



The Commission for
Local Administration in England

**The Local Government Ombudsman's
Annual Letter
Rushcliffe Borough Council
for the year ended
31 March 2007**

The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) investigates complaints by members of the public who consider that they have been caused injustice through administrative fault by local authorities and certain other bodies. The LGO also uses the findings from investigation work to help authorities provide better public services through initiatives such as special reports, training and annual letters.

Annual Letter 2006/07 - Introduction

This annual letter provides a summary of the complaints we have received about your authority. Where possible, we comment on the authority's performance and complaint-handling arrangements to assist with your service improvement.

I hope that the letter will be a useful addition to other information your authority holds on how people experience or perceive your services.

Two attachments form an integral part of this letter: statistical data covering a three year period and a note to help the interpretation of the statistics.

Complaints received

In the year ending 31 March 2007, I received 15 complaints about your Council, just one more than the previous year.

As the breakdown in this table shows, the profile of those complaints remains largely unchanged.

| Category of complaints | Received in 2005/06 | Received in 2006/07 | Change |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------|
| benefits | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| housing | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| other | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| planning & building control | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| public finance | 6 | 4 | -2 |
| transport & highways | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| total | 14 | 15 | 1 |

The numbers of complaints themselves are too small from which to draw meaningful conclusions about the Council's overall performance. However, I encourage the Council to consider the complaint numbers in light of its own information (for example feedback from its internal complaint procedure).

Decisions on complaints

Reports and local settlements

A 'local settlement' is a complaint that is resolved by the Council taking, or agreeing to take, action which we consider is a satisfactory response to the complaint so that the investigation can be discontinued. In 2006/07 27.7% of complaints dealt with by the three Local Government Ombudsmen (excluding premature and those outside jurisdiction) were resolved by local settlement. When we complete an investigation we must issue a report.

I did not issue any reports about your Council in the year and the one complaint we agreed to settle locally did not give rise to concerns of systemic problems with the way in which the Council administers its services.

Decisions

In addition to the local settlement, I determined 12 other complaints.

Of the 12, three complaints were outside my jurisdiction, two I exercised discretion not to investigate, in two I found no evidence of maladministration and five were 'premature' (in our view the Council had not been given adequate opportunity to investigate and resolve them for itself, so were returned to the Council to consider through its internal complaint procedure).

Other findings

Your Council continues to meet the target of 28 days to respond to our enquiries with apparent ease. Last year, replies to enquiries were received from your Council in just 20.3 days on average. Thank you for your continued co-operation in this respect.

Your Council's complaints procedure and handling of complaints

None of my investigations have given rise to concerns about the way in which the Council handles complaints. Its commitment to providing an effective service in this respect is demonstrated through the information it publishes. The information is readily accessible via the Council's web-site and I am pleased to see it contains references to the LGO.

Training in complaint handling

Part of our role is to provide advice and guidance about good administrative practice. We offer training courses for all levels of local authority staff in complaints handling and investigation. The feedback from councils that have taken up the training is very positive.

The range of courses is expanding in response to demand and in addition to the generic Good Complaint Handling (identifying and processing complaints) and Effective Complaint Handling (investigation and resolution), we can run open courses for groups of staff from smaller authorities and also customise courses to meet your Council's specific requirements.

All courses are presented by an experienced investigator so participants benefit from their knowledge and expertise of complaint handling.

I have enclosed some information on the full range of courses available together with contact details for enquiries and any further bookings.

Liaison with the Local Government Ombudsman

The very good response times your Council achieves are testament to the effectiveness of the liaison arrangements between our organizations. Your liaison staff are helpful and professional in providing information and responses to our enquiries.

LGO developments

You may be interested in the development of our initiative to improve the first contact that people have with us. A new Access and Advice Service will provide a gateway to our services for all complainants and enquirers. It will encourage telephone contact but will also deal with email, text and letter correspondence. We will let you have further details about how it will operate and the expected timescales and discuss with you the implications for the Council.

I hope you have received our latest special report about telecommunications masts. It draws on our experience of dealing with complaints about planning applications for masts which can be highly controversial. We recommend simple measures that councils can adopt to minimise the chances of maladministration occurring.

In July we will be publishing a special report about the difficulties that can be encountered with complaints when local authorities deliver services or discharge their functions through partnerships. *Local partnerships and citizen redress* provides advice and guidance on how these problems can be overcome by good governance arrangements that include an effective complaints protocol.

Conclusions and general observations

I welcome this opportunity to comment on our experience of complaints about the Council over the past year. I hope that you find the information and assessment provided useful when seeking improvements to your Council's services.

**Anne Seex
Local Government Ombudsman
Beverley House
17 Shipton Road
York
YO30 5FZ**

June 2007

Encs: Statistical data
Note on interpretation of statistics
Leaflet on training courses (with posted copy only)

| Complaints received by subject area | Benefits | Housing | Other | Planning & building control | Public finance | Transport and highways | Total |
|--|-----------------|----------------|--------------|--|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| 01/04/2006 - 31/03/2007 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 15 |
| 2005 / 2006 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 6 | 0 | 14 |
| 2004 / 2005 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 15 | 3 | 2 | 27 |

Note: these figures will include complaints that were made prematurely to the Ombudsman and which we referred back to the authority for consideration.

| Decisions | MI reps | LS | M reps | NM reps | No mal | Omb disc | Outside jurisdiction | Premature complaints | Total excl premature | Total |
|--------------------------------|----------------|-----------|---------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| 01/04/2006 - 31/03/2007 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 8 | 13 |
| 2005 / 2006 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 10 | 13 |
| 2004 / 2005 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 5 | 3 | 9 | 19 | 28 |

See attached notes for an explanation of the headings in this table.

| Response times | FIRST ENQUIRIES | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | No. of First Enquiries | Avg no. of days to respond |
| 01/04/2006 - 31/03/2007 | 3 | 20.3 |
| 2005 / 2006 | 5 | 17.0 |
| 2004 / 2005 | 5 | 19.2 |

Average local authority response times 01/04/2006 to 31/03/2007

| Types of authority | <= 28 days % | 29 - 35 days % | >= 36 days % |
|---------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| District Councils | 48.9 | 23.4 | 27.7 |
| Unitary Authorities | 30.4 | 37.0 | 32.6 |
| Metropolitan Authorities | 38.9 | 41.7 | 19.4 |
| County Councils | 47.1 | 32.3 | 20.6 |
| London Boroughs | 39.4 | 33.3 | 27.3 |
| National Park Authorities | 66.7 | 33.3 | 0.0 |