Appendix

Dumfries and Galloway Council

Annual Complaints Monitoring Report

2025/26



Contents

The Year in Numbers	3
Chief Executive's Foreword	4
Introduction	5
Key Headlines	6
How Customers Have Complained	6
Complaints Received in 2025/26 by Directorate	7
Complaints Received by Topic	8
Our Performance – Key Figures	9
Indicator One – Complaints Received	9
Indicator Two – Closed Complaints Within Target Timescales	10
Comparison with 2023/24 and 2024/25	11
Indicator Three – Average Response Times	12
Comparison with 2023/24 and 2024/25	12
Indicator Four – Complaint Outcomes	13
Stage 1 Outcomes	13
Stage 2 Outcomes	13
Escalated Complaint Outcomes	13
Learning from Complaints	14
Complaints Investigated by the SPSO	19
Customer Satisfaction and Feedback	20
Contact us	22

The Year in Numbers

Received **646** complaints



Closed **597** complaints



Received **138** compliments recorded as positive feedback



Closed **80.7%** of Stage 1 complaints within the five-day target



Resolved **74.5%** of all complaints at Stage 1





49 complaints not closed reflect complaints that were not recorded as closed within the reporting year, which may include cases still open, later withdrawn, found to be out of remit, or not closed on the system

Closed **29.5%** of Stage 2 investigations within twenty working days



Recorded an average Stage 1 response time of **5.5** working days





Closed **57.4%** of escalated complaints within twenty working days

Chief Executive's Foreword



I am pleased to present Dumfries and Galloway Council's Annual Complaints Monitoring Report for 2025/26.

The Council is committed to getting things right first time and the feedback we receive from our customers and service users provides us with an invaluable understanding as to what we are doing well and where we can improve.

This report provides information mainly relating to the Council's performance in the handling of complaints against a group of key performance indicators set out by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), which we have been required to report on since the introduction of the national Model Complaints Handling Procedure in 2013.

Although there is no statutory requirement to report on compliments we receive, the report contains an indication of the positive feedback recorded across the Council during 2025/26. I am grateful to all those who have taken the time to contact us to acknowledge the effort made by our valued workforce.

Thank you for your encouraging support. We value all feedback we receive from our customers as this helps us to improve the way we do things. Please continue to give us your feedback on any aspect of the Council's services, all of which have contributed to the production of this Annual Complaints Monitoring Report

Dawn Roberts
Chief Executive

Introduction

This report provides an overview of Dumfries and Galloway Council's complaints handling performance from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. It provides information on customer complaints and our performance for 2025/26, together with comparisons on how we are performing against our previous reports of 2024/25 and 2023/24.

The Council is committed to delivering high-quality services for the people of Dumfries and Galloway. We recognise that sometimes services do not meet the standards expected by our customers. When this happens, complaints provide valuable insight into customer experiences and help us identify opportunities to improve.

We operate the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) Model Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP), which promotes early resolution, fair investigation and organisational learning.

What is a Complaint?

Dumfries and Galloway Council's definition of a complaint is, *'an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about our Council action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of our Council.'*

In most cases, a complaint will be made because the customer considers that the Council has:

- Done something wrong
- Failed to live up to expectations
- Treated someone badly or unfairly

Complaints are managed through a two-stage process, depending on the nature and complexity of the issues raised. The stage assigned does not reflect the seriousness of the complaint or reduce the importance of the concerns raised.

Stage 1 – Frontline Resolution

These are straightforward complaints which require little or no investigation. The aim is to resolve the matter quickly through an apology, explanation, or an action to put things right. This should normally be resolved or responded to within five working days.

Stage 2 – Investigation

These are more complaints where the customer is not satisfied with the frontline response (escalated complaints), or where the complaint is complex and requires further detailed investigation. Stage 2 responses have a resolution target of 20 working days.

We try to make our complaints process as easy and accessible as possible, and customers can access our procedure through our website, by email, over the telephone, or in person.

If a customer remains dissatisfied with the Council's Stage 2 response, they can refer their concerns to the SPSO who will consider their complaint further. The SPSO is the final stage for complaints about public service organisations in Scotland, including local authorities.

Key Headlines

2025/26 saw the highest number of complaints recorded since the Council adopted the SPSO Model Complaints Handling Procedure. However, while complaint volumes remain higher than in previous years, the rate of increase has slowed and is beginning to stabilise.

