

REPORT TO: Policy and Performance Review Committee

MEETING DATE: 24 September 2013

BY: Depute Chief Executive - Partnerships and Services for Communities

SUBJECT: Customer complaints and feedback

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To give a report on the use of the Council's complaints handling procedure for Q4: 1 January 2013 to 31 March 2013, and provide an overview of all customer feedback received for the year 2012/2013.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To note the report

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 East Lothian Council complies with the model complaints handling procedure for local authorities introduced by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO):

Stage 1 (Frontline Resolution) - Complaint dealt with at point of service within 5 working days

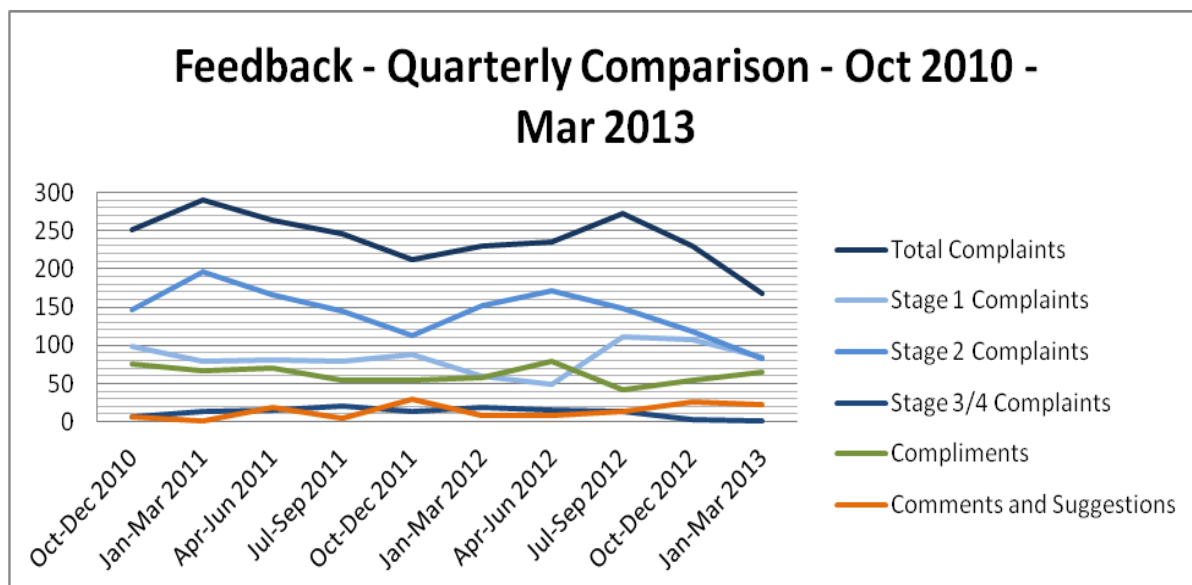
Stage 2 (Investigation) – Investigation of points raised, acknowledged within 3 working days and response provided within 20 working days

If complainants remained dissatisfied after completing this process then they have a legal right of appeal to the SPSO.

- 3.2 Complaints, comments and compliments are 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. This system also records comments and compliments from customers.

- 3.3 The Council records and reports on complaints received by the Contact Centre, Customer Feedback Team or Coordinators appointed for individual service areas. Service areas are encouraged to report complaints they receive through these channels, to ensure recording is as accurate as possible.
- 3.4 The total number of complaints received for Q4 was **166**. This was made up of 84 Stage 1 complaints and 82 Stage 2 complaints. This represented a 30% decrease on the total number of complaints received over the same period last year (237) and a 27% decrease on the number of complaints received the previous quarter (Q3); which was 226.
- 3.5 84 complaints (51%) were dealt with at Stage 1. It is encouraging to see that an increasing proportion of complaints are being dealt with at service level, building on the progress made in earlier quarters this year. This will partly be due to the increased emphasis in the new complaints handling procedure on resolving complaints at the front line, which is considered best practice, as well as improved recording.
- 3.6 89% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to within the 5 working day timescale.
- 3.7 In line with the overall decrease in complaint numbers, there was a 51% decrease in Stage 2 complaints compared to the same period in 2011/12, and a 30% decrease from last quarter.
- 3.8 Performance against agreed targets for acknowledging and responding to complaints for Q4 was as follows:
- Acknowledgement within 3 working days: 100%, against a target of 80%
 - Response within 20 working days (28 days for social work): 68%, against a target of 80%
 - Extension agreed / update provided within timescale in a further 19% of cases.
- 3.9 Although the acknowledgement rates improved to 100% from 97%, response rates dropped from 76% last quarter. This has in part been due to resource difficulties in service areas, which has led to a delay in information being gathered. As an additional internal review stage was removed when the model complaints handling procedure was adopted, the Stage 2 investigation process is now more robust as Stage 2 responses have to stand up to external scrutiny. Complainants are referred to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) at this point.
- 3.10 It is important to present a balanced view of services and so compliments received about services are also recorded. **65** were recorded for Q4, a 17% increase from last quarter.

