

complaints annual performance report

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
2015/16



CONTENTS

COMPLAINTS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2015/16

INTRODUCTION	3
SUMMARY	4
COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE	5
HOW CUSTOMERS COMPLAINED	6
INDICATOR 1 – COMPLAINTS RECEIVED PER 1,000 OF POPULATION	7
INDICATOR 2 – CLOSED COMPLAINTS	8
INDICATOR 3 – COMPLAINTS UPHELD/NOT UPHELD	9
INDICATOR 4 – AVERAGE TIME SPENT RESPONDING TO COMPLAINTS	10
INDICATOR 5 – COMPLAINTS CLOSED AGAINST TIMESCALES	11
INDICATOR 6 – COMPLAINTS THAT REQUIRE AUTHORISED EXTENSIONS	12
INDICATOR 7 – CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	13
INDICATOR 8 – WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT, CHANGED OR IMPROVED	14
BENCHMARKING AGAINST OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES	16
NEXT STEPS	22
SPSO LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT	23

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL COMPLAINTS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2015/16

INTRODUCTION

*“putting our customers
at the heart of what we do”*



I am pleased to present Scottish Borders Council's third annual Complaints Performance Report, which gives details on customer complaints received by the Council between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016. This report reflects the information collected throughout the year which is considered during management meetings and presented to the Executive Committee quarterly.

The report provides information based on key performance indicators which every Local Authority in Scotland reports on, the details of which are submitted to and collated by

the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) annually.

For the first time this year, we are able to compare our performance for 2014-15 against two other Local Authorities, Argyll & Bute and Aberdeenshire, who have kindly agreed that we can publish their data.

Also included in the report for the first time is information gathered through the introduction of the Complaint Satisfaction Survey in June 2015. While the responses are small in number, they are invaluable in helping us improve our customer's experience when they make a complaint.

It is always disappointing to hear our services have fallen below the standards expected by our customers, but this feedback provides us with the opportunity to continuously review and where necessary make improvements to our service to ensure they meet the needs of the residents of the Scottish Borders. We will therefore continue to monitor trends and patterns in complaints, to help us identify areas where improvements can still be made, and which may result in changes in the way we serve our customers.

Tracey Logan
Chief Executive
Scottish Borders Council

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL COMPLAINTS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2015/16

SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The statistics gathered in this report are based on eight key performance indicators devised by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) in conjunction with all 32 Scottish Local Authorities.

All complaints detailed on the report are handled under the Council's Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) which complies with the SPSO model for Public Services complaint handling.

This is the third year of handling complaints under the revised complaints handling model. This report details our performance in 2015-16, and for the first time also includes information on how satisfied our customers have been with their complaint journey.

Also included is benchmarking data and information on complaints received by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman for 2014-15.

Complaint Officer meetings are held to highlight issues surrounding complaints. Work is being undertaken as part of these meetings to establish a formal procedure for reviewing complaints and implementing any actions to prevent reoccurrences. These meetings are also used to share best practice so that lessons learned are disseminated across the Council.

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL COMPLAINTS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2015/16

COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE (CHP)

We regard a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf. We value all complaints and use the information from them to help us improve our services.

Stage One – We aim to resolve complaints quickly and close to where we provide the service. We will give a decision at Stage One in five working days or less, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Stage Two – If customers are dissatisfied with our response at Stage One they can escalate their complaint to Stage Two. We also handle complaints immediately via Stage Two if they are complex and require a detailed investigation. We will acknowledge all Stage Two complaints within three working days and will give a full response as soon as possible and within 20 working days. If the investigation will take longer than 20 days we will agree revised time limits with the customer and keep them updated on the progress of their complaint.

Where a customer is dissatisfied with the Council's decision regarding a Stage Two complaint, they may then contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to ask him to consider it.

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL COMPLAINTS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2015/16

HOW CUSTOMERS COMPLAINED

The statistics in this report do not include complaints that have been closed as invalid. The types of complaints closed as being invalid include:

- routine first time requests for a service
- requests for compensation
- requests for information or an explanation of policy or practice
- Insurance Claims

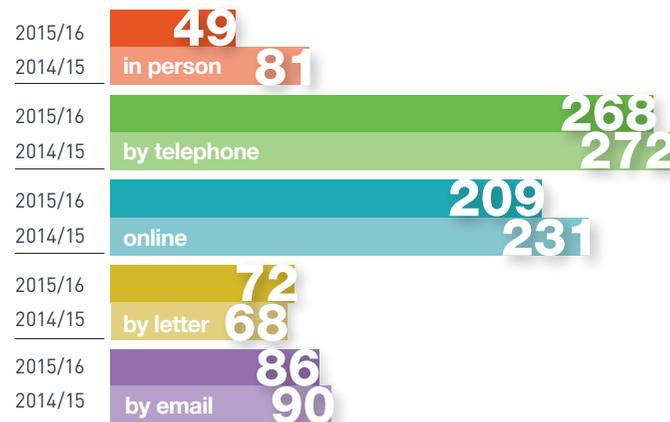
Customers can complain to or comment about the Council in a range of different ways.

