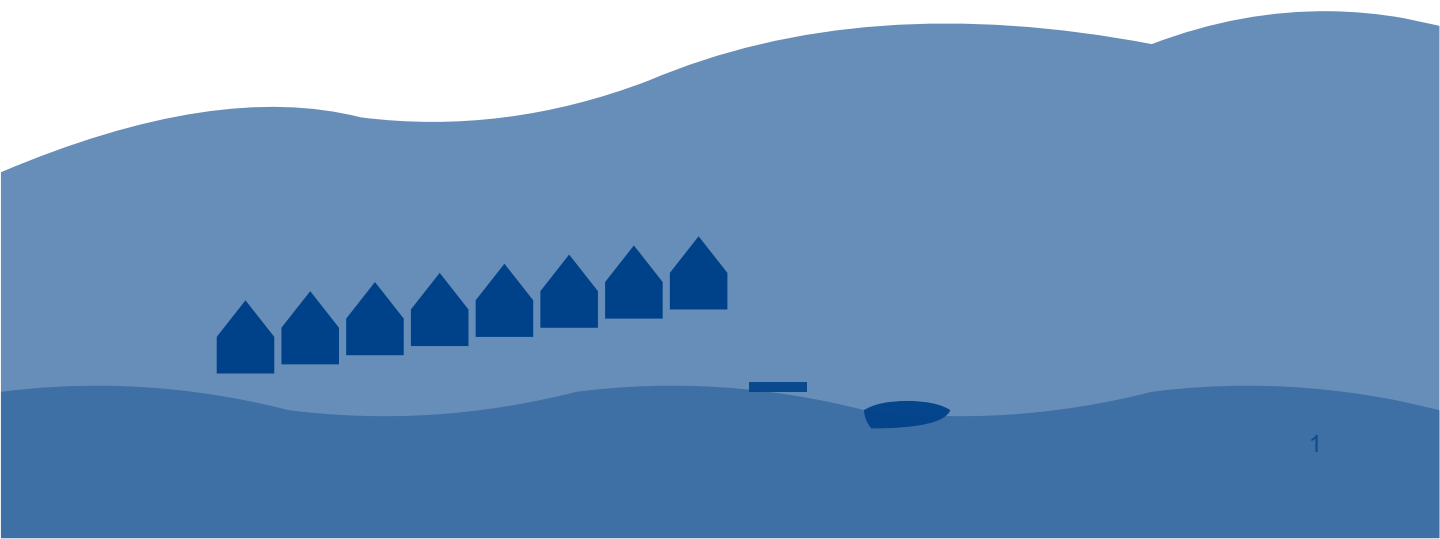
From mountain to sea

Aberdeenshire COUNCIL

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL ANNUAL COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024-2025



Contents

Chief Executive's Foreword 3

Our Complaints Performance.....4

How Customers Complained 4

Complaints closed per 1,000 Population.....5

Complaints escalated to the Ombudsman in 2024/25.....6

Complaints Upheld, Partially Upheld and Not Upheld.....7

Average Times/Within Timescales/Extensions to Timescales given 7

Why Customers Complained 9

Case Studies.....10

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman/Benchmarking 14

Contact Us 15

Chief Executive's Introduction

Jim Savege

Chief Executive
Aberdeenshire
Council

As we present the 2024/25 Annual Complaints Performance Report, we reflect on another year of dedicated service and continuous improvement within Aberdeenshire Council. This report highlights our commitment to transparency, accountability, and the ongoing enhancement of our services.

Over the past year, we have continued to listen to the voices of our community, addressing concerns and implementing changes to better meet the needs of our residents. The insights gained from complaints have been invaluable in driving our efforts to provide high-quality services and foster a culture of excellence.

We are proud of the progress made in 2024/25, including the reduction in complaint resolution times and the increased satisfaction with our responses. These achievements are a testament to the hard work and dedication of our staff, who strive to resolve issues promptly and effectively.

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Looking ahead, we remain committed to learning from every complaint, using the feedback to inform our practices and policies. Our goal is to ensure that every interaction with Aberdeenshire Council is positive and that we continue to build trust and confidence within our community.

