

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATION IN  
ENGLAND AND WALES (THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN)**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To bring the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Report to the attention of the Committee.

**Background**

2. The Standards Committee has constitutional responsibility for the oversight of the council's arrangements for handling customer complaints.
3. The most serious unresolved complaints made about council services are considered by the Local Government Ombudsman. Every year he issues a report to each local authority on their performance in that year. At Appendix 1 members will find the Ombudsman's report for 2009-10. This report covers complaints received by her over that period.
4. The Committee will note a change in the Ombudsman with responsibility for Wiltshire Council. Following on from Jerry White, Dr Jane Martin has now joined the Local Government Ombudsman. We hope to extend an invitation to her in the near future.

**Main issues for consideration by the Committee**

5. This is the first Annual Report from the Local Government Ombudsman since become Unitary. Compared to the previous year 2008/2009, complaints and/or enquires from the Ombudsman have dropped from 111 to 81 equating to a drop of 27%.
6. The response time for replying to Ombudsman enquiries is 28 calendar days. The Council's average for 2009/10 is 29.9 days. Although the Ombudsman notes that this is slightly outside the target time, the Head of Governance and Corporate Complaints Manager are encouraged by this, given the huge challenges which have faced this Council over that reporting period.
7. The Ombudsman noted that some complainants had commented that they were unsure whether their complaint was being dealt with through the Council's complaint procedure. The corporate complaints team is currently working with teams across the organisation advising when a response should include reference to the complaints procedure.
8. Whilst there is room for improvement, the Ombudsman notes that in the first year of a new authority, complaints handling has made a positive start.

### **Specific issues arising from the report**

9. Whilst the Ombudsman's noted the response time were slightly over the set deadline of 28 days, both the Head of Governance and Corporate Complaints Manager would ask the committee to take into account that one particular response to a complaint took 41 days to respond to. This was due to a delay from the Department of Children and Education under exceptional circumstances and one which is not expected to arise again. Had this not occurred it is firmly believed the response time would have certainly met the 28 deadline, if not been significantly under.
10. The Head of Governance and Corporate Complaints Manager would like to improve on the response time and will be working with both service teams and Complaints Managers in ensuring requests for information on receipt of an Ombudsman's complaint are dealt with within the set timescales.
11. To ensure a consistent approach in providing responses for Ombudsman investigations, the Corporate Complaints team has undertaken to organise regularly meetings with Complaints Managers across each of the service departments. It is hoped that once this is established, an invitation will be extended to an investigator from the Local Government Ombudsman's office to attend a meeting and offer an insight into the investigation process.

### **Recommendation**

To note the report

IAN GIBBONS – DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND  
MONITORING OFFICER

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**The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:**

None