

Data Label: PUBLIC

West Lothian Council

Annual Complaint Performance Report 2018/19

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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 2018 and 31 March 2019.

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 2018/19 was 3,382. 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 prioritise our activities to meet the changing needs of our community. Complaint benchmark data for 2018/19 is not yet available for other Local Authorities. Where applicable, this report has included the 2017/18 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. 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 3,390 complaints from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. This is equivalent to 18.7 received complaints per 1,000 population. Of the total complaints received in 2018/19 (3,390), 3,382 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 closed by the council in 2018/19 when compared to the previous year from 17.6 to 18.7 complaints per 1,000 population.

Table 1: Complaints closed per 1,000 population

Measure	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
West Lothian Population ¹	176,140	177,200	178,550	180,130	181,310
Total number of complaints closed	2,113	2,330	3,414	3,169	3,382
Number of complaints closed per 1,000	12.0	13.1	19.1	17.6	18.7

In 2017/18, the Scottish Local Authority average for the number complaints closed per 1,000 population was 11.6. Table 2 provides a breakdown of complaints closed by service from 2014/15 to 2018/19.

Table 2: Complaints closed by service

Service	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Operational Services	794	819	1,852	1,644	1,759
Housing, Customer & Building Services	579	746	1,013	950	969
Education Service	268	287	277	225	276

¹ Previous years published mid-year estimate used

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Service	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Area Services ²	195	235	N/A	N/A	N/A
Finance and Property/ Executive Office	178	154	179	127	163
Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration	81	70	72	73	71
Corporate Services	11	13	16	13	16
Social Policy	7	6	5	137	128
Total	2,113	2,330	3,414	3,169	3,382

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 2014/15 to 2018/19.

Table 3: Complaints closed by category

Category	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Standard of Service	1,003	1,008	1,652	1,809	2,134
Employee Attitude	290	330	324	366	383
Policy Related	452	468	578	437	330
Poor Communication	233	295	369	299	307
Waiting Time	127	210	463	228	206
Missed Appointments	8	19	28	30	22
Total Complaints	2,113	2,330	3,414	3,169	3,382

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).

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.

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Table 4: Closed complaints

Closed complaints	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Scottish LA average 2017/18
Number complaints closed at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints	76% (1,606)	73.7% (1,718)	82.9% (2,831)	84.2% (2,667)	83.8% (2,833)	88.9%
Number complaints closed at stage two (20 days) as % of all complaints	24% (507)	24.6% (572)	15.7% (535)	13.8% (437)	14.6% (493)	8.2%
Number complaints closed at stage two (20 days) after escalation as % of all complaints ³	0.8% (17)	1.7% (40)	1.4% (48)	2.1% (65)	1.7% (56)	2.9%

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	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Scottish LA average 2017/18
Number of complaints upheld at stage one as % of all complaints closed at stage one (5 days)	33.1%	32.8%	35.11%	22.8%	34.6%	50.7%
Number complaints upheld at stage two as % of complaints closed at stage two (20 days)	14.6%	18.0%	23.4%	20.6%	15.20%	34.0%
Number escalated complaints upheld at stage two as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two (20 days)	11.76%	20.0%	27.1%	12.3%	16.10%	30.8%

Table 6: Partially upheld complaints

Complaints partially upheld	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Scottish LA average 2017/18
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints closed at stage one	23.8%	28.2%	26.14%	28.2%	23.0%	14.8%

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	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Scottish LA average 2017/18
Number complaints partially upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of complaints closed at stage two	18.3%	23.8%	25.0%	19.9%	23.3%	19.5%
Number escalated complaints partially upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	47.06%	30.0%	25.0%	18.5%	21.4%	21.2%

Table 7: Not upheld complaints

Complaints not upheld	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Scottish LA average 2017/18
Number of complaints not upheld at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints closed at stage one	36.4%	39.0%	38.75%	49.0%	42.4%	33.9%
Number complaints not upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of complaints closed at stage two	64.1%	58.2%	51.6%	59.5%	61.5%	46.5%
Number escalated complaints not upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	41.18%	50.0%	47.9%	69.2%	62.5%	21.2%

Overall, the council upheld/ part upheld 1,842 (54.4%) complaints from a total of 3,382 complaints closed in 2018/19. Variances in the total for these indicators in 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	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Scottish LA average 2017/18
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage one (5 day resolution target)	7.0	4.0	3.8	3.9	4.5	8.3
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage two (20 day resolution target)	13.8	12.5	11.4	13.9	15.2	19.5

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Average times	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Scottish LA average 2017/18
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation (20 day resolution target)	14.7	9.1	10.0	10.7	7.5	19.5

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 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	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Scottish LA average 2017/18
Number complaints closed at stage one within 5 working days as % of stage one complaints	78.0%	84.7%	85.6%	83.9%	81.6%	62.4%
Number complaints closed at stage two within 20 working days as % of stage two complaints	85.8%	88.5%	89.2%	84.4%	81.7%	74.9%
Number escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as % of escalated stage two complaints	76.5%	90.0%	95.8%	87.7%	92.9%	62.4%

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	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Scottish LA average 2017/18
% of complaints at stage one (5 days) where extension was authorised	1.1%	1.3%	1.2%	1.2%	0.6%	4.5%
% of complaints at stage two (20 days) where extension was authorised	2.4%	2.4%	1.3%	3.4%	1.4%	10.6%

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	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the length of time it took to deal with their complaint.	68.6%	75.5%	64.8%	71.3%	65.3%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the outcome of their upheld complaint.	74.3%	68.2%	69.7%	73.0%	61.3%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the way their complaint was handled.	76.2%	75.5%	70.3%	73.0%	67.3%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they found it easy to complain to the council.	88.6%	85.5%	80.7%	85.1%	83.8%

