



The Commission for
Local Administration in England

The Commission for Local Administration in England
Corporate Plan
2005/06, 2006/07, 2007/08
(incorporating the Business Plan for 2005/06)



Corporate Plan 2005/06, 2006/07, 2007/08 (incorporating the Business Plan for 2005/06)

Contents

Chapter 1 – Foreword.....	1
Chapter 2 – Review of our performance in 2003/04.....	3
Complaints based activity.....	3
Resources deployed on investigations and advice	6
Performance against our business goals	8
Other significant achievements in 2003/04	18
Chapter 3 – External influences on this plan	23
Changes which may influence the volume and nature of complaints.....	23
Changes which may affect the nature of our operations	28
Chapter 4 – Developing the Commission over the next three years.....	30
Our vision and business goals	30
Improving quality and efficiency	33
Improving external communications	34
Chapter 5 – Business plan for 2005/06 (and forward plans for 2006/07, 2007/08) .	40
Complaints workload projections.....	40
Our business goals and performance targets	42
Staffing resources for 2005/06	46
Chapter 6 – Alternative planning assumptions for 2006/07 and 2007/08.....	48
Appendix 1	51
The statutory role of the Commission and the Commissioners.....	51
Appendix 2	52
Statement of purpose and values, and equal opportunities statement.....	52

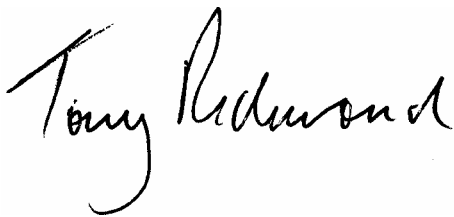
Chapter 1 – Foreword

- 1.1 This is the Commission's overall strategic planning document for the three years ahead. It is produced in line with guidelines from HM Treasury¹. In this document we review our performance over the latest complete financial year, 2003/04. We identify the likely external influences on our workload and organisation over the life of the plan. We then describe the broad direction of development over the next three years and our business goals. The business plan for 2005/06 gives our assumptions for workload, performance targets and detailed plans for that year, with the resource implications; these are based on past trends, development initiatives and predicted outcomes for 2004/05. Finally we set out our long term projections and alternative scenarios for 2006/07 and 2007/08.

- 1.2 Since September 2003 we have experienced a considerable upsurge in new complaints, on average 7% more than the previous 12 month period. The growth is spread widely across a range of services and geographically. We have been unable to establish any one reason for this growth and attribute it to a variety of factors including propensity to complain. We had planned on no growth in new complaints in 2003/04 and only a 2% increase in 2004/05. Our staff have responded magnificently to the challenge of the extra new complaints with our highest ever productivity per head. But inevitably the number of cases in hand by the end of 2003/04 had increased. In the current year, 2004/05, we have pursued economies and efficiency measures to redirect resources so we can employ additional investigators. Despite this, and continued high staff productivity, we are experiencing a severe build up of cases which will carry forward into 2005/06. We expect new complaints growth of between 4% and 8% in 2005/06, based on long and short term trends.

1 HMT Draft Model Management Statement 99 Oct 02

- 1.3 Notwithstanding these challenges in processing complaints we continue to make excellent progress in our work to develop the advice role of the Commission. This is so that bodies within jurisdiction, and ultimately the public who use their services, benefit from the general lessons from individual complaints. We are working closely with bodies such as the Audit Commission, the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA), other public sector ombudsmen, and the advisory and voluntary sector on these developments. We have an exciting new plans in 2005/06 to quadruple the amount of training we offer local government and other bodies in jurisdiction to improve their own complaints handling processes and, in particular, the effective investigation of complaints.
- 1.4 We are also making considerable efforts to improve awareness and understanding of our service, particularly amongst the advisory sector and sectors of the community who are under-represented in the numbers of complaints we receive.
- 1.5 In order to meet the planned complaints workload and to continue the development of advice and training we are seeking modest growth in our grant in 2005/06. We are mindful of the many spending pressures on government and local government so we have offset some of the requirement by efficiency savings, redirecting resources and drawing on our reserves, but in a relatively small organisation the scope for this is not great.
- 1.6 We look forward to a challenging and exciting three years as we continue to develop and improve our services, to the benefit of the public and bodies within jurisdiction.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Redmond". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'T'.

Tony Redmond
Chairman and Chief Executive

Chapter 2 – Review of our performance in 2003/04

Complaints based activity

Table 1: Overview of Commission’s performance on complaints over the last decade

Year	Complaints received	Complaints determined	Cases in hand at year end	Average number of staff in post	Average number of complaints determined per investigator (average in post) ²	Average number of complaints determined per member of all staff (average in post) ³	Average time taken - all cases, excluding prematures (weeks)	Average cost per complaint determined at constant 2003/04 prices ⁴
94/95	15,525	15,140	5,157	178.5	186.9	85.0	20.9	541
95/96	15,266	16,344	4,079	197.5	176.9	83.0	21.8	557
96/97	15,322	15,412	3,889	205.0	161.6	75.0	19.3	561
97/98	14,969	15,262	3,696	198.0	168.8	77.0	17.9	562
98/99	15,869	15,653	3,912	196.8	179.9	79.5	17.1	555
99/00	17,555	16,759	4,708	193.5	190.4	86.5	16.6	540
00/01	19,179	18,220	5,633	203.0	189.0	89.7	17.6	506
01/02	18,309	19,055	4,846	209.5	191.5	89.4	19.2	509
02/03	17,610	18,376	3,926	209.3	184.3	91.2	17.9	517
03/04	18,982	18,658	4,203	202.6	198.5	96.6	15.5	555

2.1. The year 2003/04 was characterised by a significant increase in complaints received; this particularly occurred in the second half of the year. By the end of the year complaints had increased by 8.4% over the previous year’s figures, and the increase for the last six months over the last six months of the previous year was 12.3%. The total was over 1,000 more cases than our original planning assumption for the year. Our staff responded very well to this unexpected increase, producing the highest productivity and lowest average times taken for the decade. But inevitably the number of cases in hand at the end of the year had increased.

2.2. The following table sets out in detail an analysis of changes in types of complaint received comparing 2003/04 with the previous year.

2 Figures exclude investigators seconded to non-investigative work.

3 The figures have been adjusted to allow for 5% of staff resources being spent on advice based activity in 2002/03 and 2003/04.

4 The figures have been adjusted to allow for the costs of advice based activity.

Table 2: New complaints received in 2003/04 and the previous year by category

Category	London			Coventry			York			Commission		
	last year	this year	Diff	last year	this year	Diff	last year	this year	Diff	last year	this year	Diff
Housing:												
<i>Register/alloc</i>	129	141	9.3%	94	123	30.9%	145	155	6.9%	368	419	13.9%
<i>Transfers</i>	230	237	3.0%	222	247	11.3%	133	145	9.0%	585	629	7.5%
<i>Homelessness</i>	146	181	24.0%	86	90	4.7%	58	77	32.8%	290	348	20.0%
<i>Neighr nuis</i>	215	245	14.0%	184	226	22.8%	195	234	20.0%	594	705	18.7%
<i>CH repairs</i>	408	419	2.7%	378	436	15.3%	472	486	3.0%	1,258	1,341	6.6%
<i>CH mangt, other</i>	188	199	5.9%	106	130	22.6%	117	110	-6.0%	411	439	6.8%
<i>Sales/leasehold</i>	176	171	-2.8%	137	132	-3.6%	110	120	9.1%	423	423	0.0%
<i>Housing benefit</i>	799	701	-12.3%	549	517	-5.8%	691	649	-6.1%	2,039	1,867	-8.4%
<i>Housing grants</i>	37	41	10.8%	39	54	38.5%	98	79	19.4%	174	174	0.0%
Total Housing	2,423	2,436	0.5%	1,905	2,086	9.5%	2,227	2,280	2.4%	6,555	6,802	3.8%
Planning:												
<i>Pub for pl apps</i>	30	33	10.0%	68	86	26.5%	53	42	20.8%	151	161	6.6%
<i>Enforcement</i>	165	182	10.3%	204	276	35.3%	205	214	4.4%	574	672	17.1%
<i>Cons/amenity</i>	517	627	21.3%	793	1,001	26.2%	679	901	32.7%	1,989	2,529	27.1%
Total planning	892	1,005	12.7%	1,434	1,705	18.9%	1,145	1,386	21.0%	3,471	4,096	18.0%
Education	513	567	10.5%	437	360	-17.6%	676	554	18.0%	1,626	1,481	-8.9%
Social services	320	393	22.8%	358	417	16.5%	515	536	4.1%	1,193	1,346	12.8%
Land	92	47	-48.9%	105	123	17.1%	133	152	14.3%	330	322	-2.4%
Env health	165	193	17.0%	210	268	27.6%	237	217	-8.4%	612	678	10.8%
Highways	530	711	34.2%	457	537	17.5%	382	421	10.2%	1,369	1,669	21.9%
Local taxation	340	352	3.5%	431	448	3.9%	309	276	10.7%	1,080	1,076	-0.4%
Council tax	1	30		0	26		1	18		2	74	
Other	307	360	17.3%	397	465	17.1%	565	613	8.5%	1,269	1,438	13.3%
Total	5,583	6,094	9.2%	5,734	6,435	12.2%	6,190	6,453	4.2%	17,507	18,982	8.4%

2.3. Over the past five years we have experienced unusually high levels of housing benefit complaints. This was due to serious problems in a relatively small number of councils. As these councils have improved service delivery, the numbers and overall proportion of HB complaints in our workload has fallen back, but this has still not returned to proportions experienced before the upsurge which was around 7%. The following tables illustrate the position.

