

Midlothian



MIDLOTHIAN COUNCIL

ANNUAL COMPLAINT HANDLING REPORT 2023/24

Welcome

to Midlothian Council's Annual Complaint Handling Report for 2023/24

Midlothian



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"Go live" with our new complaints and feedback management system arrived this year.

The new system uses a customer focused online platform that enables a better customer experience and improved complaint handling by staff.

We have provided compliments in this report

We upheld 50% of complaints at stage 1 and 50% at stage 2

We handled 1755 complaints and closed 1201 complaints during the year 2023/24

Midlothian Council is committed to discharging its duties required by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). We recognise that valuable lessons can be learnt from the feedback we receive from customers. The council's complaints handling procedure provides our customers with a clear and structured way to provide feedback on council service delivery.

The 2023/24 Annual Complaint Handling report presents information about the way Midlothian Council managed complaints between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024. During the year 2023/24 a new complaints and feedback management system was launched. The system is multi-functional, intelligent, fully transparent, user-friendly, and has improved reporting capabilities. During the system build, we reviewed the complaints management process, adopting a whole system approach. We also updated some of our service standards. These improvements to the complaints management process enables us to reflect a more accurate picture of how complaints are handled across the Council, and this is reflected in this annual report.

The report centres on 8 key performance indicators, and the data show the council has performed when

processing complaints from the beginning through to resolution. We have included examples of what improvements we have made to our services following complaint handling. 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. Services use this information to learn, plan and monitor change/outcomes and supports council services to continually develop.

While there are areas for improvement, we value complaints by viewing them in a positive way and using the information to continually improve the way we deliver services for our citizens. 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.



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) in partnership 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)¹ and Sinclair (2008)² 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. 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:

“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.”

To supplement Midlothian's commitment to valuing complaints, the report 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 Group³. 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.

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

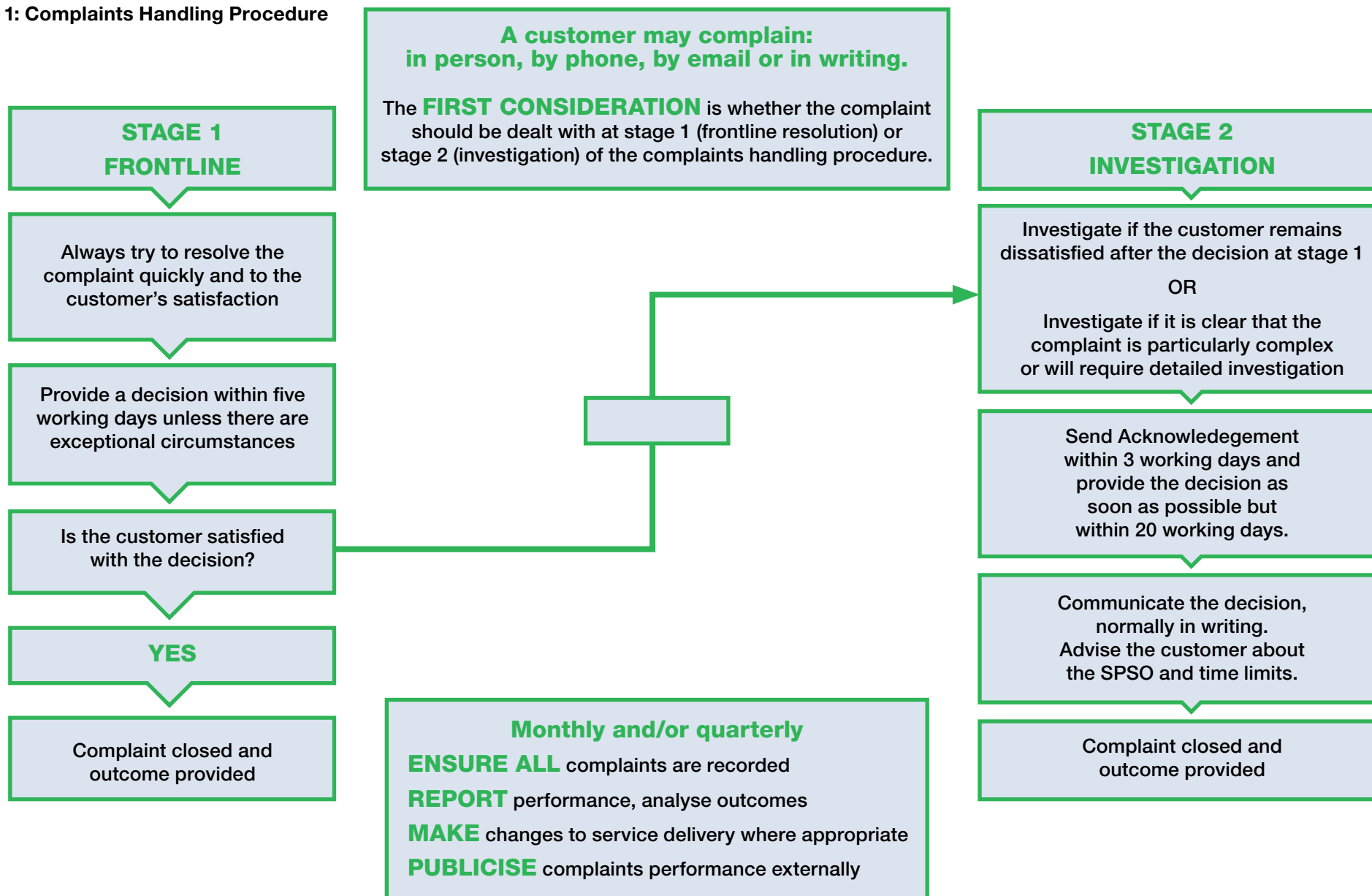
2 Fit-for-Purpose Complaints System Action Group (FCSAG), 2008. www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/923/0063564.doc

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



Channel Used to Submit Complaints for 2023/24

Figure 2 illustrates the differences in the channel used to submit complaints for the years 2022/23 and 2023/24. This shows the difference between the old system and the newly launched system used to record complaint information.

