

**REPORT TO:** Policy and Performance Review Committee

**MEETING DATE:** 25 September 2012

**BY:** Executive Director (Support Services)

**SUBJECT:** Customer Feedback

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## **1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To give a report on the use of the Council's Feedback Procedure for the period 1 January 2012 to 31 March 2012 (Q4), a yearly summary for the year 2011-12, and Q1 of the 2012-13 year (1 April 2012 to 30 June 2012).

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 To note the report.

## **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 During this period, East Lothian Council had in place a 3 stage internal feedback procedure:

**Stage 1** - Complaint dealt with at point of service

**Stage 2** - Formal complaint made and investigated by appropriate officer

**Stage 3** - Review by the Chief Executive (or Complaints Review Committee for social work)

If complainants remained dissatisfied after completing this process then they had a legal right of appeal to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

- 3.2 Customer Feedback is recorded on the Council's Customer Relationship Management system (CRM), which provides data on the types of complaints customers make about Council services, as well as complaint handling performance.

- 3.3 The Council records and reports on Stage 1 complaints received through the Contact Centre, Customer Feedback Team or Feedback Coordinators appointed for individual service areas.
- 3.4 The total number of complaints received between 1 January 2012 and 31 March 2012 was **237**, a slight increase from the previous quarter (225). Numbers remained consistent moving into 2012-13, with a total of **236** complaints received for the period 1 April 2012 – 30 June 2012 (Q1).
- 3.5 The number of Stage 1 complaints dropped to 59 (from 90) in the last quarter of last year and again to 49 for the period April to June 2012. This reduction in the number of complaints being resolved at service level is disappointing. It is best practice for complaints to be resolved quickly at source wherever possible, avoiding the need to go through the investigation process. This has been identified as an area to be targeted for improvement.
- 3.6 In contrast, the number of stage 2 complaints requiring investigation and formal response increased over this 6 month period, with **159** recorded in Q4 (a 25% increase from Q3) and **171** recorded in the first quarter of this year (a further 7% increase). This reversed the previous trend of a decrease in the number of stage 2 complaints. This, combined with a reduction in Stage 1 complaints, is disappointing as the formal investigation stage can be time consuming, costly and takes longer to reach a potential resolution with the customer. More emphasis needs to be placed on resolving complaints at the front line.
- 3.7 The service areas with the highest number of complaints during these periods were as follows:

**Quarter 4 – 1 January to 31 March 2012**

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Stage 1 complaints</b>	<b>Stage 2 complaints</b>	<b>Total</b>
Property Maintenance	16 (35)	64 (54)	<b>80 (93)</b>
Social Work	8 (4)	15 (12) (12 Adult Wellbeing, 2 Children's Wellbeing, 1 Criminal Justice)	<b>23 (16)</b>
Community Housing	4 (3)	15 (17)	<b>19 (20)</b>
Environment	8 (20)	9 (6)	<b>17 (26)</b>
Finance	2 (4)	12 (10)	<b>14 (14)</b>

*\* Numbers in brackets denote figures for previous quarter*

### Quarter 1 – 1 April to 30 June 2012

Service Area	Stage 1 complaints	Stage 2 complaints	Total
Property Maintenance	24 (16)	75 (64)	<b>99 (80)</b>
Community Housing	1 (3)	19 (17)	<b>20 (20)</b>
Environment	9 (8)	10 (9)	<b>19 (17)</b>
Landscape and Countryside	1 (2)	17 (8)	<b>18 (10)</b>
Social Work	4 (8)	12 (15) (8 Adult Wellbeing, 4 Children's Wellbeing)	<b>16</b>
Transportation	2	14	<b>16</b>

*\* Numbers in brackets denote figures for previous quarter*

3.8 Pie charts, showing an overview of Stage 2 complaints received by service area per quarter, are attached at Appendices 1a and 1b.

