



Annual Complaint Handling Report

2017/18

Welcome to Midlothian Council's Annual Complaint Handling Report 2017/18

We have provided
compliments in this report

We upheld

3832 (74%)

of complaints

We handled **5202**
complaints in **2017/18** and
closed

5175 complaints

We recorded

103,528

customer interactions through
our Contact Centre

We are replacing our online
system to improve the way
we deal with customers and
handle complaints

Foreword

Midlothian Council has a duty to respond to the people it serves, and an integral part of that duty includes responding positively to complaints.

This report presents Midlothian Council's second Annual Complaint Handling report in this format. The report provides a comprehensive analysis of complaints statistics, and evaluates the data recorded for the performance cycle between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018.

The material within the report is mostly centred on the 8 statutory key performance indicators that all Scottish local authorities are required to report on, and the data reflects the detail of the performance information about complaints that is measured and discussed by the council's senior management on a quarterly basis before being published.

Although it is disappointing to convey that Midlothian Council's services occasionally fall below the expected standard, it is encouraging to recognise that issues are captured, reviewed and where applicable, improvements are implemented so that services are continually being refined as a direct result of the information provided by the residents of Midlothian Council.

The report also takes account of other additional, interesting feedback data that contributes towards the council's determination to value its customers in the most efficient way, also using this information to learn, to plan and to monitor change/outcomes and thereby inspiring council services to constantly evolve.

Accordingly, Midlothian takes its commitment to the duties required by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) very seriously and this year, comparative information that relates to similar Scottish local authorities, as well as the Scottish averages is provided for Benchmarking purposes.

Dr Grace Vickers, Chief Executive



Dr Grace Vickers
Chief Executive

Background

Complaints are crucial in identifying areas or processes that are not working for customers. Reporting complaints data is a national objective that is monitored by Audit Scotland in conjunction with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), and it is in line with Best Value arrangements.

The Complaint Handling Procedure (CHP) specifies how Midlothian Council handles complaints. The 8 key indicators, developed by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) along with other public sector experts, are reported on a quarterly cycle.

The CHP has thus far:

- Introduced a uniform two stage procedure for dealing with complaints, with timescales for each stage;
- Encouraged the use of early resolution methods wherever feasible;
- Allocated responsibility for complaint handling in organisations;
- Included requirements for recording complaints and publishing complaint data and for:
 - Reporting on complaint performance;
 - Provided a definition of 'complaint'; and
 - Encouraged learning from complaints.

Complaint information is also used in the shared risk assessments of local authorities that Audit Scotland conducts with other regulators such as Education Scotland. It helps to build up an overall picture of particular services within the local authority.

Midlothian Council defines a complaint per the SPSO's recommended description as follows:-

'An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about Midlothian Council's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on Midlothian Council's behalf.'

The information provided in this report is generated from the records that staff have input into the established complaints system - the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. The report is presented in a way that provides insight about what the figures may suggest.

Illustrated within the report, is comparative data to Midlothian Council's indicator figures from last year, along with benchmarking information that measures Midlothian Council's complaints information to similarly likened local authorities known as a Family Group¹. Additionally, comparisons to the Scottish average complaints statistics are delivered.

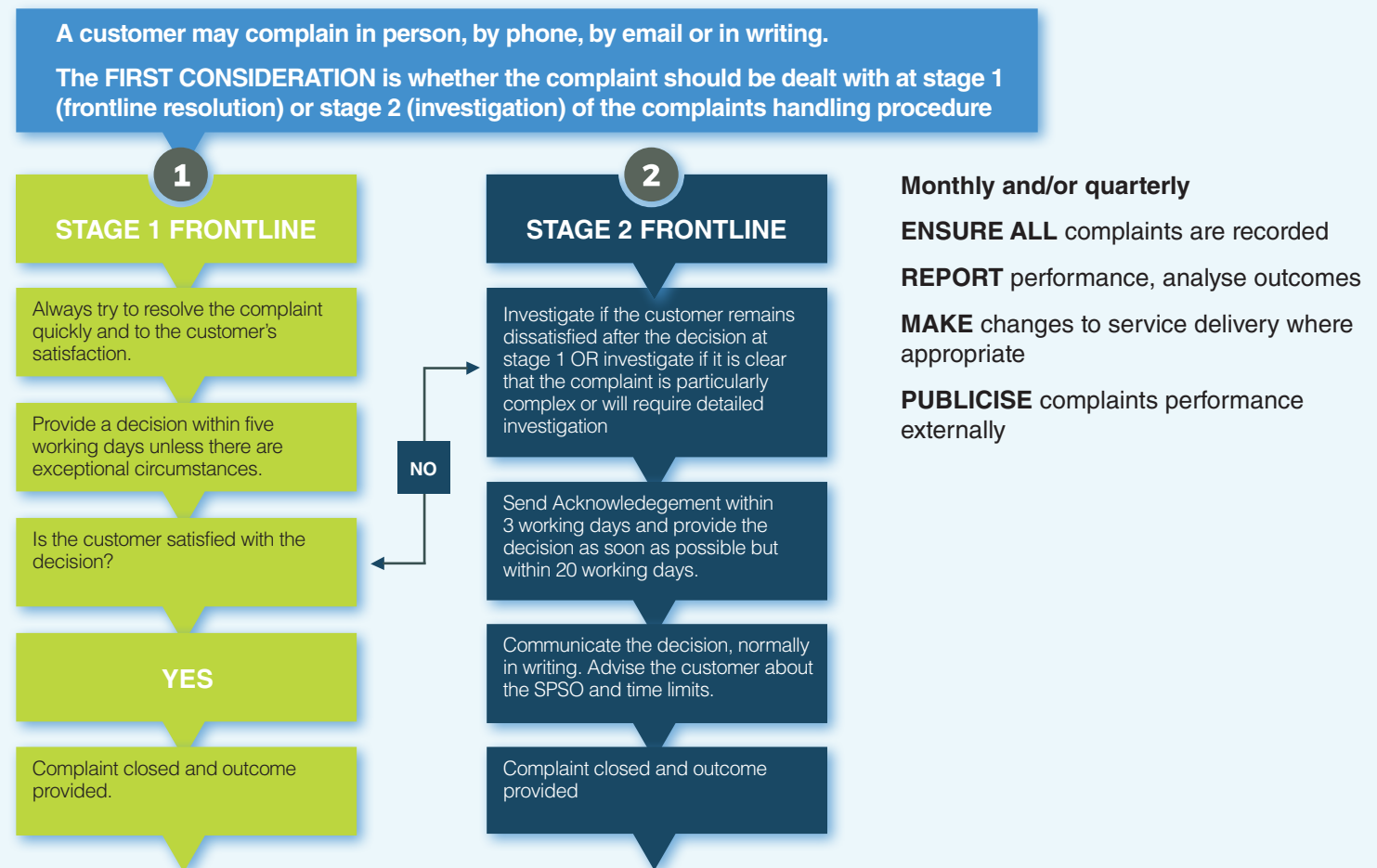
The new Social Work Model Complaints Handling Procedure was implemented on 1 April 2017 and the data in the report includes Social Work complaints. However, a separate document highlighting specific information about Social Work Complaints can be found at <https://www.midlothian.gov.uk/>

¹ Councils are arranged in 'Family Groups', as agreed by Local Authority Officers in association with the Improvement Service, so that councils that are similar in terms of the type of population that they serve (e.g. relative deprivation and affluence) and the type of area in which they serve them (e.g. urban, semi-rural, rural) can be compared. The point of comparing like with like is that this is more likely to lead to useful learning, sharing good practice, and working together to improve services. Midlothian Council's Family Group includes Angus; Clackmannanshire; East Renfrewshire; Inverclyde; Renfrewshire; South Lanarkshire and West Lothian.

Complaints Handling Procedure

Figure 1 illustrates a summary flow chart of the complaints procedure, which is used for the corporate Complaints Handling Procedure.

FIGURE 1: Complaints Handling Procedure



CHP Development Actions - What's Happened During 2017/18

The first Annual Complaint Handling Report for 2016/17 was published.

