
Report To:	Policy & Resources Committee	Date:	16 September 2025
Report By:	Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services	Report No:	LS/097/25
Contact Officer:	Carol Craig-McDonald	Contact No:	01475 712725
Subject:	Complaint Handling Annual Report 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 ☒ For Decision ☐ For Information/Noting
- 1.2 This is an agreed routine annual monitoring report to provide the Policy & Resources Committee with details of the annual performance of all complaints received and handled by Inverclyde Council, Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), and both Arms-Length Organisations (ALEOs), Inverclyde Leisure and Riverside Inverclyde, for the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.
- 1.3 The appended report (appendix 1) provides the annual complaint handling statistical information for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. The report has been prepared by the Council's Information Governance Team and provides the following information:
- i. Performance Information.
 - ii. Analysis of complaint activity; and an
 - iii. Update on learning from complaints.
- 1.4 The SPSO has provided statistical information on the Council's complaint handling during the above period, which is included in section 4.10 of this report. There have been no cases involving the Council or the HSCP investigated by the SPSO in this reporting period.
- 1.5 The Council remains committed to investigating, learning from, and taking appropriate action where it is found that standards have fallen below the level expected or where it is recognised that services could be improved.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

- (1) notes the annual performance of Inverclyde Council's complaint handling procedure; and
- (2) approves the publication of the Annual Complaint Handling Report on the Council's website.

Lynsey Brown
Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Local Authority Complaint Handler Network (LACHN) is a national forum for local authority complaint handlers to meet quarterly to assist in the development of professional practice in relation to complaint handling. The Council's Senior Information Governance and Complaints Officer represents Inverclyde Council at this forum. The Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO) attends these meetings to support the ongoing development of complaint handling within local authorities and to achieve consistency in approach.
- 3.2 There is a requirement for Councils to report complaint handling performance for ALEOs. Inverclyde Council has two ALEOs, Inverclyde Leisure and Riverside Inverclyde, and they both require to report on complaints handled. Inverclyde Council is adhering to the reporting requirements for ALEOs set out by the SPSO.
- 3.3 Inverclyde Council supplies complaint handling statistical data to the SPSO on a quarterly basis. The draft report is issued to LACHN for discussion at the network meeting and any inconsistencies in data interpretation and analysis is resolved before the formal annual submission to the SPSO each year.
- 3.4 Inverclyde Council, the HSCP and both ALEOs implemented revised model complaint handling procedures on 1 April 2021.

4.0 PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Inverclyde Council, the HSCP, Inverclyde Leisure and Riverside Inverclyde received and handled 294 complaints and closed 279 complaints within the relevant period.
- 4.2 Section 3 of the appended report provides a comparison of the complaint handling performance by the Council from 2020/21 to 2024/25. Members will note that, in comparison with volumes received during 2023/24, there has been a slight decrease in the overall number of complaints dealt with by Inverclyde Council and Inverclyde Leisure, although the number of complaints dealt with by the HSCP shows a 15.06% increase.
- 4.3 Sections 3.6 to 3.8 of the appended report show the breakdown of complaint volumes per area and the percentage of complaints per service area against the total number of complaints received for the reporting period. The numbers remain low within some services. However, they are proportionately higher in those services that have historically received higher complaint volumes based on the nature of work undertaken. The Chief Executives Office, Organisational Development, HR and Communications Service and Riverside Inverclyde were the only areas who did not receive a complaint over the course of the reporting period.
- 4.4 Sections 3.9 – 3.12 of the appended report show the outcome of complaint investigations at each stage of the complaint handling procedure by area, the collective view of which is summarised below:
- 62 complaints were upheld across all complaint stages.
 - 69 complaints were partially upheld across all complaint stages.
 - 102 complaints were not upheld across all complaint stages: and
 - 43 complaints were resolved across all complaint stages.
- 4.5 Sections 3.13 to 3.18 of the appended report detail the Council's responses to complaints at each of the complaint stages and the average timescales for resolving complaints. Timescale management across all stages of the complaint handling procedure is a necessary improvement action for the Council and the HSCP in order to improve performance and build on some of the improvements made over the course of the last 12 months. Complaints should be escalated timely to the appropriate stage

of the complaint handling procedure. This allows adequate time to conclude the investigation and will support the improvements required for stage 1 complaints.

- 4.6 Stage one of the complaint handling procedure should be attempted where there are straightforward issues which are potentially easily resolved with little or no investigation. This should be completed within five working days. If the service user remains unhappy following the stage one complaint investigation, they can request that their complaint be escalated to stage two of the procedure. The performance of complaints handled at stage one of the complaint handling procedure has been summarised in the table below.

Stage 1 Complaints	Indicators 2024/25	Indicators 2023/24	Trend when comparing to 2023/24
No of complaints closed	175	188	A decrease of 7.42% stage 1 complaints – 13 complaints
% Of complaints closed on time within 5 days (including cases where a time extension was approved)	67.4%	84.7%	A decrease of 17.3% for on time responses
Average number of days taken to close complaints	5.5 days	4.3 days	An increase by 1.2 days average time taken to close S1 complaint.

Outcome of complaints	No of cases 2024/25	%	No of cases 2023/24	%	Trend when comparing to 2023/24
No of complaints upheld & as % of all stage 1 complaints	49	28%	60	31.7%	A decrease of 3.7%
No of complaints partially upheld & as % of all stage 1 complaints	36	20.6%	29	15.3%	An increase by 5.3%
No of complaints not upheld & as a % of all stage 1 complaints	49	28%	72	38%	A decrease of 10%
No of complaints resolved & as a % of all stage 1 complaints	41	23.4%	28	14.8%	An increase of 8.6%

- 4.6 A stage two complaint is for complex complaints, or for serious issues where a thorough investigation will be undertaken. It should also be used for complaints that cannot be resolved at stage one of the procedure. This typically requires a more thorough investigation to establish facts prior to reaching conclusion and allows 20 days for the investigation to be completed. The performance of complaints handled at stage two of the complaint handling procedure has been summarised in the table below.

