

Data Label: PUBLIC

# **West Lothian Council Annual Complaint Performance Report 2016/17**

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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 2016 and 31 March 2017.

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 2016/17 was 3,414. 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 2016/17 is not yet available for other Local Authorities. Where applicable, this report has included the 2015/16 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 2016/17, 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 3,430 complaints from 1 April 2016 to 31 April 2017. This is equivalent to 19.2 received complaints per 1,000 population. Of the total complaints received in 2016/17 (3,430), 3,414 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 closed by the council in 2016/17 when compared to the previous year from 2,330 to 3,414.

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

Measure	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
West Lothian Population <sup>1</sup>	175,300	175,990	176,140	177,200	178,550
Total number of complaints closed	2,166	2,036	2,113	2,330	3,414
Number of complaints closed per 1,000	12.4	11.5	12.0	13.1	19.1

In 2015/16, the Scottish Local Authority average for the number complaints closed per 1,000 population was 13.81. Table 2 provides a breakdown of complaints closed by service from 2012/13 to 2016/17.

**Table 2: Complaints received by service**

Service	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Operational Services	742	614	794	819	1,852
Housing, Customer & Building Services	625	725	579	746	1,013
Education Service	288	201	268	287	277
Area Services <sup>2</sup>	227	224	195	235	N/A
Finance and Property/ Executive Office	188	210	178	154	179
Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration	42	48	81	70	72
Corporate Services	27	8	11	13	16
Social Policy	27	6	7	6	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,166</b>	<b>2,036</b>	<b>2,113</b>	<b>2,330</b>	<b>3,414</b>

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 2012/13 to 2016/17.

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

<sup>2</sup> Areas Services activity has now been disaggregated across Housing Customer and Building Services, Education Service and Finance and Property Services and Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration.

**Table 3: Complaints received by category**

Category	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Standard of Service	1,088	1,065	1,003	1,008	1,652
Policy Related	275	272	452	468	578
Waiting Time	181	142	127	210	463
Poor Communication	264	242	233	295	369
Employee Attitude	324	299	290	330	324
Missed Appointments	34	13	8	19	28
Not Categorised	0	3	0	0	0
<b>Total Complaints</b>	<b>2,166</b>	<b>2,036</b>	<b>2,113</b>	<b>2,330</b>	<b>3,414</b>

## 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	2016/17	Scottish LA average 2015/16
Number complaints closed at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints	69% (1405)	76% (1606)	73.7% (1718)	82.9% (2831)	84.5%
Number complaints closed at stage two (20 days) as % of all complaints	31% (631)	24% (507)	24.6% (572)	15.7% (535)	13.5%
Number complaints closed at stage two (20 days) after escalation as % of all complaints <sup>3</sup>	7% (146)	0.8% (17)	1.7% (40)	1.4% (48)	N/A

<sup>3</sup> From 2015/16, the escalated stage 2 complaint figure was not included in stage 2 complaints closed total for the council.

### 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.

**Table 5: Upheld complaints**

<b>Complaints upheld</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>Scottish LA average 2015/16</b>
Number of complaints upheld at stage one as % of all complaints closed at stage one (5 days)	32.0%	33.1%	32.8%	35.11%	60.9%
Number complaints upheld at stage two as % of complaints closed at stage two (20 days)	23.2%	14.6%	18.0%	23.4%	51.5%
Number escalated complaints upheld at stage two as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two (20 days)	20.5%	11.76%	20.0%	27.1%	N/A

**Table 6: Partially upheld complaints**

<b>Complaints partially upheld</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>Scottish LA average 2015/16</b>
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints closed at stage one	18.2%	23.8%	28.2%	26.14%	12.7%
Number complaints partially upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of complaints closed at stage two	23.6%	18.3%	23.8%	25.0%	14.3%
Number escalated complaints partially upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	17.1%	47.06%	30.0%	25.0%	N/A

**Table 7: Not upheld complaints**

<b>Complaints not upheld</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>Scottish LA average 2015/16</b>
Number of complaints not upheld at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints closed at stage one	33.5%	36.4%	39.0%	38.75%	25.2%
Number complaints not upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of complaints closed at stage two	48.3%	64.1%	58.2%	51.6%	32.9%
Number escalated complaints not upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	38.4%	41.18%	50.0%	47.9%	54.6%

