

REPORT TO: Policy and Performance Review Committee

MEETING DATE: 23 September 2014

BY: Depute Chief Executive - Partnerships and Community Services

SUBJECT: Customer Complaints and Feedback

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To report on the use of the Council's complaints handling procedure for the year 2013/2014 and provide analysis on customer feedback received for Q1 of 2014/2015: 1 April 2014 to 30 June 2014.

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, 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 complied complaints indicators to help local authorities monitor their complaints handling performance. These indicators will be identified throughout the report and will help with benchmarking across local government. This is the first year of using these indicators.

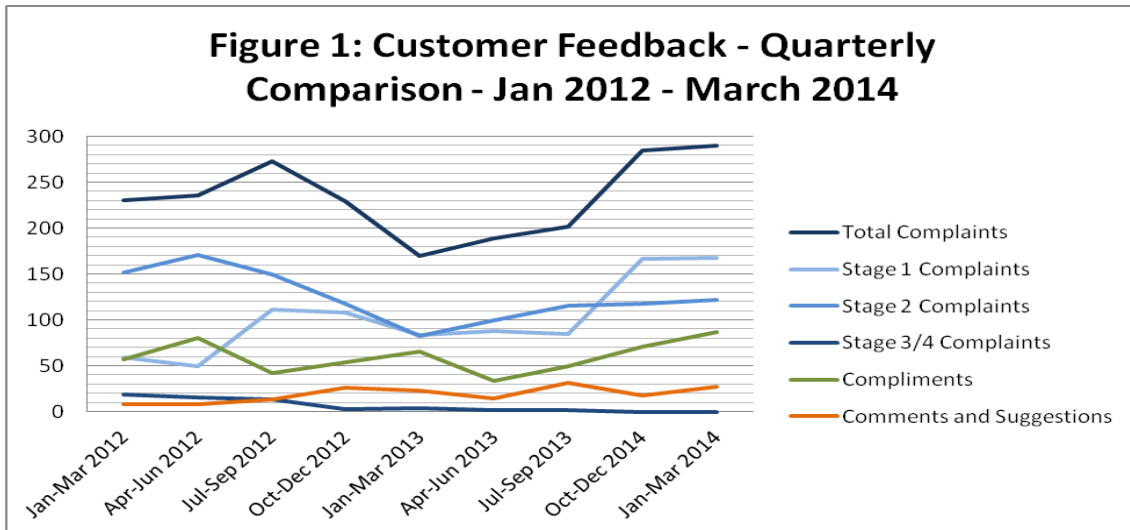
YEARLY OVERVIEW 2013/2014

- 3.5 For the year 2013/2014, East Lothian Council received **961** complaints. This was made up of 507 Stage 1 complaints and 454 Stage 2 complaints. This was almost a 10% increase on the total number received last year (872).
- 3.6 The total number of complaints received represented 0.9 complaints per 1000 population (*based on 2013 mid-year estimate of 101,360*). **SPSO Performance Indicator 1.**
- 3.7 A total of 1293 customers contacted us with their views on our services, up from 1183 last year.
- 3.8 The number of complaints, comments and compliments received for each quarter were as follows:

Type of customer feedback	Q1 (April – June '13)	Q2 (July – Sept '13)	Q3 (Oct – Dec '13)	Q4 (Jan – March '14)
Stage 1 complaints:	88	85	166	168
Stage 2 complaints:	99	115	118	122
Total no of complaints:	<u>187</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>284</u>	<u>290</u>
Compliments:	34	50	71	87
Comments:	14	31	18	27

- 3.9 52.7% of the overall total number of complaints were closed at Stage 1. 47.3% were closed at Stage 2. 1.2% of the Stage 2 closed figure represented complaints escalated from Stage 1, as the complaint had been unable to be resolved at service level. **SPSO Performance Indicator 2.**

3.10 As shown in the table above and in Figure 1 (below), there was a steady increase in the total number of complaints received each quarter, peaking in Q4. The number of compliments received also increased each quarter, which is pleasing to note.



3.11 It is encouraging to see the significant rise in the proportion of complaints now being dealt with at Stage 1 of the complaints procedure i.e. dealt with directly at service level. This builds on progress last year and is in line with best practice, as it is better for both the complainant and the Council for issues to be resolved quickly by the service concerned. This demonstrates a responsive attitude towards complaints. 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 The Customer Feedback Team identifies at time of receipt whether a complaint should be dealt with at by the service area (Stage 1) or whether the subject of complaint requires an investigation (Stage 2). Making this decision at an early point prevents frustration on the part of both the customer and the service area.

3.13 There is no single identifiable cause for the rise in complaint numbers for 2013/2014. 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. Also, 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.

