

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 10 DECEMBER 2014
REPORT ON: BI-ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLAINTS
REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE
REPORT NO: 450-2014

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To report on complaints statistics for the first half of 2014/2015 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 2014, 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 plan 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 2014, 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 2013/14

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 2014, 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.

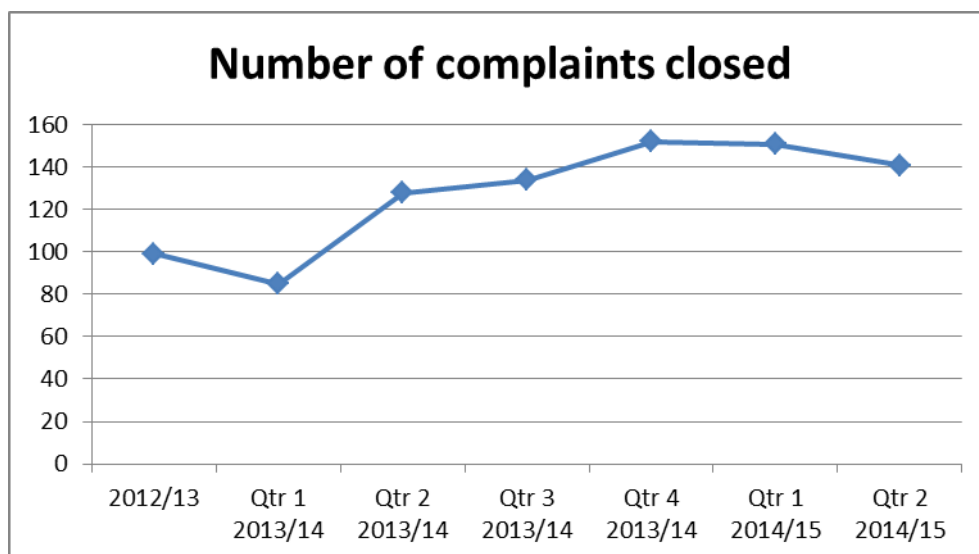
5. COMPLAINTS STATISTICS : 1 APRIL 2014 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2014

- 5.1 In the first half of 2014/15:

- 292 complaints were closed (this excludes 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)
- 53.4% of complaints at the frontline stage were closed within the target of 5 working days and a further 34.5% within an extended target time. 92.8% of complaints at the investigation stage were closed within the 20 working days target
- 26.9% of complaints were upheld at the frontline stage, and a further 14.4% were partially upheld. At the investigation stage, 35.7% were upheld and 25.0% were partially upheld
- the average number of working days taken to close complaints was 7.4 days at the frontline stage and 8.4 days at the investigation stage
- the percentage of complaints recorded in each category is shown below (with the figure for 2013/14 in brackets):

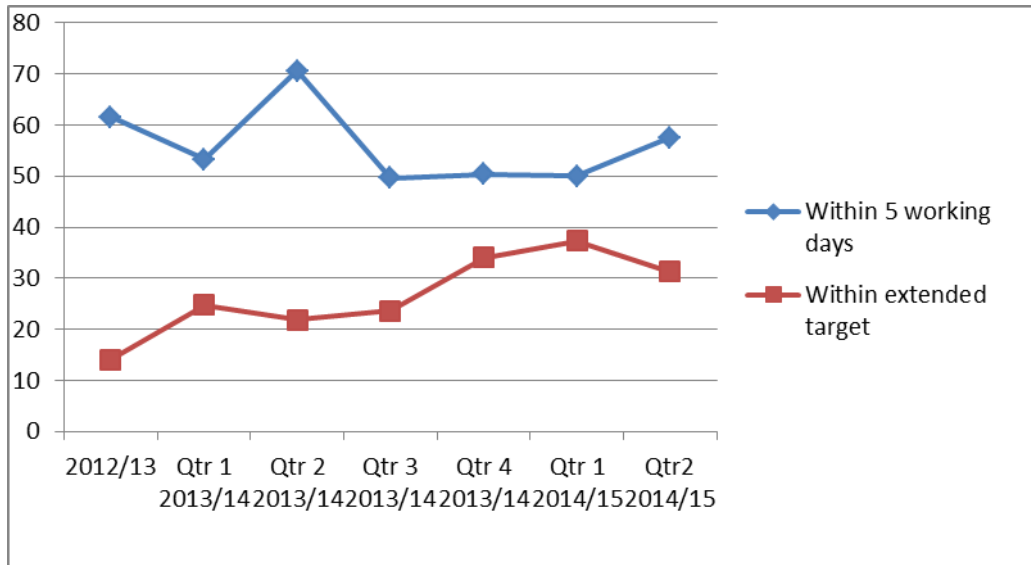
| | | |
|---|---|---------------|
| - delay in responding to enquiries and requests | - | 19.2% (17.3%) |
| - failure to meet our service standards | - | 20.8% (16.2%) |
| - treatment by, or attitude of, a member of staff | - | 25.1% (27.5%) |
| - failure to provide a service | - | 18.6% (17.8%) |
| - dissatisfaction with our policy | - | 10.4% (13.7%) |
| - failure to follow the proper administrative process | - | 4.9% (6.3%) |
| - refusal to give advice or answer questions | - | 1.0% (1.2%) |
- 15 people made more than one complaint during the first half of 2014/15, 13 making two complaints and 2 making five complaints
- by department, the highest number of complaints recorded were for Housing (86), Education (72), Corporate Services (61), Environment (47), City Development (23) and Chief Executive's (3). 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 below:



