

**Haringey** Council

# **Annual report for the year 2006–07 on the Council’s handling of:**

- **customer feedback - complaints, compliments and suggestions**
- **members’ enquiries**

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**Central Feedback Team**  
August 2007

## 1. Introduction and overview

1.1 This annual report provides information for the financial year 2006-07 about the key features and statistics of the Council's handling of

- complaints, compliments and suggestions under the corporate feedback procedure, and
- members' enquiries under the corporate members' enquiries procedure

1.2 There are separate statutory procedures for the handling of social care complaints for both adults, and children and young people. Adults, Culture and Community Services, and the Children and Young People's Service produce separate annual reports for these two complaint categories.

### Definitions of a complaint and a member enquiry

1.3 We define a complaint as *"any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, requiring a response"*

1.4 We define a member's enquiry as *"any enquiry from an elected member requesting information about an individual or community group, and/or in relation to a council policy, where the member is entitled to that information"*.

('Elected member' includes councillors, members of parliament, members of the European parliament, members of the Greater London Assembly, and the London Mayor.)

### Key achievements in 2006-07

1.5 Key achievements in the year include the following:

- A reduction in the time taken to complete complaints at each of the three stages – by 3 days at stages 1 and 3, and 5 days at stage 2
- 77% of stage 1 complaints were completed in 10 working days – a good performance compared with 80% in 15 days in 2005-06 (target was 80%)
- 76% of stage 2s were completed on time, 2% up on 2005-06 (target was 80%)
- 93% of stage 3s were completed in the reduced 20 day timescale, against 90% target
- 84% of members' enquiries were completed on time against the 90% target, but numerous improvements were made, which are now being reflected in above target performance in 2007-08 as at the end of July.
- The Ombudsman found us to be at fault in a smaller proportion of the complaints than last year, and in more than seven per cent fewer cases than two years ago
- The Ombudsman commented on the promptness of our replies to his enquiries: our average response time was the best in London.
- A successful pilot of the WOW! Awards scheme resulted in its corporate adoption as the Council's compliments scheme from 1 May 2007: Haringey is the first public sector organisation to participate in the scheme.

## **2. Stages of the corporate complaints procedure and summary of performance**

### Our procedure

2.1 There are three stages to Haringey's corporate complaints procedure:

- *Stage 1, local resolution:* this is dealt with by the service, who aim to reply within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint
- *Stage 2, service investigation:* if the customer is unhappy with the stage 1 reply, a more senior manager investigates and aims to reply within 25 working days
- *Stage 3, independent review:* if the customer is still dissatisfied, the Central Feedback Team conducts a review and aims to reply within 20 working days. (Stage 3 replies inform complainants of their right to complaint to the Ombudsman.)

We aim to acknowledge receipt within two working days at each stage, and must inform the customer, giving reasons, if we can't send a reply on time.

### Summary of performance in 2006-07

2.2 We received 1,896 stage 1 complaints during the year of which 1,459, 77%, were dealt with in the reduced timescale of 10 working days against a target of 80%. Although this represents a 3% reduction on 2005/06, it represents a very good performance when taking account of the 33% reduction in target timescale from 15 to 10 days.

2.3 For the more complex stage 2, 206 out of 270 complaints, 76%, were resolved within the 25 working day timescale. While falling short of the 80% target, this was an improvement on the 74% achieved in 2005/06.

2.4 At stage 3, 50 out of 54 cases, 93%, were completed within timescale, exceeding our 90% target. There was also a timescale reduction for stage 3 cases from 25 to 20 days and a caseload increase of 59%, from 32 in 2005-06.

2.5 The stage 1 and 2 figures exclude complaints received by Homes for Haringey, but these are included at appendix 1. The stage 3 figures include Homes for Haringey as the Central Feedback Team conducts stage 3 reviews for them.

## **3 Members' enquiries summary of performance**

3.1 We aim to reply to members' enquiries within 10 working days of receipt.

3.2 We received 3,551 members' enquiries during the year, and replied to 2,987, 84%, within timescale, compared with the target of 90%. These figures exclude Homes for Haringey, whose figures are included at section 10.

## **4 Handling of complaints under the corporate procedure**

### Complaints performance

4.1 There was a small reduction in complaint numbers to the Council in 2006-07 when there were 1,896 stage 1 complaints, compared with 2,003 in the previous year.

However, after inclusion of Homes for Haringey complaints, the total for stage 1 was 2,569. This increase reflects:

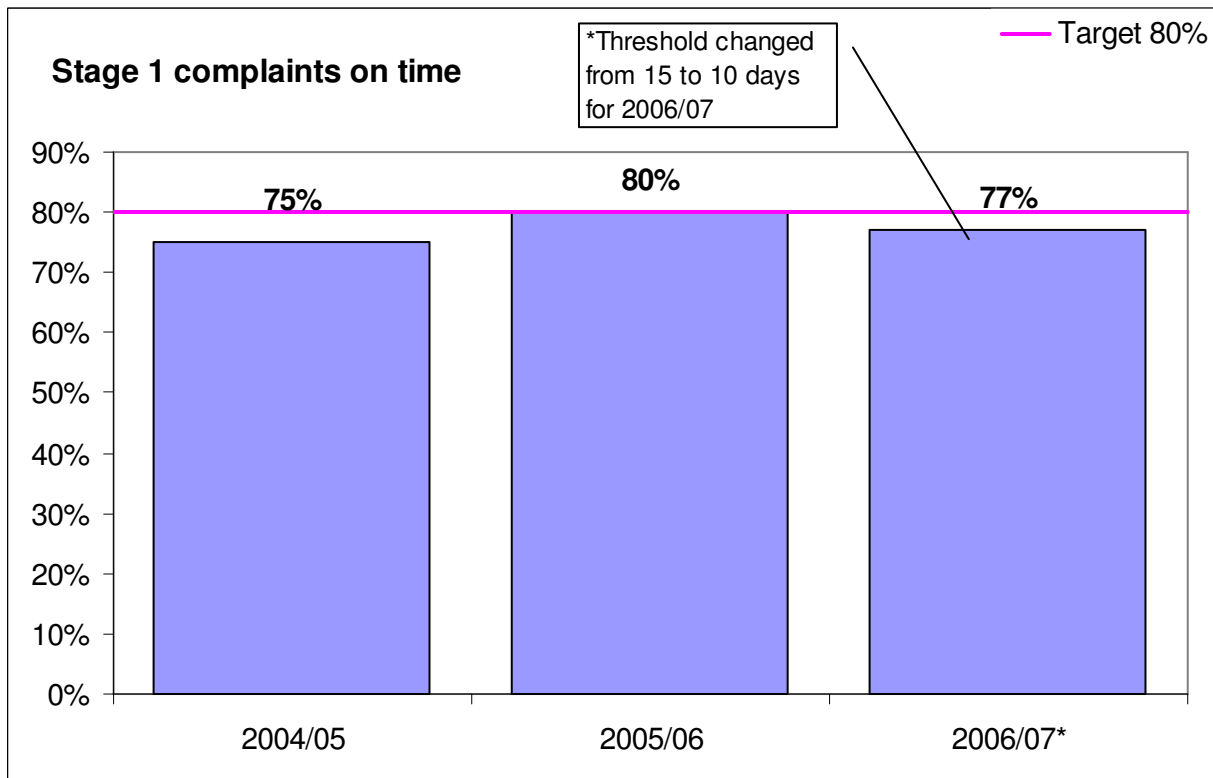
- our continuing improvement in recording the number of complaints received on the corporate database through staff training
- increased confidence of service users in the Council: research in both the public and private sectors indicates that customers will complain more if they trust the organisation to deal effectively with their concerns

4.2 Performance in time taken to deal with complaints, including Homes for Haringey, improved at all 3 stages as shown in the table below.

	Average working days to complete complaints	
	2005-06	2006-07
<b>Stage 1</b>	13	10
<b>Stage 2</b>	18	13
<b>Stage 3</b>	17	14

4.3 The timescale for dealing with stage 1 complaints was reduced from 15 to 10 working days on 1 April 2006. The shortfall of only 3% in the number of cases completed within the same 80% target as in the previous two years represents a good performance.

4.4 The percentage completion performance for the last three years is shown in the table below. In the first quarter of 2007-08, performance continued to improve with 85% of cases completed on time.



4.5 At stage 2, performance within the 25 day timescale against the 80% target improved to 76% from 74% in 2005-06. The timescale will be reviewed as performance improves with the aim of a reduction to 20 working days in due course.

4.6 At stage 3, performance to timescale remained above the 90% target for the second year running – despite a reduction in timescale from 25 to 20 working days, and an increase in caseload from 32 to 54 complaints.

4.7 The performance figures for the handling of complaints to timescale at all three stages in 2001-02, 2002-03, 2003-04, 2004-05, 2005-06 and 2006-07 were as follows:

Stage	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
1 *	44%	68%	76%	75%	80%	77%
2	33%	76%	63%	76%	74%	76%
3 +	30%	80%	94%	88%	94%	93%
<b>Total</b>	42%	69%	76%	75%	79%	77%

- \* Stage 1 timescale was 14 working days in 2001-02, 15 days from May 2002 to March 2006, and 10 working days in 2006-07
- + Stage 3 timescale reduced from 25 to 20 working days in 2006-07
- (Stage 2 timescale was 25 days throughout.)

4.8 A detailed breakdown of performance information for 2005-06 and 2006-07 is attached at Appendix 1.

#### Escalation of complaints

4.9 The table below shows the number of cases that complainants took to the next stage, including Homes for Haringey. A higher proportion of complaints escalated from stage 1 to stage 2 than in previous years, but a lesser proportion of stage 2 complaints went to stage 3 and of stage 3 complaints to the Ombudsman.

