

Complaints Handling Annual Report

2023-24



Introduction

At Moray Council, we aim to provide the highest level of service however there are times when we don't meet the expectations of our customers. When this happens, it's important we learn from the complaints we receive and improve our service delivery.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) is the responsible body for complaints handling for the public sector in Scotland. Their Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) defines how they expect complaints to be dealt with. In line with this, all complaints we receive are managed under the two Stage Complaints Handling Procedure:

Stage 1 - Also known as Frontline Resolution

These complaints should be straightforward. A Stage 1 complaint could mean immediate action to resolve the matter. These complaints should be answered within 5 working days. Most complaints should be dealt with at Stage 1.

Stage 2 – Also known as Investigation Stage

A Stage 2 complaint may be a concern that has not been successfully resolved at Stage 1 and is therefore escalated or refers to a matter that is more complex and requires a full and detailed investigation. These complaints should be answered within 20 working days.

To help improve the customer experience, we aim to resolve as many complaints as possible at Stage 1. However, if a customer remains dissatisfied following the 2 Stage process, we advise how complaints can be passed to the SPSO for further consideration.

Complaints Performance

All complaints are recorded on our Complaints Management System. Details are shared with our Corporate Management Team and Heads of Service on a quarterly basis and with our Service Committees every six months. Our Complaints Officer holds regular meetings with Complaints Administrators and at a national level, attends quarterly meetings of the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network.

As part of a revised MCHP issued on 1 April 2021, local authorities are required to record and publish complaints performance annually against 4 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). This report details how we performed against these KPIs between 01 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 and provides examples of changes introduced as a result of the complaints we have received. For comparison purposes, we have also included our performance from the previous two years and the 2023-24 national data for Scotland.

Indicator 1: Total number of complaints received (including complaints per 1,000 population)

This indicator records the total number of complaints received at both Stage 1 and Stage 2. To allow for consistent benchmarking across all local authorities in Scotland, the figure per 1,000 population is included.

Table 1: Complaints received including per 1,000 population

	Moray Council			Scotland
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2023-24
Total Complaints Received (Stage 1 and Stage 2)	541	593	747	47,294
Population	96,410	96,410	94,280	4,764,140
Complaints per 1,000 population	5.61	6.15	7.92	9.93

(2023-24 population based on Mid-Year Estimates 2022)

During 2023-24, we received 747 complaints, an increase of 154 (26%) against 2022-23 and 206 (38%) from 2021-22. Although complaints have risen to 7.92 per 1,000 population, we remain below the national average of 9.93.

By department, complaints received by Environmental and Commercial Services increased from 191 to 296 while for Housing and Property Services, complaints fell from 191 to 180.

Table 2: Number and % of Complaints received by Department

	2021-22		2022-23		2023-24	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Environmental and Commercial Services	168	31%	191	32%	296	40%
Housing and Property Services	157	29%	191	32%	180	24%
Education	66	12%	64	11%	80	11%
Children and Families and Criminal Justice	23	4%	29	5%	44	6%
Financial Services	7	1%	36	6%	38	5%
Economic Growth and Development	37	7%	23	4%	37	5%
Health and Social Care Moray	24	4%	22	4%	26	3%
Education Resources and Communities	18	3%	14	2%	24	3%
Governance, Strategy and Performance	35	6%	21	4%	20	3%
HR, ICT and Organisational Development	6	1%	2	0.3%	2	0.3%
Grand Total	541		593		747	

NB percentages may not total 100% due to rounding

Table 3 shows the most common complaints received by Environmental and Commercial Services in 2023-24, with a comparison provided for the previous two years. Proportionally, Public/School Transport has seen the largest increase from the previous year followed by Lighting, Winter Maintenance and Household Collections.

Table 3: Environmental and Commercial Services – Most Common Complaints 2023-24 (with previous years comparison)

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Environmental and Commercial Services			
Household Collections	77	70	105
Road Maintenance	18	27	27
Public/School Transport	2	4	25
Complaint Against Staff	17	19	22
Winter Maintenance	1	11	22
Street Lighting	1	3	17

Recent changes within Environmental and Commercial Services can be linked to this notable increase in complaints. The enhanced m.connect service, including the launch of a new booking system and app, led to a spike in complaints for Public Transport as new procedures were introduced while a planned rise in the cost of the Garden Waste Permit resulted in a higher rate of complaints for Household Collections.

External factors also contributed, with a period of wintery weather leading to complaints around Winter Maintenance while Moray Council received complaints relating to Street Lighting that were found to be associated to work undertaken by third party organisations.

For Housing and Property, the 2023-24 Service Plan included an action to improve the customer service provided for housing repairs, to be measured by a 10% reduction in complaints. A review of complaints received by this Service show those relating to Repairs/Capital/Planned Maintenance, fell by 14% from 130 in 2022-23 to 111 in 2023-24 achieving the planned outcome of this Service Plan action and resulting in a fall in Housing and Property complaints overall.

