

Aberdeenshire Council Complaints Performance Report 2015-2016

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Chief Executive's Foreword

Scotland's public sector has a duty to the people it serves, and part of that duty involves responding positively to complaints. I am pleased therefore to present Aberdeenshire Council's third annual Complaints Report. This report provides information on customer complaints handled between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016.

Aberdeenshire Council provides the highest possible quality of service to our customers and service users, and we recognise that there are times when things go wrong, or where their expectations are not met.

In this report you will find details of how we have performed in dealing with complaints, the outcomes of investigations and how we have changed our service as a result. I am pleased to see work practices modified as a result of a complaint, which I feel shows we are listening to the public when they are not happy.

Naturally, not every complaint is upheld, but clearly they are all addressed at either frontline stage or through a more detailed, thorough investigation within respective timescales. We take our commitment to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) framework seriously and I am confident that our customer service will continue to improve as a result of the complaints we receive.

Jim Savege
Chief Executive

Our Complaints Performance

Aberdeenshire Council is publishing 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.

The reporting of complaints is monitored by Audit Scotland 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 and the performance indicators below adhere to the requirements set out by the SPSO's Model Complaints Handling Procedure.

The Council aims to resolve complaints quickly and close to where the service is provided:

- Front Line stage (Stage one) complaints could mean immediate action to resolve the problem, or complaints which are resolved in no more than five working days.
- Investigation stage (Stage two) deals with two types of complaints: those that have not been resolved at Stage one and those that are complex and require detailed investigation.
- After the Council has fully investigated the complaint, and if the customer is still not satisfied with the decision or the way the Council dealt with the complaint, the complaint can then be referred onto the SPSO.

We publish complaints performance information quarterly and annually.

The following complaints management performance information outlines the council's annual performance for the year 2015/16 between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016.

Complaints are a key way for local authorities to learn about services that are not working well and to use that feedback to make improvements. Our Service Management teams analyse complaint report information along with SPSO recommendations to ensure that they are incorporated into service business plans. Customer feedback is an opportunity to encourage real organisational learning so repeat failings no longer occur.

There is also evidence that, as well as providing accountability and other clear benefits for service users, getting things right early saves money for the public purse. Incorporating complaint analysis findings into our day to day business activities ensures that the services we provide are high quality, continually improving, efficient, and responsive to our residents and service user's needs.

We saw complaint numbers fall in some service areas of the council with the Waste service leading the way. On review, this was down to the bedding in period of the new recycling process concluding and organisational change enhancing the performance of the service.

The Feedback Team are responsible for the administration and collation of all Council complaints and compliments, and have continued to work with services to ensure that investigating officers for each service deal directly with complainants and importantly, supported our front line employees who engage with and respond to our service users, putting things right when they have gone wrong, quickly, empathetically and at first point of contact.

How Customers Complained

Customers can complain to, comment on or provide compliments about the Council in a range of ways, including:

- In person at any of our Customer Service Points, Area Offices, Libraries and other Council offices.
- In person, to any council employee
- By telephone
- On-line
- By letter
- By e-mail

In 2015-16, we received **1785** complaints from customers who chose the following ways to contact us with a complaint:

547 Online Form (2014/15: 830)

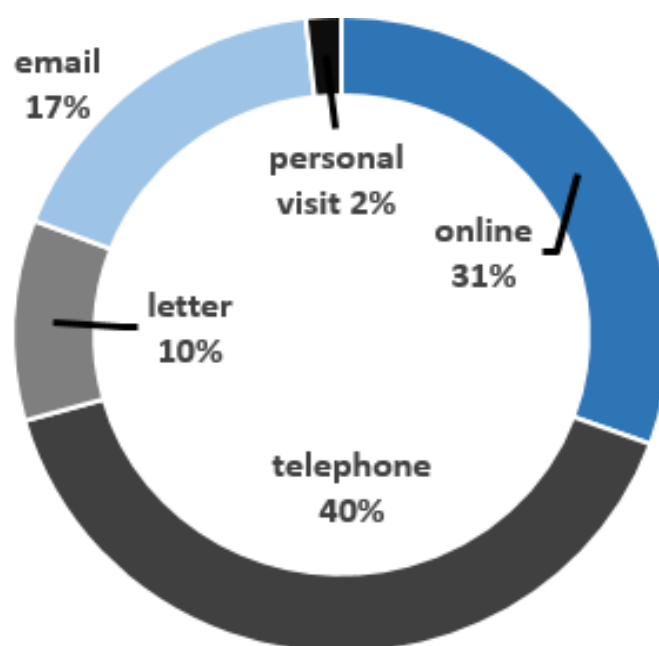
713 Telephone (2014/15: 584)

182 Letter (2014/15: 124)

312 Email (2014/15: 341)

31 In person (2014/15: 111)

In comparison with last year, there has been a change in the way our residents have chosen to contact us. The biggest change can be seen by the increase in the use of telephone contact, replacing the online form as the most favoured way to contact us.



Indicator 1: Complaints received per 1,000 population

This indicator records the total number of complaints received by Aberdeenshire Council in the period between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016. To allow for a fair comparison across all 32 councils in Scotland, the figure of complaints per 1000 of population is used.

The population of Aberdeenshire is **261,960** **

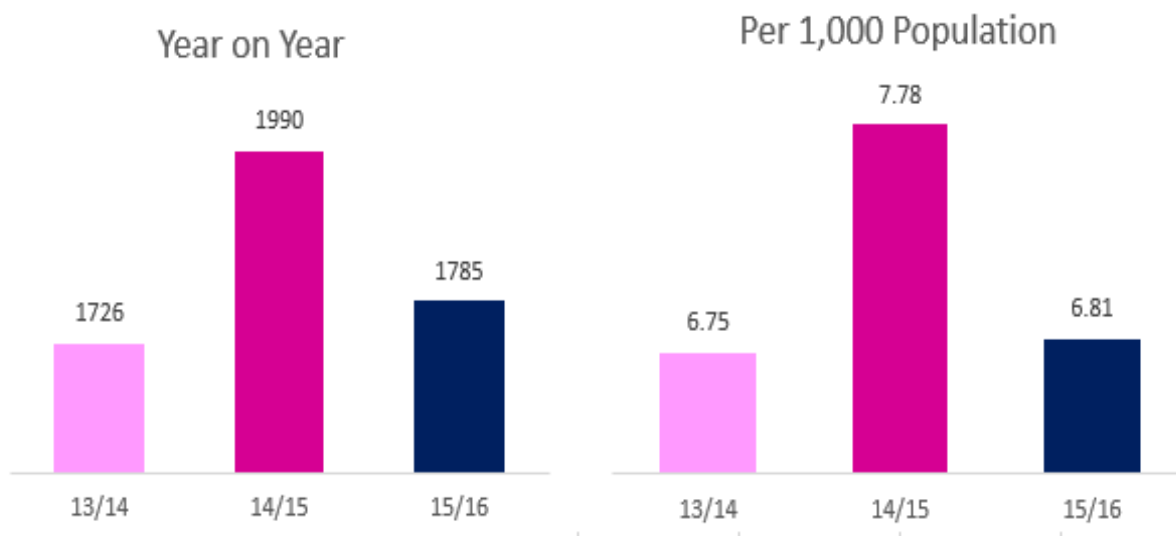
In 2015/16 we handled **1785** complaints for this period. This was 205 less than last year (14/15 - 1990)

This means that an average of **6.81** complaints were received per 1,000 residents.

