
REVIEW OF OUTCOME OF COMPLAINTS MADE TO OMBUDSMAN

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor John Williams, Leader

Responsible Director - Paul Wildsmith, Director of Corporate Services

Purpose of Report

1. To provide Members with an update of the outcome of cases which have been considered by the Local Ombudsman and to indicate any points for particular attention and/or referral to the Standards Committee since the meeting of Cabinet on 12th September, 2006.

Information and Analysis

2. Cabinet at its meeting on 14th May, 2002 considered a report on the outcome of cases referred to the Ombudsman during the Municipal Year 2001/02 and resolved that at each meeting of Cabinet a similar report should be submitted on the outcome of cases since the previous meeting of Cabinet. Since the meeting on 12th September, 2006, four cases have been the subject of decision by the Ombudsman.
3. This report sets out in abbreviated form the outcome of matters which have been the subject of complaints to the Local Ombudsman by individuals and on which the Local Ombudsman has come to a conclusion. The outcome of the four cases on which the Ombudsman reached a view in the current reporting period is as follows :-

Finding	No. of Cases
Maladministration causing injustice (MI)	
No Maladministration (NM)	
Ombudsman's Discretion (OD)	
Outside Jurisdiction (OJ)	2
Local Settlement (LS)	1
No or Insufficient Evidence of Maladministration (NIEM)	1
Premature Complaint (PC)	

Outside Jurisdiction

4. A matter under this heading is one where the Ombudsman for one of a number of technical reasons is not empowered to take action, e.g. there is a remedy through a normal Court of Law or the matter relates to an employment issue.

Premature Complaint

5. This heading covers matters where the Local Authority has not had the opportunity to deal with a complaint through its own Internal Complaints Procedures; the Ombudsman will normally wait for that procedure to be carried out before she considers investigating the matter herself.

No or Insufficient Evidence of Maladministration

6. This heading is self-explanatory. The Ombudsman will have carried out preliminary investigations but concluded that there is no or insufficient evidence of maladministration and no further action will be taken.

Ombudsman Discretion

7. This heading covers those cases where the Ombudsman decides not to investigate the case further for any other reason and exercises her discretion to close the file.

Local Settlement

8. This heading relates to cases where the Ombudsman after investigation suggests that the complaint might be resolved locally without a formal report being made and suggests how the matter might be drawn to a conclusion.

Analysis of Findings

9. The opportunity is normally taken to analyse the areas of the Council's functions where complaints have arisen. It seems appropriate to do that in order to establish whether there is any pattern to complaints received or whether there is a particular Directorate affected or a type of complaint which is prevalent. If there were a significant number of cases in any one particular area, that might indicate a problem which the Council would seek to address.
10. In regard to classification of outside jurisdiction there were two complaints that the Ombudsman put into this category. The first of these matters related to a complaint about the way in which a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 were dealt with. The complainant was aggrieved that his requests had been classified as being vexatious. The Ombudsman classified the complaint as being 'outside jurisdiction' as the complaint had redress available by taking the matter up with the Information Commissioner rather than the Local Government Ombudsman.
11. The second complaint in this category was a complaint in regard to an Adult Services matter. The Ombudsman classified the complaint as being 'outside jurisdiction because the complaint was not made by the person affected by the Council's actions and the complainant did not have the consent of the person affected to make the complaint.

12. In regard to the matter classified as a local settlement the complainant had complained about the way a homelessness application was dealt with by the Council. The complainant was an individual with drug and alcohol problems and there had been issues over his co-operation with the homelessness assessment process. In the end the Council was able to identify appropriate accommodation. The Ombudsman in her final letter to the Council said we had been helpful in the way we had dealt with the matter and said that the Tenancy Services Manager's input in resolving the complaint was 'extremely useful'.
13. The complaint classified as 'no or insufficient evidence of maladministration' related to allegations that the Council failed to take appropriate action to deal with nuisance that the complainant said was occasional by the conduct of their neighbour. In its response to the Ombudsman the Council set out in detail the work that had been undertaken to deal with the allegations of nuisance. The Ombudsman concluded that there did not appear to have been any maladministration as there was ample evidence that the Council had taken the complaints seriously and acted properly in response.

Outcome of Consultation

14. The issues contained within this report do not require formal consultation.

Legal Implications

15. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

16. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Council Policy Framework

17. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework

Decision Deadline

18. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.

Recommendation

19. It is recommended that the contents of the report be noted.

Reasons

20. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons :-

- (a) It is important that Members are aware of the outcome of complaints made to the Local Ombudsman in respect of the Council's activities.
- (b) The Contents of this report do not suggest that further action is required.

Paul Wildsmith
Director of Corporate Services

Background Papers

Note: Correspondence with the Ombudsman is treated as confidential to preserve anonymity of complainants.

Catherine Whitehead : Ext. 2306
TAB