

Midlothian



MIDLOTHIAN COUNCIL  
ANNUAL COMPLAINT HANDLING REPORT 2020/21



# Welcome

to Midlothian Council's Annual Complaint Handling Report for 2020/21

Midlothian



We have provided compliments in this report

We upheld 6545 (91%) of complaints

We handled 7337 complaints, and closed 7164 complaints during the year 2020/21

We recorded 91,260 customer interactions through our Contact Centre

We are nearing the end of the significant ongoing project to procure a new customer focused online platform that will enable better customer relations including improved complaint handling.

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**Despite a very challenging year, Midlothian Council remains committed to providing high quality services for customers, residents, businesses and visitors to the area. Owing to the unprecedented pandemic situation, this year's performance cycle began with amended priorities to ensure critical services were sustained. Our customers and employees adjusted to different ways of doing things, different working environments, and many staff taking on new tasks to deliver lifeline support to our local residents, customers and businesses.**

I would like to thank each and every staff member and the fantastic teams who embraced the changes and delivered services during lockdown under very difficult circumstances. During this time several messages of praise were received towards our services and employees and some of these compliments are shared within this report. Thank you also to our customers and stakeholders for their patience and understanding. The year 2020/21 was also the first full year of an embedded significant structural change made the previous year.

Although faced with these significant trials, they should not overshadow the achievements made in relation to our customers and the way we handled complaints. Midlothian Council recognises that valuable lessons can be learnt from the feedback we receive from customers, and although it is disappointing to report that we fall short in some areas, we value complaints by viewing them in a positive way and using the information to continually improve the way we do things. We have included some examples of what improvements we have made to our services as a result of complaints. We strive to be thorough, transparent, objective and fair in our approach

to complaints, and we make every effort to ensure that the process is accessible, straightforward and timely.

Midlothian takes its commitment to the duties required by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) very seriously. This year's Annual Complaint Handling report presents information about the way Midlothian Council managed complaints between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021. 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 the beginning through to resolution. The information is shared internally where it is measured and discussed by the council's senior management on a quarterly basis. We also look towards making improvements in our complaints process and we continue to monitor the way we deal with complaints

The report also takes account of other additional 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.

The SPSO handles the final stage of complaints about public services in Scotland. The Ombudsman service is independent of government and has a duty to act impartially. The Complaints Standards Authority (CSA) was established by the SPSO to work with public bodies to standardise and simplify complaints handling procedures and to help drive improvement. In addition, the CSA has taken forward new responsibilities provided to the SPSO by the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010, including requiring the SPSO to monitor and promote best practice in complaints handling. These responsibilities allow the SPSO to take forward recommendations made by the Crerar Review (2007)<sup>1</sup> and Sinclair (2008)<sup>2</sup> reports which concluded that there is a need for a quicker, more consistent, more user focused approach to handling complaints.

The local authority complaint handler network (LACHN) is a national forum for local authority complaint handlers to meet quarterly to assist in the development of professional practice in relation to complaint handling. Midlothian Council are represented at this forum by the complaint officer alongside representatives from 32 Scottish Local Authorities. The SPSO attend these meetings to support the ongoing development of complaint handling within local authorities and to achieve consistency in approach.

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

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***“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.”***

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To supplement Midlothian’s commitment to valuing complaints, the report also illustrates comparative data to the indicator figures from last year, along with benchmarking information that measures Midlothian Council’s complaints information to similarly likened local authorities known as a Family Group<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, comparisons to the Scottish average complaints statistics are presented.

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.

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1 The Crerar Review: The Report of the Independent Review of Regulation, Audit, Inspection and Complaints Handling of Public Services in Scotland, 2007. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/PublicServiceReform/IndependentReviewofReg/latest-news/TheCrerarReview>

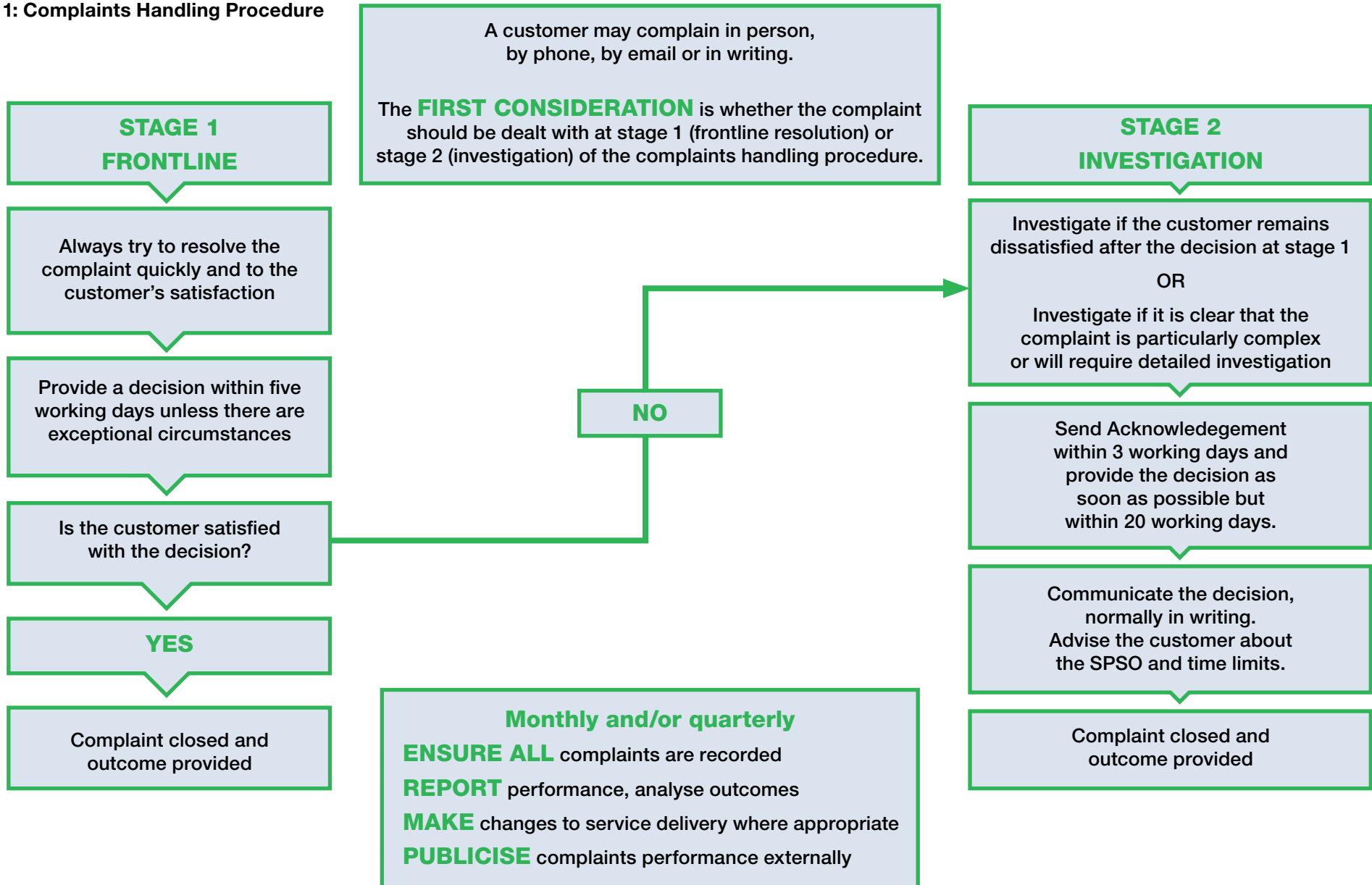
2 Fit-for-Purpose Complaints System Action Group (FCSAG), 2008. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/923/0063564.doc>

