

complaints annual performance report

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
2016/17



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SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL COMPLAINTS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2016/17

FOREWORD

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



I am pleased to present Scottish Borders Council's fourth annual Complaints Performance Report, which gives details on customer complaints received by the Council between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017. This report reflects the information collected throughout the year, which is considered regularly during management meetings and presented to the Council's Executive Committee quarterly.

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. This year, we have also included information about how we compare to other Local Authorities similar to us, as we are always keen to benchmark and learn from others.

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 2016/17

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 2016/17, the report also shows the Council’s performance for 2014/15 and 2015/16, with details in Appendix 1, as well as benchmarking information comparing Scottish Borders Council to other similar Local Authorities and Scotland for 2016/17¹.

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 2016/17; the integrated trust that now delivers sport and cultural service on behalf of SBC.

The table below shows the “Next Steps” identified in the 2015/16 Complaints Annual Performance Report along with the progress made.

¹ SBC is in a Family Group that comprises 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 2017).

The diagrams below shows the “Next Steps” identified in the 2015/16 Complaints Annual Performance Report along with the progress made.

THE NEXT STEPS FROM 2015/16



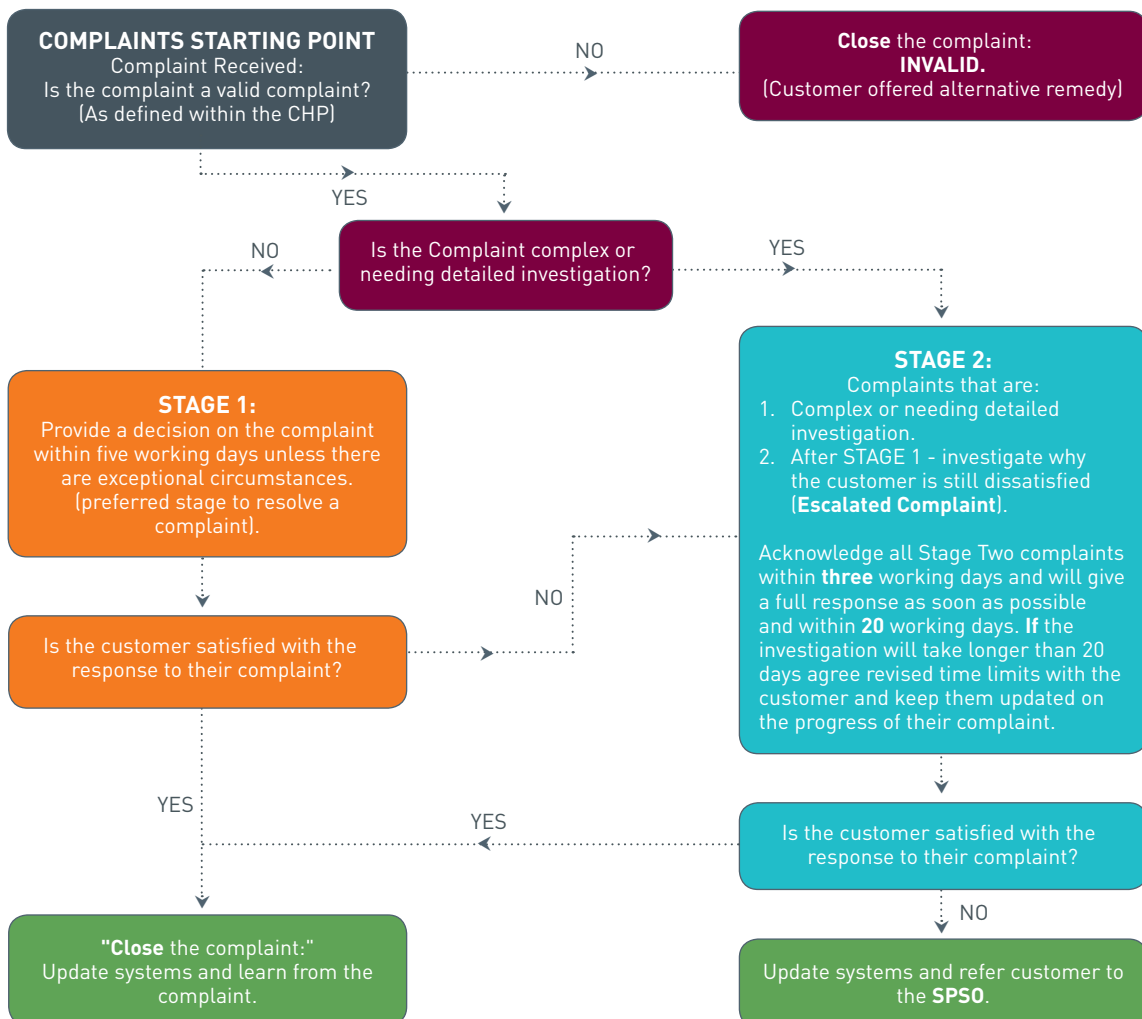
² Local Authority Complaints Handling Network

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COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCEDURE (CHP)

All complaints are valued by Scottish Borders Council and we strive to use them to help us improved 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. 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



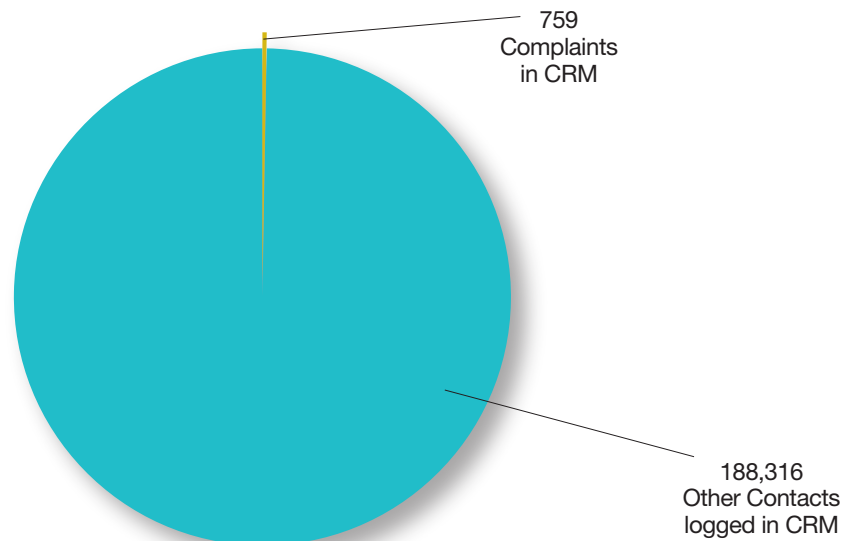
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COMPLAINTS RECEIVED IN 2016/17

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 2016/17 Scottish Borders Council received **759** complaints, equal to **0.4%** of the 189,075 interactions logged through the CRM.

