

Data Label: PUBLIC

# **West Lothian Council Annual Complaint Performance Report 2014/15**

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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 2014 and 31 March 2015.

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.

A revised complaints procedure was introduced in February 2013 to provide 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, with the exception of those which are described as Social Care statutory complaints.

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 1 complaints could mean immediate action to resolve the problem or complaints which are *resolved in no more than five working days*.
- Stage 2 deals with two types of complaints: those that have not been resolved at Stage 1 and those that are complex and require detailed investigation. Stage 2 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 indicators 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 2014/15 was 2,113. This is a slight increase from the number received 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 2014/15 is not yet available for other Local Authorities.

### **2.1. Indicator 1: Complaints received per 1,000 population**

This indicator records the total number of complaints received by the council. This is the sum of the number of complaints received at stage one, (frontline resolution) and the number of complaints received directly at stage two (investigation). 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 2,135 complaints from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015. This is equivalent to 12.1 received complaints per 1,000 population. Of the total complaints received in 2014/15 (2,135), 2,113 were closed in this period.

Table 1 provides the council's total complaints close per 1,000 population over the past 5 years. The table shows that there has been slight increase in complaints received by the council in 2014/15 when compared to the previous year from 2,036 to 2,113.

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**Table 1: Complaints closed per 1,000 population**

Measure	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
West Lothian Population <sup>1</sup>	173,040	174,090	175,300	175,990	176,140
Total number complaints received	2,732	2,323	2,166	2,036	2,113
Number complaints received per 1,000	15.8	13.3	12.4	11.5	12.0

Table 2 provides a breakdown of complaints closed by service for 2013/14 and 2014/15

**Table 2: Complaints received by service**

Service	2013/14	2014/15
Operational Services	614	794
Housing, Construction & Building Services	725	579
Education Service	201	268
Area Services	224	195
Finance and Estates/ Executive Office	210	178
Planning and Economic Development	48	81
Corporate Services	8	11
Social Policy	6	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,036</b>	<b>2,113</b>

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 2010/11 to 2014/15.

**Table 3: Complaints received by category**

Category	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Employee Attitude	331	283	324	299	290
Missed appointment	11	19	34	13	8

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<sup>1</sup> Previous years published mid-year estimate used

<b>Category</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
Policy related	204	188	275	272	452
Poor Communication	219	257	264	242	233
Standard of Service	1,752	1,340	1,088	1,065	1,003
Waiting Time	215	236	181	142	127
Not Categorised	0	0	0	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,732</b>	<b>2,323</b>	<b>2,166</b>	<b>2,036</b>	<b>2,113</b>

## 2.2. Indicator 2: Closed complaints

This indicator provides information on the number of complaints closed at stage one and stage two 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**

<b>Closed complaints</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
Number complaints closed at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints	69% (1405)	76% (1606)
Number complaints closed at stage two (20 days) as % of all complaints	31% (631)	24% (507)
Number complaints closed at stage two (20 days) after escalation as % of all complaints <sup>2</sup>	7% (146)	0.8% (17)

## 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.

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<sup>2</sup> The escalated stage 2 complaint figure is not included in the total complaints received figure for the council. These complaints are included in the stage 1 complaints closed total i.e. they are not double counted.

**Table 5: Upheld complaints**

<b>Complaints upheld</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
Number of complaints upheld at stage one as % of all complaints closed at stage one (5 days)	32%	33.1%
Number complaints upheld at stage two as % of complaints closed at stage two (20 days)	23.2%	14.6%
Number escalated complaints upheld at stage two as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two (20 days)	20.5%	11.76%

**Table 6: Partially upheld complaints**

<b>Complaints partially upheld</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints closed at stage one	18.2%	23.8%
Number complaints partially upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of complaints closed at stage two	23.6%	18.3%
Number escalated complaints partially upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	17.1%	47.06%

**Table 7: Not upheld complaints**

<b>Complaints not upheld</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
Number of complaints not upheld at stage one (5 days) as % of all complaints closed at stage one	33.5%	36.4%
Number complaints not upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of complaints closed at stage two	48.3%	64.1%
Number escalated complaints not upheld at stage two (20 days) as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	38.4%	41.18%

Variances in the total for these indicators can be attributed to fields which have not been populated in the CRM system. This is being 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
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage one (5 day resolution target)	7.9	7.0
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage two (20 day resolution target)	15.1	13.8
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation (20 day resolution target)	11.2	14.7

