



To: Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board

On: 19 January 2026

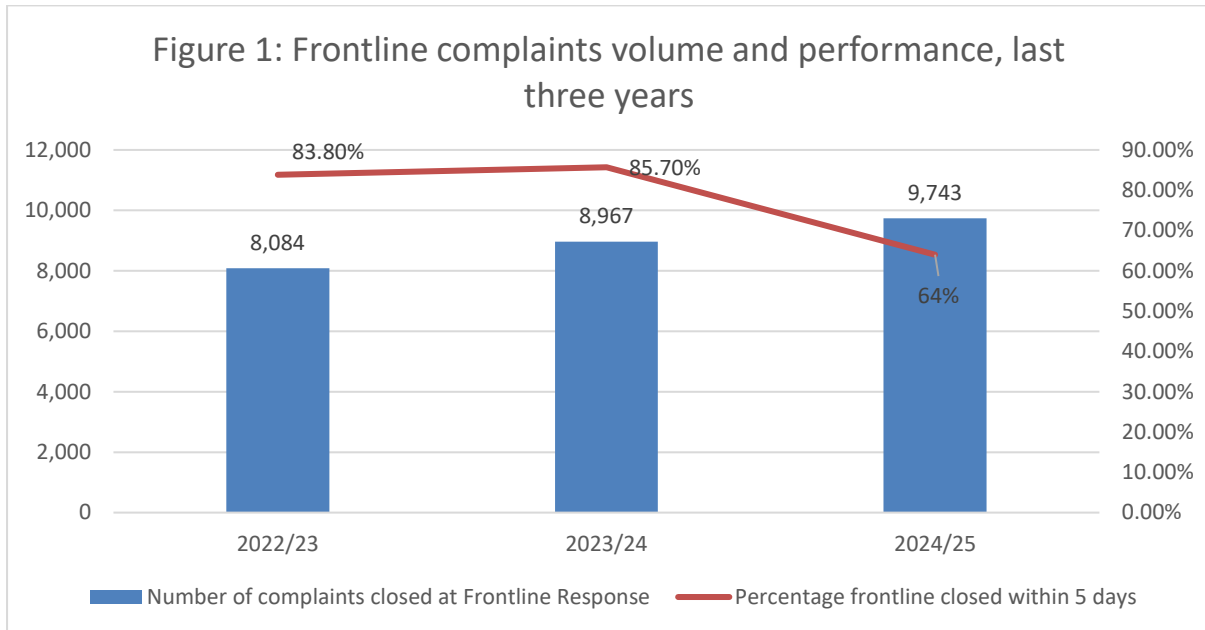
Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: 2024/25 Complaints Handling Performance

1. Summary

- 1.1 Renfrewshire Council's complaint handling procedure (CHP) helps the Council to improve services and processes based on customer feedback. It is one of a range of methods to help the Council understand how well it is delivering its services.
- 1.2 Revised in December 2023, the Council's CHP complies with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's (SPSO) guidance and aims to help 'get it right first time'. The expectation is to have quicker, simpler and more streamlined complaints handling with early response by capable, well-trained staff. As part of the procedure, all complaints are recorded and monitored.
- 1.3 This report provides information on complaints closed during the year from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 and performance on key indicators, as well as highlighting improvements made to the complaints handling procedure (CHP) (revised in December 2023) to ensure that complaints are handled well, and the organisation learns from them and improves service delivery where appropriate. Data is taken from the Council's DASH system, which is used by all services excepting schools, and allows for consistency in recording and reporting of complaints information. Although some schools have piloted DASH, at present they are using their own tracking.
- 1.4 The Council is, year on year, receiving increasing numbers of contacts across complaints, Freedom of Information requests and elected member enquiries and consequently there are increasingly resource challenges in supporting these processes. The increase in complaints volume can be seen in

Appendix 1 and has been noted in previous annual reports. A similar trend in other local authorities has been noted. Figure 1 below shows the volume of complaints and our corresponding performance.



