

Meeting: STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Agenda Item:

Date: 15 July 2009

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THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN'S ANNUAL REVIEW FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2009

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1 PURPOSE

To review the Ombudsman's complaint statistics for 2008/9.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

To note this report.

3 BACKGROUND AND DETAILS

- 3.1** The Local Government Ombudsman provides end of year statistics to every local authority, these are followed by an annual letter, usually issued in June.
- 3.2** The Stevenage statistics for 2008/9 are set out in the Appendix to this report. There is also attached a sheet showing the number of complaints over the past three years and the average of local authority response times.
- 3.3** The Ombudsman does not recognise Stevenage Homes Limited as a separate body for the purpose of complaints therefore the Council deals with all housing complaints which are raised with the Council.
- 3.4** In his annual review for 2008/9 the Ombudsman indicated that he had received twenty-two enquiries and complaints, twelve of which concerned housing. Of the nine complaints passed to the investigation team, six concerned housing matters, four concerned housing repairs and one each about housing allocations and homelessness; the remainder concerned a planning application, anti-social behaviour and local taxation.
- 3.5** Two of the ten decisions made by the Ombudsman last year were outside jurisdiction; one concerned council tax and affected most of the inhabitants in the area and the other housing benefit.
- 3.6** Four of the eight complaints within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction were local

settlements; the Council was asked to pay compensation of £1,450 in total. The cases concerned were three housing disrepair complaints and one housing allocations matter. In all three of the disrepair cases the Council agreed to payments of compensation including the housing allocations case on which it consulted with the Ombudsman on a revised allocations policy. The Ombudsman found no fault with the Council's action but indicated that the Council may draw lessons from such cases. One involved homelessness; the Ombudsman indicated that the Council had not taken proper account of its duty and suggested that it review its procedures to ensure that no problems recur in this area in future.

- 3.7** The Council is asked to respond to the Ombudsman's enquiries within 28 days; the Council's average response times were 29.6 days which the Ombudsman considered to be disappointing, nonetheless it is a significant improvement to recent years.

4 IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1** None.

APPENDICES

- The Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review for the year ended 31 March 2009