

Standards Committee – 5 October 2005

Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review 2004-2005

Service Area: Corporate Support (Policy Unit)

Summary of report:

The purpose of this report is to:

- a) provide information on the number and range of complaints referred by the Local Government Ombudsman to the Council during 2004-2005
- b) provide information on the Ombudsman's annual letter for the year 2004-2005

Reasons for Lateness

Committee are requested to consider this report at tonight's meeting as urgent business as the next meeting of the committee is not until 12 January 2006, by which time the information in the report, which relates to the year 2004-05, will be less current.

Recommendations:

To note the contents of this report.

Resource and legal considerations

The Ombudsman service operates in accordance with provisions in the Local Government Act 1974, as amended by subsequent legislation. Councils are expected to respond to enquiries received in the Ombudsman within a set timescale – 15 working days for our initial response – and must give the Ombudsman access to files and other information relevant to the complaint, and to officers and Members who have had an involvement in the matter. Reports of maladministration must be considered by the Council, as must further reports issued in cases where the Council declines to implement the Ombudsman's recommendation, although ultimately the Ombudsman cannot require a Council to comply with his recommendations.

Citizen impact:

The Ombudsman is very largely concerned with specific complaints by individual residents and service users. However, the Ombudsman has a broader role in relation to good administrative practice, and seeks to identify through his conclusions on individual complaints, through the annual report and his annual letter to Councils, learning points of more general applicability.

The Ombudsman has in the past issued a number of guidance notes, including one on complaints handling, which have helped Councils to identify best practice. Also the Ombudsman issues an annual digest of significant cases, where the service believes that other Councils might learn from the case. These volumes of “case law” are circulated across the Council, as an example of how the organisation learns from complaints.

Community safety:

There are no specific community safety implications of this report.

Environmental impact:

A significant proportion of the Ombudsman’s caseload relates to issues of an environmental nature, including planning, highways, and housing.

Performance and risk management issues:

Ombudsman statistics are no longer the basis for any Best Value Indicators (PI’s). However, the Council retains local PIs on its handling of complaints; the current Performance Plan includes PIs relating to the total number of complaints received from the Ombudsman, and also the number resulting in a local settlement or a report of maladministration.

Equality implications:

The Ombudsman service provides leaflets in a number of languages, including Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Turkish and Urdu, in large print, and other formats. These leaflets are circulated within the Council, including local service points, and are available externally at the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Consultation:

Matters relating to the Ombudsman are coordinated by the Policy Unit, working council-wide through the complaints co-ordinators group. Details of the Ombudsman service are available in the Council’s Tellus leaflet, and via our web site.

Vision 2008:

Complaints handling, and the ability of residents and other service users to make complaints about our services, are integral to the Council's vision, and specifically to our strategic priorities to make it easier to access local services, and to listen to what local people want.

Background papers: None**Contact officers:**

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Signed:**Executive Director: David Martin****Date:**

1. FURTHER INFORMATION

- 1.1 The Commission for Local Administration, commonly referred to as the Local Government Ombudsman service ('the Ombudsman'), was established by Part 3 of the Local Government Act 1974. There are three Local Government Ombudsmen in England and they each deal with complaints from different parts of the country. They investigate complaints about most council matters including housing, planning, education, social services, consumer protection, drainage and council tax. The Ombudsmen can investigate complaints about how the council has done something, but they cannot question what a council has done simply because someone does not agree with it. The Ombudsman who deals with this Council is Jerry White who is based in Coventry.