In reviewing the feedback and complaint process as a whole, one of the objectives was to improve webform access to be more user friendly whilst empowering customers to be self-sufficient through self reporting with the new system. The functionality behind the process was also improved, ensuring cases get to the required service area faster and more efficiently.

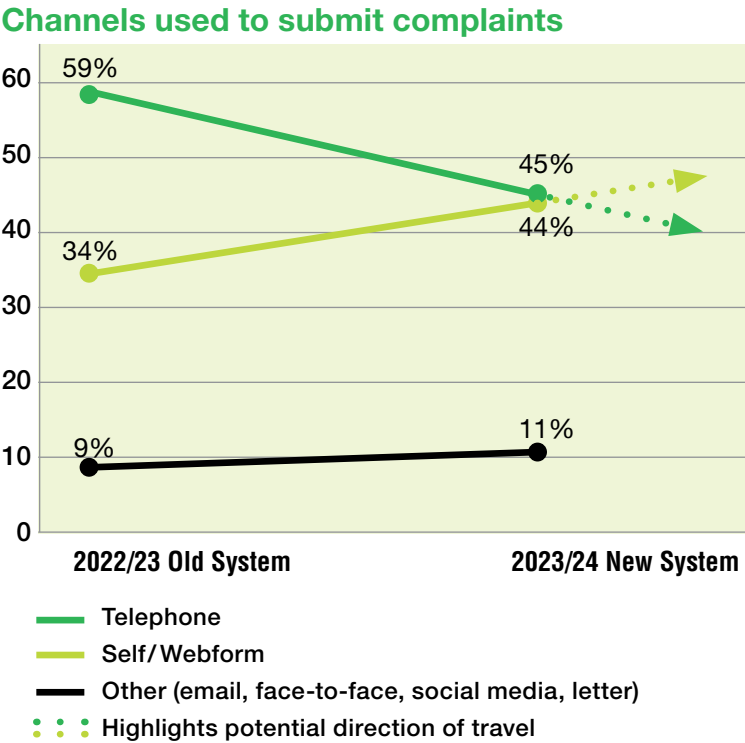
Figure 2 is a reflection of the relative percentages of the channels used by customers to make a complaint. In the year 2022/23, it can be seen that telephone contact is the heavily preferred method of contact for complaints at 59%, followed by webform at 34%, then other methods such as face to face email letter etc were very small by comparison, and so this is why they are grouped together with only 9% of contact being those methods.

Looking at the preferred methods of contact more closely, it can be clearly seen that in the year 23/24, there is a visible decline in telephone contact, and an uptick in webform access with 45% and 44% respectively, with not much movement in the 'other' category at just 11%.

This could mean that Midlothian succeeded in its ambition to empower its customers to switch to online, making everything more efficient and also enable better service planning. 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 data displayed in figure 2 is clear evidence that channel-shift work is thus far moving in the desired direction.

For illustration purposes, a trend line in the form of the arrow and the dotted line has been added to figure 2 to show the potential direction that could be evident in future years. It may equally revert to telephone as preferred channel, or indeed it may continue in a linear direction. Next year should provide more data that will help determine future direction

FIGURE 2:
Comparison of old feedback/complaints management system (2022/23), and new system



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 2022 obtained from the National Records of Scotland (NRS).

- The population of Midlothian Council is estimated to be 96,527
- Midlothian Council handled 1755 complaints
- This equates to an average of 18 complaints received per 1000 population
- Expressed another way, 1 in every 56 people made a complaint about a service

FIGURE 3: Figures for Performance Indicator 1: Complaints received per thousand population

	Internal Benchmarking						External Benchmarking	
	Midlothian 18/19	Midlothian 19/20	Midlothian 20/21	Midlothian 21/22	Midlothian 22/23	Midlothian 23/24	Family Group 23/24	Scotland 23/24
Population Total	90,090	91,340	92,460	93,150	94,680	96,527	900,200	4,878,800
Total Number of Complaints	5107 (↓95)	5421 (↑314)	7337 (↑1916)	6450 (↓887)	6478 (↑28)	1755 (↓4723)	9,252	48,118
Complaints Per 1000 Population	57	59	79	69	68	18	10	10

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 2023/24 closed complaints were received in 2022/23, while some of the 2023/24 received complaints will be closed in 2024/25 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 4: Figures for Performance Indicator 2: Relative percentage figures for complaints closed at stage 1, stage 2 and escalated