Table 2A: Housing benefit complaints in 2003/04 and the previous year for authorities where 100 or more complaints were received

Borough	Last year	This year	Difference
Hackney	168	168	0%
Lambeth	180	163	-9.4%
Islington	147	66	-55.1%
Ealing	118	56	-52.5%
Liverpool	213	257	20.7%
Birmingham	122	77	-36.9%
Total	948	787	-17.1%

Table 2B: HB as a percentage of total new complaints over the decade

Year	Total complaints received	HB complaints	% of total	Non HB complaints
1994/95	15,525	1,060	6.8	14,465
1995/96	15,266	837	4.5	14,429
1996/97	15,322	1,055	6.9	14,267
1997/98	14,969	1,147	7.7	13,822
1998/99	15,869	1,365	8.6	14,504
1999/00	17,555	2,353	13.4	15,202
2000/01	19,179	4,028	21.0	15,151
2001/02	18,309	2,996	16.4	15,313
2002/03	17,610	2,053	11.7	15,557
2003/04	18,982	1,867	9.8	17,115

- 2.4. If HB complaints are excluded from the calculations, other complaints show an increase of 10% between 2002/03 and 2003/04. As table 2 illustrates, this was concentrated in the areas of planning, highways, neighbour nuisance, social services and homelessness. The complaint increase involved a wide range of councils rather than being concentrated in a few councils in difficulties.

Table 3: Summary of decisions taken in the past five years

Decisions	1999/2000	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
No. of prematures	3,705	4,334	4,143	4,100	4,693
<i>% of total</i>	<i>22.1%</i>	<i>23.8%</i>	<i>21.7%</i>	<i>22.3%</i>	<i>25.2%</i>
No. of outside jurisdiction	2,019	2,175	2,289	2,210	2,365
<i>% of total</i>	<i>12.0%</i>	<i>11.9%</i>	<i>12.0%</i>	<i>12.0%</i>	<i>12.7%</i>
Local settlements	2,788	3,732	4,146	3,648	3,188
<i>% of total</i>	<i>16.6%</i>	<i>20.5%</i>	<i>21.8%</i>	<i>19.9%</i>	<i>17.1%</i>
Reports	333	261	237	272	199
Other decisions	7,914	7,718	8,240	8,146	8,213
Total no. of decisions	16,759	18,220	19,055	18,376	18,658

- 2.5. This comparison indicates that the proportions of outcomes were broadly the same over the five years. We published relatively few reports; publication occurs when an investigation is completed rather than the complaint being settled by the local authority or otherwise discontinued by the Ombudsman. The total number of cases where redress was obtained in 2003/04 was 3,363 (29% of complaints excluding premature complaints and those outside jurisdiction).

Resources deployed on investigations and advice

Table 4: Income and expenditure, past three years

	2001/02 Actual (£)	2002/03 Actual (£)	2003/04 Actual (£)
Grant	9,244,000	11,480,000	10,490,000
Interest	27,502	57,251	57,190
Other income	50,768	28,583	118,744
Total income	9,322,270	11,565,834	10,665,934
Carried forward balance	550,819	643,098	1,099,846
Total resources	9,873,089	12,208,932	11,765,780
Total expenditure	9,229,992	10,330,953	11,079,120

- 2.6. The 2002/03 grant included £1.64 million to fund the London office relocation. We earned interest on this amount which explains the difference in interest between years. The carry forward includes the capitalised value of the fitting out of the new London offices and the residue of grant monies allocated to the move.
- 2.7. Table 5 sets out details of our accommodation. We moved our London premises at the beginning of 2003/04. The London premises is larger because it also provides accommodation for corporate services staff and corporate functions, including our main training and meetings space, which we share with the Office of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (OPHSO).

Table 5: Accommodation 2003/04

Location	Office	Square footage	Lease expiry date	Rental
London	2.5 floors in Millbank Tower	18,289	25 December 2018*	£685,837
Coventry	The Oaks	10,485	28 September 2015	£152,820
York	Beverley House	9,173	31 July 2015	£115,000
Commission total		32,920		

*(break clause in 2013)

Table 6: Average staff in post

Team	2001/02			2002/03			2003/04		
	Management/ Specialist staff	Invs	Other staff	Management/ Specialist staff	Invs	Other staff	Management/ Specialist staff	Invs	Other staff
London	6.92	35.25	28.20	7.00	34.04	26.17	6.00	31.92	21.79
Coventry	6.00	32.33	21.53	6.00	32.75	21.92	6.00	31.29	20.38
York	6.00	32.21	24.66	5.88	32.88	25.04	6.00	32.08	24.71
Corporate	9.00		9.46	9.00		8.58	10.75	2.75	8.96
Total	27.92	99.79	83.85	27.88	99.67	81.71	28.75	98.04	75.84

- 2.8. In broad terms our budgeted staffing level has remained stable over the three year period but staff in post varies with turnover. There has been a reduction in the proportion of other (ie support) staff and an increase in staff working on corporate communications projects as part of our development of advice activity.

Table 7: Staff turnover

Year	Investigative staff			All staff		
	Average in post	No of leavers	Turnover	Average in post	No of leavers	Turnover
1999/2000	88.4	8.0	9.0%	193.5	22.5	11.6%
2000/01	95.4	8.0	8.4%	203.0	33.0	16.3%
2001/02	99.8	12.0	12.0%	209.5	26.0	12.4%
2002/03	99.6	6.0	6.0%	209.2	18.5	8.8%
2003/04	98.0	2.5	2.6%	202.6	21.0	10.4%

2.9. Staff turnover has an impact in terms of loss of knowledge and the costs of recruitment and training new recruits. But it also introduces new experience to the organisation which is a good thing and often staff who leave us take the positive experience of working for us into employment with bodies in jurisdiction.

Performance against our business goals

2.10. We had seven key business goals in 2003/04. We set performance targets for most of these goals, based on past performance, efficiency measures and available resources.

Business goal 1 – to reduce the time taken to decide cases.

Business goal 2 – to increase the number of complaints decided per head of staff allocated to the investigative process.

Business goal 3 – to reduce the average cost per complaint (in constant prices).

Business goal 4 – to make decisions that are sound and justified.

Business goal 5 – to provide customers with a service that is courteous, considerate and respects diversity.

Business goal 6 – to increase awareness and understanding of our services.

Business goal 7 – to give guidance and advice, and so improve local authority services.

2.11. Our recent performance against these goals is set out below.

Business goal 1: To reduce the time taken to decide cases

Table 8: Cases decided within time bands

Key indicator	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Percentage of all complaints (excluding prematures) determined within 13 weeks	54.9	51.3	49.9	53.9	58.4 (50)
Percentage of all complaints (excluding prematures) determined within 26 weeks	81.2	78.7	75.8	78.4	83.9 (75)
Percentage of all complaints (excluding prematures) determined within 52 weeks	95.4	95.1	93.0	93.5	96.4 (95)

(target figures shown in brackets)

2.12. We exceeded all our targets (shown in brackets). Our performance is affected by the response times from complainants and local authorities; the latter are summarised in table 9 and detailed in our annual report.

Table 9: Average local authority response times 2003/04 (previous year shown in brackets)

Bodies (number)	< 4 weeks %	4 - 8 weeks %	> 8 weeks %
District Councils (238)	51 (44)	46 (53)	3 (3)
Unitary Authorities (46)	35 (24)	65 (72)	0 (4)
Metropolitan Authorities (36)	47 (42)	53 (58)	0 (0)
County Councils (34)	41 (38)	59 (62)	0 (0)
London Boroughs (33)	21 (12)	79 (73)	0 (15)

Table 10: Older cases in hand

Key indicator	March 2000	March 2001	March 2002	March 2003	March 2004
More than 52 weeks	207	364	298	158	120

2.13. Cases can be delayed for good reasons, such as related court proceedings. But the main reason for the increases in older cases is when we are faced with unplanned increases in new work as was experienced with HB cases in 2000/01.

Table 11: Complaints ‘carried forward’ between financial years

Year	a. Carried forward from previous year	b. Complaints received	Total workload (a + b)	Carried forward to next year	Carried forward as %age total
99/00	3,912 (3,730)	17,555	21,467	4,708	21.9
00/01	4,708 (4,416)	19,179	23,887	5,633	23.6
01/02	5,633 (5,246)	18,309	23,942	4,846	20.2
02/03	4,846 (4,645)	17,610	22,456	3,926	17.5
03/04	3,926 (4,921)	18,932	22,858	4,203	18.4

2.14. Some complaints will always have to be carried forward from the financial year in which they are made – for instance, many complaints received in the closing three months of that year will still be in progress at year end (the number of cases in hand at the end of the year which were received in the last three months of the year is shown in brackets). But it also reflects the effects of unplanned increases in new complaints. The average carry forward over the past five years has been 20% and the 2003/04 figure was below this.

Business goal 2: To increase the number of complaints decided per head of staff allocated to the investigative process

Table 12: Complaints decided per head of staff

Key indicator	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	
	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Target	Actual
Number of complaints decided per head of average number of staff in post (full time equivalents)	79.5	86.6	89.4	91.2	93	96.9

2.15. Our complaint decisions output averaged per head of all staff is at its highest level for the decade. This allows for 5% of staff time spent on work on advice and awareness and not directly connected to complaints processing.

Business goal 3: To reduce the average cost per complaint (in 2003/04 prices)

Table 13: Average cost per complaint

Key indicator	1999/2000	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
	£	£	£	£	£
Average cost per complaint	540	506	509	517	555

2.16. The average cost per case has increased. This is for the following reasons:

- increase in pension fund contributions;
- premises costs arising from the London office move;
- new scheme for investigator pay;
- National Insurance contributions increase.

To enable of historical comparisons, we have not separated out the advice activity costs from the costs of complaint handling in calculating these figures; and advice activity costs increased significantly in 2003/04 with our new level of activity.