Stage	Numbers completed			Numbers to next stage			% to next stage		
	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2004/5	2005-6	2006-7
1	1573	2003	2569	138	172	309	8.8%	8.6%	12.0%
2	181	209	361	31	34	52	17.1%	16.1%	14.4%
3	32	34	54	12	8	11	37.5%	23.5%	20.4%
<b>Total</b>	1786	2246	2984	181	211	372	10.1%	9.4%	12.5%

4.10 Work is in hand with directorates to review the reasons for increased escalation from stage 1 and to put in place appropriate measures to address the matter.

#### Decisions taken on complaints

4.11 The chart below indicates the decisions taken on complaints at each stage.

Decision	Stage 1			Stage 2			Stage 3		
	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Not upheld	32%	40%	38%	35%	32%	37%	16%	45%	38%
Partly upheld	30%	26%	27%	39%	35%	37%	35%	42%	46%
Upheld	33%	32%	30%	21%	30%	21%	48%	12%	15%
Withdrawn	5%	2%	2%	6%	3%	4%	0%	0%	2%
No finding*	-	0.2%	3%	-	0%	1%	-	0%	0%

\* This category was added in 2005: cases here would previously have been recorded as not upheld.

4.12 The proportion of complaints that were upheld or partly upheld in 2006-07 compared with 2005-06 fell from 58% to 57% at stage 1 and from 65% to 58% at stage 2, but increased from 54% to 61% at stage 3.

Issues raised by complainants, what they wanted, and how they made contact

4.13 The charts at appendix 4 show the issues complainants raised at stage 1, what they wanted, and also how they made contact with us.

4.14 We increased the number of categories used for recording issues raised in 2006-07. As in previous years, the main issues raised concerned employee behaviour, and delay, lack of provision or poor quality of service.

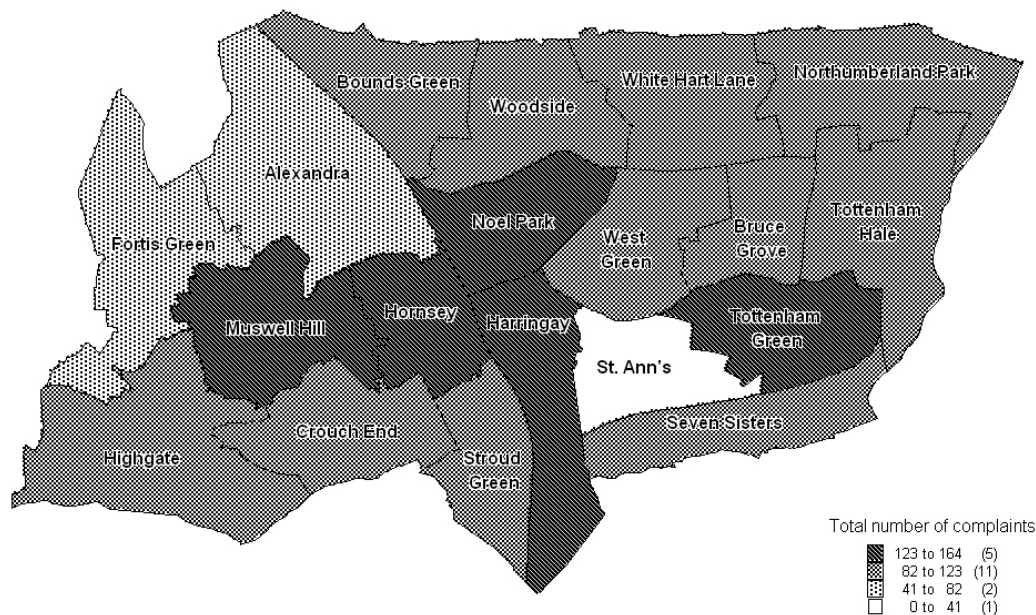
4.15 The main things that complainants wanted us to do were to provide a service, explain a decision, provide information, and apologise. The only significant change from the previous year was an increase in those wanting better customer care.

4.16 The main methods by which complainants contacted us remained letter, email, feedback form and phone. However there were significant falls in contact by letter and phone and increases by web form and email.

Analysis of complaints issues by ward

4.17 The chart below indicates the number of complaints issues recorded at stage 1 by ward, by address of the complainant.

Total number of Stage 1 cases (Issues)  
April 2006 - March 2007



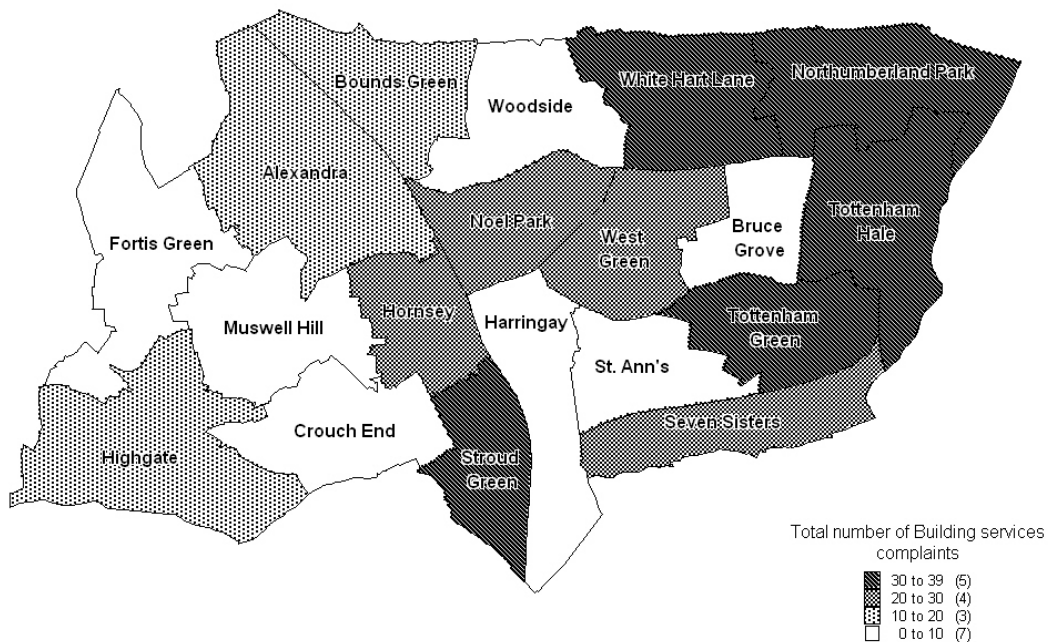
4.18 As can be seen, the highest number of complaints issues were from residents of Hornsey, Harringay and Tottenham Green wards, followed by Bounds Green, Muswell Hill and Noel Park. The fewest came from Alexandra and Fortis Green wards.

4.19 In all stage 1 complaints cases, the business unit with the highest number of issues recorded was Homes for Haringey's Building Services with 370. These were in the following categories

Issue	Number of Cases
Repair Operations	251
Design and Engineering	103
Asset Management	15
General	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>

4.20 The map below indicates the distribution of Building Services cases by ward. It shows that the highest numbers of cases were in White Hart Lane, Northumberland Park, Tottenham Hale, Tottenham Green and Stroud Green wards.

Total number of Homes for Haringey building services Stage 1 cases (Issues)  
April 2006 - March 2007



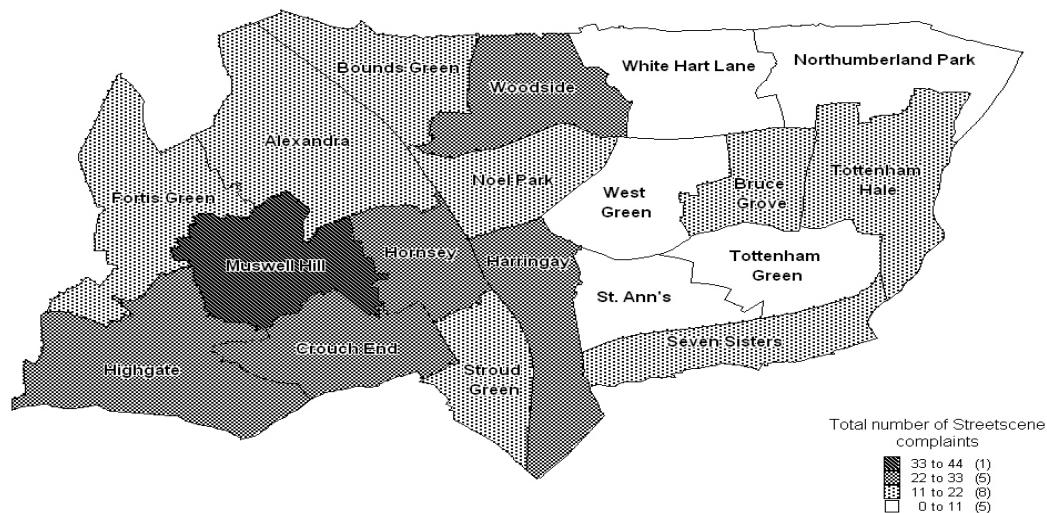
4.21 The following map plots the distribution of Repairs Operations cases. It can be seen that most cases were in White Hart Lane, Tottenham Green, Stroud Green and Hornsey wards.

Total number of Building repair operations Stage 1 cases (Issues)  
April 2006 - March 2007



4.22 The second highest number of issues was 348 in the Streetscene business unit. The highest concentration was in Muswell Hill ward, followed by Woodside, Harringay, Hornsey, Crouch End and Highgate.