During 2015-16 we received **684** complaints from customers who chose the following ways to contact us with a complaint.

120 complaints were subsequently classed as invalid but are included here to fully detail the preferred methods of contact.



Totals for



INDICATOR 1 COMPLAINTS RECEIVED PER 1,000 OF POPULATION

This indicator records the total number of complaints received by Scottish Borders Council in the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016. This is the sum of the number of complaints received at Stage One and the number of complaints received directly at Stage Two divided by the estimated population size which was obtained from the National Records of Scotland.

This does not include the 120 complaints closed as invalid.

TOTAL POPULATION

The population of Scottish Borders is estimated at **114,030** (mid year population estimate)

OUTCOME OF COMPLAINTS HANDLED

SBC handled **564** valid complaints from customers, meaning that an average of **4.9** valid complaints were received per 1,000

AVERAGE

This indicates that, on average **1** in every **202** Scottish Borders residents have registered a complaint about our services

2014-15 AND 2015-16 COMPARISONS

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED PER 1000 OF POPULATION

	2014/15	2015/16	Variance
Population total	114,030	114,030	0
Total number of valid complaints	619	564	-55
Complaints per 1000 population	5.4	4.9	-0.5

The population in the Scottish Borders has remained static over the last 2 years. As the number of complaints received in 2015-16 has reduced by 55, this has resulted in a reduction of 0.5 complaints received per 1000 of the Scottish Borders population.

INDICATOR 2 CLOSED COMPLAINTS

This indicator provides information on the number of complaints closed at Stage One, Stage Two and after escalation from Stage One to Stage Two as a percentage of all complaints closed.

Escalated complaints are those which had been resolved at Stage One; however the customer is not satisfied with that conclusion and requests the same issue to be considered again.

The term 'closed' refers to a complaint that has had a response sent to the customer and at the time, no further action was required.

STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS

480 complaints closed at Stage One, representing 85.7% of all complaints closed

STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

80 complaints were closed at Stage Two, representing 14.3% of all complaints closed

ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

30 complaints were closed after escalation from Stage One, representing 5.3% of all complaints closed

Although a complaint is received between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016, it may not be possible to close the complaint within this period on occasions; therefore the figures in Indicator 1 and Indicator 2 may differ.

2014-15 AND 2015-16 COMPARISONS

CLOSED COMPLAINTS

	2014/15		2015/16		Variance	
	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	%
Stage One	504	81.4%	480	85.7%	-24	+4.3%
Stage Two	115	18.6%	80	14.3%	-35	-4.3%
Escalated from Stage One	23	3.7%	30	5.3%	+7	+1.6%

In 2015/16 Scottish Borders Council closed 85.7% of all complaints received at Stage One. This is an improvement on 2014/15 where 81.4% of complaints were closed at Stage One. As a result fewer complaints were closed at Stage Two in 2015/16. This is a positive outcome for the year. While the overall number of complaints has reduced, the number of closed complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two has increased by 7 in 2015/16. This is to be expected due to the fact that a higher percentage of complaints were handled at Stage One in 2015-16, and because a higher percentage of those complaints were not upheld.

INDICATOR 3 COMPLAINTS UPHELD/ NOT UPHELD

There is a requirement for a formal outcome to be recorded for each complaint. Scottish Borders Council made the decision not to have a partially upheld outcome when the Complaint Handling Procedure was introduced. Complaints are therefore either recorded as upheld or not upheld.

STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS

213 complaints were upheld at Stage One, representing 44.4% of complaints closed at Stage One 267 complaints were not upheld at Stage One, representing 55.6% of complaints closed at Stage One

STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

31 complaints were upheld at Stage Two, representing 38.8% of complaints closed at Stage Two 49 complaints were not upheld at Stage Two, representing 61.2% of complaints closed at Stage Two

ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

7 complaints were upheld after escalation, representing 23.3% of complaints closed after escalation 23 complaints were not upheld after escalation, representing 76.7% of complaints closed after escalation

2014-15 AND 2015-16 COMPARISONS

COMPLAINTS UPHELD/NOT UPHELD

	2014/15		2015/16		Variance	
	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total
Stage One - upheld	248	49.2%	213	44.4%	-35	-4.8%
Stage One - not upheld	256	50.8%	267	55.6%	+11	+4.8%
Stage Two - upheld	34	29.6%	31	38.8%	-3	+9.2%
Stage Two - not upheld	81	70.4%	49	61.2%	-32	-9.2%
Escalated from Stage One - upheld	11	47.8%	7	23.3%	-4	-24.5%
Escalated from Stage One - not upheld	12	52.2%	23	76.7%	+11	+24.5%

The number of complaints upheld at Stage One has decreased from 49.2% in 2014/15 to 44.4% in 2015/16, whereas at Stage Two the number of complaints upheld has increased from 29.6% in 2014/15 to 38.8% in 2015/16. However, the biggest change is the number of complaints that were escalated from Stage One to Stage Two where 47.8% were upheld in 2014/15 and only 23.3% have been upheld in 2015/16. Whilst the increase in complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two indicates that more people were dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint at Stage One, the reduction in escalated complaints that were upheld supports the original decision to not uphold the complaint.

INDICATOR 4 AVERAGE TIME SPENT RESPONDING TO COMPLAINTS

The average time spent in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage.

STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS

We aim to respond to and close Stage One complaints within **5** working days.
The average time to respond to a complaint at Stage One was **4** working days

STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

We aim to respond to and close Stage Two complaints within **20** working days. The average time to respond to a complaint at Stage Two was **17.2** working days

ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

We aim to respond to escalated complaints within **20** working days. The average time to respond to escalated complaints was **16.7** working days

2014-15 AND 2015-16 COMPARISONS

AVERAGE TIME SPENT RESPONDING TO COMPLAINTS (IN DAYS)

	2014/15	2015/16	Variance
Stage One	3.9	4	+0.1%
Stage Two	17.3	17.2	-0.1%
Escalated from Stage One	17.5	16.7	-0.8%

Whilst there has been little change in the overall response times we have seen a slight reduction in the average response times for complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two. However, all average response times remain within the prescribed timescales.

INDICATOR 5 COMPLAINTS CLOSED AGAINST TIMESCALES

This indicator reports the number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days. These include cases where an extension to the timescales has been authorised.

STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS

409 complaints were closed at Stage One within 5 working days, representing **85.2%** of all Stage One complaints

STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

62 complaints were closed at Stage Two within 20 working days, representing **77.5%** of all Stage Two complaints

ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

25 escalated complaints were closed within 20 working days, representing **83.3%** of all complaints that were escalated from Stage One to Stage Two

2014-15 AND 2015-16 COMPARISONS

COMPLAINTS CLOSED AGAINST TIMESCALES

	2014/15		2015/16		Variance	
	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total
Stage One	438	86.9%	409	85.2%	-29	-1.7%
Stage Two	89	77.4%	62	77.5%	-27	+0.1%
Escalated from Stage One	14	60.9%	25	83.3%	+11	+22.4%

The number of complaints closed at Stage One within the timescales fell from 86.9% in 2014/15 to 85.2% in 2015/16. The percentage of complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two closed within the 20 working days measure has increased from 60.9% in 2014/15 to 83.3% in 2015/16. This represents a significant improvement in view of the increased numbers of complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two in 2015/16.

INDICATOR 6 COMPLAINTS THAT WERE GRANTED AUTHORISED EXTENSIONS

This indicator reports the number and percentages of complaints at each stage where an extension to the 5 or 20 working day timeline was authorised.

It does not however include the numbers of complaints where responses were late and an extension was either not recorded or not requested.

STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS

16 complaints closed at Stage One were granted an extension, representing 3.3% of Stage One complaints

STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

14 complaints closed at Stage Two were granted an extension, representing 17.5% of Stage Two complaints

ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

3 complaints closed after being escalated from Stage One to Stage Two were granted an extension, representing 10% of escalated complaints

2014-15 AND 2015-16 COMPARISONS

COMPLAINTS THAT WERE GRANTED AUTHORISED EXTENSIONS

	2014/15		2015/16		Variance	
	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total
Stage One	13	2.6%	16	3.3%	+3	0.7%
Stage Two	20	17.4%	14	17.5%	-6	0.1%
Escalated from Stage One	7	30.4%	3	10.0%	-4	-20.4%

The number of complaints requiring an extension is less than 6% of those received (excluding those classed as invalid). There has been an increase in the number of complaints at Stage One given an extension, and a small increase in Stage Two complaints given an extension. However, there has been a significant reduction from 30.4% to 10% in the number of complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two where an extension has been granted.