3.14 Complaint outcomes for 2013/14 are detailed below. **SPSO Performance Indicator 3**

Stage 1 Complaints (overall average for the year)

- Upheld 25%

- Partially Upheld 20%
- Not Upheld 55%

Stage 2 complaints (quarterly breakdown)

Stage 2	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Average
Upheld	13%	12%	29%	33%	23%
Partially Upheld	28%	43%	20%	18%	27%
Not Upheld	59%	45%	47%	49%	50%
Outcome not selected			4%		

3.15 Average outcomes for 2012/2013 for Stage 2 complaints were:

- Upheld - 27.5%
- Partially Upheld – 32.5%
- Not Upheld – 39%

3.16 The % of Stage 2 complaints being upheld and partially upheld dropped slightly compared to last year, whereas the % of complaints not upheld (i.e. no evidence of maladministration and service failure) rose.

3.17 Of the 12 complaints escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2, 92% were not upheld and 8% were partially upheld.

3.18 Where complaints were upheld / partially upheld, appropriate apologies were given and action taken to put the situation right and to make sure a similar situation did not happen again. Where complaints were not upheld an explanation and information was provided. For Stage 1 cases, action was taken to give the complainant their required outcome if at all possible, regardless of outcome.

3.19 The average time to respond to Stage 1 complaints was 4 working days and the average working time for responding to Stage 2 complaints was 12 working days. The average response time for responding to complaints escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2 of the complaints procedure was 8 working days. **SPSO Performance Indicator 4**

3.20 Acknowledgement and response times per quarter for 2013/2014 are set out below: **SPSO Performance Indicators 5 & 6**

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Average
Stage 1 Response (5 working days)	94%	93%	99%	88%	93%
Stage 2 Acknowledgement (3 working days)	89%	97%	96%	84%	92%
Stage 2 Response (20 working days)	67%	94%	86%	84%	83%
Extension agreed	12%	4%	9%	10%	9%

- 3.21 Acknowledgement and response times did dip in Q4 but it should be noted that complaint numbers increased over the year, which did impact on performance.
- 3.22 Overall, there was an improvement in Stage 2 response times compared with 2012/2013, where the average was 76.5%. 100% of cases escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2 were responded to within timescale. Acknowledgement performance dipped from an average of 96% in 2012/2013 to 92%. This is an area to be targeted for improvement.
- 3.23 The overall number of complaints, comments and compliments received per service area for the year 2013/2014 is outlined in Appendix 1.
- 3.24 The service areas with the highest number of complaints over the year were:
- Property Maintenance (32% of total)
 - Transportation (10% of total)
 - Community Housing (8% of total)
 - Waste Services (6% of total)
 - Landscape & Countryside (5% of total)
- 3.25 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 it should be noted that the proportion of Stage 2 complaints received about housing maintenance issues steadily decreased during 2013/14, with a significantly higher % of complaints being resolved at the frontline compared with 2012/2013. A service review has also been undertaken, which should help to improve services to tenants.

3.26 Members requested more information about the types of complaints being received about housing maintenance issues. The most repeated subject of housing complaints for 2013/2014 were as follows:

- Outstanding day-to-day repairs (various)
- Recharges (normally after moving out of a property)
- Staff attitude / conduct / lack of customer service
- Appointments (not kept / inconvenient / length of time to wait)
- Damp / condensation
- Roof / Rhones / Guttering
- Ineffective repair (did not work first time)
- Standard of kitchens and bathrooms (wanting upgrades)
- Shared cost repairs

3.27 Some services areas have seen a decrease in complaints received compared to last year, such as social work services. Others have seen an increase e.g. Transportation and Waste Services.

3.28 Notable subjects of complaint included:

- Cemetery / grounds maintenance (in particular grass cutting)
- Maintenance of roads (including potholes) and pathways
- Withholding decoration allowance for new tenancy due to outstanding debt to ELC
- Planning process
- Housing allocations policy
- Management of bullying in schools
- Antisocial behaviour investigations
- Bins not being uplifted
- Staff conduct
- Changes to care packages
- Gas safety inspection charge due to non-access
- Council Tax administration

3.29 Complaints about staff attitude only represented 3.5% of the total number of complaints received for 2013/2014. This continues the trend reported

last year where complaints about staff attitude significantly decreased from the number received the previous year.

3.30 3 social work complaints were referred to a Complaints Review Committee (see the 2013/2014 social work complaints report for further details).

3.31 The SPSO received 51 enquiries and complaints about ELC during 2013/2014, an increase from 40 in 2012/2013. 25 of these related to housing issues.

