

North Ayrshire Council

Complaint Report

2019/20

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Introduction

North Ayrshire Council always seeks to deliver the best services possible to its customers and residents but it is recognised that dissatisfaction will sometimes occur. When it does we want to know what went wrong, why it went wrong and what we can do to make things right.

The Council recognises valuable lessons can be learnt from complaints which are defined as being expressions of dissatisfaction from members of the public about actions, or lack of actions, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Council.

The Council's complaint handling procedure (CHP) has two stages for handling complaints from the public:-

Stage One complaints (also known as Frontline Resolution) are straightforward, non-complex complaints the Council can resolve at the initial point of contact or as close to the point of service delivery as possible. The Council has up to 5 working days to resolve these.

Stage Two complaints (also known as Investigations) are complaints the Council are typically unable to resolve at Stage One and need more time to carry out further investigation. This may be because the nature of the complaint is complex, serious or high risk. The Council has up to 20 working days to resolve these.

This report details the Council's complaint handling performance covering financial year 2019/20 (1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020) and is referred to in the report as 2019. Performance is measured via several Scottish Public Services Ombudsman indicators (some of which have national targets) and complaint data relating to previous years has been included in certain sections to allow comparisons to be made.

Reporting complaints is a statutory requirement and is monitored by Audit Scotland.

1 Volume of complaints closed

2,443 complaints were closed during the year and the chart below provides a breakdown per Directorate:

Directorate	Volume
Place	1,978
Multi-Service	16
Health & Social Care	125
Finance & Corporate Support	178
Communities	136
Chief Executive/Democratic Services	10

The following tables highlight complaint volumes per Directorate under each Stage:

Place	Stage One	Stage Two
Building Services	255	1
Employability	1	
Facilities Management	22	
Housing	94	16
Planning	3	2
Property Management & Investment	88	7
Protective Services	3	
Regeneration	1	
Roads	45	1
Streetscene	133	1
Transport	1	1
Waste Services	1,299	4
Total	1,945	33

Multi-Service	Stage One	Stage Two
Complaints involving more than one service	6	10
Total	6	10

Health & Social Care Partnership	Stage One	Stage Two
Children, Families & Criminal Justice	26	16
Health & Community Care	31	36
Mental Health	2	9
Support Services	4	1
Total	63	62

Finance & Corporate Support	Stage One	Stage Two
Benefits	17	
Customer Services	141	7
HR	1	
Revenues	2	2
Transformation	8	
Total	169	9

Communities	Stage One	Stage Two
Community Facilities	4	
Education (HQ)	44	17
Education (Schools)	59	7
Information and Culture	5	
Total	112	24

Chief Executive/Democratic Services	Stage One	Stage Two
Information Governance		1
Legal	7	2
Total	7	3

- Although there is no target for the volume of complaints handled under each Stage, the Council seeks to maximise closure at Stage One wherever possible and 94% were handled at this Stage during the period. This indicates the majority of complaints received were straightforward to resolve or non-complex in nature.
- The majority of Stage One complaints were handled by Commercial Services within the Place Directorate.
- Some Services handled all the complaints they received at Stage One.
- In Education, Stage One complaints are normally handled by schools and if complainants remain unhappy with the resolutions the complaints are escalated to Stage Two and handled within Education HQ by Senior Managers. The reason there was a higher than expected volume of Stage One HQ complaints during the year is because most related to school employees and such complaints must be handled by Senior Managers from the outset.
- Multi-Service complaints have a table of their own given they relate to multiple departments and so cannot be attributed to one Service.

