
REPORT TO:	COUNCIL	AGENDA ITEM: 16
DATE OF MEETING:	16TH AUGUST 2007	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	FRANK McARDLE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EXT. 5702)	DOC:U:\JAYNE\Commtee\COMM REP\OmbAnnualLetter06/07.doc
SUBJECT:	LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN – ANNUAL LETTER 2006/07	REF: J Beech
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 To accept the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Letter 2006/07.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 This report will inform Members of the reflections of the Local Government Ombudsman on the complaints received against this Authority and dealt with by the Ombudsman's Office during the year 2006/07.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 On 22nd June 2007, the Council received the Annual Letter for the period 2006/07 from the Local Government Ombudsman, setting out a table of statistical data covering a three year period from 1st April 2004 to 31st March 2007 and a note to help with the interpretation of the statistics. A copy of the statistics and note are attached at Annexe 'A'.

Complaints received

- 3.2 The Ombudsman received 12 complaints about this Council during 2006/07. She commented that the number of complaints is too small to be able to draw meaningful conclusions about the types of complaint received, which are spread evenly across the subject areas.

Decisions on Complaints

- 3.3 No Ombudsman Reports were issued against the Council in the year 2006/07 and there were no findings of maladministration.
- 3.4 There were two local settlements. A 'local settlement' is a complaint that is resolved by the Council taking, or agreeing to take, action which the Ombudsman considers to be a satisfactory response to the complaint so that the investigation can be discontinued.

- 3.5 Of the two local settlements, one resulted in the reinstatement of a garden gate and an apology for the wording of a letter to persons involved in a neighbour dispute. The second settlement involved the Council agreeing (at its discretion) to enclose a passageway at the entry to sheltered council flats to stop non-residents congregating there.

The Council's complaints procedure and handling of complaints

- 3.6 The Council averaged 17.7 days to respond to initial enquiries, a quicker response rate than the previous year and well within the 28 day target. The Ombudsman has commented that this continues to compare well with other district councils, 48.9% of which responded in 28 days or less. She states that speed of response is important in enabling her to provide a good quality service to complainants.
- 3.7 The Ombudsman made 10 decisions during the year, of which 4 (40%) were that the complaint was premature, because the Council had not had a reasonable opportunity to respond to the issue. Of the complaints decided, one was a resubmitted premature complaint where the complainant was unhappy with the Council's response. This complaint was not upheld.
- 3.8 The Ombudsman has commented that she welcomes the Council fully reviewing its complaints procedure during the year, to meet the recommendations of the Local Government Ombudsman in their guidance on running a complaints procedure.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 None directly arising from this report.

5.0 Community Implications

- 5.1 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.

6.0 Corporate Implications

- 6.1 A good complaints system 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.

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1 The Annual Letter 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.

8.0 Background Papers

Annual Letter 2006/07 from the Local Government Ombudsman dated 20th June 2007