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REPORT TO:	COUNCIL	AGENDA ITEM: 17
DATE OF MEETING:	8 <sup>TH</sup> JULY 2010	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	FRANK McARDLE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EXT. 5702)	DOC:U:\JAYNE\Commtee\COMM REP\Ombudsman Annual Review 0910.doc
SUBJECT:	LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN – ANNUAL REVIEW 2009/10 AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS TO THE OMBUDSMAN SERVICE	REF: J Beech
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	

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## **1.0 Recommendations**

- 1.1 To accept the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review 2009/10 and to note further developments to the Ombudsman service.

## **2.0 Purpose of Report**

- 2.1 This report will inform Members of the reflections of the Local Government Ombudsman ("LGO") on the complaints received against this Authority and dealt with by the Ombudsman's Office during the year 2009/10.
- 2.2 It will also bring Members up to date on developments in the LGO in relation to the 'Council First' procedure for complaints and the proposal to use 'Statements of Reasons' relating to decisions of the LGO following investigation of complaints.

## **3.0 Detail**

- 3.1 On 24<sup>th</sup> June 2010, the Council received the Annual Review for the period 2009/10 from the LGO, setting out a table of statistical data for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 and a note to help with the interpretation of the statistics. A copy of the statistics and note are attached at **Annexe 'A'**.

### **Enquiries and Complaints received**

- 3.2 The Ombudsman Advice Team deals with all initial contacts and gives advice to people who want to make a complaint. The Advice Team recorded 15 enquiries about this Council during 2009/10 and 11 complaints were forwarded to the investigation team at the Ombudsman's Office. The complaints they considered were spread between planning and building control (4), housing (3), other (3) and public finance (1).

## **Complaint outcomes**

- 3.3 The Ombudsman's Office made decisions on 13 complaints about the Council in 2009/10. In any one year, there can be a difference in the number of complaints received and the number of decisions made. This is because some decisions will have been made on complaints received in the previous year and not all the complaints received in 2009/10 will have been decided by 31st March.
- 3.4 During the year, there were no findings of maladministration or local settlements.

## **Liaison with the Local Government Ombudsman**

- 3.5 The LGO made no first formal enquiries of this Council during the year and so there are no response times included on the table of statistics. For comparison, the LGO made 4 first enquiries during the previous year with an average response time of 25 days which was within the target of 28 days. It should be noted that many complaints now do not reach formal enquiry stage, as much more information is now provided to the LGO Advice Team prior to allocation to an investigator. This allows many complaints to be determined by the LGO without the necessity of formal enquiries.

## **LGO developments**

### 'Council First'

- 3.6 The 'Council First' procedure was introduced in April last year, requiring complainants to go through all stages of the Council's own complaints procedure before the LGO will consider the complaint. It aims to build on the improved handling of complaints by councils. The LGO is now reviewing the 'Council First' procedure and proposes to research the views of people whose complaints have been referred to councils as premature.

### Statements of Reasons

- 3.7 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 made provision for the LGO to publish statements of reasons relating to individual decisions of an Ombudsman following the investigation of a complaint. The proposal is that these statements will comprise a short summary of the complaint, the investigation, the findings and the recommended remedy. The statement, naming the Council but not the complainant, would usually be published on the LGO's website. Last year the LGO consulted councils on the broad proposals and received very supportive and constructive feedback on the proposals, which aim to provide greater transparency and increase understanding of the LGO's work. Since the consultation took place, the LGO have been carrying out more detailed work and intend to introduce the new arrangements in the near future.

## **4.0 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 None directly arising from this report.

## **5.0 Corporate Implications**

- 5.1 The Corporate Plan theme 'Value for Money' and the priority 'High Standards of Corporate Governance' are reflected in having a good complaints system. It is an opportunity for the Council to show that it cares about providing a good service, and that it genuinely values feedback on whether there are any problems which need attention. It is, therefore, imperative that we get feedback, not only through our own complaints system, but also from the Ombudsman, and that this information is widely distributed to show that this Council takes complaints seriously and deals with them sympathetically.

## **6.0 Community Implications**

- 6.1 One of the roles of the Local Government Ombudsman is to investigate complaints about Councils from members of the public. Their aim is to get Councils to put things right if they have gone wrong and if this has affected members of the public directly.
- 6.2 The LGO is mindful of the current economic climate, financial stringencies and their public accountability and will continue to increase the efficiency, cost-effectiveness and public value of their work.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

- 7.1 The Annual Review is a useful addition to other information held by the Council, highlighting how people experience or perceive its services. It should also be seen as an opportunity to continue to improve the services offered by the Council.
- 7.2 The Annual Review also keeps the Council informed of further developments in the LGO service.

## **8.0 Background Papers**

- Annual Review 2009/10 from the Local Government Ombudsman
- LGO Link Newsletters Nos. 6 and 7