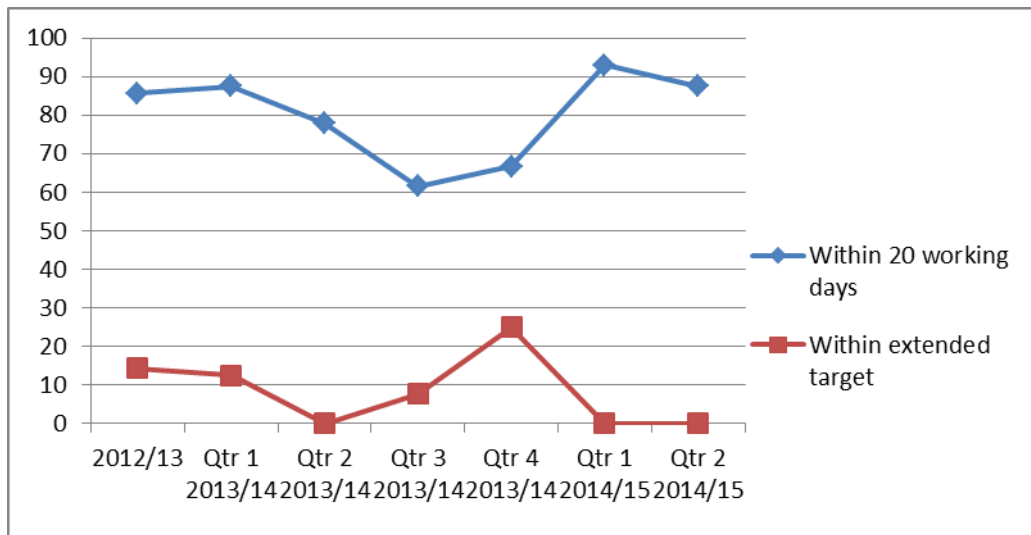
While the overall trend has risen since 2012, we believe this reflects greater use of the electronic complaints recording system rather than any increase in actual dissatisfaction.

% of stage 1 complaints closed within target



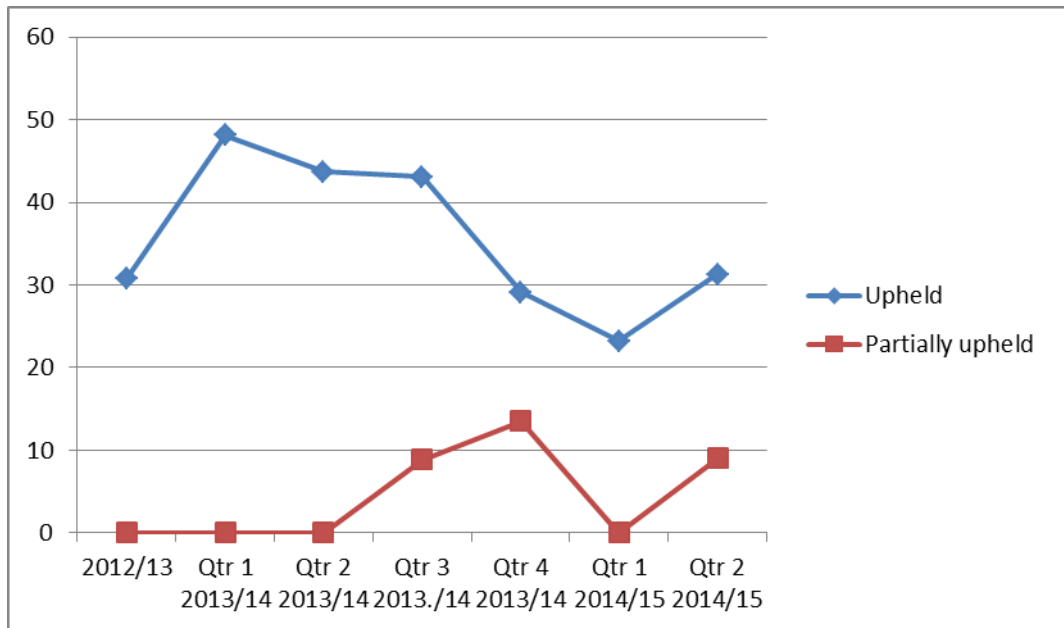
We continue to emphasise to staff the importance of responding to complaints within target or contacting customers to agree extended targets if a quick response is not possible.

