

Agenda Item	5
Report No	AC/22/23

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: **Audit Committee**

Date: 28 November 2023

Report Title: **Annual Complaints Performance Report – 2022/23**

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Communities & Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council is required by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to publish its Corporate Complaints Performance annually. **Appendix 1** covers the period 1 April 2022 until 31 March 2023.
- 1.2 The SPSO publishes a list of 8 Key Performance Indicators which all Local Authorities must report to members, staff, and citizens. Performance against these indicators are summarised below and detailed in the report appendix.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - Scrutinise the performance outlined in the Annual Complaints Report for 2022/23 at Appendix 1, including:
 - the trend for customers to submit their complaint electronically at 97.4%, an increase of 11.6% on 21/22;
 - that most complaints (62.6%) closed in the period were considered Frontline and did not require investigation, with 96.5% of those closed considered to be resolved to the satisfaction of the customer;
 - the time to respond to a Frontline complaint continues to be within the target of 5 working days with an average of 3.6 days in 22/23 showing an improving downward trend;
 - that work is still required to improve the performance of Investigation complaints and that this is an ongoing improvement process.
 - Agree to publish the appended report on the Council's website and submit this to the SPSO.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource Implications - There are no direct resource implications arising from this report. However, the report highlights the volume of complaints, FOIs, requests for service and general enquires received by the Council on an annual basis and which require a response from services.
- 3.2 Legal Implications - The Council's compliant process is fully compliant with the SPSO's statutory frontline resolution, and complex investigation complaint processes, and officers participate in benchmarking undertaken in partnership with the SPSO.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) Implication - Analysis and learning from complaints help inform improvements in the design of our services and policies. Improving performance in contact with our citizens and customers is part of our approach to improving engagement and openness with our communities.
- 3.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever implications - 97.6% of complaints were received and responded to via digital channels which reduces paper usage and printing which helps contribute to reducing our carbon footprint. This is an increase from 84% in 2021/22.
- 3.5 Risk Implications - Complaints management is a critical component of the Council's overall approach to citizen and public engagement and to achieving more efficient and effective delivery of services. The Executive Leadership Team have arrangements in place via the central team in the Communities and Place Service, to prioritise complaints and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and achieve statutory targets. Failure to deliver against our statutory obligations will lead to intervention by the SPSO or Information Commissioner.
- 3.6 Gaelic Implications - There are no new implications arising from this report.
- 3.7 Health and Safety – There are no implications arising from this report.

4 Background

- 4.1 The Council follows the 2 Stage Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) laid down by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), a copy of the Highland version can be found [here](#) – the key emphasis of this document is quality and customer care and how we manage our relationships with our customers and citizens.
- 4.2 All complaints are managed by the Customer Resolution and Improvement Team. On receipt of a complaint the Team assess it according to the MCHP.
- 4.3 Complaints which are validated are managed as either a Frontline response (within 5 working days for less complex complaints) or an Investigation response (within 20 working days for more complex cases). Complaints do not have to move through both stages; if on initial assessment the matters are deemed complex, they will be moved to

the investigation stage and the customer informed accordingly.

