

**ITEM No ...5.....**

**REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 10 DECEMBER 2015**

**REPORT ON: BI-ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLAINTS**

**REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**REPORT NO: 428-2015**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To report on complaints statistics for the first half of 2015/2016 compared to previous periods, and on the action which continues to be taken to ensure good complaints handling and to learn from complaints.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Committee notes:

- a) the key performance indicators on complaints closed between 1 April and 30 September 2015, with trends from previous periods
- b) the latest findings from the Complaints Review Group which meets quarterly to check the quality of complaints handling and promote learning and process improvement from complaints
- c) the intention to use complaints to identify suitable subjects for STEP reviews
- d) the results of the satisfaction survey sent to everyone who made a complaint closed between April and September 2015, with trends from previous surveys
- e) a summary of the annual letter from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman on complaints received about the Council during 2014/15

**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.
- 4.2 This latest report covers complaints closed during the 6 months from 1 April to 30 September 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 the effectiveness of the complaints handling procedure and to promote learning and process improvement from complaints.
- 4.4 This report also includes a summary of the annual letter from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman on complaints about the Council during the last year.

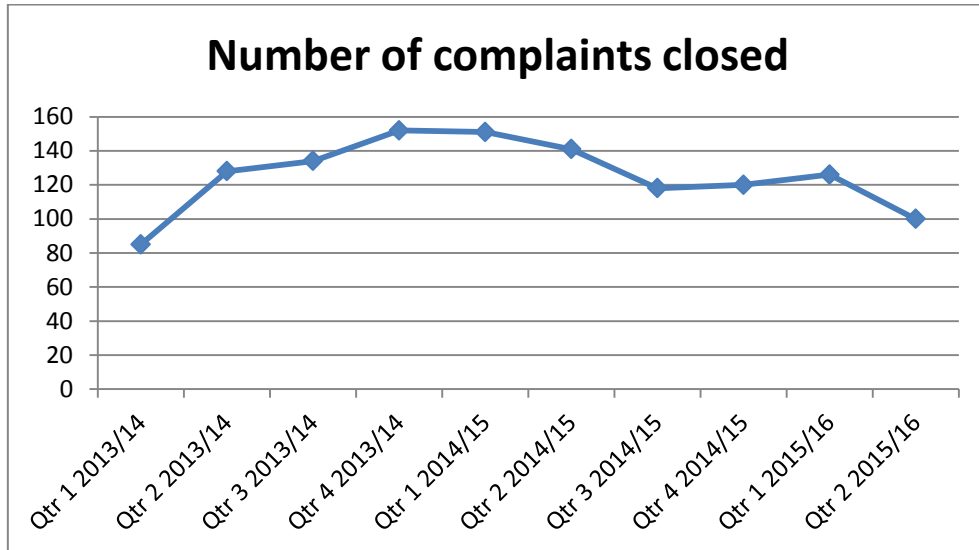
## 5. COMPLAINTS STATISTICS : 1 APRIL 2015 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2015

### 5.1 In the first half of 2015/16:

- 224 complaints were closed (this excludes statutory complaints about Social Work as they are not subject to the model Complaints Handling Procedure and complaints about Leisure and Culture Dundee who use the Council's complaints recording system but report separately on this to their own board and to the Council)
- 62.0% of complaints at the frontline stage were closed within the target of 5 working days and a further 15.3% within an extended target time. 54.8% of complaints at the investigation stage were closed within the 20 working days target and a further 26.2% within an extended target time
- 24.0% of complaints were upheld at the frontline stage, and a further 14.9% were partially upheld. At the investigation stage, 21.7% were upheld and 19.6% were partially upheld
- the average number of working days taken to close complaints was 9.7 days at the frontline stage and 22.5 days at the investigation stage
- the percentage of complaints recorded in each category is shown below (with the figure for 2014/15 in brackets):
 