- Presentation given to all Midlothian School Headteachers about Complaint Handling Procedure (CHP) and how the data can be utilised in the most efficient way to ensure learning and improvement within schools.
- Presentation on CHP provided to all Lifelong Learning and Employability staff, followed by CRM system training on how to identify and log a complaint.
- CRM system training on complaint logging took place which also included complaints procedural information to Contact Centre staff.
- Internal audit of the CHP. Actions thereof presented useful training/review opportunities.
- Special complaints report presented to Corporate Management Team (CMT) that included unique comparisons and data analysis for each Directorate.
- Improvements to quarterly complaints reporting process.
- Development work to CRM to correct timeline inaccuracies that became apparent as a result of national benchmarking data.
- Indicator wording on performance reporting system, Pentana reviewed and changed to reflect full meaning to ensure accuracy and enhance understanding.
- Better use of benchmarking and/or Scottish complaint average information to drive service improvement and best practice.
- Continuing visibility with the Local Authority Complaint Handler's Network Group (LACHN), and ensuring related items are carried out and/or passed on to relevant Heads or Officers following attendance.

Complaints Received and Channel Used 2017/18

The number of complaints that are logged on the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system are proportionately very little when compared to the overall number of recorded dealings.

With a total of 103,528 interactions on CRM, only 5202 were complaints. This equates to just under 5%.

Figure 2 illustrates the difference in complaints received in relation to the total amount of interactions received by the CRM system.

FIGURE 2: Total CRM interactions relative to complaints

2017/18 Complaints 5%

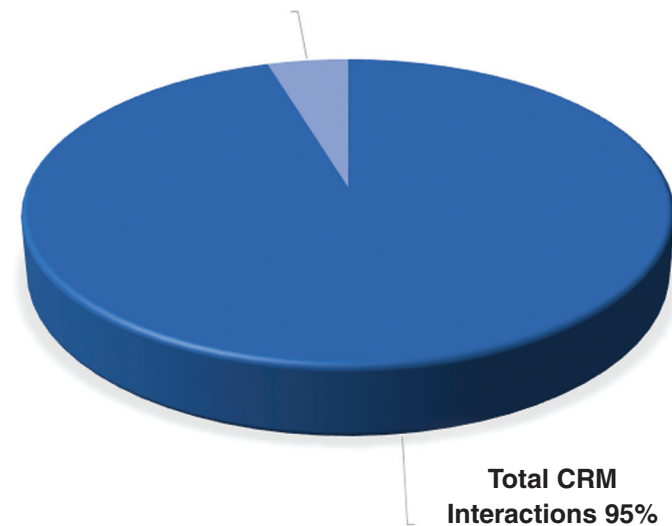


TABLE 1: Methods of contact used to report a complaint reflected as a percentage of the total complaints for the corresponding year

	2016/17	2017/18
Online	17%	21%
In Person	1%	1%
Telephone	81%	78%
Letter	0.6%	0.3%
Feedback Form	0.8%	0.3%
Total Complaints	5936	5202


 **4%**
 **3%**

Table 1 is a reflection of the channel used by customers to make a complaint, and the percentage of the total number of complaints per year, to the corresponding channel. It can be seen that telephone contact is the preferred method of approach, followed by online.

Interestingly, the amount of telephone calls relative to the total number of complaints for years 2016/17 and 2017/18, have reduced, and although it is not a considerable amount at 3%, it is noteworthy since the percentage of online complaint interactions has increased by 4%.

This could be a result of the continual work to improve the user-friendliness of the council website, and is evidence that channel-shift work is moving in the desired direction. It will be interesting to see if further planned work to enhance web-form accessibility will amplify the trend.

Statutory Performance Indicators

Midlothian Council assesses complaints handling performance to provide assurance in relation to their performance, to facilitate continuous improvement and to assist in benchmarking performance between local authorities.

- ① **Indicator 1** - Complaints received per thousand population
- ② **Indicator 2** - Complaints closed at each stage as a percentage of all complaints closed
- ③ **Indicator 3** - The number of complaints upheld/partially upheld/not upheld at each stage as a percentage of complaints closed in full at each stage
- ④ **Indicator 4** - Average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage
- ⑤ **Indicator 5** - The number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days
- ⑥ **Indicator 6** - The number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension to the 5 or 20 working day timeline has been authorised.
- ⑦ **Indicator 7** - Customer Satisfaction statement about the complaints service provided.
- ⑧ **Indicator 8** - A statement outlining changes or improvements to services or procedures as a result of the consideration of complaints.

Key Indicator



Indicator 1: Complaints received per thousand population

1

This indicator records the total number of complaints received at stage 1, or directly at stage 2. The sum is divided by the estimated population size of Midlothian Council. Population size data is a Mid-Year Population Estimate from 2016 obtained from the National Records of Scotland (NRS).

- The population of Midlothian Council is estimated to be 88,610
- Midlothian Council handled 5202 complaints
- This equates to an average of 59 complaints received per 1000 population
- Expressed another way, 1 in every 17 people made a complaint about a service

TABLE 2: Figures for Performance Indicator 1: Complaints received per thousand population

Complaints received per 1000 population				
	Internal Benchmarking		External Benchmarking	
	Midlothian 16/17	Midlothian 17/18	Family Group 17/18	Scotland 17/18
Population Total	88,610	88,610		
Total Number of Complaints	5936	5202 (↓734)		
Complaints per 1000 population	67	59 (↓12)	16	11

Internal Benchmarking

The number of complaints per 1000 population has decreased from 67 in 2016/17 to 58 in 2017/18. Both sets of statistics include Social Work data. This notable reduction in complaints from one year to the next could reflect tangible evidence that there has been improvements to the way the Council is managing services.

External Benchmarking

With 59 complaints received per 1000 population for Midlothian Council, and 16 and 11 complaints per 1000 population for the Family Group and the Scottish average respectively, there is a considerable difference. This indicator has been widely discussed at the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network (LACHN) as there is a diverse

variation when individual data can be seen. Factors for consideration that might have an impact on complaint totals when comparing Local Authorities are events, tourism, weather, locale - rural/town and demographics. Discussion also often takes place around waste related complaints about missed bins.

Currently, some Local Authorities report this matter as a complaint, and some report the issue as a service request as they might have a policy whereby for example, reported missed bins within 24 hours after the scheduled pick up are categorised and processed as a service request. Midlothian records missed bins as a complaint, a practice that is supported by the SPSO, but at the moment it is an unresolved matter. However, it is a subject that should be considered during benchmarking exercises, and might explain why Midlothian's complaint statistics are higher for this indicator.

Indicator 2: Complaints closed at stage 1 and stage 2, and escalated as a percentage of all complaints closed

2

Closed complaints are those that have been allocated an outcome and a response has been given to the customer. At time of reporting, no further action was required.

The number of closed complaints differs to the number of received complaints because some of the 2017/18 closed complaints were received in 2016/17, while some of the 2017/18 received complaints will be closed in 2018/19 as their target date falls into the next reporting cycle.

Customers who have undergone the complaints procedure at stage 1, but who remain dissatisfied are invited to escalate their complaint to a stage 2 investigation.

FIGURE 3: 2017/18 data for performance indicator 2: Complaints closed at each stage as a percentage of all complaints closed, including comparative data for 2016/17