Total number of Streetscene Stage 1 cases (Issues)  
April 2006 - March 2007



4.23 These cases were in the categories below.

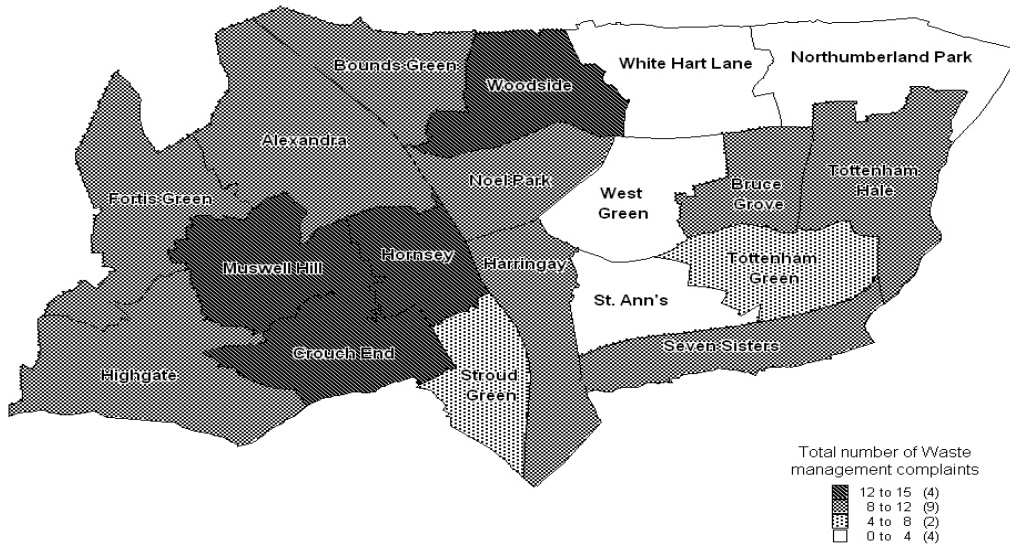
Issue	Number of cases
Waste management	161
Parking	94
Highways Maintenance group	35
Traffic and Road Safety	33
Haringey Accord	21



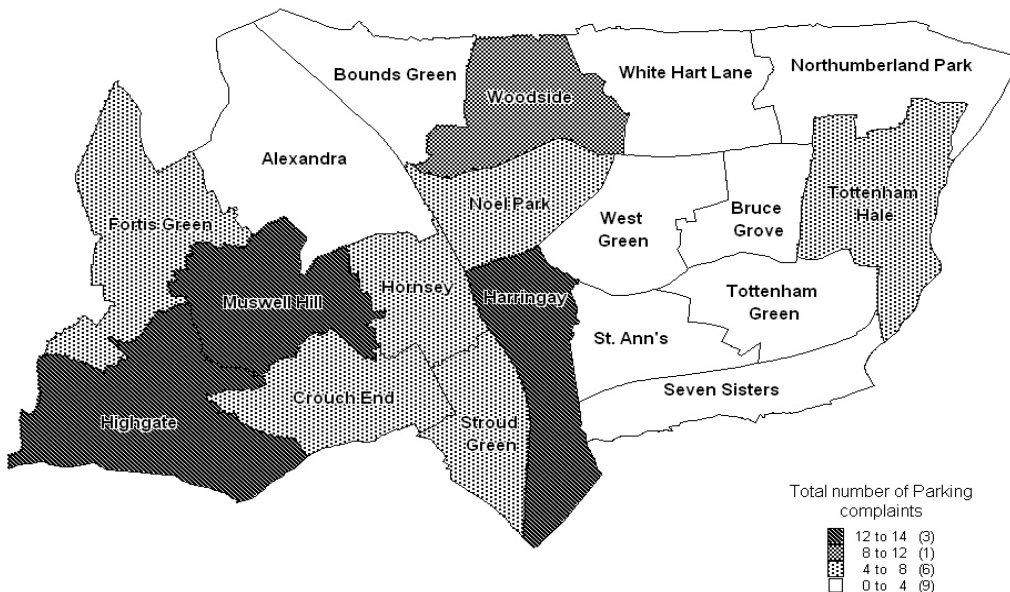
Infrastructure Group	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>348</b>

4.24 The maps below show the distribution of Waste Management and Parking cases. Woodside, Hornsey, Muswell Hill and Crouch End wards had most Waste Management cases. Harringay, Muswell Hill and Highgate had most Parking cases.

Total number of Waste Management Stage 1 cases (Issues)  
April 2006 - March 2007



Total number of Parking Stage 1 cases (Issues)  
April 2006 - March 2007



## **5 Complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman**

### Complaint numbers

- 5.1 The Local Government Ombudsman received 185 complaints about the Council, including Homes for Haringey, in 2006/07. This was an increase of 39 on the previous year. Excluding 'premature' complaints referred back because the Council had not had an opportunity to consider them, there was an increase of 20, from 105 to 125 in the number of decisions the Ombudsman made on Haringey complaints.
- 5.2 The number of 'local settlements', where the Council admitted some fault, increased from 25 to 28 from the previous year but this represents a smaller proportion of total cases than the previous year, and 7% less than two years ago. For the third successive year, the Ombudsman issued no report of maladministration against the Council.

### Performance in responding

- 5.3 Our performance in responding to the Ombudsman's written enquiries averaged 18.4 calendar days. This was just outside our 18 calendar day target, although well within the Ombudsman's target of 28 days and the best of any London Borough. The Ombudsman again commented favourably on this – see paragraph 6.2 below.
- 5.4 A detailed breakdown of data on Ombudsman complaints is at Appendix 2.

## **6 The Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Letter 2006-07**

- 6.1 The aim of the Ombudsman's letter is to:
- Provide a summary of information on the complaints received about the Council, and
  - Try to draw any lessons learned about our performance and complaint handling arrangements, which might be fed back into service improvement
- 6.2 The Ombudsman refers to 'the promptness of the Council's replies' to his written enquiries, which was 'all the more creditable' in view of the increased number of enquiries: our average response times to his first enquiries were the best in London. He also refers to special reports he has recently issued on phone masts and local partnerships and citizen redress. Our reply refers to the Council's position on these subjects.
- 6.3 The annual letter and the Council's reply are attached at Appendix 3.

## **7 Learning from complaints**

### Learning reports

- 7.1 The Central Feedback Team produces regular reports for each directorate on:
- 'learning points' from stage 3 investigations and Ombudsman cases
  - issues raised and outcomes of stage 1 and 2 complaints.
  - decisions on complaints at all stages: upheld, not upheld or partly upheld

- improvement issues arising from a range of data analysis at business unit level
- general findings and recommendations of the Central Feedback Team and directorate complaints officers.

### Annual audits

7.2 The third annual audit of complaint handling was conducted in the summer of 2006. The 2007 audit is now under way. Their purpose is to check for adherence to the requirements of the customer feedback scheme, including the quality of responses. It involves examination of a random sample of cases closed during the year in each directorate against the criteria of an audit guide. The findings are written up for each directorate with guidance on areas for improvement.

### Directorate action

7.3 The Central Feedback Team meets directorate lead officers twice yearly to review and support their action on audit findings, improving performance and improving services as a result of feedback from complaints and members' enquiries. The lead officers report to their management teams as appropriate, and business unit heads consider and implement the findings as appropriate.

### Service improvements made as a result of feedback

7.4 The Planning Service produce an annual review of complaints and focus specifically on recurring issues to improve service delivery. They have also made customer focus a priority in their improvement plan. Specific improvements made include:

- Following a complaint about non consultation over a planning application, officers now verify full address details, including flat numbers in blocks, when undertaking site visits, and check the data held on the address database
- Because of a misunderstanding of the planning process, further guidance on the planning system is to be produced when a new standard application form is introduced.

7.5 Adult Services have:

- Improved the community meals contract with a bigger range of vegetables and hot desserts for kosher meals
- Made arrangements to train all supported housing staff in wheelchair handling, purchased spare wheelchairs for one off use in some supported schemes, and given a brief to a project officer to facilitate activities in supported housing
- The Learning Disabilities Team have improved needs analysis for people in transition and working arrangements for adult placement/family link

7.6 Homes for Haringey have:

- Reviewed and updated all gas safety check literature and correspondence in response to complaints that it was overly threatening and not informative
- Issued a new leaflet explaining the general eviction process as a result of an anti social behaviour Ombudsman complaint.
- Introduced a repairs passport for elderly and disabled tenants so they can access additional repairs without having to prove they are entitled to them every time: this was a result of complaints and feedback from the disabled users group

7.7 Embedding learning from complaints for service improvement remains a high priority in the corporate and directorate complaints improvement plans for 2007-08.

## 8 Compliments and suggestions

8.1 The corporate feedback scheme provides for compliments and suggestions from the public in addition to complaints. All feedback received is administered by directorate complaints teams in accordance with the customer feedback scheme.