2. THE OMBUDSMAN'S PROCEDURES

- 2.1 Each complaint sent to the Ombudsman, on a pre-printed complaint form, or simply by letter, is looked at by one of the Ombudsman's team of investigators. A small number of complaints are rejected at this stage: they may be outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction; the complainant may have other remedies (e.g. a tribunal, or formal appeal procedure); the complaint may be submitted too late to be considered (normally over 12 months after the incident or issue arose); or it may not relate to administrative matters. These cases are generally referred to the relevant Council purely for its information. Also, in a significant number of cases, the Ombudsman decides to pass back the complaint to the Council, to be investigated through the Council's own complaints procedures.
- 2.2 All other cases are referred to the Council concerned, with a written response required, currently within a 15 working day period. The Ombudsman will look at the Council's response, asking for further information or clarification as appropriate, before deciding whether to take the matter further. He may at this stage consider that the Council has acted reasonably, and therefore decide not to pursue the complaint. He may consider that the Council has settled the matter locally or on occasion he may suggest to the Council a local settlement at this stage.
- 2.3 Where the Ombudsman considers that the Council's initial response leaves matters unclear, he will continue with his investigation procedure, to establish and record all relevant facts, so that he can reach a decision on the complaint. This will normally involve an inspection of all relevant files, and interviews with all individuals involved in the matter to a significant degree, including any Members, employees, ex-employees, and the complainant(s).
- 2.4 After carrying out these enquiries, the Ombudsman will either end the investigation, if no fault on the Council's part is found; he may again propose a local settlement; or he will prepare a draft report setting out the facts. The Council and all those who have been interviewed (see paragraph 2.3 above) will be asked to comment on the draft report before the Ombudsman publishes his formal investigation report, which will include his conclusions and recommended course of action.
- 2.5 The formal investigation report, including the Ombudsman's conclusions and recommended course of action, when it is published, will be sent by the Ombudsman to the complainant, the Council, to the Councillor (if any) who had counter-signed the complaint, and also to the news media. The Council must publish a notice in the local press, within two weeks, and must make the report available for viewing. Within three months, the report should be considered by a Committee of the Council and the Ombudsman advised of the Council's response to his recommendations. The Council's constitution places responsibility for considering any reports of this nature with this Committee.

- 2.6 If the Ombudsman is not satisfied with the Council's response, he may issue a further report, which the Council must consider. If the Ombudsman considers the Council's response to the further report to be unsatisfactory, provisions in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 require the Council to publish in 2 editions of a local newspaper of the Ombudsman's choice, a notice setting out details of the complaint, the Ombudsman's proposed course of action, and, if the Council wishes, its own reasons for not following the Ombudsman's recommendations.

3. STATISTICAL REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

During the year 2004-2005 the Ombudsman forwarded 48 new cases to the Council. Cases received by the Council are dealt with by the Policy Unit, part of Corporate Support, now located within the Social Care and Inclusion directorate, who work with other Council services to prepare a response.

3.2 Analysis by nature of complaint

The majority of complaints against the Council concern planning, highways, and social services matters; a pattern which mirrors the national picture. Further details are set out in the attached annual letter, including comparisons with 2002-2003 and 2003-2004. Prior to the transfer of the Council's housing stock to Walsall Housing Group and WATMOS, a significant number of complaints were housing related, in line with national statistics.

- 3.3 Set out below is an analysis of the 52 complaints considered to a conclusion by the Ombudsman during this period; the difference in numbers reflects the fact that some cases received in one year will be concluded in the following year.

3.4 Analysis by outcome

Of the 52 cases concluded by the Ombudsman in 2004-2005, none resulted in a formal investigation report.

In summary, the 52 cases can be divided into the categories set out below.

	2004-2005
Cases rejected by the Ombudsman without seeking the Council's response; also cases passed back to the Council's own complaints procedures	17
Cases investigated by the Ombudsman, discontinued with no maladministration found	22
Cases investigated by the Ombudsman, considered to have been settled locally	13
Cases investigated by the Ombudsman, leading to a formal investigation report finding:	
maladministration, no injustice;	0
maladministration with injustice;	0
no maladministration	0
Total	52

- 3.5 As Members will see, the Ombudsman has issued no reports of maladministration to the Council during 2004-2005. In fact, of the 441 complaints received in the eight years to March 2005, only four formal reports have found maladministration on the Council's part, and there have been no findings of maladministration against the Council for the last four years.

