

ANGUS COUNCIL

**SCRUTINY & AUDIT COMMITTEE
22 AUGUST 2023**

ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2022-23

**REPORT BY JACKIE BUCHANAN,
DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

1. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee note the contents of the Annual Complaints Report

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN

This report contributes to the following local outcome contained within the Community Plan:

- Angus is a safe, secure, vibrant and sustainable community.

3. BACKGROUND

It is important that as a Council we understand the public's experience of dealing with Angus Council and we aim to use the information we have received from complaints to help improve our services where we can.

By looking at the complaints received, we can try to prevent a problem happening again. The information recorded includes the types of complaint received, how quickly we deal with each complaint and how many were upheld, not upheld or partially upheld. The Information is split into the different complaint stages. We also report how many complaints were considered by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) and their decision ([Report 178/23](#) refers)

The model complaints handling procedure can be found at www.spsso.org.uk/the-model-complaints-handling-procedures

4. COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of the service provided by or on behalf of the council. This includes a failure to follow the proper administrative processes, delays in responding to service requests and enquiries, failure to provide a service to the expected standard, dissatisfaction with the Council policies and treatment by or attitude of a member of staff.

All complaints are recorded on the council's system and are managed under the two-stage complaint procedure.

Stage 1: This stage is known as Frontline Resolution as these complaints should be straightforward. A Stage 1 complaint could mean that we can fix the issue quickly and easily within five working days. Most complaints should be dealt with at Stage 1.

Stage 2: This stage is known as the Investigation stage. A Stage 2 complaint may be a concern that has not been successfully dealt with at Stage 1 and therefore escalated or refers to a matter that is complex and requires a full and detailed investigation. Stage 2 complaints should be answered in 20 working days.

A person can make a complaint by using our online form, in writing or in person at any council office. The online form and further information can be found at www.angus.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/complaints_and_comments/make_a_complaint_about_a_council_service

5. 2022/23 Summary

In 2022/23, Angus Council received 357 complaints overall. The number of complaints received for each category is shown below.

Category	2022/23	Upheld	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Resolved
Councils' failure to follow appropriate administrative procedures	2	1	1	0	0
Delay in responding to enquiries & requests	100	24	17	33	26
Disagreement with a decision where customer cannot use another procedure	16	2	6	6	2
Dissatisfaction with Council Policy	27	3	20	2	2
Equalities Issues	11	0	7	3	1
Failure to provide a service	52	19	10	14	9
Treatment or attitude of a staff member	38	8	12	12	6
Other	38	5	8	3	22
Service Request/Comment	3	0	3	0	0
Resolved	5	0	1	0	4
Not a corporate complaint	1	0	0	1	0
Inadequate Standards	64	18	21	11	14
TOTAL	357	80	106	85	86

We can see that the majority of complaints received relate to a delay in responding. It is important to note that although there is a reduction in the workforce, the demands on staff are increasing, and whilst every effort is made to respond to issues quickly, there is an ever-increasing expectation by the public that staff should respond immediately. The use of email and digital systems has increased customer expectation in this regard but as our workforce decreases and budgets reduce, customer expectation remains high. A number of these complaints relate to no response from service requests submitted via the online portal/Customer Relations System. Once a service request is logged through either the online portal or Accessline a response number is issued and the request sent to the service. The Service then have no auto response to allow our customers to know that we have received their issue or advise of the estimated timeframe in dealing with the request. This in turn results in complaints once a number of weeks elapse without any further correspondence to the customer. As a council we need to look at an auto response to ensure our citizens firstly know that we have received their request and can be informed on the expected timeframe. This would reduce the number of complaints raised which in turn would reduce the pressure on officers. Officers are looking at how this might be feasible.

6. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) have outlined four key performance indicators for local authorities to use to monitor practise and identify any trends.

Indicator One: The total number of complaints received

This indicator records the total number of complaints received. This is the sum of the number of complaints received at Stage 1 (this includes escalated complaints, as they were first received at Stage 1), and the number of complaints received directly at Stage 2.

Indicator Two: the number and percentage of complaints at each stage that were closed in full within the set timescales of five and 20 working days.

The SPSO requires complaints to be closed within five working days at stage 1 and 20 working days at stage 2.

This indicator will report:

- (i) the number of complaints closed in full at stage 1 within five working days as % of all stage 1 complaints responded to in full.
- (ii) the number of complaints closed in full at stage 2 within 20 working days as % of all stage 2 complaints responded to in full.

Escalated complaints are those that have been considered at Stage 1 and then have either moved to Stage 2 at the customer's request (because the customer was unhappy with the response at Stage 1) or because they have exceeded the maximum of ten working days at Stage 1 therefore have automatically been moved to Stage 2.

Indicator Three: the average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage.

This indicator represents the average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage.

This indicator will report:

- (i) the average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage 1
- (ii) the average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage 2
- (iii) the average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation.

Indicator Four: the outcome of complaints at each stage.

There is a requirement for the outcome to be recorded for each complaint. There are four outcome categories: resolved, upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. Where some of the points of complaint are upheld and others are not, this should be reported as 'partially upheld'.

This indicator will report:

- (i) the number of complaints
 - (a) upheld
 - (b) partially upheld
 - (c) not upheld and
 - (d) resolvedas a % of all complaints closed at stage 1.

- (ii) the number of complaints
 - (a) upheld
 - (b) partially upheld
 - (c) not upheld and
 - (d) resolvedas a % of all complaints closed at stage 2.

- (iii) the number of complaints
 - (a) upheld
 - (b) partially upheld
 - (c) not upheld and
 - (d) resolved after escalationas a % of all complaints closed after escalation.

The performance for 2022/23 has been provided in Quarterly reports to the committee, with comparison to the previous financial year where possible to show development and areas that require improvement. (Reports [209/22](#), [402/22](#), [82/23](#) & [222/23](#))

During 2022/23 Angus Council received 679 complaints

Stage 1

- 266 complaints were closed at frontline resolution
 - 61 complaints upheld (22.9%)
 - 75 complaints not upheld (28.2%)
 - 58 complaints partially upheld (21.8%) and
 - 72 complaints resolved (27.1%)

The average time taken to close a Stage 1 frontline complaints was 5.1 working days. The SPSO state that a Stage 1 complaint should be responded to within five working days.

Stage 2

- 23 complaints were closed at Stage 2
 - 3 complaints were upheld (13.0%)
 - 11 complaints were not upheld (47.8%); and
 - 9 complaints were partially upheld (39.1%)

The average time taken to close a Stage 2 Investigation complaint was 19.3 working days. The SPSO state that a Stage 2 complaint should be responded to within 20 working days, however this can be extended where there are clear and justifiable reasons for extending the timescale, subject to agreement with the complainant.

Following Escalation (that is Stage 1 and Stage 2 escalated)

- 68 complaints were closed after escalation
 - 16 complaints were upheld after escalation (23.5%)
 - 19 complaints were not upheld after escalation (27.9%)
 - 19 complaints were partially upheld after escalation (27.9%)
 - 14 complaints were resolved after escalation (20.6%)

The average time taken to close a Stage 2 complaint after escalation was 15.3 working days.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An Equality Impact Assessment is not required as this report is only reporting information so has no differential impact on persons with protected characteristics.

8. CONSULTATION

8.1 The Chief Executive and all Directors have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

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