INDICATOR 7 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Scottish Borders Council has developed a Complaint Satisfaction Survey, which was implemented on 10 June 2015. Customers are contacted approximately one week after their complaint was closed inviting them to complete our survey.

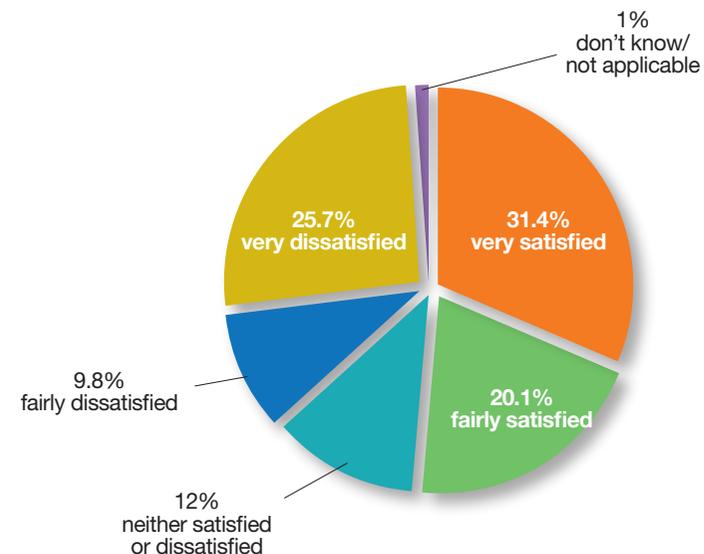
The survey asks the customer to state how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with:

- Being able to deal with someone who could help you with your complaint?
- That someone took responsibility for your complaint?
- Being given information that was easy to understand?
- Being given all the information you needed?
- Being treated fairly?
- Being kept up to date on the progress of your complaint?
- How well the staff did their job?
- The time taken to deal with your complaint from start to finish?
- The final outcome?

Not all customers who complained were invited to take part in the survey due to either the sensitive nature of their complaint or the complaint being made anonymously. For the period 10 June 2015 to 31 March 2016 383 complaints were closed, and 314 survey invitations were sent.

Of the 314 surveys that were issued, only 41 were returned giving a return rate of only 13.1%.

As the number of people that have completed the survey is very low, it is difficult to get a full picture of how satisfied our customers are with how their complaint was handled. Of those that have responded, the overall outcomes show that 51.5% of people were either very or fairly satisfied compared to 35.5% who were very or fairly dissatisfied.



Improvements need to be made in how we gather information that tells us why a customer was satisfied or dissatisfied. Changes to the survey will be implemented to allow a customer to feedback any specific comments regarding each question in future and more in depth reporting will therefore be available in the next Complaints Annual Performance Report. We will also consider how to improve the return rate of the survey, although this may be difficult to achieve.

In addition to this, consideration will also be given as to how to improve the collection of comments and compliments, and to report the levels in next year's Complaints Annual Performance Report.

INDICATOR 8

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT, CHANGED OR IMPROVED

Formal complaint reports are provided to the Corporate Management Team on a monthly basis and complaints performance information is provided to Elected Members on a quarterly basis through our Corporate Public Performance report.

www.scotborders.gov.uk/performance

We take all complaints seriously, and the information gathered from them is invaluable in helping to continually improve our services. Since the introduction of the Complaints Handling Procedure, many changes have been made to services as a result of complaints and some examples of case studies are detailed in this section.

CASE STUDY 1

A customer applied for a Bus Pass on the grounds of disability due to a medical condition that meant he was not allowed to drive. He provided a letter from the DVLA acknowledging his driving licence to them and a letter from his GP confirming that he could not drive. However, the Bus Pass was refused because the letter from the DVLA was not the specific letter as stated in the Transport Scotland criteria, it was just an acknowledgement of him returning his licence.

The customer complained that in order for him to get the specific letter from the DVLA it would take months, and in the meantime he would not be able to travel, and this was not acceptable.

After speaking to Transport Scotland, they investigated with the DVLA and found that since the Bus Pass criteria was set the DVLA criteria had changed along with their letters. This meant that Transport Scotland allowed us to award the customer his Bus Pass and gave us greater power to use our own discretion until they are in a position to notify all Local Authorities of the updated criteria for these types of passes.

The customer was very satisfied with the outcome of this complaint, and told us his faith in public services had been restored.

CASE STUDY 2

On reviewing complaints within the Education Service, a trend showed that some complaints have been escalated as relationships between parents and the school has broken down. In these cases, mediation has been offered to rebuild these relationships, recognising the valuable role that parents have in supporting the learning of their children at school and being clear that learning is enhanced when parents and schools work together.

CASE STUDY 3

A customer contacted Customer Services to book an appointment to register the death of a family member. They complained because they had to wait in a queue for their call to be answered which was not acceptable at such a difficult time for them.

As a result of this complaint we have worked closely with two local Funeral Directors to develop an online booking system. The Funeral Director can advise the customer during their first meeting that they can book the appointment for them to register the death. They complete an online booking form which provides Customer Services with the name of the person who will be attending the appointment, the name of the person who has passed away and the preferred date/time/office for the appointment.

An appointment is booked by Customer Services and a response issued to the Funeral Director to advise the details and they confirm this with the customer. This booking system is being rolled out to all Funeral Directors in the Scottish Borders, and makes the process less stressful for the customer as they no longer need to make contact with Customer Services directly.

CASE STUDY 4

A customer complained that information had been passed to Social Work which was untrue.

As result of this complaint, a review of the procedures for taking a referral was undertaken. The review of Policy and guidance on Social Work case records recommends that the writing of all records, referrals, emails and letters should clearly state what is fact and what is professional opinion. The Open Access policy regarding the sharing of information between Agencies was also reviewed. It was recommended that best practice would be to make service users aware of what was being shared with other agencies through referrals to reduce the chance of them being surprised or upset by anything that is written.

CASE STUDY 5

A customer applied for a clothing grant for their three children, with the youngest child just starting school for the first time. The customer complained about the length of time it was taking to process her application because she needed to buy the school uniforms.

On investigation, it was found that the whole application was being held back because the youngest child had not been enrolled on the school system, and payment couldn't be made until they were registered. However, the application could have been processed for the two older children, while waiting for the start of term for the youngest child.

The processing instructions have now been updated to ensure that if additional information is required for one part of an application, this should not hold up processing the remainder of that application.

CASE STUDY 6

A customer complained that when emptying an overflowing communal wheelie bin over the Christmas period, one of the Operatives threw some of the side waste sacks into the corner of the carpark. This resulted in the bags splitting and spilling their contents with no attempt to pick them up.

Following an investigation, it was found that because of the public holidays the loaders on some routes were being operated by either agency workers or staff from other departments. It was established during the investigation that because of this, not all of the crew were aware that the side waste, which is not usually picked up, should have been collected over the Christmas period.

Measures have now been put in place to ensure that all crew are given clear instructions prior to public holidays. Regular checks are also now being made to ensure that brushes are available on each vehicle to clear up any litter left from a collection.

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL COMPLAINTS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2015/16

BENCHMARKING 2014-15

Benchmarking statistics are now available for complaints for Indicators 1 – 6 for 2014-15 which allows us to compare our performance against other Local Authorities.

A summary of the overall statistics has now been produced by the Improvement Service, however this summary has not yet been published.

It should be noted that the summary data takes no account of differences in how Local

Authorities handle their complaints, for example, the different ways that some Local Authorities handle first time requests for service and some Local Authorities have housing stock and others do not.

Work continues to be done by the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network (LACHN) to standardise complaint handling and reporting across Scotland.

We have obtained permission from two other Local Authorities who are similar in size, population or demographics to use their data for comparison with Scottish Borders Council's 2014-15 figures. It must be noted that Aberdeenshire Council have housing stock which Scottish Borders Council and Argyll & Bute Council do not have.

INDICATOR 1

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED PER 1000 OF POPULATION – 2014-15

	Scotland	Scottish Borders	Argyll & Bute	Aberdeenshire
Population total	5,226,410	114,030	90,000	255,540
Total number of valid complaints	67,620	619	340	1,990
Complaints per 1000 population	12.2	5.4	3.8	7.8

The number of complaints received per 1000 population of the Scottish Borders is slightly higher than Argyll & Bute. Whereas we have received fewer complaints than Aberdeenshire, but it must be noted that they have housing stock which will account for the higher number of complaints per population.

All three Local Authorities received fewer complaints per 1000 of population in their respective areas than the national average.

INDICATOR 2

CLOSED COMPLAINTS – 2014-15

	Scotland	Scottish Borders	Argyll & Bute	Aberdeenshire
	% of Total	% of Total	% of Total	%
Stage One	82% ¹	81.4%	76.8%	62.1%
Stage Two	18% ¹	18.6%	23.2%	37.9%
Escalated from Stage One to Stage Two	-	3.7%	2.6%	1.8%

Scottish Borders Council has dealt with a higher percentage of complaints at Stage One than both Argyll & Bute Council and Aberdeenshire Council and consequently this resulted in a smaller proportion of complaints closed by Scottish Borders Council at Stage Two. As a result, Scottish Borders Council have a higher percentage of complaints closed at Stage One which have then been escalated to Stage Two.

¹The Scottish averages for Stage Two complaints and complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two are not comparable against the three Local Authorities. This is because national figures combine Stage Two complaints and complaints escalated from Stage One, which are presented as a percentage of the total number of complaints where these figures are reported separately by Local Authorities, and we are therefore not able to benchmark against the Scottish national average.

INDICATOR 3

COMPLAINTS UPHELD/NOT UPHELD/PARTIALLY UPHELD – 2014-15

	Scotland	Scottish Borders	Argyll & Bute	Aberdeenshire
	% of Total	% of Total	% of Total	% of Total
Stage One – upheld & partially upheld	68.10%	49.2%	61.7%	34.9%
Stage One - not upheld	31.90%	50.8%	38.3%	65.1%
Stage Two – upheld & partially upheld	68.90%	29.6%	39.2%	30.1%
Stage Two - not upheld	31.10%	70.4%	60.8%	69.9%
Escalated from Stage One to Stage Two – upheld & partially upheld	-	47.8%	0.0%	25.7%
Escalated from Stage One to Stage Two - not upheld	-	52.2%	100.0%	74.3%

Scottish Borders Council does not record partially upheld complaints, if any part of a complaint is partially upheld we record this as an upheld complaint. The Scottish National Average statistics have combined upheld and partially upheld data. The data for Aberdeenshire Council and Argyll & Bute Council has been combined for upheld and partially upheld complaints to enable comparison.

At Stage One Scottish Borders Council upheld 12.5% more complaints than Aberdeenshire Council but 22.4% less than Argyll & Bute Council. The national average is more in line with Argyll & Bute Council at 68.1% which indicated that nationally a much higher percentage of complaints are upheld at Stage One than at Scottish Borders Council in 2014/15. At Stage Two Aberdeenshire Council and Scottish Borders Council uphold a similar percentage of complaints but Argyll & Bute Council uphold approximately 10% more. The national average of complaints upheld at Stage Two is significantly higher than any of the three councils.

The figures for complaints upheld or partially upheld after being escalated from Stage One to Stage Two show that Argyll & Bute have not upheld or partially upheld any escalated complaints whilst Scottish Borders Council upheld 47.8% and Aberdeenshire Council upheld 25.7%. It is difficult to draw any conclusions about performance from these figures without having an understanding of the type and content of the complaints being received by other Councils.

It is not possible to benchmark against the national average for complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two as these figures have been added together in the summary report to give an average rather than being reported separately as Local Authorities have done.

INDICATOR 4

AVERAGE TIME SPENT RESPONDING TO COMPLAINTS (IN DAYS) – 2014-15

	Scotland	Scottish Borders	Argyll & Bute	Aberdeenshire
Stage One	4.4	3.9	4.3	4
Stage Two	18.6	17.3	15.5	19
Escalated from Stage One to Stage Two	15.7	17.5	15.2	20

The time Scottish Borders Council spends responding to complaints is in line with both Argyll & Bute Council and Aberdeenshire Council, but improvement could be made in dealing with Stage Two complaints and complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two in comparison with Argyle & Bute Council. On average the Stage Two response time across Scotland is 18.6 working days. It should be noted that on average all three Councils were within the 5 and 20 working day prescribed timescales.

INDICATOR 5

COMPLAINTS CLOSED AGAINST TIMESCALES – 2014-15

	Scotland	Scottish Borders	Argyll & Bute	Aberdeenshire
	% of Total	% of Total	% of Total	%
Stage One	80.8%	86.9%	82.4%	83.4%
Stage Two	84.5% ¹	77.4%	79.4%	88.7%
Escalated from Stage One to Stage Two	-	60.9%	44.4%	100%

Scottish Borders Council performs well at Stage One and closes almost 87% of these complaints within the timescale of 5 days. All three Local Authorities perform better than the national average for this indicator.

However, there is room for improvement at Stage Two, and even greater room for improvement for escalated complaints where Scottish Borders Council's performance falls behind that of Aberdeenshire Council.

¹Stage Two complaints and complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two have been added together, which makes it difficult to benchmark against this part of the indicator.

INDICATOR 6

COMPLAINTS THAT REQUIRED AUTHORISED TIMESCALES – 2014-15

	Scotland	Scottish Borders	Argyll & Bute	Aberdeenshire
	% of Total	% of Total	% of Total	%
Stage One	4%	2.6%	2.7%	0%
Stage Two	13.6% ¹	17.4%	6.3%	11.4%
Escalated from Stage One to Stage Two	-	30.4%	0%	0%

13.1% of Scottish Borders Council's Stage One complaints should have received an authorised extension, however only 2.6% of these complaints were granted an authorised extension. Similarly 22.6% of Stage Two complaints required an authorised extension with only 17.4% granted, and 39.1% of complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two required an extension and 30.4% granted. This trend is reflected across all three Local Authorities, and is an area that requires improvement.

¹Stage Two complaints and complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two have been added together, which makes it difficult to benchmark against this part of the indicator.

CONCLUSIONS

Performance in handling complaints at Stage One has made an overall improvement in 2015/16, and the benchmarking data for 2014/15 shows that performance in handling Stage One complaints was better than the Scottish average in all areas where comparisons were possible.

There was an excellent improvement in the percentage of complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two being closed within the timescales, resulting in fewer of these complaints requiring an authorised extension.

The key findings for Scottish Borders Council are that improvements need to be made;

- to reduce the number of complaints being escalated from Stage One to Stage Two
- in the Stage One response given to customers to increase satisfaction levels
- to reduce the time spent dealing with Stage Two complaints
- to reduce the time spent dealing with complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two
- to increase the number of complaints handled at Stage One rather than Stage Two
- to reduce the number of complaints that require an extension at Stage Two
- to reduce the number of escalated complaints that require an extension
- to increase the number of authorised extensions
- to improve and standardise complaint reporting
- to improve collection of comments and compliments

These key findings would indicate that the main focus for improvement in 2016-17 is the response we give to customers at Stage One to avoid escalation, and the overall performance in handling Stage Two and escalated complaints.

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL COMPLAINTS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2015/16

NEXT STEPS

WE WILL:

- improve and standardise reporting of complaints to drive forward improvements in service
- expand the volume of comments and compliments recorded which will be reflected alongside complaints in future reports
- work with the LACHN to standardise the complaints process across Scotland as benchmarking against other Local Authorities has proved difficult, due to the variations in services provided by each Local Authority and the interpretation of what constitutes a complaint for each Local Authority
- use the 2014-15 benchmarking data to drive best practice and continual service improvement
- work with all departments to improve our communication with customers at Stage One to reduce the number of complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two
- learn from complaints closed at Stage Two and those complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two to improve our overall performance in these areas
- make the improvements to our performance recommended in the complaint handling review to ensure that the Council's CHP has embedded, once those recommendations have been approved

ANNEXE

SPSO LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT

SCOTTISH PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN (SPSO) COMPLAINTS

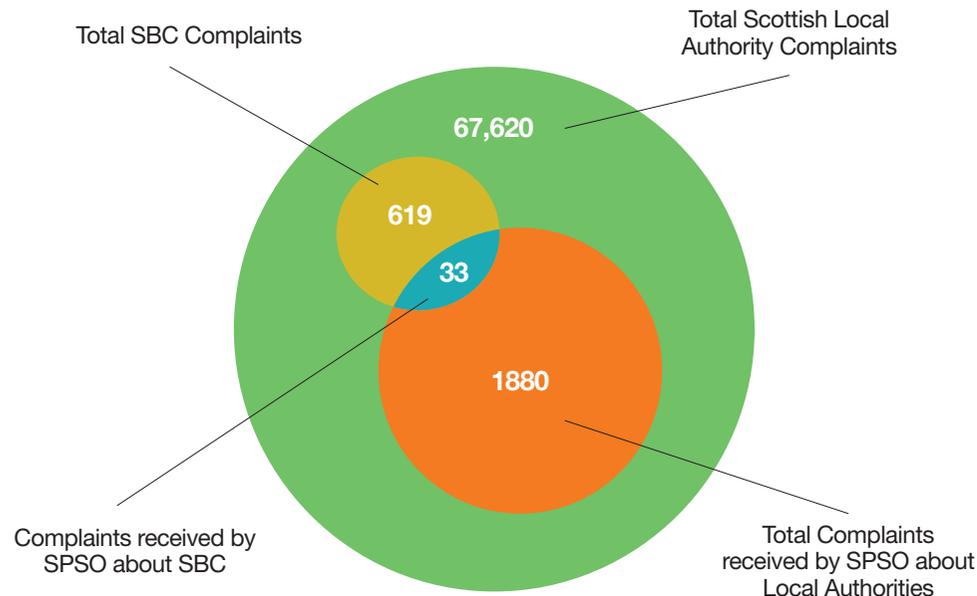
If after we have fully investigated a complaint, the complainant is still dissatisfied with our decision or the way in which we have dealt with their complaint, the customer can ask the SPSO to look at the complaint.

The SPSO publishes their statistics in October of each year, which means we are only able to present statistics for 2014-15 in the 2015-16 report.

The number of complaints about Scottish Borders Council, received by the SPSO in 2014-15, accounts for 1.8% of the total number of complaints received by the SPSO for the Local Authority Sector in 2014-15. This 1.8% is the equivalent of 5.3% of all complaints received by Scottish Borders Council for the year.

Only **four** of the **thirty three** complaints that the SPSO received for Scottish Borders were appropriate for them to consider, and only one of those complaints was upheld or partially upheld. Of the remaining complaints they received about Scottish Borders Council, 21 were only given advice and a small number raised their complaints with the SPSO before the complainant had fully completed Scottish Borders Council's Complaint Handling Procedure.

Three of the four Scottish Borders complaints handled by the SPSO have been published and the case studies are detailed here.



CASE STUDY 1

A child went missing while using the school bus service. The customer complained to Scottish Borders Council (SBC) that the bus driver had not followed procedures and this put their child at risk as the driver did not know which children were travelling on the bus that day, and did not check, when asked, to ensure that the child was not on the bus.

The customer said that he was not confident in his child using the school bus service because he did not believe that SBC had investigated the matter properly. He also complained that SBC's recommendations had not been implemented, and that therefore adequate controls had not been put in place to ensure that a similar situation did not occur again in the future.

The SPSO found that SBC had investigated his complaint appropriately and that it had been conducted in accordance with SBC's complaints procedure. They also found that the bus driver had followed the procedures that were in place at the time, so the SPSO did not uphold the complaint.

However, the SPSO did make recommendations as SBC had told the customer that as part of their investigation they would interview him and this did not happen. The SPSO also found that SBC had not given the customer sufficient advice about the changes being made, or provided them with clear and consistent advice about the progress and timescale of the implementation of the recommendations.

SBC explained that there had been sufficient information in a statement made by the customer's wife at the time of the incident for SBC to come to a decision without further interview and as there was evidence of changes, which had been recommended in the council's original findings, having been implemented the SPSO did not uphold either of these elements of the complaint.

CASE STUDY 2

A customer complained about SBC's investigation into a complaint he made about his child's primary school. His complaints included that the school did not put in place necessary meetings and that the council did not investigate his complaint properly. He also said that the council did not discuss his complaint with him before coming to their conclusions.

The SPSO found that some of the customer's concerns were not complaints of service failure or maladministration; rather he disagreed with actions taken by members of staff, and their decisions. In addition the SPSO found that one of his complaints was premature as he had not put it to SBC. The SPSO did not look at any of these matters.

In considering the complaints that they could look at, which were about the meetings and SBC's complaint investigation, the SPSO did not uphold the customer's complaints as they found that meetings were held, and that the council investigated and contacted the customer appropriately.

CASE STUDY 3

A customer was staying in homeless accommodation provided by SBC. He said that, although he did not wish to leave, his place there was cancelled because he had been spending time elsewhere. SBC put his belongings into storage, but did not take an inventory. He complained to the SPSO that SBC acted unreasonably in not accepting arrangements he made for his belongings to be delivered to a family member, and in disposing of his belongings without compensating him for the loss.

After the SPSO discussed this with SBC, the SPSO were told that SBC were reviewing their practices about storage, and agreed to resolve the complaint by meeting the customer's claim for loss of his belongings. The customer was happy with this outcome.

You can get this document on audio CD, in large print, and various other formats by contacting us at the address below. In addition, contact the address below for information on language translations, additional copies, or to arrange for an officer to meet with you to explain any areas of the publication that you would like clarified.

CHIEF EXECUTIVES

Council Headquarters | Newtown St Boswells | MELROSE | TD6 0SA

tel: 0300 100 1800 | email: customerservices@scotborders.gov.uk | www.scotborders.gov.uk