- 4.4 Complaints can be extended at Frontline to 10 working days, but only in exceptional circumstances and any which are, would be recorded as not meeting the required timescales. No Frontline complaint should go over 10 working days and if it does it is escalated to an investigation complaint for oversight and signature of the relevant Head of Service or ECO. Equally an investigation complaint can be extended past the 20- working day deadline.
- 4.5 This report focuses on how the Council manages the complaints it receives however many complaints received are often first requests for service, appeals, or other administrative processes, rather than complaints and are moved into the correct channel for action and the customer informed. Examples of this are Council Tax and Planning Appeals, or first requests for service detailing issues with potholes and/or waste issues where there is already an existing route to report these. In 22/23 there were 1773 “complaints” recorded on the system, and an additional 958 emails to the complaints@highland.gov.uk email address. Of this total, only 903 cases were assessed as valid complaints, with others being directed to the correct route for a response e.g. a request for service. This also involves careful discussion with the customer to explain the process.
- 4.6 The complaints the Council receive represent a small proportion of the recorded contact through the CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system. Customers can contact the Council via the website, telephone and walk in channels for a variety of needs such as:
- Make a Payment i.e., Council Tax, Rents
 - Report a Problem i.e., Missed Bin, Pothole or Fly-Tipping
 - Request for Service i.e., Garden Waste, Apply for Housing or Licensing
 - General Enquiry – where there is no defined process set up to meet the request of the customer this internal form is used by Customer Services
- 4.7 In 2022/23 there were 321,288 recorded transactions in CRM. A decrease of 6.8% on figures in 21/22 but 87% higher than figures just prior to the pandemic. **0.28% of recorded contact** is considered a complaint.
- 4.8 Whilst complaints over this period have reduced, it is helpful to view this contact within the context of associated requests for information, which have increased over this period:
- Freedom of Information requests – 1889 cases in 22/23, an increase of 17% on 21/22
 - Data Rights requests – including Subject Access Requests – 205 cases in 22/23, a 51% increase on the previous year.

5 Annual Complaints Report 2022/23

- 5.1 The Council is required by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to publish its Corporate Complaints Performance against the 8 Key Performance Indicators. **Appendix 1** covers the period 1 April 2022 until 31 March 2023.
- 5.2 The average number of days taken to respond to Frontline complaints has remained within the target of 5-day target at **3.6 days in 2022/23**, down from 5 days in 2021/22. These are complaints that do not require investigation. This continues to show a downward trend and consistent improvement in response to frontline complaints in recent years.
- 5.3 Most complaints (**62.6%**) are categorised as Frontline (Stage 1). Of those, **96.5%** are categorised as the outcome 'resolved' and did not require an investigation. Customers can request complaints are escalated if they remain unsatisfied with a response, however with 96.5% of Frontline complaints categorised as 'resolved', this indicates most customers were satisfied with the way in which we responded to their complaints. Between 2021/22 and 2022/23 there was a **38% reduction** in escalated complaints.
- 5.4 The percentage of frontline complaints handled within the 5 working day target set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman has improved to **81.4%**, an increase of **19.5%** on the comparative period in 2021/2022. Whilst performance at the Frontline complaint stage continues to improve, work is still required to improve performance on Investigation (Stage 2) complaint performance. Of the complaints considered at stage 2, 41.6% were handled within the 20 working day timescale set by the SPSO.
- 5.5 Improvement at Investigation stage will remain a focus for the CRIT team and services across the Council in 2023/24. Where there is a delay, the aim to ensure customers are advised of this timeously and liaise with the Service on the reasons for that delay.
- 5.6 **Appendix 2** – provides a rank order of complaints by function of the Council in 2022/23 and a comparison with 2021/22 data. Note it is not possible due to service restructures and system changes to compare this with data in previous years. The functions with the greater number of complaints, in the main, are in line with functions that deliver services to significant numbers of the whole population.

6 Next Steps

6.1 *Training and Improvement*

The Customer Resolution & Improvement Manager will be providing each Service with an overview of their complaint data for 22/23 together with information on lessons learnt. This will be tailored for each individual service.

- 6.2 Mandatory online learning complaint courses for all staff and bespoke training for those carrying out investigations is currently under development with colleagues in our People team.