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

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

3.33 All customers using the complaints procedure now receive a survey card / link to online survey with their response to assess customer satisfaction with the complaints service, focusing on quality outcomes. There have been limited returns so far but a link between a negative complaint outcome and dissatisfaction with the overall process has been identified. Customers have, however, indicated general satisfaction with how easy it is to make a complaint, clarity of response and how they have been treated with by the Customer Feedback Team. Efforts are being made to increase the number of returns to gather more information on customer experience of making a complaint. **SPSO Performance Indicator 7**

3.34 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 made in 2013/2014 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
- Improving information provided to tenants on insurance provision
- Review administrative procedures relating to home to school transport (Taxi requests)

3.35 In addition to the public six monthly reports to the Policy Performance Review Committee, it is intended to produce quarterly briefings for the Council Management Team and complaint case studies for service areas.

Service areas are already asked to use complaints information and customer feedback when completing self-assessments. Training modules are being developed on Learn Pro to help support and train staff in dealing with complaints. **SPSO Performance Indicator 8**

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK Q1 – 1 APRIL TO 30 JUNE 2014

- 3.36 **214** complaints were received during Q1 2014/2015. This was made up of 110 Stage 1 complaints and 104 Stage 2 complaints. This was a 26% reduction from the amount received in Q4 last year but a 13% increase when compared with Q1 last year.
- 3.37 74 compliments and 25 comments were received, both significantly higher than Q1 last year.
- 3.38 94% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to within 5 working days.
- 3.39 Stage 2 acknowledgement and response times were:
- 97% acknowledged within 3 working days
 - 74% responded to within 20 working days
- 3.40 Acknowledgement performance improved from last quarter (84%) but there was a 10% dip in response performance. Both figures were favourable compared to Q1 last year (see table at paragraph 3.20)
- 3.41 A breakdown of comments, compliments and complaints received by service is attached at Appendix 2.
- 3.42 The service areas with the highest number of complaints were:
- Property Maintenance
 - Waste Services
 - Adult Wellbeing
 - Transportation
 - Community Housing
- 3.43 It should be noted that although Property Maintenance still received the highest number of complaints, its number of Stage 2 complaints continues to reduce.
- 3.44 Notable subjects of complaints included:
- Open space maintenance (including grass cutting)
 - Library rules / changes to library layouts
 - Delays in carrying out road repairs

- Issuing of Summary Warrant / application of discounts (Council Tax)
- Condensation / Dam (lack of action to resolve)
- Gas recharges
- Housing allocations policy / sign up process
- Additional in-service day for Primary School staff - short notice
- Changes to care packages

3.45 It was disappointing to note that 28 complaints about staff attitude were received (12% of overall total), as these decreased during 2013/2014.

3.46 Complaint outcomes this quarter were as follows:

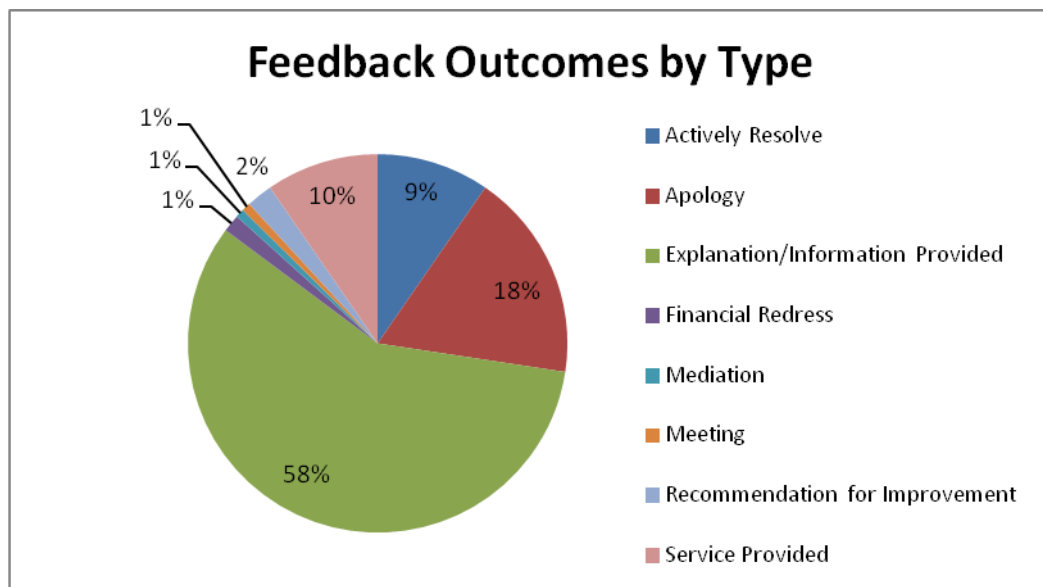
Not Upheld - 43%

Partially Upheld – 33%

Upheld – 24%

3.47 Figure 2 (below) identifies actions taken to resolve and respond to complaints.

Figure 2



3.48 Improvement actions identified by the service in those cases where complaints were upheld or partially upheld will be acted on in the coming year to prevent similar complaints being received in future.

