



**ORKNEY**  
ISLANDS COUNCIL

# **Annual Complaints Handling Report 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019**

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# 1. Introduction

1.1. Local authorities in Scotland have adopted the Model Complaints Handling Procedure produced by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to ensure that there is a standardised approach across all Scottish councils, to implement a consistent process for customers to follow which makes it simpler to complain, to ensure staff and customer confidence in complaints handling and to encourage organisations to make the best use of lessons from complaints.

1.2. The Indicators within this report have been produced by the SPSO in consultation with local authority stakeholders and Audit Scotland.

1.3. The points below are key to a successful complaints process:

1.3.1. We should:

- 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.

1.4. The Model Complaints Handling Procedure sets out three types of complaint:

- **Frontline Resolution Stage One:**
  - Frontline resolution should be attempted where there are straightforward issues potentially easily resolved with little or no investigation. This should be completed within 5 working days.
- **Investigation Stage Two:**
  - Where complaints cannot be resolved at the frontline stage or where complaints are complex, serious or high risk, a thorough investigation will be undertaken. This typically requires more thorough examination in order to establish facts prior to reaching conclusion. This should be completed within 20 working days.
- **Escalated Investigation Stage Two:**
  - Where the complainant remains dissatisfied with the way the Council dealt with their complaint at frontline resolution, the complainant can request a detailed investigation under stage two of our complaints handling procedure. This must be undertaken before the complainant can take their complaint to the SPSO to review.

1.5. Until 31 March 2018, Social Work services had a different Complaints Handling Procedure and from 1 April 2018, local government social work teams now use the Model Complaints Handling Procedure. Statistics for social work complaints are not currently available for this year's Annual Report, but they will be included in the 2019 to 2020 Report.

1.6. The Local Government Network of Complaints Handlers has Family Groups which bring together broadly similar councils. Orkney Islands Council is part of Family Group One (FG1) with Shetland Islands Council, Scottish Borders Council, Aberdeenshire Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Argyll and Bute Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council and Highland Council. Throughout the report, the statistics for Orkney Islands Council have been compared with the average for Family Group One in 2017 to 2018 because not all the figures for 2018 to 2019 are currently available.

## **2. Executive Summary**

- The number of complaints received in 2018 to 2019 was 101, higher than the previous year (72).
- The Council responded to 62% of complaints within the target times, which is lower than the figure for 2017 to 2018 (80%).
- 62% of complaints handled at Stage Two (requiring investigation) were responded to within the target time, which is a significant improvement on the 2017 to 2018 figure when only 33% of Stage Two complaints were responded to on time.
- 82% of the complainants who completed the Feedback Questionnaires were satisfied with the Council's handling of their complaints.

## **3. Indicators**

### **3.1. Indicator 1: Number of Complaints received per 1,000 population**

The population of Orkney is about 21,850.

From 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019, the Council handled 101 new complaints from service users. This means that, on average, 4.6 complaints were received per 1,000 residents in Orkney.

Expressed in another way, 1 in every 216 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 (2017 to 2018 figures).

### **3.2. Indicator 2: 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. 71% of the complaints received by the Council (70) 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 27% of the Complaints received by the Council (26) were dealt with at this Stage.

A further 2% of complaints (2) were initially dealt with as a Stage One complaint and then 'escalated' to a Stage Two complaint because it was decided that further investigation was needed.

## **Comment**

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

### **3.3. Indicator 3: Number of Complaints Upheld, Not Upheld or Partially Upheld at Each Stage**

#### **Stage One**

- 52% of Stage One complaints were upheld (Family Group 1: 31%).
- 34% were not upheld (FG1: 54%).
- 14% were partially upheld. (FG1: 15%).

#### **Stage Two**

- 15% of Stage Two complaints were upheld. (FG1: 23%).
- 27% were not upheld. (FG1: 63%).
- 58% of complaints were partially upheld. (FG1: 14%).

#### **Escalated complaints**

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

### **3.4. Indicator 4: Average Number of Working Days to Provide a Full Response to Complaints at Each Stage**

**Stage One:** average response time was 6.3 days (was 5.7 days for the Council in 2017 to 2018, 8.5 days for FG1 in 2017 to 2018).

**Stage Two:** average response time was 23.5 days (was 56.5 days for the Council in 2017 to 2018, 18 for FG1 in 2018 to 2019).

**Escalated cases:** average response time was 17 days (was 14 days for the Council in 2017 to 2018, 19.8 FG1 in 2018 to 2019).

## **Comment**

Overall, the time it takes the Council to respond to complaints is increasing, and this is a priority for the Council to address in 2018 to 2019.

### **3.5. Indicator 5: 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:** 63% (was 83% for 2017 to 2018).

**Stage Two:** 61.5% (was 33%).

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

**Total for all complaints:** 62% (was 80%).

## Comments

The overall percentage for all types of complaints that were responded to within the deadline was 63%, which is a little lower than the FG1 (66%), and significantly lower than the figure for the Council in 2017 to 2018 (80%).

However, the percentage of Stage Two Complaints responded to on time has significantly improved, up from 33% in 2017 to 2018 to 61.5% for 2018 to 2019.

A priority for the Council's Complaints Officers Group will be to increase the number of complaints fully responded to within the deadlines.

### **3.6. Indicator 6: Number and Percentage of Complaints at Each Stage Where an Extension to the 5 or 20 Working Day Timetable Has Been Authorised**

**Stage One:** 37% of complaints closed at stage one were granted an extension of time to reply.

**Stage Two:** 38.5% 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 that need an extension of time to be resolved.

### **3.7. Indicator 7: Customer Satisfaction with the Complaints Handling Process**

Of the 98 complaints closed last year, the Council received back 18 feedback forms which represents a return rate of 18%.

Of those:

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

Complainants were asked how the Council could have avoided the cause of the complaint and samples of the replies include:

*"If the painting [on the ferry] hadn't been done she would not have had to go up the stairs and she would not have fallen in the first place."*

*"You need to speak to company and let them know that householders should be treated with a lot more respect."*

Complainants were asked about the Council's handling of their complaints and these are three representative replies:

*“You should have followed it up sooner.”*

*“Not being a straightforward complaint, resolution took a bit longer than normal. However, the matter was fully resolved and fully explained to me.”*

*“Happy with the outcome and the way the complaint was handled.”*

## **Comments**

It is regrettable that not all the complaints were resolved to the satisfaction of the complainants. However, most complainants stated that the complaint had been resolved completely and 82% were either very or fairly satisfied with how the Council had dealt with their complaint.

### **3.8. Indicator 8: 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.

Through handling complaints:

- Staff came to know about problems that they were not already aware of, such as when information was no longer available via the website, the behaviour of visitors to the Birsay Campsite, and housing repairs that had only been completed by outside contractors.
- Staff became aware of communication issues that needed addressing, including making sure that tenants knew if workers needed to enter their gardens to carry out work or how information should be provided to explain why domestic waste collection could not take place for reasons beyond the control of the Council.
- Staff became aware of the problems caused by the programme to make headstones safe, with many stones being laid flat which did not need to be without the owners of the lairs being consulted. This led to the Council’s Internal Audit Team carrying out a specific audit which will be published and presented to the Council’s Monitoring and Audit Committee at the same time as this Annual Report.

A third of complaints continue to relate to housing repairs however and often concern communications with contractors. However, last year the Council was responsible for carrying out over 1,336 repairs with only 1% leading to complaints which were upheld.