2016/17 saw an **11%** increase in complaints received compared to 2015/16 (684), but only **2%** more than in 2014/15 (742).

FIGURE 2: CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS WITH SBC IN 2016/17



Figures 3 and 4 show the complaints SBC receives by the channel. Figure 3 shows the proportion of complaints received by channel for 2016/17 and Figure 4 shows the change in numbers of complaints received by channel for 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17.

In 2016/17 online was the most common channel used to log a complaint (**44%**), followed by telephone (**31%**). This amounted to a significant increase (**61%**) in the number of complaints received online, compared to 2015/16. Other channels either the same or reduced.

FIGURE 3: CHANNEL USED FOR COMPLAINTS, 2016/17

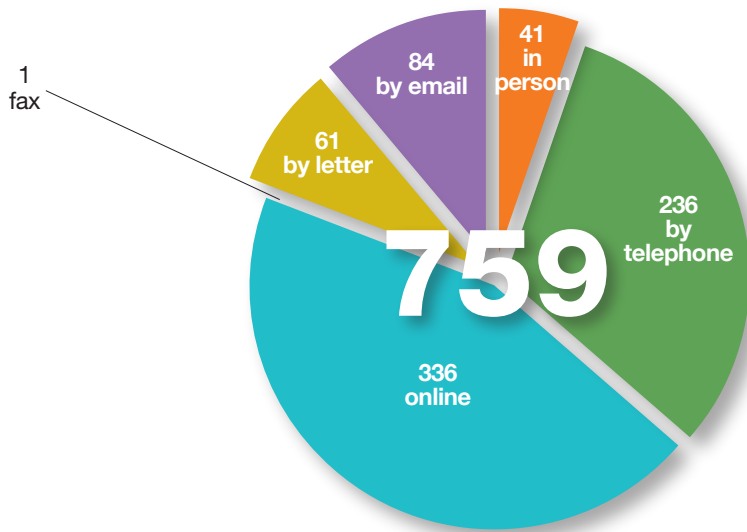
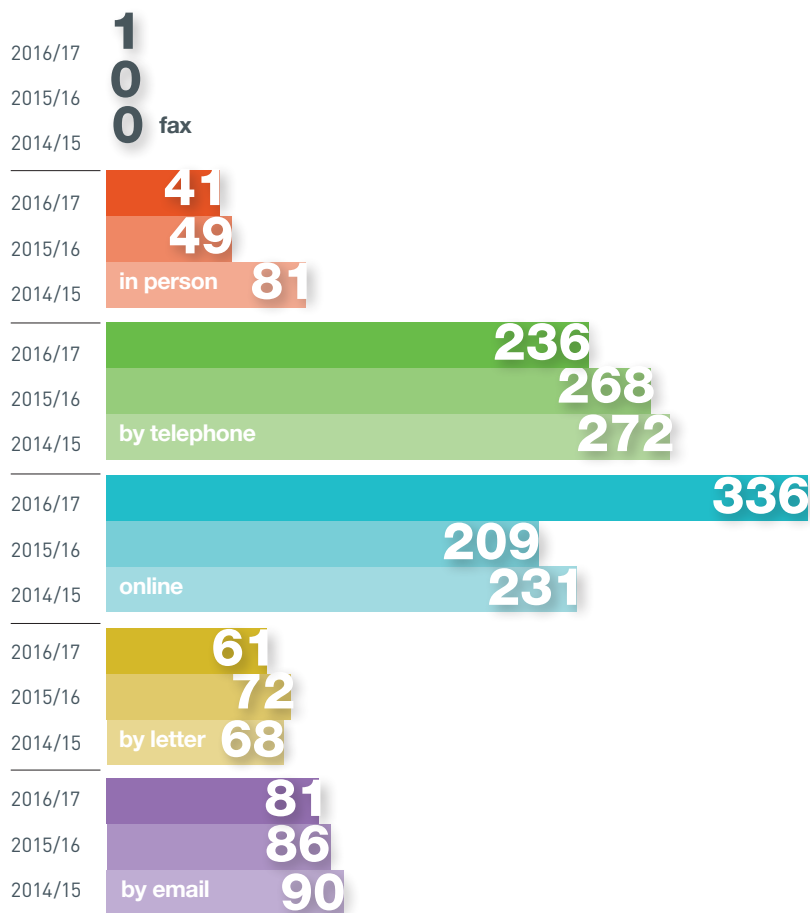
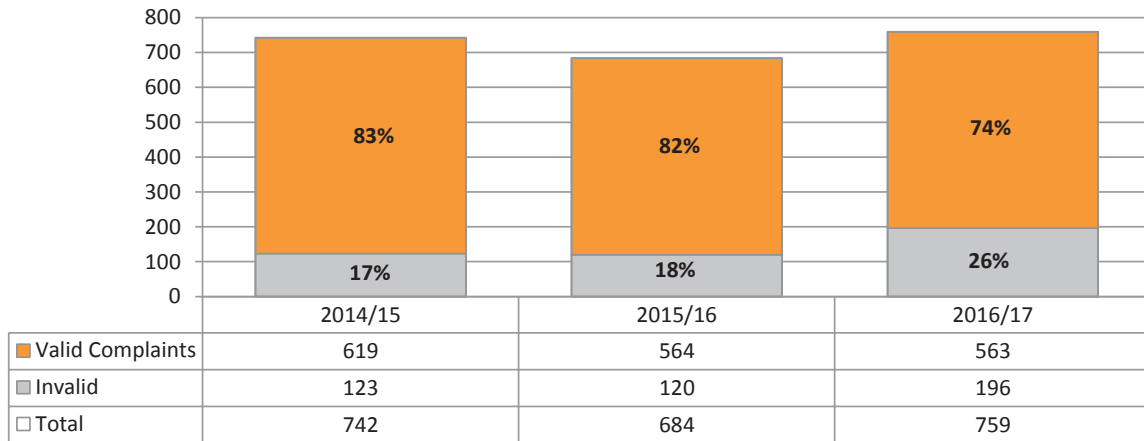


