

Data Label: PUBLIC

West Lothian Council

Annual Complaint Performance Report 2017/18

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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 2017 and 31 March 2018.

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. From the 1 April 2017 the Social Work Complaints Review Committee ceased to have a statutory function and all Social Care complaints will now be considered within the council's complaints handling 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 one complaints could mean immediate action to resolve the problem or complaints which are *resolved in no more than five working days*.
- Stage two deals with two types of complaints: those that have not been resolved at stage one and those that are complex and require detailed investigation. Stage two 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 indicator themes 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 2017/18 was 3,169. This is a decrease 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 prioritise our activities to meet the changing needs of our community. Complaint benchmark data for 2017/18 is not yet available for other Local Authorities. Where applicable, this report has included the 2016/17 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 closed 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 3,193 complaints from 1 April 2017 to 31 April 2018. This is equivalent to 17.7 received complaints per 1,000 population. Of the total complaints received in 2017/18 (3,193), 3,169 were closed in this period.

Table 1 provides the council's total complaints closed per 1,000 population over the past 5 years. The table shows that there has been a decrease in complaints closed by the council in 2017/18 when compared to the previous year from 19.1 to 17.6 complaints per 1,000 population.

Table 1: Complaints closed per 1,000 population

Measure	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
West Lothian Population ¹	175,990	176,140	177,200	178,550	180,130
Total number of complaints closed	2,036	2,113	2,330	3,414	3,169
Number of complaints closed per 1,000	11.5	12.0	13.1	19.1	17.6

In 2016/17, the Scottish Local Authority average for the number complaints closed per 1,000 population was 13.41. Table 2 provides a breakdown of complaints closed by service from 2013/14 to 2017/18.

¹ Previous years published mid-year estimate used

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Table 2: Complaints closed by service

Service	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Operational Services	614	794	819	1,852	1,644
Housing, Customer & Building Services	725	579	746	1,013	950
Education Service	201	268	287	277	225
Area Services ²	224	195	235	N/A	N/A
Finance and Property/ Executive Office	210	178	154	179	127
Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration	48	81	70	72	73
Corporate Services	8	11	13	16	13
Social Policy	6	7	6	5	137
Total	2,036	2,113	2,330	3,414	3,169

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 2013/14 to 2017/18.

Table 3: Complaints closed by category

Category	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Standard of Service	1,065	1,003	1,008	1,652	1,809
Policy Related	272	452	468	578	437
Waiting Time	142	127	210	463	228
Poor Communication	242	233	295	369	299
Employee Attitude	299	290	330	324	366
Missed Appointments	13	8	19	28	30
Not Categorised	3	0	0	0	0
Total Complaints	2,036	2,113	2,330	3,414	3,169

² 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.

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	2017/18	Scottish LA average 2016/17
Number complaints closed at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints	69% (1,405)	76% (1,606)	73.7% (1,718)	82.9% (2,831)	84.2% (2,667)	88.2%
Number complaints closed at stage two (20 days) as % of all complaints	31% (631)	24% (507)	24.6% (572)	15.7% (535)	13.8% (437)	9.8%
Number complaints closed at stage two (20 days) after escalation as % of all complaints ³	7% (146)	0.8% (17)	1.7% (40)	1.4% (48)	2.1% (65)	1.8%

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

Complaints upheld	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Scottish LA average 2016/17
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%	22.8%	59.2%
Number complaints upheld at stage two as % of complaints closed at stage two (20 days)	23.2%	14.6%	18.0%	23.4%	20.6%	43.0%
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%	12.3%	26.7%

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

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Table 6: Partially upheld complaints

Complaints partially upheld	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Scottish LA average 2016/17
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%	28.2%	11%
Number complaints partially upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of complaints closed at stage two	23.6%	18.3%	23.8%	25.0%	19.9%	16.6%
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%	18.5%	18.4%

Table 7: Not upheld complaints

Complaints not upheld	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Scottish LA average 2016/17
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%	49.0%	26.0%
Number complaints not upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of complaints closed at stage two	48.3%	64.1%	58.2%	51.6%	59.5%	36.3%
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%	69.2%	53.5%