3.9 The top 3 subjects of Stage 2 complaints per quarter were:

#### **Q4 (Jan – March 2012)**

- 1) Outstanding Repairs: 25 complaints
- 2) Recharges (Voids / Gas access): 16 complaints
- 3) Staff Attitude: 12 complaints

#### **Q1 (April – June 2012)**

- 1) Outstanding Repairs: 27 complaints
- 2) Staff attitude: 13 complaints
- 3) Recharges (Voids / Gas access): 7 complaints

3.10 Other notable issues complained about included:

- Refuse collection – bins not being emptied
- Planning process
- Council Tax administration
- Benefits administration
- Social Work financial assessment process / contributions towards care
- Lack of communication / response to messages from staff

- Paving / roads maintenance
- Street lighting
- Open space maintenance
- Waiting time for Occupational Therapy assessment
- Housing allocation policy
- Health and Housing process
- Complaints about neighbours / Antisocial Behaviour (lack of action)
- Dog fouling

3.11 The number of complaints about staff attitude was consistent over the two quarters. It should be noted there has been a significant decrease in complaints about staff from the start of last year. This could perhaps be attributed to the customer services training which has been undertaken in a number of service areas.

3.12 Property Maintenance consistently receives the highest number of complaints, which is not surprising considering the nature of the service and high level of interaction with tenants. Complaint numbers increased over the reporting period. This was in contrast to the trend seen last year when complaint numbers decreased over time. Customer satisfaction surveys carried out by Property Maintenance generally indicate high levels of satisfaction with the service.

3.13 Some services saw a rise in the number of complaints received over this period, for example Transportation and Landscape and Countryside. This was mainly in relation to roads and open space maintenance.

3.14 It should also be noted that this reporting period covered some winter months and so adverse weather conditions may have impacted on the level of complaints received by some service areas.

3.15 The number of Stage 2 complaints received for most other service areas remained consistent.

3.16 Timescales apply for acknowledging and responding to complaints at Stage 2. Performance against agreed targets was as follows:

Acknowledgement within 5 working days: Jan to March (Q4) - **99%**, April to June (Q1) – **94%** (Target is 95%)

Response within 20 working days (28 days for social work): Jan to March (Q4) – **81%**, April to June (Q1) – **82%** (Target is 85%)

3.17 Response improved from previous quarters, which is positive considering the rise in the number of Stage 2 complaints. It should be noted that updates were sent to complainants in an additional 13% (Q4) and 6%

(Q1) of cases, meaning that respectively for each quarter, 94% and 88% of complainants received a response or update on progress within timescale. This is in line with best practice. A breakdown of performance per service area is attached at Appendix 2. *(Please note - any variation in top line figures will be a result of complaints being withdrawn or being unable to be taken forward due to lack of consent)*

3.18 It is important to present a balanced view of services and so compliments received about services are also recorded. **57** compliments were recorded during Q4 and **80** during the first quarter of this year. The continued increase in compliments is encouraging to see.

3.19 Areas receiving the highest number of compliments included:

Adult Wellbeing

Customer Services

Landscape & Countryside

A comparison graph showing complaints, comments and compliments received this period compared to previous quarters is attached at Appendix 3.

3.20 The percentage of Stage 2 complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld was as follows:

<b>Q4 (Jan – March 12)</b>	<b>Q1 (April – June 12)</b>
Upheld – <b>31%</b>	Upheld – <b>32%</b>
Partially Upheld – <b>31%</b>	Partially Upheld – <b>34%</b>
Not Upheld – <b>38%</b>	Not Upheld – <b>30%</b>
	Not Selected – <b>4%</b>

3.21 It is interesting to note the % of complaints upheld and partially upheld. This demonstrates that client concerns are being taken seriously and managers are demonstrating a willingness to review their services in an objective way.

3.22 The graph at Appendix 4 shows the actions taken by service areas to resolve Stage 2 complaints. The most common actions were to provide an appropriate explanation / additional information, provide the requested service or offer an appropriate apology. An apology was always provided wherever failings were identified.

