

## COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS MONITORING 2003/2004

**Report By: Director of Policy & Community**

### Wards Affected

County-wide

### Purpose

1. To inform Members of the figures for complaints and compliments recorded including complaints determined by the Local Government Ombudsman and the Complaints Panel for the year ended 31 March 2004 and the first Quarter of 2004/2005 with comparative data.

### Background

2. Records of the comments, complaints and compliments received within each Directorate/ Department, are maintain by the relevant Complaints Administrator using ComTrac, the Council's computerised recording system. Reports can be produced for each respective Directorate Management Team.
3. Leaflets are available at receptions, libraries and Info Shops or Points to enable the public to register their comments, complaints and compliments. This leaflet now incorporates a cut-off section to enable the Council to monitor the ethnicity of complainants and report accordingly.
4. Customers can also register their feedback on line by accessing either the Herefordshire Council websites to complete the electronic complaints form.
5. Prior to April 2002 when ComTrac, the Council's electronic recording system, was implemented informal and formal complaints had not been recorded separately, therefore for the purposes of comparisons in this report 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.

### Herefordshire's Comments and Complaints Procedure

6. The Council's Best Value Performance Improvement Plan set a corporate target for informal & formal complaints received during 2004/2005. The tables below show the annual performance against targets for 2002/2003, 2003/2004 and the first quarters of 2002, 2003 and 2004.

<b>Total Informal and Formal Complaints received</b>	<b>2002/2003</b>	<b>2003/2004</b>	<b>2004/2005</b>
<b>Target</b>	268	285	330
<b>Actual</b>	317	434	

	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
<b>Quarter - Apr to Jun</b>	42	140	*40

\*It is estimated that this will be the final figure for the first quarter of 2004

7. A 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	April 2003 to March 2004	Quarter April to June		
				2002	2003	2004 **
Chief Executive – Personnel from Sep 03	N/A	N/A	0	N/A	0	0
County Secretary & Solicitor	16	8	5	1	1	1
County Treasurer	37	34	43	8	5	2
Education	43	52	30	8	8	2
Environmental Health and Trading Standards	23	43	16	3	4	2
Engineering and Transportation	26	15	30	3	2	4
Planning	15	23	15	7	7	3
Property Services	0	5	1	0	0	0
Social Care – Adults			104			14
Social Care - Children	42	94	23	4	24	1
Strategic Housing			18			4
Policy & Community						
General	9	2	4	1	1	6
IT from Apr 03	N/A	N/A	4	N/A	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>39</b>
Commercial Services to 31 Aug 03 - (incl. IT to Mar 03)	33	41	141	7	88	N/A
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>39</b>

\*\* As at 7 June 2004

8. The number of registered formal and informal complaints have increased year on year. This would indicate that we have been successful in making it easier for people to register their comments and complaints. Also more people are availing themselves of the opportunity to have their say.
9. However, it is difficult to identify any overall trends because of organisational changes and the externalisation of services.

## Herefordshire's Compliments Procedure

10. 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	April 2003 to March 2004	Quarter April to June		
			2002	2003	2004 **
Chief Executive – Personnel (wef Sep 03)	N/A	9	N/A	N/A	0
County Secretary & Solicitor	66	80	10	19	9
County Treasurer	28	27	4	8	4
Education	3	2	0	0	0
Environmental Health and Trading Standards	75	58	0	8	0
Engineering and Transportation	79	83	0	5	17
Planning	29	22	0	11	6
Property Services	5	8	0	0	0
Policy & Community	General	9	0	1	2
	IT (wef Apr 03)	N/A	0	3	1
Social Care & Strategic Housing	55	98	0	7	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>53</b>
Commercial Services to 31 Aug 03 IT (up to Mar 03)	33	13	15	6	N/A
	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>53</b>

\*\* As at 7 June 2004

## Ethnicity Monitoring

11. The Comments, Complaints and Compliments leaflets incorporating the equal opportunities monitoring information were available in receptions, INFO Shops and Libraries from 1 September 2003.

