

REPORT TO: Policy and Performance Review Committee

MEETING DATE: 25 March 2014

BY: Depute Chief Executive - Partnerships and Community Services

SUBJECT: Customer Complaints and Feedback

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To give a report on the use of the Council's complaints handling procedure for the following 6 month period; Q2: 1 July 2013 to 30 September 2013 and Q3: 1 October 2013 to 31 December 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. Those complaining about social work issues have the option of asking for their complaint to be referred to a Complaints Review Committee (CRC).

- 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.

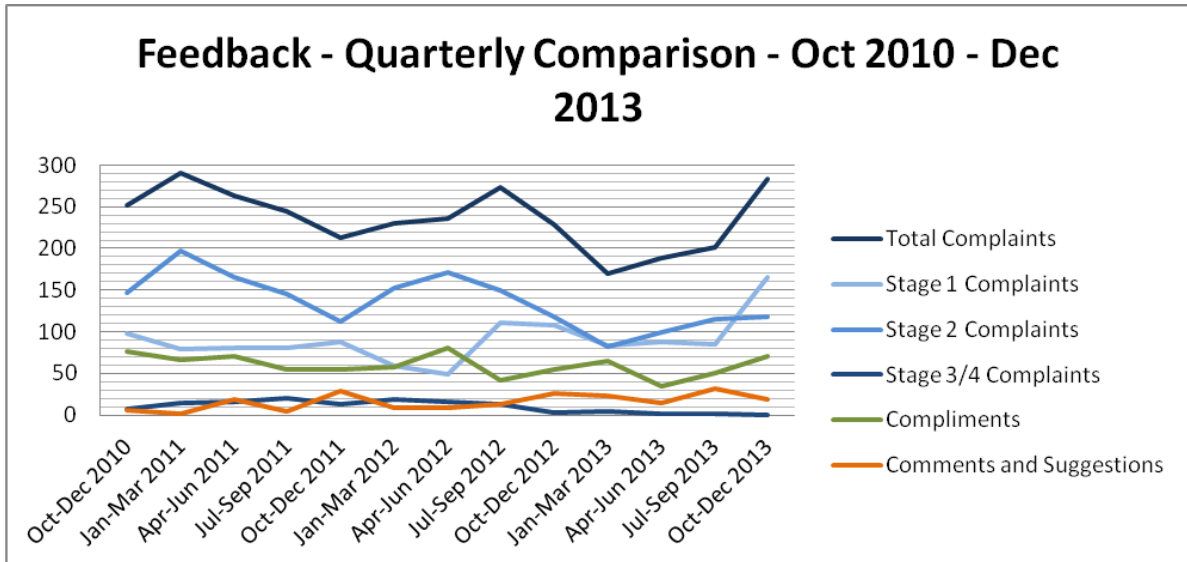
- 3.3 The Council records and reports on complaints received by the Contact Centre, Customer Feedback Team or Coordinators appointed for individual service areas. Service areas are encouraged to report complaints they receive through these channels, to ensure recording is as accurate as possible.
- 3.4 The total number of complaints, comments and compliments received for each quarter were as follows:

Type of customer feedback	Q2 (July – Sept '13)	Q3 (Oct – Dec '13)
Stage 1 complaints:	85	166
Stage 2 complaints:	115	118
Total no of complaints:	<u>200</u>	<u>284</u>
Comments:	31	18
Compliments:	50	71

- 3.5 Compared to the same period last year there was a 23% decrease in the total number of complaints for Q2 (260) and a 20% increase in the total number of complaints recorded during Q3 (226).
- 3.6 This pattern is the reverse of the same period last year, which saw a decrease in complaints received during Q3. No single particular cause has been identified but it is not unusual to see complaint figures rise during the winter months if, for example, there has been a prolonged period of bad weather which has affected services.
- 3.7 It is encouraging to see the significant rise in the proportion of complaints now being dealt with at Stage 1 of the complaints procedure, which means they are being dealt with directly at service level. This follows on from progress last year and is in line with best practice, as well as being better for both the complainant and the Council, as issues are being resolved quickly by the service concerned. This demonstrates a more responsive attitude towards dealing with complaints at the front line.
- 3.8 Interestingly, there was also a rise in the number of compliments received over this period, with 50 received in Q2 and 71 received in Q3. It is pleasing to see that members of the public are also taking the time to contact the council when they receive a good service.
- 3.9 A quarterly comparison graph of top line figures for all customer feedback received since October 2010 (Figure 1) shows that complaint numbers are on the rise from a low in Q4 of last year (Jan – March 2013). Again, there is no single identifiable cause. This could be a result of changes being made to how some services are delivered in light of the financial challenges being faced by local authorities. Alternatively, work carried out

to publicise the complaints procedure and advise people, particularly more vulnerable groups, of their right to complain may have had an impact.