3.23 Examples of service improvements as a result of complaints included:

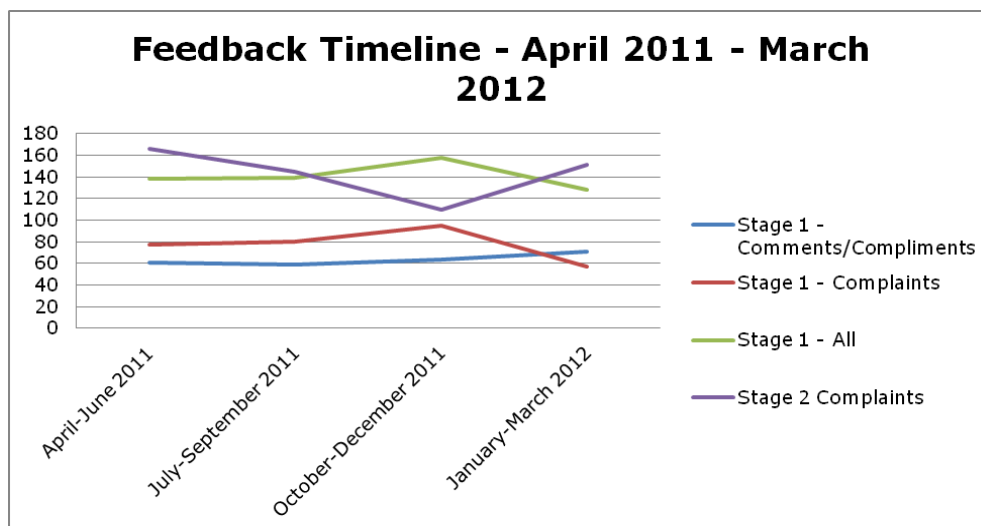
- Review of Access Procedure for essential maintenance works
- Changes to administrative procedures

- Formal reminders of Customer Care standards
- Review of training for children’s social workers in report writing
- Review of financial assessment process for contributions towards care

3.24 17 complaints progressed to the final stage of the complaints process during Jan to March 2012 (Q1) and 14 in April to June 2012 (Q1). This is a very small proportion given the overall number of complaints received, suggesting many customers accepted the outcome of their complaint at Stage 2.

3.25 2 complaints went to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman each quarter. None progressed to full investigation.

3.26 For the year 2011/2012, 254 compliments, 309 Stage 1 complaints and 572 Stage 2 complaints were received. A total of 1135 customers contacted us to give feedback, both good and bad, on the service they received.



3.27 The SPSO received 35 complaints about East Lothian Council. None resulted in a report to the Scottish Parliament, as they were determined or resolved at an early stage.

### CUSTOMER FEEDBACK DEVELOPMENTS

3.28 East Lothian Council implemented the new model complaints handling procedure for local government on 1 September 2012, reducing the stages in the feedback procedure from 3 to 2. This should have a minimal impact on current practice, as only a small proportion of complaints progressed to third stage. However, it will increase the emphasis on getting things right first time and resolving complaints as early as possible at service level.

3.29 The Customer Feedback Team is currently producing improved staff guidance and will implement appropriate quality assurance measures to

ensure complaints are dealt with consistently and in line with the new procedure.

- 3.30 There is a Scottish Government consultation currently ongoing about the future of the statutory social work complaints procedure, in particular whether Complaints Review Committees should be retained.

#### **4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 None

#### **5 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1 This report is not applicable to the well being of equalities groups and an Equalities Impact Assessment is not required.