Year on Year comparison

The table below shows a comparison of the volume of complaints received over the last three years:

Year	Volume of complaints
2017	1,813
2018	1,817
2019	2,443

The table below shows the volume breakdown for each Directorate over the three years:

Directorate	2017	2018	2019	Variance (2018 – 2019)
Chief Executive/ Democratic Services	6	7	10	neg.
Communities	149	185	136	-26%
Finance & Corporate Support	279	268	178	-33%
HSCP (Social Work complaints)	127	122	125	neg.
Place	1,237	1,235	1,978	+60%
Total	1,798*	1,817	2,427**	+34%

*15 complaints are missing from the 2017 volume as they related to a decision made by Elected Members

** Multi-Service complaints have been excluded from the 2019 volume to allow for true comparisons

- The 60% increase in complaints for Place is due to a rise in complaints being received within Waste Services (up from 640 in 2018 to over 1,300 in 2019). The increase was anticipated as changes were made to the collection service from 1 April 2019 resulting in an uplift in complaints as the changes were embedded. Changes included the introduction of a new bin to increase recycling and reduce the amount of waste unnecessarily sent for disposal as well as collection frequencies for certain bin colours changing from fortnightly to three-weekly.
- Two Directorates saw a sizable reduction in complaints received when comparing 2019 with 2018.

2 Volume of complaints closed on time at both Stages

Stage	% closed on time	Target
Stage One	91%	80% and above
Stage Two	86%	85% and above

- The volume closed on time includes extended complaints that met their new due dates*

Year on Year comparison

The tables below show the volume of complaints closed on time under both Stages over the last three years have remained consistent.

Stage One	% closed on time	Target
2017	92%	80% and above
2018	92%	80% and above
2019	91%	80% and above

Stage Two	% closed on time	Target
2017	90%	85% and above
2018	88%	85% and above
2019	86%	85% and above

*Stage One complaints can be extended an additional 5 working days (10 if they relate to social work). Stage Two complaints can be extended to any agreed date in the future

3 Volume of complaints not closed on time per Directorate

This section provides details of complaints not closed on time under each Stage and includes extended complaints that did not meet their new timescales.

Stage One

Democratic Services

Department	Volume
Licencing	1

- A Licencing complaint breached timescale due to a misunderstanding over the due date. The complaint was subsequently closed just beyond the 5 working days timescale.

Communities

Department	Volume
Community Facilities	2
Education (HQ)	16
Education(schools)	13
Information & Culture	3

- For Education-related complaints, reasons recorded for breaching the 5 working day timescale included school staff being unavailable to progress complaints as parents were unavailable and schools being closed for holidays. Some of these complaints could have been considered for extension.

Finance & Corporate Support

Department	Volume
Community Facilities	2
Education (HQ)	16
Education(schools)	13

- Some complaints in the Directorate breached timescale due to complaint handlers awaiting information from third parties, complaints being allocated to employees who were on annual leave and complaint being allocated to incorrect workflow queues. Timescales extensions could have been considered for some of these or escalated to Stage Two.

HSCP (Social Work complaints)

Department	Volume
Children & Families	7
Health & Community Care	9

- Reasons for these complaints breaching the 5 working day timescale included uncertainty in who should handle the complaints and complainants not being available to support investigations.

Place

Department	Volume
Building Services	5
Facilities Management	1
Housing	7
Planning	1
PMI	10
Roads	2
Streetscene	19
Waste Services	97

- Whilst 142 Stage One complaints in Place did not meet their due dates, over half were closed just beyond the 5 working day timescale. Reasons for breaching timescale were varied, including delays in sign off for responses, lack of resources, complaints awaiting customer input and complaints requiring thorough investigation before outcomes could be provided. Some of these complaints could have had their timescales extended or been considered at Stage Two.
- Whilst 97 complaints for Waste Services were not closed on time, the service handled approximately 1,300 complaints during the year which equates to 7% not being closed on time. This is a remarkable achievement given the changes to policy and kerbside collections from 1 April 2019 resulted in a significant uplift in complaints which has not had a material impact on their complaint handling performance.

Stage Two

Communities

Department	Volume
Education (HQ)	5
Education (schools)	3

- Many of the Education Stage Two complaints breached timescale due to the complexity of the issues being raised and some of these complaints could have had their timescales extended.