This indicates that **1** in every **146** Aberdeenshire residents have registered a complaint about our services. (Improvement on last year - 14/15: 1 in every 128)

	Total Complaints Received	Per 1,000 Population
Q1 (Apr-Jun)	445	1.69
Q2 (Jul-Sep)	460	1.75
Q3 (Oct-Dec)	394	1.50
Q4 (Jan-Mar)	486	1.85
Total	1785	6.81

** Population is taken from the National Records Office for Scotland mid 2015 Population estimates. www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics



Indicator 2: Closed complaints

This indicator provides information on the number of complaints closed at Stage One and Stage Two as a percentage of all complaints closed.

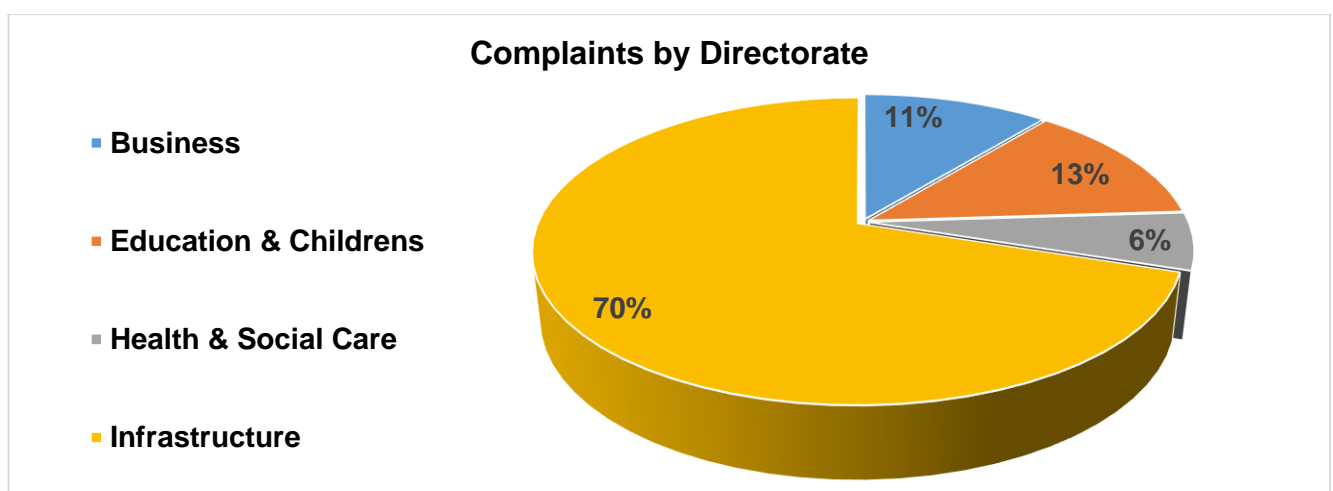
	Stage One (Frontline Resolution)	Stage Two (Investigation)	Stage Two Escalated (Ombudsman)
Q1 (Apr-Jun)	276	169	14
Q2 (Jul-Sep)	250	210	7
Q3 (Oct-Dec)	220	174	15
Q4 (Jan-Mar)	300	186	12
Total	1046	739	48

The term “closed” refers to any complaint where a response has been sent to the customer and at the time no further action is required.

59% of complaints were dealt with at Stage One at the customer’s first point of contact with a frontline member of staff. **41%** of the remaining complaints were resolved at Stage Two, the Investigation stage.

Compared to last year: 62% dealt with at Stage One and 38% dealt with at Stage Two.

Ideally we would aim to deal with and resolve as much 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 service as possible. Over the financial year only **2.68%** of customer complaints have escalated to the Ombudsman.



Indicator 3: Complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld

This indicator measures the outcome (upheld, partially upheld or not upheld) recorded for each complaint following our investigation and a response having been given to the complainant.

Stage One (Front Line Resolution)			
	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld
Q1 (Apr-Jun)	185	21	70
Q2 (Jul-Sep)	150	25	75
Q3 (Oct-Dec)	155	16	49
Q4 (Jan-Mar)	202	17	81
Total	692	79	275
Stage Two (Investigation)			
	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld
Q1 (Apr-Jun)	126	18	25
Q2 (Jul-Sep)	151	19	40
Q3 (Oct-Dec)	120	22	32
Q4 (Jan-Mar)	134	17	35
Total	531	76	132
Stage Two Escalated (Ombudsman)			
	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld
Q1 (Apr-Jun)	1	0	0
Q2 (Jul-Sep)	2	1	1
Q3 (Oct-Dec)	2	1	1
Q4 (Jan-Mar)	1	1	0
Total	6	3	2

In addition to the above Ombudsman cases, there were a further **34** cases 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.

On review the Ombudsman advised that they would not take their 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.

Therefore a total of **45** cases were decided upon last year. As of March 2016 the Ombudsman informed us they were considering four further cases opened by them in February and March 2016.

Please note: Indicator 3's total number of **45** cases, are the decisions given by the Ombudsman at 31 March 2016. The combined total of **45** differs from Indicator 2's total number of **48** cases escalated, as explained above, the Ombudsman have not yet concluded their investigation and provided a decision for three of the cases brought to them for this period.

Indicator 4: Average Times

- 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.

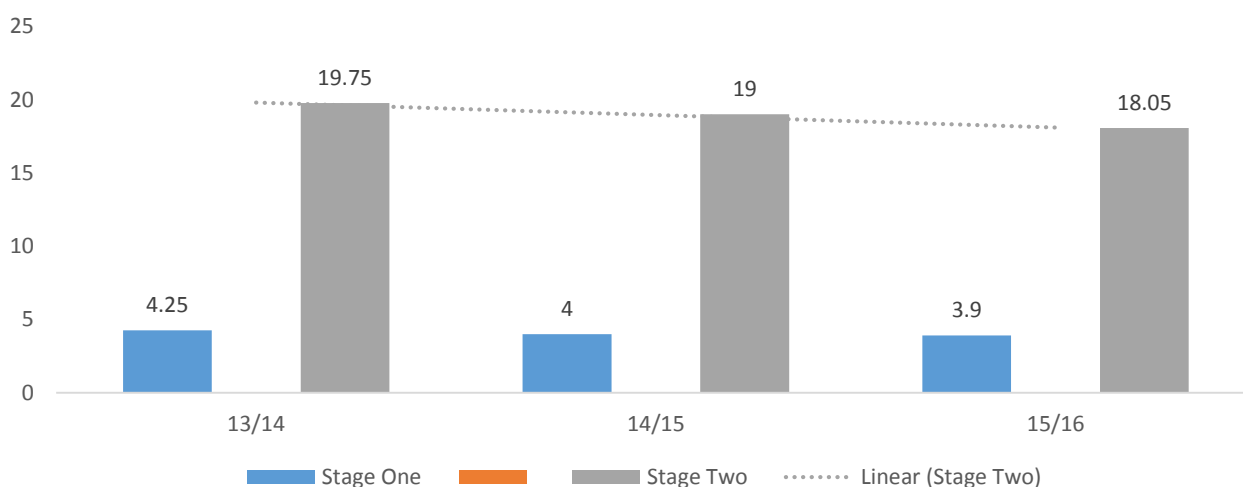
Indicator 4 represents the average time in working days to close complaints at Stage One and Stage Two. The average number of days taken to respond to complaints is below the SPSO's five and 20 day timescales.

