

Data Label: PUBLIC

West Lothian Council Annual Complaint Performance Report 2015/16

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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 and closed between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016.

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.

The council's complaints procedure provides 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

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

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. Stage 2 complaints should be resolved *in no more than 20 days*.
- 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 Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

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.

2. Complaint Performance Statistics

Statistics on complaints are based on 8 key performance indicators devised by the SPSO in conjunction with all 32 Scottish councils.

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 closed in 2015/16 was 2,330. This is an increase from the number closed in the previous year. The council will continue to analysis complaints to help inform service improvement, identify training opportunities for our staff and help priorities our activities to meet the changing needs of our community. Complaint benchmark data for 2015/16 is not yet available for other Local Authorities. Where applicable, this report has included the 2014/15 Scottish Local Authority national average for a range of performance indicators for comparative information.

2.1. Indicator 1: Complaints closed per 1,000 population

This indicator records the total number of complaints received by the council. In 2015/16, this calculation was modified and it is the sum of the number of complaints closed at stage one, (frontline resolution), the number of complaints closed directly at stage two (investigation) and the number complaints closed at stage two after escalation. To allow for a fair comparison across all 32 councils in Scotland, the figure of complaints per 1,000 of population is used. The council received 2,391 complaints from 1 April 2015 to 31 April 2016. This is equivalent to 13.49 received complaints per 1,000 population. Of the total complaints received in 2015/16 (2,391) 2,330 were closed in this period.

Table 1 provides the council's total complaints close per 1,000 population over the past 5 years. The table shows that there has been an increase in complaints received by the council in 2015/16 when compared to the previous year from 2,113 to 2,330.

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Table 1: Complaints closed per 1,000 population

Measure	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
West Lothian Population ¹	174,090	175,300	175,990	176,140	177,200
Total number of complaints received	2,323	2,166	2,036	2,113	2,330
Number of complaints closed per 1,000	13.3	12.4	11.5	12.0	13.1

In 2014/15, the Scottish Local Authority average for the number complaints closed per 1,000 population was 12.19. Table 2 provides a breakdown of complaints closed by service from 2011/12 to 2015/16.

Table 2: Complaints received by service

Service	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Operational Services	1,071	742	614	794	819
Housing, Construction & Building Services	686	625	725	579	746
Education Service	169	288	201	268	287
Area Services	213	227	224	195	235
Finance and Estates/ Executive Office	79	188	210	178	154
Planning and Economic Development	38	42	48	81	70
Corporate Services	25	27	8	11	13
Social Policy	42	27	6	7	6
Total	2,323	2,166	2,036	2,113	2,330

All complaints received by the council are grouped into 6 categories. The 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 council complaints closed by complaint category from 2011/12 to 2015/16.

Table 3: Complaints received by category

Category	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Standard of Service	1,340	1,088	1,065	1,003	1,008
Policy Related	188	275	272	452	468

¹ Previous years published mid-year estimate used

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Category	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Employee Attitude	283	324	299	290	330
Poor Communication	257	264	242	233	295
Waiting Time	236	181	142	127	210
Missed Appointments	19	34	13	8	19
Not Categorised	0	0	3	0	0
Total Complaints	2,323	2,166	2,036	2,113	2,330

2.2. Indicator 2: Closed complaints

This indicator provides information on the number of complaints closed at stage one and stage two and stage two escalated complaints 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	2014/15	2015/16	Scottish LA average 2014/15
Number complaints closed at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints	69% (1405)	76% (1606)	73.7% (1718)	82%
Number complaints closed at stage two (20 days) as % of all complaints	31% (631)	24% (507)	24.6% (572)	16%
Number complaints closed at stage two (20 days) after escalation as % of all complaints ²	7% (146)	0.8% (17)	1.7% (40)	2%

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 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.

² From 2015/16, the escalated stage 2 complaint figure was not included in stage 2 complaints closed total for the council.

