

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

EXECUTIVE – 11 OCTOBER 2004

REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND REGENERATION

REPORT TITLE: COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT 2003/04

FOR INFORMATION

NAME OF WARD(S)

ALL

FP REF: PRU-04/05-5

1. SUMMARY

1.1 The annual report for 2003/04 on complaints about Brent Council is attached. This is the fifth 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.

The Ombudsman considered 95 complaints against Brent in 2003/04 – an increase of 12 complaints from the previous year, but a 67% drop since 1999/00. The average number of complaints against London councils in 2003/04 was 122, so Brent continues to perform considerably better than average. For the third year running, the Ombudsman did not issue any formal reports against the Council. There were only ten complaints in the whole year where he found some fault by the Council that it had not already remedied. This made up about 11% of all Brent Ombudsman complaints. The only London council with a lower proportion of complaints settled by the Ombudsman was Kensington and Chelsea.

1.2.2 Operation of the Council's own complaints procedure.

The number of complaints made under the Council's complaints procedure, and particularly at stage 2, has dropped slightly in 2003/04. Escalation from stage 1 to stage 2 has also decreased, indicating an improvement in the quality of stage 1 responses. There was some increase in compliance with time targets, and performance by Brent Housing Partnership particularly improved. The average across the Council was affected by problems in complaints handling during 2003/04 by the Revenue and Benefits Service.

1.2.3 The payment of compensation.

The amount of compensation paid out in 2003/04 dropped for the third year running. Payments were 15% less than in 2002/03.

1.2.4 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 2003/04 continued to provide some important learning points for the Council.

1.2.5 Key developments in complaint handling in 2003/04, and targets for 2004/05.

An important strand of work in 2003/04 has been the continued 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. Work is underway on a children and young people's complaints procedure, and on measuring customer satisfaction with the complaints process.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 that the report be noted.

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 keeping these at a low level will continue to produce significant financial savings for the Council. Better handling of complaints at stage 1 of the complaints procedure, and reducing rates of escalation, also produces savings. 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

5. **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

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

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