1.5 The Council's Corporate Management Team regularly review complaints performance and referred this to the Council's Performance Group for more intensive work to understand the key issues and also to drive up performance in this area. The group has already established three workstreams to look at systems and processes, training and culture, and root cause analysis. These workstreams report progress back to the Performance Group every eight weeks. Officers have recently undertaken the annual audit of complaints handling and this will support the identification of any gaps in knowledge or training. As part of our Making Every Contact Count programme, a staff campaign will launch in 2026 to highlight key processes and remind staff of available training materials.

1.6 The key messages highlighted in the report are as follows:

- 10,418 complaints were dealt with during 2024/25, compared with 10,025 in 2023/24) (note that figure in Appendix 1 for complaints received includes those still being dealt with after 31 March 2025 and is therefore higher);
- Over 93% of our complaints are dealt with as a frontline response, demonstrating the Council's commitment to getting it right first time in response to complaints (91% in 2023/24);
- 64% of frontline complaints and 67.5% of investigation complaints received were completed within target timescales (85.7% and 94% respectively in 2023/24);

- the average time to respond to frontline complaints increased to 8.1 days, against a target of 5 days and is a slight improvement from the previous year's performance of 8.5 days;
- the average time to respond to an investigation complaint was 23.1 days, 8 days longer than the 15.2 days reported for 2023/24 and outwith the SPSO target of 20 days;
- the 2024/25 breakdown of complaints received by services continues to be broadly reflective of the volume of services provided, with Environment, Housing and Infrastructure delivering the highest volume and widest scope of frontline Council services and consequently receiving the highest volume of customer interactions and complaints;
- an intensive piece of work has recently been initiated by the Council's Performance Group looking at a range of customer interactions (including complaints) and identifying improvements which could be made.

1.7 A performance scorecard has been included within the appendix of this report to provide additional data for 2024/25 performance against SPSO indicators.

1.8 All indicators will continue to be monitored regularly, and support and guidance will be provided to all services to assist with analysing and improving performance where required.

2 Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that members of the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board:

- Note the content of this report.

3 Background

3.1 Renfrewshire Council's Complaint Handling Procedure (CHP) was implemented in 2013 and complies with the model complaints handling procedure for local authorities introduced by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman at that time. It is regularly reviewed to include updated guidance. The most recent guidance was implemented in 2023/24.

3.2 The CHP reflects Renfrewshire Council's ongoing commitment to the provision of high-quality complaints handling. The CHP operates to ensure that complaints are processed and responded to consistently within target timescales, with a particular focus on working to resolve customer dissatisfaction as close as possible to the point of contact or service delivery.

- 3.3 Services are required to record, analyse and monitor complaints performance and use the information gathered through the CHP to improve service delivery wherever possible.
- 3.4 In line with the SPSO complaints handling procedure, Renfrewshire Council's CHP uses a two-stage process, Frontline Response and Investigation (also referred to as Stage 1 and Stage 2).
- 3.5 The frontline response stage aims to quickly resolve straightforward customer complaints that require little or no investigation. Any member of staff may deal with complaints at this stage, and these are often dealt with 'on the spot' – an explanation, apology or an action to put something right may all be appropriate responses to a frontline complaint.
- 3.6 The main principle is to seek an early response, resolving complaints at the earliest opportunity and as close to the point of service delivery as possible. This may mean a face-to-face discussion with the customer or asking an appropriate member of staff to deal directly with the complaint. The Council has 5 working days to respond to these complaints.
- 3.7 An example of a complaint which may be addressed at the frontline response stage is where a customer complains that a staff member failed to attend a scheduled appointment. When this is reported, the service should provide an apology and reschedule the appointment at a suitable time for the customer.
- 3.8 Not all complaints are suitable for frontline response and not all complaints will be satisfactorily resolved at this stage. Investigation complaints are typically complex or require a detailed examination before resolving. These complaints may already have been considered at the frontline response stage, or they may have been identified from the start as needing investigation. In these cases, the customer should receive an acknowledgement of their complaint within three working days and be advised that it is being dealt with as an investigation.
- 3.9 An investigation aims to establish all the facts relevant to the points made in the complaint and to give the customer a full, objective and proportionate response that represents the final position. The Council has 20 days to respond to these complaints.
- 3.10 An example of an investigation complaint may relate to the standard or nature of a repair within a Council property which requires an inspection or visit to investigate. As a supervisor or manager might need to examine the repair to assess this and agree with the customer the corrective work required, it may require the 20-day timescale. Services may also agree an extension to the

timescale with the customer. The SPSO procedures allow councils to extend an investigation for a further 10 working days.

