

Data Label: Public

West Lothian Council

Annual Complaint Performance Report 2020/21

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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 2020 and 31 March 2021.

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

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.

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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 2020/21 was 2,875. This is a marginal 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 prioritise our activities to meet the changing needs of our community. Complaint benchmark data for 2020/21 is not yet available for other Local Authorities. Where applicable, this report has included the 2019/20 Scottish Local Authority national average for a range of performance indicators for comparative information. The current council's performance relating to the processing of complaints continues to outperform the Scottish National Average in almost all indicators.

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

This indicator records the total number of complaints closed by the council. 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 2,904 complaints from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. This is equivalent to 15.9 received complaints per 1,000 population. Of the total complaints received in 2020/21 (2,904), 2,875 were closed in this period¹.

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 slight decrease in complaints per 1000 closed by the council in 2020/21 when compared to the previous year from 15.8 to 15.7 complaints per 1,000 population.

Table 1: Complaints closed per 1,000 population

Measure	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
West Lothian Population ²	178,550	180,130	181,310	182,140	183,100
Total number of complaints closed	3,414	3,169	3,382	2,871	2,875
Number of complaints closed per 1,000	19.1	17.6	18.7	15.8	15.7

In 2019/20, the Scottish Local Authority average for the number complaints closed per 1,000 population was 10.1. Table 2 provides a breakdown of complaints closed by service from 2016/17 to 2020/21.

Table 2: Complaints closed by service

Service	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Operational Services	1,852	1,644	1,759	1,290	1,576
Housing, Customer & Building Services	1,013	950	969	911	757
Education Service	277	225	276	263	222
Finance and Property/ Executive Office	179	127	163	171	146

¹ There was a carry-over of complaints received that remained open from 2019/20 which accounts for the closed figure being smaller than the complaints received in 2020/21.

² Previous years published mid-year estimate used

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Service	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Social Policy	5	137	128	146	118
Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration	72	73	71	62	43
Corporate Services	16	13	16	28	13
Total	3,414	3,169	3,382	2,871	2,875

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 2016/17 to 2020/21.

Table 3: Complaints closed by category

Category	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Standard of Service	1,652	1,809	2,134	1,347	1,281
Policy Related	578	437	330	533	597
Poor Communication	369	299	307	483	475
Employee Attitude	324	366	383	331	393
Waiting Time	463	228	206	155	104
Missed Appointments	28	30	22	22	25
Total Complaints	3,414	3,169	3,382	2,871	2,875

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	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Scottish LA average 2019/20
Number complaints closed at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints	82.9% (2,831)	84.2% (2,667)	83.8% (2,833)	82.7% (2,374)	85.1% (2,447)	89.1%

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Closed complaints	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Scottish LA average 2019/20
Number complaints closed at stage two (20 days) as % of all complaints	15.7% (535)	13.8% (437)	14.6% (493)	15.8% (453)	13% (373)	7.8%
Number complaints closed at stage two (20 days) after escalation as % of all complaints ³	1.4% (48)	2.1% (65)	1.7% (56)	1.5% (44)	1.9% (55)	3.2%

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.

Table 5: Upheld complaints

Complaints upheld	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Scottish LA average 2019/20
Number of complaints upheld at stage one as % of all complaints closed at stage one (5 days)	35.11%	22.8%	34.6%	21.4%	19.5%	45.3%
Number complaints upheld at stage two as % of complaints closed at stage two (20 days)	23.4%	20.6%	15.20%	12.2%	14.2%	24.5%
Number escalated complaints upheld at stage two as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two (20 days)	27.1%	12.3%	16.10%	15.9%	16.4%	26.7%

Table 6: Partially upheld complaints

Complaints partially upheld	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Scottish LA average 2019/20
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints closed at stage one	26.14%	28.2%	23.0%	12.2%	11.6%	16.9%
Number complaints partially upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of complaints closed at stage two	25.0%	19.9%	23.3%	19.4%	17.4%	23.3%

