

REPORT TO: Policy and Performance Review Committee

MEETING DATE: 9 June 2021

BY: Executive Director for Council Resources

SUBJECT: Customer Feedback Reporting 2020/2021

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To report on the use of the Council's Complaints Handling Procedure for 2020/2021 (1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021).
- 1.2 To raise awareness of implemented and planned improved processes as result of trends seen in the reporting.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To note the report and where appropriate highlight areas for further consideration.

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 remain dissatisfied after completing this process they have a legal right of appeal to the SPSO.

- 3.2. Complaints handled at Stage 1 where customers are not satisfied with the response, escalate to Stage 2. Such complaints continue to be recorded separately. This ensures that the reporting of complaints “escalated to Stage 2” are more accurate.
- 3.3 The Customer Feedback and FOI team have continued to grow in experience and knowledge over the past year. Cross skilling has allowed for movement when required between FOI and Feedback. This provides continued stabilisation within both teams. Covid had an impact initially, however having a team member already working remotely allowed the team to remain stable, while getting other team members access to online tools. This allowed the team to comply with the regulatory requests in accordance with legislation.
- 3.4 With the implementation of the new category “Resolved” on the 1st April 2021, the Feedback team have created a Complaint Handling Completion Form. All Stage 1 complaints investigated by Service areas will be requested to complete this form before closure of these individual complaints. This will allow the Feedback team to capture all required data, including resolutions, learnings and help develop new practices. Service Improvement logs for all Service areas have been created to capture all improvements to services and processes as a result of feedback. This will be shared with Service areas quarterly. This will be a valuable tool for supporting Services in making continuous improvements and maintaining a Customer First approach.
- 3.5 Two new KPI’s were introduced from 1st April 2021. The first new KPI relating to “*Customer Satisfaction Survey in relation to the complaint handling*”. To capture the required reporting information a new Satisfaction Survey was created through ELC’s consultation hub . An email containing a link is sent to complainants on the completion of Stage 1 complaints. This encourages participation and feedback on the complaint handling process. All emails sent to complainants are recorded and retained to allow an audit trail and a weekly report is produced through the consultation hub of recorded responses.

The second new KPI in relation to “*Training Upskilling of Staff as a result of complaint findings*”. New training material was produced by the Feedback team to enable Service Managers/Team Managers to deliver complaints training to all staff. The training material will allow staff to efficiently deal with complaints while supporting frontline resolution. The training acted as a refresher to all key changes within the new Complaint Handling Procedure, supporting the new KPI around upskilling of staff as a result of complaints findings.

- 3.6 The Council continues to record and report 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.

3.7 In previous reports it was highlighted that CRM (Customer Relationship Management software – case handling) was being replaced with the new OCP (On-line Customer Portal). This has continued to progress, with the Feedback Team liaising with the Project Team to ensure that all build requirements have been included. Improved processes and on-line capability will further improve efficiencies. Due to COVID-19 this will be delayed until normal services have resumed.

3.8 This report covers all Council Services.

3.9 CUSTOMER FEEDBACK OVERVIEW 2020/2021

3.9.1 During 2020/2021, East Lothian Council received **622** complaints, compared with **899** in 2019/2020. Overall 2020/2021 was a positive year in terms of Customer Feedback in relation to the continued decrease in Stage 2 complaints and the number of complaints not upheld remained stable. This is detailed further below. There has been a significant increase in compliments received, particularly in relation to the number of communications (22% to 43%)

2020/2021

Stage	Complaints	Compliments	Comments
1	570	386	673
2	52		

2019/2020

Stage	Complaints	Compliments	Comments
1	840	237	172
2	59		

3.9.2 Complaint **response times** were as follows:

Stage 1: 45% (259 of 570) responded to within 5 working days.

Stage 2: 38% (20 of 52) responded to within 20 working days.

3.9.3 Response times have increased since 2019/2020 at 45% for Stage 1 and decreased from 56% to 38% for Stage 2. Greater complexity around the stage 2 requests have required lengthy investigations by ELC service areas extending the 20 working day timescale in some instances.

Whilst the response time is longer than the SPSO guidelines, customers are advised if their Stage 2 complaint is going to take more than 20 days and provided with regular updates, where required.

