

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 24 JUNE 2015

REPORT ON: ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLAINTS

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

REPORT NO: 203-2015

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To report on complaints performance and satisfaction figures for 2014/2015, with comparisons to previous periods, and on the action which continues to be taken to ensure that complaints are handled well and to learn from complaints.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Committee notes:

- a) the key performance indicators on complaints closed between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015, with trends from previous periods
- b) the latest update from the Complaints Review Group which meets quarterly to check the quality of complaints handling and to promote learning and process improvement from complaints
- c) the results of the satisfaction survey sent to everyone who made a complaint closed during each quarter of 2014/2015, with trends from previous surveys.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Since 1 October 2012, the Council has been operating the model Complaints Handling Procedure for Local Authorities as required by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. Part of that procedure requires that regular reports are produced for the Council's management team and elected members.
- 4.2 This latest report covers complaints closed during the year from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015, and includes performance on key indicators as well as the results of the satisfaction survey sent to all those who made complaints closed during this period, with charts showing the trends compared to previous periods.
- 4.3 The report also updates Committee on the work of the Complaints Review Group which meets to check that the complaints handling procedure is being followed correctly and to promote learning and process improvement from complaints.
- 4.4 To clarify, this report does not analyse every instance of dissatisfaction, only those where people have used the formal complaints process. A sample of cases passed by elected members to departments over a couple of months were checked to see if the issues raised fell into the same categories as those pursued as complaints and this was confirmed to be the case. It is not recommended that statistics on such cases are collected for inclusion in this report because we do not have an electronic system in place to analyse these efficiently and produce the type of information detailed in this report, but it is open to members to encourage and assist constituents to use the formal complaints process where appropriate.

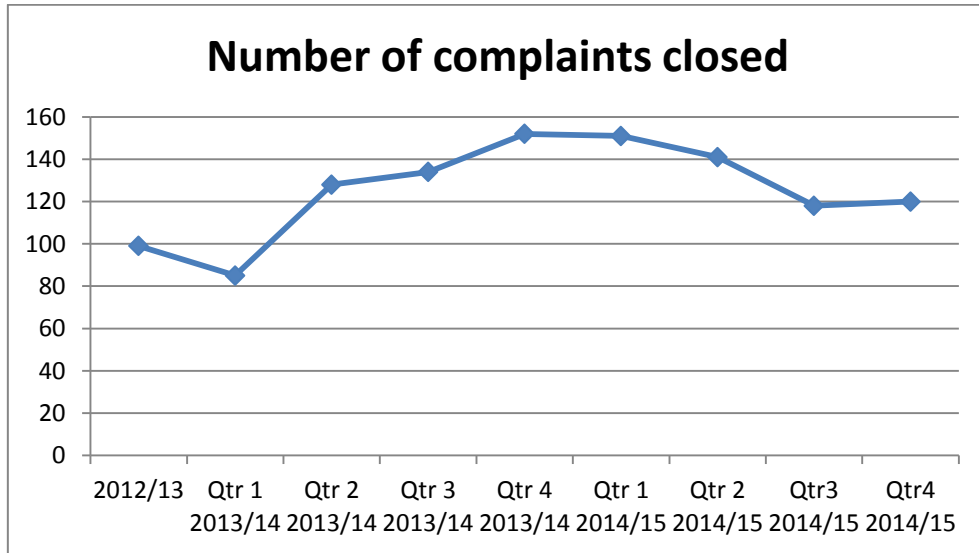
5. COMPLAINTS STATISTICS : 1 APRIL 2014 – 31 MARCH 2015

5.1 In 2014/15:

- 530 complaints were closed (this excludes complaints about Social Work as they are not subject to the model Complaints Handling Procedure. It also excludes complaints about Leisure and Culture Dundee who use the Council's complaints recording system but report separately on complaints to their own board, although information on this is included for members' interest in the report to Policy and Resources Committee on Third Party Funding).
- 58.5% of complaints at the frontline stage were closed within the target of 5 working days and a further 30.2% within an extended target time. 85.7% of complaints at the investigation stage were closed within the 20 working days target and a further 5.7% within an extended target time
- the average number of working days taken to close complaints was 7.5 days at the frontline stage and 11.0 days at the investigation stage
- 26.5% of complaints were upheld at the frontline stage, and a further 14.3% were partially upheld. At the investigation stage, 27.1% were upheld and 22.9% were partially upheld
- the percentage of complaints recorded in each category is shown below (with the figure for 2013/14 in brackets):

