



**Shetland
Islands
Council**

Complaints Monitoring Report

2016-17



INTRODUCTION



I am pleased to be able to present our complaints monitoring report for the financial year 2016-17. We have made good progress in some areas but in others we have not performed as well as I would have liked.

This has again been subject to consideration by the Council's Corporate Management team and a steering group has been appointed to drive forward the necessary changes to ensure we continue to improve in our complaints handling and reporting.

Progress was reported in February 2017 and Complaints is now a specific workstream within the Council's Business Transformation Programme 2016-20 as we continue to strive to put the customer first.

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It can be easy to view complaints in a negative light. However, I take the view that effective monitoring of the messages provided through a complaints handling process is an essential way for a modern organisation to learn and improve the way it works. It is extremely important for a public service provider like the Council to be mindful, at all times, of the feedback our service users provide.

The challenge for us as a Council going forward is to encourage our staff to embrace the positives from effective complaints handling. We must ensure that our monitoring processes examine the reasons behind complaints and, wherever possible, avoid these arising again. We must also seek to share good practice so that it can be repeated.

There is always more that can be done to better understand the needs of our community. Ensuring we use the learning from complaints will continue to be an important part of that process.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Boden', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Chief Executive, Mark Boden



AN OVERVIEW OF 2016-17

It is acknowledged that the information held on 2016-17 complaints handling, in some services, continues to lack numbers and detail to allow us to report confidently against the national indicators.

The Council's Corporate Management Team have recognized that complaints handling remains challenging council wide and a Steering Group has been set up to encourage all services to engage positively in the handling of complaints. The first meeting of this group was in October 2016 and a further report was presented to CMT in February 2017. Complaints is now a work stream in the Councils' Business Transformation Programme 2016-20.

From the data that is available, it is clear that many areas prioritise complaints effectively and seek to abide by the principles outlined in the model procedure.

An important part of handling complaints effectively is to take time to develop a better understanding of the information they tell us. As a Council we should be committed to:

- **Identify service failures and take appropriate action**
- **Identify where services need to improve**
- **Identify poor complaints handling practice and put it right**
- **Examine good practice and understand how we might repeat it in other areas**
- **Identify trends in complaints and proactively address any issues**

The above components are key to a successful complaints process and will be at the forefront of the work that will be undertaken as part of the Business Transformation Programme.



Indicator 1 – Complaints received per 1,000 population

This indicator allows us to track our progress against previous years, and compare ourselves to other authorities. It gives some indication whether or not we are formally recording too many or too few “expressions of dissatisfaction” compared with other authorities.

During 2016-17, we recorded **106** complaints from the public. Using the population estimate of 23,200 * that gives a value of:

4.6 complaints per 1000 population.

COMMENT:

This is a decrease from last year’s figure of 5.6 per 1,000. However, it’s likely that all complaints aren’t being recorded, especially those complaints that are dealt with right away (e.g. a bin that’s not been picked up). We’re aware of this possible gap in our data and we’re working towards a more consistent approach to the full recording of complaints.

Complaints are a valuable source of information that help to drive improvements. Proper recording is part of that process and any future increase in the number of complaints recorded does not necessarily mean there’s been a deterioration in level of service.

In other local authorities, the number of complaints per 1,000 population varies considerably. Consultation with other authorities confirms that the variation in these figures reflects the recording levels in those authorities, rather than the standard of service delivered.

¹ Source: National Records of Scotland - <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/population-estimates/mid-year-2016/16mype-cahb.pdf>

