

Data Label: Public

# **West Lothian Council**

## **Annual Complaint Performance Report 2013/14**

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## 1. Overview

### 1.1. Introduction

This is the council's annual complaints performance report which provides information on customer complaints received between 1 April 2013 and 21 March 2014.

The council always aims to provide the highest possible quality of service to our community, but recognise that there are times when things go wrong and fail to meet the expectations of our customer. A new complaints procedure was introduced in February 2013 to provide our customers with a clear and structured way to provide feedback on their dissatisfaction with council services in a range of easily accessible ways. The council welcomes feedback and it provides information that helps services learn from complaints and to modify and improve the way services are delivered. The indicators covered in this report were created to provide a useful tool that the council and the public can use to judge objectively how well complaints are being handled and how it informs service improvement activity.

### 1.2. Corporate Complaints Procedure

There are many factors that affect the number and complexity of complaints received by the council such as the standard of service that is being delivered, the attitude of our employees, the service response time to customer requests, missed appointments and poor communication.

The council's complaint procedure has 2 stages in its process which are outlined below:

- Stage 1 complaints could mean immediate action to resolve the problem or complaints which are resolved in no more than five working days.
- Stage 2 deals with two types of complaints: those that have not been resolved at Stage 1 and those that are complex and require detailed investigation.
- After the council has fully investigated the complaint, and if the customer is still not satisfied with the decision or the way the council dealt with the complaint, then it can be referred onto the SPSO.

The statistics gathered are based on 8 key performance indicators devised by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) in conjunction with all 32 Scottish councils.

The council has put in place clear governance arrangements for complaints. The Corporate Complaint Steering Board is an officer group that monitors the implementation of the corporate complaint procedure and the corresponding performance and reporting activity. The board ensures that the council is compliant with the complaint procedure requirements. This is chaired by a Depute Chief Executive and the membership consists of council Heads of Service. Complaint performance is reported on a quarterly basis to both the council's Corporate Management Team and the council's Performance Committee. All complaint performance statistics are reported to the public and are available on the council's website.

The Corporate Complaints Procedure applies to all complaints against the council, with the exception of those which are described as Social Care statutory complaints.

## 2. Complaint Performance Statistics

This report details the performance of complaint handling and outcomes covering the period between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014.

Complaints are recorded and tracked using the council's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System which enables the production of the complaints performance information.

The number of complaints the council received has shown a year on year reduction in complaints over the past four years. The council will continue to analyse complaints to help inform service improvement, identify training opportunities for our staff and help prioritise our activities to meet the changing needs of our community.

### 2.1. Indicator 1: Complaints received per 1,000 population

This indicator records the total number of complaints received by the council. This is the sum of the number of complaints received at stage one, (frontline resolution) and the number of complaints received directly at stage two

(investigation). To allow for a fair comparison across all 32 councils in Scotland, the figure of complaints per 1000 of population is used. Table 1 provides the council's total complaints reviewed per 1,000 population over the past 4 years. Performance shows that there has been a year on year decrease in the number of complaints received by the council over this period.

**Table 1: Complaints received per 1,000 population**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b>
West Lothian Population <sup>1</sup>	173,040	174,090	175,300	175,990
Total number complaints received	2,732	2,323	2,166	2,036
Number complaints received per 1,000	15.8	13.3	12.4	11.5

Table 2 provides a breakdown of complaints received by service for 2013/14

**Table 2: Complaints received by service**

<b>Service</b>	<b>2013/14</b>
Housing, Construction & Building Services	725
Operational Services	614
Area Services	224
Finance and Estates/ Executive Office	210
Education Service	201
Planning and Economic Development	48
Corporate Services	8
Social Policy	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,036</b>

All complaints received by the council are categories into 6 categories. This categorisation allows the service to group complaints by theme and helps the service to identify areas that require improvement actions.

Table 3 breaks down all complaints received by the council by complaint category from 2010/11 to 2013/14.

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<sup>1</sup> Previous years published mid-year estimate used

**Table 3: Complaints received by category**

Category	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Employee Attitude	331	283	324	299
Missed appointment	11	19	34	13
Policy related	204	188	275	272
Poor Communication	219	257	264	242
Standard of Service	1,752	1,370	1,088	1,065
Waiting Time	215	236	181	142
Not Categorised	0	0	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,732</b>	<b>2,323</b>	<b>2,166</b>	<b>2,036</b>

## 2.2. Indicator 2: Closed complaints

This indicator provides information on the number of complaints closed at stage one and stage two as a percentage of all complaints closed. Table 4 provides the performance information for this indicator.