FIGURE 4: COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY CHANNEL



Although slightly more complaints were received in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16 the number that were classified as 'Valid' was similar; 563 and 564 respectively. Figure 5 shows the total number of complaints received for 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 and the proportion that were classified as valid or invalid complaints. The increased proportion (8%) of 'Invalid' complaints for 2016/17 may be due to the increase in complaints made through the online channel. Customers may have submitted complaints using the online option that are actually requests for service and not complaints.

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 Scottish Borders Council
- 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 2016/17 compared to 2014/15 and 2015/16.

INDICATOR 1

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED PER 1,000 OF POPULATION

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

In 2016/17 SBC received 759 complaints of which 196 were closed as invalid. The remaining **563** were handled as valid complaints.

TOTAL POPULATION

The population of Scottish Borders is estimated at **114,030** (NRS, Mid-Year Population Estimate 2015)

OUTCOME OF COMPLAINTS HANDLED

SBC handled **563** valid complaints from customers, meaning that an average of **4.9** valid complaints were received per 1,000

RATIO

This indicates that, on average **1** in every **203** Scottish Borders residents have registered a complaint about our services

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED PER 1000 OF POPULATION

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Variance: 2016/17 less 2014/15
Population total	114,030	114,030	114,030	0
Total number of valid complaints	619	564	563	-56
Complaints per 1000 population	5.4	4.9	4.9	-0.5

The population in the Scottish Borders has been relatively static over the last 3 years. The number of valid complaints received in 2016/17 (563) and 2015/16 (564) has remained static. This has resulted in very little movement in the complaints per 1,000 population figures.

Benchmarking 2016/17	Scottish Borders	Family Group	Scotland
Complaints per 1000 population	4.9	5.6	14.3

In 2016/17 SBC received 4.9 complaints per 1,000 people this was less than the Family Group average of 5.6 and Scottish average of 14.3. The difference between Scotland and SBC's Family Group may relate to the rural nature of the family group.

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. This is because some of the closed complaints for 2016/17 will have been received in 2015/16 and there may be complaints received in 2016/17 that are still going through the 'Complaints Handling Procedure' after 31 March.

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.

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

STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS

450 complaints closed at Stage One, representing 79% of all complaints closed

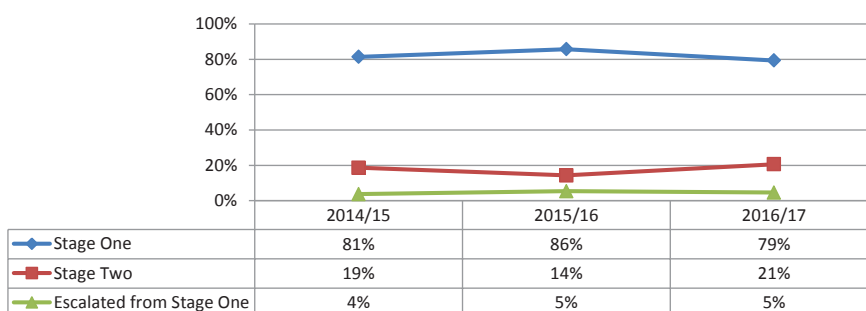
STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

117 complaints were closed at Stage Two, representing 21% of all complaints closed

ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

26 complaints were closed after escalation from Stage One, representing 5% of all complaints closed

FIGURE 6: CLOSED COMPLAINTS BY STAGE



The proportion of complaints closed at Stage One decreased from 86% in 2015/16 to 79% in 2016/17. 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.

2016/17	Scottish Borders	Family Group	Scotland
Stage One	79.4%	76.2%	88.4%
Stage Two	20.6%	23.3%	10.1%
Escalated from Stage One	4.6%	3.4%	1.9%

SBC closes proportionally more complaints at Stage One (79.4%) compared to the Family Group (76.2%) but less compared to Scotland (88.4%). Compared to both the Family Group and Scotland, SBC had more complaints Escalated from Stage One in 2016/17, 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. Scottish Borders Council made the decision not to have a “partially upheld” outcome when the CHP guidance was introduced by the SPSO. Therefore at SBC complaints are either recorded as upheld or not upheld.

STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS

180 complaints were upheld at Stage One, representing 40% of complaints closed at Stage One
270 complaints were not upheld at Stage One, representing 60% of complaints closed at Stage One

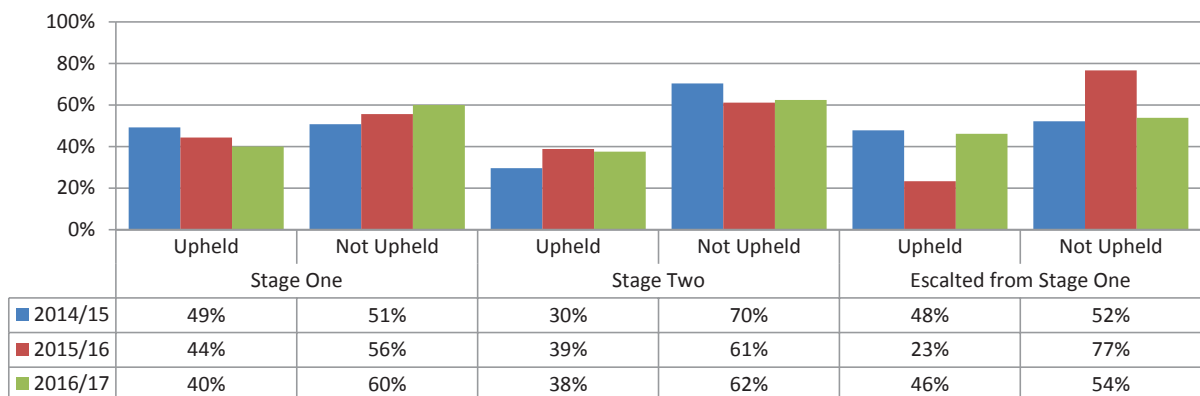
STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

44 complaints were upheld at Stage Two, representing 38% of complaints closed at Stage Two
73 complaints were not upheld at Stage Two, representing 62% of complaints closed at Stage Two

ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

12 complaints were upheld after escalation, representing 46% of complaints closed after escalation
14 complaints were not upheld after escalation, representing 54% of complaints closed after escalation

FIGURE 7: COMPLAINTS UPHELD / NOT UPHELD BY STAGE



Over the past three years the proportion of Stage One complaints that were “Not Upheld” has increased.

2016/17	Scottish Borders	Family Group	Scotland
Stage One - upheld ³	40.0%	44.6%	70.0%
Stage One - not upheld	60.0%	54.6%	26.2%
Stage Two - upheld	37.6%	39.2%	59.3%
Stage Two - not upheld	62.4%	65.3%	36.8%
Escalated from Stage One - upheld	46.2%	36.8%	45.5%
Escalated from Stage One - not upheld	53.8%	55.2%	53.2%

In 2016/17 a lower proportion of Stage One and Stage Two complaints made to SBC were upheld compared to those complaints made to the Family Group and Scotland. Specifically, 40% of the Stage One complaints to SBC were upheld compared to 70% for Scotland and 45% for the Family Group. It is unclear why there is such a difference between SBC, the Family Group and the figures for Scotland. The proportion of Escalated complaints that were upheld for the Scottish Borders was similar to the level for Scotland and the Family Group. Any fluctuations in the figures for the Escalated complaints could be due to the small numbers of complaints (12 upheld & 14 not upheld) where one or two complaints has a bigger impact on changing the percentages.

³ The % upheld include those complaints that were wholly or partially upheld. The proportion of those upheld and proportion not upheld may not add to 100% because some local authorities may have other reasons for closing a complaints e.g. Policy.

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

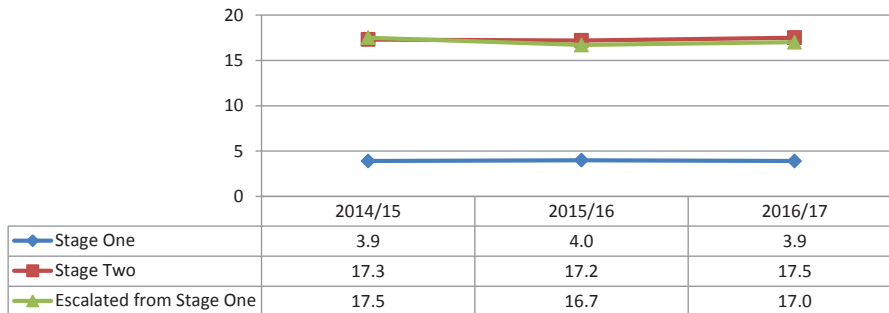
STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

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 17.5 working days

ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

We aim to respond to escalated complaints within 20 working days. The average time to respond to escalated complaints was 17.0 working days

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



The average time taken to respond to complaints has remained consistent for all stages over the past three years.

2016/17	Scottish Borders	Family Group	Scotland
Stage One	3.9	12.7	7.5
Stage Two	17.5	17.3	19.5
Escalated from Stage One	17.0	17.1	19.4

For 2016/17 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 for Stage 2 and Escalated complaints. Even though SBC has good performance in this area in comparison with the target timescales, the Family Group and Scotland averages, 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

391 complaints were closed at Stage One within 5 working days, representing 87% of all Stage One complaints

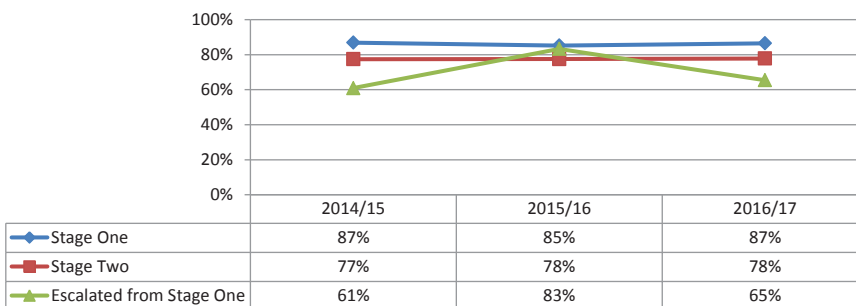
STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

91 complaints were closed at Stage Two within 20 working days, representing 78% of all Stage Two complaints

ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

17 escalated complaints were closed within 20 working days, representing 66% 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 and Stage Two has been consistent. However, the proportion of SBC's complaints Escalated from Stage One that were closed against timescales has fluctuated.

2016/17	Scottish Borders	Family Group	Scotland
Stage One	86.7%	60.6%	71.1%
Stage Two	77.8%	77.5%	69.1%
Escalated from Stage One	65.4%	59.8	74.8%

In 2016/17 SBC's proportion of Stage One complaints closed within timescales was higher compared to the Family Group and Scotland. However, of the proportion of complaints that were Escalated from Stage One to Stage Two that were closed within the timescale was below the level for Scotland. There are a relatively low number of complaints (17) that contribute to this figure and this means one or two late complaints has a larger impact on the percentage, but complaints also tend to be more complicated when they are Escalated. At this stage more time and care needs to be taken to ensure the complaints are investigated properly. On occasion this means the complaint response does not meet the prescribed timescale.