Stage 2 Complaints	Indicators 2024/25	Indicators 2023/24	Trend when comparing to 2023/24
No of complaints closed	91	74	An increase of 18.68% complaints – 17 complaints
% Of complaints closed on time within 20 days & where we applied time extension	84.6%	59.5%	A 25.1% increase for on time responses
Average number of days taken to close complaint	18.4 days	21.5 days	A 3.1 day decrease in days to close complaint

Outcome of complaints	No of cases 2024/25	%	No of cases 2023/24	%	Trend when comparing to 2023/24
No of complaints upheld & as % of all stage 2 complaints	12	13%	11	14.9%	A decrease of 1.9%
No of complaints partially upheld & as % of all stage 2 complaints	28	30.4%	20	27%	An increase of 3.4%
No of complaints not upheld & as a % of all stage 2 complaints	51	55.4%	41	55.4%	No change in the %
No of complaints resolved & as a % of all stage 2 complaints	1	1.11%	2	2.7%	A decrease of 1.6%

- 4.7 Escalated stage two complaints are ones where the service user 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 the complaints handling procedure. This allows 20 days for completing the investigation. This must be undertaken before the complainant can take their complaint to the SPSO to review. The performance of complaints handled at escalated stage two of the complaint handling procedure has been summarised in the table below. It is noted that the HSCP have not seen any complaints escalate from stage 1 to stage 2 during the year.

Escalated Stage 2 Complaints	Indicators 2024/25	Indicators 2023/24	Trend when comparing to 2023/24
No of complaints closed	13	9	An increase of 30.76% complaints – 4 complaints
% Of complaints closed on time within 20 days & where we applied time extension	84.6%	67%	A 17.6% increase in those complaints meeting timescale
Average number of days taken to close complaints	18.6 days	17.4 days	An increase of 1.2 days

Escalated stage 2 outcomes	No of cases 2024/25	%	No of cases 2023/24	%	Trend when comparing to 2023/24
No of complaints upheld & as % of all escalated stage 2 complaints	1	7.7%	3	33.3%	A 25.61% decrease
No of complaints partially upheld & as % of all escalated stage 2 complaints	6	46.2%	5	55.5%	A 9.3% decrease
No of complaints not upheld & as % of all escalated stage 2 complaints	5	38.5%	1	11.1%	A 27.4% increase
No of complaints resolved & as a % of all escalated stage 2 complaints	1	7.69%	0	0%	A 7.69% increase

- 4.8 Section 4 of the appended report provides an update on Customer Satisfaction Surveys for complaint handling to gain insight on how well the Council is managing complaints. The SPSO has now advised that the Customer Satisfaction Survey is optional, rather than mandatory for the Council to enrich its understanding of how it is managing complaints. Therefore, views will be obtained on the Council's approach to this optional requirement before any development work is progressed.

- 4.9 Section 5 of the appended report provides an overview of service improvement recording which commenced in November 2016. This has been embedded within services and is reported quarterly to Directorate Management Teams. During 2024/25 the HSCP have been noting their service improvements, thereby now meeting the requirement to report this information. Care requires to be exercised in the sharing of these matters as some of the learnings are specific to the individual care. The Council publishes learnings taken from complaints on a quarterly basis, along with statistical information, in compliance with the SPSO's expected requirements of all Scottish local authorities.
- 4.10 Section 6 of the appended report provides detailed information on the complaints which were taken to the SPSO.

Inverclyde Council: The SPSO received 13 complaints for Inverclyde Council which is one more case than the SPSO reviewed last year. Four complaints were dealt with under the advice stage and not taken further and 9 complaints were dealt with at early resolution stage. No complaints were investigated. The SPSO recognised that the Council had demonstrated good complaint handling in 6 of the complaints they reviewed.

HSCP: The SPSO received 3 complaints for the HSCP which is a reduction of 5 complaints when compared to last year. All the complaints were reviewed at early resolution stage and not taken further. One complaint was recognised as an example of good complaint handling, one complaint was reviewed and noted that insufficient benefit would be gained from further investigation, and one complaint's subject matter was not in the SPSO's jurisdiction. No complaints were investigated in the period.

This reflects a reduction of 4 complaints received by the SPSO for the HSCP and the Council's performance showed an increase by one complaint being received for a review by the SPSO in the 2023/24. It is also an indication of good complaint handling where a right of review was exercised, as the complainant remained dissatisfied with the Council's handling of their complaint.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman – Complaints Determined by Authority and Outcome
(Tab 4 Joint Health & Social Care Cases Determined and tab 6 Local Authority)
<https://www.spsso.org.uk/statistics-2024-25>

- 4.11 The Council is responsible for ensuring the services provided by Inverclyde Leisure and Riverside Inverclyde meet the required standards and adhere to the complaint handling procedure. In doing this, the Council must establish mechanisms to identify and act on any complaint handling performance issues found.
- 4.12 Inverclyde Leisure implemented their complaint handling procedure in March 2017 and have provided their management information for inclusion into the Council's quarterly and annual reporting requirements to the SPSO.
- 4.13 Riverside Inverclyde implemented their complaint handling procedure from 1 April 2018 and provide quarterly statistical information for inclusion in the reporting for the Council. The volume of complaints from this ALEO continue to be limited with an entire year noted where no complaints were received.
- 4.14 Section 7 of the appended report explains that quarterly reports on progress throughout the year are submitted to the Directorate Management Teams for overall review and any actions on a service specific basis and to ensure awareness of the impact on staff resources.
- 4.15 Section 8 of the report provides a short update on positive comments that are received from service users by the Customer Services. This covers the recognition of where employees are recognised for excellent work in the opinion of services users using Council services.

- 4.16 Section 9 of the report provides a short update on the training carried out cover the course of the year as part of our commitment to ensure staff are equipped to deal with complaints both where they are new to the Council as part of their induction and for existing employees as part of their continuous professional development.
- 4.17 Section 10 of the report provides the summary on the conclusion for the years performance and an outlook for the focus and improvements required in the coming performance year 2025/26. The Council has procured and implemented a new complaint handling relationship management system, Workpro, through the Digital Modernisation Project Board. Implementation was finalised in November 2024. This new system, together with the recent centralisation of resources and expertise to handle complaints for the HSCP and the Council within the Information Governance Team has added resilience to the processing of Council and HSCP complaints.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial		x
Legal/Risk		x
Human Resources		x
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)	x	
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People's Rights & Wellbeing		x
Environmental & Sustainability		x
Data Protection		x

5.2 Finance

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

5.3 Legal/Risk

There are no legal or risk implications arising from this report.

