

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL
REPORT BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE
AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

21TH JUNE 2006

Subject: Monitoring Public Complaints

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is:

- to provide a corporate overview of complaints and complaints processing for the period 1 October 2005 to 31 March 2006 and
- to provide comparative data relating to the previous six month reporting periods.

2. Background

As part of the Council-wide public complaints policy, introduced in January 1999, it was agreed that departmental statistics on complaints would be monitored corporately and reported twice a year.

3. Main Issues

**Results of Monitoring Public Complaints
1 October 2005 to 31 March 2006**

This section examines Stage 2¹ complaints for the six-month period between 1 October 2005 and 31 March 2006. There were two Stage 3² complaints received during this period.

3.1 Complaints Received

3.1.1 Complaints Received by Service/Department

Between 1 October 2005 to 31 March 2006, the Council received a total of 81 Stage 2 complaints. The number of complaints received in this period shows a slight drop (8%) compared to the previous 6 month monitoring period when 87 complaints were

¹ A Stage 2 complaint is defined as 'a formal written complaint to the department/service' received either in a letter or in the official complaints form. (For your information, a Stage 1 complaint is defined as an informal complaint that is usually made verbally.)

² A Stage 3 complaint is defined as an 'appeal against the department/service's decision'. Appeals are made to the Chief Executive.

received. Table 1 displays the number of complaints received by service/department and the cumulative total for the last 12 months.

**Table 1: Complaints Received by Service/Department
1 October 2005 to 31 March 2006**

Service/Department-	No	% of Total	Cumulative Totals 1 April 2005 – 31 March 2006	
			No	% of Total
Chief Executive	0	0%	0	0%
Corporate Services (Finance)	15	18%	21	12%
Corporate Services (Information Services)	0	0%	1	1%
Corporate Services (Legal & Administration)	0	0%	3	2%
Corporate Services (Personnel & Training)	0	0%	0	0%
Developmental and Environmental Services	3	4%	22	13%
Education and Cultural Services (Community & Cultural)	9	11%	11	7%
Education and Cultural Services (Education Services)	7	9%	9	5%
Housing and Technical Services (Housing Services)	31	38%	58	34%
Housing and Technical Services (Technical Services)	4	5%	13	8%
Social Work Services	12	15%	30	18%
TOTALS	81	100%	168	100%

3.1.2 Complaints Received by Outcome

Table 2 shows the number of complaints received between 1 October 2005 to 31 March 2006 by outcome. The outcome can be one of five standard categories: justified; part justified; unjustified; unsubstantiated or unknown, if the complaint has been made at the end of the reporting period and the outcome is not yet known. Table 2 also shows the cumulative totals for the last 12 months.

**Table 2: Complaints Received by Outcome
1 October 2005 to 31 March 2006**

Outcome	1 October 2005 to 31 March 2006		Cumulative Totals for 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006	
	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total
Unjustified	18	22%	49	29%
Part Justified	11	14%	27	16%
Justified	44	54%	77	46%
Unsubstantiated	6	7%	11	7%
Unknown	2	3%	4	2%
TOTALS	81	100%	168	100%

The percentage of justified and part justified complaints is 68% of the total number of complaints received from 1 October 2005 to 31 March 2006. This is an increase of justified or part justified complaints compared to the previous 6 month monitoring period which was 56% of the total number of complaints received.

3.1.3 Complaints Received by Type

Table 3 on the following page looks at the types of complaints received by the Council, based on standard categories, for the six months between 1 October 2005 to 31 March 2006. It also shows the cumulative totals for the last 12 months.

Table 3: Complaint Received by Type 1 October 2005 to 31 March 2006

Type	1 October 2005 to 31 March 2006		Cumulative Totals: 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006	
	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total
Failure to provide a service	19	24%	42	25%
Failure to achieve standards/quality of service	4	5%	15	9%
Policy	6	7%	11	6%
Administration	4	5%	7	4%
Administrative delays	1	1%	2	1%
Policy implementation	4	5%	8	5%
Bias or unfair discrimination	0	0%	1	1%
Employee attitude	8	10%	16	10%
Failure to fulfill statutory responsibilities	0	0%	4	2%
Other	35	43%	60	36%
Unknown	0	0%	2	1%
TOTALS	81	100%	168	100%

The type of complaint categorised as 'other', range from complaints that relate to other agencies to complaints disagreeing with an assessment.