3.11 A quarterly comparison graph of top line figures for all customer feedback shows the following:



3.12 Considering the financial challenges being faced by local authorities in the delivery of services, the drop in the number of complaints being received and the increase in the number of compliments is encouraging. East Lothian Council places emphasis in good customer service and training is provided, as well as the opportunity to study for the Customer Service Professional qualification (CSPQ). Lessons are being learnt from complaints and there is also an increasing emphasis on managing customer expectations at an early point.

3.13 The service areas with the highest number of complaints for Q4 were as follows:

Q4 – 1 January 2013 to 31 March 2013

Service Area	Stage 1 complaints	Stage 2 complaints	Total
Property Maintenance	28	34	62
Adult Wellbeing	9	20	29
Transportation	9	2	11
Community Housing	10	0	10
Waste Services	7	1	8

3.14 A breakdown of complaints, comments and compliments received per service area and Directorate per quarter is attached at Appendix 1 and performance by service area at Appendix 2.

3.15 The top subject of complaint was **outstanding repairs** to council properties.

3.16 Other notable issues complained about included:

- Administration of planning applications
- Charge for not arranging access for annual gas safety check
- Staff attitude
- Conduct / recommendations of social worker
- Condition of new tenancy
- Financial assessment process for care contributions
- Delays in delivering a service
- Outgoing tenant charged following void inspection
- Delay in Occupational Therapy assessment
- Bin not uplifted
- Management of disruptive behaviour in schools
- Lack of information
- Delayed discharge from hospital
- School catchment areas

3.17 The number of complaints recorded about staff attitude decreased from 21 in Q3 to 15 in Q4.

3.18 Property Maintenance consistently receives the highest number of complaints, which is not surprising considering the nature of the service and the high level of interaction with tenants. It is positive to note that complaint numbers for this service decreased by 35% this quarter.

3.19 Complaint outcomes for Q4 were as follows:

Upheld: **22%**

Partially Upheld: **37%**

Not Upheld: **41%**

3.20 A graph showing the actions taken in response to complaints is attached at Appendix 3. 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. Meeting directly with complainants is also being actively encouraged to try and resolve complaints.

- 3.21 One Adult Wellbeing complaint was referred to a Complaints Review Committee (CRC). This was about deprivation of capital. The complaint was not upheld.
- 3.22 For the year 2012/13, East Lothian Council received **872** complaints about its services, made up of 352 Stage 1 complaints and 520 Stage 2 complaints. This was a slight reduction from last year when 881 complaints were received.
- 3.23 In addition, 241 compliments and 70 comments were received, meaning a total of 1183 customers contacted us to give feedback, both good and bad, on the services they received.
- 3.24 Acknowledgement and Response performance for 2012/13 by quarter:

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Average
Acknowledgement	94%	94%	97%	100%	96%
Response	81%	81%	76%	68%	76.5%
Update/Extension	6%	9%	3%	19%	9%

- 3.25 Complaint outcomes for 2012/13 by quarter:

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Average
Upheld	32%	39%	17%	22%	27.5%
Partially Upheld	34%	26%	33%	37%	32.5%
Not Upheld	30%	35%	50%	41%	39%
Outcome not selected	4%				

- 3.26 For the year 2012/13, the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman received 40 complaints about East Lothian Council, compared to 32 for the year 2011/12. A breakdown is attached at Appendix 4.
- 3.27 Given that the introduction of the model complaints handling procedure removed a stage of internal review, meaning a higher number of cases are being referred to the SPSO, a slight increase is not surprising. East Lothian Council is below the sector average for the % of premature complaints to the SPSO and the % of complaints upheld/partially upheld.
- 3.28 The Ombudsman partially upheld two complaints at early resolution/initial investigation stage. These related to Building Standards. No concerns were raised over professional practice but the complaints were partially upheld due to administrative delays, which had already been

acknowledged and apologised for. No complaints progressed to the final investigation stage.