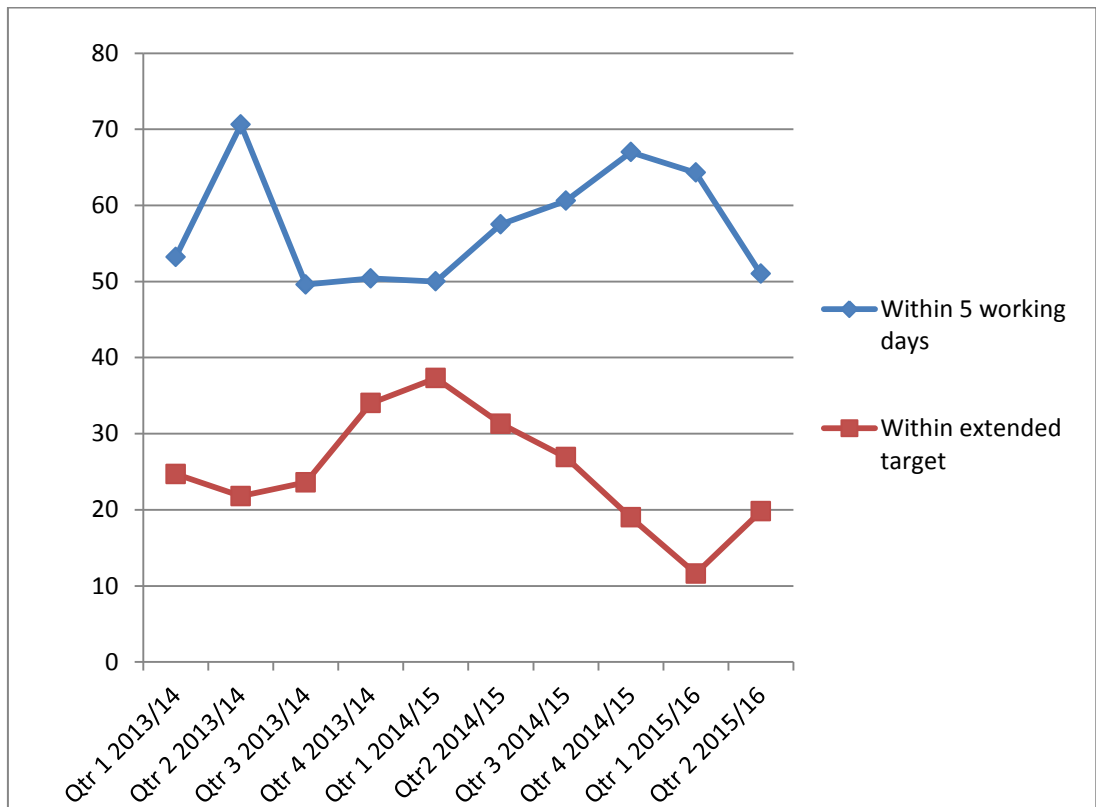
- delay in responding to enquiries and requests	-	15.4% (17.9%)
- failure to meet our service standards	-	20.1% (17.9%)
- treatment by, or attitude of, a member of staff	-	26.0% (27.1%)
- failure to provide a service	-	18.5% (18.8%)
- dissatisfaction with our policy	-	11.8% (11.9%)
- failure to follow the proper administrative process	-	6.7% (5.5%)
- refusal to give advice or answer questions	-	1.5% (0.9%)
- 11 people made more than one complaint during the first half of 2015/16, 9 making two complaints and 2 making three complaints
- by service, the highest number of complaints recorded were for Housing (70), Education (67), Corporate Services (39), Environment (30) and City Development (18). A breakdown of each service's figures is given in Appendix 1.

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



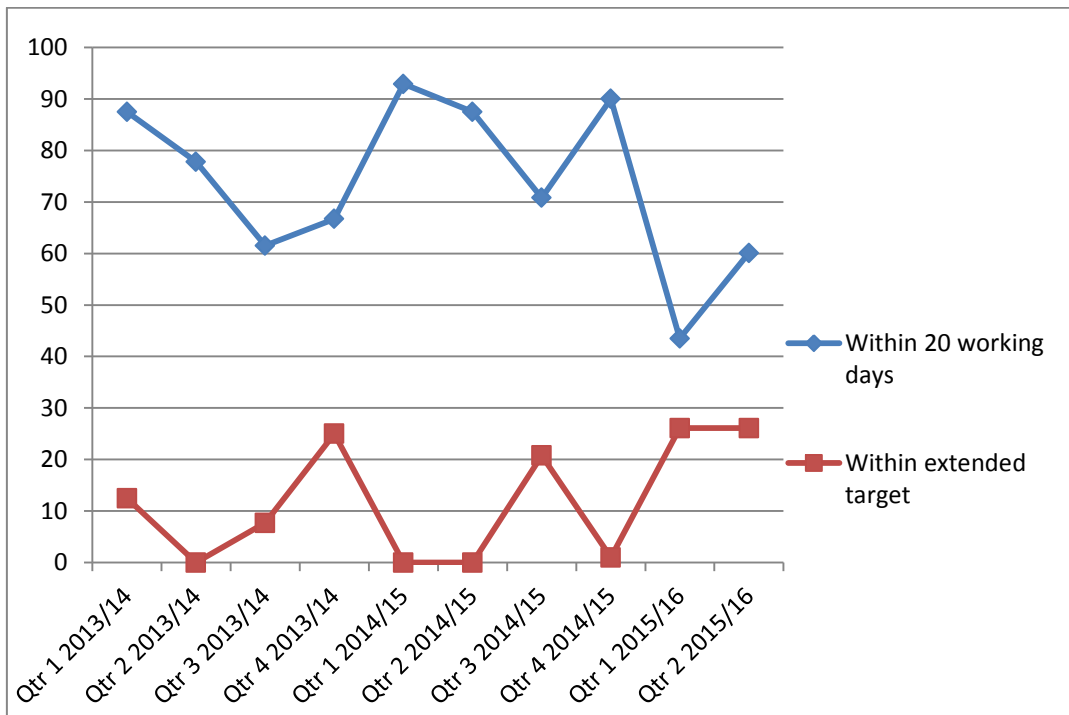
The number of complaints recorded has dropped over the last year. While this might appear to be positive, the Council welcomes complaints as a valuable source of feedback, aims to make it straightforward for people to complaint and encourages all services to ensure that complaints are recorded, so an increase should not necessarily be interpreted as a problem.