The majority of complaints continued to be resolved through frontline resolution, demonstrating that services are generally effective at addressing concerns quickly and locally before escalation becomes necessary.

Performance against Stage 1 timescales remained strong. However, timeliness at Stage 2 continues to present challenges, reflecting the complexity of cases requiring detailed investigation and the pressures facing Council services.

The Council received 646 complaints during 2025/26, compared with 637 complaints in 2024/25, representing an increase of approximately 1.4%. This continues the upward trend seen over recent years.

How Customers Have Complained



47%
Web Form



35%
By Email



8%
Telephone

4%
Via the Contact Centre

3%
In Person



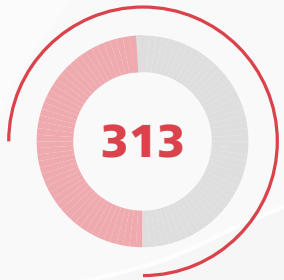
3%
By Letter

Complaints Received in 2025/26 by Directorate

The Council received **646 complaints** during 2025/26.

A total of **597 complaints were closed** during the year.

49 complaints not closed reflect complaints that were not recorded as closed within the reporting year, which may include cases still open, later withdrawn, found to be out of remit, or not closed on the system.



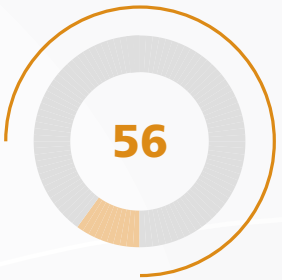
Economy and Infrastucture



Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing



Social Work Services



Enabling and Customer Services



Complaints Received by Topic

We have developed a list of 'topics' which complaint handlers are prompted to select from when recording the details of a complaint. This classification allows us to run reports about a specific topic area and identify themes of complaints received and identify any trends.

Between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, the most common customer complaints related to the following topic areas across all Services. The chart below shows the main issues we have received complaints about. It includes all complaints where we received 10 or more in connection with a particular issue.

Topic	Total
Inadequate or poor standard of service delivery	59
Road Condition/Road Maintenance	56
Behaviour/Bullying (Schools)	37
Waste Collection	29
Children and Families Social Work	26
Professionalism of Staff	25
Learning and Teaching	23
Communication	22
Council Tax	22
Potholes	22
Policy and Procedure	21
Additional Support Needs	19
Drains	19
Failure to follow policy or procedure	18
Bus Service	17
Flooding	15
Class Organisation	14
School Transport/Travel	14
Adult Social Work	11
Planning	11
Road Works and Road Closures	10

Our Performance – Key Figures

The following sections detail our performance against the set of standardised complaints KPIs outlined by the SPSO. The KPIs outlined below, apply to all Local Authorities that have a statutory duty to comply with the SPSO's MCHP.

Indicator One: Complaints Received

This indicator records the total number of complaints received during the reporting period and allows comparison using complaints per 1,000 population.

In 2025/26 Dumfries and Galloway Council received, processed and closed

646

complaints

The population of Dumfries and Galloway is estimated at around

145,860

Measure	Result
Total complaints received	**646**
Complaints per 1,000 population	**4.4**
Previous year (2024/25)	**637**
Change from previous year	**+9 complaints (+1.4%)**

This equates to **4.44 complaints per 1,000 population** based on the Council's mid-year population estimate of 145,860.

Indicator Two: Closed Complaints Within Target Timescales

This indicator measures the number and percentage of complaints closed within SPSO target timescales. In addition to these SPSO indicators, the Council has set a target of 80% of complaints to be closed in full at both Stage 1 and Stage 2 as a Key Performance Indicator.

Complaint Stage	SPSO target timescale	Closed Within Target
Stage 1	within 5 working days	**80.7%**
Stage 2 (Direct)	within 20 working days	**29.5%**
Escalated Complaints	within 20 working days	**57.4%**

Stage 1 performance remained strong, performance at Stage 2 fell below SPSO expectations.

70 Stage 2 complaints required an extension during 2025/26. The most common reason was being unable to obtain essential information within the required timescale and the complexity of the issues being investigated. When applying an extension, we must keep customers up to date about the reason for the extension and when they can expect a response.

