

COMPLAINTS
(Report by the Director of Central Services)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an analysis of internal complaints and a summary of complaints determined by the Local Government Ombudsman.

2. SUMMARY OF INTERNAL COMPLAINTS

- 2.1 The Council's internal complaints system summarises complaints into six categories as follows:-

- ◆ action of employee;
- ◆ council policy;
- ◆ council procedures;
- ◆ equality of service;
- ◆ failure to respond; and
- ◆ service delivery.

- 2.2 The table attached at Annex A provides an analysis of complaints by complaint reason, the Division involved and results compared with the previous year.

- 2.3 The call centre has been in operation since September 2005 and captures information relating to verbal complaints. These complaints predominantly relate to the Operations Division and for the period 2006/07 448 complaints were received out of 27,508 service requests, which represented a complaint rate of 1.6%

3. SUMMARY OF OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINTS

- 3.1 The Local Government Ombudsman Service has published its statistics for complaints determined against the District Council in the year 1st April 2006 to 31st March 2007.

- 3.2 The Ombudsman has received 16 complaints in 2006/07, which represents a small increase on the 12 received in the previous year. The following table provides a summary of the complaints received by decision compared with previous years.

Decisions	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Formal report finding maladministration causing injustice	0	0	0
Complaints settled locally	0	5	1
Maladministration causing no injustice	0	0	0
No maladministration	0	0	0
No, or insufficient, evidence of maladministration	8	9	7
Ombudsman's Discretion	1	1	3
Outside LGO's jurisdiction	3	0	3
Premature complaints	4	2	3
Total excluding premature	12	15	14
Total	16	17	17

- 3.3 One complaint was settled locally which concerned a delay in the investigation of noise nuisance from a factory and as a result the Council agreed to pay the complainant £150. This represented the total amount of compensation paid during the year.
- 3.4 A comparison of complaints received by subject area in relation to District Council services, including premature complaints, is set out in the table below. The largest number of complaints received related to planning, which is typical for rural England.

Subject Area	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Transport and highways	2	2	0
Housing (not including HB)	4	0	0
Housing Benefit	1	0	2
Public finance	4	1	0
Planning & Building Control	8	6	9
Other	3	3	5
Total	22	12	16

- 3.5 The Ombudsman does not normally consider a complaint unless a Council has had the opportunity to deal with the complaint itself. So if someone complains to the Ombudsman without having taken the matter up with a Council the Ombudsman will usually refer it back to the Council as a '*premature complaint*' to see if the Council can itself resolve the matter.
- 3.6 The number of premature complaints was low (three) when set against the number of incoming complaints (16). The Ombudsman suggested that this represented a good public awareness of the Council's complaints process and a willingness on the part of the Officers to refer customers to it.

- 3.7 The difference in the totals between the two tables is attributable to the fact that the Ombudsman may receive a complaint in one year but the decision may not be made until the following year.
- 3.8 The average time for the Council responding to complaints was 27 days against a target of 28 days. This represented a considerable improvement on the previous year of 43 days. The Council has been commended for their efforts in this regard.
- 3.9 The Ombudsman is proposing to hold a regional seminar in Cambridgeshire this year to enable Members and Officers to obtain a better understanding of the Ombudsman's role in complaint handling. Further information will be circulated to Members in due course.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Panel are invited to note the contents of the report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Local Government Ombudsman Annual Report 2004/05 – 2005/06
Provisional Complaint Statistics 2006/07

Contact Officer: Lisa Jablonska
Central Services Manager
(01480) 388004

Annex A

Complaint Reason	Division Involved 2004/05 and action	Division Involved 2005/06 and action	Division involved 2006/07 and action
Action of Employee	1 Committee / Member Services (NAT) 4 Council Tax (2 NAT, 1 SI & 1 RTC) 3 Housing (2 NAT & 1 SI) 4 Benefits (NAT) 1 Business Rates (RTC)	2 Development Control (2 SI) 8 Council Tax (7 NAT and 1 RTC) 1 Housing (NAT) 1 Public Health 1 Benefits (FT) 1 Admin - Ops	3 Housing (NAT and 1 SI) 1 Public Health 4 Council Tax (NAT, 1SI and 1 FT) 3 Development Control (NAT) 2 Benefits (NAT) 2 Planning Policy
Council Policy	1 Council Tax (NAT)	1 Housing (NAT) 3 Benefits (SI) (NAT) 2 Council Tax (2 NAT)	3 Council Tax (NAT) 1 Development Control 7 Benefits (NAT)
Council Procedures	8 Council Tax (7 NAT & 1 SI) 3 Development Control (1 NAT & 2 SI) 1 Business Rates (NAT)	3 Benefits (2 SI) (CIP) 5 Council Tax (4 NAT) (FT) 1 Business Rates (NAT) 1 Housing (SI) 1 Development Control	2 Development Control (NAT) 7 Benefits (NAT and 1 CIP) 6 Council Tax (NAT and 1 CIP) 1 Housing (NAT) 1 Recruitment
Equality of Service		2 Development Control (2 NAT) 1 Operational (SI)	
Failure to Respond	1 Benefits (NAT)	1 Housing (NAT) 2 Benefits 1 Development Control (SI)	1 Development Control
Service Delivery	2 Council Tax (1 NAT & 1CIP) 4 Development Control (3 NAT & 1 SI) 3 Housing (1 NAT & 2 RTC) 3 Benefits (NAT) 1 Business Rates (NAT) 1 Cashiers (NAT)	4 Development Control (3 NAT) 4 Council Tax (4 NAT) 1 Highways 1 Business Rates 1 Operational 1 Planning Policy 1 Housing (SI) 2 IT	1 Development Control (NAT) 2 Council Tax (NAT and 1 SI) 2 Benefits (NAT) 2 Planning Policy (NAT) 1 Housing (NAT)
Total	41	53	52

KEY:

NAT No Action Taken
 CIP Change in Procedures
 SI Staff Instruction
 RTC Referral to Contractor
 CIS Change in Service
 FT Formal Training