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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.	Education Services: Standard of Service	Several complaints were received about the food served at a Christmas Party Night at the Burgh Halls.	An apology was made and a partial refund was given to the affected customers. After carrying out a full review, the service would not use the agency chef again.
2.	Social Policy: Poor Communication	Social Policy received a complaint where the request for a referral was not progressed within timescale.	A full apology was given to the customer. The employee who dealt with the case was given additional refresher referral and assessment training. In conjunction with the training, a new telephone call management system has been installed at the relevant Social Work Centre to ensure that calls are answered in a timely manner.
3.	Social Policy: Poor Communication	A complaint was received relating to a bill that had been sent out to the customer for Home Safety Service equipment which had previously been cancelled and returned.	The administration manager has reviewed and updated the services procedure ensuring that any changes in circumstances are communicated in a timely manner to all relevant areas.
4.	Operational Services: Standard of Service	The customer complained that there was poor web site information on the council's bulky uplift process.	Waste Services web page has been revised to include an additional daily update page for real time missed collections and service updates. Social media is now being used to provide links to Waste Services web page.
5.	Operational Services: Standard of Service	A customer called to complain that their fence was damaged by a council vehicle.	The customer's fence was repaired and additional driver training was provided to the employee.

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	Complaint Area/ Complaint Theme	Complaints Analysis	Service Improvement Action(s)
6.	Operational Services: Standard of Service	A customer emailed to complain about the quality of repair to a footpath. Customer advised the footpath was re-surfaced and there was now a lip between the kerbstone and the footpath.	A meeting was held with the developer to review the council's maintenance procedure. The developer now returns to temporary repairs to assess the state of repair until permanent works are carried out.
7.	Housing, Customer and Building Services: Standard of Service	Disabled people had difficulty in reaching the doorbell to one of the local council facilities.	Maintenance replaced the door entry system with a DDA compliant door station which was at a lower height.
8.	Housing, Customer and Building Services: Standard of Service	A number of complaints were received relating to the failure to complete housing repairs on the first visit.	The service have reviewed and refreshed the Recall Procedure while including the property multi visits. This puts greater emphasis onto recall and multi property visits and allows the ward teams to analyse the data and implement the required improvement actions. This ensures that the repair teams have a clear focus on completing repairs during the first visit where possible.
9.	Housing, Customer and Building Services: Standard of Service	Several customers complained about inspections that were carried out on dampness issues in their homes.	The service created a bespoke training course relating to dampness inspection and this was delivered to all relevant staff. This now ensures that there is a consistent approach across the service when dealing with dampness issues.
10.	Finance & Property Services: Standard of Service	A complaint was received about the temperature in a council community centre during the day.	The temperature setting has been adjusted and is being monitored on a regular basis by staff.

3. 2018/19 Complaint Summary

In 2018/19 the council closed 3,382 complaints and this represents an increase of 213 from the 2017/18 figure of 3,169.

The number of complaints closed across council service areas varies significantly with 52% of all complaints being recorded against Operational Services to 0.5% in Corporate Services.

Of the seven service areas that deliver the council's activities and functions, two have shown a reduction in customer complaints and five had an increase in the number of complaints closed compared to the previous year. Social Policy has experienced the largest reduction in complaints with a 7% reduction. Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration have had a marginal percentage reduction in complaints closed at 3%. Operational Services has shown the largest numerical increase in complaints from 1,644 in 2017/18 to 1,759 in 2018/19.

Council wide there has been a substantial reduction in complaints closed in the second half of the reporting period when compare to the first half. Over 60% of all complaints closed in 2018/19 were recorded between April 2018 and September 2018 with 39% being recorded between October 2018 and March 2019. Comparatively, 55% of complaints were closed in the second half of 2017/18. The longer term trend would indicate that there will be a reduction in the number of complaints closed over 2019/20 when compared to the 2018/19 figure.

The general increase in complaints across the council can be linked to an increase in the number of complaints closed by Operational Services between April and September 2018. The main generator of complaints within Operational Services was Waste Services. Over this 6 month period there was an increase in the number of Waste Service complaints relating to missed bin collections. The underlying reasons for this increase were cause by multiple factors which included a backlog of missed collections due to the extreme weather condition between February and March 2018. This was combined with unusually high levels of vehicle breakdowns which placed an additional load on the equipment as a result of attempting to recover missed collection. When compared to the previous year's Waste Services complaint total, there has been an increase of 373 in 2018/19.

83.8% of all complaints closed by the council were resolved at stage one (Frontline Resolution), 14.6% of complaints resolved at stage two (Investigation) with the remaining 1.7% 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 4.5 days and 15.2 days respectively. The council's performance relating to the processing of stage one and stage two complaints has shown a marginal decrease and is below the resolution target of 85% but is well above the national average for processing complaints at both stages. 81.6% stage one complaints were resolved within 5 days and 81.7% stage two complaints were resolved within 20 days. The Scottish National Average 2017/18 was 62.4% and 74.9% for stage one and stage two resolution respectively.

The percentage of complaints that were upheld/ part upheld across the council in 2018/19 was 54.4% which represents an increase of 5.3% from the 2017/18 figure which was 49.1%. The council's performance in relation to this measure substantially outperformed the Scottish National Average 2017/18 which was 67%.

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In 2018/19, the council has shown varied performance across a range of indicators relating to complaint handling. There are four key customer satisfaction complaint indicators. The four indicators have dipped in performance when compared to the previous year. 83.9% of customers surveyed said that they found it easy to submit a complaint to the council, which is a decrease of 1.3% from 2017/18.

Overall, there has been an increase in the number of complaints closed in 2018/19 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 decreased across the four indicators and complaint driven service improvement continues to be identified based on robust complaint analysis.