

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

Annual Complaint Handling Performance Report 2025/26

Ag freastal ar an Dún
agus Ard Mhacha Theas
Serving Down
and South Armagh



Comhairle Ceantair
an Iúir, Mhúrn agus an Dúin
Newry, Mourne and Down
District Council

Introduction

The Council published its first annual complaints report covering the 2024 calendar year, reflecting the establishment of the new Model Complaint Handling Procedure on 01 January 2024 and its accompanying formal complaint reporting arrangements. That report provided a baseline overview of complaint handling activity.

However, the Council's wider corporate performance, governance, and statutory reporting is aligned to the financial year. To ensure consistency with these arrangements, the current report is presented as the Year 2 Annual Complaints Report and uses the 2024/25 financial year as the Year 1 comparator period.

Background

The Council's arrangements for handling complaints are based on the Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) issued by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). The MCHP provides a standardised, two-stage framework for handling complaints across public bodies in Northern Ireland and promotes fairness, consistency, transparency, and learning from complaints.

The Council adopted the MCHP to ensure that complaints are managed in a timely and proportionate manner, that complainants are treated fairly, and that outcomes and learning are recorded and used to support service improvement.

This annual complaints report is produced in line with the expectations of the MCHP and provides an overview of complaint volumes, themes, performance, and learning. Publishing this information supports openness and accountability and allows the Council, elected Members, and the public to understand how complaints are handled and how feedback is used to improve services.

Complaint Management

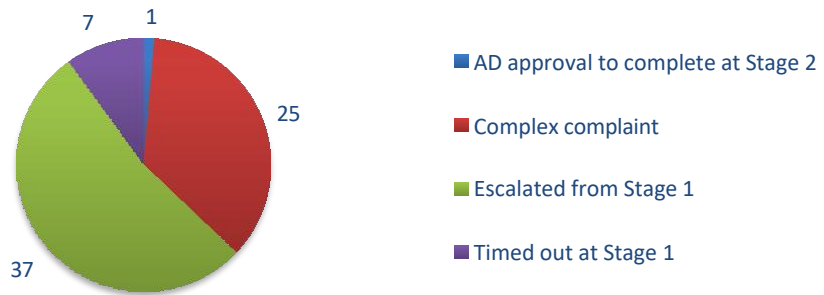
This report covers complaints received by the Council between 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

During this time, the Council received 341 complaints, representing an increase of 12% compared with the same period in 2024/25.

56% of complaints received were submitted via the online form and 39% by email, which demonstrates a strong preference for digital channels in line with Council's Digital First strategy.

The total number of complaints received includes complaints received at Stage 1 and those escalated to Stage 2.

- 315 Stage 1 complaints were closed in the period 01 April 2025 – 31 March 2026
- 70 Stage 2 complaints were processed during this period as follows:



When adjusted for population size, the Council recorded 1.87 complaints per 1,000 residents in Year 2, compared with 1.67 in Year 1. This small increase remains within typical local authority benchmarks and does not indicate a disproportionate level of dissatisfaction with Council services.

The increase also reflects improved complaint recording, accessibility, and consistent application of the Complaints Handling Procedure. Ongoing improvements to tracking, oversight, and learning continue to support transparency, accountability, and service improvement.

