

North Ayrshire Council Complaint Report 2020/21

Contents

Introduction

- 1 Volume of complaints closed
- 2 Volume of complaints closed on time at both Stages
- 3 Volume of complaints not closed on time per Directorate
- 4 Key complaint topics
- 5 Average time in working days for a full response
- 6 Extended complaints
- 7 Complaint Outcomes
- 8 Improvements made as a result of complaints
- 9 Compliments
- 10 Coronavirus impact
- 11 ALEO complaints
- 12 SPSO complaint referrals
- 13 Glossary

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 2020/21 (1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021) and is referred to in the report as 2020. 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

2,571 complaints were received during 2020/21 and 2,541 were closed. The chart below provides a breakdown per Directorate:

Directorate	Volume
Place	2,128
Health & Social Care	127
Communities	90
Chief Executive's	176
Multi-Service	20

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

Place	Stage One	Stage Two
Building Services	156	3
Business Team	2	-
Facilities Management	14	-
Housing	130	28
Planning	2	3
Property Management & Investment	71	1
Protective Services	11	1
Regeneration	2	1
Roads	55	1
Streetscene	112	-
Waste Services	1,532	3
Total	2,087	41

Health & Social Care Partnership	Stage One	Stage Two
Children, Families & Criminal Justice	28	24
Health & Community Care	42	23
Mental Health	2	2
Support Services	5	1
Total	77	50

Communities	Stage One	Stage Two
Community Learning & Development	1	-
Education (HQ)	43	19
Education (Schools)	25	1
Sports & Activity	1	-
Total	70	20

Chief Executive's	Stage One	Stage Two
Customer Services	167	4
Democratic Services (Management)	-	1
ICT	1	-
Legal	2	1
Total	170	6

Multi-Service	Stage One	Stage Two
Complaints involving more than one service	13	7
Total	13	7

- 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 95% were handled at this Stage during the period.
- Some Services handled all their complaints at Stage One.
- Whilst 60% of all complaints received related to Waste Services (the majority being missed bins and assisted pullouts), the Service empty over 102,000 household waste bins each week. As this equates to approximately 4.9 million collections over the year, 0.03% of these collections resulted in complaints being raised. The Council overcame operational challenges and maintained its bin collection service during Covid 19.
- Complaints received that related to measures the Council took to combat Covid-19 can be found later in this report.
- Multi-Service complaints have a table of their own as they are not 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
2018	1,817
2019	2,443
2020	2,541

The table below shows the volume breakdown for each Directorate over the last three years (based on the Council's new 2020 structure):

Directorate	2018	2019	2020	Variance (2019 – 2020)
Chief Executive's	275	188	176	-6%
Communities	185	136	90	-34%
HSCP (Social Work complaints)	122	125	127	neg.
Place	1,235	1,978	2,128	+7%
Total	1,817	2,427*	2,521*	+4%

*Multi-service complaints have been excluded to allow for true Directorate comparisons

- Whilst the Council had to introduce measures and change policies, processes and practices to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, there has only been a 4% increase in complaints when comparing 2020 with the previous year.
- Two Directorates saw reductions in complaints received when comparing 2020 with 2019.
- It should be noted that a previous reorganisation of the Council in 2019 resulted in some services aligning with other Directorates. This should therefore be considered if reflecting on the 2018 complaint volumes for each Directorate with subsequent years.

2 Volume of complaints closed on time at both Stages

Stage	% closed on time	Target
Stage One	81%	80% and above
Stage Two	96%	85% and above

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

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

Chief Executive's

Department	Volume
Customer Services	6
ICT	1
Legal	1

- Reasons for these complaints breaching included services being unable to contact complainants to discuss the issues raised and complaints being incorrectly routed when logged.

Communities

Department	Volume
Education (HQ)	19
Education(schools)	7

- Some of these complaints breached due to their complexity and complaint handlers being unable to contact complainants to agree complaint elements. Some also breached due to schools closing due of the pandemic, causing difficulties accessing paperwork and files to investigate complaints.

HSCP (Social Work complaints)

Department	Volume
Children & Families	1
Health & Community Care	3

- These complaints breached due to complainants being unavailable to assist with investigations and investigations being impacted as a result of Covid-19 restrictions.

Place

Department	Volume
Building Services	11
Housing	10
PMI	12
Protective Services	1
Roads	2
Streetscene	6
Waste Services	364

- Reasons given for Place complaints not meeting the 5 working day timescale included complaint handlers not being available to progress complaints and complainants being unavailable to assist with investigations. Some complaints also breached due to factors related to Covid-19 measures and restrictions.
- Many complaints that breached were closed only one or two days beyond their due dates.
- Regarding the volume of Waste complaints that did not meet timescale, see the additional commentary below.