4. LOCAL SETTLEMENTS

Brief details of the 13 local settlements are outlined below:

1	Complaint concerned information forwarded to complainant on their Council Tax Benefit and delay in calculating Council Tax Benefit. Agreed and actioned local settlement; to send a letter of apology and cheque for £200 for distress caused by the Council's actions.
2	Complaint concerned damage to outbuildings from adjacent sports ground. Agreed and actioned local settlement; to carry out repairs to outbuilding, reimburse the costs of a structural survey undertaken for the complainant and send a cheque for £100 for time and trouble in making complaint.
3	Housing related complaint concerning service charge, in particular how this was broken down. Agreed and actioned local settlement; to apologise for delays, send breakdown of service charge, send cheque for £250 for time and trouble in making complaint.
4	Complaint concerned delay in processing Right to Buy application. Agreed and actioned local settlement; to apologise and send cheque for £650 for uncertainty, inconvenience and time and trouble in making complaint.
5, 6, 7	Three complainants concerned about bathing/washing arrangements. Agreed and actioned local settlement; to reassess arrangements and to make changes/adaptations to facilities as appropriate.
8	Complaint concerned delay in processing claim for compensation for damage to car. Agreed and actioned local settlement; to apologise and send a cheque for £75.
9	A complex complaint concerning use of play area near complainant's home. Agreed and actioned local settlement; to put up 'no ball games' sign and send cheque for £100 for time and trouble in making the complaint. Complainant asked that the payment be made to a charity of her choice.
10	Complaint concerned transfer of property to Walsall Housing Group and delay in complainant completing purchase of property. Agreed and actioned local settlement; to pay additional costs incurred in the sum of £393.30 including amount for anxiety and uncertainty.
11	Complaint concerned delay in processing Housing and Council Tax Benefit claim. Agreed and actioned local settlement; to apologise and pay compensation for delay, in the sum of £450.
12	Complaint concerned information/action in relation to Council Tax arrears. Agreed and actioned local settlement; to apologise and make payment of £200 for distress caused, time and trouble in making the complaint.
13	Homelessness related complaint concerning request for transfer to another Local Authority area. The Ombudsman agreed that a local settlement had been reached when Council completed the transfer.

5. ANNUAL LETTER

As last year the Ombudsman has sent each Council an annual letter, setting out details of the Council's 'performance' during the year, and offering advice and guidance. The letter sent to the Council by the Ombudsman, in June 2005 is attached to this report. The main points are as follows:

- 5.1 The letter gives a summary of **complaints received by the Ombudsman**. The number of complaints that the Ombudsman has classified as 'premature' (sent to the Ombudsman, without recourse to the Council's own complaints procedure) was below average, suggesting that our local procedures are widely known and accessible.
- 5.2 The letter sets out **details of complaints which were upheld**, in part or in total. As noted above, there were no reports of maladministration. There were 13 local settlements. In all cases, the service concerned has acted as agreed, and where necessary looked at procedures and made changes where appropriate (see paragraph 4 above).
- 5.3 The letter also notes that our **average initial response time** of 25 days exceeds the Ombudsman's 21 day timescale (15 working days). Members should note that the Ombudsman has recognised that this 21 day target is difficult to achieve for all councils and that from 1 July 2005, the target is 28 days (20 working days). It is encouraging to note that the speed of responses locally has continued to improve from 33 days in 2001-02 to 25 days in 2004-05 and the Ombudsman has commented positively on this.