- 6.3 A new way of reporting overdue cases was implemented during Q4 of 22/23. All overdue case data has now been made available to the Executive Leadership Team, Service Management Teams, and their support staff, to support greater oversight on cases that are due imminently and any that are overdue. Performance against Complaint and Freedom of Information handling is also now scrutinised at each Strategic Committee as part of the combined Quarterly Revenue and Performance Monitoring Report.
- 6.4 The Council continues to participate in quarterly meetings of the Local Authority Complaints Handlers Network (LACHN), operating in partnership with the SPSO. Benchmarking activity has been developed in recent years with the aim of supporting improvement, with Highland part of a family group which includes Shetland, Orkney, Western Isles, Scottish Borders, Argyle & Bute, Dumfries & Galloway, and Aberdeenshire councils. This benchmarking information has not yet been shared with Local Authorities.
- 6.5 *Child Friendly Complaints Process*
All Local Authorities via the LACHN group have been liaising with the SPSO on the implementation of a new 'child friendly' complaints process in Scotland to support the duties contained within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). A model process has been developed and is currently being piloted in a number of Local Authority areas with a view to this being implemented during 2024.
- 6.6 *My Council*
The My Council Redesign Programme commenced at the end of 2022, with the aim of the programme to create a joined-up customer contact experience at the Council, including opportunities to further utilise digital approaches to support improved outcomes for our citizens, staff, and the Council.
It is anticipated that easier, self-service access to service information may reduce complaints in the medium term, however it is important that complaints are viewed not necessarily as negative, and that they are used a learning opportunity for the Council to improve service delivery and fed back consistently to services.
- 6.7 The Customer Resolution & Improvement Manager will continue to work with colleagues in Customer Services, ICT/Web User Experience, and My Council project team, to understand how improvements in website design and contact methods can reduce incoming cases not validated as complaints and ensure the customer is routed to the correct destination first time, with a view to significantly reduce the cases not validated, and received by the team in 23/24.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer – Communities & Place

Date: 31 October 2023

Author: Angela Morrison, Customer Resolution & Improvement Manager

Appendix 1: Annual Complaints Performance Report 2022/23

Appendix 2: Functions where more than 10 complaints (all stages) have been received in rank order

Annual Complaints Performance Report 2022-2023

Valuing Customer Feedback

Listening * Open * Valuing * Improving * Supporting * Partnering * Delivering
Èisteachd * Fosgailte * Luach * Leasachadh * Taic * Com-pàirteachas * Libhrigeadh

Ambitious

Sustainable

Connected

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Executive Summary

The Council's published definition of a complaint is:

"An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the local authority's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the local authority."

This report details the Council's corporate complaints performance in 2022/23, against Key Performance Indicators laid down by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) for all Scottish Local Authorities.

In this report, we will explain how the Council have performed against these indicators and how we value complaints to improve and inform service delivery. The Council is committed to providing high quality and timely services. Sometimes, as a customer you may feel that the service you received has fallen below the Council's standards. When this happens, we want to understand the situation, fix any issues quickly and learn from them.

Our Complaints Handling Procedure reflects the Council's commitment to valuing complaints and seeing them as a way of improving our services. We will seek to resolve customer dissatisfaction as close as possible to the point of service delivery and undertake a thorough, impartial, and fair investigation of all complaints, whilst ensuring responses are delivered on time and are of a consistent high quality.

If you wish to provide feedback on this report, we welcome your comments. To do so please [email us](#) or write to us at Customer Resolution & Improvement Team, Highland Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness, IV3 5NX.

Allan Gunn - Executive Chief Officer – Communities & Place

Report Headlines

Citizens' preference for making a complaint continues to be to self-serve through the Council's website, however this has fallen further from 69% in 2020/21, to 50% in 21/22 and 36% in 22/23 due to the publication of a direct email address for complaint handling (complaints@highland.gov.uk) . When combined with email channel, 97.6% of complaints are received via a digital channel, an increase of 11.6% on 2021/22. Citizens who engage with us online are linked directly to the Customer Resolution & Improvement Team, further enhancing the first contact resolution and further work will be undertaken to understand how we can encourage customers to log complaints themselves online.

Most complaints **62.6%** are categorised as Frontline (Stage 1) and of those, **96.5%** have been categorised as resolved and did not require an Investigation. We have reasonably concluded that most customers were therefore satisfied with the way that we responded to their complaints.

The average number of days taken to respond to frontline complaints is within the target of 5 working days and is **3.6 days in 2022/23** from 5 days in 2021/22. These are complaints that do not require an investigation.

The percentage of frontline complaints handled within the 5 working day target set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman has improved to **81.4%**, an increase of **19.5%** on the comparative period in 2021/2022. There has been a decrease in Investigation performance to **41.6%** (a decrease of **14.1%**) where the SPSO target is 20 working days.