Multi-Service

Department	Volume
Involved multiple services	5

- Reasons for these multi-service complaints breaching included relevant employees not being available to assist with investigations (as a result of Covid-19 implications) and technical problems encountered with the complaint workflow system.

Covid-19 and impact on Waste Services

Whilst Waste Operations had to re-write operational risk assessments and change operating arrangements as a result of Covid-19, during the first 6 months of the pandemic there were no instances of coronavirus within the workplace, however, the second phase throughout the winter period proved more challenging. This was mainly due to competing demands for resources, particularly as it was a fairly severe winter and road gritting was equally as high a priority as waste collection.

During that time Waste Operations were unable to rely on the support previously provided from the Roads and Streetscene services (as it did at the beginning of the pandemic) and further challenges arose with several employees testing positive for Covid-19 and periods of self-isolation. Nonetheless, the service managed to maintain service delivery throughout, although there was pressure on some service areas such as bin deliveries and more recently the seasonal demands of the brown bin service.

It is important to consider the above when reviewing complaint data for Waste Services in this report. It should also be recognised that North Ayrshire Council was one of only a few local authorities in Scotland that managed to maintain a normal waste collection service during the pandemic.

Stage Two

Communities

Department	Volume
Education (HQ)	3

- These complaints were sensitive in nature and required further investigation. Extensions could therefore have been considered for these.

HSCP (Social Work complaints)

Department	Volume
Health & Community Care	1

- This complaint breached due to investigations being hampered by Covid-19 restrictions.

Multi-Service

Department	Volume
Involved multiple services	1

- This complaint breached due to a technical issue with a shared mailbox.

4 Key complaint topics

Key topics for upheld and partially upheld complaints for Services are listed below. Services will not be listed if there were low complaint volumes that did not allow meaningful analysis.

Chief Executive's

Service	Key complaint topic(s)
Customer Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication

Communities

Service	Key complaint topic(s)
Education (HQ)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitive issues relating to teachers and/or pupils • Alleged employee behaviour

HSCP (Social Work complaints)

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

Place

Service	Key complaint topic(s)
Building Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow Up appointments • Quality issues
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-social behaviour
PMI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gas Central Heating (incl. maintenance)
Streetscene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality/lack of grass cutting
Waste Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missed bins (all colours) • Missed pull outs (all colours) • Bins not delivered • Household Recycling Centres • Failed bulky uplifts • Domestic bin spillages • Alleged employee behaviour

- 'Alleged employee behaviour' 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. This could include instances where:
 - The attitude of employees was considered inappropriate
 - The content/tone of letters from employees was considered inappropriate
 - Employees made inappropriate comments or offered inappropriate advice
 - Employees were considered 'officious' when quoting procedures, policies or regulations

Where 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
2018	3.1	5 workings days or less
2019	3.3	5 workings days or less
2020	4.3	5 workings days or less

Stage Two	Average number of days to close	Target
2018	14.7	20 working days or less
2019	14.5	20 working days or less
2020	14.3	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.

Chief Executive's

Stage One	Average number of working days to close	Target
Legal	10	5 workings days or less
Multi-service	6	5 workings days or less

- One Legal-related complaint took 19 days to resolve, resulting in the average number of days target not being met. The complaint was complex and related to the sale of some land. This complaint could have been considered at Stage Two. A small number of multi-service complaints did not meet timescale due to investigations being hampered by Covid-19 restrictions and delays in services identifying some complaint elements were multi-service.

Communities

Stage One	Average number of working days to close	Target
Education (HQ)	13.4	5 workings days or less
Education (schools)	15.5	5 workings days or less

- Some Stage One complaints for Education HQ and schools did not meet their timescales, resulting in the average number of days target not being met. The main reason for this was complaints no longer being able to be progressed or concluded as a result of Covid-19 measures that were introduced.

HSCP

Stage Two	Average number of working days to close	Target
Health & Community Care	22.3	20 workings days or less

- A Health & Community Care Stage Two complaint was closed on working day 72, directly resulting in the average number of days target not being met for the service. The delay was due to the impact on service delivery and resourcing issues as a result of Covid-19 restrictions. This complaint could have had its timescale extended.