HSCP (Social Work complaints)

Department	Volume
Health & Community Care	5
Mental Health	4

- There were a number of reasons these complaints in HSCP breached timescale, including the complexity of the issues being complained about, delays in finding suitable meeting dates with complainants and additional information being required to support investigations. Some of these complaints could therefore have been considered for extension for these reasons.

Place

Department	Volume
Building Services	1
Housing	1
PMI	1

- The Building Services complaint that breached was due to the complaint not being processed via the correct channel.
- The Housing and Property Management & Investment complaints were complex matters and both breached the 20 working-day timescale by a small number of days.

4 Key complaint topics

Key topics for upheld and partially upheld complaints within Services are listed below. Services will not be listed if there were insufficient complaint volumes to allow meaningful analysis.

Communities

Department	Key complaint topic(s)
Education (HQ and schools)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee actions Service provision/delivery

Finance & Corporate Support

Department	Key complaint topic(s)
Customer Services (including One Team)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication Incorrect information provided

HSCP (Social Work complaints)

Department	Key complaint topic(s)
Health & Community Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee actions Service provision/delivery

Place

Department	Key complaint topic(s)
Building Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication Follow ups not done Quality issues (work incomplete or poor workmanship) Employee actions
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estate management
PMI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GCH (including maintenance) Planned works for tenants
Streetscene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grass cutting (general and scheme) Grounds maintenance
Waste Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Missed bins (all colours) Missed pullouts (all colours) Bins not delivered Employee Actions Failed special uplifts Litter/mess when bins being emptied

- The majority of missed bins and pullouts that were upheld or partially upheld for Waste Services related mainly to brown and grey bins.
- Employee Actions appears as a key topic for some Services but the definition is broad and has been used where complainants perceived employee actions or behaviour to be unacceptable. Where any unacceptable behaviour was identified by Services, appropriate action will have been taken to address.

5 Average time in working days for a full response

The average time in working days to close complaints under both Stages during the year is noted below. Values for previous years have been included to allow comparisons to be made. Any complaints that had their timescales extended have been excluded from the calculations.

Stage One	Average number of working days to close	Target
2017	3	5 workings days or less
2018	3.1	5 workings days or less
2019	3.3	5 workings days or less

Stage Two	Average number of days to close	Target
2017	16.7	20 working days or less
2018	14.7	20 working days or less
2019	14.5	20 working days or less

- The average time to close complaints under both Stages has consistently exceeded target.

The tables below detail Services that did not meet the average time in working days for a response under either Stage. Services that met the target are not listed and any complaints that had their timescales extended have been excluded from the calculations.

Communities

Stage One	Average number of working days to close	Target
Education (HQ)	7.5	5 workings days or less
Education (schools)	5.4	5 workings days or less
Information & Culture	7.4	5 workings days or less

- Whilst several Stage One complaints for Education did not meet timescale, a small number were significantly adrift of the 5 working day timescale which resulted in the averages of 7.5 and 5.4 working days.
- Due to an error within the complaint workflow system, an Information & Culture complaint was resolved on working day 16 and resulted in the average of 7.4 working days.

Finance & Corporate Support

Stage One	Average number of working days to close	Target
Transformation	7.6	5 working days or less

- Whilst the vast majority of Transformation complaints were closed on time, two complaints did not meet timescale which resulted in an average of 7.6 working days. One complaint was delayed as a result of it being routed incorrectly in the workflow system and the other was delayed due to a thorough investigation being required. This complaint could have been considered at Stage Two.

HSCP (Social Work complaints)

Stage One	Average number of working days to close	Target
Children & Families	6.1	5 working days or less
Health & Community Care	6.4	5 working days or less

Stage Two	Average number of working days to close	Target
Health & Community Care	21.2	20 working days or less
Mental Health	26.2	20 working days or less

- Whilst the majority of Stage One complaints for Children & Families and Health & Community Care were resolved on time, a number were significantly adrift of the target and reasons for breaching can be found in section 3.
- A small number of Stage Two complaints for Health & Community Care and Mental Health did not meet timescale resulting in an average working days of 21.2 and 26.2 respectively. Delays included issues meeting with the complainants, the complexity of the complaints, additional information needing to be sourced and the impact on service delivery as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak. Some of these complaints could have been considered for timescale extension.

