

13. COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS MONITORING 2002/2003

Report By: Director of Policy & Community

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

1. To inform Members of the figures for complaints and compliments recorded for the year ended 31 March 2003 and the 1st Quarter of 2003/2004 with comparative data.

Background

2. The Complaints Administrators in each of the Directorates, maintain detailed records on behalf of the Nominated Complaints Officers using ComTrac, the Council's computerised recording system. Reports can be produced for Directorate Management Teams.
3. A leaflet is available at receptions, libraries and Info Shops or Points to enable the public to register their complaints about the Council's services. The leaflet is currently being updated, it will make it easier for the public to record compliments as well as complaints and will be in circulation by the end of July. This leaflet will also incorporate a section to enable the Council to undertake its legal obligations to monitor the ethnicity of complainants.
4. Customers can also register their feedback on line by accessing either the Herefordshire Council or Info in Herefordshire websites to complete the electronic complaints form.
5. Prior to the implementation of ComTrac, informal and formal complaints were not recorded separately, therefore for the purposes of comparisons in this report the informal and formal complaints have been combined. Informal complaints cover those comments or requests for service, where failure to take action could result in escalation to a formal complaint.
6. Since February 2002 the Council has achieved:
 - The implementation of a computerised complaints recording system;
 - Complaints Administrators who provide support with the recording and administration of the complaints process;
 - A revised Complaints Leaflet;
 - Revised Comments and Complaints Procedure;
 - Creation of a Compliments Procedure;
 - Creation of a Customer Service Strategy.

A Customer Service Pack containing the Comments and Complaints Procedure, Compliments Procedure and the Customer Service Strategy will be available to Members shortly.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from Mark Warren, Customer Service, Libraries and Information Manager on (01432) 260617 or Colin Brothers Business Support Manager on (01432) 260496

Herefordshire's Comments and Complaints Procedure

7. The Council's Best Value Performance Improvement Plan set a corporate target for informal & formal complaints received during 2002/2003. The table below shows performance against targets for 2001/2002, 2002/2003 and the first quarter of 2001, 2002 and 2003.

Total Informal and Formal Complaints received	Target for 2001/2002	Actual for 2001/2002	Target for 2002/2003	Actual for 2002/2003	Target for 2003/2004	Quarter Apr to Jun		
	Not fixed	244	268	317	285	2001	2002	2003
						63	42	140*

* It is estimated that the final figure for the 1st quarter of 2003 will be 160

8. It is proposed that a % of the overall corporate target is set within Directorates, as part of their Service Planning process, based on the outturn of last years performance.
9. A detailed breakdown of the informal and formal complaints received, by Directorate/Department, is shown in the table below:

	April 2001 to March 2002	April 2002 to March 2003	% +/- 2001/02 to 2002/03	Quarter April to June		
				2001	2002	2003**
Commercial Services (incl. IT to Mar 03)	33	41	+24%	16	7	88
County Secretary & Solicitor	16	8	-50%	5	1	1
County Treasurer	37	34	-9%	7	8	5
Education	43	52	+21%	8	8	8
Environment	64	86	+34%	17	13	13
Social Care & Strategic Housing	42	94	+123%	10	4	24
Policy & Community (incl. IT from Apr 03)	9	2	-76%	0	1	1
Totals	244	317	+30%	63	42	140

10. The table shows there has been a dramatic increase in the number of complaints recorded in the first quarter of 2003/2004 compared to the same period for 2002/2003. Although formal complaints have risen from 38 to 51 the number of comments/requests for service has leapt from 4 in 2002 to 89 this year. This increase has been due mainly to improvements in the recording of comments/requests for service where a formal complaint is likely to result from a failure to action.
11. Of the 140 complaints received so far in 2003/2004, 22% have been referred to the next stage of the process; however, none have to date resulted in a change of working practice. A target of 6% has been set for 2003/2004 where complaints have resulted in a change of working practice.

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12. Compliments are also recorded on ComTrac. The table below shows the number of compliments received last year and a comparison for the first quarter of 2002 and 2003.

COMPLIMENTS			
	April 2002 to March 2003	Quarter April to June	
		2002	2003**
Commercial Services (incl. IT to Mar 03)	39	15	6
County Secretary & Solicitor	66	10	19
County Treasurer	28	4	8
Education	3	0	0
Environment	188	0	24
Social Care & Strategic Housing	55	0	7
Policy & Community (incl. IT from Apr 03)	9	0	3
TOTAL	388	29	67

** As at 17 June

13. The number of compliments recorded over the 1st quarters has more than doubled resulting from staff having been encouraged to make sure that all complimentary letters etc are recorded. The new Compliments Procedure will reinforce the need to record all acknowledgements of excellent customer service to promote the sharing of best practice.
14. Work is ongoing to:
- review and improve the electronic recording system;
 - the process for reviewing and sharing of best practice across the Council;
 - the process for considering the changes in working practices following the investigation of complaints.

Complaints Website

15. For the period April 2002 to March 2003 there were a total of 70 hits on the website. 57 were valid complaints, 10 were requests for information and 3 came from customers mistaking Herefordshire for Hertfordshire.

Consideration for Improvements

16. Consideration is to be given to the setting of targets within the Service Planning process. Work continues to make improvements in the review process of changes in working practices and the sharing of best practice.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the report is noted and agreed.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None identified

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