3 Councils are arranged in 'Family Groups', as agreed by Local Authority Officers in association with the Improvement Service, so that councils that are similar in terms of the type of population that they serve (e.g. relative deprivation and affluence) and the type of area in which they serve them (e.g. urban, semi-rural, rural) can be compared. The point of comparing like with like is that this is more likely to lead to useful learning, sharing good practice, and working together to improve services. Midlothian Council's Family Group includes Angus; Clackmannanshire; East Renfrewshire; Inverclyde; Renfrewshire; South Lanarkshire and West Lothian.

# 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 2020/21

<b>NEXT STEPS FROM 2019/20</b>	<b>DEVELOPMENT</b>
Ensure response to complaints is maintained during COVID pandemic.	This has been covered as part of this report.
Analyse response to complaints during COVID pandemic.	This is included as part of this report.
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.
Make arrangements to update essential systems and processes, and carry out required training for implementation of the revised Complaint Handling Procedure by April 2021.	This was achieved within the timescale required, taking into account the resourcing and capacity issues available as the Council continued to respond to the pandemic.
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.	During the period covered by this report, this large-scale project was underway and at the contractual stage.

# Complaints received and channel used 2020/21

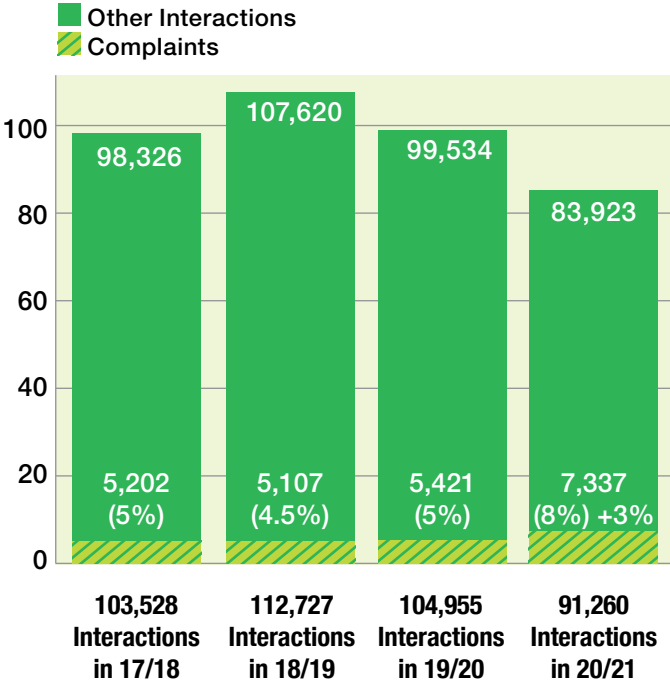


Figure 2 illustrates the difference in complaints received in relation to the total amount of interactions received by the CRM system for the years 2017/18, through to 2020/21.

The figure shows that for the current year 2020/21, there is a total of 91,260 customer interactions through CRM, and 7337 were complaints. This equates to 8% of dealings.

Although the number of complaints that are logged on the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system are proportionately fairly small when compared to the overall number of recorded dealings, there is a definite shift for the year 2020/21 since the previous 3 years have shown a consistent trend at 5%, 4.5% and 5%. The 3% increase to 8% from the previous year in complaints to other interactions reflected in the current year is likely be due to the pandemic, and it is noteworthy that the overall total interactions is substantially lower than in previous years, also contributing to the higher percentage. The lower figure in overall interactions is again likely due to the pandemic and people's needs/ requirements being different to more normal times.

