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South Ayrshire**

**Commitment 5**

Increase the profile and  
reputation of South Ayrshire  
and the Council

# Annual Complaints Performance Report 2019/20





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## Introduction

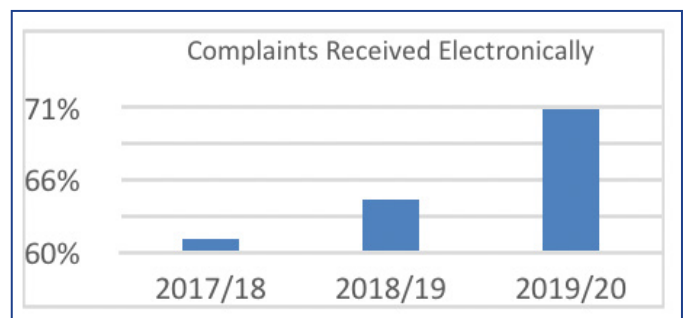
I am pleased to present South Ayrshire Council’s seventh annual Complaints Report. This report provides information on customer complaints between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, together with comparison on how we are performing against our previous report of 2018/19.



South Ayrshire Council recognise valuable lessons can be learnt from the complaints and comments we receive from our customers, allowing us to continue to improve our services. Where a customer has been unhappy, our “Listening to you” complaints procedure helps us to capture customer feedback. While it is always disappointing to learn that a customer is unhappy, through continuous monitoring

and listening to your comments, we use this feedback to improve our services and train our staff.

In 2019/20 71% of our 735 complaints were received either via our online [Complaints Form](#) or by email. Over the course of the past three years there has been an ongoing increase in the number of customers contacting us electronically, indicating the majority of our customers are finding this the most efficient way to get in touch when they have concerns. The use of online communication allows customers to contact us with their concerns 24 hours a day, in an efficient and effective manner. Of course, complaints are also received by letter, telephone and in person



All complaints received are processed by trained frontline and complaints staff, such as Customer Services Advisors and Complaints Officers. To ensure we are providing our

customers with the help and support that is needed, we will use complaints information and learning to form key parts of staff training and induction. We also employ complaints coordinators, investigators and administrators to make sure we have all the information we need to investigate a complaint and respond within designated timescales.

There has been a decrease of 24 complaints between 2018/19 and 2019/20. Taking into account authorised extensions, 88% of complaints escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2, and 80% of complaints administered directly at stage 2 were responded to within required timescales.

We continuously look towards making improvements in our complaints process and contact our customers who have made a complaint to gauge their views and establish where improvements can be made. We also continue to monitor complaints to establish where we can improve the delivery of services and customer engagement. This vital feedback is reported to Service Leads, Heads of Service, Assistant Directors, Directors and our Elected Members and really does help to shape how we can do things better.

As always, I am delighted to note the high level of positive feedback we have received from our customers. It is impossible to provide details of all the compliments given but a few examples are provided in the “Compliments Received” section that demonstrates the hard work and dedication of our staff. Compliments and suggestions can be made online using our website [Compliments or Suggestions](#)

**Eileen Howat, Chief Executive**

## Our customer comments and complaints procedure

### Listening to You

We regard a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction about our action, or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us, or on our behalf.

We take all complaints seriously. Our staff are trained in handling complaints effectively by focusing where possible on resolution at the first point of contact.



### Our complaints procedure 'Listening to you' has two stages:

#### Stage 1

We will always try to resolve complaints quickly, within five working days.

#### Stage 2

If customers are dissatisfied with our response at Stage One, they can escalate their complaint to Stage Two. We will also look at some complaints immediately at this stage if it is clear they are complex or need detailed investigation. We will acknowledge all Stage Two complaints within three working days and provide a response to customers within 20 working days, unless there is clearly a good reason for needing more time to investigate.