- 3.11 In line with the model complaints handling procedure provided by the SPSO and with practice in other local authorities, Renfrewshire's complaints policy does not include a number of service areas that are processed through other means. Some examples include: the right to appeal a refusal of planning permission or to appeal planning conditions (this is made to the Local Review Body or the Scottish Ministers); allegations of bullying in schools (these are treated and investigated as bullying incidents by the education establishment); and a compensation claim for personal injury, loss of or damage to property (these are processed through the Council's standard 'Public Liability Claim Form').

4. 2024/25 Council Performance

- 4.1 Complaints are crucial in identifying areas or processes that need to be improved for our customers and Councils are required to report their complaints handling performance against a range of key performance indicators related to the SPSO complaints handling procedure. This report provides information on the complaints closed during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 and Appendix 1 details Renfrewshire Council's complaints performance for 2024/25 against these key SPSO performance indicators. The SPSO publishes all local authority complaints annual reports on its website.
- 4.2 A new complaints system was launched in April 2020 and has now been fully rolled out with all Council services (excluding schools) logging their complaints on the same system. This means that for reporting purposes, all performance data is now taken from a single source, and this has been useful in improving visibility of the number of complaints and related enquiries received by the organisation. In previous years, the data included all issues raised by customers through our complaints process, even where they are reviewed and found not to be a complaint (such as when someone used our complaints system to raise an issue about another organisation, or to make a service request). From 2023/24, these have been excluded from reporting wherever an item has been closed with the status "Closed, not a complaint" bringing the report more in line with other local authorities. Despite this, we continue to see increased volumes, not only in complaints but in other requests including Freedom of Information and Subject Access Requests, and elected member enquiries. This creates additional resource pressures across services and impacts on overall performance. Whilst there are training resources available for staff, we have not run a focused campaign on complaints handling since

the current system was launched in 2020 and intend to prioritise this in early 2026, to ensure practice reflects our policies and our values.

- 4.3 In 2024/25 we received 10,418 complaint cases, an increase of almost 400 cases from the previous year, reported at 10,025 which was also an increase to the 9,155 cases received during 2022/23. It is recognised that this increase is primarily due to an increase in the number of complaints received by Environment, Housing and Infrastructure (EHI) and, although it is disappointing to note the year-on-year increase, is not unexpected given the wide range of universal frontline services delivered. Analysis has shown that the increase is largely driven by complaints about waste services. The breakdown of complaints received is shown below, with the previous year's data included to show the trend. (Due to restructuring, data before 2023/24 by service is not directly comparable.)

Table 1: Volume of complaints received, last two years

	Frontline		Investigation		Total		% Change
	2023/24	2024/25	2023/24	2024/25	2023/24	2024/25	
Chief Executive's	24	51	12	11	36	62	72%
Children's Services	85	56	125	132	210	188	-10%
Environment, Housing and Infrastructure	8331	9264	477	344	8808	9608	9%
Finance and Resources	509	367	139	133	648	500	-23%

- 4.4 All Council services strive to ensure that complaints are answered correctly first time and that customers are responded to quickly. During 2024/25, 93.5% of complaints were addressed through a frontline response, however only 64% of frontline complaints and 67.6% of investigation complaints received completed within target timescales. This compares with 85.6% and 94% respectively in 2023/24.
- 4.5 Councilwide, the average time to respond to a frontline investigation was 8.1 days (against a target of 5 days) – this a slight improvement on 8.5 days reported in 2023/24. Reminders have been issued to all relevant staff reminding them of the target timescales in order to increase awareness. The number of working days for investigation complaints did not achieve the SPSO target of 20 days with the average investigation case taking 23.1 days to complete – an increase on the 15.2 days reported for 2023/24. This figure is skewed by a very small number of complaints open in excess of 90 days; excluding those would give an average of 19.4 days, which is within target.