Table 5: Upheld complaints

Complaints upheld	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Scottish LA average 2014/15
Number of complaints upheld at stage one as % of all complaints closed at stage one (5 days)	32.0%	33.1%	32.8%	54.0%
Number complaints upheld at stage two as % of complaints closed at stage two (20 days)	23.2%	14.6%	18.0%	57.9%
Number escalated complaints upheld at stage two as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two (20 days)	20.5%	11.76%	20.0%	25.1%

Table 6: Partially upheld complaints

Complaints partially upheld	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Scottish LA average 2014/15
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints closed at stage one	18.2%	23.8%	28.2%	14.1%
Number complaints partially upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of complaints closed at stage two	23.6%	18.3%	23.8%	13.3%
Number escalated complaints partially upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	17.1%	47.06%	30.0%	20.0%

Table 7: Not upheld complaints

Complaints not upheld	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Scottish LA average 2014/15
Number of complaints not upheld at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints closed at stage one	33.5%	36.4%	39.0%	29.0%
Number complaints not upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of complaints closed at stage two	48.3%	64.1%	58.2%	32.5%
Number escalated complaints not upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	38.4%	41.18%	50.0%	54.6%

Overall, the council upheld/ part upheld 1,307 (56.1%) complaints from a total of 2,330 complaints closed in 2015/16. Variances in the total for these indicators in 2013/14 and 2014/15 were attributable to fields which were not populated in the Customer

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Relationship Management system which generated the performance information. This was 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 at 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	2014/15	2015/16	Scottish LA average 2014/15
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage one (5 day resolution target)	7.9	7.0	4.0	4.4
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage two (20 day resolution target)	15.1	13.8	12.5	18.8
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation (20 day resolution target)	11.2	14.7	9.1	15.7

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 percentage of complaints which were closed in full at each stage 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	2014/15	2015/16	Scottish LA average 2014/15
Number complaints closed at stage one within 5 working days as % of stage one complaints	71.9%	78.0%	84.7%	80.8%
Number complaints closed at stage two within 20 working days as % of stage two complaints	82.6%	85.8%	88.5%	85.2%
Number escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as % of escalated stage two complaints	73.3%	76.5%	90.0%	77.6%

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 the 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

Number of cases where an extension is authorised	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Scottish LA average 2014/15
% of complaints at stage one (5 days) where extension was authorised	7.0%	1.1%	1.3%	4.0%
% of complaints at stage two (20 days) where extension was authorised	1.9%	2.4%	2.4%	13.8%

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

Customer satisfaction	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the length of time it took to deal with their complaint.	64.2%	68.6%	75.5%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the outcome of their upheld complaint.	72.3%	74.3%	68.2%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the way their complaint was handled.	67.9%	76.2%	75.5%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they found it easy to complain to the council.	83.0%	88.6%	85.5%

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.

	Complaint Area/ Complaint Theme	Complaints Analysis	Service Improvement Action(s)
1.	Area Services: Standard of Service	Customer complained that the flooring in pool changing area was slippery.	To reduce slipperiness of floor a new cleaning agent, recommended by the flooring manufacturer, was sourced. Training was provided to staff on the use of the new cleaning agent and changes were made to the frequency of the cleaning.
2.	Education Services: Standard of Service	School path and playground flooded.	West Lothian Council Flood Prevention Officer liaised with housing developers to address run-off from site.
3.	Education Services: Standard of Service	Complaint about handling of bullying, failure of Headteacher to meet with parent, agreed strategies not followed up on.	Improvements made to the incident report form process to ensure parents are contacted. Localised process changed to ensure all relevant telephone messages are passed on to the appropriate member of the school senior management.
4.	Education Services: Standard of Service	A complaint was received where the parent as not informed that their child was being referred for Additional Support Needs provision.	More detailed information is now being provided to parents in relation to the Additional Support Needs referral process.
5.	Finance and Estates: Standard of Service	A customer complained that there was a delay in receiving a council tax refund.	Procedures have been reviewed and updated to ensure that refunds are made in a timely manner.