We extend our gratitude to all residents who have taken the time to provide feedback. Your input is crucial in helping us improve and deliver the best possible services.
Together, we will continue to make Aberdeenshire a great place to live, work, and visit.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Jim Savege
Chief Executive

Our Complaints Performance

Aberdeenshire Council publishes its performance of complaints handling to provide assurance in relation to our performance, to deliver continuous improvement, and to assist in benchmarking between local authorities.

Audit Scotland monitor the reporting of complaints in conjunction with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) and in line with the principles of the Best Value arrangements.

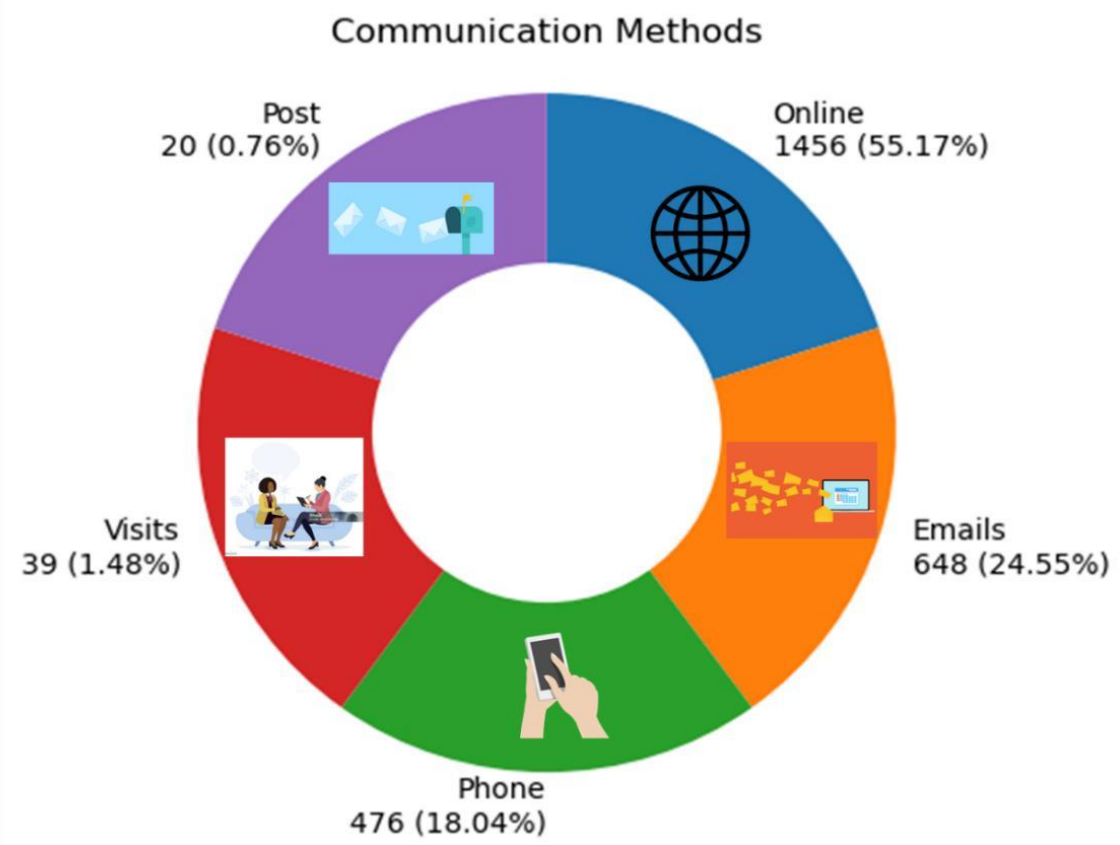
The council's Complaints Procedure (CHP) and the performance indicators below, adhere to the requirements set out by the SPSO's Model Complaints Handling Procedure.

We publish complaints performance information quarterly and annually.