3.10 COMPLAINT ANALYSIS 2020/2021

3.10.1 Complaint **outcomes** were as follows:

Stage 1: 570 complaints received

Not Upheld 58% (295)

Partially Upheld 27% (139)

Upheld 15% (79)

Escalated to Stage 2 5% (25)

Please note: Totals will not match as not all complaints are closed in the same quarter as in which they are received.

The service areas receiving the highest volume of **Stage 1** complaints in **2020/2021** were:

Property Maintenance 26% (146)

Community Housing 13% (75)

Road Services 12% (63)

Stage 2: 52 complaints received

Not Upheld 58% (22)

Partially Upheld 37% (14)

Upheld 5% (2)

Please note: Totals will not match as not all complaints are closed in the same quarter as in which they are received.

The service areas receiving the highest volume of **Stage 2** complaints in **2020/2021** were:

Education 44% (23)

Planning 17% (9)

Community Housing 11% (6)

Road Services received 11% (63) of all Stage 1 complaints received in 2020/2021 (570). Of the complaints received, over 49% were not upheld.

Community Housing received 13% (75) of all Stage 1 complaints (570) and has seen a decrease from 80 in 2019/2020. Of the complaints received, over 48% were not upheld.

Property Maintenance received 26% (146) of all Stage 1 complaints received in 2020/2021 (570). Stage 1 complaints have seen a significant decrease from 228 in 2019/2020 to 146 this year. Stage 2 complaints have seen a continued positive decrease from (5) 2019/2020 to (4) 2020/2021. Of the complaints received, over 50% were not upheld.

3.10.2 A table of all Service Area Complaints in 2020/2021 are shown in Appendix 1. Service Area Response Timescales are shown in Appendix 2.

3.11 COMPLIMENTS OVERVIEW 2020/2021

3.11.1 386 compliments were received in **2020/2021**.

The following Service Areas received a high percentage of compliments:

Adult Wellbeing 13% (49)

Customer Services 15% (59)

Revenues 23% (88)

This follows the trend seen in previous years as these Service Areas have a high volume of customer facing interactions and as such have more opportunity to receive more feedback; both compliments and complaints.

3.12 COMMENTS OVERVIEW 2020/2021

3.12.1 **673** comments were received in 2020/2021.

The following Service Areas received a high percentage of comments:

Roads 35% (237)

Sports Countryside & Leisure 15% (101)

Waste 13% (90)

This follows the trend seen in previous years as these Service Areas have a high volume of customer facing interactions and as such have more opportunity to receive more feedback; both compliments and comments.

3.13 SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS AS A RESULT OF FEEDBACK

3.13.1 As a result of feedback received the following improvements and actions have been carried out and comment from the individual services is contained in Appendix 2

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None

5. INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1 The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial - None

6.2 Personnel - None

6.3 Other – None

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None

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Appendix 1 Customer Feedback Breakdown by Service 2020/2021

Service Area	Stage 1 Received	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Escalated to stage 2	Stage 2 Received	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Compliments	Comments
Adult Wellbeing											
Total	22	12	5	3	2	3	9	8	1	49	6
Building Maintenance											
Total	4	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Building Standards											
Total	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Children's Services											
Total	17	14	0	0	0	3	1	1	0	2	3
Community Housing											
Total	75	36	23	12	4	6	3	2	0	4	57
Community Partnerships											
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	4
Corporate Policy & Improvements											
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
Customer Services											
Total	18	5	4	9	0	1	0	0	0	59	9
Economic Development and Strategic Investment											
Total	3	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	4	1
Education											
Total	37	20	8	5	5	23	9	8	1	9	17
Engineering incl. Gas											
Total	31	12	11	7	1	0	0	0	0	2	6

Service Area	Stage 1 Received	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Escalated to stage 2	Stage 2 Received	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Compliments	Comments
Environment & Protective Services											
Total	16	8	4	3	4	2	4	0	1	24	18
Facilities Management											
Total	5	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	23
People and Governance											
Total	5	4	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	10	2
Other Services for Communities											
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Planning											
Total	19	10	1	2	8	9	6	1	0	3	17
Property Maintenance											
Total	146	77	35	20	3	1	0	0	0	36	58
Revenues and Welfare Support Services											
Total	22	13	2	7	1	0	0	0	0	88	10
Roads											
Total	63	31	15	9	4	2	2	0	0	21	237
Sports Countryside & Leisure											
Total	31	14	8	7	3	1	1	1	0	28	101
Transportation											
Total	2	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	5
Waste											
Total	57	38	13	5	0	0	0	0	0	31	90