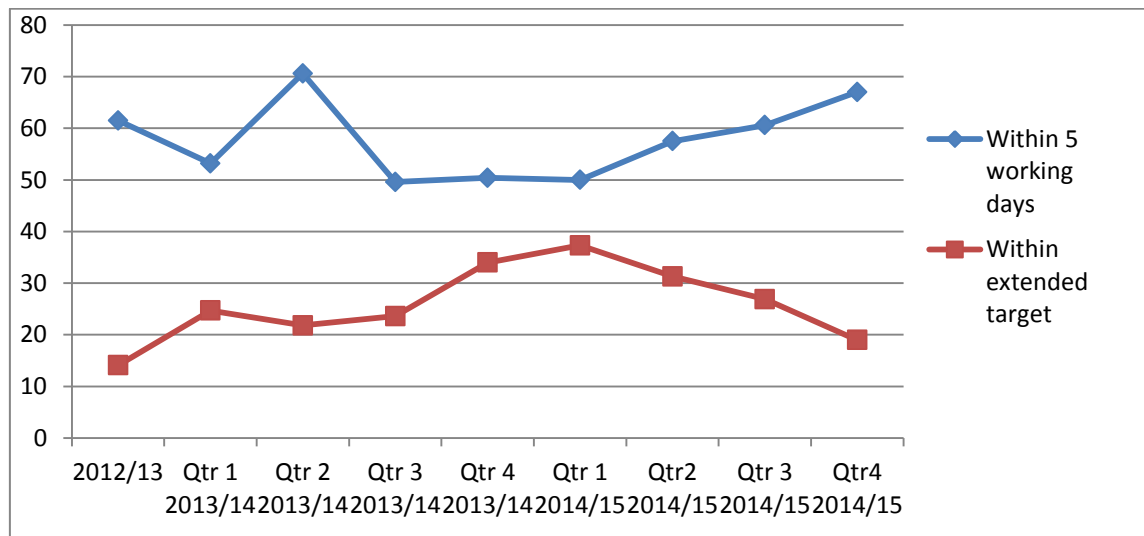
- delay in responding to enquiries and requests	-	17.9%	(18.5%)
- failure to meet our service standards	-	17.9%	(17.1%)
- treatment by, or attitude of, a member of staff	-	27.1%	(25.2%)
- failure to provide a service	-	18.8%	(17.7%)
- dissatisfaction with our policy	-	11.9%	(13.3%)
- failure to follow the proper administrative process	-	5.5%	(7.0%)
- refusal to give advice or answer questions		0.9%	(1.2%)
- 33 people made more than one complaint during 2014/15 - 28 made two complaints, 3 made three complaints, 1 made five complaints and 1 made seven complaints.
- by department, the number of complaints recorded were Education (151), Housing (146), Corporate Services (108), Environment (78), City Development (38) and Chief Executive's (9). A breakdown of each department's figures is given in Appendix 1.

5.2 Key quarterly trends from the analysis of performance indicators are shown in the charts below:



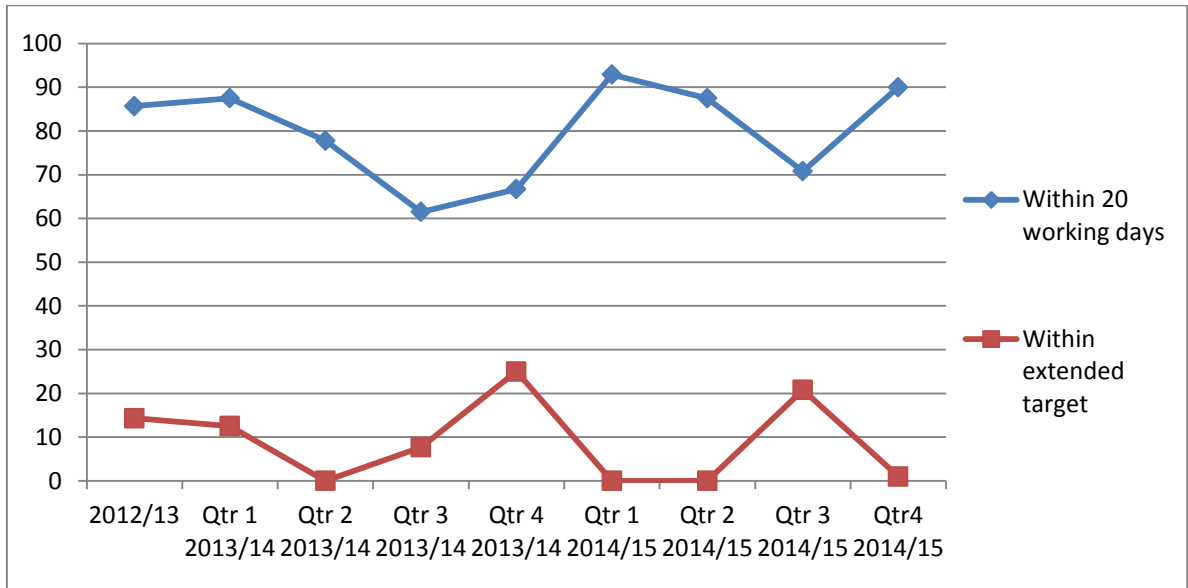
While the overall trend has risen since 2012, we believe this reflects greater use of the electronic complaints recording system rather than any increase in actual dissatisfaction. The Council should continue to welcome complaints as a valuable source of customer feedback and an opportunity to identify improvements, rather than something negative.

