

Wiltshire Council

Standards Committee

21st September 2011

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 2010-11. This report covers complaints received by her over that period.

Main issues for consideration by the Committee

4. In 2009/10 the Ombudsman received 81 complaints about Wiltshire Council. In 2010/11 the number had increased slightly to 90, of which 48 were investigated. 25 were referred back to the council for investigation through the council's internal complaints procedures.
5. The Ombudsman's target time for council's to respond to investigations is 28 days. This year Wiltshire Council exceeded this target with an average response time of 33.6 days. This is disappointing, although it should be noted that the average time was largely as a result of a few exceptional cases, rather than reflecting a trend across the authority. The Ombudsman noted that the principal areas of delay were in complaints relating housing and anti-social behaviour, both of which are handled by the same service directorate in the council. The authority has already decided to conduct a systems review of the complaints service and this will include consideration of how response times might be improved.
6. The Ombudsman noted that local settlements in cases where there had been an element of maladministration had been agreed in 10 cases. This is in line with the national average. The Ombudsman did not find it necessary to issue any formal reports finding maladministration leading to injustice.

Proposal

7. That the Committee notes the content of this report and keeps the council's arrangements for complaints handling under review.

IAN GIBBONS – DIRECTOR OF LAW & GOVERNANCE

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The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

None