

23 JULY 2008

**STATEMENT OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER
(Corporate Affairs, Performance Management, Procurement, Asset Management and
Finance)**

COUNTY COUNCILLOR CARL LES

Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2007/08

The Executive have received the Annual Report on Compliments and Complaints received by the Council.

A new procedure for recording data has been introduced and this has led to an increase in the number of compliments and complaints being recorded. The number of compliments being recorded has gone up four fold to almost 1,800. The number of complaints being recorded has gone up 60% to 847.

It is expected that more meaningful comparisons between the years can start to be made as the position levels out.

A sustained effort has been made by the Authority over the last two years to address this area of work so that we can analyse the reasons for complaints and identify areas for improvement.

Amongst the action taken is:-

- An improvement in the timeliness with which complaints are dealt with. Almost 90% of complaints dealt with within the target timescale of 20 days.
- The establishment of representatives in each Directorate to lead on complaints issues who meet regularly to share information and training.
- Regular reports to Management Board.
- The resolution of the majority of complaints at Stage 1.
- The majority of complaints investigated are not up-held - those that are up-held (around 31%) are used to identify areas for improvement.

A members seminar on this subject was recently held and I am advised that the Ombudsman's Annual Letter has now been received and will be reported to the Executive. This letter confirms that 51 complaints were raised against the Authority in the last year - a relatively low number given the volume of transactions the Authority undertakes on a daily basis.

However there is no room for complacency and methods for analysing the data obtained are being further improved in the next year in order that further improvements can be made.

County Hall Members Group

The County Hall Members Group has been meeting on a quarterly basis since 1999. The Group is chaired by myself and made up of Members with a particular interest in County Hall and Members local to Northallerton viz. Cllr Peter Brown, Cllr. Tony Hall, Cllr. John Marshall, Cllr. Brian Marshall, Cllr Bill Barton.

The work of the group is to oversee the budgetary management of the County Hall campus and to approve specific improvement schemes which will maintain and enhance the buildings and the site. Projects that have been implemented through the Group are:

- The upgrade to the main reception in the Brierley Building
- The introduction of a First Aid Room in South Block
- The painting and refurnishing of the Grand Meeting Room
- The installation of a fresh air ventilation system for the top floor of South Block (Monodraft)
- Improvements to the County Hall Grounds
- The installation of a PowerPerfector which has resulted in significant savings in energy bills for County Hall

Current projects for implementation during this year include:

Improving pedestrian access around the campus and upgrading the CCTV system used externally to monitor the grounds and the site.

The Group will also oversee the re-letting of the County Hall Restaurant contract over the latter part of this financial year.

Union strike action

This report is written before the national strike action organised by Unison and Unite/T&G for the 16th and 17th of July. This national strike action was organised in protest at the employers' final pay offer from 1 April 2008 of 2.45%, on all spinal column points, with a further £100 per year on points 4, 5 and 6. This is a total cost of 2.5%. The County Council has good relations with Unison locally and this dispute was the result of national pay negotiations. Whilst the annual pay settlement is negotiated and determined nationally the County Council has made provision for 2.5% and any pay award above this will cause budget pressures. The Council has done all it can to ensure services are maintained to the public particularly where the provision of that service has significant impact on individuals' daily lives. This included reallocating work/duties to non union members, minimising the impact of picketing and communicating regularly with staff emphasising the need to maintain services. Unfortunately, despite discussions with the local Unison Branch, it has not been possible to agree exemptions for posts to maintain essential services, as on this occasion decisions have been taken by the regional Unison office and to our knowledge, no other authorities in the region have been given exemptions. Steps have been taken to ensure customers and the public are kept informed via use of the local press, updated information on the website and with the customer service centre. I will be able to update the Council, on the impact of the strike, at the meeting.

Apprentice scheme

This scheme goes from strength to strength with 100 apprentices appointed since September 2007 and the Council being well on track to meet its own target of 120 by September 2008. There has been a huge interest since the end of June when school ended for many young people. This has resulted in a pool of 104 young people currently registered as wanting to be an apprentice and waiting for an available post. The scheme has been profiled by Unison and the TUC as national best practice and some of the current apprentices have won regional awards. A new development is the introduction of an electrical engineering apprenticeship within the highways electrical team. This scheme covers the various levels of training over a 5 year programme including an ONC and HNC in electrical and electronic engineering. Understandably this is generating a lot of interest from young people locally. The numbers will be small initially until the scheme is established.

2007/08 Final Accounts and Corporate Governance matters

The final accounts for 2007/08 have been approved by the Audit Committee.

The Audit Committee has also received a report on the Local Code of Corporate Governance. Governance is about how local authorities ensure that they are doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, honest and accountable manner. It is very important, therefore, that we have the right processes, cultures and values in place to provide the necessary assurances that we are getting these things right.

The draft Code will be considered further over the months ahead before coming to Council in October for formal adoption.

The Committee also received the Annual Governance Statement. This replaces the previous Statement on Internal Control, and provides our assessment of the organisation's performance and actions that are required to address any areas of concern.

The Audit Committee congratulated all the staff who had been involved in producing all these documents, both in respect of the quality of the work and, in respect of the final accounts, meeting the tight deadlines for their production.

Sustainability

The Environmental Management Strategy has been approved by Management Board and is being considered by the Executive on 29 July. This sets out our overall strategy for dealing with the environmental aspects of sustainable development. Some of the targets will be very challenging indeed, particularly those around consumption of natural resources, but it is a big step forward to have a strategic approach to the issues which will be suitable for the challenges of the next few years. The Executive will also consider issues around the Climate Change Bill currently going through Parliament and the County Council is proactively developing responses to the likely impact of the legislation.

Some of the practical steps currently being taken by the newly-formed energy team based in the Corporate Property Landlord Unit which contribute to the delivery of the targets in the Environmental Management Strategy are:

- Upgrade of lighting in all council buildings to improve efficiency. Work has started in the Scarborough area and will roll out across the county in the coming year.
- Insulation upgrade project to survey current levels of cavity wall and roof space insulation in council buildings and implement improvements where necessary. This is at the procurement stage and will be started by the end of this year.
- Water consumption monitoring and reduction. This will survey all council buildings for water consumption, billing arrangements, leak detection, water efficiency installations and drainage arrangements with the implementation of proposed changes to reduce consumption. This is currently under development and procurement will start by the end of the year.
- Developing a staff awareness programme to inform staff of environmental issues and to encourage energy conservation. This will be rolled out with the help of the recently-formed environmental champions network.

10 July 2008