### % of stage 1 complaints closed within target



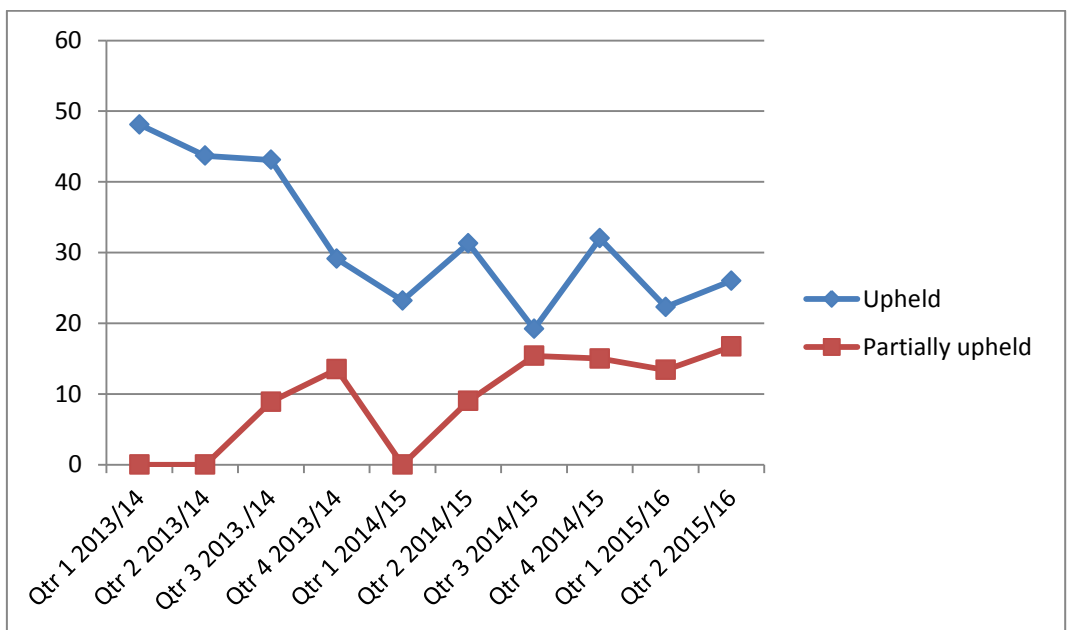
Managers continue to emphasise to staff the importance of responding to complaints within target or contacting customers to agree extended targets if a quick response is not possible. The dip in the % of complaints closed within the 5 day target has been highlighted to the Council's Management Team for action to improve performance.

### % of stage 2 complaints closed within target



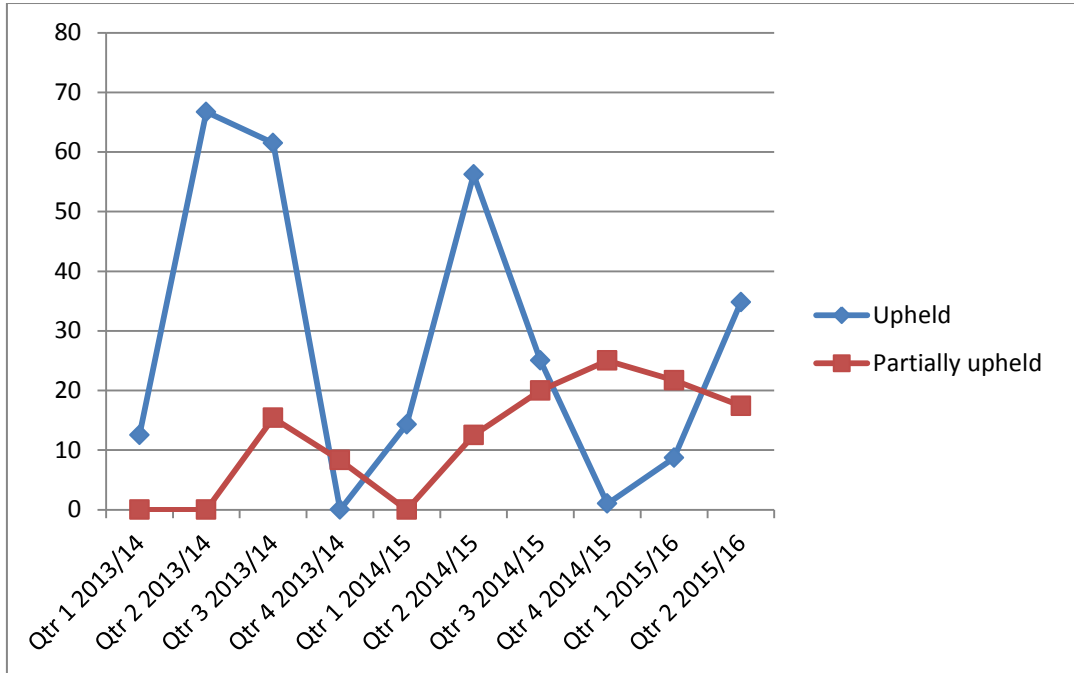
A very small number of complaints go to stage 2, so % figures will fluctuate considerably due to individual cases. Chief officers and managers receiving stage 2 complaints have been reminded that these should be acknowledged within 3 days as well as responded to within 20 days or an agreed extended target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