Indicator 2: Number and Percentage of complaints at each stage that were closed in full within set timescales of 5 and 20 working days

The MCHP requires complaints be closed within 5 working days at Stage 1 and 20 working days at Stage 2. While the aim is to handle complaints as quickly as possible, the main consideration must always be to deliver a quality decision based on facts and evidence.

Table 4: Complaints Closed

	Moray Council			Scotland
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2023-24
Stage 1	402	466	586	39,272
Stage 2	118	80	123	4,001
Escalated Stage 2	14	26	26	2,476
Total	534	572	735	45,749

Table 5: Number and Percentage of Complaints at each Stage that were closed in full within set timescales

	Moray Council						Scotland	
	2021-22		2022-23		2023-24		2023-24	
	No. closed within set timescales	% closed within set timescales	No. closed within set timescales	% closed within set timescales	No. closed within set timescales	% closed within set timescales	No. closed within set timescales	% closed within set timescales
Stage 1	310	77%	377	81%	494	84%	25,382	65%
Stage 2	89	75%	54	68%	61	50%	2,506	63%
Escalated Stage 2	4	29%	8	31%	4	15%	1,536	62%
Total	403	75%	439	77%	559	76%	29,424	64%

During 2023-24, we increased the proportion of Stage 1 complaints closed within target timescales. Stage 2 complaints achieving target fell for the second consecutive year while Escalated Stage 2 complaints dropped to 15%. Overall, our closed complaints meeting MCHP targets have remained relatively static, however we continue to be above the national average.

A higher proportion of our late complaints are recorded by Education and Children and Families and Criminal Justice. Due to the complex nature of the issues involved within these services, Stage 2 complaints can take longer to investigate fully. In particular with Education, investigations can take longer if the complaint is received immediately prior to a school holiday period.

To reduce these late complaints, our Complaints Officer has worked with Administrators and Heads of Service to develop a more proactive approach for dealing with complaints approaching their due date, including the increased use of extensions. The impact of this will be monitored over the next few months.

Indicator 3: Average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage

This indicator details the average time in working days for a full response to be provided to a complaint at each stage.

Table 6: Average Response Times (Working Days)

	Moray Council			Scotland
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2023-24
Stage 1	5.1	6.26	5.36	9.40
Stage 2	20.9	27.45	27.92	22.80
Escalated Stage 2	26.2	28.73	32.77	19.60

Our average response time for Stage 1 complaints in 2023-24 improved to just above the MCHP target of 5 working days, well below the national average of 9.4 days. Stage 2 and Escalated Stage 2 complaints however both increased for the second consecutive year. As highlighted with Indicator 2, we have fewer Stage 2 complaints meeting target timescales and this has an impact on our average times. The targeted work undertaken by our Complaints Officer to reduce late complaints should help to address this.

Indicator 4: The outcome of complaints at each stage

Once a complaint has been investigated, we are required to provide the customer with an explanation of the findings and confirm the outcome category as one of the following;

Upheld – when a complaint is found to be true or is confirmed.

Partially Upheld - where several issues have been raised and some, but not all, are upheld.

Resolved - where a complaint includes a number of issues, but we manage to agree an outcome without the need to investigate and respond on each separately.

Not Upheld - when a complaint is found to be untrue or where a reasonable standard of service has been provided.

Indicator 4 reports the number and percentage of our complaints closed at each stage against the outcome decision.

Table 7: The outcome of complaints at each Stage

	Moray Council						Scotland	
Stage 1	2021-22		2022-23		2023-24		2023-24	
Not Upheld	182	45%	202	43%	276	47%	14,171	36%
Partially Upheld	49	12%	36	8%	51	9%	6,681	17%
Upheld	151	38%	212	45%	255	44%	12,232	31%
Resolved	20	5%	16	3%	4	1%	6,188	16%
Total Closed at Stage 1	402		466		586		39,272	
	Moray Council						Scotland	
Stage 2	2021-22		2022-23		2023-24		2023-24	
Not Upheld	65	55%	39	49%	78	63%	2,106	53%
Partially Upheld	26	22%	22	28%	24	20%	1,012	25%
Upheld	24	20%	19	24%	19	15%	726	18%
Resolved	3	3%	0	0%	2	2%	157	4%
Total	118		80		123		4,001	
	Moray Council						Scotland	
Escalated Stage 2	2021-22		2022-23		2023-24		2023-24	
Not Upheld	3	21%	10	38%	5	19%	1,080	44%
Partially Upheld	6	43%	13	50%	12	46%	570	23%
Upheld	5	36%	3	12%	8	31%	631	26%
Resolved	0	0%	0	0%	1	4%	195	8%
Total	14		26		26		2,476	

NB percentages may not total 100% due to rounding

The outcome of our complaints by Stage varies against national averages. With Stage 1, we have a high proportion of complaints closed as Upheld and Not Upheld. In contrast, Stage 1 complaints closed as Resolved are significantly low.

