

Midlothian



MIDLOTHIAN COUNCIL
ANNUAL COMPLAINT HANDLING REPORT 2019/20



Complaints are crucial in identifying areas or processes that are not working for customers. Reporting complaints data is a national objective that is monitored by Audit Scotland in conjunction with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), and it is in line with Best Value arrangements.

The Complaint Handling Procedure (CHP) specifies how Midlothian Council handles complaints. The 8 key indicators, developed by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) along with other public sector experts, are reported on a quarterly cycle.

The CHP has thus far:

- introduced a uniform two stage procedure for dealing with complaints, with timescales for each stage;
- encouraged the use of early resolution methods wherever feasible;
- allocated responsibility for complaint handling in organisations;
- included requirements for recording complaints and publishing complaint data and for
- reporting on complaint performance;
- provided a definition of 'complaint'; and
- encouraged learning from complaints.

Complaint information is also used in the shared risk assessments of local authorities that

Audit Scotland conducts with other regulators such as Education Scotland. It helps to build up an overall picture of particular services within the local authority

Midlothian Council defines a complaint per the SPSO's recommended description as follows:

“An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about Midlothian Council’s action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on Midlothian Council’s behalf.”

The 2019/20 Report

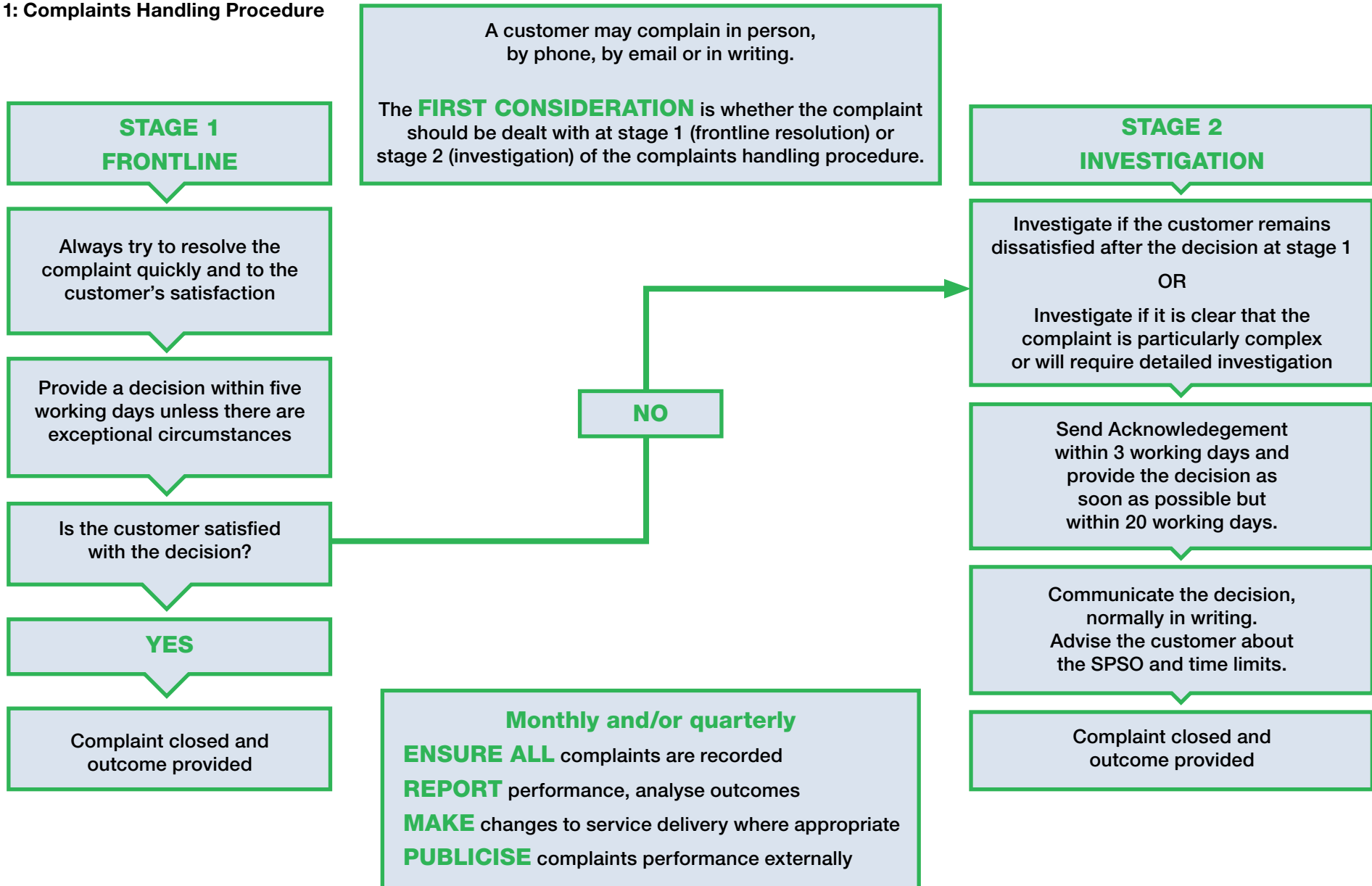
The information provided in this report is generated from the records that staff have input into the established complaints system – the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. The report is presented in a way that provides insight about what the figures may suggest.

