

Data Label: Official

West Lothian Council

Annual Complaint Performance Report 2022/23

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1. 2022/23 Complaint Summary

In 2022/23 the council closed 4,072 complaints and this represents an increase of 1,318 complaints from the 2,754 complaints closed in 2021/22.

The number of complaints closed across council service areas varies significantly with 47.9% (1,950) of all complaints being recorded against Operational Services to 0.47% (19) in Corporate Services.

Of the seven service areas that deliver the council's activities and functions, each have shown an increase in the number of complaints closed compared to the previous year. Operational Services showed the largest increase in the number of complaints closed over 2022/23 from 1,137 in 2021/22 to 1,950 in 2022/23.

86.2% of all complaints closed by the council were resolved at stage one (Frontline Resolution), 11.9% 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 4.8 days and 17.9 days respectively. The council's performance relating to the processing of stage one complaints within five days has decreased from 83.8% in 2021/22 to 77.0% in 2022/23. The processing of stage two complaints within twenty days have shown a decrease in performance from 79.8% to 69.8%. 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 2021/22 was 67.1% and 63.4% for stage one and stage two resolution respectively.

The percentage of complaints that were upheld/part upheld across the council in 2022/23 was 41% which represents an increase of 5.8% from the 2021/22 figure which was 35.2%. The council's performance in relation to this measure substantially outperformed the Scottish National Average 2021/22 which was 53.5%.

There are a range of customer satisfaction complaint indicators. In 2022/23, the council has shown a decrease in performance on six of the indicators. It should be noted that there were 3 additional indicators added in 2021/22 which align to the SPSO's suggested customer satisfaction measures. 70% of customers surveyed said that they found the complaint process to be accessible which is a decrease of 6.3% from 2021/22.

Overall, there has been an increase in the number of complaints closed in 2022/23 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 2022 and 31 March 2023.

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 2022/23 was 4,072. This is an increase from the number closed in the previous year. The council will continue to analyse 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 2022/23 is not yet available for other Local Authorities. Where applicable, this report has included the 2021/22 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 4,134 complaints from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. This is equivalent to 22.3 received complaints per 1,000 population. Of the total complaints received in 2022/23 (4,134), 4,072 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 an increase in complaints per 1000 closed by the council in 2022/23 when compared to the previous year from 15.0 to 21.9 complaints per 1,000 population.

Table 1: Complaints closed per 1,000 population

Measure	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
West Lothian Population ¹	181,310	182,140	183,100	183,820	185,580
Total number of complaints closed	3,382	2,871	2,875	2,754	4,072
Number of complaints closed per 1,000	18.7	15.8	15.7	15.0	21.9

In 2021/22, the Scottish Local Authority average for the number complaints closed per 1,000 population was 15.0. Table 2 provides a breakdown of complaints closed by service from 2018/19 to 2022/23.

Table 2: Complaints closed by service

Service	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Operational Services	1,759	1,290	1,576	1,137	1,950
Housing, Customer & Building Services	969	911	757	1,109	1,467

¹ Previous years published mid-year estimate used

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Service	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Finance and Property/ Executive Office	163	171	146	163	228
Education Service	276	263	222	193	206
Social Policy	128	146	118	93	140
Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration	71	62	43	49	62
Corporate Services	16	28	13	10	19
Total	3,382	2,871	2,875	2,754	4,072

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 2018/19 to 2022/23.

Table 3: Complaints closed by category

Category	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Standard of Service	2,134	1,347	1,281	1,378	2,250
Poor Communication	307	483	475	425	565
Policy Related	330	533	597	384	521
Waiting Time	206	155	104	238	380
Employee Attitude	383	331	393	290	313
Missed Appointments	22	22	25	39	43
Total Complaints	3,382	2,871	2,875	2,754	4,072