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



# Complaints received and channel used 2020/21

**TABLE 1: Methods of contact used to report a complaint reflected as a percentage of the total complaints for the corresponding year**

Complaints	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Online	17%	21%	26%	30%	45%
In Person	1%	1%	1%	0.90%	0.05%
Telephone	81%	78%	72%	69%	55%
Letter	0.60%	0.30%	0.70%	0.40%	0.16%
Feedback Form	0.80%	0.30%	0.40%	0.50%	0.05%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5936</b>	<b>5202</b>	<b>5130</b>	<b>5421</b>	<b>7337</b>

**CHART 1: Correlation Analysis between Telephone and Online channels used to submit a complaint**

**NEGATIVE CORRELATION -1**  
**Channel Shift Complaints**

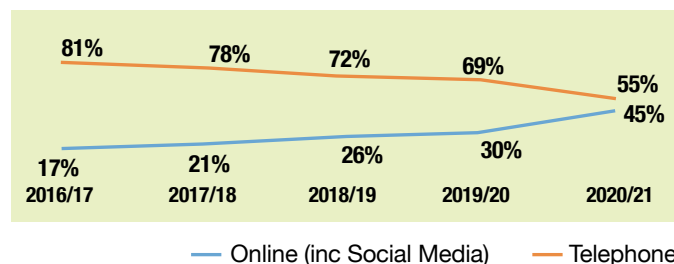


Table 1 is a reflection of the relative percentages of each the channels used by customers to make a complaint. The total complaints received for each year is highlighted, and corresponding percentages for each channel used can be viewed in the table. Each year reflects that telephone contact is the preferred approach, followed by online.

Looking at these preferred methods of contact more closely, Chart 1 provides more clarity around what is actually happening. There is a clear relationship between the two channels where it can be seen that over time, customers are choosing more and more to use an online service to submit a complaint, and as that is happening, there is less of a demand for telephone contact when it comes to making a complaint. If the trend continues, soon the lines will cross and reflect that the dominant channel used is online, and this will enable us to better plan our services.

This trend could be occurring due to a number of reasons. It could be the result of the continual work to improve user-friendliness of, and access to the council website, or it could be that in general the Midlothian population are becoming more digitally amenable. It is likely a combination of both, and to conclude further, the pattern displayed in Chart 1 is clear 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 magnify 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 timescales 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 the 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 2019 obtained from the National Records of Scotland (NRS).**

- The population of Midlothian Council is estimated to be 92,460
- Midlothian Council handled 7337 complaints
- This equates to an average of 79 complaints received per 1000 population
- Expressed another way, 1 in every 13 people made a complaint about a service

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

	Internal Benchmarking					External Benchmarking	
	Midlothian 16/17	Midlothian 17/18	Midlothian 18/19	Midlothian 19/20	Midlothian 20/21	Family Group 20/21	Scotland 20/21
<b>Population Total</b>	88,610	88,610	90,090	91,340	92,460		
<b>Total Number of Complaints</b>	5936	5202 (↓734)	5107	5421 (↑314)	7337 (↑1916)	16,761	51,677
<b>Complaints Per 1000 Population</b>	67	59	57	59	79	17	10

## Internal Benchmarking

It is unsurprising that there was such an increase in complaints (+1916) when compared with previous years. The remarkable changes to services that were quickly put in place that ensured critical services were provided during the global pandemic meant that other non-essential areas had to either cease operation or become limited in the way they function. These changes were carried out in a reactive manner, and were difficult to implement, and with all the other factors that people were coping with it is not an unexpected outcome. Looking at the wider context from a different perspective, there were significantly less overall interactions through the CRM system in 2020/21 at 91,260 when compared with

the previous year which shows 104,955 interactions. This can be viewed when observing Figure 2 (displayed earlier in report), where it also highlights that the relative percentage of complaints when compared with overall interactions is 8%. Therefore, although the figure of 1916 more complaints on the previous year, highlighted in Table 2, looks like a significant amount, when looking instead at the relevant percentage of 8% when compared with the previous year's 5%, the increase is only 3% higher than the year before. Notably the lower overall interactions contributes to the higher percentage, and it is encouraging to note that complaints were still being dealt with in the correct way, despite the situation

## External Benchmarking

With 79 complaints received per 1000 population for Midlothian Council, and 17 and 10 complaints per 1000 population for the Family Group and the Scottish average respectively, there is a considerable difference. This indicator has been widely discussed at the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network (LACHN) as there is a diverse variation when individual data can be seen. Factors for consideration that might have an impact on complaint totals when comparing Local Authorities are events, tourism, weather, locale - rural/town and demographics.

## 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 2020/21 closed complaints were received in 2019/20, while some of the 2020/21 received complaints will be closed in 2021/22 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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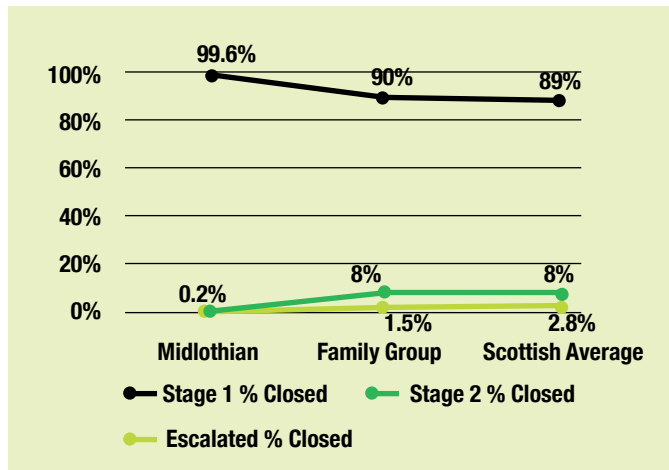
**FIGURE 3: Data for performance indicator 2: Complaints closed at each stage as a percentage of all complaints closed, including comparative data from previous years**

Stage 1	Stage 2	Escalated
<b>16/17</b> 5799 (98%)	<b>16/17</b> 85 (1.5%)	<b>16/17</b> 39 (0.7%)
<b>17/18</b> 5095 (99%)	<b>17/18</b> 40 (0.8%)	<b>17/18</b> 40 (0.8%)
<b>18/19</b> 4944 (98%)	<b>18/19</b> 45 (0.9%)	<b>18/19</b> 77 (1.5%)
<b>19/20</b> 5180 (98%)	<b>19/20</b> 46 (0.9%)	<b>19/20</b> 54 (1.0%)
<b>20/21</b> 7134 (99.6%)	<b>20/21</b> 14 (0.2%)	<b>20/21</b> 16 (0.2%)

Figure 3 shows that the most recent percentage of complaints closed at stage 1 is 99.6%. It is interesting that even although there is a much higher number of complaints, the percentage closed at stage 1 when compared to how they look on other years remains fairly consistent across the 5 years listed at 98%, 99%, 98%, 98%, and 99.6%.