5.4 Human Resources

There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

5.5 Strategic

This report will help deliver the outcomes in the Council Plan Theme 3 – Performance - high quality and innovative services are provided giving value for money.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 The Corporate Management Team has been consulted on this report.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None.

Inverclyde Council

Annual Report

Complaint Handling Performance
covering

1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Inverclyde Council, along with all other Scottish Local Authorities, follows a model complaint handling procedure (MCHP) which was created by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). This report demonstrates how Inverclyde Council has performed against the 8 key performance indicators that are set by the SPSO. It provides an overview of improvements made to services along with positive feedback from service users.

2. THE COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCEDURE

2.1. Inverclyde Council co-ordinates the reporting of complaints to the SPSO and this includes the HSCP, Inverclyde Leisure and Riverside Inverclyde. Each area is responsible for recording their own complaints and providing their management information to Inverclyde Council to enable the consolidated statistical report to be produced quarterly and annually.

2.2. The procedure provides a quick, simple, and streamlined process with a strong focus on local, early resolution. This enables issues or concerns to be dealt with as close as possible to the event which gave rise to the service user making the complaint. As far as possible, the complainant should be actively and positively engaged with the process from the outset.

2.3. Stage one of the complaint handling procedure should be attempted where there are straightforward issues which are potentially easily resolved with little or no investigation. This should be completed within 5 working days. If the service user remains unhappy following the stage one complaint investigation, they can request that their complaint be escalated to stage two of the procedure.

2.4. Stage two of the complaint handling procedure should be used for those matters which are complex, or for serious issues where a thorough investigation will be undertaken. It should also be used for complaints that cannot be resolved at stage one of the procedure. This typically requires a more thorough investigation to establish facts prior to reaching conclusion. The complaint points and resolution outcome sought is agreed with the complainant. This complaint should be completed within 20 working days. Should the service user remain unhappy with the investigation of the stage 2 complaint they can exercise their right of review and request the SPSO to look at the issues raised and determine whether they can investigate the matter further.

2.5. Escalated stage two of the complaint handling procedure can be used where the service user 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.

2.6. The SPSO reviews complaint outcomes that are referred to them by the service user and decide whether they should investigate the complaint.

2.7. Child Friendly Complaints Handling

2.7.1. In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Children (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 (UNCRC Act) all public services must give children and young people under the age of 18 the chance to have their say about anything that affects them. This has brought notable changes for some services in relation to complaints received from and about children, in respect of how complaints are managed. Most of the UNCRC Act provisions came into force on 16 July 2024. The SPSO developed the Child Friendly Complaints Principles, Child Friendly Complaints Handling Process and Parental Guidance which were adopted by the Council in July 2024. The Information Governance team is working with relevant internal services to update the complaint handling procedures over the course of 2025/26 to ensure compliance with this new legislation.

3. SUMMARY OF COMPLAINT HANDLING PERFORMANCE BY SPSO INDICATORS

Indicator 1: the number of complaints received per 1,000 of the population.

3.1. To allow a fair comparison to be made across all 32 Scottish Local Authorities, this indicator looks at the figure of "Complaints per 1,000 of the population". The total number of complaints received by Inverclyde Council per 1,000 of the population in Inverclyde Council during the reporting period 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025 was 3.8 complaints. There is no change in this indicator when comparing to the same period last year. The population of Inverclyde is estimated to be at around 76,700 residents.

3.2. This means that there were 3.8 complaints per 1,000 of the population, or one resident in 263 made a complaint about services. A comparison of this indicator over the past 2 years is shown in the table below.

Table: Number of Complaints received per 1,000 of the population

Year	No of Complaints	Complaints Per 1,000 of the population
2024/25	294	3.8
2023/24	288	3.8

Indicator 2 the number of complaints closed at each stage of the complaint handling procedure.

3.3 In the reporting period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025 Inverclyde Council, Inverclyde Leisure and the HSCP received and managed 294 complaints and closed 279 complaints. It should be noted that Riverside Inverclyde did not receive any complaints. The table below shows the percentage of complaints received at each stage of the complaint procedure.

Table 1: 2024/25 No of complaints closed at each stage and the percentage of complaints closed at each stage of the procedure.

Area	No of stage 1 Complaints rec & closed	Stage 1 % of all closed complaints	No of Stage 2 Complaints rec & closed	Stage 2 % of all closed complaints	No of Esc Stage 2 complaints rec & closed	Esc stage 2 % of all closed complaints
Inverclyde Council	124	62.0%	66	33%	10	5%
HSCP	41	59.4%	25	36.2%	3	4.33%
Inverclyde Leisure	10	100%	0	0%	0	0%
Riverside Inverclyde	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Collective Total	175	62.5%	91	32.6%	13	4.6%

Note: Inverclyde Council had a further 2 complaints handled at stage 1 of the complaint handling procedure where a time extension was used this resulted in the complaints being responded to on-time. The HSCP used a time extension for 1 complaint at stage 1 and for 3 complaints at Stage two of the complaint handling procedure.

Table 2: 2023/24 – No of complaints closed at each stage and the percentage of complaints closed at each stage of the procedure.

Area	No of stage 1 Complaints rec & closed	Stage 1 % of all closed complaints	No of Stage 2 Complaints rec & closed	Stage 2 % of all closed complaints	No of Esc Stage 2 complaints rec & closed	Esc stage 2 % of all closed complaints
Inverclyde Council	148	72.5%	47	23%	9	4.4%
HSCP	23	33.9%	30	66.1%	0	0%
Inverclyde Leisure	17	85.7%	0	14.3%	0	0%
Riverside Inverclyde	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Collective Performance	188	67.3%	77	27.3%	9	5.4%

3.4 Inverclyde Council has handled 19.35% less complaints this performance year at stage one of the complaint procedure when comparing to same period last year and 28.78% more complaints at stage 2 of the complaint handling procedure. The uplift in stage 2 complaints may be attributable to the complexity of complaints we have received over the course of the year which includes some of the child friendly complaints we received too. The HSCP has seen an increase of 23.18% complaints being handled at stage 1 of the complaint handling procedure when comparing to last year which is a positive to note. The HSCP has also seen 3 complaints escalate to stage 2 of the complaint handling procedure for the first time in the HSCP area since the work was centralised into the Information Governance team on 1 June 2024.