The following complaints management performance information outlines the council's annual performance for the year 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

How Customers Complained

In 2024-25, we closed 2639 complaints from customers who chose the following ways to contact us with a complaint:



Complaints closed per 1,000 Population and closed at each stage

Total number of complaints closed by Aberdeenshire Council. To allow for a fair comparison across all 32 councils in Scotland, the figure of complaints per 1,000 of population is used. The population of Aberdeenshire is **264,320.****

Period	Total Closed	Change from previous year	Average Complaints per 1000 Residents	Closed at Stage One	Stage One %	Closed at Stage Two	Stage Two %	Escalated to Ombudsman
2024 - 25	**2639**	**78**	**9.98**	**2122**	**80%**	**517**	**20%**	**49**
2023 - 24	2561	465	9.7	2178	85%	383	15%	50
2022 - 23	2096	92	8	1710	82%	386	18%	53
2021 - 22	2004	326	7.67	1531	76%	473	24%	45
2020 - 21	1678	-213	6.42	1308	78%	370	22%	40

We aim to deal with and resolve as many complaints as is appropriate at Stage One of our procedure, as this better for our customers and service users – resolving complaints as quickly and as close to the first point of contact as possible. A split of anything above 70%/30% is the aspiration. We do well with in this area evidenced by the consistent percentages.

Over the financial year only 1.85% of complaints were brought to the Ombudsman by complainants.

*** Population is taken from the National Records Office for Scotland Mid-2023 Population estimates, updated October 2024.*
www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data

Complaints Escalated to the Ombudsman in 2024/25

There were **49** cases in total brought to the Ombudsman where complainants asked them to review our handling of their complaint and/or our decision following the completion of our Complaints Handling Procedure, as they remained dissatisfied. Only **2** were decided Some Upheld with recommendations, and none fully Upheld. You can find all these cases and others from previous years at the following link on the SPSO's page: Decision Reports | SPSO.

Not Upheld	Upheld	Some Upheld	Not Taken Further	Total Closed
0	**0**	**2**	**47**	**49**
0.00%	0.00%	4.08%	95.92%	

On review the Ombudsman advised that out of the **49** cases investigated, for **47** cases (95.92%) they would not take these complaints any further as they could find no maladministration on our part, or that they were unable to achieve the outcome that the complainant was looking for due to the council already undertaking the appropriate action. This is another area where we consistently continue to do well due to good investigations, clear explanations, apologies, and resolutions where appropriate. There are **8** cases awaiting the SPSO to decide upon from this last year.

Complaints Upheld, Partially Upheld and Not Upheld

There is a requirement for a formal outcome to be recorded for each complaint. These outcomes are “upheld,” “partially upheld” or “not upheld.”

The figures for 2024/25 highlighted a slight increase in the number of complaints which were upheld during this financial year for Stage One complaints. Stage Two complaints saw the same percentage in upheld complaints as the year before. In handling complaints, Aberdeenshire Council seeks to solve problems as close to the frontline provision of service as possible and within a short timeframe. The increase in upheld Stage One complaints indicates that services are acknowledging any service failure and resolving complaints early, without complaints either being escalated or reaching a level of seriousness or complexity where a Stage Two complaint response is required.

Period	Stage	Not Upheld	Upheld	Partially upheld
2024-25	**Stage 1**	**53.10%**	**6.40%**	**40.50%**
2024-25	**Stage 2**	**65.80%**	**14.70%**	**19.50%**
2023-24	Stage 1	48.60%	9.43%	42.10%
2023-24	Stage 2	65.30%	18.00%	16.00%
2022-23	Stage 1	55.80%	7.40%	36.80%
2022-23	Stage 2	73.10%	10.10%	16.00%
2021-22	Stage 1	58.80%	0.00%	41.20%
2021-22	Stage 2	74.20%	0.00%	25.80%
2020-21	Stage 1	53.00%	6.40%	40.60%
2020-21	Stage 2	78.40%	3.40%	18.20%

Average Times/Within Timescales/Extensions to Timescales given

We aim to respond to and close stage one complaints within 5 working days.
We aim to respond to and close stage two complaints within 20 working days.

The average time in working days to close complaints at Stage One and Stage Two is shown below. Most complaints are resolved at Stage One (Front Line resolution). Service areas where this is not the case are those where the nature of the complaints tend to be more complex and therefore take longer to investigate and come to an agreeable resolution.

We saw an increase in the average time to resolve front line complaints, due to the increase in complaints being logged at this stage. There was also an overall increase in complaints received due to changes to Waste collections.

We saw a decrease in the time taken to resolve Investigation complaints.