### % of stage 1 complaints upheld and partially upheld



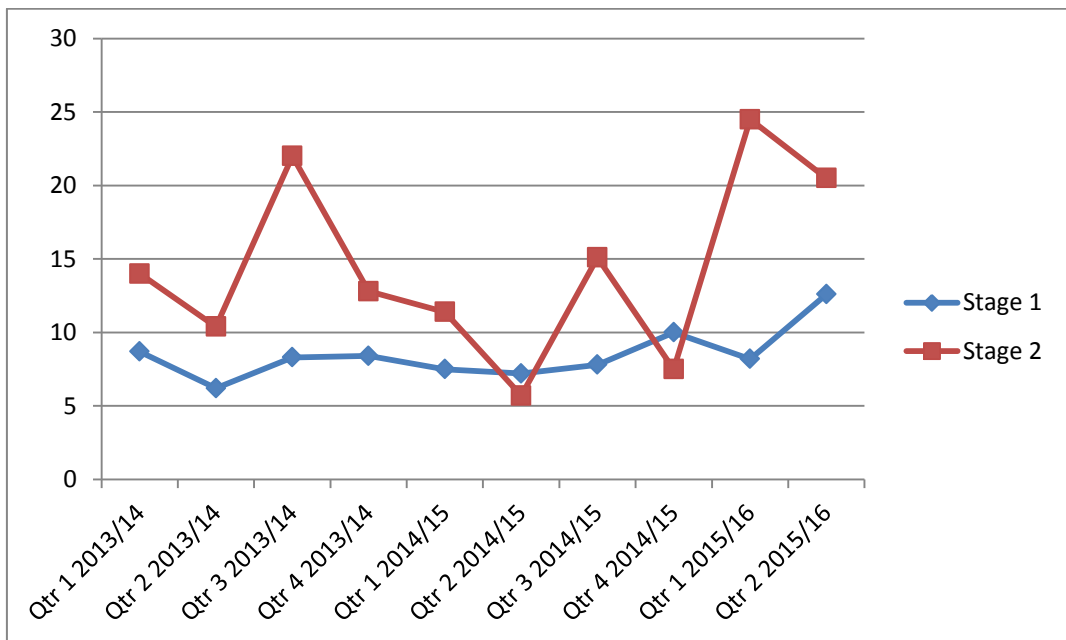
'Partially' upheld was not originally included as an option in the indicators required by the SPSO, so these figures are only available from 1 October 2013.

**% of stage 2 complaints upheld and partially upheld**



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

**Average number of days to close complaints**



The average number of days to close Stage 1 complaints has risen in the last quarter. This has been highlighted to the Council's Management Team for action to improve performance.

**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 concerned with performance and improvement from the Chief Executive's Department, meets quarterly to review a sample of complaints and check if they 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 better practices 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 or complainants have not been advised about escalating complaints if still dissatisfied and this is fed back to those who dealt with the complaint. 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, and the Council's Management Team has been asked to reinforce this message.

6.3 Most of the 'planned service improvements' identified in the first half of 2015/16 involved speaking to individuals about errors or arranging advice, guidance and training to remind individuals or teams about procedures, standards etc. However, there were also a number of improvements identified to services and processes, for example:

- Revenues have changed their process to ensure that all credit balances are automatically transferred from one financial year to the next
- tradespersons have been reminded to consider follow-up repairs required as part of their job completion process
- use of staffing resources at a Housing office has been changed to provide more cover during busy periods when there is a build-up of enquiries
- inspection checks on completed External Cyclical Maintenance works are being improved
- a sample of closed anti-social behaviour cases will be checked randomly for quality assurance
- school to review communication of guidelines and decisions on composition of classes to parents and pupils
- school to review supervision requirements for football training and changing arrangements
- new system has been put in place for Parking Attendants to report problems with signs and unclear road markings
- the Environment service is reviewing various aspects of telephone call handling and will provide extra call handling capacity during the remainder of the implementation of the new refuse collection system

6.4 The electronic complaints recording system also sends an automatic 'follow-up' email 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 updates a month after the complaint was closed, and these are also reviewed by the Complaints Review Group.