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK DEVELOPMENTS

- 3.29 A national review of the current statutory social work complaints procedure is currently underway and a short-life working group has been set up by the Scottish Government and will shortly be making recommendations to Ministers.
- 3.30 Information on the new complaints handling procedure is available on the ELC website and in council offices. Updated staff guidance is available on ELNET.
- 3.31 Briefings to raise awareness of the new complaints handling procedure and the standards expected in dealing with complaints are being delivered.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Financial - None
- 5.2 Personnel - None
- 5.3 Other - None

6 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 Appendix 1 - breakdown of complaints, comments and compliments received per service area and Directorate
- 7.2 Appendix 2 - breakdown of performance per service area in relation to acknowledgement and response times
- 7.3 Appendix 3 – Complaint outcomes
- 7.4 Appendix 4 – SPSO stats

AUTHOR'S NAME	Sarah Bogunovic
DESIGNATION	Customer Feedback Manager
CONTACT INFO	X 7497 email: sbogunovic@eastlothian.gov.uk
DATE	10 September 2013

Appendix 1: Customer Feedback (complaints, comments and compliments) breakdown by Service Area (Q4)

Directorate	Service Area	Comment	Stage 1 Complaint	Compliment	Stage 2	Stage 3 (SPSO or CRC)	Total
Services for Communities	Antisocial Behaviour	0	0	0	1	0	1
	Community Housing	1	10	1	0	0	12
	Facilities Management	0	0	6	0	0	6
	Homelessness	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Housing Strategy	0	0	1	1	0	2
	Landscape and Countryside	5	4	2	1	0	12
	Licensing	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Planning and Building Control	0	0	0	5	0	5
	Property Maintenance	1	28	9	34	1	73
	Property Services	0	1	0	3	0	4
	Trading Standards	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Transportation	4	9	6	2	0	21
	Waste Services	2	7	4	1	0	14
	Other - Services for Communities	0	0	2	1	0	3
Directorate Totals		13	59	31	49	1	153
Services for People	Adult Wellbeing	0	9	15	20	1	45
	Children's Wellbeing	0	1	0	3	0	4
	Criminal Justice	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Education and Schools	0	1	1	5	0	7
	Other - Services for People	0	0	0	1	0	1
	Directorate Totals		0	11	16	29	1
Support Services	Community Care Finance	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Council Tax	0	1	1	1	0	3
	Cultural Services	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Customer Services	0	3	13	0	0	16
	Democratic Services	0	0	0	0	0	0

Appendix 1: Customer Feedback (complaints, comments and compliments) breakdown by Service Area (Q4)

