

Data Label: Official

West Lothian Council

Annual Complaint Performance Report 2021/22

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1. 2021/22 Complaint Summary

In 2021/22 the council closed 2,754 complaints and this represents a decrease of 121 complaints from the 2020/21 the council closed 2,875.

The number of complaints closed across council service areas varies significantly with 41.3% (1,137) of all complaints being recorded against Operational Services to 0.36% (10) in Corporate Services.

Of the seven service areas that deliver the council's activities and functions, four 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 showed a decrease in the number of complaints closed over 2021/22 from 1,576 in 2020/21 to 1,137 in 2021/22. Housing Customer and Building Services has shown the largest numerical increase in complaints from 757 in 2020/21 to 1,109 in 2021/22.

83.2% of all complaints closed by the council were resolved at stage one (Frontline Resolution), 14.0% of complaints resolved at stage two (Investigation) with the remaining 2.8% 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 4 days and 14.9 days respectively. The council's performance relating to the processing of stage one complaints within five days has increase slightly in from 82.6% to 83.8%. The processing of stage two complaints within twenty days have shown a marginal decrease in performance from 81.0% to 79.8%. Both performance levels are below the corporate resolution target of 85% but are well above the national average for processing complaints at both stages. The Scottish National Average 2020/21 was 71.1% and 62.7% for stage one and stage two resolution respectively.

The percentage of complaints that were upheld/ part upheld across the council in 2021/22 was 35.2% which represents an increase of 3.9% from the 2020/21 figure which was 31.3%. The council's performance in relation to this measure substantially outperformed the Scottish National Average 2020/21 which was 62.7%.

There are six key customer satisfaction complaint indicators. In 2021/22, the council has shown improved performance one of the indicators relating to complaint handling with a decrease in performance on two of the indicators. It should be noted that there are 3 additional indicators added which align to the SPSO's suggested customer satisfaction measures. 76.3% of customers surveyed said that they found the complaint process to be accessible which is a decrease of 8.3% from 2020/21. The satisfaction indicator that has shown the largest increase was customers stating that they were satisfied with the outcome of their complaint which increase by 3.6% from 68.1% in 2020/21 to 71.7% in 2021/22.

Overall, there has been a slight decrease in the number of complaints closed in 2021/22 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 complaint driven service improvement continues to be identified based on robust complaint analysis.

2. Overview

2.1. Introduction

This is the council's annual complaints performance report which provides information on customer complaints received and closed between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022.

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.

2.2. 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.

3. 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 2021/22 was 2,754. This is a marginal 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 2021/22 is not yet available for other Local Authorities. Where applicable, this report has included the 2020/21 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.

3.1. 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 2,750 complaints from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. This is equivalent to 15.0 received complaints per 1,000 population. Of the total complaints received in 2021/22 (2,750), 2,754 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 2021/22 when compared to the previous year from 15.7 to 15.0 complaints per 1,000 population.

Table 1: Complaints closed per 1,000 population

Measure	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
West Lothian Population ²	180,130	181,310	182,140	183,100	183,820
Total number of complaints closed	3,169	3,382	2,871	2,875	2,754
Number of complaints closed per 1,000	17.6	18.7	15.8	15.7	15.0

In 2020/21, the Scottish Local Authority average for the number complaints closed per 1,000 population was 9.9. Table 2 provides a breakdown of complaints closed by service from 2017/18 to 2021/22.

Table 2: Complaints closed by service

Service	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Operational Services	1,644	1,759	1,290	1,576	1,137

¹ There was a carry-over of complaints received in 2020/21 that were closed in 2021/22 which accounts for the closed figure being larger than the complaints received in 2021/22.

² Previous years published mid-year estimate used

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Service	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Housing, Customer & Building Services	950	969	911	757	1,109
Education Service	225	276	263	222	193
Finance and Property/ Executive Office	127	163	171	146	163
Social Policy	137	128	146	118	93
Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration	73	71	62	43	49
Corporate Services	13	16	28	13	10
Total	3,169	3,382	2,871	2,875	2,754

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 2017/18 to 2021/22.

Table 3: Complaints closed by category

Category	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Standard of Service	1,809	2,134	1,347	1,281	1,378
Policy Related	437	330	533	597	384
Poor Communication	299	307	483	475	425
Employee Attitude	366	383	331	393	290
Waiting Time	228	206	155	104	238
Missed Appointments	30	22	22	25	39
Total Complaints	3,169	3,382	2,871	2,875	2,754

3.2. 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).

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Table 4: Closed complaints

Closed complaints	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Scottish LA average 2020/21
Number complaints closed at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints	84.2% (2,667)	83.8% (2,833)	82.7% (2,374)	85.1% (2,447)	83.2% (2,291)	88.8%
Number complaints closed at stage two (20 days) as % of all complaints	13.8% (437)	14.6% (493)	15.8% (453)	13% (373)	14.0% (386)	8.4%
Number complaints closed at stage two (20 days) after escalation as % of all complaints ³	2.1% (65)	1.7% (56)	1.5% (44)	1.9% (55)	2.8% (77)	2.8%

3.3. 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	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Scottish LA average 2020/21
Number of complaints upheld at stage one as % of all complaints closed at stage one (5 days)	22.8%	34.6%	21.4%	19.5%	21.2%	47.2%
Number complaints upheld at stage two as % of complaints closed at stage two (20 days)	20.6%	15.20%	12.2%	14.2%	16.3%	24.4%
Number escalated complaints upheld at stage two as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two (20 days)	12.3%	16.10%	15.9%	16.4%	23.4%	21.2%

Table 6: Partially upheld complaints

Complaints partially upheld	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Scottish LA average 2020/21
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints closed at stage one	28.2%	23.0%	12.2%	11.6%	13.7%	14.2%