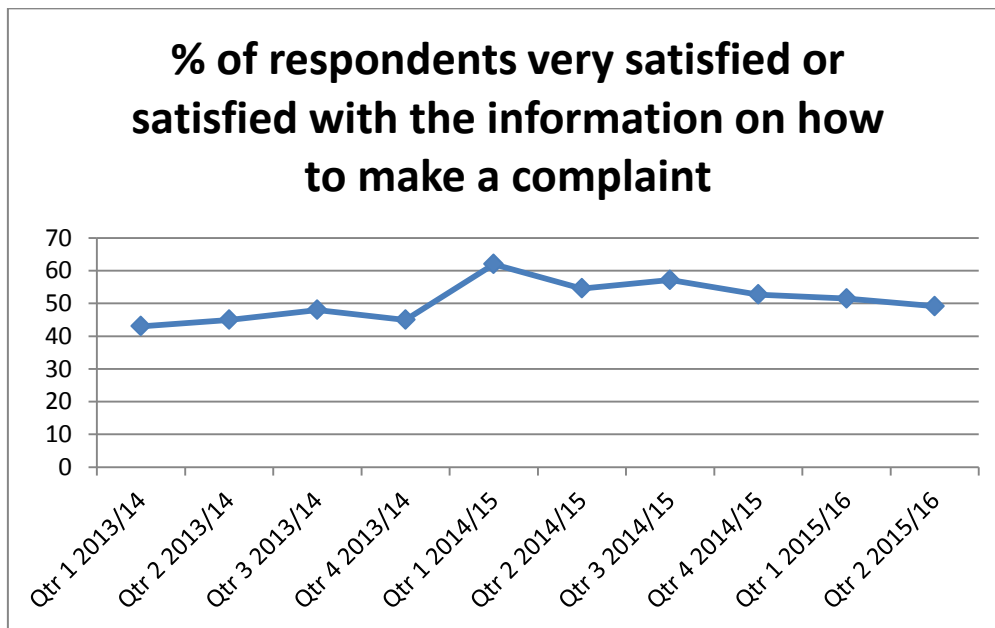
6.5 Analysis of complaints will be used to inform decisions on subjects for STEP reviews. STEP (Systems Thinking Empowers People) is the Council's approach to service improvement based on the principles of lean service and customer insight, and it is felt that this approach lends itself well to learning from complaints and improving processes to prevent recurrence.

## 7. SATISFACTION WITH THE COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

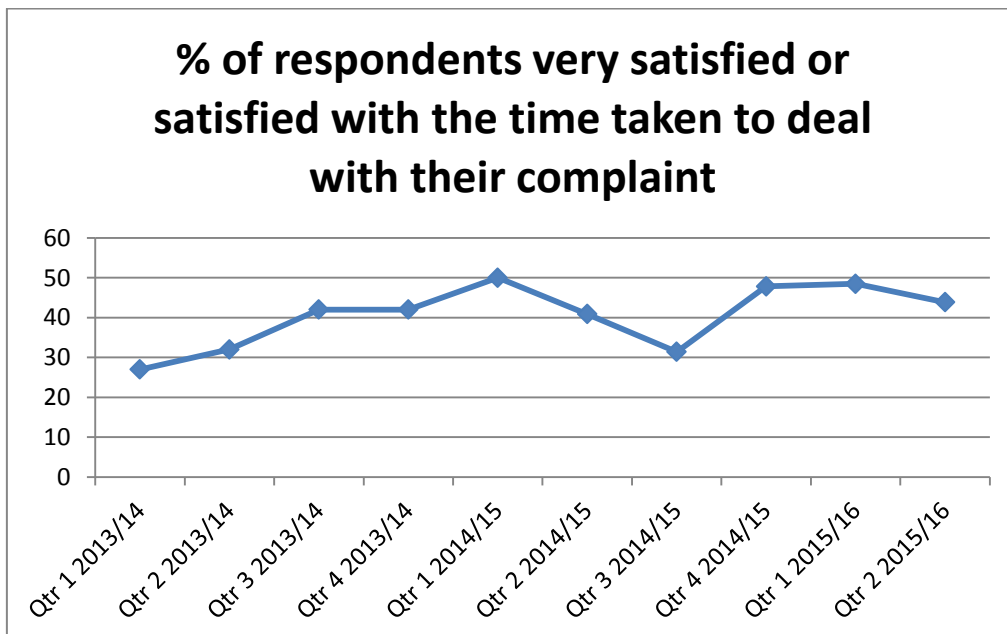
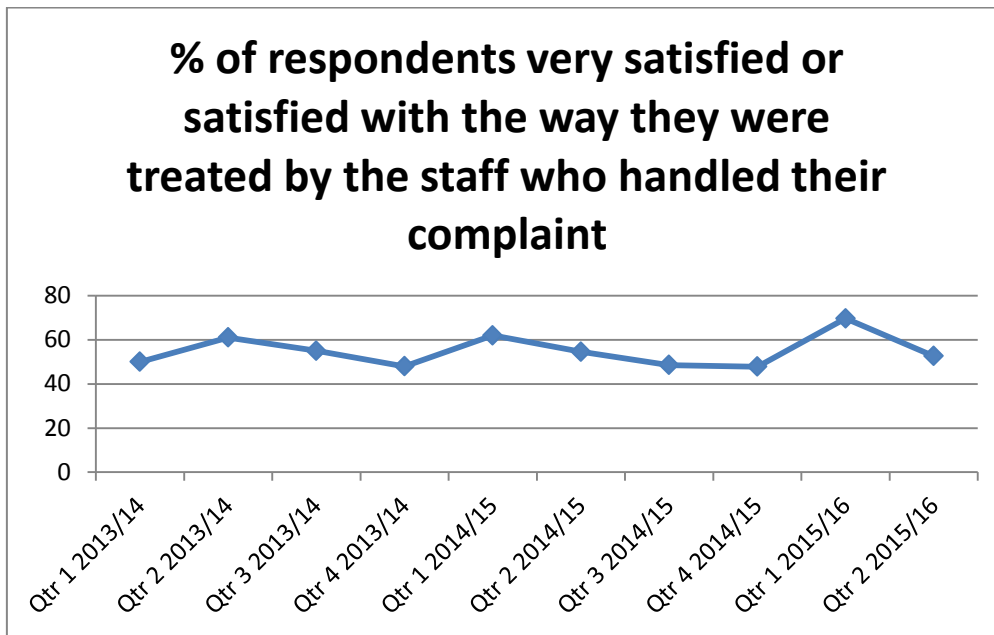
7.1 The model Complaints Handling Procedure requires that the Council reports on a measure of customer satisfaction with its complaints process. To achieve this, we issue surveys to all those who have made a complaint in the previous three months.

