

Midlothian



# MIDLOTHIAN COUNCIL

ANNUAL COMPLAINT HANDLING REPORT 2019/20

# Welcome

to Midlothian Council's Annual Complaint Handling Report for 2019/20

Midlothian



We have provided  
compliments in this report

We upheld 4235 (78%) of  
complaints

We handled 5421  
complaints, and closed  
5280 complaints during  
the year 2019/20

We recorded 104,995  
customer interactions  
through our Contact Centre

We are continuing the process  
of purchasing a new customer  
focused online platform that  
will enable better customer  
relations including improved  
complaint handling.

## Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Complaints Handling Procedure</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Complaints Throughout 2018/19</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Compliments Throughout 2018/19</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Case Studies</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Annual Complaints Handled by the SPSO</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Discussion and Conclusion</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Next Steps</b>	<b>17</b>

**This year's Annual Complaint Handling Report sets out performance information about the way complaints are managed by Midlothian Council. The report provides a comprehensive analysis of complaints statistics, and evaluates the data recorded for the performance cycle between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020.**

The material in the report centres on the 8 statutory key performance indicators, and the data reflects the detail about how the council is performing when processing complaints from start through to resolution. The information is shared internally where it is measured and discussed by the council's senior management on a quarterly basis. It is then published externally on the council's website.

All of the local authorities across Scotland are required to report on the indicators, which enables benchmarking and comparisons to take place with similarly placed local authorities, as well as at a national level, and the data is collated and monitored by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

It is hoped that when a complaint is made, the procedure is easily accessible, straightforward and timely for customers. It is encouraging to recognise that issues are captured, reviewed and where applicable, developments are implemented so that services are frequently being refined as a direct result of the information provided by the residents of Midlothian Council, complimenting the work that we already do to continually improve.

Accordingly, Midlothian takes its commitment to the duties required by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) very seriously. The report takes account of other additional, interesting feedback data that contributes towards the council's determination to value its customers in the most efficient way, also using this information to learn, to plan and to monitor change/outcomes and thereby inspiring council services to continually evolve.



Dr Grace Vickers,  
Chief Executive  
Midlothian Council

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

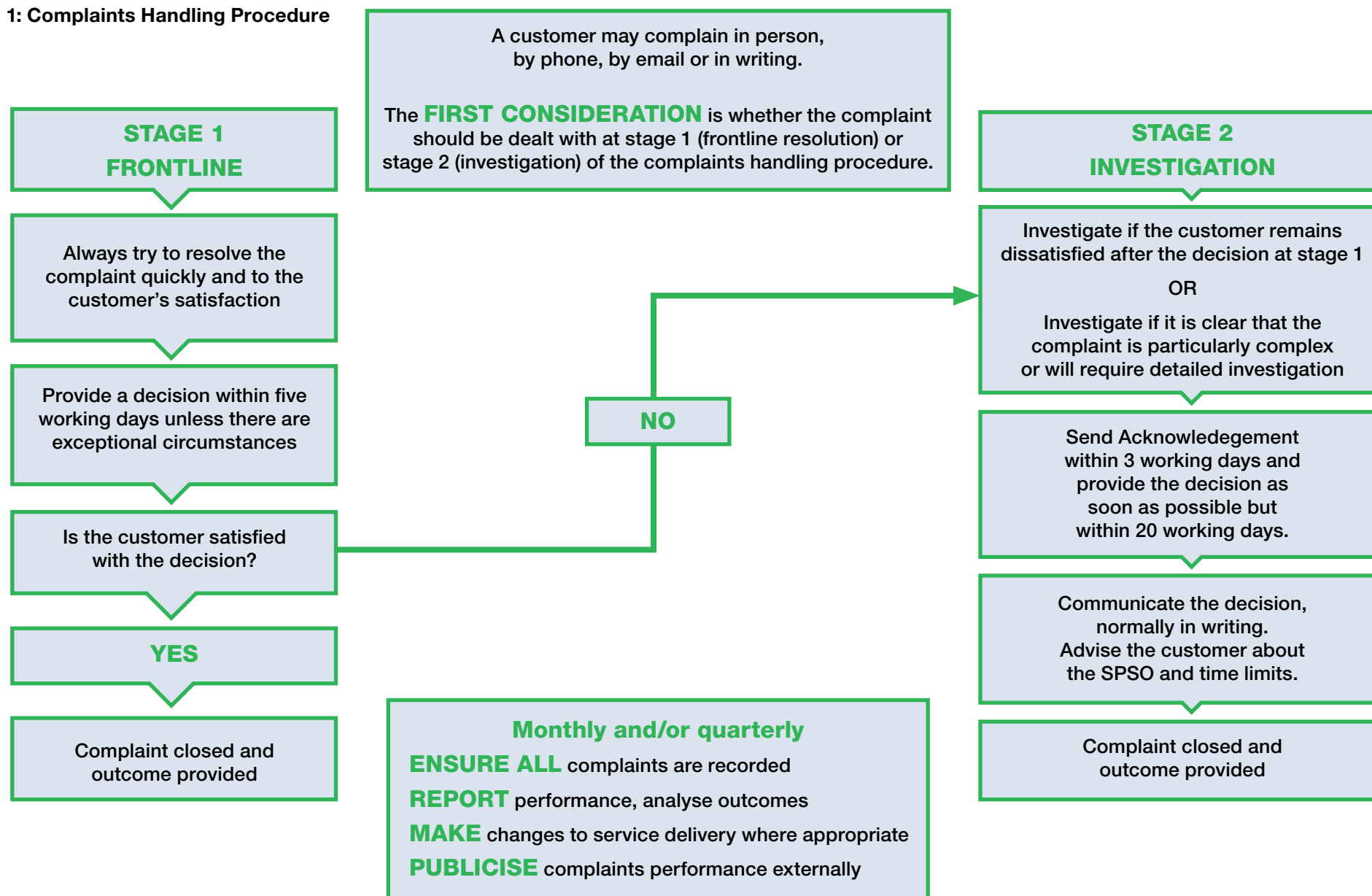
The information provided in this report is generated from the records that staff have input into the established complaints system – the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. The report is presented in a way that provides insight about what the figures may suggest.