% of stage 1 complaints closed within target



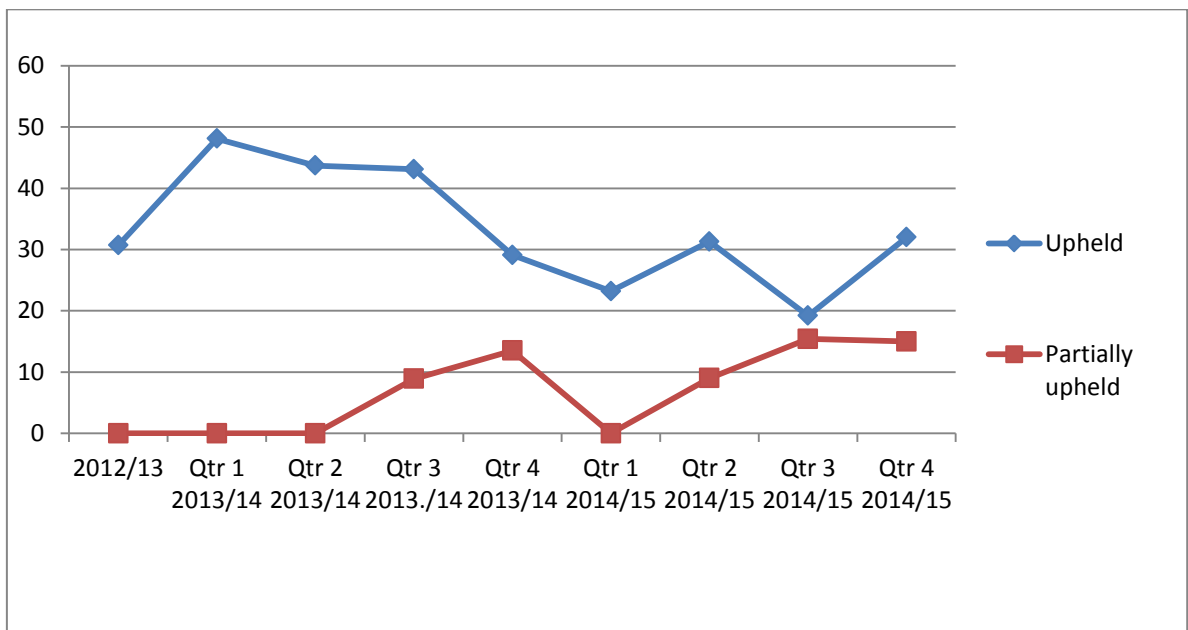
We continue to emphasise to staff the importance of responding to complaints within target (or contacting customers to agree extended targets if a quick response is not possible) so it is pleasing to see an upward trend on this indicator.

% of stage 2 complaints closed within target



A very small number of complaints go to stage 2, so % figures will fluctuate considerably due to individual cases. Chief officers and managers receiving stage 2 complaints have been reminded that these should be acknowledged within 3 days as well as responded to within 20 days or an agreed extended target timescale.

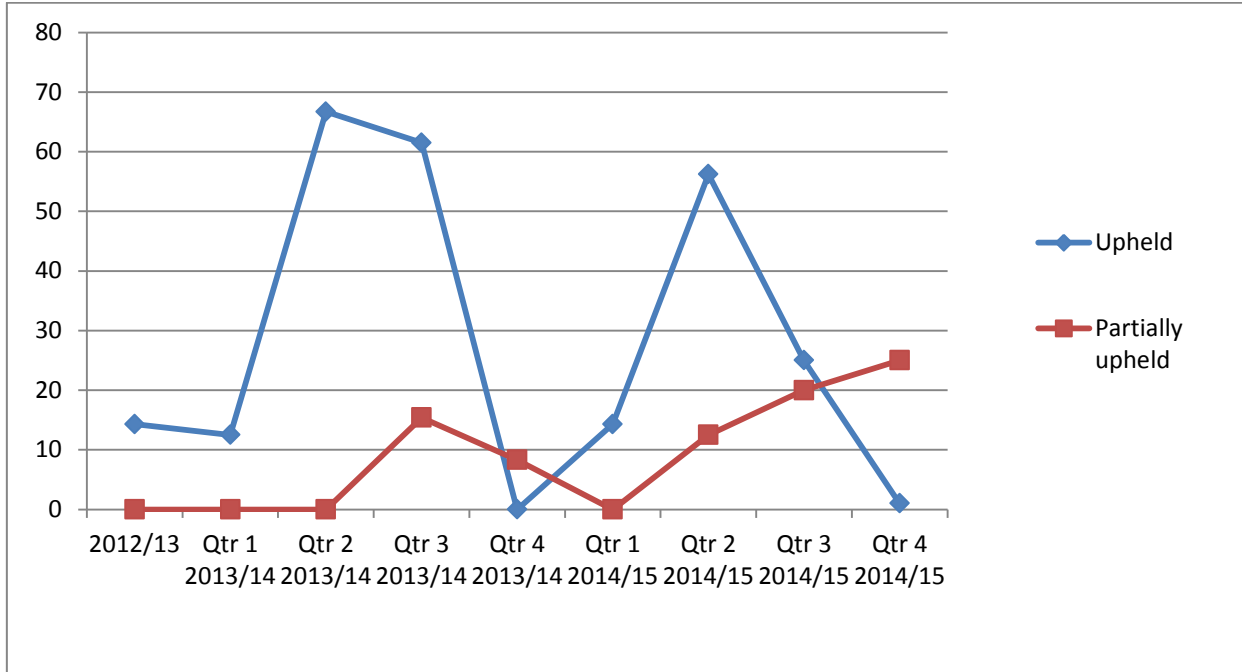
% of stage 1 complaints upheld and partially upheld