Most complaints are resolved within the first three days, well within the CHP's aims. 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.

School holiday periods have caused delays in some schools complaint investigations, however this has not affected the ability of Education to meet the guideline timescales overall.

	Stage One (Frontline Resolution)	Stage Two (Investigation)	Stage Two Escalated (Ombudsman)
Q1 (Apr-Jun)	4.61	16.68	N/A
Q2 (Jul-Sep)	3.49	18.76	N/A
Q3 (Oct-Dec)	3.77	19.36	N/A
Q4 (Jan-Mar)	3.76	17.41	N/A
Total	3.90 days	18.05 days	N/A

Year on Year



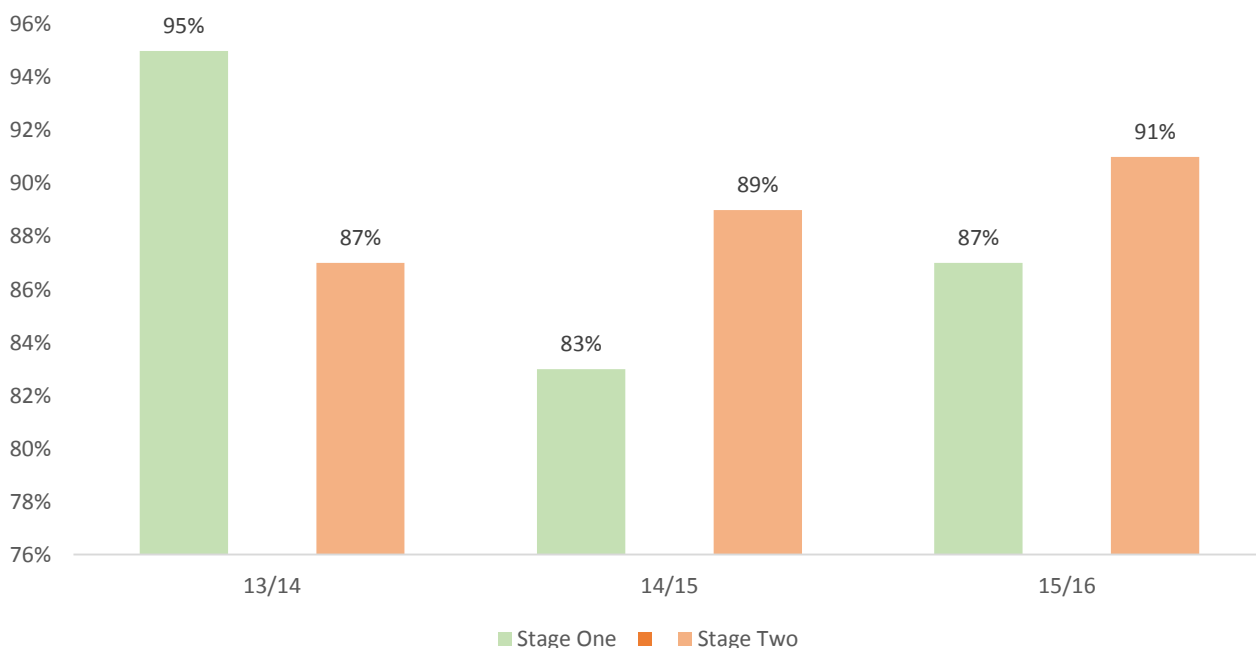
Indicator 5: Performance against timescales

This is the number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days.

The Council have performed well in closing the majority of frontline Stage One complaints (87%) and Stage Two complaints (91%). An improvement on last year 14/15.

	Stage One (5 Working days)	Stage Two (20 Working days)
Q1 (Apr-Jun)	245	159
Q2 (Jul-Sep)	229	187
Q3 (Oct-Dec)	183	154
Q4 (Jan-Mar)	254	170
Total	911	670

Year on Year



Indicator 6: Number of cases where an extension has been authorised

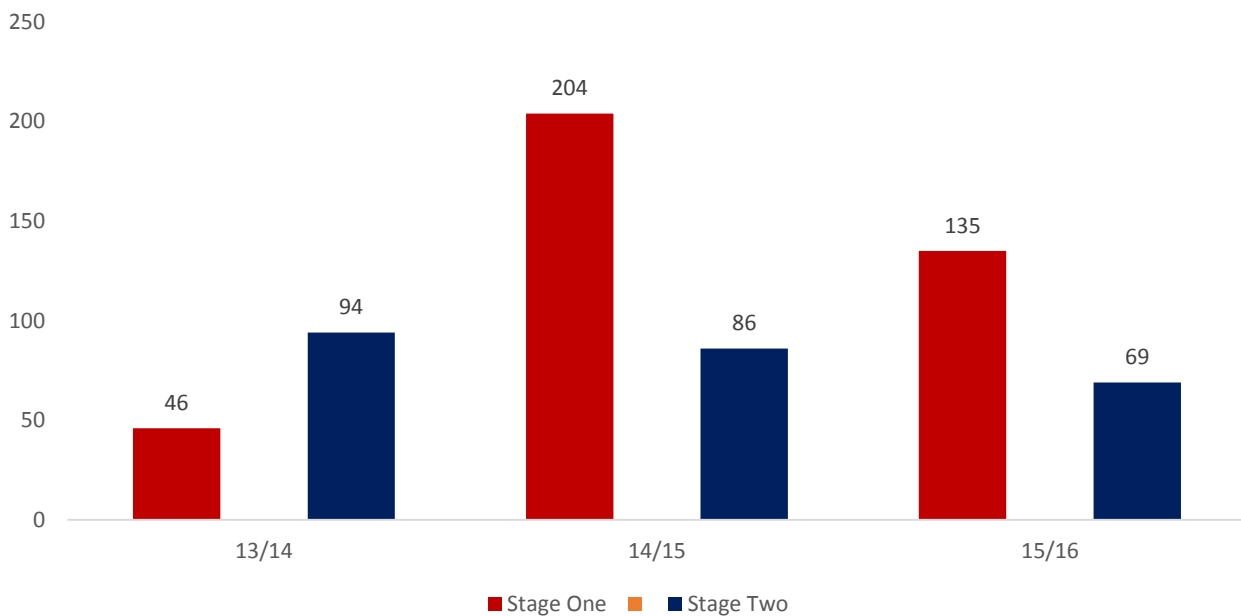
An extension to the timescales is authorised in certain circumstances. This is the number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension to the 5 or 20 working day timeline has been authorised.