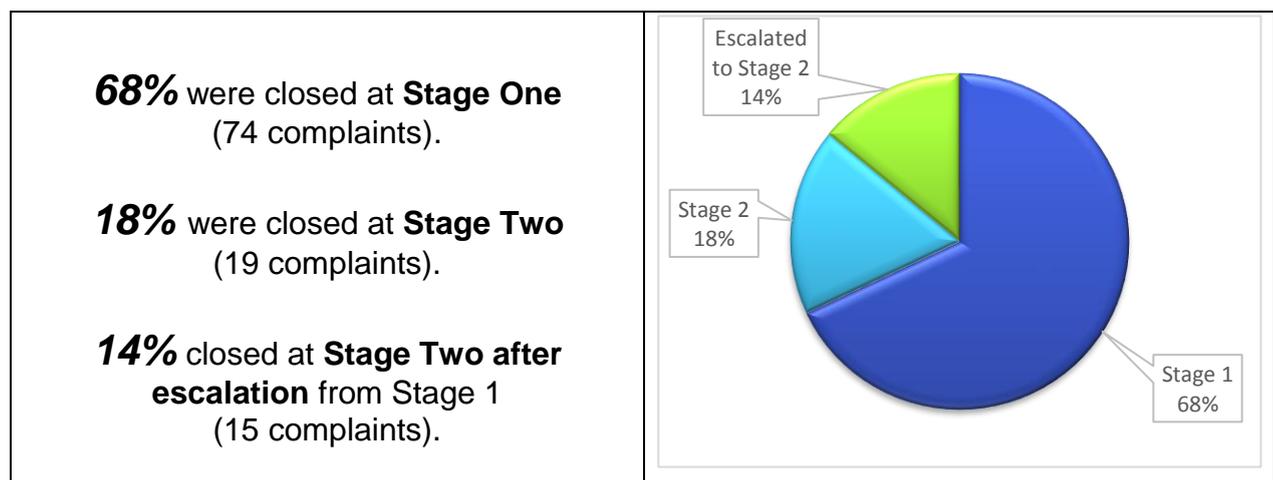
Indicator 2 – Closed Complaints

This indicator allows us to monitor what proportion of our complaints are dealt with “at the front-line” (Stage 1). Dealing with complaints quickly and efficiently is a priority for the Council and the Scottish Ombudsman. **The proportion of Stage 1 complaints should be high.**

Stage 1 complaints are usually straightforward issues that can be resolved requiring little or no investigation.

Stage 2 complaints are issues where it is apparent that an investigation should take place to establish the cause of the issue.

Stage 2 “after escalation” complaints are where the issue has not been resolved to the customer’s satisfaction at Stage 1 and have therefore been escalated to a more thorough (Stage 2) investigation.



COMMENT:

The proportion of complaints dealt with in Stage 1 has dropped from 78% to 68%. Again, this apparent performance drop is most likely due to the number of “simple” complaints not recorded.

Similarly, it is disappointing that almost 1 in 7 (14%) of our recorded complaints have escalated to Stage 2, where the customer was not satisfied by our first attempt to deal with the complaint at Stage 1. Lack of recording of Stage 1 complaints affects this indicator, and most others.

Indicator 3 – Complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld

This indicator allows us to monitor what proportion of our complaints were upheld, or partially upheld.

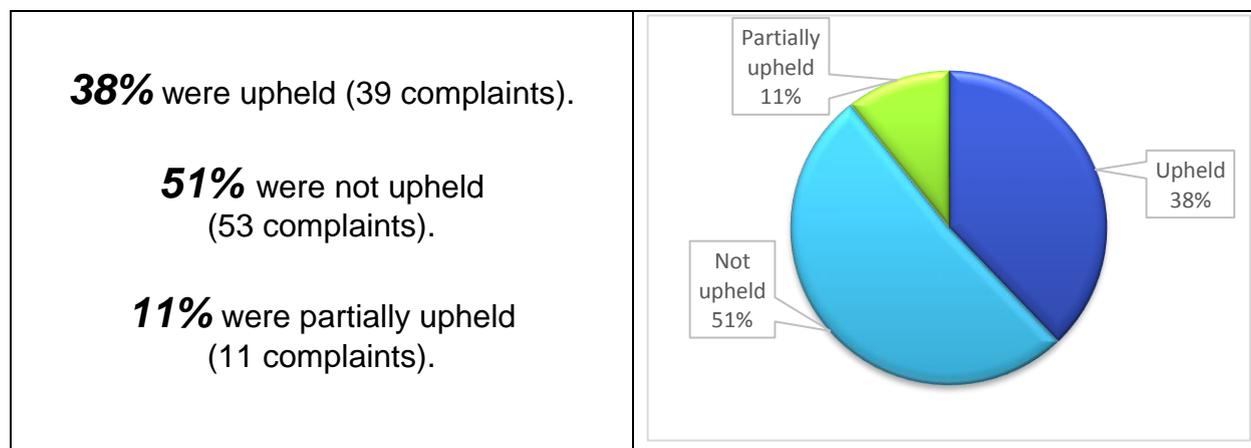
To decide whether a complaint is upheld (or not), we use the following guidance:

- Has the Council **failed** to follow its own guidance, policies, or procedures? If so, the complaint would be classed as “upheld”.
- If the Council **has** followed its own guidance, policies, procedures and treated the customer well ; the complaint would be “not upheld”.