8.2 The number of compliments and suggestions recorded in the last three years was as follows:

Directorate	Compliments			Suggestions		
	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
<b>Chief Executive's</b>	40	70	62	26	29	52
<b>Children's</b>	2	16	4	1	15	8
<b>Environment</b>	28	43	63	55	55	65
<b>Finance</b>	0	1	2	1	2	2
<b>Housing</b>	4	4	-	3	5	-
<b>Social Services</b>	41	13	30	1	0	1
<b>COUNCIL TOTAL</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>Homes for Haringey</b>	-	-	12	-	-	8
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>			<b>173</b>			<b>136</b>

8.3 Below are some examples of compliments we have received:

- 'He was so so good at his job, by listening to my problems and understood my situation on what I was going through at the time of the claim. I really do thank him a lot. He UNDERSTOOD and RELATED' (customer's use of underline and capitals)
- 'Fear of queues, answers at coming to building, dispelled when entering, I was greeted with a 'chirpy' hello, a great smile and she helped me greatly, also the girls with her also assisted me, very helpful, very welcoming, very proficient at their job, made me smile! Thank you.'
- 'Extremely helpful. Knows exactly how to do her job efficiently and accurately. Gave me all of the appropriate information. I could not ask for better customer service.'
- 'They have really made a difference to my mental well being in a very short space of time'
- She was very, very friendly, helpful & accommodating both on the phone and in person'
- The Homes for Haringey Chief Executive received a compliment for the whole organisation praising the work that had been carried out by everyone in the first year of operation.

### WOW! Awards

8.4 From 1 May 2007, all compliments we receive are dealt with under the WOW! Awards scheme. The WOW! Awards is a national non profit making organisation which seeks to raise standards of customer service by encouraging and motivating

staff and holding up examples of good practice. Haringey is not only the first local authority to participate in this scheme but the first public sector organisation too. Homes for Haringey are considering joining the scheme.

8.5 The importance and significance of customer perceptions of Haringey's services, together with the ease and attractiveness of opportunities for feedback, are key concerns for the council. The WOW! Awards scheme provides a further channel for such feedback. Its positive nature will help to further promote and reward the customer-focussed thinking and behaviour that is integral to delivering excellent services.

8.6 A pilot scheme was launched in the Registrar's and Libraries, Arts and Museum services in June 2006 and was joined by Customer Services in March 2007. Its success exceeded all expectations, and it was therefore rolled out corporately from 1 May as the Council's compliments scheme. The early indications are that this will be extremely successful: by the end of June, only two months after the corporate launch, 299 compliments and WOW! nominations had been received. This compares very favourably with the 161 compliments received for the whole Council in 2006-07.

## **9 Improvements to corporate feedback arrangements**

9.1 The Corporate Feedback Scheme was updated and reissued in 2006. It now includes a revised section on harassment, hate crime and anti social behaviour, in line with the hate crime and harassment strategy. There were revisions to procedures for complaints about senior managers, and the formal reissue of previously advised changes that had not formally been issued as part of the scheme.

9.2 Compliments received are all now dealt with under the WOW! Awards scheme, and the corporate feedback scheme has been amended accordingly. Although the WOW scheme is widely publicised, we still accept compliments by any method.

9.3 As indicated above, the timescales for responding to complaints were reduced on 1 April 2006 from 15 to 10 working days at stage 1, and from 25 to 20 working days at stage 3. It is intended to reduce the stage 2 timescale from 25 to 20 working days when performance meets the current 80% target.

9.4 Homes for Haringey introduced a revised feedback scheme following specific consultation with the customers, the Council, the Ombudsman and Members. The new scheme includes a new pre-stage 1 process for resolving basic issues quickly where possible and reduced timescales for Stage 2 complaints - 20 working days as opposed to 25.

## **10 Handling of members' enquiries**

10.1 The number of member enquiries increased marginally in 2006-07 to 4,293, including Homes for Haringey, compared with 4,270 in 2005-06. Performance in responding fell marginally from 85% to 84% of replies sent within the 10 working day timescale against the target of 90%.

10.2 The table below sets out performance in 2005-06 and 2006-07 by directorate.

Total		On time		% on time		Average days to complete		Over 45 working days	
2005-06	2006-07	2005-06	2006-07	2005-06	2006-07	2005-06	2006-07	2005-06	2006-07
<b>Chief Executive's</b>									
229	276	196	249	85%	90%	6	5	1	0
<b>Children's</b>									
207	259	174	221	84%	85%	7	7	0	1
<b>Environment</b>									
2493	2079	2151	1820	86%	88%	5	6	1	1
<b>Finance</b>									
251	363	187	295	75%	81%	10	8	2	1
<b>Social Services</b>									
249	572	179	401	72%	70%	8	9	0	2
<b>Housing</b>									
840	-	724	-	86%	-	7	-	1	-
<b>COUNCIL TOTAL</b>									
4270	2549	3611	2986	85%	84%	6	7	5	4
<b>Homes for Haringey</b>									
-	744	-	518	-	70%	-	11	-	16

10.3 The Central Feedback Team provided induction training for members on the members' enquiries procedures after the 2006 municipal elections. Their training programme for member enquiry contact officers was improved to include "hands-on" practice on the member enquiry case management system. A training session for officers with responsibility for responding to member enquiries was also developed.

10.4 Directorates undertook a range of measures to improve their performance and the operation of the procedures. Performance figures for 2007-08 suggest the improvements are proving effective: to the end of July, overall Council performance was 94% and Homes for Haringey 90%.

10.5 Issues raised in members' enquiries cases were as follows:

Feedback Type	No.	Percentage
Employee Behaviour	47	1%
Freedom of Information	2	0%
Information/Service request	3467	82%
Policy	278	7%
Poor Communication	3	0%
Service Cost	1	0%
Service Delayed	316	7%
Service Inappropriate	1	0%
Service Not Provided	29	1%

Service Quality	53	1%
Service Removed	29	1%

10.6 The Central Feedback Team carried out a member survey of the handling of their enquiries, asking members about their experiences in making enquiries, their awareness of our procedures for handling enquiries, and any ideas they had for improving the procedure. Members had a good awareness of who the designated Member Enquiry contact officers were and how to go about making an enquiry. Most thought that the responses they received were good or adequate and that officers were helpful. The findings are being acted on – in particular a concern that a limited number of enquiries should be treated as urgent when appropriate.

10.7 The Central Feedback Team will shortly be conducting the second annual audit of member enquiries. The audit will look at a sample of cases for each directorate completed between 1 April 2006 and 31 March 2007. They will be assessed to see whether they have been dealt with properly in line with the procedure and whether they have been recorded properly.

## **11 Training arrangements**

11.1 There is an ‘investigating complaints’ course, run by Central Feedback Team staff, and ‘handling complaints’ is a module in the Corporate Customer Focus course, run by Organisational Development and Learning staff. Both are part of the internal short course programme.

11.2 The Environment Directorate ran a series of lunchtime seminars over the winter for staff responsible for responding to stage 1 and 2 complaints and member enquiries. The purpose was to improve awareness of the importance of customer focus, the complaints and member enquiry procedures, and the key features of effective responses. There were speakers from Organisational Development and Learning and the Central Feedback Team. Together with other measures implemented by the directorate, this has resulted in significant performance improvements.

11.3 Training provided on members’ enquiries is detailed at paragraph 10.3 above.

## **12 Publicity and communications**

12.1 This annual report is published in the ‘complaints, compliments and suggestions’ section of Council’s website and publicised through a press release. The website and intranet entries are regularly updated, most recently in the winter of 2007-08 to reflect the reshaping of the Council.

12.2 The corporate ‘complaints, compliments and suggestions’ leaflet was updated, and reprinted with the revised contact details following the Council reshaping. A similarly revised poster was issued for display at service reception points.

12.3 Separate leaflets and posters for the WOW! Awards scheme were produced and distributed to all reception points. Dedicated suggestion boxes were provided for the return of the leaflets at all the main receptions.

12.4 A staff leaflet, 'Do you know how to deal with a complaint?', was issued with payslips in November 2006. This provided a quick overview of the complaints procedure, and emphasised

- the responsibility of all staff for receiving and handling complaints efficiently
- the importance of trying to resolve problems straight away as a key part of customer service

12.5 The key messages of the leaflet were added to the intranet complaints pages, including 'quick overviews' of both the complaints procedure and complaints investigation.

### 13 Persistent, serial and vexatious complainants

13.1 We have procedures for dealing with extreme situations where a complainant may impose such demands on our resources that measures need to be taken to address the position, while still providing for complaints to be considered.

13.2 During 2006-07, it was necessary to impose new exceptional measures provided for in our procedures as set out below.

- *Option 2b: restrict all communication to writing* was applied in one new case
- *Option 2c: decline further communication on a specific complaint:* was also applied in one new case

### 14 Equalities implications

14.1 Equalities monitoring data is requested on customer feedback forms but this is not always completed. Complaints received by letter, email or fax invariably do not include it. In 2006-07 overall, data was generally known for about one third of complaints, a similar figure to previous years.

14.2 There were 9 complaints of discrimination in 2006-07, compared with 8 in 2005:06. They were in the following categories:

- Disability: 2
- Race: 5
- Religion/faith/belief: 2

#### Gender and disability

14.3 The known percentages of women and disabled people amongst complainants at stage 1 of the Council's procedures are set out in the table below. There were more complaints from women than their proportions in the community but a broadly similar number from people with a disability.

Year	% Women	% Disabled
2004-05	57.8	8.0
2005-06	57.9	10.0
2006-07	57.8	8.4



14.4 The over representation of complaints from women reflects the fact that more of our service users are women. It is the Council's experience that more women than men need to use front line services and therefore more likely to complain.

Ethnicity

14.5 There were significantly more complaints in proportion to their numbers from black/black British people, and significantly less from white British people. However, the ethnicity of 71%, 66% and 68% of complainants was unknown in 2004-05, 2005-06 and 2006-07 respectively.

