

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

12TH JUNE 2008

ANNUAL OMBUDSMAN STATISTICS

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Councillor Roger Smith
Responsible Head of Service	Claire Felton, Monitoring Officer

1. SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information from the annual statistics compiled by the Local Government Ombudsman's office as to complaints recorded against this Council during the 12 month period ending 31st March 2008.

2. RECOMMENDATION

Members are requested to receive and note the provisional annual statistics from the Local Government Ombudsman and make any recommendations to Council as necessary.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The provisional annual statistics of complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) have been produced and are attached as Appendix 1. The Council is due to receive the Annual Letter confirming the provisional statistics from the LGO by the end of June.

3.2 The Local Authority Report at Appendix 1 sets out the figures for the last municipal year and the previous two municipal years. Members will note that:

3.2.1 There has been a reduction in the total number of complaints made to the LGO. In 2006/2007 the number of complaints made was 33. For 2007/2008 this figure has reduced to 26. This figure includes complaints which fall outside the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman or which are discounted for other reasons. Of the 26 complaints made 14 were disregarded for various reasons including that they were premature, outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction or related to incidents that had happened too long ago to be investigated. The number of complaints which were actually investigated was 12 compared to 18 the previous year.

3.2.2 The number of local settlements was also significantly lower than in the previous year. A complaint is resolved by a local settlement if the ombudsman accepts that the outcome is satisfactory for the complainant. This will usually involve the payment of a small amount of compensation, and generally the reason for the settlement reflects that there has been maladministration by the Council or poor communication with the complainant. In 2006/2007 there were 7 local settlements; in 2007/2008 this figure reduced to 1.

3.2.3 The LGO also monitors average response times to first enquiry letters. In 2006/2007 there had been an upward trend in this figure and the response time had increased to 34.4 days. In 2007/2008 the response time was 28.3 days. The target response time is 28 days. For the current municipal year officers have introduced a corporate performance indicator to try and reduce the response time to below 28 days. The target is for officers responding to first enquiry letters to collate their responses and return them to the Council's LGO Link Officer within 10 working days, and for finalised responses to be forwarded to the LGO by the Link Officer in no less than 28 days from the date of the first enquiry letter.

3.2.4 With regard to subject matter of complaints, the highest category continues to be Planning and Building Control of which there were 12 complaints received in 2007/2008 and 6 investigated.

3.3 Overall the provisional statistics are showing some positive trends compared to the previous figures for 2006/2007 including fewer complaints, less local settlements and faster response times.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

6. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

Improvement – Customer Service: the statistics will enable the Council to improve its services to customers

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 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.

7.2 These risks are being managed as follows:

- Through the recent introduction of the Council's Customer First Policy which sets out a defined procedure for responding to complaints before they reach the stage of being referred to the Ombudsman.
- Through a comprehensive programme of training for all staff and managers in implementing the Customer First Policy and managing complaints.

8. **CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS**

The statistics should enable the Council to improve service delivery to customers.

9. **EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

None.

10. **VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS**

None.

11. **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

Procurement Issues	None
Personnel Implications	None
Governance/Performance Management	None
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime and Disorder Act 1998	None
Policy	None
Environmental	None

12. **OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT**

Portfolio Holder	No
Chief Executive	Yes
Executive Director - Partnerships and Projects	No

Executive Director - Services	No
Assistant Chief Executive	No
Head of Service	Yes
Head of Financial Services	Yes
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	Yes
Head of Organisational Development & HR	No
Corporate Procurement Team	No

13. WARDS AFFECTED

All wards.

14. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Local Authority Report on Ombudsman statistics for Bromsgrove DC plus notes to assist in interpretation.

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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