

Committee:	Executive	Agenda Item No.:	
Date:	8 th August 2011	Status	Open
Category	3. Part of the Budget and Policy Framework		
Subject:	Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter		
Report by:	Customer Service and Access Officer		
Other Officers Involved			
Director	CEO		
Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor E Watts Portfolio Holder for Customer Services and Policy and Performance		

RELEVANT CORPORATE AIMS

CUSTOMER FOCUSED SERVICES – Providing excellent customer focused services

STRATEGIC ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT – Continually improving our organisation.

The effective management of complaints is central to good customer service. It also provides a good source of information which the Council can use to improve services.

TARGETS

Local Performance Indicators CSP3 and CSP4 for number of complaints and response times

VALUE FOR MONEY

N/A

THE REPORT

Purpose

To provide information contained within the Annual Review 2010/11 from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).

The letter is in a slightly different format this year. It still contains an annual summary of statistics on the complaints made about the Authority for the year ending 31 March 2011 but the covering letter provides no additional comments. The letter provides more information about the changes affecting the Local Government Ombudsman. Both the letter and the statistical report have been appended for your information.

Key points from the Statistical Report:

- The LGO received 12 enquiries and complaints during 2010/11, of which 8 were forwarded to the Investigative Team.
- Our average response time to first enquiries was 26.5 days, slightly longer than our 2009/10 performance (25.3 days) but within the LGO's target of 28 days.
- The LGO decided 6 complaints, 2 were found to have insufficient evidence of maladministration, 1 was discontinued at the Ombudsman's discretion and 3 resulted in a local settlement.

ISSUES/OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

None

IMPLICATIONS

Financial: - None

Legal: - None

Human Resources: None

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Executive receive the report and the LGO Annual Review 2010/11

REASON FOR DECISION TO BE GIVEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CONSTITUTION

To keep Members informed of Ombudsman complaints

ATTACHMENTS: - Annual Review Letter 2010/11 dated 24th June 2011

FILE REFERENCE:

SOURCE DOCUMENT:

24 June 2011

Mr W Lumley
Chief Executive
Bolsover District Council
Sherwood Lodge
Bolsover
CHESTERFIELD S44 6NF

Dear Mr Lumley

Annual Review Letter

I am writing with our annual summary of statistics on the complaints made to me about your authority for the year ending 31 March 2011. I hope the information set out in the enclosed tables will be useful to you.

The statistics include the number of enquiries and complaints received by our Advice Team, the number that the Advice Team forwarded to my office and decisions made on complaints about your council. Not all complaints are decided in the same year that they are received. This means that the number of complaints received and the number decided will be different.

The statistics also show the time taken by your authority to respond to written enquiries and the average response times by type of authority.

Communicating decisions

We want our work to be transparent and our decisions to be clear and comprehensible. During the past year we changed the way we communicate our decisions and reasons. We now provide a stand-alone statement of reasons for every decision we make to both the citizen who has complained and to the council. These statements replace our former practice of communicating decisions by letter to citizens that are copied to councils. We hope this change has been beneficial and welcome comments on this or any other aspect of our work.

In April 2011 we introduced a new IT system for case management and revised the brief descriptions of our decisions. My next annual letter will use the different decision descriptions that are intended to give a more precise representation of complaint outcomes and also add further transparency to our work.

Extended powers

During 2010/11 our powers were extended to deal with complaints in two significant areas.

In October 2010 all complaints about injustice connected to adult social care services came under our jurisdiction. The greater use of direct payments and personalised budgets mean that it is particularly important for us to be able to deal with such complaints irrespective of whether a council has arranged the care. The increasing number of people who arrange and pay for their own social care now have the right to an independent and impartial examination of any complaints and concerns they may have about their care provider.

In the six months to April 2011 we received 75 complaints under our new adult social care powers. Between 2009/10 and 2010/11 complaints about care arranged or funded by councils doubled from 657 to 1,351.

The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children & Learning Act 2009 introduced powers for us to deal with complaints about schools by pupils or their parents. This was to be introduced in phases and currently applies in 14 council areas. By the end of 2010/11 we had received 169 complaints about schools in those areas and 183 about schools in other areas where we had no power to investigate. The Education Bill currently before Parliament proposes to rescind our new jurisdiction from July 2012.

Our new powers coincided with the introduction of Treasury controls on expenditure by government departments and sponsored bodies designed to reduce the public spending deficit. This has constrained our ability to inform care service users, pupils and their parents of their new rights.

Assisting councils to improve

For many years we have made our experience and expertise available to councils by offering training in complaint handling. We regard supporting good complaint handling in councils as an important part of our work. During 2010/11 we surveyed a number of councils that had taken up the training and some that had not. Responses from councils where we had provided training were encouraging:

- 90% said it had helped them to improve their complaint handling
- 68% gave examples of how the knowledge and skills gained from the training had been applied in practice
- 55% said that complaints were resolved at an earlier stage than previously
- almost 50% said that citizens who complained were more satisfied.

These findings will inform how we develop and provide training in the future. For example, the survey identified that councils are interested in short complaint handling modules and e-learning.

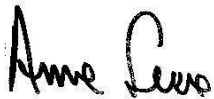
Details of training opportunities are on our web site at www.lgo.org.uk/training-councils/

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Mr W Lumley

More details of our work over the year will be included in the 2010/11 Annual Report. This will be published on our website at the same time as the annual review letters for all councils (14 July).

If it would be helpful to your Council I should be pleased to arrange for me or a senior manager to meet and explain our work in greater detail.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne Seex". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Anne Seex
Local Government Ombudsman