6 Extended complaints

- 74 complaints had their timescales extended during the year - 38 at Stage One and 36 at Stage Two). The complaints related mainly to services within the HSCP (62%) and Place (31%) Directorates.
- There were numerous reasons for extending, including complainants and individuals being unavailable to assist with investigations, additional information having to be sought to support investigations and issues arising from the Covid-19 outbreak (see section 10 for more information).
- Of the 74 complaints that had their timescales extended, 87% were closed within their new due dates.

7 Complaint Outcomes

Stage One

Outcome	
% closed as Upheld	52%
% closed as Partially Upheld	12%
% closed as Not Upheld	36%

- Of all the complaints upheld and partially upheld* at Stage One, many related to Waste Services and in particular bin collections. This was anticipated given issues the service encountered as a result of Covid-19.
- Many complaints not upheld related to policy/procedure changes as a result of Covid-19.

Given the high volume of upheld missed bin collection complaints during the year, the table below shows the outcomes with these complaints excluded. As you will note, there is now a significant difference when comparing the upheld and partially upheld figures between both tables:

Outcome	
% closed as Upheld	24%
% closed as Partially Upheld	16%
% closed as Not Upheld	60%

Stage Two

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

- Stage Two complaints that were upheld or partially upheld* were split across mainly services within Communities, HSCP and Place.
- Stage Two complaints not upheld related mainly to polices or 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.

Up to 31 March 2021, a complaint that meets our complaint criteria could be upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. From 1 April 2021, a fourth outcome became available to use called 'Resolved'. Resolved complaints are where the Council has taken action to address the problem/issue without making a decision on whether there were any failings (this would happen where we agree a solution with the complainant at the outset without needing to actually investigate the complaint). This new outcome will typically only apply to complaints handled at Stage One.

Details of 'Resolved' complaints will appear in future complaint reports, beginning with the H1 2021 complaint report.

8 Improvements made as a result of complaints

Some improvements were made as a result of complaints received during the year and a selection is noted below.

What happened?	What we did
A driver complained about road works at a roundabout where the diversion took them up a rural road.	The driver was advised that there were numerous signs advising the road was closed and additional signs had also been erected since the works had started. The driver commented that a 'local access only' sign could have been erected and this suggestion will be considered for any future works planned at this location.
A tenant complained about flooding in his front garden due to a grille, causing disruption to the tenant and immediate neighbours	Although the grille meets regulatory requirements, the Council will replace this with an improved design which will be less likely to trap material coming down-stream. The Council will also increase the monitoring regime carried out by the on-site staff.
A gas boiler broke down and the tenant had difficulty contacting the right department to arrange a repair.	The contractor will provide clearly marked emergency contact details on their new installations. Also, the Council's contact centre will be provided with correct out of hours emergency contact details for the contractor to ensure notifications of call-outs are routed correctly. As a result of this complaint the contractor will now be able to more quickly diagnose and rectify unusual faults of this nature.
A contractor engineer visited a Council property to change an external gas box but did not inform the occupants of his arrival.	The contractor has introduced a process where engineers will advise occupants they have turned up to complete work even if only outside access is required.
A complainant raised an issue regarding information about household income contained in Tax Credit Award correspondence.	The Council will review the correspondence surrounding Tax Credit Award Notices and make changes to make clear to parents how to obtain household income details.
A resident booked a special uplift which went to an incorrect address.	When it was determined that the resident's customer record showed a previous address, the system was updated to reflect the new address, the special uplift items were removed and an apology was offered to the complainant. Consideration is being given to include the address of the special uplift when uplift confirmation emails are issued to customers.

9 Compliments

Over 270 compliments were recorded cross-Council during the year and whilst they cannot all be highlighted in this report a selection is noted below.