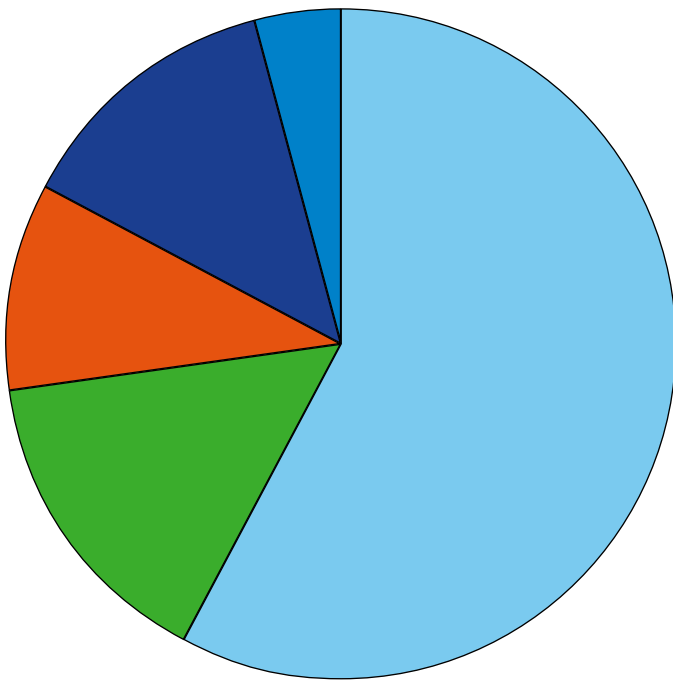
Where customers are dissatisfied with our decision regarding a Stage Two complaint, they can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to consider their complaint further.

## How customers have complained

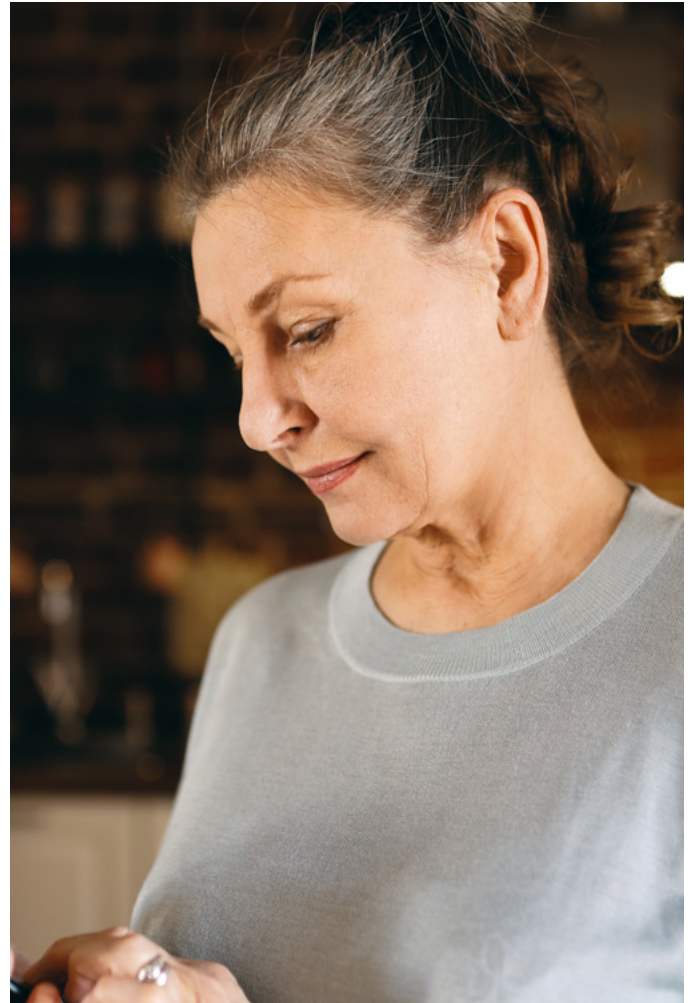
Customers can complain to, or comment about the Council, in a range of ways, including:

- In person, at any of our five centrally located Customer Services Centres in Ayr, Girvan, Maybole, Troon and Prestwick
- In person to any Council employee
- By phone on 0300 123 0900
- By letter
- Online
- By email.