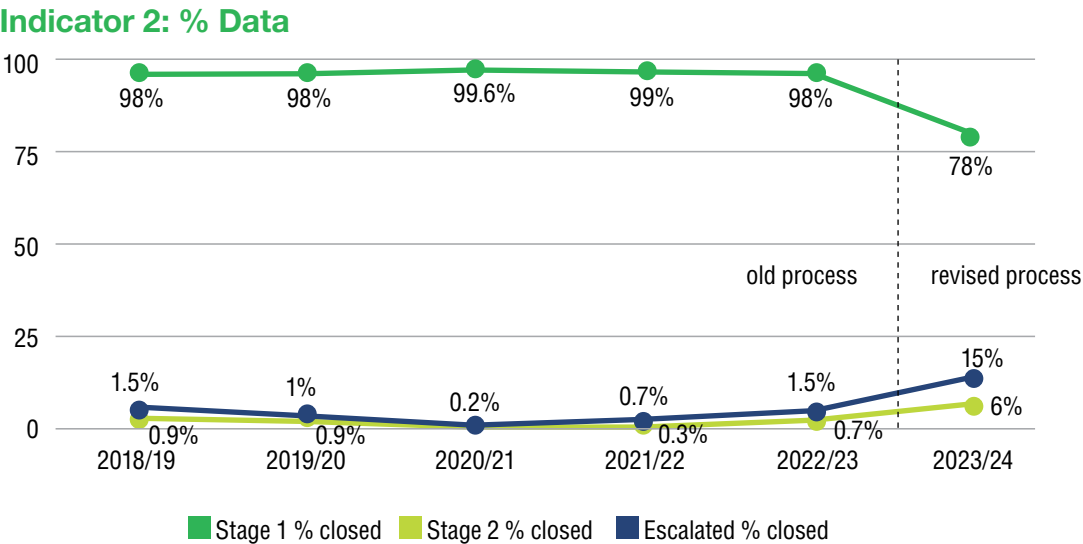


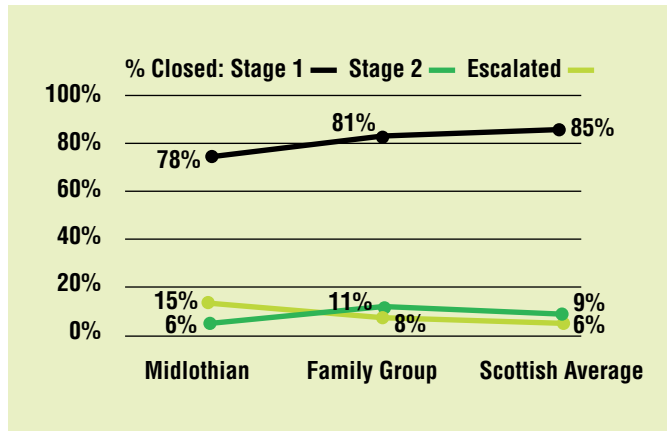
Figure 4 shows that the most recent relative percentage of complaints closed at stage 1 is 78% compared with the previous year at 98%. The reduction can be explained because further analysis of previous year’s data identified that the statistics are heavily skewed. To overcome this, a Service Standard was changed, and this has contributed towards providing a realistic position.

Conversely, when the amount of closed stage 2 and escalated complaints are viewed, the proportionate percentage has increased this year at 6% and 15% respectively compared with corresponding previous years at 0.7% and 1.5%.

For stage 2 complaints, the increase in relative percentage can again be attributed to the change mentioned above. Although the data provides an indication that there is a small increase in the number of people who reported issues that were not deemed appropriate for stage 1, this statistic is reflective of a true picture where the figures are not skewed. It is a relative percentage of all complaints closed and there are now less closed complaints due to the stripping out of the weighted data causing the skew.

The data for escalated complaints also varies greatly to that of previous years with 15% for 2023/24 and 0.7% for the previous year. Similarly, this can be attributed to the same cause as mentioned above. Additionally, the new system provides greater transparency and greater empowerment to complainants. They can now escalate cases themselves using links in their responses, and reporting of escalated complaints is easier to monitor, track and report on. The other positive function of the system that impacts this statistic, is that it will auto-escalate stage 1 cases to stage 2 if they are not dealt with at that stage by officers within the service and within the deadlines as set out in the policy. The SPSO’s aim is to close complaints at as early a stage as possible to prevent the need for lengthy and costly investigations.

FIGURE 5: 2023/24 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



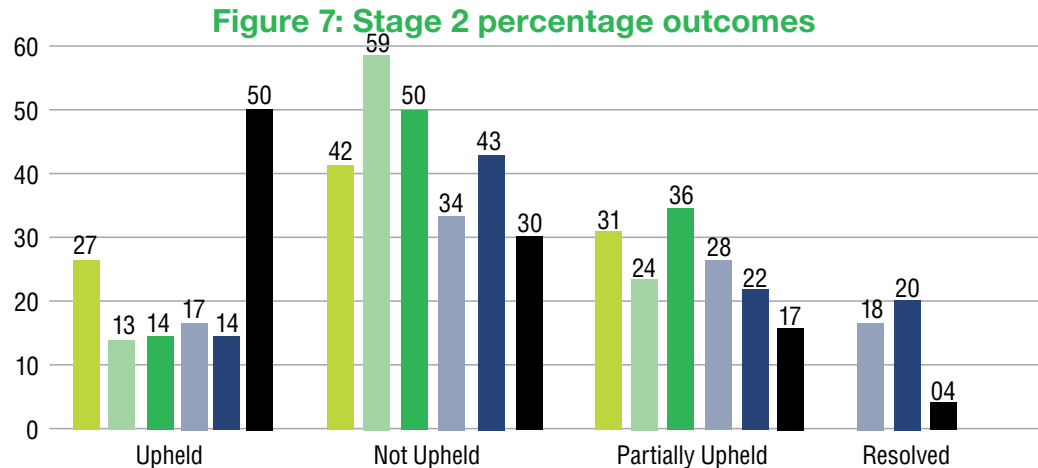
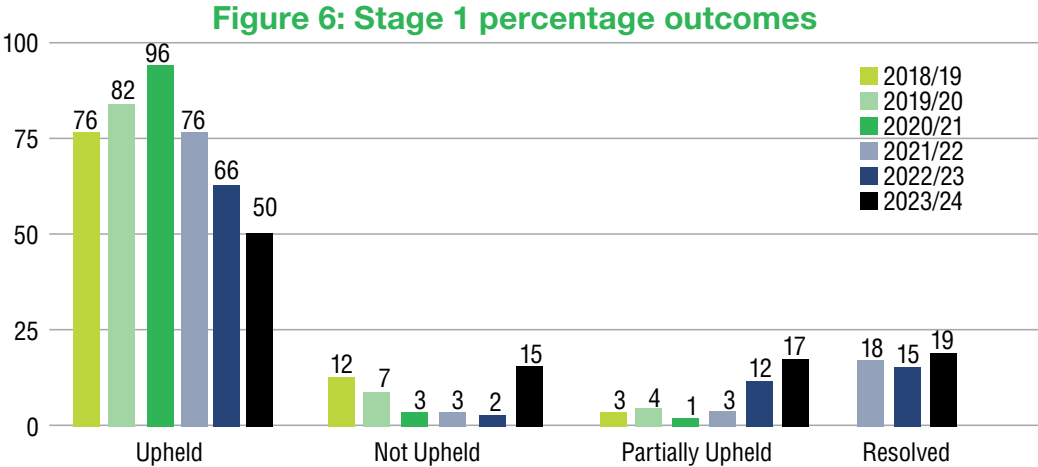
It can be seen in Figure 5 above that Midlothian Council closed proportionately less stage 1 complaints in 2023/24 (78%) than the family group and Scottish total at 81% and 85% respectively.