Appendix 2 Customer Feedback Response Times by Service 2020/2021

Service Area	Stage 1 % responded to within 5 Working days	Stage 2 % responded to within 20 Working days
Adult Wellbeing	90%	75%
Building Maintenance	66%	**
Building Standards	67%	0%
Children's Services	75%	0%
Community Housing	40%	66%
Community Partnerships	**	**
Corporate Policy & Improvements	**	**
Criminal Justice	**	**
Customer Services	66%	0%
Economic Development and Strategic Investment	50%	0%
Education	39%	56%
Engineering incl. Gas	46%	**
Environment & Protective Services	62%	50%
Facilities	100%	**
Finance	**	**
IT	**	**
Legal	**	**
People and Governance	60%	0%
Other Services for Communities	**	**
Planning	47%	67%
Property Maintenance	26%	67%
Benefits	**	**
Revenues and Welfare Support	81%	**
Roads	33%	100%
Sports Countryside & Leisure	64%	**
Transportation	0%	0%
Waste	70%	**
** no complaints recorded		

SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS AS A RESULT OF FEEDBACK

Road Services

It's been a very challenging year for Road Services . While there were a number of restrictions in place we have continue to deliver the service. The focus and priorities have been our response to COVID and essential road related works including our winter maintenance. We will now start to see the relaxing of some restrictions over the coming weeks and we will review.

In regards to the complaints for 20/21 the Service Area has proactively taken the opportunity to updated information on the website and social media to help inform and reduce complaints. We have done further work to promote the reporting of faults and worked with our corporate communications colleagues and key stakeholders such as the Area Partnership and community councils to promote a preferred method for reporting road related defects within East Lothian Council.

The main focus continues to have people use the online system via the website as the first method. We want people to know they can also use this system to obtain an update on a reported defect. By using this system it ensures that all defects are recorded, giving a more accurate picture when assessing the condition of the road network for future planned works. All this is to help improve the customer experience and reduce complaints.

Complaints received 2020/2021 – Stage 1 complaints received 63, we have seen a positive decrease from (85) in 2019/2020 to (63) in 2020/2021. With a number of staff working remotely there have been some challenges, but the processes in place to deal with complaints have worked well. Ongoing training and development is key to ensure improve customer experience.

Community Housing

The Community Housing service continues to carefully consider customer feedback, through both complaints and positive comments, as well as satisfaction survey data to continuously review its processes. Customer satisfaction remains relatively high but complaints analysis, especially around upheld complaints is being factored into ongoing service development activity.

Property Maintenance

The service continues to sit above the Scottish LA peer average for tenant satisfaction. Notwithstanding this, development work around new technology and mobile working continues with an aim of bringing in further service improvements and increased tenant satisfaction.

Transport & Waste Services

Feedback information has enabled the services to identify areas where action may be required and respond to customer/citizen needs. The process also helps provide a record to support service actions taken or comments made which is presumed to be what the customer/citizen wants.

This allows more reinforcement of service commitments. An example of this is when we get complaints around pupil numbers on buses and overcrowding. Actions taken by team to reinforce bus checks with contractors resolves these issues. The feedback helps to identify areas of non-compliance and informs ELC when contractors fail to follow correct processes.

Sports Countryside & Leisure

2020 / 21 has certainly been a year like no other. We have really tried to listen to our communities in respect of the role and importance our open spaces make to our communities.

We prioritised service delivery in respect of having presentable parks, open spaces and countryside sites for the public to take their recommended daily exercise and for when lockdown was eased.

We were delighted to receive a range of positive feedback from across our communities in the work that had taken place and the look and feel within and across towns and villages as the public spent more time outdoors.

The focus on continuous improvement for our open spaces will continue as we know through community feedback the important role they play in people's, families and communities lives.