Illustrated within the report, is comparative data to Midlothian Council’s indicator figures from previous years. The external benchmarking information that is usually included in the report has been omitted this year due to the ongoing COVID pandemic, and being unable to report this information at time of writing.

Complaints handling procedure

Figure 1 illustrates a summary flow chart of the complaints procedure, which is used for the corporate Complaints Handling Procedure.

FIGURE 1: Complaints Handling Procedure



CHP development actions

How have we progressed through 2019/20

NEXT STEPS FROM 18/19	DEVELOPMENT
Rollout the complaints dashboard using Tableau for senior staff to have regular, consistent access to complaints data.	This was completed but has recently been discontinued due to a resourcing issue. Discussions around reinstating the process are in the pipeline.
Maintain engagement with the Local Authority Complaint Handler's Network (LACHN) to ensure benchmarking is accurate to enable learning.	The team who deal with the CHP have been cross-skilling to ensure better business continuity and so attendance at the LACHN has been carried out by different MC staff. We work with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) and other Local Authorities (LA's) to improve data quality and timeliness of data collection.
As part of the installation of a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform, implement a new complaints system which will provide a more robust and efficient arrangement.	This large-scale project is still underway and is now at the contractual stage.
Use the new CRM system to relaunch the Complaint Handling Procedure (CHP) and correlate training on procedural matters with necessary system training.	When the implementation stage of the new customer platform is reached, this will take place. However, with the new MCHP being rolled out for April 2021, the training required for this may supercede the former.
Use training to work towards reducing time taken to respond to complaints.	This took place and will be progressed further when the above mentioned training takes place.
Improve online accessibility for logging a complaint, with guidance to assist customers whilst submitting a complaint so they are better able to differentiate between a service request and a complaint.	This will take place as part of the new online customer based platform project.
In driving forward a disciplined culture of continuous improvement and to help ensure that the organisation learns from feedback and complaints received and improves service delivery the Council is adopting the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) standard. The standard has particular focus on delivery, timeliness, information, professionalism and staff attitude. Emphasis is also placed on developing customer insight, understanding the user's experience and robust measurement of service satisfaction.	This project is underway.

Midlothian Council assesses complaints handling performance to provide assurance in relation to their performance, to facilitate continuous improvement and to assist in benchmarking performance between local authorities.

Indicator 1 – Complaints received per thousand population

Indicator 2 – Complaints closed at each stage as a percentage of all complaints closed

Indicator 3 – The number of complaints upheld/partially upheld/not upheld at each stage as a percentage of complaints closed in full at each stage

Indicator 4 – Average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage

Indicator 5 – The number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescale of 5 and 20 working days

Indicator 6 – The number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension to the 5 or 20 working day timeline has been authorised

Indicator 7 – Customer satisfaction statement about complaints service provided

Indicator 8 – A statement outlining changes or improvements to services or procedures as a result of the consideration of complaints.