In 2019/20 we received 735 complaints from customers who chose the following ways to contact us with a complaint:



Breakdown of the ways people got in touch in 2019/20:



**IN 2019/20 WE RECEIVED 735 COMPLAINTS, COMPARED TO 759 IN 2018/19, A 3 % DECREASE (24 COMPLAINTS) IN THE PAST YEAR.**

**OF THESE COMPLAINTS, 71% OF CUSTOMERS CONTACTED US ELECTRONICALLY, EITHER VIA EMAIL OR THROUGH OUR WEBSITE, COMPARED TO 64 % IN 2018/19. THIS INCREASE OF 7 % INDICATES OUR CUSTOMERS ARE FINDING OUR ONLINE COMMUNICATION OPTIONS EFFICIENT AND EASILY ACCESSIBLE.**

## Our Performance – Key Figures

The following sections of this report provide performance information which is based on indicators outlined by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

### Indicator 1 – Complaints Received Per 1,000 of Population

This section details the total number of complaints handled by South Ayrshire Council in the reporting period 2019/20. To allow for a fair comparison across all 32 Scottish Councils the figure of complaints per 1,000 of population is used.

- The population of South Ayrshire is estimated at 112,470
- In 2019/20 South Ayrshire Council handled 735 complaints from customers
- Meaning that an average of 7 complaints were received per 1,000 residents
- This indicates that 1 in every 153 South Ayrshire residents have registered a complaint about our services

*In 2018/19, the Council received 7 complaints per 1,000 South Ayrshire residents. This number has remained consistent in 2019/20.*

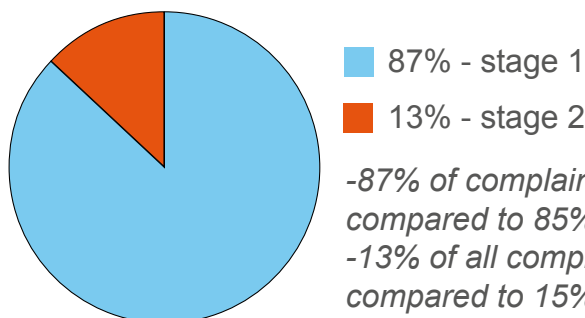
### Indicator 2 – Closed Complaints

This indicator provides information on the number of complaints closed at Stage One and Stage Two, as a percentage of all complaints closed.

The term “closed” refers to a complaint that has had a response sent to the customer and at the time no further action is required (regardless of which stage it is processed at and whether any further escalation takes place).

- 636 complaints were closed at Stage One. This represents 87 % of all complaints closed.
- 99 complaints were closed at Stage Two. This represents 13 % of all complaints closed.
- Of the 636 Stage One complaints, 52 were escalated to Stage Two, showing that only 8 % of our customers were dissatisfied with their Stage One outcome.

Complaints closed at Stage One and Stage Two:



*-87% of complaints received in 2019/20 were closed at Stage One compared to 85% in 2018/19 representing an annual increase of 2%  
-13% of all complaints received in 2019/20 were closed at Stage Two, compared to 15% in 2018/19 representing an annual decrease of 2%*



## Indicator 3 – Complaints Upheld, Partially Upheld and Not Upheld

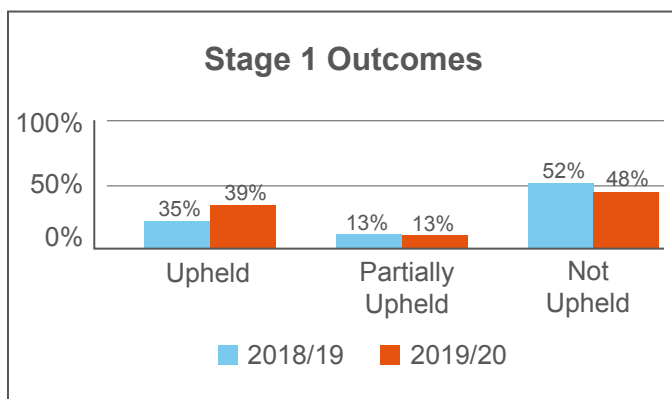
Having considered a complaint, we contact every complainant to explain whether their complaint has been upheld, not upheld or partially upheld and why.

