

# complaints annual performance report

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL  
2014/15



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# SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL COMPLAINTS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2014/15

## INTRODUCTION

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



I'm pleased to present Scottish Borders Council's second annual Complaints Performance Report providing information on customer complaints received by the Council between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015. This report summarises the detailed information considered throughout the year during management team meetings and which is then presented at the Council Executive committee.

We pride ourselves in providing high quality services to our communities, but also on our ability to respond quickly and effectively when,

occasionally, we get things wrong. The actions we take to record, analyse and respond to complaints underpin our commitment to put things right when we fall short of customer's expectations or of our own standards, but also in improving how we deliver our services in the future.

Although this is now the second year we have followed Scottish Council's standardised Complaints Handling Procedure, we continue to revise and reshape, where we are able, the ways in which we administer the procedure and in particular how Council officers engage practically

with members of the public to handle their concerns and issues.

Whilst we will continually work to refine and improve the procedure, most importantly we will ensure we continue to listen to our customers in order to understand where we have gone wrong and not only correct the error, but make changes to reduce or prevent such mistakes happening again.

**Tracey Logan**  
Chief Executive  
Scottish Borders Council

# SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL COMPLAINTS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2014/15

## 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 complaints handling.

2014-15 is the second year of handling complaints under the revised complaints handling model and this report reflects on our performance in 2014-15.

It should be noted that the 2013-14 report was submitted in January 2015, therefore some of the recommended improvements have not been fully implemented, and where implemented may not have had time to embed and be fully reflected in the 2014-15 performance.

Ongoing CHP training, together with bespoke training, support and guidance is continuing to assist our services to handle complaints more confidently and effectively. Procedures are in place to provide that all complaints that are likely to take longer than the agreed timescales have an extension agreed by the customer and authorised by the appropriate Service Director. Individual departmental complaints handling processes

are being reviewed by the Customer Services Manager. 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 as required.

Regular Complaint Handler 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.

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## 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.

**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

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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 2014-15, we received **742** complaints from customer who chose the following ways to contact us with a complaint. 123 were subsequently classed as invalid but are included here to fully detail the preferred contact methods.

**81** in person  
**272** by telephone  
**231** online  
**68** by letter  
**90** 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 2014 to 31 March 2015. 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. This does not include complaints closed as invalid.

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

In 2014-15 Scottish Borders Council handled **619** complaints from customers, meaning that an average of **5.43** complaints were received per 1,000 residents.

This indicates that on average **1** in every **184** 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.

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.

**504** complaints were closed at Stage One.  
This represents **81.4%** of all complaints closed.

**115** complaints were closed at Stage Two.  
This represents **18.6%** of all complaints closed.

**23** complaints were closed after escalation (from Stage One to Stage Two). This represents **3.7%** of all complaints closed.

Although a complaint is received between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015, it may not be possible to close the complaint within this period therefore on occasions the figures in Indicator 1 and Indicator 2 may differ.

## 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 complaints procedures were introduced.

### OUTCOME OF STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS

248 complaints were upheld at Stage One, representing 49.2% of complaints closed at Stage One  
256 complaints were not upheld at Stage One, representing 50.8% of complaints closed at Stage One

### OUTCOME OF STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

34 complaints were upheld at Stage Two, representing 29.6% of complaints closed at Stage Two  
81 complaints were not upheld at Stage Two, representing 70.4% of complaints closed at Stage Two

### OUTCOME OF ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

11 complaints were upheld after escalation, representing 47.8% of complaints closed after escalation  
12 complaints were not upheld after escalation, representing 52.2% of complaints closed 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 3.9 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 17.3 working days.

### ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

We aim to respond to escalated complaints within 20 working days.  
The average time to respond to escalated complaints was 17.5 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.

438 complaints were closed at Stage One within 5 working days, representing 86.9% of all Stage One complaints.

89 complaints were closed at Stage Two within 20 working days, representing 77.4% of all Stage Two complaints.

14 escalated complaints were closed within 20 working days, representing 60.9% 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 percentages of complaints at each stage where an extension to the 5 or 20 working day timeline was authorised.

13 complaints closed at Stage One were granted an extension, representing 2.58% of Stage One complaints.

20 complaints closed at Stage Two were granted an extension, representing 17.4% of Stage Two complaints.

7 complaints closed after being escalated from Stage One to Stage Two were granted an extension, representing 30.4% of escalated complaints.

## INDICATOR 7 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Scottish Borders Council has developed a complaints handling survey, including questions about Equality and Diversity. The intention is to gather feedback from customers on how their complaint has been handled, how they felt they were treated by staff during the complaint process and to ensure that all our customers are being given the same opportunities and access to Council services.

The gathering of this information began in April 2015 and we are therefore not in a position to report on customer satisfaction on complaint handling. However, it is our intention from April 2015 to regularly collate and report on this feedback.

Statistics on customers who have complained to the SPSO about the Council will not be available from the SPSO until approximately September 2015 therefore these cannot be included in this report.



## 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 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](http://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.

### COMPLAINT 1

A complaint was received regarding a letter issued to a customer removing their entitlement to Single Occupancy Discount on their Council Tax account.

The customer had been receiving a 25% Single Occupancy Discount, but in 2013 it was established that they had not been entitled to this discount for the previous three years. The discount was ended and a letter issued to advise the date the discount had ended.

In January 2015 the customer applied for Second Adult Rebate as the person residing with them was on a low income. They requested the backdating of the rebate to the date the Single Occupancy Discount had been ended but were advised the rebate could only be backdated for 3 months from the date of application.

The customer complained that if the letter they had received had given the details of Second Adult Rebate, they would have applied for it at that time. On reviewing the wording of the standard letter, it was found that it did not signpost customers to the rebate. As a result information on Second Adult Rebate is now included in that standard letter.

### COMPLAINT 2

A customer had arranged with their telephone provider to block all incoming calls on their home phone that had a withheld number to avoid unsolicited calls.

The customer complained because he had regular contact with a department within Scottish Borders Council, and often had to rely on the department calling him back. As all Scottish Borders Council numbers are withheld this was proving very inconvenient for the customer.

After investigation, it was found that staff members were not aware that a code could be entered before dialing a customer's telephone number that would release the number of the person making the call, and that call could then be made to the phone number which did not accept withheld numbers.

This information has now been publicised widely on internal newsletters and websites to ensure that all staff members are aware of the code.

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## NEXT STEPS

### WE WILL:

- continue to work to embed the eight SPSO indicators into the Council's performance management framework and public performance reporting.
- continue to work with other Local Authorities and the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to develop the benchmarking of complaints performance indicators across Scotland.
- utilise benchmarking to drive the sharing of best practice and continual service improvement.
- work to identify further improvements services can make to enhance service delivery and improve complaint responses.
- finalise the development of an online complaints training package which will provide staff with an understanding of what a complaint is, how to handle a complaint and the timescales to be met.
- continue to review and improve administrative processes corporately to ensure complaint handling consistency is improved.

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