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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Complaints partially upheld	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Scottish LA average 2019/20
Number escalated complaints partially upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	25.0%	18.5%	21.4%	25.0%	20.0%	25.0%

Table 7: Not upheld complaints

Complaints not upheld	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Scottish LA average 2019/20
Number of complaints not upheld at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints closed at stage one	38.75%	49.0%	42.4%	66.4%	68.9%	36.6%
Number complaints not upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of complaints closed at stage two	51.6%	59.5%	61.5%	63.4%	68.4%	53.7%
Number escalated complaints not upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	47.9%	69.2%	62.5%	59.1%	63.6%	45.5%

Overall, the council upheld/ part upheld 900 (31.3%) complaints from a total of 2,875 complaints closed in 2020/21. The equivalent upheld/ part upheld figure in 2019/20 was 34.2% (981).

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	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Scottish LA average 2019/20
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage one (5 day resolution target)	3.8	3.9	4.5	4.3	4.0	10.2
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage two (20 day resolution target)	11.4	13.9	15.2	14.4	14.7	23.9
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation (20 day resolution target)	10.0	10.7	7.5	9.7	11.7	17.5

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

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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	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Scottish LA average 2019/20
Number complaints closed at stage one within 5 working days as % of stage one complaints	85.6%	83.9%	81.6%	82.8%	82.6%	61.0%
Number complaints closed at stage two within 20 working days as % of stage two complaints	89.2%	84.4%	81.7%	81.7%	81.0%	61.9%
Number escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as % of escalated stage two complaints	95.8%	87.7%	92.9%	95.5%	85.5%	59.7%

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	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Scottish LA average 2019/20
% of complaints at stage one (5 days) where extension was authorised	1.2%	1.2%	0.6%	0.9%	0.6%	4.5%
% of complaints at stage two (20 days) where extension was authorised	1.3%	3.4%	1.4%	1.3%	0.8%	12.7%

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.

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Table 11: Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the length of time it took to deal with their complaint.	64.8%	71.3%	65.3%	58.1%	69.5%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the outcome of their upheld complaint.	69.7%	73.0%	61.3%	63.4%	68.1%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the way their complaint was handled.	70.3%	73.0%	67.3%	64.8%	67.4%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they found it easy to complain to the council.	80.7%	85.1%	83.8%	84.3%	84.6%

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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.

	Service/ Complaint Theme	Complaints Analysis	Service Improvement Action(s)
1.	Corporate Services Standard of Service	A customer complained that they had to pay for a letter from the council that had not been franked.	The administration team have included additional checks ensure that letters are franked before they are sent in the post.
2.	Corporate Services Poor Communication	The service was late in providing a response to a customer complaint.	The service held additional training sessions on complaint handling and highlighted the importance of dealing with complaints within the agreed timescales.
3.	Education Services Poor Communication	A complaint was received regarding poor communication and support around a Child's Planning Meeting at a school.	The school made improvements to their Child's Planning Meetings. All staff have undertaken in-depth training on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Dyslexia to ensure a consistent approach to supporting each learner. The approach to communication was also reviewed to keep the parent/carers informed.
4.	Housing, Customer and Building Services Poor Communication	A tenant tried to contact a Housing Officer who failed to respond in a timely manner.	The Housing Officer was late in attempting to call the customer. The correct communication process was reinforced to the employee reminding them that an email should be sent to the customer if a phone call is not answered.
5.	Housing, Customer and Building Services Standard of Service	Customer complaint about the litter left around their property after a roof repair was carried out.	A full site clean up was carried out and an apology was given to the customer. The supervisor discussed the complaints with the operatives and reinforced the requirement to ensure each work area is cleaned when the job is complete.