Figure 1



3.10 In Q2 93% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to within the 5 working day timescale. This rose to 99% in Q3.

3.11 Performance against agreed targets for acknowledging and responding to complaints at Stage 2 was as follows:

	Q2 July – Sept '13	Q3 Oct – Dec '13
Acknowledgement within 3 working days	97%	96%
Response within 20 working days (28 days for social work)	94%	86%
Extension agreed and notification provided within timescale	4%	9%

3.12 Acknowledgement rates remained consistently high continuing the good performance from last year. There was a marked improvement in response rates within timescale, which is pleasing to note as the average response rate for 2012/13 was 76.5%, leaving room for improvement. There was a drop in response rates for Q3 this year but this has to be put in context with the rise in the overall number of complaints received during that quarter.

3.13 Performance by each service area per quarter is detailed in Appendices 1a and 1b (attached).

3.14 The service areas with the highest number of complaints each quarter were as follows:

Q2 – 1 July 2013 to 30 September 2013

Service Area	Stage 1 complaints	Stage 2 complaints	Total
Property Maintenance	23	22	45
Landscape & Countryside	13	14	27
Transportation	9	18	27
Adult Wellbeing	3	7	10
Community Housing	5	5	10
Waste Services	10	0	10

Q3 – 1 October 2013 to 31 December 2013

Service Area	Stage 1 complaints	Stage 2 complaints	Total
Property Maintenance	73	33	106
Community Housing	13	12	25
Transportation	9	14	23
Waste Services	17	0	17
Education	5	8	13
Landscape & Countryside	5	8	13

3.15 A breakdown of complaints, comments and compliments received by service area per quarter is attached at Appendices 2a and 2b.

3.16 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. Although there was a significant increase in the number of complaints received about this service over the winter period, it is important to note that 69% of these complaints were dealt with within 5 working days. Last year a much higher proportion of complaints were progressing to Stage 2.

- 3.17 Landscape & Countryside saw a rise in the number of complaints received in Q2. These mainly related to cemetery and park maintenance.
- 3.18 Transportation was in the top three service areas for complaints in both quarters and received more complaints than over the same period last year. These mainly related to maintenance of roads and pathways and delays in carrying out road repairs.
- 3.19 Community Housing saw a rise in complaints in Q3, as did Education. Complaint subjects varied.
- 3.20 No social work complaints progressed to a Complaints Review Committee (CRC) during this period.
- 3.21 Examples of Stage 1 complaints received during this period included:
- Outstanding repairs to council homes
 - Lack of response to enquiries (various)
 - Bin / recycling box not uplifted
 - Internet connection problems in libraries
 - Road repairs e.g. potholes
 - Automated switchboard
 - Dog fouling / litter issues
 - Neighbour problems
 - Public toilet closure times over festive period
 - Content of school assembly
 - Incorrect invoices
- 3.22 Resolutions included providing apologies, information and / or explanations and undertaking to provide the requested service.
- 3.23 Notable issues complained about at Stage 2 included:
- Administration of planning applications (including neighbour notification)
 - Charge for not arranging access for annual gas safety check
 - Condensation / damp issues in council owned properties
 - Condition of new tenancy
 - Delay in Occupational Therapy assessment

- Capital improvement works to council homes (rewiring / kitchen & bathroom upgrades)
- Shared cost repairs – delays etc
- Antisocial behaviour investigations
- Change to Home to School transport route (Waughton / Newbyth area)
- Closure of gates at Linkfield Road / Pinkie Park during school hours
- Staff conduct
- Housing allocations policy
- Lack of communication about care decisions for relatives
- Financial assessment process to determine care contributions / if self-funding for residential care
- Information contained in social work reports
- Council Tax administration

3.24 The number of complaints recorded about staff attitude / conduct dropped from 14 in Q2 to 11 in Q3. The overall total was 25% less than received about this subject during the same period last year. This is positive and perhaps reflects the emphasis put on good customer service within the Council; for example encouraging front line staff to take up the Customer Service Professional Qualification (CSPQ).

