

Meeting of the Cabinet – 13th September 2006

Report of the Director of Law and Property

**Annual Letter 2005/06 from the Local Government Ombudsman
in respect of Complaints made against the Council**

Purpose of Report

1. To consider the content of the annual letter 2005/06 from the Local Government Ombudsman in respect of complaints received against this Council and dealt with by the Ombudsman's office over the year ending 31st March, 2006.

Background

2. Attached, as Appendix 1, to this report is a copy of the Annual Letter 2005/06 of the Local Government Ombudsman setting out his reflections on the complaints received against the Council and dealt with by his office over the last year. Attached as Appendices 2 and 3 are statistical data covering a 3-year period and a note to assist interpretation of the Commission's statistics.
3. The conclusions that can be drawn from the information contained in the letter and the statistical information in Appendix 2 to the letter are that
 - There has been an increase in the number of complaints received in the period to 31st March, 2006 of 18 from last year mainly due to education and planning. The Ombudsman comments that the increase does not point to systemic failures in service delivery in any area and he would expect to see such fluctuations in numbers in the normal course of events.
 - In respect of the 91 complaints decided in the year to 31st March, 2006, no formal reports finding maladministration causing injustice, formal reports finding maladministration but causing no injustice to the complainant and formal reports finding no maladministration by the Council were issued by the Ombudsman. 5 complaints were determined by way of local settlement whilst in respect of 35 complaints no maladministration was found. Of the remaining complaints, 30 were premature complaints, 12 were discontinued at the Ombudsman's discretion and 9 were outside his jurisdiction.

- Regarding the outcome of complaints received, compensation was paid in respect of complaints involving the housing and planning cases outlined in the letter.
 - The favourable comments made on the Council's willingness to take responsibility for failures in its services and to offer appropriate remedies to complaints and take speedy action in most cases.
 - That, given the doubling of premature complaints, it may be the case that the publicity about the Council's own complaints procedure is not effectively reaching service users at the point of delivery.
 - The continuing improvement in the Council's response time in the period to 31st March, 2006 averaging 30.2 days. Although this represents an improvement and compares well with the national average for metropolitan councils, it is still two days outside the target of 28 days.
4. The requests of the Ombudsman that a hyperlink to his website be included to enable people to access his service online and the posting of his Annual Letter on the Council's website can be dealt with following this meeting.

Finance

5. There are no direct financial implications arising from the content of this report. Compensation determined, arising from an investigation by the Local Government Ombudsman will be met from existing directorate budgets.

Law

6. The Commission for Local Administration was created under Part 1 and 3 of the Local Government Act, 1974.

Equality Impact

7. This report accords with the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy. The role of the Ombudsman affords a system of complaint and redress to members of the public who feel they have been subject to maladministration by the Council.

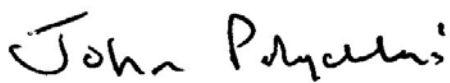
Some of the complaints made concern children and young people and so, dependent on the remedy proposed, if any, there may have been either a direct or indirect impact on them.

Recommendations

8. That the information contained in the report, and Appendices to the report, submitted be noted and that Directors be requested to review their internal arrangements, as appropriate, to ensure that requests for information on

complaints received are dealt with by the date requested so that responses can be submitted to the Ombudsman's office within the time scales set.

9. That the requests of the Ombudsman that a hyperlink to his website to enable people to access his service online and the posting of his Annual Letter on the Council's website be dealt with following this meeting.



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DIRECTOR OF LAW AND PROERTY

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Letter from the Local Government Ombudsman dated 21st June, 2006– annual letter 2005/06