12. Results of the monitoring for the period 1 September 2003 to 21 March 2004 for ethnicity, age and gender are as follows:

Ethnic Grouping		Age Range		Gender	
				Male	Female
White English	19	Under 21	1	12*	6*
White Scottish	2	22-30	0		
White Welsh	1	31-40	5		
		41-50	4		
		51-60	4		
		61-70	9*		
		71 & over	5		
				* Joint complaint	
Information not given	13		8	18	
<b>Total number of forms received</b>	<b>35</b>				

13. Further consideration needs to be given to re-evaluating the availability and access to corporate information in other languages. Further work will be done to bring forward corporate wide proposals on how interpreter and translation services and public material can be improved.

### Complaints Website

14. For the period April 2003 to March 2004 there were a total of 48 hits on the website. 33 were valid complaints, 14 were requests for information and 1 came from a customer mistaking Herefordshire for Hertfordshire.

	2002 / 2003	2003 / 2004
<b>Complaints</b>	57	33
<b>Requests for Service / Information</b>	10	14
<b>Mistaking Hertfordshire for Herefordshire</b>	3	1
<b>Total</b>	70	48

15. Figures suggest that peoples use of the website is still low.

### The Local Government Ombudsman

16. The Local Government Ombudsman's office investigates complaints about councils with the aim of putting things right if they have gone wrong: it is unbiased and independent. Ombudsmen have similar powers to the High Court to order anyone to produce information or documents for their investigation. Their investigations are carried out in private and there is no charge for their service. They provide an invaluable service to users of public services and are an independent means of monitoring aspects of council performance.
17. The Council's Best Value Performance Improvement Plan 2002/03 set targets for the number of complaints to the Ombudsman classified as maladministration. There have been no such findings against the Council since it was set up in 1998. The table below shows the total number of complaints determined by the Ombudsman for Herefordshire in 2003/04 and the three previous years.

	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Total number of complaints determined by the Ombudsman	37	27	36	35
Total number of complaints to the Ombudsman settled locally.	8	5	5	3

18. As shown above, the majority of the complaints were found by the Ombudsman to be unfounded. In three cases however, the Council did agree to take some further action to resolve the complaint.

19. The table below sets out the number of complaints received by the Ombudsman by Directorate for 2003/04.

Directorate	LS	NM	OD	OJ	Total
Environment	1	9	6	8	24
Education	1			1	2
Policy and Community			2		2
Social Care and Strategic Housing		3	1	1	5
Treasurers			1		1
County Secretary and Solicitor	1				1
Chief Executive					0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>35</b>

**Key:** LS – Complaint settled locally (no report)  
 NM – No or insufficient evidence of maladministration  
 OD – Ombudsman's Discretion (i.e. not proceeded with for a variety of reasons)  
 OJ – Outside Ombudsman's Jurisdiction

## Response Times

20. The table below shows the average time the council takes to respond to the Ombudsman's first enquiries on a complaint. It is measured in calendar days from the date they send their letter/fax/email to the date that they receive a substantive response from the Council.

	First Enquiries	
	No. of First Enquiries	Avg no. of days to respond
2003/04	16	36.7
2002/03	24	33.1
2001/02	21	29.4

## Complaints Panel

21. The Complaints Panel meet to hear unresolved complaints from members of the public following review at level 1 (by the local manager) and level 2 (by Director). The Panel comprises the Chief Executive and two Group Leaders advised by the County Secretary and Solicitor. During 2003/04 it heard 8 complaints. One was upheld and one was partially upheld.

Directorate/ Department	No. of Complaints / Section	Outcome
County Treasurer's	2 – Council Tax 1 – Revenue & Benefits Services	Not Upheld Partially Upheld
Environment	2 – Planning 2 – Engineering & Transportation 1 – Env. Health & Trading Standards	1 Upheld – 1 Not Upheld Upheld Not Upheld Not Upheld

## RECOMMENDATION

**THAT the Report is noted.**

### Background Papers

- None identified.