

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

**MEETING DATE:** 29 September 2015

**BY:** Depute Chief Executive (Partnerships and Community Services)

**SUBJECT:** Customer Complaints and Feedback

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## **1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To report on the use of the Council's complaints handling procedure for the year 2014/2015.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 To note the report.

## **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 East Lothian Council complies with the model complaints handling procedure (CHP) 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)** – Complaint investigated; 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.

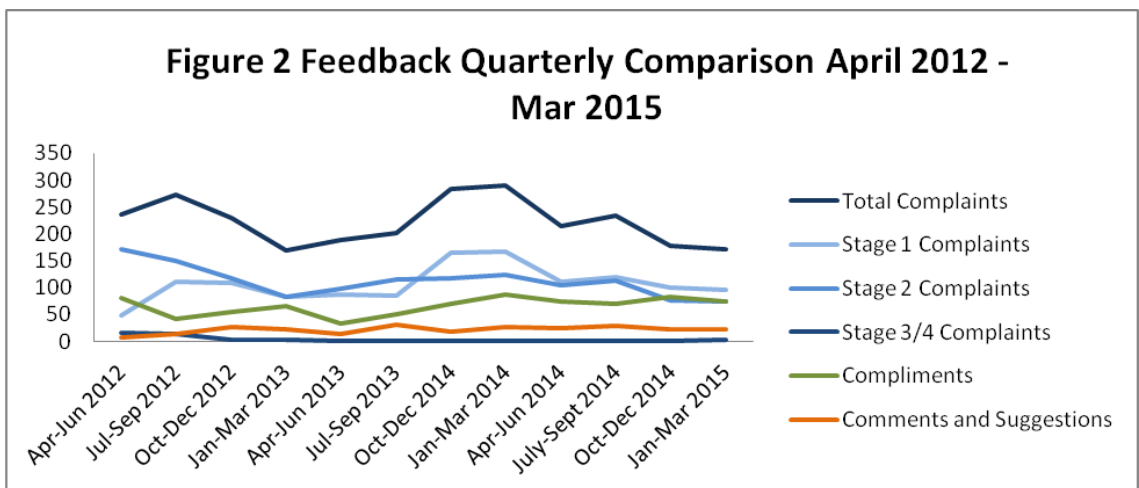
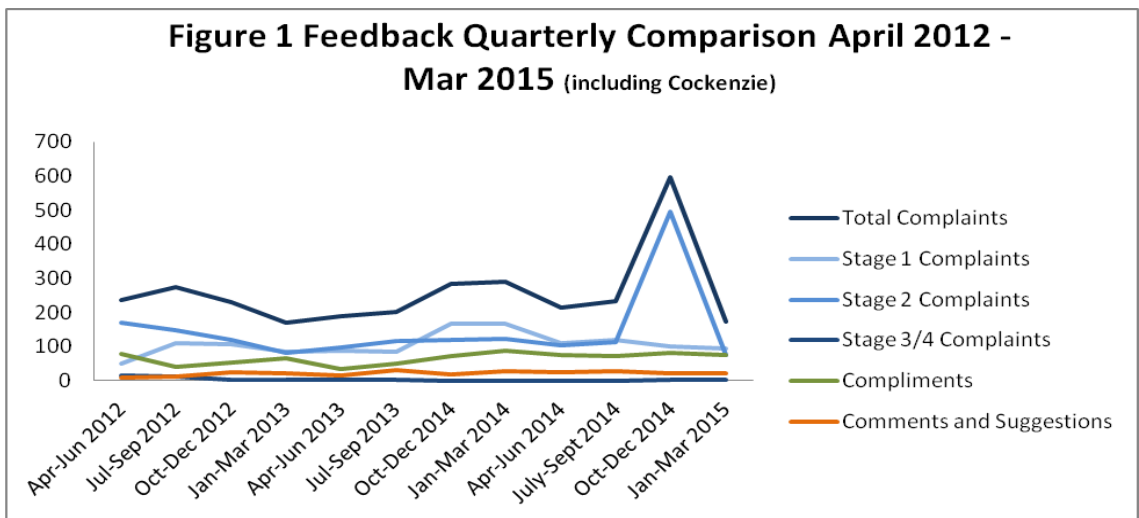
- 3.3 The Council records and reports on complaints received by the Contact Centre, local area offices and the Customer Feedback Team. Service areas are encouraged to report complaints they receive through these channels to ensure recording is as accurate as possible.
- 3.4 The SPSO has compiled performance indicators for complaints handling to assess how local authorities are performing against the model CHP and to enable benchmarking. Each local authority is required to produce an annual report (attached at Appendix 1) which will be published on the Council's website.
- 3.5 The report referred to above does not include social work complaints, as there is a separate social work complaints process. This report covers all council services, including social work, so it should be noted there will be differences in some of the figures contained in the two reports.