However, for stage 2 complaints, Midlothian Council has comparatively less, with 6% for stage 2 compared with 11% and 9% for both the family group and Scottish average amount. Midlothian has more escalated complaints than the family group and Scottish average at 15%, 8% (family group) and 6% (Scottish total).

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, partially upheld and resolved.

FIGURES 6, 7 and 8: 2023/24 data for performance indicator 3: The number of complaints upheld/partially upheld/not upheld and the newest outcome, resolved at each stage as a percentage of complaints closed in full including comparative data for previous years.



Figures 6, 7 and 8 illustrates the relative percentage at each stage and has taken the number of complaints upheld/partially upheld/not upheld and the newest outcome, resolved at each stage as a percentage of complaints closed in full at each stage and includes comparative data for previous years.

Figure 6 shows the relative proportion of upheld complaints for stage 1 in 23/24 is 50%, a 16% decrease from the previous year. This is reflective of the decrease in overall complaints, whilst providing that clearer, less weighted picture talked about above. 15% of stage 1 complaints were not upheld, a 13% increase from last year, while 17% were partially upheld. The newer Resolved outcome data for this indicator has remained fairly constant at 18% (21/22), 15% (22/23) and 19% (23/24) were resolved

Figure 7 highlights that the proportion of stage 2 complaints that were upheld is higher than the previous year with 50% against last years 14%. This can be explained by the transparency of the system, which auto-escalates complaints to stage 2 when they reach day 11. Midlothian is still on a transformation journey with the new system, and effort is being driven to ensure responses are provided in a timely manner at stage 1. It is a key focus of the council to decrease the number of upheld complaints at stage 2. Those that were not upheld show 30%, partially upheld 17% and resolved 4% for the current year 2023/24.

Figure 8 highlights that the proportion of escalated complaints that were upheld is also larger (36%) than the previous year in 22/23 (6%). Escalated complaints not upheld, partially upheld and resolved are sitting at 34%, 21% and 9% respectively for the current year 2023/24.

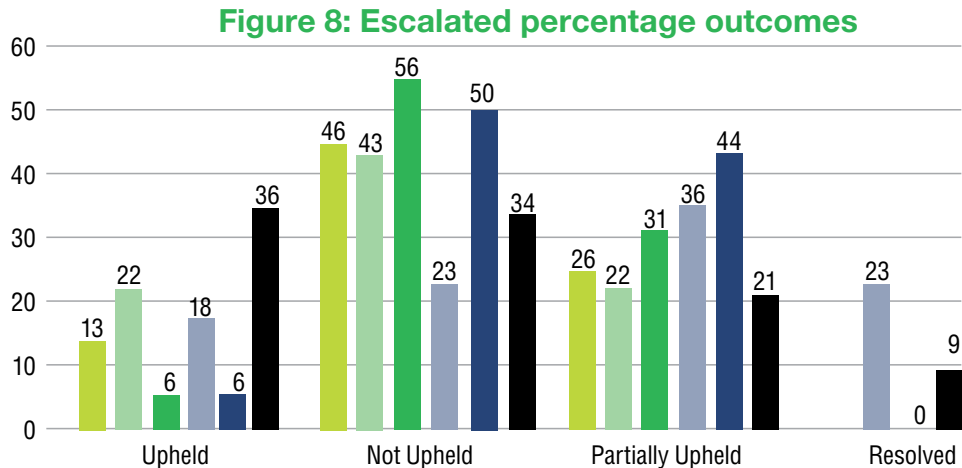


FIGURE 9: Data for performance indicator 3: The number of complaints upheld/partially upheld/not upheld and resolved at each stage as a percentage of complaints closed in full at each stage, including comparative data for family group and Scottish average