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.

# Complaints received and channel used 2019/20

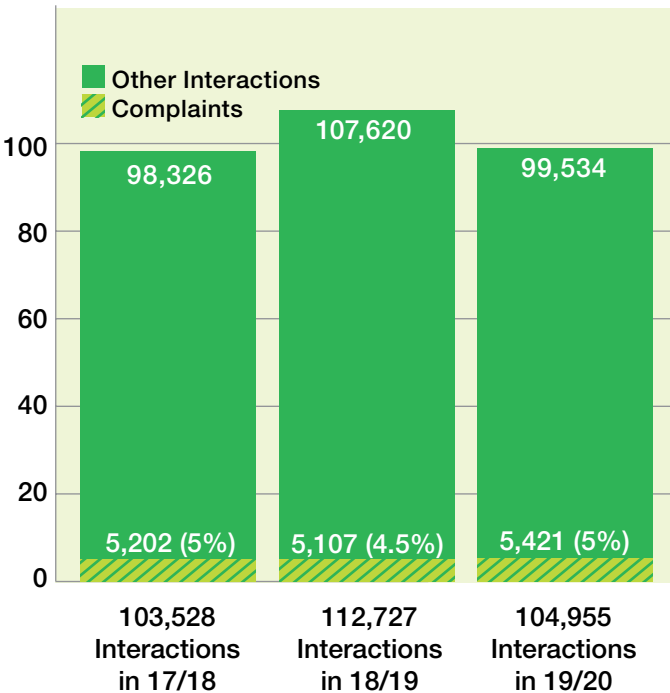
## Statutory Performance Indicators

Figure 2 illustrates the difference in complaints received in relation to the total amount of interactions received by the CRM system for the years 17/18, 18/19 and 19/20.

It can be seen in figure 2 that for the current year 19/20, there of the total of 104,995 customer interactions through CRM, only 5421 were complaints. This equates to 5% of dealings.

The number of complaints that are logged on the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system are proportionately very little when compared to the overall number of recorded dealings. This has been a consistent trend for all the years shown. However, the current year does reflect a 6% increase in complaints from last year, but it is noteworthy that the ratio of interactions to complaints is the same as the previous year (17/18) at 5%.

**FIGURE 2: Total CRM interactions relative to complaints for years 17/18, 18/19 and 19/20 with percentage figures representing total interactions to complaints ratio**



**Methods of contact used to report a complaint reflected as a percentage of the total complaints for the corresponding year**

**TABLE 1**

Complaints	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Online	17%	21%	26%	30%
In Person	1%	1%	1%	0.9%
Telephone	81%	78%	72%	69%
Letter	0.6%	0.3%	0.7%	0.4%
Feedback Form	0.8%	0.3%	0.4%	0.5%
Total	5936	5202	5130	5421

**13% increase in online complaints and 12% reduction in telephone complaints relative to total complaints between 16/17 & 19/20**

Table 1 is a reflection of the channel used by customers to make a complaint, and the percentage of the total number of complaints per year, to the corresponding channel. Each year reflects that telephone contact is the preferred method of approach, followed by online.

