

## Complaints about Brent Council

### Annual report 2002/03

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This is the fourth annual report on the operation of the Council's complaints procedure. It sets out the Council's performance under its own procedure, and analyses complaints dealt with by the Ombudsman.

#### 2. Complaints to the Ombudsman

##### Number of Ombudsman complaints

- 2.1. In 2002/03 the Ombudsman considered only 83 complaints about the Council. This was a drop of 15% over the previous year, and 71% since 1999/00. Over the past three years Brent's performance has improved faster than any other London council. Brent continued to have fewer Ombudsman complaints than most of the London Boroughs with similar socio-economic profiles – including Ealing, Newham, Waltham Forest – and continued to do better than Camden and Lewisham, both of which have a reputation for excellence in complaints handling. It now rates 15<sup>th</sup> out of the London Boroughs in terms of numbers of complaints considered by the Ombudsman, up from 17<sup>th</sup> in 2001/02. This is a considerable improvement from 1999/00 when Brent ranked 31<sup>st</sup> (worse than all other Boroughs except Lambeth). This has to be seen in the context of Brent being absolutely rigorous in making sure that its customers are aware of their right to approach the Ombudsman.
- 2.2. The London average for number of Ombudsman complaints considered in 2002/03 was 138. So at 83, Brent continues now to perform considerably better than average.

**Table 1: Brent complaints made to the Ombudsman**

	Complaints closed by the LGO
1999/00	286
2000/01	238
2001/02	98
2001/03	83

##### Outcome of Ombudsman complaints

- 2.3. For the second year running, the Ombudsman did not issue any formal reports against the Council.
- 2.4. The Ombudsman did not uphold the vast majority of the Brent complaints that he considered. In 2002/03, only 7 of the 83 Ombudsman complaints were closed on the basis of local settlements. (This is where, as a result of the Ombudsman's involvement, the Council accepted that something had gone wrong and took steps to put matters right.) About 27% of the complaints made to him were out of his jurisdiction. In all the other complaints he found either that the Council was not at fault, or that it had already done sufficient itself to put matters right.

- 2.5. In terms of numbers of complaints settled locally by the Ombudsman, the Council tied with Sutton in fifth place in the league table. Brent was beaten only by Bexley, Havering, Richmond and Hillingdon. For a Council with the socio economic profile of Brent, this is a significant achievement. The number of complaints settled locally dropped about 80% from 2001/02. This shows that the Council continues to get better and better at dealing with complaints under its own complaints procedure and, if things have gone wrong, making sure they are put right. (The average number of complaints settled locally across London was 58, compared to Brent's seven.)
- 2.6. Since 1999/00, the number of Brent complaints settled locally by the Ombudsman has dropped by a massive 95%. No other London council has come even near this rate of improvement. The second most improved London council in this regard was Camden, with a 35% drop in locally settled complaints over the same period.

**Table 2: Outcome of Ombudsman complaints**

	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03
Local settlements	130 (45%)	112 (47%)	34(35%)	7 (8%)
No maladministration	39 (14%)	49 (21%)	18(18%)	26(31%)
Ombudsman's discretion	72 (25%)	46 (19%)	26(27%)	28(34%)
Outside jurisdiction	35 (12%)	26 (11%)	20(20%)	22(27%)
Report – Maladministration	8 (3%)	4 (2%)	0	0
Report – No maladministration	1 (0%)	0	0	0
Report – Local settlement	1 (0%)	0	0	0
Total	286 (100%)	237 (100%)	98(100%)	83(100%)

- 2.7. As in 2001/02, the Ombudsman decided to close most of the complaints in 2002/03 without undertaking any further investigation himself. He made enquiries of the Council in 34 cases during the course of the year. At any one time there are about 10 open Ombudsman investigations across the Council. This is in sharp contrast to previous years, when there were as many as 130 open Ombudsman investigations. The reduction in Ombudsman complaints continues to represent a significant resource saving for the Council.