Business goal 4: To make decisions that are sound and justified

2.17. Our performance measure for this goal was ‘justified comebacks’; a comeback is a request for reconsideration of a decision by a complainant. The following table summarises the results (we have only two years of data collected in this way):

Table 14: Comebacks

	2002/03	2003/04
Comebacks terminated in period	1,331	1,436
Comebacks as a % of total decisions	7.2%	7.7%
% of comebacks completed within 28 days	72.1%	71.7%
Outcome of comebacks		
i) Decision confirmed	953	1,166
ii) Decision confirmed: further explanation	267	191
iii) Termination confirmed: new reason	15	7
iv) Relunched: new information	74	63
v) Relunched: error	12	9
Unsatisfactory original decision (ii, iii and v)	294	207
Unsatisfactory as % of total decisions	1.6%	1.1%

2.18. The data for both years shows that only a very small proportion are found to be in error; the percentage change between the years is not significant. In most cases we either confirm the decision or provide a further explanation to try to address the complainant's concerns. Sometimes the complainant provides new information which warrants a relaunch of the investigation.

2.19. We recognise that 'comebacks' only occur where a complainant decides to complain about a decision, but there could be other errors which would not be noticed in this way. So we also check a sample of files from each investigator as part of our quality control process.

2.20. Another indicator of performance in this area is the results of judicial review cases where our decisions are challenged in the courts by complainants or bodies within jurisdiction. The following table summaries the position in recent years:

Table 15: Judicial review cases

	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Number of cases	11	7	7
Fault found	0	0	0

Business goal 5: To provide customers with a service that is courteous, considerate and respects diversity

2.21. We periodically commission a large customer satisfaction study, which is conducted by an independent consumer research company. The most recent survey was in 1999; the results are on our website (www.lgo.org.uk/surveys.htm). The survey showed significant improvements in most areas. We will conduct the next survey in 2004.

Table 16: Our own conduct - customer complaints and compliments

	1999/2000	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Complaints					
Total	125	117	114	94	92
Not upheld	90	86	74	67	68
Upheld wholly or in part	35	31	40	27	24
Compliments	-	-	273	476	535

2.22. The number of customer complaints we find justified remains relatively small and the majority of them are about delay. We analyse complaints that are upheld to learn lessons for improvement in our performance. We do not seek out compliments (and these are not always recorded by staff) but we are always pleased to receive them. We did not collect data on compliments in 2000/01. The increase in 2002/03 most likely reflects our improved recording of compliments in our records.

2.23. We also monitor response times from our advice calls service.

Table 17: Advice calls response rate

	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Telephone times			
% of calls dealt with immediately	61.9%	73.3%	88.6%
Av. response times for call-backs	7.3 mins	9.2 mins	5.0 mins

Business goal 6: To increase awareness and understanding of our services

2.24. We believe that the most significant factors that influence the level of complaints are public awareness and whether people, and those who advise them, feel that complaining to us is the best way of resolving their complaint.

- 2.25. In 2003/04 acting jointly with OPHSO, we commissioned a public awareness and attitudes survey. The results of this are on our website (www.lgo.org.uk/surveys.htm). The key conclusions are reported in chapter 3.
- 2.26. The following special projects were carried out to increase awareness and understanding in 2003/04 as part of our Change Agenda:

Developing understanding in the voluntary and advisory sector

2.27. We carried out the following actions targeted at this sector:

- *We introduced an advisers' section on our website. This includes advice about when and how the LGO may be able to help, an on-line referral form and an interactive feedback form.*
- *We introduced a telephone consultancy line for advisers so that they can talk through a potential complaint with one of our investigators.*
- *We prepared a poster giving detailed advice about when and how the LGO may be able to help and distributed this to a wide range of advisory groups (1,500 distributed).*
- *We updated the information about the LGO contained in Citizen's Advice Bureaux information systems to include a copy of our revised complaint booklet and the advisers' referral form.*
- *We responded to many requests for talks etc from advisory groups.*
- *We ensured that a number of key organisations now have links to our website and contain information about the LGO – this is ongoing work as part of an audit of our database of advisory groups.*
- *We made contact with over 250 agencies whose client group is predominately ethnic minority communities.*
- *We engaged with the Higher Education advisory sector through e-mail, consultation and the distribution of information.*

2.28. It is difficult yet to evaluate what has been the impact of these initiatives. Feedback so far has been positive. The advisers' section on the website is currently attracting between 700 – 900 'hits' a month. The telephone consultancy line has been little used as yet; this may be due to a number of factors, including our reluctance to advertise fully the fact that advisers can ask to speak to an investigator until we knew what the resource implications would be. In addition, it is not always apparent that a caller is an adviser so we may not be recording all referrals. We have only recently begun to record where complaints are subsequently referred by an adviser so we do not yet have data to show whether the number of such referrals are increasing.

Developing awareness and understanding amongst young people

2.29. We have focussed on this sector because we are aware of the low proportion of complaints we receive from under 25s and of the Government's plans to establish a Children's Commissioner who will direct individual complaints to us. The project focussed strongly around working with advisers and advocates. It included:

- *Working with Connexions partnerships to develop a section of our website aimed at children, to produce a digest of cases showing how and where the Ombudsmen have helped this age group and to explore the possibility of getting information about the LGO into the handbooks of Connexions personal advisers, who deal with large numbers of children between the ages of 13 -19 regularly.*
- *Developing key contacts with advisers and advocates both in the advisory sector and in councils.*
- *Developing process and procedures to improve our handling of young peoples' complaints. (We say more about this in chapter 4.)*

Advice calls service

2.30. We provide the public with telephone advice about our services through a dedicated team of advisers based in York. Where we are unable to help because a matter is outside our jurisdiction they will advise the caller about any other relevant bodies. The performance of the service is summarised below.

Table 18: Advice calls activity

	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Total calls	15,094	15,001	16,743
Lo-call calls	9,401	6,721	10,649
Average calls per day	61.1	60.1	66.7
Average lo-calls per day	38.1	26.9	42.4
% lo-calls of all calls	62.3%	44.8%	63.6%
% of calls from potential complainants ¹	86.3%	85.8%	86.5%
% callers referred to other orgs ¹	16.2%	15.9%	12.4%

¹ The percentage figures for potential complainants and those referred to other bodies do not add up to 100 because some callers fall into both categories.

- 2.31. We recorded an 11.6% increase in use of the service between 2002/03 and 2003/04. The percentage of callers making use of the lo-call facility also increased. There is a direct link between increases in the calls to the advice line and subsequent increases in complaints lodged with us.
- 2.32. We are exploring ways in which we might develop the current service based on best practice in the public sector, experience of other bodies and suggestions from our own staff. We completed the second stage of a review of this service in 2003/04 and changes are being implemented as detailed in chapter 4.

Business goal 7: To give guidance and advice, and so improve local authority services

Publications

- 2.33. In August 2003 we published our seventh annual digest of cases. Our discussions with councils and advisers indicate that this is seen as a very useful resource, both in its printed and website forms.
- 2.34. We have now established a regular programme of special reports. The first three were published in 2003/04:
- about the funding of aftercare of people discharged from compulsory detention in hospital under Section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983,

- about delays in referring housing benefit appeals to the Appeals Service,
- drawing attention to a range of common faults in dealing with education admissions and appeals.

2.35. As well as distributing printed versions of these reports to relevant authorities we have put them on our website where they are being regularly accessed. The Section 117 report which was published in May 2003 was still attracting approximately 900 – 1400 ‘hits’ a month in the first quarter of 2004. Each of the other reports attracted over 800 ‘hits’ in the months immediately following publication – February and March 2004. The reports also attracted publicity in the national and specialist press.

2.36. We have established that, so far, two thirds of social services authorities have responded to the Section 117 report by searching out and reimbursing people whom they had charged wrongly and it appears that the amount they expect to pay totals about £45m. It seems likely that other authorities will follow suit with possibly £75m being repaid to those wrongly charged.

Annual letter

2.37. In 2003/4 we successfully completed and evaluated a pilot in which we sent a letter to 122 councils. The aims of the annual letter are:

- Helping councils learn from the outcome of complaints made to us.
- Underpinning effective working relations between us and councils.
- Identifying opportunities for us to provide assistance that a council may wish to seek in bringing about improvements to its internal complaint handling.
- Providing complaint-based information which councils may find useful in assessing and reviewing their performance.

2.38. The response of councils to the pilot was overwhelmingly positive. So the Commission decided to send letters to all councils in future years.

Training activity

2.39. We provided training events for staff from 25 local authorities. These were a mixture of training for local authority link officers (nominated staff who help to process ombudsman complaints) and training in good investigative practice for groups of local authority staff who deal with complaints. We describe our plans for a considerable development of this activity in chapter 4.

Ad hoc advice

2.40. During the year we gave substantial amounts of specific advice on administrative practice to individual local authorities and other bodies, at meetings, by telephone and in correspondence.

Other significant achievements in 2003/04

2.41. There have been a number of other achievements which are worthy of note in terms of the impact on our organisation and the services we provide to the public.

Working with local government bodies

2.42. We held our annual liaison meeting with representatives of LGA, SOLACE and ACSeS. Amongst the issues discussed were the consultation draft of our corporate plan; reviewing progress with the various Change Agenda projects, in particular those relating to improving local authorities complaints handling; and the operation of the Commission's Memorandum of Understanding with the Standards Board for England. We had also been in dialogue with these bodies on individual issues during the course of the year, including developing our annual letter and our special reports.

Working with allied organisations

2.43. We have been working with the Audit Commission to contribute information on local authorities' complaints performance to the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of local authorities. We have established a regular pattern of meetings at senior level to explore ways of working in complementary ways.

2.44. We have been in regular dialogue with the Standards Board throughout the year about the discharge of our respective functions and opportunities for liaison on complaints.

