

Scottish Borders Council Annual Complaint Performance Report 2019/20

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1. Overview

1.1. Introduction

This is the council’s annual complaints performance report that provides information on customer complaints received from our customers between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020.

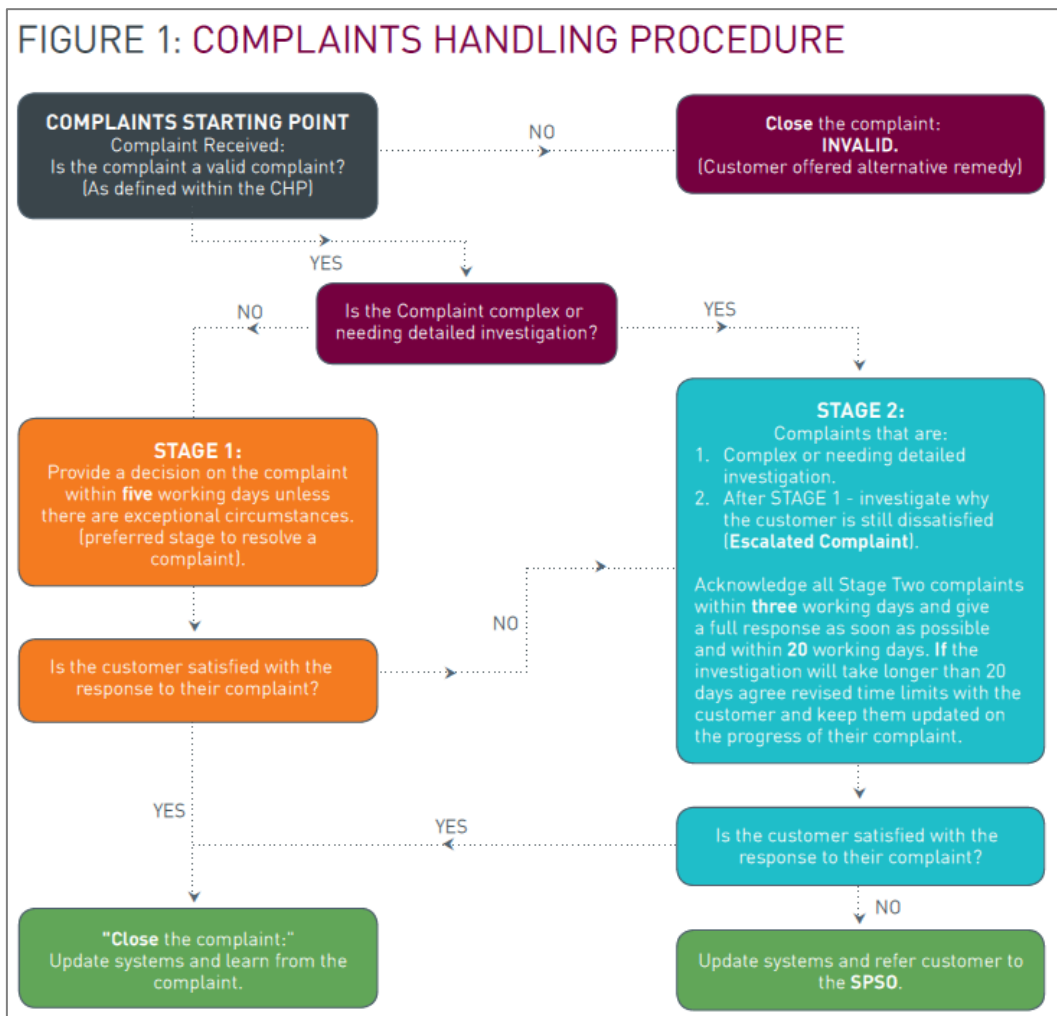
Scottish Borders Council always aims to provide the highest possible quality of service to the residents of the Scottish Borders. However, there are times when things go wrong and we fail to meet the expectations of our customers.

The council’s complaints procedure provides our customers with a clear and structured way to provide feedback on what has gone wrong with a council service. The process to resolution should be straightforward and timely. Listening to our customers helps us to put things right, improve our services and learn from our mistakes.

This report provides us with an opportunity to share how well we are performing.

1.2. Corporate Complaints Procedure

Scottish Borders Council (SBC) values all complaints and we strive to use them to help us improve our services. The objective of the Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) is to resolve customer dissatisfaction as close to the point of service delivery and as soon as possible at Stage One in the procedure. Figure 1 is a flow chart of SBC’s CHP. Complaints can be raised online, by email, in person, by telephone or letter.