Across a range of indicators performance has improved in the last year and as part of an improving trend over the past 5 years. There is still work to be done to continuously improve our performance and the Customer Resolution & Improvement Team aims to drive and support the change required directly with responsible Services. While most frontline complaints are now handled within target timescales (5 days), (and therefore avoiding escalation) in 2022/23, Investigation and Escalated complaints did not improve in terms of timescale performance, this will remain a focus for the team, working with responsible colleagues across the Council, in 2023/24.

Background

Customer enquiries, requests for service and complaints are recorded on our customer relationship management system. For context there were 321,288 transactions in 2022/23 of which 903 (0.28%) were customer complaints. This is a decrease in total transactions from 2021/22 (344,948).

Scottish Councils operate a complaints process which considers complaints as either:

- **Frontline** - straightforward issues that are easily resolved, requiring little or no investigation. This could mean an on-the-spot apology, explanation, or other action to resolve the complaint within 5 working days.
- **Investigation.** For issues that have not been resolved at the frontline or that are complex or require a detailed examination before we can state our position. We aim to provide a definitive response within 20 working days following a thorough investigation of the points raised.

This mandatory complaint process is defined by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). It is important to note that a complaint does not need to be considered at Frontline resolution before progressing to Investigation. When a complaint is received, the Customer Resolution and Improvement Team assess in accordance the appropriate stage according to the nature of the complaint – in many instances the team can now resolve the complaint straightaway. Where customers are dissatisfied with our decision following an Investigation, they can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman to consider their complaint further.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Annual Performance Indicators

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman has established **8 performance indicators** which are used by local authorities to monitor complaints and to benchmark their performance with other local authorities which are similar in scale and demography.

These are set out below together with the Council's annual performance for 2022/2023.

Note: Due to COVID-19 the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network (LACHN) has been unable to collate Scottish Local Authority national average data for 2020/21 and 21/22

Indicator 1 - The total number of complaints received per thousand of population.

This indicator records the total number of complaints received by the Council in the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 per 1,000 population.

For Highland there were 3.8 complaints logged per 1,000 of population during 2022/23, a decrease in the number from 2021/22.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Population Estimate	234,770	235,180	235,540	235,830	235,430	238,060
Complaints Per 1,000	9.3	6.1	7.3	4.4	5.2	3.8

The Council validated a total of **903 complaints** in 22/23 a 25% decrease from figures in 21/20 (1,217 validated), for comparison in 20/21 1,048 were validated. Policy and legislative changes, together with seasonal, social, economic, and other external factors throughout the year, can all influence the volume of complaints received, however extensive work has been undertaken by the Customer Resolution & Improvement Team to only progress complaints as defined by our Model Complaints Handling Procedure.

Citizens' preference for making a complaint continues to be self-serve through the Council's website, however has fallen from 69% to 50% in 21/22 and continues to fall to 36% in 22/23 due to the publication of a direct email address for complaint handling (complaints@highland.gov.uk). When combined with email channel, **97.6% of complaints are received via a digital channel**, and increase of 11.6% on 21/22. Citizens who engage with us online are linked directly to the Customer Resolution & Improvement Team, further enhancing the first contact resolution.

Citizens who choose to engage digitally with the Council's complaints process receive email and telephone responses, which provides quicker delivery timescales than traditional methods.

Indicator 2 - Complaints closed at Frontline and Investigation as a percentage of all complaints closed.

The term 'closed' refers to those complaints where a response has been provided for the customer, and at the time no further action is required (regardless of whether it is Frontline or Investigation and whether any subsequent action takes place).

This indicator provided information on the number of complaints closed at Frontline, Investigation and those Frontline complaints that have been closed and subsequently progressed to Investigation due to the customer's request or where the timescale for a Frontline response has elapsed.