<p><i>"I reported a dangerous tree which was removed promptly. I would like to pass on my compliments to Business Support and Streetscene for the prompt action"</i></p>	<p>Multiple compliments were received for Building Services regarding the "fantastic", "brilliant" and "amazing" jobs that joiners, electricians, plumbers and other staff have carried out over the last year.</p>
<p>Multiple compliments were received regarding the service provided by HSCP Care at Home staff during the Covid-19 pandemic. Comments included that they provide a fantastic service with personal care support as well as offering emotional support at a time when families are unable to visit.</p>	<p><i>"I want to say a huge thanks to Angela Watson, Library Assistant. She went above and beyond to assist with my membership. A great job, thank you!"</i></p>
<p><i>"Just want to say thanks to those working in the Local Offices, those who may still be at their desks or working from home, those in Waste Services who are still collecting our waste and other staff who are carrying out other essential jobs during this historically remarkable time, you are doing a great job and deserve our thanks and gratitude. Thank you"</i></p>	<p><i>"I just wanted to say I think the Council is doing a wonderful job during the lockdown. The specific information on your website about all the services and support available is comprehensive and helpful. The speed with which you set up the Community Hubs is amazing. The Q and A session held by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive was comprehensive and helpful too"</i></p>
<p><i>"I had a query with council tax and it was dealt with by a nice lady in the Contact Centre. She was polite, efficient and a credit to your team"</i></p>	<p>Multiple compliments were received for Waste Services thanking drivers and crews for continuing to maintain a collection service during Covid-19.</p>
<p><i>"Congratulations to the Council regarding food boxes being issued to families on benefits whose children receive free school meals. These goods really help to feed families and are so much better than vouchers as it means fewer visits to the supermarket are necessary. Well done NAC!"</i> (multiple similar compliments were also received from people who benefitted from this initiative)</p>	<p><i>"Thanks to John Mack in your Planning Team for his prompt, clear response to my question. Well done and thanks for all you do for us at this time"</i></p>
<p>Multiple compliments received for Roads regarding repairs and faults being addressed swiftly during the last six months.</p>	

10 Coronavirus impact

From March 2020 the Council continually assessed the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak and its ability to continue to deliver critical and key services. Whilst robust business continuity plans were already in place, these unprecedented circumstances presented substantial challenges to the Council and service provision in some services was affected.

Of the 2,541 complaints closed during the year, 8% related directly or indirectly to the pandemic. Below is a table detailing the Directorate and Service breakdown.

Directorate	Service	No. of Covid-19 related complaints	Volume that was policy-related*
Chief Executives	Customer Services	15	10
	Legal	1	1
Communities	Community Learning	1	1
	Education (HQ)	5	4
	Education (schools)	1	-
HSCP	Children & Families	5	1
	Health & Community Care	4	-
	Support Services	2	-
Multi-Service	Involves multiple services	5	3
Place	Building Services	33	21
	Facilities Management	1	-
	Housing	3	2
	PMI	14	12
	Protective Services	4	2
	Roads	8	7
	Streetscene	39	38
	Waste	60	43
TOTAL		201	145

* These were Council policies and procedures that were revised/updated to combat the pandemic

Looking at services that received Covid-related complaints, analysis identified:

- Some **Customer Services** complaints related to long waiting times. Some of the reasons behind this included increased call volumes, additional workloads due to handling outbound calls for Test & Protect and the balance of work/home life as employees were working from home. Some complaints also related to Council tax/second home reductions not being offered during the lockdowns.
- Some **Education** complaints related to school closures and children having to be taught from home.
- Some **HSCP Health & Community Care** complaints related to delays to service provision.
- Some **Building Services** complaints related to the change in policy where only emergency repairs were to be carried out.

- Some **PMI** complaints related to a reduced service as a result of contractors having to close their offices/businesses.
- Some **Protective Services** complaints related to the closure of non-essential businesses.
- Some **Roads** complaints related to the closure of the Council's car parks.
- The majority of the 39 Covid-related **Streetscene** complaints related to grass cutting/general maintenance being suspended and the time taken to phase it back in
- Covid-related complaints about **Waste Services** related mainly to the closure of the Household Waste Recycling Centres, the suspension of special uplifts, missed collections (due to redeployed employees being unfamiliar with the service) and new bin requests only being processed for new properties.

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 by NALL using the same Two Stage procedure the Council operates. Note the statistics only cover Q1 to Q3 2020 as the Q4 2020 report had not yet been approved by the NALL Board when this report was created.

Complaints received per Business Area and Complaint Category

Business Area	Complaint Category	Volume
LEISURE		
Irvine	Activities & Programming	10
	Facilities General	12
	Facilities Cleanliness	1
	Customer Service	20
	Marketing/Promo	0
	Policy/General	6
Three Towns	Activities & Programming	24
	Facilities General	2
	Facilities Cleanliness	1
	Customer Service	5
	Marketing/Promo	0
	Policy/General	8
Garnock & Kilwinning	Activities & Programming	0
	Facilities General	3
	Facilities Cleanliness	0
	Customer Service	1
North Coast & Arran	Activities & Programming	4
	Facilities General	8
	Facilities Cleanliness	10
	Customer Service	3
	Policy General	1
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY		
Active Lifestyles	Activities & Programming	1
	Customer Service	0
Community Sport	Activities & Programming	0
	Customer Service	0
SUPPORT TEAM		
Support Team	Customer Service	27
	Policy General	3
	Marketing/Promo	0

- 150 complaints were received by NALL during the year.