INDICATOR 6 COMPLAINTS THAT WERE GRANTED AUTHORISED EXTENSIONS

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

14 complaints closed at Stage One were granted an extension, representing 3% of Stage One complaints

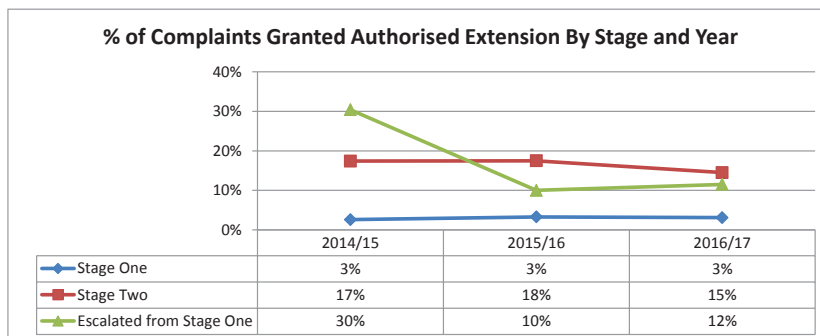
STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

17 complaints closed at Stage Two were granted an extension, representing 15% of Stage Two complaints

ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

3 complaints closed after being escalated from Stage One to Stage Two were granted an extension, representing 12% of escalated complaints

FIGURE 10: % OF COMPLAINTS GRANTED AUTHORISED EXTENSION BY STAGE



The proportion of SBC's Stage One closed complaints that have been granted an authorised extension has remained consistent at 3%. The proportion of SBC's complaints Escalated from Stage One to Stage Two that were granted an authorised extension has decreased from 30% in 2014/15 to 12% in 2016/17.

2016/17	Scottish Borders	Family Group	Scotland
Stage One	3.1%	31.5%	4.5%
Stage Two	14.5%	63.6%	16.3%
Escalated from Stage One	11.5%	10.3%	13.5%

The proportion of closed complaints at all Stages that were granted an extension for SBC was below the proportion for Scotland. There is an anomaly in the data from one of the other Local Authorities in the Family Group, which has skewed the data, and it is therefore not appropriate to benchmark with the Family Group for this indicator.

INDICATOR 7 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Scottish Borders Council runs a Complaint 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:

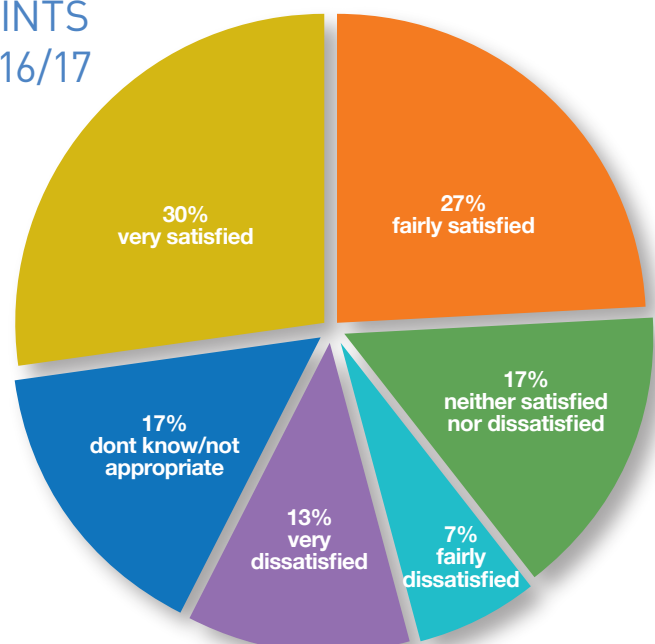
- Being able to deal with someone who could help you with your complaint?
- That someone took responsibility for your complaint?
- Being given information that was easy to understand?
- Being given all the information you needed?
- Being treated fairly?
- Being kept up to date on the progress of your 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 **563** complaints were closed, and **145** survey invitations were sent, representing **26%** of the closed complaints.

Of the **145** invitations that were issued, only **26** were returned giving a return rate of only **18%**.

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 overall outcomes show that **57%** of respondents were either very or fairly satisfied compared to 20% who were very or fairly dissatisfied.

**FIGURE 11: OVERALL COMPLAINTS
CUSTOMER SATISFACTION, 2016/17**



COMPLIMENTS FROM 2016/17

Over the year the Council received over 125 unsolicited compliments for the services provided. These compliments include: kerb-side waste and recycling, road and drainage, community recycling centres, and customer services.

EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

"...she was very polite, humorous and friendly and made his experience a delight."

"Thank you for the speedy response to the broken drain cover."

"We completed the Borders Abbeys Way and wanted to compliment whoever is responsible for it."

Customer complimented the new SBC website. He advised that he thought it was much easier to navigate and understand.

"Many thanks for your welcome initiative; your actions have restored my faith in SBC. Looking after an elderly parent is not easy and I greatly appreciate your willingness to quickly investigate and resolve this straightforward issue."

"... was very professional, and drafted a letter explaining everything succinctly and to the point. He listened intently to (the customer)".

"The service at the Eshiels Site has improved radically over the last few months."

"Please accept and pass on my thanks for the thorough and very professional job which was completed a few days after my request. Great Service!"

(Customer) has just moved to the Borders and she is delighted she can come to see someone from the Council face to face.

Customer stating how happy she is with the new Food waste collection service- it means her kitchen bin is odour free and can be put out less often as the decaying food is kept separate.

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.

The following case studies are a sample of some lessons that have been learned as a result of customers complaining about service standards falling below expected levels.