The term “closed” refers to a complaint that has had a response sent to the customer and at the time no further action is required (regardless at which stage it is processed and whether any further escalation takes place).

**Table 4: Closed complaints**

Closed complaints	2013/14
Number complaints closed at stage one as % of all complaints	69%
Number complaints closed at stage two as % of all complaints	24%
Number complaints closed at stage two after escalation as % of all complaints	7%

### 2.3. Indicator 3: Complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld

The council reviews all complaints and each customer is contacted to explain whether their complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld or and why.

This indicator measures the number and percentage of complaints which were upheld, partially upheld or not upheld recorded at each stage. The results can be seen in Tables 5, 6 and 7.

**Table 5: Upheld complaints**

<b>Complaints upheld</b>	<b>2013/14</b>
Number of complaints upheld at stage one as % of all complaints closed at stage one	32%
Number complaints upheld at stage two as % of complaints closed at stage two	23.2%
Number escalated complaints upheld at stage two as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	20.5%

**Table 6: Partially upheld complaints**

<b>Complaints partially upheld</b>	<b>2013/14</b>
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage one as % of all complaints closed at stage one	18.2%
Number complaints partially upheld at stage two as % of complaints closed at stage two	23.6%
Number escalated complaints partially upheld at stage two as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	17.1%

**Table 7: Not upheld complaints**

<b>Complaints not upheld</b>	<b>2013/14</b>
Number of complaints not upheld at stage one as % of all complaints closed at stage one	33.5%
Number complaints not upheld at stage two as % of complaints closed at stage two	48.3%
Number escalated complaints not upheld at stage two as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	38.4%

Variances in the total for these indicators can be attributed to fields which have not been populated in the CRM system. This has been addressed through

improved monitoring arrangement and officer training in complaint handling and use of the CRM system.

## 2.4. Indicator 4: Average times

Indicator 4 represents the average time in working days to close complaints at stage one and complaints stage two of the council's Complaint Handling Procedure (CHP). Indicator 4 performance can be seen in Table 8

**Table 8: Average times**

Average times	2013/14
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage one	7.9
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage two	15.1
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation	11.2

## 2.5. Indicator 5: Performance against timescales

The council's Complaint Handling Procedure requires complaints to be closed within 5 working days at stage one and 20 working days at stage two. This indicator measures the number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days. Indicator 5 performance can be seen in Table 9

**Table 9: Performance against timescales**

Performance against timescales	2013/14
Number complaints closed at stage one within 5 working days as % of stage one complaints	71.9%
Number complaints closed at stage two within 20 working days as % of stage two complaints	82.6%
Number escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as % of escalated stage two complaints	73.3%

## 2.6. Indicator 6: Number of cases where an extension is authorised

The council always aims to respond to complaints as quickly as possible. There are, however, times when a complaint is particularly complex and it is not feasible to fully investigate the issues within the prescribed timescales. In these



situations the council can agree with a complainant to extend the timescale for closing the complaint.

This indicator provides is the number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension to the 5 or 20 working day timeline has been authorised. Indicator 6 performance can be seen in Table 10

**Table 10: Number of cases where an extension is authorised**

<b>Number of cases where an extension is authorised</b>	<b>2013/14</b>
% of complaints at stage one where extension was authorised	7%
% of complaints at stage two where extension was authorised	1.9%

## 2.7. Indicator 7: Customer satisfaction

This indicator provides information on the levels of customer satisfaction with the complaint handling procedure and process. Indicator 7 performance can be seen in table 11. A sample of complainants are contacted by the council's Customer Service Centre on a monthly basis to gather this satisfaction information.

**Table 11: Customer satisfaction**

<b>Customer satisfaction</b>	<b>2013/14</b>
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the length of time it took to deal with their complaint.	64.2%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the outcome of their upheld complaint.	72.3%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the way their complaint was handled.	67.9%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they found it easy to complain to the council.	83%

## 2.8. Indicator 8: Learning from complaints

The council has a clear commitment to listen to our customers and act on their feedback. Learning from complaints is a continuous process that helps the council to resolve common complaints and further improve the services that are provided. Some examples of actions that have been taken are highlighted below.