This indicator provides information on the number and percentage of complaints which were upheld, partially upheld or not upheld at each stage.

### Outcome of Stage One Complaints

- 248 complaints were upheld at Stage One (39%)
- 85 complaints were partially upheld at Stage One (13%)
- 303 complaints were not upheld at Stage One (48%)

### Complaints made: year-by-year comparison

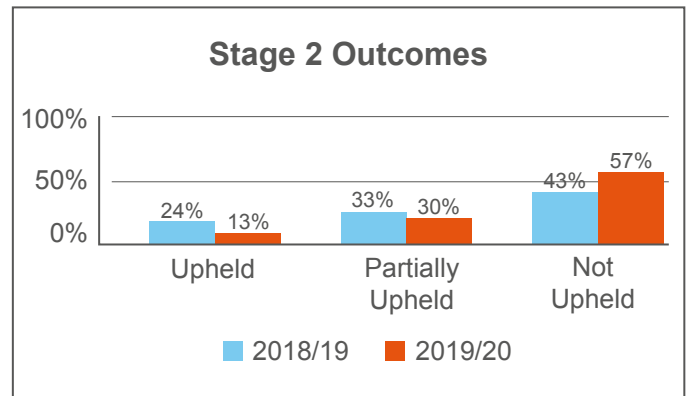


-In 2019/20, 52% of all Stage One complaints were either upheld or partially upheld indicating that almost half of our customers raised genuine concerns with our service provision. This is four percent higher than 2018/19 when 48% of Stage One complaints were upheld or partially upheld.

-In 2018/19, 52% of all Stage One complaints were not upheld. This number has decreased to 48% in 2019/20.

### Outcome of Stage Two Complaints

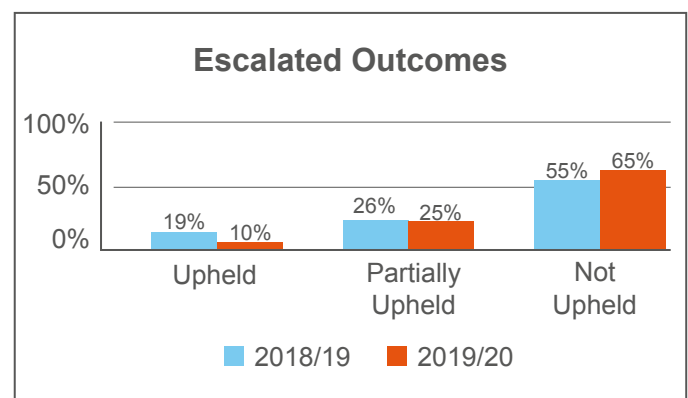
- 6 complaints were upheld at Stage Two (13%)
- 14 complaints were partially upheld (30%)
- 27 complaints were not upheld (57%)



### Outcome of complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two

- 5 complaints were upheld (10%)
- 13 complaints were partially upheld (25%)
- 34 complaints were not upheld (65%)

### Complaints made: year-by-year comparison



38% of complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two in 2019/20 were either upheld or partially upheld, compared to 45% in 2018/19, an increase of 7%.

## Indicator 4 – Average Times

### Stage One complaints

- We aim to respond to and close Stage One complaints within 5 working days
- The average time to respond to complaints at Stage One was 6 working days

### Stage Two complaints

- We aim to respond to and close Stage Two complaints within 20 working days
- The average time to respond to complaints at Stage Two was 18 working days

### Complaints Escalated from Stage One to Stage Two

- The average time to respond to escalated complaints was 19 working days

*In 2019/20 we responded on average to a Stage One complaint within 6 working days, which is one day higher than the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) statutory time scale of 5 working days.*

*- This shows an improvement of 4 working days from 2018/19, which saw an average of 10 working days to complete Stage 1 complaints.*

*- 2019/20 we responded to Stage 2 complaints on average within 18 working days, which is an improvement of 5 working days compared to 2018/19 when we responded on average within 23 working days*

*- 2019/20 – we responded on average to escalated complaints within 18 working days, which is an improvement of 15 working days from 2018/19, where the average working days was 33.*