CASE STUDY 1

Young children leaving schools alone

In February 2017, a 5 year old pupil told a supply teacher that she was allowed to walk home on her own and did not need to wait for her mother to collect her, so was let out a different door from pupils' whose parents collect them. When Pupil B's mother, who was waiting for her in the playground, realised all the children had left, she began to panic.

Fortunately, Pupil B was found safely waiting outside the door to her house, but the incident raised the fact that the school had no policy regarding letting young children leave the school on their own. A written protocol has now been shared with parents, and has also been included in the school handbook and is part of the induction for new staff.

CASE STUDY 2

Stray Dogs

Customer C's dog escaped from her garden in August 2016 and was picked up by SBC as a "stray". Fortunately, Customer C was reunited with her dog, but complained that there was insufficient information available on the Council's website regarding stray dogs. She also complained that her dog was microchipped and the Council had not scanned the dog and contacted her.

As a result of Customer C's complaint, the Council's website has been updated with more information including who to contact and how much it costs to reclaim dogs, as well as information and posters distributed to local veterinary surgeries, police stations and kennels.

Although kennels that house stray dogs do routinely scan them for microchips and contact details, many owners, including Customer C, forget to keep details up to date. The Council also periodically runs campaigns to remind customers to update details.

CASE STUDY 3

Road Signage

A customer complained after driving a stretch of road near Jedburgh. They were stopped by road operatives laying hot tar and advised that they could not continue their journey and should follow the diversion signs. The customer explained there was no road closed or diversion signs erected with the operative unable to help. The complaint was investigated and it was found that advance warning signage should have been put in place prior to works commencing. Further process improvements implemented will ensure that appropriate signage is erected prior to any road works commencing with additional consultation undertaken with local residents and businesses where necessary ahead of planned road works.

CASE STUDY 4

Improving Our Correspondence

A complaint was made after two family members received a letter from the Council in connection with their recently deceased mother's care and Council Tax. Both letters contained significant errors that caused distress to the family (one letter incorrectly designated the relationship between the deceased and the recipient; the other referred to an incorrect address). The process was reviewed and as a result led our Customer Services staff to change the Council Tax letters so that the standard template does not include any reference to a relationship between the deceased and the recipient. A further procedure was put in place to ensure Council Tax letters are checked more robustly before being sent.

CASE STUDY 5

School Transport

A customer complained about the school transport route allocated for her daughter. Pick-up and drop off points were on a busy main road which is especially hazardous in the darker winter months. The route was reviewed and an alternative found, with drop off and pick up points further away, but not on a main road. An apology was made to the customer that this had not been previously considered, and alternatives will now be offered, when possible and practical, where pick up and drop off points are on main roads.

CASE STUDY 6

Memorial Trees in Council-owned Parks

Customer D purchased a memorial tree and plaque for her daughter and had them placed in Park E. On visiting, Customer D realised that the plaque was missing, as was a neighbouring memorial tree. Work was being done to the park but it was unclear as to whether the plaque had been removed as part of the works, or whether it had been stolen.

Following a dissatisfactory response to Customer D's enquiries, she complained that there had been no consultation regarding the plans for the park with those who had memorial trees in the park, and felt that the plans were sketchy at best, causing avoidable distress.

As a result of this complaint, Customer D was invited to meet with an officer to discuss a new site for her daughter's memorial tree and plaque and the park renovation project team will investigate whether there are any records kept for those who were given permission to plant memorial trees.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall we continue to perform well against our Family Group and Scottish average performance indicators.

Complaints made to Scottish Borders Council about its services accounted for a very small proportion (0.4%) of all the customer interactions recorded in the Council's Customer Relationship Management system in 2016-17.

Even though the proportion of complaint received is small, each and every complaint received is valued and through the use of the Complaint Handling Procedure the Council strives to ensure all complaints are treated fairly and as quickly as possible.

For the first time, Scottish Borders Council is now receiving more complaints on-line (44%) than through any other channel, supporting the drive for channel shift. However the increase in invalid complaints suggests we need to review the information offered on-line to support the customer in differentiating between a service request and a complaint so it is clear to them which is the most appropriate contact type for the issue they wish to raise with the Council.

The majority of complaints (79.4%) closed by Scottish Borders Council were handled at Stage One. This is a declining trend as 85.7% were handled at Stage One in 2015-16. This decrease is counter to one of the Council's key principles of the Complaint Handling Procedure which is to 'seek early resolution, resolving complaints at the earliest opportunity and as close to the point of service delivery as possible.' What this declining trend means is that fewer complaints are receiving an early resolution and are taking longer to resolve as the Council has 20 working days to respond to a Stage Two complaint. It also means that in essence complaints handled at Stage Two are costing the Council more to process because more time is spent on handling a complaint at this stage and more senior staff become involved in the sign off process. More importantly it represents a reduction in the quality of our service to the customer.

While acknowledging numbers are small, Scottish Borders Council had a higher percentage of complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two and upheld at Stage Two than either our Family Group or the Scottish local authorities as a whole. This may indicate that whilst we outperform other Councils at Stage One our investigatory work and responses at this stage are an area where further improvement is possible and Scottish Borders Council is committed to the continuation of work to improve this area. It is our hope that this improvement work will reduce the instances where our customers remain dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage One and ask for further investigation. It is also recognised that the numbers responding to the Complaint Handling Satisfaction Survey were very low making it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from the data, however of those that responded the majority were satisfied with the way we dealt with their complaint. The survey questions have been updated to assist us in understanding where the process can go wrong and will be used to drive improvements. Work is on-going to achieve a better return rate.

During 2016/17 the Council recorded over 125 unsolicited compliments across the range of services provided. These compliments have been shared with staff where possible, to highlight the good work being done.

Over the year the Council has taken the opportunity to learn from the complaints it has received and where appropriate made changes to policy and practice to improve our service to our customers. Even though the number of complaints received in the year is very small when looked at in the context of the number of customer interactions handled, they are an important measure of how our customers think we are performing, and as such, are a valuable tool in the continuous efforts being made to improve our service levels.