#### **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

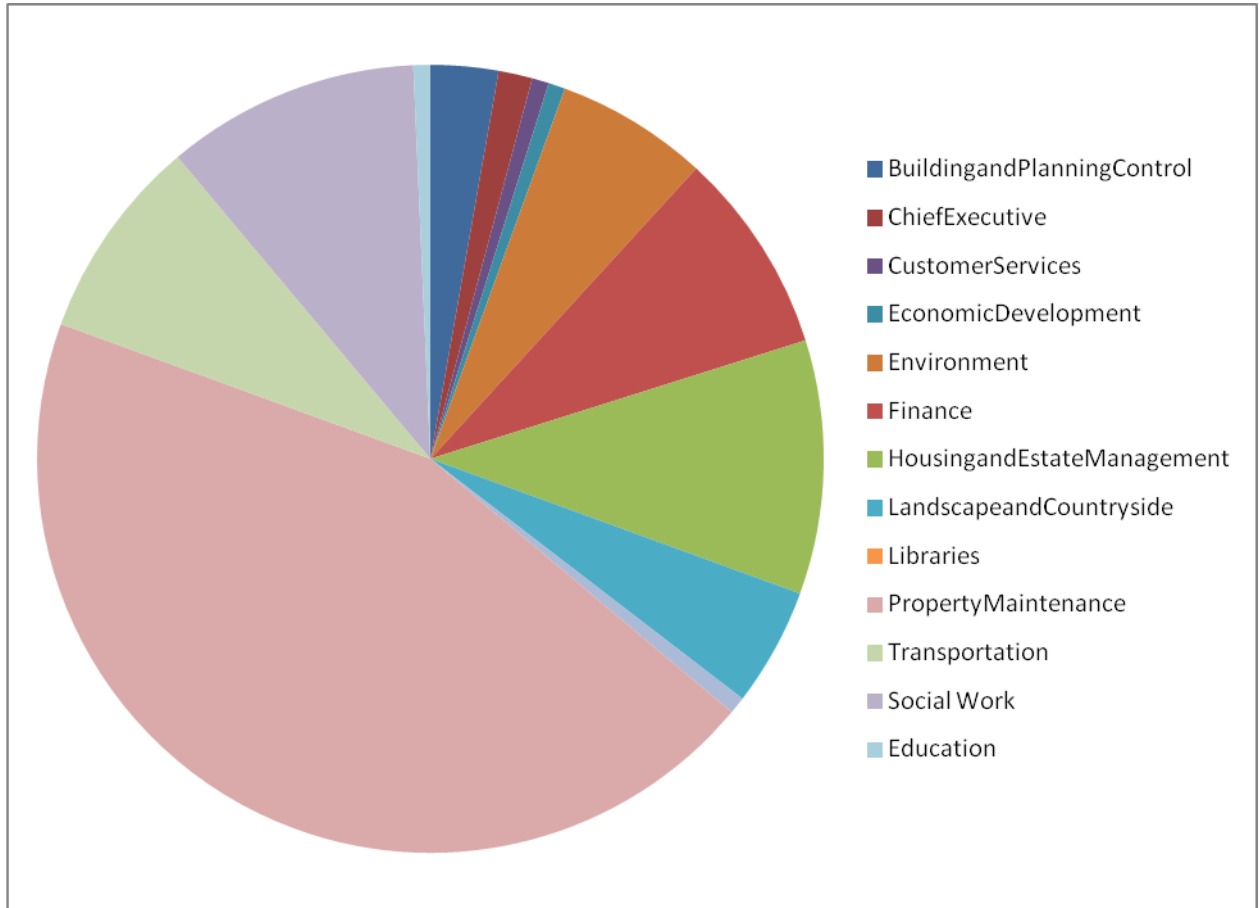
- 6.1 Financial - None  
6.2 Personnel - None  
6.3 Other - None

#### **7 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1 Appendix 1a – Pie chart showing overview of complaints (Q4)  
7.2 Appendix 1 b – Pie Chart showing overview of complaints (Q1)  
7.3 Appendix 2 – performance breakdown  
7.4 Appendix 3 – Comparison graph  
7.5 Appendix 4 – Complaint outcomes  
7.6 Report to Council 28 August 2012 – New Customer Feedback Procedure (Item 8 on agenda)