Place

Stage Two	Average number of working days to close	Target
Building Services	24	20 working days or less

- As a Stage Two complaint for Building Services was closed on day 24, this had an effect on the average number of days not meeting the 20 working-day target. The reason the complaint did not meet timescale was due to the complaint not being processed through the correct workflow channel.

6 Extended complaints

- 80 complaints had their timescales extended during the year (40 at Stage One and 40 at Stage Two). The complaints related mainly to services within the HSCP and Place Directorates.
- Although this is a higher volume of extensions than normal, there were numerous reasons for extending, including complainants being unavailable to assist with investigations, information awaited from third parties to support investigations, the complexity of the complaints and some that were impacted by the Covid-19 outbreak (see section 10 for more information).
- Of the 80 complaints extended, over 80% were closed within their new due dates.

7 Complaint Outcomes

Stage One

Outcome	
% closed as Upheld	59%
% closed as Partially Upheld	12%
% closed as Not Upheld	29%

- Two thirds of upheld and partially upheld* complaints related to Waste Services and in particular bin collections. This was anticipated given changes were made to the service at the start of the financial year.
- Of the 29% of complaints not upheld, two thirds related to policies and regulations and the remainder were deemed unproven/unfounded.

Stage Two

Outcome	
% closed as Upheld	14%
% closed as Partially Upheld*	28%
% closed as Not Upheld	58%

- Over one third of upheld and partially upheld* Stage Two complaints related to the Health and Social Care Partnership. The remainder related to other Directorates and various services.
- Of the 58% of complaints not upheld, these related to policies, regulations and complaints that were determined to be unproven/unfounded.

*Partially Upheld complaints are complaints that contain more than one complaint element and at least one of them is upheld.

8 Improvements made as a result of complaints

Below are a few examples of actions taken and/or improvements made by Services as a result of complaints received during the year.

- ✓ A complaint was received about a lack of disabled parking bays at a Community Facility. As a result, the traffic order will be reviewed and an application made to acknowledge all disabled bays. An order will also be raised through procurement to introduce appropriate signage at the area.
- ✓ Due to minor spillages when waste collection bins are being emptied, in future they will be cleared by the waste crew using brushes and shovels and larger spillages will be reported to Streetscene to remove.
- ✓ A customer made us aware of an issue with how the icalendar data was loaded in Outlook. An alternative mechanism for loading the calendar in Outlook was identified, documented and shared with the customer. This document can also be shared with anyone else who encounters the same issue.
- ✓ Road resurfacing works started one day early, causing problems for the street's residents. Whilst there was a valid reason for the works being brought forward, the project team responsible for the works will ensure any future changes are notified to affected residents prior to the changes taking place.
- ✓ As rubbish was blown into a river when the river bank was being cleared by a Council operative, a communication was issued to operatives advising they must manually sweep the bottom section of pathways so leaves and litter do not accumulate at river edges.
- ✓ A complaint was received as a library visitor was rebuked for using the fire exit door to leave the building due to an emergency. As a result, proper signage will be displayed to ensure employees and visitors know when the fire exit door should be used.
- ✓ A complaint was received about a contractor and an emergency plumbing repair where insufficient information was sourced and requested by the Contact Centre adviser in order to assist the tenant. Whilst the repair was carried out, a process will be introduced to ensure issues are investigated fully before advisers provide responses to tenants regarding emergency repairs.
- ✓ A complaint was received due to someone tripping over the bollard of an empty car pool space at one of the Council's buildings. An apology was offered and a reminder issued to all members of the Council's Car Club service regarding how and when to use the bollards.
- ✓ A resident did not receive a letter advising their bin collection days were changing as part of the Waste Services collection changes on 1 April 2019. As a result, the resident received a personal visit, an apology and the appropriate literature was provided. The technical team that performed the mailshot was also advised so there are no further errors regarding future mailshots for the customer.