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	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Scottish LA average 2021/22
Number complaints closed at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints	83.8% (2,833)	82.7% (2,374)	85.1% (2,447)	83.2% (2,291)	86.2% (3,509)	88.6%
Number complaints closed at stage two (20 days) as % of all complaints	14.6% (493)	15.8% (453)	13% (373)	14.0% (386)	11.9% (484)	7.5%
Number complaints closed at stage two (20 days) after escalation as % of all complaints	1.7% (56)	1.5% (44)	1.9% (55)	2.8% (77)	1.9% (79)	3.8%

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	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Scottish LA average 2021/22
Number of complaints upheld at stage one as % of all complaints closed at stage one (5 days)	34.6%	21.4%	19.5%	21.2%	25.8%	40.7%
Number complaints upheld at stage two as % of complaints closed at stage two (20 days)	15.20%	12.2%	14.2%	16.3%	18.0%	18.3%
Number escalated complaints upheld at stage two as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two (20 days)	16.10%	15.9%	16.4%	23.4%	22.8%	24.6%

Table 6: Partially upheld complaints

Complaints partially upheld	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Scottish LA average 2021/22
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints closed at stage one	23.0%	12.2%	11.6%	13.7%	15.9%	14.5%
Number complaints partially upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of complaints closed at stage two	23.3%	19.4%	17.4%	18.7%	18.6%	20.7%

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Complaints partially upheld	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Scottish LA average 2021/22
Number escalated complaints partially upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	21.4%	25.0%	20.0%	22.1%	13.9%	21.0%

Table 7: Not upheld complaints

Complaints not upheld	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Scottish LA average 2021/22
Number of complaints not upheld at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints closed at stage one	42.4%	66.4%	68.9%	65.1%	58.3%	28.0%
Number complaints not upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of complaints closed at stage two	61.5%	63.4%	68.4%	65.0%	63.2%	49.7%
Number escalated complaints not upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	62.5%	59.1%	63.6%	54.5%	63.3%	46.7%

Overall, the council upheld/ part upheld 1,668 (41%) complaints from a total of 4,072 complaints closed in 2022/23. The equivalent upheld/ part upheld figure in 2021/22 was 35.2% (969).

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	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Scottish LA average 2021/22
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage one (5 day resolution target)	4.5	4.3	4.0	4.0	4.8	6.3
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage two (20 day resolution target)	15.2	14.4	14.7	14.9	17.9	20.7
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation (20 day resolution target)	7.5	9.7	11.7	10.1	8.9	18.6

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	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Scottish LA average 2021/22
Number complaints closed at stage one within 5 working days as % of stage one complaints	81.6%	82.8%	82.6%	83.8%	77.0%	67.1%
Number complaints closed at stage two within 20 working days as % of stage two complaints	81.7%	81.7%	81.0%	79.8%	69.8%	63.4%
Number escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as % of escalated stage two complaints	92.9%	95.5%	85.5%	89.6%	91.1%	61.6%

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	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Scottish LA average 2021/22
% of complaints at stage one (5 days) where extension was authorised	0.6%	0.9%	0.6%	0.9%	0.4%	6.2%
% of complaints at stage two (20 days) where extension was authorised	1.4%	1.3%	0.8%	1.6%	2.1%	18.8%

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 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	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Percentage of customers who rated the accessibility of the complaint procedure as good or excellent.	83.8%	84.3%	84.6%	76.3%	70%
Percentage of customers who rated the way their complaint was handled as good or excellent.	67.3%	64.8%	67.4%	61.7%	50%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the outcome of their upheld complaint.	61.3%	63.4%	68.1%	71.7%	62%
Percentage of customers who rated the service’s updates on the progress of their complaints as good or excellent ²				51.3%	47%
Percentage of customers who rated the clarity of response to their complaint as good or excellent ²				54.6%	46%
Percentage of customers who rated the service’s understanding of the complaint raised as good or excellent ²				71.5%	65%