Complaints performance is reported on a quarterly basis to both the council's Corporate Management Team and the council's Executive Committee. All complaints performance statistics are reported to the public and are available on the council's website.

2. Complaint Performance Statistics

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.

The number of complaints closed in 2019/20 was **725**. This is an increase on the number closed in the previous year. The council will continue to analysis complaints to help inform service improvement, identify training opportunities for our staff and help prioritise our activities to meet the changing needs of the residents of the Scottish Borders. Complaint benchmark data for 2019/20 is accurate at the time of publishing this report. Where applicable, this report has included the Scottish Local Authority national average and Family Group performance indicators for comparative information. The council's performance relating to the processing of complaints continues to perform well against many of the Scottish National and Family Group Averages.

2.1. Indicator 1: Complaints closed per 1,000 population

This indicator records the total number of 'Valid' complaints received by SBC during the financial year (April to March) as a rate per 1,000 population. In 2019/20 SBC received **1034** complaints of which **301** were closed as 'Invalid'. The remaining **725** were handled as 'Valid' complaints. This is equivalent to 6.3 received complaints per 1,000 population.

Table 1 provides SBC's total complaints closed per 1,000 population over the past 5 years along with the Scottish and Family Group Averages for 2019-20. The table shows that there has been an increase in complaints closed and complaints closed by SBC per 1,000 population in 2019/20.

Table 1: Complaints closed per 1,000 population

Measure	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	FG 1 Average 2019-20	Scottish Average 2019-20
Population Total	114,030	114,030	114,530	115,020	115,270	919,340	5,424,800
Total number of Valid complaints	564	563	670	625	725	5,479	56,119
Number of complaints per 1,000	4.9	4.9	5.8	5.4	6.3	6.0	10.34

2.2. Indicator 2: Closed complaints

This indicator provides information on the number of complaints closed at stage one, stage two and escalated complaints as a percentage of all complaints closed. Table 2 provides the performance information for this indicator.

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 to respond to the customer

Escalated complaints are those complaints that have been resolved at Stage One initially, but the customer was not satisfied with the response they received. When the customer requests that the same issue is considered again at Stage Two, of the complaints handling procedure, these complaints are called ‘escalated’ complaints.

Table 2: Closed Complaints

Complaints Closed as a % of all complaints closed	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	FG 1 Average 2019-20	Scottish Average 2019-20
Stage One	81%	76%	75%	78%	75%	76.5%	89.1%
Stage Two	14%	20%	21%	17%	21%	20.4%	7.8%
Escalated from Stage One	5%	4%	4%	4%	5%	3.1%	3.2%

2.3. Indicator 3: Complaints upheld and not upheld

There is a requirement for a formal outcome to be recorded for each complaint. SBC made the decision not to use a ‘Partially Upheld’ outcome when the CHP was introduced in 2013. Therefore, for the purposes of this reporting, complaints are recorded as either ‘Upheld’ or ‘Not Upheld’

This indicator measures the percentage of complaints, which were upheld or not upheld, recorded at each stage. The results can be seen in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Upheld Complaints

Complaints upheld	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	FG 1 Average 2019-20	Scottish Average 2019-20
Stage One	44%	40%	42%	37%	48%	50%	62%
Stage Two	39%	38%	38%	45%	47%	38%	47%
Escalated from Stage One	23%	46%	50%	39%	30%	49%	51%

It should be noted that in Table 3 above, the ‘Upheld’ and ‘Partially Upheld’ outcomes for the Family Group and Scottish Average have been added together, to allow meaningful comparison with SBC’s figures. This is because SBC does not use a ‘Partially Upheld’ outcome.