	% of all Cases closed 2017/18	% of all Cases closed 2018/19	% of all Cases closed 2019/20	% of all Cases closed 2020/21	% of all Cases closed 2021/22	% of all Cases closed 2022/23
Closed at Frontline	90.6	82.7	73.7	72.0	67.9	62.6
Closed at Investigation	5.9	12.6	22.7	24.6	17.1	25.4
Closed after progression from Frontline to Investigation or where the Frontline timescale has expired	3.5	4.7	3.5	3.4	14.9	12

There were **909 complaints closed** during 2022/23, 569 (62.6%) at Frontline, 231 (25.4%) at investigation and 109 (12%) after progression from frontline to investigation. Most of our complaints are received and resolved at frontline; however, the increase in escalated complaints continues, either because the customer wishes to escalate to the next stage, or where the frontline response time has been exhausted. This increase may indicate an increasing complexity in the complaints being investigated.

Indicator 3 - The number of complaints upheld or partially upheld/not upheld at each stage as a percentage of complaints closed in full at each stage.

There is a requirement for a formal outcome to be recorded for each complaint. Formal outcomes are the complaint is either **upheld, partially upheld, not upheld** or a new SPSO outcome of **resolved** which was introduced as part of the SPSO's revised MCHP in 21/22.

A resolved outcome is where both the Council and the customer has agreed the case has been resolved to a suitable resolution and can be closed.

Performance over time is shown in the table on the right.

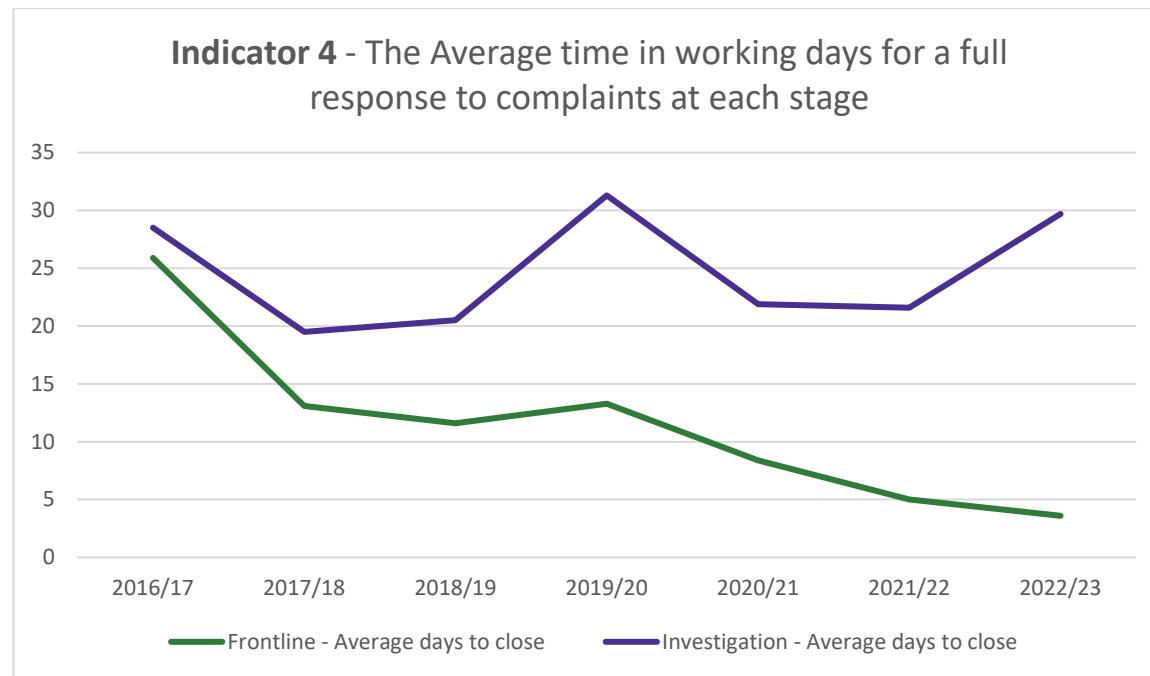
Given the significant number of cases classified with this new category and to ensure accuracy, a review was undertaken of those cases closed as 'resolved' but where it was subsequently reopened (i.e., not resolved) – out of all complaints in 21/22 this accounted for 24 cases, and we can be confident this classification is being used accurately by the team. We have continued to monitor this in 22/23, to ensure accuracy.