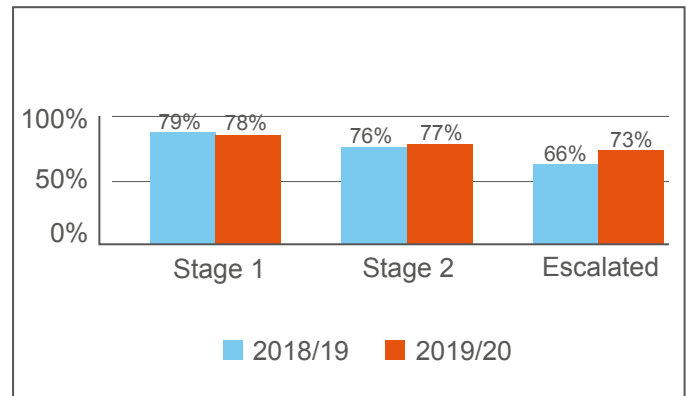


## Indicator 5 – Performance against Timescales

This indicator reports the number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set time scales of 5 and 20 working days. These include cases where an extension to the timescale has been agreed with the complainant.

- 496 complaints were closed at Stage One within 5 working days, representing 78 % of all Stage One complaints
- 35 complaints were closed at Stage Two within 20 working days, representing 77 % of all Stage Two complaints
- 38 escalated complaints were closed within 20 working days, representing 73 % of all complaints that were escalated from Stage One to Stage Two

### Complaints made: year-by-year comparison



*In 2019/20 there was a 7 % increase in the number of Escalated complaints being issued within the statutory time scale of 20 working days, compared to 2018/19*

## Indicator 6 – Number of Cases where an Extension is authorised

We always aim to respond to complaints as quickly as possible. However, there are times when a complaint is particularly complex and it is not feasible to fully investigate the issues within the prescribed timescales. In these situations we can agree with a complainant to extend the timescales for closing the complaint. This indicator outlines the number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension to the 5 or 20 working day timescale was authorised:

61 complaints closed at Stage One were granted an extension, representing 10 % of all Stage One complaints. Taking into account extensions 88% of Stage One complaints met required timescales.

2 complaints closed at Stage Two were granted an extension, representing 4% of all Stage Two

complaints. Taking into account extensions 79% of Stage Two complaints met required timescales.

4 complaints closed at the escalation stage were granted an extension, representing 8% of all Stage Two complaints. Taking into account extensions 81% of all escalated complaints met required timescales.

*2018/19 67 complaints were subject to an authorised extension, compared to 62 in 2019/20, a decrease of 5 cases. The Council will discuss an extension with a complainant if a response cannot be provided within timescales, to ensure the Council can undertake a full investigation.*

## Indicator 7 – Customer Satisfaction

A customer satisfaction survey is available online for complainants who wish to comment on how satisfied they are with our complaints service. The link to this survey is provided to all complainants and is also available on the Council website at:

[South Ayrshire Complaints Procedure Survey](#).

Between April 2019 and March 2020, 32 % of complainants engaged and responded to the survey (based on a total of 19 email responses received as at 1 April 2020):

	Strongly Agree or Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
It was easy for me to make a complaint to the Council	89%	11%
My Complaint was understood by the Council	58%	42%
My complaint was thoroughly investigated	47%	53%
My complaint was taken seriously	63%	37%
I was kept up-to-date with progress of my investigation	63%	37%
I was given a clear explanation of the decision made	47%	53%
The information was easy to understand	53%	47%
I am satisfied the investigation addressed my concern	31%	69%
My complaint was responded to within appropriate timescales	53%	47%
The procedure for taking my complaint to the next stage was clear	58%	42%

In 2018/19 51% of our customers responded on average to our survey questions with positive feedback, with this number increasing by 5% to 56% in 2019/20. We will continue to pro-actively seek feedback from complainants to establish where our complaints procedure can be improved further to meet our customers' needs.