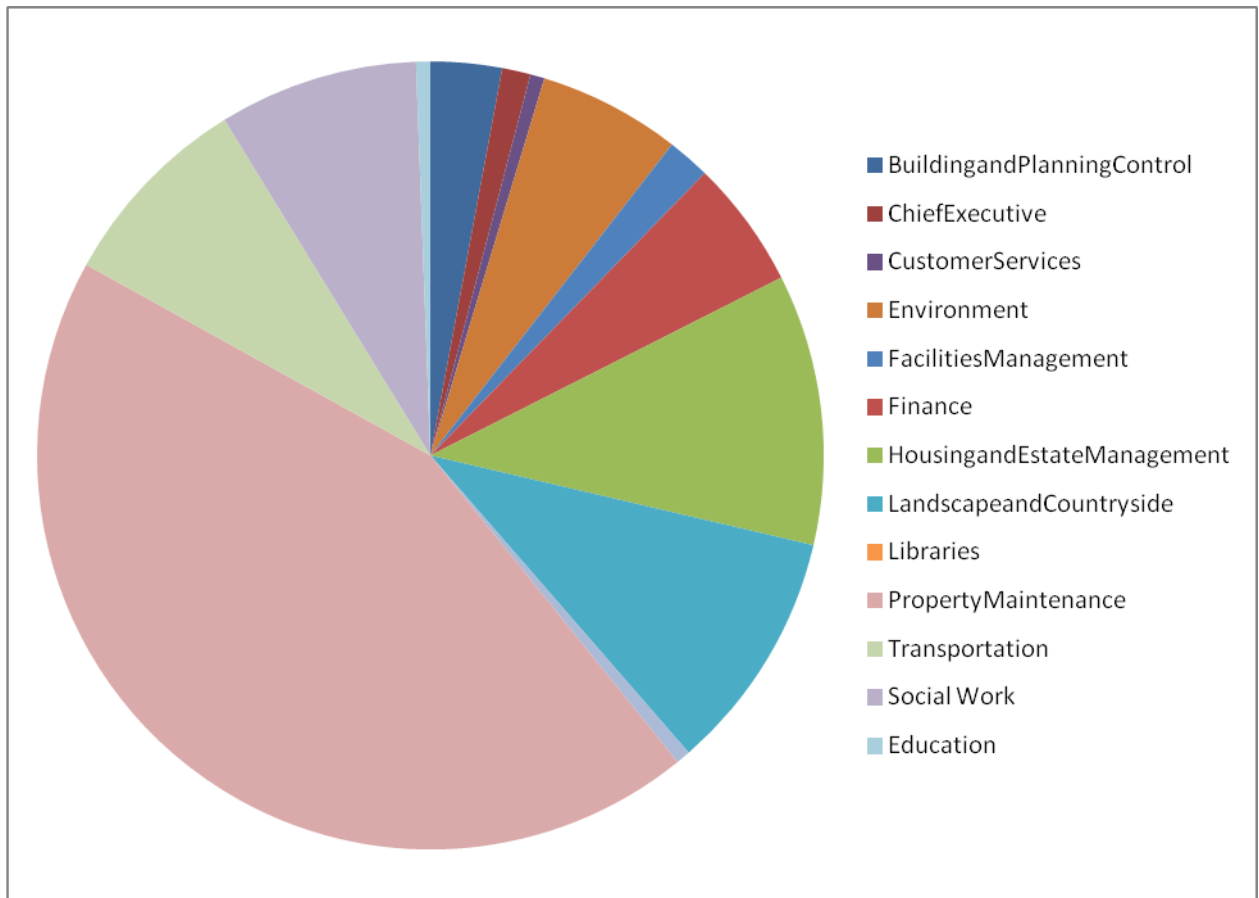
<b>AUTHOR'S NAME</b>	Sarah Bogunovic
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<b>DATE</b>	12 September 2012

