

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

16TH OCTOBER 2008

ANNUAL OMBUDSMAN STATISTICS

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Councillor Roger Smith
Responsible Head of Service	Claire Felton, Monitoring Officer
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information regarding the Council's Annual Letter from the Local Government Ombudsman's office as to complaints recorded against this Council during the 12 month period ending 31st March 2008, and information regarding the performance of Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) as compared with the other districts in Worcestershire.

2. RECOMMENDATION

Members are requested to receive and note the contents of the Annual Letter from the Local Government Ombudsman and the additional information regarding the other districts and make any recommendations to the Council as necessary.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The provisional annual statistics of complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) were previously reported to the Standard's Committee and considered at the meeting held on 12th June 2008. Since that report was prepared the final statistics for Bromsgrove and all local authorities in England have been confirmed and published by the LGO. The information for Bromsgrove is set out in the Annual Letter to the Council dated 18th June 2008. A copy of the letter and statistical data is attached at Appendix A.
- 3.2 The table of statistics is almost identical to that previously reported to the Committee in June. The only change to note is that on the final statistics there was a slight decrease in response time to first enquiries. The provisional statistics recorded this figure as 28.3 days which was slightly over the recommended response time of 28 days. In the final statistics this figure has reduced to 27.4 days which brings the Council within the recommended response time (albeit only by a small amount). Members are referred to the previous report for the meeting on 12th June for a detailed analysis of the statistics. The overall trends identified from the 2007/2008

statistics are positive including fewer complaints, less local settlements and faster response times.

- 3.3 With reference to comparing this Council with other district councils, attached at Appendix B is an extract from the statistics for 2007/2008 from the LGO website showing the performance of all the district councils in England, including Bromsgrove. To add some more local detail the table below sets out some of the statistics for Bromsgrove and the five other district councils in Worcestershire. The figures in italics show the same statistics for the previous year (2006/2007). Members will see that Bromsgrove continues to have the highest number of actual complaints determined. However, BDC has no greater number of complaints where there is a formal finding of maladministration (column 4) and in correlation with the higher level of complaints the highest number of findings of no maladministration. With reference to column 3, local settlements are defined as decisions to discontinue investigations because action has been agreed by the authority and accepted by the Ombudsman as a satisfactory outcome for the complaint. In 2006/2007 BDC agreed 7 local settlements which involved payments of compensation to complainants. For 2007/2008 this figures has reduced to just 1.

Authority	Total complaints determined (excluding premature complaints)	Local settlements	Maladministration reports	No Maladministration
Bromsgrove	22 (23)	1 (7)	0 (0)	13 (11)
Malvern Hills	7 (12)	1 (1)	0 (0)	8 (4)
Redditch	9 (9)	3 (2)	0 (0)	3 (4)
Worcs City	10 (7)	1 (0)	0 (0)	6 (5)
Wychavon	14 (13)	1 (1)	0 (0)	7 (7)
Wyre Forrest	7 (10)	0 (1)	0 (0)	3 (3)

- 3.4 Members can take from these statistics that there is not a link between the number of complaints and findings of maladministration. Appendix A shows that across England as a whole Bromsgrove is not unusual in the number of complaints determined and a significant number of other district councils have levels of total complaints determined of 20 or above. The levels of complaints are monitored continually by officers. To date this year 7 ombudsman complaints have been received and officers are hopeful that this is a reflection of a continued downward trend. More information regarding the ombudsman scheme can be found at the Local Government Ombudsman's website www.lgo.org.uk.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

6. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

Information on complaint handling links to Improvement – Customer Service.

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	No
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 A – Annual Letter on Ombudsman statistics for Bromsgrove DC plus notes to assist in interpretation.

Appendix B – Extract of statistics for District Councils in England for 2007/2008.

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

CONTACT OFFICER

Name: Sarah Sellers
E Mail: s.sellers@bromsgrove.gov.uk
Tel: (01527) 881397