% of stage 2 complaints closed within target



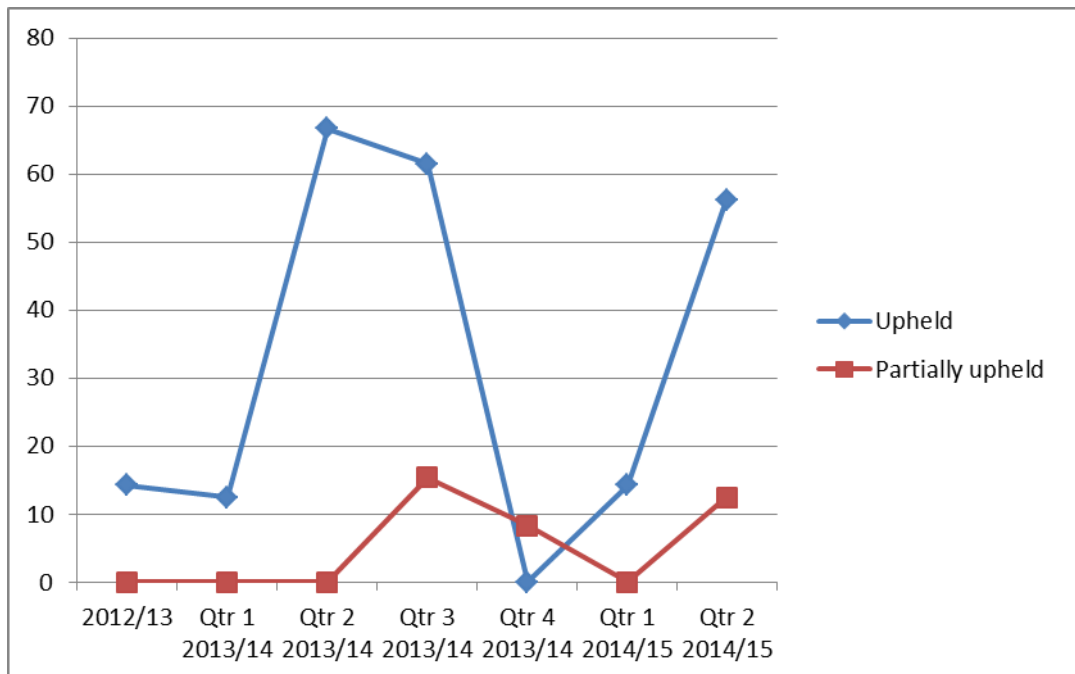
A very small number of complaints go to stage 2, so % figures will fluctuate considerably due to individual cases. Chief officers and managers receiving stage 2 complaints have been reminded that these should be acknowledged within 3 days as well as responded to within 20 days or an agreed extended target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

% of stage 1 complaints upheld and partially upheld



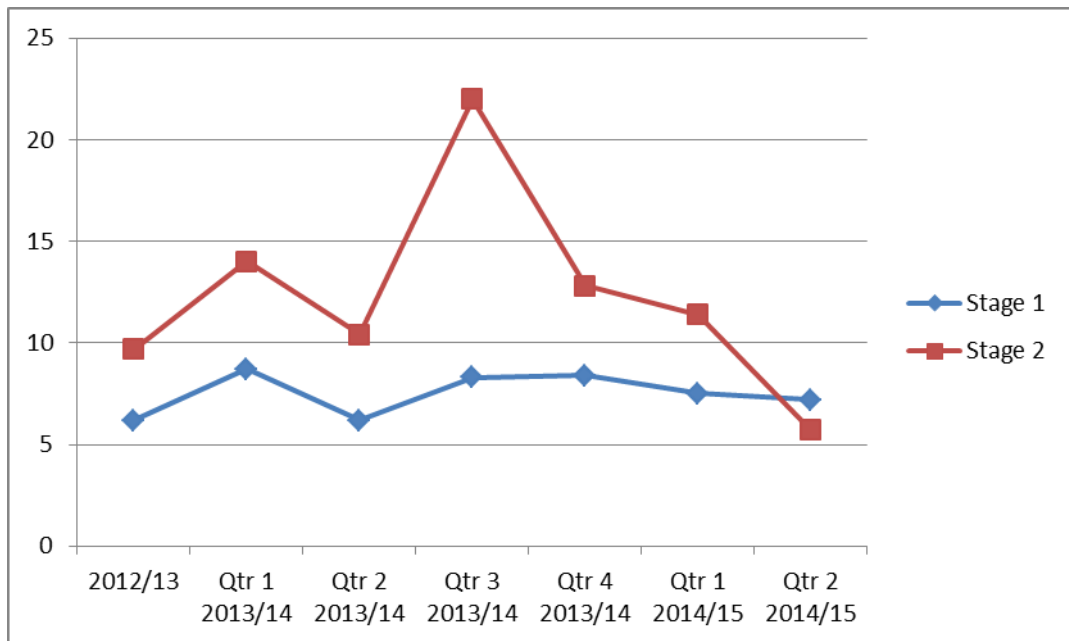
'Partially' upheld was not originally included as an option in the indicators required by the SPSO, so these figures are only available from 1 October 2013.