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	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Scottish LA average 2020/21
Number complaints partially upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of complaints closed at stage two	19.9%	23.3%	19.4%	17.4%	18.7%	19.3%
Number escalated complaints partially upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	18.5%	21.4%	25.0%	20.0%	22.1%	23.6%

Table 7: Not upheld complaints

Complaints not upheld	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Scottish LA average 2020/21
Number of complaints not upheld at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints closed at stage one	49.0%	42.4%	66.4%	68.9%	65.1%	35.9%
Number complaints not upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of complaints closed at stage two	59.5%	61.5%	63.4%	68.4%	65.0%	48.4%
Number escalated complaints not upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	69.2%	62.5%	59.1%	63.6%	54.5%	49.5%

Overall, the council upheld/ part upheld 969 (35.2%) complaints from a total of 2,754 complaints closed in 2021/22. The equivalent upheld/ part upheld figure in 2020/21 was 31.3% (900).

3.4. 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	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Scottish LA average 2020/21
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage one (5 day resolution target)	3.9	4.5	4.3	4.0	4.0	6.5
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage two (20 day resolution target)	13.9	15.2	14.4	14.7	14.9	22.9
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation (20 day resolution target)	10.7	7.5	9.7	11.7	10.1	20.7

3.5. 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	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Scottish LA average 2020/21
Number complaints closed at stage one within 5 working days as % of stage one complaints	83.9%	81.6%	82.8%	82.6%	83.8%	71.1%
Number complaints closed at stage two within 20 working days as % of stage two complaints	84.4%	81.7%	81.7%	81.0%	79.8%	62.7%
Number escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as % of escalated stage two complaints	87.7%	92.9%	95.5%	85.5%	89.6%	65.5%

3.6. 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	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Scottish LA average 2020/21
% of complaints at stage one (5 days) where extension was authorised	1.2%	0.6%	0.9%	0.6%	0.9%	4.6%
% of complaints at stage two (20 days) where extension was authorised	3.4%	1.4%	1.3%	0.8%	1.6%	14.3%

3.7. 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

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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	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Percentage of customers who rated the accessibility of the complaint procedure as good or excellent.	85.1%	83.8%	84.3%	84.6%	76.3%
Percentage of customers who rated the way their complaint was handled as good or excellent.	73.0%	67.3%	64.8%	67.4%	61.7%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the outcome of their upheld complaint.	73.0%	61.3%	63.4%	68.1%	71.7%
Percentage of customers who rated the service's updates on the progress of their complaints as good or excellent ⁴					51.3%
Percentage of customers who rated the clarity of response to their complaint as good or excellent ⁴					54.6%
Percentage of customers who rated the service's understanding of the complaint raised as good or excellent ⁴					71.5%

⁴ New Indicator

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3.8. 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.	Education Services	A customer complained that they had tried multiple times to apply for a pre-school place but the online form was not working.	An apology was issued to the customer. The online form failure was linked to a problem with the website. The web team investigated and resolved the online form issue. In the interim, the customer was e-mailed the word version of the form and their request was processed.
2.	Finance and Property Services	Customer complained as they had been advised that their rent refund would be received shortly. There was a delay in the customer receiving the refund.	A letter to the customer was issued as part of a manual process before the refund process had been fully completed. The process was reviewed and has now been set up on the service workflow system to ensure that communications can only issued to customers once the process has been fully completed.
3.	Finance and Property Services	A complaint was received relating to a crane operator at council building beginning works before 7am.	Contactors has been informed that works are not to start before 8am and to be considerate of the surrounding area.
4.	Housing, Customer and Building Services	Customer expressed dissatisfaction with a contractor who missed a scheduled appointment. Customer called and left a message with the number on the letter and failed to get a response until one week later.	Discussion was made with contractor's operations manager about this specific complaint and general service standards. Operations manager agreed that the service was unacceptable and advised that they recruited two new staff members to resolve the issues discussed.
5.	Housing, Customer and Building Services Standard of Service	Customer complained that during their flat renovations their ariel was damaged and was also dissatisfied	The ariel was fixed and an apology was issued to the tenant.

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	Service/ Complaint Theme	Complaints Analysis	Service Improvement Action(s)
		with the mess around the flat as the works progressed.	The renovation team were reminded that areas around the works must be kept to a certain standard. Regular checks on this were carried out during the renovation.
6.	Operational Services	A complaint was received regarding a replacement bins not being delivered within the agreed timescales.	During Covid restrictions, difficulties with the supply and re-stocking of bins resulted in bin delivery times fluctuating. Waste Services have created a new online update page which advises if delays are expected when ordering new bins. The Service also informs customer services on any potential delays so they can keep customers up to date on delivery timescales.
7.	Operational Services	A customer complained about a dog fouling bin not fit for purpose and was damaged.	The dog fouling bin was removed and replaced. Additional checks of the condition of litter bins are now included in the operative's inspection when litter bins are emptied to ensure that they are fit for purpose. A works order is raised for any bin that requires to be replaced.
8.	Planning, Economic Development & Regeneration	The complaint related to a customer attempted to contact a building standards officer handling their case on a number of occasions, but did not receive a response.	The officer handling the case received counselling from line manager to address the issue of lack of response to customer's email and telephone message over a two-month timeframe. Discussion emphasised the consequences of not responding, and highlighted the importance of responding within a reasonable timeframe.
9.	Social Policy	A complaint was received regarding a delay in providing adult social care.	Service carried out a review of referral screening, waiting list timescales and allocations processes to reduce delays in the process. A review of the client's referrals and related experience in terms of this complaint took place. The manager discussed the specific case with the team to ensure requests are processed in a timely manner.