

Standards Committee

15 August 2006

Local Government Ombudsman
Annual Review 2005/06



Report of Lesley Davies, Acting Director of Corporate Services and Monitoring Officer

Purpose of the Report

1. To advise members about the publication of the Annual Review of the Local Government Ombudsman for England 2005/06 entitled 'Delivering Public Value'.

Overview

2. The Ombudsman investigate complaints by members of the public who consider that they have been caused injustice through maladministration by local authorities and other bodies within their jurisdiction. Their services are free, independent and impartial. The Annual Review highlights how the Commission has maintained its high level of performance, with particular emphasis to customer needs by providing an accessible service, delivering quality and timely decisions, and contributing to the improvement in the administration of local authority services as part of its public value agenda.
3. The overall number of complaints received in 2005/06 (18,626) remained broadly the same as the previous year. Planning, social services and education experienced growth, while housing benefit complaints continued to decline in number. The 23 per cent increase in education complaints was entirely due to an increase in the complaints about school admissions.
4. Decisions taken in the year totalled 10,991 after excluding premature complaints and those outside the Ombudsmen's jurisdiction. The Ombudsmen asked local authorities to provide a remedy in 27 per cent of this number – the same proportion as the previous year. They recommended payments of £1.67m, compared with £1.1m in 2004/05.
5. Further developmental activity, in addition to publishing annual letters, includes:
 - beginning work on a major project to provide a single point of first contact that people have with the Ombudsmen's offices, providing more advice and engaging them as active participants in resolving their complaint;

- publishing a special Casebook on complaints from children and young people, along with a leaflet for advisers and advocates who work with children and young people outlining the special help the Ombudsmen can provide;
 - forging relationships with voluntary organisations more generally, especially advice agencies, so as to improve awareness and understanding of the Ombudsmen's service among them and their clients;
 - working with the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman to seek powers to carry out joint investigations and issue joint reports and guidance; and
 - increasing the amount of training provided to local authorities in effective complaint handling to a total of more than 100 courses run in the year.
6. The Commission will publish its full Annual Report for 2005/06, including summary annual accounts, in September 2006.

The Future

7. The Commission has commenced work in response to customer satisfaction feedback and is undertaking a major project to improve the 'first contact' conception within its organisation. This includes a commitment to be clearer about the Ombudsman's jurisdiction and to provide advice which is accessible, responsive and helps to secure higher satisfaction levels for the complainant.
8. A copy of the document has been placed in the Members Resource Centre for information.

Members are asked to note the report.