## Indicator 8 – Learning from Complaints

**We take all complaints seriously and information gathered from complaints is invaluable in helping us to continuously improve our services. Since the introduction of Listening to You we have made changes to our services and procedures as a direct result of complaints we have received. Some examples of these improvements are outlined as case studies in this section.**

How we report on complaints performance and trends to senior managers and staff

- We report quarterly to Senior Managers, providing them with complaints performance information and highlighting any issues and complaints trends in their service areas.
- We provide bi-annual reports to our Elected Members. These reports contain complaints performance information and provide analysis of reasons for complaints and complaint trends. Service Leads attend Panels to discuss these reports and complaints trends with Panel Members.
- Council managers use information from these reports to identify and share any learning from complaints and to inform their service planning process.
- We have dedicated web pages which employees can access to obtain information on our Listening to You process, complaint trends and patterns and learning from complaints.

- We actively train complaint co-ordinators, investigators, officers and administrators in complaints handling procedures and provide email updates and ongoing coaching as required.
- We provide bespoke guidance to Head Teachers and school staff on the implementation of new procedures.
- We train Customer Service advisors and frontline staff on how to handle customer complaints professionally.
- We also use complaints information to coach individual staff and teams, and provide in-house staff training. For example, we use information and learning from complaints as part of our Induction procedures for new Customer Services advisors, as well as ongoing Customer Services training, team briefs and individual Performance and Development Reviews.

**SINCE THE INTRODUCTION OF LISTENING TO YOU WE HAVE MADE CHANGES TO OUR SERVICES AND PROCEDURES AS A DIRECT RESULT OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED.**

**SOME EXAMPLES OF THESE IMPROVEMENTS ARE OUTLINED IN OUR CASE STUDIES SECTION.**

## Learning from Complaints – Case Studies

One of our key performance indicators is ensuring services are using complaints information to identify areas of improvement. Our Management Teams use complaints information to change and improve their services. The next few pages give a selection of case studies showing how services have used complaints to change the way we do things.



### Housing

A customer complained that his mother, a council tenant, had fallen as a result of a build-up of moss and lichen on the path outside her home, even though the Housing department had carried out works to try and clear the moss and lichen build-up several times. As a result of this complaint, the Housing Service resurfaced the path with Asphalt, and has introduced a regular path-sweeping schedule at the property to prevent any potential build up and to mitigate any future risk.

A Council tenant contacted Housing to express dissatisfaction at the length of time it was taking to carry out an inspection and subsequent repairs required on her boiler. The tenant raised concerns that she had been left without heating or hot water. The Housing service investigated and established that, while the required repairs were undertaken within the target timescale, it was repairs like this one should be treated with a higher priority in future to ensure tenants were not left without heating or hot water in their property for any longer than necessary.





## Neighbourhood Services

A service user complained that the Community Refuse Disposal site at Maybole was inadequately managed by Council staff, with users who had commercial waste using the site without the appropriate authorisation.

An investigation by our Neighbourhood Services team showed that an officer from the service had previously been on site full-time. This allowed the Council, for a period of time, to monitor users accessing the site with commercial waste without the appropriate permit.

As a result of this complaint, the Waste Enforcement Officer was increased the number of hours spent at the site to challenge those suspected of dumping commercial waste. This important feedback from our customer allowed the Council to ensure this practice was reduced significantly.



## Property Maintenance

A customer complained about the length of time taken to identify and complete repairs required for his Council home. This included dampness works and repairs to guttering. An investigation found that there had been a delay in identifying where the repairs were needed and as a result, the Property Maintenance team has updated their processes to ensure any outstanding repairs are undertaken timeously.

All Technical and Maintenance Officers have now created a log for all works that have been allocated to both our internal employees and external contractors, and all works will be inspected at the start, during and on completion of all works to ensure our tenants are happy with all being completed.

To ensure target dates for repairs are being met, Operational Team Leaders will have weekly update meetings with their officers and request full updates on all jobs currently being worked on.



## Compliments Received in 2019/20 by our Services

Compliments are recorded by our complaints team to give us an indication of when services are meeting the needs and expectations of our service users. The following are a small sample of the compliments received during 2019/20.