Table 4: Not Upheld Complaints

Complaints not upheld	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	FG 1 Average 2019-20	Scottish Average 2019-20
Stage One	56%	60%	58%	63%	52%	49.1%	36.3%
Stage Two	61%	62%	62%	55%	53%	61.8%	53.7%
Escalated from Stage One	77%	54%	50%	61%	70%	50.9%	45.5%

2.4. Indicator 4: Average times

Indicator 4 represents the average time in working days to close complaints. Indicator 4 performance can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5: Average times

Average times	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	FG 1 Average 2019-20	Scottish Average 2019-20
Stage One	4.0	3.9	4.0	4.6	5.3	8.1	10.2
Stage Two	17.2	17.5	17.7	18.2	22.5	24.0	23.9
Escalated from Stage One	16.7	17.0	18.0	14.9	32.4	25.4	17.5

The average time taken to close complaints at Stage One, Stage Two and Escalated from Stage One continues to worsen. The Escalated from Stage One figure is particularly poor in 2019/20. Comparison with the Family Group and Scottish Averages shows that this increasing length of time to close complaints is a national picture, and with the exception of complaints Escalated from Stage One SBC's average working days to close complaints are less than the Family Group and Scottish averages.

2.5. Indicator 5: Performance against timescales

This indicator reports the percentage of complaints at each stage that were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days. These include cases where an extension to the timescale has been authorised. Indicator 5 performance can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6: Performance against timescales

Performance against timescales	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	FG 1 Average 2019-20	Scottish Average 2019-20
Stage One	85%	87%	86%	81%	77%	66.3%	61.0%
Stage Two	78%	78%	67%	74%	60%	67.2%	61.9%
Escalated from Stage One	83%	65%	54%	79%	24%	52.1%	59.7%

2.6. Indicator 6: Number of cases where an extension is authorised

SBC always aims to respond to complaints as quickly as possible. There are, however, times when a complaint is particularly complex and it is not feasible to fully investigate the issues within the prescribed timescales. In these situations SBC agree with a complainant to extend the timescale for closing the complaint.

This indicator reports the percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension to the 5 or 20 working day timeline has been authorised. Indicator 6 performance can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Number of cases where an extension is authorised

Percentage of cases where an extension is authorised	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	FG 1 Average 2019-20	Scottish Average 2019-20
Stage One	3%	3%	4%	3%	2%	11.2%	4.5%
Stage Two	18%	15%	18%	11%	5%	14.0%	12.7%
Escalated from Stage One	10%	12%	31%	4%	6%	12.3%	8.6%

2.7. Indicator 7: Customer Satisfaction

SBC runs a Complaint Handling Customer Satisfaction Survey on an ongoing basis. Customers are contacted approximately one week after their complaint is closed inviting them to provide feedback on their experience. Indicator 7 performance can be seen in Table 8. This indicator provides information on the levels of customer satisfaction with the complaint handling procedure and process.

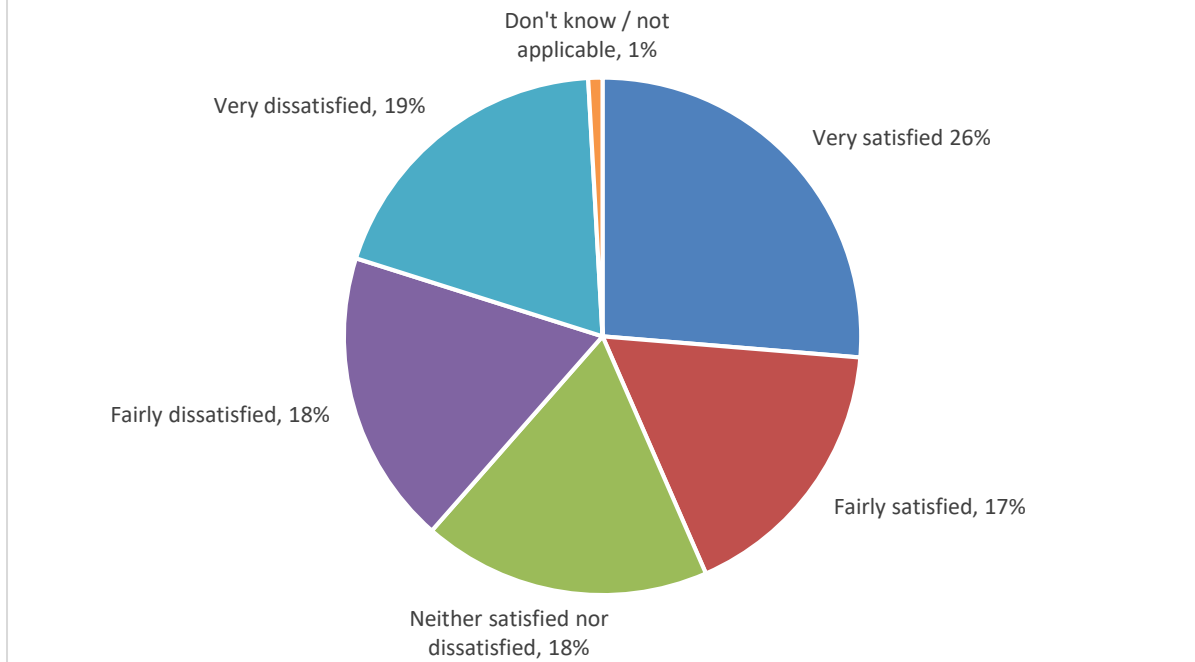
The survey asks the customer to state how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with:

- 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?