INDICATOR 1: Complaints received per thousand population

This indicator records the total number of complaints received at stage 1, or directly at stage 2. The sum is divided by the estimated population size of Midlothian Council. Population size data is a Mid-Year Population Estimate from 2018 obtained from the National Records of Scotland (NRS).

- The population of Midlothian Council is estimated to be 91,340
- Midlothian Council handled 5421 complaints
- This equates to an average of 59 complaints received per 1000 population
- Expressed another way, 1 in every 18 people made a complaint about a service

TABLE 2: Figures for Performance Indicator 1: Complaints received per thousand population

	Internal Benchmarking			
	Midlothian 16/17	Midlothian 17/18	Midlothian 18/19	Midlothian 19/20
Population Total	88,610	88,610	90,090	91,340
Total Number of Complaints	5936	5202 (↓734)	5107	5421 (↑314)
Complaints Per 1000 Population	67	59	57	59

Although there is 314 more complaints between the years 2018/19 and 2019/20, this could be due to the population being greater since the complaints per 1000 has not changed significantly with only a difference of 2 more (57 to 59 respectively). The number of complaints per 1000 population has decreased from 67 in 2016/17 to 59 in 2019/20, with each of the past 3 year's data being mainly consistent. All sets of statistics include Social Work data. This consistency tells us that the council is interpreting and processing complaints in a streamlined way, which tells us that there is a uniform understanding of the procedure.

INDICATOR 2: Complaints closed at stage 1 and stage 2, and escalated as a percentage of all complaints closed

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Closed complaints are those that have been allocated an outcome and a response has been given to the customer. At time of reporting, no further action was required.

The number of closed complaints differs to the number of received complaints because some of the 2019/20 closed complaints were received in 2018/19, while some of the 2019/20 received complaints will be closed in 2020/21 as their target date falls into the next reporting cycle.

Customers who have undergone the complaints procedure at stage 1, but who remain dissatisfied are invited to escalate their complaint to a stage 2 investigation.

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FIGURE 3: Data for performance indicator 2: Complaints closed at each stage as a percentage of all complaints closed, including comparative data from previous years

Stage 1	Stage 2	Escalated
16/17 5799 (98%)	16/17 86 (1.5%)	16/17 39 (0.7%)
17/18 5095 (98.5%)	17/18 40 (0.8%)	17/18 40 (0.8%)
18/19 4944 (97.6%)	18/19 45 (0.9%)	18/19 77 (1.5%)
19/20 5180 (98.1%)	19/20 46 (0.9%)	19/20 54 (1%)

The variance of the percentage of complaints closed at stage 1 remains consistent across the 4 years listed, the most recent (19/20) being 98%. The proportion of stage 2 complaints that have been closed, aside from the year 16/17, also remains consistent. However, it can be seen that the number of stage 2 complaints is on the increase and so more in depth monitoring work is required to ensure that cases are captured early before reaching this stage. When escalated complaints are viewed, the proportionate percentage also remains fairly consistent. This is an indication that there is a stable number of complainants who remain dissatisfied at stage 1. Midlothian Council's stats for this indicator supports the SPSO's aim to close complaints at as early a stage as possible to prevent the need for lengthy and costly investigations.

INDICATOR 3: Complaints upheld/partially upheld/not upheld at each stage (as a % of complaints closed in full at each stage).

“ The procedure states that there is a requirement to record an outcome for each complaint received. The outcomes are categorised as upheld, not upheld and partially upheld. ”

FIGURE 4: 2019/20 data for performance indicator 3: The number of complaints upheld/partially upheld/not upheld at each stage as a percentage of complaints closed in full at each stage including comparative data for previous years

	YEAR	UPHELD	NOT UPHELD	PARTIALLY UPHELD
STAGE 1	2016/17	4872 (84%)	629 (10.8%)	298 (5.1%)
	2017/18	3820 (75%)	614 (12%)	320 (6%)
	2018/19	3750 (76%)	579 (12%)	163 (3%)
	2019/20	4229 (82%)	380 (7%)	179(4%)
STAGE 2	2016/17	13 (15.1%)	38 (44.2%)	35 (40.7%)
	2017/18	8 (20%)	19 (47.5%)	11 (27.5%)
	2018/19	12 (26.7%)	19 (42.2%)	14 (31%)
	2019/20	6 (13%)	27 (59%)	11 (24%)
ESCALATED	2016/17	5 (12.8%)	24 (61.5%)	10 (25.6%)
	2017/18	4 (10%)	21 (52.5%)	12 (30%)
	2018/19	10 (13%)	35 (45.5%)	20 (26%)
	2019/20	12 (22%)	23 (43%)	12 (22%)