3.1.4 Complaints Received by Action Taken

Table 4 outlines the number of complaints received by action taken. The action taken can be one of five standard categories: no action; policy amended; service standards revised; compensation provided; or other.

**Table 4: Complaints Received by Action Taken
1 October 2005 to 31 March 2006**

Action Taken	1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006		Cumulative Totals 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006	
	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total
None	26	32%	64	38%
Service Standards Revised	1	1%	1	1%
Compensation Provided	0	0%	0	0%
Policy Amended	0	0%	0	0%
Other	54	67%	101	60%
Unknown	0	0%	2	1%
TOTALS	81	100%	168	100%

In this monitoring period there were 54 'action taken' categorised as 'other', of which 41 were in the form of a letter of apology and action taken to resolve the complaint. We will review the possibility of adding this as a new category. A further 9 were letters or appointments to provide the complainant with explanation or clarification of procedure or the service provided. Of the remaining 4 noted in the 'other' category the consequence of 2 of the complaints was staff training and 2 complainants were referred to other agencies.

A brief commentary on the nature of complaints received during the reporting period and the action taken to resolve them is included in Appendix 1. For specific information on action taken at a service/department level, Members are invited to contact the relevant departmental complaint co-ordinator. A list of co-ordinators is included in Appendix 2.

3.2 Complaints Processed

The corporate complaints policy sets out target times for acknowledging complaints

3.2.1 Acknowledging Receipt of Complaints

Of the 81 stage 2 complaints received by the Council in this monitoring period, 80 (99%) were acknowledged within the target time of 5 days. This is an improvement in the performance of the administration of complaints procedure as in the previous monitoring period only 93% of complaints were acknowledgements in the target time.

3.2.2 Providing Final Written Responses to Complaints

Between 1 September 2005 to 31 March 2006, 68 (84%) of complainants received a final written response on time, 12 (15%) received a final written response after 20 working days and 1 (8%) was 'not recorded'. The 'not recorded' category are complaints that are still under investigation as the complaint was received at the end of the recording period. The overall performance has improved slightly from 82%, in the previous monitoring period, to 84% complainants receiving a final written response on time in this 6 month period.

4. Comparative Data

This section compares complaint data for the previous three 6 month reporting periods. This will help to identify trends and provide a benchmark of the Council's performance over time.

4.1 Complaints Received

Table 5 shows the number of complaints received in the last three reporting periods.

Table 5: Complaints received by Reporting Period

Reporting Period	Number of complaints
1 October 2004 - 31 March 2005	63
1 April 2005 - 30 September 2005	87
1 October 2005 – 31 March 2006	81

Although the number of complaints in the last period declined by 7% there was an increase in the percentage of complaints found to be justified or part justified compared to the previous 6 month monitoring period. The percentage of justified or part justified was 68% of the total number of complaints from 1 September 2005 to 31 March 2006 compared to 56% in the previous monitoring period.

In addition to the display of complaint forms and posters in all council public access points and available via the Council web page we are continuing to look at ways to

raise awareness of the procedure and ensure that all potential complainants have easy access to the process.