Frontline	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Resolved
2017/18	498 (26.5%)	431 (22.9%)	953 (50.6%)	n/a
2018/19	284 (25.7%)	256 (23.1%)	567 (51.2%)	n/a
2019/20	250 (20.7%)	256 (21.2%)	699 (58.0%)	n/a
2020/21	230 (31.2%)	241 (32.7%)	266 (36.1%)	n/a
2021/22	32 (4.0%)	19 (2.4%)	81 (10.1%)	673 (83.6%)
2022/23	3 (0.5%)	1 (0.2%)	16 (2.8%)	549 (96.5%)
Investigation				
2017/18	20 (16.3%)	38 (30.9%)	65 (52.8%)	n/a
2018/19	30 (17.8%)	50 (29.6%)	89 (52.7%)	n/a
2019/20	65 (17.5%)	104 (28.0%)	202 (54.4%)	n/a
2020/21	55 (21.8%)	107 (42.5%)	90 (35.7%)	n/a
2021/22	13 (6.4%)	47 (23.2%)	73 (36.0%)	70 (34.5%)
2022/23	39 (16.9%)	66 (28.6%)	101(43.7%)	25 (10.8%)

Indicator 4 - The average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage.

The Council aims to respond to **Frontline** complaints within **5 working days** and an **Investigation** complaint within **20 working days**.

As shown on the chart below, the average number of days taken to respond to **Frontline** complaints has **reduced from 25.9 days in 2016/17 to 3.6 days in 2022/23**. The average number of days taken to respond to **Investigation** complaints has **increased to 29.7 days in 2022/23**.



Indicator 5 - The number of complaints which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 working days and 20 working days.

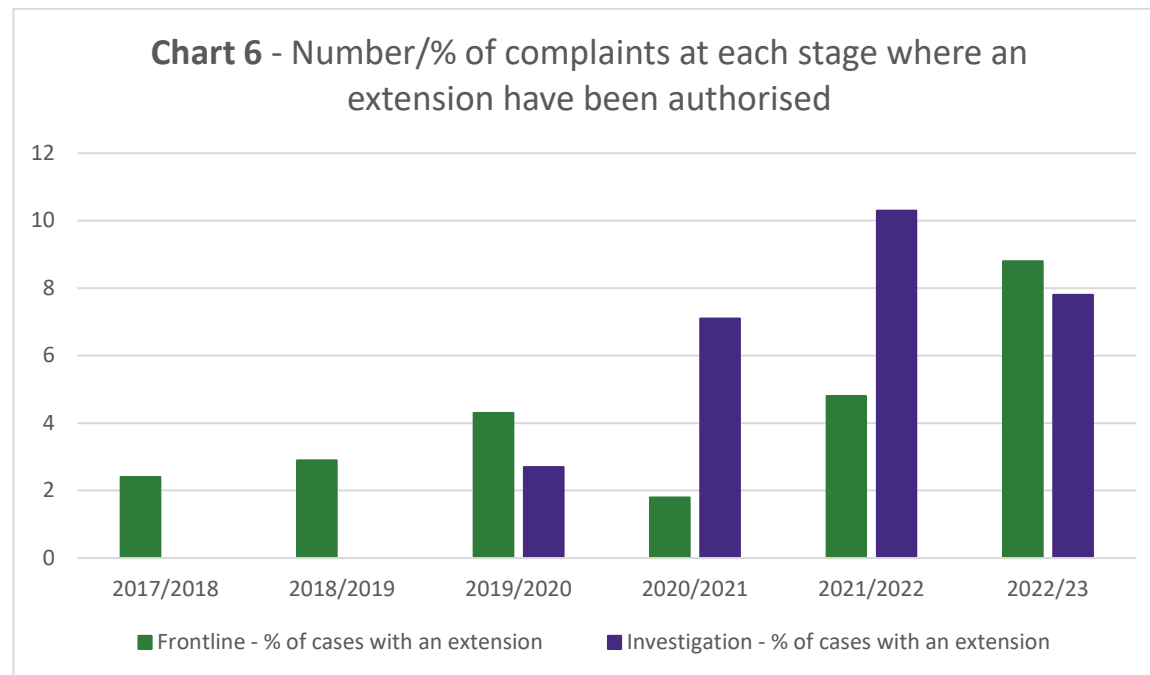
This indicator reports the number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days, including cases where an extension to the timescales has been agreed.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number closed at Frontline Resolution	802	502	597	399	498	463
% within 5 working days	42.6%	45.4%	49.5%	54.1%	61.9%	81.4%
Number closed at Investigation	78	109	234	173	113	96
% Investigation closed within 20 working days	63.8%	64.7%	63.1%	68.7%	55.7%	41.6%
Number closed at Escalation	55	39	40	35	78	109
% Escalation closed within 20 working days	75.3%	61.9%	69.0%	85.7%	44.1%	28.4%