Figure 4 illustrates the outcome totals for each stage, as well as the relative percentage. It should be noted that there is an identified anomaly within our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system that, if incorrect practice is applied, permits staff to close off complaints without an outcome. This explains why the figures from 2017/18 onwards for each stage fall below 100%. Midlothian council is in the process of procuring a new CRM platform, and due the current, in-house developed system having reached the end of its 'lifespan', no further development work is being carried out on it. Worsening of the statistics relating to this loophole is prevented or reduced through regular system reporting and training.

The relative amount of upheld complaints for stage 1 in 19/20 is 82%, a 6% increase from the previous year. 7% of stage 1 complaints were not upheld, which is the lowest in 4 years, while 4% were partially upheld.

The proportion of stage 2 complaints that were upheld has decreased substantially from 27% in 18/19 to 13% in 19/20. Stage 2 complaints, and those that were not upheld have increased from 42% to 59%. It was a key focus of the council to decrease the number of upheld complaints at this stage, so the trend where the relative amount of not upheld complaints increases while the relative number upheld decreases, is favourable.

INDICATOR 4:

Average time in working days to provide a full response to complaints at each stage

“ This indicator takes the sum of the total number of working days for all complaints to be dealt with and closed at stage 1; at stage 2; and escalated complaints.

An average time in working days for a full response to be given is then calculated by dividing the sum by the total number of closed complaints for each stage.

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FIGURE 5: 2019/20 data for performance indicator 4: Average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage including comparative data for previous years

Stage 1 Complaints	TARGET	5 Working Days
	16/17	0.3 Working Days
	17/18	3 Working Days
	18/19	4 Working Days
	19/20	3 Working Days
Stage 2 Complaints	TARGET	20 Working Days
	16/17	7.3 Working Days
	17/18	19.5 Working Days
	18/19	18.31 Working Days
	19/20	20 Working Days
Escalated Complaints	TARGET	20 Working Days
	16/17	26.7 Working Days
	17/18	20.2 Working Days
	18/19	21.07 Working Days
	19/20	19 Working Days

Figure 5 indicates that Midlothian Council has remained within the pre-determined target of 5 days for stage 1 complaints. Aside from the year 16/17, the average number of days is fairly consistent with 3, 4 and 3 for years 17/18, 18/19 and 19/20 respectively.

Also shown in Figure 5 is the average time for stage 2 complaints for each year. The council have kept within the 20 working day limit, although it is on the upper threshold for 19/20, therefore there is a need to focus on ensuring that this does not exceed the maximum limit.

With previous years displaying a somewhat disappointing average number of days for escalated complaints, there is a positive improvement in the current (19/20) year's data, which highlights a reduction to a 19 day average.

As mentioned previously, the SPSO's ethos is that complaints should be dealt with at as early a stage as possible, so the less time it takes to deal with complaints the better

INDICATOR 5: The number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days.

“ This indicator represents the number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the predetermined timescales of 5 and 20 working days. Cases where an extension to the timescales has been authorised are included. ”

FIGURE 6: 2019/20 data for performance indicator 5: The number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days, including comparative data

YEAR	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	ESCALATED
2016/17	5463 (94%)	55 (64%)	25 (64%)
2017/18	4475 (88%)	28 (70%)	27 (68%)
2018/19	4337 (88%)	33 (73%)	47 (61%)
2019/20	4538 (88%)	28 (61%)	40 (74%)

It can be seen in figure 6 that the relative amount of Midlothian Council’s complaints that were closed against timescales for stage 1 complaints has remained relatively stable at 88%. The proportion of stage 2 complaints is at a 4 year low with 61%. This is a fairly significant (12%) drop from the year before highlighting that there is work required here to ensure that timeframes are met. Stage 2 complaints generally require a substantial investigation since they are ordinarily complex. Prior to the council being in a position to provide a full, impartial and balanced outcome, there first needs to be a detailed assessment of all the elements made in the complaint case. At times, there are instances where responses cannot be provided with the pre-determined target due to either capacity issues, or an inability to proceed with meetings at the desired times.