	Stage One (5 Working days)	Stage Two (20 Working days)
Q1 (Apr-Jun)	31	10
Q2 (Jul-Sep)	21	23
Q3 (Oct-Dec)	37	20
Q4 (Jan-Mar)	46	16
Total	135	69

This is another area where the Council have performed well.

Stage One 135 out of 1046 complaints (only 13%) extended passed 5 days and 69 out of 739 Stage Two complaints (only 9%) extended passed 20 working days. A total of 204 required extensions out of 1785 complaints, equating to 11% of complaints. An improvement on the last year.

Year on Year



Indicator 7: Customer Satisfaction

This indicator allows for an analysis of customer satisfaction with the complaints handling service provided.

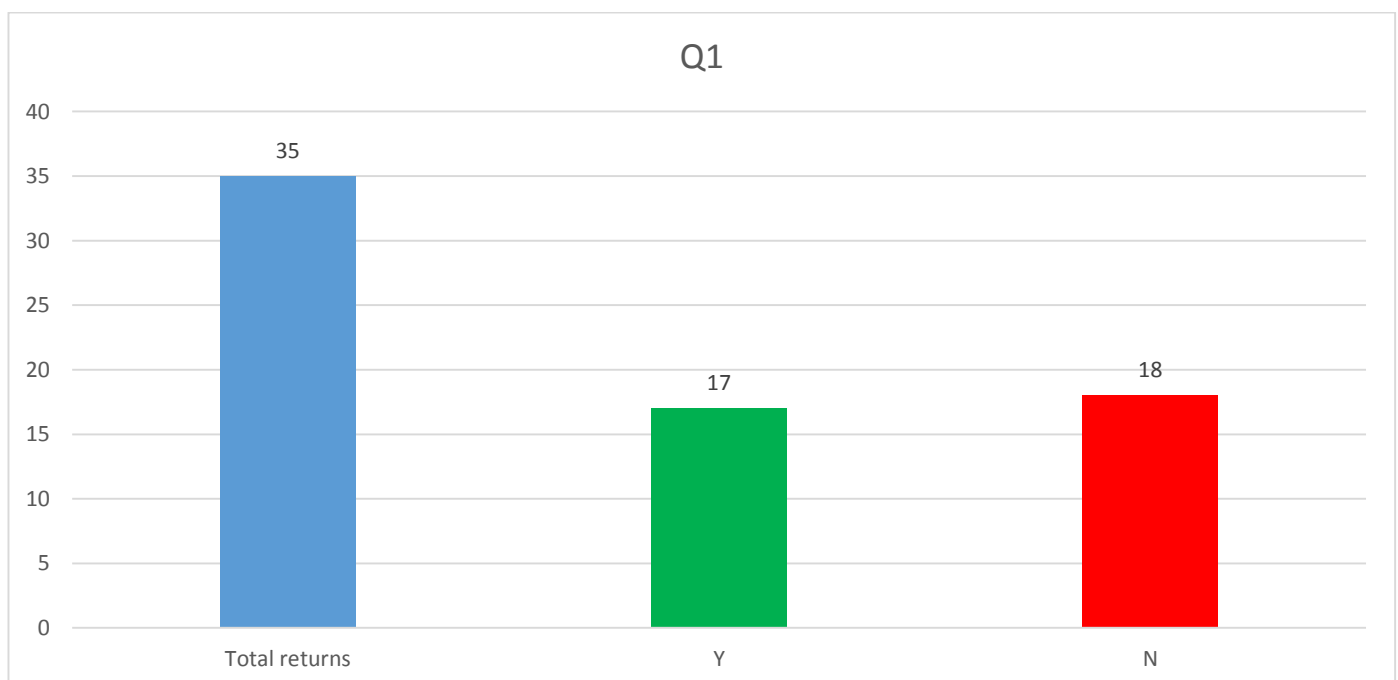
What we continue to find from this data is that, on analysis of the respondents comments in conjunction with their individual complaints, it is clear that a large percentage of those who have given negative feedback have not received the outcome to their complaint that they expected or wanted. This may have led to negative feedback about the process, as they have not been able to separate the complaint experience - the way in which their complaint was handled - from the complaint itself and the complaint outcomes they had hoped for.

As you will see from the comments below, we have also found that, although we ask complainants to rate their experience with the way in which their complaint was handled, as opposed to the nature or outcome of their complaint itself, this is not always understood or adhered to, and this reflects in some of the comments and results.

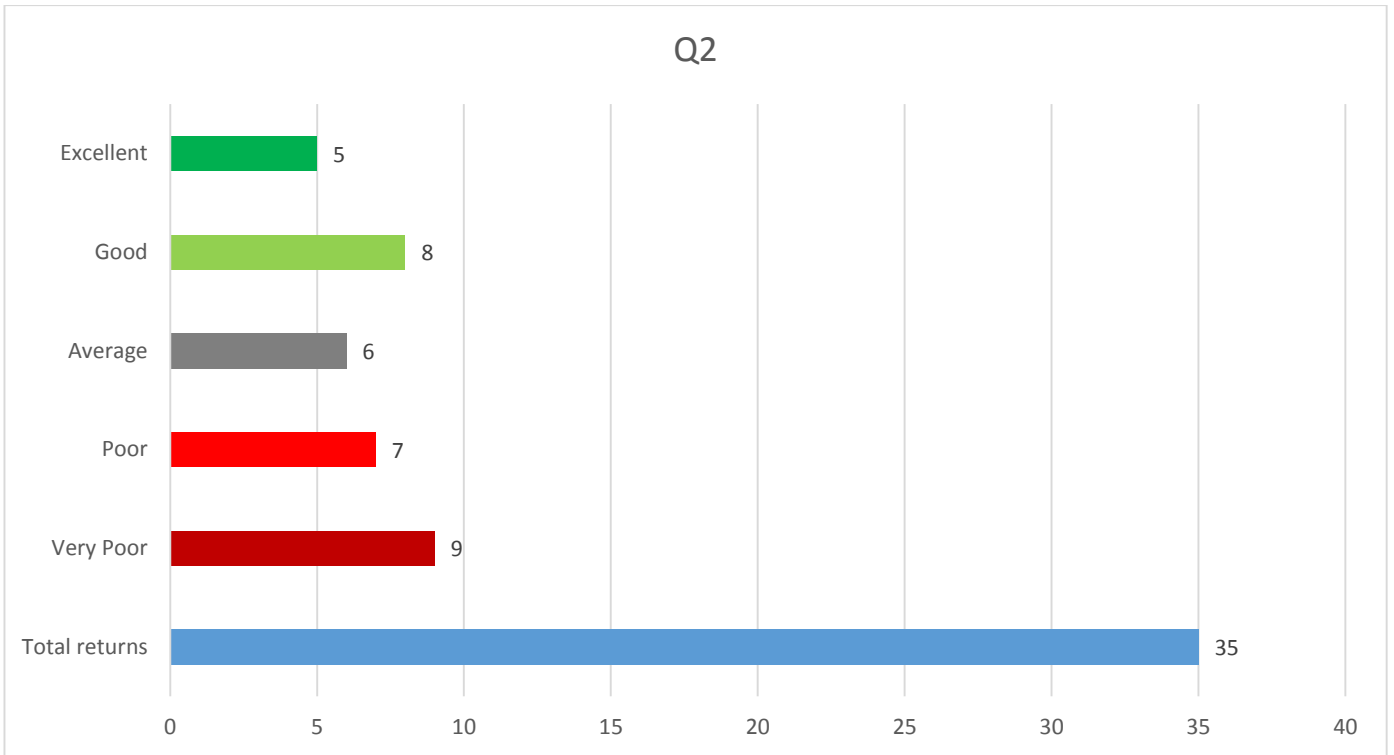
From the survey feedback it can also be true to suggest that this is the same for the positive feedback, as the respondents have often received the outcomes or responses that they desired.