When the amount of closed escalated complaints are viewed, the proportionate percentage also remains consistent. This is an indication that there is a small but steady 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.

**CHART 2: Data for performance indicator 2: Complaints closed at each stage as a percentage of all complaints closed, including comparative data for family group and Scottish average**



It can be seen in chart 2 that Midlothian Council closed proportionately more stage 1 complaints in 2021 (99.6%) than the family group and Scottish total at 90% and 89% respectively.

However, for stage 2 and escalated complaints, it can be seen that Midlothian Council has comparatively less of these complaints in both instances, with 0.2% for stage 2 compared with 8% for both the family group and Scottish amount. Midlothian's escalated complaints are more in line with both the family group and Scottish total with 0.2%, 1.5% (family group) and 2.8% (Scottish total)

Midlothian Council's statistics 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. The data also shows that the council has a lower instance of escalated complaints than that of the family group average and the Scottish average. This is reflective of the fact that customers are happy with the response that they have received at stage 1.

**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: 2020/21 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 and visual line data to summarise and identify patterns.**

	YEAR	UPHELD	NOT UPHELD	PARTIALLY UPHELD
<b>STAGE 1</b>	2016/17	4872 (84%)	629 (11%)	298 (5%)
	2017/18	3820 (75%)	614 (12%)	320 (6%)
	2018/19	3750 (76%)	579 (12%)	163 (3%)
	2019/20	4229 (82%)	380 (7%)	179(4%)
	2020/21	6826 (96%)	234 (3%)	74 (1%)
<b>STAGE 2</b>	2016/17	13 (15%)	38 (44%)	35 (41%)
	2017/18	8 (20%)	19 (48%)	11 (28%)
	2018/19	12 (27%)	19 (42%)	14 (31%)
	2019/20	6 (13%)	27 (59%)	11 (24%)
	2020/21	2 (14%)	7 (50%)	5 (36%)
<b>ESCALATED</b>	2016/17	5 (13%)	24 (62%)	10 (26%)
	2017/18	4 (10%)	21 (53%)	12 (30%)
	2018/19	10 (13%)	35 (46%)	20 (26%)
	2019/20	12 (22%)	23 (43%)	12 (22%)
	2020/21	2 (6%)	9 (56%)	5 (31%)

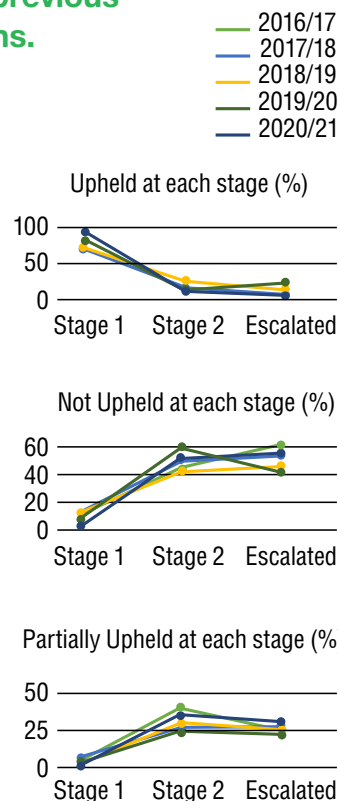


Figure 4 illustrates the outcome totals for each stage, as well as the relative percentage. There is an identified anomaly within our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system that should be observed. If incorrect practice is applied, the known anomaly permits staff to close off complaints without an outcome. This explains why the figures from 2017/18 onwards for each stage fall slightly below 100%. Midlothian council has procured a new customer platform solution that includes a CRM, which will overcome this problem, and meantime due to 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, engagement with services who use the system, and training.

The relative amount of upheld complaints for stage 1 in 20/21 is 96%, a 14% increase from the previous year. 3% of stage 1 complaints were not upheld, while 1% were partially upheld, this the lowest quantity for both of those outcomes in 5 years.

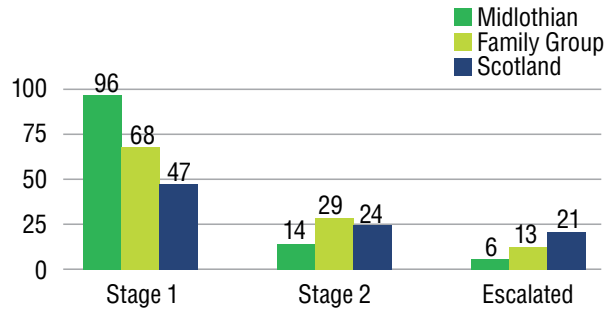
The proportion of stage 2 complaints that were upheld has remained moderately unchanged with only a 1% increase from 13% in 19/20 to 14% in 20/21. There had been a notable decrease in upheld complaints at stage 2 from the previous (18/19) year so it is pleasing to see that this has remained relatively low for 20/21. Stage 2 complaints, and those that were not upheld have increased from remain high at 50%. It was a key focus of the council to decrease the number of upheld complaints at stage 2, so where the relative amount of not upheld complaints increases while the relative number upheld decreases, is favourable.

