

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

23RD SEPTEMBER 2009

OMBUDSMAN – ANNUAL REVIEW

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

1. SUMMARY

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 (previously called the Annual Report) sets out the statistics for complaints made against this Council during the 12 month period ending 31st March 2009.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 Members are requested to receive and note the contents of the Annual Review from the Local Government Ombudsman and make any recommendations to Council as necessary.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Annual Review from the Local Government Ombudsman is attached at Appendix A. In particular Members are referred to the table of statistics which is Appendix 2 of the Annual Review.

3.2 The following observations can be made based on the statistics:-

- Number of first enquiries – this has remained constant compared to 07/08 at 11.
- With regard to the outcome of decisions, there were no formal findings of maladministration recorded. On 7 matters there was no maladministration and 4 were outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction. There were 2 local settlements. 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.

- Response times – the Council’s recorded response time to first enquiries has improved again. It has gone down from 26.3 days in 07/08 to 24.5 days in 08/09. The target response time is 28 days. This is a continuing downward trend which is specifically referred to as “continuing excellent performance” on page 4 of the Review. There is an internal performance indicator in place to monitor response times.
- With regard to subject matter of complaints, the highest category continues to be Planning and Building Control.

3.3 With reference to comparing this Council with other district councils, I attach at Appendix B an extract from the statistics for 08/09 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 (07/08). 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 3) and in correlation with the higher level of complaints the highest number of findings of no maladministration. With reference to column 2, 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. As referred to in paragraph 3.2, this will normally involve the payment of a small amount of compensation. The level of local settlements has remained very low at 2.

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

6.1 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 Council's Customer First Policy under which there is 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.

8. **CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 The statistics in the review will assist officers in the on-going monitoring of complaint handling and resolution.

9. **EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None

10. **VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 None

11. **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

Procurement Issues	None
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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	<u>Yes</u>
Head of Financial Services	<u>No</u>
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	<u>Yes</u>
Head of Organisational Development & HR	<u>No</u>
Corporate Procurement Team	<u>No</u>

13. **WARDS AFFECTED**

All wards

14. **APPENDICES**

Appendix A – Ombudsman’s Annual Review for Bromsgrove District Council.

Appendix B – Extract of statistics for District Councils in England for 2008/2009.

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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