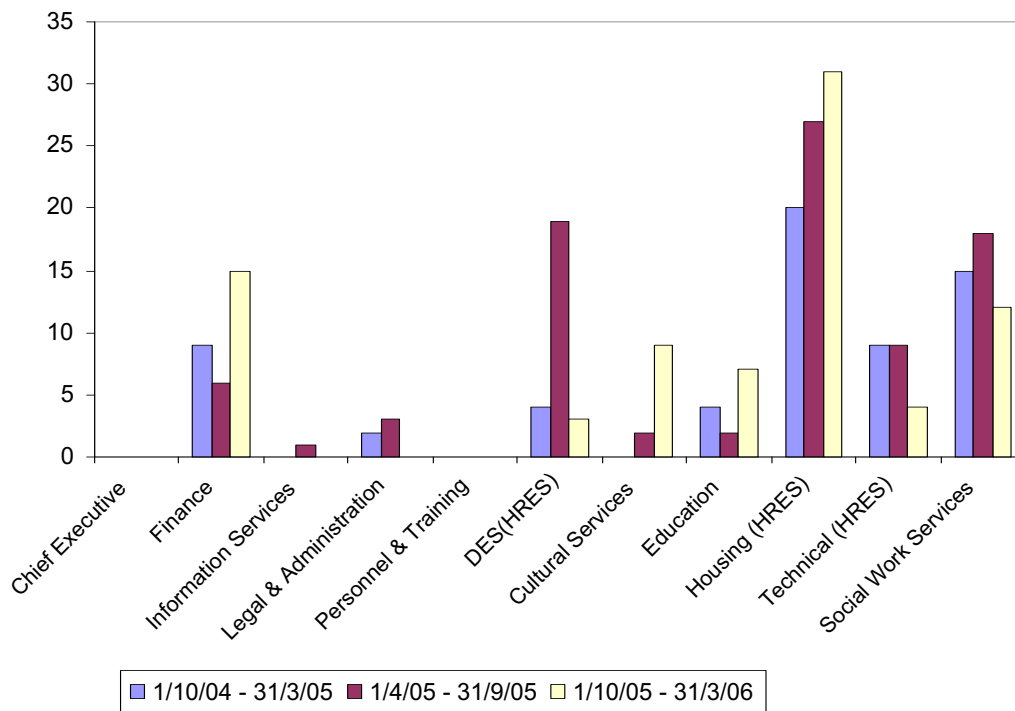
This includes:-

- reporting on complaints in the West Dunbartonshire News;
- advertising in the Council Tax Guide 2006/2007;
- individual services promoting the complaints procedure at customer contact points; and
- including complaints information in the Performance Monitoring stall at Community Day 2006.

The complaints form became accessible on the Council's web page at the end of March 2005 and between 1 April 2005 and 31 March 2006, 12% of complaints were received electronically.

Figure 2 below illustrates the variations within services/departments over the last three reporting periods.

Figure 2: Complaints received by Service/Department Comparison Over Last 3 Reporting Periods



5. Equal Opportunities Monitoring

The complaints leaflet includes a section which allows each service to monitor the profile of the complainant as part of equal opportunities monitoring. As only 25% of the complainants have completed this section, the analysis of the profile of complainants, is limited.

Out of the 20 people who completed this section 5 people indicated that they were disabled. The gender of the complainants was 11 female: 9 male and of the 20 people who complete the form 15 indicated they were of 'white/Scottish', 2 indicated 'white/Irish' and three people selected the 'other white British' category.

The age profile of the complainants using the complaints process has primarily been older members of the community. However in this monitoring period 20% of complainants were 'under 24 years old' and this may be partly due to the complaints forms now being available on the Council web page.

6. Stage 3 Complaints 1 October 2005 to 31 March 2006

There were two Stage 3³ complaints received during this period. After investigation, the Chief Executive was satisfied that each of the complaints was dealt with in a satisfactory and correct manner. He referred each of the complainants to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman if they were unsatisfied with the outcome.

One of the complainants has referred their concerns to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman who are in the process investigating the complaint.

7. Financial Implications

None

8. Personnel Implications

None

9. Recommendation

Members are invited to consider and comment on the results of this monitoring exercise.

³ A Stage 3 complaint is defined as an 'appeal against the department/service's decision'. Appeals are made to the Chief Executive.

Tim Huntingford
Chief Executive

Person to Contact:

May Simpson, Policy Assistant, 01389 737242

Background Papers

Report on Complaints to A&PR Committee Dec 2005