The line charts in Figure 4 visually highlight the trend as described above. When looking at stage 1 complaints it is clear that there is a high instance of upheld complaints across the years, while stage 2 complaints show a low instance, and it is the opposite on the chart titled 'not upheld'.

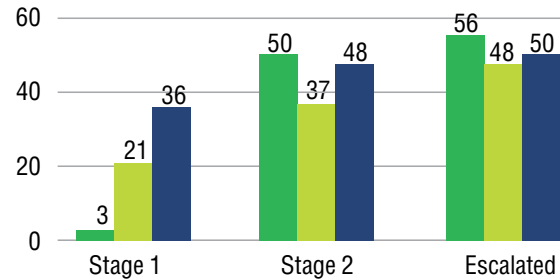
Looking at the patterns alone in each line chart, it can be seen that over each year there is no diverse arrangements, they are all similar for each year illustrating that there is a general consistency in the way that complaints are dealt with and understood as a whole.

**CHART 3: 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 family group and Scottish average**

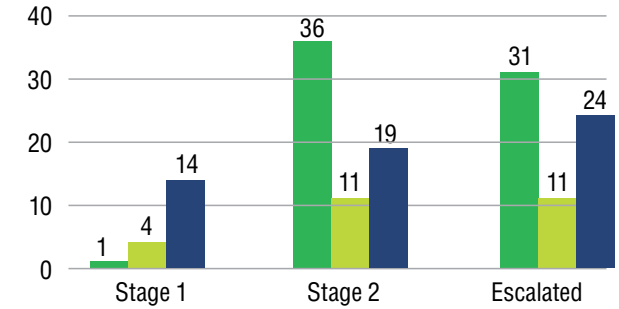
**Upheld at Each Stage (%)**



**Not Upheld at Each Stage (%)**



**Partially Upheld at Each Stage (%)**



Figures between upheld stage 1 complaints in 2020/21 are higher than the Family Group and also the Scottish Average. This supports the theory proposed in Indicator 2, that customers are happy with the response that they have been provided at this early stage i.e. to apologise and uphold complaints early on.

Conversely, Midlothian Council's upheld stage 2 complaints and escalated complaints in 2020/21 are lower than the Family Group and Scottish average. This supports the SPSO's concept that dealing with complaints at an early stage can help to avoid situations becoming a complex issue.

It is therefore logical that the 'not upheld' and 'partially upheld' outcomes for stage 1 complaints is much lower than both the family group and Scotland. Midlothian has a higher instance of not upheld outcomes in stage 2 and escalated complaints when compared with both the family group and Scotland's data.

## 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: 2020/21 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**

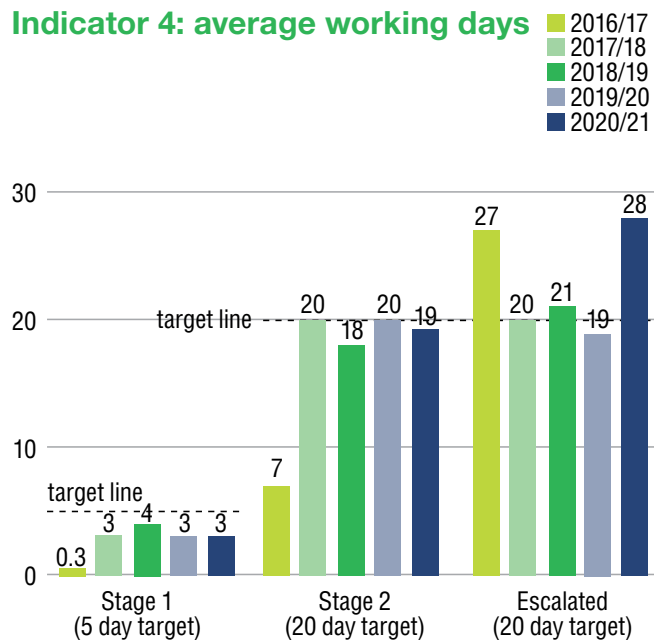
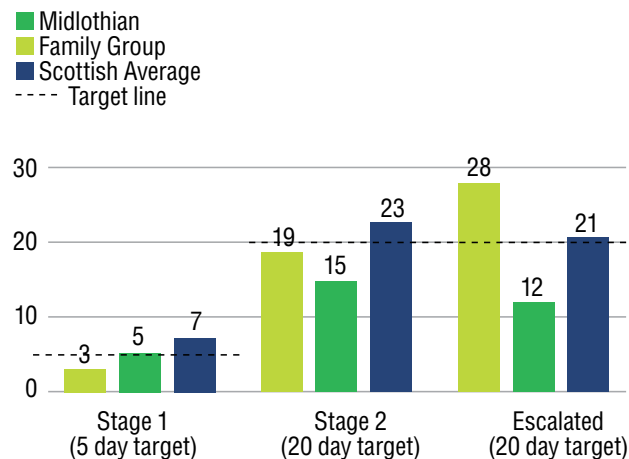


Figure 5 indicates that Midlothian Council has remained within the pre-determined target of 5 days for stage 1 complaints. Aside from the year 16/17, the average number of days over the past 4 years is fairly consistent with 3, 4, 3 and 3 for years 17/18, 18/19, 19/20 and 20/21 respectively.

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. There is a slight improvement this (20/21) year on last years' (19/20) upper threshold limit, but the need to focus on ensuring that this does not exceed the maximum limit is still there.

Although there had been an improvement in last years' indicator 4 data for escalated complaints, there is an unfortunate drift well over the 20 day target to a 28 day average in the current 20/21 year. Work is required to tighten this up. Further research will tell whether this should be through policy or system training for staff, but a review of how the system is configured to record escalations could also be helpful.