4.6 Figures 2 and 3 below show the service breakdown of total complaints received and those closed within the timescales, during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. This is for frontline response and investigation complaint cases. Figure 4 shows the breakdown by service of investigations which were granted an extension. The complaints for social work services are included in services provided by Children’s Services, whilst the data for the Chief Executive’s Service also includes those complaints sent directly to the Chief Executive but which can relate to any service area within the Council. Table 2 shows compliance with timescales by service and to an extent this is impacted by volume received.

Figure 2: Frontline Complaints Closed 2024/25

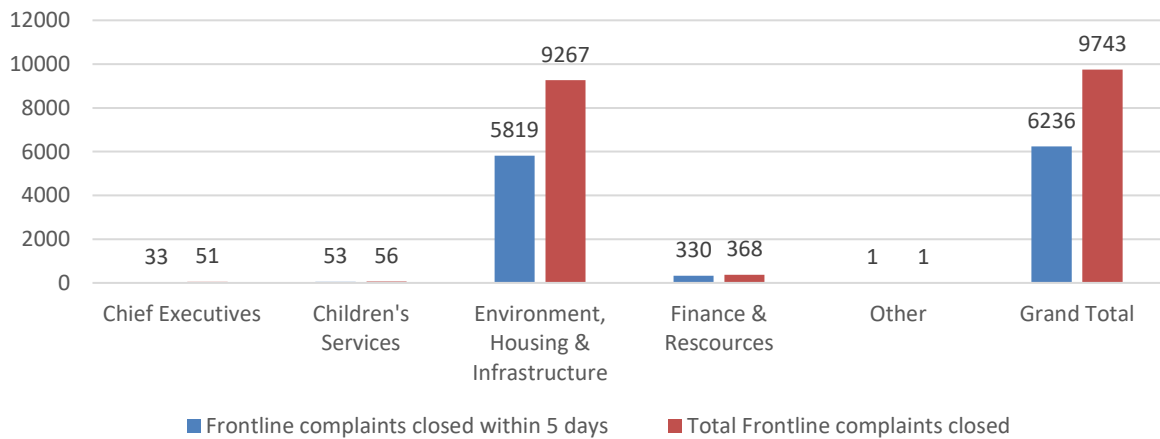


Figure 3: Investigation Complaints Closed 2024/25

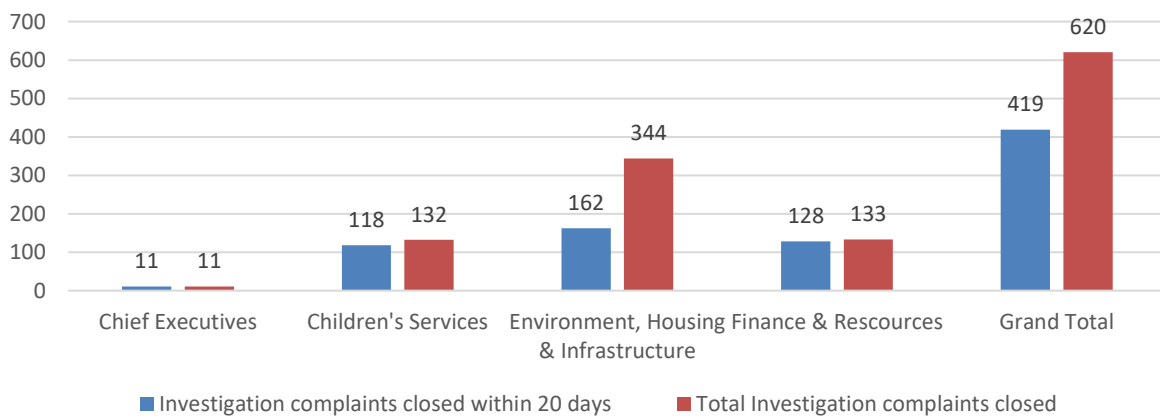


Figure 4: Investigation Complaints Closed 2024/25

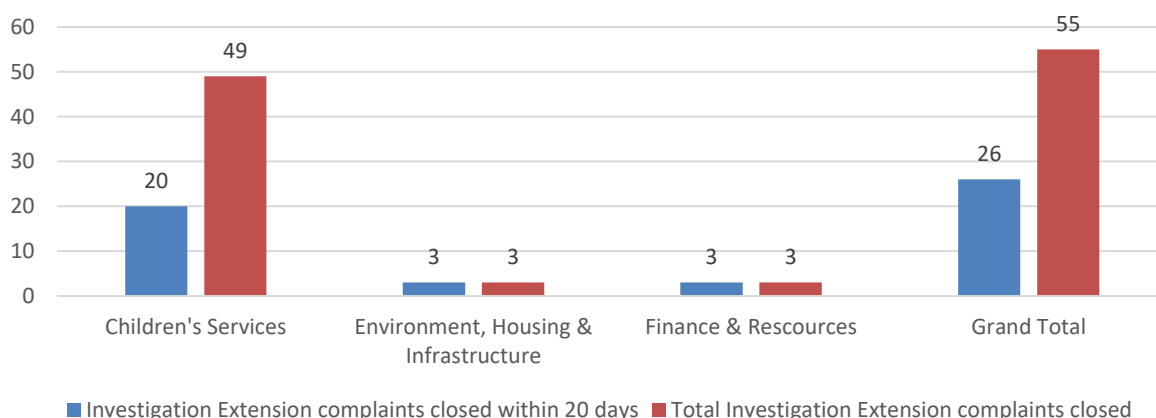


Table 2: Percentage of Complaints Cases Closed Within Timescale (by service/by service level)

Service	Frontline	Investigation	Investigation Extension
Chief Executives	64.7%	100%	-
Children's Services	94.6%	89.4%	40.8%
Environment, Housing & Infrastructure	62.7%	47.1%	100%
Finance & Resources	89.7%	96.2%	100%
Other	100%	-	-
All Services	64%	67.5%	47.3%

4.7 From 2024/25, this annual report includes performance figures on the percentage of complaints which are upheld, partially upheld, not upheld or resolved. Data has been added to the appendix for the previous two years to allow comparison. Figure 5 below shows the percentage in each of these categories. More than two-thirds of frontline complaints were upheld but the figure drops considerably for investigations and investigation extensions, our more complex cases. This is a change from the previous two years when around two-thirds of investigation complaints were upheld. More than half of investigation extensions were closed as 'Resolved' meaning that an agreement on an action was reached between the customer and council without the complaint having to be fully explored. Figure 6 shows the trend in the last three years, with a noticeable increase in the percentage of complaints being upheld.

4.8 Scrutiny of complaints data and performance continues to be carried out on a regular basis at service-level management team meetings and has been

supported by improvements in both data analytics and access to management information.

