

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

FROM: Head of Corporate Services

REPORT NUMBER **G84**

TO: **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
(STEWARDSHIP) COMMITTEE**

DATE OF MEETING: 29 August 2007

ANNUAL MONITORING OF COMPLAINTS

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Council has received its annual letter from the Local Government Ombudsman. The letter includes information on the number of complaints received by the Ombudsman about the Council, decisions made broken down by decision reason, and the time it takes for the Council to respond to initial enquiries made by the Ombudsman.
- 1.2 This report also provides information on all formal complaints made to the Council, whether or not referred to the Ombudsman.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the report be noted.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The complaints handling training courses cost £810 for up to 15 officers. Two such courses would be adequate for the Council's needs and the costs can be met from existing training budgets.

4. KEY INFORMATION

- 4.1 The annual letter (Appendix 1) reports that in 2006/07 the Ombudsman received 13 complaints against the Council. Past year's figures are:

2005/06	10
2004/05	21
2003/04	12
2002/03	25

- 4.2 The Ombudsman would expect to see some fluctuation in the number of complaints from year to year.
- 4.3 No maladministration decisions have been made against the Council and only one local settlement has been made.
- 4.4 Of the 13 complaints, six concerned planning matters. The Ombudsman reported that the predominance of planning complaints is not unusual for District Councils and reflects previous years and the nature of the Council's area. Last year five complaints concerned planning matters and 11 the year before.

- 4.5 Over the last two years the Council has made a number of changes to improve the handling of Ombudsman complaints, including reducing the number of premature complaints to the Ombudsman, reducing the time taken to reply to the Ombudsman's enquiries, and creating a link from the Council's website to the Local Government Ombudsman's website. Last year a representative of the Ombudsman attended a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee to comment on the annual letter and support the initiatives the Council was taking to improve performance.
- 4.6 In 2005/06 the Complaints Procedure was promoted and published widely, and this seemed to have an effect on the number of premature complaints to the Ombudsman, with only one being reported. For 2006/07 this figure has risen to five. The Ombudsman has pointed out that, whilst this is more than in the previous year, the proportion of such complaints is in line with the national average of 28%. However, further promotion of the Complaints Procedure will be carried out to try and reduce this figure again.
- 4.7 The Ombudsman expects Councils to respond to his enquiries within 28 days. Babergh's figures continue to improve:-

	% of Councils meeting 28 day target	Babergh's Performance
2006/07	48.9%	25.3 days
2005/06	53.2%	27.7 days
2004/05	-	28.3 days

- 4.8 The complaints handling training courses offered by the Local Government Ombudsman have been investigated and prove to be good value for money. Complaints handling forms part of the 2007/08 Corporate Training Plan.
- 4.9 Appendix 2 sets out a summary of complaints received in Mike Hammond's and Helen Style's directorates for 2006/07.
- 4.10 Mike Hammond's directorate dealt with 33 complaints compared to 31 last year. All have been resolved.
- 4.11 Helen Style's directorate dealt with five complaints compared with six last year. Again all have been resolved.

5. **APPENDICES**

- (a) Appendix 1 – Annual letter 2006/07 Appendix 1a, Appendix 1b
 (b) Appendix 2 – Complaints received by Mike Hammond's and Helen Style's Directorates

6. **BACKGROUND PAPERS REFERRED TO:**

None.

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