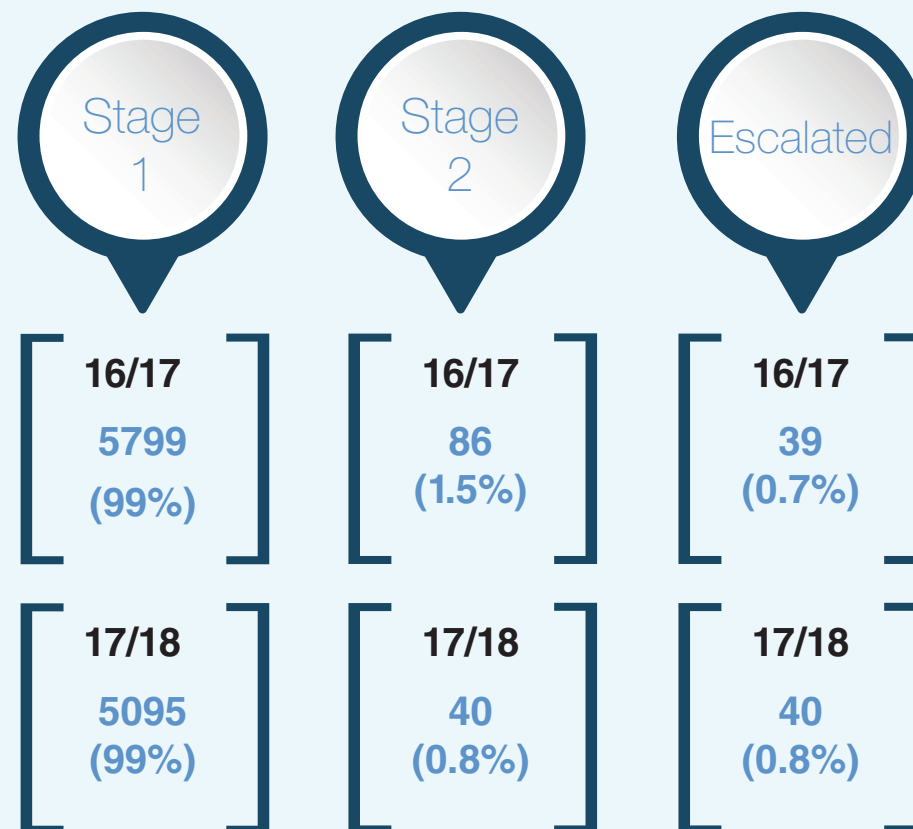
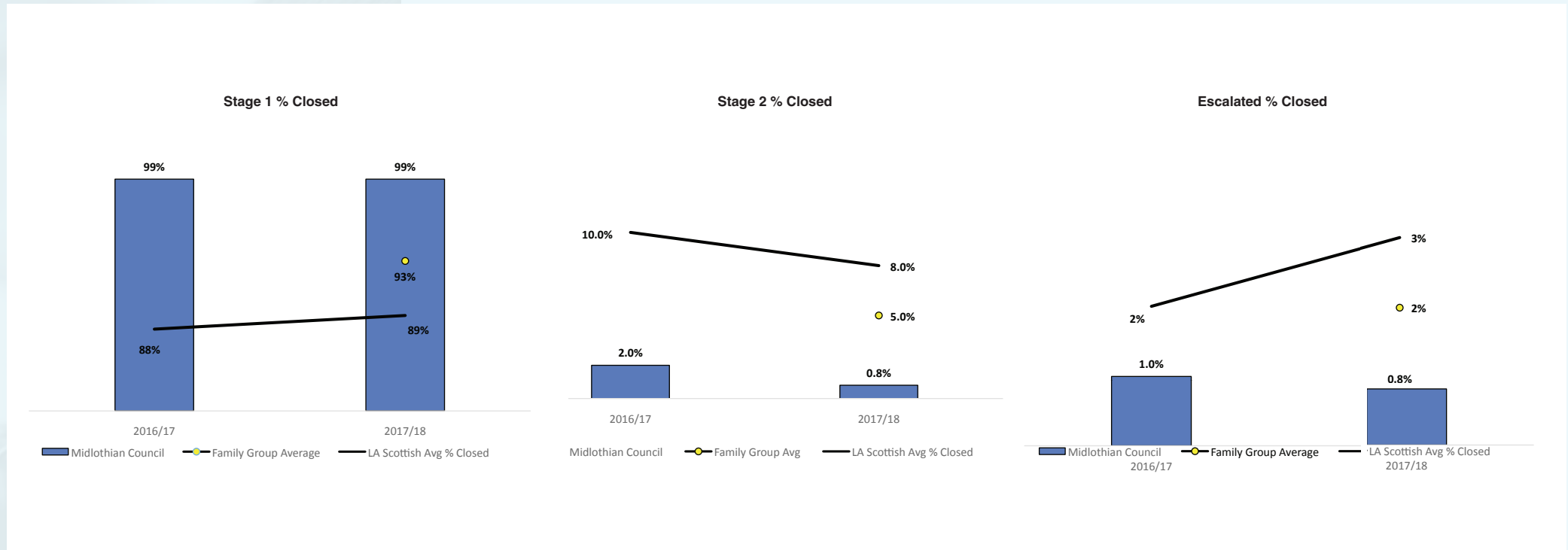


FIGURE 4: Comparative data for performance Indicator 2 - Midlothian Council
Data for 16/17 & 17/18, and Family Group average for 17/18, and Scottish average for 16/17 & 17/18



It can be seen in figure 4 above that Midlothian Council close proportionately more stage 1 complaints in both 16/17 (99%) and 17/18 (99%) than the Scottish average in both years at 88% and 89% respectively. In figure 4 above, it can be seen that the family group average for 17/18 is 93%, which is also proportionately less than Midlothian Council for the same year.

Midlothian Council's stats for this indicator supports

the SPSO's aim to close complaints at as early a stage as possible to prevent the need for lengthy and costly investigations. The data also shows that the council has a lower instance of escalated complaints than that of the Family Group average and the Scottish average. This is reflective of the fact that customers are happy with the response that they have received at stage 1.

However, for stage 2 and escalated complaints, it can be

seen that Midlothian Council has comparatively less of these complaints in both instances, and in both years, with 2% and 1% for stage 2 and escalated respectively compared with 10% (stage 2) and 2% (escalated) in 16/17, and 0.8% and 0.8% for stage 2 and escalated in 17/18. The family group average for 17/18 is also higher than Midlothian Council with 5% (stage 2) and 2% (escalated).

Indicator 3: Complaints upheld/partially upheld/not upheld at each stage (as a % of complaints closed in full at each stage)

3

The procedure states that there is a requirement to record an outcome for each complaint received. The outcomes are categorised as upheld, not upheld and partially upheld.

FIGURE 5: 2017/18 data for performance indicator 3: The number of complaints upheld/partially upheld/not upheld at each stage as a percentage of complaints closed in full at each stage including comparative data for 2016/17

STAGE 1	2016/17		
	UPHELD	NOT UPHELD	PARTIALLY UPHELD
2016/17	4872 (84%)	629 (10.8%)	298 (5.1%)
2017/18	3820 (75%)	614 (12%)	320 (6%)
STAGE 2	2016/17		
	UPHELD	NOT UPHELD	PARTIALLY UPHELD
2016/17	13 (15.1%)	38 (44.2%)	35 (40.7%)
2017/18	8 (20%)	19 (47.5%)	11 (27.5%)
ESCALATED	2016/17		
	UPHELD	NOT UPHELD	PARTIALLY UPHELD
2016/17	5 (12.8%)	24 (61.5%)	10 (25.6%)
2017/18	4 (10%)	21 (52.5%)	12 (30%)

Figure 5 illustrates the outcome totals for each stage, as well as the relative percentage. It should be noted that there is an identified anomaly within our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system that, if incorrect practice is applied, permits staff to close off complaints without an outcome.

This explains why the 2017/18 figures for each stage fall below 100%. Midlothian Council is in the process of procuring a new CRM platform, and due the current, in-house developed system having reached the end of its lifespan, no further development work is being carried out on it. Worsening of the statistics relating to this loophole is prevented through regular system training.

Figure 6 shows that figures between upheld stage 1 complaints in 17/18 are higher than the family group and also the Scottish average. This supports the suggestion noted for Indicator 2, that customers are happy with the response that they have been provided at this early stage i.e. to apologise and, if applicable to the case, uphold complaints early on to avoid escalation, which is also in tone with the SPSO's concept that dealing with complaints at an early stage can help to avoid situations becoming a complex issue.