% 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



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 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. 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 assistance of Chief Officers in reinforcing this message has been requested.
- 6.3 Among the process improvement issues identified from the review of complaints in the first 6 months of 2014/15 were:
- Revenues are reviewing all letters to ensure that these include the current details of the Translation and Interpreting Service
 - Housing are reviewing the information given to tenants about when repairs will be done
 - Housing are to carry out checks on maintenance works before projects are signed off

- City Development are reviewing information given to occupants about road closures
- Customer Services have identified a need for training on new processes being transferred to them from departments
- All departments should be asked to review procedures for holiday cover, to ensure that emails and phone messages are checked in case customers have been trying to contact staff about important issues

6.4 Most of the 'planned service improvements' in the first half of 2014/15 involved speaking to individuals about errors or arranging training for teams to remind them of procedures, customer care standards etc, but there were also some service improvements identified, covering topics such as:

- Housing improving signage at the West Office Community Lounge to make clear that meetings are in progress and avoid interruptions
- City Development reviewing policy and procedures on pothole patching
- Environment changing telephone call 'pick up' groups to improve telephone answering response
- Customer Services making every effort to ensure there are sufficient staff available to greet visitors to Dundee House at busy periods and ensure they are appropriately signposted
- Housing accelerating the introduction of a procedure to ensure clearer communication with users of the Homeless Service about decisions on their case
- Housing ensuring that tenants are notified in advance when delays may occur to planned work on capital projects
- Education publishing information for parents on the assessment of dyslexia in schools and to undertake work with Dundee College to achieve a more consistent and shared understanding of the assessment framework for dyslexia across the different learning settings
- City Development monitoring the building management system for Dundee House more closely following complaints about the waiting area being cold
- Communities extending the time period between community centre hall lets to ensure adequate time for cleaning
- Environment re-assessing their telephone answering operation with the aim of improving response times

6.5 A new feature of the electronic complaints recording system was launched in September 2014 and 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 will be prompted to give updates a month after the complaint was closed, and these will also be reviewed by the Complaints Review Group.

6.6 It is proposed that analysis of complaints is used systematically in future 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

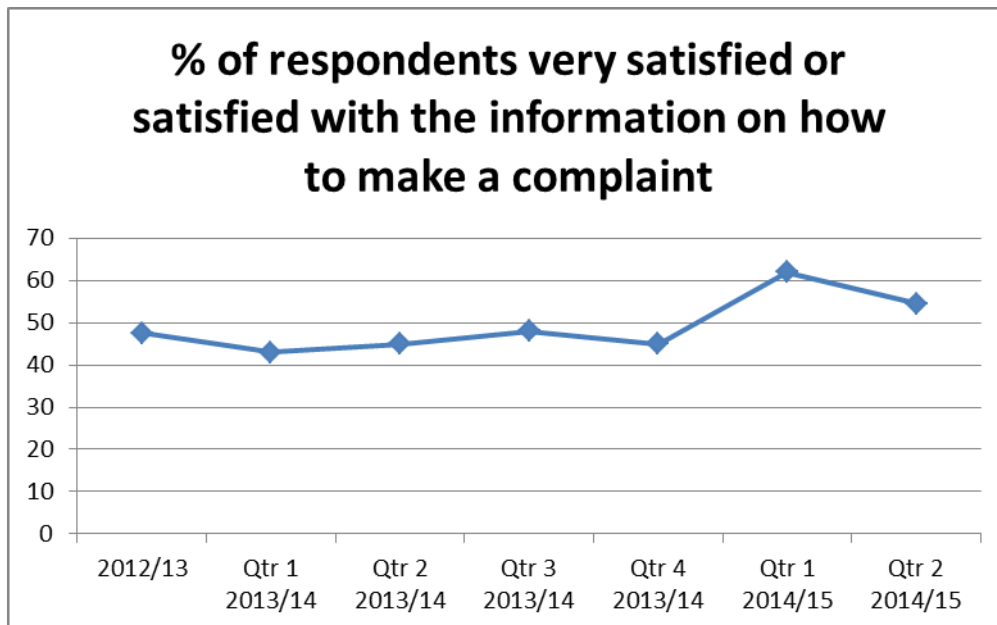
service and customer insight, and it is felt that this approach lends itself well to learning from complaints and improving processes to prevent recurrence.