The SPSO Statement of Complaints Handling Principles states that:

"Thoroughness of investigation should not be compromised by attempts to meet timescales and flexibility may be afforded for particularly complex cases. It is vital that, in cases where timescales cannot be met for good reason, complainants are kept informed of those reasons."

(https://www.spso.org.uk/sites/spso/files/csa/principles.pdf)

Extensions are permitted under the CHP. The SPSO view a Stage 1 Complaint as late after Day 6 and a Stage 2 complaint as late after Day 21 (whether an extension is applied or not). However, in practice extensions are used when necessary. Therefore, these cases are still viewed as late by SPSO for reporting purposes.

Comparison with 2023/24 and 2024/25

Measure	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Stage 1 within target	87.1%	84.2%	80.7%
Stage 2 within target	34.3%	48.5%	29.5%
Escalated within target	70.6%	68.9%	57.4%



Indicator Three: Average Response Times

This indicator measures the average number of working days taken to provide a full response and close complaints.

Complaint Stage and Average Response Time

Stage 1

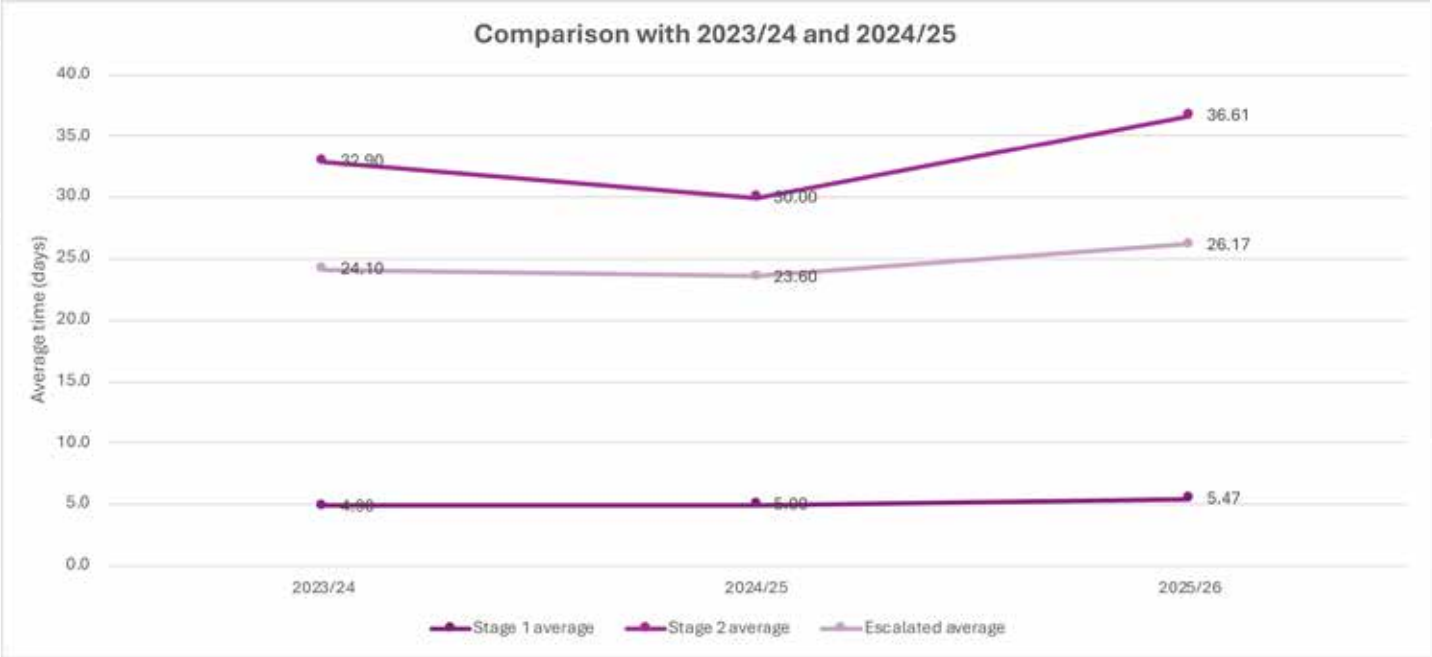
5.47 working days

Stage 2 (Direct)