#### YEARLY OVERVIEW 2014/2015

- 3.6 For the year 2014/2015, East Lothian Council received **1205** complaints, a significant increase on the **961** complaints received in 2013/2014. 421 of these complaints related to a campaign about a single issue; the proposal for a marine energy park at the Cockenzie Power station site and the role of East Lothian Council in this matter.
- 3.7 If this is counted as a single issue, the council received **785** complaints, an 18% decrease from last year. This was made up of:
- Stage 1: 425 complaints
- Stage 2: 360 complaints
- 3.8 The number of complaints, comments and compliments received for each quarter were as follows:

<b>Type of customer feedback</b>	<b>Q1 (April – June '14)</b>	<b>Q2 (July – Sept '14)</b>	<b>Q3 (Oct – Dec '14)</b>	<b>Q4 (Jan – March '15)</b>
Stage 1 complaints:	110	119	101	95
Stage 2 complaints:	104	114	77 (497 incl cockenzie)	65
Total no of complaints:	<b><u>214</u></b>	<b><u>233</u></b>	<b><u>178</u></b> (598)	<b><u>160</u></b>
Compliments:	74	71	83	80
Comments:	25	29	22	29

- 3.9 54% of the overall total number of complaints were closed at Stage 1 and 46% were closed at Stage 2. These figures were similar to last year.
- 3.10 Work needs to be undertaken to identify how the Council can resolve a higher proportion of complaints at service level without progressing to the investigation stage.
- 3.11 Stage 1 resolutions included providing an agreed service, providing additional information / explanation, apologising for a service failure, manager / team leader making contact to try and resolve issue.
- 3.12 As shown in the table above and in Figures 1 & 3 (below), generally there was no real trend (e.g. seasonal) with complaint numbers across the quarters, with the exception of the spike in Q3 as a result of the complaint campaign referred to earlier (Figure 1). If the campaign is counted as a single issue, complaint numbers actually fell in Q3 and Q4 (as shown in Figure 2).
- 3.13 It is positive to reflect on the total number of compliments (308) received over the period.



3.14 Average complaint outcomes for 2014/15 are detailed below in Figures 3 & 4.

Figure 3

<b>Stage 1</b>	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld
2014/15	25%	19%	56%
2013/14	25%	20%	55%

Figure 4

<b>Stage 2</b>	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld
2014/15	30%	31%	39%
2013/14	23%	27%	50%

3.15 Stage 1 outcomes were similar to last year. A higher proportion of Stage 2 complaints were either upheld or partially upheld compared to last year.

3.16 Where it is identified that something has gone wrong and policy / procedures were not properly followed, a complaint will either be upheld or partially upheld, depending on circumstances. An apology will be given for any identified failings and action taken to put the situation right.

3.17 If there is no evidence to suggest that policies / procedures have not been properly followed then a complaint will not be upheld. In such cases, a full and clear explanation will be given of the decision taken.

3.18 The average time to respond to Stage 1 complaints was 4 working days (1 day more than last year) and the average working time for responding to Stage 2 complaints was 17 working days (5 days more than last year). The average response time for responding to complaints escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2 of the complaints procedure was 3 working days.