## 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
Number complaints closed at stage one within 5 working days as % of stage one complaints	71.9%	78.0%
Number complaints closed at stage two within 20 working days as % of stage two complaints	82.6%	85.8%
Number escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as % of escalated stage two complaints	73.3%	76.5%

## 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**

<b>Number of cases where an extension is authorised</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
% of complaints at stage one (5 days) where extension was authorised	7%	1.1%
% of complaints at stage two (20 days) where extension was authorised	1.9%	2.4%

## 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**

<b>Customer satisfaction</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
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%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the outcome of their upheld complaint.	72.3%	74.3%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they were satisfied with the way their complaint was handled.	67.9%	76.2%
Percentage of customers who agreed that they found it easy to complain to the council.	83.0%	88.6%

## 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.

	<b>Complaint Area/ Complaint Theme</b>	<b>Complaints Analysis</b>	<b>Service Improvement Action(s)</b>
1.	<b>Area Services:</b>  Waiting Time	Customer complained about the waiting time to see a Customer Information Service officer at the Bathgate Partnership Centre.	A frontline staff vacancy has now been filled in the Bathgate Partnership Centre to reduce customer waiting times.
2.	<b>Corporate Services:</b>  Policy Related	The customer complained that the council did not provide clear information on the blue badge process.	As part of the review of the blue badge guidance, more detailed information on the application process has been added to the council's webpage.
3.	<b>Corporate Services:</b>  Policy Related	The received complaint was in relation to a customer not being able to renew a blue badge earlier than 4 weeks before it was due to expire.	The time between accepting a renewal application for a blue badge before the current Blue Badge expires was extended. The blue badge guidance was modified and sent to all Customer Information Service staff.
4.	<b>Finance and Estates:</b>  Poor Communication	A customer complained that they were misled by incorrect information on the council website.	The website content was updated and all Revenues information is now being checked as part of the year end processes.
5.	<b>Finance and Estates:</b>  Standard of Service	A supplier complained about the accuracy of the tender information supplied by the council.	All Procurement staff has been briefed on the processes surrounding the complaint. The User Intelligence Group (UIG) which helps develop complex tenders will be further developed and used for specific procurement exercises.

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<b>Complaint Area/ Complaint Theme</b>		<b>Complaints Analysis</b>	<b>Service Improvement Action(s)</b>
6.	<b>Education Services:</b>  Standard of Service	Two parents raised concerns about a letter they had received about their children's attendance.	The school standard letter template relating to attendance was modified based on the analysis of the received complaints.
7.	<b>Education Services:</b>  Standard of Service	A pre-school application form was incorrectly processed by Education Services.	The procedures for processing forms were reviewed and changes were made to prevent reoccurrence.
8.	<b>Education Services:</b>  Standard of Service	A child was given a 'yellow' card on the 'Good to be Green' behaviour strategy, but on enquiry the school could not tell the parent why.	Changes were made to the 'Good to Be Green' behaviour strategy procedures to ensure reasons for yellow and red cards were recorded and communicated to parents.
9.	<b>Education Services:</b>  Standard of Service	Some school pupils did not receive free school meals due to an administrative error.	The school procedure was reviewed by the management team. An apology and a refund was given to the parents.
10.	<b>Housing, Construction and Building Services:</b>  Standard of Service	Customers unhappy with decision not to replace internal key house components where minimal/ cosmetic damage has occurred.	A new cosmetic repairs service has been introduced which will address concerns of customer without the need to replace components.
11.	<b>Housing, Construction and Building Services:</b>  Poor Communication	Customers unhappy with repair timescales available when a repair is logged.	New repair categories and timescales are being introduced in 2015/16 following consultation and agreement with tenants.
12.	<b>Housing, Construction and Building Services:</b>	Customers made various complaints about the poor driving behaviours of council employees.	A new vehicle telematics system was introduced in 2014/15 which allows the service to monitor a vehicles location, movements, status and driving behaviour.