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 Customer Feedback by service for the year 2013/2014

7.2 Appendix 2 Breakdown of Customer Feedback by service for Q1 2014/2015 (1 April 2014 to 30 June 2014)

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DATE	11 September 2014

Appendix 1: Customer Feedback Breakdown by Service for the year 2013/2014

Directorate		Comment	Compliment	Stage 1 Complaint	Stage 2 Complaint	Total	
Services for Communities	Antisocial Behaviour	1	2	3	7	13	
	Community Housing	6	7	44	33	90	
	Customer Services	1	37	20	5	63	
	Economic Development	0	0	2	0	2	
	Environment	0	0	0	3	3	
	Facilities Management	0	3	3	0	6	
	Homelessness	0	0	3	5	8	
	Housing	0	0	1	5	6	
	Landscape and Countryside	12	26	26	24	88	
	Libraries	11	22	23	1	57	
	Licensing	0	0	1	2	3	
	Planning and Building Control	0	4	8	19	31	
	Property Maintenance	11	35	183	126	355	
	Property Services	0	2	5	4	11	
	Trading Standards	0	0	0	1	1	
	Transportation	16	16	44	55	131	
	Waste Services	14	7	48	5	74	
	Other - Services for Communities	6	4	9	30	49	
	Services for People	Adult Wellbeing	4	57	16	32	109
		Children's Wellbeing	0	3	13	16	32
Criminal Justice		0	0	0	0	0	
Education and Schools		1	2	11	35	49	
Other - Services for People		5	3	12	8	28	

Appendix 1: Customer Feedback Breakdown by Service for the year 2013/2014

Directorate		Comment	Compliment	Stage 1 Complaint	Stage 2 Complaint	Total
Support Services	Community Care Finance	0	0	0	2	2
	Council Tax	0	4	10	14	28
	Cultural Services	0	0	1	0	1
	Democratic Services	0	0	0	0	0
	Finance	0	1	1	9	11
	Human Resources	1	0	1	1	3
	IT	1	0	1	0	2
	Legal Services	0	0	1	2	3
	Print Unit	0	0	0	0	0
	Revenues and Benefits	0	2	5	3	10
Other/Unknown	Other/Unknown	0	5	12	7	24
Feedback Total		90	242	507	454	1293

Appendix 2 – Customer Feedback breakdown by Service for Q1: 1 April 2014 to 30 June 2014

Directorate	Service Area	Comment	Stage 1 Complaint	Compliment	Stage 2 complaint	Total	
Services for Communities	Antisocial Behaviour	0	0	0	2	2	
	Community Housing	2	7	3	10	22	
	Customer Services	1	2	9	0	12	
	Economic Development	0	0	0	1	1	
	Environment	0	0	0	2	2	
	Facilities Management	0	2	1	2	5	
	Homelessness	0	1	0	1	2	
	Housing	0	0	0	1	1	
	Landscape and Countryside	6	9	9	6	30	
	Libraries	1	2	6	3	12	
	Licensing	0	0	0	1	1	
	Planning and Building Control	1	0	0	2	3	
	Property Maintenance	1	39	7	28	75	
	Property Services	0	1	1	0	2	
	Trading Standards	0	0	0	0	0	
	Transportation	6	10	2	7	25	
	Waste Services	2	21	2	4	29	
	Other - Services for Communities	1	3	10	1	15	
	Services for People	Adult Wellbeing	0	4	16	9	29
		Children's Wellbeing	0	3	3	7	13
Criminal Justice		0	0	0	1	1	
Education and Schools		1	0	2	5	4	
Other - Services for People		0	1	0	1	2	

Directorate	Service Area	Stage 1 Comment	Stage 1 Complaint	Compliment	Stage 2 complaint	Total
Support Services	Community Care Finance	0	0	1	0	1
	Council Tax	0	1	0	4	5
	Cultural Services	0	0	0	0	0
	Democratic Services	0	0	0	0	0
	Finance	0	0	0	0	0
	Human Resources	0	0	0	0	0
	IT	0	0	0	0	0
	Legal Services	0	0	0	1	1
	Print Unit	0	0	0	0	0
	Revenues and Benefits	0	3	0	3	6
	Other - Support Services	0	0	2	0	2
Other/Unknown	Other/Unknown	3	1	0	2	6
Feedback Total		25	110	74	104	313

Stage 2 Complaints relating to Staff Attitude	28
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