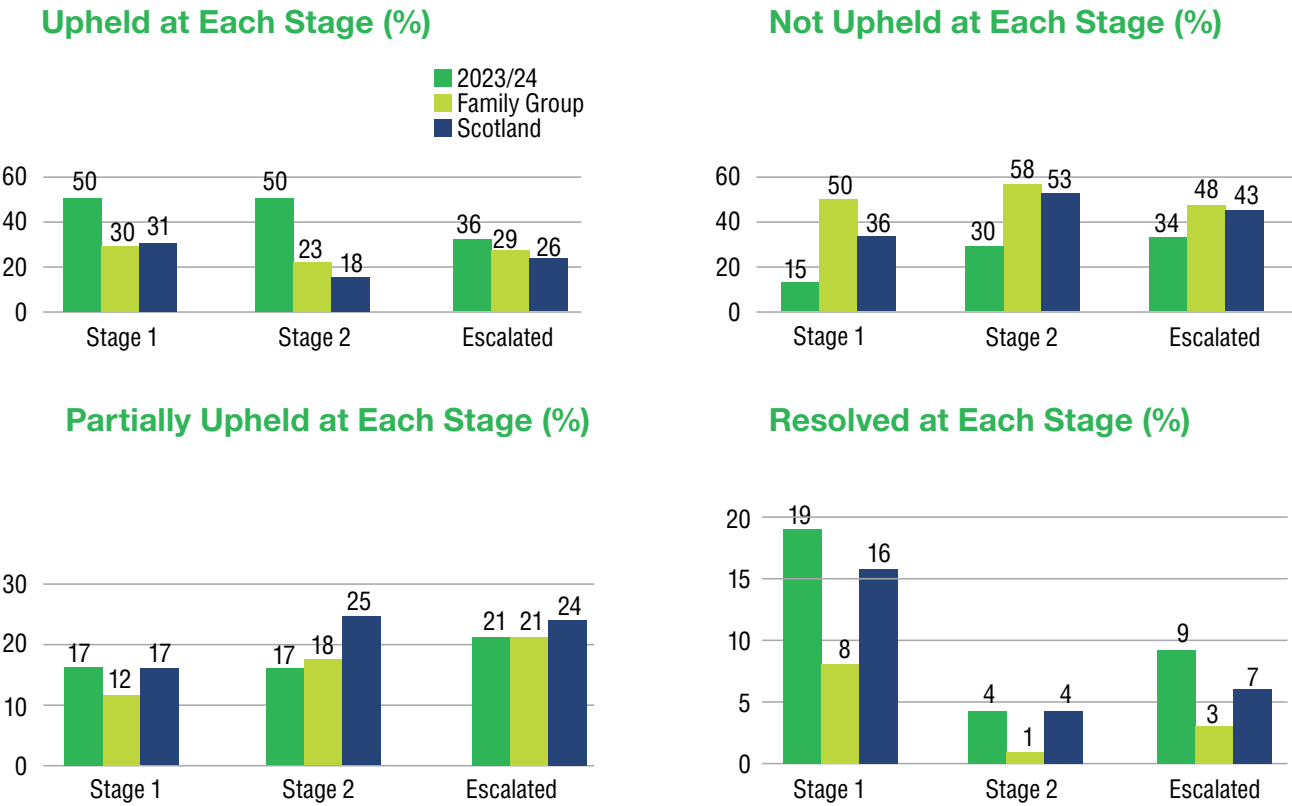


Figure 9 shows that the data between upheld stage 1 complaints in 2023/24 for Midlothian Council are higher than the Family Group and the Scottish Average. This supports the internal assumption, that customers are happy with the response that they have been provided at this early stage i.e. to apologise and uphold complaints early on.

Midlothian Council’s upheld stage 2 complaints and escalated complaints in 2023/24 are 50% and 36%, both higher than the Family Group and the Scottish average. Looking more closely at the data, this could be a result of the new system’s transparency and the auto-escalation of cases. More information is needed here to confirm.

The ‘not upheld’ outcomes for all complaint categories for Midlothian is much lower than both the family group and Scotland.

The newer outcome ‘resolved’ shows that Midlothian has more of these cases than the Family Group and Scotland across all complaint categories. With it being a new outcome there is not a lot of historical comparative data. However, the data supports our endeavour to work with our customers to amicably and mutually agree on a course of action in order to ensure a satisfactory outcome.

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 10: 2023/24 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. An indicator line is present to highlight deadlines at each stage.

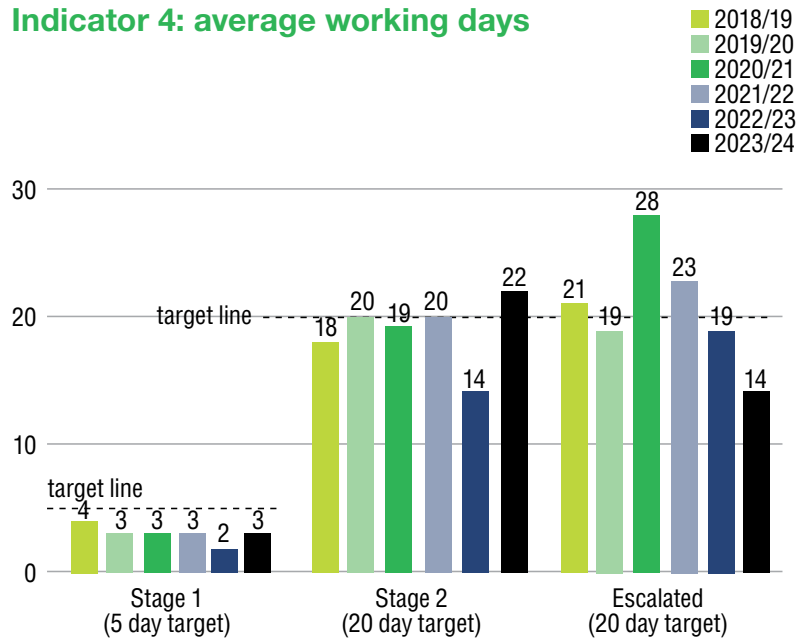
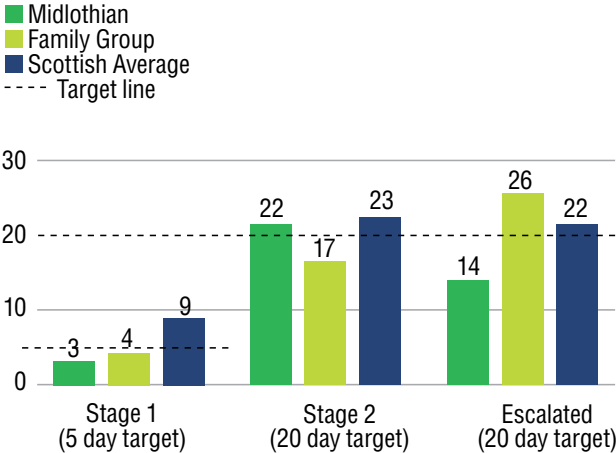


