

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

**MEETING DATE:** 28 April 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 and provide analysis on customer feedback received for Q2 and Q3 of 2014/2015: 1 July 2014 to 30 September 2014 and 1 October 2014 to 31 December 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. Service areas are encouraged to make sure the complaints they receive are recorded to ensure reporting data is as accurate as possible.
- 3.3 The total number of complaints, comments and compliments received for each quarter (following on from the Q1 figures already reported) 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>
Stage 1 complaints:	110	119	101
Stage 2 complaints:	104	114	497* (77)
Total no of complaints:	<b><u>214</u></b>	<b><u>233</u></b>	<b><u>598* (178)</u></b>
Comments:	25	29	22
Compliments:	74	71	83

- 3.4 There was a significant increase in the number of Stage 2 complaints received in Q3. This was due to a single issue campaign in the county relating to the proposal for a marine energy park at the Cockenzie power station site and the role of East Lothian Council in this matter. 421 individual complaints were received about this issue. The figures in brackets count this as single issue i.e. one complaint, which will help when making direct comparisons with previous quarters.
- 3.5 Compared to the same period last year there was a 13% increase in complaints in Q1 (187 received), a 14% increase in Q2 (200 received) and a 34% decrease in Q3 when taking the Cockenzie park complaints as a single issue (284 received), or a 53% increase when counting these complaints separately.
- 3.6 Figures 1 and 2 (below) provide quarterly comparisons of top line figures for all customer feedback received since April 2012. Figure 1 has classed the Cockenzie complaints as a single issue, while Figure 2 shows the impact a single issue campaign of this type can have on overall complaints figures.

Figure 1 (Cockenzie complaints classed as one issue)

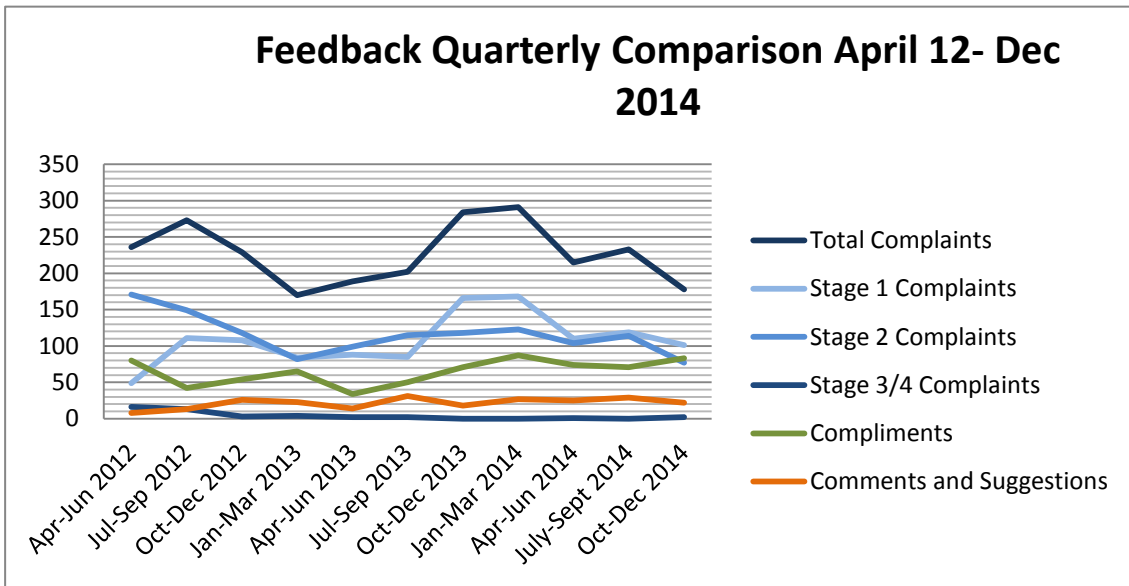
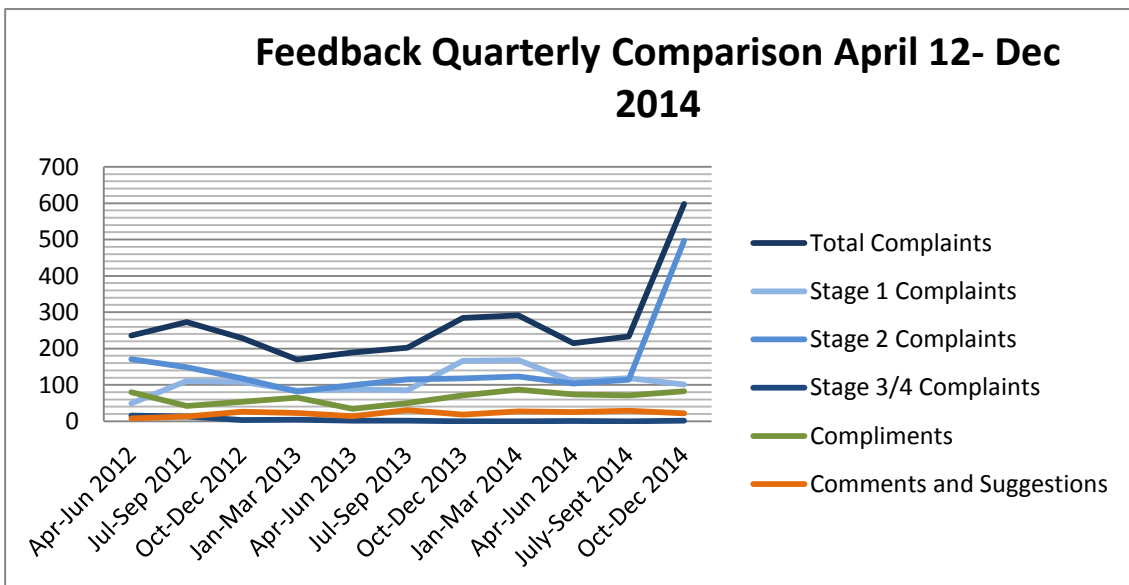