- 2.45. We work closely with OPHSO. We share many common facilities in our London offices; we have cross representation on one of our working groups. We pursue joint initiatives where there are common interests and to maximise value. An example of this is the MORI survey referred to elsewhere.
- 2.46. We have been in discussion with I&DeA about ways of cooperating in our training and advisory activities.

Annual management conference

- 2.47. We held our 2003/04 annual management conference in Coventry. This event brings together the Ombudsmen, senior and middle management from our three offices, together with representatives from other Public Sector Ombudsman schemes. We considered a range of topics associated with performance and improving efficiency.

Equality and diversity

- 2.48. Our working group on equality and diversity had an active year. Its membership includes staff from all levels in the organisation and from all three offices, plus an external adviser and our senior personnel staff. Amongst the issues tackled in 2003/04 were:
- mental health awareness training;
 - the implications of the Race Relations Amendment Act;
 - family friendly policies;
 - reviewing our equal opportunities policy.
- 2.49. As well as monitoring data on employment, we analyse use of our services by ethnicity, gender, age, and people with a disability. Table 19 below shows the percentages of complainants who fall into the various groups shown, for those complainants who provided monitoring information.

Table 19: Equal opportunities monitoring of complaints

Area monitored	2001/02 (%)	2002/03 (%)	2003/04 (%)
<i>Ethnic group</i>			
White	84	85	86
Black	8	7	7
Asian	4	4	4
Other ethnic group	4	4	4
<i>Gender</i>			
Male	54	55	56
Female	46	45	44
<i>Age</i>			
24 or under	4	3	3
25-59	72	70	70
60 and over	24	27	27
<i>Disability</i>			
with disability	29	29	29
<i>Overall</i>			
Response rates	55	59	63

2.50. The proportions of people who complain to us are broadly in line with the population in England except for the high levels of complaints from people with a disability and low number of complaints from people under 24. We are also mindful that the usage of some local authority services will be proportionately higher for disadvantaged sectors of the community.

Professional training of staff

2.51. We have a major commitment to keeping the professional and operational skills of our staff up to date. This year, in addition to targeted training for individuals, we organised seminars for groups of staff on a wide range of topics including:

- Mental Health Awareness for Support Staff
- Plain English
- Equality and diversity for all new staff
- Identifying and Managing Stress (York)
- Legal Seminars for Investigators

Competencies

2.52. In 2002/03 we adopted a competencies framework for the performance appraisal and pay system of our investigators, who make up half our workforce. In 2003/04 we extended this approach by agreeing competencies for our 13 Assistant Directors.

Review of governance arrangements

2.53. We reviewed the terms of reference and composition of our Audit Committee. We appointed a new independent Chair, Chris Swinson, who commenced in July 2004.

2.54. We agreed a Risk Management Strategy to complement our Risk Register. It sets out responsibilities and review mechanisms to ensure we have a robust approach to risk management.

E-government

2.55. We have a detailed IT Strategy and we have agreed subsidiary objectives linked to the business goals on which our spending and development activity is based.

2.56. We make widespread use of technology for communication, information giving, and transactions. We have encouraged all councils to refer to our services on their websites and we try to ensure that the information held in the main advisory sector information databases is correct about our services and performance.

2.57. We have continued our work to develop the accessibility of our services and the way we conduct our business via electronic means.

2.58. Our progress with the Government's targets is as follows:

- **By March 2001, 90% by value of low value purchases by central government should be carried out electronically.** We handle electronically over 75% of our payments, plus regular payments to the Commission (eg subscriptions). Invoices and some purchases are also dealt with electronically. We are always keen to increase the proportion but are limited by the requirements of our suppliers, especially small firms.
- **By 2005, 100% of government services should be capable of electronic delivery.** Almost all of our dealings with the councils, complainants and others can be done electronically. But some activity cannot be carried out electronically, for example we need to meet with individuals and visit sites. We are increasingly using email for correspondence with councils and some complainants. But many of the public who contact us are not in a position to access the internet and so will continue to rely on written communication and the telephone. Also because of the amount or nature of some material most complainants and councils still prefer to post us bulk printed material associated with complaints even if they use email for other correspondence with us.
- **By 2004, 100% of filing should be electronic.** We operate a scanning system which can hold corporate file materials electronically, but most material is still held in paper form. We destroy most of our closed case files when they are 14 months old; where we do hold older 'landmark cases', these are scanned and then held electronically.

2.59. We carried out a major review of our approach to records management with the assistance of a consultant from the National Archives, in preparation for the Freedom of Information Act 2000. We engaged a project officer to help us to review our systems and policies. We produced a publication scheme and have placed the accessible material under the scheme on our website.

Chapter 3 – External influences on this plan

- 3.1. The following external factors may influence the volume and nature of complaints to us and the way we operate, over the life of this plan. They contribute to the uncertainty in the assumptions in our planning.

Changes which may influence the volume and nature of complaints

Housing benefit

- 3.2. The unusually high numbers of HB complaints which we experienced over the past five years have been generated by a relatively small number of local authorities (table 2A on page 5). With only a few exceptions we have seen a significant improvement in these councils' performance. But we expect HB complaints to continue at around 9% of workload as there is now a heightened awareness of our role.

Transfer of council housing stock

- 3.3. There has been a steady decline in the size of the council housing stock, as council dwellings are transferred to registered social landlords who fall outside of our jurisdiction, and this is expected to continue at the rate of around 100,000 dwellings per year. About 19% of the stock has transferred over the past decade (involving over 680,000 properties), helping to reduce the stock from 3.7 million dwellings in 1993 to 2.5 million in 2003. But the number of housing complaints has not fallen in relation to this change and we expect housing complaints will remain a significant part of our work for the foreseeable future. The changes are shown in the following table:

Table 20: Dwelling stock by tenure (England)

Year	Rented from Registered Social Landlords (000's)	Rented from Local Authorities (000's)
1993/94	779	3,666
1994/95	857	3,565
1995/96	942	3,470
1996/97	985	3,401
1997/98	1,040	3,309
1998/99	1,146	3,178
1999/00	1,273	3,012
2000/01	1,424	2,812
2001/02	1,467	2,708
2002/03	1,621	2,457

Source: ODPM Housing statistics table 104 'Dwelling stock by tenure: England'

Partnership working

3.4. Modern approaches to service delivery are leading to a greater degree of 'joined up services' through partnership working. This not only has potential for more complex complaints, but also for complaints which cover actions within the jurisdiction of more than one statutory scheme. This means we need to liaise more closely with a wider range of bodies, develop protocols and, where the legislation permits, carry out joint investigations.

Complaint handling by bodies within jurisdiction

3.5. The level of complaints to us is affected by bodies' own ability to deal with justified complaints effectively and promptly. We consider it part of our advisory role to help councils to improve their own complaints handling. We have issued a guidance note on this subject and we run training events for councils. We plan to develop considerably this area of activity and say more about this in later chapters. We recognise that as council complaints handling improves it may mean that the cases which do come to us will be more complex and the parties will be more estranged, which will impact on the nature of our workload.

Planning applications

- 3.6. The large increase in the number of planning complaints in 2003/04 has coincided with a sizeable increase in planning applications in the previous year. We feel that there is likely to be a relationship between these occurrences and, whilst the property market remains buoyant, we can expect the high levels of applications and complaints to continue.

Table 21: Planning applications and planning complaints

Year applications	Applications	LGO complaints
1997/98	504,000	
1998/99	502,000	3,290
1999/2000	526,000	3,482
2000/01	543,000	3,354
2001/02	583,000	3,283
2002/03	634,000	3,494
2003/04	677,000	4,124

Antisocial behaviour

- 3.7. Complaints to us about antisocial behaviour have increased significantly over the past year. There is new legislation (the Antisocial Behaviour Act) which includes reference to 'high hedges'; the Government estimates a backlog of some 10,000 cases on this subject will be referred to local authorities and it is likely that some cases will reach us. We will be publishing a special report on this subject, the publicity on which may generate more complaints.

Social services complaints procedures

- 3.8. The new Commission for Social Care Improvement (CSCI) is able to refer on some complaints direct to us bypassing the review stage of the social services complaints procedures. It is still too early to estimate the impact of this on our work but it seems likely it will produce some additional and complex cases.

Changes in jurisdiction

- 3.9. In early 2004 the Government placed over 200 internal drainage boards in our jurisdiction. We do not expect large numbers of complaints; DEFRA predict no more than a handful based on their historical experience. More problematic than numbers may be the nature of the complaints, combined with the fact that these boards do not generally have complaints procedures in place.
- 3.10. We suggested other jurisdictional changes in our triennial review; most notably concerning school management. Any change requiring new legislation will take time to put in place and we will probably have time to plan for the impact on complaint levels.
- 3.11. The Government has plans for elected regional assemblies outside London subject to the outcome of referenda. If established in areas that currently have two tiers of local government one tier would be removed. These bodies will fall within our jurisdiction. It is difficult to assess the impact on complaint levels with such changes but past experience of reorganisations indicate that complaints which span periods of change are more complex due to record systems and staff changes. We have suggested to the Government that as part of this change it would be logical also to place Regional Development Agencies within our jurisdiction.

Relationship with the courts

- 3.12. We believe that individuals are increasingly coming to us as an alternative to the courts. Two recent developments may have influenced this.
- 3.13. In September 2003 the Legal Services Commission published its guidance on the funding code for legal aid and the guidance mentions ombudsmen as an alternative to litigation throughout, including a reference to the code's criteria 5.4.3 which prescribes that a legal aid application may be refused if the matter is not first submitted to an ombudsman or other form of dispute resolution.
- 3.14. In the case of *Anufrijeva v LB of Southwark* (October 2003) concerning alleged breach of the Human Rights Act the Court of Appeal said that before giving permission to apply for judicial review the Administrative Court Judge should require the claimant to explain why it would not be more appropriate to use any available internal complaints procedure or proceed by making a claim (sic) to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration or the Local Government Ombudsman, at least in the first instance. We have initiated discussions with the Lord Chief Justice's office to look at how the pre-action protocol and

JR claim form can be amended to alert potential claimants to the preferred option of going first to the ombudsman.