Overall, the council upheld/ part upheld 1,557 (49.1%) complaints from a total of 3,169 complaints closed in 2017/18. 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

Average times	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Scottish LA average 2016/17
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage one (5 day resolution target)	7.9	7.0	4.0	3.8	3.9	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	13.9	19.4
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation (20 day resolution target)	11.2	14.7	9.1	10.0	10.7	19.2

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 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	2016/17	2017/18	Scottish LA average 2016/17
Number complaints closed at stage one within 5 working days as % of stage one complaints	71.9%	78.0%	84.7%	85.6%	83.9%	70.9%
Number complaints closed at stage two within 20 working days as % of stage two complaints	82.6%	85.8%	88.5%	89.2%	84.4%	69.2%
Number escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as % of escalated stage two complaints	73.3%	76.5%	90.0%	95.8%	87.7%	75.2%

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	2016/17	2017/18	Scottish LA average 2016/17
% of complaints at stage one (5 days) where extension was authorised	7.0%	1.1%	1.3%	1.2%	1.2%	4.4%
% of complaints at stage two (20 days) where extension was authorised	1.9%	2.4%	2.4%	1.3%	3.4%	16.5%

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	2016/17	2017/18
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%	71.3%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the outcome of their upheld complaint.	72.3%	74.3%	68.2%	69.7%	73.0%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the way their complaint was handled.	67.9%	76.2%	75.5%	70.3%	73.0%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they found it easy to complain to the council.	83.0%	88.6%	85.5%	80.7%	85.1%

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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.	Housing, Customer and Building Services: Standard of Service	Customer complained about the number and location of vehicles from a council contractor that parked in the resident's area.	Service now monitors the contractors parking on a weekly basis and action is taken if the contractor fails to ensure safe parking in the residential area.
2.	Operational Services: Standard of Service	Customer complained about water gathering on a lair.	An assessment of the lair was carried out and a decision was taken to raise the levels of the lair. The work carried out now prevents water resting in the lair.
3.	Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration Services: Standard of Service	The customer expressed their dissatisfaction with the council's online planning portal not being available.	A message is now uploaded to inform customers when the portal is down. The message also provides information on alternative ways to submit planning applications or make comments.
4.	Social Policy: Standard of Service	The complaint related to lack of ownership within the service when ordering and delivering products via the Community Equipment Store to a service user.	Processes have been reviewed and updated to provide further clarity on the service arrangements when supplying and collecting equipment from the store. Refresher customer service training was also delivered to staff.
5.	Operational Services: Standard of Service	Customer unhappy with number of dog walkers in a cemetery who did not remove their dog's waste.	The cemetery has public access from the Country Park. Signs have been erected to remind dog walkers to clean up their dog waste. It also provides information on the penalties for leaving dog waste. As a short term action, Enforcement Officers also increased their monitoring of the cemetery.

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	Complaint Area/ Complaint Theme	Complaints Analysis	Service Improvement Action(s)
6.	Operational Services: Standard of Service	A complaint was made by a customer about the condition of a local Woodland.	The woodland is subject to regular fly-tipping. The area was cleared following the complaint and the Ranger Service now monitors the area on an ongoing basis.
7.	Education Services: Standard of Service	A customer complained that cars and delivery lorries are entering the school playground while there are pupils present.	The school gates are now locked to prevent vehicles from accessing the playground when pupils are on break.
8.	Corporate Services: Standard of Service	A complaint was received about a customer being unsuccessful in his Blue Badge application and that the information provided by the Blue Badge Administration team was inaccurate.	The Blue Badge Administration team now proved further information on unsuccessful applications in the refusal letters. The team, where appropriate, have also rephrased a statement in refusal letters where it now states that opening a car door is not in itself a qualifying criterion for a Blue Badge.
9.	Education Services: Standard of Service	A customer was trying to phone a school to report an absence but the phone line was not working.	The investigation showed that the phone lines were working but the answer phone message had not been changed after the school holidays and implied the office was closed. Office based staff now have procedures in place to ensure that recorded messages on the school phones are kept up to date when in use.
10.	Finance & Property Services: Standard of Service	Customer feels she was given wrong information during a visit to the Advice Shop.	Although advice provided to the customer was correct and the complaint was not upheld, the service improved the structure of customer case notes when dealing with clients. This now helps advisors follow on from advice given if customers have future appointments.