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	Complaint Area/ Complaint Theme	Complaints Analysis	Service Improvement Action(s)
6.	Finance and Estates: Standard of Service	Customer complained that the system to make a payment was not fully operational.	The software supplier investigated and resolved the specific issue after carrying out a full investigation relating to the system performance.
7.	Housing, Construction and Building Services: Standard of Service	Communal repairs were not being carried out in flatted property in a timely manner.	A change in the procedure was implemented to ensure all operatives who maintain stairwells were given access to a Key Fob to enter property.
8.	Operational Services: Standard of Service	Garden Maintenance account was not effectively transferred to a customer.	The business processes for Garden Maintenance have been reviewed and updated to reduce time to review an application and improve the customer experience.
9.	Operational Services: Standard of Service	Complaints received relate to early morning and weekend bin uplifts from Waste Services.	The service originally operated from 6am – 10am on Saturdays. From March 2016 the Saturday service was changed to 7am – 11am.
10.	Planning and Economic Development: Standard of Service	Customers raised complaints in relation to the lack of response to enquiries from Planning Services.	Officers now have access to Customer Relationship Management system queues to monitor enquiries. A rota system is now in place to ensure enquiries are monitored and responded to on a regular basis.
11.	Social Policy	Social Policy statutory complaint improvement actions are linked to their statutory complaints process and are not covered in this report.	

3. 2015/16 Complaint Summary

In 2015/16 the council closed 2,330 complaints and this represents an increase of 217 from the 2014/15 figure of 2,113.

The number of complaints closed across the council service areas varies significantly with 35% of all complaints being recorded against Operational Services to 0.3% in Social Policy. However it should be noted that the majority of Social Policy complaints are channelled through the council's statutory social work complaints process and are not covered in this report.

Of the eight service areas that deliver the council's activities and functions, two have shown a reduction in customer complaints, two have remained relatively static and four have had an increase in the number of complaints closed compared to the previous year. Planning and Economic Development have experienced the largest reduction in complaints with a 14% reduction. Finance and Estate Services had a 13% reduction. The two services that have shown the largest rise in complaints when compared to the previous year were Housing Construction and Building Services and Area Services with a 29% and 21% increase respectively.

The council's performance relating to complaint handling has improved with 73.7% of all complaints received being resolved at Stage 1 (Frontline Resolution), 24.6% of complaints being resolved at Stage 2 (Investigation) with the remaining 1.7% of complaints being resolved at Stage 2 (Escalation). The average times taken by the council to resolve both Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints were 4 days and 12.5 days respectively. The majority of complaints were responded to within timescales: 84.7% at Stage 1 (5 day target) and 88.5% at Stage 2 (20 day target).

The percentage of complaints that were upheld/ part upheld across the council in 2015/16 was 56.1% which represents an increase of 4.9% from the 2014/15 figure which was 51.2%. During 2015/16, 37 complaints were dealt with where a request was made to extend the review timescales.

In 2015/16, the council has shown improved performance across the majority of indicators relating to complaint handling. Customer satisfaction across the four key customer perception complaint indicators has shown an increase in one indicator, two have remained relatively static and one has shown a reduction compared to the previous year. The indicator that had an increase in customer satisfaction focused on the length of time the council took to resolve a customer complaint, showing an increase of 6.9% to 75.5%. 85.5% of customers surveyed said that they found it easy to submit a complaint to the council, which is a reduction of 3.1% from 2014/15.

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In addition a number of improvements have been made to existing services as a result of complaint analysis which ranged from service redesign to small scale alterations to existing practice.

Overall, the council's complaint performance has shown a general improvement in the processing of complaints across the various key indicators, customer satisfaction relating to complaint handling has been maintained and complaint driven service improvement continues to be identified based on robust complaint analysis.