

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 two years.

- 2.3 The Council captures information relating to verbal complaints. These complaints predominantly relate to the Operations Division and for the period 2007/08 921 complaints were received out of 43,699 service requests, which represented a complaint rate of 2.1%.

3. SUMMARY OF OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINTS

- 3.1 The Local Government Ombudsman Service has published its provisional statistics for complaints determined against the District Council in the year 1st April 2007 to 31st March 2008.

- 3.2 The Ombudsman has received 18 complaints in 2007/08, which represents a small increase on the 17 received in the previous year. The following table provides a summary of the complaints received by decision compared with previous years.

Decisions	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Formal report finding maladministration causing injustice	0	0	0
Complaints settled locally	5	1	1
Maladministration causing no injustice	0	0	0
No maladministration	0	0	0
No, or insufficient, evidence of maladministration	9	7	3
Ombudsman's Discretion	1	3	1
Outside LGO's jurisdiction	0	3	4
Premature complaints	2	3	9
Total excluding premature	15	14	9
Total	17	17	18

3.3 One complaint was settled locally which concerned the processing of a planning application and as a result the Council agreed to pay the complainant £500 (see report elsewhere on the Agenda). 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	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Transport and highways	2	0	2
Housing (not including HB)	0	0	2
Housing Benefit	0	2	0
Public finance	1	0	1
Planning & Building Control	6	9	12
Other	3	5	2
Total	12	16	19

3.5 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.

3.6 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.

- 3.7 The average time for the Council responding to complaints was 30 days against a target of 28 days. In 2006/07 the average time taken to respond to the Ombudsman was 28 days.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Local Government Ombudsman Provisional Complaint Statistics 2007/08

Contact Officer: Tony Roberts
Central Services Manager
(01480) 388004

Annex A

Complaint Reason	Division Involved 2005/06 and action	Division involved 2006/07 and action	Division involved 2007/08 and action
Action of Employee	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	1 Public Health 1 Benefits (SI) 5 Development Control 2 Planning Policy
Council Policy	1 Housing (NAT) 3 Benefits (SI) (NAT) 2 Council Tax (2 NAT)	3 Council Tax (NAT) 1 Development Control 7 Benefits (NAT)	3 Council Tax 2 Benefits 4 Housing (NAT) 1 Development Control
Council Procedures	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	1 Development Control (NAT) 4 Benefits (1 NAT, 2 SI) 1 Business Rates (NAT) 5 Housing (3 NAT) 1 Commercial Team
Equality of Service	2 Development Control (2 NAT) 1 Operational (SI)		1 Housing (NAT) 1 Operational 1 Development Control
Failure to Respond	1 Housing (NAT) 2 Benefits 1 Development Control (SI)	1 Development Control	
Service Delivery	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)	8 Development Control 3 Operational (CIP) 1 Amenities 2 Benefits (1 SI, 1 NAT) 2 Housing (1 NAT) 4 Council Tax (NAT) 1 Planning Policy
Total	53	52	58

KEY:

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