The option to close a complaint as Resolved was introduced by the SPSO in 2021 and covers complaints where a resolution has been agreed without the need to investigate each area. To ensure this category is applied correctly, our Complaints Officer regularly monitors Resolved complaints. If required, complaints are investigated fully, resulting in a more specific outcome of Not Upheld, Upheld or Partially Upheld being applied.

Following discussions with the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network, it was clear this level of monitoring is not routinely undertaken by other authorities and is perhaps why Resolved complaints recorded by Moray Council are lower than the national average.

For Stage 2 complaints, an increasing proportion have been closed as Not Upheld. This is only possible following a full investigation and may be a contributing factor in the increase of Stage 2 complaints exceeding target timescales. The thoroughness of our investigation process can be linked to the low number of complaints referred to the SPSO and the feedback they have provided shows, in the majority of cases, the required standard of service has been provided.

SPSO Complaints

If a complainant remains dissatisfied following the 2 Stage process, their complaint can be passed to the SPSO for further consideration. The SPSO provide feedback and, if required, recommendations to help councils learn and improve. When recommendations are made, the council must take action within a specified time frame and provide evidence that demonstrates the learning and improvements taken.

During 2023-24, 10 complaints were considered by the SPSO however no recommendations for any improvements were made. Seven minor feedback points were raised and passed to the relevant departments to make staff and managers aware.

An annual report covering the seven feedback points will be discussed at the Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 20 November 2024.

Learning from Complaints

Complaints are a valuable source of information; they provide us with the opportunity to identify trends or emerging issues and develop and improve our service delivery. Some examples of changes we have implemented due to complaints in 2023-24 are provided below.

Public Transport

To improve the booking experience of the new m.connect service, additional training and procedures have been implemented for both contact centre staff and drivers. Roaming sim cards have been purchased to ensure more reliable system coverage and the liftandgo app has been updated to improve notifications for passengers.

Housing Repairs

To reduce complaints relating to remedial work, new Tenant Liaison Assistants have been recruited to improve scheduling of repairs and communication with tenants and contractors. Housing have also worked with ICT to develop a new booking system for inspections and implemented a new mould and damp policy to reduce time taken to address these issues.

Antisocial Behaviour

To minimise the impact on local communities, a new system has been introduced that will improve the monitoring of ASB at council properties used for homeless accommodation.

Financial Services

Work practices and procedures have been improved within Financial Services, ensuring all enquiries receive a prompt and thorough response.

Education

Following concerns highlighted to Education, school procedures around use of personal devices and social media permissions have been improved. Protocols relating to food allergies and issuing of medication have also been updated.

Education Resources and Communities

To improve accessibility at one of our community facilities, we instigated work to construct dropped kerbs allowing safer entry for all.

Household Collections

Although issues around supplier lead times for new/replacement bins is out with the control of the Waste Team, improvements have been made to internal stock control procedures to minimise disruption should delivery take longer than expected.

Children & Families

To improve communication and understanding of procedures, a practitioner toolkit and a family leaflet are in development. Staff have also been reminded of the importance of regular, timely updates.

Customer Satisfaction

In December 2021, as part of our plans for recovery and renewal from the Covid pandemic, we replaced paper copies of our survey with a link to an online questionnaire, sent to those supplying an email address. In 2023-24, 567 links to our survey were issued resulting in 68 responses and a return rate of 12%. This is an improvement on the 8% recorded in 2022-23 and similar to that achieved in 2021-22 when paper surveys were issued for most of the year. Alternative methods, within available resources, that could increase responses are kept under review however low response rates to complaint surveys are evident nationally.

Our survey requests feedback on the process of dealing with a complaint as opposed to the complaint outcome. In 2023-24, it was highlighted information about our complaint's procedure was accessible and our responses were clear and easy to understand. Areas identified for improvement included ensuring all points raised are addressed and that we communicate better regarding timescales and the next stages of a complaint. Refresher training has been undertaken with Administrators covering the need to accurately agree all areas of a complaint and improve communication with the complainant.

Conclusion

We are committed to learning from the views and experiences of our customers. To do this, we aim to record complaints accurately and adhere to the Complaints Handling Procedure. Where a complaint is closed as upheld or partially upheld, learning and improvement opportunities are identified to improve service provision. This can lead to a change in process or policy to prevent or reduce the likelihood of similar complaints occurring.

This Annual Report complies with the SPSO's requirement to publish our complaints performance against their 4 key performance indicators. It also highlights some of the recent changes we've made as a result of the complaints we've received. We will continue to welcome customer feedback and work towards providing the best service possible.

Contact Us

For more information on our complaints procedure, or to make a complaint via our complaints e-form, visit www.moray.gov.uk/complaints. For more detailed advice or to request a copy of the procedure in another format contact 01343 543451 or email complaints@moray.gov.uk.