Looking at these preferred methods of contact, it can be seen that the amount of telephone calls relative to the total number of complaints during the course of the 4 years, have reduced by 12%, and that the amount of online contact has increased by 13%.

There is a definite noteworthy trend here that is likely the result of the continual work to improve user-friendliness of the council website. The trend is evidence that channel-shift work is moving in the desired direction. It will be interesting to see if further planned work to enhance web-form accessibility will amplify the trend.

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
<b>Population Total</b>	88,610	88,610	90,090	91,340
<b>Total Number of Complaints</b>	5936	5202 (↓734)	5107	5421 (↑314)
<b>Complaints Per 1000 Population</b>	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

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.

**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
<b>16/17</b> 5799 (98%)	<b>16/17</b> 86 (1.5%)	<b>16/17</b> 39 (0.7%)
<b>17/18</b> 5095 (98.5%)	<b>17/18</b> 40 (0.8%)	<b>17/18</b> 40 (0.8%)
<b>18/19</b> 4944 (97.6%)	<b>18/19</b> 45 (0.9%)	<b>18/19</b> 77 (1.5%)
<b>19/20</b> 5180 (98.1%)	<b>19/20</b> 46 (0.9%)	<b>19/20</b> 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.

**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**

<b>Stage 1 Complaints</b>	<b>TARGET</b>	<b>5 Working Days</b>
	16/17	0.3 Working Days
	17/18	3 Working Days
	18/19	4 Working Days
	19/20	3 Working Days
<b>Stage 2 Complaints</b>	<b>TARGET</b>	<b>20 Working Days</b>
	16/17	7.3 Working Days
	17/18	19.5 Working Days
	18/19	18.31 Working Days
	19/20	20 Working Days
<b>Escalated Complaints</b>	<b>TARGET</b>	<b>20 Working Days</b>
	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.

**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.

## 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.



# 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
<b>Catering Services</b>	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.
<b>Property Maintenance</b>	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.
<b>Healthy Living</b>	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.



**TABLE 4: Comparative figures on the number of complaints and their corresponding areas that have reached the SPSO**

SUBJECT GROUP	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17
Social Work	3	8	6	7
Housing	10	3	7	10
Education	3	3	2	4
Planning	1	3	1	3
Finance	1	3	0	0
Legal & Admin	3	1	1	1
Building Control	0	1	0	0
Roads & Transport	1	0	1	1
Environmental Health & Cleansing	1	0	1	2
Recreation & Leisure	0	0	1	1
Land & Property	0	0	0	0
Personnel	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0
Economic Development	0	0	0	0
Valuation Joint Boards	0	0	0	0
National Park Authorities	0	0	0	0
Welfare Fund - Community Care Grants	0	1	0	0
Welfare Fund - Crisis Grants	0	0	0	0
Subject unknown or Out of Jurisdiction	1	2	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>29</b>