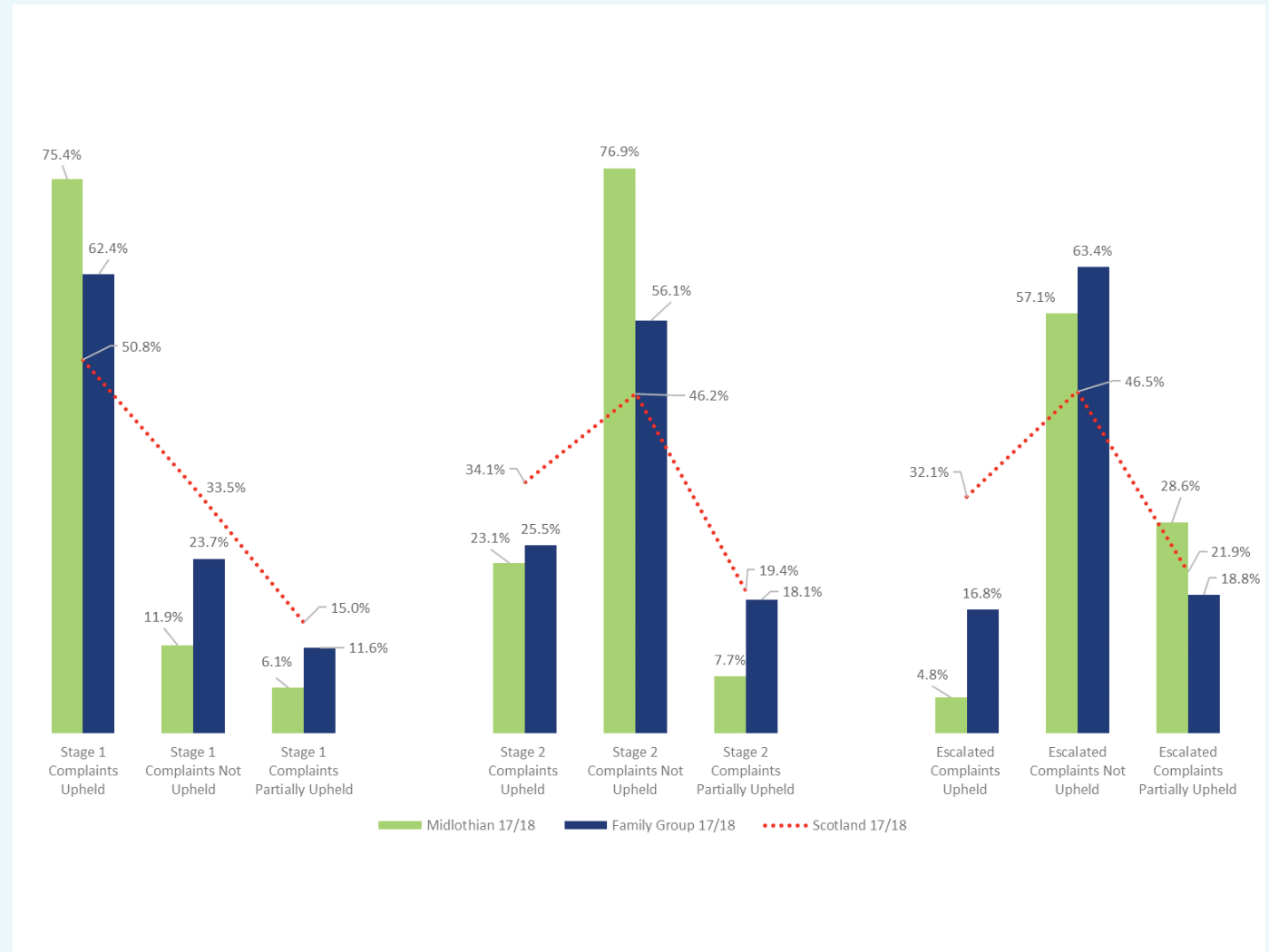
Conversely, Midlothian Council's upheld rate for stage 2 and escalated complaints is lower than both the family group and Scottish average. This could indicate that capturing the complaints early on could lessen the number of upheld rates in stage 2 circumstances.

When viewing the 'not upheld' complaints in the way that table 3 illustrates it can be seen that the stage 1's for Midlothian is quite low (11.9%) compared to the family group (23.7%), and the Scottish average (33.5%), whereas the council's stage 2 'not upheld' complaints are quite high (76.9%) when compared to the Scottish average (46.2%) and family group (56.1%).

Escalated 'not upheld' complaint figures are quite high (57.1%) for the council too (though not higher than the family group (63.4%)) compared to the Scottish average at 46.5%.

This, along with the low percentage of 'upheld' escalated complaints could mean that time spent on escalated complaints is not as a consequence of them being badly handled at the earlier stage, but is likely to be down to a customer being unhappy with their initial outcome.

Figure 6: Comparative figures between Midlothian Council, Family Group and Scottish Average for 17/18 Complaint Outcomes for all Stages



Indicator 4: Average time in working days to provide a full response to complaints at each stage

4

This indicator takes the sum of the total number of working days for all complaints to be dealt with and closed at stage 1; at stage 2; and escalated complaints.

An average time in working days for a full response to be given is then calculated by dividing the sum by the total number of closed complaints for each stage.

FIGURE 7: 2017/18 data for performance indicator 4: Average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage including comparative data for 2016/17

STAGE 1 Complaints	TARGET	5 Working Days
	16/17	0.3 Working Days
	17/18	3.3 Working Day
STAGE 2 Complaints	TARGET	20 Working Days
	16/17	7.3 Working Days
	17/18	19.5 Working Days
Escalated Complaints	TARGET	20 Working Days
	16/17	26.7 Working Days
	17/18	20.2 Working Days

Figure 7 indicates that in 2017/18, Midlothian Council was within the pre-determined target of 5 days for stage 1 complaints with an average of 3.3 days to complete these types of complaints. This is slightly lower than in 2016/17, where the same Figure illustrates that 0.3 days was the average. The difference in these statistics can be explained by an identified erroneous process when complaints were logged on Midlothian Council's Customer

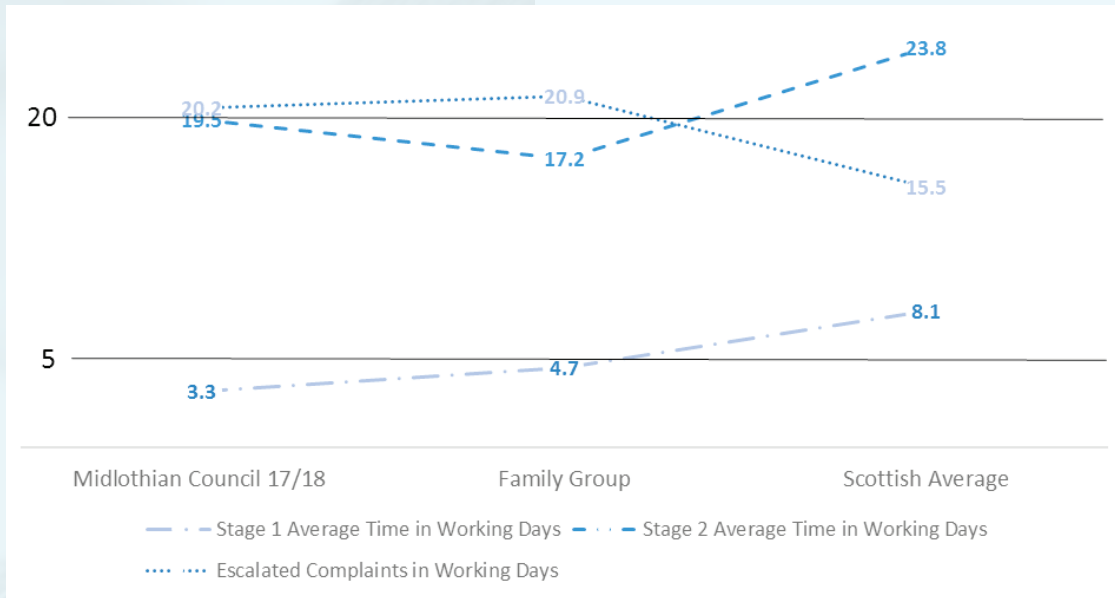
Relationship Management (CRM) system. Instead of counting the day of receipt as day one, the system counted it as day zero. Once identified, a considerable exercise was carried out and the problem has been addressed.

Figure 7 also shows that the average time for stage 2 complaints has increased from 7.5 in 2016/17 to 19.5 in 2017/18. 2016/17's result brought into question whether the stage 2 complaints were allocated the

correct stage since the number was so low. Although there is a notable decrease in the average days, it is useful to note that the 2017/18 report presents a more realistic figure.

With a disappointing average of 26.7 days in 2016/17 for escalated complaints, there is a positive improvement in the following year's data, which highlights a reduction to 20.2 days.

FIGURE 8: 2017/18 Comparative Figures between 17/18, Family Group and Scottish Average for indicator 4



As mentioned previously, the SPSO's ethos is that complaints should be dealt with at as early a stage as possible, so the less time it takes to deal with complaints the better. When compared to the Family Group average at 4.7 days, and the Scottish average at 8.1 days, Midlothian Council shows good performance in this area at 3.3 days. This data can be viewed in figure 8.

The average time taken for stage 2 complaints for Midlothian Council during 17/18 falls within the 20 day target at 19.5 days. Although this is relatively satisfactory, especially since the Scottish average falls outside the 20 day limit at 23.8 days, it is important to Midlothian Council that focus is on achieving amicable resolutions to complaints well within the designated timescales. The family group average is 17.2 days.

With an average of 19.6 days to complete escalated complaints, there are no concerns although it is noted that, as in the case with stage 2 complaints, there is a need to continuously strive to respond as quickly as is feasible.

Indicator 5: The number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days.

