

**Standards Committee**

**15 August 2007**

**Local Government Ombudsmen  
Annual Review 2006/07**



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

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**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To advise Members about the publication of the Annual Review of the Local Government Ombudsmen for England 2006/07 entitled 'Delivering Public Value'.

**Overview**

- 2 The Ombudsmen 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 2006/07 was 18,320 compared with 18,626 in the previous year. Planning and building control accounted for 24% of complaints, transport and highways 10%, Education 8%, Adult Care Services 4% and Children and Family Services 4%. It was noted that there had been a 12% fall in complaints about Education. This figure includes an even greater reduction of nearly 18% in complaints specifically about school admissions. These have reduced from 1,006 in 2005/06 to 827 in 2006/07.
- 4 The review provides further detailed information on the outcome of complaints and the types of remedy or settlement obtained, in the context of performance against the business goals of the Ombudsmen's office.
- 5 Further developmental activity, in addition to publishing annual letters, includes:
  - An access and advice centre is to be established next year, and the Commission sees this as a major initiative in improving the service to both complainants and councils.
  - Preparations are underway to provide joint investigations and joint reports with the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman where the complaints affect both jurisdictions. It is anticipated that such a facility will be available in August of this year; this is designed to give complainants a single point of reference.

- Partnership working has grown in local authorities and the Local Government Ombudsmen must adapt their working methods in order to ensure an effective service to complainants and councils. The Ombudsmen recently published a report on *Local partnerships and citizen redress*. It is hoped it will be of assistance to councils when grappling with the often complex governance arrangements that underpin partnerships and complaint handling.

6 The Commission will publish its full Annual Report for 2006/07, including summary annual accounts, in September 2007.

### **The Future**

7 As partnerships is a particular theme of the Local Government Bill now before Parliament the Commission will seek to modernise its own legislation to stay abreast of such developments. It will also seek to have measures put in place that will increase the accessibility of the service and clarify the jurisdiction of the Ombudsmen.

8 The Commission sees balancing the core business of investigating complaints with its increasingly proactive role as important. The service must acknowledge the changes that continue to happen in decision-making, service delivery and complaints handling in local government and that will be the challenge as the Commission takes the public value agenda to another level during the course of the coming year.

9 A copy of the document has been placed in the Members' Resource Centre for information.

Members are asked to note the report.

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