Figure 6 also shows that escalated complaints that were closed within target displays an increased amount of 13% (61% in 18/19 to 74% in 19/20).

INDICATOR 6: The number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension was authorised

With authorisation from a senior manager such as a Chief Officer, the pre-determined 5 day limit to respond to a stage 1 complaint may be extended a further 5 days if there are extenuating circumstances in which the complaint cannot be dealt with within the 5 day limit. Similarly, an extension may be approved by management to the 20 day limit for stage 2 and escalated complaints.

This indicator looks at the number and percentage of complaints at each stage where authorisation was agreed to extend the 5 or 20 working day timeline.

It does not include complaints that were late but authorisation was not requested and/or logged accordingly.

INDICATOR 7: Customer satisfaction about the complaint handling procedure

The Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network (LACHN) are working alongside the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to finalise a generic set of survey questions to be used as a minimum set of questions. This will enable better benchmarking of complaint handling satisfaction across Scotland.

Due to a poor uptake in responses to previous questionnaire attempts, Midlothian Council decided to cease further development work in this area and await the generic survey from the LACHN network group.

It is anticipated that the new format will improve the return rate of this particular indicator so that robust, informative data can be provided about whether or not customers are pleased with the way that their complaint has been handled. This will also enable informed decisions to be made about any improvements to the procedure that might be required.

FIGURE 7: data for performance indicator 6: number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension to the 5 or 20 working day timeline has been authorised, including previous year's data for comparison

YEAR	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	ESCALATED
2016/17	3 (0.1%)	6 (7%)	3 (8%)
2017/18	0 (0%)	14 (35%)	4 (10%)
2018/19	3 (0.1%)	4 (9%)	4 (5%)
2019/20	4 (0.1%)	7 (15%)	3 (6%)

Figure 7 highlights that the relative amount of Midlothian Council's complaints that had an agreed extension to the timescale has increased for both stage 2 and escalated complaints with 9% (2018/19) to 15% (2019/20), and 5% (2018/19) to 6% (2019/20) respectively. This is an encouraging result since some work was done to raise the awareness of this element of the CHP. It could be interpreted as improved communication with customers and enhanced use and understanding of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. It can be seen that Stage 1 complaints have remained reasonably consistent in this statistic with only 0.1% being extended in 19/20. Further work, such as raising staff awareness to ensure that they log the detail when extensions are made could change this value.

Compliments throughout 2019/20

There were 172 compliments received during the year 2019/20, compared with 173 in 18/19 and 150 in 17/18. They covered a range of services and each Head of Service received the information relevant to their areas to ensure that staff were informed. Many of the compliments were broad and covered factors on a larger scale such as the good work of the general council during adverse weather conditions, whereas many were specific to staff whom our customers felt had gone above and beyond. Table 3 highlights an excerpt of some of these, and includes the service areas in which they belong