Council performance on the number of frontline complaints managed within the 5 working day target set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman has improved significantly from **61.9%** to **81.4%**, an increase of **19.5%** on the comparative period in 2021/22 and **27.3%** increase from 2020/21 which continues a steady increase in performance. There has been a decrease in investigation performance to **41.6%** (a decrease of **14.1%**) where the SPSO target is 20 working days. Analysis would suggest this is due to several interlinked reasons which include the complexity of many of the cases received, staff absences within wider services teams and Customer Resolution team, particularly in Q3 and 4 of 22/23. Where a case is overdue the Customer Resolution & Improvement Team ensure contact is maintained with the customer to keep them up to date on the reasons for delay and when they should expect a response.

Indicator 6 - The number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension of 5 or up to 20 days timelines have been authorised.

50 (8.8%) frontline complaints (39 during 2021/2022) were authorised with a 5-day extension. 18 (7.8%) investigation complaints were authorised with an extension up to 20 working days. With agreement from the customer, we can apply an extension when it is deemed necessary due to the complexity of the issue.



An extension to a complaint is by exception and are generally approved by the Customer Resolution & Improvement Manager in conjunction with Heads of Service/Executive Chief Officers. We will continue to challenge our frontline performance for extending the number of days to resolve these complaints. Our aim is to further reduce the number of instances when extensions are necessary however the steady increase can be attributed to better recording (and correct application) of approved extensions in the last two financial years.

Indicator 7 - The Complaints Handling Procedure followed by the Council requires us to report on customer satisfaction with the complaints service provided.

Normally the Council conducts an annual survey of performance and attitudes from its Citizens' Panel to inform customer satisfaction. It includes specific questions on complaint management and performance. However, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic the survey has not been run since 2019. A new approach to delivering the next Performance Survey is currently being developed and a new survey is planning during 2023/24. Customer Satisfaction data will be provided in the next annual report.

Indicator 8 - Outlining improvements to services or procedures as a result of the consideration of complaints

During 22/23 work has focused on a number of areas -

- Continued engagement with Service Management Teams
- Targeted engagement with sections of the Council receiving the most complaints
- Renewed focus on resolution as an outcome and focus of the team resolving customer complaint at first point of contact.
- Focus on quality assurance procedures to ensure responses are provided to customers of a corporate standard
- Ongoing training with Customer Services Officers to refine and deliver a comprehensive complaint service including full certification from the SPSO in both stages of their complaints handling training
- Participation with the My Council project team to deliver improvements based on learning from complaints
- Increasing the links and understanding of roles with our colleagues in the frontline of customer services

Compliments Received

During 22/23 the Council also received compliments for the services provided. Some examples of compliments received during this time are shown below. It is important to recognise when excellent services are being delivered and the Customer Resolution and Improvement Team thank all customers for their compliments and ensure the details are passed on to the member of staff directly.

