

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET - 8 JULY 2009

ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLAINTS AND COMMENTS - 2008/09

Report by the Chief Executive

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide the Cabinet with information relating to the formal complaints received and resolved by Council services for the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In October 1997, the Council's Policy and Resources Committee agreed the Corporate Complaints and Comments Procedures to be used by all departments within the Council. These corporate procedures have been kept under review since 1997 and have been updated as required. The procedures were most recently updated in June 2004, to incorporate the recording of complaints of a discriminatory nature and also to collect data on positive comments received by Council departments. The procedures are subject to a current review to ensure that they continue to provide comprehensive and relevant information in terms of Customer First priorities.
- 2.2 Departments monitor statistics on an ongoing basis and present quarterly reports outlining the number of complaints (that is those complaints not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction at the first point of contact) and positive comments received which informs the annual report.
- 2.3 The Council's "It's Better to Listen" leaflet was first published in 1998. This has been updated several times since, most recently in 2007 and the current version outlines the complaints process and lists a number of contact options for the customer. This leaflet is the subject of a comprehensive review in terms of format to take cognisance of equality impact assessment issues.
- 2.4 A review of the Council's arrangements for dealing with customer feedback is also in hand and will be the subject of a report in the near future.

3. ANNUAL STATISTICS

- 3.1 Details of the total number of complaints, improvements made and positive comments received are shown in the table overleaf, for the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009.

Department	Complaints		Improvements		Positive Comments	
	07/08	08/09	07/08	08/09	07/08	08/09
Chief Executive's	4	1	0	0	5	8
Corporate Support	4	12	2	1	12	40
Educational and Social Services:	23	40	7	4	23	11
Neighbourhood Services:	72	69	15	26	1079	962
TOTAL	148	122	22	31	1134	1021

3.2 Comparable figures have been included for the total number of complaints across the Council for 2007/08.

3.3 It should be noted that **no** complaints of a discriminatory nature were received during the year 2008/09.

3.4 The Council investigated 122 formal complaints during 2008/09, a reduction of 16 from the previous year (148). Of the 122, 59 complaints were considered to have been "justified", representing 48% of the total number of formal complaints received.

3.5 Executive Directors continue to review systems and procedures and importantly service delivery as a consequence of complaints and suggestions received from the public.

4. DEPARTMENTAL COMMENTS

4.1 Chief Executive's Office

One complaint was received in respect of the Finance and Asset Management Service within the Chief Executive's Department. Following investigation this complaint was considered justified and appropriate remedial action was taken.

4.2 Corporate Support

12 formal complaints were received by Corporate Support; 6 related to Legal Services; 1 to Information Technology; 1 to Environmental Health; 1 to Trading Standards and 3 to Planning. Following investigation, 4 were considered justified and the appropriate corrective action was taken.

There was a notable rise in positive comments received, a rise of 70% from 12 to 40; a large proportion of these (15) can be attributed to Human Resources for the various Equalities events and training sessions which took place during the year.

In relation to the number and range of services delivered by Corporate Support, the number of complaints remains low, however, the Executive

Director will continue to monitor any emerging trends and continue to use feedback from customers to improve areas of service delivery.

4.3 Educational and Social Services

Educational and Social Services experienced a significant rise in the number of complaints received; an increase of 17, from 23 in 2007/08 to 40 in 2008/9. This represents a 42.5% increase. All complaints within the Department are investigated by senior management with an individual response being given. In all cases, the complainant is involved in the investigation. Wherever possible the complaint will result in specific improvement action.

In many cases the complaint relates to the application of formalised and approved processes, for example in needs assessment with the complainant focusing on the outcome of the process, rather than the way it has been applied.

For both Education and Social Services, the number of complaints and concerns is extremely low given the volume of services provided and their complex nature. This given, each complaint is treated seriously and assessed on its own merits.

4.4 Neighbourhood Services

Neighbourhood Services received 69 formal complaints during 2008/09, a slight reduction on the previous year (72). Of the 69 complaints, 37 related to tenant repairs; 14 to sports and leisure facilities and 7 to arts and museums. The remaining 11 complaints related to a variety of issues ranging from unprofessional conduct from employees to poor customer care, also from employees.

Some 38 complaints were justified following investigation, representing 55% of complaints received.

Neighbourhood Services received 962 positive comments in 2008/09 which is slightly down from the 1079 received in 2007/08. The majority of the positive comments in 2008/09 came from the Arts and Museums and Community Recreation sections who actively seek customer feedback through visitor books and feedback forms and surveys. Positive comments provide a valuable indicator that stakeholder's expectations are frequently being met and exceeded.

5. SCOTTISH PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN

5.1 East Ayrshire Council again had no complaints upheld against them by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None arising directly from this report.

7. LEGAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None.

8. RECOMMENDATION

8.1 It is recommended that Cabinet note the annual return for complaints and comments for the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009.

Fiona Lees
Chief Executive

List of Background Papers: Departmental Returns

Any member wishing more detailed information is requested to contact the appropriate Executive Director

Implementation Officer: Bill Walkinshaw, Head of Democratic Services.