Children's Commissioner

- 3.15. At time of drafting, the Children's Bill is currently passing through Parliament. One element of the bill is the establishment of a Children's Commissioner for England (CCE). The CCE would not normally be able to conduct an investigation of the case of an individual child, but could seek the Secretary of State's agreement to hold an inquiry where the case of an individual child raises issues of public policy of relevance to other children and it will not duplicate the work of another body. On this basis we expect the CCE to refer to us individual complaints which fall within our jurisdiction and we will liaise with the CCE on cases that raise broader issues (to the extent that our legislation permits). We expect the high profile of the CCE to attract more cases from young people for us to consider and we are preparing staff and procedures to better accommodate this type of case. The level of personal contact in such cases is likely to be high and so the time needed for processing a higher number of those cases will impact disproportionately.

Public awareness and propensity to complain

- 3.16. Public awareness and propensity to complain to us are difficult to predict. In broad terms it is influenced by general efforts by the Government and the media to draw attention to complaint handling bodies and to encourage consumer complaints.
- 3.17. We know from the recent MORI survey that awareness and understanding about our services is not widespread. The population of England is 49 million, almost all of whom are local authority service users. Relative to this number, our total of 19,000 complaints is extremely small, leaving considerable scope to increase demand where our service users remain dissatisfied with local authority services after complaining to the council. Awareness is affected by publicity given to our individual decisions and by information about our services given out by ourselves, by local authorities and the advisory sector. Even when the public and their advisers are aware of us they may not be willing to complain to us. This is linked to our public image, the availability of alternative routes for their complaint and whether they think it will make any difference. Later in this plan we outline our own plans to try to increase awareness and understanding. We estimate this activity will increase the number of new complaints by 2% per annum in the last two years of the plan.

Changes which may affect the nature of our operations

Review of the public sector ombudsmen arrangements in England

- 3.18. The Government announced in July 2001 its intention to merge us with OPHSO. But there are no definite plans of when the necessary draft legislation might be introduced. In July 2003, in its response to the Public Administration Select Committee report on ‘Ombudsman issues’ which had recommended the production of a draft Parliamentary Bill, the Government said that it is keen to explore what more can be done under existing statutory arrangements to deliver an accessible, flexible and comprehensive Ombudsman service. This includes addressing the constraints on joint working between Ombudsmen.
- 3.19. We and the OPHSO are actively pursuing ways of working more closely and identifying issues to be considered by the Government to assist with this. There is now potential to achieve joint working between Local Government, Health and Parliamentary Ombudsmen by means of a Regulatory Reform Order

The Data Protection Act (DPA) and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

- 3.20. A number of complainants are exercising their rights under the DPA to view personal data in our written records. Under the DPA we may exclude data which we feel could prejudice our investigations, so we need to review material before deciding if all or part of it can be released. Processing these requests takes staff time. A change in legislation in January 2005 will increase the scope of data we will need to make available under the Act.
- 3.21. Based on experience outside the UK we expect to receive FOIA enquiries from complainants and the press when access rights under that Act are in force in January 2005.

The review of Administrative Justice

- 3.22. At the time of writing the Government was to publish a White Paper on this subject. Although its focus is on the tribunals system there is reference to the role of public sector ombudsmen. In particular, the contrast is drawn between the range of ways available to the new Financial Ombudsman Service to resolve complaints, compared with the more limited powers available to the English public sector ombudsmen under their earlier legislation. We are hopeful that the Bill that is produced in response to the White Paper may encompass proposals to widen the scope available to the Local Government Ombudsmen to resolve disputes.

The growth in public use of new technology

- 3.23. We are committed to making the best use of technology to communicate with complainants and councils, and to run our organisation efficiently. The internet can be used to increase awareness of our services to those with access to it, especially young people and people who are housebound, and those who advise potential complainants. Email has the potential to enable us to speed up communication and to improve access to our services. But it also can raise unrealistic expectations about speed of response and email is open to misuse by complainants, for example, to try to influence prioritisation of work.
- 3.24. The availability of mobile phones has meant that a far larger proportion of complainants are contactable by phone, and surveys show some sectors of the community prefer to use telephone rather than written communication. Our research with young people has identified text messaging as a preferred means of communication with us. Our telephone advice call service plays an important role in dealing with initial enquiries. More telephone contact with complainants increases our telephone costs and staff time spent dealing with phone enquiries. But the benefits are that we are able to reach a wider sector of the community and are better able to keep in touch with complainants and discuss their complaints.

Chapter 4 – Developing the Commission over the next three years

Our vision and business goals

- 4.1. The core of our business is the provision of a high quality and customer orientated complaints service concerning local government and other bodies within jurisdiction. Everything we do depends on the high regard in which we are held by these bodies, the public and those who advise them. So we will continue to strive to maintain and, where necessary, to improve the quality of the complaints service over the life of this plan.
- 4.2. We are also committed to a major development of our advisory role. This involves drawing general lessons from our detailed investigations of individual complaints, so that bodies can prevent similar problems for other service users. In this way the public gain the most benefit from the public resources that fund the Commission's activities.
- 4.3. We also want to see an improvement in awareness and understanding about our service. The 2003 MORI survey of the public and advisers showed the current levels of awareness among different sections of the population. Overall, only 44% of the population have heard about us and there is much lower awareness among young people, the unskilled/unemployed and minority ethnic groups. The findings also highlighted the key role of the advisory sector (and especially CABx) in enabling access to our services; the more advisers knew about us, the more favourably they are likely to view us; and direct people to us. But current awareness amongst advisers is very limited.
- 4.4. The results also give us reliable information about how our organisation is perceived. We are seen by the public as independent and fair and providing a service for ordinary people. But most advisers consider that ordinary people find the Ombudsman intimidating. We are not viewed as powerful and one of the things that puts people off pursuing complaints is the feeling that 'it will not do any good', so we need to do more to publicise successful outcomes we have achieved for the public. One of the other things that deter people from pursuing complaints is because 'it is too bureaucratic and time consuming'. Both the public and advisers view us as a last resort – which MORI point out can be positive – because it is associated with being a final independent arbiter, but also negative - because it may mean vulnerable people, who tend to be less persistent with their complaints, will not reach us. This suggests that how we deal with potential

complainants or those whose complaints are premature may be a deciding factor in whether or not they make use of our services.

- 4.5. The survey led to conclusions on the areas where we need to focus. These are:
- basic customer care (fairness, speed, responsiveness, knowing who you are dealing with and being kept informed);
 - projecting a positive image;
 - not being overly bureaucratic;
 - taking account of the way different people prefer to communicate – for example, young people, minority ethnic communities and the unskilled/unemployed are less likely to want to write a letter and would prefer to see someone, while legal and housing advisers are more likely to want to write a letter, and advisers in disability groups prefer telephone contact.
- 4.6. Apart from ensuring that people know about us when they need to complain, general public awareness and respect for our work is also important to encourage local authorities to comply with our recommendations. We are particularly concerned to increase awareness and understanding amongst disadvantaged sections of the community who are often highly dependent on local government services.
- 4.7. We realise that we are not resourced for major public awareness campaigns in the media and anyway the effect of these are relatively short term. So we will concentrate on working in partnership with others, seeking cooperation for their staff to pass on information about us to the public they deal with, especially when they need to lodge a complaint. This is primarily bodies within jurisdiction, but also includes the voluntary and advisory sector.
- 4.8. Much of the advice and awareness work we undertake is integrated with the investigation process. We are pursuing ways of improving our practices to free up time and resources within the teams for this activity. Staff are eager to participate and this is an important element of staff development. But we are mindful that this initiative has coincided with a time of increasing complaints. And planned actions to raise our profile through advice and awareness activity will increase demand further.

- 4.9. We will continue to strive for efficiency and value for money in all our activity. We will continue with our programme of improvements following the 2000 KPMG Efficiency Review. We are conscious of the Government's agenda which is modernising and improving public services, including bodies within our jurisdiction and we are keen to participate.
- 4.10. Our main way of assessing our improving performance is by comparing current and historical data, but we are mindful that the nature and type of complaint we receive does change in proportion between years. We have considered introducing weighting schemes to allow for this in our calculations but we are not convinced that this would be any more reliable than counting all complaints as equal.
- 4.11. We also make comparisons with the performance of other public sector schemes. This is complicated by different ways of working and differences in how we record data, but can help us to learn from each other better practices which help us to improve our services. We have made use of the Cabinet Office Public Sector Benchmarking Service and our internal auditors to seek out bodies that are not involved in public complaints but which have similar organisational processes and activities that can provide useful information and ideas.
- 4.12. We define our purpose as:
- **to provide independent, impartial and prompt investigation and resolution of complaints of injustice caused through maladministration by local authorities and other bodies within jurisdiction;**
 - **to offer guidance intended to promote fair and effective administration in local government.**
- 4.13. Our vision of how this purpose will be carried out over the life of this plan is:
- **to provide a high-quality and efficient service, accessible to all, that remedies injustice for individuals and maximises the value of our investigations to make public services better.**
- 4.14. We have also reviewed our business goals to bring these into line with this vision. Business goals 2 and 5 are new wording and incorporate the aims and performance measures of our former business goals, 1, 2 3 and 5.

Business goal 1 – to make decisions that are sound and justified.

Business goal 2 – to provide customers with a service that meets their needs.