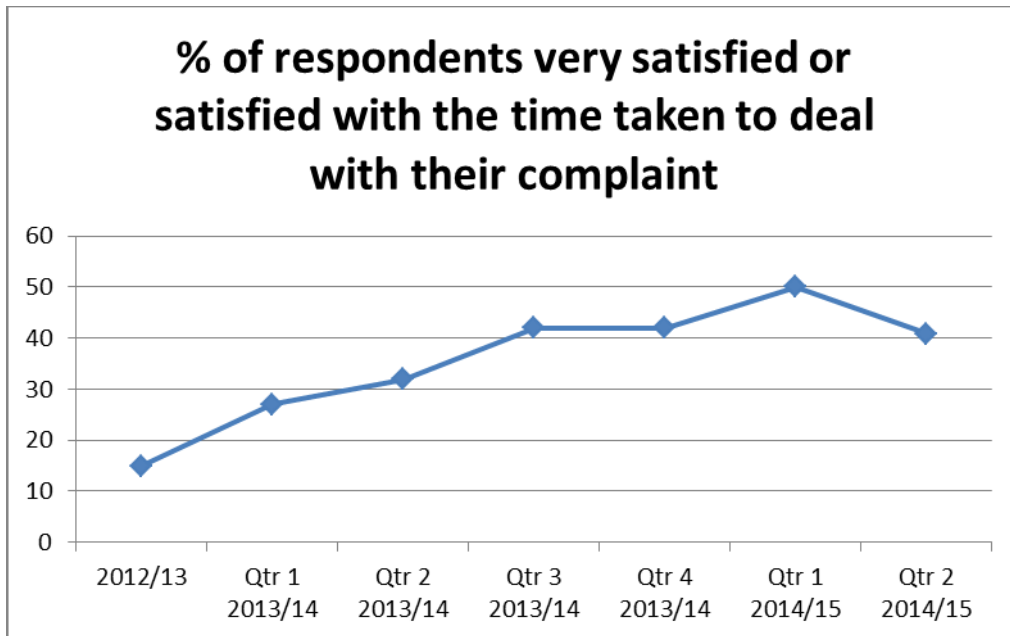
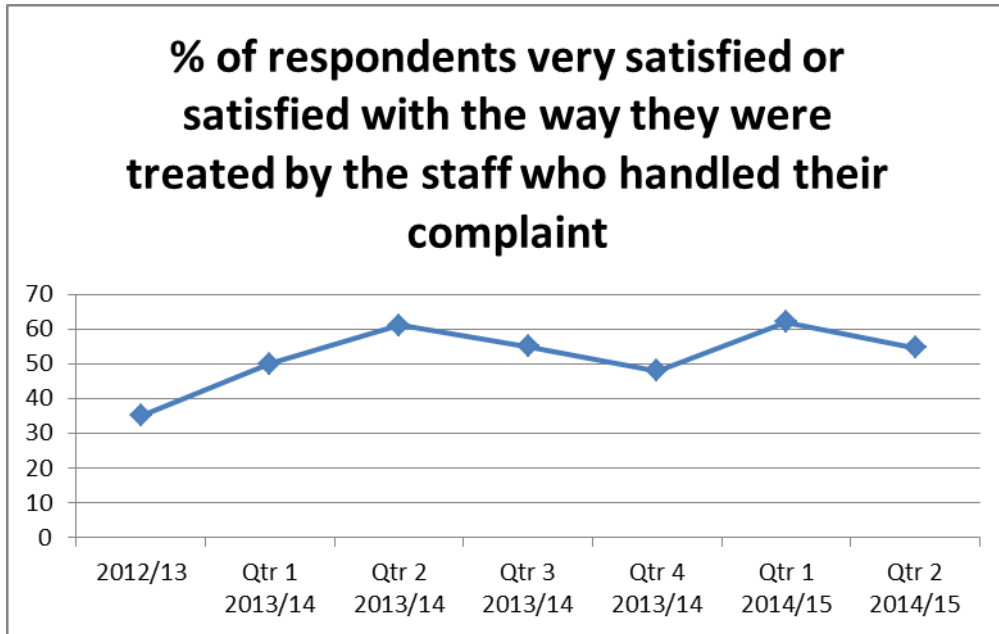
7. SATISFACTION WITH THE COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

7.1 The model CHP 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. 34 questionnaires were completed in the first quarter of 2013/14 and 66 in the second quarter.