Overall, the council upheld/ part upheld 2,018 (59.2%) complaints from a total of 3,414 complaints closed in 2016/17. Variances in the total for these indicators in 2013/14 and 2014/15 were attributable to fields which were not populated in the Customer 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**

<b>Average times</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>Scottish LA average 2015/16</b>
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage one (5 day resolution target)	7.9	7.0	4.0	3.8	7.5
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage two (20 day resolution target)	15.1	13.8	12.5	11.4	23.3
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation (20 day resolution target)	11.2	14.7	9.1	10.0	N/A



## 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**

<b>Performance against timescales</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>Scottish LA average 2015/16</b>
Number complaints closed at stage one within 5 working days as % of stage one complaints	71.9%	78.0%	84.7%	85.6%	63.1%
Number complaints closed at stage two within 20 working days as % of stage two complaints	82.6%	85.8%	88.5%	89.2%	71.6%
Number escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as % of escalated stage two complaints	73.3%	76.5%	90.0%	95.8%	N/A

## 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**

<b>Number of cases where an extension is authorised</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>Scottish LA average 2015/16</b>
% of complaints at stage one (5 days) where extension was authorised	7.0%	1.1%	1.3%	1.2%	3.4%
% of complaints at stage two (20 days) where extension was authorised	1.9%	2.4%	2.4%	1.3%	6.3%

## 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>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>
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%	64.8%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the outcome of their upheld complaint.	72.3%	74.3%	68.2%	69.7%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the way their complaint was handled.	67.9%	76.2%	75.5%	70.3%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they found it easy to complain to the council.	83.0%	88.6%	85.5%	80.7%

## 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.	<b>Corporate Services:</b>  Standard of Service	Customer complained that they were initially refused an automatic Blue Badge since they did not have the required Personal Independence Payment points.	Scottish Transport guidance states that anyone who requested a mandatory reconsideration of a decision to remove the mobility component of Personal Independence Payment when previously in receipt of a fixed term award of the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance should still be eligible for an automatic Blue Badge for 1 year.  The Blue Badge Administration Team guidance documentation was updated to ensure that the correct process is followed when a customer is going through a mandatory reconsideration of a PIP decision when applying for a Blue Badge.
2.	<b>Education Services:</b>  Standard of Service	Pupil fell on rough ground when path improvement works were underway.	Fencing around site had been removed due to concerns about high winds. Fence reinstated and apology given to pupil and family.
3.	<b>Education Services:</b>  Poor Communication	Complaint that customer had tried to call staff several times but calls had not been returned.	Following a restructure, new procedures for tracking enquiries has been implemented. All prospective learners will have the opportunity to discuss their learning needs and to be referred or signposted to the appropriate service.

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	<b>Complaint Area/ Complaint Theme</b>	<b>Complaints Analysis</b>	<b>Service Improvement Action(s)</b>
4.	<b>Education Services:</b>  Standard of Service	Complaint that online school payment system was not working, and that customer had e-mailed several times and did not receive a reply.	Issues with the system were raised with supplier and have been resolved. Review carried out on out-of-office messages to ensure customers are signposted to other appropriate employees to deal with their request.
5.	<b>Finance and Property Services:</b>  Standard of Service	Adviser sent customer form to Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) with no supporting evidence. This should have been agreed with the customer in advance.	Procedures updated to ensure customers agree with the content of the form before being sent to DWP.
6.	<b>Finance and Property Services:</b>  Standard of Service	A customer requested CCTV footage. However, this was lost due a replacement system being installed before the incident which had the incorrect settings.	The CCTV settings have been changed and a review is ongoing to ensure any new CCTV system is set to 28 days.
7.	<b>Finance and Property Services:</b>  Standard of Service	A customer complained after her Council Tax was closed in error following a household change.	The error was rectified. The complaint was discussed with the member of staff who had made the error and further training/instruction was given.
8.	<b>Housing, Customer and Building Services:</b>  Policy Related	Conflicting advice about the council's Right to Buy Policy was given to customer.	Additional training was carried out. Comprehensive documentation has been issued to all housing teams outlining the Right To Buy rules and entitlement.
9.	<b>Housing, Customer and Building Services:</b>  Missed Appointment	Staff failed to turn up to an appointment to repair a boundary fence.	Procedure change to ensure if appointments cannot be kept, customers are notified and are rearranged. Improving communication with customers has been incorporated into the Housing, Customer and Building Services Complaint Handling Training programme which was delivered in Quarter 2 2016/17.