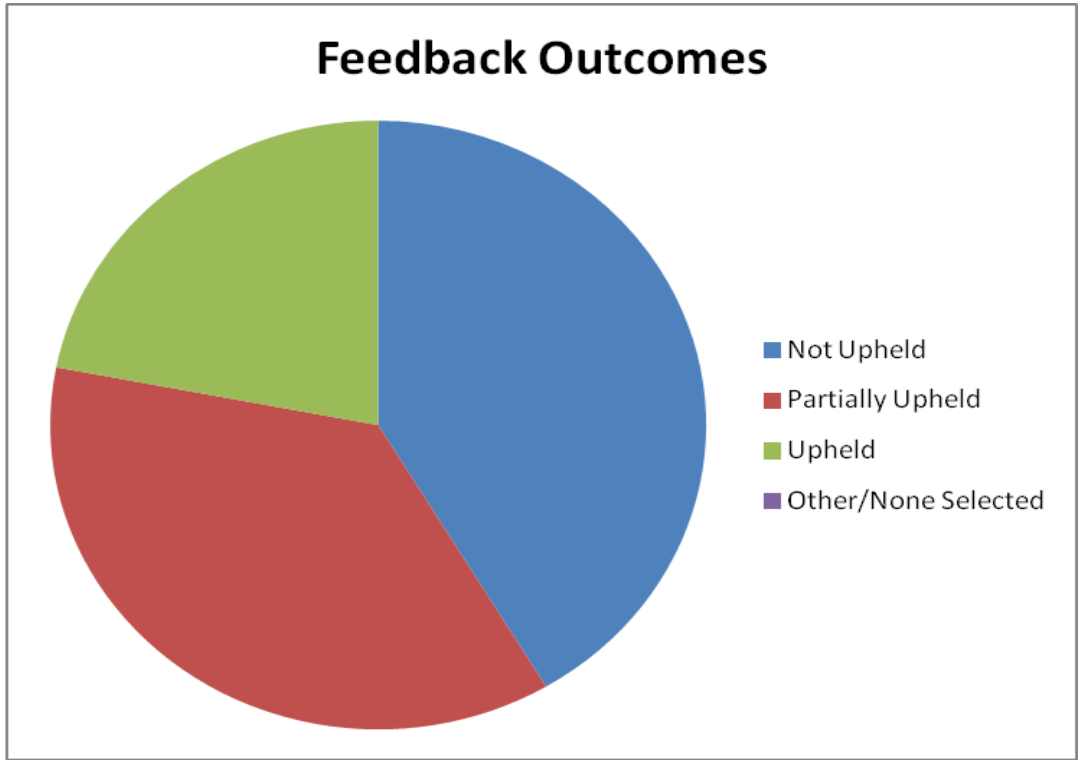
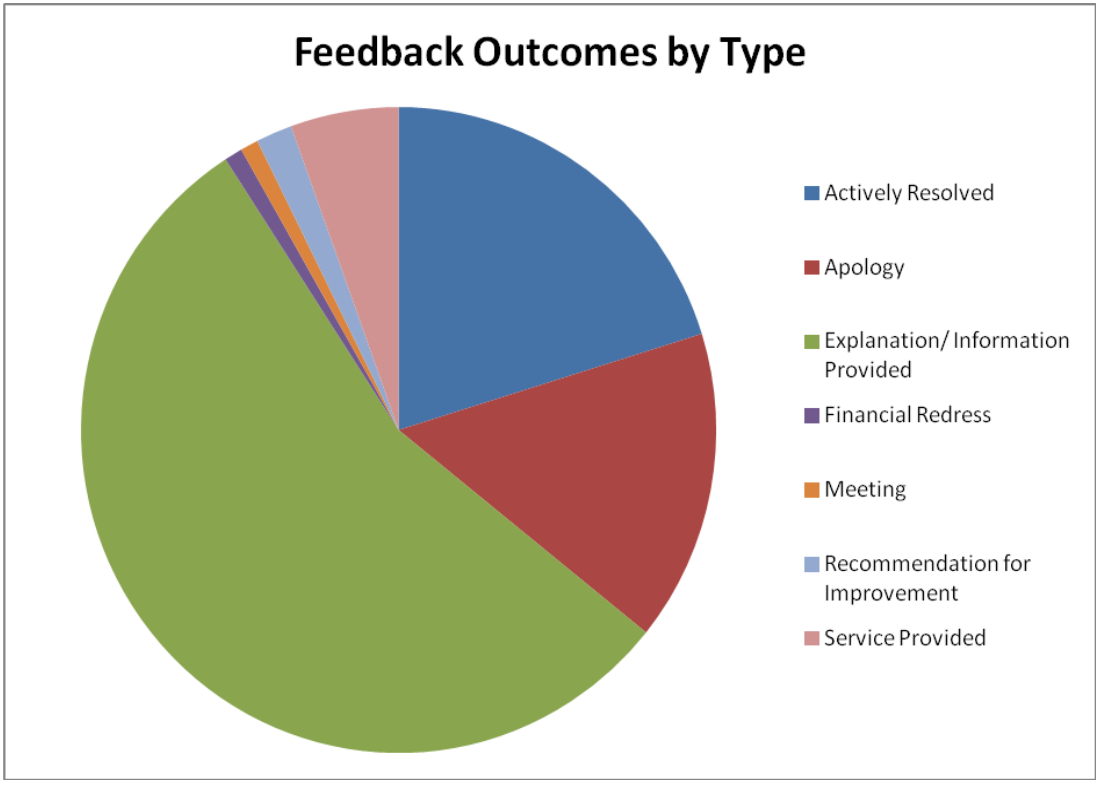
Directorate	Service Area	Comment	Stage 1 Complaint	Compliment	Stage 2	Stage 3	Total
Support Services	Economic Development	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Finance	0	2	2	1	0	5
	Human Resources	0	0	0	0	0	0
	IT	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Legal Services	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Libraries	7	3	1	0	0	11
	Print Unit	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Revenues and Benefits	0	0	1	0	0	1
	Other - Support Services	3	3	0	2	0	8
	Directorate Totals	10	14	18	4	0	46
Feedback Total		23	84	65	82	2	256

