

21 June 2006

FIRST CLASS

Mr P Murdock  
Chief Executive  
Gedling Borough Council  
Civic Centre, Arnot Hill Park  
Arnold NOTTINGHAM NG5 6LU



The Commission for  
Local Administration in England

**Anne Seex**  
Local Government Ombudsman

**Neil Hobbs**  
Deputy Ombudsman

Our Ref: Annual Letter 06/C/AS3/sh  
(Please quote our reference when contacting us)

**If telephoning contact: Mrs Agnew's Personal Assistant on 01904 380201**  
**If e-mailing: [st3york@lgo.org.uk](mailto:st3york@lgo.org.uk)**

Dear Mr Murdock

### **Annual Letter 2005/06**

i am writing 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.

This year we will publish the letters on our website and share them with the Audit Commission as there was widespread support from authorities for us to do this. We will wait for four weeks after this 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.

In addition to the narrative below 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**

In the year ending 31 March 2006 I received 18 complaints against the Council a figure which matched exactly the number received in the previous year. Once again complaints about planning matters comprised the majority of complaints sent to me. I received 10 complaints about planning which means that 55 % of all complaints against the Council are about such matters. The numbers are not large but the Council might /.....

wish to reflect upon the fact that nationally complaints about planning issues amount to approximately 23% of all complaints made to the Ombudsman.

### **Decisions on complaints**

I took 15 decisions in the last year a figure which differs from the number of complaints I received because of work in hand at the beginning and end of the year. Four complaints sent to me were premature in the sense that it was apparent that the Council was unaware of the complaints and had been given no opportunity to address them. I sent each of these complaints to you with the request that they be considered through the Council's Internal complaints procedure.

Two complaints were outside of my jurisdiction while in 3 other cases I exercised my discretion not to pursue the complaints. In 5 cases I found no evidence of maladministration by the Council and in the remaining case, a housing repair matter the Council, accepted that something had gone wrong and agreed to pay a small amount of compensation to the complainant.

### **Other findings**

As you know I asked for comprehensive replies to my enquiries to reach me within 28 days. I am happy to record that in the year to 31 March 2006 replies from the Council reached me, on average, in 21.1 days. I am grateful to the Council for its co-operation in this respect.

### **Training in complaint handling**

Our training in complaint handling is proving very popular with authorities and we continue to receive very positive feedback from participants. Over the last year we have delivered more than 100 courses from the range of three courses that we now offer as part of our role in promoting good administrative practice.

Effective Complaint Handling was the first course we developed, aimed at staff who deal with complaints as a significant part of their job. Since then we have introduced courses in complaint handling for front line staff and in handling social services complaints.

All courses are presented by an experienced investigator so participants benefit from their knowledge and expertise of complaint handling.

I have enclosed some information on the range of courses available together with contact details for enquiries and bookings.

### **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.

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Mr P Murdock

I would again be happy to consider requests for myself or senior colleagues to visit the Council to present and discuss the letter with Councillors or staff. We will do our best to meet the requests 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.

The Council should know that some re-organisation has taken place within my office and that the Assistant Ombudsman leading the team with responsibility for complaints against the Council is now Mrs Rosemary Agnew. Mrs Agnew will be very pleased to deal with any queries you may have about this letter and will be equally happy to be your first point of contact during the coming year should you have any issues of concern or should you need advice about a complaint within your own system.

Yours sincerely

Anne Seex  
Local Government Ombudsman

Enc: statistical data  
note on interpretation of statistics  
information on complaints handling training courses