6. CHANGES TO OMBUDSMAN SERVICE GENERALLY

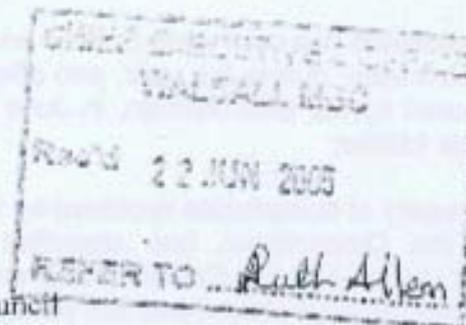
- 6.1 The Cabinet Office is currently consulting on matters relating to the Local Government Ombudsman, the Parliamentary Ombudsman, and the Health Service Ombudsman. The proposals would allow the three services to work more closely together, and to work jointly on complaints which might cross over from one jurisdiction to another. There are two main changes proposed which would have an impact on the Local Ombudsman service. Firstly, the paper proposes extending the power of the three Ombudsmen so that, in appropriate cases, they could offer other remedies than investigation; for instance, they might offer mediation. Secondly, the proposals would in limited circumstances allow the Ombudsman to investigate complaints without the complainant having to make his/her complaint to the local council first. The Policy Unit is currently seeking the views of council services on these changes, preparatory to a written response before the Cabinet Office deadline of November 18th. The changes, if agreed, would be implemented by government order to take effect during 2006.

21 June 2005



The Commission for
Local Administration in England

Mrs A Shepperd
Chief Executive
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Civic Centre
Darwall Street
WALSALL WS1 1TP



Jerry White
Local Government Ombudsman

Neville Jones
Deputy Ombudsman

Our ref: B1/JRW/ajw

If telephoning contact: Stephen Purser on 024 7682 0026
Email: s.purser@lgo.org.uk

Dear Mrs Shepperd

Annual Letter 2004/05

I wrote to you in January 2005 to explain our proposals for annual letters for 2005 and to invite your comments on the format of statistics and plans to make the letters more widely available in the future. We are grateful to all those councils who replied.

As a result of the comments received, we have decided not to include the proposed simplified heading of 'complaints upheld in full or part' above the figures for reports finding maladministration and local settlements. We agree with those who say this would misrepresent those cases where a local settlement is offered by a council before I, or one of my colleagues, have decided whether to uphold a complaint; and that it could undermine this practice, which would not be to the benefit of complainants.

There was widespread support for our proposals to put annual letters on our web site and to share the letters with the Audit Commission, so we will go ahead with this from 2006. We will wait for four weeks after sending you the letter before making it more widely available in these ways to give you an opportunity to consider and review the letter first. If a letter is found to contain any factual inaccuracy we will reissue it.

I am writing now to give you my reflections on the complaints received against your authority and dealt with by my office over the last year. I hope that in reviewing your own performance you will find this letter a useful addition to other information you hold highlighting how people experience or perceive your services.

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DX 702110 Coventry 6
www.lgo.org.uk

In addition to this narrative there are two attachments which form an integral part of this letter: statistical data covering a three year period and a note to help the interpretation of the statistics.

Complaints received

We received 48 complaints about your authority. This is on a par with last year (when we received 49) and is considerably lower than the figure for 2002/2003 (69). The number is not exceptional for such a large and populous area. It is comparable with a number of your neighbouring authorities, and considerably lower than at least one of them. If you wish to compare, full details of the number of complaints we receive about all councils are published in our Annual Report.

No department of the Council generates a disproportionate number of complaints: the largest number this year concerned planning (11), followed by highways and housing (eight each) and social services (six).

Decisions on complaints

Of the 52 complaints decided last year, 11 were deemed premature and six were outside my jurisdiction. In 22 cases my staff decided, after making enquiries, that there was no justification for further investigation. I issued no reports against the authority.

In 13 cases the Council agreed to local settlements of complaints. In some, the settlements were quite significant. In one housing complaint, the complainant lived next door to a football club whose buildings were in a poor state of repair. The condition of the stand in the football ground had caused damage to the complainant's property. The Council agreed to repair the property (at a cost of approximately £5,000), pay surveyor's costs, and draw up a new lease with the football club including a tougher repairing clause.

In another case, the Council had failed to explain clearly to the complainant, a Council tenant, the basis on which rent and service charges were calculated. The Council agreed to provide a full breakdown, apologise for delays and lack of clarity in responding to the complainant, and pay £250 compensation for time, trouble, frustration and delay. In a third, which concerned failure to process an application for housing benefit and council tax benefit, the Council agreed to apologise and pay the complainant £400 in compensation.

Local settlements are a good outcome for all the parties – council, complainant and Ombudsman. Once a council recognises there has been some fault, we always welcome proposals for a suitable remedy provided informally and as early as possible.