Figure 2 (Cockenzie complaints recorded individually)



- 3.7 Looking at Figure 1, there is no discernible pattern that can be determined for complaints, with peaks and troughs happening at different times of the year. Factors such as the seasons do not appear to impact on complaint numbers.
- 3.8 The graphs show that more effort is needed to resolve a higher proportion of complaints at Stage 1, i.e. directly at service level, which is better for both the complainant and the council in terms of time, resource etc. Progress was made in this area last year but latest figures show almost an even split of the number of complaints being dealt with at each stage. This may be due to the complexity of complaints received; however if a complaint can be resolved at service level within 5 working days then it should be. This message will be reinforced with all service areas.

- 3.9 It is pleasing to note that the number of compliments being received rose in Q3, with only 18% less compliments received during this period than Stage 1 complaints. The highest number of compliments was received about Adult Wellbeing services.
- 3.10 It is also pleasing to note that only a tiny proportion of complaints progressed to external review, either by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) or Complaints Review Committee (CRC) for social work issues (classed as Stage 3 / 4 on diagrams).
- 3.11 Appendices 1a and 1b show the breakdown of customer complaints, comments and compliments received per service area per quarter.
- 3.12 The services with the highest number of complaints during these quarters (in order) were as follows:

<b>Q2</b>	Stage 1	Stage 2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Maintenance</li> <li>• Waste Services</li> <li>• Landscape &amp; Countryside</li> <li>• Transportation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Maintenance</li> <li>• Education &amp; Schools</li> <li>• Adult Wellbeing</li> <li>• Antisocial Behaviour</li> </ul>
<b>Q3</b>	Stage 1	Stage 2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Maintenance</li> <li>• Transportation</li> <li>• Waste services</li> <li>• Landscape &amp; Countryside / Community Housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic Development (Cockenzie campaign)</li> <li>• Adult Wellbeing</li> <li>• Housing Maintenance</li> <li>• Transportation</li> </ul>

- 3.13 Housing maintenance was the top subject of complaint for both quarters. This is consistent with previous quarters and is not unsurprising given the potential impact of a maintenance issue on an individual's daily life. Tenants also have the complaints procedure well publicised to them e.g. information provided in tenancy packs and have a number of contact points with the Council. The complaints received fell within the remit of both the Property Maintenance and Community Housing services, which is why the category of complaint has been termed 'housing maintenance'.
- 3.14 A breakdown of the housing maintenance complaints received is attached at Appendix 2.