Business goal 3 – to increase awareness and understanding of our services.

Business goal 4 – to give guidance and advice, and so improve local authority services.

Business goal 5 – to increase our efficient use of resources.

- 4.15. Set out below are the main developments we plan in pursuit of these goals over the life of the plan.

Improving quality and efficiency

- 4.16. Quality is a critical aspect of our work. We do not have powers to compel councils to accept our decisions and the high levels of voluntary compliance reflect the high regard councils have for the quality of our investigations. Quality is also an important factor in our advisory activity and in our recruitment process to help us to recruit the best staff. We have defined a quality framework for the investigative process. This links indicators of quality to the customer standards in our literature, the competencies for our staff and our management of risk. The work has involved benchmarking with other organisations and help from our auditors.
- 4.17. We are applying this framework with various quality control measures, including regular sampling of our files. The criteria are linked to relevant investigative competencies and so form part of performance appraisal evidence. We also conduct targeted sampling of a range of cases from all three offices in a specific subject area.
- 4.18. We are moving towards a competency based scheme for assessment and development of other non-investigative staff. The competencies reflect the way the Commission is developing its role and activities. In some cases ‘outstanding performance’ is linked to pay advancement.
- 4.19. We have reviewed the split of responsibilities between support staff and investigators. We are developing the capabilities of our investigators so that they are more self-sufficient and are adjusting the levels and roles of support staff to achieve the most cost-effective deployment of staff resources.

- 4.20. We are reviewing our approach to testing customer satisfaction surveys in terms of our complainants, advisers and councils and how best to feed this back into a process of continuous improvement.
- 4.21. We are reviewing our use of technology to ensure that we are making best use of current systems and we have plans in place to take advantage of modern ways of working. This is both to help staff work effectively and to make our services accessible.
- 4.22. We are developing the skills of our middle managers. We are working with the Warwick Institute of Governance and Public Management to facilitate organisational improvements and related change.
- 4.23. We will continue to work closely with the OPHSO as both bodies review our processes and procedures, to maximise the opportunities for joint working to the benefit of the public and the running of our respective organisations. At the time of drafting of this plan the Government is supporting a regulatory reform order to enable us to conduct joint investigations on related complaints under the three public sector schemes.
- 4.24. We have an environmental policy which is the special responsibility of one of our Deputy Ombudsmen. We encourage staff to cycle, car share or use public transport when travelling to or in the course of work. We encourage use of email and electronic storage of documents. We use chlorine-free paper from sustainable sources for our printed stationery, and for our publications. We encourage re-use of stationery. We have an intranet which reduces the need for staff to have paper versions of our materials. We recycle waste, and in particular, waste paper and IT consumables. We purchase environmentally friendly goods where possible, and seek information on the environmental policies of suppliers of goods and services.

Improving external communications

- 4.25. We have a detailed External Communications Strategy. Key projects over the next three years are:

Better communications with advisers

- 4.26. Jointly with OPHSO we plan:

- to hold a national meeting or conference for representatives of the advisory sector in the autumn of 2004, part of which will be a general plenary session and part separate specialised sessions focussing on specific areas – eg, health and social care
 - to develop materials that will enable staff from either office to speak about the LGO/OPHSO when meeting external agencies.
- 4.27. We plan to complete a review of our database of advice agencies to which we send materials etc (this will include agencies aimed specifically at young people and minority ethnic communities).
- 4.28. We will explore the possibility of setting up regional focus groups of advisors with whom to explore some of the issues arising from the MORI survey and to consult about our services.
- 4.29. We will continue to respond to requests for talks from local advisory groups, concentrating on areas where our services are more likely to be needed (eg, by focusing more on large metropolitan areas where levels of deprivation are higher). This also gives us useful feedback to inform our activities.
- 4.30. We will encourage the specialist press to carry items about our service and the outcomes of significant cases.
- 4.31. We will develop materials which would be suitable for training those working in the advisory sector.

Improving accessibility for young people

- 4.32. We are taking steps to increase awareness and understanding of young people (under 25). The initiatives so far are focussed primarily at the under 19 age group. But we will also take steps to raise awareness in the 19 – 25 age group, including developing links with the Higher Education advisory sector. We are also developing special procedures for our investigators handling specific complaints made by or on behalf of the under 19s. We have established a small team (two in each office) who will handle any such complaints for a trial period. Particular emphasis will be placed on speed of resolution and keeping in close touch with the young person throughout. The experience of this group will be evaluated at the end of 2004/05 with a view to advising the Commission about any longer term arrangements.

- 4.33. We have set up SMS texting as another way to keep in touch with young people, or indeed with others who may be hard to reach in other ways.

Improving accessibility for people from minority ethnic communities

- 4.34. We will develop ways of increasing awareness and improving communications with ethnic minority communities about our services. We also plan to explore with relevant groups of potential employees what may increase their interest and prospects of employment with us.

Review of the advice calls service

- 4.35. Our advisers play a key role in identifying calls from the advisory sector, helping those with straightforward queries and passing on others to designated investigators. We will continue to develop this service over the next three years at our York office, but in the final year this could be as part of a joint LGO/OPHSO service.

Developing understanding among council staff and members

- 4.36. This is potentially a huge area where there are different needs. We are carrying out research to establish what councils might value in terms of materials and activity. We can see potential to work closely with other bodies, notably I&DeA and the regional employer organisations. Emerging ideas include:

- developing our website as a means of regularly providing information and advice;
- providing electronic bulletins highlighting decisions, advice and publications;
- producing training materials explaining who we are and what we do;
- visits and talks from the Ombudsmen and their senior staff.

Improving council complaint handling – training development

- 4.37. There is considerable demand from councils for training in complaint handling and investigation. We conducted detailed research involving benchmarking with other Ombudsman services and contact with over 200 local authorities, as well as various commercial/academic and other potential partners. This indicated that there were few specialist providers of such training; and that they would rather buy it from us than anyone else. We have provided training, mainly in an ad hoc way, for some years (there has been a particular focus on this at our York office). Councils that have had training

from us have valued it highly. Demand considerably exceeds our current arrangements to deliver such courses.

4.38. We consider that such training is a very good way of helping to fulfil our remit to promote good practice. When done well it raises our profile, enhances our reputation, promotes good relations between councils and the Commission and provides added value for councils. And it is also very good for members of the public for councils to get better at dealing with their complaints.

4.39. We therefore plan a reorganisation and expansion of this activity over the next three years. This will be based on a number of principles:

- The development must not be to the detriment of our work on processing complaints. It must not undermine our independence or our ability to criticise councils when we find fault.
- Our training events need to be based on first hand experience, so investigators must be involved.
- The focus of our events at first will be good practice in complaint handling, investigation and remedies. But we may want to diversify later into other aspects of complaints practice.
- We will want to retain full control over events so we do not intend to enter into any joint venture to deliver training. But we might use existing networks to draw attention to our events.
- We will recover from attendees the additional cost to the organisation of running the events, but not generate a surplus.

4.40. We recognise that this activity will have to develop gradually. In 2004/05 we have been conducting a number of pilots with the consultancy help of the local government employers' organisation, South East Employers. This is with a view to a gradual expansion in 2005/06 and implementation of a full range of courses in 2006/07.

4.41. We plan to develop and market two standard courses: a basic level complaint handling course for front line and other staff who only deal with complaints from time to time; and a higher level course, more focused on complaint investigation, for more specialised complaints handling staff. Materials are now being prepared for these courses. They will be offered to individual councils and to groups of councils on a regional basis. We are training a small group of investigators from each of the offices to deliver the courses in

conjunction with a central team. We aim to run at least 80 such courses annually plus a limited number of tailored courses (10) for particular needs.

- 4.42. Although the intention is to recover the additional costs of the training from course fees income there will be some non-recoverable development costs in the first year of this initiative (2005/06). We will be able to vary the number of investigators allocated to this initiative based on demand, but in the first year we estimate it will involve the equivalent of three investigators and a part time administrator.

Annual letters

- 4.43. 2004/05 is the first year that all councils will have received a letter. Previous feedback was good and we are again inviting feedback on the initiative and the letters themselves. We shall be doing another full evaluation exercise to improve and refine the process for 2005/06. We have found this activity to be quite resource intensive especially in the first quarter of each year. The work that goes into producing annual letters is spread across the whole organisation and is reflected in the 6% of non-investigative activity we allow for external communications initiatives.
- 4.44. The annual letters have also given us a strong platform for joint working with the Audit Commission in the CPA process. Our findings can give important information about the experience of service users. We send the Audit Commission copies of the statistics we use in annual letters, in advance of any CPA inspection, and their staff have been encouraged to contact Assistant Directors for help in interpretation of those statistics. This joint activity has also led to opportunities for 15 of our staff to shadow the District Council CPA process in 2004/5.

Special reports

- 4.45. The early indications are that special reports have a number of benefits:
- They draw together lessons and best practice for authorities – something councils have told us they want.
 - They are a means for providing redress for many more people than are ever likely to complain to us and avoids the need for complaint.
 - They are a means to raise our profile.

- They may be a means to indicate to advisers and the public the ‘power’ of the influence of the Ombudsman, thus addressing one of the problems of perception of us as not powerful shown in the MORI study.

4.46. We plan to maintain an output of two special reports a year. The resources necessary to sustain this activity will vary according to the complexity of the area covered.

Chapter 5 – Business plan for 2005/06 (and forward plans for 2006/07, 2007/08)

Complaints workload projections

- 5.1. It is difficult to reliably predict the numbers of new complaints. The approach we follow is to base our projections on most recent data and the three year and five year trends.
- 5.2. These trends are illustrated in the following table. Because of the unusual recent large fluctuations in HB complaints, we have distinguished between HB and non HB complaints.

