

**LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT**

**EXECUTIVE – 13 OCTOBER 2003**

**REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND REGENERATION**

**REPORT TITLE: COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT 2002/03**

**FOR INFORMATION**

**NAME OF WARD(S)**  
**ALL**

**1. SUMMARY**

1.1 The annual report for 2002/03 on complaints about Brent Council is attached. This is the fourth annual report on the operation of the Council's complaints procedure.

1.2 The report provides information about:

1.2.1 Complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman.

These have dropped by 15% since 2001/02, and by 71% since 1999/00. For the second year running, the Ombudsman did not issue any formal reports against the Council. There were only seven complaints in the whole year where he found some fault by the Council that it had not already remedied. Only four other London boroughs – Bexley, Havering, Richmond and Hillingdon – did better than Brent in this respect. Between 2001/02 and 2002/03 there was an 80% drop in complaints settled by the Ombudsman, and there has been a massive 95% drop since 1999/00. No other London council has come even near this rate of improvement.

1.2.2 The processing of complaints under the Council's own procedure.

Complaint handling continues to improve in some areas, but much remains to be done, particularly in relation to meeting time targets for responses.

1.2.3 Lessons learnt from complaints.

One of the most important parts of complaint handling is making sure that, if things have gone wrong, any appropriate procedural changes are made. Complaints in 2002/03 provided some important learning points for the Council.

1.2.4 Key developments in complaint handling in 2002/03, and targets for 2003/04.

An important strand of work in 2002/03 has been development of the Customer Relations Management system, currently in use in the One Stop Shops, to include a complaint and enquiry tracking system that can be used across the Council.

1.3 It is worth noting that Ombudsman complaint figures for the first five months of 2003/04 show an increase on the 2002/03 figures for the same period. The percentage increases are highest in Environmental Services (although the Ombudsman has not found fault in any of these complaints), and in Revenue and Benefits (which includes an increase in the complaints settled locally). There has been a slight increase in Housing complaints, although the number of Housing complaints settled locally has fallen in comparison to the same period in 2002/03. It is important to ensure, then, that despite the Council's excellent 2002/03 record, service areas continue to give complaint handling a high priority.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 The report is for information only.

3. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 There are no specific implications. However, Ombudsman complaints are expensive and time consuming for the Council to deal with, and the reduction in these complaints, combined with general improvements in complaint handling, will continue to produce significant financial savings for the Council. Complaints also provide an important window on the Council's services, and so good complaint handling helps the Council score well in audits and inspections, and thus contributes to the possibility of securing additional funding.

4. **STAFFING IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 None, although complaints handled well at an early stage mean savings in the staff time needed to deal with them.

5. **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The contact officer for further information is: Angela Hickey, Corporate Complaints Officer, Policy & Regeneration Unit, Town Hall - Room 221, Wembley, Middlesex, HA9 9HD. Tel: (020 8937 1029).

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