### **Subject of Ombudsman complaints**

- 2.8. As in previous years, most Ombudsman complaints were about Housing matters. In 2002/03 they made up over half the Ombudsman complaints. About half of these were about Housing Management Services (since October 2002 Brent Housing Partnership). Of the remaining 24 Housing complaints, 13 were about the Housing Resource Centre, ten about the Private Housing Service, and one about the Private Housing Information Unit. Housing complaints accounted for six of the seven complaints where the Ombudsman found fault with the Council, of which five involved HMS/BHP, two involved PHS, and one involved HRC.
- 2.9. Complaints about the Revenue and Benefits Service were the second most frequent type of complaint to the Ombudsman, although the actual numbers were the same as the previous year. One of the 17 Revenue and Benefit complaints was settled locally.

2.10. The number of Environment Ombudsman complaints was down slightly on the previous year. The largest categories of Environment complaints were about the Planning Service (five complaints) and Streetcare (four complaints). The Ombudsman did not find fault with any of these complaints about Environmental Services.

2.11 Complaints about other service areas remained at fairly low levels.

**Table 3: Subject of Ombudsman complaints<sup>1</sup>**

	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03
Housing – HMS/ BHP	-	-	-	25(30%)
Housing Service	-	-	-	24(29%)
Housing – all	138 (48%)	106 (44%)	49(50%)	45(54%)
Revenue and Benefits	100 (35%)	99 (41%)	17(17%)	17(20%)
Environment	40 (14%)	22 (9%)	24(24%)	15(18%)
Corporate Services	0 (0%)	1 (0%)	4(4%)	0
Education	6 (2%)	4 (2%)	3(3%)	1(1%)
Social Services	2 (1%)	8 (3%)	2(2%)	5(6%)
Total	286 (100%)	240(100%)	99(100%)	83(100%)

### Complaints returned by the Ombudsman as premature

2.12 If a complainant approaches the Ombudsman before a council has itself had a reasonable opportunity to consider the complaint, the Ombudsman may return the complaint to the council to deal with. Since May 2000, the Ombudsman has been sufficiently confident in Brent's complaints procedure to allow us to deal with premature complaints ourselves. The number of premature complaints therefore initially increased considerably. It has now started to fall. We hope this is an indication that word is spreading that people can expect to be treated fairly under the Council's own complaints procedure, and they do not need to make the Ombudsman their first port of call.

**Table 4: Number of premature complaints**

1997/98	30
1998/99	41
1999/00	42
2000/01	128
2001/02	124
2002/03	104

2.13 An analysis of premature complaints by service area, however, shows that although the number of premature complaints has fallen in both Housing and Environment, the Revenue and Benefits premature complaints have increased slightly. This may be an indication that Revenue and Benefits

<sup>1</sup> The fact that one complaint may be about more than one subject means that, wherever complaints are broken down by subject, the figures may add up to more than the total number of complaints. For the first time this year, following the creation of Brent Housing Partnership in October 2002, complaints information is provided separately for Housing Management Services/Brent Housing Partnership and the rest of the Housing Service.

customers still feel that the only way to get their concerns resolved is to approach the Ombudsman direct.

**Table 5: Subject of premature complaints**

	<b>2001/02</b>	<b>2002/03</b>	<b>% change</b>
Housing	69	54	-22%
Revenue and Benefits	35	37	+6%
Environment	16	8	-50%
All service areas	124	104	-16%