Complaints per 1,000 visits for each department

Department	Complaint Volume	Attendances	Complaint Rate
Leisure	126	185,431	0.70
Physical Activity	1	13,777	0.07
Support Team	23	n/a	n/a

- Whilst the above table only highlights complaint volumes for the first three quarters of 2020/21, the volume of complaints received over the period is negligible compared to the number of people visiting NALL facilities/venues (irrespective of the Covid-19 lockdowns).

Complaint categories by volume

Category	Volume
Facilities General	25
Facilities Cleanliness	12
Customer Service	56
Activities and Programming	41
Policy/General	16
Marketing and Promotion	0
Total	150

Three-year Complaint Category comparison

Category	2018	2019	2020
Facilities General	44	23	25
Facilities Cleanliness	6	7	12
Customer Service	16	22	56
Activities & Programming	35	27	41
Policy/General	6	17	16
Marketing/Promotion	0	4	0
Total	107	100	150

Complaints handled at each Stage by category

Category	Stage One	Stage Two
Facilities General	14	9
Facilities Cleanliness	1	9
Customer Service	41	12
Activities and Programming	21	21
Policy/General	9	5
Marketing and Promotion	0	0
Total	86	56

Examples of complaints received

Category	Nature of Complaint	Response/Action
Facilities General	Customer complained that there was no access to the toilets and locker room at Ravenspark Golf Course, despite noticing that a cleaner was in attendance.	Apology offered to the customer and advised that although the Company is able to provide periodic site cleaning services, it is only enough to maintain those areas and not keep them open for use. Also advised that Government guidelines state that such facilities should remain closed.
Facilities Cleanliness	Customer complaints received regarding the 'downgrading' of the cleaning schedule at Vikingar KA Studio.	Apology offer to customers with explanation that additional measures put in place such as 'Fit4Access' and additional cleaning stations still allow the Company to operate within Government guidelines maintaining customer throughput at a safe and steady level.
Customer Service	Customer complained about funds being debited from their account. They assumed that their membership had been frozen.	Apology offered to customer and arranged for the two payments taken to be refunded and their status set to frozen (all customers were notified prior to direct debits recommencing giving them the option to freeze their memberships).
Activities & Programming	Customer complained about the lack of provision within our pools which is preventing various supported groups from participating in activities.	Apology offered to customer with a response that across all venues the Company has taken a phased approach to restarting activity in-line with Scottish Government guidelines to ensure they are keeping staff and customers safe.

12 SPSO complaint referrals

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) is the final stage for complaints about Local Authorities in Scotland. The SPSO has published its 2020/21 referral statistics and the table below details the volume of complaints (relating to North Ayrshire Council) that were referred to the SPSO during the year:

Type of Complaint	Volume
Consumer Protection	1
Economic Development	1
Education	3
Environmental Health & Cleansing	1
Finance	3
Housing	8
Legal & Admin	4
Other	1
Planning	2
Roads & Transport	1
Social Work	2
Subject unknown or Out of Jurisdiction	1

- The SPSO received 937 complaints about Scottish Local Authorities during 2020/21 and 2.8% related to North Ayrshire Council. This referral rate is consistent with previous years (typically between 2% to 3%).
- The highest number of referrals made to the SPSO about the Council related to Housing but this was expected given many of the Local Authority referrals made to the SPSO during the year related to Housing or housing services.

The outcomes of the North Ayrshire Council complaints referred to the SPSO are noted below.

Stage	Outcome	Volume
Advice	Premature	7
	Unable to proceed	3
Early Resolution	Discretion – Insufficient benefit would be achieved by investigation	1
	Discretion - Good complaint handling	11
	Right of appeal to court/tribunal/Scottish ministers (s 7 (8))	1
	Time limit (s 10)	1
	Unable to proceed	1
Investigation	Fully upheld	1

- The majority of the referrals made by North Ayrshire complainants were resolved by the SPSO at the Advice or Early Resolution stages. Only one complaint was taken to investigation where it was upheld and some recommendations made (which the Council implemented).

- Many of the referrals at Advice stage were premature i.e. complainants approached the SPSO before exhausting the Council's Two Stage process.
- The majority of complaint referrals handled at Early Resolution were discretionary in nature, meaning the Council had discretion in terms of how to resolve them. It is pleasing to note many were considered 'good complaint handling' complaints, meaning the SPSO was satisfied with the way in which the Council handled them.

More details regarding complaint referrals for North Ayrshire Council can be found on the SPSO website at <https://www.spsso.org.uk/decision-reports>.

13 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