



## ADJUDICATION & REVIEW COMMITTEE

30 January 2014

**Subject Heading:**

**GOVERNMENT REPORT ON  
PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE  
ORGANISATION OF THE LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN IN  
ENGLAND**

**CMT Lead:**

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**Policy context:**

The effective and efficient provision of  
public services

**Financial summary:**

None associated with this report

**Has an Equality Impact Assessment  
(EIA) been carried out?**

Not required.

**The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives**

Clean, safe and green borough	<input type="checkbox"/>
Excellence in education and learning	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities for all through economic, social and cultural activity	<input type="checkbox"/>
Value and enhance the life of every individual	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
High customer satisfaction and a stable council tax	<input type="checkbox"/>

### SUMMARY

The Government – in its programme of review and revision of public services – has commissioned a review of the Local Government Ombudsman's service. The report is appended

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Committee note the report and the content of the Government review of the Local Government Ombudsman Service.

**REPORT DETAIL**

1. In November 2013, Robert Gordon CB published his report on his governance review of the Local Government Ombudsman Service. He had been invited by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to undertake this at this time because the organisation was in a process of change brought about in no small part by the significant reduction in its funding and that the original three independent Ombudsmen model was by now considered to be less than fit for purpose. In the wake of Tony (now Sir Tony) Redman's retirement and the long-term sickness absence of Ms Seex (the second Ombudsman of the triumvirate) – the time seemed opportune for a reappraisal of the service, its governance arrangements and its structure in order that it could efficiently and effectively discharge its functions in the future.
2. The review was conducted within 15 days and produced five recommendations. The Report will now be considered by Parliament and, if the recommendations are accepted, the structure of the LGO in future will be more like its counterparts in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in that there will be a single Ombudsman overseeing a countrywide organisation which will encompass a much broader jurisdiction to ensure that, as the boundaries between public services and an increasing range of "partners" become increasingly blurred, the public are provided with a more seamless Ombudsman service with a single point of contact that was more transparent and accountable as well as providing cost-effective public scrutiny of local government complaint handling processes.
3. The five recommendations are that:
  1. There should in future be **one** Local Government Ombudsman presiding over an integrated process for handling complaints against bodies within the jurisdiction of the Local Government Ombudsman Service. (Paragraph 22)
  2. An early opportunity is found to make the limited legislative changes to provide for a single local government ombudsman in England. (Paragraph 23)

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3. In recognition of actual, proposed and likely future changes to public service delivery and taking account of pressure on public finances, consideration should be given to the creation of a unified public services ombudsman in the medium term. (Paragraph 33)
4. The Local Government Ombudsman Service and the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman continue to build on their current commitment to closer joint working proactively engaging in substantial initiatives to achieve economies, to harmonise processes and to provide the public with a clearer route to redress. (Paragraph 35) and
5. The Commission for Local Administration in England should be strengthened by administrative action. (Paragraph 37)
4. The full report sets out the reasoning for the proposed changes, but if the proposals are accepted by Parliament, the Council – along with all councils across England – will see considerable changes in the way in which it relates to the Ombudsman. One area which will have to be addressed (if the proposal to join the LGO with the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman [PHSO] proceeds) will be the time it takes for decisions to be “signed-off”.
5. Havering has had (to date) very little exposure to the workings of the PHSO, but in the couple of cases where there have been joint investigations, the Council has had to wait for several months (in one case, about a year), before the LGO could provide the Council with a final decision it had arrived at much sooner, but was unable to communicate until the PHSO report had been presented to Parliament.
6. There is currently a joint investigation which commenced in April 2013 and I was informed by the LGO investigator on 1 August that her part had been completed, but that she could not tell the Council anything until the PHSO had presented its report. We are still waiting.
7. There will undoubtedly be changes coming – and this report indicates that those changes are likely to be coming sooner than initially anticipated – and when those changes become clearer, the Committee may need to consider reviewing the manner in which the Council handles Ombudsman cases.

**IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

**Financial implications and risks:**

None associated with this report. Though there may be cost implications if the recommendations of the Parliamentary report are implemented.

**Legal implications and risks:**

There are no direct legal implications from this report.

**Human Resources implications and risks:**

There are none associated with this report.

**Equalities implications and risks:**

There are none associated with this report

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None