

complaints annual performance report

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
2013/14



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SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL COMPLAINTS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2013/14

INTRODUCTION

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



I am pleased to present Scottish Borders Council's first annual Complaints Performance Report in this format. This report provides information on customer complaints received between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014 and is in addition to what we regularly present at our management teams and with our Council Executive committee.

We are committed to providing high-quality services to our communities, but occasionally things go wrong and when this happens it is

important that we act quickly to address and resolve the situation. Complaints indicate where we fall short of what people expect, and sometimes where we are failing to meet our own standards. We can use this information to make service improvements.

In line with other Scottish Councils, we introduced a standardised complaints handling procedure in April 2013. We also recently revised our monitoring procedure within our Customer Services function with the aim of highlighting issues at an earlier point in the complaint process. Council officers

are encouraged to enter into discussions with members of the public to deal with issues, if possible, as early as possible.

Listening to our customers helps us to put things right, improve our services, and learn from our mistakes, and we have included examples at the end of this report.

Tracey Logan
Chief Executive
Scottish Borders Council

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL COMPLAINTS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2013/14

SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

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

All complaints detailed in the report are handled under the Council's Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) which was implemented corporately on 1 April 2013.

CHP training, together with additional bespoke training, support and guidance throughout 2013-14 assisted our services to handle complaints more confidently and effectively. For example, procedures have now been put in place to ensure all complaints that are likely to take longer than the agreed timescales have an extension agreed by the customer and authorised by the appropriate Head of Service.

Complaint reports are provided for senior management monthly, quarterly and annually. The reports are reviewed by management, and

also presented quarterly to the Council's Executive committee, where further information is provided if required.

Regular Complaint Handler meetings are held to highlight issues surrounding complaints and work will be undertaken as part of these meetings to establish a formal procedure for reviewing complaints and implementing any actions necessary to prevent reoccurrence. These meetings will also be used to share best practice so that lessons learned are disseminated across the Council.

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HOW CUSTOMERS COMPLAINED

Customers can complain to or comment about the Council in a range of ways, including:

- In person at any of our Library Contact Centres or Contact Centres;
- By phoning 0300 100 1800
- On-line
- By letter
- By email

DURING 2013-14, we received **696** complaints from customers who chose the following ways to contact us with a complaint:

85 in person
231 by telephone
221 online
78 by letter
81 by email



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 2013 and 31 March 2014. This is the sum of the number of complaints received at stage one, and the number of complaints received directly at stage 2.

The population of Scottish Borders is estimated at **113,710** (mid year population estimate).

In 2013-14 Scottish Borders Council handled **696** complaints from customers, meaning that an average of **6.1** complaints were received per 1,000 residents.

This indicates that **1** in every **164** Scottish Borders residents have registered a complaint about our services.

INDICATOR 2 CLOSED COMPLAINTS

This indicator provides information on the number of complaints closed at stage one, stage two and after escalation as a percentage of all complaints closed.

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.

429 complaints were closed at stage one.
This represents **76.6%** of all complaints closed.

118 complaints were closed at stage two.
This represents **21.1%** of all complaints closed.

13 complaints were closed after escalation (from stage one to stage two). This represents **2.3%** of all complaints closed.

Although a complaint is received between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014, it may not be possible to close the complaint within this period which is why the figures for Indicator 1 and Indicator 2 are different.

INDICATOR 3 COMPLAINTS UPHELD/PARTIALLY 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 complaints procedures were introduced.

OUTCOME OF STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS

198 complaints were upheld at stage one
231 complaints were not upheld at stage one

OUTCOME OF STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

46 complaints were upheld at stage two
72 complaints were not upheld at stage two

OUTCOME OF ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

6 complaint were upheld after escalation
7 complaints were not upheld after escalation

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 3.8 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 working days.

ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

We aim to respond to escalated complaints within 20 working days.
The average time to respond to escalated complaints was 15.6 working days.

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.

387 complaints were closed at stage one within 5 working days, representing 90.2% of all stage one complaints.

101 complaints were closed at stage two within 20 working days, representing 85.6% of all stage 2 complaints.

11 escalated complaints were closed within 20 working days, representing 84.6% of all complaints that were escalated from stage one to stage two.

INDICATOR 6 COMPLAINTS THAT REQUIRED AUTHORISED EXTENSIONS

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

8 complaints closed at stage one were granted an extension, representing 1.9% of stage one complaints.

5 complaints closed at stage two were granted an extension, representing 4.2% of stage two complaints.

INDICATOR 7 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

At present we seek feedback from customers, who supply an e-mail address during their interaction with a Customer Service Adviser, about the service they received from Customer Services.

Scottish Borders Council are working towards a procedure to allow customers to take part in a complaint handling survey. The aim for this survey is to gather feedback from customers on how their complaint has been handled and how the customer felt they were treated by staff during the complaint process.

CUSTOMERS WHO COMPLAINED TO THE SPSO ABOUT THE COUNCIL

2013-14 was the first full year of operation of standardised Local Government Complaint Handlers Procedures.

During 2013-14 the SPSO received 44 complaints about Scottish Borders Council compared to 31 in 2012-13. This was a 42% increase in the number of complaints taken to the SPSO.

Of the 44 complaints sent to the SPSO, 47% were premature which meant the customer did not raise the complaint with the Council before going to the SPSO.

From the 44 complaints received, 9 investigations were carried out and from this, 4 cases (44.4%) were upheld/partially upheld.



INDICATOR 8

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT, CHANGED OR IMPROVED

We provide our services with monthly reports on complaints relevant to their area, which they can use to help drive improvement. More 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

Following a corporate restructure in 2014, complaints have now been re-aligned to the new departments and work is progressing with the new Service Directors to ensure that the system for dealing with complaints is bedded in to this new structure.

Some examples of where we have listened to customers, are now detailed in this section.

COUNCIL TAX BILLS (CUSTOMER SERVICES)

A complaint was made in relation to a letter issued to a customer awarding exemptions and discounts.

The customer was receiving an exemption based on the property being unoccupied and unfurnished. When this exemption ended, an amended Council Tax Bill was issued to the customer with a 50% discount. The customer thought this would be the amount due for the remainder of the financial year, however a further bill was issued after the 50% discount expired and a 10% discount was applied.

On reviewing the wording of the letter issued to the customer it was highlighted that it was not made clear to the customer that amended bills would be issued each time an exemption or discount expired.

As a result, the wording in letters has been amended to make things clearer for customers.

BULLYING BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOLS (CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE)

Bullying behaviour between children was one of the most common themes of education complaints received during 2013-14.

Analysis of complaints on bullying and how these were handled in schools highlights the need for parents to be better informed of the new 'respectful relationships (anti-bullying) policy' and for staff to share this information with parents if they report concerns.

We are looking to work with Parent Councils and school staff to raise awareness amongst parents of the approach schools now take in managing bullying behaviour. This focuses on working with children who display bullying behaviour and children who perceive they are being bullied and try to turn the situation round restoratively without the need to use punitive measures.

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NEXT STEPS

WE WILL:

- Look to embed these eight SPSO indicators into the Council's performance management framework and public performance reporting;
- Work with other local authorities and the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to develop the benchmarking of complaints performance indicators across Scotland which will drive sharing of best practice and service improvements;
- Work to identify further improvements that services can make to reduce complaint volumes, improve complaint response times and enhance service delivery.

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