36.61 working days

Escalated Complaints

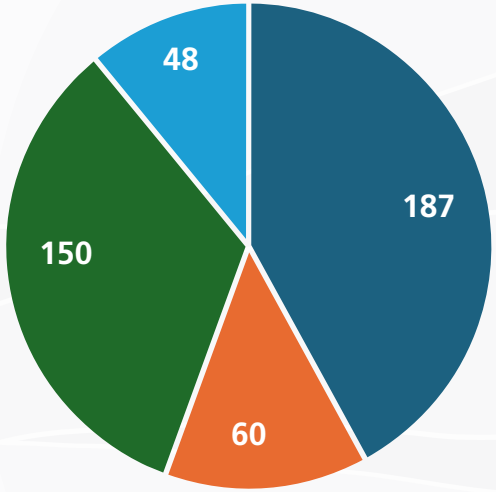
26.17 working days



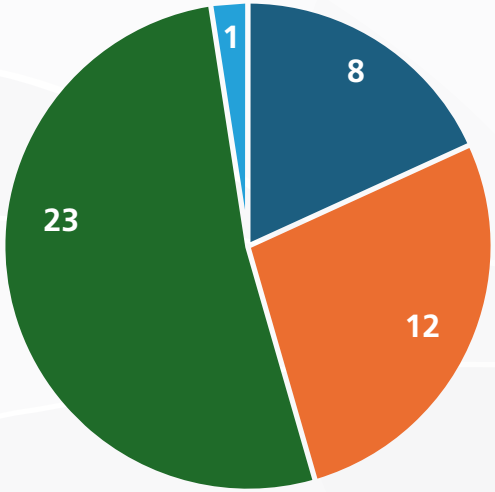
Indicator Four: Complaint Outcomes

This indicator records the outcomes of complaints closed during the reporting period.

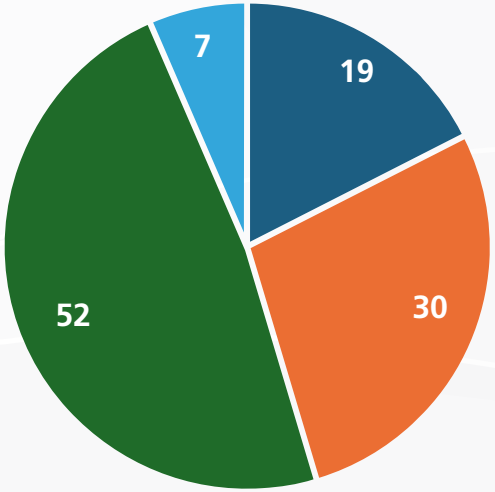
Stage 1 Outcomes



Stage 2 Outcomes



Escalated Complaint Outcomes



Upheld Partially Upheld Not Upheld Resolved

Learning from Complaints

We value all feedback as it helps us better understand why customers complain and identify where improvements can be made. A key purpose of the Complaints Handling Procedure is to ensure that learning from customer feedback is shared with staff and used to improve services.

Complaints remain an important way of identifying opportunities to strengthen service delivery.

Learning from complaints – improvement work undertaken

The examples in the following pages show service improvements and changes made as a result of learning from key complaint themes.



Economy and Infrastructure

Strengthening Safeguards for Dietary Requirements

A complaint related to the provision of a meal that did not meet a pupil's dietary requirements prompted a comprehensive review of catering procedures. The service updated its Special Diet Risk Register, reinforced staff awareness of religious and cultural dietary requirements and introduced additional measures to improve the visibility of dietary information during service delivery. This learning demonstrates a proactive approach to protecting vulnerable service users, reducing risk and strengthening compliance with equality and safeguarding responsibilities.

Improving School Transport Oversight and Contract Compliance

Complaints relating to school transport arrangements highlighted the importance of robust contract management, effective communication and consideration of pupil wellbeing. In response, the Council undertook a wider review of transport arrangements, strengthened engagement with transport providers and implemented additional measures to ensure services operate in line with contractual and policy requirements. This learning has driven improvements in governance, contractor oversight and service quality, helping to ensure transport provision better meets the needs of pupils and families.

Enhancing Cross-Service Processes to Reduce Delays

A complaint concerning delays in road drain repairs identified that responsibility for the asset had initially been assigned incorrectly. The investigation led to a review of asset identification and recording processes, reinforcing the importance of accurate ownership records and maintenance responsibilities. This learning extends beyond the individual case, highlighting the value of robust asset management and clear accountability arrangements in reducing delays, improving customer outcomes and increasing public confidence in service delivery.