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	Service/ Complaint Theme	Complaints Analysis	Service Improvement Action(s)
6.	Housing, Customer and Building Services Standard of Service	Customer complaint about the lack of signage in an area being worked on by council contractors.	An apology was given to the customer and the contractor provided additional signage across the whole site. The customer was contacted and was satisfied with the agreed outcome.
7.	Operational Services Standard of Service	Complaint made about the service's failure to carry out a scheduled bulky uplift.	There was a system error with the Bulky Uplift booking and payment system which cancelled the customer's uplift. The service worked with the supplier to rectify the system issue. An apology was made to the customer and the payment was reimbursed.
8.	Operational Services Waiting time	Complaint received about time taken for a new bin to be delivered.	Due to Covid-19 the supplier was on restricted deliveries. The service managed to secure bins from an alternative supplier and a delivery was made to the customer.
9.	Operational Service Standard of Service	The customer complained about council vehicles queuing to access a council facility in Blackburn.	The service reviewed the issue where the vehicles were queuing at the site. The service introduced staggered tipping times and improvements have been made in the weighbridge system which has helped reduce the impact of traffic congestion.
10.	Social Policy Poor Communication	A customer received a Care Home payment request in error.	An apology was provided to the customer and additional checks have been introduced to ensure the information in customer documentation is accurate before being sent.

3. 2020/21 Complaint Summary

In 2020/21 the council closed 2,875 complaints and this represents a slight increase of 4 complaints from the 2019/20 figure of 2,871.

The number of complaints closed across council service areas varies significantly with 55% (1,576) of all complaints being recorded against Operational Services to 0.45% (13) in Corporate Services.

Of the seven service areas that deliver the council's activities and functions, six have shown a reduction in customer complaints and one has had an increase in the number of complaints closed compared to the previous year. Operational Services increased the number of complaints closed over 2020/21 from 1,290 in 2019/20 to 1,576 in 2020/21. Housing Customer and Building Services has shown the largest numerical decrease in complaints from 911 in 2019/20 to 757 in 2020/21.

The marginal increase in complaints across the council can be linked to an increase in the number of complaints closed by Operational Services over 2020/21. The main generator of complaints within Operational Services was Recycling, Waste and Fleet Services and Roads and Transportation Services. There was a large increase in Roads and Transportation Services complaints when compared to the previous year. The number of complaints increased from 165 in 2019/20 to 461 in 2020/21. Roads and Transportation Services received a total of 288 Policy complaints and the main complaint themes related to their Spaces for People programme and the Winter Maintenance activity.

85.1% of all complaints closed by the council were resolved at stage one (Frontline Resolution), 13.0% of complaints resolved at stage two (Investigation) with the remaining 1.9% 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 4 days and 14.7 days respectively. The council's performance relating to the processing of stage one and stage two complaints have shown a marginal decrease in performance. Both performance levels are below the corporate resolution target of 85% but are well above the national average for processing complaints at both stages. 82.6% stage one complaints were resolved within 5 days and 81.0% stage two complaints were resolved within 20 days. The Scottish National Average 2019/20 was 61% and 61.9% for stage one and stage two resolution respectively.

The percentage of complaints that were upheld/ part upheld across the council in 2020/21 was 31.3% which represents a decrease of 2.9% from the 2019/20 figure which was 34.2%. The council's performance in relation to this measure substantially outperformed the Scottish National Average 2019/20 which was 62.3%.

In 2020/21, the council has shown improved performance across a range of indicators relating to complaint handling. There are four key customer satisfaction complaint indicators. Customer satisfaction performance relating to complaint handling has improved in each of the four key indicators. 84.6% of customers surveyed said that they found it easy to submit a complaint to the council, which is an increase of 0.1% from 2019/20. The satisfaction indicator that has shown the largest increase was customers stating that they were satisfied with the time it takes to respond to a complaint which increased by 11.4% from 58.1% in 2019/20 to 69.5% in 2020/21.

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Overall, there has been a slight increase in the number of complaints closed in 2020/21 when compared to the previous year. The council's performance relating to the processing of complaints continues to outperform 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 increased across all four indicators and complaint driven service improvement continues to be identified based on robust complaint analysis.