9 Compliments

Over 400 compliments were recorded during the year cross-Council:

Directorate	Volume
Communities	59
Finance & Corporate Support	33
Health & Social Care Partnership	54
Place	266

Of the compliments recorded:

- Some related to specific individuals as well as teams
- Some commended or praised more than one service
- Some were internal with employees complimenting other employees

Although many compliments were received in Education these were not recorded and is reflected in the table above. A reminder was issued to the Service during the year confirming how and when to record them.

10 Coronavirus impact

Since March 2020 the Council has been continually assessing the impact of the Coronavirus outbreak and its ability to continue to deliver critical/key services. Whilst robust business continuity plans are in place for unforeseen events, these unprecedented circumstances presented substantial challenges and service provision in some areas of the Council was affected.

Towards the end of financial year 2019/20 it was identified that 11 Stage Two complaints that were being progressed when the Council introduced its lockdown measures would not meet their due dates. The majority therefore had their timescales extended and all met the new timescales. It was also identified that 2 Stage One complaints that were being progressed when the lockdown measures were introduced would not meet their original due dates and these were extended 5 and 10 working days respectively. Neither met the new due dates as the lockdown measures were still in place when the new due dates were reached.

8 complaints were received as a result of measures the Council introduced to mitigate the impact of the virus and explanations were provided to complainants as to why the changes had been made.

Regarding receiving and managing complaints during the health crisis, all complaints have been and will continue to be recorded and handled in line with the model Two Stage CHP. Where the Council is unable to progress a complaint as a result of measures that have been taken to mitigate the Coronavirus impact, complainants are informed and next steps agreed. This can include timescale extension considerations.

Further information and analysis on the impact Coronavirus has had on our complaint handling performance will be reported in the 2020/21 half yearly complaint report.

11 ALEO complaints

An Arms-Length External Organisation (ALEO) is an organisation formally separate from a local authority but still subject to its control and influence. North Ayrshire Leisure Limited (NALL) is an ALEO for North Ayrshire Council and this section highlights complaints handled in 2019 by NALL using the same Two Stage procedure the Council uses.

Complaints received per Business Area and Complaint Category

Business Area	Complaint Category	Volume
LEISURE		
Irvine	Activities & Programming	14
	Facilities General	14
	Facilities Cleanliness	7
	Customer Service	24
	Marketing/Promo	1
	Policy/General	7
Three Towns	Activities & Programming	5
	Facilities General	4
	Facilities Cleanliness	2
	Customer Service	7
	Marketing/Promo	1
	Policy/General	3
Garnock & Kilwinning	Activities & Programming	8
	Facilities General	9
	Facilities Cleanliness	1
	Customer Service	2
North Coast & Arran	Activities & Programming	8
	Facilities General	3
	Facilities Cleanliness	1
	Customer Service	3
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY		
Active Lifestyles	Activities & Programming	5
	Customer Service	0
Community Sport	Activities & Programming	1
	Customer Service	0
SUPPORT TEAM		
Support Team	Customer Service	1
	Policy General	13
	Marketing/Promo	2

- 146 complaints were received by NALL during the year.
- As the Portal and Auchendarvie Leisure Centre are situated in Irvine and the Three Towns respectively, they attract higher visitor numbers compared to other venues/facilities and explains the higher volumes for these locales.

Complaints per 1,000 visits for each department

Department	Complaint Volume	Attendances	Complaint Rate
Leisure	123	2,450,732	0.05
Physical Activity	6	215,360	0.03
Support Team	17	n/a	n/a

- The volume of complaints is negligible compared to the number of people visiting NALL facilities/venues.

Complaint categories by volume

Category	Volume
Facilities General	30
Facilities Cleanliness	11
Customer Service	37
Activities and Programming	41
Policy/General	23
Marketing and Promotion	4
Total	146

Three-year Complaint Category comparison

Category	2017	2018	2019
Facilities General	55	61	30
Facilities Cleanliness	3	13	11
Customer Service	54	20	37
Activities & Programming	46	48	41
Policy/General	33	10	23
Marketing/Promotion	4	0	4
Total	195	152	146

- Reductions seen in complaints in certain categories when comparing 2018 with 2019.