Table 8: Customer Satisfaction

Survey Invitations Sent:	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
No. survey Invitations Sent	146	225	131	57
No. closed complaints	563	691	645	725
% of customers invited to respond to the survey	26%	33%	20%	8%
Return Rate:				
No. Returned	26	25	33	25
% Return Rate	18%	11%	25%	44%
Responses:				
Either Fairly or Very Satisfied	57%	60%	49%	43%
Either Fairly or Very Dissatisfied	20%	20%	30%	38%

**Figure 2 Overall Complaints Handling Customer Satisfaction
2019/20**



Despite fewer satisfaction surveys being sent out in 2019/20 there was a higher return rate. In 2019/20, satisfaction with complaints handling has dropped for the 3rd year in a row and dissatisfaction has increased for a 2nd year in a row.

2.8. Indicator 8: Learning from Complaints

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.

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 and improvements have been made to services as a result of complaints and some examples of case studies are detailed in this section.

Case Study 1

Customer A raised concerns with the Council regarding rubbish from the primary school next-door coming over the wall into their garden. This was having a real impact on Customer A's quality of life. On a daily basis Customer A told the council, they picked up more than 50 crisp bags from the garden.

It was noted that the litter that goes over the wall into the garden was not solely from the primary school. Due to the garden's location rubbish from the High School, Rugby Club events and general town litter would compound the litter problem from the primary school.

The Head Teacher wrote to Customer A to provide reassurance that measures were being put into place to improve the situation for Customer A and for the school.

Better bins were being ordered, chicken wire was being put on the schools side of the fence so that litter could not blow under it. Two additional sets of litter pickers were purchased and following the complaint, classes were sent out into the estate grounds to tidy up.

The school also entered into 'The Great Big Schools Clean' in connection with 'The Great British Spring Clean 2019', and in the school assembly each week the Head Teacher discussed litter, to reinforce the importance of looking after the school grounds and helping to care for their 'next door neighbour'.

Case Study 2

Customer B called the council after receiving a reminder for an outstanding council tax amount. Customer B had called the council prior to selling their property to check whether they had outstanding council tax balance. Customer B was told no. Customer B then cancelled their Direct Debit and the council refunded the overpaid council tax.

Unfortunately, the final balance calculation that showed a refund was due included a final payment that could not be taken because Customer B cancelled their direct debit before the payment was collected. This then resulted in a balance being owed on the account and the reminder letter being sent.

To prevent this happening again an additional step has been added into the process. This is to ensure staff check what payments have been received. The council tax refund process has also been changed to ensure staff check the notes section to see if there are any automated notices regarding direct debits being cancelled.

Case Study 3

Customer C has an electric vehicle and planned a journey that went through Hawick, where the council's website advertised a rapid charge unit was available for recharging. Customer C chose a particular site in Hawick since it was closer, and their charge was getting low.

When Customer C arrived at the site, they found the unit had been decommissioned even though the council's website still showed it as active.

Customer C stressed how important it is that organisations' provide accurate and up to date information so electric vehicle users are not caught out.

In the complaint response, the council explained that the rapid charge unit at the site in question had been decommissioned as a result of extensive flood damage. It was acknowledged that the council website had not been updated to reflect this and an apology was issued.

The response also explained that due the ongoing flood prevention scheme that is currently underway in Hawick the council is considering alternative locations within Hawick for rapid chargers and hope to be in a position to install additional infrastructure in the near future.

Following the receipt of this complaint the council's website has been updated to include information and directions to the Charge Place Scotland website. This site is much more informative regarding the up to date data for the national charging infrastructure not just the ones in the borders.

Case Study 4

Customer D raised concerns that the glass recycling bins at Reston had not been emptied for at least 4 weeks. The bins were full and bottles were being dumped on the ground beside the bins. This was not the first time this had happened in recent months.

