



The Commission for  
Local Administration in England

**The Local Government Ombudsman's  
Annual Letter  
Selby District 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**

### ***Volume & Character***

The number of complaints against the Council received by my office rose slightly as compared to the previous year, being 37 compared to 33. That is of no great significance. The number of complaints about planning issues remains very high at around 68% of the total. I commented on this last year and will return to it later in this letter.

## **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 have not issued any reports against the Council during the year. In none of the decided cases did my staff see evidence of any failures by the Council sufficient to warrant seeking a remedy.

## **Your Council's complaints procedure and handling of complaints**

30 complaints were decided by my staff with 13 of those (43%) being premature – ie sent to me before the Council itself had been given a proper opportunity to investigate and respond. This is a relatively high figure. It *could* indicate that the Council's own complaints procedure was not well enough signposted to citizens or that staff were insufficiently rigorous in recognising complaints. It would be unfair of me to make too much of what could also be a random occurrence.

## **Liaison with the Local Government Ombudsman**

The Council's performance in responding to enquiries from this office worsened compared to the previous year. Responses took on average nearly 36 days (the figure for 2005/06 was 25 days). Our target is to receive responses within 28 days. Within the average figure I note three cases where responses took over 50 days and that is wholly unacceptable for the citizens concerned (and had those been within 28 days then the Council would have met the target on average). The Council did make changes during the year to how it deals with our enquiries. I cannot say why its performance has declined but ask the Council to look into this and to let me know what can be done.

In August 2006 the Assistant Ombudsman dealing with Selby met the manager responsible for liaising with this office. He reports on a positive meeting and felt that the new manager and new processes ought to improve the way that the Council handles complaints.

### **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**

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

<b>Complaints received by subject area</b>	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Housing</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Planning &amp; building control</b>	<b>Public finance</b>	<b>Transport and highways</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>01/04/2006 - 31/03/2007</b>	0	10	1	25	0	1	<b>37</b>
<b>2005 / 2006</b>	1	7	4	18	3	0	<b>33</b>
<b>2004 / 2005</b>	2	12	3	15	0	1	<b>33</b>

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

<b>Decisions</b>	<b>MI reps</b>	<b>LS</b>	<b>M reps</b>	<b>NM reps</b>	<b>No mal</b>	<b>Omb disc</b>	<b>Outside jurisdiction</b>	<b>Premature complaints</b>	<b>Total excl premature</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>01/04/2006 - 31/03/2007</b>	0	0	0	0	9	5	3	13	17	<b>30</b>
<b>2005 / 2006</b>	0	8	0	0	10	3	3	9	24	<b>33</b>
<b>2004 / 2005</b>	0	4	0	0	8	5	2	5	19	<b>24</b>

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

<b>Response times</b>	<b>FIRST ENQUIRIES</b>	
	<b>No. of First Enquiries</b>	<b>Avg no. of days to respond</b>
<b>01/04/2006 - 31/03/2007</b>	10	35.8
<b>2005 / 2006</b>	18	24.4
<b>2004 / 2005</b>	17	20.9

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

<b>Types of authority</b>	<b>&lt;= 28 days %</b>	<b>29 - 35 days %</b>	<b>&gt;= 36 days %</b>
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