Period	Stage 1 Frontline Resolution Average Days	Within 5 Working Days	Extension Given	Stage 2 Investigation Average Days	Within 20 Working Days	Extension Given
2024 - 25	**9.3**	**65%**	**753**	**22.3**	**69%**	**162**
2023 - 24	11	52%	1055	24.7	71%	113
2022 - 23	8.1	67%	558	18.88	78%	85
2021 - 22	8.2	67%	400	19.3	67%	155
2020 - 21	5.7	78%	200	20.25	74%	96

35.5% of all Stage One complaints (753 out of 2122) were given authorised extensions out-with the target timescale of 5 working days. There are a variety of reasons for services requiring an extension to timescales for example: pending meetings with customers, repairs required, more information required, increase in complaints received.

31.3% of all Stage Two complaints (162 out of 517) were given authorised extensions out-with the target response time of 20 working days. Extensions in these cases are more likely to relate to the seriousness of the allegations, complexity in investigation, and a prioritisation of work due to commitment of time and resources. This also includes arranging meetings and interviewing employees/customers, requiring more information from complainants, arranging meetings with complainants/employees.

Why Customers Complained

Below is the breakdown of complaints, per Service Directorate along with the top ten topics of complaints.

Complaints received by Directorate	2023/2024	2024/2025	Trend
Business Services	236	189	▼
Education & Children's Services	260	287	▲
Environment & Infrastructure Services	1864	1837	▼
Health & Social Care	79	123	▲
Live Life Aberdeenshire	122	203	▲
Total	**2561**	**2639**	

Top 10 Topics of Complaint	2023/2024	2024/2025	Trend
Tenancy Services	89	68	▼
Swimming pools and Leisure Centres	91	132	▲
Staff behaviour	78	63	▼
Road works (potholes, diversions, surface dressing)	189	188	▼
Refuse and Collections	827	730	▼
Property and Facilities Management	107	125	▲
Primary Schools	94	141	▲
Parks & Opens Spaces/Grass cutting/Maintenance	110	126	▲
Council Tax	59	48	▼
Asset Management and Repairs	264	241	▲

Case Studies

Case Study 1: Children's services - SPSO – 202302482

After many repeat complaints to the council and remaining dissatisfied with the council's responses, C complained to the Ombudsman that the council had failed to keep their child (A) safe whilst in the council's care and that A had been inappropriately placed in secure accommodation. A had been in care in a number of different settings, including secure units. Some were run by third party care providers or the NHS. C complained to the council that A had been able to harm themselves whilst in care and that A had been placed in secure accommodation when the council was not legally entitled to do so. The council said that some incidents had occurred despite best efforts of staff to keep A safe.

The Ombudsman took independent advice from a registered social worker. They found that the council had taken reasonable steps to try and ensure A's safety and had worked with third parties to ensure incidents were fully reviewed. The council had also taken reasonable steps to prevent a reoccurrence of the error that led to A being accommodated.

Therefore, the Ombudsman did not find communication with C had been unreasonable and given C's restrictions on the kind of communication that they would accept from the council. The Ombudsman did not uphold these aspects of the complaint.

Case Study 2: HSCP – SPSO - 202306940

D complained about the Social Work assessment of their adult child (A). A had a condition which affected them in a variety of ways. A's long-standing care worker had retired, and A was experiencing difficulties which were putting them and their family at risk. D believed unreasonable assumptions were made about A's ability to function independently because of the level of support their family provided for them. A had been referred for assessment by a psychologist and the HSCP's social work department. A was assessed by social workers as not eligible for support. D challenged this, because A's psychology assessment recommended, they receive support, and the process of assessment had been inadequate. The HSCP refused to alter their decision, saying the psychology report was inappropriately worded, and they would seek to have it reworded. D complained to the Ombudsman this was unacceptable and that the HSCP had failed to manage their complaint properly.

The Ombudsman took advice from a registered social worker on the case. Based on their advice and the evidence, they found the assessment of A by social workers was reasonable. Although the HSCP wrote to D saying they would seek to have the wording of A's psychological assessment reworded or redacted, there was no evidence they had asked for this. The advice received was that the psychological assessment was inappropriately worded, as A's eligibility for support could only be assessed by social workers. Social work raised reasonable concerns about this with the psychology team. The Ombudsman found D's complaint was managed unreasonably, as the HSCP failed to discuss it with D, and consequently did not address all the points of concern D wished to raise.