The response to Customer D explained that the bottle banks at this location (Reston) were on a monthly uplifted schedule. When speaking to the glass contractor it was identified that the collection was delayed by 4 days because they had vehicle breakdowns.

It was also noted, that the community council, wanted to relocate the glass banks to another part of the village. The council was working with the community council to get the appropriate permissions in place for this relocation.

As a result of this complaint, the council planned to speak to the contractor with a view to increasing the uplift frequency and if there is space at the proposed new site then additional glass banks could also be put in so that there is additional capacity.

3. SPSO LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT

If, after we have fully investigated a complaint, the customer is still dissatisfied with our decision or the way in which we have handled their complaint, the customer can ask the SPSO to look at the complaint. In 2019/20, the SPSO received 41 and closed 38 complaints about SBC. This is equal to 3.3% of all complaints received by the SPSO in relation to the Local Authority Sector, or 3.0% of all complaints closed 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 in Figure 3.

Figure 1: Illustration of SPSO complaints of all complaints for 2019/20

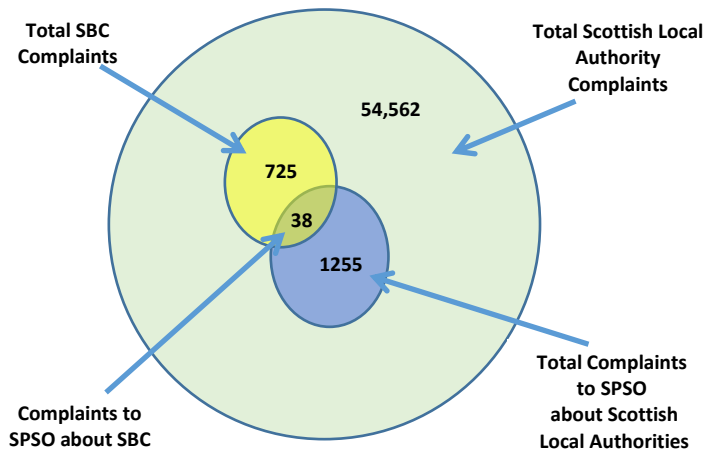


Table 9 below shows the number of complaints about SBC received by the SPSO and this as a percentage of the Local authority Sector

Table 9: SPSO Complaints Received by Year

SPSO Received Complaints /Year	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
SPSO Received Complaints about SBC	33	20	27	11	41
SBC Complaints as % all for Scottish Local Authority sector	1.9%	1.3%	1.8%	0.8%	3.3%

Table 10 below shows how SBC compares to the Scottish Local Authority Sector in relation to complaints closed by the SPSO.

Table 10: SPSO Closed Complaints for SBC / Year

SPSO Closed Complaints for SBC / Year	2017/18			2018/19			2019/20		
	SBC Count	SBC %	Sector %	SBC Count	SBC %	Sector %	SBC Count	SBC %	Sector %
Closed	30	1.9%	2.7%	24	1.9%	2.3%	38	3.0%	2.2%
Stage SPSO Complaint Closed									
Advice	12	1.9%	42%	2	0.7%	22%	12	2.4%	39%
Early Resolution	14	1.9%	47%	20	3.2%	49%	25	3.7%	54%
Investigation	4	2.4%	11%	1	1.0%	8%	1	1.2%	7%
Premature	7	1.6%	28%	1	0.3%	24%	5	1.9%	21%
SPSO Decision									
Fit for SPSO	9	4.6%	11%	1	1.0%	8%	1	1.2%	7%
Upheld / Partially Upheld	5	4.7%	6.0%	1	1.8%	4%	0	0%	4%

In 2019/20, the SPSO undertook one investigation into a complaint about SBC. The published Case Studies for this complaint is detailed below. The complaint was not upheld and SBC did not receive any recommendations.

Case Study One:

Mr C complained about the council's handling of a planning application for a new development. Mr C said that the council did not undertake an independent transport assessment, and did not fully take into account the numerous objections raised, particularly about traffic and road safety. Mr C said that the council used the wrong guidance in assessing the traffic capacity of the road, and did not take into account relevant Scottish Government policy.

The council said that the consultation responses were considered in detail in the report of handling, and they also met with objectors (including Mr C) to discuss his concerns. They said that the relevant policies had been taken into account, and the guidance used to assess road capacity was appropriate.