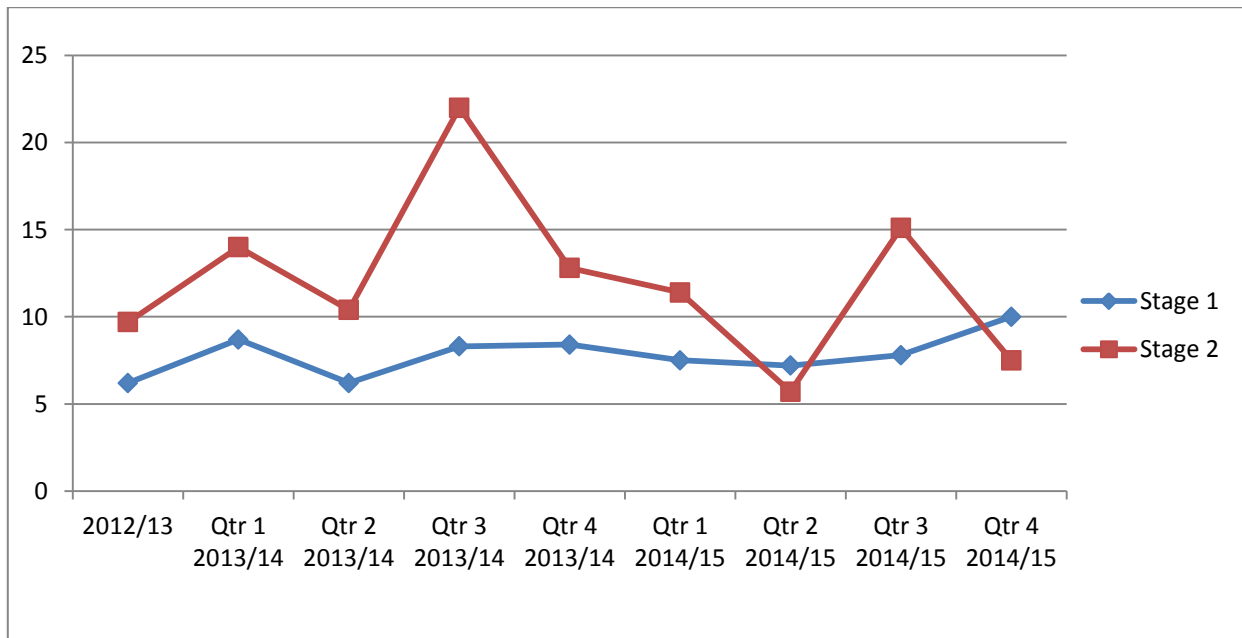
'Partially' upheld was not originally included as an option in the indicators specified by the SPSO, so these figures are only available from 1 October 2013.

% of stage 2 complaints upheld and partially upheld

A very small number of complaints go to stage 2, so % figures will fluctuate considerably from one quarter to the next due to individual cases.



Average number of days to close complaints



6. QUALITY CHECKS AND LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

6.1 A Complaints Review Group, made up of complaints administrators from a number of departments and officers with a remit for performance and improvement from the Chief Executive's Department, meets every quarter to review a sample of complaints and check if these were well recorded, investigated and responded to. The group also looks at all 'open' complaints which are beyond the target date for response, and at the planned service improvements identified by officers when they close complaints as

upheld or partially upheld. A key aim is to identify any lessons learned from complaints which can be generalised and lead to better practices being adopted.

6.2 The group continues to find evidence that complaints are generally being recorded, investigated and responded to well, along with evidence that complainants are being contacted to keep them informed of progress if complaints are taking longer than the target number of days to investigate. However, the group does still see some cases where targets have been missed, complainants have not been advised about escalating complaints if still dissatisfied and clearer explanations and apologies could have been given where complaints were upheld. The importance of dealing with complaints quickly, keeping complainants informed and advising complainants what to do if still dissatisfied continues to be emphasised to staff through guidance on the intranet, reminder messages on the complaints system, emails and presentations.

6.3 Many of the 'planned service improvements' in 2014/15 involved speaking to individuals about errors or arranging training for teams to remind them of procedures and customer care standards, but over the past year there have also been a number of service improvements identified, covering topics such as:

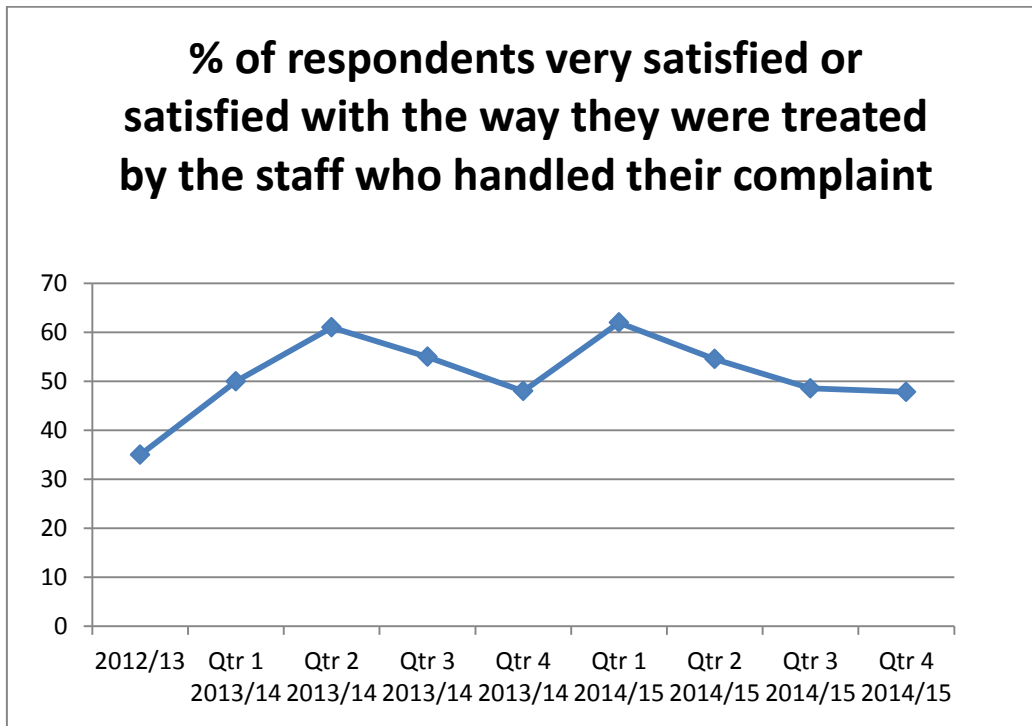
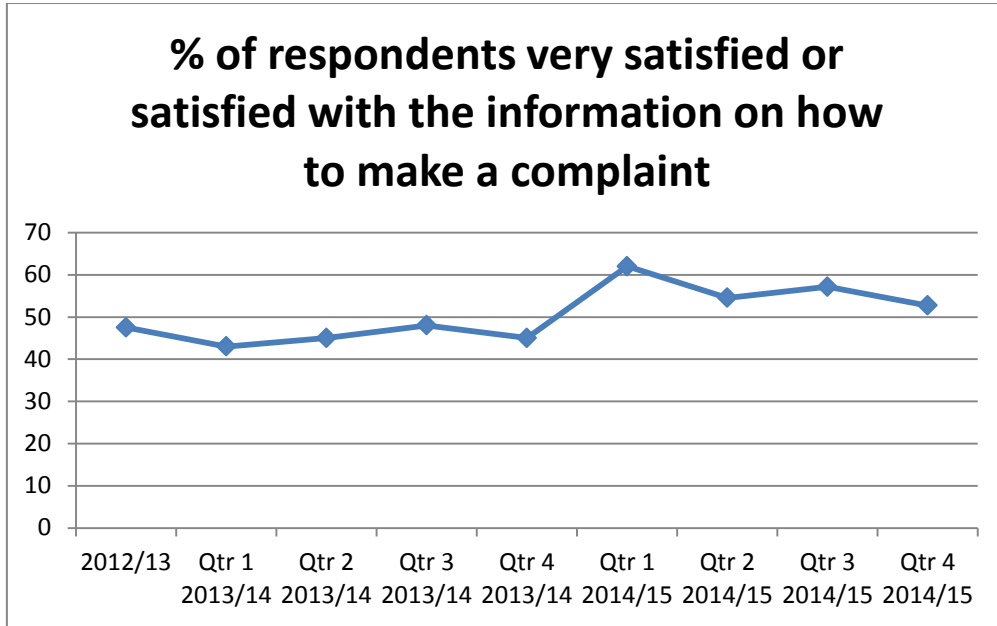
- signage at the West Office Community Lounge improved to make clear that meetings are in progress and avoid interruptions
- policy and procedures on pothole patching to be reviewed
- telephone call 'pick up' groups changed in Environment to improve telephone answering response
- accelerated introduction of a procedure to ensure clearer communication with users of the Homeless Service about decisions on their case
- information published for parents on the assessment of dyslexia in schools and work to be undertaken with Dundee College to achieve a more consistent and shared understanding of the assessment framework for dyslexia across the different learning settings
- time period between community centre hall lets extended to ensure adequate time for cleaning
- action to be taken to ensure that information about tenants' arrears and arrangements to pay is kept up-to-date on the Common Housing Register system
- tradesmen to be advised of a need for deeper excavation when repairing drainage pipes
- signage regarding cycle access through Dundee Port to be reviewed
- a school's behaviour policy updated, with new protocols for dealing with playground incidents added and communicated to staff
- a school's medical protocol updated and shared with staff, and information on dealing with accidents displayed in the medical room
- implementation of a Landlord Portal which will allow landlords to see 'real time' information on tenants' benefit claims
- improved communications between tenants and the Housing and Environment departments concerning access arrangements and post-repair quality inspections