Figure 10 indicates that Midlothian Council has remained within the pre-determined target of 5 days for stage 1 complaints. The average number of days over the years illustrated is fairly consistent.

Also shown in Figure 10 is the average time for stage 2 complaints for each year. The council have marginally dipped outside of the 20 working day limit at 22 days for 2023/24. Work will be done to explore reasons behind this, and bring it back down to within the 20 day deadline.

It is good to see that the indicator 4 data for escalated complaints has further reduced to 14 days in 22/23.

FIGURE 11: 2023/24 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. An indicator line is present to highlight deadlines at each stage.



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. Figure 11 shows that when compared to the Family Group average at 4 days, and the Scottish average at 9 days, Midlothian Council shows good performance in this area with an average of 3 days to complete stage 1 complaints.

Figure 11 also illustrates that the average time for stage 2 complaints for Midlothian Council during 23/24 is more on par at 22 days, with the Scottish average at 23 days. There is a need to ensure there is a response to stage 2 complaints as quickly as is feasible and within the deadline of 20 days. It can be seen that when compared to the Family Groups and Scotland with an average of 26 and 22 days respectively for escalated complaints, Midlothian is sitting comfortably in this area at 14 days.

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 12: 2023/24 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 12 that the relative amount of Midlothian Council’s complaints that were closed against timescales for stage 1 complaints reduced from 91% in 2022/23 to 83% in 2023/24. Overall, we are good at resolving complaints early to avoid escalation, though this dip will be monitored.

The proportion of stage 2 complaints closed against timescales shows a decrease from 78% in 2022/23 to 58% for the current year. This is a concern, however when looking more closely at the data, there were more stage 2 complaints cases investigated overall and it is assumed that the new feedback system processes and captures in a more efficient way. We had more Stage 2 complaints, and many of them required a substantial investigation since they are more 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 within the pre-determined target due to either capacity issues, or an inability to proceed with meetings at the desired times.

The number of escalated complaints closed on time has increased again this year from 72% in 2022/23 to 77% in 2023/24. It is good to see the increasing trend continue.

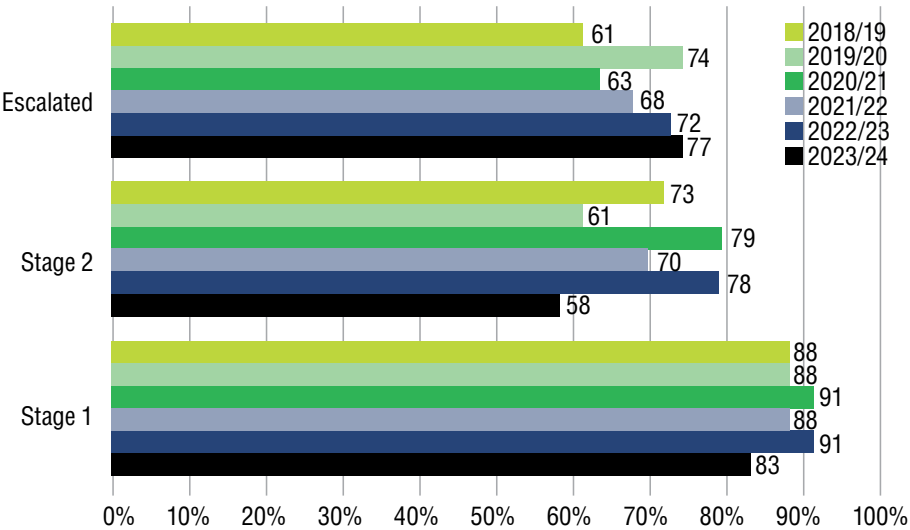
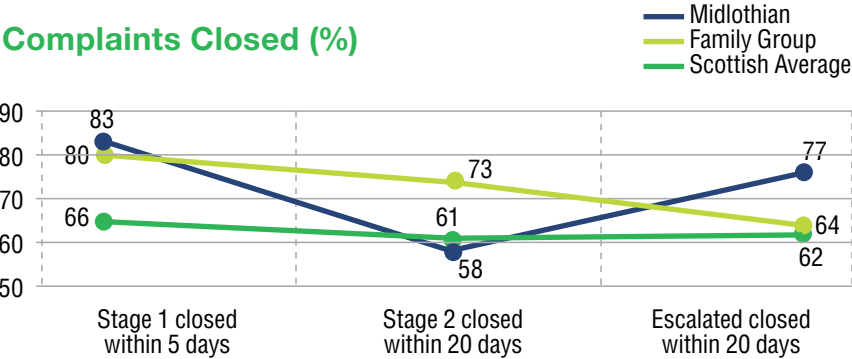


FIGURE 13: 2023/24 data for performance indicator 5: The number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days, including comparative data with family group and Scottish average



It can be seen in Figure 13 that Midlothian Council had a 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. However the percentage of stage 2 complaints closed within timescales at 58% for Midlothian is less than the family group at 73% but more in line with the Scottish Average at 61%.