We took independent advice from a planning adviser. We found evidence that the written consultation responses had been taken into account, and objectors (including Mr C) also had the opportunity to speak to the planning committee who made the decision. We considered that the guidance used to assess traffic capacity was appropriate, and there was evidence that the council had also taken into account relevant Scottish Government policy. While the transport assessment was carried out by the developer (not the council), this is standard practice, and the council had agreed the scope and reviewed the result. Therefore, we did not uphold Mr C's complaint.

4. 2019/20 Complaint Summary

In 2019/20, the council closed 725 valid complaints and this represents an increase of 100 from the 2018/19 figure of 625.

75% of all complaints closed by the council were resolved at Stage One (Frontline Resolution), 21% of complaints resolved at Stage Two (Investigation) with the remaining 5% of complaints being resolved after being escalated from Stage One.

The average times taken by the council to resolve Stage One, Stage Two and Escalated from Stage One complaints were 5.3 days, 22.5 days and 32.4 days respectively. The council's overall performance relating to the timeliness of processing complaints has decreased for all stages, but especially for Escalated from Stage One. That said, the council's performance is better at Stage One and Stage Two than the Family Group and the Scottish Averages. SBC's performance of Escalated from Stage one complaints is worse than other the Family Group and Scottish Averages.

77% of Stage One complaints were resolved within 5 days and 60% of Stage Two complaints were resolved within 20 days. Whereas only 24% of Escalated from Stage One complaints were resolved within 20 working days. The Scottish National Average 2019-20 is 61% and 61.9% for Stage One and Stage Two resolution respectively. The Scottish National Average 2019-20 for Escalated from Stage One complaints is 59.7%

The percentage of Stage One, Stage Two and Escalated form Stage One complaints that were upheld in 2019/20 were 48%, 47% and 30% respectively. The council's performance in relation to this measure outperformed the Scottish National Averages for 2019/20 which were 62%, 47% and 51%.

In 2019/20, fewer complaint handling customer satisfaction surveys were issued, but we received the highest percentage return rate to date, which was 44%. The percentage of customers either fairly of very satisfied has decreased from 49% in 2018/19 to 43%. However, we continue to have more customers say they are very satisfied with the handling of their complaint than any of the other categories. See Figure 2.

In 2019/20, the Council received approximately 186 unsolicited comments and compliments for the services provided, an increase from 104 in 2018/19. Of these 116 were compliments. These compliments related to areas such as kerb-side waste and recycling, roads and drainage, community recycling centres, health and social care and customer services. There were also a number of compliments council staff who had assisted members of the public who had fallen or had an accident.

Overall, there has been an increase in the number of complaints closed in 2019/20 when compared to the previous year. In 2019/20, we continue to have more complaints that are not upheld that are upheld. The council's performance relating to the processing of complaints continues to perform well against the Scottish National and Family Group averages in many indicators.

5. Live Borders Complaints

Live Borders has a Complaints Handling Procedure that aligns with SBC's and the SPSO's Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP). The Volume of all complaints, comments and compliments for 2019/20 are presented below (as well as overall figures for 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19 for comparison).

Complaints 2018/19	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17
Price	2	0	1	1	4	8	14	16
Booking/access/info	23	9	17	12	61	87	55	78
Quality	9	2	18	16	45	47	47	27
Staff attitude	4	2	2	1	9	19	11	4
Other	15	8	8	6	37	21	47	8
Total	53	21	46	36	156	181	174	133
Comments	23	4	4	0	31	72	87	64
Compliments	9	6	5	5	25	12	21	8

The number of complaints recorded has decreased since last year by 14 % and the number of comments has decreased by 57% whilst the number of compliments has increased by 108%.

Price:

Last year we commented on price explaining rigorous benchmarking and the desire to provide value for money. The number of complaints concerning price has fallen to extremely low levels, indicating that our price point is right for the Borders.

“Eyemouth leisure centre - we are visiting the area and visited the centre for a swim. Very clean facilities, staff extremely friendly and helpful. Only negative, showers by side of pool kept changing from tepid to cold but other than that, good value as price was reasonable compared to other [local authority] areas where we didn't visit the pool due to high cost. Keep prices reasonable as it encourages people to use facilities.”

Staff Attitude:

The number of complaints concerning staff attitude has halved. We continue to roll out World Host training to our staff and now have 52% of frontline staff (149) trained in World Host. Nurturing our staff and focusing on the importance of great customer service is clearly making a difference that is reflected in our statistics.