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL COMPLAINTS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2016/17

NEXT STEPS

SBC is currently developing a refreshed Customer Strategy. Although a key focus of the strategy will be on providing more customer friendly digital channels, it 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 our CHP.

There are two specific improvement actions that will be taken forward over the next year and these are:

- 1) We will improve our guidance on-line to assist customers when making a complaint so they are better able to differentiating between a service request and a complaint.
- 2) We will work to improve frontline (Stage One) responses and thereby reduce the number of complaints that are escalated to Stage Two.

In addition we will continue to engage with the Local Authority Complaints Handling Network (LACHN) who are working to produce meaningful benchmarking data for the sector and are working to improve complaints handling performance across Scotland.

In April 2017 the Social Work Model Complaints Handling Procedure was implemented at Scottish Borders Council for all Social Work related complaints. Work is ongoing to determine the format that will be required for reporting Social Work and SB Cares complaints figures. The 2017/18 Complaints Annual Report will also further incorporate Live Borders Complaints performance.

APPENDIX 1

STAGE ANALYSIS FOR INDICATORS 2 - 6

STAGE ONE

STAGE 1 COMPLAINTS								
	2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		Variance 2016/17 less 2014/15	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Indicator 2: Closed Complaints (% of all closed)	504	81.4%	480	85.7%	450	79.4%	-54	-2.0%
Indicator 3: Complaints Upheld (% of Stage 1)	248	49.2%	213	44.4%	180	40.0%	-68	-9.2%
Indicator 3: Complaints NOT Upheld(% of Stage 1)	256	50.8%	267	55.6%	270	60.0%	14	9.2%
Indicator 4: Average Time Spent Responding to Complaints (Days)	3.9		4.0		3.9		0.0	
Indicator 5: Complaints Closed Against Timescales (% of Stage 1)	438	86.9%	409	85.2%	391	86.7%	-47	-0.4%
Indicator 6: Complaints That Were Granted Authorised Extensions (% of Stage 1)	13	2.6%	16	3.3%	14	3.1%	1	0.5%

Between 2015/16 and 2016/17 the proportion of complaints closed at Stage One has decreased from 85.7% to 79.4%. 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 49.2% to 40.0%.

For Indicator 4, 5 and 6 the results for Stage One complaints have remained consistent.

STAGE TWO

STAGE 2 COMPLAINTS

	2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		Variance 2016/17 less 2014/15	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Indicator 2: Closed Complaints (% of all closed)	115	18.6%	80	14.3%	117	20.6%	2	2.0%
Indicator 3: Complaints Upheld (% of Stage 2)	34	29.6%	31	38.8%	44	37.6%	10	8.0%
Indicator 3: Complaints NOT Upheld(% of Stage 2)	81	70.4%	49	61.2%	73	62.4%	-8	-8.0%
Indicator 4: Average Time Spent Responding to Complaints	17.3		17.2		17.5		0.2	
Indicator 5: Complaints Closed Against Timescales (% of Stage 2)	89	77.4%	62	77.5%	91	77.8%	2	0.4%
Indicator 6: Complaints That Were Granted Authorised Extensions (% of Stage 2)	20	17.4%	14	17.5%	17	14.5%	-3	-2.9%

Between 2015/16 and 2016/17 the proportion of complaints closed at Stage Two has increased from 14.3% to 20.6%. 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 increased from 29.6% to 37.6%.

For Indicator 4 and 5 the results for Stage One complaints have remained consistent. The number of Stage Two complaints that were granted authorised extension has decreased.

ESCALATED FROM STAGE ONE

ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

	2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		Variance 2016/17 less 2014/15	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Indicator 2: Closed Complaints (% of all closed)	23	3.7%	30	5.4%	26	4.6%	3	0.9%
Indicator 3: Complaints Upheld (% of Escalated)	11	47.8%	7	23.3%	12	46.2%	1	-1.6%
Indicator 3: Complaints NOT Upheld (% of Escalated)	12	52.2%	23	76.7%	14	53.8%	2	1.6%
Indicator 4: Average Time Spent Responding to Complaints	17.5		16.7		17.0		-0.5	
Indicator 5: Complaints Closed Against Timescales (% of Escalated)	14	60.9%	25	83.3%	17	65.4%	3	4.5%
Indicator 6: Complaints That Were Granted Authorised Extensions (% of Escalated)	7	30.4%	3	10.0%	3	11.5%	-4	-18.9%

Between 2015/16 and 2016/17 the proportion of complaints that have Escalated from Stage One has remained consistent.

Over the three years the proportion of Escalated complaints that were upheld has fluctuated as has the proportion that were closed against timescales.

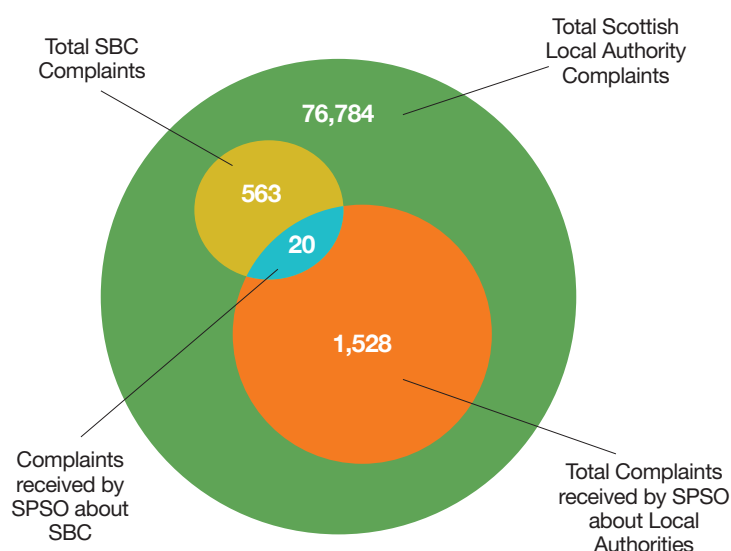
The number of Escalated complaints that were granted authorised extension has decreased.