Table 22: Five year incoming complaints data

	Total	(% change)	Non HB	(% change)	HB	(% change)	HB as a % of total
1999/2000	17,555	(10.6%)	15,202	(4.8%)	2,353	(72.4%)	(13/4%)
2000/01	19,179	(9.3%)	15,151	(-0.3%)	4,028	(71.2%)	(21.0%)
2001/02	18,309	(-4.5%)	15,313	(1.1%)	2,996	(-25.6%)	(16.4%)
2002/03	17,610	(-3.8%)	15,557	(1.6%)	2,053	(-31.5%)	(11.7%)
2003/04	18,982	(8.4%)	17,115	(10.0%)	1,867	(-9.1%)	(9.8%)
2004/05 (six months)	9,910	-	9,081	-	829	-	(8.4%)
12 month rolling to September '04	19,181	(6.9%)	17,437	(8.7%)	1,744	(-8.3%)	(9.1%)
Five year average change	-	(3.9%)	-	(3.6%)	-	(7.4%)	
Three year average change	-	(-0.3%)	-	(4.3%)	-	(-17.9%)	

- 5.3. The current 12 month trend (September 2004) indicates growth in non HB complaints of 8.7%. Much of this is based on growth since September 2003. The growth has occurred predominantly in the areas of planning, highways, neighbour nuisance, social services and homelessness (see table 2).
- 5.4. Taking the short, medium and long term trends together we expect the number of non HB complaints to increase by between 4% and 8% per annum in 2004/05 and 2005/06. In addition to these trends we expect that our own efforts to stimulate awareness and understanding will increase levels of non HB complaints by an additional 2% per annum in 2006/07 and 2007/08.

- 5.5. We have given careful consideration to the reasons for the current upsurge in non HB complaints and whether this is likely to be sustained. Factors we have considered include:
- increased publicity of our decisions;
 - increased dissatisfaction with government;
 - changes to legal aid funding;
 - failure in particular councils or services across local government.
- 5.6. None of these appear to correlate with our pattern of complaints. The aggregate of complaints to us and to local government itself might demonstrate such a link. But we do not have access to data on local government complaints, and anyway recording practices vary considerably between councils. We believe that there may be a link between the number of planning applications received and our planning complaint levels a year later but we do not consider this is reliable enough to revise our general projections.
- 5.7. The long term trends in HB cases are unreliable, but based on recent experience we expect the proportion of HB cases to stay at around 9% of our new cases in 2005/06 and for the remainder of the life of the plan.
- 5.8. In chapter 3 we listed other external factors which may influence complaints levels, but we are unable to predict the impact, other than to recognise that it creates uncertainty. The effect of alternative predictions is outlined in the next chapter.
- 5.9. Taking into account these assumptions, our predicted volumes of new complaints for the current and next three years would be as follows:

Table 23: Predicted new complaints

	non HB range	% change	HB range	% of total	total range	% change
2003/04 (actual)	17,115	10	1,867	9.8	18,982	8.4
2004/05	17,800 - 18,600	4 - 8	1,760 - 1,840	9.0	19,560 - 20,440	3 – 7.5
2005/06	18,512 - 20,088	4 - 8	1,831 - 1,987	9.0	20,342 - 22,075	4 – 8
2006/07	19,622 - 22,097	6 - 10	1,941 - 2,185	9.0	21,563 - 24,283	6 – 10
2007/08	20,800 - 24,307	6 - 10	2,057 - 2,404	9.0	22,857 - 26,711	6 – 10

5.10. We try to carry forward less than 20% of cases between financial years (see table 11 on page 10). The following is our projection of the range of decisions we would need to take based on these predictions in order to maintain a 20% carry forward. We expect the carry forward in 2004/05 will be around 23% as we cannot currently increase our output any more than we have done to match the increase in new complaints.

Table 24: Predicted range of decisions

	carry forward range	%	new complaints range	total workload range	decisions range
2003/04 (actual)	3,926	18.4	18,982	22,908	18,658
2004/05	4,203 (actual)	18.3	19,560 – 20,440	23,763 – 24,643	18,700
2005/06	5,063 – 5,943	22 - 24	20,342 – 22,075	25,405 – 28,018	20,324 – 22,414
2006/07	5,081 – 5,604	20.0	21,563 – 24,283	26,644 – 29,887	21,315 – 23,910
2007/08	5,329 – 5,977	20.0	22,857 – 26,711	28,186 – 32,688	22,548 – 26,150

Our business goals and performance targets

5.11. The following sets out our plans and performance targets for each of our business goals for the next three years.

Business goal 1 – to make decisions that are sound and justified

- 5.12. Our primary performance measure for this business goal is ‘justified comebacks’. This measures the outcome of our consideration of concerns raised by complainants about the accuracy and basis of the decision on their complaint. The review is carried out by a senior member of staff. We do not consider it would be appropriate to set a target for this, but we would not expect our performance to deteriorate (fault found currently in only 1% of all comebacks). We will also continue to monitor the aggregated outcome of judicial reviews of our decisions.
- 5.13. We are mindful that we need other measures to monitor quality of our output of decisions. We conduct a file sampling process by Ombudsmen and Assistant Directors against quality criteria which are linked to our newly established quality assurance framework. We may set targets for this when the system has become firmly established, possibly from 2006/07 onwards.

Business goal 2 – to provide customers with a service that meets their needs

- 5.14. We are conducting research in 2004/05 to establish criteria for customer satisfaction taking account of the reasonable expectations of complainants and bodies within jurisdiction. We plan to use this as a basis for a system of continuous monitoring of a proportion of complaints for customer satisfaction.
- 5.15. Based on previous customer satisfaction surveys we know that important factors include: times taken to process complaints; telephone response times; keeping in touch; and plain English clarity of correspondence. Our current targets and monitoring reflects this.
- 5.16. In terms of **times to process complaints** we monitor performance in 13, 26 and 52 week bands. As stated earlier, our times are affected by staffing levels and also by the promptness of councils and complainants to respond to our enquiries, which is difficult to influence. We do not feel we can set more ambitious targets whilst the current high volumes of complaints continue.
- 5.17. Our targets are as follows:

Table 25: Time taken to decide cases

Percentage of all complaints (excluding prematures) determined within:	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
	Actual	Target	Target	Target	Target
13 weeks	55.0%	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%
26 weeks	79.0%	80.0%	80.0%	80.0%	80.0%
52 weeks	94.5%	95.5%	95.5%	95.5%	95.5%
Cases over 52 weeks old	120	150	150	150	150
Percentage of cases c/forward	18.3%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%

- 5.18. We have agreed the following targets concerning **telephone response**. (We are improving monitoring of this area in 2005/06.)

Table 26: Telephone response times

	2002/03	2003/04 outturn	2004/05 estimate	2005/06 target	2006/07 target	2007/08 target
Switchboard: % of calls dealt with within five rings	-	-	-	95%	95%	95%
Advice calls service (ACS): % of calls dealt with within five rings	73.3%	88.6%	85%	85%	85%	85%
ACS: average response times for call-backs	9.2 mins	5.0 mins	5 mins	5 mins	5 mins	5 mins

- 5.19. We have controls in place for the other aspects of quality of service mentioned in para 5.15. We monitor the outcomes of complaints about us and consider the general lessons learnt centrally so that all offices benefit.

Business goal 3 – to increase awareness and understanding of our services

Business goal 4 – to give guidance and advice, and so improve local authority services

- 5.20. Our plans for the next three years in relation to BG3 and 4 are outlined in chapter 4. Detailed plans and targets are set out in our three year External Communications Strategy which is on our website (www.lgo.org.uk/worddocs/communications-strategy.doc) and is updated at regular intervals.

Business goal 5 – to increase our efficient use of resources

- 5.21. Our performance measures for this business goal are the number of complaints decided per head of staff allocated to the investigative process, and our average cost per complaint decided.
- 5.22. We believe that our improving productivity over the past five years is linked to our efficiency improvements but is also influenced by the changing workload. During recent years we have had an unusually high proportion of HB complaints concentrated from a small number of councils (table 2A on page 5). This has enabled us to reduce staff input

time by streamlining and grouping activity. So we expect productivity to be affected as this HB work makes up a lower proportion of workload (see table 23 on page 40).

- 5.23. Output per investigator is presently very high compared with the past decade. We do not feel it is realistic to expect this to continue to increase. But we would expect to be able to maintain the output levels of our better years in the decade. We also expect that by making investigators more self-sufficient and making efficient use of other Commission staff we can continue to increase average decisions per head of all staff involved in the investigative process during the life of this plan.
- 5.24. We are currently pursuing an initiative to make investigators more self-sufficient with a corresponding reduction in the number of support staff. We expect this to have a short term impact on productivity in 2004/05 and 2005/06.
- 5.25. Also in 2005/06 we expect to have a higher proportion of new staff. New appointees produce on average about 50% of the number of decisions in their first year compared with experienced investigators. So projecting forward for the next three years we expect productivity to be as follows:

Table 27: Staff output (decisions per head)

	DPH all staff¹	DPH investigators
2003/04 (actual)	96.6	198.5
2004/05 (expected)	96.0	197.0
2005/06 (target)	96.0	197.0
2006/07 (target)	98.0	198.0
2007/08 (target)	98.0	198.0

¹ Excludes percentage of staff time not related to investigation of complaints (6%).

- 5.26. We also monitor **average cost per case** under this business goal. Cost per case increased over the past three years for reasons outlined in chapter 2 and in previous plans. Also, to enable of historical comparisons, we do not separate out the advice activity costs from the costs of complaint handling in calculating these figures; and advice activity costs have increased over the past three years with our new level of activity. We expect the average cost per case in 2004/05 to be around £555 which reflects our new rental levels and increased employment costs including increasing pension contributions and national insurance. We project the average cost per case in 2005/06 to be £559.