5

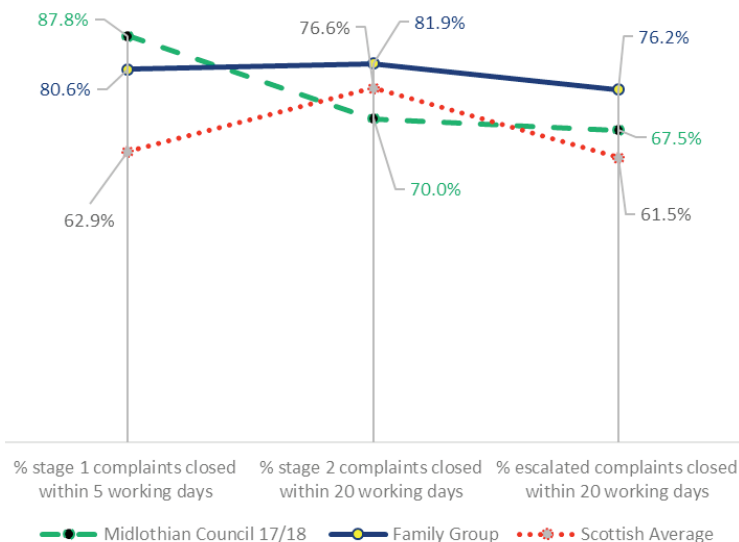
This indicator represents the number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the predetermined timescales of 5 and 20 working days. Cases where an extension to the timescales has been authorised are included.

Table 3: 2017/18 data for performance indicator 5: The number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days, including data for 2016/17 for comparison

It can be seen in table 3 that the relative amount of Midlothian Council's complaints that were closed against timescales has decreased for stage 1 complaints. However, the proportion of stage 2 complaints, and complaints that were escalated from stage 1 to stage 2 shows an increased amount (64% and 64.1% respectively in 2016/17 to 70% and 67.5% respectively in 2017/18) of complaints that were closed within target.

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Escalated
16/17	5463 (94.2%)	55 (64.0%)	25 (64.1%)
17/18	4475 (87.8%)	28 (70%)	27 (67.5%)

FIGURE 9: 2017/18 Comparative Figures between Midlothian Council, Family Group and Scottish Average for 2017/18 indicator 5



The relative amount of stage 1 complaints administered by Midlothian Council and closed within timescales is proportionately higher at 87.8% when compared to the Family Group (80.6%) and more so the Scottish average at 62.9%.

Stage 2 complaints closed within timescales, however are proportionately lower for Midlothian Council at 70.0% than the Scottish average (76.6%) or the Family Group (81.9%). The relatively small amount of stage 2 complaints (28 closed, as seen in table 3) dealt with by Midlothian Council means that there is a greater influence on the percentage. Similarly, with 67.5% of escalated complaints closed within timescales for Midlothian Council, this is an area for improvement, however it does exceed the Scottish average at 61.5%, but falls behind the Family Group average (76.2%).

Stage 2 complaints generally require a substantial investigation since they are ordinarily complex. Prior to the council being in a position to provide a full, impartial and balanced outcome, there first needs to be a detailed assessment of all the elements made in the complaint case. At times, there are instances where responses cannot be provided with the pre-determined target due to either capacity issues, or an inability to proceed with meetings at the desired times.

Indicator 6: The number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension was authorised

6

With authorisation from a senior manager such as a Head of Service, the pre-determined 5 day limit to respond to a stage 1 complaint may be extended a further 5 days if there are extenuating circumstances in which the complaint cannot be dealt with within the 5 day limit. Similarly, an extension may be approved by management to the 20 day limit for stage 2 and escalated complaints.

This indicator looks at the number and percentage of complaints at each stage where authorisation was agreed to extend the 5 or 20 working day timeline.

It does not include complaints that were late but authorisation was not requested and/or logged accordingly.

FIGURE 10: 2017/18 data for performance indicator 6: number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension to the 5 or 20 working day timeline has been authorised, including data for 2016/17 for comparison

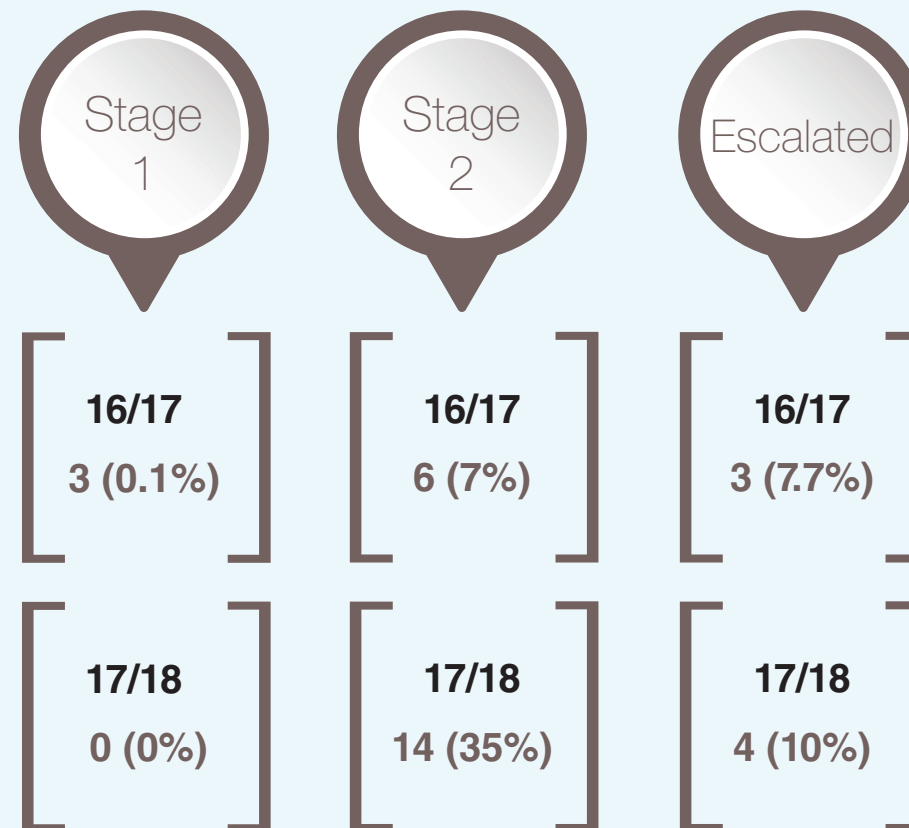


Figure 10 highlights that the relative amount of Midlothian Council's complaints that had an agreed extension to the timescale has increased for both stage 2 and escalated with 7% (2016/17) to 35% (2017/18) and 7.7% (2016/17) to 10% (2017/18) respectively.

This is an encouraging result since some work was done to raise the awareness of this element of the CHP. It could be interpreted as improved communication with customers and enhanced use and understanding of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.

It can be seen that Stage 1 complaints have decreased in this statistic from one year to the next. It was relatively low in the first instance at 0.1% in 2016/17 compared with 0% in 2017/18 which highlights that there is a need to promote knowledge of this function.

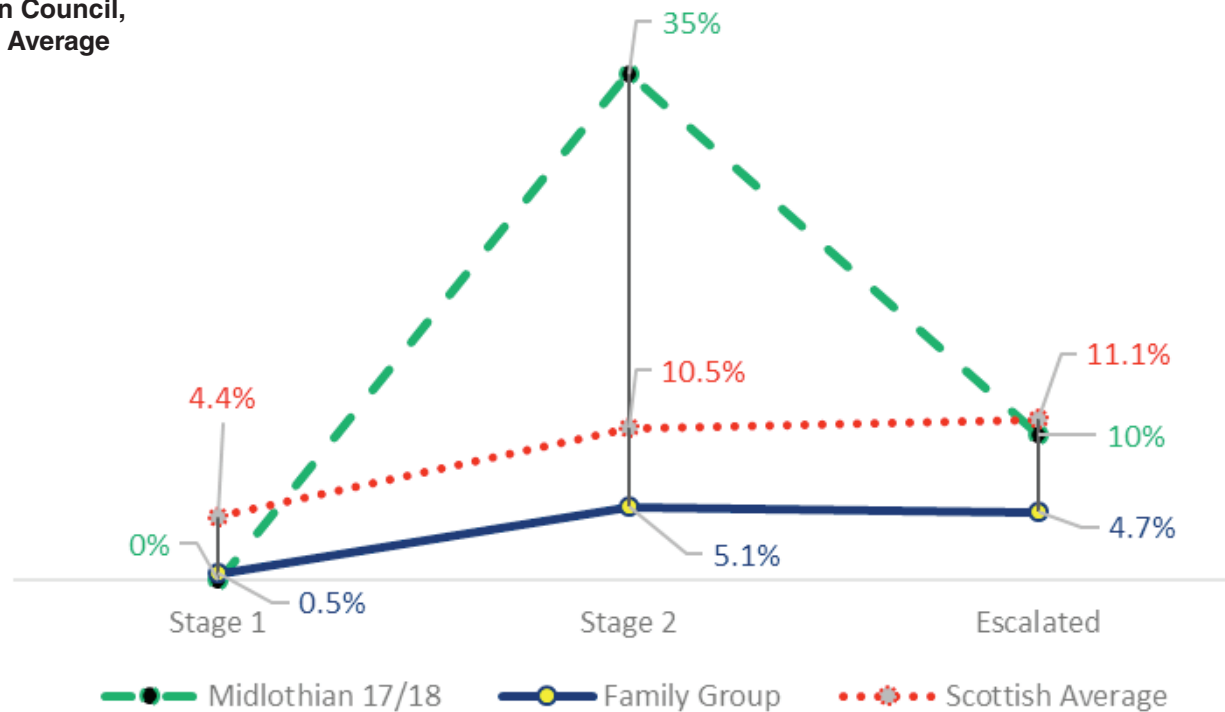
Figure 11 illustrates that the relative amount of stage 1 extended complaints for Midlothian is marginally lower than the Family Group with 0% and 0.5% respectively. The Scottish average for stage 1 complaints is slightly higher again at 4.4%.