Figure 5: Closure status by complaint type, 2024/25

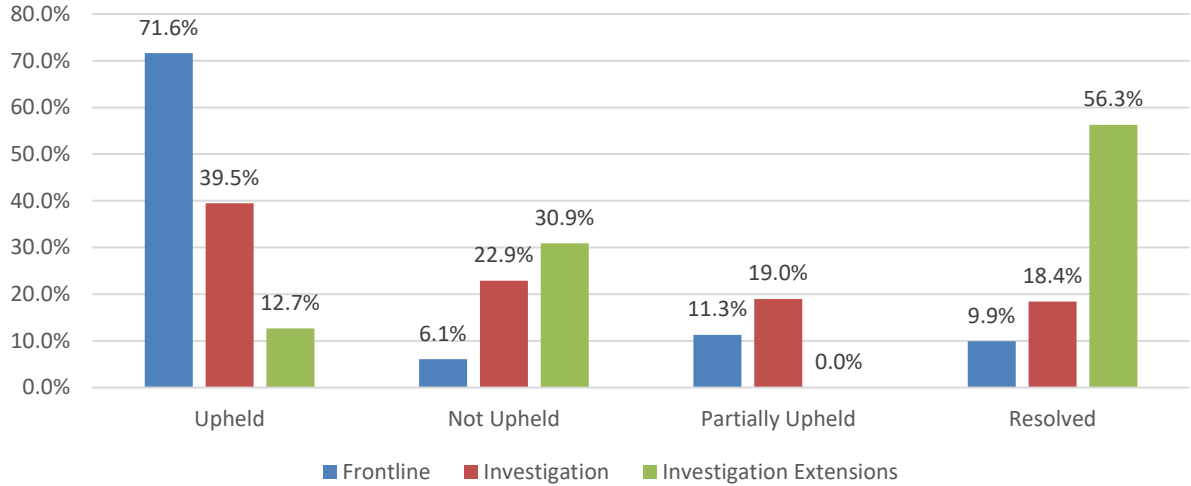
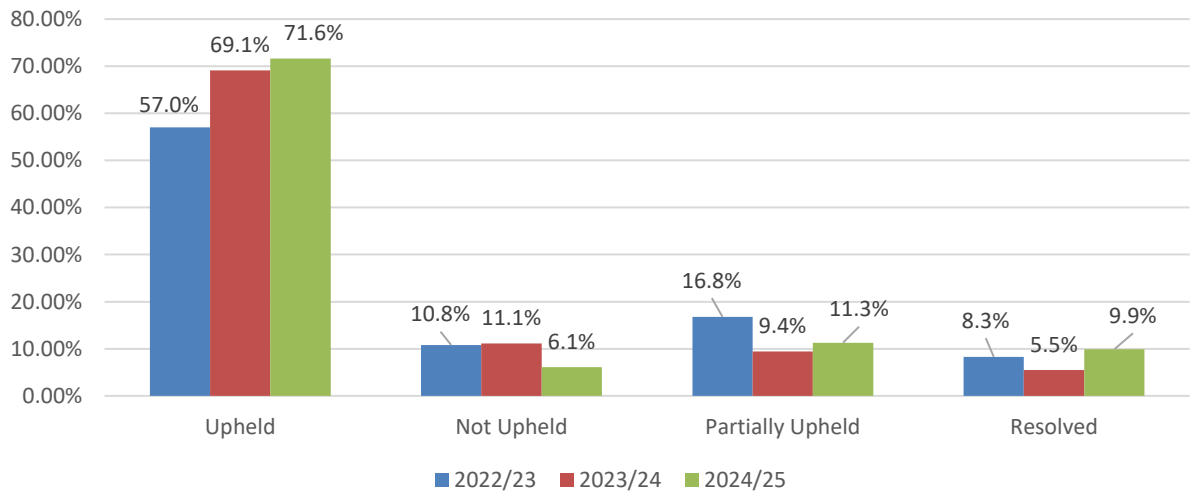


Figure 6: Frontline complaints by closure status



4.9 Overall the breakdown of complaints received by services is broadly reflective of the volume of services provided. Environment, Housing and Infrastructure (EHI) delivers the highest volume of frontline Council services, and the most diverse, covering 220 council premises, to over 92,000 households and businesses, supports more than 862km of roads and transport infrastructure, collects more than 135,000 bins weekly and manages 12,078 Council houses. It is to be expected therefore that the service will receive the highest volume of customer interactions.

- 4.10 Environment, Housing and Infrastructure dealt with 9,614 complaints during 2024/25, accounting for 92.2% of all cases dealt with during the reporting year. Waste services remain the top subject category followed by Housing Services Responsive Repairs, Building Services, Neighbourhood Services (incorporating street cleansing, litter bins and parks), and road repairs. Work is ongoing to learn from complaints received and seek to improve our Services through training, investment in technology to streamline processes and increase the knowledge and information about service delivery to address any issues identified. These issues will be explored as part of the intensive work being progressed by the Performance Group.
- 4.11 Complaints received by the Chief Executive's Service in 2024/25 mainly related to the Environmental Taskforce operated through the Connected Communities team within Policy and Partnerships (as customers use the Dash complaints module to log fly tipping reports) however, a number of these cases were not completed within the 5-day frontline target due to the complexity of fly tipping investigations, which often require input from other services or external agencies. Since volumes are low relative to other services, each late complaint corresponds to a much larger percentage. Improvements in recording and triaging are ongoing to reduce delays and better align with complaints handling timescales. In terms of complaints relating to planning and building standards these typically relate to timescales and concerns around the process. The complexity and the range of information submitted is such that many of the complaints require significant investigation thus creating pressures in respect of meeting timescales.
- 4.12 The majority of complaints made to Finance and Resources related to Customer Services and Business Support service areas with both responding to cross organisation cases which are predominately closed at frontline with 90% of frontline cases closed within 5-day target. Council tax, benefits (claims suspension, delay in processing or payment issues), customer services (cross service support including service appointments, waste, blue badge and Millie (digital assistant)) and licensing (unhappy with advice or approach taken) cases remain the top service categories and although these cases can be complex and require detailed investigation, the service has demonstrated a strong performance with the average number of days processing an investigation complaint reported as 11 days, well within the SPSO target and overall performance of 96.2% investigation cases completed within timescale. Of the complaints received by Customer Service, 70% of relate to other Council services and have to be passed to the appropriate team to respond. The remaining 30% are related to the service received and are used to understand where changes can be made to improve the service for future customers.

