

## Standards Committee

21 August 2009

Local Government Ombudsman -  
Annual Review 2008/09



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## Report of Colette Longbottom, Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer

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### Purpose of the Report

- 1 To present the Standards Committee with complaints based information from the Local Government Ombudsman for 2008/09.

### Background

- 2 The Local Government Ombudsman is an independent service set up by the Government to investigate complaints about most council matters.
- 3 The Ombudsman undertakes a *health check* (now in its seventh year of operation) on each relevant authority and produces an Annual Letter which is aimed at helping councils learn from the outcome of complaints, underpinning effective working relationships and generally providing complaint based information to help councils assess and review performance.

### The Annual Review for County Durham Council for 2008/09

- 4 The 2008/09 annual review provides a summary of the complaints the Ombudsman has dealt with about County Durham Council. In view of the fact that on 1 April this year the County Council assumed responsibility for the areas and communities formerly served by the seven district councils this review is a summary of the complaints received and the complaints determined against each of these councils as well as the County Council.
- 5 The Ombudsman hopes this information will give the County Council some understanding of the likely number and the type of complaints it may have to deal with in 2009/2010 and beyond.
- 6 In addition a change in the way the Ombudsman's office operates means that the statistics about complaints received in 2008/09 are not directly comparable with those from 2007/08.

- 7 Since 1 April 2008 the new LGO Advice Team has been the single point of contact for all enquiries and new complaints. The number of telephone calls to the service has increased significantly since then to more than 3,000 a month. LGO advisers now provide comprehensive information and advice to people who telephone, write or e-mail. It enables citizens to make informed decisions about whether to put their complaint to the Ombudsman.
- 8 This means that direct comparisons with some previous year statistics are difficult and could be misleading. So the annual review focuses mainly on the 2008/09 statistics without drawing those comparisons. A copy of the Annual Review letter, is attached as Appendix 1 and this has also been placed on the Council's website.
- 9 Members of the Standards Committee are invited to consider the Annual Review letter as part of their regular review of complaints handling within the authority.

### **Background Papers**

Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2008/09

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