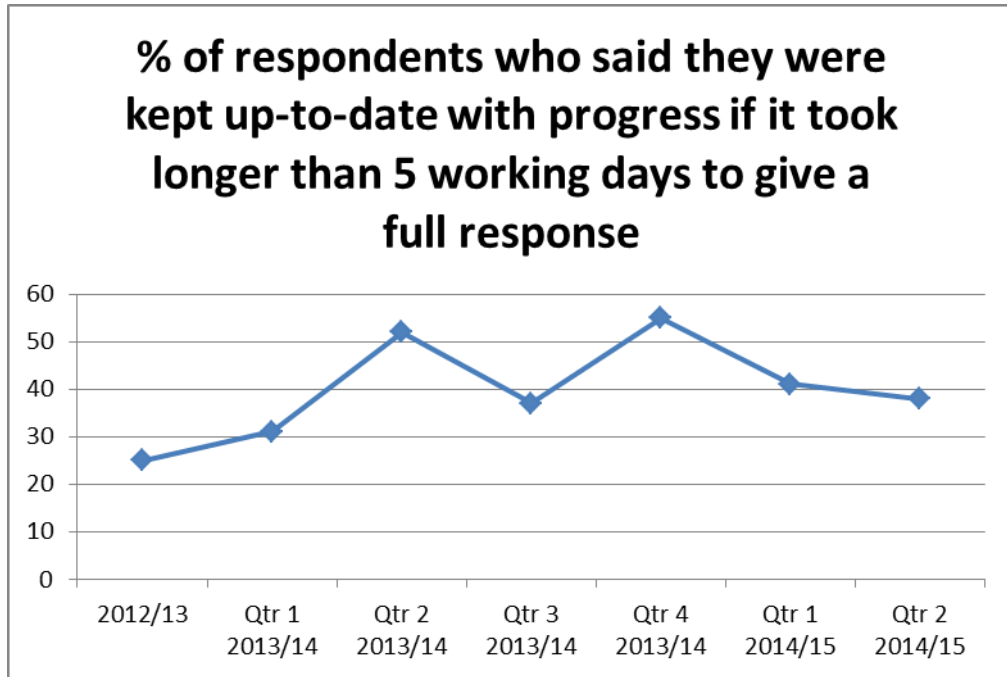
7.2 Trends in satisfaction are highlighted in the charts at 7.3 below. Since the survey sample always consists entirely of people who have made complaints about the Council, the majority of which are not upheld, it is not surprising that satisfaction levels are not always high. It is recognised to be 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:

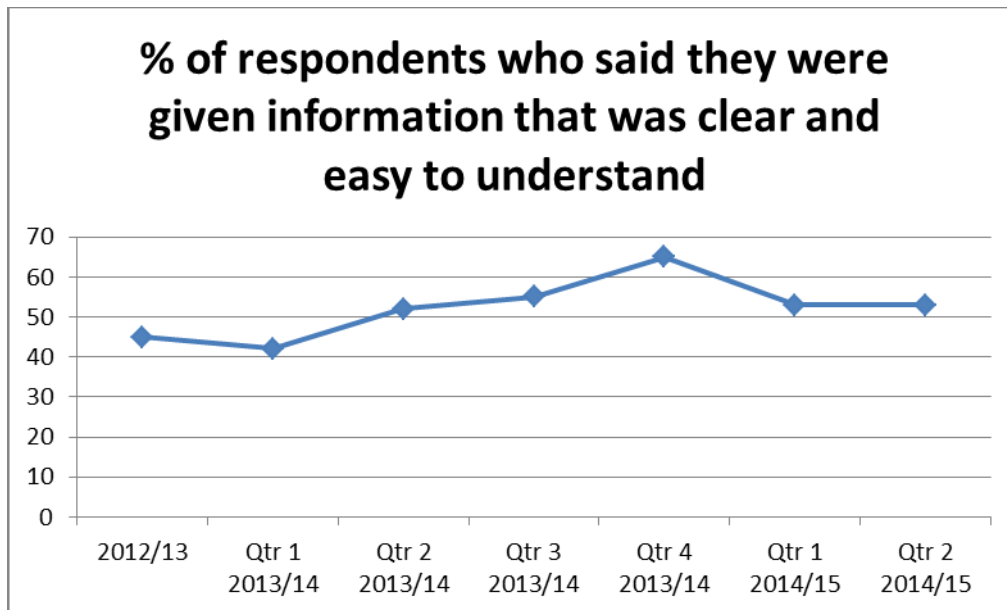




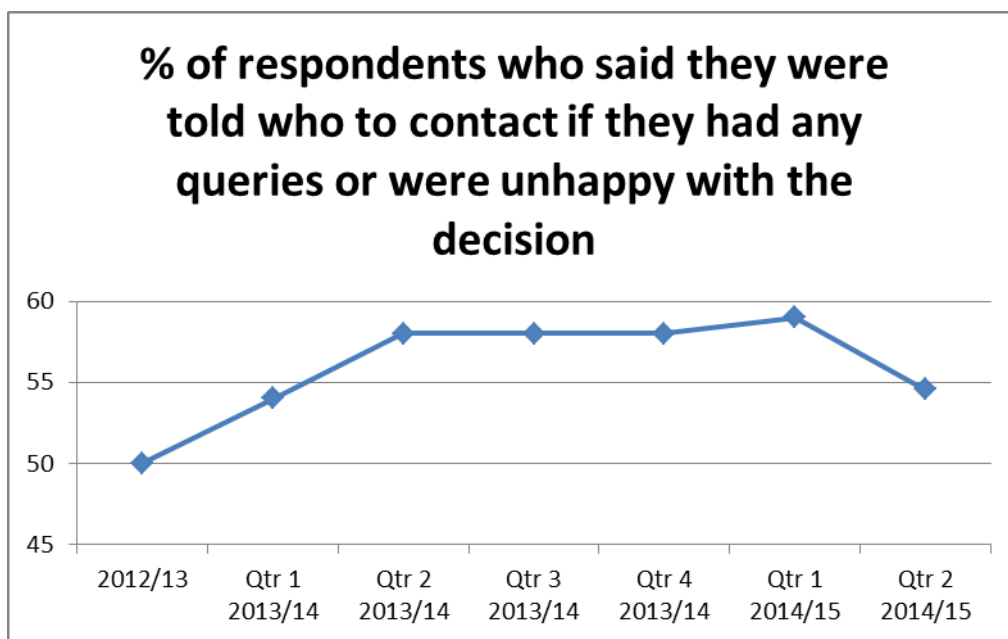
27% of those responding in the latest quarter said they were 'very dissatisfied' with the time taken to deal with their complaint.