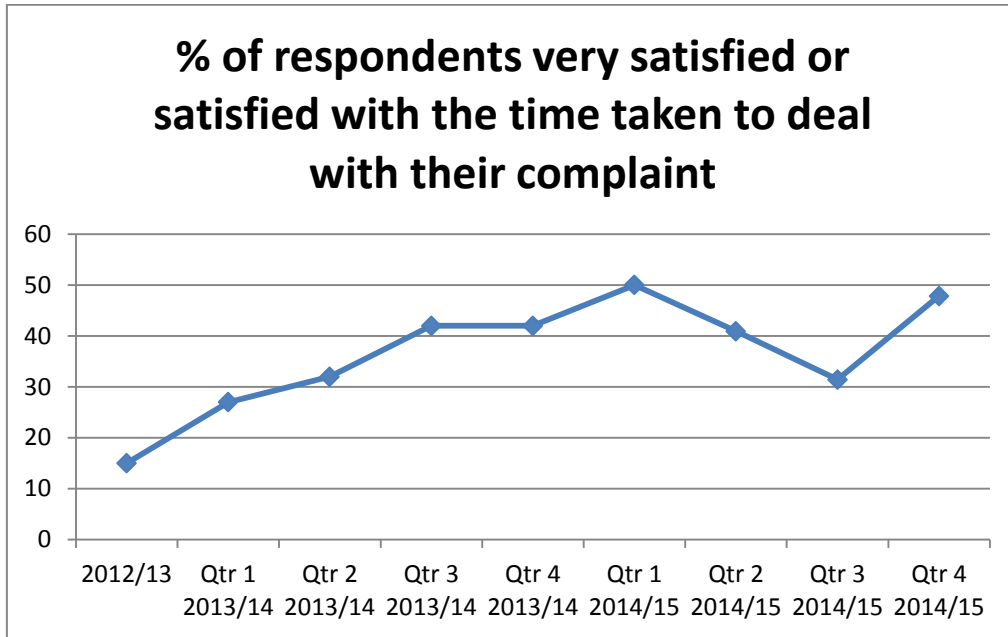
- parking enforcement regime around football grounds on match days to be reviewed alongside Police Scotland
 - development of a handbook for staff to ensure consistent procedures used when processing documents by the translation service
 - lessons learnt from implementation of phase 1 of the new waste collection services for future phases, including extra call handling capacity to deal with queries
- 6.4 A new feature of the electronic complaints recording system launched in September 2014, involves an automatic 'follow-up' email being sent to those who record planned service improvements when closing complaints. The aim is to ensure that these improvements are implemented. Officers are prompted to give further updates a month after the complaint was closed, and these are also reviewed by the Complaints Review Group.
- 6.5 Analysis of complaints will now be used systematically to inform decisions on subjects for STEP reviews. STEP (Systems Thinking Empowers People) is the Council's approach to service improvement based on the principles of lean service and customer insight, and it is felt that this approach lends itself well to learning from complaints and improving processes to prevent recurrence.

7. **SATISFACTION WITH THE COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE**

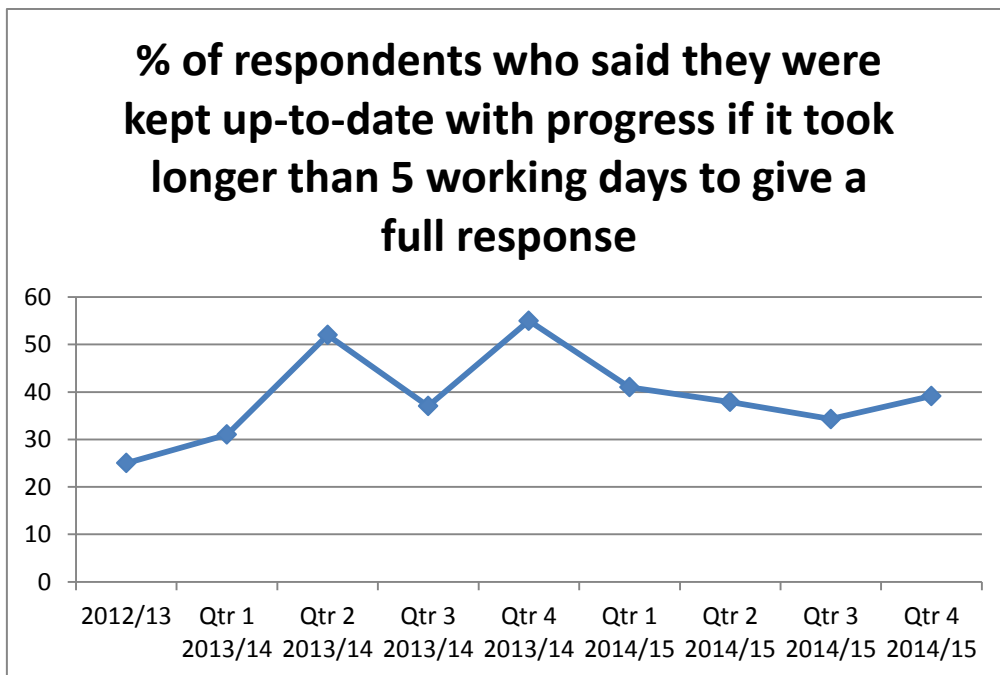
- 7.1 The model Complaints Handling Procedure requires that the Council reports on a measure of customer satisfaction with its complaints process. To achieve this, we issue surveys to all those who have made a complaint in the previous three months.
- 7.2 Trends in satisfaction are highlighted in the charts at 7.3 below. Since the survey sample always consists entirely of people who have made complaints about the Council, the majority of which are not upheld, it is not surprising that satisfaction levels are not always high. It is recognised to be very difficult to get complainants to comment objectively on the complaints process, as distinct from the outcome, where their complaint was not upheld or did not result in the action they wanted. Nevertheless, our aim is to increase the % of complainants who acknowledge that the process of dealing with their complaint was satisfactory, even if they did not get the outcome they desired.

