

Local Government  
**OMBUDSMAN**

**The Local Government Ombudsman's  
Annual Review**

**Ribble Valley Borough Council**  
for the year ended  
**31 March 2010**

**Local Government Ombudsmen (LGOs) provide a free, independent and impartial service. We consider complaints about the administrative actions of councils and some other authorities. We cannot question what a council has done simply because someone does not agree with it. If we find something has gone wrong, such as poor service, service failure, delay or bad advice, and that a person has suffered as a result, we aim to get it put right by recommending a suitable remedy. We also use the findings from investigation work to help authorities provide better public services through initiatives such as special reports, training and annual reviews.**

# Contents of Annual Review

<b>Section 1: Complaints about Ribble Valley Borough Council 2009/10 .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Introduction .....	3
Enquiries and complaints received .....	3
Complaint outcomes.....	3
Liaison with the Local Government Ombudsman.....	4
Training in complaint handling .....	4
Conclusions.....	4
<b>Section 2: LGO developments.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Introduction .....	5
New schools complaints service launched.....	5
Adult social care: new powers from October.....	5
Council first .....	5
Training in complaint handling .....	6
Statements of reasons.....	6
Delivering public value.....	6
<b>Appendix 1: Notes to assist interpretation of the statistics 2009/10.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Local authority report 2009/10</b>	

# Section 1: Complaints about Ribble Valley Borough Council 2009/10

## Introduction

This annual review provides a summary of the complaints we have dealt with about Ribble Valley Borough Council. I hope that the review will be a useful addition to other information your authority holds on how people experience or perceive your services.

There are two appendices to the review: statistical data for 2009/10 and a note to help the interpretation of the statistics.

## Enquiries and complaints received

Our Advice Team deals with all initial contacts to the Ombudsmen and advises people who want to make a complaint. The Advice Team recorded 10 enquiries about your Council in 2009/10, seven of which were complaints for my office to consider. The Council had not had an opportunity to consider and respond to two complaints and these were referred to you, as premature.

## Complaint outcomes

In any one year, there can be a difference in the number of complaints received and the number of decisions made by my office. This is because some decisions will have been made on complaints received in the previous year and not all the complaints received in 2009/10 will have been decided by 31 March.

We made decisions on 12 complaints during the year. In one case I exercised my powers to discontinue the investigation and in six cases no evidence of maladministration was found.

## Reports

When we complete an investigation, we generally issue a report. This year we issued one report about the Council. This was part of a group of complaints made against a number of councils across the country by the Royal National Institute for the Blind on behalf of people who would be affected by the way that some councils had altered the entitlement to concessionary bus travel for disabled people and those over 60. The Government had introduced a new national scheme, but councils had the right to implement more advantageous schemes if they wished. The Council, which had previously operated a more advantageous scheme, had decided to opt for the national scheme. In doing so, it did not adequately consider its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act, and the individual circumstances of those affected. Nor did it inform them of the change.

The Council reintroduced its previous concessionary travel for disabled people and their companions. It also agreed to pay £100 to the complainant as compensation for the way it had dealt with the matter, and for the time and trouble in pursuing the complaint.

## Local settlements

We will often discontinue enquiries into a complaint when a council takes or agrees to take action that we consider to be a satisfactory response – we call these local settlements. 26.9% of all decisions on complaints in the Ombudsmen's jurisdiction were local settlements. Of the decisions on complaints about your authority, four resulted in settlements of this sort. One concerned a

failure by the Council to respond to correspondence. It settled this immediately by setting up a meeting between the complainant and appropriate Council officers.

The other three complaints related to a difficulty in refuse collection caused by the Council's decision that its vehicle could not safely cross a bridge to get to the complainant's homes. The Council agreed to reassess the matter.

### **Liaison with the Local Government Ombudsman**

My office made enquiries of the Council on two occasions. The average time to respond was 22 days, against my target of 28 days.

I am pleased to note that the Council was able to send an officer to the seminar in York for members of staff responsible for liaison with my office.

### **Training in complaint handling**

Part of our role is to provide advice and guidance about good administrative practice. We offer training courses for all levels of local authority staff in complaints handling and investigation. All courses are presented by experienced investigators. They give participants the opportunity to practise the skills needed to deal with complaints positively and efficiently. We can also provide customised courses to help authorities to deal with particular issues and occasional open courses for individuals from different authorities.

We have extended the range of courses we provide and I have enclosed some information on the full range of courses available together with contact details for enquiries and bookings.

### **Conclusions**

The very small number of complaints against your authority that have reached this office makes it difficult for me to reach any generalised conclusions. However, it does appear that when something has gone wrong the Council is quick to remedy it.

If there are any issues that you wish to discuss, I or one of my senior colleagues would be happy to meet with the Council.

**Mrs A Seex  
Local Government Ombudsman  
Beverley House  
17 Shipton Road  
YORK  
YO30 5FZ**

**June 2010**

**LGO Advice Team**

<b>Enquiries and complaints received</b>	<b>Public Finance inc. Local Taxation</b>	<b>Planning and building control</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total</b>
Formal/informal premature complaints	1	1	0	2
Advice given	0	0	1	1
Forwarded to investigative team (resubmitted prematures)	0	2	1	3
Forwarded to investigative team (new)	0	2	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>

**Investigative Team**

<b>Decisions</b>	<b>MI reps</b>	<b>LS</b>	<b>M reps</b>	<b>NM reps</b>	<b>No mal</b>	<b>Omb disc</b>	<b>Outside jurisdiction</b>	<b>Total</b>
2009 / 2010	1	4	0	0	6	1	0	12

Response times	FIRST ENQUIRIES	
	No. of First Enquiries	Avg no. of days to respond
1/04/2009 / 31/03/2010	2	22.0
2008 / 2009	2	25.0
2007 / 2008	4	27.5

**Average local authority resp times 01/04/2009 to 31/03/2010**

Types of authority	<= 28 days %	29 - 35 days %	>= 36 days %
District Councils	61	22	17
Unitary Authorities	68	26	6
Metropolitan Authorities	70	22	8
County Councils	58	32	10
London Boroughs	52	36	12
National Parks Authorities	60	20	20