14.6 A full analysis of data by gender and ethnicity for the last three years, including unknowns, is at Appendix 5. The percentage ethnicity complainants at stage 1, where known, is set out below

Year	Asian/Asian British	Black/Black British	Mixed	Chinese & other	White British	White Irish	Other White
2004-05	5.3%	33.0%	3.1%	6.4%	30.0%	5.5%	16.7%
2005-06	4.4%	32.1%	4.1%	6.1%	34.3%	6.6%	12.4%
2006-07	6.5%	26.4%	3.8%	3.2%	38.5%	5.3%	16.3%

Age of complainants

14.7 The percentage of known complainants by age group at stage 1 is set out in the table below. There was under representation in complaints made by people under 24, and over representation in other age groups. The age of 73.6%, 62.5% and 65.8% of complainants was unknown in 2004-05, 2005-06 and 2006-07 respectively.

Year	Under 16	16-17	18-23	24-45	46-59	Over 60
2004-05	0.5%	0.7%	5.3%	55.4%	20.0%	18.1%
2005-06	0.3%	0.7%	7.1%	49.8%	23.4%	18.8%
2006-07	0.7%	0.2%	5.3%	50.4%	24.6%	18.8%

Equalities impact assessment

14.8 An equalities impact assessment on the accessibility of the complaints procedures was carried out during the year, based on complaints received in 2005-06. In 2006-07, there was a significant increase in complaints from the 'white other' groups, and a fall in complaints from 'Chinese and other ethnic groups'. Complaints from these communities were in approximate alignment with their numbers in the community.

14.9 The current position is that there is:

*under representation in complaints received from:*

- White British
- Men, and in particular black Caribbeans

*over representation amongst:*

- Black communities
- White Irish
- Women

14.10 We therefore need:

- targeted work to encourage more complaints from the under represented groups
- introduce monitoring of sexual orientation and religion or belief and provide appropriate publicity for customers and staff

14.11 Thirty one community groups, identified from a range of sources, have been contacted by post since February 2007. They were invited to contact us if they needed any advice regarding the feedback process for their users. Initial letters were followed up by telephone or e-mail contact. Posters to be displayed within premises, and a sample feedback leaflet were sent to all groups.

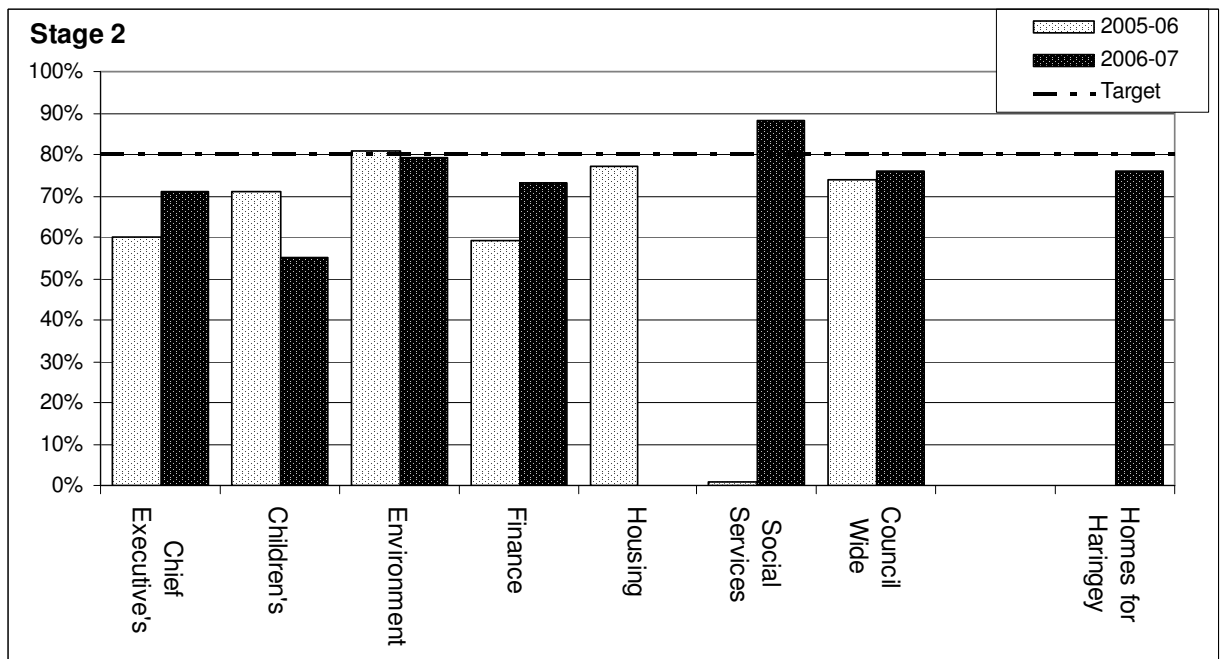
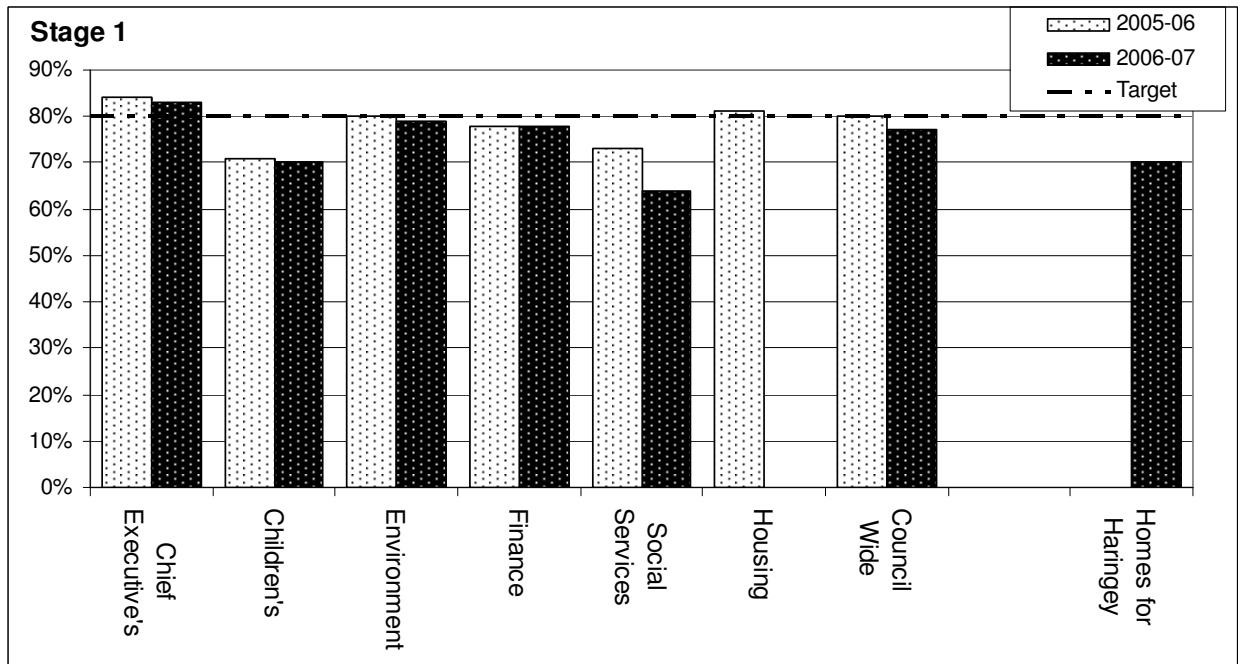
14.12 Some groups requested a supply of leaflets, and translated versions have also been supplied to a few groups, but overall take up has been disappointing. Further approaches will be made to agencies such as the Citizens' Advice Bureau to develop possible ways of working together to increase awareness of the Council's feedback procedure across all groups. Direct approaches are also planned to the faith and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transsexual communities.

## Appendix 1:

### COMPLAINT HANDLING PERFORMANCE TO TIMESCALE

#### 1. Comparative directorate performance in 2005-06 & 2006-07

Targets for both stages in both years were 80%



## 2. Complaints completed on time at all stages in 2005-06 & 2006-07

### a. 2005-06

Targets: stage 1 – 80% in 15 working days; stage 2 - 80% in 25 working days; stage 3\* - 90% in 25 working days

Stage 1	Total	On time	%	Stage 2	Total	On time	%	Stage 3*	Total	On time	%	Overall	Total	On time	%
---------	-------	---------	---	---------	-------	---------	---	----------	-------	---------	---	---------	-------	---------	---

#### Council Wide Total

	2003	1595	80%		209	155	74%		34	32	94%		2246	1782	79%
--	------	------	-----	--	-----	-----	-----	--	----	----	-----	--	------	------	-----

#### Chief Executive's

	156	131	84%		5	3	60%
--	-----	-----	-----	--	---	---	-----

#### Children's

	65	46	71%		7	5	71%
--	----	----	-----	--	---	---	-----

#### Environment

	647	520	80%		81	66	81%
--	-----	-----	-----	--	----	----	-----

#### Finance

	454	353	78%		37	22	59%
--	-----	-----	-----	--	----	----	-----

#### Housing

	633	510	81%		77	59	77%
--	-----	-----	-----	--	----	----	-----

#### Social Services

	48	35	73%		2	0	0%
--	----	----	-----	--	---	---	----

\* The Central Feedback Team investigates all stage 3 complaints.