We have however looked at every negative rating, and the complaint handling process for specific complaints to seek opportunities for learning and improving the process where it is appropriate to do so.

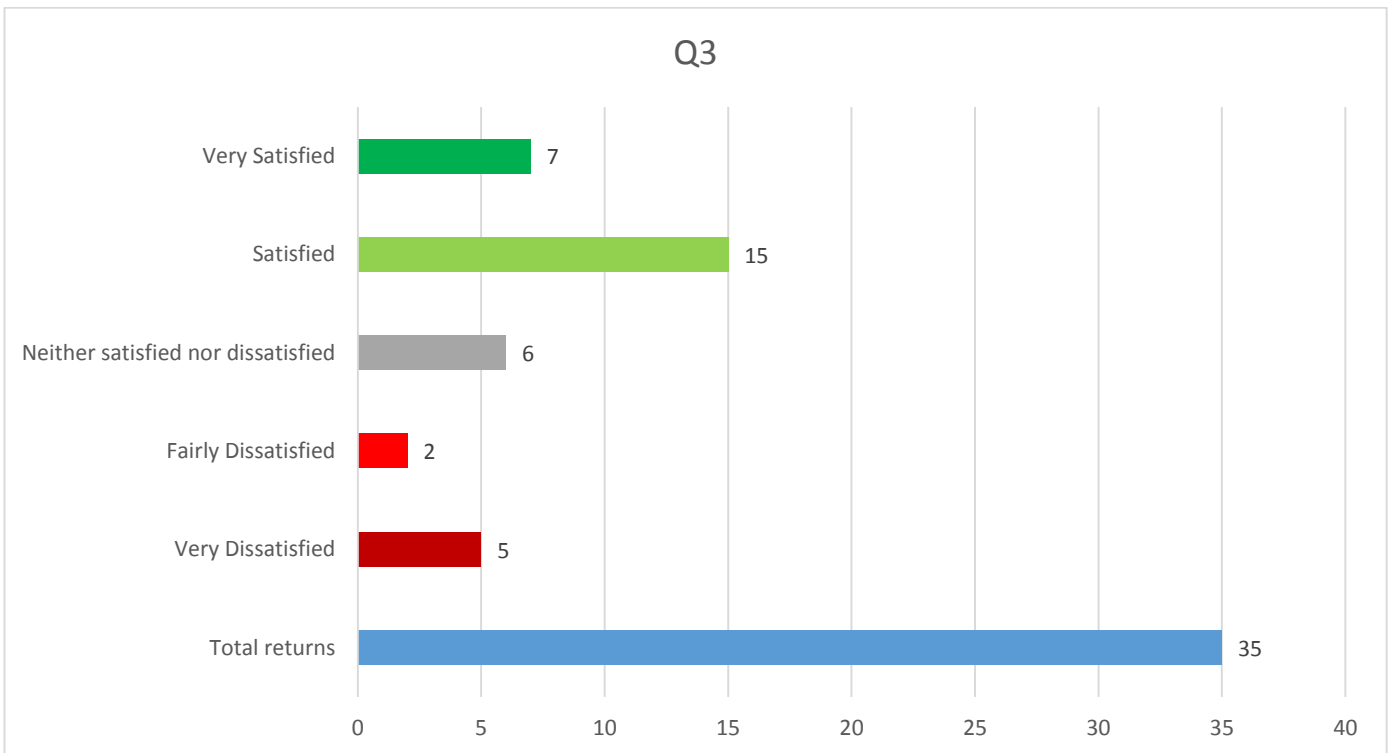
Q1: Before you contacted us, were you aware that the council had a formal complaints procedure? Yes/No answers.



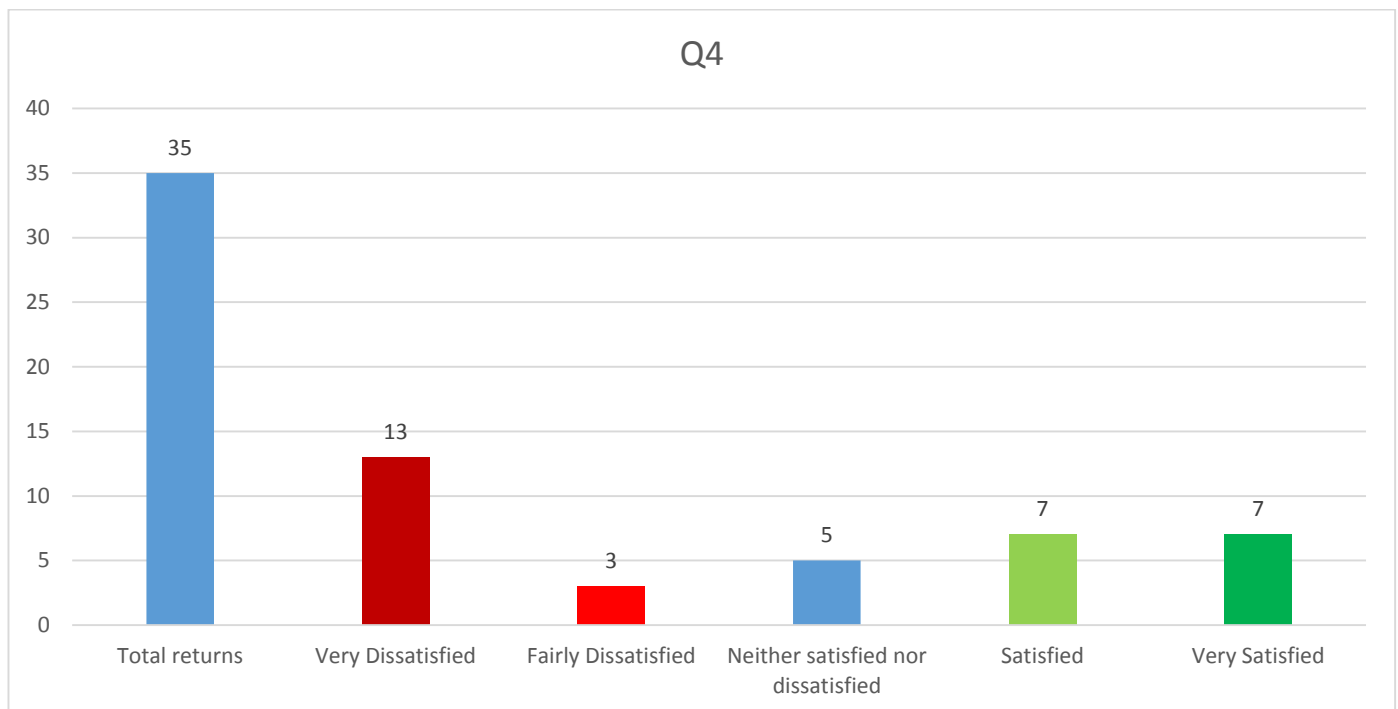
Q2: Aberdeenshire council is committed to providing excellent customer services, how would you rate your overall experience of the complaints procedure? (Please note: we are asking you to rate your experience with the way in which your complaint was handled and not about the complaint itself)