3.25 Complaint outcomes for Q2 and Q3 were as follows:

Outcome	Q2 (Jul – Sept '13)	Q3 (Oct - Dec '13)
Upheld	12%	29%
Partially Upheld	43%	20%
Not Upheld	45%	47%
Outcome not selected		4%

3.26 The numbers of complaints not upheld remained fairly consistent but the numbers of complaints upheld increased over the period while the number of complaints partially upheld dropped. This in contrast to the same period last year where the number of complaints upheld dropped and the number of complaints partially upheld increased. This appears to

demonstrate that each complaint is looked at individually and that outcomes are evidence based.

3.27 The most common actions in response to complaints 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 and action taken to remedy the situation. Meeting directly with complainants is also being actively encouraged to try and resolve complaints.

3.28 It is important that lessons are learned where evidence of maladministration and / or service failure is identified. Below are some examples of recommendations for service improvements following complaints investigations:

- Review information in Repairs and Maintenance policy and Tenant's Handbook in relation to the provision of additional locks on windows and doors to clarify responsibilities of both council and tenant
- Reminder to social workers to inform clients and / or carers when closing a case and the reasons why
- Review administrative procedures relating to home to school transport (Taxi requests)
- Reminders of Customer Care Charter and the standards of behaviour expected of employees in their dealings with members of the public
- In addition, complaints information has fed into various service reviews

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK DEVELOPMENTS

3.29 New information specifically for children on the complaints handling procedure is now in circulation. Updated information for adults with learning disabilities will be designed next.

3.30 An online learning module on complaint handling is being developed for council staff.

3.31 As of 1 April 2014, surveys will be sent out with complaint responses (electronic and post card versions, depending on method of contact) to gather information on people's experience of making a complaint to East Lothian Council so that customer views can be taken into account as part of the continuous improvement of the complaint handling service.

3.32 The Customer Feedback Team will be examining ways to better record and share information on service improvements resulting from complaints.

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 and 1b - breakdown of complaints, comments and compliments received per service area

7.2 Appendix 2a and 2b - breakdown of performance per service area in relation to acknowledgement and response times

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DATE	13 March 2014

Appendix 1a: Acknowledgement and response performance by service in Q2 (June – Sept '13)

Service Area	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Acknowledged Within 3 Working Days	% Acknowledged Within 3 Working Days	Update Needed and Sent On Time	Responded To Within 20 Working Days	% Responded To Within 20 Working Days
Antisocial Behaviour	2	2	100.00%	0	2	100.00%
Community Housing	5	5	100.00%	0	5	100.00%
Homelessness	3	2	66.67%	0	3	100.00%
Housing	9	9	100.00%	0	9	100.00%
Landscape and Countryside	14	14	100.00%	0	13	92.86%
Planning and Building Control	5	5	100.00%	1	4	80.00%
Property Maintenance	22	22	100.00%	2	20	90.91%
Transportation	18	18	100.00%	0	18	100.00%
Environment	4	4	100.00%	0	4	100.00%
Other - Communities	4	4	100.00%	0	4	100.00%
Adult Wellbeing	7	7	100.00%	2	5	71.43%
Children's Wellbeing	2	2	100.00%	0	2	100.00%
Education and Schools	5	5	100.00%	0	5	100.00%
Other - People	2	2	100.00%	0	2	100.00%
Community Care Finance	1	1	100.00%	0	0	0.00%
Council Tax	2	1	50.00%	0	2	100.00%
Customer Services	0	0	0.00%	0	0	0.00%
Finance	5	5	100.00%	0	5	100.00%
Human Resources	0	0	0.00%	0	0	0.00%
Legal Services	0	0	0.00%	0	0	0.00%
Revenues and Benefits	1	0	0.00%	0	1	100.00%

Service Area	Number of Stage 2 Complaints	Acknowledged Within 3 Working Days	% Acknowledged Within 3 Working Days	Update Needed and Sent On Time	Responded To Within 20 Working Days	% Responded To Within 20 Working Days
Other - Resources	2	2	100.00%	0	2	100.00%
Other	2	2	100.00%	0	2	100.00%
Total	115	112	97.39%	5	108	93.91%

Appendix 1b: Acknowledgement and response performance by service in Q3 (Oct – Dec'13)