7.3 Key trends from the survey are:

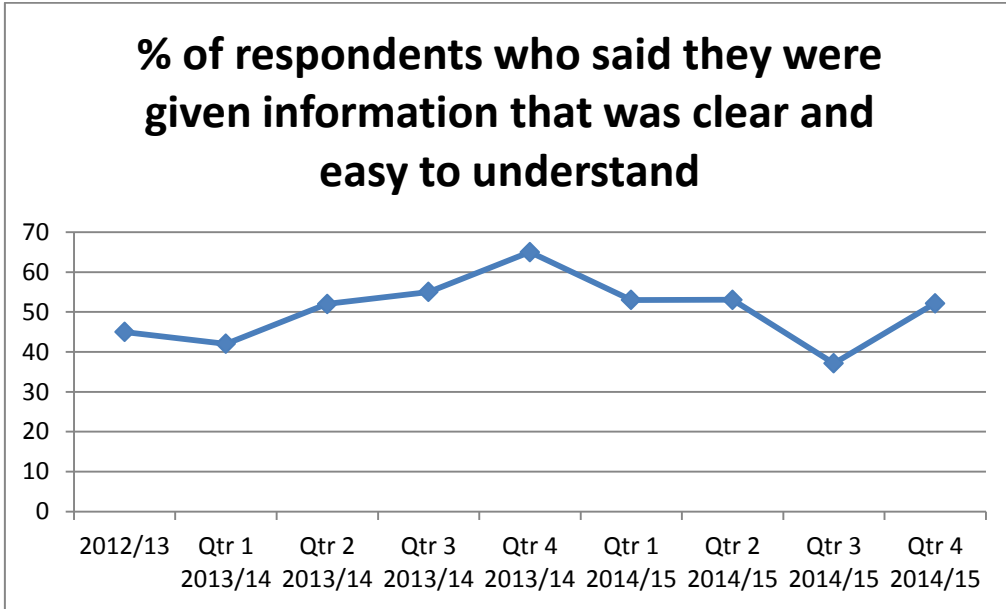




The % of those responding in the latest quarter who said they were 'very dissatisfied' with the time taken to deal with their complaint fell from almost 46% to just over 30% but chief officers have been asked to continue to reinforce to officers the importance of dealing with complaints as quickly as possible, and explaining to customers where this is not possible – see next result also



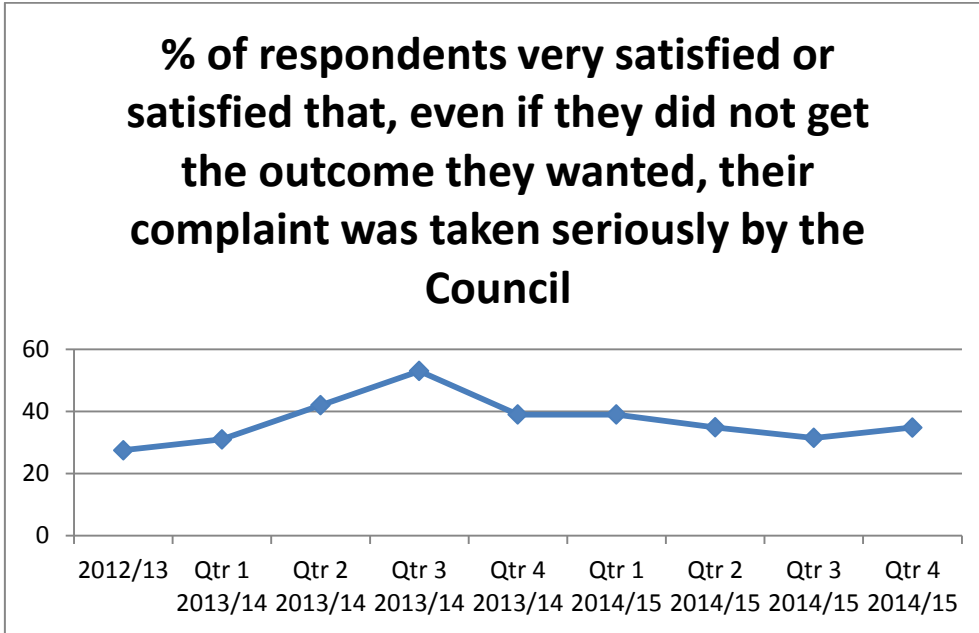
Chief officers have been asked to reinforce to staff the importance of keeping complainants up-to-date with progress on complaints which take longer than the target number of days to resolve.



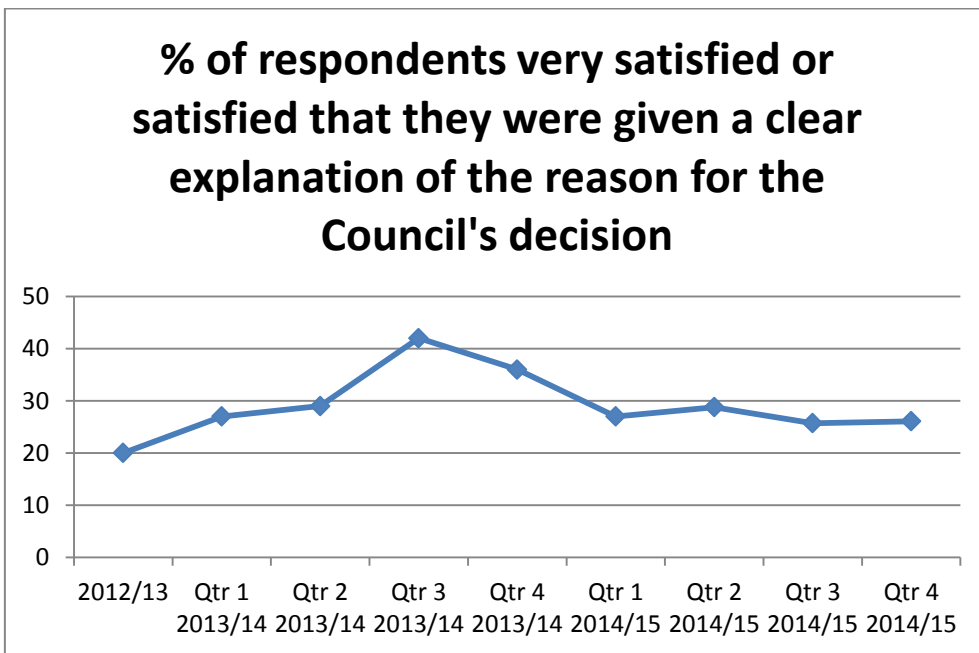
This result has improved compared to the previous quarter but we continually reinforce to staff the importance of using plain English and techniques such as bullet points, headings etc to make complex explanations easier to read and understand.