**Appendix 1a – Stage 2 Complaints Overview (Q4) 1 January 2012 to 31 March 2012**





**Appendix 1b – Complaints Overview Q1 1 April 2012 to 30 June 2012**



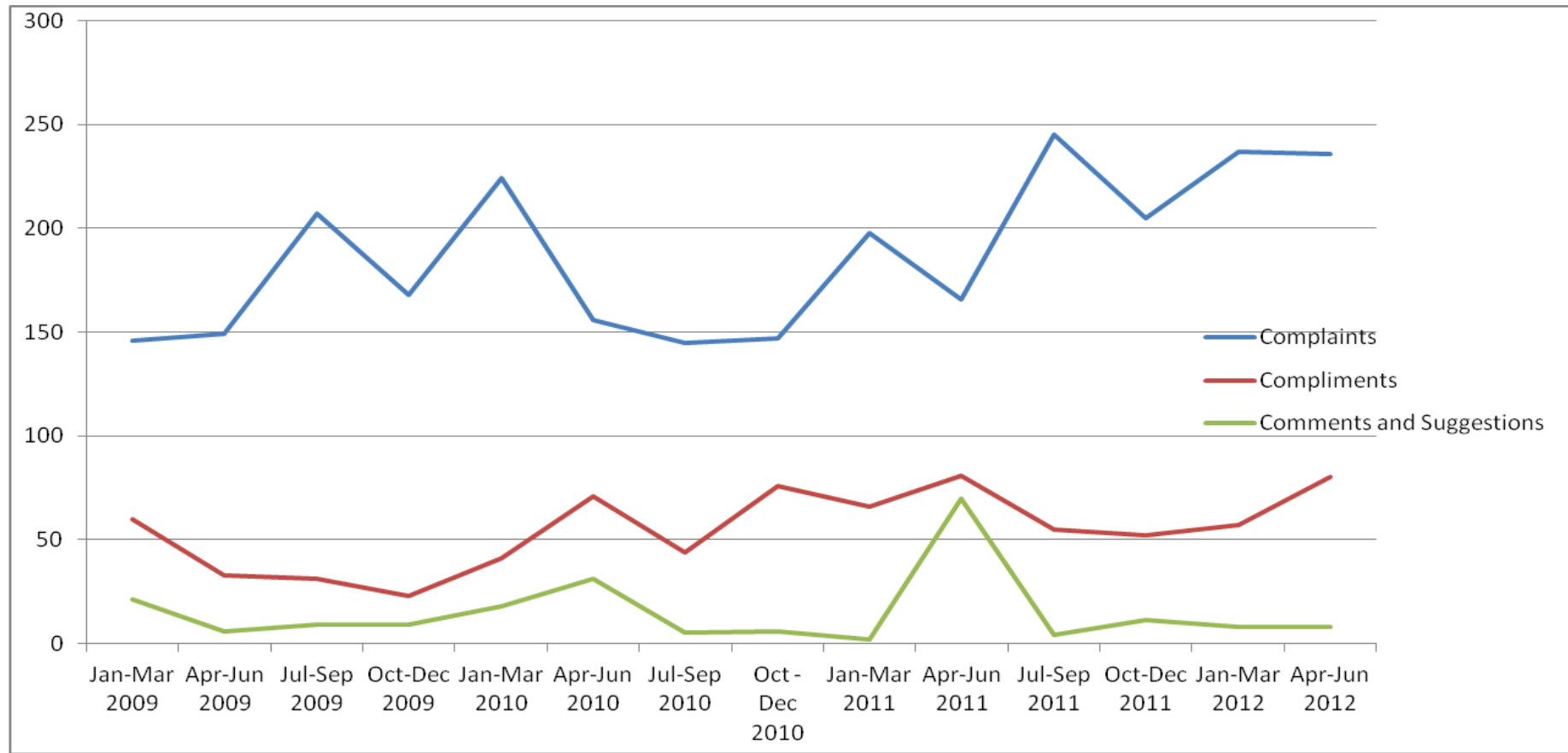
## **Appendix 2 – Breakdown of Stage 2 complaints by service**