Complaints sometimes have more than one element to them, especially more serious complaints. This often results in a decision of “partially upheld” when one or more elements of service were not delivered to an acceptable standard, but others were.

We learn from these complaints. Where complaints are upheld (or partially upheld), we investigate the “root cause” and consider actions to improve performance and minimize the likelihood of similar events in the future.

Outcome of all complaints combined (Stage 1 + Stage 2 + Stage 2 escalated):



COMMENT (detailed data on opposite page):

The proportion of Stage 1 complaints upheld is very similar to previous years. Comparisons with other authorities aren't easily made, as some authorities have a much more rigorous test of “upheld”.

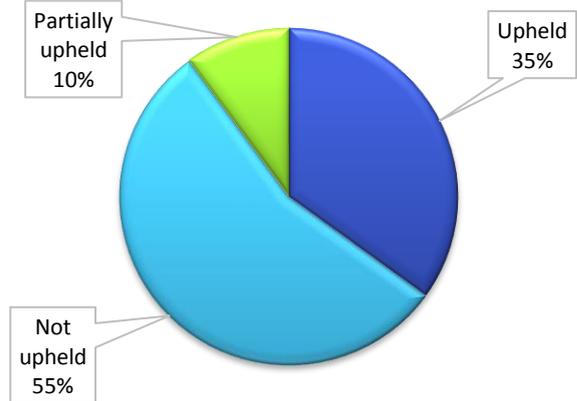
One notable difference from previous years is by grouping together Stage 2 and Stage 2 escalated. The proportion of upheld and partially upheld complaints has risen from 43% to 56%, while the numbers of these recorded complaints has dropped from 37 to 34. We will continue to promote and monitor the recording of complaints to ensure we have reliable data.

Outcome of Stage One complaints:

35% were upheld (24 complaints).

55% were not upheld
(38 complaints).

10% were partially upheld
(7 complaints).



Outcome of Stage Two complaints:

53% were upheld (10 complaints).

47% were not upheld
(9 complaints).

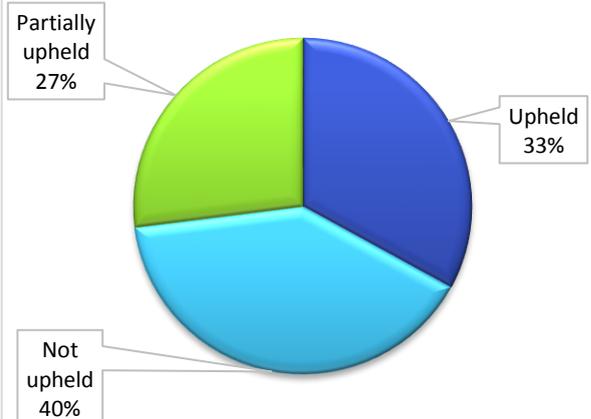


Outcome of Stage Two complaints, escalated from Stage 1:

33% were upheld (5 complaints).

40% were not upheld
(6 complaints).

27% were partially upheld
(4 complaints).



Case Study - Community Care

A family member complained to the [Service] around left feeling unwanted by the staff when it came to [staff] collecting their parents [from] their own home.

A fact finding meeting was held with the complainant whose statement included 'I find [the staff] quite hostile' 'I no longer feel able to be in the same room as the staff in my own home' 'I am finding it stressful' 'Mum and Dad feel unwanted at [Service]'.

As a result of a full investigation elements of the complaint were upheld.

The outcome of this investigation highlighted the need for an improvement in staff behavior and a review of the carer's assessment was undertaken to allow the complainant to access further support.

Case Study - Education

A parent of a child with Additional Support Needs complained about the lack of notice given when the child's teacher changed.

We will now consider more carefully the affect that changes of class teacher can have on children with ASN, and communicate better with parents in circumstances such as these.

Case Study - Infrastructure

Removal of flowers from grave.

The complainant was upset upon visiting a grave to find that wreaths and flowers had been removed.

The Council has a policy of removing flowers/wreaths after 2 weeks.

Better communication of council procedures is necessary around burial grounds (and other policies in general)

Case Study - Corporate Services

Complainant was expecting their Pension lump sum to be paid on 31st December and complained when they thought it had not been paid on time.