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<b>Complaint Area/ Complaint Theme</b>		<b>Complaints Analysis</b>	<b>Service Improvement Action(s)</b>
Employee Attitude			
13.	<b>Operational Services:</b>  Standard of Service	Standard of service complaints were received relating the increase of litter across the community impacted by the frequency and timing of the service.	The service carried out a geographical analysis of complaints and requests for service to identify littering hotspots. This has led to changes in the number of environmental teams being available at certain times of the month. The analysis also informed route changes to reduce the impact of littering.
14.	<b>Operational Services:</b>  Standard of Service	The main theme of Garden Maintenance complaints were linked to the standard of the work carried out and in particular the way gardens are left. Customers complained that debris, grass and hedge cuttings were all left behind.	A programme of training has begun for all our supervisors which will improve their awareness and their ability to deal with customer service issues and service issues on site.
15.	<b>Operational Services:</b>  Standard of Service	A large number of Waste Services standard of service complaints related to customer bins not being emptied/ being missed.	Weekly reports on missed wheel bin take-out are now being circulated to supervisors to identify those customers where the bin is repeatedly missed. The supervisor works with each team to highlight areas of concern and to ensure that they have a particular focus on specific streets and addresses to reduce the opportunity for a missed collection.  A route assessment and optimisation has been undertaken to improve routing of vehicles to avoid known areas of access issue/congestion dependant on the time of collection. This also

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<b>Complaint Area/ Complaint Theme</b>		<b>Complaints Analysis</b>	<b>Service Improvement Action(s)</b>
			provided routing guidance for new/ unfamiliar crews to reduce missed collection.
16.	<b>Planning and Economic Development:</b>  Standard of Service	A complaint was received regarding the time being taken to analyse noise recordings in relation to a service investigation.	To enable Environmental Health officers' investigation of noise complaints, special software has now been installed. This will reduce the time to review an investigation.
17.	<b>Social Policy:</b>  Standard of Service	A customer complained that a care home had moved a grit bin from the pathway at the car park entrance to the front door of the care home. The bin was also to be used by residents of the street.	The care home manager was instructed to relocate the bin back to the original position at the car park entrance. Staff were informed that the grit bin was also for public use and should not be moved.
18.	<b>Social Policy</b>	Social Policy statutory complaint improvement actions are linked to their statutory complaints process and are not covered in this report.	

### **3. 2014/15 Complaint Summary**

In 2014/15 the council received 2,113 complaints, and whilst this represents an increase on the 2,036 complaints received in 2013/14, it is lower than at any other period in the last five years.

The number of complaints received across the council service areas varies significantly with 38% of all complaints being recorded against Operational Services to 0.3% in Social Policy. However it should be noted that the majority of Social Policy complaints are channelled through the council's statutory social work complaints process and are not covered in this report.

Of the eight service areas that deliver the council's activities and functions, three have shown a reduction in customer complaints, two have remained relatively static and three have had an increase in the number of complaints received compared to the previous year. Housing Construction and Building Services have experienced the largest reduction in complaints with a 20% reduction. Finance and Estates have experienced a 15% reduction followed by Area Services with a reduction of 8% in complaints received. The two services that have shown the largest rise in complaints when compared to the previous year were Education Service and Operational Services with a 33% and 29% increase respectively.

The council's performance relating to complaint handling has improved with 76% of all complaints received being resolved at Stage 1 (Frontline Resolution) with the remaining 24% of complaints being resolved at Stage 2 (Investigation). The average times taken by the council to resolve both Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints were 7 days and 13.8 days respectively. The majority of complaints were responded to within timescales: 78% at Stage 1 (5 days target) and 85.8% at Stage 2 (20 days target).

The percentage of complaints that were upheld/ part upheld across the council in 2014/15 was 51.2% which represents an increase of 2.7% from the 2013/14 figure which was 48.5%. During 2014/15, only 30 complaints were dealt with where a request was made to extend the review timescales.

In 2014/15, the council has shown improved performance across the majority of indicators relating to complaint handling. There has been an increase in customer satisfaction across the four key customer perception complaint indicators compared to the previous year. The largest increase in customer satisfaction was 8.3% to 76.2% which focused on the way the council handled customer complaints. Furthermore, 88.6% of customers surveyed said that they found it easy to submit a complaint to the council, which is an increase of 5.6% from 2013/14.

In addition a number of improvements have been made to existing services as a result of complaint analysis which ranged from service redesign to small scale alterations to existing practice.

Overall, the council has improved complaint performance in a number of areas including the processing of complaints, customer satisfaction relating to complaint handling and complaint driven service improvement. There has also been a reduction in complaints received across a number of key front line services. Complaints will continue to be used to inform service improvement and complaint benchmarking against other Local Authorities will be included in the next annual report.