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:

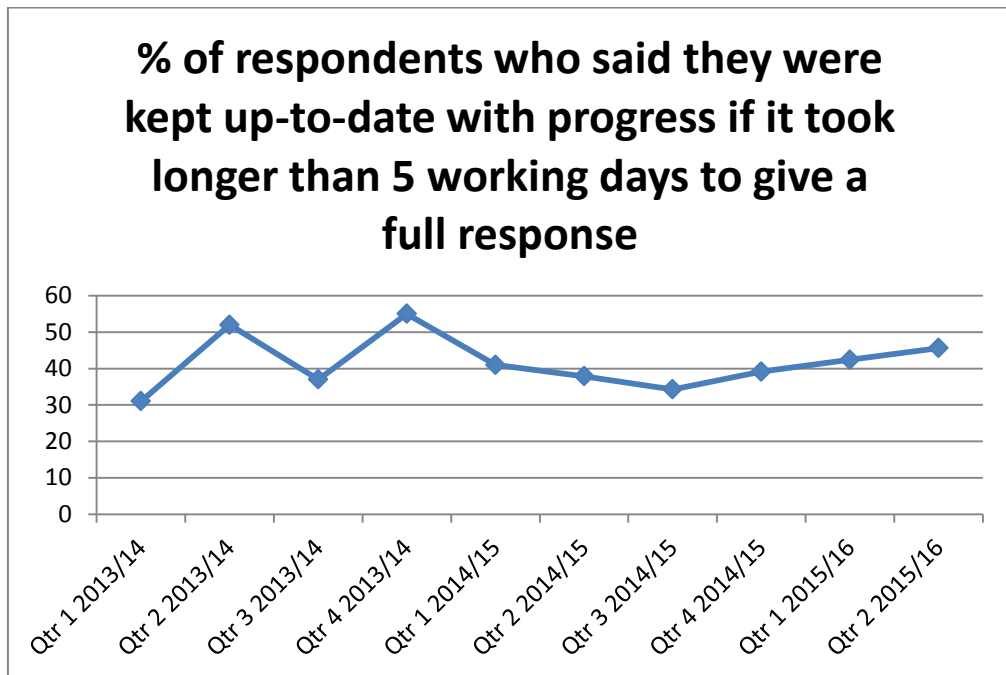


Less than 20% of respondents expressed any dissatisfaction with this aspect of the process in the last quarter.

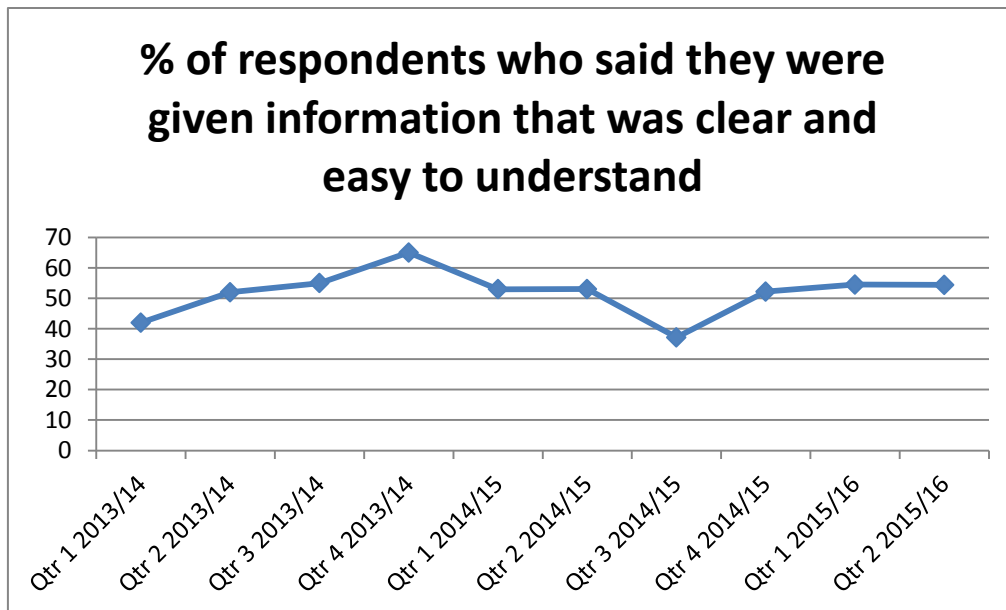


33% of those responding in the latest quarter said they were 'very dissatisfied' with the time taken to deal with their complaint.