### **3 Complaints under the Council's procedure**

#### **Numbers of complaints**

- 3.1 There were 4,812 formal complaints registered under the Council's procedure in 2002/03. This was an increase of about 13% on 2001/02, when the figure was 4,256. However, it is important to stress that changes in complaint numbers are not necessarily an indication of the quality of service delivery. In 1999/00 the quality of complaint recording and tracking was very poor, and the Council had a reputation for failing to deal properly with customers' concerns. This was reflected in the numbers who approached the Ombudsman directly, and in the Ombudsman's own doubts about Council's procedure. It is arguable, then, that the increase simply reflects better identification and recording of complaints. We do not want to encourage complaints to be swept under the carpet. Complaints that are logged formally can be tracked and monitored, and we can ensure that if things have gone wrong they can be put right. Those swept under the carpet will almost certainly emerge elsewhere, and probably with the Ombudsman. The message must be that, while we want to provide services that give no cause for complaint, we want to make it as easy as possible for our customers to voice their concerns. It is how complaints are dealt with, and the lessons that are learnt from them, that should be the measure of performance.
- 3.2 Over 2000 of the complaints in 2002/03 were about the Revenue and Benefits Service (43% of all complaints). The second largest category was Housing complaints, at 1700, making 28% of the total, of which almost 1200 were about Housing Management Services/Brent Housing Partnership matters. Complaints about other service areas were at relatively low levels.
- 3.3 The biggest increase in complaints under the Council's own procedure between 2001/02 and 2002/03 was in Housing, where complaints rose 25%. Revenue and Benefits complaints showed a big increase of 48% between 2000/01 and 2001/02, but the rate of increase between 2001/02 and 2002/03 had slowed to about 8%. (There has in fact been a reduction in Benefit complaints since the service was taken back in house in October 2002.) Environment complaints increased by 4%. Social Services complaints increased by about 24%, but the overall numbers were small.

**Table 6: Complaints made under the Council's procedure**

Service area	Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 3		Total	
	01/02	02/03	01/02	02/03	01/02	02/03	01/02	02/03
Housing – HMS/BHP	-	904	-	221	-	60	-	1185
Housing Service	-	412	-	85	-	36	-	533
Housing - all	1037	1300	240	305	83	96	1360	1701
R&B	1592	1711	287	290	52	76	1931	2077
Environment	489	516	87	90	34	30	610	636
Social Services	210	264	20	27	8	5	238	296
Ed, Arts & Lib	71	51	5	2	3	2	79	55
Community Devt	7	na	0	na	0	na	7	na
Corporate	27	46	4	1	0	0	31	47
Total	3433	3888	643	715	180	209	4256	4812

- 3.4 About 850 complaints in 2002/03 were made via the One Stop Shops or Call Centre, which is about 18% of the total. Most of these were made during the course of a face to face interview, although a considerable number were handed in to reception. In terms of the number of transactions dealt with by the One Stop Shops and Call Centre, this suggests that they are successful at resolving enquiries at the point of contact. Few complaints were made by email or on line, although the number is growing.

**Table 7: Complaints made via the One Stop Shops/ Call Centre in 2002/03**

Method of contact	Number	%
Reception desk	217	26%
Post	36	4%
Fax	22	3%
Interview	447	53%
Phone	38	5%
Online/email	69	8%
Other	21	2%
Total	850	100%

### Escalation through the complaints procedure

- 3.5 The escalation of complaints from stage 1 to stage 2 has decreased slightly, from about 19% in 2001/02 to about 18% in 2002/03. Escalation remained high in Housing, at about 23%, but dropped slightly to about 17% in Revenues and Benefits and Environmental Services. Escalation of Social Services complaints from stage 1 to stage 2 remained the same, at about 10%.
- 3.6 Escalation from stage 2 to stage 3, on the other hand, increased slightly from 28% in 2001/02 to 29% in 2002/03. But again there were different trends in different service areas. In three service areas the escalation rate dropped – in Housing from 35% to 31%, in Environment from 39% to 33%, and in Social Services from 40% to 19%. In Revenues and Benefits the escalation rate increased from 18% to 26%.

- 3.7 We still have a long way to go to achieve the target escalation rates of 10% escalation from stage 1 to stage 2, and 20% from stage 2 to stage 3.
- 3.8 Of the 83 complaints decided by the Ombudsman in 2002/03, 58 had been dealt with at stage 3 of the Council's procedure, giving an escalation rate of about 28%. The Ombudsman upheld the stage 3 decision in all but 3 of these complaints. In one of these cases he simply recommended additional compensation, and in the other two there were some concerns about events since the stage 3 investigation. Clearly, then, the stage 3 responses continue to stand up to external scrutiny.
- 3.9 Details of escalation by service area is set out in Appendix 1, table A1.