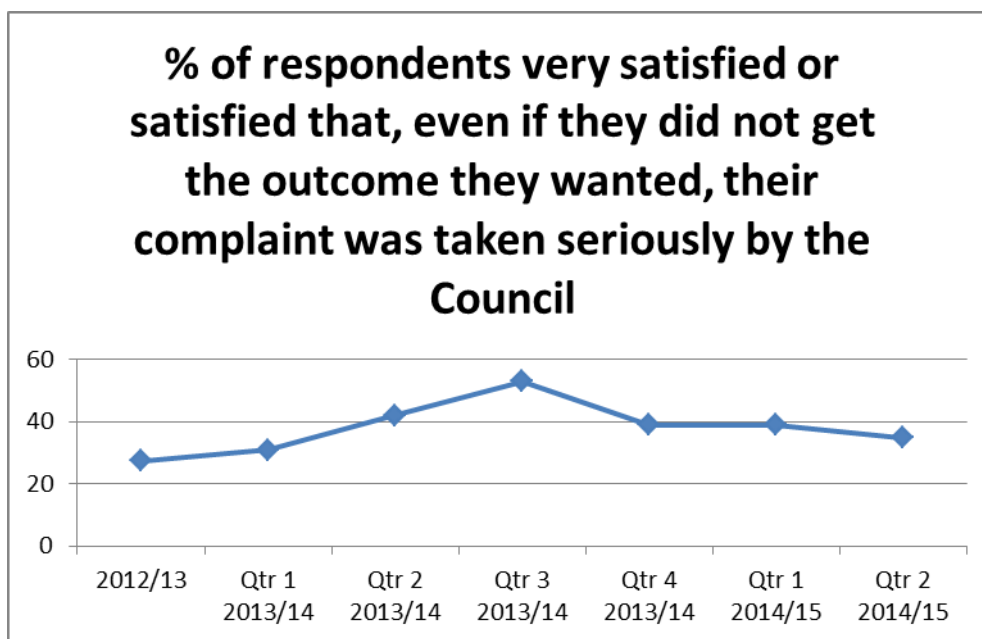
Chief Officers have been asked to reinforce to staff the importance of keeping complainants up-to-date with progress on complaints which take longer than the target number of days to resolve.



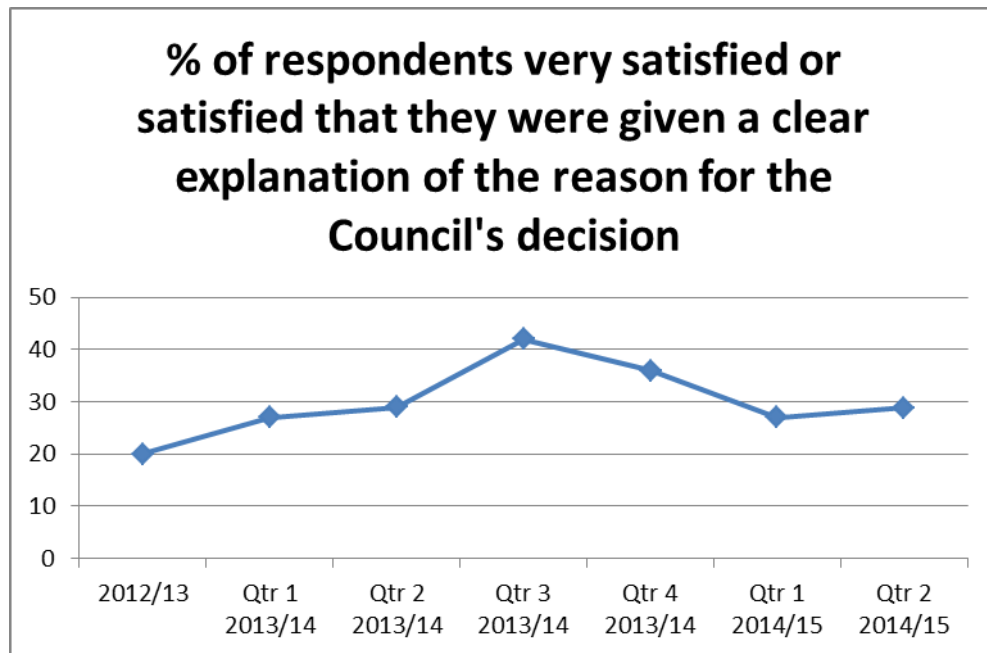
We will continually reinforce to staff the importance of using plain English and techniques such as bullet points, headings etc to make complex explanations easier to read and understand.



