

# **STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**21<sup>st</sup> September 2011**

## **OMBUDSMAN REVIEW**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr Mark Bullivant
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Cllr Mark Bullivant
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton
Wards Affected	<b>All</b>
Ward Councillor Consulted	N/A
Non-Key Decision	

### **1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information regarding the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review of Bromsgrove District Council. The Annual Review sets out the statistics for complaints made against this Council during the 12 month period ending 31st March 2011.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That Members note the contents of the report.

### **3. KEY ISSUES**

#### **Financial Implications**

- 3.1 There are no financial implications associated with the contents of this report.

#### **Legal Implications**

- 3.2 The Local Government Ombudsman scheme was set up under the Local Government Act 1974. The main activity of the LGO is the investigation of complaints, which are limited to complaints from members of the public alleging they have suffered injustice as a result of maladministration.

#### **Service / Operational Implications**

- 3.3 The Annual Review from the Local Government Ombudsman is attached at Appendix 1. The information includes a breakdown of the number complaints made and the average response times.
- 3.4 The following observations can be made based on the statistics:-

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- The number of first enquiries increased slightly in 2010/2011 to 9, compared with 7 the previous year.
  - With regard to the outcome of decisions following formal investigation, there were no findings of maladministration. Neither were there any outcomes involving agreed payments of compensation to complainants (known as local settlements). There were 6 findings of no maladministration and in 1 case the Ombudsman exercised his/her discretion not to pursue the complaint. There were 5 local settlements. The data also shows that there were 4 cases of customers making premature complaints to the ombudsman, i.e. before the Council had had a chance to investigate the complaints internally.
  - Response times – the Council’s recorded response time to first enquiries has increased slightly from 26 days to 26.6 days. The target response time is 28 days. There is an internal performance indicator in place to monitor response times. Bromsgrove falls into the same category as 65% of District Councils whose average response time is below 28 days.
  - Breakdown of subject matter of complaints – no one particular area stands out based on the statistics. The areas where the most complaints were received related to Environment Services, Planning and Development, Benefits and Tax and Housing.
- 3.5 The Council continues to have a strong focus on providing good customer service which includes having processes in place to respond to complaints from customers. In the last year the customer services strategy has been updated and re-launched under the title of “Every Customer Every Time” and there has been a programme of staff training to accompany the changes that have been made. Inevitably there will always be some cases where customers are not satisfied and refer matters to the ombudsman. In those cases the Council will co-operate to provide the information required by the ombudsman to carry out their investigation. The most recent statistics do not reveal any findings of maladministration in the 12 months to March 2011.

**Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 3.6 In terms of customer implications, providing good customer service is of significant importance to the Council and the statistics in the review will assist officers in the monitoring of complaint handling and resolution.

**4. RISK MANAGEMENT**

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4.1 The main risks associated with the details included in this report are those linked to poor standards of complaint handling. The effects of not handling complaints efficiently can include poor customer service, increased customer dissatisfaction, increased numbers of complaints and damage to the Council's reputation.

4.2 These risks are being managed as follows:

- Through the Council's Customer services strategy – “ Every Customer Every Time” under which aims to promote good customer service throughout the Council and includes a defined procedure for responding to complaints before they reach the stage of being referred to the Ombudsman.
- Through on-going training for staff and managers in implementing good customer service and managing complaints.

**5. APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Annual Review for Bromsgrove District Council 2011

**6. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

**7. KEY**

Not applicable

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