### Neighbourhood Services

A customer visited a Recycling Centre and let us know the way the staff had helped her out of a difficult situation, telling us ***"I just wanted to thank the workers at Ayr recycle centre for their efforts in successfully retrieving my car keys, when I accidentally dropped them over with my rubbish. Nothing was a bother and they safely and effectively got my keys back with minimal hassle. In a world where we are quick to complain it's necessary that workers are praised for going above and beyond."***

### Community Care

Our Community Care Teams receive the highest volume of compliments across all South Ayrshire Council services, which has included compliments about our Home Care and Occupational Therapy services.

One service user's daughter got in touch to compliment the way our Home Care staff helped in supporting her mother at home, advising us that ***"...the care now being provided, it is superb. Mum is really thriving and she is much better mentally and physically. The girls are so good, and I can now rest at night knowing she is in safe hands."***

Another service user let us know about the service they received from one of our Occupational Therapists, and the wonderful job she was doing working for his family, highlighting , ***"The way she has helped to make our lives a little less stressful and my dad's care a lot more manageable....I can't describe how happy we are! From the first day she came to visit us she were helpful and understanding; went above and beyond to take care of our dad with great compassion, which means the world to us. Now that it's dad's turn to need looking after, we appreciate every single thing Occupational Therapy has done. There truly are no words to thank you enough."***

### Waste Management

One of our customers contacted our Waste Management Team as they needed a new bin, they complimented how easy it was to organise, letting us know ***"I would just like to comment on the efficient service I received recently when I need a new brown bin. The online application was quick and so was the delivery of the bin. I am delighted with the service I received from the council and thought it would be nice to let you know."***



## Conclusion

In 2019/20 South Ayrshire Council has had an decrease in the number of complaints we received against 2018/19, but has continued to show areas of improvement in our handling of customer complaints, by in establishing ways to listen to feedback and improving our services as a result.

The Council remains committed to listening to our customers and using customer feedback to actively change and improve the way we do things.

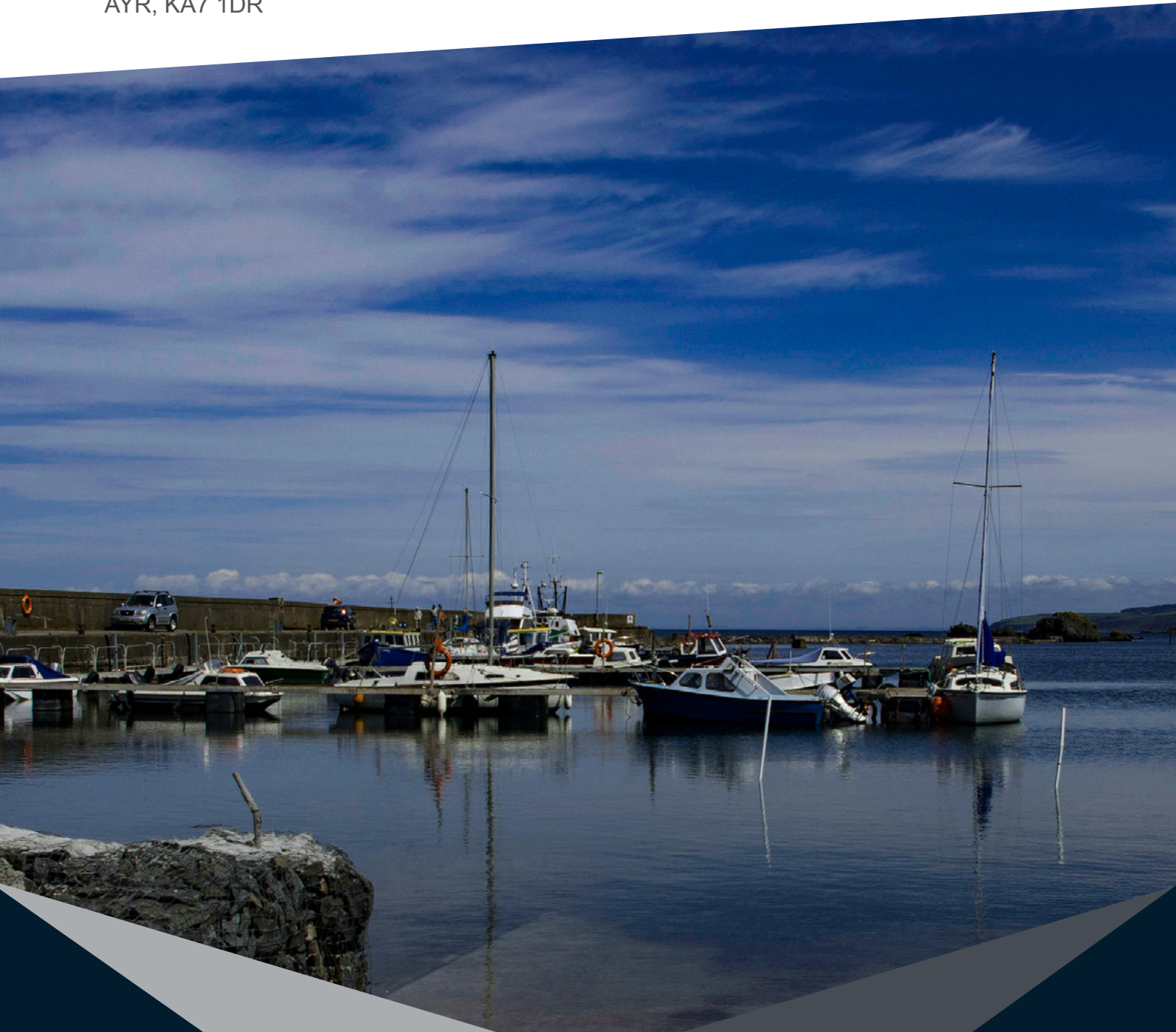
We continue to benchmark our complaints handling with our Scottish Local Authorities and work with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to ensure best practice continues.