The pension payment was paid promptly after the holiday break

The Council's Retirement Options Letter has been revised to clarify the timing of when members can expect to receive payment of their pension and lump sum. This will hopefully avoid any similar complaints going forward.

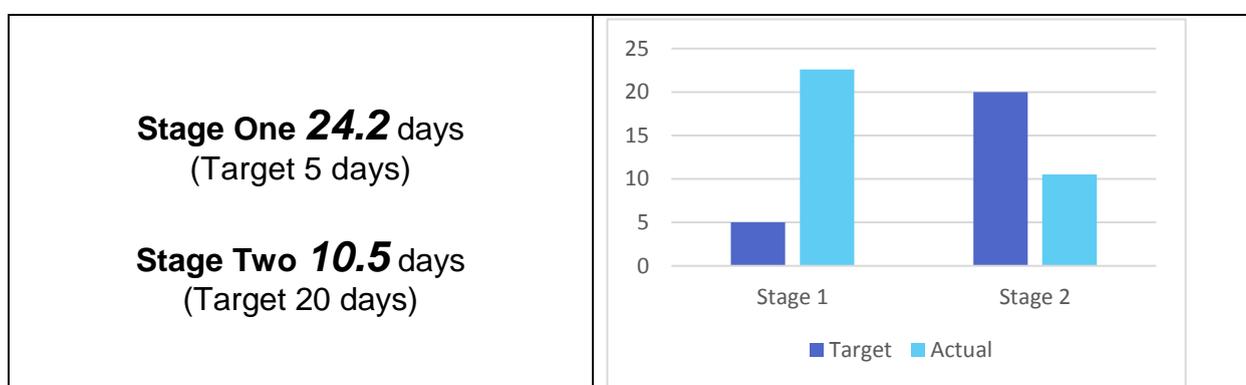
Indicator 4 – Average Times

This shows how long, on average, we're taking to deal with complaints. The target for Stage 1 complaints is 5 days, and the target for Stage 2 complaints is 20 days. This allows us time to fully investigate the more serious, Stage 2, complaints.

There are occasions when a 5-day time-extension can be granted. This should only be done where a short delay will result in a more accurate investigation e.g. when a key member of staff is on leave.

The indicator is measured in working days, and should be as low as possible, while not compromising the quality of the investigation.

Average time in working days to close complaints:



Stage Two escalated complaints

The average time to close complaints after escalation was **139.5** days. This has a target maximum of 25 days (5 days for Stage 1 plus 20 days for Stage 2).

COMMENT:

Even with the possible lack of recording of “simple” complaints (which would take our average response time down), it is clear from this data that we are taking too long to deal with many Stage 1 complaints which should be dealt with in 5 days.

Our performance has deteriorated from last year's stage 1 average of 22.6 days.

Or performance in Stage 2 complaints has shown significant improvement from last year (25.7 days to 10.5 days).

However, our Stage 2 escalated performance has deteriorated significantly from 54.5 days to 139.5 days. This deterioration is mainly due to 6 escalated complaints which took more than 100 days to resolve, 3 of which were over 400 days each.

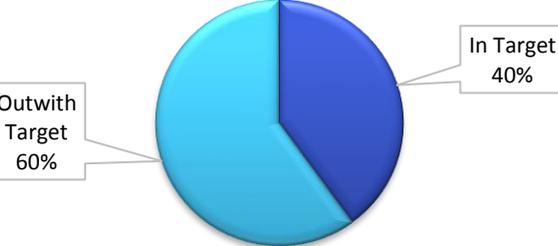
It is clear from this analysis that more work needs to be done to ensure complaints are dealt with promptly and recorded accurately.

Indicator 5 – Performance against targets

This indicator shows the proportion of complaints closed within the agreed deadlines.

Ideally, we'd be closing all our complaints within the national guidelines. However, sometimes it's prudent to continue the work to identify causes and solutions beyond the deadline date. Obviously, these cases should be in the minority. **The following indicators should be as high as possible.**

Proportion of complaints dealt with in target times:

<p>55% of Stage One complaints were closed within 5 days</p>	 <p>A 3D pie chart with a light blue section representing 45% 'Outwith Target' and a dark blue section representing 55% 'In Target'.</p>
<p>94% of Stage Two complaints were closed within 20 days</p>	 <p>A 3D pie chart with a very small light blue section representing 6% 'Outwith Target' and a large dark blue section representing 94% 'In Target'.</p>
<p>40% of Stage 2 escalated complaints were closed within target (20-25 days)</p>	 <p>A 3D pie chart with a light blue section representing 60% 'Outwith Target' and a dark blue section representing 40% 'In Target'.</p>

COMMENT:

Our performance is far from ideal, but we have improved since last year. Stage 1 “on-time” complaints have risen from 40% to 55% and Stage 2 has improved significantly from 14% to 94%.