Service Area	Number of Complaints	Acknowledged Within 3 Working Days	% Acknowledged Within 3 Working Days	Update Needed and Sent On Time	Responded To Within 20 Working Days	% Responded To Within 20 Working Days
Antisocial Behaviour	3	2	66.67%	0	2	66.67%
Community Housing	12	10	83.33%	1	10	83.33%
Homelessness	0	0	0.00%	0	0	0.00%
Housing	1	1	100.00%	0	1	100.00%
Landscape and Countryside	8	8	100.00%	0	7	87.50%
Planning and Building Control	3	3	100.00%	0	3	100.00%
Property Maintenance	33	33	100.00%	2	30	90.91%
Property Services	1	1	100.00%	0	1	100.00%
Trading Standards	1	1	100.00%	0	1	100.00%
Transportation	14	14	100.00%	3	11	78.57%
Environment	5	5	100.00%	0	5	100.00%
Other - Communities	2	2	100.00%	0	2	100.00%
Adult Wellbeing	7	6	85.71%	2	4	57.14%
Children's Wellbeing	4	3	75.00%	2	2	50.00%
Education and Schools	8	8	100.00%	0	8	100.00%
Other - People	2	2	100.00%	0	2	100.00%
Community Care Finance	0	0	0.00%	0	0	0.00%
Council Tax	4	4	100.00%	1	3	75.00%
Customer Services	2	2	100.00%	0	2	100.00%
Finance	2	2	100.00%	0	2	100.00%
Human Resources	0	0	0.00%	0	0	0.00%

Service Area	Number of Complaints	Acknowledged Within 3 Working Days	% Acknowledged Within 3 Working Days	Update Needed and Sent On Time	Responded To Within 20 Working Days	% Responded To Within 20 Working Days
Legal Services	1	1	100.00%	0	1	100.00%
Revenues and Benefits	0	0	0.00%	0	0	0.00%
Other - Resources	1	1	100.00%	0	1	100.00%
Other	3	3	100.00%	0	3	100.00%
Unknown	1	1	100.00%	0	1	100.00%
Total	118	113	95.76%	11	102	86.44%

Appendix 2a: Customer Feedback breakdown by service Q2 (July – Sept '13)

Service Area	Comment	Compliment	Stage 1 Complaint	Stage 2 complaint	Total
Antisocial Behaviour	0	0	2	2	4
Community Housing	3	1	5	5	14
Environment	0	0	0	4	4
Facilities Management	0	0	1	0	1
Homelessness	0	0	0	3	3
Housing	0	0	0	9	9
Landscape and Countryside	4	13	13	14	44
Licensing	0	0	0	0	0
Planning and Building Control	0	1	1	5	7
Property Maintenance	2	5	23	22	52
Property Services	0	1	0	0	1
Trading Standards	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation	7	2	9	18	36
Waste Services	5	0	10	0	15
Adult Wellbeing	1	14	3	7	25
Children's Wellbeing	0	1	2	2	5
Criminal Justice	0	0	0	0	0
Education and Schools	0	0	0	5	5
Community Care Finance	0	0	0	1	1
Council Tax	0	1	0	2	3
Cultural Services	0	0	0	0	0
Customer Services	0	5	4	0	9
Democratic Services	0	0	0	0	0
Economic Development	0	0	0	0	0
Finance	0	1	0	5	6
Human Resources	1	0	0	0	1
IT	0	0	0	0	0
Legal Services	0	0	1	0	1
Libraries	7	3	4	0	14
Print Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Revenues and Benefits	0	0	2	1	3
Other/Unknown	1	2	5	10	18
TOTALS	31	50	85	115	281

Appendix 2a: Customer Feedback breakdown by service area Q3 (Oct – Dec '13)

Service Area	Comment	Compliment	Stage 1 Complaint	Stage 2 Complaint	Total
Antisocial Behaviour	0	0	1	3	4
Community Housing	0	4	13	12	29
Environment	1	1	0	5	7
Facilities Management	0	1	0	0	1
Homelessness	0	0	2	0	2
Housing	0	0	0	1	1
Landscape and Countryside	5	6	5	8	24
Licensing	0	0	0	0	0
Planning and Building Control	0	2	1	3	6
Property Maintenance	2	11	73	33	119
Property Services	0	1	2	1	4
Trading Standards	0	0	0	1	1
Transportation	4	3	9	14	30
Waste Services	4	2	17	0	23
Adult Wellbeing	0	19	3	7	29
Children's Wellbeing	0	1	4	4	9
Criminal Justice	0	0	0	0	0
Education and Schools	0	2	5	8	15
Community Care Finance	0	0	0	0	0
Council Tax	0	0	4	4	8
Cultural Services	0	0	0	0	0
Customer Services	0	7	6	2	15
Democratic Services	0	0	0	0	0
Economic Development	0	0	0	0	0
Finance	0	0	1	2	3
Human Resources	0	0	0	0	0
IT	0	0	0	0	0
Legal Services	0	0	0	1	1
Libraries	1	7	9	0	17
Print Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Revenues and Benefits	0	0	1	0	1
Other/Unknown	1	4	10	9	
TOTALS	18	71	166	118	373