## Contact Us

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

- Phone: 0300 123 0900
- Email: [listeningtoyou@south-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:listeningtoyou@south-ayrshire.gov.uk)
- Log on to: [www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/listeningtoyou](http://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/listeningtoyou)
- Visit: Our Customer Service Centres in Girvan, Maybole, Ayr, Prestwick and Troon
- In writing to:  
South Ayrshire Council  
Information Governance  
Listening to You  
County Buildings  
Wellington Square  
AYR, KA7 1DR



This information can be made available, on request, in braille, large print or audio formats and can be translated into a range of languages. Contact details are provided below.

درخواست کرنے پر یہ معلومات ناپینا افراد کے لئے ابھرے حروف، بڑے حروف یا آڈیو میں مہیا کی جاسکتی ہے اور اسکا مختلف زبانوں میں ترجمہ بھی کیا جاسکتا ہے۔ رابطہ کی تفصیلات نیچے فراہم کی گئی ہیں۔

本信息可应要求提供盲文，大字印刷或音频格式，以及可翻译成多种语言。以下是详细联系方式。

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ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਮੰਗ ਕੇ ਬੋਲ, ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਸਣਨ ਵਾਲੇ ਰਪ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਲਈ ਜਾ ਸਕਦੀ ਹੈ, ਅਤੇ ਇਹਦਾ ਤਰਜਮਾ ਹੋਰ ਬੋਲੀਆਂ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਕਰਵਾਇਆ ਜਾ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ। ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੀ ਗਈ ਹੈ।

Niniejsze informacje mogą zostać udostępnione na życzenie, w alfabecie Braille'a, w druku powiększonym lub w formacie audio oraz mogą zostać przetłumaczone na wiele języków obcych. Dane kontaktowe znajdują się poniżej.

Faodar am fiosrachadh seo fhaighinn, le iarrtas, ann am braille, clò mòr no clàr fuaim agus tha e comasach eadar-theangachadh gu grunn chànanan. Tha fiosrachadh gu h-ìosal mu bhith a' cur fios a-steach.

**South Ayrshire Council**  
**Contact Centre**  
**0300123 0900**

*south*  
**AYRSHIRE**  
COUNCIL  
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Deas

Making a Difference Every Day 