Jan to March 2012	Number of Complaints	Acknowledged Within 5 Working Days	% Acknowledged Within 5 Working Days	Responded To Within 20 Working Days	% Responded To Within 20 Working Days	Update Sent	% Update Sent
Building and Planning Control	4	4	100%	3	75%	0	0%
Chief Executive	2	2	100%	2	100%	0	0%
Cultural Services	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Customer Services	1	1	100%	1	100%	0	0%
Economic Development	1	1	100%	1	100%	0	0%
Environment	1	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%
Facilities Management	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Finance	11	11	100%	9	82%	1	9%
Housing and Estate Management	14	14	100%	11	79%	2	14%
Human Resources	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Landscape and Countryside	4	4	100%	4	100%	0	0%
Libraries	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Other	1	1	100%	1	100%	0	0%

Jan to March 2012	Number of Complaints	Acknowledged Within 5 Working Days	% Acknowledged Within 5 Working Days	Responded To Within 20 Working Days	% Responded To Within 20 Working Days	Update Sent	% Update Sent
Property Maintenance	61	60	98%	50	82%	10	16%
Transportation	4	4	100%	4	100%	0	0%
SW - Adult Social Care	12	12	100%	11	92%	1	100%
SW - Children's Services	2	2	100%	1	50%	1	100%
SW - Criminal Justice	1	1	100%	1	100%	0	0%
Education	8	8	100%	4	50%	0	0%
Total	127	126	99%	103	81%	16	13%

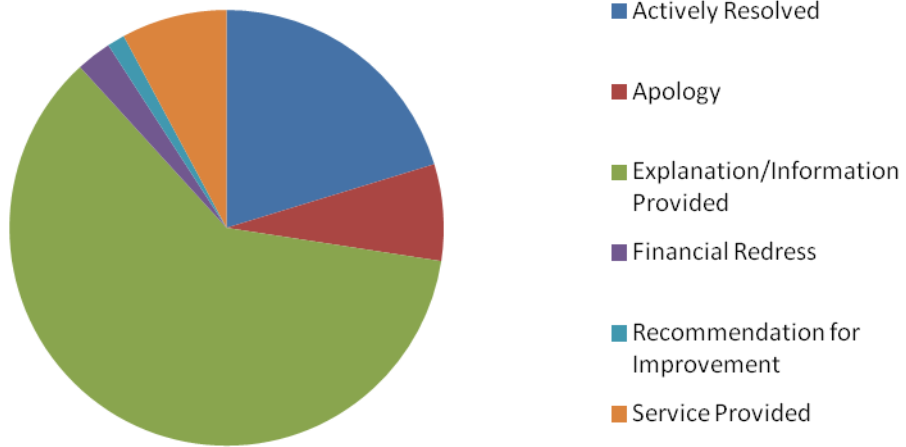
April to June 2012 (Q1)	Number of Complaints	Acknowledged Within 5 Working Days	% Acknowledged Within 5 Working Days	Responded To Within 20 Working Days	% Responded To Within 20 Working Days	Update Needed Sent On Time	% Update Needed Sent On Time
Building and Planning Control	5	4	80%	3	60%	0	0%
Chief Executive	2	2	100%	3	100%	0	N/A
Cultural Services	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	N/A
Customer Services	1	1	100%	1	100%	0	N/A
Economic Development	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	N/A
Environment	10	9	90%	7	70%	0	0%
Facilities Management	3	3	100%	3	100%	0	N/A
Finance	9	9	100%	7	78%	1	50%
Housing and Estate Management	19	16	84%	15	79%	0	0%
Human Resources	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Landscape and Countryside	17	16	94%	16	94%	1	100%
Libraries	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	N/A
Other	1	1	100%	1	100%	0	N/A
Property Maintenance	75	71	95%	64	85%	5	45%
Transportation	14	14	100%	14	100%	0	N/A
SW - Adult Social Care	8	8	100%	3	38%	3	60%
SW - Children's Services	6	6	100%	3	50%	1	33%
SW - Criminal Justice	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	N/A
Education	1	1	100%	1	100%	0	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6%</b>

**Appendix 3: Customer Feedback - Comparison Graph Data**



**Appendix 4 – Complaint Outcomes**

**Complaint Outcomes Jan - March 2012**



**Complaint Outcomes April - June 2012**