(The 34 stage 3 complaints in 2005-06 were from the following directorates: CE's 1, Environment 16, Finance 7, and Housing 10)

**b. 2006-07**

Targets: stage 1 – 80% in 10 working days; stage 2 - 80% in 25 working days; stage 3\* - 90% in 20 working days

Stage 1	Total	On time	%	Stage 2	Total	On time	%	Stage 3*	Total	On time	%	Overall	Total	On time	%
---------	-------	---------	---	---------	-------	---------	---	----------	-------	---------	---	---------	-------	---------	---

**Chief Executive's**

	250	208	83%		17	12	71%								
--	-----	-----	-----	--	----	----	-----	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

**Children's**

	63	44	70%		11	6	55%								
--	----	----	-----	--	----	---	-----	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

**Environment**

	777	613	79%		126	100	79%								
--	-----	-----	-----	--	-----	-----	-----	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

**Finance**

	578	449	78%		91	66	73%								
--	-----	-----	-----	--	----	----	-----	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

**Social Services**

	228	145	64%		25	22	88%								
--	-----	-----	-----	--	----	----	-----	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

**Council Wide Total**

	<b>1896</b>	<b>1459</b>	<b>77%</b>		<b>270</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>76%</b>		<b>54</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>93%</b>		<b>2220</b>	<b>1715</b>	<b>77%</b>
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**Homes for Haringey**

	673	474	70%		91	69	76%								
--	-----	-----	-----	--	----	----	-----	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

\* The Central Feedback Team investigates all stage 3 complaints.

(The 54 stage 3 complaints in 2006-07 were from the following directorates: CE's 1, Children's 3, Environment 24, Finance 5, Social Services 7, and Homes for Haringey 14)

## Appendix 2: COMPLAINTS MADE TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN

### 1. Decisions made by the Ombudsman on complaints determined by him

<u>Category</u>	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
<b><i>Cases not subject to formal report:</i></b>				
Local settlement	39	38	25	28
No maladministration	26	31	34	42
Ombudsman's discretion	45	33	23	30
Outside jurisdiction	25	22	23	25
<b><i>Cases subject to formal report:</i></b>				
Maladministration causing injustice	1	0	0	0
Maladministration, no injustice	0	0	0	0
No maladministration	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL (excluding prematures*)</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>125</b>
Premature complaints*	64	42	43	54
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>179</b>

\*The Ombudsman does not normally deal with a complaint unless the Council has first had an opportunity to deal with it. If the Council has not had that opportunity, he will therefore usually refer the matter back as a 'premature complaint' to see if the Council can resolve the matter. The total 'excluding prematures' is of decisions made excluding cases referred back as premature.

### 2. Decisions made by the Ombudsman by directorate in 2006-07

Directorate	Local settlement	No evidence of maladministration	Ombudsman discretion	Outside jurisdiction	Premature complaint	Total
Chief Exec	-	4	1	2	1	8
Children	3	2	2	1	4	12
Environment	6	12	14	7	14	53
Finance	5	7	5	7	14	38
Homes for Haringey	8	9	3	7	11	38
Social Services	5	8	6	-	11	30
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>179</b>

### 3. Complaints received by the Ombudsman

(These include 'prematures'. The service categories are those defined by the Ombudsman.)

Year	Adult care	Bene fits	Children & family	Educ ation	Housing	Other	Planning & bldg control	Public finance	Social Services other	Transpo rt & high ways	Total
06-7	11	19	2	9	56	29	17	16	0	26	185
05-6	9	18	8	7	38	23	10	14	2	17	146
04-5	6	17	17	10	43	22	14	6	1	18	154

### 4. Council response times to the Ombudsman's first enquiries

	Enquiries received	Average days to respond	LGO target*	Council target*
<b>2004-05</b>	69	20.7	21	26
<b>2005-06</b>	45	18.1	28	21
<b>2006-07</b>	63	18.4	28	18

\*Targets are calendar days

## **Appendix 3:**

### **1. THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN'S ANNUAL LETTER**

## **The Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Letter**

# **London Borough of Haringey**

**for the year ended  
31 March 2007**

**The Local Government Ombudsman (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. The LGO also uses the findings from investigation work to help authorities provide better public services through initiatives such as special reports, training and annual letters.**

## **Annual Letter 2006/07 - Introduction**

The aim of the annual letter is to provide a summary of information on the complaints about your authority that we have received and try to draw any lessons learned about the authority's performance and complaint-handling arrangements. These might then be fed back into service improvement.

I hope that the letter will be a useful addition to other information your authority holds on how people experience or perceive your services.

There are two attachments which form an integral part of this letter: statistical data covering a three year period and a note to help the interpretation of the statistics.

## **Complaints received**

Complaints against the Council increased to 185 during 2006/07, a rise of over a quarter since last year. With the exception of complaints against children and family services, the increase covered the range of council services.

The most pronounced rise was in complaints about housing, up from 38 to 56. The single largest category was housing allocations (17), followed by repairs (10), managing tenancies (10), sales and leaseholds (9) and homelessness (5).

Complaints about highways and transport increased from 17 to 26 and covered a wide variety of council activities: the issue of penalty charge notices, removal of abandoned vehicles, resident and disabled parking, consultations on controlled parking zones and general highways management issues.

The planning and building control category included 10 complaints about planning applications and seven about planning enforcement.

Complaints about benefits were exclusively about housing benefit while all of the public finance complaints were about local taxation, mostly billing and recovery.

The "other" category includes nine complaints about antisocial behaviour and five about environmental health issues.

During the year your staff have asked for our views on the possible reasons for the overall increase in complaints we received against the Council. It does go against the national picture which shows an overall reduction in complaints to the Ombudsman of under 2%. But it is not easy to draw conclusions at a local level. I would be interested in seeing the Council's own analysis of the situation, in the context of its wider complaints management reporting.

## **Decisions on complaints**

### ***Reports and local settlements***

We use the term 'local settlement' to describe the outcome of a complaint where, during the course of our investigation, the Council takes, or agrees to take, some action which we



consider is a satisfactory response to the complaint and the investigation does not need to be completed. These form a significant proportion of the complaints we determine. When we complete an investigation we must issue a report.

I issued no reports against the Council and I decided 28 complaints as local settlements. The proportion of complaints decided as settlements and reports was 28%, just 1% short of the average for all authorities. The settlements included compensation totalling just under £6,000. I set out below a summary of the main settlements.

### **Housing benefit**

Four complaints about housing benefit uncovered delay by the Council in requesting information in support of a claim, delay in amending a claim following a change in circumstances, delay in following up a request made to the Rent Officer Service and failure to respond to a request for a review of a decision on benefit entitlement. In addition to paying compensation, the Council agreed to review internal procedures relating to the claw back of overpaid housing benefit and the follow up of referrals which have gone to the Rent Officer service.

### **Housing repairs**

The Council paid compensation of £1,650 to a complainant for its delay of over three years in repairing a leak in her bathroom. It also paid compensation to settle a complaint about a leaking boiler and in two other complaints it took action to ensure that outstanding work was diagnosed and repaired.

### **Homelessness and housing allocations**

In one complaint the Council failed to consider properly letters from a complainant's physician and to apply its own policy on the award of welfare points. Although I could not conclude that the complainant had lost out on an offer, I was satisfied that the Council's faults had caused distress and inconvenience for which the remedy of £500 was in addition to the proper award of points. Flaws in the way points were assessed provided the basis for the settlement of two other complaints where the complainants were participating in the Council's recently introduced choice based lettings scheme. I should be interested to know whether the Council plans to review the operation of the scheme and, if so, what improvements it considers are necessary.

In one complaint the Council failed to accept a homelessness application. To remedy that error it interviewed the complainant, provided temporary accommodation and paid compensation of £100. In another homelessness case there was poor communication with a complainant about her temporary accommodation, which in my view led to a delay in her rehousing. The Council paid compensation of £350.

### **Private housing grants**

The Council paid £350 compensation to reflect distress caused to a complainant by its delay in dealing with her application for a grant to adapt her home. I am pleased that all the works have been completed satisfactorily and that the Council has introduced new procedures to help prevent a recurrence of this problem.

## **Antisocial behaviour**

A complainant who was the victim of harassment was awarded management transfer status but the Council did not properly consider his reasons for not wanting an offer in a particular part of the borough. He was given misleading information at times and the Council's evidence gathering was unsatisfactory. Eventually the Council agreed to make a new offer in the complainant's preferred areas and to pay compensation of £1,000. In another case the Council delayed in dealing with allegations of antisocial behaviour and did not seem to be following the relevant procedures. The Council paid compensation and agreed to pursue the case with a degree of priority.

## **Planning**

In one case the Council misfiled the complainant's letter of objection to a planning application and there was a loss of opportunity to have those comments considered, for which the Council paid compensation of £250. A similar level of compensation was paid when the Council delayed in taking enforcement action against the complainant's neighbour whose rear extension breached the planning consent. In another case the Council broke an undertaking to send the complainant a copy of the enforcement notice served on a neighbour.

## **Education**

The Council dealt incorrectly with a late application for a school place (made after all the offers had gone out) when it placed the application at the bottom of its waiting list rather than ranking it according to its admissions criteria. But for that fault, the child would have been offered a place over the summer and so the Council agreed to give the child a place. The Council also said it would review its procedures in time for the 2007 admissions round and I trust that this has now been done.

## **Highways and transportation**

A complainant was misled into believing that there would be a statutory consultation about a roundabout outside her home. The Council paid compensation and agreed to hold a site meeting to discuss with the complainant how to make access to her drive easier.

## **Your Council's complaints procedure and handling of complaints**

During the year we referred 54 complaints back to the Council to be dealt with under its complaints procedure. At 30% of all decisions, that is above the average for all authorities (28%).