TABLE 3: Excerpt of compliments received during 2019/20

SERVICE AREA	COMPLIMENTS
Environmental Health	Many thanks for the prompt and efficient service from the pest control officer. He kept us well informed.
	I would like to thank the pest control officer for his prompt action during the incident that took place today.
Education	I would like to thank the new P1 teacher for being absolutely amazing. The kids love her and she goes above and beyond. I hope my son gets her in P2.
Specialist Teaching & Disabilities Team	My son is currently being supported in the Nurture and I would like the staff to be recognised for the outstanding support they provide. Can the staff be recognised in some way?
Planning	I wanted to flag to you that the notification you provided worked, and that I appreciated it. It helped me understand who had been contacted and what was going to happen so I was prepared and had all the relevant information to hand. Thank you.
Building Standards	I commend you on your candid and very helpful approach to everything, and for your previous comments on consultations.
	Just wanted to express our thanks with helping out yesterday with these outstanding Building Warrants, we know your department is really busy just now, so to take the time out of your workload to help is greatly appreciated.
	Excellent service from start to finish. The officer is knowledgeable and very helpful.
Landscape & Countryside	I cannot praise highly enough the standard of work done to the hedge and I really do wish to convey my thanks to the council. It's very evident to me that time, effort and a high standard has been applied to the work.
	Grateful thanks to the team who were very respectful and allowed some family time at the graveside of our late relative. It is appreciated.
	Customer called to pass on thanks and praise for the team that attended to the overhanging bushes and trees covering street lights. She is delighted with the work done and the leaves are also all swept up.
Waste Services	Customer called to say she thinks the bin crew in her area are fantastic, they can't do enough for her and she appreciates their hard work.
	Elderly couple want to say thank you to the staff working at the recycling centre as they are very helpful and always give them a hand with taking things out the car and things like that. They are very grateful for this.
	Thanks you so much an excellent service. Our selection of bins are always collected promptly and the guys doing this are considerate and friendly. Thanks again.
Road Services	Many thanks to @midgov roads dept for undertaking surfacing works at the approach to Newtongrange. I filled out the online form to request the work and within 3 days, lovely flat surface to cycle on. The system works.
	Thanks for sending through this written update. I passed the area again this morning and noticed that this pot hole has now been filled so thanks for acting so quickly in getting this sorted.
	Customer would like to say thank you for the new pavement surface. It looks very smart and they have done a really good job.
Travel & Fleet Services	Customer came into reception to hand in expired blue badge, whilst in customer asked if thanks could be passed for help in dealing with matters relating to blue badge renewal.

TABLE 3: Excerpt of compliments received during 2019/20 (continued...)

SERVICE AREA	COMPLIMENTS
Catering Services	I had dinner at the Newbattle cafe with my boys and was delighted the soup was gluten and dairy free as well as free from garlic since I am allergic to it. The soup was AMAZING, compliments to the chef and thank you for an available healthy meal.
Property Maintenance	I had a plumbing emergency. The phone operator dealt well with our somewhat agitated call, the plumber was quickly on the scene and dealt with the situation very efficiently, explaining what the problem was, the electrician followed swiftly, removed the kitchen light and was able to tell me when it would be replaced, as it duly was by another efficient worker. All who dealt with the problem were polite and reassuring. Thank you.
	Thank you for the new windows and I'd like to praise the crew of men who were in our home. They did a cracking job, and they were very thoughtful in their planning with regards to my wife, who is disabled. A great asset to the council.
	Thanks and compliments to the staff who installed new SHQS doors today. The customer is so happy. She suffers with Parkinson's and they were very helpful to her.
Healthy Living	Compliments to the staff on duty today during Aquafit. The lifeguards rescued a man who had mobility issues, and then they provided support that enabled him to remain in the class in a safe way. The instructor continued the class and between them they got the balance right, and the gentleman could also maintain his independence. Well done.
	My kids and their friends had a great time at the mini tubing party at Hillend today. The staff member was very friendly, kind and helpful. Thanks
	Thanks to the instructor who demonstrated a lot of patience and kindness with my son. He spent a lot of time with him and helped him to overcome his fear in a gentle and supportive way. My other son attends, too and all the instructors have been incredibly good. I'm very impressed. Well done and thanks again.

CASE STUDY 1



Service: Waste

Complaint Analysis

A 'spike' of complaints were made about bins not being collected on time. It transpired that parking issues had presented themselves as obstacles impeding Waste Services from fulfilling collections on the set collection day.

Service Improvement Actions

The Service have written to local residents asking them to park considerately on bin collection days given the challenges negotiating tight access points with a large bin collection vehicle. This was not totally successful so to enhance the communication there is now lamppost signs and banners reinforcing the message on problematic streets.



CASE STUDY 2



Service: Landscape and countryside

Complaint Analysis

Around 50% of enquiries are about trees but getting hold of the enquirer and getting the details to gather more information and/or provide a response was an issue that lead to a series of complaints.

Service Improvement Actions

The service created a web page with a Tree Enquiries tab which takes the user to a form which ensures the information is gathered that allows a full response and subsequent inspection. It also ensures that a response can be provided to customers since there is a field that ensures they leave details such as an email address.