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	<b>Complaint Area/ Complaint Theme</b>	<b>Complaints Analysis</b>	<b>Service Improvement Action(s)</b>
10.	<b>Housing, Customer and Building Services:</b>  Waiting Time	Customer complaints about the length of time for their call to be answered.	Additional staff have been recruited and a full review of current shift patterns has been carried out. This has resulted in the realignment of staff resource to meet the peak call time demands over the course of the working day.
11.	<b>Operational Services:</b>  Employee Attitude	Complaint regarding the school crossing patrol.	The guide was met with and the training reiterated. The role was detailed to ensure the individual understood that all persons were to be assisted when crossing the road.
12.	<b>Operational Services:</b>  Standard of Service	Complaints relating to bins being missed on assisted bin collection service.	The assisted collection service process has been fully reviewed to ensure that the current customer list held on the service database is accurate. This will ensure that the service is targeted to those in need.
13.	<b>Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration.</b>  Waiting Time	Customer dissatisfied about the waiting time to an email from a planning officer in relation to a planning permission application.	Procedures have been refined to ensure customers are kept informed of the status of their application.
14.	<b>Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration.</b>  Standard of Service	Customer complained that drawings for a planning application were not available online which prevented informed comment to be made about the application	Planning staff have been provided with additional training to highlight how to compress files which are received in different formats.
15.	<b>Social Policy</b>	Social Policy statutory complaint improvement actions are linked to their statutory complaints process and are not covered in this report.	

### 3. 2016/17 Complaint Summary

In 2016/17 the council closed 3,414 complaints and this represents an increase of 1,084 from the 2015/16 figure of 2,330.

The number of complaints closed across the council service areas varies significantly with 54.2% of all complaints being recorded against Operational Services to 0.15% 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 seven service areas that deliver the council's activities and functions, one has shown a reduction in customer complaints, three have remained relatively static and three have had an increase in the number of complaints closed compared to the previous year. Education Services have experienced the largest reduction in complaints with a 3.5% reduction. The two services that have shown the largest rise in complaints when compared to the previous year were Operational Services and Housing Customer and Building Services with a 126% and 36% increase respectively.

The council's performance relating to complaint handling has improved with 82.9% of all complaints received being resolved at Stage 1 (Frontline Resolution), 15.7% of complaints being resolved at Stage 2 (Investigation) with the remaining 1.4% 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 3.8 days and 11.4 days respectively. The majority of complaints were responded to within timescales: 85.6% at Stage 1 (5 day target) and 89.2% at Stage 2 (20 day target).

The percentage of complaints that were upheld/ part upheld across the council in 2016/17 was 59.2% which represents an increase of 3.1% from the 2015/16 figure which was 56.1%. During 2016/17, 40 complaints were dealt with where a request was made to extend the review timescales.

The general increase in complaints can be linked to Waste Services who implemented multiple changes to key service activities over 2016/17. These changes included the rollout of the 140 litre grey wheeled bin for landfill material and removing all of the existing 240l and 360l bins, implementing Waste Service vehicle route optimisation for grey, blue and food waste collections and a review of the assisted takeout service.

The service changes resulted in various complaints ranging from missed bin collections, replacement bins not being delivered on time and the assisted take out service missing customer bins. It should be noted that moving to a four bin service has

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increased the number of bin collections carried out by Waste Services over a four week period. Over a calendar year, Waste Service carries out over eight million collections which include residential bin collections, commercial waste collections and bulky uplifts.

In 2016/17, 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 and three have shown a reduction compared to the previous year. The indicator that has shown an increase in customer satisfaction related to customers who were satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, increasing from 68.2% to 69.7%. 80.7% of customers surveyed said that they found it easy to submit a complaint to the council, which is a reduction of 4.8% from 2015/16.

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, due to major service redesign in Waste Services, there has been a large increase in the number of complaints received by the council. The service is actively reviewing these complaints and has identified additional service improvements.

In relation to the council's complaint processing performance, this has shown a general improvement 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.