We decided 11 complaints which had previously been referred back to the Council but where the complainants resubmitted their complaints to us. We did not uphold 8 of those complaints, but we decided the other three as local settlements. In one of those, about disrepair, the Council's delay in responding to our further enquiries was because of difficulties in obtaining information from a contractor.

In one complaint which we did not uphold when it was resubmitted to us, we noted that after our referral the Council declined to pursue the complaint because it was about matters which were over twelve months old. But it did not signpost the remaining stages

of its procedure. The Council has since confirmed that officers have been reminded of the importance of providing information about how a complaint can be taken to the next stage of the procedure.

### **Training in complaint handling**

As part of our role to provide advice in good administrative practice, we offer training courses for all levels of local authority staff in complaints handling and investigation. The feedback from courses that have been delivered over the past two and a half years is very positive.

The range of courses is expanding in response to demand and in addition to the generic Good Complaint Handling (identifying and processing complaints) and Effective Complaint Handling (investigation and resolution) we now offer these courses specifically for social services staff. We have also successfully piloted a course on reviewing complaints for social services review panel members. We can run open courses for groups of staff from smaller authorities and also customise courses to meet your Council's specific requirements.

All courses are presented by an experienced investigator so participants benefit from their knowledge and expertise of complaint handling.

I have enclosed some information on the full range of courses available together with contact details for enquiries and any further bookings.

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

Earlier in the year I was pleased to make two visits to the Council. In the first I met the Council's Executive and its Management Board. Members were clear that they wished to continue to improve services and complaint handling. In the second visit, I met the Board of Homes for Haringey, the Arms Length Management Organisation set up in April 2006 to manage the Council's housing stock. One of the matters discussed was the need to ensure a "joined up" service to complainants whose complaints cover both ALMO and Council services.

The average time taken by the Council to respond to our written enquiries on complaints was just over 18 days, much the same as last year and all the more creditable when you take into account that the number of enquiries increased by over 40%. My staff have made various comments about the promptness of the Council's replies and, at times, its willingness to agree to our proposals for settlement. There are times when the Council, quite reasonably, wishes to contest our assessments. We are always willing to listen to what the Council says and we are open to persuasion. But where there is no agreement, we have a duty to the complainant not to let matters drift and in those circumstances we will consider issuing a formal report.

One of the Council's officers attended a link officer seminar which we held in November. I hope that she found the event to be informative.

/...

## LGO developments

I thought it would be helpful to update you on a project we are implementing to improve the first contact that people have with us as part of our customer focus initiative. We are developing a new Access and Advice Service that will provide a gateway to our services for all complainants and enquirers. It will be mainly telephone-based but will also deal with email, text and letter correspondence. As the project progresses we will keep you informed about developments and expected timescales.

Changes brought about by the Local Government Bill are also expected to impact on the way that we work and again we will keep you informed as relevant.

We have just issued a special report that draws on our experience of dealing with complaints about planning applications for phone masts considered under the prior approval system, which can be highly controversial. We recommend simple measures that councils can adopt to minimise the problems that can occur.

A further special report will be published in July focusing on the difficulties that can be encountered when complaints are received by local authorities about services delivered through a partnership. *Local partnerships and citizen redress* sets out our advice and guidance on how these problems can be overcome by adopting good governance arrangements that include an effective complaints protocol.

## Conclusions and general observations

I welcome this opportunity to give you my reflections about the complaints my office has dealt with over the past year. I hope that you find the information and assessment provided useful when seeking improvements to your Council's services.

**Tony Redmond**  
**Local Government Ombudsman**  
**10<sup>th</sup> floor, Millbank Tower**  
**Millbank**  
**London SW1P 4QP**

**June 2007**

Enc: Statistical data  
Note on interpretation of statistics  
Leaflet on training courses (with posted copy only)

# Notes to assist interpretation of the LGO's local authority statistics

## 1. Local authority report

This information forms an integral part of the Annual Letter to your council. Again this year, the Annual Letter will be published on our website, at [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

## 2. Complaints received

This information shows the number of complaints received by the LGO, broken down by service area and in total within the periods given. These figures include complaints that are made prematurely to the LGO (see below for more explanation) and that we refer back to the council for consideration. The figures may include some complaints that we have received but where we have not yet contacted the council.

## 3. Decisions

This information records the number of decisions made by the LGO, broken down by outcome, within the periods given. **This number will not be the same as the number of complaints received**, because some complaints are made in one year and decided in the next. Below we set out a key explaining the outcome categories.

**MI reps:** where the LGO has concluded an investigation and issued a formal report finding maladministration causing injustice.

**LS (local settlements):** decisions by letter discontinuing our investigation because action has been agreed by the authority and accepted by the Ombudsman as a satisfactory outcome for the complainant.

**M reps:** where the LGO has concluded an investigation and issued a formal report finding maladministration but causing no injustice to the complainant.

**NM reps:** where the LGO has concluded an investigation and issued a formal report finding no maladministration by the council.

**No mal:** decisions by letter discontinuing an investigation because we have found no, or insufficient, evidence of maladministration.

**Omb disc:** decisions by letter discontinuing an investigation in which we have exercised the Ombudsman's general discretion not to pursue the complaint. This can be for a variety of reasons, but the most common is that we have found no or insufficient injustice to warrant pursuing the matter further.

**Outside jurisdiction:** these are cases which were outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.

**Premature complaints:** decisions that the complaint is premature. The LGO does not normally consider a complaint unless a council has first had an opportunity to deal with that complaint itself. So if someone complains to the LGO without having taken the matter

up with a council, the LGO will usually refer it to the council as a 'premature complaint' to see if the council can itself resolve the matter.

**Total excl premature:** all decisions excluding those where we referred the complaint to the council as 'premature'.

#### **4. Response times**

These figures record the average time the council takes to respond to our first enquiries on a complaint. We measure this in calendar days from the date we send our letter/fax/email to the date that we receive a substantive response from the council. The council's figures may differ somewhat, since they are likely to be recorded from the date the council receives our letter until the despatch of its response.

#### **5. Average local authority response times 2006/07**

This table gives comparative figures for average response times by authorities in England, by type of authority, within three time bands.

#### **6. Categories of complaint**

From 1 April 2007 we have amended our complaint category system, and you may notice some changes in the descriptions used in our decision letters and on the printouts attached.

The major change is that we now split social services cases between 'adult care services' and 'children and family services', in order that complaints relating to children and young people can be easily identified.

#### **7. Complaints about personnel matters (employment and pensions)**

We receive some complaints from members of council staff about personnel matters. These are usually outside our jurisdiction, and our practice is now to advise you that we have received the complaint without informing you of who made it.

For that reason, any such complaints on the attached printouts will show a blank space for the complainant's name.

## 2. THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE LETTER TO THE OMBUDSMAN

Mr Tony Redmond  
Local Government Ombudsman

Date

Dear Mr Redmond

### Annual Letter 2006-07

Thank you for your letter. I set out below the Council's comments on the points you have raised.

### Complaints received

We share your concerns at the increased number of complaints to you about Haringey, against the national trend.

Your *Housing* category includes the Council's Housing services and Homes for Haringey. With regard to the Council's services, it seems probable that the introduction in November 2006 of a new Home Connections lettings scheme, together with the attendant publicity, has raised awareness of the rehousing process, which has led to a natural increase in the number of complaints made. Preceding this, there was also a borough-wide review exercise which examined all housing applications and advised applicants on the new process, which may in turn have perhaps raised customer expectations unrealistically. There has been extensive consultation in this area, with tenants, stakeholders and other involved parties, but it is normal that such large-scale changes attract complaints.

Homes for Haringey, the Council's arms length management organisation, was established on 1 April 2006. Its creation was widely publicised and raised awareness and knowledge and heightened expectations, particularly of the 'Decent Homes' standard, work on which has yet to commence. In these circumstances it is to be expected that complaints would increase.

In the *Highways and Transport* category, we believe that complaint numbers have been affected by three key programmes of work of very high profile. The Parking Service were devolved extra powers by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency as part of joined up working with them for removal of untaxed and abandoned vehicles from the highway. This activity impacted on residents' views of the removal of such vehicles, which in turn led to an increase in complaints in this area. The Traffic & Road Safety Team have had two key programmes: increasing the activity for implementation of traffic calming and road safety measures, and increasing the number of Controlled Parking Zones. Whilst the majority of these have been at the request of residents, there are some particularly contentious areas where not everyone is in agreement and residents and traders feel strongly. While there has been extensive consultation activity in the wards affected, complaints have arisen from individuals not entirely satisfied with the outcome.

Work we have undertaken to increase awareness of the planning system, and encourage people to participate in the process, may have led to an increase in the number of *Planning and Building Control* complaints received.

## **Decisions on complaints**

### ***Reports and local settlements***

We are pleased that our proportion of cases decided as local settlements and reports was 1% below the national average. It was also a smaller proportion than in 2005-06 and some 7% less than 2 years ago.

### **Housing Benefit**

Our benefit overpayment default recovery figure has been changed to the Department of Work and Pensions' recommended maximum rate. In January 2007, we reviewed the Rent Officer referral process, and introduced a procedure to improve and monitor both referral turnaround times and valuations of outstanding referrals. To date the average rent officer referral turnaround time is 4 to 5 days and we have seen a significant drop in the number of outstanding referrals awaiting valuation.

### **Housing Repairs**

For a number of reasons, our service fell below its usual and advertised standards in the case you refer to. We have now met with the contractors concerned and reviewed the way in which we share information and handle complaints, and are confident that our response will be better in the future. In addition, we are reviewing our processes for gaining access to properties in order to ensure that we tackle problems in a more efficient and effective manner.

