

CORPORATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Corporate Affairs Committee was held on 28 August 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor Clark (Chair), Councillors Brunton, Elder, McPartland, Purvis and Mrs H Pearson.

OFFICIALS: J Bennington and C Davies.

**** PRESENT AS AN OBSERVER:** Councillors Cox, Hubbard, McTigue and K Walker.

**** AN APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE** was submitted on behalf of Councillor Rehman.

**** DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made at this point of the meeting.

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Affairs Committee held on 26 June 2008 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN – ANNUAL LETTER 2007/2008

In a report of the Members' Office Manager the Committee was informed of the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Letter 2007/2008 as shown in Appendix 1 of the report submitted which commented on the performance of the Council in respect of complaints to the Ombudsman. Appendix 2 of the report gave a breakdown of complaints over the past five years.

Members were advised that although the number of complaints reported to the Ombudsman during 2007/2008 had increased to 30 the number of decisions made by the Ombudsman had decreased to 16. The Ombudsman's Letter stated that there were no discernible trends and that the number of complaints was considered small when set against the volume of the Council's transactions.

The Committee noted that for the fifth year in succession there had been no findings of maladministration against the Council.

In terms of local settlements only one had been proposed by the Ombudsman. A summary of the complaint was outlined to the Committee. It was felt that as there was only one such settlement it reflected well on the Council as it had indicated that there were few complaints where some sort of settlement was felt necessary to reach a satisfactory resolution.

Although response times had risen for the third successive year it was noted that such an increase last year had been due to a single very complex case relating to land ownership and planning permission.

It was noted that the Ombudsman's Annual Letter had demonstrated that the Council was performing well in respect of complaints to the Ombudsman. One contributory factor was that the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure appeared to be effective and robust, and that most complaints relating to the Council services were dealt with internally and to the satisfaction of the complainant. Of those that were progressed to the Ombudsman it was noted that only in a minority of cases had the Ombudsman required further action from the Council.

In overall terms the Committee concurred that the Ombudsman had been generally positive both in respect of the number of complaints being lodged with the Ombudsman or with the Council's handling of such complaints.

ORDERED as follows: -

1. That the information provided be noted and approved.
2. That the report be referred to the Standards Committee.

ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS – LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

The Members' Office Manager presented a report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services which outlined a request from Councillor Ferrier for exemption from attendance at Council meetings as required by Section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 in order to allow a further period of time to assist with convalescence after his recent illness.

ORDERED as follows: -

1. That Councillor Ferrier's absence due to illness be regarded as a valid reason for absence from the Council.
2. That Council's Ferrier's absence in accordance with Section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 be approved for a further period of six months terminating on 5 March 2009.
3. That the best wishes of the Committee and for a speedy recovery be extended to Councillor Ferrier.