

Customer Complaints Monitoring Report

Annual Report 2024/25

This report covers the twelve month period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

Appendix 1 contains the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman's Performance Indicators.

What is a Complaint?

Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute Valuation Joint Board's definition of a complaint is:

An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the Joint Board's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Joint Board.

A complaint may relate to:

- A failure to provide a service,
- A failure to achieve standards or quality of service promised by the Joint Board,
- Dissatisfaction with Joint Board policies or the way they are being applied or administered,
- Disagreement with a decision where the customer cannot use another procedure (for example an appeal) to resolve the matter,
- The Joint Board's failure to follow the appropriate administrative process,
- Failure, negligence or delays in responding to customers' inquiries or requests,
- Unhelpful or insensitive treatment by, or attitude of, a member of staff,
- Malice, bias or unfair discrimination,
- Inadequate or incomplete provision of information and/or advice,
- Failure to take account of relevant matters in coming to a decision,

The above list is not exhaustive.

A complaint is **not**:

- A routine first-time request for a service,
- A request for compensation only,
- An issue that is in court or has already been heard by a court or a tribunal,
- A disagreement with a decision where a statutory right of appeal exists, for example in relation to council tax or non-domestic rating appeals or Electoral Registration objections,
- An attempt to reopen a previously concluded complaint, or to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision.

Complaints Received During 2024/25

There were a total of 34 Complaints received during 2024/25 which is a significant increase from previous years (2023/24 – 4 complaints, 2022/23 – 4 complaints).

Nineteen of these complaints related to a backlog of sold house band increases that was uncovered. Where a house is extended, and subsequently sold, the assessor is required to assess any impact on the Council Tax band. Where the band should increase, legislation directs that this must be effective from the date the property was first sold following completion of the alterations.

These complaints were all upheld. The time taken to assess these properties, and to change the Council Tax List was way beyond any expectations the Board or the Assessor had. Following the discovery of the backlog, the Management Team put in place better reporting measures to mitigate the risk of such backlogs building up again. Guidance was reviewed and re-issued to staff, and training provided on the process. A project to tackle the remainder of the backlog was put in place, and this has now been cleared.

Further to this, the Board agreed to a new Key Performance Indicator, which they will monitor to ensure that the level of service provided is maintained at an acceptable level.

A number of complaints centred around the annual audit of Self-Catering properties on the Valuation Roll. The Scottish Government introduced new time limits for the provision of information each year in April 2024. A number of people fell foul of this, and as a consequence their property was removed from the Valuation Roll and added to the Council Tax List. The decision to alter the Council Tax List is one that has a statutory appeal process by way of challenge, so complaints against the decision reached are unable to be progressed through the complaints process. Some of the complaints were in relation to level of service in responding to enquiries on this new process. Our team worked beyond capacity in dealing with this new workstream. This resulted in enquiries taking some time to answer in favour of the statutory process being progressed to conclusion. With no funding having been provided for this process, it is unlikely that this will change in future years.

With a UK General Election during the year, there was a spike in Electoral Registration linked complaints. Nationally publicised issues surrounding the timing of posting a receipt of Postal Ballot Packs saw the Board receiving complaints. Postal Ballot Packs are sent out by Returning Officers, over which the Board have no control. These complaints were unable to be upheld.

There were some instance of complaints relating to poor standard of service provided in relation to the Valuation function of the Board. A number of these were upheld where the length of time taken to see matters dealt with was out with the expectation of the Board and the Assessor. Processes are currently being implemented alongside a new Case Management system, which will give staff and managers better oversight of workloads, and allow such issues to be spotted sooner.

A complaint was received in relation to conduct of valuation staff who were visiting a property to undertake an inspection. The primary issued raised was raised about the availability / visibility of formal staff ID. This complaint was upheld at stage 1. As a result of this complaint, and another complaint surrounding identification of staff in the previous financial year, the Board have introduced an ID badge policy and procedure.

Resolution of Complaints

Of the 34 complaints received in year, 31 were resolved at Stage 1, and 3 at Stage 2.

23 complaints were upheld. The vast majority of these (19) related to the identified backlog of Council Tax sale reviews. This should not be an event that re-occurs again.

1 complaint was partially upheld, and the remaining 10 were not upheld.

Referral to the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman

No complaints have progressed to the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman for decision.

Learning from Complaints

The outcome of complaints are discussed at the regular management team meetings and any learning is implemented.

Further detail of complaints received are contained in our published quarterly reports.

In the last year, a staff identification card policy has been introduced as a direct result of two complaints received.

New processes and monitoring have been put in place in relation to Sold House processes, and a new KPI introduced which is reported to the Board at each of its meetings. This is a direct result of the complaints received in relation to the standard of service received as part of this process.

Our website has been extensively updated with guidance for Self-Catering Unit operators. The guidance is regularly reviewed, and kept current. An additional email write out has also been included in the plans for the 2024/25 audit which is about to commence. This has been a direct

action from listening to feedback from taxpayers, and acting on their concerns in a manner that is possible within existing tight financial pressures.

Conclusion

The number of complaints received in the last year saw a large increase from previous years.

A number of these were attributable to confusion surrounding new legislation (Self-Catering and Civil Penalty Notices), and Postal Votes in relation to the UK Parliamentary Election.

By far the largest event was the discover of the backlog of work of sold houses. This has been addressed and should not be an issue in future years.

The feedback from the complaints we received are invaluable in gauging the success of our evolving processes, and is actively used to appraise workflows, instructions and processes.

Kevin Kelly
Depute Assessor & ERO
21 May 2025

Appendix 1

SPSO Performance Indicators

Indicator 1: Complaints Received per 1000 of population.

0.12

Indicator 2: Closed complaints.

The number of complaints closed at stage one as a percentage of all complaints: **91%**

The number of complaints closed at stage two as a percentage of all complaints: **9%**

Indicator 3: Complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld.

The number of complaints upheld at stage one as % of all complaints closed at stage one: **65%**

The number of complaints not upheld at stage one as a percentage of all complaints closed at stage one: **32%**

The number of complaints partially upheld at stage one as a percentage of all complaints closed at stage one: **3%**

The number of complaints upheld at stage two as % of all complaints closed at stage two: **100%**

The number of complaints not upheld at stage two as a percentage of all complaints closed at stage two: **0%**

The number of complaints partially upheld at stage two as a percentage of all complaints closed at stage two: **0%**

Indicator 4: Average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage.

Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage one: **1 day**

Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage two: **5 days**

Indicator 5: Percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days.

The number of complaints closed at stage one within 5 working days as % of total number of stage one complaints: **100%**

The number of complaints closed at stage two within 20 working days as % of total number of stage one complaints: **100%**

Indicator 6: Number of cases where an extension was authorised.

The number of complaints closed at stage one where extension was authorised, as % all complaints at stage one: **0**

The number of complaints closed at stage two where extension was authorised, as % all complaints at stage two: **0**

Indicator 7: Customer satisfaction

The statutory functions undertaken by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer are covered by a number of different appeal mechanisms, such as Non Domestic Valuation and Council Tax Appeals and some aspects of Electoral Registration. Representations under these are quite rightly not recorded as complaints. The resolution of these appeals can be confrontational or adversarial but, despite this, our staff have over the years scored consistently highly for their professionalism and knowledge in our Customer Satisfaction Survey. The relatively low number of customer complaints does not lend itself to an analysis solely of these.

Indicator 8: Learning from Complaints

Reports of the number and type of complaints received are submitted to the management team at quarterly meetings with any trends being identified. A number of changes were implemented in year, including new policies and procedures and staff training as a direct action to address points raised in complaints.