For stage 2 and escalated complaints, Midlothian Council used the function to extend the time considerably more than both the Family Group and Scotland. With 35% for stage 2 compared to 10.5% (Scottish average) and 5.1% (Family Group), and 11.1% for escalated

complaints compared with the Scottish average at 10%, and the Family Group at 4.7%.

This is a reflection of some work carried out by Midlothian Council to promote the fact that the function to extend exists and should be used correctly instead of reporting complaints as late without the correct justification.

FIGURE 11: 2017/18 Comparative Figures between Midlothian Council, Family Group and Scottish Average for 2017/18 indicator 6



Indicator 7: Customer satisfaction about the complaint handling procedure

The Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network (LACHN) are working alongside the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to finalise a generic set of survey questions to be used as a minimum set of questions. This will enable better benchmarking of complaint handling satisfaction across Scotland.

Due to a poor uptake in responses to previous questionnaire attempts, Midlothian Council decided to cease further development work in this area and await the generic survey from the LACHN network group.

It is anticipated that the new format will improve the return rate of this particular indicator so that robust, informative data can be provided about whether or not customers are pleased with the way that their complaint has been handled. This will also enable informed decisions to be made about any improvements to the procedure that might be required.

Compliments throughout 2017/18

There were 150 compliments received during the year 2017/18. They covered a range of services and each Head of Service received the information relevant to their areas to ensure that staff were informed.

Many of the compliments were broad and covered factors on a larger scale such as the good work of the general council during adverse weather conditions, whereas many were specific to staff whom our customers felt had gone above and beyond.

Table 4 highlights an excerpt of some of these, and includes the service areas in which they belong

TABLE 4: Excerpt of compliments received during 2017/18

COMPLIMENTS	
Landscape & Countryside	"I would just like to say how impressed I am with your efficient staff. I reported the damaged tree yesterday and today your staff came out and cut it down and took it away. Well done for a good job."
	"I would like to say thank you to the wonderful work done by the gardeners attending to the park. The flowers on either side of the little walkway from the play area to the high street is a treat to the tired eyes."
	"Compliments to the landscaping service for cutting back all the bushes and nettles on the path leading from the water tower. This has made a huge difference."
Waste	"Thanks to the crew who empty her bins son promptly every week and for always attending to the fly tipping when she has reported this. They do a marvellous job."
	"Thanks on the great work the team have done on the old railway, it will be so much easier and safer now that it has been cleaned up. Can you please let the team know it's appreciated."
	"I reported slippery pavements in Dalkeith - I was very pleased to see council workers with a power washer and a mini street cleaner there the following morning. The surface is much better now so I would like to pass on my gratitude to the workers and to the Council for fixing this so quickly."
Roads	"Despite what we hear in the media about potholes and the lack of repairs, I would just like to compliment the council on quickly filling the quite small potholes before they got too big and needed extensive repair."
	"Last week I have reported a banging manhole on Lauder Road. I'm just writing to say a massive thank you to the road team for dealing with it so quickly and repairing it. It is much, much appreciated by myself and my neighbours. Thanks again."
	"Would like to thank the Roads Team for the wonderful work they have carried out through this bad weather."

Compliments throughout 2017/18...continued

TABLE 4: Excerpt of compliments received during 2017/18

COMPLIMENTS	
Property Maintenance	"Called to compliment men who were out fitting windows this morning. They cleaned up after themselves and I am very happy with the work that has been carried out. Please pass on my thanks."
	"Thank you to the paint team, they were absolutely brilliant. Customer really appreciates their hard work and they made a fantastic job."
	"Thanks for the lovely new fence that has been erected. I am delighted with the work and would like to give praise where praise is due. The workers were lovely and I am now 'showing off' the fence to my friends."
Healthy Living	"My children have just completed a great week of skiing and I wanted to thank all your staff. I also wanted to thank the instructor for his positive and encouraging approach to such a young age group."
Library	"I wanted to give positive feedback about the change to the library charges. Since the reservation fee was abolished at the beginning of May I have ordered a greater number, and a much wider variety of books to read than I would have had I paid 55p per book. In tricky financial circumstances it is refreshing to see a council making a bold decision to promote and encourage reading like this. Well done, keep up the good work."
Registrars	"I would like to say a massive thank you for the great way the registrars dealt with me today I needed a replacement marriage certificate ASAP and I got it within 5 minutes. Thank you so much, great service."
Contact Centre	"Thanks to all your teams that kept Midlothian moving during this unprecedented weather. My compliments are targeted to the contact centre, who directed the enquiries. You are the silent heroes - the shop window into services. Well done."
Reception	"Thanks to the gentleman on the reception desk in Buccleuch House. He was very pleasant and helpful."
Revenues & Benefits	"Would like to give praise to one of your workers who was very helpful and understanding. She really was fantastic. Thanks again."
Lifelong Learning & Employability	"I am very grateful to have one of your team supporting my son. On more than one occasion she has gone above the call of duty to ensure he is going forward on the right path. She seems to care passionately about the job, and deserves recognition for her hard work and dedication to the people she supports."

Indicator 8: Learning, changes and improvements made to service areas as a result of the feedback given from complaints

*Please note that there are several Case Studies already reported in the Social Work Annual Complaint Report 2017/18, where further details can be found at <https://www.midlothian.gov.uk/>

CASE STUDY 1

Service: Resources & Education

Complaint Analysis

Multi-service involvement was required when a parent telephoned Midlothian Council to complain about the content of the snack 'goodie' bags provided to her child at one of the local area Gala days.

Although it is volunteers who manage these events and not Midlothian Council, the council heavily support the events by providing assistance with matters such as redirecting traffic, setting up of certain equipment and distributing information and/or vouchers for the snack bags for the events through the schools.

Midlothian therefore took ownership of the case, which was processed using the council's Complaint Handling Procedure (CHP).

The complainant had a valid point that the content of the bags was unhealthy and did not support the work of the schools and other services that promote healthy eating. The complaint was further fuelled as there was no response or acknowledgement of receipt by the council.

Once brought to the attention of senior officials, it was rightly escalated to a stage 2 where a multi-service investigation took place.

Service Improvement Actions

Work was carried out to investigate who the decision makers were in terms of who managed the content of the snack bags, and after some discussion between the council and the committee who organise the Gala events, the subject was made an item on the upcoming committee agenda, with an aim to review the content of the bagged items.

The matter was also raised with all Headteachers through the Associated Schools group (ASG) meetings. This was mainly to raise awareness of the issue and to explore and implement more control measures when assisting groups such as this one. A pro-forma with a series of questions was introduced to better screen these and similar groups so that knowledge is obtained before agreement to support is made.

The issue regarding the complaint not being dealt with at the time of reporting was to do with difficulties in identifying a responsible service area to assign the complaint to. This resulted in the case sitting 'stagnant' on the system. Work to the Customer Relationship Management system that ensures that there is a 'corporate' area to select when there is multi-service involvement, with a designated Corporate Officer who would take the lead in dealing with the complaint to prevent similar issues occurring in future. Staff were updated accordingly.