	<b>Complaint Area/ Complaint Theme</b>	<b>Complaints Analysis</b>	<b>Service Improvement Action(s)</b>
1.	Housing, Construction and Building Services: Standard of Service	There were two linked themes that emerged in relation to the repairs. These were the quality of work and lack of follow up to complete repairs.	Local Repairs Teams have been introduced with specific ward responsibility. A post inspection process has also been introduced which includes a number of weekly quality checks. When the materials are in stock Works Planners contact customers and arrange a suitable date for works to be completed
2.	Housing, Construction and Building Services: Poor Communication	A number of complaints in this theme were in relation to lack of notices on display that work had been carried out.	Staff instructed that notices must be put up to warn people about painting operations. Additionally notices to be updated on each common stair to show last date stair was cleaned.
3.	Housing, Construction and Building Services: Poor Communication	Taking account of customers contact preferences where there are specific needs identified.	Vulnerability indicators now created in our housing management software system to take account of customers contact preferences.

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	<b>Complaint Area/ Complaint Theme</b>	<b>Complaints Analysis</b>	<b>Service Improvement Action(s)</b>
4.	Operational Services: Standard of Service	Complaints were received relating to excess littering in local communities.	Geographical analysis of complaints and requests for service is carried out to identify any particular littering hotspots.  This has led to changes in a number of the beats and squads to ensure that we are tackling the right areas at the right time of the day/week/month. For example we have changed a number of the beats and timings around Secondary Schools to tackle the problem of litter after lunchtime.
5.	Operational Services: Standard of Service	The condition of roads and footpaths was highlighted as an issue although there were no themes to locations of these complaints.	Footpath condition surveys are being undertaken by staff from the service and these will help highlight the footpaths in the greatest need of repair. Road condition surveys are undertaken each year and the main priorities are then identified and programmed for investment.
6.	Operational Services: Standard of Service	Customer complaints relating to missed bins and bulky uplift appointments not being met.	Route optimisation and assessment was undertaken to improve routing of vehicles to avoid known areas of access issue/congestion dependant on the time of collection.  Customers with an e-mail address now get an additional e-mail confirming their actual uplift date within 1 working day of uplift being logged. This resolves the issue of online customers not knowing their collection date.
7.	Operational Services: Standard of Service	During winter 2013/14, complaints were received relating to the standard of the winter maintenance service.	The service will provide customers with more real time information on the winter maintenance programme, including information on the priority gritting routes, how the council will deal with residential areas and the resources that will be available.

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	<b>Complaint Area/ Complaint Theme</b>	<b>Complaints Analysis</b>	<b>Service Improvement Action(s)</b>
8.	Education Services: Policy related	Complaints were linked to the access to community courses to home educated children. The council caused unnecessary confusion to in that communication about community courses has been unclear and inconsistent	Amendments to Educating Children and Young People at Home policy, containing clear written guidance on the access to Community High Schools by children and young people educated at home, approved by Education Executive 1 October 2013.
9.	Education Services: Standard of Service	Educational Psychology Service did not provide a reasonable service in relation to the Early Years Assessment process.	Actions considered and implemented on 4 October 2013 as a result of an internal review of the processes in relation to case. There is now a standard letter that is issued with all copies of reports to parents to explain the purpose of the report. It is also now standard practice for Educational Psychologists to record all attempts to contact a family even when unsuccessful.
10.	Area Services: Waiting time	Customers unhappy with time to wait in Queue to speak to CSC.	Implementation of new telephony system following relocation of CSC from Lomond House to Civic Centre. Staff Skillsets on new system have been reviewed and adjusted to maximise efficiency.
11.	Finance and Estates: Standards of service	Delay in processing benefit claim documentation not linked to the case incorrect advice given to customers, and documents received not being scanned to the case papers timeously.	Under the new structure of the Unit a training and development team leader and section leader have been appointed and are undertaking a programme of training/ refresher training with front line staff to improve understanding of the processes and customer service.

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	<b>Complaint Area/ Complaint Theme</b>	<b>Complaints Analysis</b>	<b>Service Improvement Action(s)</b>
13.	Corporate Services: Standards of service	Complaints related to late handling of mail from a partner agency through the central mail room.	After discussions with Royal Mail, delivery times were modified after Royal Mail agreed to adjust their collection route.
14.	Social Policy	Social Policy complaint improvement actions are linked to their statutory complaints process and are not covered in this report.	