

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 8 JUNE 2006

ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLAINTS AND COMMENTS – 2005/06

Report by the Chief Executive

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1** To provide the Corporate Governance Committee with information relating to the formal complaints received and resolved by the Council for the period 1 April 2005 – 31 March 2006 (i.e. those complaints that were not resolved to complainants' satisfaction at the first point of contact).

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** At its meeting on 23 October 1997, the Council's Policy and Resources Committee agreed the Council-wide 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.
- 2.2** Departments collate statistics on a quarterly basis on the number of complaints received and positive comments received. A corporate summary report is presented to the Council's Corporate Management Team each quarter. An annual report is presented to the Council's Corporate Governance Committee.
- 2.3** The Council's "It's Better to Listen" leaflet, first published in 1998, has been updated several times, with the most recent version being printed in October 2004. Changes to the Council's structure and means of contacting the Council have been incorporated into the latest version of the leaflet.

3. ANNUAL STATISTICS

- 3.1** Details of the total number of complaints, improvements made and positive comments received are shown in the table below, for the period 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006 :-

Department	Complaints		Improvements		Positive Comments	
	04/05	05/06	04/05	05/06	04/05	05/06
Corporate Support	0	3	0	2	30	42
Development & Property Services	22	16	1	1	20	34
Educational and Social Services:						
Education	12	18	0	3	4	2
Social Work	13	21	0	0	1	17
Neighbourhood Services:						
Community Services	21	15	13	8	708	850
Housing Service	48	80	0	2	12	39
Total	116	153	14	16	775	984

3.2 Comparable figures for 2004/05 have been provided.

3.3 It should be noted that no complaints of a discriminatory nature have been received during the year 2005/06.

3.4 Executive Directors continue to review systems and procedures in relation to complaints and suggestions received from the public.

4. DEPARTMENTAL COMMENTS

4.1 Corporate Support

Of the three complaints received in 2005/06, two were considered to be justified. One concerned a clerical error which resulted in an individual's benefit being stopped. The other related to a delay in advising a resident of Council Tax arrears. Both matters were rectified.

Notwithstanding that the number of complaints received remains low, the Department considers each one and reflects learning points in service improvements.

Positive comments received cover a variety of service delivery matters, but of particular note are the views expressed in relation to the assistance given to those claiming benefit.

4.2 Development and Property Services

For the 2005/06 submission, there was a departmental review of the categorisation of complaints, particularly in relation to the outcome of planning applications, following advice/guidelines received by the Corporate Development and Communication section. This has resulted in a decrease in communications logged as formal complaints for 2005/06.

Positive comments have increased for the current year due to Roads Division receiving good feedback from the public on Traffic Calming

Measures; street lighting repairs; courteous and prompt staff co-operation.

A greater emphasis on considering and implementing improvements derived from “justified” complaints will be incorporated into the departmental procedures from Quarter 1 of 2006/07.

4.3 Educational and Social Services

Within Educational services there has been a rise of 6 complaints between 2004/05 and 2005/06. Although these numbers are very small against the overall size of the service, the department continues to monitor the complaints closely and wherever possible to improve both services and how the complaint or concern is handled. This has resulted in specific improvement action in relation to both staff training and procedures for dealing with disagreements over service provision.

The overall level of formal complaints about Social Work services remains at a very low level in comparison to the volume of work undertaken. This reflects upon the overall professionalism of staff given that in many instances involvement is on a statutory basis. There is no identifiable pattern in the increase from 13 to 21 complaints.

The increase in positive comments from 1 to 17 reflects the result of a concerted effort to encourage Social Work staff to submit these for recording to ensure that they are fully captured and reported. It places the number of formal complaints received within a broader context.

4.4 Neighbourhood Services

There were 15 formal complaints received in 2005/06, which is a decrease of 28% on 2004/05. The complaints covered a range of issues across the services, with no identifiable trend. Of the eight improvements to services, seven of these were made in the Library Service. These included increasing the number of talking books, checking for faulty audio items, on-line requests, lending of reference materials, introducing basic computing classes and reviewing heating and noise levels in libraries. In Local Offices, posters have been displayed requesting that customers check receipts so that mistakes can be rectified more easily.

Of the 850 positive comments received, 426 were received in the Arts and Museums service where comments books have been introduced. Libraries, Community Recreation and Leisure Development also received a high number of positive comments through customer feedback forms and customer surveys.

The Housing Service captures and records details of all “formal” complaints submitted by customers in the form of letters, e-mails as well as the approved complaints forms. This information is recorded on RESPOND, a software based information retrieval system initially introduced to support the local Antisocial Behaviour Initiative. This allows Senior Managers to monitor the level and nature of complaints and identify those situations where actions to improve service

performance need to be taken either by individuals or by the service as whole.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None arising directly from this report.

6. LEGAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None.

7. RECOMMENDATION

7.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Governance Committee note the annual return for complaints and comments for the period 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006.

Fiona Lees
Chief Executive
23 May 2006

List of Background Papers

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

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER: Elizabeth Morton, Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Corporate Support (01563 576001)