Staffing resources for 2005/06

- 5.27. In 2004/05 we budgeted for 102 investigators to deal with complaints (with a further three seconded for advice and awareness raising activity)
- 5.28. In table 24 we estimated that we would need to take between 20,500 and 23,320 decisions in 2005/06 depending on the level of new complaints and a 20% carry forward of work from 2004/05. Based on productivity of an average of 197 decisions per investigator we would require between 104 and 119 investigators to produce this number of decisions.
- 5.29. We have included provision in our estimates for 2005/06 for an additional six investigators to allow for complaints growth, making a total of 108 to deal with complaints. New recruits will not be fully productive until their second year so we will not experience the full benefit of this increase in 2005/06. Taking this into account we estimate we can achieve 20,500 decisions in 2005/06 (and, without further staff increases, 21,280 decisions in 2006/07). This will result in the following predictions on output and carry forward in 2005/06:

Table 28: Predicted range of decisions

	carry forward range	% carry forward	new complaints range	total workload range	decisions range	DPI ¹	funded investigators
2003/04 (actual)	3,926	18.4	18,982	22,908	18,658	198.5	96
2004/05	4,203	18.3	19,560 - 20,688	23,763 - 24,643	18,700	197.0	102
2005/06	5,063 – 5,943	22.0 – 24.0	20,342 - 22,075	25,405 - 28,018	20,500	197.0	108
2006/07	4,905 – 7,518	19.3 – 26.8					

¹The DPI (decisions per investigator) figures are based on average staff in post which will be lower than the funded establishment due to turnover.

- 5.30. We will continue to use some seconded investigative staff to work on communications projects and in 2005/06 we will create a dedicated training team. We have provided for our ‘other staffing’ to reduce by six posts, so the net effect will be as follows:

Table 29: Budgeted establishment¹

	2003/04			2004/05			2005/06		
	Management/ Specialist	Inv	Other	Management/ Specialist	Inv	Other	Management/ Specialist	Inv	Other
London	6.0	32.0	22.0	6.0	34.0	20.5	6.0	36.0	20.0
Coventry	6.0	32.0	21.5	6.0	34.0	20.0	6.0	36.0	18.5
York	6.0	32.0	24.0	6.0	34.0	23.0	6.0	36.0	21.5
Corporate	10.0	3.0	10.0	11.5	3.0	9.0	11.5	3.0	8.0
Training	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.0	0.5
Total	28.0	99.0	77.5	29.5	105.0	74.5	29.5	114.0	68.5
(Overall)			(204.5)			(209.0)			(212.0)

¹ Excludes the three Ombudsmen)

Chapter 6 – Alternative planning assumptions for 2006/07 and 2007/08

- 6.1. In chapter 3 we highlighted the various factors which produce uncertainties in this plan.
- 6.2. The majority of our work is associated with the processing of complaints. Our projections in chapter 5 are based on current trends in new complaints. We pointed out that the reasons for increases (and occasional decreases) of complaints are complex, and so trends may not be a reliable indicator. But we have no better predictive tool.
- 6.3. We also made assumptions about staff productivity on current performance which is at record levels. But productivity improvement is not linear; it tends to reflect the outcome of the initiatives described in chapter 4 and can be detrimentally affected in the short term by some of the external factors described in chapter 3. Sometimes efficiency improvement is achieved in ways other than increased productivity in complaints output, notably in our advice and awareness activities, as we indicate in chapter 4, and better meeting the needs of some of our most disadvantaged complainants.
- 6.4. So we have to recognise that these uncertainties mean that our work demands and output could vary from those outlined in chapter 5, especially in 2005/06 and 2006/07. The following tables illustrate the effects of different assumptions.
- 6.5. In table 30 we have used the predictions for complaints growth and output per investigator set out in the previous chapter. The figures are based on medians of the ranges shown. If we wish to avoid a build up of cases carried forward between years we would need to employ more investigators. Sizeable staffing growth might have implications for our current accommodation especially in the York office which is now occupied to its maximum capacity (as advised by our property consultants).

Table 30: Predicted range of decisions

	carry forward	% carry forward	new complaints	total workload	decisions	DPI ¹	funded investigators ²
2003/04	3,926	18.4	18,982	22,908	18,658	198.5	96.0
2004/05 (actual)	4,203	18.3	20,000	24,203	18,700	197.0	102.0
2005/06	5,503	23.0	21,209	26,712	20,500	197.0	108.0
2006/07	6,212	23.3	22,923	29,135	23,308	198.0	128.0
2007/08	5,827	20.0	24,784	30,611	24,489	198.0	133.0

6.6. In table 31 we illustrate the effects of alternative new complaint assumptions in 2006/07 and 2007/08 based on table 23 on page 40.

Table 31: Alternative assumptions

A. Higher levels of growth (based on short term trends)

	carry forward	% carry forward	new complaints	total workload	decisions	DPI ¹	funded investigators ²
2005/06	5,503	23.0	22,075	27,578	20,500	197	108.0
2006/07	7,078	28.3	24,283	31,361	25,089	197	142.0
2007/08	6,272	20.0	26,711	32,983	26,386	198	148.0

B. Lower levels of growth (based on long term trends)

	carry forward	% carry forward	new complaints	total workload	decisions	DPI ¹	funded investigators ²
2005/06	5,503	23.0	20,342	25,845	20,500	197	108.0
2006/07	5,345	20.7	21,563	26,908	21,526	197	115.0
2007/08	5,382	20.0	22,857	28,239	22,591	198	119.0

C. No growth in complaints from 2004/05 levels

	carry forward	% carry forward	new complaints	total workload	decisions	DPI ¹	funded investigators ²
2005/06	5,503	23.0	20,000	25,503	20,500	197	108.0
2006/07	5,003	19.6	20,000	25,003	20,002	197	108.0
2007/08	5,001	20.0	20,000	25,001	20,001	198	106.0

¹The DPI (decisions per investigator) figures are based on average staff in post which will be lower than the funded establishment due to turnover.

²Staff working exclusively on complaints work.

6.7. Another assumption which underpins our plans is that we will devote about 6% of staff time to work not directly related to processing complaints. This is our advisory role, and increasing awareness and understanding of our services. This includes the time of specialist staff in corporate services, seconded investigators and also relatively small amounts of time spent by other staff working on this activity alongside the investigation of complaints. We are sensitive to the fact that our development of these areas of work needs to be done in close discussion with those it is designed to benefit – local authorities and those who advise the public. As we develop this activity there will be new ideas

which we will wish to explore, perhaps jointly with other bodies involved in local government and other ombudsman schemes, especially the OPHSO. So the estimate of time engaged on this activity will vary accordingly. Based on the positive responses we have received to our development of our advice and awareness activity we consider 6% to be a realistic estimate for the life for this plan.

Appendix 1

The statutory role of the Commission and the Commissioners

The role of the Ombudsmen (Commissioners) and the Commission for Local Administration in England is set out in the Local Government Act 1974.

The Local Government Ombudsmen's jurisdiction covers all local authorities (excluding town and parish councils); police authorities; education appeal panels; and a range of other bodies providing local services. The Ombudsmen may investigate complaints by members of the public who consider that they have been caused injustice by maladministration in connection with action taken by, or on behalf of, authorities within the Ombudsmen's jurisdiction in the exercise of their administrative functions.

The members of the Commission are the three Ombudsmen together with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (the Parliamentary Ombudsman). The functions of the Commission are:

- (a) to decide on the division of England into areas and provide ... Local Commissioner(s) to be made responsible for that area (s23(8))
- (b) to publish information about the procedures for making complaints (s23(10)(b))
- (c) ... every third financial year ... review the operation ... of the provisions of the Act about the investigation of complaints and convey recommendations or conclusions (s23(12)) to government
- (d) to provide, after consultation ... advice and guidance about good administrative practice (s23(12A))
- (e) for each ... financial year .. prepare a general report on the discharge of (its) functions ... consult and arrange publication (s23A)
- (f) may appoint a Secretary and such other officers as (it) considers necessary for the discharge of (its) function (Schedule 4)
- (g) shall make arrangements to enable Local Commissioners to investigate complaints and in particular arrangements for
 - allocating staff to assist Local Commissioners
 - providing offices and other accommodation (Schedule 4)

The Ombudsman service is financed by an annual grant, top-sliced from the Revenue Support Grant for local government.

Appendix 2

Statement of purpose and values, and equal opportunities statement

The Commission for Local Administration's purpose, values and equal opportunities statement are as follows.

The Local Government Ombudsmen's purpose

Our purpose is:

- to provide independent, impartial and prompt investigation and resolution of complaints of injustice caused through maladministration by local authorities and other bodies within jurisdiction;
- to offer guidance intended to promote fair and effective administration in local government.

The Local Government Ombudsmen's values

Our values are that:

- we treat people with courtesy, consideration, openness and honesty; and respect their privacy;
- in the provision of our service we strive to:
 - be independent, fair and consistent; and take full account of what people tell us;
 - get to the truth and report accurately, promptly and in plain language;
 - explain fully the reasons for our decisions;
 - treat people equally and not to discriminate on any improper grounds;

Ë in employment we strive to:

- train and develop individuals so that they make their best possible contribution;
- encourage team work, work ownership, innovation and creativity; and recognise success;
- provide good and safe working conditions;
- provide equal opportunities;

Ë as a responsible public organisation we strive to:

- improve our work continuously;
- provide value for money;
- take account of the effect on the environment in the way we work;
- have good working relationships with our suppliers to maintain and improve our services.

Equal opportunities

We are committed to giving an equal service to all members of the public. This means that we will not treat them any differently from someone else because of their: *sex, colour, race, nationality, ethnic group, regional or national origin, age, marital status, disability, political or religious belief, sexuality, or class.*