

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

# **Yorkshire Dales National Park**

**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 Yorkshire Dales National Park 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**

I received just 2 complaints against the Authority during the year having received none in the previous year. Both complainants concerned planning matters but from so small a sample it is not possible to pass meaningful comment other than perhaps to acknowledge that the Authority will be pleased that so few complaints are made against it.

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

I made detailed enquiries of the Authority on only 2 occasions during the year. The average time taken by the Authority to reply to me was 26.5 days against a request by me for replies to reach me within 28 calendar days. I am grateful to the Authority for responding to my office as quickly as possible.

## **Decisions on complaints**

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

We will often discontinue enquires into a complaint when an authority 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 (excluding 'premature' complaints - where authorities 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 Authority during the year.

### ***Other findings***

I determined two complaints during the year, one on the basis that it was premature, the other on the basis that it was outside of my jurisdiction.

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

No issues arose during the year to suggest that there are any problems in the way in which the Authority handles complaints made 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 authorities over the past three years shows very high levels of satisfaction. We will customise courses to meet your 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 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'. Feedback on special reports is always welcome. I would particularly appreciate information on complaints protocols in the governance arrangements of partnerships with which your Authority is involved.

## **Conclusions and general observations**

I welcome this opportunity to comment on our experience of complaints about the Authority over the past year. Although the very low level of complaints leaves me with very little to say by way of detailed comment I hope that you find the information and assessment provided useful when seeking improvements to your Authority'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 | Planning & building control | Total |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|
| 01/04/2007 - 31/03/2008             | 2                           | 2     |
| 2006 / 2007                         | 3                           | 3     |
| 2005 / 2006                         | 2                           | 2     |

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       | 0      | 1        | 1                    | 0                    | 2                    | 2     |
| 2006 / 2007             | 0       | 0  | 0      | 0       | 0      | 0        | 0                    | 0                    | 0                    | 0     |
| 2005 / 2006             | 0       | 0  | 0      | 0       | 1      | 0        | 1                    | 1                    | 2                    | 3     |

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 | 2                      | 26.5                       |
| 2006 / 2007             | 0                      | 0.0                        |
| 2005 / 2006             | 0                      | 0.0                        |

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           |