### **Homelessness and housing allocations**

We provided training for officers in the applications and implications of the new Lettings Policy in November 2006. As a result, we are confident that complaints will significantly reduce in the future, including for cases you refer to such as the failure to properly consider letters, errors in awarding points and failure to accept a homelessness application

### **Private housing grants**

As you say, we have introduced new procedures to help prevent a recurrence of the problem in the case mentioned.

### **Anti social behaviour**

We welcomed your assistance in resolving the first complaint, but will be writing to you separately in view of the implications of the agreed settlement for future cases in the light of our current policies. We accept that, in some instances, it may have appeared that the information supplied to the complainant was incorrect, but in the main this was to preserve the confidentiality of our investigations on issues unrelated to the allegations raised by the complainant.

We accept that, in the second case, our investigations and enforcement actions were delayed and officers did operate outside of relevant procedures. Having reviewed the case, both internally and with our enforcement partners, we have decided not to amend our procedures as we believe this to be a unique and particularly complex case.



## **Planning**

The council receives a very large number of communications each year in respect of planning applications, and encourages people to participate in the process and to submit comments. The errors you refer to are therefore very regrettable. We will work to continuously improve our systems to try to prevent any recurrence in the future.

## **Education**

We have now changed the waiting list arrangements for Haringey community schools as we agreed in relation to the case you refer to.

## **Highways and transportation**

A site meeting has been held on the case you refer to. It was agreed that an amendment would be made to the access point of the complainant's crossing, and that maintenance would be arranged for the planted area on the roundabout.

## **The Council's complaints procedure and the handling of complaints**

Of the three local settlements in cases resubmitted to you, two concerned Homes for Haringey. In both of these, whilst we agree there were service failures, we only had the opportunity to carry out a stage 1 investigation before you conducted your own investigation. We would have hopefully otherwise resolved both without your involvement at stages 2 or 3 of our complaints process.

In the third case, which related to housing benefit, there was an individual officer error and, as you say, we have taken appropriate action to prevent a recurrence.

## **Liaison with you**

We were pleased that you were kind enough to make visits to both the Council and Homes for Haringey during the year. These were valued and much appreciated. We are very keen to make all possible use of complaints for service improvement, and your contributions to this are most welcome.

We share your concern to resolve complaints as quickly as possible. This is why we aim to respond to your enquiries almost ten days quicker than your own target, and intend to continue to do so.

The staff member who attended your link officer seminar found it to be of great value to her work. We would like to thank you for providing the event.

## **LGO developments**

When we receive your special reports, we ask the appropriate services to ensure that they bring their procedures into line with the best practice, should that not already be the case.

The guidance in your report on planning applications for phone masts is helpful. We do meet the 56 day requirement for dealing with applications, and try to be pro-active in guiding telecommunications companies to appropriate locations, and encourage site sharing. There are some details over which we have queries, and we will write to you separately about these.

We have been awaiting your report on local partnerships to inform our work in developing an effective complaints protocol with partners. We are actively considering it and will be raising the matter shortly with the Haringey Strategic Partnership.

### **Conclusions and general observations**

We make use of your findings on individual cases throughout the year for service improvement, but your annual letter is a helpful focus for both us and our service users as we publish both your letter and our response as part of our annual complaints report.

Yours sincerely,

Ita O'Donovan  
Chief Executive

**Appendix 4:  
WHY PEOPLE COMPLAINED, WHAT THEY WANTED, & HOW THEY  
MADE CONTACT (stage 1 complaints)**

**1. Issues raised in complaint cases**  
(Stage 1 – including Homes for Haringey)

Nature of Problem	Further info on problem	2005-06		2006-07	
		No.	%	No.	%
Data Protection	Data Protection	4	0.2%	5	0.2%
Discrimination	Age	1	0%	-	-
	Disability	2	0.1%	2	0.1%
	Gender	1	0%	-	-
	Race	2	0.1%	5	0.2%
	Racist incident	1	0%	-	-
	Religion/belief/faith	1	0%	2	0.1%
Employee Behaviour	Employee Behaviour	200	8.5%	234	8.7%
Freedom of Information		-	-	5	0.2%
Harassment/hate crime/ASB	Disability	-	-	1	0%
Harassment/hate crime/ASB	Ethnicity	-	-	1	0%
Harassment/hate crime/ASB	General	-	-	17	0.6%
Policy	Policy	30	1.3%	49	1.8%
Poor Communication	Not enough/wrong explanation	36	1.5%	11	0.4%
	Not enough/wrong information			32	1.2%
	Long wait for meeting/visit	5	0.2%	6	0.2%
	No reply to emails	19	0.8%	34	1.3%
	No reply to letters	57	2.4%		
	Not informed of a decision	44	1.9%	42	1.6%
	Other	88	3.7%	62	2.3%
	Repeat requests for info	26	1.1%	15	0.6%
	Telephones busy/unanswered	8	0.3%	6	0.2%
	Unsatisfactory Response	30	1.2%	33	1.2%
Service Access	Physical	8	0.3%	19	0.7%
	Opening hours	-	-	5	0.2%
Service Cost	Service Cost	36	1.5%	17	0.6%
Service Delayed	Service Delayed	5	0.2%	159	5.9%
Service Inappropriate	Bailiffs/summons	19	.8%	67	2.5%
	Bereavement	57	2.4%	1	0.0%
	Demands for payment	-	-	129	4.8%
	Legal action	-	-	3	0.1%
	Other enforcement action	-	-	45	1.7%
Service not provided	Other	44	1.9%	-	-
	Payment not made	39	1.7%	43	1.6%
	Other	535	22.7%	512	19.1%
	Service incomplete	1	0%	-	-
	Promised service not provided	-	-	242	9.0%
	Enforcement action not taken	-	-	24	1.3%
	Service Quality	Appointment Not Kept	74	3.1%	38
Confidentiality		5	0.2%	-	-
Incorrect or misleading advice		64	2.7%	52	1.9%
Lost Documents		11	0.5%	-	-
Other		532	22.5%	260	9.7%
Payment made to wrong a/c		1	0%	-	-
No response to info/service request		-	-	13	0.5%
Policy/procedure not followed		-	-	24	0.9%

	Service incomplete	-	-	37	1.4%
	Unhappy with decision	-	-	56	2.1%
	Inaccurate records	-	-	16	0.6%
	Poor standard	2	0.1%	320	11.9%
Service Removed	Service Removed	22	0.9%	13	0.5%

## 2. What complainants wanted

(Stage 1 – including Homes for Haringey)

Expectations	2005-2006		2006-2007	
	No.	%	No.	%
Action against employee(s)	70	2 %	73	1%
A decision explained	555	16 %	656	13%
An apology	431	13 %	619	13%
A service provided	933	28%	1230	25%
Better customer care	249	7%	563	11%
Compensation	56	2%	80	2%
Improved customer information	99	3%	112	2%
Improved policy	98	3%	307	6%
Improved procedure	323	10%	498	10%
Information provided	460	14%	648	13%
Refund	59	2%	95	2%
Training for employees	56	2%	58	1%

## 3. How complainants made contact

(Stage 1 – including Homes for Haringey)

How received	2005-2006		2006-2007	
	No.	%	No.	%
Complaint Form	408	21 %	497	19%
Email	363	18 %	629	24%
Fax	37	2 %	23	1%
In person	14	1 %	18	1%
Letter	619	31 %	665	26%
Ombudsman Letter	21	1 %	28	1%
Phone	468	24%	454	18%
Web Form	58	3%	248	10%

## Appendix 5: GENDER & ETHNICITY OF COMPLAINANTS

(Stage 1 – including Homes for Haringey)

	2004-05		2005-06		2006-07	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1571</b>		<b>2003</b>		<b>2569</b>	
<b>1. Gender</b>						
Female	720	45.8	979	48.9	1342	52.2
Male	524	33.4	709	35.4	940	36.6
Male & Female	24	1.5	43	2.1	38	1.5
Unknown	303	19.3	272	13.6	239	9.3
<b>2. Ethnicity</b>						
<i>Asian/ Asian British</i>						
Bangladeshi	2	0.1	6	0.3	9	0.4
East African Asian	2	0.1	2	0.1	6	0.2
Indian	10	0.6	9	0.4	16	0.6
Other	7	0.4	10	0.5	19	0.7
Pakistani	3	0.2	3	0.1	3	0.1
<i>Black/black British</i>						
African	61	3.9	83	4.1	89	3.5
Caribbean	85	5.4	124	6.2	100	3.9
Other	4	0.3	12	0.6	26	1.0
<i>Chinese</i>	1	0.1	3	0.1	2	0.1
<i>Mixed</i>						
<i>Other</i>	3	0.2	7	0.3	8	0.3
White & Asian	4	0.3	4	0.2	3	0.1
White & black African	4	0.3	9	0.4	5	0.2
White & black Caribbean	7	0.4	8	0.4	15	0.6
<i>Other ethnic group</i>	28	1.8	39	1.9	24	0.9
<i>White</i>						
British	136	8.7	234	11.7	313	12.2
Greek-Cypriot	11	0.7	9	0.4	31	1.2
Irish	25	1.6	45	2.2	43	1.7
Kurdish	12	0.8	15	0.7	6	0.2
Other	33	2.1	36	1.8	61	2.4
Turkish	11	0.7	11	0.5	28	1.1
Turkish-Cypriot	9	0.6	14	0.7	7	0.3
<i>Unknown</i>	1117	71.1	1291	64.5	1682	65.5
<i>Did not want to provide</i>			29	1.4	73	2.8