- 4.13 Complaints in Children's Services are often complex as they typically relate to people rather than processes. The service makes every effort to respond to complaints in a timeous manner, taking account of the sensitivities and complexities of the child or young person and their family. Current complaints data relates to social work services for children and families and justice social work, as well as those complaints made directly to senior managers about early years and education; it does not yet include frontline complaints dealt with directly by schools and early years establishments.
- 4.14 Children's Services dealt with 237 complaint cases during 2024/25 with the majority dealt with as investigations due to their complexity, with the average timescale for completion of 21.3 days. The majority of complaints to Children's Services relate to schools, and the most common complaints are around Additional Support Needs, bullying incidents and parents /carers being unhappy about how a schools has dealt with incidents such as these.
- 4.15 Draft figures for 2025/26 indicate an improving trend in terms of timescales for both frontline and investigation complaints.

5. Learning from complaints and improving the Council's complaints procedure

- 5.1 As noted above, the Council has a single system for logging and reporting on complaints, regardless of how the customer chooses to contact us. The Council also uses a suite of reports to track performance on complaints handling, and these are available to all services.
- 5.2 As set out within the body of the report, the volume of complaints remains challenging and related performance in this area requires further action. Complaints handling has been identified as a priority for improvement by the Corporate Management Team and is now part of an intensive piece of work being progressed by the Performance Group. As noted above, a focused campaign highlighting training resources and reminding staff of the key principles and processes of complaints handling will be undertaken in 2026. Detailed data has been reviewed and three workstreams are being progressed to identify and implement improvement activities. These workstreams will review system requirements, look at policies and training, and undertake root cause analysis to better understand what is driving complaints volumes in particular service areas. Improvement actions will be identified and progressed, and reviewed by the Performance Group every eight weeks, and more frequently as required.

- 5.3 Learning from the October 2024 audit of complaints was reported back to services and feedback from participants has resulted in changes to the audit process for 2025. The audit took place in late October and findings are being compiled; service-level analysis will be provided to Directors. The audit found mostly good practice but has identified some areas where refresher training would be helpful to ensure consistency in processes and recording.
- 5.4 The Council also participates in the Local Authority Complaints Handling Network, which has representation from all Scottish councils. This group allows us to benchmark performance and share good practice. Data from other local authorities shows that Renfrewshire Council is reporting the highest number of complaints, though it is acknowledged that there is likely under-reporting in some other council areas.
- 5.5 It is expected that with greater focus on key performance questions and more regular, targeted reporting that our complaints performance will improve during 2025/26.
- 5.6 As part of the functionality of the complaints system, customers can also provide comments and compliments, with 38 cases recorded during 2024/25 (12 comments and 26 compliments). A few examples of these compliments are provided below:

“Thank you very much for the prompt uplift of my waste materials as I thought that it might take a few weeks. I was pleasantly surprised as the materials were gone within a few days. Thank you again for your excellent service”.

“I was delighted to witness your collection staff ensuring that paper dropped from a bin being emptied was not simply left on the ground. The staff member took the time to stop and pick up the paper and place this into the waste lorry.”

“I have visited to Paisley recycling centre several times recently, on each visit the staff are all very helpful, either directing people to correct area or physically helping people to carry waste if they are struggling. Everyone is polite and happy to help.”