**CHART 4: 2020/21 data for performance indicator 4: Average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage including comparative data with family group and Scottish average and Scottish average**



Part of 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. Chart 4 shows that when compared to the Family Group average at 5 days, and the Scottish average at 7 days, Midlothian Council shows good performance in this area with an average of 3 days to complete stage 1 complaints.

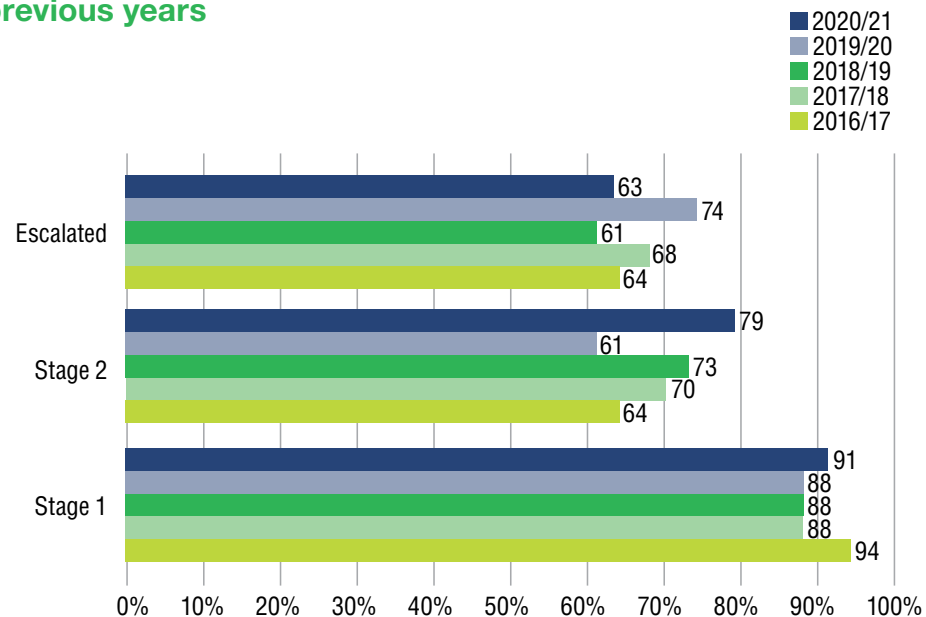
Chart 4 also illustrates that the average time for stage 2 complaints for Midlothian Council during 20/21 is within target at 19 days. There is a need to maintain this momentum to ensure there is a response to stage 2 complaints as quickly as is feasible. It can be seen that when compared to Scotland with an average of 23 days for stage 2 complaints, Midlothian is excelling in this area.

**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. ”

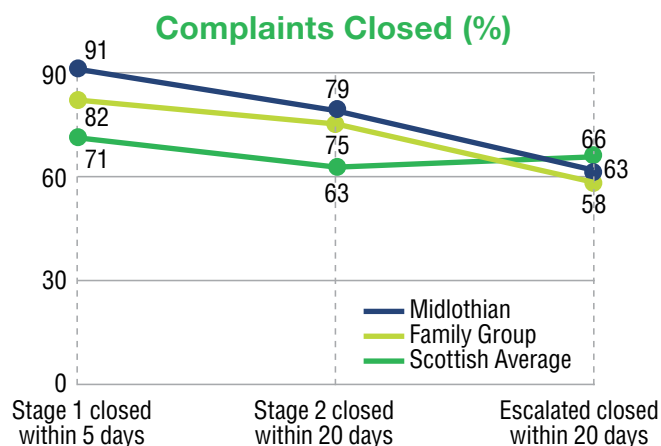
**FIGURE 6: 2020/21 data for performance indicator 5: The number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days, including comparative data with previous years**

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 slightly increased from 88% in 2019/20 to 91% in 2020/21. This is still a relatively stable position. The proportion of stage 2 complaints closed against timescales shows an increase to 79% after a disappointing, low drop in the previous year. The work to improve this statistic has been successful. The number of escalated complaints closed on time has dipped to 63%. There is work required to get this statistic higher. Similar to stage 2 complaints, escalated complaints require a substantial investigation since they can be 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.





**CHART 5: 2020/21 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 with family group and Scottish average**



It can be seen in Chart 5 that Midlothian Council had a much higher proportion of stage 1 complaints that were closed within the timescale of 5 days when compared to both the Family Group and the Scottish average. The percentage of stage 2 complaints closed is also higher for Midlothian Council with 79% compared with 75% (family group) and 63% (Scottish average).

The percentage of escalated complaints closed on time is in 63% for Midlothian Council. This is somewhat higher than the Family Group at 58%, but not as high as the

Scottish total which is 66%. Investigations tend to be complicated in nature and at times can require cross-service communication and/or include delays in scheduling mutually convenient times to discuss complaint cases with the customer/s. This can sometimes cause interruptions in providing a timely response but it is important to gather all the correct information to ensure that the council is positioned to provide an objective and proportionate response so that the council's standpoint can be provided to the customer.

## INDICATOR 6

“ With authorisation from a senior manager such as a Head of Service, 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.**

”

The number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were granted an authorised extension.