² New Indicator in 2021/22

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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	Customer unhappy that the school cancelled a proposed school trip.	The procedure for obtaining school trip approval was not followed. An apology was given to the complainant. The school staff were reminded that the council's education excursion policy should be reviewed prior to arranging school trips.
2.	Finance and Property Services	Customer complained that they had received an invoice which they believed had been paid.	After investigation it was found that a historical payment had been incorrectly allocated. A detailed review of the process was carried out and additional controls implemented.
3.	Housing, Customer and Building Services	Customer has made several enquiries about their son's housing situation. A call back was promised and this did not happen.	A briefing was delivered by the service manager to all staff on the expected standards of communication as part of their monthly team meeting. Staff designed new communication pathways for dealing with customer enquiries that require multiple service touch points.
4.	Housing, Customer and Building Services	Customer received incorrect information from a council case worker.	Service inductions were redesigned focussing on customer cases and associated service standards on call backs including the expected standards on the frequency and consistency of information and advice given to customers. The customer was contacted by the case worker to provide further information on the case and to clarify the service process when dealing with this customer.

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	Service/ Complaint Theme	Complaints Analysis	Service Improvement Action(s)
5.	Housing, Customer and Building Services	Customer made a complaint relating to not being advised about an appointment which had been scheduled.	Planners now send SMS or email through the Open Housing system when they are unable to contact the customer to arrange or reschedule appointments.
6.	Housing, Customer and Building Services	Poor communication reported by private owners regarding skips located around a garage site.	After the service carried out a detailed analysis of this complaint the following actions were implemented: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All neighbours affected will be visited prior to work commencing • Notification letters given to owners in neighbouring properties. • Staff contact details will be provided to owners. • Managers to communicate with owners on a regular basis.
7.	Operational Services	A complaint was received regarding the lack of response to a previous complaint relating to a change in uplift dates.	The service contacted the customer and apologised. The website was updated to advise that changes made to uplift dates were being made to ensure the service was making the most of available resources.
8.	Operational Services	The service received a complaint relating to an issue with broken glass and increased noise around the bottle bank close to the Eliburn Pavilion.	After engaging with the complainant, the bottle banks were moved to a more suitable location to minimise disruption in the local area.
9.	Operational Services	A complaint relating to the standard of tidiness and maintenance at areas within Polkemmet Country Park was raised by a customer.	Funding was secured to upgrade the toilets and SMART litter bins were installed in the park to mitigate the increase in litter linked to the recently opened fast food restaurants near the park.

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	Service/ Complaint Theme	Complaints Analysis	Service Improvement Action(s)
10.	Planning, Economic Development & Regeneration	Customer booked an appointment for pest control, which the officer did not attend.	Customer was offered and accepted a rearranged appointment. On investigation an issue was identified with diaries deleting appointments. The procedure was reviewed and changed, with new diary arrangements implemented.
11.	Planning, Economic Development & Regeneration	A customer complained that they did not receive a response to an initial service contact, and following further contact, the service did not provide the requested update on a planning application.	The customer was contacted and information was provided on the planning application. The service kept the customer informed on all aspects of the planning application including changes made. The staff were counselled and reminded of the importance of responding timeously to requests for information.
12.	Planning, Economic Development & Regeneration	Complaint related to a delay in registering a planning application over a bank holiday weekend. The planning application was submitted though e-planning portal during a bank holiday period but the submission date was registered two days later on system.	Following review of the planning procedure it was modified to allow the validation date to be changed in specific circumstances. The validation date on the customer planning application was revised on the system.
13.	Social Policy	A complaint was recorded regarding ongoing building works relating to a bathroom extension following an Occupational Therapy (OT) assessment.	A review of the communication pathway between the OT Service and Building Services was carried out. Procedural changes were made to improve cross-service communication to ensure robust, accurate and timely information sharing.

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	Service/ Complaint Theme	Complaints Analysis	Service Improvement Action(s)
14.	Social Policy	The Crisis Care Team received a complaint relating to the service information provision on a service leaflet.	<p>Content of the Crisis Care leaflet was reviewed in order to better reflect what the service is able to provide.</p> <p>Staff within Social Policy and Health teams have been reminded of the purpose and remit of the Crisis Care Team so that they are equipped to manage customer expectations/queries effectively.</p>