3.19 Acknowledgement and response times per quarter for 2014/2015 are set out below:

	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>	Average
Stage 1 Response (5 working days)	97%	93%	99%	88%	94%

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Average
Stage 2 Acknowledgement (3 working days)	97%	95%	99%	79%	92.5%
Stage 2 Response (20 working days)	74%	53%	96%	71%	73.5%
Extension agreed	15%	47%	1%	29%	23%

- 3.20 The was little change in the annual acknowledgement figure, which was **93%** compared with **92.5%** for 2013/2014.
- 3.21 There was a dip in response rates in Q2 and the action taken to address this saw a significant improvement in Q3. The average for 2013/14 was 83% so overall there was a dip in performance this year and a higher % of cases where extensions to timescales had to be agreed.
- 3.22 Resource difficulties within service areas have had an impact on complaint response times; however the Customer Feedback Team will continue to work with service managers to ensure complaints are responded to in a timely manner and customers kept updated in the event of any unavoidable delays.
- 3.23 The overall number of complaints, comments and compliments received per service area for the year 2014/2015 is outlined in Appendix 2.
- 3.24 The service areas with the highest number of complaints over the year were:
- Economic Development\* (\*taking into account Cockenzie complaint campaign)
  - Housing Maintenance
  - Transportation
  - Waste Services
  - Community Housing
  - Education
  - Social Work
- 3.25 Housing 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. To put complaint numbers in context, it should be noted that the service undertakes over 15,000 domestic repairs a year.

3.26 It is positive to note there was a 30% decrease in the number of housing maintenance complaints progressing to the investigation stage this year, meaning more complaints are being resolved at the front line.

3.27 Some examples of housing maintenance issues complained about were:

- Outstanding day-to-day repairs (various)
- Recharges (normally after moving out of a property)
- Appointments (not kept / inconvenient / length of time to wait)
- Damp / condensation

3.28 There were drops in total numbers of complaints for the following services:

- Community Housing - down from 90 in 2013/14 to 52 in 2014/15
- Customer Services - down from 63 in 2013/14 to 14 in 2014/2015
- Landscape and Countryside - down from 88 in 2013/14 to 41 in 2014/15
- Libraries - down from 57 in 2013/14 to 18 in 2014/15

3.29 It should also be noted that the number of Stage 2 complaints received for the Transportation service were also notably lower than the previous year, from 55 in 2013/2014 to 29 in 2014/2015. This was despite significant pressures on the service, particularly on the Roads Network.

3.30 Examples of subjects of complaint included:

- Cemetery / grounds maintenance (in particular grass cutting)
- Maintenance of roads (including potholes) and pathways
- Planning process
- Housing allocations policy
- Composite classes
- Bins not being uplifted
- Employee behaviour
- Changes to care packages
- Gas safety inspection charge due to non-access
- Council Tax administration

3.31 The SPSO has not yet publicly reported its statistics on how many complaints about East Lothian Council were referred for independent

adjudication for the year 2014/15. This information will be included in a future report.

3.32 The service areas receiving the highest number of compliments were:

- Adult Wellbeing
- Customer Services
- Housing Maintenance
- Landscape & Countryside
- Libraries

3.33 Some examples of service improvements undertaken as a result of complaints are included in the report at Appendix 1.

3.34 All customers using the complaints procedure now receive a survey card / link to an online survey to assess customer satisfaction with the complaints service. Questions focus on the process itself rather than the complaint outcome. Return rates are low, however.

3.35 73% of respondents indicated satisfaction with how easy it was to make a complaint, 66% with the time taken to respond and 60% with both the clarity of the complaint response and how they were treated when they made a complaint.

3.36 47% indicated dissatisfaction with how well their complaint was understood. This is an area highlighted for improvement.

## **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 1: Complaint Performance Report 2014/2015

7.2 Appendix 2 Breakdown of Customer Feedback by service 2014/2015

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<b>DATE</b>	17 September 2015



Not including social work complaints which follows a different procedure.

## THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

We welcome complaints about our services as they let us know where we need to improve. Like all councils in Scotland we follow a model complaints handling procedure. This has 2 stages:

### STAGE 1 FRONTLINE RESOLUTION

This is where we aim to resolve complaints at point of contact, or as close to the point of service delivery as possible.

**Response Timescale: 5 working days**

### STAGE 2 INVESTIGATION

This is where a complaint is more complex, sensitive or serious and we need to carry out an investigation, which takes us more time.

**Acknowledgement Timescale: 3 working days**  
**Response Timescale: 20 working days**

## HOW MANY COMPLAINTS DID WE DEAL WITH?

Of 1143 complaints received 421 came about through a complaint campaign on a single issue. For statistical purposes we count these as 1 complaint. This works out at just over 7 per 1,000 population of East Lothian.

**409 (58%) FRONTLINE RESOLUTIONS** vs **294 (42%) INVESTIGATION** complaints.

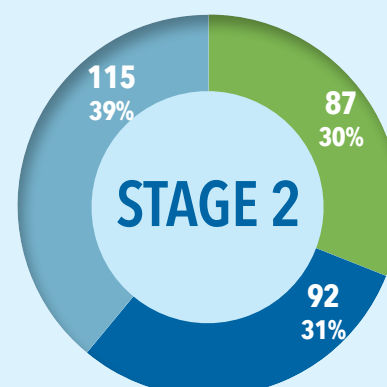
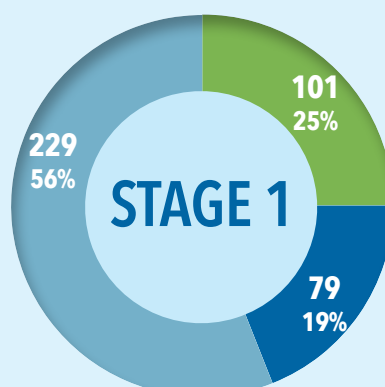
**5** complaints (0.7%) were escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2.



## COMPLAINT OUTCOMES

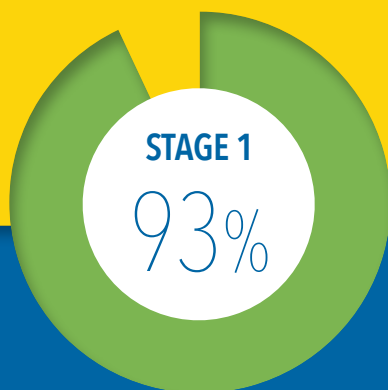
If something has gone wrong with a service or how we have followed our policies and procedures we will uphold or partially uphold the complaint depending on the circumstances. We will apologise and put things right. If the proper process has been followed and we have acted reasonably, the complaint will not be upheld and we will explain the reasons why.

- Complaints upheld
- Complaints partially upheld
- Complaints not upheld



## RESPONSE TIMES

How did we do?

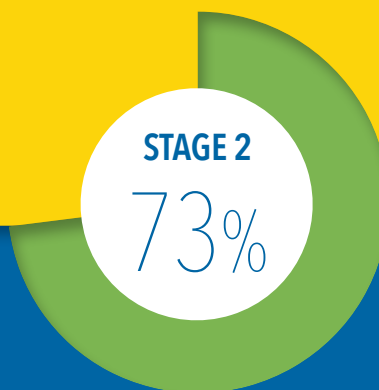


**382 Complaints were responded to in time**

**Total working days taken to deal with complaints:**

STAGE 1: 1608 days

STAGE 2: 4932 days



**215 Complaints were responded to in time**

92.5% Complaints were acknowledged in time

**The average time taken to respond to complaints was:**

STAGE 1: 4 working days (1 day more than last year)

STAGE 2: 17 working days (5 days more than last year)

For those complaints escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2 the average response time was 3 working days.  
100% of complaints were closed after escalation.