**FIGURE 8: Trend analysis of number of complaints and corresponding areas that have reached the SPSO**

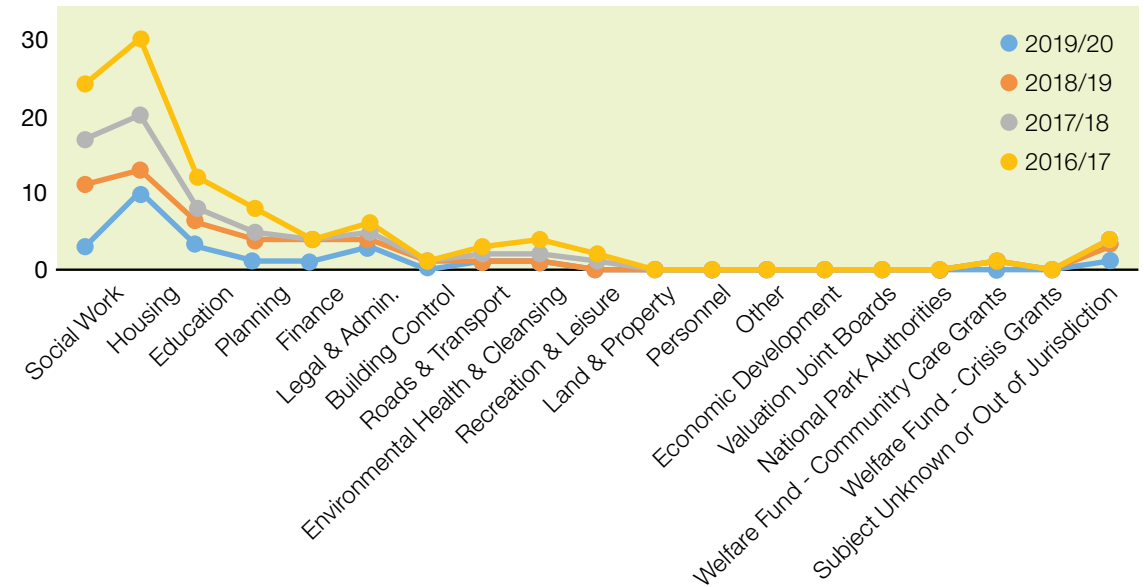


Table 4 illustrates the total number of complaints that have been received by the SPSO about a Midlothian Council service between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020. The main service areas have been given generic terminology by the SPSO since they deal with all local authorities in Scotland, and since each authority has locally named service areas/ divisions.

Looking at figure 8, it is interesting to note that although the numbers differ between the years, the trend is similarly matched in terms of the most commonly complained about services.

**TABLE 5:**  
**Comparative figures between years 16/17 through to 19/20 on the number of complaints received by the SPSO that reached the ADVICE stage**

	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17
Not duly made or withdrawn	3	6	3	8
Out of jurisdiction (discretionary)		0	0	0
Out of jurisdiction (non-discretionary)		0	0	0
Premature	5	4	10	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>

Tables 5, 6 and 7 shows the outcomes of the complaints determined by the SPSO about Midlothian Council over the same period. Similarly to the council's statistics, the figures received (shown in table 5) and the figures determined don't tally because the SPSO were still working on a case after the business year had ended.

The advice stage, shown in table 5 is the initial receipt stage where the SPSO will check if they have enough information, that the complainant has first of all complained to the relevant organisation, and that the matter is one that they are allowed to look at. It can be seen that there have been 8 at this stage compared to 10 the year before. 5 were deemed premature (hadn't gone through authority's internal procedure first), and 3 were withdrawn (not taken any further).

**TABLE 6:**  
**Comparative figures between years 16/17 through to 19/20 on the number of complaints received by the SPSO that reached the EARLY RESOLUTION stage**

	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17
Not duly made or withdrawn	1	0	0	1
Out of jurisdiction (discretionary)		2	1	2
Out of jurisdiction (non-discretionary)	1	0	0	2
Outcome not achievable		1	1	4
Premature		1	1	1
Proportionality	14	4	5	1
Resolved		0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>

The early resolution stage, referred to in table 6 is where the SPSO have confirmed that the complaint is mature (ie that the complaint has completed the organisation's complaint process) and is in jurisdiction. The SPSO will then begin gathering the information needed for an investigation. Some cases are closed at this stage if they are able to be resolved with the organisation, or if they consider there would be no significant benefit, or achievable outcome from a full investigation. There was 16 complaints in total that reached this stage compared with 8 the year before.

**TABLE 7:**  
**Comparative figures between years 16/17 through to 19/20 on the number of complaints received by the SPSO that reached the INVESTIGATION stage**

	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17
Fully upheld		0	1	0
Some upheld	1	0	0	1
Not upheld	1	2	1	1
Resolved		0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

Table 7 illustrates the complaints that the SPSO conducted an investigation for. It can be seen that of the 21 complaints that the SPSO received, there were 2 that reached this stage. The decisions can be viewed in the table, which reflects that 1 had some aspects of the complaint upheld and 1 was not upheld. Further analysis informs that the services were insurance claims and council tax respectively.



The quantity of telephone calls relative to the total number of complaints for the years 16/17 and 19/20 have reduced at 12% but it is important to recognise it since the percentage of online complaint interactions has increased by 13%. This could be a consequence of the continual work to improve the user-friendliness of the council website, and is evidence that channel-shift work is moving in the desired direction. It will be interesting to see if further planned work to enhance web-form accessibility will amplify the trend.

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). It could also mean that there is a wider staff understanding of the procedure that ensures that customers know that they are being signposted to it in the correct way. It could also mean that staff are identifying complaints correctly and logging them in line with the CHP.