3.5 The tables below show the number of complaints received and closed in total, as well as at each stage of the complaint handling procedure for each area over the last 2 years for comparison purposes.

Table: Complaints received by each in total and at each stage of the complaint handling procedure.

Total number of complaints rec'd & closed by each area	2024/25	2023/24
Inverclyde Council	211	209
HSCP	73	61
Inverclyde Leisure	10	17
Riverside Inverclyde	0	0
Total number of complaints rec'd & closed by each area at stage 1	2024/25	2023/24
Inverclyde Council	124	148
HSCP	41	23
Inverclyde Leisure	10	17
Riverside Inverclyde	0	0
Total number of complaints rec'd & closed by each area at stage 2	2024/25	2023/24
Inverclyde Council	66	47
HSCP	25	30
Inverclyde Leisure	0	0
Riverside Inverclyde	0	0
Total number of complaints rec'd & closed by each area at esc stage 2	2024/25	2023/24
Inverclyde Council	10	9
HSCP	3	0
Inverclyde Leisure	0	0
Riverside Inverclyde	0	0

3.6 The tables below provide a monthly breakdown of complaints closed within each service area covering the reporting period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. The numbers below exclude complaints that were considered by the service areas to be invalid complaints, and it also excludes those complaints which were received and withdrawn part way through the process. Riverside Inverclyde, Chief Executives Office and Organisational Development, Policy & Communications did not receive any complaints during 2024/25.

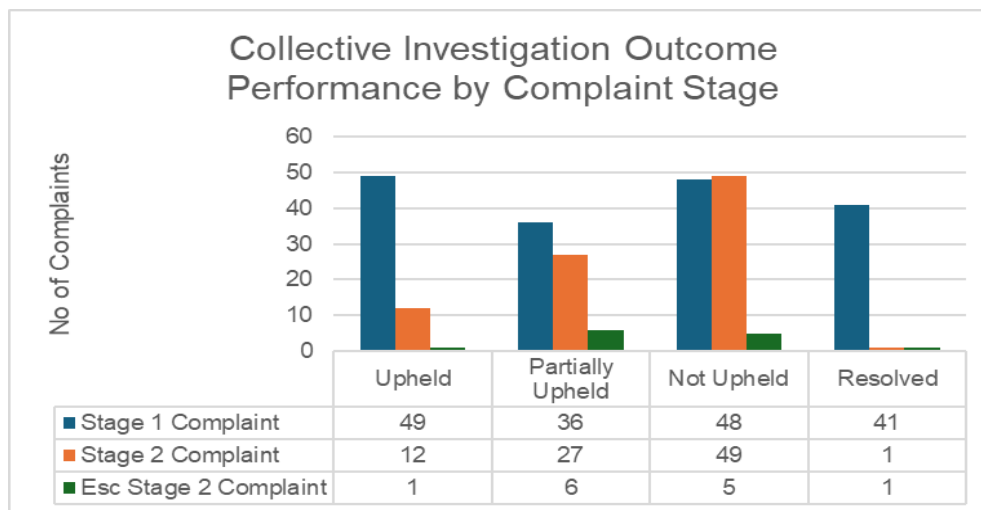
Table: Breakdown of complaints received only by all service areas covering 2024/25

Service Area	Total Complaints Received in 2023/24	Total Complaints Received 2024/25
Chief Executives Office	2	0
Education	50	77
Culture, Communities & Educational Resources	16	6
Organisational Dev, Policy & Comms	1	0
Finance	33	29
Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer	9	9
Physical Assets	1	3
Regeneration & Planning	6	5
Environmental Services	36	36
Public Protection	25	12
Physical Assets Roads	27	23
HSCP	61	69
Inverclyde Leisure	17	10
Riverside Inverclyde	0	0

Indicator 3 Outcome of Complaint Investigation

3.7 The graph below outlines the outcomes of investigations of all complaints at each of the complaint stages. For every complaint the Council investigates, the service user will be contacted and an explanation of the outcome of the complaint investigation will be confirmed as being either upheld, not upheld, partially upheld, or resolved.

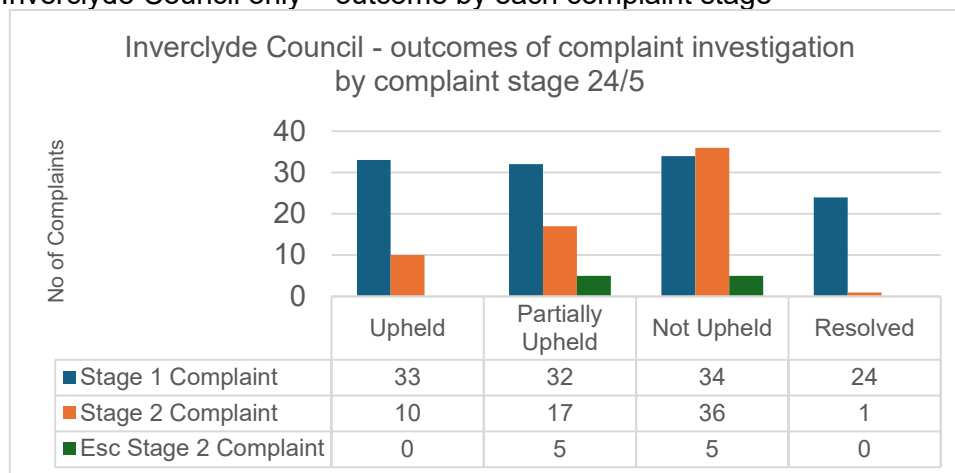
Chart 1: Collective performance for complaint Investigation outcome % by each complaint stage all areas.