*Please note that there are several Case Studies already reported in the Social Work Annual Complaint Report 2017/18, where further details can be found at <https://www.midlothian.gov.uk/>

CASE STUDY 2

Service: Education

Complaint Analysis

Complaint about school gate and surrounding paving area being unsuitable for ingress/egress of the school grounds, and thereby causing overcrowding issues and a trip hazard due to erosion of the paving. With large numbers entering and exiting the area at one time with buggies/prams, wheelchairs, bikes, scooters etc included, the complaint was raised to the school and dealt with using the CHP. There was also involvement of the Council's Health and Safety team, who confirmed that the gate and path area were unsuitable.

Service Improvement Actions

The gate leading into the playground was increased by a recommended 1.2m, and the width of the path leading from the playground was increased in line with the increase to the width of the gate.

CASE STUDY 3

Service: Customer Services

Complaint Analysis

There were some complaints about misinformation being provided by the Contact Centre. Although they were low level stage 1 complaints, combined they had generated enough attention to rationalise an analysis of current practice.

Service Improvement Actions

Work was carried out that included process mapping exercises, self-evaluation and reviewing the amount of contact with services that are supported by the Contact Centre. This identified areas for consideration and changes were implemented that ensures Customer service staff work more closely with the services they support. This includes regular meetings; regular short training sessions or practice updates; and time spent for respective officers within each service area to ensure better understanding of end-to-end service provision.

CASE STUDY 4

Lifelong Learning and Employability

Complaint Analysis

Complaints were received regarding re-registration for an adult learning class following receipt of an auto generated email to register. Reports of being timed out before the application was completed and that the details for the named contact support person on the auto generated letter were not up to date as the staff member no longer worked for the council. Costs had also been increased without consultation or forewarning.

Service Improvement Actions

A full booking system review of the current system was undertaken to ensure that up to date procedures were in place. The time out functionality was changed, data security was evaluated, and class/contact details were revised and updated where necessary. Going forward, thorough updates are scheduled with the supplier as matter of routine practice. The class was attended by a senior officer to make contact, apologise and offer temporary alternative methods of payment due to the problem.

CASE STUDY 5

Service: Education, Property and Facilities Management, Landscape and Countryside

Complaint Analysis

An influx of complaints were received from the public about staff smoking in either their council owned vans, or on council property such as on school grounds etc.

Service Improvement Actions

The smoking policy was reviewed and work was undertaken on a corporate scale to promote staff health and wellbeing where 'Healthy Working Lives' events took place, and reiteration of the policy that will ensure staff are aware of Midlothian's strict rules about smoking on or near council premises/property.

Annual Complaints Handled by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) is the organisation that handles complaints about public services in Scotland. The Ombudsman service is independent of government and has a duty to act impartially. The SPSO also shares learning from its work to improve service delivery across the public services spectrum in Scotland. The office carries out awareness-raising activities with the general public, and bodies under their jurisdiction and promotes good complaints handling by public service providers in Scotland. The SPSO has a separate website to support best practice in complaints handling.

Mentioned earlier in this report, customers who have used Midlothian Council's established Complaint Handling Procedure, and who remain dissatisfied with any aspect of the way in which their complaint has been handled, are signposted by the council to the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO). Provided it is within their jurisdiction, the SPSO will review the complaint and consequently reach a decision. Depending on the decision, the SPSO will make recommendations to the authority accordingly. This is to encourage lasting improvements to services so that the trust and confidence of the public is re-established.

Figure 12: Comparative figures between 17/18 and 16/17 on the number of complaints and their corresponding areas that have reached the SPSO

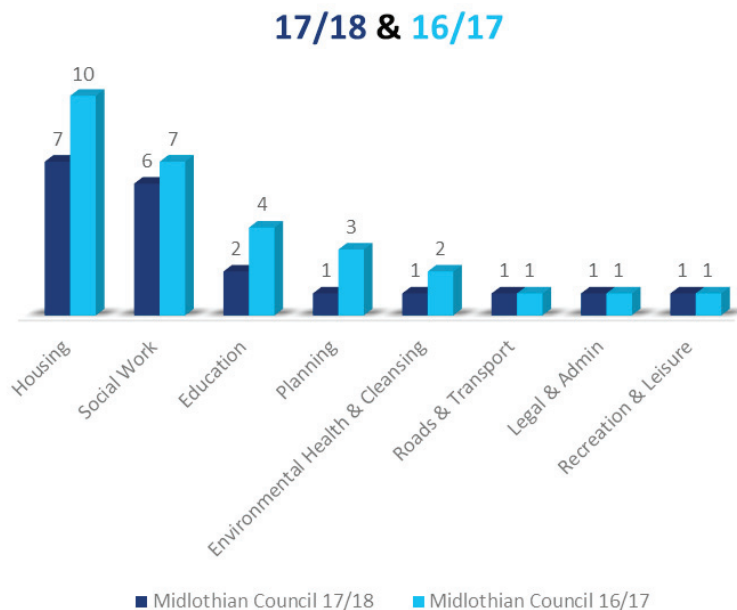


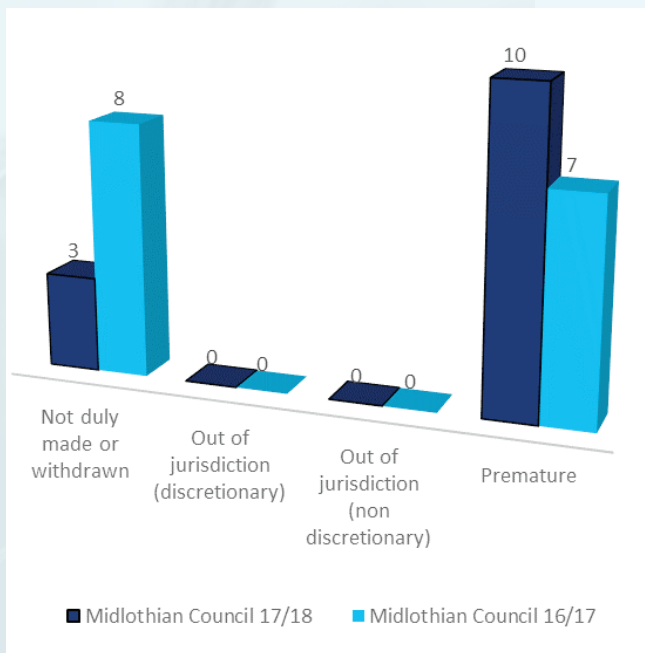
Figure 12 illustrates the total number of complaints that have been **received** by the SPSO about a Midlothian Council service between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018. The main service areas have been given generic terminology by the SPSO since they deal with all local authorities in Scotland, and since each authority has locally named service areas/ divisions.

It is interesting to note that although the numbers differ between the years, the trend is similarly matched in terms of the most commonly complained about services.

Figures 13, 14 and 15 show the outcomes of the complaints determined by the SPSO about Midlothian Council over the same period. Similarly to the council's statistics, the figures received (shown in figure 12) and the figures determined don't tally because the SPSO were still working on a case after the business year had ended.

The advice stage, shown in figure 13 is the initial receipt stage where the SPSO will check if they have enough information, that the complainant has first of all complained to the relevant organisation, and that the matter is one that they are allowed to look at. It can be seen that there have been 13 at this stage compared to 15 the year before. 10 were deemed premature (hadn't gone through authority's internal procedure first), and 3 were withdrawn (not taken any further).

FIGURE 13: Comparative figures between 17/18 and 16/17 on the number of complaints received by the SPSO that reached the ADVICE stage



The early resolution stage, referred to in figure 14 is where the SPSO have confirmed that the complaint is mature (ie that the complaint has completed the organisation's complaint process) and is in jurisdiction. The SPSO will then begin gathering the information needed for an investigation. Some cases are closed at this stage if they are able to be resolved with the organisation, or if they consider there would be no significant benefit, or achievable outcome from a full investigation. There were 8 complaints in total that reached this stage compared with 11 the year before.

Figure 15 illustrates the complaints that the SPSO conducted an investigation for. It can be seen that of the 21 complaints that the SPSO received, there were 2 that reached this stage. The decisions can be viewed in the table, which reflects that 1 was not upheld (Education), and 1 was upheld. Further analysis informs that these were Education and Community Safety and Justice.

