

7 July 2014

By email

Mr Alan Robinson
Executive Director
West Devon Borough Council

Dear Mr Alan Robinson

Annual Review Letter 2014

I am writing with our annual summary of statistics on the complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) about your authority for the year ended 31 March 2014. This is the first full year of recording complaints under our new business model so the figures will not be directly comparable to previous years. This year's statistics can be found in the table attached.

A summary of complaint statistics for every local authority in England will also be included in a new yearly report on local government complaint handling. This will be published alongside our annual review letters on 15 July. This approach is in response to feedback from councils who told us that they want to be able to compare their performance on complaints against their peers.

For the first time this year we are also sending a copy of each annual review letter to the leader of the council as well as to the chief executive. We hope this will help to support greater democratic scrutiny of local complaint handling and ensure effective local accountability of public services. In the future we will also send a copy of any published Ombudsman report to the leader of the council as well as the chief executive.

Developments at the Local Government Ombudsman

At the end of March Anne Seex retired as my fellow Local Government Ombudsman. Following an independent review of the governance of the LGO last year the Government has committed to formalising a single ombudsman structure at LGO, and to strengthen our governance, when parliamentary time allows. I welcome these changes and have begun the process of strengthening our governance by inviting the independent Chairs of our Audit and Remuneration Committees to join our board, the Commission for Administration in England. We have also recruited a further independent advisory member.

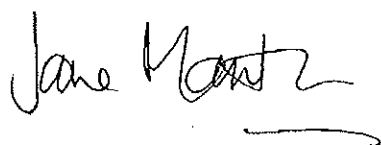
Future for local accountability

There has been much discussion in Parliament and elsewhere about the effectiveness of complaints handling in the public sector and the role of ombudsmen. I have supported the creation of a single ombudsman for all public services in England. I consider this is the best way to deliver a system of redress that is accessible for users; provides an effective and comprehensive service; and ensures that services are accountable locally.

To contribute to that debate we held a roundtable discussion with senior leaders from across the local government landscape including the Local Government Association, Care Quality Commission and SOLACE. The purpose of this forum was to discuss the challenges and opportunities that exist to strengthen local accountability of public services, particularly in an environment where those services are delivered by many different providers.

Over the summer we will be developing our corporate strategy for the next three years and considering how we can best play our part in enhancing the local accountability of public services. We will be listening to the views of a wide range of stakeholders from across local government and social care and would be pleased to hear your comments.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Martin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Dr Jane Martin
Local Government Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

Local authority report – West Devon Borough Council

For the period ending – 31/03/2014

For further information on interpretation of statistics click on this link to go to <http://www.lgo.org.uk/publications/annual-report/note-interpretation-statistics/>

Complaints and enquiries received

Local authority	Adult care services	Benefits and tax	Corporate and other services	Education and children's services	Environmental services and public protection and regulation	Highways and transport	Housing	Planning and development	Total
West Devon BC	0	0	2	0	3	0	2	9	16

Decisions made

Local authority	<u>Detailed investigations carried out</u>		Advice given	Closed after initial enquiries	Incomplete/Invalid	Referred back for local resolution	Total
	Upheld	Not upheld					
West Devon BC	0	3	0	4	0	4	11

LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN

COMPLAINTS 1st April 2013 – 31st March 2014

Complaint	Department	LGO's First Letter	WDBC's First Reply	Number of Days (LGO allows 20 days for first reply)	LGO's Final Decision
Impact of wind turbine not properly considered	Planning	1 st May 2013	n/a		Closed after initial enquiries
Incorrect pre-app advice given	Planning	5 th September 2013	LGO decision made through review of paperwork provided by the complainant	n/a	Not upheld
Planning decision made on flawed information	Planning	4 th October 2013	n/a		Closed after initial enquiries
Failure to consult with neighbour regarding a planning application Dunterton	Planning	31 st October 2013	3 rd December 2013	22	Resolved locally
Commercial refuse collection service Hexworthy	Environmental Services	10 th December 2013	27 th September 2013	32	Not upheld
Poor administrative support	Planning	17 th February 2014	n/a	n/a	Closed after initial enquiries

Complaint about an alleged breach of a parish council's code of conduct	Corporate	26 th February 2014	LGO decision without reference to Council	n/a	Outside jurisdiction
---	-----------	--------------------------------	---	-----	----------------------

Complaints and enquiries received by category 2013/14

Local Government
OMBUDSMAN

Local Authority	Adult Care Services	Benefits & Tax	Corporate & Other Services	Education & Childrens Services	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	Highways & Transport	Housing	Planning & Development	Total
East Devon DC		2	7	7	7	3	1	16	33
Exeter City C			4			3	11	4	22
Mid Devon DC		3	3	3	3	1	3	6	19
North Devon DC			2	2	7	2	2	10	23
South Hams DC		3	2	2	4	1		18	28
Teignbridge DC	1	7	4	4		2		16	30
Torrige DC		4	4	4	1	4	3	17	33
West Devon BC			2	2	3		2	9	16