

'HAVE YOUR SAY'- LGO STAFF SURVEY

The Commission for Local Administration has today published the outcome of the Local Government Ombudsman's (LGO) recent staff survey exercise.

Introduction from Dr Jane Martin, Chair of the Commission for Local Administration

LGO conducted a 'Have your say' exercise during October and November 2012 to give all staff an opportunity to provide feedback on a range of issues affecting the organisation. This was carried out earlier than originally planned to ensure that what was learned from staff could help to inform LGO's Transformation Plan. The Communities and Local Government Select Committee, in their report on the work of the Local Government Ombudsman, rightly highlighted the importance of conducting a staff survey.

The exercise was conducted by an independent external researcher and facilitator to ensure that staff felt able to provide open and robust feedback. An anonymous, all staff survey was used to gather a wide range of views with follow up work being carried out in staff focus groups. We were pleased to note that 90% of staff took the opportunity to share their views. The results have been presented in all staff meetings

The key messages that emerged from the exercise were:

- LGO has a dedicated body of people who show great commitment and professionalism in their work. There is a strong belief in the benefit that they can bring to both complainants and the wider public interest and a desire to work together to improve the service further.
- Nevertheless, staff highlighted concerns that showed the process of developing LGO for the future was causing them some anxiety and uncertainty.
- This, in part, is caused by a desire for greater engagement between management and staff across the organisation so that all can understand and play their part in developing the organisation.
- A consistent view was expressed that success is dependent upon stronger and more effective leadership and management in LGO, including the working style and approach of the ombudsmen.

The staff consultation exercise reaffirmed the view of the Commission that the people at LGO are its greatest asset. The feedback they have provided has given us an opportunity to ensure that we equip the organisation to make best use of their skills and commitment. LGO has reflected on its plans for change in the Transformation Plan and has committed to working differently in the following ways:

Revitalising our leadership and management

- 1) The Commission will agree a new scheme of delegation for all operational decision making to a new executive team comprised of the newly appointed commission operating officer and two executive directors. They will be responsible for running the LGO scheme on behalf of the Commission and will be accountable to the Commission through the Chair. The executive team will be responsible for arrangements for communication and engagement with staff.
- 2) The Commission recognises its duty of care to all staff and the need to ensure that the Ombudsmen are themselves providing the highest standard of service. New arrangements have been introduced by the executive team for managing casework which require the involvement and authorisation of the Ombudsman. The Commission has agreed not to continue with the geographical split of jurisdictions between the current Ombudsmen which

means that they can both delegate authority to investigate and decide complaints to all staff which will enable more flexible working.

- 3) Consultation with staff has already begun on the role the Ombudsman should play in providing advice, monitoring quality and authorising casework decisions. A more collegiate approach of case conferencing will be employed to ensure that investigative staff are supported in their decision making on behalf of the Ombudsman. A programme of regular good practice seminars is planned from January 2013, supported by specialist expertise and external facilitation.
- 4) In January the Commission will consider the results of a board effectiveness review and make decisions on changes to board practice and executive team support to the board to maximise board effectiveness.
- 5) The Commission has also agreed that the number of Ombudsmen should be reduced from two to one as soon as practical on the grounds of effectiveness and efficiency. It is acknowledged that this is a decision for Parliament and requires the consent of the Secretary of State and a change to primary legislation. The Commission has requested discussions with DCLG officials to explore how best to achieve this.

Using learning to develop our service

- 6) LGO will be working with staff to ensure that their knowledge and experience helps shape the development of the organisation. External partners also have a lot to contribute to this process and an independent external evaluation of LGO decisions has been commissioned and will report by April 2013. This is in line with a recommendation in the CLG Select Committee Report. The evaluation will be led by the Chairman of the Administrative Justice and Tribunals Council Richard Thomas CBE, LL.D. It will also include Jim Martin, the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman and Dr Richard Kirkham of Sheffield University School of Law. The recommendations from this evaluation will be used to improve LGO's service further.
- 7) In addition, LGO is benchmarking against other Ombudsman services to identify best practice in customer satisfaction research. This will inform the development of a new customer satisfaction research methodology, to help use feedback to constantly improve LGO's service.
- 8) The newly appointed Head of Policy and Communications has begun staff consultation on the introduction of more inclusive internal communications processes with greater emphasis on team briefings led by the executive team. This will inform the way we consult staff in future on changes required in the transformation plan and on the next strategic business planning cycle.

The LGO will report on actions taken following the staff survey to the next CLG Select Committee inquiry and will conduct a follow up exercise in 12 months time.

Dr Jane Martin
Chair, Commission for Local Administration

SUMMARY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN 'HAVE YOUR SAY' EXERCISE

Methodology

1) All staff survey

- Total number of questions: 50
- Total number of potential respondents: 203
- Total number of actual respondents: 181
- Response rate of 90%

2) Focus groups

- Held across all three locations
- Approximately 55 staff members attended
- Attendees included support staff, investigators and Assistant Ombudsmen

Key Findings

1) *About the LGO*

LGO has a dedicated body of people who show great commitment and professionalism in their work. There is a strong belief in the benefit that we can bring to both complainants and the wider public interest. There is some uncertainty about whether we provide a good service to our customers but a desire to work together to improve the service further. Staff want us to engage more with our stakeholders to better demonstrate the value of what we do.

In particular:

- 88% of staff believe in the LGO and what it is trying to achieve;
- 85% are committed to the organisation's values;
- 39% believe we provide a great service to our customers but 34% are undecided.

2) *The way we are currently organised*

There is a need for much improved methods of communication within LGO so that we can meet the strong desire from staff to better understand the reasons behind decisions.

In particular:

- 59% feel that management information systems are not efficient or effective;
- 68% do not believe that communication is clear and timely;

3) *Change within the LGO*

Staff highlighted concerns that showed the process of developing LGO for the future was causing them some anxiety and uncertainty and that we could do better in explaining the reasons for change. We need to better demonstrate the trust and respect that we have for the skills, knowledge and experience of people at LGO.

In particular:

- 77% feel the recent changes had been a negative experience for them;
- 57% do not consider the changes to have been well communicated;

- 64% agreed or strongly agreed that they understand the reasons for change;
- 65% do not believe the change has been managed well.

4) *Leadership and Management within the LGO*

A consistent view was expressed that success is dependent upon strong and effective leadership and management in LGO. There needs to be greater clarity about the role of the Ombudsmen and of the senior managers in leading casework and the organisation.

This, in part, is caused by a desire for greater engagement between management and staff across the organisation so that all can understand and play their part in developing the organisation. There is an opportunity to build upon the mainly positive views that people have of their line managers.

In particular:

- 67% do not think the ombudsmen are visible or accessible enough;
- 80% of people believe that the ombudsmen need to demonstrate stronger leadership skills;
- 78% feel that they are listened to by their line managers.