FIGURE 14: Comparative figures between 17/18 and 16/17 on the number of complaints received by the SPSO that reached the EARLY RESOLUTION stage

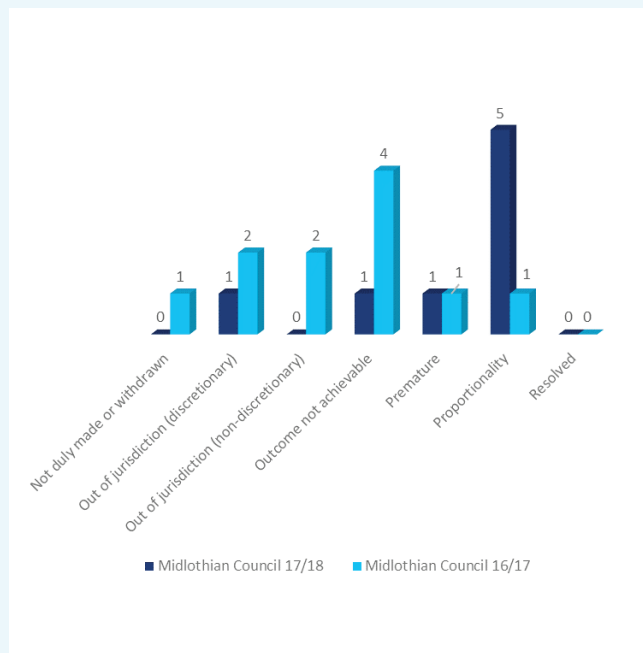
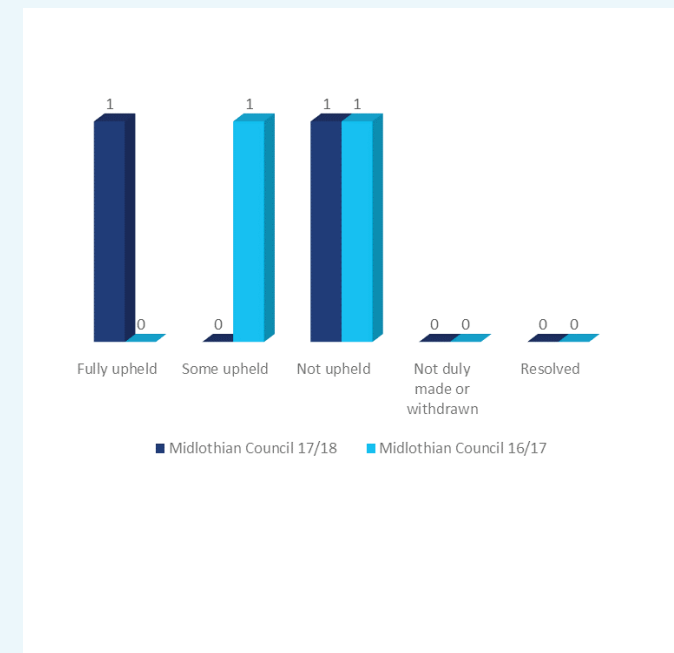


FIGURE 15: Comparative figures between 17/18 and 16/17 on the number of complaints received by the SPSO that reached the INVESTIGATION stage



Discussion And Conclusion

The quantity of telephone calls relative to the total number of complaints for the years 16/17 and 17/18 have reduced. It is a negligible amount at 3% but it is important to recognise it since the percentage of online complaint interactions has increased by 4%. This could be a consequence of the continual work to improve the user-friendliness of the council website, and is evidence that channel-shift work is moving in the desired direction. It will be interesting to see if further planned work to enhance web-form accessibility will amplify the trend.

During 2017/18, Midlothian Council processed 734 fewer complaints compared with the year before. The year on year difference could be viewed in one of two ways. The reduction could be interpreted as tangible evidence that there has been improvement in terms of enhancing service provision. From another perspective, it could also mean that there is a wider consideration to ensure that customers know that the procedure exists and/or that staff are identifying complaints correctly and logging them accordingly per the CHP.

With a considerable difference between the complaints per 1000 population (59 for Midlothian Council) when externally benchmarked to the Scottish average (16) and family group average (11), it is important to bear in mind that factors for consideration might have an impact on complaint totals when comparing Local Authorities with this statistic. These are items such as events, tourism, weather, locale - rural/town and demographics.

The SPSO's aim to close complaints at as early a stage as possible to prevent the need for lengthy and costly investigations is reflected in Midlothian Council's ability to close off stage 1 complaints at the initial point of contact. The data also shows that the council has a lower instance of escalated complaints than that of the Family Group average and the Scottish average, which also provides evidence to the theory that customers are happy with the response that they have received at stage 1.

The average time to complete stage 2 complaints was a concern in 2016/17 and the low number brought into question whether the correct stage had been assigned. Following awareness raising activities and training, 2017/18 saw a significant improvement in this area. Even though the number has notably decreased, it is a more realistic figure that is much closer to the family group average. Similarly for escalated complaints, there is a

positive improvement in the 2017/18 data, which highlights a reduction from 26.7 days to 20.2 days.

For stage 2 and escalated complaints, Midlothian Council used the function to extend the time considerably more than both the Family Group and Scotland. With 35% for stage 2 compared to 10.5% (Scottish average) and 5.1% (Family Group), and 11.1% for escalated complaints compared with the Scottish average at 10%, and the Family Group at 4.7%. This is a reflection of some work carried out by Midlothian Council to promote the fact that the function to extend exists and should be used correctly instead of reporting complaints as late without the correct justification.

It is reassuring to report that the number of agreed extensions to complaint timescales have increased for stage 2 and escalated complaints by Midlothian Council. There is improvement between years 16/17 and 17/18, and also Midlothian's figures are higher for this outcome than both family group and Scottish average. The result is evidence that the work done to raise the awareness of this element of the CHP has been a success. It also provides assurance that communication with customers has improved and that there is better understanding of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.

150 compliments were received to a range of services during 2017/18. An excerpt of these can be viewed in figure 12 above. Many of them related to the work of the council in keeping Midlothian operational during adverse weather conditions, and many were about staff whom our customers felt had gone 'above and beyond'. Compliments were shared with both officers and heads of service to ensure awareness of the good work. The practice of recording compliments as well as complaints is encouraged in all services to ensure that reports can be generated, and to enable some analysis work that will permit learning and continuous improvement.

Satisfaction is an area requiring fairly large scale effort to drive the process of administering the forms throughout the authority. Using the new generic form will enable better benchmarking and allows the opportunity to launch as a 'new look' form as one of best practice.

Next Steps

Development of dashboard using Tableau for senior staff to have regular, consistent access to complaints data.

Maintain engagement with the Local Authority Complaint Handler's Network (LACHN) to ensure benchmarking is accurate to enable learning.

As part of the installation of a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform, implement a new complaints system which will provide a more robust and efficient arrangement.

Use the new CRM system to relaunch the Complaint Handling Procedure (CHP) and correlate training on procedural matters with necessary system training.

Use training to work towards reducing time taken to respond to complaints.

Review and update customer feedback leaflets.

Improve online accessibility for logging a complaint, with guidance to assist customers whilst submitting a complaint so they are better able to differentiate between a service request and a complaint.

Your feedback counts

Whether you want to know more about our performance, have something to say about this report, or want to suggest an alternative way of receiving this kind of information in the future.

Please contact the Policy and Scrutiny Team:

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COMMUNICATING CLEARLY

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如有需要我們樂意提供翻譯本，和其他版本的資訊與刊物，包括盲人點字、錄音帶或大字體。

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ਅਸੀਂ ਮੰਗ ਕਰਨ ਤੇ ਖੁਸ਼ੀ ਨਾਲ ਅਨੁਵਾਦ ਅਤੇ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਤੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਪ੍ਰਦਾਨ ਕਰਾਂਗੇ, ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਬਰੇਲ, ਟੇਪ ਜਾਂ ਵੱਡੀ ਛਪਾਈ ਸ਼ਾਮਲ ਹਨ।

Körler için kabartma yazılar, kaset ve büyük nüshalar da dahil olmak üzere, istenilen bilgileri sağlamak ve tercüme etmekten memnuniyet duyuyoruz.

اگر آپ چاہیں تو ہم خوشی سے آپ کو ترجمہ فراہم کر سکتے ہیں اور معلومات اور دستاویزات دیگر شکلوں میں مثلاً بریل (ناپینا افراد کے لیے) بھرے ہوئے حروف کی لکھائی (میں، ٹیپ پر یا بڑے حروف کی لکھائی میں) فراہم کر سکتے ہیں۔