Q3: Were you satisfied with how easy it was to make a complaint?



Q4: How satisfied were you with the service provided by the Officer in any correspondence you may have had with them?



Q5: Can you suggest any improvements we could make to this service?

“A courteous response was sent to me within a short time frame. The matter had clearly been investigated properly, giving me confidence in the system.”

“I was not giving any option to be heard in person or to defend any of the issues raised. The process was totally unfair and biased.”

“When speaking to the operator that took my call the tone in her voice gave me the impression that I was just moaning about nothing.”

“Having no further redress following the initial response and being directed straight to the Ombudsman is obstructive and not in the interests of conflict resolution and I am surprised at the inadequacy of the service.”

“I was very pleased to only have to speak to one person who then dealt with the issue quickly and efficiently.”

“Action was taken very quickly after waiting months for something to be done.”

“An apology does not cover costs of repair to rectify the damage a council employee caused by undue care and attention”

“The online complaints procedure is very simple and straight forward. It would be helpful if the complaint could be addressed by the person responsible for the decisions which caused the complaints in the first place.”

“Not if you carry on like this. I was impressed.”

“The time taken to respond was good and there was a clear process as to how the complaint was handled which was good”

Why Customers Complained

This financial year the highest volume of complaints we received related to:

- Complaints about the Waste service: **403** (2014/15: 690 so -287 complaints)

Most complaints regards:

- 1 - Missed Refuse & Recycling Collections
- 2 - Staff Behaviour including Driving
- 3 - Replacement of containers following collection

- Complaints about the Housing service: **420** (2014/15: 388 so +32 complaints)

Most complaints regards:

- 1 - Service standards
- 2 - Delay in providing a service
- 3 - Communication

- Complaints about Education & Children’s service: **238** (2014/15: 244 so -6)

Most complaints regards:

- 1 - Disagreements with schools handling and communication of issues/complaints/procedures
- 2 - Swimming pools – service standards
- 3 - Resourcing and budgeting constraints

- Complaints about Roads & Landscape Services: **270** (2014/15: 206 so -64)

Most complaints regards:

- 1 - Roads & Footpaths - Policy & Service Standards
- 2 - Traffic Management & Road Safety
- 3 - Landscape Service - Parks & Open spaces

Indicator 8: Learning from complaints

We take all complaints seriously and information gathered from complaints is indispensable in helping us to continuously improve our services. Since the implementation of the complaints procedure, we have made changes to our services and procedures as a result of complaints.

How We Report on Complaints Performance and Trends to Senior Managers and Staff?

Reports sent monthly to Senior Management. Top level and service specific information on complaints handled by services. These reports contain complaints performance information and analysis of reasons for complaints where appropriate. Service Managers use the information from these reports to identify and share any learning from complaints, and to inform their service planning process.

Reports sent Quarterly to services for their Key Performance Indicators, and provide a Quarterly top level update to the Elected Members Policy and Resources Committee.

You said we did – Is it really worth doing? YES!

- You said that it would be handy to include photos on our Have Your Say online form.

We agree and would like to do this. At present the current technology does not allow the photos to pull through to our CRM system we use to administer complaints. Therefore while we investigate opportunities of introducing this facility, we have added text to the form to inform customers that they can email any photo's to the feedback team with a reference number to attach to their case.

- You said that the website could be improved to provide a better joined up service.

We agreed and our ICT service worked on redeveloping the website to bring it up to current industry standards/usability.

- You said that following an update to the council's Public Convenience Strategy, you did not want a specific public convenience in Turriff to close.

We listened and action was considered and taken to help keep them operational.

- You said that where complaints involved an employee, you expected these to be addressed directly.

We agree and have reassured individuals specifically of the actions we can take. This can involve employees being reminded of procedures and the expected standard of customer service, or present opportunities for further training and coaching.

- You said that our recharges for Housing work were confusing and unclear.

We listened and as a result have changed the information that is sent out with regards to this.

Case Studies

• Case Studies 1: Housing – Repairs – Front Line stage (1681007)

A complaint was received where the customer was angry that a housing repairs job sheet, issued to her mother, relating to issues with drainage in the bathroom at her sheltered housing complex; had included a note including incorrect and sensitive information alluding to her health. This note caused considerable distress to the customer's mother.

On receipt of the complaint, the Council immediately acknowledged the distress this matter was likely to have caused, and that it required a prompt response. The complaint was passed to senior members of staff within the Council's Contact Centre, as Contact Centre staff are responsible for logging repairs of this nature, and issuing confirmation sheets to customers.

The advisor involved immediately acknowledged the error on their part, as they were unaware that any information included when logging the repair would be included on the confirmation sheet which would be issued to the tenant.

A detailed letter was issued to the complainant, highlighting where the service had made errors on this occasion. Moreover, two letters of apology, one from the Contact Centre Manager and one from the advisor in question were issued directly to the customer's mother, along with a bouquet of flowers.

The customer and her mother were extremely satisfied with the prompt and delicate manner in which this complaint was handled, acknowledging that the Council had taken full ownership of their mistake and sought to apologise for any distress caused.

This complaint represents an excellent example of why, on many occasions, the best way for a service to process a complaint is to openly acknowledge a fault on their behalf, offer a sincere apology and advise how they intend to move forward to ensure that the mistake is not repeated.

Customers appreciate contrition where an error has been made, and oftentimes feel their complaint has been taken more seriously where the service acknowledge their error and apologise, than when they may acknowledge that things did not go quite as they would have hoped but offer several reasons as to why this was beyond their control.