Enabling and Customer Services

Following a complaint regarding the personalisation of a civil ceremony, refresher training was provided to all Civil Celebrants to reinforce engagement with couples and ensure appropriate ceremony personalisation.

Following feedback regarding accessibility at a customer service centre, improvements were made, including the installation of a doorbell to facilitate prompt and supported access where required.

The Revenues and Benefits Service received a complaint regarding the financial assessment process for residential care. As a result, work was undertaken with Social Work colleagues to improve communication with families at an early stage of the process. Updated information and guidance are now available to support better understanding of financial implications.

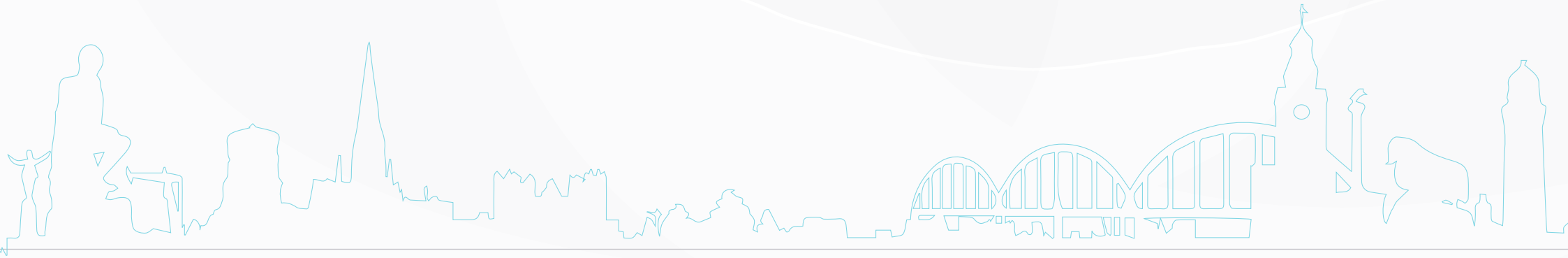
The Revenues and Benefits Service received a complaint regarding awareness of discounts and exemptions available to eligible customers. As a result, call handling scripts were updated to ensure relevant information is consistently provided and recorded, improving awareness of available reductions.

Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing

Following a complaint regarding communication after a service visit, staff were reminded to leave a calling card or make appropriate follow-up contact where a visit is unsuccessful, ensuring customers are aware of the visit and its purpose.

Following a complaint involving safeguarding concerns outside of school hours, additional guidance was provided to staff on responding appropriately to welfare concerns and escalating issues in line with safeguarding procedures.

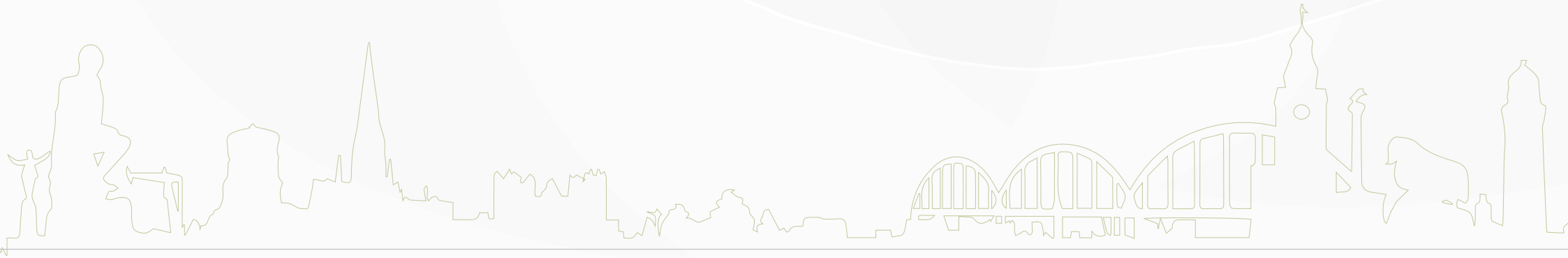
As a result of a complaint relating to the experiences of a child with additional support needs, agreement was reached on measures to improve understanding amongst peers of individual support needs and how these may affect behaviour and communication. Specialist staff also provided support and advice to school staff and the child to help promote inclusion and positive engagement within the school community.



Social Work Services

Following an Adult Services complaint, we worked with the NHS to develop written information and guidance to help individuals and families choose a residential care home for a family member.