Complaints by Council Department

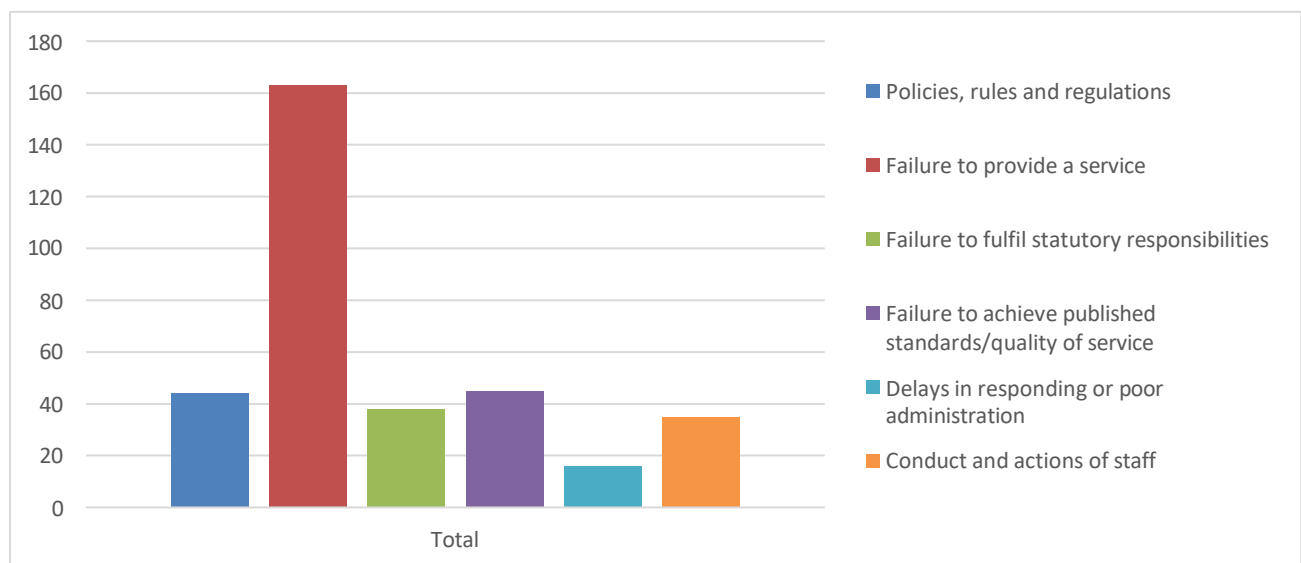
Council Department	Areas of Complaint	Number of Complaints
Healthy Living	Leisure Centres, Sport and Outdoor Recreation	117
Environment	Refuse, Recycling, Street Cleansing, Environmental Health and Animal Welfare	114
Regeneration	Planning and Planning Enforcement	34
Sustainability	Public Conveniences, Grounds Maintenance	31
Economy, Growth and Tourism	Forest Parks, Tourist Amenities, Grants & Funding and Events	18
Legal and People	Recruitment, Corporate Policy	13
Community Development	Diversity and Inclusion, Community Centres	13
Democratic Services	Council and Committee Meetings	1

Healthy Living and Environment services accounted for the majority of complaints, together representing over two-thirds of the total, reflecting the high level of day-to-day interaction with these frontline services.

Regeneration-related complaints made up around 10% of the total, largely in relation to planning matters.

Sustainability services accounted for a relatively small proportion of complaints, at around 9%.

Complaints by Category



The most common reason for complaints was failure to provide a service, accounting for 48% of all complaints received. The second most frequent reason was failure to fulfil statutory responsibilities, while the third related to complaints about policies, rules, and regulations, each of which accounted for 13% of total complaints.

These complaints primarily relate to frontline services with high levels of public interaction, and continue to inform the Council's focus on maintaining service standards and responding effectively to issues raised by residents.

Complaint extensions

26% of Stage 1 complaints were extended beyond the 5 working days timeframe

74% Stage 2 complaints were extended beyond the 20 working days timeframe

Acknowledgements – Stage 2

76% of stage 2 complaints were acknowledged within the required 3 working days

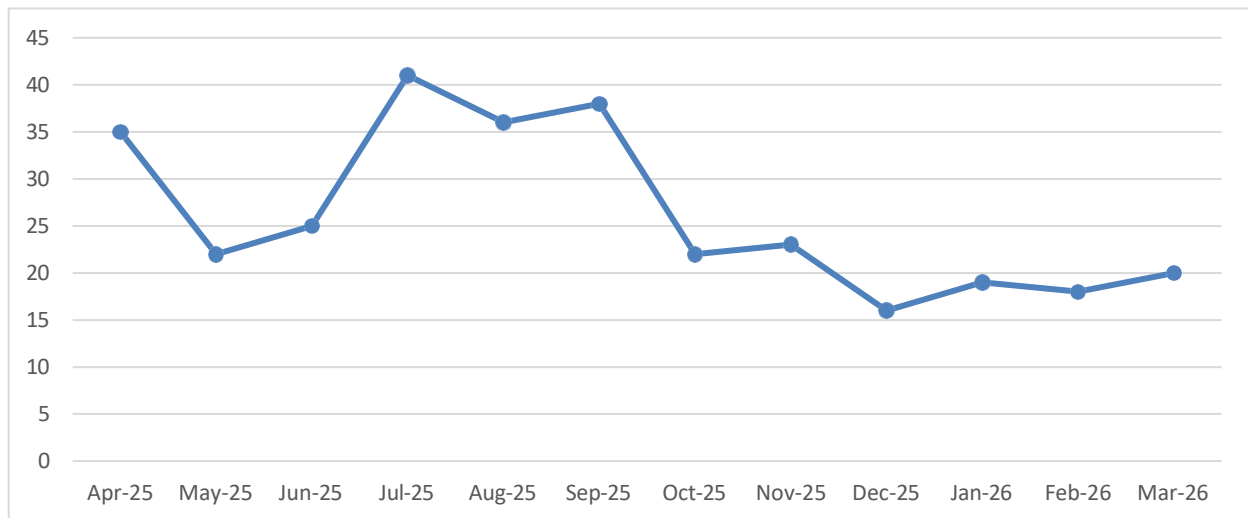
Average time to close complaints – Stage 1

The average time to close all Stage 1 complaints in 2025/26 was 6 working days. This represents a 25% reduction on Year 1.

The average time to close all Stage 1 complaints that were not extended was 3 working days

The average time to close extended stage 1 complaints was 10 days

Average number of days taken to close a Stage 1 complaint by month



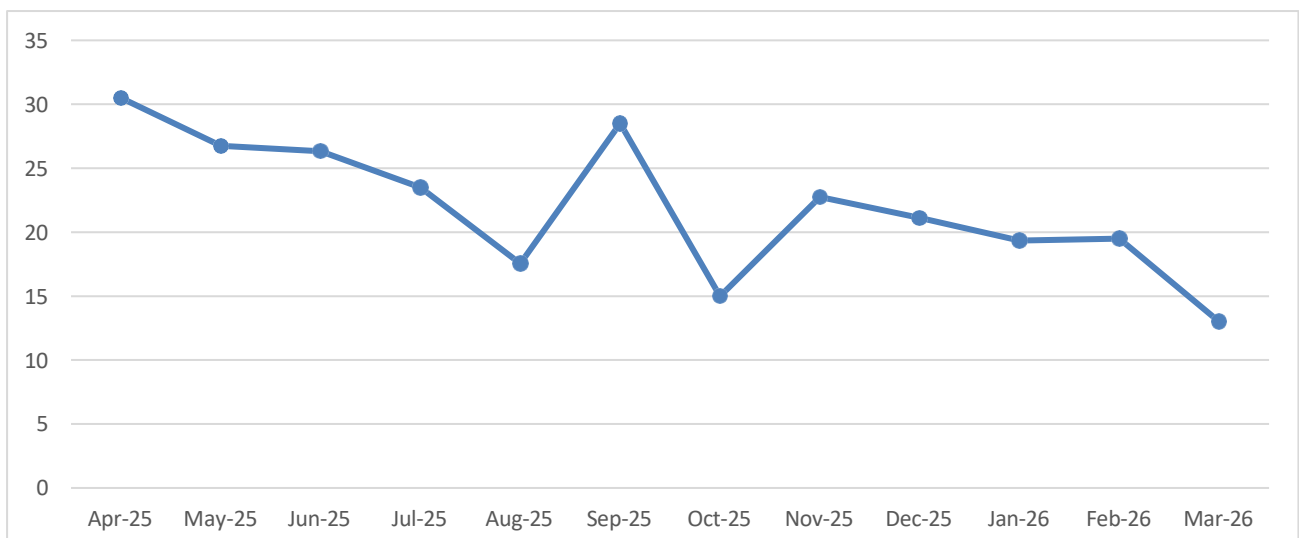
The graph shows some monthly variation in the average time taken to close Stage One complaints during the year, with higher averages recorded in the early part of the reporting period, particularly in April and July 2025. From the end of Quarter 2 onwards performance improves with a sustained reduction in average completion times through autumn and winter and consistently lower figures from October 2025 to March 2026. This overall downward trend reflects strengthening complaint handling processes, improved oversight, and more consistent application of timescales over the course of the year.

Average time to close complaints – Stage 2

The average time to close all stage 2 complaints was 23 working days. This represents an 8% reduction on Year 1.

The average time to close all Stage 2 complaints that were not extended was 19 working days
The average time to close extended stage 2 complaints was 40 working days

Average number of days taken to close a Stage 2 complaint by month



While some monthly variation is evident, the overall trend demonstrates sustained improvement across the year, with marked reductions in average figures from Quarter 3 onwards. This indicates strengthened processes and improved oversight as the year progressed.

Resolution of complaints

- 74% of stage 1 complaints were closed within five working days.
- 12% of all stage 1 complaints were resolved at point of contact
- 40% of all stage 1 complaints were upheld and 34% were partially upheld
- 19% of all stage 1 complaints were not upheld and 7% were resolved
- 66% of stage 2 complaints were closed within 20 working days
- 26% of stage 2 complaints were upheld, 22% partially upheld
- 46% of stage 2 complaints were not upheld and 4% were resolved.

Lessons Learnt

Complaints received during the year highlighted recurring themes across key service areas with high levels of public interaction, including waste collection, planning matters and leisure facilities. This feedback provided valuable insight into where service standards are most visible to residents.

Services responded by reviewing operational processes, reinforcing service schedules, improving monitoring arrangements and providing additional guidance or clarification where required. In several cases, complaints led directly to service adjustments or improvements helping to prevent recurrence.

Overall, the themes identified demonstrate the importance of listening to resident feedback and using complaints constructively to strengthen service delivery. The Council continues to view complaints as an important source of learning and assurance, supporting continuous improvement, responsiveness, and a positive resident experience.

For further information on our Complaints Handling Procedures please visit:

www.newrymouredown.org/complaints-to-the-council

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