Stage 2 Complaints relating to Staff Attitude	15
--	-----------

Appendix 2 – Performance for Stage 2 complaints (acknowledgement and response)(Q4)

Service Area	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Acknowledged Within 5 Working Days	% Acknowledged Within 3 Working Days	Update Needed and Sent On Time	% Update Needed Sent On Time	Responded To Within 20 Working Days	% Responded To Within 20 Working Days
Antisocial Behaviour	1	1	100.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Housing Strategy	1	1	100.00%			1	100.00%
Landscape and Countryside	1	1	100.00%			1	100.00%
Planning and Building Control	5	5	100.00%	1	50.00%	3	60.00%
Property Maintenance	34	34	100.00%	1	16.67%	28	82.35%
Property Services	3	3	100.00%	0	0.00%	2	66.67%
Transportation	2	2	100.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Waste Services	1	1	100.00%			1	100.00%
Other - Services for Communities	1	1	100.00%			1	100.00%
Adult Wellbeing	20	20	100.00%	2	18.18%	9	45.00%
Children's Wellbeing	3	3	100.00%	0	0.00%	2	66.67%
Education and Schools	5	5	100.00%	0	0.00%	4	80.00%
Other - Services for People	1	1	100.00%	1	100.00%	0	0.00%
Council Tax	1	1	100.00%			1	100.00%
Finance	1	1	100.00%			1	100.00%
Other - Support Services	2	2	100.00%			2	100.00%
Total	82	82	100.00%	5	19.23%	56	68.29%

Appendix 3: Complaint outcomes (actions taken) (Q4)



Appendix 4 - Complaints to SPSO.

Complaints Received by Subject 2012-13

Subject Group	East Lothian Council	Rank	Complaints as % of total	Sector Total	Rank	Complaints as % of total
Housing	12	1	30%	361	1	24%
Social Work	7	2	18%	183	3	12%
Planning	3	3	8%	197	2	13%
Environmental Health & Cleansing	2	4=	5%	60	7	4%
Building Control	2	4=	5%	26	10	2%
Finance	1	6=	3%	85	4	6%
Education	1	6=	3%	76	5	5%
Legal & admin	1	6=	3%	48	8	3%
Roads & Transport	0	-	0%	73	6	5%
Land & Property	0	-	0%	28	9	2%
Recreation & Leisure	0	-	0%	20	11	1%
Other	0	-	0%	10	12	1%
Consumer protection	0	-	0%	9	13	1%
Personnel	0	-	0%	7	14	0%
Valuation Joint Boards	0	-	0%	6	15	0%
Fire & Police Boards	0	-	0%	2	16	0%
Economic development	0	-	0%	1	17	0%
Out Of Jurisdiction	0	-	0%	20	-	1%
Subject Unknown	11	-	28%	293	-	19%
Total	40		100%	1,505		100%

Complaints as % of Sector

2.7%

100%

Complaints Received by Subject 2011-12

Subject Group	East Lothian Council	Rank	Complaints as % of total	Sector Total	Rank	Complaints as % of total
Housing	14	1	44%	341	1	22%
Social Work	4	2	13%	182	3	12%
Planning	3	3	9%	210	2	14%
Education	2	4	6%	77	5	5%
Roads & Transport	1	5=	3%	96	4	6%
Finance	1	5=	3%	73	6	5%
Building Control	1	5=	3%	42	8	3%
Other	1	5=	3%	12	12	1%
Legal & admin	0	-	0%	44	7	3%
Environmental Health & Cleansing	0	-	0%	40	9	3%
Land & Property	0	-	0%	30	10	2%
Recreation & Leisure	0	-	0%	23	11	2%
Personnel	0	-	0%	11	13	1%
Consumer protection	0	-	0%	10	14	1%
Valuation Joint Boards	0	-	0%	9	15	1%
Fire & Police Boards	0	-	0%	1	16=	0%
National Park Authorities	0	-	0%	1	16=	0%
Subject Unknown or Out Of Jurisdiction	5	-	16%	325	-	21%
Total	32		100%	1,527		100%

Complaints as % of sector

2.1%

100%