3.8 In summary, of all the complaints investigated the outcomes reached at each stage of the complaint procedure are detailed in the table below for the last 2 years:

Complaints outcomes for all stages of the procedure	2023/24 % & No	2024/25 % & No
Upheld	26% - 74 complaints	22.5% - 62 complaints
Not Upheld	35% - 114 complaints	36% - 102 complaints
Partially Upheld	32.63% - 54 complaints	25% - 69 complaints
Resolved	5.83% - 30 complaints	15.5% - 43 complaints

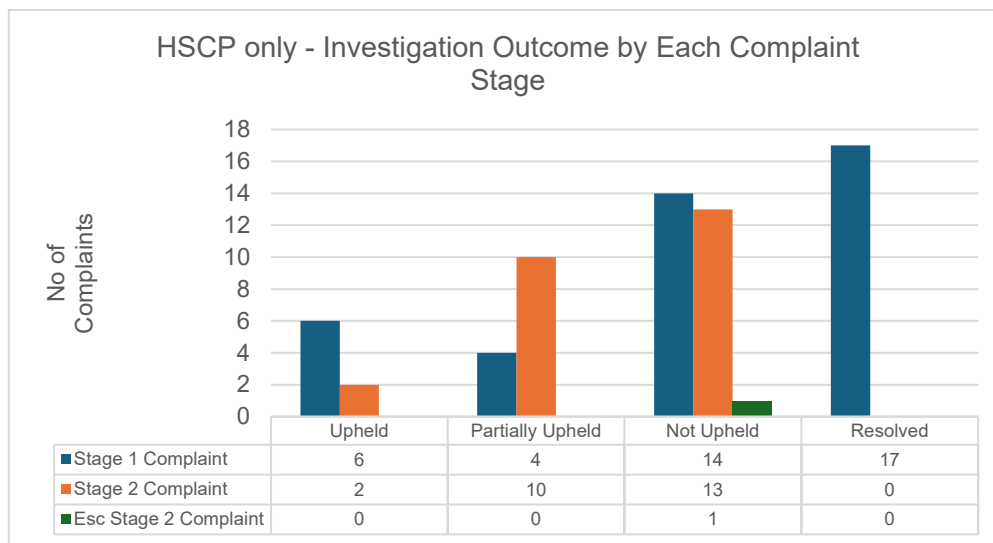
Chart 2: Inverclyde Council only – outcome by each complaint stage



3.9 In summary, of all the complaints investigated the outcomes reached at each stage of the complaint handling procedure are summarised in the table below:

Complaints all stages outcome analysis	2023/24 % & No	2024/25 % & No
Upheld	14% - 56 complaints	14% - 43 complaints
Not Upheld	45.27% - 78 complaints	45.3% - 78 complaints
Partially Upheld	33.87% - 44 complaints	33.9% - 54 complains
Resolved	6.97% - 28 complaints	7% - 25 complaints

Chart 3: HSCP only – outcome of each complaint stage of the complaint handling procedure



3.10 In summary of all the complaints investigated the outcomes reached at each stage of the complaint handling procedure are summarised in the table below:

Complaints all stages outcome analysis	2023/24 % & No of complaints	2024/25 % & No of complaints
Upheld	4.77% - 4 complaints	18.6% - 8 complaints
Not Upheld	44% - 35 complaints	39.4% - 28 complaints
Partially Upheld	15.4% - 12 complaints	27.7% - 14 complaints
Resolved	2.5% - 2 complaints	13.8% - 17 complaints

3.11 In respect of Inverclyde Leisure, all the complaints investigated were upheld in 2024/25 and the comparison data for the previous year is summarised in the table below.

Complaints all stages outcome analysis	2023/24 % & No of complaints	2024/25 % & No of Complaints
Upheld	76.5% - 13 complaints	100% - 10 complaints
Not Upheld	17.6% - 3 complaints	0
Partially Upheld	5.9% - 1 complaints	0
Resolved	0	0

Indicator 4 – average timescales for resolving complaints.

3.12 The table below outlines each service areas performance on the average time taken to close complaints at each stage of the complaint handling procedure. The key performance indicators for complaints that are managed at stage 1 of the procedure should be closed by day 5 or sooner. Complaints managed at stage 2 or escalated stage 2 should be closed by day 20 or sooner. The only exception to this is where a time extension is used at any complaint stage which allows a further 5 days on top of the key performance indicator.

Area	No of complaints stage 1	Stage 1 ave time to close complaint	No of complaints stage 2	Stage 2 ave time to close complaint	No of complaints esc stage 2	Esc Stage 2 ave time to close complaint
Inverclyde Council	124	5.9 days	66	14.7 days	10	16.3 days
HSCP	41	5.3 days	25	29.4 days	3	29.7 days
Inverclyde Leisure	10	4.7 days	0	-	0	-
Riverside Inverclyde	0	-	0	-	0	-
Collective Council	175	5.5 days	91	18.4 days	13	18.6 days

3.13 Inverclyde Council's collective performance measures on timescale management across all stages of the complaint procedure and covering the last 2 years for comparison purposes is shown in the table below.

Table: Collective complaint handling average timescale for resolving complaints

Stage 1 Frontline Resolution	2023/24	2024/25
No of complaints received	189	175
No of complaints – closed at stage 1 within 5 days	160	118
% Complaints meeting timescale (inc complaints that were time extended & completed on time)	84.7%	67.4%
No of complaints closed at stage 1 as a % of all complaints closed	69.5%	62.7%
Ave working days taken stage 1 complaints	4.3 days	5.5 days
Stage 2 Investigation	2023/24	2024/25
No of complaints received	74	91
No of complaints – closed at stage 2 within 20 days	48	61
% Complaints Meeting timescale (inc complaints that were time extended & completed on time)	59.5%	67%
No of complaints closed at stage 2 as a % of all complaints closed	27.2%	32.6%
Ave working days taken stage 2 complaints	21.5 days	18.4 days
Escalated Stage 2 Investigation	2023/24	2024/25
No of complaints received	9	13
No of complaints – closed at escalated stage 2 within 20 days	6	10
% Complaints Meeting timescale (inc complaints that were time extended & completed on time)	66.7%	84.6%
No of complaints closed at escalated stage 2 as a % of all complaints closed	3.3%	4.7%
Ave working days taken escalated stage 2 complaints	17.4 days	18.6 days

Table: Inverclyde Council performance – average timescale for resolving complaints.