The percentage of escalated complaints closed on time is 77% for Midlothian Council. This is somewhat higher than both the family group average which is 64%, and

the Scottish average at 62%, 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.

“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.

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INDICATOR 6: The number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were granted an authorised extension.

FIGURE 14: 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

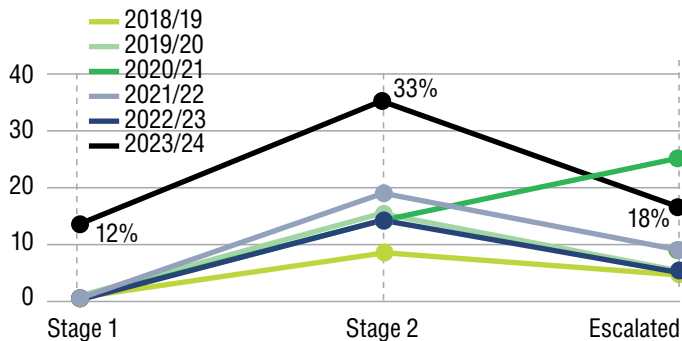
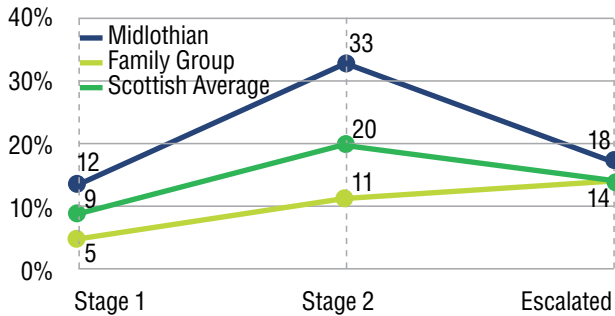


Figure 14 shows that the function to extend stage 1 complaints has been used minimally in years past, however the latest year, with the new system, shows a noteworthy uptick in this function across all complaint stages. They remain on the same trend pattern as most previous years.

FIGURE 15: 2023/24 Comparative Figures between Midlothian Council, Family Group and Scottish Average for indicator 6

Complaints Extended



The proportion of stage 1 complaints that were granted an authorised extension is generally low all round. Midlothian is the highest with 12%. At stage 2 both Midlothian and the Scottish average had the highest proportion of extended complaints with 33% and 20% respectively. This was reasonably higher than the family group (11%). The family group and Scottish average both have 14% for extended escalated complaints and Midlothian is slightly higher with 18%.

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.

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

CASE STUDY

“

Service: Roads Service

Complaint Analysis

Service requests not being responded to and actioned resulting in an influx of complaints about lack of response. Complaints were also not being responded to in the established way.

Service Improvement Actions

New post resourced and created to focus on customer service.

”

Compliments throughout 2023/24

The compliments received in 23/24 covered a range of services and each Chief Officer and 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 also adverse weather conditions, whereas many were specific to staff whom our customers felt had gone above and beyond.

Table 1 highlights an excerpt of some of these, and includes the service areas in which they belong.

TABLE 1: Excerpt of compliments received during 2023/24

SERVICE AREA	COMPLIMENTS
Adult Health and Social Care	"I am writing this because I want to convey my thanks to the managers and the support staff alike for their kindness to my brother, myself and visitors whilst he was in their care at Highbank Care Home. The staff are wonderful and thoughtful, and I couldn't have wished for a better place for Peter to spend his final days. Nothing was too much trouble, and my brother was very comfortable and very settled whilst he was in their care. Can you convey my thanks and appreciation to your lovely, hardworking, caring and amazing staff."
Customer Services	"As always, a quick response from the girls dealing with social media. My favorite way of contacting the Council is through their Facebook chat because the engagement is amazing."
Libraries	"I have attended the Bookbug group for the first time this month at Gorebridge library and I wanted to feedback how amazing the group is. As a first time mum I found this class very welcoming, love the fact it is free and a way for me to meet other mums in my local community- thank you!"
Landscape and Countryside	"Well done to the Greenspaces team for making Penicuik look so well by grass cutting and planting, which improves the quality of life for all spending time outdoors, first rate job!!"
Leisure Centres	"Please pass on to all the staff at Loanhead Leisure, from reception, to all the lifeguards, cafe staff, aquafit instructor and for the first time today - you are all "Simply the best". I Have been a member at many health clubs and for me, none match the friendliness, welcoming environment of Loanhead Leisure, it has a real family feeling, nothing is ever too much of a problem, 5 star every time. I absolutely love it and cannot praise the staff highly enough, thankyou everyone."
Building Maintenance Services	"I would like to thank the trades putting up my kitchen ceiling - brilliant job and very tidy when they leave - I was in the trade before so I know good work when I see it and I appreciate them cleaning up after themselves." "Customer would like to thank the Manager and the two plumbers that attended to his tap repair on 17/11/23. He was very impressed and said that he has not had such good service like that for a long time, and wanted to pass on his compliments to all involved."
Revenues and Benefits	"I have found the staff at Midlothian Council to be understanding and extremely helpful. The arrears team has given me information about further services available to help my brother and followed up our telephone call with a comprehensive e-mail detailing next steps. The level of customer service was excellent. I think the team have done an excellent job in making the processes accessible and ensuring my brother does not fall back into arrears. Thanks for the support - it has made the whole process much easier."
Roads	"Customer wishes to pass on big thanks to the team who installed disabled parking space at the property today (24/7/23) Has been done in a very timely fashion. Please pass on customers thanks to team."
Waste	"Compliment for friendly nature and road awareness/courtesy to drivers if the crew operating the red bull rubbish truck on Thursday 22nd June at about 8:30am on Newtongrange Main Street. This great service and thought does not go unnoticed." "Customer would like to say a big thank you to the waste team and the call handler for putting the bin on the right side of the road after collection."
Registrars	"Thank you to the Registrar who expedited the update and turnaround of the death certificate. This allowed me to continue the closing of my brothers estate some 7 months later to much family relief. Thankyou."