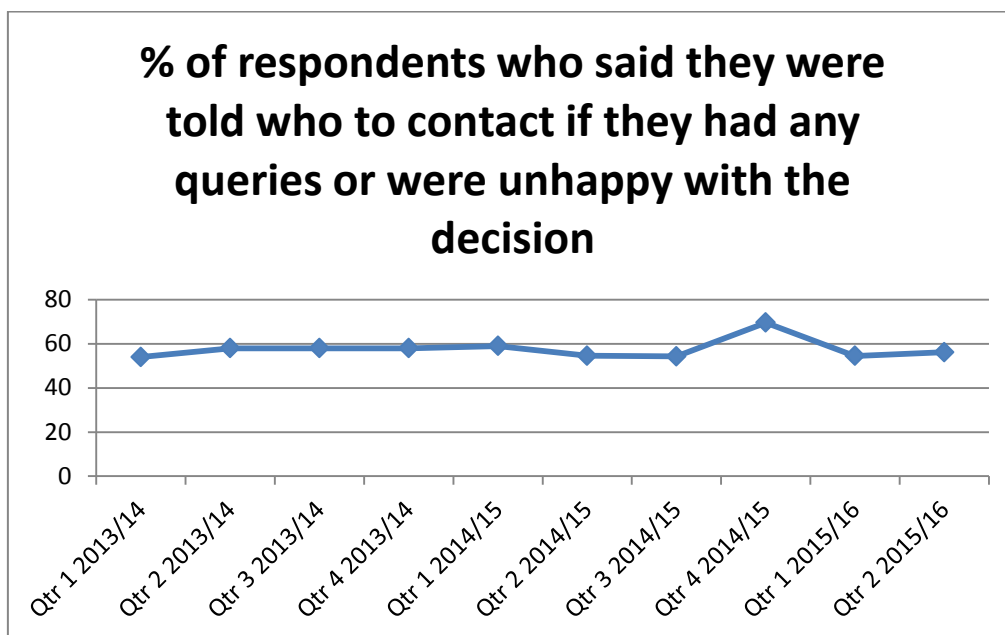




Chief Officers have been asked to reinforce to staff the importance of keeping complainants up-to-date with progress on complaints which take longer than the target number of days to resolve.



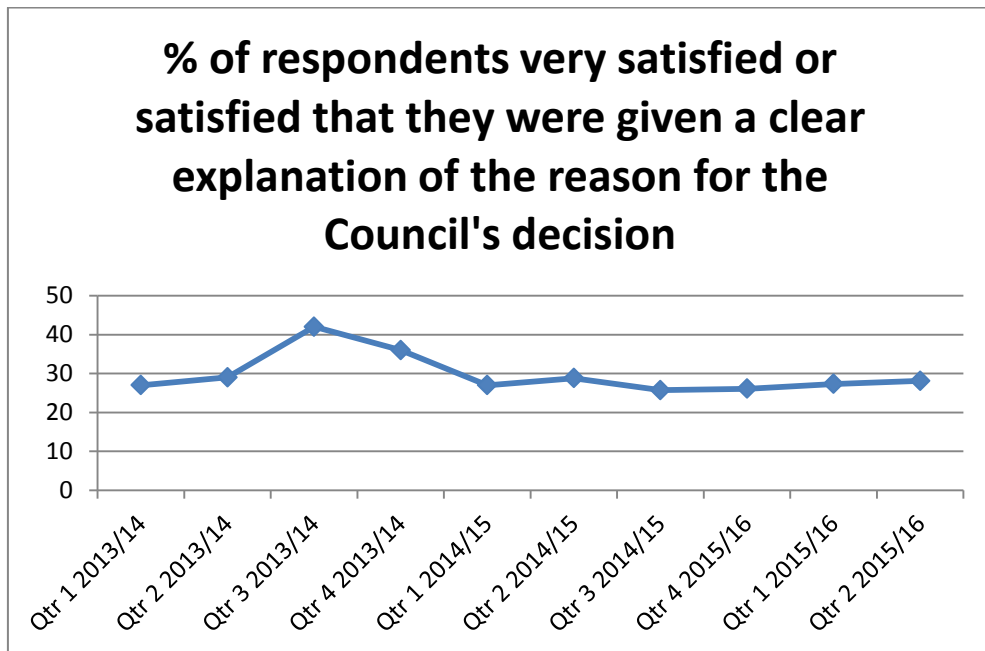
Guidance on dealing with complaints emphasises the importance of using plain English and techniques such as bullet points, headings etc to make complex explanations easier to read and understand.



The Council Management Team's has been asked to reinforce the importance of telling complainants who to contact if dissatisfied with a response.