Stage 1 Frontline Resolution	2023/24	2024/25
No of complaints – closed at stage 1	148	124
% Complaints Meeting timescale (5 days) inc those time extended (10 days)	83.6%	73.1%
Ave working days taken stage 1	4.6 days	5.9 days
Stage 2 Investigation	2023/24	2024/25
No of complaints – closed at stage 2	47	66
% Complaints Meeting timescale (20 days) inc those time extended (25 days)	78.5%	79.7%
Ave working days taken stage 2	15.6 days	14.7 days
Stage 2 Escalated Investigation	2023/24	2024/25
No of complaints – closed at esc stage 2	9	10
% Complaints Meeting timescale (20 days) inc those time extended (25 days)	66.7%	90%
Ave working days taken esc stage 2	17.4 days	16.3 days

3.14 For the first time in five years, Inverclyde Council's stage 1 complaint performance has exceeded the 5-day key performance indicator for the period 2024/25, ending the year on 5.9 days. Analysis of the complaints that exceeded timescales has been carried out and a key theme that has been established from this review was that services were not progressing the complaint to stage 2 of the complaint handling when it becomes apparent that they could not close the complaint by day 5 or using a time extension, therefore in each case they remained at stage one and the complaints were responded to late. In all the complaints reviewed, all complaints would be responded to on time if they had been progressed to stage 2 of the complaint handling procedure. Services must take focused action to ensure all service areas are handling complaints at the correct and appropriate stage of the complaint handling procedure which will support improving their timescales management for stage 1 complaints. It is positive to note that the Council managed to respond to its stage 2 and escalated stage 2 complaints within the timescales for the period 2024/25. The collective performance for the average time taken to close stage 2 and escalated stage 2 complaints has fluctuated over the course of the last five years although it has positively finished the year on 18.4 days for stage 2 and 18.6 days for escalated stage 2 complaints.

Table: HSCP performance– average timescale for resolving complaints

Stage 1 Frontline Resolution	2023/24	2024/25
No of complaints – closed at stage 1	23	41
% Complaints Meeting timescale (5 days) inc those time extended (10 Days)	100%	41.5%
Ave working days taken stage 1	4.7 days	5.3 days
Stage 2 Investigation	2023/24	2024/25
No of complaints – closed at stage 2	30	25
% Complaints Meeting timescale (20 days) inc those time extended (25 days)	46.7%	24%
Ave working days taken stage 2	32.1 days	29.4 days
Stage 2 Escalated Investigation	2023/24	2024/25
No of complaints – closed at esc stage 2	0	3
% Complaints Meeting timescale (20 days) inc those time extended (25 days)	0	0
Ave working days taken esc stage 2	0	29.7 days

3.15 When comparing the performance achieved by the HSCP in the period 2024/25 the average days taken to resolve complaints in stage 1 has increased by 0.6 days. It is also noted that the number of complaints received at stage one has increased by 43.90% when compared to the 2023/24. There is a noted 20% reduction in the number of complaints received at stage 2 of the complaint procedure and 2.7 days reduction in the number of days taken to resolve complaints at stage 2 when comparing to 2023/24. There have been 3 complaints escalated to stage 2 of the complaint handling procedure, and these complaints have also exceeded the 20-day timescale.

3.16 Whilst there is a noted improvement in the performance achieved this year, the key performance indicators for timescale management across all 3 stages of the complaint handling procedure still require further improvement in the year ahead as the HSCP performance has affected the collective performance reported within the Council's statistics. It has been promising to see the improvements coming through in the quarterly performance updates, but performance fluctuated over the course of the year, so consistency is key to help embed the improvements across the area.

3.17 Some specific themes that have affected the HSCP's performance have been during periods when HSCP services were under considerable pressure with service areas seeing the highest volume of complaints. The complexity of some of the complaints being received has been a noted area impacting performance, this has been evident in some of the thorough and considerable investigations being undertaken. There have been increased numbers of Freedom of Information Requests and Subject Access Requests, due to the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry and the Redress Scheme. Additionally, some duplication has been encountered with enquiries from MSPs also being raised whilst complaints are ongoing. Lastly, as also noted in the Council's performance, there have been instances of officers not handling complaints at the correct stage of the procedure. All of these matters have impacted the averages seen in the performance this year.

3.18 Training has been rolled out across the HSCP on the importance of complaints, together with support from the management team and greater collaboration within service areas supporting the improvements required. The training programme saw many officers completing the SPSO training to support the ongoing improvement actions.

Table: Inverclyde Leisure performance – average timescale for resolving complaints

Stage 1 Frontline Resolution	2023/24	2024/25
No of complaints – closed at stage 1	17	10
Complaints Meeting timescale (5 days) inc those time extended (10 Days)	100%	100%
Ave working days taken stage 1	1.7 days	4.6 days
Stage 2 Investigation	2023/24	2024/25
No of complaints – closed at stage 2	0	0
% Complaints Meeting timescale (20 days) inc those time extended (25 days)	0	0
Ave working days taken stage 2	0	0
Stage 2 Escalated Investigation	2023/24	2024/25
No of complaints – closed at esc stage 2	0	0
% Complaints Meeting timescale (20 days) inc those time extended (25 days)	0	0
Ave working days taken esc stage 2	0	0

3.19 Inverclyde Leisure positively handled all the complaints which they received within stage one of the complaint handling procedure and within timescales. Limited feedback

can be directed for improvement although one observation would be the small number of complaints reported over the course of the year and the reduction of recorded complaints when comparing to previous year. This is to support ensuring staff in leisure establishments are reminded of the processes to ensure complaints are being recorded within leisure establishments.

3.20 It should be noted that Riverside Inverclyde has not managed any complaints over the course of the last 5 years.

3.21 We will require to be mindful as we progress through 2025/26 when monitoring the performance improvements we are seeking for complaint handling timescales of the likelihood of more complaints being taken through stage 2 of the complaint procedure due to Child Friendly Complaints being implemented into our complaint handling procedures. These complaints have proven to be more complex and require more processes to be followed before the investigation can commence to ensure we are complying with the UNCRC Act. This may put further strain on performance particularly for the Education Service, Education establishments, and the HSCP, as these areas will be affected most by this legislation and they also receive the higher number of complaints about matters that affect children.

3.22 It is the cumulative effect of all these contributing factors that has made it difficult to recover the performance in the year 2024/25. Too many complaints were not managed within the correct stage of the complaint handling procedure resulting in the key performance indicator exceeding 5 days across the Council and the HSCP. Within the HSCP too many complaints were also responded to out with the 20-day timescale for both stage 2 and escalated stage 2 of the complaint handling procedure despite some of the noted improvements with their performance in particular quarters. Lastly, following the implementation of the new complaint handling system there were some transitional teething issues noted in a small number of complaints, in that the process was not followed correctly to allocate a complaint, which delayed the allocation of a small number of complaints. In summary, both the Council and the HSCP require services to take focused action for timescale management when handling their complaints at all stages. All service areas need to ensure they are handling complaints at the correct stage of the complaint handling procedure, which will support improving their timescales management for stage 1 complaints.