- 3.15 It is positive to note that for Q3 a much higher proportion of complaints about housing maintenance issues were being resolved at service level within 5 working days. Actual complaints numbers about maintenance issues have also fallen from previous years.
- 3.16 Other complaints dealt with at Stage 1 included:
- Waste uplifts
  - Dog fouling / litter
  - Library procedures / layout
  - Road maintenance e.g. potholes
  - Open space maintenance e.g. grass cutting
  - Lack of communication / information (across service areas)
- 3.17 Resolutions included providing apologies, information and / or explanations and an undertaking to provide the requested service.
- 3.18 Over 90% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to within the 5 working day timescale, for both Q2 and Q3, consistent with performance in previous quarters.
- 3.19 Stage 2 complaint acknowledgement and response times (following on from the Q1 figures already reported) were:

	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>2013/2014 Average</b>
Acknowledgement (within 3 working days)	97%	95%	99%	92%
Response (within 20 working days)	74%	53%	96%	83%
Update provided/ Extension agreed	15%	47%	1%	9%

- 3.20 There was a significant dip in response performance for Q3, with only 53% of complaints being responded to within 20 working days, which was not an acceptable level of service. Updates on progress were provided in the remaining 47% of cases that quarter. Service managers reported experiencing challenges during this period in providing resources for complaint matters. The Customer Feedback Team worked with service areas to address this and performance increased dramatically in Q3 up to 96% within timescale.
- 3.21 Notable issues complained about at Stage 2 during Q2 and Q3 (in addition to those already referred to) included:

- Planning decision-making process
- Allocation of nursery places
- Access to Library facilities
- Care at home service – missed visits etc
- Antisocial behaviour investigations – decisions reached / lack of impartiality
- Care package – amount of care / quality etc
- Staff conduct
- Housing allocations policy
- Occupational Therapy assessment - delays
- Council Tax administration
- Insurance & claims process
- Delays in carrying out road repairs
- Management of pupil behaviour in school

3.22 Most complaints related to individual situations, rather than general policy or approach. However, a number of complaints were received from parents in Q2 about funding for partnership nursery places.

3.23 22 complaints about staff attitude were received in Q2, a slight drop from the previous quarter. This number then fell to 7 in Q3 which was pleasing to note and more in line with 2013/2014 numbers.

3.24 Complaint outcomes were as follows:

	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3*</b>	<b>2013/14 Average</b>
Not Upheld	43%	51%	81%	50%
Partially Upheld	33%	25%	10%	27%
Upheld	24%	24%	9%	23%

*\*the outcomes for Q3 would have been impacted by the Cockenzie campaign*

3.25 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.

3.26 Improvement actions identified by the service in those cases where complaints were upheld or partially upheld will be acted on to prevent similar complaints being received in future. A log of improvement actions is now being kept.

## **CUSTOMER FEEDBACK DEVELOPMENTS**

- 3.27 Schools are now required to record complaints dealt with locally by the school. This information will be included in future reports.
- 3.28 Survey cards are sent to all complainants to gather their views on their experience of making a complaint. The next annual report will include an analysis of survey returns.
- 3.29 Work is being undertaken to make the complaints procedure more accessible for children and young people.

## **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 1a and Appendix 1b Breakdown of Customer Feedback by service per quarter
- 7.2 Appendix 2 Breakdown of housing maintenance complaints per quarter
- 7.3 Local Government Model Complaints Handling procedure (can be accessed at [www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk](http://www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk)) & East Lothian Council's complaints handling procedure (can be accessed at [www.eastlothian.gov.uk](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk))

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Appendix 1a – Customer Feedback Breakdown by Service Area Q2 (1 July 2014 to 30 September 2014)

Directorate	Service Area	Comment	Compliment	Stage 1 Complaint	Stage 2 Complaint	Total	
<b>Services for Communities</b>	Antisocial Behaviour	1	0	1	7	9	
	Community Housing	0	6	2	6	14	
	Customer Services	0	4	0	4	8	
	Economic Development	1	0	0	0	1	
	Environment	0	0	0	3	3	
	Facilities Management	1	1	3	2	7	
	Homelessness	2	0	0	0	2	
	Housing Maintenance	1	8	43	31	83	
	Landscape and Countryside	4	5	14	4	27	
	Licensing	0	0	0	0	0	
	Libraries	0	7	7	1	15	
	Planning and Building Control	1	0	1	3	5	
	Property Services	0	1	2	1	4	
	Trading Standards	0	0	0	0	0	
	Transportation	9	1	11	3	24	
	Waste Services	4	4	23	1	32	
	Other - Services for Communities	0	3	5	3	11	
	<b>Services for People</b>	Adult Wellbeing	1	26	3	14	44
		Children's Wellbeing	0	0	1	1	2
Criminal Justice		0	0	0	0	0	
Education and Schools		1	0	0	23	24	
Other - Services for People		1	1	1	0	3	



Appendix 1a – Customer Feedback Breakdown by Service Area Q2 (1 July 2014 to 30 September 2014)