Channel:

90% of our complaints in 2019/20 were received electronically, with similar numbers for both online and by email. The balance has changed from 2018/19 when the bulk of electronic receipts were online. The percentage of electronic submissions by email was 52% in 2018/19 and this has risen to 77% for 2019/20.

2019/20 Quarter by Quarter analysis	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Total received	53	14	46	36
Received online	26	4	20	14
% received online	49%	29%	43%	39%
Closed complaints	56	13	47	36
Closed at stage 1	54	13	46	36
Closed at stage 2	1	0	0	0
Escalated from Stage 1 and closed	1	0	1	0
Total Upheld	29	5	26	26
Closed within authorised timescale	45	12	46	35
% closed within time scale	85%	86%	100%	98%

Complaints which were not upheld: 3 concerned compensation, 34 requests for information or an explanation of policy or practice, 28 were routine first time requests for service.

Complaints which were upheld concerning: price 25% (one complaint) booking/ access information 50%, quality 75%, staff attitude 78%, other 38%

5.1 Live Borders Learning from Complaints

Respect:

Live Borders took on the management of the Greenyards (Melrose 3G) in 2019. This facility is adjacent to the church and whilst the two-minute silence was observed on the pitch, the noise from the game disturbed those at the remembrance service. We have learnt from this and will not take bookings on the morning of Remembrance Sunday in future, as a mark of respect.

Engagement:

We received a complaint about the lack of disabled changing facilities at Harestanes. We are keen to develop this as a “changing places” facility; however, this comes at a time of some considerable budgetary pressure. We have implemented some interim arrangements, whilst scoping a wider improvement plan for the Visitor Centre. Meantime we are keeping the customer informed and updated, as they are keen to share updates with their own network.

We also received complaints regarding the very much-reduced opening hours at one of our leisure centres over the festive season. One person in particular represented a number of members. Whilst the complaint were handled through the CHP, we elected to meet with the customer to discuss and explain our rationale and the extreme budget pressures we faced, in particular with that facility. This brought about an understanding and an appreciation of being kept informed. Members were offered access to Trifitness during this period, and could of course enjoy a swim at a nearby pool, some 5 miles away.

5.2 2019/20 Comments & Compliments

Along with complaints, the number of comments we received in the last year has declined. This is likely to reflect greater engagement at sites, our staff listening and responding and thus pre-empting the customers need to complain. This aligns with the roll out of World Host Training and our strategic objectives.

We are also receiving more compliments and are now collecting these more diligently, not just counting those received through the 3Cs portal. Compliments are shared with the staff / facility concerned and the upward management structure. Compliments in the main are about our staff, their friendliness, helpfulness and knowledge. We are proud of our people.

We have 21 records of customer satisfaction with complaints handling and resolution reasons include:

- Proactive actions and proposals going forward
- Being kept informed
- Appreciation of follow up
- Speed, result and explanation

Swimming Lessons: “My daughter had a great lesson on Saturday, there was a different instructor this week but she was also more authoritative over the class and although my daughter was a little shaky at the start got on with the lesson no problem at all. I thought it was quite obvious that something had been done about it as the instructor was very safety conscious and made me feel much more at ease watching her.” I thank you for your ongoing investigations it’s very much appreciated.”

Feedback from following a BBC recording at a Live Borders Swimming Pool: “I hope my email finds you well today. We arrived back in Glasgow last night and are busy now getting the programme edited to put out on the BBC Scotland channel tonight at 10pm. I just wanted to get in touch and thank you for all of your help with our Outside Broadcast. It was great to bring the show to X and hopefully the audience enjoyed it too! I would also like to feedback on A who was just fantastic to work with both in the run up to the event and on the day. He was incredibly helpful and accommodating and we would have had a difficult job without him – if you can pass this onto his Manager we would really appreciate it.”

Eyemouth Triathlon: “I am not the best with words but feel strongly that I need to get in touch as I want to commend the Live Borders team for the Eyemouth triathlon event yesterday. It was my first experience of triathlon, and admit I was equally excited and nervous for my challenge. Each member of the team were so approachable and helpful all offering enthusiasm about the event and encouragement for myself and all other participants. Although the course had to be changed at last minute it was ensured that there were enough marshals on route to avoid any issues!” Although my body is aching today I will definitely attempt another! Thank you again for an enjoyable well organised event!”