This result has improved but it should be clear to all complainants who to contact in every case. We continue to reinforce the importance of telling complainants who to contact if dissatisfied with a response.



Almost 35% of respondents in the latest survey said they were ‘very dissatisfied’ that their complaint had been taken seriously. This is slightly down on the previous quarter’s figure but suggests that we still need to make more effort to assure complainants that their concerns have been taken seriously even where their complaint is not upheld.



Just over 30% of respondents in the latest survey said that they were ‘very dissatisfied’ with this aspect of the process. That is an improvement on the figure of almost 46% in the previous quarter, but we continue to emphasise to staff the importance of clearly explaining decisions on complaints.

- 7.4 The results from the fourth quarter of 2014/15 are mostly up compared to recent quarters, but performance will continue to be monitored and messages about good complaints handling will continue to be reinforced. Overall trends since the Council adopted the model Complaint Handling Procedure are positive, but those responding to the survey still indicate high levels of dissatisfaction with certain aspects of how we have dealt with their complaints so efforts to improve will continue.

8. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 This report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty, Equality and Risk Management. There are no major issues.

8.2 The complaints recording system includes a feature that asks complaint handlers to highlight any complaint relating to an equalities issue – age, disability, gender, LGBT, race or religion. In 2014/15, complaints relating to an inequalities issue included:

- seating for people with disabilities at an event in City Square
- uplift of refuse for an older person with disabilities
- the BSL interpreter service for deaf people (two cases)
- concern about bullying in school which might have a racial aspect

All have been drawn to the attention of the Council’s Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator.

9. CONSULTATIONS

The Director of Corporate Services, Head of Democratic and Legal Services and Performance and Improvement Manager have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

David R Martin
Chief Executive

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29/06/2015

APPENDIX ONE

BREAKDOWN OF DATA ON KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR 1/4/2014 TO 31/3/2015

Corporate Services													
Stage	Total		Within Target		With Extension		Upheld		Not upheld		Partially upheld		Average days to resolve
	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	
Frontline	103	95.4	88	85.4	5	4.8	33	32.0	63	61.2	7	6.8	4.0
Investigation	5	4.6	5	100.0			1	20.0	4	80.0			3.6

Education													
Stage	Total		Within Target		With Extension		Upheld		Not upheld		Partially upheld		Average days to resolve
	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	
Frontline	127	84.1	59	46.5	32	25.2	28	22.0	71	55.9	28	22.0	12.5
Investigation	24	15.9	18	75.0	2	8.3	3	12.5	14	58.3	7	29.2	14.5

Housing													
Stage	Total		Within Target		With Extension		Upheld		Not upheld		Partially upheld		Average days to resolve
	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	
Frontline	125	85.6	61	48.8	52	41.6	36	28.8	72	57.6	17	13.6	6.4
Investigation	21	14.4	20	95.2			3	14.3	12	57.1	6	28.6	10.6

Environment													
Stage	Total		Within Target		With Extension		Upheld		Not upheld		Partially upheld		Average days to resolve
	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	
Frontline	67	85.9	40	59.7	15	22.4	16	23.9	40	59.7	11	16.4	6.4
Investigation	11	14.1	9	81.8			7	63.6	2	18.2	2	18.2	10.4

City Development													
Stage	Total		Within Target		With Extension		Upheld		Not upheld		Partially upheld		Average days to resolve
	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	
Frontline	32	84.2	17	53.1	8	25.0	6	18.8	23	71.9	3	9.4	5.9
Investigation	6	15.8	5	83.3	1	16.7	2	33.3	3	50.0	1	16.7	4.4

Chief Executive's													
Stage	Total		Within Target		With Extension		Upheld		Not upheld		Partially upheld		Average days to resolve
	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	
Frontline	6	66.7	3	50.0	2	33.3	3	50.0	3	50.0			5.1
Investigation	3	33.3	3	100.0			1	33.3	2	66.7			1.7

Totals													
Stage	Total		Within Target		With Extension		Upheld		Not upheld		Partially upheld		Average days to resolve
	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	
Frontline	460	86.8	268	58.3	114	24.8	122	26.5	272	59.1	66	14.4	7.5
Investigation	70	13.2	60	85.7	3	4.3	17	24.3	37	52.9	16	22.8	10.5