3. 2017/18 Complaint Summary

In 2017/18 the council closed 3,169 complaints and this represents a decrease of 245 from the 2016/17 figure of 3,414.

From the 1 April 2017 the Social Work Complaints Review Committee ceased to have a statutory function and all Social Care complaints are now be considered within the council's complaints handling procedure. This change has added 132 complaints to the council's 2017/18 total complaint figure when compared to 2016/17.

The number of complaints closed across council service areas varies significantly with 52% of all complaints being recorded against Operational Services to 0.4% in Corporate Services.

Of the seven service areas that deliver the council's activities and functions, four have shown a reduction in customer complaints, two have remained relatively static and one had an increase in the number of complaints closed compared to the previous year. Finance and Property Services have experienced the largest reduction in complaints with a 23% reduction. Education Services and Operational Services have also had a substantial percentage reduction in complaints closed at 19% and 11% respectively. Social Policy has shown the largest numerical increase in complaints from 5 in 2016/17 to 137 in 2017/18 for reasons already outlined above.

84.2% of all complaints closed by the council were resolved at stage one (Frontline Resolution), 13.8% of complaints resolved at stage two (Investigation) with the remaining 1.8% of complaints being resolved at stage two (Escalation). The average times taken by the council to resolve both stage one and stage two complaints were 3.9 days and 13.9 days respectively. The council's performance relating to the processing of stage one and stage two complaints has shown a marginal decrease and is slightly below the resolution target of 85%. 83.9% stage one complaints were resolved within 5 days and 84.4% stage two complaints were resolved within 20 days. The Scottish National Average 2016/17 was 70.9% and 69.2% for stage one and stage two resolution respectively.

The percentage of complaints that were upheld/ part upheld across the council in 2017/18 was 49.1% which represents a substantial decrease of 10.1% from the 2016/17 figure which was 59.2%. The council's performance in relation to this measure substantially outperformed the Scottish National Average 2016/17 which was 72%.

The general decrease in complaints across the council can be linked to a large reduction in complaints received by Waste Services. The previous year's performance was adversely impacted by a major Waste Services redesign which generated a large number of customer complaints. When compared to the previous year's Waste Services complaint total, there has been a reduction of over 300 in 2017/18.

The adverse weather conditions over the winter caused an increase in complaints received by Roads and Transportation Services. The service closed a total of 400 complaint in 2017/18 compared to 219 in 2016/17. A large number of complaints were related to roads and paths not being gritted and grit bins not being filled. The service followed the council's Winter Weather Policy where activity is prioritised to ensure that treatment is targeted to areas of greatest need.

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In 2017/18, the council has shown improved performance across a range of indicators relating to complaint handling. The four key customer satisfaction complaint indicators have all shown improvement when compared to the previous year. The indicator that has shown the largest increase in customer satisfaction related to customers who were satisfied with the time it took to deal with their complaint, increasing from 64.8% to 71.3%. 85.1% of customers surveyed said that they found it easy to submit a complaint to the council, which is an increase of 4.4% from 2016/17.

In addition a number of improvements have been made to existing services as a result of complaint analysis which ranged from implementing targeted employee customer care training to various alterations to existing practice.

Overall, there has been a reduction in the number of complaints closed in 2017/18 when compared to the previous year. The council's performance relating to the processing of complaints outperformed the Scottish National Average in almost all indicators. These indicators include the percentage of stage one and stage two resolved within timescale, the average time to resolve a complaint and the number of complaints that were upheld/ part upheld. Customer satisfaction relating to complaint handling has improved in all indicators and complaint driven service improvement continues to be identified based on robust complaint analysis.