“I wanted to compliment the council workers who came to replace my kitchen counter. Both guys were very professional, polite and pleasant. The work carried out was done fast and to a high standard.”

1. **Financial** – none
2. **HR & Organisational Development** - none
3. **Community/Council Planning** –
We consider our services performance against a number of strategic outcomes to measure how we are delivering better outcomes for our local communities:

Living our Values – complaints are monitored under this outcome of the Council Plan and service improvement planning process.
4. **Legal** - none.
5. **Property/Assets** - none
6. **Information Technology** - none.
7. **Equality & Human Rights** - The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for noting only.
8. **Health & Safety** – none
9. **Procurement** – none
10. **Risk** – none
11. **Privacy Impact** – none
12. **COSLA Policy Position** – none
13. **Children's Rights** – this report is for noting and has no direct implications on children's rights. However, the Council is implementing the SPSO guidance on child-friendly complaints where this is appropriate.
14. **Climate Risk**- none

List of Background Papers: none

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Appendix 1: Renfrewshire Council Annual Complaints Report SPSO Indicators

(due to rounding, percentages may not total 100)



Total number of complaints received, frontline and investigation	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Total number of complaints received (open and closed)	9,155	10,025	10,913
Number of complaints closed at Frontline Response	8,084	8,967	9,743
Complaints closed at Frontline Response as a percentage of all complaints closed	87.9%	91.5%	93.5%
Number of complaints closed at Investigation	892	788	620
Complaints closed at Investigation as a percentage of all complaints	9.9%	8.0%	6.0%
Number of complaints closed at Investigation after escalation	60	38	55
Complaints closed at Investigation after escalation as a percentage of all complaints	0.6%	0.4%	0.5%

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Average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Frontline Response	4	8.5	8.1
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Investigation	14	15.2	23.1
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation	9	5.3	15.1
Percentage of complaints at each stage which were responded to in full within the set timescales	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Complaints closed at Frontline Response within 5 working days as a percentage of the total number of Frontline Response complaints	83.8%	85.7%	64%
Complaints closed at Investigation within 20 working days as a percentage of total number of Investigation complaints	89.5%	94%	67.5%

Number and percentage of complaints where an extension to the timescale has been authorised	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Complaints closed at Frontline Response where extension was authorised, as a percentage of all complaints at Frontline Response	0.0%	0.0%	0%
Complaints closed at Investigation where extension was authorised, as a percentage of all complaints closed at Investigation	6.3%	4.6%	8.1%
Percentage of complaints by closure status	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Percentage of complaints upheld at Frontline Response as % of all complaints closed at Frontline Response	57.0%	69.1%	71.6%
Percentage of complaints not upheld at Frontline Response as % of all complaints closed at Frontline Response	10.8%	11.1%	6.1%
Percentage of complaints partially upheld at Frontline Response as % of all complaints closed at Frontline Response	16.8%	9.4%	11.3%
Percentage of complaints resolved at Frontline Response as % of all complaints closed at Frontline Response	8.3%	5.5%	9.9%
Percentage of complaints upheld at Investigation as % of all complaints closed at Investigation	66.7%	63.8%	39.5%

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Percentage of complaints by closure status	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Percentage of complaints not upheld at Investigation as % of all complaints closed at Investigation	14.8%	18.0%	22.9%
Percentage of complaints partially upheld at Investigation as % of all complaints closed at Investigation	7.8%	3.3%	19%
Percentage of complaints resolved at Investigation as % of all complaints closed at Investigation	11.5%	12.3%	18.4%
Percentage of complaints upheld at Investigation Extension as % of all complaints closed at Investigation Extension	14.3%	13.2%	12.7%
Percentage of complaints not upheld at Investigation Extension as % of all complaints closed at Investigation Extension	14.3%	28.9%	30.9%
Percentage of complaints partially upheld at Investigation Extension as % of all complaints closed at Investigation Extension	42.9%	10.5%	0%
Percentage of complaints resolved at Investigation as % of all complaints closed at Investigation Extension	28.6%	47.4%	56.3%