**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**

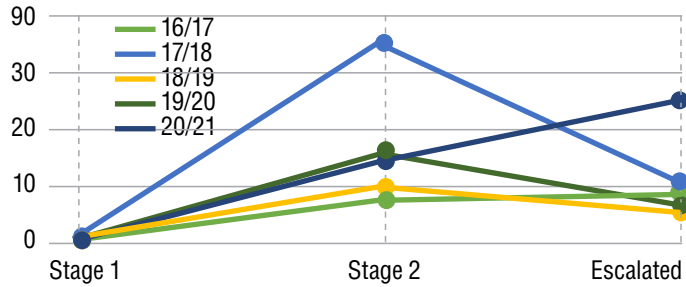
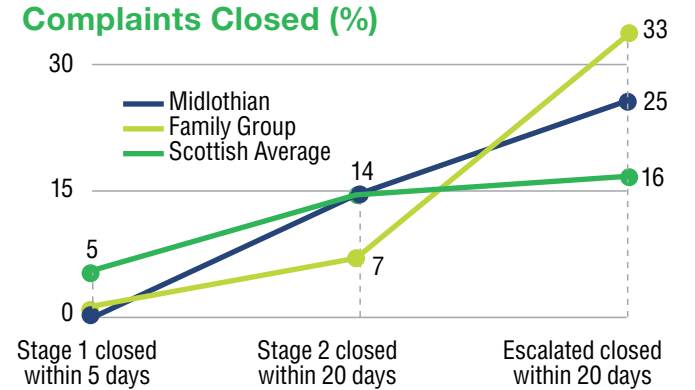



Figure 7 shows that the function to extend stage 1 complaints is used minimally. This could be a training issue on functionality of the CRM system, or it could mean that there just hasn't been a great need to extend stage 1 complaints. On further analysis of the stage 1's that are not closed and not extended using the system, it is likely to be the latter.

Stage 2 extended complaints have remained reasonably consistent between last year (15%) and this year (14%), and this year, extended escalated complaints has increased to 25% from last year's 6%. This is a positive result since some work was done to raise the awareness of this element of the CHP. It also means that customers are receiving a better experience as they are being kept informed about when they can expect a response.

**CHART 6: 2017/18 Comparative Figures between Midlothian Council, Family Group and Scottish Average for indicator 6**



The proportion of stage 1 complaints that were granted an authorised extension is generally low all round. The Scottish average is the highest with 5%. Midlothian Council had 0% whilst the family group only has 1%. At stage 2 both Midlothian and the Scottish average had the highest proportion of extended complaints with 14%. This was reasonably higher than the family group (7%). Midlothian Council runs closely with the family group (25% and 33% respectively) for extended escalated complaints and the Scottish average is lower with 16%.

## INDICATOR 7: Customer satisfaction about the complaint handling procedure

The council has identified the area of satisfaction about the complaint handling procedure as one that requires some development work. There has been a very poor uptake in responses about satisfaction of the complaint handling procedure in the past. It is hoped that this will allow for satisfaction data to be better collated and reported about all council services. 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.

It is also anticipated that the new customer platform, scheduled to go live in early 2022 will better accommodate this functionality. 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.

## INDICATOR 8: Learning, changes and improvements made to service areas as a result of the feedback given from complaints

### CASE STUDY 1

“

**Service: Waste**

**Complaint Analysis**

Complaints were received on re-opening the recycling centre as the wait to access the site was higher than normal, partly due to high demand and partly due to limiting the number of people on site to facilitate (at the time) social distancing. This led to some customer complaints.

**Service Improvement Actions**

In response Waste Services are procuring and installing a customer booking system to ensure a shorter wait and guaranteed appointment time.

”

# Compliments throughout 2020/21

There were 216 compliments received during the year 2020/21, compared with 172 in 19/20. They covered a range of services and each Chief Officer/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 the pandemic, and also 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 2020/21**

SERVICE AREA	COMPLIMENTS
<b>Education</b>	What an amazing job my son's primary 3 teacher is doing with the online work for home schooling. He's so supportive and organized. He's also been doing song requests every Friday. This week my son chose a song and changed the lyrics, his teacher then played it online to the class. It was so inspiring. He definitely cheered us all up.
	I compose this email to raise recognition for the hard work and efforts that Lawfield Primary School have undergone since the reopening of the school. Worried, I spoke with the Headteacher who was extremely supportive with my concerns, discussing the schools risk assessments and allowing me to recognise the hard work and efforts that had been implemented into the schools regime. Thank you for your hard work.
	I'm home schooling my granddaughter today. The enthusiasm shown by her French teacher was inspiring. Great set up by Woodburn Primary class 4pn.
<b>Landscape &amp; Countryside</b>	Hi, just to say what a massive difference the landscaping team have made to the path. Thank you.
	I'd like to say thanks to all of your staff who have continued doing their many varied jobs throughout this difficult time. I use the Loanhead path as part of my daily walk. I'd really like to thank your team for getting on and trimming back the growth either side of the path. Obviously, it makes walking and keeping distanced easier, but it also has given it a freshness to the mile from the town to the pond.
	Thank you. I must say the guys have been doing a fantastic job... what a difference, everywhere looks lovely and fresh.
<b>Waste</b>	A few men were working hard on the gorse bushes near Hillend Ski Centre. They were very busy but made a point of stopping their really noisy machine until our two dogs got past. They smiled and reassured us not to worry they would wait until we were past. I was so surprised by their consideration and pleasantness - then I saw the Midlothian livery on their work van and felt very proud of my local council. Such a nice lift in these stressful times. Thanks guys.
	Continue to be impressed with service dealing with flytipping. Reported rubbish dumped in Burghlee Park several days ago, once again cleared. So very well done to all the staff responsible for dealing with this.
	Thank you so much for arranging to get our grey bin emptied after it was missed on Monday due to snow. Much appreciate the bin men coming out today and for the customer service staff for arranging this. Great service.
	Just to let you know though the food waste van came round this morning and I was out trying to clear the road myself and a lovely man called Ian from the food waste collection helped me clear it which was very helpful and kind of him. Could you please let the person in charge of this department know of this as I couldn't thank him enough.
	Just wanted to say thank you very much for delivering my new grey wheelie bin. It was very much appreciated and I didn't have to wait too long after ordering it. Many thanks.
<b>Roads</b>	I requested a replacement red recycling box last Thursday, and was pleasantly surprised that on Saturday, a brand new box was delivered to my driveway by 10.00am Please continue with the fantastic service
	Thanks to the wonderful staff at Midlothian Council for all their efforts in making sure the roads are safe, hats off to them
	It was a relief to see the roads team arrive and sort out the problems so quickly. Please pass on my thanks to the guys for doing such a good job keeping us safe.
	Given how rapidly heavy rain turned to heavy snow last night, even in low lying areas - the winter roads team will have had their work cut out for them. I always appreciate their hard work and long hours in winter. Sincere thanks for the men who took care of all our pavements, road gritting etc during this very bad weather. Being an elderly citizen I was very grateful I could still get out of my house for exercise during this pandemic.