• **Case Studies 2: Transport: School bus – Investigation stage (1666278)**

The customer contacted the Council wishing to complain about the assigned school bus driver for her daughter's bus to school. The customer highlighted an extensive number of concerns with the driver in question, including inconsistent pick up times, unpleasant conduct and erratic driving – all of which she felt amounted to clear unprofessional behaviour both by the driver in question, and his management.

The customer detailed a number of different incidents with the driver in question – listing several dates where these incidents had taken place, and offering several witnesses who the customer felt could support her version of events. The customer also sought to highlight Aberdeenshire Council policy that she felt the driver was breaching, most importantly the Primary School's policy that the children should arrive no later than twenty minutes before the bell rings, so as to allow them to be supervised.

After one incident whereby the customer had engaged in a heated conversation with the driver as a result of a further inconsistent pick up time, the customer was further displeased to find that on informing the driver's line manager, he had subsequently spoken with the driver in question specifically referencing the customer. The customer felt this represented a breach of confidentiality, and again unprofessionalism.

The customer was in correspondence with several members of the Aberdeenshire Council transport service, until the complaint was passed to the Head of Transport to investigate. The Head of Transport, while sympathetic with the customer's claims, made it clear that there was no corroborating evidence for the customer's claims. This is often the case with complaints of this nature, where customer and service offer a contradictory version of events, and there is insufficient evidence to be certain either way.

Despite the lack of corroborating evidence, the service did acknowledge that there was clearly an issue with this school run, and reminded the Bus Company of their contractual obligations with regards to the operation of such a service. It was deemed in the interest of all parties that the bus driver in question was reassigned – though the service were continually keen to stress that this did not amount to them accepting the customer's version of events, only that they accepted this represented the best way forward for both customer and service to an amicable resolution.

This complaints represents a good example of the difficulty involved where a personal grievance is raised against a specific employee. Oftentimes complaints of this nature are difficult to investigate, due to the lack of corroborating evidence.

Furthermore, this complaint represents a good example of where complaints, even when not upheld, represent excellent learning opportunities for Council services. While no fault was found with the driver, a resolution was still found to the satisfaction of both customer and the service.

• **Case Studies 3: Education – School Exam Facility – Investigation stage (1776419)**

The customer contacted the Council to complain about her daughter's Secondary School's decision to hold prelim examinations in the nearby sports centre, rather than on Campus. The customer expressed considerable dissatisfaction with the decision for a number of reasons, relating to what she felt was a lack of risk assessment in light of the number of pupils on site at one time, a lack of toilet facilities, a lack of space for pupil's schoolbags, the fact that pupil's sitting different exams would do so at the same time in the same hall and that this would lead to disruption.

The customer's concerns were initially passed to the Head Teacher of the school to respond at the frontline. The Head Teacher put together a detailed response, which specifically addressed each of the customer concerns. The school were satisfied that all required procedure had been followed, and that and that the facility met the standards required. However, the customer remained dissatisfied with this response, and requested that her complaint was escalated to stage two. The complaint was subsequently passed to the Quality Improvement Officer for the area. As by this stage the exam period had now begun, it was decision of the investigating officer that they would wait until after the cessation of the exam period to allow for a full review of the customer's concerns.

On completion of the exam period, a further response was provided to the customer by the investigating officer. This response not only reiterated that the school had followed the appropriate procedures when selecting the exam venue, but further highlighted the extremely positive feedback that the service had received from both pupils and parents. The facility in question had provided pupils with a large and quiet venue free from everyday interruptions, such as period bells and tannoy messages. Teachers and invigilators also commented favourably on the venue, as it provided a formal examination arena and meeting room where the team could discuss any issues.

Good complaints handling demonstrates not only why the actions taken by the service did not constitute the service failures that the customer believed were an issue, but should further demonstrate why the council feels that the service provided in fact represents a positive experience for our customers, as was the case in this instance. This allows the service to demonstrate that they are actively seeking to provide the best quality service at all times, rather than a service that is simply of required standard with minimal difficulties.

Unfortunately, the customer remained dissatisfied with the council's position, and contacted the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

Following their review, the Ombudsman confirmed that they were satisfied with the Council's response, and while the customer clearly disagreed with the conclusions the Council had reached, she had not raised any concerns that the Council had not provided a reasonable response to.

• **Case Studies 4: Housing – Service Standards – Front Line stage (1774710)**

Ms C wished to raise a complaint in relation to the standard of service provided by our Housing Team. Ms C advised she had been instructed by her landlady she was to be made homeless. Ms C was upset when she contacted the Housing Team as she thought she required temporary homeless accommodation from Aberdeenshire Council for herself, her partner and four children. Ms C became distressed on the phone and used inappropriate language towards Housing employees as she believed Aberdeenshire Council were not providing the appropriate support.

During this call, Ms C alleged the conduct of the Housing employee who spoke with her had been inappropriate and unprofessional. Therefore, as a resolution Ms C requested appropriate disciplinary action to be taken in response to the concerns raised.

Ms C listed several further concerns when clarification was sought as to what she wanted and what resolution she was looking for. Amongst them she believed council houses were being provided to others whilst her young family were not being provided with appropriate accommodation, the conditions in her mobile home were not good and requested the Housing Team provide appropriate accommodation, which Ms C alleged was not being provided. She wanted a clear explanation of why temporary accommodation could not be provided.

Following contact with the Housing Team to clarify what assistance was available to Ms C and family in the short term, and with the landlady to ascertain the position, it was discovered that there were no issues with the continued occupation of the mobile home. The site operated for 12 months and there had been no notice given or any requirement to move identified. In addition, records showed the advice provided by the Housing employee was correct and the staff had conducted themselves in an appropriate manner. It was just the message being delivered that frustrated Ms C.

Following this, a written response was provided clearly addressing all of the concerns raised by Ms C and provided relevant contact details should she wish to raise further concerns.

On review the complaint was well handled by the service. Due to the urgent nature of the concerns, swift action was taken, to ensure the complaint was addressed in a short time frame. In addition, a clear explanation for any decisions made were provided within the corporate timescales.

This complaint represents a good example of a service providing a response which was clear, concise and detailed, ensuring the customer was aware of the reasons for the decisions made by the council. This complaint was of an emotive nature, and the complainant was clearly distressed when contacting Aberdeenshire Council. Therefore, it was important to respond to the concerns raised in a positive, reassuring manner, which represented model complaints handling.

• **Case Studies 5: Libraries – Website upgrade – Investigation stage (1784179)**

The customer became a frequent user of the online system provided by his local library and could search, request and renew items borrowed. After an upgrade of the Council's website, the customer could not access the catalogue. He wished to be able to access his online account to search the library catalogue.

Once the complaint was received and reviewed, the Council's ICT team apologised for the inconvenience to the customer and explained that the problems he was experiencing were due to an upgrade of the Aberdeenshire Libraries new website. The customer was emailed links to assist and an explanation was given that we had received information from other customers that the system was not working and that the team would endeavour to fix the problem swiftly, which they did.