Almost 30% of respondents in the latest survey said they were 'very dissatisfied' that their complaint had been taken seriously.



Almost 37% of respondents in the latest survey said that they were 'very dissatisfied' with this aspect of the process. Again we continue to emphasise to staff the importance of clearly explaining decisions on complaints.

- 7.4 The results from the second quarter of 2015/16 are slightly down on some questions but broadly similar on most compared to the first quarter. 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 broadly positive.

## 8 ANNUAL LETTER FROM THE SCOTTISH PUBLIC SERVICE OMBUDSMAN

- 8.1 The annual letter from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, providing statistics on complaints to the SPSO about the Council during 2014/15, was received during October.
- 8.2 34 complaints about Dundee City Council were received by the Ombudsman in 2014/15, up slightly on the 31 received in 2013/14. The total number of complaints received about the Council represents 1.8% of those received by the Ombudsman about local authorities in the year, exactly the same as last year. Although complaints about Dundee City Council are up slightly, the number of complaints about all Councils also rose slightly, so our share of Council complaints remained the same.
- 8.3 Of the 34 complaints received, 12 were about Housing; 7 about Social Work; 4 about Environmental Health and Cleansing; 3 each about Education and Planning and 1 each about Land and Property, Consumer Protection, Legal and Administration and Welfare Fund Crisis Grants. In one case, the subject is listed as unknown or out of jurisdiction.
- 8.4 Of the 33 complaints determined during the year:
- at the 'advice' stage, 11 are recorded as being premature, 9 as not duly made or withdrawn, 1 as outcome not achievable and 1 as out of jurisdiction
  - at the 'early resolution' stage, 1 is listed as out of jurisdiction, 1 as not duly made or withdrawn and 3 as outcome not achievable
  - at the 'investigation' stage, 1 was partially upheld and 1 not upheld. There were no fully upheld complaints

**9. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 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 the first half of 2015/16, no complaints within the scope of this report was identified as relating to an inequalities issue.

**10. CONSULTATIONS**

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

**11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Annual letter from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman containing statistics on complaints to the SPSO about the Council in 2014/15.

David R Martin  
Chief Executive

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02/12/2015

## APPENDIX ONE

## BREAKDOWN OF DATA ON KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR 1/4/2015 TO 30/9/2015

<b>Corporate Services</b>													
<b>Stage Description</b>	<b>Total</b>		<b>Within Target</b>		<b>With Extension</b>		<b>Upheld</b>		<b>Not upheld</b>		<b>Partially upheld</b>		<b>Average days to resolve</b>
	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	
Frontline	35	96.7	23	65.7	3	8.6	9	25.7	22	62.9	4	11.4	5.7
Investigation	4	3.3	3	75.0					4	100.0			14.6

<b>Education</b>													
<b>Stage Description</b>	<b>Total</b>		<b>Within Target</b>		<b>With Extension</b>		<b>Upheld</b>		<b>Not upheld</b>		<b>Partially upheld</b>		<b>Average days to resolve</b>
	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	
Frontline	49	73.1	25	51.0	9	18.4	9	18.4	31	63.3	9	18.4	20.6
Investigation	18	26.9	6	33.3	7	38.9	3	16.7	7	38.9	8	44.4	34.2

<b>Housing</b>													
<b>Stage Description</b>	<b>Total</b>		<b>Within Target</b>		<b>With Extension</b>		<b>Upheld</b>		<b>Not upheld</b>		<b>Partially upheld</b>		<b>Average days to resolve</b>
	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	
Frontline	62	88.6	44	71.0	10	16.1	15	24.2	40	64.5	7	11.3	5.1
Investigation	8	11.4	6	75.0	1	12.5	2	25.0	6	75.0			17.4

<b>Environment</b>													
<b>Stage Description</b>	<b>Total</b>		<b>Within Target</b>		<b>With Extension</b>		<b>Upheld</b>		<b>Not upheld</b>		<b>Partially upheld</b>		<b>Average days to resolve</b>
	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	
Frontline	29	96.7	17	58.6	6	20.7	11	37.9	16	55.2	2	6.9	9.4
Investigation	1	3.3							1	100.0			23.7

<b>City Development</b>													
<b>Stage Description</b>	<b>Total</b>		<b>Within Target</b>		<b>With Extension</b>		<b>Upheld</b>		<b>Not upheld</b>		<b>Partially upheld</b>		<b>Average days to resolve</b>
	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	
Frontline	7	38.9	4	57.1			1	14.3	6	85.7			5.4
Investigation	11	61.1	8	72.7	3	27.3	5	45.5	6	54.5			9.7

<b>Totals</b>													
<b>Stage Description</b>	<b>Total</b>		<b>Within Target</b>		<b>With Extension</b>		<b>Upheld</b>		<b>Not upheld</b>		<b>Partially upheld</b>		<b>Average days to resolve</b>
	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% age</b>	
Frontline	182	81.3	113	62.0	28	15.3	46	25.0	116	63.0	22	12.0	9.7
Investigation	42	18.7	23	54.8	11	26.2	10	23.8	24	57.1	8	19.1	22.5