/...

Your Council's complaints procedure and handling of complaints

If we receive a complaint we regard as 'premature' (that is to say, a complaint the Council has not had a chance to address), we refer it back to the Council to deal with it in the first instance through its own complaints procedure. Once it has gone through the Council's procedure the complainant, if still unsatisfied, can ask us to look at it again. We refer to these as 'resubmitted' complaints. If, after investigating, we find fault in a large number of resubmitted complaints, this would normally set alarm bells ringing: we would be concerned that a council's procedure was allowing justified complaints to slip through the net. In your Council's case, only six of the total of 52 complaints were 'resubmitted' complaints, and none has resulted in a finding of fault. This does not, in my view, point to any problem with the Council's complaint handling.

Training in complaint handling

Last year, we told you about the training we were developing for local authorities on complaints handling as part of our role in promoting good administrative practice and asked for your views. Our pilot programme has been extremely successful with very positive feedback from the local authorities involved, so we are now increasing the amount of training that we can provide. Sue Dalley, from your social services department, attended a course with other social services complaint officers, organised by the West Midlands Complaint Officers Group. You might find that officers from other departments would also benefit from our training.

A key element of the training is our Effective Complaint Handling course, specifically developed for council staff who deal with complaints as a significant part of their job. This one-day course is aimed at those who handle complaints in the higher stages of the authority's complaints procedure, up to the point of deciding the complaint. A further course has been developed on Complaint Handling for Front-line Staff and other specialist areas are also being considered to meet the needs of local authorities and further promote good practice.

All courses are presented by an experienced LGO investigator, so participants benefit from their knowledge and expertise of complaint handling. Courses can be delivered to a single local authority or to staff from a group of authorities at a regional centre. We do have to charge for the training, just to cover our costs, but the feedback has shown that councils consider it good value for money.

I have enclosed some further information about our complaints handling training courses including contact details.

Liaison with LGO

We ask for information on complaints to be sent within 21 days of receipt, and on average your Council's response to first enquiries has taken just under 25 days. No department of the Council takes an exceptionally long time to respond: the longest

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response times were for planning complaints (average 28.8 days) and the shortest for education complaints (14.5 days).

Your performance is an improvement on 2003/2004, when your average was 28.8 days. In the year before that, the average was 30.9 days. So you have made creditable efforts to bring the response times down over the last few years.

Any delay in responding can cause complainants additional anxiety and frustration while waiting for an initial view on their complaint. Having said that, we recognise that it can be difficult for councils to meet the current 21 day target and provide good quality, comprehensive responses to our enquires so, from 1 July 2005, we are revising this target to 28 days.

I understand from my staff that they consider your link officer helpful and co-operative. If she is interested in joining us for a seminar here in Coventry – a regular event we run to help link officers understand the practices and principles that underpin our work – she is welcome to contact Louise McCaig in this office on 024 7682 0019.

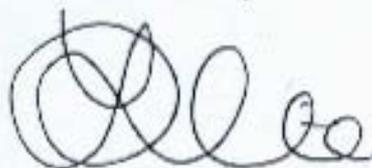
Conclusions/general observations

I welcome this opportunity to give you my reflections about the complaints my office has dealt with over the past year. I hope that you find the information and assessment provided useful when seeking improvements to your Council's services. I would again very much welcome any comments you may have on the form and content of the letter.

Last year a number of councils asked if I could visit the council to present the letter in person and to discuss it with councillors or staff. I, and my senior colleagues, would be happy to consider any similar requests this year and we will do our best to meet them within the limits of the resources available to us.

I am also arranging for a copy of this letter and its attachments to be sent to you electronically so that you can distribute it easily within the council and post it on your website should you decide to do this.

Yours sincerely



J R White
Local Government Ombudsman

Complaints received by subject area	Education	Highways	Housing (not incl. HB)	Housing Benefit	Local Taxation	Other	Planning	Social Services	Total
01/04/2004 - 31/03/2005	3	8	8	1	3	8	11	6	48
2003 / 2004	4	5	12	1	0	11	9	7	49
2002 / 2003	5	3	10	3	3	15	12	10	69

Note: these figures will include complaints that were made prematurely to the Ombudsman and which we referred back to the authority for consideration.