Indicator 5 - Performance against timescales for Stage 1 Complaints:

3.23 The Council aims to close all stage 1 complaints within 5 working days. In 2024/25 the collective performance noted for stage 1 complaints was that 175 complaints were closed, with 116 of these closed within timescale. This equates to a 66.3% response within timescale rate. A further 3 (1.7%) complaints were closed after an extension was agreed with the service user.

Table 1: Number of complaints closed within timescale as a percentage at stage 1.

Period	No of Complaints	No of Complaints closed within timescale	%	No complaints with time extension used	%
2024/25	175	116	66.3%	3	1.7%
2023/24	189	150	79.4%	10	5.3%

Indicator 5 – collective performance against timescales for Stage 2 Complaints

3.24 The Council aims to close all stage 2 complaints within 20 working days. In 2024/25, the collective performance noted for stage 2 complaints was that 91 complaints were closed, with 60 of these complaints closed within timescale. This equates to 64.4% response within timescale rate. A further 5 (5.4%) complaints were closed after an extension was agreed with the service user. There is noted lower use of time extensions over the course of the year.

Table 2: Number of complaints closed within timescale as a percentage at stage 2.

Reporting period	No of complaints closed	Within timescale	%	No with extension	%
2024/25	91	60	65.2%	5	5.4%
2023/24	74	44	65.2%	4	5.4%

Indicator 5 – collective performance against timescales escalated stage 2 complaints.

3.25 The Council aims to close all escalated stage 2 complaints within 20 working days. In 2024/245, the collective performance noted for escalated stage 2 complaints was that 13 complaints were closed, with 9 of these complaints being closed within timescale. This equates to a 69.2% response within timescale rate. A further 2 (15.4%) complaints were closed after an extension was agreed with the service user. There has been lower use of time extension over the course of the year.

Table 3: Number of complaints closed within timescale & percentages escalated stage 2.

Reporting period	No of complaints closed	Within timescale	%	No with extension	%
2024/25	13	9	69.2%	2	15.4%
2023/24	9	6	66.7%	0	0%

Table: Showing each areas performance against timescales at each stage of the complaint handling procedure.

	Stage 1 no of closed complaints	No of Stage 1 complaints within timescale	% Include time ext. complaints	No of complaints with time ext.	%
Inverclyde Council	124	89	73.1%	2	1.6%
HSCP	41	17	41.5%	1	2.4%
Inverclyde Leisure	10	10	100%	0	0%
	Stage 2 no of closed complaints	No stage 2 complaints within timescale	% Include time ext. complaints	No of Complaint with time ext.	%
Inverclyde Council	66	51	79.7%	3	4.5%
HSCP	25	6	24%	3	12%
Inverclyde Leisure	0	0	0%	0	0%
	Esc Stage 2 no of closed complaints	No of esc stage 2 complaints within timescale	% Include time ext. complaints	No of complains with time ext.	%
Inverclyde Council	10	9	90%	1	10%
HSCP	3	0	0%	1	33%
Inverclyde Leisure	0	0	0%	0	0%

Indicator 6 - Extensions to Complaint Timescales

3.26 The complaint handling procedure allows officers to seek an extension to the timescales permitted for stage one and stage two complaint investigations. The maximum period permitted to extend the timescale of a complaint is 5 days for both complaint stages. This indicator reports the number and percentage of complaints at each stage of the procedure, which were closed after an extension to the 5 days, or 20-day timescale was authorised. There has been reduced use of time extensions despite the timescale pressures seen across stage 1 and stage 2 of the complaints handled.

Complaint stage	No of extensions agreed
Stage 1 complaints	3 extensions were agreed
Stage 2 complaints	5 extensions were agreed
Escalated stage 2 complaints	2 extensions were agreed

4 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

4.1 The SPSO recommended that all Local Authorities should be completing customer satisfaction surveys with service users regularly to gain true insight on how well they are managing complaints. The SPSO has now advised that the Customer Satisfaction Survey is optional rather than a mandatory requirement for the Council to enrich their understanding of how well it is managing complaints. Therefore, views will be obtained on the Council's approach to this optional requirement before any development work is progressed.

5 LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

5.1 The Council is committed to reflecting on occasions when it does not get it right to highlight opportunities for improvement. As such, where a complaint has been upheld or partially

upheld, the service determines what actions are required to support improvement and prevent a repeat of circumstances that led to the complaint.

5.2 Service improvement recording commenced in November 2016 for Inverclyde Council only. This has been embedded within services and is reported quarterly to Directorate Management Teams. During 2024/25 the HSCP have been noting their service improvements thereby meeting this requirement. Following the implementation of the new complaint handling system Workpro in November 2024 tracking of this information can be undertaken in a centralised way going forward providing officers record the information in the complaint handling system. Care requires to be exercised in the sharing of these matters as some of the learnings are specific to the individual care.

5.3 The Council shares learnings taken from complaints on a quarterly basis with the Directorate Management Teams, along with statistical information, in compliance with the SPSO's expected requirements for the Council. A selection of the learnings is published on the Council's website each quarter along with the quarterly statistics although there have been some noted delays in this being actioned timely due to pressure within the wider team. Each year the annual report is prepared and presented to the Corporate Management Team for review and scrutiny to conclude the performance reporting for the year.

6 SCOTTISH PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN (SPSO) – RIGHT OF REVIEW

6.1 Following a stage two investigation and written response, if a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint investigation, they have a right of review through the SPSO. The table below outlines the number complaints received at the SPSO for Inverclyde Council and HSCP.

Table: Complaints received by the SPSO for a review

Year	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Inverclyde Council	13	12	10	12	7	15
HSCP	3	7	1	4	3	11

6.2 The SPSO reviewed 13 complaints for Inverclyde Council of which 4 complaints were reviewed at the advice stage and these complaints were not taken forward. A further 9 complaints were reviewed at the early resolution stage of the procedure. The outcome of these reviews were as follows:

- 6 complaints were recognised as examples of good complaint handling;
- 2 complaints were reviewed and insufficient benefit would be gained from further investigation of the complaint;
- 1 complaint - SPSO were unable to proceed with the investigation.