- *"I want to thank the Highland Council Waste Team for removing the glass bins on X Road, Inverness and for the excellent job they did of cleaning up all the glass etc after the bins were removed."* – **Waste Team**
- *"I rang the Service Centre at 10.38am for a replacement garden bin, the next morning my brown bin was delivered into my back garden, the operator took of my new current license and stuck it onto the new bin.....well impressed with the Service. Please pass my thanks to the Service Centre and Waste team"* – **Service Centre and Waste Team**
- *"Many thanks for fixing all the potholes I've recently reported within a few weeks. Very impressive as usual".* – **Roads Team**
- *"Today we visited Fort William and while looking for parking facilities we met a Council employee (parking enforcement officer) whom could only be described as an ambassador on how to welcome visitors"* – **Parking Team**
- *"I attended the Inverness Service Point, unsure how to get an over 60 bus pass, I was greeted by a person who seemed genuinely happy to see me, was polite and very helpful and gave me all the information I needed, they even googled the nearest photo booth for me. On returning with my picture twenty minutes later she saw me come back in, beckoned me to her counter and completed my application efficiently and quickly. The whole process was effortless due to the attitude of your staff member –* **Service Point Team**
- *I would just like to say how thankful I am to the welfare fund for a crisis grant i received.....I found myself in financial difficulty due to unforeseen circumstances. I had no food, electricity, or money. I was not due to be paid for another week and I was left feeling extremely anxious as to how I would be able to survive until pay day. I received a swift response from the welfare team, and it resulted in a payment same day. Once again, I just want to express how grateful I was for this help at a difficult time and situation –* **Welfare Team**
- *"Last week my heating stopped working, I phoned in and had someone at the house in the late afternoon, they let me know that the gas boiler needed some parts. About an hour later there was a knock at the door, with someone from the council to let me know that they were going to replace the boiler, which was done on Monday excellent service! –* **Housing Repairs Team**
- *"The Planning Service was excellent, I found the email correspondence to be prompt, well focused and giving clear instructions for us to follow, especially at a time when we are still not 'back to normal' after COVID –* **Planning Team**

Complaints investigated by the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO)

When a customer is not satisfied with our final response to a complaint, they can ask the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman to investigate their complaint. The Scottish Public Service Ombudsman is the final arbiter for complaints about public services.

Each year elected members are presented with a report which set out the number and types of complaints relating to the Council that have been considered by the SPSO and the subsequent judgements in the cases where the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman's inquiry has concluded. The detailed report will be presented to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee in November 2023 by the Performance and Governance Service.

Conclusion

Citizens and Customers are at the centre of our service delivery model. We aim to focus on listening to our customers and use their feedback to make changes so that we can deliver improvements. The ambitious My Council Programme aims to improve our approach to customer contact throughout the organization.

This report demonstrates how we are continuously improving our performance and in the current financial climate, there are challenges facing local authorities in their service delivery and in achieving positive results around complaints. However, the MCHP framework of positive customer engagement, ensuring customers are involved from the outset and providing channels which make it easier for them to let us know when things go wrong, underpin our improvement ambitions.

We continue to review and to challenge our processes to deliver quality services within our overall budget.

Table 1 - Functions where more than 10 complaints (all stages) have been received in rank order – 21/22 compared to 22/23

	Number of complaints (21/22)	Number of complaints (22/23)	New Ranking (previous in brackets)
Function:			
Schools	68	116	1 (5)
Waste Services	140	109	2 (2)
In-House Building Maintenance Team/Repairs	182	102	3 (1)
HRA (Management of Council Housing)	122	78	4 (4)
Roads	136	69	5 (3)
Revenues	52	64	6 (8)
Planning	54	50	7 (6)
Customer Services	51	34	8 (9)
Children's Services: Social Care	35	34	8= (11)
Winter Maintenance	n/a	32	10 (n/a)
Public Conveniences	30	28	11 (13)
Grounds Maintenance**	39	18	12 (10)
Environmental Health	15	16	13 (16)
Car Parking	32	10	14= (12)
Burials & Cremations	19	10	14= (14)
Street Lighting	n/a	10	14= (n/a)

*Taxation and Revenues were previously ranked together

**Grounds Maintenance and Burials were previously ranked together