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 2016/17 the SPSO received 20 complaints about Scottish Borders Council. This is equal to 1.3% 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 20 SPSO complaints represent a 39% reduction compared to the 33 received for 2015/16.

SPSO Received Complaints /Year	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
SPSO Received Complaints about SBC	33	33	20
SBC Complaints as % all for Scottish Local Authority sector	1.8%	1.9%	1.3%
% Change to previous year		0.0%	-39.4%

In 2016/17 the SPSO closed 19 complaints related to Scottish Borders Council of which 13 (68%) were considered to be 'Fit for SPSO' compared to 27% for 2015/16 and 12% for 2014/15. In 2016/17 2 of the 13 complaints about Scottish Borders Council to the SPSO were 'Upheld / Partially Upheld' compared to 5 in 2015/16 and 1 in 2014/15. The table below shows the results of the closed SPSO complaints related to Scottish Borders Council and how SBC compares to Scotland for the Local Authority Sector.

SPSO Closed Complaints for SBC / Year	2014/15			2015/16			2016/17		
	SBC Count	SBC %	Sector %	SBC Count	SBC %	Sector %	SBC Count	SBC %	Sector %
Closed	34			33			19		
Stage SPSO Complaint Closed									
Advice	21	62%	46%	7	21%	19%	3	16%	38%
Early Resolution 1	3	9%	16%	12	36%	32%		0%	0%
Early Resolution 2	3	9%	4%	1	3%	5%	11	58%	28%
Investigation 1	1	3%	5%	4	12%	6%		0%	0%
Investigation 2	0	0%	0%	0	0%	0%	2	11%	8%
Premature	6	18%	29%	9	27%	38%	3	16%	26%
SPSO Decision									
Fit for SPSO	4	12%	9%	9	27%	11%	13	68%	8%
Upheld / Partially Upheld	1	3%	4%	5	15%	6%	2	11%	5%

Case studies for the two 'Upheld / Partially Upheld' Scottish Borders complaints, are detailed below and all resulting recommended actions have been undertaken.

CASE STUDY 1

Mrs C raised a number of concerns relating to the planning situation at an adjoining farm. In particular, she complained that the council had failed to ensure all planning conditions attached to planning consent for the erection of four houses were enforceable. She also complained that the council failed to follow planning procedures in relation to a planning application for a replacement shed on land owned by the farm and that incorrect information was contained in the officer's report for another planning application for the same site.

The SPSO took independent advice from a planning adviser, whose advice, that the planning condition did not meet the standards of precision and reasonableness, was accepted by the SPSO. The SPSO upheld this part of Mrs C's complaint and recommended that a full and unreserved apology be issued to Mrs C. The SPSO also found that while the officer's report lacked detail, there was no evidence that the council had failed to follow planning procedure, and they therefore did not uphold this part of Mrs C's complaint.

SBC also accepted that the officer's report had contained some drafting errors, and while the SPSO were mindful that a site visit had been carried out during which the planning officer would have seen the actual position when assessing the planning application, the SPSO found that the errors should have been corrected prior to determination of the planning application. The SPSO upheld this part of Mrs C's complaint.

CASE STUDY 2

Ms C complained to us about the council's handling of an application made by a neighbour for consent to carry out works to trees on Ms C's property which were subject to a tree preservation order (TPO). In particular, Ms C complained that the council failed to carry out a proper assessment of the trees, failed to ensure the trees in question were identified in the permission given by the council and failed to ensure the application for consent met the requirements of the TPO.

The SPSO took independent advice from a planning adviser. While the SPSO were satisfied that in considering the request for permission to carry out work to trees on Ms C's property, that were overhanging the neighbouring property, the council acted in line with legislation. The SPSO were concerned about the adequacy of record-keeping and the lack of a publicly available register of applications submitted.

The SPSO were also concerned that the council had failed to refer to the works approved in the decision to the application and that they had failed to ensure the applicant had provided a plan or map sufficient to identify the trees on which permission to work was being sought. We therefore upheld Mrs C's complaint.

APPENDIX 3 LIVE BORDERS COMPLAINTS



COMPLAINTS REPORTING

Live Borders now has a Complaints Handling Procedure that aligns with SBC's. Live Borders has presented, for Q1, 2, 3 and 4 the volume of all complaints received, presented in the table below:

COMPLAINTS 16/17					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2016/17
Price	7	0	8	1	16
Booking/access/info	25	20	14	19	78
Quality	2	10	2	13	27
Staff attitude	1	2	1	0	4
Other	2	1	2	3	8
Total	37	33	27	36	133
Comments	25	24	15	0	64
Compliments	2	3	3	0	8

From midway through Q3 2016/17, Live Borders started recording the response times to all valid complaints. Quarter 4 is the only quarter with a complete set of data so only this has been reported.

DURING Q4

- 32 out of 36 complaints were closed at Stage 1 (within 5 working days). 14 were upheld, 2 were still "open"
- 2 out of 36 were closed at Stage 2. Both were upheld
- 33 out of 36 were closed within the required time scales, with authorised extensions given to the other 3.

Of the 18 upheld issues covered included:

- Cancellation of class
- Cleanliness at pool
- Content of classes
- Quality of equipment

Responses are provided to all complainants and appropriate action taken. The majority relate to sport and the Area Managers have met with staff and are providing support and training to deal with issues at source and reduce the number of complaints received.

As a result of the complaints received in 2016/17 Live Borders are taken the following action:

- Taking steps to improve the website to make it as easy as possible to navigate
- Considering publishing a forward refurbishment plan
- Improve on staff training to ensure they are well briefed, vigilant and enabled to help customers

Starting for 2017/18 Live Borders has implemented a customer complaint handling satisfaction survey to gain additional feedback from its customers.

SBC Customer Services is liaising with Live Borders to ensure that this happens and we can confidently use this information in SBC's annual report to the SPSO.

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.

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