

	<p style="text-align: center;">Executive 14th November 2005</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Report from the Director of Policy and Regeneration</p>
For Action	Wards Affected: ALL
<p>Complaints Annual Report 2004/05</p>	

Forward Plan Ref: PRU-05/06-09

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The annual report for 2004/05 on complaints about Brent Council is attached. This is the sixth annual report on the operation of the Council's complaints procedure.
- 1.2 The report provides information about:
- Complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman. The number of complaints to the Ombudsman about the Council dropped by 13% over the year to 173, the lowest figure for the last six years. For the fourth year running the Ombudsman did not issue any formal reports against Brent. There were only 13 complaints where the Ombudsman found some fault by the Council for which we had not already provided a satisfactory remedy. This made up 15% of decisions, against a national average of 27%. The Council improved its response times significantly over the year. The Ombudsman's Annual Letter was highly complimentary of the Council's complaint performance.
 - The operation of the Council's own complaints procedure. Overall, the number of complaints across the Council has dropped slightly, but we need to be vigilant in identifying complaints at the earliest opportunity. Complaints at Stage 2 rose slightly, while the number of Stage 3 complaints remained constant. The proportion of complaints upheld at Stages 2 and 3 remains high. Taken together, this suggests a need to ensure that complaints are resolved at the earliest opportunity. There remains a wide disparity between

service areas in their ability to respond to complaints within the Council's target times, but the Revenues and Benefits Service made remarkable improvements in their response times.

- Overall, the amount of compensation paid rose, but this has to be seen against a background of the Ombudsman increasing his suggested tariffs.
- Increasingly service areas are using the lessons learned from complaints to inform and shape service delivery.
- Key developments in 2004/05 have included the continued development of the Customer Relations Management system to include a complaints module for use across the Council. A children and young persons feedback service was launched in June 2005. Two customer satisfaction surveys were completed which provided useful feedback on customers' perceptions of the complaints service.
- The work plan for 2005/06 includes ensuring proper complaints handling arrangements in all service areas following the Council reorganisation, redrafting and relaunching the Council's complaints policy, followed by an intensive programme of internal training and external outreach with local community groups, and providing training for Members after the May 2006 elections.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The report is for information only.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no specific implications. However, complaints are expensive and time-consuming for the Council to deal with, particularly at the second stage and beyond. Keeping Stage 3 and especially Ombudsman complaints at a low level and encouraging customers to use the complaints procedure rather than taking legal proceedings with their attendant costs will continue to produce significant financial savings.

4. STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None

5. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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