The Management Team's assistance is requested in reinforcing the importance of telling complainants who to contact if dissatisfied with a response.



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



30% 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 2014/15 are mostly down slightly compared to the first quarter, so performance will continue to be monitored and messages about good complaints handling will continue to be reinforced. However, overall trends since we 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 about complaints to the SPSO about the Council, was received on 8 October 2014.

- 8.2 31 complaints about Dundee City Council were received by the Ombudsman in 2013/14, up slightly on the 29 received in 2012/13 but less than the 36 in 2011/12. The total number of complaints received about the Council represents 1.8% of those received by the Ombudsman about local authorities in the year, compared to 1.9% in 2012/13 and 2.4% in 2011/12. Although complaints about Dundee City Council are up slightly, the number of complaints about all Councils to the SPSO rose by 16% so our share of Council complaints fell.

- 8.3 Of the 31 complaints received, 8 were about Housing; 5 about Social Work; 3 about Education; 2 each about Planning, Finance, Roads and Transport, Environmental Health and Cleansing and Legal and Administration; and 1 each about Building Control, Land and Property, Consumer Protection 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, 18 are recorded as being premature, 4 as not duly made or withdrawn, 4 as outcome not achievable and 1 as out of jurisdiction
- at the 'early resolution' stage, 1 is listed as out of jurisdiction, 1 as outcome not achievable and 2 as upheld
- at the 'investigation' stage, 1 was partially upheld and 1 not upheld

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 2014/15, 3 complaints within the scope of this report were identified as relating to an inequalities issue, 2 concerning disability and 1 concerning age. All have been drawn to the attention of the Council’s Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator.

10. 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.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Letter from the Ombudsman dated 8 October 2014, containing statistics about complaints to the SPSO about the Council in 2013/14..

David R Martin
Chief Executive

.....

01/12/2014

APPENDIX ONE

BREAKDOWN OF DATA ON KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR 1/4/2014 TO 30/9/2014

| Corporate Services | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|
| Stage Description | 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 | 59 | 96.7 | 50 | 84.7 | 3 | 5.1 | 17 | 28.8 | 36 | 61.0 | 6 | 10.2 | 4.0 |
| Investigation | 2 | 3.3 | 2 | 100.0 | | | | | 2 | 100.0 | | | 5.6 |

| Education Department | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|
| Stage Description | 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 | 65 | 90.3 | 30 | 46.2 | 23 | 35.4 | 13 | 20 | 37 | 56.9 | 15 | 23.1 | 11.6 |
| Investigation | 7 | 9.7 | 6 | 85.7 | | | | | 4 | 57.1 | 3 | 42.9 | 10.9 |

| Housing | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|
| Stage Description | 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 | 74 | 86.0 | 28 | 37.8 | 40 | 54.1 | 25 | 33.8 | 40 | 54.1 | 9 | 12.2 | 7.2 |
| Investigation | 12 | 14.0 | 11 | 91.7 | | | 3 | 25.0 | 5 | 41.7 | 4 | 33.3 | 10.7 |

| Environment | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|
| Stage Description | 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 | 41 | 87.2 | 23 | 56.1 | 15 | 36.6 | 9 | 22.0 | 25 | 61.0 | 7 | 17.1 | 6.9 |
| Investigation | 6 | 12.8 | 6 | 100.0 | | | 6 | 100.0 | | | | | 1.0 |

| City Development | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|
| Stage Description | 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 | 22 | 95.7 | 11 | 50.0 | 8 | 36.4 | 6 | 27.3 | 15 | 68.2 | 1 | 4.5 | 5.6 |
| Investigation | 1 | 4.3 | 1 | 100.0 | | | 1 | 100.0 | | | | | 0.5 |

| Chief Executive's | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|
| Stage Description | 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 | 3 | 100.0 | | | 2 | 66.7 | 1 | 33.3 | 2 | 66.7 | | | 8.2 |

| Totals | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|
| Stage Description | 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 | 264 | 90.4 | 141 | 53.4 | 91 | 34.5 | 71 | 26.9 | 155 | 58.7 | 38 | 14.4 | 7.4 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|----|-----|----|------|--|--|----|------|----|------|---|------|-----|
| Investigation | 28 | 9.6 | 26 | 92.8 | | | 10 | 35.7 | 11 | 39.3 | 7 | 25.0 | 8.4 |
|---------------|----|-----|----|------|--|--|----|------|----|------|---|------|-----|