In some cases, we needed extra time to deal with a complaint. Extensions were authorised for:

STAGE 1: 27 complaints (6.6%)

STAGE 2: 72 complaints (25%)

## WHAT WERE YOUR COMPLAINTS ABOUT?

The top 3 services complaints were received about were:

- Housing Maintenance
- Transportation
- Waste & Recycling

The top 3 subjects of complaint were:

- Quality of service
- Lack of / quality of information
- Employee behaviour

## WHAT YOU TOLD US ABOUT OUR COMPLAINTS PROCESS

We issue a survey to everyone who makes a complaint. Of those who responded in 2014/15:

73% were satisfied with how easy it was to make a complaint

66% were satisfied with the time we took to respond

60% were satisfied with how clear our response was

60% were satisfied with how they were treated

54% were dissatisfied with how well their complaint was understood – we need to improve on this.



**YOU SAID.**  
**WE DID....**

**YOU** raised concerns housing maintenance jobs were being routinely cancelled if there was no access to a property, even though the repair was still needed.

**WE** began issuing letters following no access appointments, giving time for people to get back to us to reschedule an appointment before any job was cancelled.

**YOU** raised concerns that you had to contact a number of people in the council to advise of a relative's death, which added stress at an already upsetting time.

**WE** introduced a 'Tell us Once' system, taking on this task for you (including informing other government organisations).

**YOU** raised concerns about the quality of building repairs carried out under statutory works notices.

**WE** reviewed the individual cases, carried out site visits, addressed any concerns directly with contractors and owners and amended invoices, where necessary. We also changed our procedures for issuing statutory works notices.

## COMPLIMENTS & COMMENTS

People also let us know when they received a good service and to give us helpful comments. We received 308 compliments and 105 comments in 2014/2015.

Thank you for taking the time to get in touch with us this year with your comments, complaints and compliments. We really value your feedback!



Versions of this leaflet can be supplied in Braille, large print, audiotape or your own language please phone Translation and Interpretation Services on 10620 827199





## Appendix 2: Customer Feedback Breakdown by Service for the year 2014/2015

Directorate		Comment	Compliment	Stage 1 Complaint	Stage 2 Complaint	Total Complaint
Services for Communities	Antisocial Behaviour	1	1	2	16	18
	Community Housing	4	11	26	26	52
	Cultural Services	0	5	0	0	0
	Customer Services	3	20	9	5	14
	Economic Development	2	0	1	421*	422*
	Environment	2	0	1	7	8
	Facilities Management	1	2	4	0	4
	Homelessness	2	0	3	2	5
	Housing (other)	0	0	1	3	4
	Housing Maintenance	7	50	159	88	247
	Landscape and Countryside	14	24	25	16	41
	Libraries	3	17	18	0	18
	Licensing	0	0	0	0	0
	Planning and Building Control	3	0	2	13	15
	Property Services	0	2	2	3	5
	Trading Standards	0	0	0	0	0
	Transportation	28	9	49	29	78
	Waste Services	12	13	66	0	66
	Other - Services for Communities	2	19	15	16	31
	Services for People	Education and Schools	3	3	4	45
Other - Services for People		1	2	5	2	7
Social Work – Adult Wellbeing		2	102	18	44	62
Social Work – Children’s Wellbeing		1	7	6	13	19
	Social Work – Criminal Justice	0	0	0	0	0

## Appendix 2: Customer Feedback Breakdown by Service for the year 2014/2015

Directorate		Comment	Compliment	Stage 1 Complaint	Stage 2 Complaint	Total
Support Services	Community Care Finance	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
	Council Tax	0	0	2	11	<b>13</b>
	Democratic Services	3	2	0	0	<b>0</b>
	Finance	0	0	1	3	<b>4</b>
	Human Resources	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
	IT	1	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
	Legal Services	0	2	1	2	<b>3</b>
	Print Unit	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
	Revenues and Benefits	2	3	5	4	<b>9</b>
Other/Not Known					10	<b>10</b>
Complaint Total				425	780	<b>1205</b>