### **Outcome of complaints**

- 3.10 As in previous years, complainants remain more likely than not to have their complaints upheld, in whole or in part, with over 60% of complaints fully or partially upheld. It is of some concern that the number of complaints fully or partially upheld at stage 2 remains about the same as at stage 1. We would hope that, if complaints are got right at the first stage, the number upheld at stage 2 would be low. It would appear, then, that there are still some problems with the quality of some stage 1 responses. However, the number of stage 3 complaints that are fully or partially upheld has decreased over the past three years, from 60% in 2000/01 to 37% in 02/03, suggesting a steady increase in the quality of stage 2 responses. There is still scope, though, for further improvement.

**Table 8: Percentage of complaints upheld**

	Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 3	
	01/02	02/03	01/02	02/03	01/02	02/03
Fully upheld	47	49	48	49	24	22
Partially upheld	13	13	16	15	20	15
Total upheld	60	63	64	64	44	37

- 3.11 An analysis of outcomes by service area is given in Appendix 1, table A2. Perhaps the most significant point is that, at 63%, more Revenue and Benefits complaints were fully upheld at stage 1 than any other service area, and almost three out of every four Revenue and Benefits complaints were upheld in either full or in part. At stage 2, it was HMS/BHP complaints that were the most likely to be fully or partially upheld (73%), suggesting that there may still be problems with the quality of some stage 1 responses in this service area. In both HMS/BHP and Social Services, the number of stage 3 complaints fully or partially upheld was also high (although the actual number of Social Services stage 3 complaints was small).
- 3.12 Complaints about the Housing Service, excluding HMS/BHP, were the least likely to be upheld. This is no doubt a reflection of the pressures the Housing Service is under, and the lack of resources to meet customers' expectations.

## Performance in meeting time targets

- 3.13 The time targets for replies to complaints are 15 working days at stage 1, 20 working days at stage 2 and 30 working days at stage 3. Different time targets apply to complaints dealt with under the statutory provisions for some social services complaints. Inevitably, some complaints will always take longer than the target time to deal with. The Council aims to respond to 85% of complaints within the target times.
- 3.14 The percentage of complaints meeting time targets remains poor. Performance in 2002/03 at both stage 1 and stage 2 was worse than in 2001/02. Performance at stage 3 had improved slightly, but still remained at a low level. Overall, only about half the complaints dealt with under the complaints procedure were responded to within target times.
- 3.15 There were, however, significant differences between service areas. Education, Arts and Libraries dealt with 90% of stage 1 complaints within target times (although the numbers were small). The Housing Service, excluding HMS/BHP complaints, also performed well, with 79% of stage 1 complaints dealt with within time. Environment improved its performance at both stage 1 and stage 2, and achieved 70% of responses within the target times, although this still fell short of the Council's aim of 85% of responses within time. The poorest performance was from Revenue and Benefits, with only 41% of stage 1 complaints and 36% of stage 2 complaints responded to within time.
- 3.16 The priority now must be to improve the timeliness of complaint responses. In last year's annual report, we said that the key to improving complaints performance overall must be to continue work on improving stage 1 responses, both in terms of timeliness and quality. This would reduce escalation, and increase the Council's ability to meet time targets at stage 2 and stage 3. It may be that more frequent and closer monitoring by service areas of stage 1 responses, to check on both quality and timeliness, and to take up problems as they occur, is the best way forward to achieve this.

**Table 9: Percentage of complaints answered within target times**

Service area	Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 3	
	01/02	02/03	01/02	02/03	01/02	02/03
Housing – HMS/BHP	-	59	-	41		
Housing Service	-	79	-	60		
Housing – all	69	64	47	47		
R&B	51	41	58	36		
Environment	60	70	49	70		
Social Services	56	51	21	47		
Ed, Arts & Lib	100	90	na <sup>2</sup>	na		
Corporate	85	66	na	na		
Total	60	54	53	45	52 <sup>3</sup>	55

<sup>2</sup> Number of stage 2 complaints too small to provide meaningful figures

<sup>3</sup> This figure excludes complaints made under the statutory social services procedure

## 4 Compensation payments

- 4.1 Details of compensation payments by stage and service area are set out in Appendix 1, table A3. In 2002/03 the Council paid out £84,636 in compensation on 498 complaints under the complaints procedure, and to the Ombudsman. About £18,500 of this was paid by the Council's contractors. The total amount of compensation paid in 2001/02 was about £117,000 on 350 complaints. So there has been a reduction of about 27% in compensation payments between 2002/03, even though compensation is now paid in significantly more cases. The average payment in 2002/03 was about £330 per case, and in 2002/03 this had fallen to about £170. It would seem, then, that legitimate complaints are being resolved earlier, and therefore at less cost to the Council.
- 4.2 It is interesting to note that although the amount of compensation paid out at stage 1 has remained approximately stable, in 2002/03 more compensation was paid at stage 2 and significantly less at stage 3. This is encouraging, suggesting that service areas are increasingly biting the bullet and paying compensation themselves at stage 2, rather than waiting for complaints to be investigated at stage 3. On the basis that the earlier a complaint is resolved the better, we would hope that, in due course, more compensation payments will be made at stage 1, and less at stage 2 and stage 3.
- 4.3 In terms of compensation by service areas, a significant proportion of the compensation is paid by Housing Management Services/Brent Housing Partnership. Much of this will no doubt be payments on disrepair complaints, many of which could have been the subject of litigation if they were not dealt with under the complaints procedure. We would hope to encourage as many complainants as possible to take their claims through the complaints procedure, rather than taking legal action, with the attendant costs for all parties.
- 4.4 Compensation payments on Revenue and Benefit complaints fell slightly in 2002/03, but still made up about 25% of the total compensation paid. Compensation payments in other service areas were relatively low.

## 5 Lessons learnt from complaints

- 5.1 An important part of dealing with complaints is ensuring that the lessons are learnt from the things that go wrong, and steps taken to put them right. Each service area has its own managerial arrangements for identifying and implementing changes arising from complaints. There are also formal mechanisms in place in most service areas for senior staff to review the outcome of stage 3 and Ombudsman complaints. (In the case of Brent Housing Partnership this process includes tenant representatives.) Some examples of lessons learnt from complaints in 2002/03 are as follows:

### Housing Complaints

- 5.2 A complaint about flooding from the flat above a tenant highlighted lack of co-ordination between different sections in dealing with forced entry to carry out repairs. Brent Housing Partnership is as a consequence implementing new procedures, so that such problems do not recur.

## **Revenues and Benefits**

- 5.3 As a result of complaints received by the Revenue and Benefits Service, the Benefits Service is looking at revising its guidelines and procedures for using its discretion to extend Benefit claims, and on backdating claims.

## **Social Services**

- 5.4 Following some complaints about the way that access to records requests have been dealt with in Children's Services, a monitoring process has been established to improve practice to ensure that timely and appropriate action is taken.

## **Environmental Services**

- 5.5 A complaint about noise nuisance and breaches of planning control and licensing arrangements identified serious lack of co-ordination between different sections of Environmental Services, which each went about enforcement action without being fully aware of what the other sections were doing. Steps have been taken to improve co-ordination, and the underlying issues will be fully considered in the forthcoming Regulatory Best Value Review.

## **Education, Arts and Libraries**

- 5.6 The Teacher Recruitment Section gives salary statements for teachers to give to potential landlords, when requested. Following a complaint where the landlord treated this as a character reference, the nature of the statement has now been made clearer, and landlords are told that character references must be obtained directly from the school where the potential tenant is employed.

## **6 External scrutiny of the complaints process**

- 6.1 The way the Council handles complaints plays an important part of any independent scrutiny of the way it delivers services. Complaint handling provides auditors with an important window on the Council's performance. It is how an organisation deals with both justified and unjustified criticism from its customers, and how it learns from its mistakes, that can often be the key to identifying how the organisation performs more widely. Good complaint handling is therefore essential if the Council is to score well in inspections.
- 6.2 There have been two recent important inspection reports which have specifically commented on the Council's approach to complaints. In December 2002 the report of the joint Social Services Inspectorate and Audit Commission report on Social Services noted that the Council's Chief Executive, on his appointment in 1998, made creating a 'welcoming complaints' culture one of his priorities. It pointed to the Council's improved record on Ombudsman complaints, and said that the change in culture had been extended across the Council. The report noted that, although Social Services already had a better record than some other service areas, a number of further improvements had been made.
- 6.3 In May 2003 the Audit Commission inspected the housing management services provided by Brent Housing Partnership. Its inspectors, in their August 2003 report, have commented positively on BHP's robust complaint

recording and monitoring system, and on the fact that there have been no formal Ombudsman reports on housing management matters for the last three years. They were enthusiastic about the fact that issues arising from stage 3 complaints are discussed at regular review panels attended by BHP and Council staff, and by residents. They particularly commented on the professional and courteous manner with which surveyors dealt with two stage one complaints, and noted examples of stage 3 investigations that clearly set out learning points for the Council and BHP. They did not express any concern at the number of complaints received by BHP between October 2002 and March 2003, or at the level of compensation payments for this period.

- 6.4 In June 2003 the Ombudsman himself commented favourably on Brent's complaints record for 2002/03. He said that the fact that he had not needed to issue any reports against Brent in the last two years was a 'notable achievement' by the Council, and that the low number of complaints settled locally seemed to point to better service delivery, including that of the complaints service. He commended the Council for the quality of its responses to his enquiries, and for the high standard of its letters at the second and third stage of its complaints procedure. He said that the complaint figures showed that the Council was able to carry out thorough investigations and provide appropriate remedies through its own complaints procedure.

## **7 Developments in complaint handling in 2002/03**

### **Development of a corporate complaints recording system**

- 7.1 There is currently no common system across the Council for recording complaints, and each service area has different arrangements. The One Stop Shops and Call Centre do not have access to these systems, and cannot tell customers what is happening on their complaints. There remains a considerable amount of duplication of work on complaints. Customers' records of complaints and enquiries are not brought together to give a comprehensive picture of what is happening, and this can result in wasted time and money, and a less than satisfactory service for the customer.
- 7.2 During 2002/03, a considerable amount of work has been done on developing a complaints module as part of the Council's Customer Relations Management (CRM) computer system, currently in use in the One Stop Shops and Call Centre. Brent and Islington Councils have worked together with Deloitte and Touche on this project, and it is hoped to 'go live' with the system from the end of 2003. The complaints module includes simple arrangements for recording and monitoring complaints, to which it is anticipated all staff will eventually have access. It will bring together in one place records of both complaints and MPs' and Members' enquiries, to prevent duplication and overlap. It also includes improved arrangements for quality assurance – both for assessing the quality of complaint responses, and measuring customers' satisfaction with the complaints process. It is anticipated that the module will eventually provide a low cost and high quality system for other councils to use, and will help improve competition in the market for complaint handling systems. Extending the CRM system to include complaints is also the pioneer of the Council's strategy to roll out the use of CRM across the Council.

- 7.3 Work has also begun on developing the link between the CRM complaints system and the Electronic Document Management system currently in use by Brent Housing Partnership and the Housing Resource Centre. The intention is to provide a seamless workflow across the two systems, and thus to improve the efficiency of complaint handling. This too will pioneer the development of integration between the CRM and other 'back office' systems. This project is being carried out under the auspices of the National CRM Project, and again it is hoped that it will be a pathfinder for solutions for other authorities.
- 7.4 It is anticipated that, once the system is introduced across the Council, there will be even better recording and monitoring of complaints, and easier mechanisms for ensuing prompt and good quality replies. The introduction of the system will provide service areas with an opportunity to review and streamline the way they deal with complaints, for which corporate support will be provided.

#### **Internet and intranet information on the complaints process**

- 7.5 Information on the complaints process has this year been made available on Brent's website, both for customers and staff. Links to the complaints pages are readily accessible from the first page on both the internet and the intranet. This makes it much easier for customers to obtain information about the complaints process, including their right to approach the Ombudsman. It also makes guidance on dealing with complaints readily accessible to Council staff.

