

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Corporate Governance Committee

September 2007

**AUTHOR/S:** Senior Management Team

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### LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN – ANNUAL LETTER 2006/07

#### Purpose

1. To report to the committee the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) annual report and the authority's response.

#### Background

2. The LGO investigates complaints by members of the public who consider that they have been caused injustice through administrative fault by local authorities and certain other bodies. Each year the LGO issues a letter which includes a summary of information about complaints received. That letter is attached at Appendix A. The Chief Executive's response is attached at Appendix B.

#### Considerations

3. While the number and type of complaints in 2006/07 were broadly in line with those received in previous years the LGO has drawn attention to a number of points. Of the 26 complaints received, the LGO found against the Council in one case. This was reported to Cabinet at its meeting on 14 June 2007.
4. The proportion of premature complaints was found to be relatively high and the LGO recommends that the Council looks at its complaints process to see whether earlier resolution could be achieved. The Council's scrutiny committee considered the complaints procedure in March and a new complaints and compliments procedure was adopted by Cabinet on May.
5. Access to the Council's complaints procedure was not easy through its website. The websites infrastructure has been redesigned to give a higher profile to the complaints page.
6. The response time for LGO enquiries was 66 days against a target of 28 days. This is unacceptable and the Chief Executive has charged the Executive Director with taking urgent action to improve response times for the current year. For the first quarter of 2007/08 the average response time was 50 days. From 1 July 2007 the Council has received 1 new LGO enquiry, but the LGO referred it to the Council's complaints procedure.
7. A joint training session for officers involved in complaint handling is to be organised with the LGO for October 2007. The Council is also hosting the LGO's regional seminar at South Cambridgeshire Hall on 16 October 2007.

## Implications

8.	Financial	Failure to resolve complaints may result in the LGO awarding costs against the Council
	Legal	The LGO has statutory powers with which it can force the Council's Officers to attend its offices rather than submit comments in writing
	Staffing	LGO enquiries can consume significant amounts of staff time and can take key managers off normal service duties
	Risk Management	The Council's reputation can be at risk if it fails to respond appropriately to complaints.
	Equal Opportunities	None

## Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

9.	Affordable Homes	None
	Customer Service	The Council adopted its Customer Service Strategy in July 2007 which sets out how it will improve customer service and learn from complaints
	Northstowe and other growth areas	None
	Quality, Accessible Services	See above
	Village Life	None
	Sustainability	None
	Partnership	None

## Recommendations

10. That the Corporate Governance Committee notes the content of the LGO annual letter for 2006/07 and actions taken in response to its findings

**Background Papers:** the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

LGO annual letter – appendix A  
CE response – appendix B

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