

Local Government  
**OMBUDSMAN**

**The Local Government Ombudsman's  
Annual Letter  
Greater London Authority  
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 we have received about the Greater London Authority. We have included comments on the Authority's performance and complaint-handling arrangements, where possible, so they can 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***

I received a total of six complaints against the GLA and its constituent bodies; one against the GLA itself and five against the London Development Agency. There were no complaints against the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority or the Metropolitan Police Agency. We did however receive 241 complaints against Transport for London, about a third up on last year. I enclose a separate letter that I have written to Transport for London about these complaints.

The complaint against the GLA was about the investigation of a crime. The complaints against the London Development Agency related to the application of funds, the sale of land and the use of land acquired for the 2012 Olympics.

## **Decisions on complaints**

### ***Reports and local settlements***

A 'local settlement' is a complaint where, during the course of our investigation, the Authority has agreed to take some action which we consider is a satisfactory response to the complaint. The investigation is then discontinued. In 2007/08 the Local Government Ombudsmen determined 27% of complaints by local settlement (excluding 'premature' complaints – where authorities have not had a proper chance to deal with them – and those outside our jurisdiction).

None of the complaints we investigated this year justified the issue of a report or a local settlement. We decided two complaints during the year other than those which were premature. Our decision in each case was that there was no evidence of maladministration.

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

I referred two complaints back to your Authority last year as "premature" as your Authority had not had sufficient time to respond to them. One of these complaints has been referred back to me because the complainant was not satisfied with your response after it had been through your complaints procedure. I determined this complaint later in the year, finding no evidence of maladministration.

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

We made enquiries to your Authority on just three complaints. The target time for authorities to respond to first enquiries is 28 days. The average time for your Authority was 46.0 days. I recognise this average is based on a small number of complaints. I am also aware that this figure is distorted by the length of time it took your Authority to respond to one complex complaint concerning the adopted criteria for the allocation of funds. But for the length of time taken to respond on this one complaint, the average response time would have been 33 days.

## **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. This year we carried out a detailed evaluation of the training with councils that have been trained over the past three years. The results are very positive.

The range of courses is expanding in response to demand. In addition to the generic Good Complaint Handling (identifying and processing complaints) and Effective Complaint Handling (investigation and resolution) we now offer these courses specifically for social services staff and a course on reviewing complaints for social care review panel members. We can run open courses for groups of staff from different smaller authorities and also customise courses to meet your Authority'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.

## **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 Authority 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'. Again, I would appreciate your feedback on these, particularly on any complaints protocols put in place as part of the overall governance arrangements for partnerships your Authority has set up.

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## **Conclusions and general observations**

I welcome this opportunity to give you my reflections about the complaints my office has dealt with over the past year. I hope that you find the information and assessment provided useful when seeking improvements to your Authority's services.

**Tony Redmond  
Local Government Ombudsman  
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Millbank  
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**June 2008**

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

<b>Complaints received by subject area</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Public finance</b>	<b>Transport and highways</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>01/04/2007 - 31/03/2008</b>	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
<b>2006 / 2007</b>	3	1	0	<b>4</b>
<b>2005 / 2006</b>	13	0	1	<b>14</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>01/04/2007 - 31/03/2008</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>2006 / 2007</b>	0	0	0	0	1	1	4	0	6	<b>6</b>
<b>2005 / 2006</b>	0	0	0	0	1	0	12	0	13	<b>13</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>01/04/2007 - 31/03/2008</b>	0	0.0
<b>2006 / 2007</b>	0	0.0
<b>2005 / 2006</b>	0	0.0

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

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