The SPSO's aim to close complaints at as early a stage as possible to prevent the need for lengthy and costly investigations is reflected in Midlothian Council's ability to close off stage 1 complaints at the initial point of contact. This provides evidence to the theory that customers are happy with the response that they have received at stage 1.

The average time to complete stage 2 complaints is within target for 2019/20, but at the upper threshold. The trend of the past 3 years shows that this is gradually increasing and there is a need to monitor this to ensure it doesn't tip over the 20 day limit. This has been flagged accordingly. Average days to complete Escalated complaints has improved from being out of target back to target for 2019/20 at 19 days. This is the first time in 4 years that the number is within target. The trend shows a gradual improvement each year to bring the number down and a corporate effort is reflected in this respect.

For stage 2 and escalated complaints, Midlothian Council used the function to extend the time more than the previous year with 9% (2018/19) to 15% (2019/20), and 5% (2018/19) to 6% (2019/20) respectively. This is a reflection of some work carried out by Midlothian Council to promote the fact that the function to extend exists and should be used correctly instead of reporting complaints as late without the correct justification. The result is evidence that the work done to raise the awareness of this element of the CHP has been a success. It also provides assurance that communication with customers has improved and that there is better understanding of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.

There were 172 compliments received during the year 2019/20, compared with 173 in 18/19 and 150 in 17/18. A selection of these can be viewed in table 3 above. Many of them related to the work of the council in keeping Midlothian operational during adverse weather conditions, and many were about staff whom our customers felt had gone 'above and beyond'. Compliments were shared with both officers and heads of service to ensure awareness of the good work. The practice of recording compliments as well as complaints is encouraged in all services to ensure that reports can be generated, and to enable some analysis work that will permit learning and continuous improvement.

Satisfaction is an area requiring fairly large scale effort to drive the process of administering the forms throughout the authority.

# Next steps

- Ensure response to complaints is maintained during COVID pandemic.
- Analyse response to complaints during COVID pandemic.
- Maintain engagement with the Local Authority Complaint Handler's Network (LACHN) to ensure benchmarking is accurate to enable learning.
- Make arrangements to update essential systems and processes, and carry out required training for implementation of the revised Complaint Handling Procedure by April 2021.
- As part of the installation of a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform, implement a new complaints module that will provide a more robust and efficient arrangement.



# Your feedback counts

Whether you want to know more about our performance, have something to say about this report, or want to suggest an alternative way of receiving this kind of information in the future.

Please contact the Continuous Improvement Team: 0131 270 8926 or [Continuous.Improvement@midlothian.gov.uk](mailto:Continuous.Improvement@midlothian.gov.uk)

Visit: [www.midlothian.gov.uk](http://www.midlothian.gov.uk)

or follow us on social media



[Twitter@midgov.uk](https://twitter.com/midgov.uk)



[facebook.com/MidlothianCouncil](https://facebook.com/MidlothianCouncil)

## COMMUNICATING CLEARLY

We are happy to translate on request and provide information and publications in other formats, including braille, tape or large print.

如有需要我們樂意提供翻譯本，和其他版本的資訊與刊物，包括盲人點字、錄音帶或大字體。

Zapewnimy tłumaczenie na żądanie oraz dostarczymy informacje i publikacje w innych formatach, w tym Braillem, na kasecie magnetofonowej lub dużym drukiem.

ਅਸੀਂ ਮੰਗ ਕਰਨ ਤੇ ਖੁਸ਼ੀ ਨਾਲ ਅਨੁਵਾਦ ਅਤੇ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਤੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਪ੍ਰਦਾਨ ਕਰਾਂਗੇ, ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਬਰੇਲ, ਟੇਪ ਜਾਂ ਵੱਡੀ ਛਪਾਈ ਸ਼ਾਮਲ ਹਨ।

Körler için kabartma yazılar, kaset ve büyük nüshalar da dahil olmak üzere, istenilen bilgileri sağlamak ve tercüme etmekten memnuniyet duyuyoruz.

اگر آپ چاہیں تو ہم خوشی سے آپ کو ترجمہ فراہم کر سکتے ہیں اور معلومات اور دستاویزات دیگر شکلوں میں مثلاً بریل (نامیہ افراد کے لیے) بھرے ہوئے حروف کی لکھائی) میں، ٹیپ پر یا بڑے حروف کی لکھائی میں فراہم کر سکتے ہیں۔

Contact 0131 270 7500 or email: [enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk)