



SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL'S
**COMPLAINTS ANNUAL
PERFORMANCE REPORT**
2017-2018





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SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL COMPLAINTS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2017/18

FOREWORD

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



This year, I am pleased to present Scottish Borders Council’s fifth Annual Complaints Performance Report, which provides information on our performance in dealing with complaints from our customers between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018, as required from all Local Authorities.

This report provides us with the opportunity to share our performance with you, share some case studies that demonstrate what we have learned, and show how we have improved some of our service areas as a direct result of the feedback that you have given us. Scottish Borders Council monitors performance closely throughout the year and information is presented quarterly to the Council’s Executive Committee for this purpose.

When we hear our services have fallen below the standards expected by our customers, it is disappointing to know that we may have let down the people who matter most- our customers and communities. However, it is this valuable feedback that enables us to continuously review and identify where we can do things better.

This year we launched our new Corporate Plan for 2018 – 2023. It lays out our strategic priorities for the next five years but it also details the part we need our customers to play to keep the Borders thriving. The Plan is supported by our #yourpart campaign and includes asking our customers to play their part by continuing to provide us with feedback; where things have gone wrong and when exceptional services have been delivered. Feedback helps us to focus on continuous improvement.

As in previous years, the report provides information based on 8 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. We also include information about how we compare to other Local Authorities similar to us, as we are always keen to benchmark and learn from others.

I hope you find this latest report of interest.

Tracey Logan
Chief Executive
Scottish Borders Council



SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL COMPLAINTS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2017/18

INTRODUCTION

Scottish Borders Council (SBC) defines 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.”

The Council’s **Complaints Handling Procedure** (CHP) sets out how SBC handles the complaints received including the timescales to resolve any complaint.

This report presents how SBC performs based on eight key performance indicators developed by the **Scottish Public Services Ombudsman** (SPSO) in conjunction with all 32 Scottish Local Authorities.

In addition to SBC’s performance for 2017/18, the report also shows the Council’s performance for 2015/16 and 2016/17, with details in **Appendix 1**, as well as benchmarking information comparing Scottish Borders Council to other similar Local Authorities and Scotland for 2017/18¹. The new Social Work MODEL Complaints Handling Procedure was implemented as at 1 April 2017 and the 2017-18 figures reported include Social Work complaints.

Appendix 2 of this report is an overview of the complaints that have been escalated by customers to the SPSO because they feel their complaint was not resolved through the Council’s CHP.

Appendix 3 of this report is an overview of the complaints received by **LiveBorders** in 2017/18, the integrated trust that now delivers sport and cultural service on behalf of SBC.

¹ SBC is in a Family Group that is comprised of rural Scottish Local Authorities, these are: Aberdeenshire, Argyll & Bute, Dumfries & Galloway, Eilean Siar, Highland, Orkney Islands, Scottish Borders, and Shetland Islands. Note the figures for the Family Group and Scotland are provisional and accurate at time of publication (September 2018) and 3 local authorities’ figures were not available.

The diagrams below shows the "Next Steps" identified in the 2016/17 Complaints Annual Performance Report along with the progress made.

THE NEXT STEPS FROM 2016/17

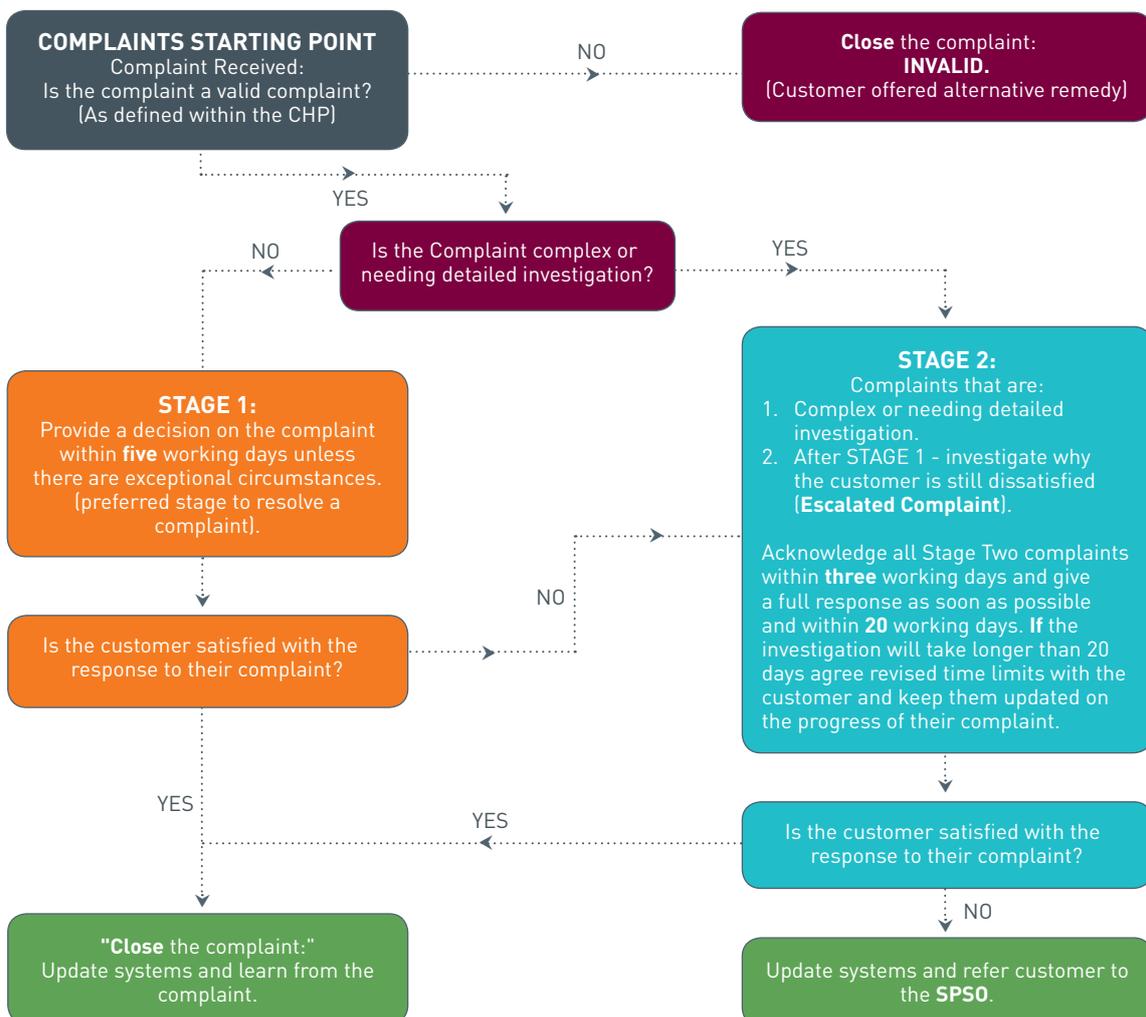


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COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE (CHP)

All complaints are valued by Scottish Borders Council and we strive to use them to help us improve our services. The objective of the CHP is to resolve customer dissatisfaction as close to the point of service delivery and as soon as possible at Stage One in the procedure. Figure 1 is a flow chart of SBC's CHP. Complaints may be received online, in person, by telephone or letter.

FIGURE 1: COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE



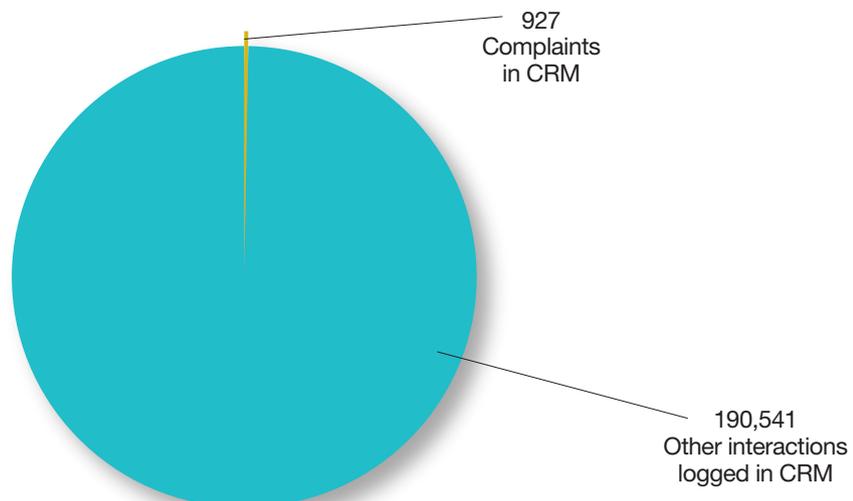
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COMPLAINTS RECEIVED IN 2017/18

The complaints received by SBC account for a very small proportion of the interactions logged in the Council's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. In 2017/18, SBC received **927** complaints, equal to **0.5%** of the **191,468** interactions logged through the CRM.

While this represents a **22%** increase in complaints received compared to 2016/17 (759), and **36%** more than in 2014/15 (684), the analysis shows that this increase is partially due to the inclusion of Social Work complaints figures for the first time, following the introduction of the new Social Work Model CHP on 1 April 2017. The increase is also due to an increased number of complaints relating to the extended period of bad weather experienced through the winter, and a change to the charging policy for public conveniences that came into effect on 1 April 2017.

FIGURE 2: CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS WITH SBC IN 2017/18



Figures 3 and 4 show the complaints SBC receives by channel. (By channel we mean the way in which the complaint was made). Figure 3 shows the proportion of complaints received by channel for 2017/18 and Figure 4 shows the change in numbers of complaints received by channel for 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18.

For the second year running online has remained the most common channel used to log a complaint [**44%**], followed by telephone [**32%**]. Overall, the channels used to log complaints in 2017/18 were broadly in line with channels used in 2016/17.



FIGURE 3: CHANNEL USED FOR COMPLAINTS, 2017/18

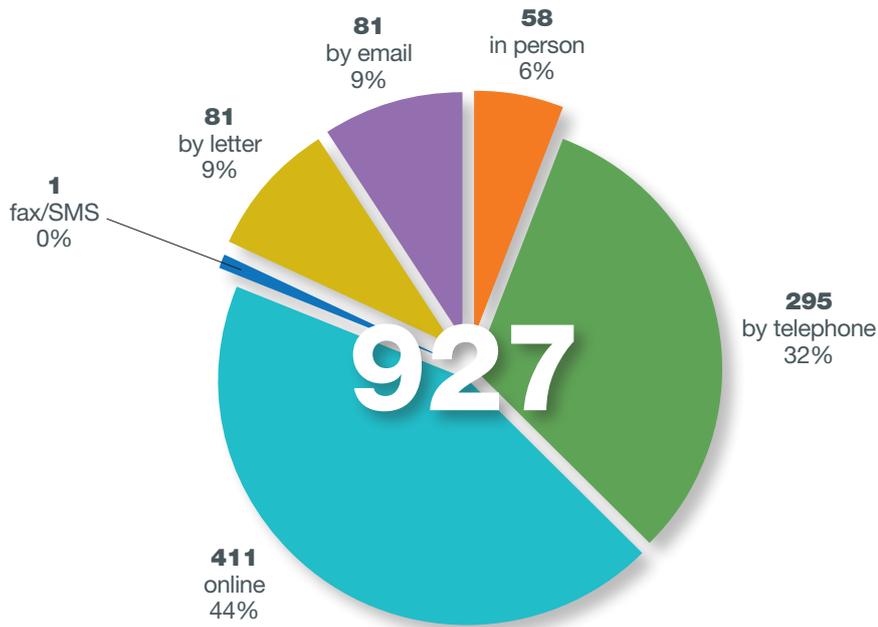
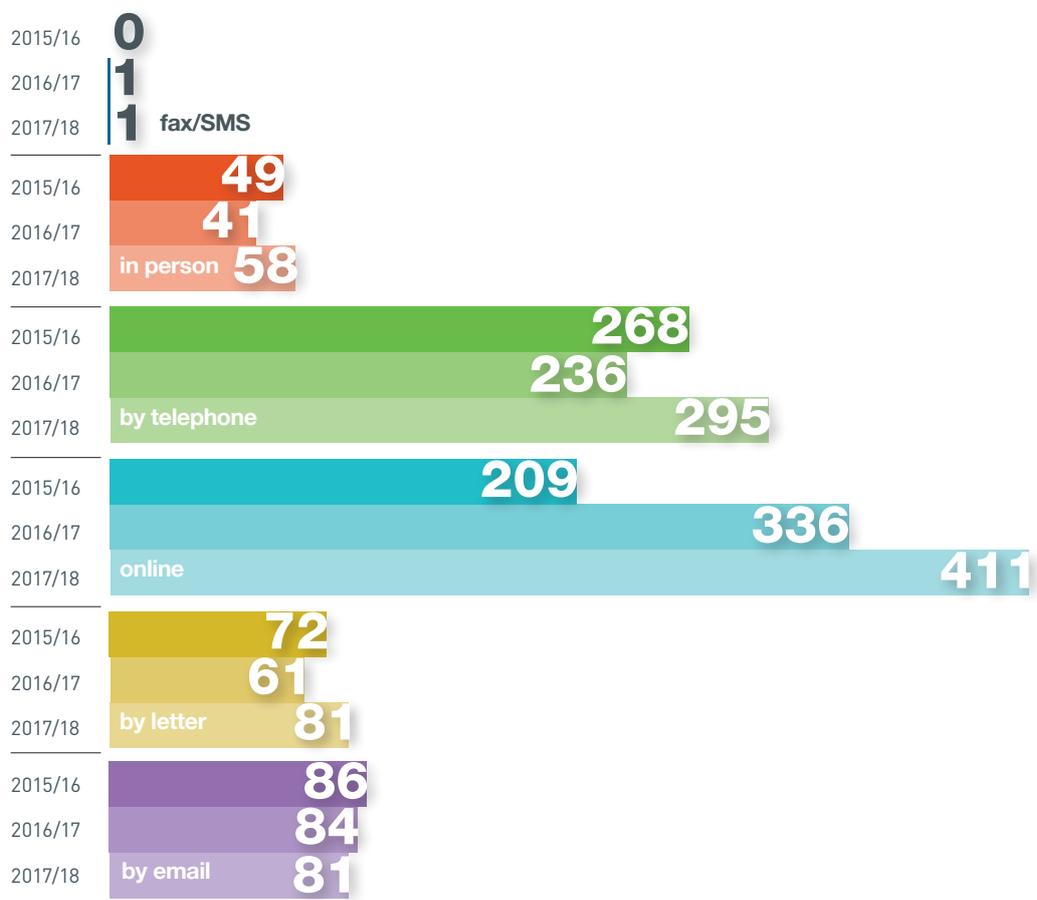
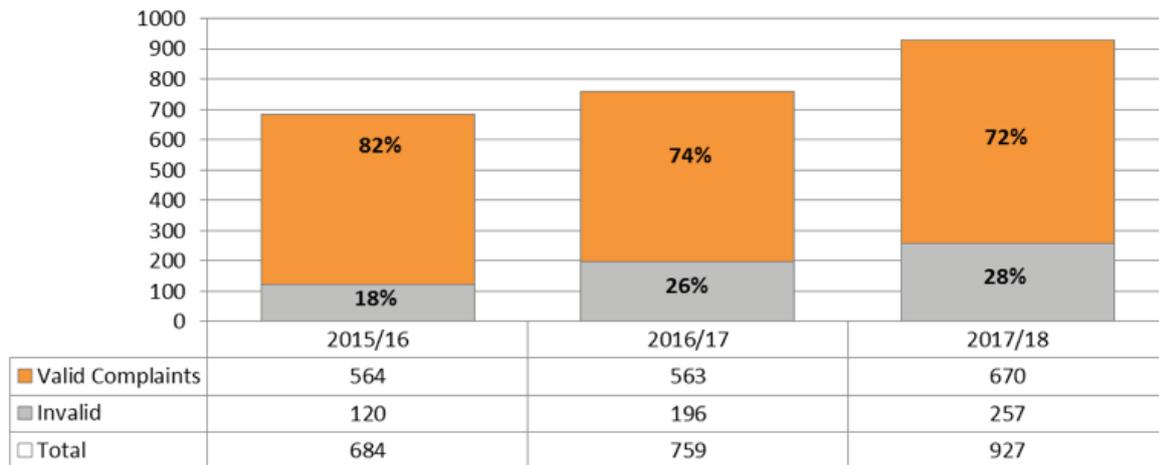


FIGURE 4: CHANNEL USED FOR COMPLAINTS 2015/16 TO 2017/18



Although complaint numbers were up in 2017/18 compared to 2016/17 the percentage that were classified as 'Valid' has reduced slightly; down to **72%** from **74%**. Figure 5 shows the total number of complaints received for 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18 and the proportion that were classified as 'Valid' or 'Invalid' complaints. It is likely that the increasing submission of complaints online is the reason for the increasing trend in complaints that are classified as 'Invalid'. Work was done in December 2017 to improve the guidance for customers on SBC's website. Analysis to establish whether this has had any impact in the level of 'Invalid' complaints submitted is inconclusive at this stage and this will continue to be monitored quarterly. However, it may be we are only able to tell whether an improvement to the online guidance on complaints has helped to reduce the number of 'Invalid' complaints when the final figures are available for 2018/19.

FIGURE 5: COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY YEAR AND % VALID



When complaints are classified as 'Invalid' customers are offered an alternative remedy, appropriate to their request.

The types of complaints closed as being invalid include:

- routine first time requests for a service
- service is not provided by SBC
- requests for compensation
- requests for information or an explanation of policy or practice
- insurance claims

The performance indicators in this report relate to 'Valid' complaints that were either opened or closed within a financial year. These indicators are based on the eight key performance indicators developed by the SPSO in conjunction with all 32 Scottish Local Authorities:

1. Complaints received per 1,000 of population
2. Closed complaints
3. Complaints upheld / not upheld
4. Average time spent responding to complaints
5. Complaint closed against timescales
6. Complaints that were granted authorised extensions
7. Customer Satisfaction
8. What we have learnt, changed or improved

Appendix 1 contains a stage by stage analysis for indicators 2 to 6 for 2017/18 compared to 2016/17 and 2015/16.



INDICATOR 1

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED PER 1,000 OF POPULATION

This indicator records the total number of valid complaints received by SBC during the financial year (April to March) as a rate per 1,000 population.

In 2017/18 SBC received 927 complaints of which 257 were closed as invalid. The remaining **670** were handled as valid complaints.

TOTAL POPULATION

The population of Scottish Borders is estimated at **114,530** (National Records of Scotland, Mid-Year Population Estimate 2016)

OUTCOME OF COMPLAINTS HANDLED

SBC handled **670** valid complaints from customers, meaning that an average of **5.8** valid complaints were received per 1,000

RATIO

This indicates that, on average **1** in every **171** Scottish Borders residents have registered a complaint about our services

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED PER 1000 OF POPULATION

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Variance: 2017/18 less 2016/17
Population total	114,030	114,030	114,530	500
Total number of valid complaints	564	563	670	107
Complaints per 1000 population	4.9	4.9	5.8	0.9

The population in the Scottish Borders has been relatively static over the last 3 years. The number of valid complaints received in 2017/18 (670) and 2016/17 (563) has grown by **19%**. This has an increase of **0.9** in the complaints per 1,000 population figures.

Benchmarking 2017/18	Scottish Borders	Family Group	Scotland
Complaints per 1000 population	5.8	5.9	11.0

In 2017/18 SBC received 5.8 complaints per 1,000 people, which was less than the Family Group average of 5.9 and Scottish average of 11.0. It is possible that the difference between Scotland and SBC's Family Group may relate to the rural nature of the family group.

The wide variation of complaints per 1000 population has also been discussed at the Local Authority Complaints Handling Network (LACHN). Other factors considered to have an impact on the number of complaints are the levels of tourism, varying impact of bad weather, events and /or sporting events in the different Local Authority areas.

INDICATOR 2 CLOSED COMPLAINTS

Closed complaints are those complaints that have been closed within the financial year (April to March) regardless of when they were raised. The number of closed complaints will differ from the number of complaints received because:

- some of the closed complaints for 2017/18 will have been received (i.e. "opened") in 2016/17;
- there may be complaints received in 2017/18 that are still going through the CHP after 31 March 2018.

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 to respond to the customer.

Escalated complaints are those complaints which have been resolved at Stage One (frontline). However, the customer was not satisfied with the response they received and they have requested the same issue be considered again at Stage Two "Investigation" Stage.

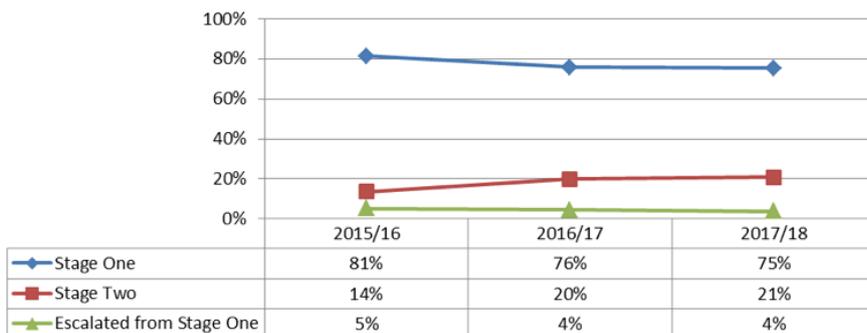
STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS
 521 complaints closed at Stage One, representing 75% of all complaints closed

STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS
 144 complaints were closed at Stage Two, representing 21% of all complaints closed

ESCALATED COMPLAINTS
 26 complaints were closed after escalation from Stage One, representing 4% of all complaints closed

FIGURE 6: CLOSED COMPLAINTS BY STAGE

(Note: %'s for 2015/16 and 2016/17 revised from previously published figures)



The proportion of complaints closed at Stage One decreased only slightly since last year. Although a small change, this decrease is counter to the SPSO goal of closing complaints at the first point of contact (i.e. more quickly). It also costs more to handle complaints at Stage Two compared to handling at Stage One.

2017/18	Scottish Borders	Family Group	Scotland
Stage One	75.4%	78.6%	88.9%
Stage Two	20.8%	18.7%	8.4%
Escalated from Stage One	3.8%	2.7%	2.6%

SBC has closed proportionally fewer complaints at Stage One (75.4%) compared to both the Family Group (78.6%) and Scotland (88.9%). Compared to both the Family Group and Scotland, SBC had more complaints Escalated from Stage One in 2017/18, indicating that SBC had a higher proportion of customers who were unhappy with the response they received at Stage One.



INDICATOR 3 COMPLAINTS UPHELD/ NOT UPHELD

There is a requirement for a formal outcome to be recorded for each complaint. SBC made the decision not to use a 'partially upheld' outcome when the CHP guidance was introduced by the SPSO. Therefore, for the purposes of this reporting, complaints are either recorded as upheld or not upheld.

STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS

219 complaints were upheld at Stage One, representing 42% of complaints closed at Stage One
302 complaints were not upheld at Stage One, representing 58% of complaints closed at Stage One

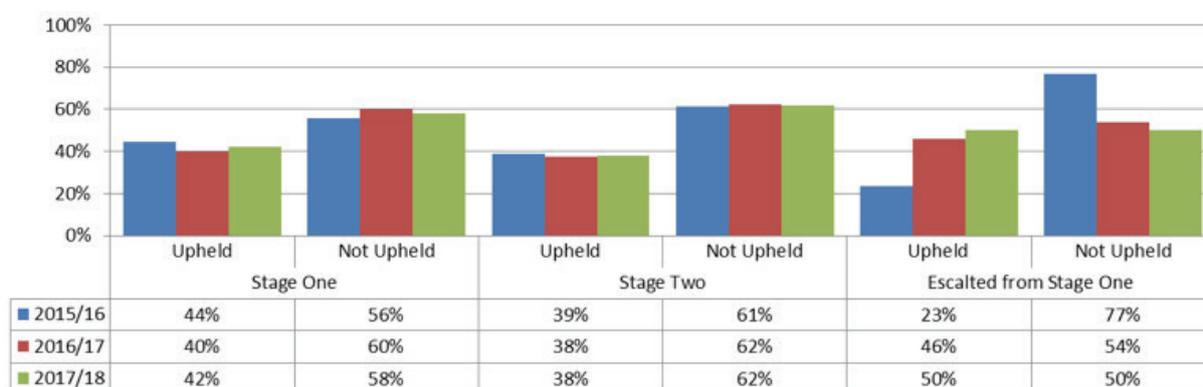
STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

55 complaints were upheld at Stage Two, representing 38% of complaints closed at Stage Two
89 complaints were not upheld at Stage Two, representing 62% of complaints closed at Stage Two

ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

13 complaints were upheld after escalation, representing 50% of complaints closed after escalation
13 complaints were not upheld after escalation, representing 50% of complaints closed after escalation

FIGURE 7: COMPLAINTS UPHELD / NOT UPHELD BY STAGE



In 2017/18 the proportion of upheld complaints for the two stages and escalated remains fairly consistent when compared to 2016/17.

2017/18	Scottish Borders	Family Group	Scotland
Stage One - upheld	42.0%	44.7%	65.8%
Stage One - not upheld	58.0%	55.3%	33.5%
Stage Two - upheld	38.2%	36.9%	53.5%
Stage Two - not upheld	61.8%	63.2%	46.2%
Escalated from Stage One - upheld	50.0%	39.6%	54.0%
Escalated from Stage One - not upheld	50.0%	60.4%	46.5%

In 2017/18 SBC's upheld rate for stage one and stage two was broadly in line with that of the Family Group and is lower than the Scottish average for the two stages and escalated complaints. There is, however, an increasing trend of upheld complaints across the two stages and escalated when comparing 2016/17 with 2017/18. Any fluctuations in the figures for the Escalated complaints could be due to the small numbers of complaints (13 upheld & 13 not upheld) where one or two complaints have a bigger impact on changing the percentages.

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 4.0 working days

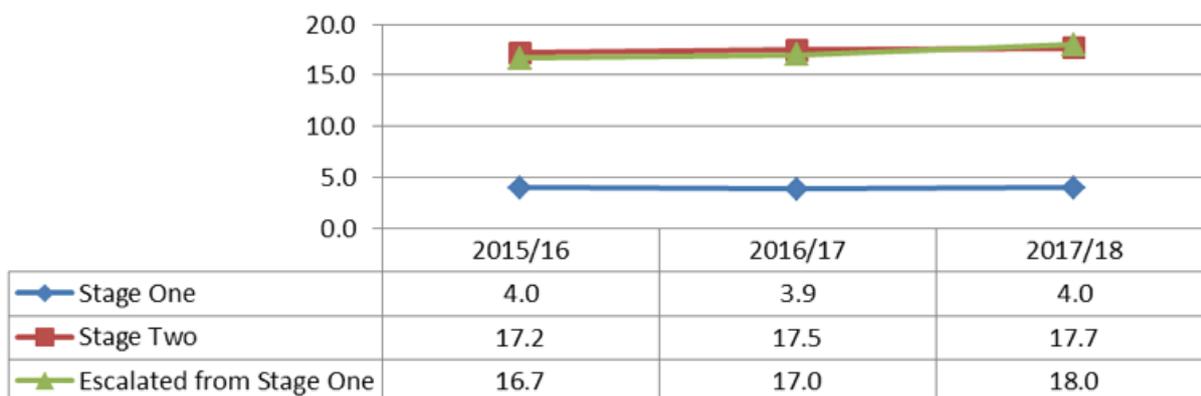
STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

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 17.7 working days

ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

We aim to respond to escalated complaints within 20 working days. The average time to respond to escalated complaints was 18.0 working days

FIGURE 8: AVERAGE TIME (DAYS) RESPONDING TO COMPLAINTS BY STAGE



2017/18	Scottish Borders	Family Group	Scotland
Stage One	4.0	8.6	8.1
Stage Two	17.7	18.2	23.8
Escalated from Stage One	18.0	18.9	15.5

For 2017/18 the average time spent, in working days, for a full response to complaints at each stage for the Scottish Borders was within the respective targets of 5 and 20 days. SBC's response time for Stage One was quicker than both the Family Group and Scotland and on a par with the Family Group for Stage Two and Escalated complaints. Even though SBC has relatively good performance in this area in comparison with the CHP target timescales, the Family Group and Scotland averages, due to the increasing timescale trends, this is an area where we continuously strive to improve and provide the customer with responses as quickly as practicable.

INDICATOR 5 COMPLAINTS CLOSED AGAINST TIMESCALES

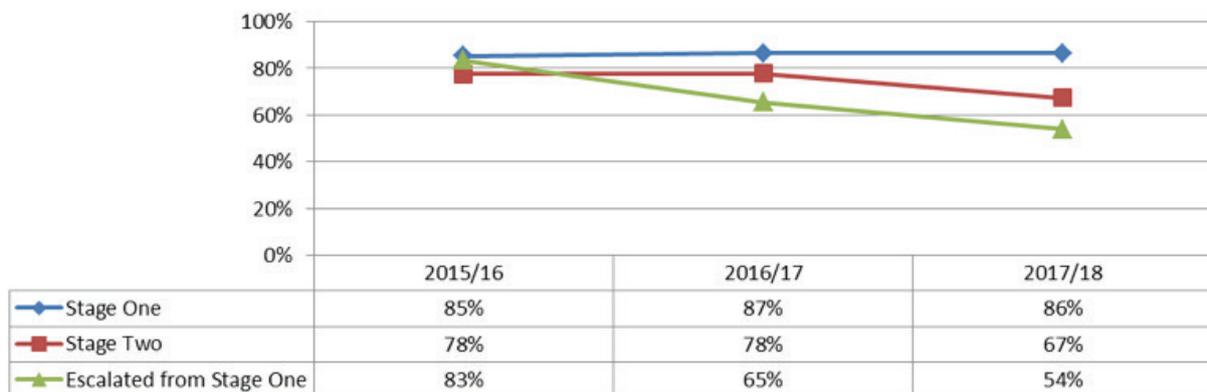
This indicator reports the number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days. These include cases where an extension to the timescales has been authorised.

STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS
 450 complaints were closed at Stage One within 5 working days, representing 86% of all Stage One complaints

STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS
 97 complaints were closed at Stage Two within 20 working days, representing 67% of all Stage Two complaints

ESCALATED COMPLAINTS
 14 escalated complaints were closed within 20 working days, representing 54% of all complaints that were escalated from Stage One to Stage Two

FIGURE 9: % OF COMPLAINTS CLOSED AGAINST TIMESCALES BY STAGE



The proportion of SBC’s complaints closed against timescales for Stage One has remained fairly consistent. However, the proportion of SBC’s complaints closed against timescales at Stage Two and Escalated, from Stage One, that were closed against timescales has reduced.

2017/18	Scottish Borders	Family Group	Scotland
Stage One	86.4%	64.5%	62.9%
Stage Two	67.4%	79.4%	76.6%
Escalated from Stage One	53.8%	65.3%	61.5%

In 2017/18 SBC's proportion of Stage One complaints closed within timescales was higher compared to the Family Group and Scotland. However, the proportion of Stage Two complaints and complaints Escalated from Stage One that were closed within the timescale was below the level for the Family Group and Scotland. There are a relatively low number of complaints (14) that contribute to the "Escalated from Stage One" figure and this means one or two late complaints has a larger impact on the percentage.

Complaints handled at the Investigation Stage of the CHP are typically complex or require a more detailed examination before the Council can state its position. An investigation aims to establish all the facts relevant to the points made in the complaint and to give the customer a full, objective and proportionate response that represents the Council's final position. On occasion, this means the complaint response does not meet the prescribed timescale. It is also possible that the general increased number of Stage Two complaints has had an impact on managers' capacity to undertake the increased number of investigations within timescales.

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

20 complaints closed at Stage One were granted an extension, representing 4% of Stage One complaints

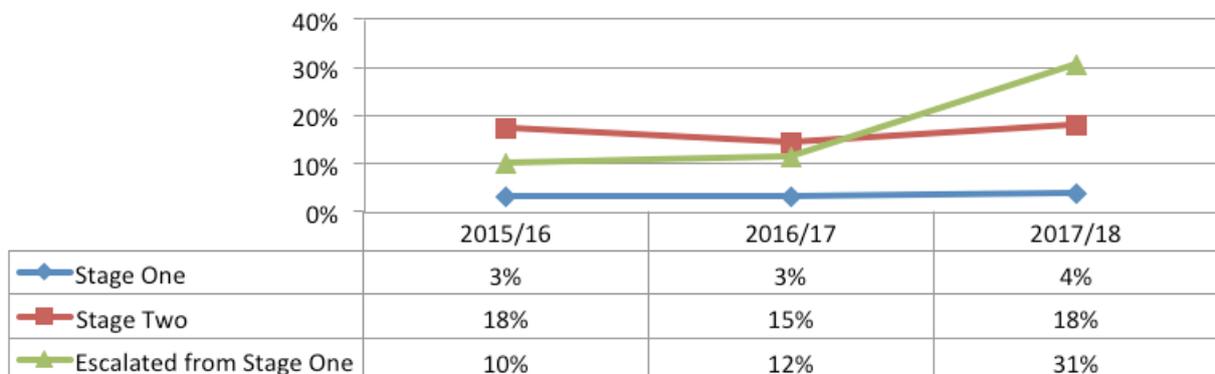
STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

26 complaints closed at Stage Two were granted an extension, representing 18% of Stage Two complaints

ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

8 complaints closed after being escalated from Stage One to Stage Two were granted an extension, representing 31% of escalated complaints

FIGURE 10: % OF COMPLAINTS GRANTED AUTHORISED EXTENSION BY STAGE



The proportion of SBC’s complaints granted an authorised extension (i.e. agreed by the customer) has increased at all stages. This is a positive improvement as it shows the communication to customers, when complaint responses are going to be late, is improving. The proportion of Stage One complaints granted an authorised extension has grown slightly from 3% to 4% between 2016/17 and 2017/18. The proportion of Stage Two complaints granted an authorised extension has increased from 15% in 2016/17 to 18% in 2017/18. The proportion of complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two granted an authorised extension increased from 12% in 2016/17 to 31% in 2017/18.

2016/17	Scottish Borders	Family Group	Scotland
Stage One	3.8%	5.6%	4.4%
Stage Two	18.1%	11.1%	10.5%
Escalated from Stage One	30.8%	10.4%	11.1%

The proportion of closed complaints at all Stages that were granted an extension for SBC at Stage One was below the proportion for the Family Group and Scotland. At Stage Two and Escalated from Stage One, the proportion granted an extension for SBC was higher than the Family Group and Scotland.

INDICATOR 7

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

COMPLAINTS HANDLING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY 2017/18

SBC runs a Complaints Handling Customer Satisfaction Survey on an ongoing basis. Customers are contacted approximately one week after their complaint was closed inviting them to provide feedback on their experience.

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

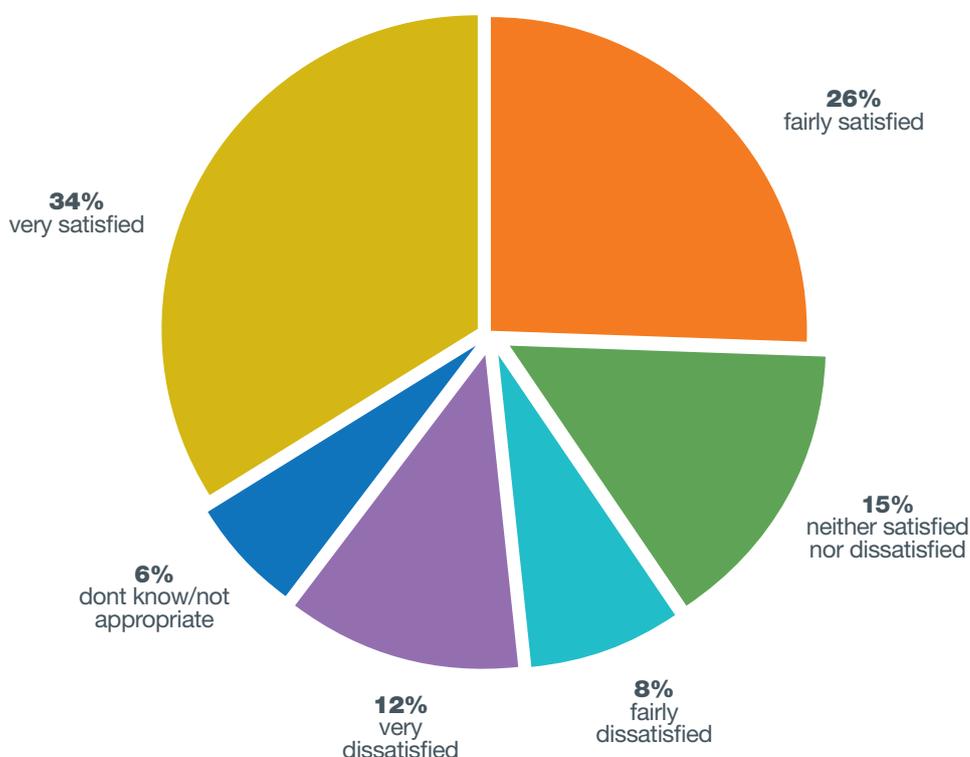
- Being able to deal with someone who could help you with your complaint?
- That someone took responsibility for your complaint?
- Being given information that was easy to understand?
- Being given all the information you needed?
- Being treated fairly?
- Being kept up to date on the progress of your 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 made a complaint were invited to take part in the survey. There are a number of reasons for this including: the sensitive nature of some complaints, some customers may have received an invitation for a previous closed complaint, the customer has indicated they do not want a survey, or the complaint has been made anonymously. Over the year 691 complaints were closed, and 225 survey invitations were sent, representing 33% of the closed complaints.

Of the 225 invitations that were issued, only 25 were returned giving a return rate of only 11%.

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 responded, the aggregate responses to questions show that 60% of respondents were either very or fairly satisfied compared to 20% very or fairly dissatisfied. The question reflecting the highest level of satisfaction was around information being easy to understand (76% very or fairly satisfied). The question reflecting the highest level of dissatisfaction was around the final outcome (44% very or fairly dissatisfied).

FIGURE 11: OVERALL COMPLAINTS CUSTOMER SATISFACTION, 2017/18



Survey Invitations Sent:	2016/17	2017/18
No. survey Invitations Sent	146	225
No. closed complaints	563	691
% of customers invited to respond to the survey	26%	33%
Return Rate:		
No. Returned	26	25
% Return Rate	18%	11%
Responses:		
- Either Fairly or Very Satisfied	57%	60%
- Either Fairly or Very Dissatisfied	20%	20%

The SPSO and the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network (LACHN) are currently finalising a standardised set of survey questions to be used as a minimum set of questions to enable better benchmarking of complaint handling satisfaction across Scotland.

COMPLIMENTS DURING 2017/18

During 2017/18, SBC recorded over **140** unsolicited compliments for the services provided, compared to 125 in 2016/17. Perhaps not surprisingly after such a difficult winter, there were many relating to work undertaken in our communities to keep roads open through adverse weather conditions.

Compliments included topics such as: kerb-side waste and recycling, road and drainage, community recycling centres, and customer services.

EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

High five and huge thanks to the fabulous gritters and snow plough drivers who work so hard to help normal life continue through the snow.....

..... thank you for providing this facility which allowed my wife and I to enjoy your lovely town.....

Customer had called to say that the bins where he lives had been set on fire. He was very impressed with the men who came out to clear up and says they did a splendid job.....

I just wanted to thank the Council for fixing the pot holes and resurfacing our road. I had phoned to ask if this could be done a couple of weeks ago and am delighted with the speedy response.....

Customer calling went on to state how pleasant it was dealing with SBC, all her enquiries have been dealt with efficiently and within the stated timescales.

Please thank staff responsible for the gardens in Bank Street, Galashiels. We do appreciate all the work in making this area so bright and cheerful.....

Customer thinks our service is wonderful. She likes that one person can deal with all sorts of queries and she has found that everybody she has dealt with, both face to face and over the phone, has been very pleasant and helpful.

.....I have made numerous trips to the Kelso Recycling Facility. On every occasion we have been impressed by the helpfulness, politeness, cheeriness and general attitude of the staff.....

Customer would like to say what a good job done by person cleaning public toilets in Peebles.....

Customer would like to say how helpful and understanding the staff member was when dealing with her enquiry.

.....what a great job was done by roads team on Abbotsford Road, Galashiels. It was so worth the short term diversions during the works.

Customer who had complained about not seeing a gritter in their village during previous snow,

I pass on my thanks this morning as a gritter has just gone through the village! Excellent service ! Feel as if I have been listened to!

Customer was pleased with the way that the Customer Advice and Support advisers had dealt with her complaint. She would like to pass her compliments on to them for their efforts in trying to put her through to the relevant people to deal with her situation.

Customer called to praise our Waste and Recycling team, having reported a missed bin collection and commented that this was later resolved and....

The team also did it with a smile on their faces...

Customer complimenting the work of a Primary School Head Teacher who had cleared snow around the gate and entrances ".....This shows a real commitment to the welfare and safety of our kids and his staff and is a great example of a small school quietly getting on with it in testing conditions....."

INDICATOR 8

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT, CHANGED OR IMPROVED

Formal complaints 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

Free School Meals

In December 2017, SBC handled a complaint from a parent regarding his child and payments that were required to be made for lunches, despite the child being entitled to Free Schools Meals (FSM), with no break in entitlement for a number of years.

The investigation identified a data anomaly in the cashless catering system. The FSM “flag” had been removed from the child’s record, resulting in the child having to pay for lunches. Following the investigation, a refund was issued to the parent.

As part of the original complaint, it was agreed that a data quality check of FSM data was required to identify if any further anomalies existed, and if so, the appropriate action be taken to correct the issues. This would provide SBC with re-assurance that children entitled to FSM were receiving the credit to their cashless catering card.

The data quality check identified a number of discrepancies in other secondary schools. The parents of the affected children have been contacted to explain the situation and discuss re-imbursment.

As a result, the procedures for managing FSM data in school canteens is to be reviewed to ensure that moving forwards into the new Academic Year, SBC is confident that the correct pupils are in receipt of free school meals allowance.

CASE STUDY 2

Missed Bin Collections

A customer called to report that her general waste bin had not been collected for two weeks running—their household does not currently receive a recycling collection because this is a small street and they have weekly general and food waste collections only. The customer was not happy that this had resulted in her having to take her bin, and two of her neighbour's bins, to the local recycling depot twice.

It was found that the Waste Team collecting from this area had staff on holiday and the team had needed to move waste operatives around. The temporary waste operative on this route did not empty the bins as he did not know or see where they were located.

The customer was provided with appropriate bags for overflow collections and an additional collection was arranged. The Waste Team has also produced a pack to be kept in the collection truck that will advise the drivers who stand in for the permanent driver what they are to pick up from each house on that street and where the bins are located.

CASE STUDY 3

Co-ordinating Roadworks

As a result of road closures on the B6360, residents living near Abbotsford were required to undertake a 10 mile diversion to get to their homes. SBC was undertaking three weeks of planned maintenance of the road at the bridge on the A7 to Selkirk, and Amey were planning roadworks at the Bridge in Selkirk during the same period.

The customer was understandably unhappy that two different sets of roadworks were cutting her and her neighbours off from their properties. It was found that the detour would have been unnecessary if the roadworks were staggered and not carried out at the same time.

Officers spoke to the contractor and secured agreement that during the road closures, access for residents would be made available. Arrangements for future co-ordination with Amey, and the consultation of the Scottish Road Works Register prior to the commencement of roadworks requiring road closures, has been put in place.

CASE STUDY 4

School Clothing Grants

A customer recently complained about the delay in paying the school clothing grant for one of her children who was going into 5th year, and about the letter that she received telling her of the delay in payment. The letter stated that payments for pupils aged 16 and 17 would be delayed. Her child was returning to 5th year, but would not turn 16 until later in the year.

It is currently Council policy to delay the payment of school clothing grants for 5th and 6th year pupils until they have registered for the new term and will definitely be attending. This is to ensure payments are not made for pupils who will not be returning or have changed their minds about returning for 5th and or 6th year.

Officers agreed with the customer that the template letter was misleading and needed to be amended. This has now been updated to better explain the Council's policy position which has not changed due to the duty to ensure Best Value.

CONCLUSIONS

During 2017/18, SBC handled more complaints than the previous year, in line with trends within our Family Group. At SBC, when this increase in complaints handled was analysed, it was found, in the main, the increase in numbers was due to:

- the inclusion of Social Work complaints figures for the first time
- increased complaints relating to the extended period of bad weather experienced in the winter
- the introduction of a charging policy for public conveniences that came into effect on 1 April 2017.

Whilst complaint numbers have grown, they still remain a very small proportion of the interactions with customers recorded by the Council and are logged in the CRM system. 927 complaints were received compared to 191,468 interactions logged on in the CRM system. This equates to 0.5% of interactions logged.

For the 3rd year running, complaints submitted online have continued to increase and online is the most frequently used channel to submit a complaint, followed by telephone, which has increased for the first time in 3 years.

Analysis has shown that this year 257 complaints received were invalid which equates to 28% of all complaints. In the previous year (2016/17) 196 of the 759 complaints raised were invalid, which equated to 26% of all complaints received. There appears to be a clear link between the increase of complaints submitted online and the increasing number of invalid complaints. It is therefore essential for the Council to ensure that the website provides good, clear guidance to customers to help them differentiate between service requests and genuine complaints. This is an area that will be considered as the Council progresses plans to rapidly grow “digital customer access” during 2018/19.

In 2017/18, the majority of complaints closed were handled at Stage One. However, the percentage closure at this stage has declined from 79% in 2016/17 to 75% in 2017/18. The Model Complaints Handling Procedure seeks to ensure that complaints are handled at the earliest opportunity and as close to the point of service delivery as possible. In 2017/18 SBC has closed proportionately fewer complaints at Stage One than our Family Group and the Scottish average. As a consequence of fewer complaints closed at Stage One, more complaints were closed at Stage Two – 144 (20.8%) in 2017/18 versus 117 (20.6%) in 2016/17. This means it is taking longer to handle complaints, it takes longer to provide resolution to customers and more senior officers are involved in complaint handling across the Council.

The average time taken to respond to complaints at Stage One has remained consistent over the past three years. The average time taken to respond to complaints at Stage Two and Escalated has shown an increasing trend over the 3 years 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18. This is similar to the Scottish Average position.

Despite a low return rate of 11%, SBC’s Complaints Handling Satisfaction Survey showed 60% satisfaction to questions asked, with the most favourable overall responses relating to information being easy to understand. The survey continues to provide the Council with additional insight to drive improvement.

Over 140 compliments were received in the year, covering a wide range of services. A number of compliments recognised the efforts in helping to keep the region operational during the winter weather. Waste and Community Recycling Services were also praised. Other aspects which were complimented were the helpfulness of SBC officers and the positive manner in which they interacted with customers. The introduction of Customer Service training at the beginning and end of all centrally funded training courses is expected to build on this good practice and further disseminate this helpfulness and positivity. Where possible, compliments are shared with officers to highlight good work being undertaken.



SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL COMPLAINTS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2017/18

NEXT STEPS

In order to put the customer at heart of what we do, and to continually improve services, we will

- 1) Continue to engage with the Local Authority Complaints Handling Network (LACHN) to produce more meaningful benchmarking data for the sector, including quarterly data collection, and work to improve complaints handling performance across Scotland.
- 2) Incorporate the standardised set of complaints handling customer satisfaction survey questions, being developed by the SPSO and LACHN, into SBC's set of customer satisfaction survey questions, to enable better benchmarking of complaint handling satisfaction across Scotland.
- 3) Continue to work to improve frontline (Stage One) responses and thereby reduce the number of complaints that are escalated to Stage Two.
- 4) Through the development of improved complaints training and refresher training, work to reduce the length of time taken to respond to customers at all stages.
- 5) As part of a new Digital Customer Access project, implement a new complaints system which will automate appropriate processes and standardise complaint handling.
- 6) Improve further our on-line guidance to assist customers when making a complaint so they are better able to differentiate between a service request and a complaint.
- 7) Complete the development and introduction of a refreshed Customer Strategy which will maximise the benefits of more customer friendly digital channels, but will also focus on ensuring that customer care is a key part of all employees' jobs. Dealing with customers in a considerate, informative and polite way is a key way to avoid complaints, but when there is cause to complain, the Customer Strategy and associated training will ensure that all employees are aware of and use our CHP.
- 8) As part of the Customer Strategy, introduce Customer Service training at the beginning and end of all centrally funded courses.

APPENDIX 1

STAGE ANALYSIS FOR INDICATORS 2 - 6

STAGE ONE

STAGE 1 COMPLAINTS

	2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		3 Year Variance		1 Year Variance	
							Variance 2017/18 less 2015/16		Variance 2017/18 less 2016/17	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Indicator 2: Closed Complaints (% of all closed)	480	81.4% #	450	75.9% #	521	75.4%	41	-6.0%	71	-0.5%
Indicator 3: Complaints Upheld (% of Stage 1)	213	44.4%	180	40.0%	219	42.0%	6	-2.4%	39	2.0%
Indicator 3: Complaints NOT Upheld (% of Stage 1)	267	55.6%	270	60.0%	302	58.0%	35	2.4%	32	-2.0%
Indicator 4: Average Time Spent Responding to Complaints (Days)	4.0	-	3.9	-	4.0	-	0.0	-	0.1	-
Indicator 5: Complaints Closed Against Timescales (% of Stage 1)	409	85.2%	390	86.7%	450	86.4%	41	1.2%	59	-0.1%
Indicator 6: Complaints That Were Granted Authorised Extensions (% of Stage 1)	16	3.3%	14	3.1%	20	3.8%	4	0.5%	6	0.7%

Notes: # %'s revised from figures previously published

Between 2015/16 and 2017/18 the proportion of complaints closed at Stage One has decreased from 81.4% to 75.4%. This decrease is counter to the SPSO goal of closing complaints at the first point of contact (more quickly). It also costs more to handle complaints at Stage Two compared to handling at Stage One.

Over the three years the proportion of Stage One complaints that were upheld has decreased from 44.4% to 42.0%.

Indicator 4 shows that the average time spent responding to complaints at Stage One has remained consistent.

Indicator 5 shows that the proportion of complaints at Stage One closed against timescales (within 5 days) has increased over the 3 years from 85.2% to 86.4%.

The percentage of Stage One complaints granted an authorised extension has grown from 3.3% to 3.8% over the 3 years, although has fluctuated during this period.



STAGE TWO

STAGE 2 COMPLAINTS

	2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		3 Year Variance		1 Year Variance	
							Variance 2017/18 less 2015/16		Variance 2017/18 less 2016/17	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Indicator 2: Closed Complaints (% of all closed)	80	13.6% #	117	19.7% #	144	20.8%	64	7.3%	27	1.1%
Indicator 3: Complaints Upheld (% of Stage 2)	31	38.8%	44	37.6%	55	38.2%	24	-0.6%	11	0.6%
Indicator 3: Complaints NOT Upheld (% of Stage 2)	49	61.2%	73	62.4%	89	61.8%	40	0.6%	16	-0.6%
Indicator 4: Average Time Spent Responding to Complaints (Days)	17.2	-	17.5	-	17.7	-	0.5	-	0.2	-
Indicator 5: Complaints Closed Against Timescales (% of Stage 2)	62	77.5%	91	77.8%	97	67.4%	35	-10.1%	6	-10.4%
Indicator 6: Complaints That Were Granted Authorised Extensions (% of Stage 2)	14	17.5%	17	14.5%	26	18.1%	12	0.6%	9	3.6%

Notes: # %s revised from figures previously published

Between 2015/16 and 2017/18 the proportion of complaints closed at Stage Two has increased from 13.6% to 20.8%. This increase is counter to the SPSO goal of closing complaints at the first point of contact (more quickly). It also costs more to handle complaints at Stage Two compared to handling at Stage One.

Over the three years the proportion of Stage Two complaints that were upheld has reduced from 38.8% to 38.2%.

Indicator 4 shows that the average time to respond to complaints at Stage Two has grown slightly over the 3 years from 17.2 days to 17.7 days. It is however still within the 20 working days timescale set out in the CHP.

Indicator 5 shows that the proportion of complaints at Stage Two closed against timescales (within 20 days) has reduced over the 3 years from 77.5% to 67.4%.

The percentage of Stage Two complaints granted an authorised extension has grown from 17.5% to 18.1% over the 3 years, although has fluctuated during this period.

ESCALATED FROM STAGE ONE

COMPLAINTS ESCALATED FROM STAGE ONE										
	2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		3 Year Variance		1 Year Variance	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	Variance 2017/18 less 2015/16		Variance 2017/18 less 2016/17	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Indicator 2: Closed Complaints (% of all closed)	30	5.1% #	26	4.4% #	26	3.8%	-4	-1.3%	0	-0.6%
Indicator 3: Complaints Upheld (% of Escalated)	7	23.3%	12	46.2%	13	50.0%	6	26.7%	1	3.8%
Indicator 3: Complaints NOT Upheld (% of Escalated)	23	76.7%	14	53.8%	13	50.0%	-10	-26.7%	-1	-3.8%
Indicator 4: Average Time Spent Responding to Complaints (Days)	16.7	-	17.0	-	18.0	-	1.3	-	1.0	-
Indicator 5: Complaints Closed Against Timescales (% of Escalated)	25	83.3%	17	65.4%	14	53.8%	-11	-29.5%	-3	-11.6%
Indicator 6: Complaints That Were Granted Authorised Extensions (% of Escalated)	3	10.0%	3	11.5%	8	30.8%	5	20.8%	5	19.3%

Notes: # %'s revised from figures previously published

Between 2015/16 and 2017/18 the proportion of complaints that have Escalated from Stage One has reduced from 5.1% to 3.8%.

Indicator 3 shows that over the three years the proportion of Escalated complaints that were upheld has increased from 23.3% to 50.0%. Due to the small numbers of Escalated complaints, the increase of 7 Escalated complaints has a bigger impact on changing the percentages.

Indicator 4 shows that over the 3 years the average time spent responding to complaints Escalated from Stage One has increased from 16.7 days to 18.0 days. It is however, still within the 20 working days timescale set out in the CHP.

Indicator 5 shows that the proportion of complaints Escalated from Stage One closed against timescales (within 20 days) has reduced over the 3 years from 83.3% to 53.8%. Due to the small numbers of Escalated complaints, any change in the completion times has a bigger impact on changing the percentages.

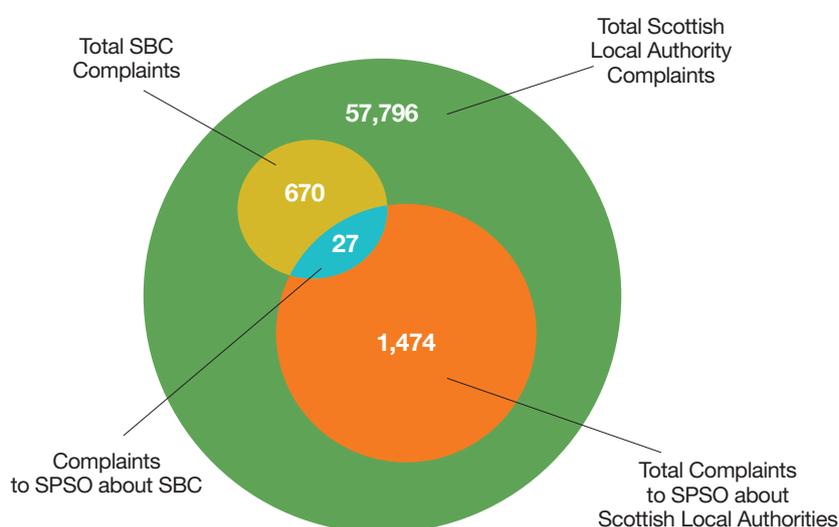
The percentage of complaints Escalated from Stage one granted authorised extensions has grown from 10.0% to 30.8% over the 3 years.

APPENDIX 2

SPSO LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT

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.

In 2017/18 the SPSO received 27 complaints about SBC. This is equal to 1.8% of all complaints received by the SPSO in relation to the Local Authority Sector. The numbers of complaints that go to the SPSO are a very small proportion of all the complaints made about Scottish Local Authorities; this is illustrated by figure 7.



The 27 complaints to the SPSO equate to a 35% increase on the 20 received for 2016/17.

SPSO Received Complaints /Year	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
SPSO Received Complaints about SBC	33	20	27
SBC Complaints as % all for Scottish Local Authority sector	1.9%	1.3%	1.8%
% Change to previous year	0.0%	-39.4%	35%

In 2017/18 the SPSO closed 30 complaints relating to SBC, of which 9 (30%) were considered to be 'Fit for SPSO' compared to 68% for 2016/17 and 27% for 2015/16. In 2017/18, 3 of the complaints about SBC to the SPSO were 'Upheld / Partially Upheld' compared to 2 in 2016/17 and 5 in 2015/16. The table below shows the results of the closed SPSO complaints related to SBC and how SBC compares to Scotland for the Local Authority Sector.