6.3 The SPSO reviewed 3 HSCP complaints of which 3 were conducted at early resolution stage and not taken forward.

- 1 complaint was recognised as an example of good complaint handling,
- 1 complaint reviewed and noted that insufficient benefit would be gained from further investigation of the complaint;

- 1 subject matter not in jurisdiction.

6.4 . The table below outlines the SPSO's published statistics for Inverclyde Council.

Table: SPSO breakdown by reviews by stage and outcomes for Inverclyde Council

Stage	Outcome Group	Inverclyde Council
Advice	A&G - Complaint submissions - mature	1
	A&G - Complaint submissions - premature	1
	A&G - Enquiries	2
	Unable to proceed	0
	Total	4
Early Resolution	Cause and impact test not met (s 5 (3))	0
	Discretion – Alternative action proposed	0
	Discretion – Alternative route used or available	0
	Discretion – Good complaint handling	6
	Discretion – Insufficient benefit would be achieved by investigation	2
	Discretion – Referred back	0
	Discretion – Resolved - both parties satisfied with proposed outcome	0
	Member of the public test not met (s 5 (6))	0
	Premature	0
	Right of appeal to court/tribunal/Scottish ministers (s 7 (8))	0
	Subject matter not in jurisdiction	0
	Time limit (s 10)	0
	Unable to proceed	1
	Total	9
Investigation	Fully upheld	0
	Not duly made or withdrawn	0
	Not upheld	0
	Some upheld	0
	Total	0
Total		13

6.5 The SPSO reviewed three complaints for the HSCP and no complaints were investigated. The table below outlines the SPSO's published statistics for the HSCP.

Table: SPSO breakdown by reviews by stage and outcomes for HSCP

Stage	Outcome Group	Inverclyde Health and Social Care Partnership
Advice	A&G - Complaint submissions - mature	0
	A&G - Complaint submissions - premature	0
	A&G - Enquiries	0
	Total	0
Early Resolution	Cause and impact test not met (s 5 (3))	0
	Discretion – Alternative action proposed	0
	Discretion – Alternative route used or available	0
	Discretion – Good complaint handling	1
	Discretion – Insufficient benefit would be achieved by investigation	1
	Discretion – Referred back	0
	Discretion – Resolved - both parties satisfied with proposed outcome	0
	Premature	0
	Right of appeal to court/tribunal/Scottish ministers (s 7 (8))	0
	Subject matter not in jurisdiction	1
	Time limit (s 10)	0
	Unable to proceed	0
	Total	3
Investigation	Fully upheld	0
	Not duly made or withdrawn	0
	Not upheld	0
	Resolved	0
	Some upheld	0
	Total	0
Total		3

7 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

7.1 The Council reports and publishes its complaint statistics quarterly and annually in line with performance indicators published by the SPSO along with a selection of improvement actions that will be taken as a result of complaints investigated.

8 COMPLAINT HANDLING SYSTEM

8.1 The Council implemented the new complaint handling system in November 2024 part way through quarter 3 of the performance year. The implementation of the system, while successful, placed additional pressures on the Information Governance Team in respect of the project development involved in introducing a new system and transitioning over to the new system for the Council. It has been a transitional period for all service areas for the recording and reporting of complaints within the new process. The new system has improved the process and reporting functionality that we have access to and increased

the resilience and stability of the system. The system enhances the option for recording information in a more granular way as well as the benefits to manage changes more efficiently. The system also includes service improvement tracking to support services recording this information following a complaint. Given the new system was introduced part way through quarter 3 this has meant that the legacy system was still in use for the majority of the year, therefore we have been running two parallel sets of data to produce reports. Officers are getting familiar with the process and over time this will become more embedded in its use. It will also enable Services to have increased opportunities to learn from complaints and use this information to inform service improvements.

9 POSITIVE COMMENTS

- 9.1** Throughout the year the Council receives positive comments and compliments from service users across all services. These recognise where employees have gone above and beyond the normal standard of service delivery and these compliments are shared with the service teams concerned directly by the Customer Service Centre to ensure staff receive balanced feedback relating performance.

10 TRAINING

- 10.1** Complaint handling training forms part of the induction process for all new staff joining the Council. Line managers identify which new staff require training, which involves completion of the complaint handling procedure e-learning module followed by attendance at a digital or face-to-face training course on the more practical aspects of dealing with complaints using the complaint handling procedure. Each year, the Education Service provides an induction training programme to all relevant staff who will be required to deal with complaints which also includes training on the use of the complaint handling system.
- 10.2** Refresher training is provided on a regular basis on request from service areas and where it is deemed necessary. This includes the use of the complaint handling system which has been undertaken with the introduction of a new complaint handling system this year. All training is tracked using personal individual development plans. A total of 164 hours training has been delivered during 2024/25 for the Council.

11 CONCLUSION

- 11.1** The Council is committed to investigating, learning from and taking action as a result of individual complaints where it is found that standards have fallen below the level expected and where services could be improved. By listening to the views of service users who make a complaint, the Council can improve its services.
- 11.2** In the coming year, the key action is again for services to focus on reducing the time taken to respond to complaints at each stage of the complaint handling process. This is particularly relevant when the Council is seeing an increase in the complexity of

complaints received by it. Balancing the need to deal with complex complaints timeously together with the implementation of child friendly complaints (which involves more steps to be carried out before the investigation commences) alongside all other priorities and challenges facing the Council will be essential, whilst also managing the resources required to support this.

- 11.3** The Council has incorporated the handling of complaints using the the Child Friendly Complaint procedure, this is sitting alongside the Model Complaint Handling Procedure. The principles of the Child Friendly Complaint Procedure underpin how to handle and investigate complaints involving children in a way that respects their rights under UNCRC Act. Parental Guidance has been provided by the SPSO to support parents understand what they can expect from the Council when they raise a complaint about matters affecting their child either directly or on their behalf. A training programme specific to Child Friendly Complaints is being devised for officers who handle complaints to develop their skills further to ensure they adapt their approach when appropriate paying regards to the child's rights. A holistic approach is being taken to complaints that are incoming to the Council which have been identified as child friendly complaints, to ensure we can learn from these and incorporate learnings into the training materials which are under development