We monitor progress regularly, monthly reports are sent to all Directors and quarterly performance information are presented to all Service Committees as part of our Performance Cycle of meetings.

In 2017/18 we will concentrate on Stage 1 complaint times and these should show a significant improvement on this year's figures.

Indicator 6 – Cases where an extension was granted

Extensions are granted where a short, but necessary, extension is needed to ensure we deal with the complaint properly. Extensions can only be approved by a Senior Officer, and only when the customer agrees. E.g. when we are waiting for information from an external source, such as a contractor.

This indicator shows the proportion of complaints that fulfilled the criteria to be granted an extension by a Senior Officer. **These figures should be low**, but extensions are often necessary to avoid further issues.

4% (3 in 74) Stage one complaints had an extension applied.

No (zero) Stage two complaints had an extension applied.

20% (3 in 15) Stage two escalated complaints had an extension applied.

COMMENT:

The proportion of complaints with extensions is low, as it should be. However, there may have been opportunities to extend Stage 1 complaints and remain within target.

We will be ensuring that managers and complaints handlers are aware of the option to extend deadlines, and when it's appropriate to apply for an extension.

Indicator 7 – Customer satisfaction

We have many methods for collecting feedback on our service delivery. Many Services, such as Housing, send regular follow-up surveys after customer contacts.

Local Government Benchmarking Framework figures show that almost all our services assessed had satisfaction levels higher than the national averages. These are shown below:

Local schools: 88% (Scotland 78%) **Above national average**

Social Care: 78% (Scotland 81%) **Below**

Refuse collection: 93% (Scotland 83%) **Above**

Street cleanliness: 73% (Scotland 74%) **Below**

Local libraries: 89% (Scotland 77%) **Above**

Local parks and open spaces: 93% (Scotland 86%) **Above**

Local museums and galleries: 93% (Scotland 74%) **Above**

Local leisure facilities: 92% (Scotland 76%) **Above**

8 – Learning from complaints

COMMENT:

One of the most important aspects of the Complaints Handling Process is to learn from the complaints received from the public.

The Council needs to encourage staff to see the opportunities complaints provide for gathering valuable customer insight, allowing the identification of failures so that we can then learn from those to make improvements.

Enhanced staff confidence in dealing with complaints will help develop consistency and efficiency across all services.

This will be a key focus of the “Customer First” Business Transformation Programme strand..

The Corporate Management Team Directors receive a monthly complaints monitoring report which helps maintain an awareness of complaints issues and performance against targets..

Complaints are also reported by Directors to elected members on a quarterly basis as part of the Performance Reporting cycle.

Looking Ahead

The key challenges we face are doubtless shared with many other councils and organisations in general. These are to:

- Further embed an organisational culture that seeks to ensure effective delivery of the principles outlined in our Complaints Handling Procedures, Policies and Guidance.
- Empower staff to have the confidence to seek early resolution of complaints.
- Ensure officers handling complaints - particularly more complicated matters - apply the necessary priority and always seek to ensure the timescales are met.
- Improve communication with complainants; always ensuring that, where it is not possible to meet timescales, an explanation is provided.
- Promote a more systematic approach to recording complaints, to ensure that future reporting against the national indicators is more efficient and accurate.
- Identify and cascade instances of best practice across the Council having a particular focus on lessons learned.
- Improve our trend analysis to help identify learning points and potential local hotspots.
- Align monitoring activity with our performance management arrangements, particularly our public performance reporting arrangements.



FURTHER INFO

The Annual report from the Chief Social Work Officer 2016-17 is available here:

<http://www.shetland.gov.uk/coins/submissiondocuments.asp?submissionid=21538>

If you want to leave feedback on Council services, you can do that here:

<http://www.shetland.gov.uk/feedback/default.asp>

You can find our quarterly monitoring reports here:

http://www.shetland.gov.uk/comments_complaints/default.asp

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