Decisions	Ml reps	LS	M reps	NM reps	No mal	Omb disc	Outside jurisdiction	Premature complaints	Total excl premature	Total
01/04/2004 - 31/03/2005	0	13	0	0	11	11	6	11	41	52
2003 / 2004	0	7	0	0	22	5	7	10	41	51
2002 / 2003	0	5	0	0	27	3	10	14	45	59

See attached notes for an explanation of the headings in this table.

Response times	FIRST ENQUIRIES	
	No. of First Enquiries	Avg no. of days to respond
01/04/2004 - 31/03/2005	29	24.9
2003 / 2004	30	28.8
2002 / 2003	23	30.9

Average local authority response times 01/04/2004 to 31/03/2005

Types of authority	<= 21 days %	22 - 28 days %	> = 29 days %
District Councils	22	38	40
Unitary Authorities	11	24	65
Metropolitan Authorities	17	44	39
County Councils	12	59	29
London Boroughs	9	21	70
National Park Authorities	60	20	20

Notes to assist interpretation of the Commission's local authority statistics

1. Complaints received

This information shows the number of complaints against your council received by the LGO, broken down by service area and in total within the periods given. These figures include complaints that are made prematurely to the LGO (see below for more explanation) and which we referred back to the council for consideration.

2. Decisions

This information records the number of decisions made by the LGO, broken down by outcome, within the periods given. This number will not be the same as the number of complaints received, because some complaints are made in one year and decided in the next. Below we set out a key explaining the outcome categories.

MI reps: where the LGO has concluded an investigation and issued a formal report finding maladministration causing injustice. (The figures for the year 2002/3 may include reports which had a finding of 'local settlement'. For legal reasons, the LGO no longer issues reports with this finding.)

LS (Local settlements): decisions by letter discontinuing our investigation because action has been agreed by the authority and accepted by the Ombudsman as a satisfactory outcome for the complainant.

M reps: where the LGO has concluded an investigation and issued a formal report finding maladministration but causing no injustice to the complainant.

NM reps: where the LGO has concluded an investigation and issued a formal report finding no maladministration by the council.

No mal: decisions by letter discontinuing an investigation because we have found no, or insufficient, evidence of maladministration.

Omb disc: decisions by letter discontinuing an investigation in which we have exercised the Ombudsman's general discretion not to pursue the complaint. This can be for a variety of reasons, but the most common is that we have found no or insufficient injustice to warrant pursuing the matter further.

Outside jurisdiction: These are cases which were outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.

Premature complaints: These are decisions that the complaint is premature. The LGO does not normally consider a complaint unless a council has first had an opportunity to deal with that complaint itself. So if someone complains to the LGO without having taken the matter up with a council, the LGO will usually refer it back to the council as a 'premature complaint' to see if the council can itself resolve the matter.

Total excl premature: These are all decisions excluding those where we referred the complaint back to the council as 'premature'.

3. Response times

These figures record the average time your council takes to respond to our first enquiries on a complaint. We measure this in calendar days from the date we send our letter/fax/email to the date that we receive a substantive response from the council. Your own figures may differ somewhat, since they are likely to be recorded from the date you receive our letter until the despatch of your response.

4. Average local authority response times 2004/05

This table gives comparative figures for average response times by authorities in England, by type of authority, within three time bands.

Training from the Local Government Ombudsman



The Commission for
Local Administration in England

Dealing well with complaints is a vital part of good customer care. Local authorities are becoming more and more aware of how good complaint handling can improve customer relations, help their organisations to learn and improve, and maximise public value.

Over more than three decades of complaint investigation we have developed an unequalled overview of the way local authorities deal with complaints – and a unique perspective on what constitutes good practice in complaint handling. In response to an increasing demand from authorities for us to share our knowledge and experience with them, and as part of our role in promoting good administration, we are now offering a range of training courses on dealing with complaints – all devised by us with the particular needs of local government in mind.