As a result, the Ombudsman upheld one part of the complaint and made a recommendation.

Case Study 3:Property - SPSO – 202304769

B complained to the Council over home energy improvement works that were being conducted by a contractor. They raised various concerns including concerns about the notification to owners, the works as they were happening, and the conduct of workers. B remained dissatisfied with the council's final response so complained to the Ombudsman. B highlighted that they were dissatisfied with the way in which the council managed their complaint, specifically that the council did not acknowledge any fault, apologise, or reach a definitive conclusion (i.e. upheld or not upheld). B confirmed that they were dissatisfied with the council's complaints handling and that they were not raising further concerns about the substantive issues.

The Ombudsman assessed B's concerns and identified that a reasonable investigation was conducted in each case. The council acknowledged where things had gone wrong, offered B an apology where appropriate, and told them of the action they had taken (or were going to take) to address the issue. B felt that the council did not take accountability for the issues and inappropriately blamed their contractor. However, the information the Ombudsman reviewed demonstrated that the council were open to receiving the feedback and addressing the issues directly with the contractor to avoid the same problems happening again. They said this was the type of action they would expect them to take in this circumstance.

The Ombudsman did not uphold the complaint but gave some recommendations on complaint handling to the council.

Case Study 4: Waste – SPSO - 202409062

E complained that his refuse collections kept getting missed from his block of flats over a lengthy period. The council investigated and provided a response and resolution to their complaints. E remained dissatisfied and asked the Ombudsman to investigate. The Ombudsman approached the council and asked whether they would be willing to undertake further monitoring of the refuse collections at the customer's property for a period and/or speak to crews to ensure collections are carried out.

In response the council confirmed that the customer's collection day and that bags needed to be presented by 07:00 to ensure collection. As they had also confirmed to the customer. The council said they would write to E to confirm the day again and confirmed they were willing to undertake further monitoring of the refuse collections at E's property, to avoid the issue again. The council said they had asked a supervisor to speak to the crews and to monitor the collection point for the next 2 cycles (6 weeks) and to record with dates, times, and photos.

The Ombudsman advised that given the concerns raised, they considered this would represent a reasonable way forward and is the type of action they would expect the council to take, therefore did not uphold the complaint.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman/Benchmarking

Complaints benchmarking with other authorities in Family Groups is ongoing and meetings are held with the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network (LACHN) and the Improvement Service regarding this.

Links to all Annual Complaints Reports for Local Authorities in Scotland can be accessed via the SPSO Valuing Complaints Website which can be found at the following link:

https://www.spso.org.uk/local-authority-complaints-reporting
You can also find the data regarding volumes and types of complaints the SPSO received and dealt with for 2024/25 here: Statistics 2024-25 | SPSO

Average Family Group statistics are provided below, to provide a benchmark to the performance of Aberdeenshire Council: **

Statistics	Aberdeenshire 2024/2025	Family Group 2024/2025	Scottish Average 2024/2025
Complaints per 1,000 population	10	7	n/a
Complaints Outcome			n/a
Stage One – Partially & Upheld	47%	52%	n/a
Stage One – Not Upheld	53%	48%	n/a
Stage Two - Partially & Upheld	34%	44%	n/a
Stage Two – Not Upheld	66%	56%	n/a
Average Response Time (in days)			n/a
Stage One (5-day target)	9.3	7	n/a
Stage Two (20-day target)	22.3	34.8	n/a
Closed Within timescale			n/a
Stage One	64.5	73.40%	n/a
Stage Two	68.7	60.30%	n/a

*** Data correct to September 2025. Only our Family Group have full returns. No Scottish Average at this time.*

Contact Us

If you would like to find out more about our complaint's procedure, or about our annual report, or provide any feedback on this, please contact us.

Email: feedback.team@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Log on to: https://online.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/haveyoursay/

In writing to:
Feedback Team
Aberdeenshire Council
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Westburn Road
Aberdeen
AB16 5GB