Directorate	Service Area	Comment	Compliment	Stage 1 Complaint	Stage 2 Complaint	Total
<b>Support Services</b>	Council Tax	0	0	0	3	3
	Democratic Services	0	1	0	0	1
	Finance	0	0	0	1	1
	Human Resources	0	0	0	1	1
	IT	1	0	0	0	1
	Legal Services	0	0	0	0	0
	Print Unit	0	0	0	0	0
	Revenues and Benefits	0	1	2	1	4
	Other - Support Services	0	2	0	0	2
<b>Other/Unknown</b>	Other/Unknown	1	0	0	1	0
<b>Feedback Total</b>		<b>29</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>333</b>

Appendix 1b – Customer Feedback by service Q3 (1 October 2014 to 31 December 2014)

Directorate	Service Area	Comment	Compliment	Stage 1 Complaint	Stage 2 Complaint	Total
<b>Services for Communities</b>	Antisocial Behaviour	0	0	0	2	2
	Community Housing	1	1	6	5	13
	Cultural Services	0	2	0	0	2
	Customer Services	0	4	2	1	7
	Economic Development	1	1	0	421	423
	Environment	1	0	0	2	3
	Facilities Management	0	0	1	0	1
	Homelessness	0	0	0	0	0
	Housing Maintenance	3	13	43	15	74
	Landscape and Countryside	2	8	5	2	17
	Libraries	1	2	4	0	7
	Licensing	0	0	0	0	0
	Planning and Building Control	0	1	0	3	4
	Property Services	0	0	1	0	1
	Trading Standards	0	0	0	0	0
	Transportation	6	4	15	10	35
	Waste Services	2	5	13	1	21
	Other - Services for Communities	0	5	2	3	10
<b>Services for People</b>	Adult Wellbeing	1	28	3	17	49
	Children's Wellbeing	0	2	1	1	4
	Criminal Justice	0	0	0	0	0
	Education and Schools	1	0	1	9	11
	Other - Services for People	0	1	2	0	3

Appendix 1b – Customer Feedback by service Q3 (1 October 2014 to 31 December 2014)

Directorate	Service Area	Comment	Compliment	Stage 1 Complaint	Stage 2 Complaint	Total
<b>Support Services</b>	Community Care Finance	0	0	0	0	0
	Council Tax	0	0	1	2	3
	Democratic Services	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	1	0	1	2
	Print Unit	0	0	0	0	0
	Revenues and Benefits	0	2	0	0	2
	Other - Support Services	0	3	0	0	3
<b>Other/Unknown</b>	Other/Unknown	3	0	0	0	3
<b>Feedback Total</b>		<b>22</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>497</b>	<b>703</b>

Appendix 2: Breakdown of Housing Maintenance Complaints for Q2 (July-Sept 2014) and Q3 (October-Dec 2014)

**Q2 1 July to 30 September 2014**

Stage 1 Complaints:

- Trade (*delays/lack of contact*): 20
- Repairs Officer (*lack of contact*): 8
- Staff Attitude: 5
- Capital Improvement works e.g. Kitchen / Bathroom / Rewiring : 3
- Trade (*multiple issues*): 2
- Trade (*ineffective repairs*): 1
- Shared cost repair:1
- Gas recharge: 1
- Gas contractor (*attitude*): 1
- Gas contractor (*performance*):1

**Total: 43**

Stage 2 Complaints:

- Gas recharge: 5
- Gas contractor – performance: 5
- Trade (*delay*): 3
- Multiple -O/S repairs: 3
- Standard of property on allocation: 3
- Kitchen/Bathroom/Rewiring: 3
- Trade (*ineffective repairs*): 2
- Gas contractor (*attitude*): 2
- Recharge dispute: 2
- Shared cost repair: 2
- Policy: 1

**Total: 31**

**Q3 1 October 2014 to 31 December 2014**

Stage 1 Complaints:

- Trade (*delays/lack of contact*): 18
- Trade (*ineffective repairs*): 5
- Staff Attitude: 5
- Repairs Officer (*delay/lack of contact*): 4
- Gas recharge: 3
- Trade – Multiple: 2
- Gas Contractor (*attitude*): 2
- Gas Contractor (*performance*): 2
- Kitchen / Bathroom / Rewiring: 1
- Damage by Trade:1

**Total: 43**

Stage 2 Complaints:

- Trade (*delays / performance*): 6
- Gas recharge / forced entry: 3
- Kitchen / Bathroom / Rewiring: 2
- Gas contractor (*performance*): 2
- Staff Attitude: 1
- Standard of property on allocation: 1

**Total: 15**