Details of the courses

All our courses are presented by experienced LGO investigative staff, so participants can be confident that their presenter has genuine practical expertise in complaint handling and can draw on a fund of real knowledge about the theory and practice covered.

In addition to the courses which we describe below, we are currently developing new courses applying good investigative practice to different subject areas of complaints. We are also working to produce a menu of training modules from which authorities will be able to select the ones which they think best meet their particular needs.

The charges we make for our 'off the peg' courses just cover our costs in delivering training (see below for more details). We believe they represent very good value for money.

Effective Complaint Handling

'Effective Complaint Handling' is a one-day course we have developed specifically for local authority staff who deal with complaints as a significant part of their job. It is aimed at people who handle complaints in the higher stages of an authority's complaints procedure, after the informal stage and up to the point of making a final decision on the complaint.

This is the course for which we've had greatest demand to date, and it has been extremely well received.

The aims of this course are to help participants -

- define complaints accurately
- identify and use sources of information
- make and communicate robust decisions
- resolve complaints quickly and appropriately

The training day is designed to be interactive, and involves a variety of activities and materials. It begins with participants drawing on their own experiences of customer care, and concludes with an exploration of the benefits of good complaint handling to their organisation.

Much of the training day is centred around a case study which illustrates and informs about the various stages of complaint handling. Participants are given basic details of a fictional but realistic complaint. They are then asked to define the complaint; to collect, analyse and evaluate information about it; to reach a reasoned decision, including a proposed remedy; and to consider how to communicate the decision to the complainant. At all stages the presenter offers guidance and insights on applying the LGO's principles of good practice.

Effective Complaint Handling in Social Services complaints

This course applies the principles and practice of good complaint handling to investigating complaints under the current statutory social services complaints procedures. It has been devised for senior social services staff and independent investigators who deal with Stage 2 complaints. The central case study uses a social services complaint which raises and addresses crucial issues in this field of investigation.

'Effective Complaint Handling' courses in other specific subject areas are being researched and developed. For further information contact us.

Good Complaint Handling for Front Line Staff

Front line staff have a crucial part to play in the early identification and resolution of complaints. Their dealings with customers who are unhappy with services can often determine which issues will end up being pursued as formal complaints, as well as influencing complainants' views about the authority.

The one-day course which we have devised for front line staff aims to help them develop their awareness and understanding of -

- issues in good customer care
- factors which make the experience of complaining a good or bad one
- their role in
 - distinguishing complaints from other contacts e.g. service requests
 - assisting customers to clarify their complaints
 - managing expectations, for the benefit of the authority and its customers
 - settling complaints rapidly where appropriate, and
 - improving services and customer satisfaction

A central element in the training day is the use of a case study. In this exercise front line staff home in on the way they can affect the course and even outcomes of complaints as well as customer experiences of the process.

Tailored Events

As well as providing these course packages we will carry on responding positively, where our resources permit, to requests from authorities for us to devise courses tailored to their particular needs. In such cases we have to charge for course development time as well as course delivery. We will be able to supply an estimate on request.

Prices

Our 'Effective Complaint Handling' courses (generic or subject specific) and the course in 'Good Complaint Handling for Front Line Staff' are available at the following prices:

One-day course for a group of up to 15, with one presenter:	£750
One-day course for a group of up to 30, with two presenters:	£1270

[Prices exclude VAT. No extra charge made for trainer's travel and expenses. Prices assume you will supply the venue for the course. Full details of venue requirements and of our terms and conditions for supplying training provided on request.]

Smaller authorities with fewer than 15 staff to put forward for training may wish to get together with neighbouring authorities to hold a regional LGO training event, and so share the costs.

For further information or bookings please contact Anne Carus at our York office:

Local Government Ombudsman's Office, Beverley House, 17 Shipton Road,
YORK, YO30 5FZ

tel. 01904 380226 or e-mail a.carus@lgo.org.uk