Annual Complaints Handled by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)

is the organisation that handles complaints about public services in Scotland. The Ombudsman service is independent of government and with a duty to act impartially. The SPSO also shares learning from its work to improve service delivery across the public services spectrum in Scotland. The office carries out awareness-raising activities with the general public, and bodies under jurisdiction and promotes good complaints handling by public service providers in Scotland. The SPSO has a separate website to support best practice in complaints handling.

Mentioned earlier, customers who have undergone Midlothian Council's established Complaint Handling Procedure, and who remain dissatisfied with any aspect of the way in which their complaint has been handled, are signposted by the council to the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO). Provided it is within their jurisdiction, the SPSO will review the complaint and consequently reach a decision. Depending on the decision, the SPSO will make recommendations to the authority accordingly. This is to encourage lasting improvements to services so that the trust and confidence of the public is re-established.

Excerpts 1 and 2 are taken from the SPSO website, and tell us how many customers they have dealt with about Midlothian Council. Excerpt 1 shows the service area that their enquiry related to. Excerpt 2 highlights the different stages in which each case was dealt with, and the outcome at that stage.

Excerpt 1 – Number of Complaints to Areas (as determined by the SPSO) that were Handled by the SPSO in 2023/24

SPSO Received Cases by Subject for Midlothian Council 1/4/22 – 31/3/23

Building Control	0
Economic Development	0
Education	5
Environmental Health & Cleansing	1
Finance	1
Fire & Police Boards	0
Housing	13
Land & Property	0
Legal & Admin	1
National Park Authorities	0
Other	0
Personnel	0
Planning	1
Recreation & Leisure	0
Roads & Transport	2
Social Work	3
Subject unknown or Out of Jurisdiction	4
Valuation Joint Boards	0
Welfare Fund - Community Care Grants	0
Welfare Fund - Crisis Grants	0

Excerpt 1 illustrates the amount of complaints that have been received by the SPSO about Midlothian Council between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024. 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.

Excerpt 2 – Outcome of Complaints determined by the SPSO about Midlothian Council in 2023/24

Excerpt 2 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 excerpt 1) and the figures determined don't tally. This is because 1 of the figures received was determined to be outside of SPSO's jurisdiction so it didn't move to an outcome. Other reasons these figures might not match in other years could be due to the SPSO still working on a case after the business year has ended, or that there wasn't a service to associate the case to.

The advice stage 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. There were 19 at this stage.

The early resolution stage, as seen in excerpt 2, is where the SPSO have confirmed that the complaint is mature (ie that the complaint has completed the organisation's complaint process) and is within their 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 were 6 complaints in total that reached this stage.

Excerpt 2 also shows the complaints that the SPSO investigated. Of the 19 complaint enquiries that the SPSO received, there were 2 that reached the investigation stage.

Outcome of Complaints determined by the SPSO about Midlothian Council

STAGE	OUTCOME GROUP	MIDLOTHIAN COUNCIL
Advice (Initial stage to determine whether SPSO will look at)	A&G - Complaint submissions - mature	2
	A&G - Complaint submissions - premature	7
	A&G - Enquiries	10
	Organisation not in jurisdiction	0
	Total	19
	Cause and impact test not met (s 5 (3))	0
Early Resolution (Once confirmed SPSO can look at Initial investigation stage may determine Resolved or no benefit from full investigation)	Discretion – Insufficient benefit would be achieved by investigation	1
	Discretion – Alternative action proposed	0
	Discretion – Alternative route used or available	0
	Discretion – Good complaint handling	3
	Discretion – Referred back	1
	Discretion – Resolved - both parties satisfied with proposed outcome	0
	Member of the public test not met (s 5 (6))	0
	No response to contact	0
	Organisation not in jurisdiction	0
	Premature	0
	Right of appeal to court/tribunal/Scottish ministers (s 7 (8))	0
	Subject matter not in jurisdiction	0
	Time limit (s 10)	0
	Unable to proceed	1
	Total	6
Investigation (Investigation carried out by SPSO)	Fully upheld	1
	Not duly made or withdrawn	0
	Not upheld	0
	Resolved	0
	Some upheld	1
	Total	2
TOTAL		27

Next steps

- Maintain engagement with the Local Authority Complaint Handler's Network (LACHN) to ensure benchmarking is accurate to enable learning.
- Continue work on the development of the internal feedback system.
- Continue with ongoing training and support to services across the Council to ensure a robust and efficient arrangement
- Continue to 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

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

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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 duyarız.

اگر آپ چاہیں تو ہم خوشی سے آپ کو ترجمہ فراہم کر سکتے ہیں اور معلومات اور دستاویزات دیگر شکلوں میں مثلاً بریل (ناہینا افراد کے لیے ابھرے 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