

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

Craven District Council

**for the year ended
31 March 2008**

The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) provides a free, independent and impartial service. We consider complaints about the administrative actions of councils and some other authorities. We cannot question what a council has done simply because someone does not agree with it. If we find something has gone wrong, such as poor service, service failure, delay or bad advice, and that a person has suffered as a result, the Ombudsmen aim to get it put right by recommending a suitable remedy. 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 2007/08 - Introduction

This annual letter provides a summary of the complaints received about Craven District Council and comments on the authority's performance and complaint-handling arrangements.

I hope that the letter will assist you in improving services by providing a useful perspective on how some people who are dissatisfied 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

I received just 6 complaints against the Council during the year, a figure in line with complaints received in previous years. The numbers are too small to offer any meaningful observations, suffice to say that no issues of concern arose during the year.

Liaison with the Local Government Ombudsman

I ask for all councils to respond to enquiries from my office within 28 days. Although the Council was asked to provide me with detailed comments in only 3 cases this year, each one took longer than 28 days and in fact the average was 40 days. I would ask the Council to try to ensure that replies are sent to my office within 28 days.

Decisions on complaints

Reports and local settlements

We will often discontinue enquires into a complaint when a council takes or agrees to take action that we consider to be a satisfactory response – we call these local settlements. In 2007/08 the Local Government Ombudsmen determined 27% of complaints by local settlement; this amounts to around 2,400 complaints nationally, (excluding 'premature' complaints - where councils have not had a proper chance to deal with them - and those outside our jurisdiction). If an investigation is completed I issue a public report.

I issued no reports against the Council in the last year and no complaints arose which called for a remedy to be provided.

Your Council's complaints procedure and handling of complaints

I have no concerns about the way in which the Council deals with complaints put directly to it by members of the public.

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. A detailed evaluation of the training provided to councils over the past three years shows very high levels of satisfaction. We will customise courses to meet your Council's specific requirements and provide courses for groups of staff from different smaller authorities. Participants benefit from the complaint-handling knowledge and expertise of the experienced investigators who present the

courses.

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

LGO developments

We launched the LGO Advice Team in April, providing a first contact service for all enquirers and new complainants. Demand for the service has been high. Our team of advisers, trained to provide comprehensive information and advice, has dealt with many thousands of calls since the service started.

The team handles complaints submitted by telephone, email or text, as well as in writing. This new power to accept complaints other than in writing was one of the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, which also came into force in April. Our experience of implementing other provisions in the Act, such as complaints about service failure and apparent maladministration, is being kept under review and will be subject to further discussion. Any feedback from your Council would be welcome.

Last year we published two special reports providing advice and guidance on 'applications for prior approval of telecommunications masts' and 'citizen redress in local partnerships'. Feedback on special reports is always welcome. I would particularly appreciate information on complaints protocols in the governance arrangements of partnerships with which your Council is involved.

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 2008

Enc: 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 | Total |
|--|-----------------|----------------|--------------|--|-----------------------|--------------|
| 01/04/2007 - 31/03/2008 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 6 |
| 2006 / 2007 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| 2005 / 2006 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 5 |

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 |
|--------------------------------|----------------|-----------|---------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| 01/04/2007 - 31/03/2008 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| 2006 / 2007 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 |
| 2005 / 2006 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |

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 |
| 01/04/2007 - 31/03/2008 | 3 | 40.0 |
| 2006 / 2007 | 1 | 26.0 |
| 2005 / 2006 | 2 | 25.5 |

Average local authority response times 01/04/2007 to 31/03/2008

| Types of authority | <= 28 days % | 29 - 35 days % | > = 36 days % |
|---------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| District Councils | 56.4 | 24.6 | 19.1 |
| Unitary Authorities | 41.3 | 50.0 | 8.7 |
| Metropolitan Authorities | 58.3 | 30.6 | 11.1 |
| County Councils | 47.1 | 38.2 | 14.7 |
| London Boroughs | 45.5 | 27.3 | 27.3 |
| National Park Authorities | 71.4 | 28.6 | 0.0 |