Social Work Services identified a need for clearer public information on disability-related expenses that may be considered when calculating an individual's contribution to the cost of their social care support. Work is under way to develop this information for individuals and families.



Complaints Investigated by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)

Once a complaint has completed Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the Council's complaints process, customers who remain dissatisfied with our decision, or with how their complaint was handled, can ask the SPSO to consider it. The SPSO is the final stage for complaints about public service organisations in Scotland.

Cases referred to the SPSO during 2025/26

38 Stage 2 cases relating to Dumfries and Galloway Council were received by the SPSO in 2025/26. These related to:

Education (11)

Social Work (6)

Environmental Health and Cleansing (4)

Housing (4)

Planning (4)

Legal and Admin (3)

Roads and Transport (3)

Finance (1)

Land and Property (1)

Recreation and Leisure (1)

unknown or outwith jurisdiction (1).

Of these cases, 4 were premature, meaning they were referred before the Council's process had been completed; 3 were mature, meaning they were submitted outwith the time limit for raising a complaint; 1 was outside the SPSO's jurisdiction; and 9 were recorded as enquiries.

A total of 17 cases were resolved at Assessment and Guidance stage, 6 at Triage and Early Decision stage, and 12 at Preliminary Investigation stage. These cases were resolved early and were not fully investigated. A total of 3 cases proceeded to full investigation.

The SPSO assesses each complaint to decide whether it should be prioritised for immediate consideration or can be resolved quickly. Some cases cannot be dealt with immediately and are held until they can be allocated. As a result, the number of complaints received by the SPSO may differ from the number determined in the same year, as some cases carry forward into the following reporting period.

Further explanation of the terms used by the SPSO is available on their website at https://www.spso.org.uk/explanation-terms.

The SPSO publishes its annual statistics on its website at https://www.spso.org.uk/statistics-2025-26.

Customer Satisfaction and Feedback

Customer satisfaction

Our customers are automatically issued with a short complaints process satisfaction survey once their complaint has been closed.

The survey asks for feedback about the complaints process and gives an opportunity to send us suggestions for improvements. The survey results are reviewed by the Information Governance Team quarterly, and the feedback can be used to improve how we handle complaints.

Between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, we received **12** anonymous responses.

Feedback shows strengths around access to the process and signposting of next steps. However, accessing customers experience of the complaint handling remains an area for improvement.

The Council will continue to promote the satisfaction survey and encourage more customers to share their views.

We recognise there are continued low satisfaction survey returns. The Council will prioritise more targeted and considered approach going forward, including engaging with pre-established forums and key stakeholders.

Positive Feedback

Compliments are expressions of praise, encouragement or gratitude about services provided or managed by the Council and present valuable feedback about the level of satisfaction with service delivery, highlighting:

- valuable indicators of the effectiveness of a service
- useful insights about the aspects of service most meaningful to customers
- examples of good practice which can be shared throughout the Council
- an opportunity to recognise the efforts of staff acknowledgements of excellence to boost morale.

Staff acknowledge compliments and thank customers for their feedback. Where possible, customers are informed how the feedback will be used and assured that it will be passed on to the relevant staff members.

During 2025/26 the Council recorded **138 compliments**.

Street Cleansing was the most frequently complimented service during 2025/26, receiving 24 compliments. Customers praised both the standard of cleanliness achieved across communities and the commitment and professionalism of staff delivering the service. Feedback highlighted the positive difference that well-maintained streets, public spaces and facilities make to residents, visitors and local communities.

Here is just a small extract of the positive feedback that we have received this year.

"I always park down by the harbour. Each time I visit the town looks fantastic, and the public toilets are immaculate."



"I have never seen Dalbeattie High Street looking as clean… very hard working and always a smile on his face."



"Your staff who cut grass and empty roadside bins in Penpont provide a fantastic service. They always work really hard and take a real pride in their work."



"The road sweeping team provided a fabulous service… they took the time to listen and showed patience while cars were moved."



Contact Us

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

Phone: 030 33 33 3000
Email: commentsandcomplaints@dumgal.gov.uk
Online: https://www.dumfriesandgalloway.gov.uk/council-elections/have-your-say/complaints-compliments

Write to Dumfries and Galloway Council, Information Governance Team, Council HQ, English Street, Dumfries, DG1 2DD

