

# HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## Report

<b>Committee:</b>	Audit Committee
<b>Date:</b>	31 March 2011
<b>Title:</b>	Information Compliance – Report of complaints and compliments received 2009/10
<b>Reference:</b>	2825
<b>Report From:</b>	<i>Chief Executive</i>

**Contact name:** Peter Andrews, Corporate Risk Manager

**Tel:** 01962 847309

**Email:** Peter.andrews@hants.gov.uk

### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Audit Committee with assurance that complaints from the public are dealt with appropriately and in a timely fashion.
- 1.2. This report analyses complaints and compliments recorded across the County Council between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010.

### 2. Contextual Information

- 2.1. The County Council provides a wide range of services, with varying public expectations of the experience that they will receive as a customer. This results in a wide range of contacts from the public; from comments, compliments and suggestions to expressions of dissatisfaction.
- 2.2. Complaint reports are compiled at departmental level and reported to their respective Management Teams and Executive Members. This report draws from those reports, and the annual review report from the Local Government Ombudsman, to provide an aggregate picture across the County Council.

### 3. The County Councils Complaints Process

- 3.1. The emphasis in the complaints procedure is to ensure that staff are equipped and empowered to act decisively to resolve complaints at a local level. The aim is that we work harder to resolve issues at the first point of contact – “do it once and do it well”.
- 3.2. The County Council operates a formal complaints procedure, which currently comprises of three stages:

*Stage 1:* the complainant either contacts or is directed to the relevant member of staff or their manager to try and come to an agreement over the issue that has led to a complaint being made.

*Stage 2:* a senior officer carries out an investigation on behalf of the Chief Officer of the Department concerned.

*Stage 3:* an internal independent investigation is undertaken by a member of the Chief Executive's Complaints and Information Compliance Team or independent person.

*Local Government Ombudsman:* where a complainant has followed all three stages of the complaints process and is still dissatisfied with the outcome they can take their complaint to the office of the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) for an external independent review.

Children's and Adult Services are subject to a statutory complaints process, which consists of a local (i.e. departmental) investigation and management stage, followed by an independent investigation stage.

- 3.3. Departments report details of the complaints dealt with under stage 1 & 2 of the complaints process to their respective departmental management teams and Executive Member.

#### **4. Complaints Received by the County Council in 2009/10**

- 4.1. The vast majority of complaints are resolved locally or within Departments. 99% of recorded complaints were resolved within the Stage 1 and Stage 2 process, i.e. at departmental level, in 2009/10.
- 4.2. The resolution of the vast majority of complaints at a local level results in the ability to make immediate improvements to the services where appropriate.
- 4.3. The small number of complaints that remain unresolved after being investigated by the Department concerned are referred to the complaints team in the Chief Executive's Department.

##### **Stage 3 Complaints**

	<b>2009/10</b>	<b>2010/11 (April-Jan)</b>
Adults Services	1	
Chief Executives	4	2
Children's Services	3	4
CCRA	0	
County Treasurers	1	
Environment	13	6
PBR&IT	1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>12</b>

- 4.4. Of the complaints investigated at stage 3 in 2009/10, two were found in favour of the complainants, in the rest of the cases, the Council was found to have followed its policies and procedures appropriately.

## **5. Time Taken to Respond to Complaints**

- 5.1. It is vital that complaints received are responded to in an efficient and timely manner. In 2009/10, substantive responses were provided to complainants in 90% of cases within 20 working days. The County Council is working to improve this, however delays can occur over complex cases that may need substantial resources to investigate, and where specific officers are required to undertake such investigations.
- 5.2. Within that figure are significant areas of best practice. For instance, in Adult Services 84% of their complaints are dealt with within 10 working days.

## **6. Compliments Received**

- 6.1. Analysis of compliments received helps to form a more rounded view of the service provided.
- 6.2. There were 5,000 compliments recorded across the County Council in 2009/2010. This equates to approximately 19 compliments per working day.
- 6.3. The recorded data indicates that the public are extremely appreciative of the service provided by the County Council. For example, during the severe weather of December and January, although the Environment Department received an increase in complaints, it also received a corresponding increase in compliments, receiving a rise of 60% in compliments in 2009/10 over 2008/09.
- 6.4. The recording of compliments provides a useful illustration of areas of service and delivery that are particularly appreciated or valued by service users. It is significant that so many members of the public have gone out of their way to express their satisfaction with the service that they have received.

## **7. Local Government Ombudsman Review Report**

- 7.1. The Local Government Ombudsman provides a report on the complaints that it has received about the County Council. In 2009/10 it investigated 38 relating to the County Council. From 1 April 2010 to January 2011 it has investigated 24 cases. There was no finding of maladministration in any of these cases.
- 7.2. In its annual review in 2009 the LGO congratulated the Council on its response times. In 2009/10 it found that the County Council took an average of 23.6 days to respond to its queries. The LGO reported that this was "a very creditable performance and well within the 28 day target we set for councils."
- 7.3. Overall, the LGO commented, "I am pleased to note the level of commitment within the council to good complaint handling and the effective working relationship that exists with my office".
- 7.4. A comparison with other County Councils in the South East indicates that the LGO has fewer complaints referred to it about Hampshire County Council than other County Councils.

## **8. Conclusions**

- 8.1. All Departments undertake regular analysis of the complaints that they receive and the actions taken to address their customers' concerns.
- 8.2. Those reports demonstrate that members of the public's concerns are addressed effectively and within the County Council's published timescales, and in some cases those standards are exceeded.
- 8.3. The Local Government Ombudsman is satisfied with the County Councils approach to its complaints handling.

## **9. Recommendation:**

**That the Audit Committee note the contents of this report.**

**CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**

**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

<b>Hampshire safer and more secure for all:</b>	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
<b>Maximising well-being:</b>	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
<b>Enhancing our quality of place:</b>	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	

<b>Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents</b>	
<p>The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)</p>	
<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	