SPSO Closed Complaints for SBC / Year	2015/16			2016/17			2017/18		
	SBC Count	SBC %	Sector %	SBC Count	SBC %	Sector %	SBC Count	SBC %	Sector %
Closed	33	1.9%	2.9%	19	1.3%	2.1%	30	1.9%	2.7%
Stage SPSO Complaint Closed									
Advice	7	2.1%	19%	3	0.4%	49%	12	1.9%	42%
Early Resolution 1	12	2.1%	32%		0%	0%			
Early Resolution 2	1	1.2%	5%	11	2.0%	37%	14	1.9%	47%
Investigation 1	4	3.7%	6%		0%	0%			
Investigation 2	0	0%	0%	2	1.3%	10%	4	2.4%	11%
Premature	9	1.4%	38%	3	0.6%	6%	7	1.6%	28%
SPSO Decision									
Fit for SPSO	9	5.3%	11%	13	8.3%	10%	9	4.6%	11%
Upheld / Partially Upheld	3	3.1%	6%	2	2.1%	6%	5	4.7%	6%

Notes: # %'s revised from figures previously published

Case Studies for the 3 "Upheld / Partially Upheld" Scottish Borders complaints are detailed below and all resulting recommendations have been undertaken.

CASE STUDY 1

Mr C raised concerns about revisions to a local bus route and the turning manoeuvre buses performed outside his house as part of the revised route. He considered that this was unsafe and that the revision, which included the turn, should not be permitted. Mr C also raised concerns that, given the number of buses performing the turn every day including in the early morning and in the evening, this posed risks in terms of public health and created a noise nuisance.

SBC undertook observation and assessment of the turn and following this, the Council concluded that they did not have any concerns and would not look to prohibit the turn, communicating this to Mr C, who was not satisfied with the response and brought his complaint to us.

Mr C complained to the SPSO that the Council unreasonably failed to follow correct procedures when permitting the revision to the bus route. The SPSO found that the Council had considered the revised route when it was proposed by the bus operator, and concluded that it was reasonable for the Council not to have raised any concerns with the bus operator, given that the turn was not against road traffic law, and that existing bus routes already carried out the same turn. The SPSO found that the Council responded appropriately when it agreed to carry out an assessment of the turn following Mr C's concerns. The SPSO did not uphold Mr C's complaint that the Council failed to follow correct procedures in permitting the bus route.

Mr C also complained that the Council failed to respond to his complaint in accordance with their obligations. The SPSO found that the Council had failed to respond to his concerns under their complaints handling policy. In addition, they found that there was a failure to signpost him to the Council's Environmental Health Team to consider his complaints about noise and fumes. They also concluded that the Council failed to diligently follow up commitments made to Mr C that they would liaise with the bus operator with a view to seeking amendments to the bus route. The SPSO upheld Mr C's complaint that the Council failed to respond to his complaint in accordance with their obligations.

The Council was asked to apologise for the complaints handling failings, to progress discussions with the bus operator regarding seeking amendments to the bus route and to ensure the Council's Environmental Health team investigate concerns that Mr C has raised about noise and pollution.

CASE STUDY 2

Mr C complained about the Council's handling of assessments of his business following the imposition of a remedial action notice under the Food Hygiene (Scotland) Regulations 2006. He also complained that the Council incorrectly registered his business and failed to correct this within a reasonable time-frame.

The Council inspected Mr C's business and served a remedial action notice. Mr C said he sought to comply with the notice, but that the Council continuously changed what was being required from him. He also said that the Council failed to take into account the expert views of a food hygiene consultant who was assisting him to comply with the notice. Finally, Mr C said it had emerged that the Council had not managed his earlier application for registration correctly.

The SPSO found that the Council had relied on the professional judgement of their officers in assessing compliance with the remedial action notice and found there was extensive correspondence between the Council, Mr C, and his consultant. In this correspondence they saw evidence that the Council had taken into account opposing views, and had sought to explain their position. There was no requirement for the Council's officers to reach the same view as Mr C's consultant. While Mr C had said that the Council had shifted what was being required, they found that the correspondence suggested that the Council was seeking to explain what evidence we needed to be satisfied that compliance had occurred, and not that we were changing what we were asking for. The SPSO did not uphold Mr C's complaint that the Council had failed to assess his business reasonably following the imposition of the remedial action notice.

Regarding Mr C's complaint about the incorrect registration of his business, the Council acknowledged that there had been problems in the handling of applications and explained that they had not requested the appropriate form from Mr C at the time he made his application for registration. The Council had apologised to Mr C and had taken action to improve their management of the files. The SPSO upheld Mr C's complaint and as the Council had apologised to Mr C and taken action to address this issue, no further recommendations were made.

CASE STUDY 3

Mr C raised concerns that the Council had failed to investigate and act on alleged breaches of a planning condition. The planning condition had been imposed by the Council to offset the impact of traffic to build and service a new development. The Council accepted there were shortcomings in how the planning condition was framed, which later made it difficult for them to enforce it.

The SPSO took independent advice from a planning adviser, who agreed that the planning condition was not sufficiently precise. The planning adviser considered the Council had taken reasonable steps to investigate and act on alleged breaches of the planning condition. However the shortcomings in the framing of the planning condition limited the action that could be taken. The planning adviser considered that safeguarding residential amenity should have been a cited reason for imposing the planning condition, as well as road safety.

In light of the failings identified in the drafting of the planning condition, the SPSO upheld Mr C's complaint.

The Council was asked to apologise to Mr C for the failings in its framing of the condition, the planning team, in conjunction with the roads and infrastructure team, should monitor vehicles' usage of the new development and the road it sits on to assess whether it is a road safety concern. Two periods of monitoring were to be undertaken and if road safety concerns are noted, the Council should take appropriate action to resolve this with the company.

APPENDIX 3 LIVE BORDERS COMPLAINTS



Live Borders has a Complaints Handling Procedure that aligns with SBC's. Volume of all complaints, comments and compliments for 2017/18 are presented below (as well as overall figures for 2016/17 for comparison)

COMPLAINTS 17/18

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2017/18	2016/17
Price	3	3	2	6	14	16
Booking/access/info	20	14	5	16	55	78
Quality	4	8	19	16	47	27
Staff attitude	3	0	3	5	11	4
Other	11	9	16	11	47	8
Total	41	34	45	54	174	133
Comments	23	21	19	24	87	64
Compliments	8	4	6	3	21	8

The number of complaints recorded has increased since last year (+23.6%), as has the number of compliments and comments (+35.9% and +61.9% respectively). This is partly due to the ongoing promotion of the **Comments, Complaints and Compliments** process, revised when the integrated sport and culture trust was established in April 2016, as well as an increasing portfolio of premises and services now run by the Trust e.g. facilities at new schools.

2017/18 QUARTER BY QUARTER ANALYSIS

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Total received	41	34 (+ 1 c/f)	45	54
Received online	32	23	18	37
% received online	78%	68%	40%	68.5%
Closed complaints	41	35	43	57
Closed at stage 1	39	34	37	52
Closed at stage 2	2	1	3	4
Escalated from Stage 1 and closed	0	0	3	1
Total Upheld	14	17	28	23
Closed within authorised timescale	32	32	39	57
% closed within time scale	78%	88.6%	86.7%	100%



LIVE BORDERS LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

In Quarter 3 Live Borders had ten complaints relating to a data breach, where individuals' e-mail addresses were erroneously shared in a promotional e-mail for library activities which went to 1,111 library users. The breach was not reported to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) as it did not result in a risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals. Whilst there is always the risk of human error, following this incident processes have been put in place to avoid a recurrence and a campaign of awareness-raising in relation to Data Protection and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) has begun.

During Q4, 13 complaints were later classified and dealt with as "requests for information". Some related to the period of facility disruption due to the heavy snow. This has resulted in some learning and improved procedures being put in place for future periods of business interruption such as the provision of information on the website and information provided to staff.

A staff attitude complaint during 2017/18 resulted in some positive engagement with the complainant, who was on the autistic spectrum, and this has resulted in improved staff understanding and an enhanced level of appreciation and service for customers who are also on the spectrum.

LIVE BORDERS COMPLIMENTS

The majority of compliments received are about staff and are shared on receipt. In Q2 this included praise for the calm, professional and compassionate way staff evacuated the leisure centre during a fire alarm at Eyemouth Pool. Other compliments have been received about swimming coaches and Business Support Assistants. Parties organised by Live Borders have also generated praise for staff. A World War 1 event also attracted high praise from a distinguished guest.

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