Complaints handled at each Stage by category

Category	Stage One	Stage Two
Facilities General	22	7
Facilities Cleanliness	6	3
Customer Service	28	6
Activities and Programming	26	14
Policy/General	13	10
Marketing and Promotion	3	1
Total	98	41

- Whilst a small number of complaints received in Q4 2019 were closed outwith timescale as a result of Covid-19 and the closure of NALL facilities, the monitoring of customer feedback is being reviewed to reduce further incidents of non-compliance. Complainants impacted by these delays have been contacted, apologies offered and assurances the issues they have raised will be addressed once facilities re-open.

Examples of complaints received

Category	Nature of Complaint	Response/Action
Facilities General	Customer complained that there is no air conditioning in upstairs studios as that the heat is almost unbearable. With no windows to open the fans just blow hot air around.	The customer was advised that the issue was not due to a lack of air conditioning but a heating issue. The issue was subsequently reported to and resolved by the Council.
Facilities Cleanliness	Customer complained that swimming facilities were in an "unacceptable state" at Auchenharvie Leisure Centre.	Apology offered to customer and it was agreed the condition of the changing area was unacceptable. The areas should be checked hourly and it is clear from the complaint this had not been done. Customer was assured the Company would investigate and speak to the staff on shift to avoid a reoccurrence.
Customer Service	Customer complained that they had tried to use the Portal Gym on two separate occasions at 7:30am. Both times their membership card did not work and there was no one on the reception desk to assist.	The customer's account was reviewed and it was discovered the entry access subscription had lapsed. This was corrected and customer advised they should experience no further problems. Apology offered to customer for the inconvenience caused.
Activities & Programming	Customer was disappointed that it took until 6:15pm to be advised that a 6.00pm class had been cancelled at Auchenharvie Leisure Centre.	Explanation provided that the class instructor had failed to turn up. As this was a recurring problem with the same instructor they no longer run classes for KA Leisure. Apology offered to customer for inconvenience caused.

12 Glossary

Term	Explanation
Stage One	Stage One (aka <i>Frontline Resolution</i>) aims to resolve straightforward customer complaints that require little or no investigation. Any employee may deal with complaints at this stage and they can be resolved via any channel. The main principle is to seek resolution at the earliest opportunity and as close to the point of service delivery as possible. Stage One complaints must be responded to within 5 working days unless an extension (a maximum of 5 additional working days or 10 if the complaint relates to Social Work) is requested and approved by a senior manager. The Council should, however, always aim to resolve these types of complaints within 5 working days.
Stage Two	Not all complaints are suitable for Frontline Resolution and not all complaints will be satisfactorily resolved at that stage. Complaints therefore handled at Stage Two (aka <i>Investigation</i>) typically require a detailed examination before the Council can state its position. These complaints may already have been considered at Stage One, or they may have been identified from the outset as being complex, serious or high risk and needing immediate investigation. The investigation under a Stage Two should establish all the facts relevant to the points made in the complaint and give the customer a full, objective and proportionate response that represents our final position. Stage Two complaints must be responded to within 20 working days unless an extension is approved by senior manager in conjunction with the customer. Stage Two complaints require a written response, signed by a senior manager.

Complaint criteria

When an expression of dissatisfaction is received the Council determines if the issue falls into one of six complaint categories:

- A service the Council should be providing is not being provided (or is not available)
- A request for a service was provided but not to an appropriate standard
- A request for service has not been answered or actioned within the agreed timescale
- A Council employee was rude, unhelpful or unprofessional
- A Council employee did not attend an appointment or call-out on a date/time agreed
- The complaint relates to a policy (internal or external)

If the issue being raised relates to one or more of the above, the matter is considered a complaint and will be recorded and handled as such. If not, the matter will be handled as a request for a service, observation or enquiry and actioned accordingly.

END OF REPORT