



**ORKNEY**  
ISLANDS COUNCIL

# **Annual Complaints Handling Report 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018**

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## **Introduction**

The local authorities in Scotland have adopted the Model Complaints Handling Procedure produced by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). In order that councils can measure how well they are handling complaints, the SPSO has drawn up a series of performance indicators that she has asked councils to publish in an Annual Report.

The Local Government Network of Complaints Handlers has Family Groups which bring together broadly similar councils. Orkney is part of Family Group One (FG1) with Shetland, the Scottish Borders, Aberdeenshire, Eilean Siar, Argyll and Bute, Dumfries and Galloway and Highlands. Throughout the report, the statistics for Orkney have been compared with the average for Family Group One.

## **Executive Summary**

- The number of complaints received in 2017/18 (72) was less than the previous year (102).
- The Council responded to 80% of complaints within the target times, which is a slight increase to the figure for 2016/17 (78%).
- Only 2 out of the 6 complaints handled at Stage Two (requiring investigation) were responded to within the target time, and the Council will work to improve that figure. The average time taken for Stage Two complaints is much higher than the Family Group One average
- The Council determined a higher percentage of complaints at the initial stage (Stage One) than in the previous year, 2016/17 (83% compared to 76%).

## **Indicator One - The Number of Complaints Received per 1,000 Population**

The population of Orkney is about 21,850.

From 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018, the Council handled 72 new complaints from service users. This means that, on average, 3.3 complaints were received per 1,000 residents in Orkney.

Expressed in another way, 1 in every 303 residents registered a complaint about the Council's services.

### **Comment**

This is significantly less than the average for FG1, which is 6.3 complaints per 1,000 residents.

## **Indicator Two - The Number of Closed Complaints**

The Council aims to resolve complaints as soon as possible. Complaints that do not need investigation are called Stage One and the Council aims to resolve these within 5 working days. 83% of the complaints received by the Council (60) were determined at this initial stage.

Some complaints are more complex and need investigation and the Council aims to resolve these within 20 working days. These are called Stage Two complaints and 8.5% of the Complaints received by the Council (6) were dealt with at this Stage.

A further six complaints (8.5%) were initially dealt with as a Stage One complaint and then 'escalated' to a Stage Two complaint because it was decided that more investigation was needed.

### **Comment**

The Council is satisfied that most complaints were able to be determined under Stage One.

## **Indicator Three - The Number of Complaints Upheld, Not Upheld or Partially Upheld at Each Stage**

### **Stage One**

- 57% of Stage One complaints were upheld (Family Group One: 31%).
- 41% were not upheld (FG1: 54%).
- 2% were partially upheld. (FG1: 15%).

### **Stage Two**

- 17% of Stage Two complaints were upheld. (FG1: 23%).
- 33% were not upheld. (FG1: 63%).
- 50% of complaints were partially upheld. (FG1: 14%).

### **Escalated complaints**

- 0% of escalated complaints were upheld. (FG1: 27%).
- 100% were not upheld. (FG1: 59%).
- 0% of complaints were partially upheld. (FG1: 14%)

## **Indicator Four - The Average Number of Working Days to Provide a Full Response to Complaints at Each Stage**

**Stage One:** average response time was 5.7 days (was 4.3 days for Orkney Islands Council (OIC) in 2016/17, 8.5 days for FG1 in 2017/18)

**Stage Two:** average response time was 56.5 days (was 16 days for OIC in 2016/17, 18 for FG1 in 2017/18)

**Escalated cases:** average response time was 14 days (was 11 days for OIC in 2016/17, 19.8 FG1 in 2017/18)

### **Comment**

The average response time for Stage Two responses is distorted by one highly complex case involving different services, which took 162 days to resolve. However, even if this complaint is taken out of account, the average response time would be 35 days which is still in excess of the target 20 working days. The three other Stage Two cases that were responded to late were also complex cases and two of these related to schools, where responses were delayed because the schools were closed. The view of the SPSO is that it is more important to carry out a thorough investigation and provide a full response to a complaint than it is to respond by the target date. Nevertheless, it is a Council priority for 2018/19 to reduce the time it takes to handle Stage Two complaints.

Overall, the time it takes the Council to respond to complaints is going up, and this is a priority for the Council to address in 2018/19.

## **Indicator Five - The Number and Percentage of Complaints Which Were Closed Within the Set Timescales (5 working days for Stage One, 20 working days for Stage Two)**

**Stage One:** 83% (was 81% for 2016/17).

**Stage Two:** 33% (was 71%).

**Escalated complaints:** 100% (was 71%).

**Total for all complaints:** 80% (was 78%)

### **Comments**

The overall percentage for all types of complaints that were responded to within the deadline has increased from 78% to 80%, which is significantly higher than FG1 (66%). However, the percentage of Stage Two Complaints responded to on time was only 33%, a significant drop since last year and much lower than the FG1 average (78%). The number of Stage Two complaints closed in 2017/18 was only 6, a very small number, so four complaints resolved late had a significant impact on the average figure.

The priority for the Council's Complaints Officers Group will be the same as for last year, to significantly increase the number of complaints fully responded to within the deadlines, especially for Stage Two.

## **Indicator Six - The Number and Percentage of Complaints at Each Stage Where an Extension to the 5 or 20 Working Day Timetable Has Been Authorised**

**Stage one:** 17% of complaints closed at stage one were granted an extension of time to reply.

**Stage Two:** 67% of complaints closed at stage two were granted an extension of time to reply.

**Escalated cases:** 0% of escalated complaints were granted an extension of time to reply.

### **Comments**

The Council plans to reduce the number of complaints, especially at Stage Two, that need an extension of time to be resolved.

## **Indicator Seven - Customer Satisfaction with the Complaints Handling Process**

Of the 72 complaints closed last year, the Council received back 10 Feedback forms which is 14%.

Of those:

- Six complainants said the issue was resolved completely, three said it was partially resolved and one said it was not resolved at all.
- Six complainants said the staff who dealt with the complaint were very helpful, two said they were fairly helpful and two said they were not helpful at all.

## **Indicator Eight - Learning from Complaints**

Lessons learnt from handling complaints are reported to the Council's Senior Management Team (the Chief Executive, the four Executive Directors, the Head of Executive Support and the Head of Finance) every quarter.

Complaints Officers in the different Services provide feedback to their colleagues on any lessons learnt that relates to their services.

The Complaints Handling Procedure helps Council staff better understand how the way they deliver their services affects service users. It helps the Council improve how it provides services and its communication with service users. For 2017/18 this included:

- If the Met Office issue an amber weather warning, school transport will be cancelled for the duration of the warning unless the Service is satisfied that it is safe for pupils to travel.
- Communication between private contractors engaged by the Council to carry out repairs and Council tenants has been improved. There were often unavoidable delays to carrying out repairs which were not explained to tenants or, when contractors were unable to attend when expected, this was not being communicated to tenants.
- Private contractors engaged by the Council to carry out housing repairs need to be reminded of the importance of carrying out their responsibilities under their contract.
- The cabins for Orkney Ferries passengers who cannot use the stairs should be better labelled.
- Publishing the summer/winter ferry timetables further in advance will allow residents to book in advance and better plan their journeys. (Planned for 2019).