### **8 Targets for 2003/04**

- 8.1 There have, then, been some significant improvements and developments in complaint handling in 2002/03. The improvements in Brent over the last few years are largely a reflection of some real improvements in service delivery. But there has also been a step change in Brent's approach to complaint handling. Key factors in achieving this have been the provision of a range of complaints training and guidance, better identification of complaints, closer monitoring, maintaining a high profile for complaints, proper escalation arrangements and a robust stage 3 process.
- 8.2 There is, however, no room for complacency. It will require continuing hard work to maintain the improvements into 2003/04 and beyond. It only requires one service area to take its eye even slightly off the ball in terms of complaints handling for the Council overall to lose its prime position amongst London authorities. There is still, then, much work to do to make sure that the Council's complaints procedure is one of the best, and that mechanisms are in place to ensure that it stays that way. The targets for 2003/04 include:
- To see through the implementation of the CRM complaints module, and the links between the complaints system and electronic document management;
  - To use the CRM complaints system to review complaint handling in service areas, and to continue work on the timeliness and quality of stage 1 complaint responses, including mechanisms for assessing stage 1 complaint responses, and customers' satisfaction with the complaints process;
  - To revise and update the complaints procedure, and guidance on its use;

- To review the handling of complaints within Social Services, particularly at stage 1 (taking account of the recent best value reviews), to achieve further improvement;
- To implement arrangements with the One Stop Shops for dealing with complaints from children and young people;
- To improve Members' access to and use of the complaints procedure;
- To undertake further outreach work with advice agencies, local solicitors and community groups to improve access to and use of the complaints procedure, and reduce litigation against the Council;
- To continue to use the lessons from complaints in best value reviews, and to ensure they are fully taken into account in arrangements being developed for performance management and in the new scrutiny process.

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**August 2003**

## Appendix 1

**Table A1: Percentage escalation of complaints by service area**

Service	Year	S1-S2	S2-S3
Housing – HMS/BHP	02/03	24	27
	01/02	-	-
Housing Service	02/03	21	42
	01/02	-	-
Housing - all	02/03	23	31
	01/02	23	35
R&B	02/03	17	26
	01/02	18	18
Environment	02/03	17	33
	01/02	18	39
Social Services	02/03	10	19
	01/02	10	40
Ed, Arts and Libs	02/03	4	na
	01/02	7	na
Corporate Services	02/03	2	na
	01/02	na	0
All services	02/03	18	29
	01/02	19	28

**Table A2: Outcome of complaints by service area**

Service	Stage	Fully upheld(%)	Part upheld(%)	Total upheld(%)
Housing-HMS/BHP	S1	51	14	65
	S2	58	15	73
	S3	37	13	50
Housing Service	S1	10	8	18
	S2	10	19	29
	S3	14	17	31
Housing-all	S1	38	12	50
	S2	45	16	60
	S3	28	15	42
R&B	S1	63	10	73
	S2	62	9	71
	S3	23	18	41
Environment	S1	42	25	67
	S2	30	26	56
	S3	0	15	15
Social Services	S1	22	17	40
	S2	17	25	42
	S3	29	29	57
Ed, Arts and Libs	S1	36	26	62
	S2	na	na	na
	S3	0	0	0
Corporate Services	S1	26	35	61
	S2	na	na	na
	S3	0	0	0
All services	S1	49	13	63
	S2	49	15	64
	S3	22	15	37

**Table A3: Compensation payments by service area (£)**

Service	Year	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Ombudsman	Total
Housing-HMS/BHP	02/03	7408	23960	11291	5290	47948
Housing Service	02/03	2470	1395	3648	1450	8963
Housing-all	02/03	9878	25355	14938	6740	56911
	01/02	9564	16189	11111	14859	51722
R&B	02/03	250	17321	2130	200	19901
	01/02	838	19539	3434	2620	26431
Environment	02/03	125	3892	0	0	4017
	01/02	51	360	290	30	731
Social Services	02/03	0	2307	1500	0	3807
	01/02	10	2108	35419	100	37637
Ed, Arts and Libs	02/03	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
	01/02	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
Corporate Services	02/03	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
	01/02	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
All services	02/03	10253	48875	18568	6940	84636
	01/02	10463	38197	50253	17609	116521