**TABLE 3: Excerpt of compliments received during 2020/21 (continued...)**

SERVICE AREA	COMPLIMENTS
<b>Property Maintenance</b>	Thanks to the trades that came out to do job on communal stair for a job well done and for turning up so promptly. He would also like to thank the team as a whole for working throughout the pandemic.
	I just wanted to say thank you. I called your emergency number and a plumber was here in about an hour and had everything sorted in about 15 minutes. Really excellent service. My Dad was very happy.
	Thank you to the team for taking her call and sending someone to fix her blocked sink and to also thank the workman that came out during COVID.
	Thank you to all involved in resolving the issues with the supply of gas/gas pipe etc. I am so pleased I can use my gas cooker again. The trades that attended did a fantastic job.
<b>Housing</b>	I'm writing with a massive thank you for helping me and my partner with the flat and with the hostel. We are really grateful for all your help.
<b>Contact Centre</b>	I called today and the gentleman I spoke with was really helpful - even to the point of emailing the form I needed over to me to make sure I got the right ones. He gave step by step advice and it was really appreciated.
	Customer called to thank CSA that took his call earlier for burst pipe. The plumber arrived almost instantly and I was very happy with the service.
	Customer called to pass on her thanks for the advisor who took her call today. She was very helpful.
<b>Revenues &amp; Benefits</b>	Thank you for sorting out the Housing benefit for my new address so promptly – I really appreciate all the help - thank you again.
<b>Adult Social Care</b>	My elderly mother has just been released from hospital and because of Coronavirus I can't come up from London to be with her - so I requested an alarm system for her last night. I was really surprised when my mum called me at 3pm this afternoon to say the system had already been fitted. I'm really impressed and grateful that you moved so quickly on this. It's been really distressing not to be with her and this system is of great comfort to me. Thanks very much.
	I would like to express my sincere thanks to Midlothian Social Services for their quick response to my request for some assistance following an accident I had. The staff were truly professional and made me have the confidence to stay in my own home. Especially when family cannot visit due to COVID 19. I want to say how much I appreciate the way these two staff people helped me. Thank you Midlothian Social Services.
	I would like to let you know about the amazing people who support and care for the residents at your fantastic facility at Cowan Court and how much they helped my dad and our family over the last 6 months. The manager and staff were always there for my dad and the family. They have been amazing and provided such a wonderful service and care for my dad that made his last few months so much better. Thank you to everyone at Cowan Court

There is a clear relationship between methods of contact using telephone or online service, where it can be seen that customers are choosing to use an online service to submit a complaint with less demand for telephone contact. If the trend continues, soon the lines will cross and reflect that the dominant channel used is online. This tangible evidence will enable us to better plan our services. This could be the result of the continual work to improve user-friendliness of, and access to the council website, or it could be that in general the Midlothian population are becoming more digitally amenable. It is likely a combination of both, and to conclude further, the pattern displayed in Chart 1 (page 8) is clear evidence that channel-shift work is moving in the desired direction. It will be interesting to see if further planned work to improve web-form accessibility will amplify the trend.

The increase of proportionate complaints in relation to overall CRM interactions from 5% in the previous year to 8% reflected in the current (2020/21) year is likely to be due to the pandemic, and it is interesting that the overall total interactions is substantially lower at 92,620 than in previous years, also contributing to the higher percentage. The lower figure in overall interactions is again likely due to the pandemic and people's needs/requirements being different to more normal times.

It is unsurprising that there was an increase in complaints (+1916) when compared with previous years. The remarkable changes to services that were quickly put in place that ensured critical services were provided during the global

pandemic meant that other non-essential areas had to either cease operation or become limited in the way they function. These changes were carried out in a reactive manner, and were difficult to implement, and with all the other factors that people were coping with it is not an unexpected outcome. It is encouraging to note that complaints were still being dealt with in the correct way, despite the situation.

The SPSO, and Midlothian'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 theory is further supported when looking at indicator 3's data between upheld stage 1 complaints in 2020/21 are higher than the Family Group and also the Scottish Average. This supports the theory proposed in Indicator 2, that customers are happy with the response that they have been provided at this early stage i.e. to apologise and uphold complaints early on.

The relative amount of Midlothian Council's complaints that were closed against timescales for stage 1 complaints has slightly increased from 88% in 2019/20 to 91% in 2020/21. This is still a relatively stable position. The proportion of stage 2 complaints closed against timescales shows an increase to 79% after a disappointing, low drop in the previous year. The work to improve this statistic has been successful.

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.

The compliments received during 2020/21 covered a range of services and each Chief Officer/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 and specific staff during the pandemic, and adverse weather conditions. There were 216 compliments received during the year 2020/21, compared with 172 in 2019/20.

# Next steps



- Ensure response to complaints is maintained during the ongoing COVID pandemic situation.
- Analyse responses to complaints during COVID pandemic.
- Maintain engagement with the Local Authority Complaint Handler's Network (LACHN) to ensure benchmarking is accurate to enable learning.
- As part of the installation of a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform, implement a new complaints process that will provide a more robust and efficient arrangement.
- In implementing a new process as part of the new CRM platform, review the process for gathering, aggregating, cleansing, consolidating and analysing the data, and implement new business intelligence approach and where possible, dashboards.



# Your feedback counts

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