

Statistics Tables – Explanatory Notes and Commentary

Attached are summary details of the enquiries and complaints about your Council that the SPSO has received and determined.

The first document attached shows (in Table 1) details of total contacts (by complaint subject) received for your Council for 2006-07 and 2007-08, along with the total of local authority complaints for 2007-08. Table 2 shows the outcomes of complaints about your Council determined by the SPSO in 2007-08.

Please note that, as the notes accompanying the tables explain, we changed our incoming logging procedures in April 2007, which has implications for comparing 2007-08 complaints data with previous years. The total numbers of contacts (enquiries plus complaints) received for each year are not affected and are therefore directly comparable. However, the figures shown as 'complaints only' in Table 1 are recorded on a different basis in each year and are, therefore, not directly comparable. Similarly, the change to our logging procedure has affected comparison of cases determined between 2006-07 and 2007-08 in Table 2.

The second document attached is a visual representation of the information from the right side of Table 1. You will see that in 2007-08 your Council was above the national average in terms of complaints about roads, and below the average for complaints about planning.

Prematurity rates

A graph is also enclosed showing for each Council the percentage of complaints that we identified as premature, and the national average for all Councils. Your Council is number 3 on that graph. We consider a complaint to be premature when it reaches us before the complainant has been through the full complaints process of the organisation concerned. Please note that the graph does not reflect the number of premature complaints that we received about your Council, but shows how the Council, proportionally, compares against the average for all Scottish local authorities. The actual number of premature complaints for your Council was 18, 69% of the total determined, and proportionally an increase on the previous year.

Please note that no adjustments have been made in the graph to estimate the impact of housing stock transfer. It is evident, however, that there is a tendency for authorities that retain housing stock to fall higher within the prematurity graph than those that have undertaken stock transfer – this is to be expected given that housing complaints are usually the largest category of complaint and that there is a disproportionately high incidence of prematurity with housing complaints.

The SPSO considers it important that organisations have the chance to resolve complaints through their own procedures and we are actively working with service providers with the aim of reducing the number of complaints that reach us prematurely. You will be aware that our Valuing Complaints website (<http://www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk/>) contains information designed to assist with such issues, and that our Outreach Team (ask@spsso.org.uk) are pleased to answer enquiries about how we can support your Council.

Investigated Complaints and Recommendations

We investigated 2 complaints about your Council in 2007-08, of which we upheld one and did not uphold the other. We have attached a summary sheet showing these complaints, and summarising any recommendations made. As you are no doubt aware, where she thinks it appropriate, the Ombudsman may make recommendations even where a complaint is not upheld, if she believes that there are lessons that may be learned. You will also be aware that SPSO Complaints Investigators will be following up to find out what changes have been made as a result of recommendations.

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We hope that you find this summary information useful. If you have any enquiries about the statistics provided, please contact Annie White, SPSO Casework Knowledge Manager, on 0131 240 8843 or by emailing awhite@spsso.org.uk. Fuller statistical reports are available on the SPSO website at: <http://www.spsso.org.uk/statistics/index.php>.

Inverclyde Council

Table 1

Received by Subject	2006/7		2007/8		complaints as % of total	All Local Authority Complaints	complaints as % of total
	Total Contacts	Complaints Only	Total Contacts	Complaints Only			
Building Control	0	0	0	0	0%	20	2%
Consumer protection	0	0	0	0	0%	3	0%
Economic development	0	0	0	0	0%	4	0%
Education	1	1	1	0	0%	67	5%
Env Health & Cleansing	0	0	2	2	9%	69	5%
Finance	2	1	5	3	13%	123	9%
Fire & police boards	0	0	0	0	0%	1	0%
Housing	6	0	9	7	30%	394	30%
Land & Property	1	0	1	0	0%	31	2%
Legal & admin	1	1	2	2	9%	66	5%
National Park Authorities	0	0	0	0	0%	2	0%
Other	2	1	1	0	0%	6	0%
Personnel	1	1	1	1	4%	29	2%
Planning	3	1	3	3	13%	243	18%
Recreation & Leisure	1	1	0	0	0%	21	2%
Roads	1	0	3	3	13%	71	5%
Social Work	1	1	3	2	9%	148	11%
Valuation Joint Boards	0	0	0	0	0%	11	1%
Out of jurisdiction	0	0	0	0	0%	0	0%
Subject unknown	0	0	0	0	0%	20	2%
Total	20	8	31	23		1,329	

Note about comparing 2007-08 complaint numbers to the previous year:

Please note that we made a change to our logging procedures in April 2007 which has implications for comparing 2007-08 complaints data with previous years. Of the total number of local authority complaints received in 2007-08, we estimate that approximately 33% could previously have been classed as enquiries. This does not affect the number of total contacts (enquiries + complaints) received.

For more information please see the full explanation at <http://www.sps.org.uk/statistics>.

Table 2

Complaints Determined by Outcome		2006/7	2007/8
Assessment	Premature	9	18
	Out of jurisdiction	2	2
	Discontinued or suspended before investigation	0	1
	Withdrawn / Failed to provide information before investigation	1	0
Examination	Determined after detailed consideration	1	3
	Report Issued - Not Upheld	6	1
Investigation	Report Issued - Partially Upheld	1	1
	Report Issued - Fully Upheld	0	0
	Discontinued during investigation	0	0
	Withdrawn / Failed to provide information during investigation	0	0
Total		20	26

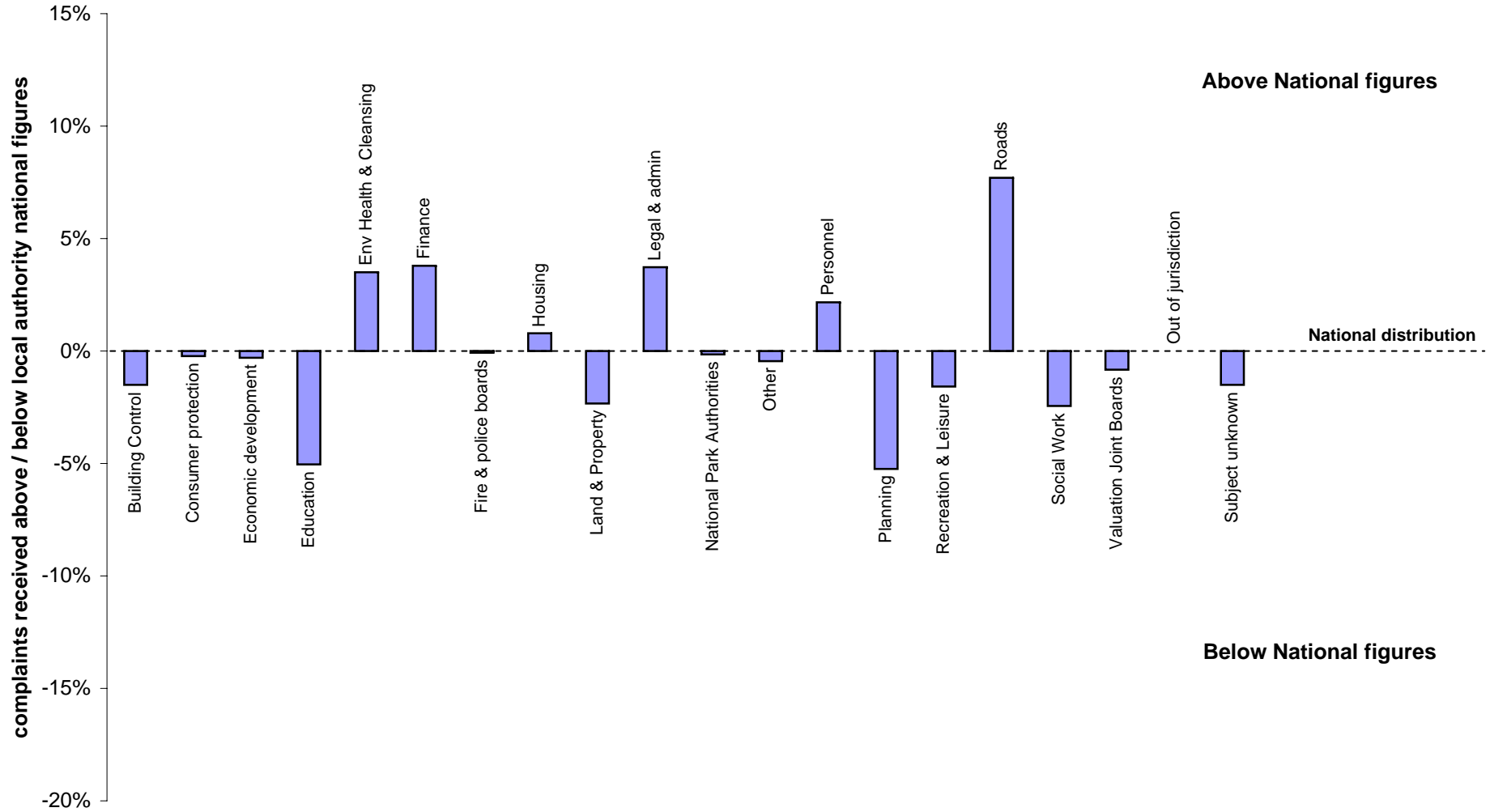
Note about comparing 2007-08 complaint numbers to the previous year:

Please note that we made a change to our logging procedures in April 2007 which has implications for comparing 2007-08 complaints data with previous years.

Of the total number of local authority complaints determined at the assessment stage in 2007-08, we estimate that approximately 39% could previously have been classed as enquiries. There has been no change to cases determined at examination or investigation stages.

For more information please see the full explanation at <http://www.sps.org.uk/statistics>.

Complaints received by subject in 2007/8: Inverclyde Council proportions compared to the distribution of all local authority complaints received



Inverclyde Council

	Case Ref	Summary	Finding	Recs	Recommendation(s)
21/11/07	200500969	(a) alleged failure by the Council to act in a timely and efficient manner (upheld); (b) alleged failure by the Council to adhere to agreements reached during the complaints handling process (no finding); and (c) the Council's complaints handling process was of a poor standard (partially upheld).	Upheld	YES	<p>(i) ensure that Estates staff adhere to the criteria set out within use classes as they relate to the Council's asset base when placing different types of business in suitable locations, while maintaining flexibility where appropriate;</p> <p>(ii) draft guidance for Estates staff on regular and documented communication with potential tenants, as well as how to make such communication clear and unambiguous. They should consider including an indication of the approximate timescales for dealing with enquiries, and explicit statements that costs incurred by potential tenants for conducting assessment of suitability of premises are to be borne by the potential tenant, and that pursuing an offer of tenancy from a potential tenant is exploratory and not a commitment on the part of the Council to let a specific property. In addition, the Council should consider whether or not it is appropriate to leave premises keys with potential tenants for an unspecified and indefinite period of time;</p> <p>(iii) ensure that in future a jointly agreed record of meetings between complainants and Council staff is made, in particular recording any action points and deadlines, agreements reached, or unresolved matters; and</p> <p>(iv) complaints process must be clear on the role of Ward Councillors, in particular that they have no formal involvement in complaints handling. The Council should also remind staff of the importance of adhering to complaints handling timescales and of drawing the complaint to a formal conclusion.</p> <p>The Council have agreed to the recommendations and put forward proposals on how to address them.</p>
19/03/08	200600702	the CRC's consideration of this matter was inadequate and did not take into account all relevant evidence (not upheld).	Not upheld	YES	<p>(i) ensure that guidance to CRC members and relevant staff clearly indicates the importance of careful drafting in the report, to ensure that the decision is fully recorded;</p> <p>(ii) ensure that, in future, any extension to the time limits, as set out in the Directions, is agreed by the parties; and</p> <p>(iii) apologise to Ms C for the failings identified in this report.</p> <p>The Council have accepted the recommendations and will act on them accordingly.</p>