Following this, the customer responded again advising that he was getting further frustrated by the new site. The customer was advised that they could arrange for a member of staff to show him the catalogue in more detail at a local library, as on questioning it was established that it was just the new layout that was confusing the customer, following the upgrade. Help and advice was given including the provision of screen shots which showed the customer specific procedures which he had used before and had now changed.

This complaint and other highlighted to the service that the new Library Management system was having teething problems but the service demonstrated they were keen to discuss specific issues further with the customer at any time.

This is a good example of the service getting involved straight away and providing a good level of advice and support to assist the customer with his issues and to provide a better service for the customer.

• **Case Studies 6: Waste – Recycling - Front Line stage (1796930)**

This case is a good example of how quick and efficient complaint handling at Stage 1 of the Complaints Handling Procedure benefits the customer and the service with a swift resolution and response.

Not all complaints are complex and not all complaints require an intensive investigation if handled correctly.

The customer contacted the Council's Feedback Team and to raise a complaint that the Waste service had delivered a refuse bin instead of a recycling bin (following a previous request) and that this action directly resulted in his recycling being rejected.

Following a quick investigation of the order and what had happened from the services end, a Waste Management Supervisor visited the customer the following morning in order to determine exactly what type of bin was delivered.

On inspection it was discovered that the correct bin had been delivered, however it was established that the customer's recycling was not being collected as it had been contaminated with materials that were non-recyclable during the kerbside recycling collection. The customer's complaint was therefore not upheld.

The Assistant Waste Officer also offered the customer some advice on what types of recycling could go into his recycling bin for uplift at kerbside for future and arranged to get his bin collected as a goodwill gesture. The customer was very satisfied with this course of action.

• **Case Studies 7: Leisure – Swimming Pool – Front Line stage (1850211)**

A customer complained that the swimming pool, facilities and grounds were not being maintained properly. There were two showers broken and children were cold while standing waiting for one. They also complained that the temperature of the games hall was too hot for exercise. Outside there were weeds in the gardens and in the guttering.

The service appreciated the feedback and advised the customer that following an investigation, the changing rooms and shower faults had been reported and were waiting for parts for the two showers that were not working.

The games hall temperature had been adjusted and staff had made requests to get it adjusted where necessary as soon as they were made aware of any issues. The temperature was to be investigated further as it was determined that this should not require to be adjusted on a regular basis.

During this complaint the Leisure service also had to contact colleagues in the Landscape team as the outside of the building is maintained by them. They advised that due to current weather conditions this would have had an impact on the service being on site, but that they would address the specific issues raised by the customer as soon as the weather improved.

As a result, a response was given to the customer within the five day timescale at the Front Line stage of our Complaints Handling Procedure, giving an explanation as to what was happening as a result of their contact and that the service had put in place a new system to ensure a prompt response to the repair and maintenance of cubicles and lockers.

This case study represents a good example of Aberdeenshire Council's commitment to ensuring that complaints are dealt with promptly and on time and that action is taken to resolve and/or inform customer complaints as close to the point of service as possible. This complaint led to an improvement of the service provided, as a result of feedback and complaints from this customer.

- **Case Studies 8: Education – Communication & Planning - Investigation stage (1540901)**

This is a good example of how our services use complaints as opportunities to implement positive changes to the service they provide to their customers.

Ms T and Mr E wrote to complain to one of our Primary Schools regarding the transportation used by staff for a trip to a P3/P4 badminton tournament.

The customers' main concerns were that they did not receive information regarding the trip in a timely manner, the permission slip completed did not detail the mode of transport to be used and that they were never made aware of the nature of the transport even after the event.

This was logged at Stage 2 of our Complaints Handling Procedure and the Quality Improvement Officer investigated the matter. The investigation found that all of the points raised by the customer were valid and the complaint was therefore upheld.

The school recognised that the decision making in relation to this trip was the result of a lack of training in this area and as a result undertook to ensure that the Head Teacher and all school staff involved in school trip planning undertook the appropriate training as a priority.

In addition to this, they planned a review of the policies and procedures in place at the school relating to the planning, preparation and delivery of school excursions in line with Aberdeenshire practice and policy. The school also carried out a review of the paperwork used for planning and communication with parents to look for improvements.

To ensure the customers that the appropriate action would be taken, the Quality Improvement Officer worked with the Head Teacher at the school to until each of the recommendations were fulfilled. The Quality Improvement office also arranged for the Head Teacher to contact the customers directly and apologise for any distress caused.

• **Case Studies 9: Property – Cleaning Standards - Front Line stage (1802672)**

Another case where, although it may not seem much of a complaint to most, it demonstrates that any and all complaints are welcomed by this council. It is also another good example of how quick and efficient complaint handling at Stage one of the Complaints Handling Procedure benefits the customer and the service with a swift resolution and response.

The customer complained that as a lot of people including herself, used a local community hall regularly (2-3 times per week) they were quite taken aback by the level of dirt on the floors and standard of cleanliness.

She explained that with her fitness class their whole bodies could be on the floor and it was noticed that often there was dried blood on the floor, other times spilt liquids, dead flies and generally just extremely dirty.

The customer asked if it was possible that the floors could be washed regularly.

Following an investigation where the points raised were discussed with the Duty Officer in charge of the hall cleaning, we apologised to the customer for the standard of cleanliness she had experienced at the hall.

It was noted that a Hall Keeper was there to provide basic cleaning and that the general cleanliness standards was discussed with them directly and they were reminded that it was within their remit to ensure the hall is checked and cleaned as and when required.

In addition, as a direct result of the customer's complaint, we commissioned a 'Deep Clean' from our mobile cleaning squad to provide a more thorough refresh, including the windows.

We also explained that due to the rural location of many of our community halls, most of them were not directly staffed. As a result we relied on the users of the more rural halls to assist in every way possible to maintain the overall cleanliness and tidiness of the facilities and that groups should continue to report to the council any problems where other users were not as diligent as others.

The hall was monitored over the following weeks on a regular spot check rota. The customer was satisfied with this outcome.

Aberdeenshire Council is committed to listening to our customers and using their feedback to change and improve the way we do things. We hope the case studies provided have given an insight into the many different types of complaints we get and how issues are resolved and how the learning is used to improve the service we provide.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman/Benchmarking

The SPSO 2014-15 Annual Report was completed in October 2015. Initial complaints benchmarking with other authorities has currently taken place and meetings have been held with the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network (LACHN) and the Improvement Service with regards to this.

Our complaints data for 2013-14 and 2014-15 was submitted to these organisations in order to assist in the development of a benchmarking process, and our 2015-16 complaints data will be submitted to the LACHN for the same purpose.

It has been established through LACHN meetings that there is some discrepancy on how the performance indicators are calculated and how the model complaints handling procedure is being implemented across the 32 local authorities in Scotland. Work is ongoing to identify these discrepancies and develop guidelines for the performance indicators, initially using the Local Government Benchmarking Framework family groupings.

We are awaiting the SPSO's best practice guidance.

Contact Us

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

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