27 June 2014

Mr Clive Betts MP
Chair, Communities and Local Government Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1P 2AA

Dear Clive,

Further review of the work of the Local Government Ombudsman

I forward herewith an update on further progress made in relation to recommendations put forward in the January report. I look forward to discussing this with you at our meeting on 15 July.

Yours,

Dr Jane Martin
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England
Local Government Ombudsman
Communities and Local Government Select Committee: Further review of the work of the LGO

Update on progress against recommendations

The Communities and Local Government Committee of the House of Commons published a report on 15 January 2014 setting out the findings of their ‘Further review of the work of the Local Government Ombudsman.’ That report made four recommendations to the Commission for Local Administration in England, the body that hosts the Local Government Ombudsman Scheme.

As requested by the Committee, this paper provides an update on the LGO’s progress in implementing those recommendations as of June 2014.

1. **Recommendation One: Staff Survey** - The Committee recommended that the 2013 LGO staff survey be published in full.

   **Action:** The survey was published in full on the LGO website on 31 January 2014.

2. **Recommendation Two: Further reviews of LGO performance** - The Committee asked to be updated on the details of, and the timetable for, the review by LGO internal auditors of the quality control system for the LGO case assessment process. In addition they asked that the LGO ensures that the arrangements for the external review of case handling time targets are in place by February 2014.

   **Action:** These matters were both incorporated into the LGO’s annual audit programme, which is carried out by XDIAS, the independent cross-departmental internal audit service.

   - An audit of the LGO Quality Framework was completed in June 2014. This confirmed moderate assurance for the new quality monitoring system and recommended some improvements to further enhance the effectiveness of the framework. All recommendations have been accepted by the LGO Executive Team and will be implemented before the end of the 2014/15 financial year.
   - An audit of the LGO’s Management Information systems was completed in March 2014. This specifically included a review of time targets in a randomly selected sample of cases. Overall this report also provided moderate assurance and in particular confirmed, “A reasonable level of assurance over LGO’s controls regarding the completeness, accuracy, validity and timeliness of its Management Information (MI)” and, “a reasonable level of confidence that the MI presented to the Commission and senior management provides an accurate representation of the LGO’s performance as an organisation.”

Both of these audits, and any recommendations flowing from them, are subject to
scrutiny by the Commission’s Independent Audit Committee.

3. **Recommendation Three: Independent Commission members** - The Committee recommended that, in advance of any changes to primary legislation governing the LGO, the Commission seek to appoint at least one independent, non-voting member before the end of the current financial year.

   **Action:** In response to the Committee’s recommendation, the Commission for Local Administration in England has appointed a third advisory member, in addition to the recent appointments of Sir Jon Shortridge and David Liggins. The third, newly appointed advisory member is Carol Brady, who has over 20 years experience working in the field of regulation and consumer protection and in delivering consumer services. Until recently she was a Lead Ombudsman for the Office of Legal Complaints and has previously worked at a senior level in the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, the Office of Fair Trading, and the Local Better Regulation Office. She also serves on the Board of the Trading Standards Institute.

4. **Recommendation Four: Complaints about LGO service** - The Committee urged the Commission to introduce, within the next three months, an independent external evaluator of complaints about the LGO’s service, but not decisions.

   **Action:** Following an open appointment process, Graham Manfield has been selected from approximately 100 applicants to take on the new role of External Reviewer for the Local Government Ombudsman service. This will involve reviewing a randomised selection of closed complaints about the standard of service that the LGO provides. In this role Graham will provide independent scrutiny of the timeliness, clarity and reasonableness of the response provided to the public. His findings and recommendations will be reported to the Commission for Local Administration and to the LGO Executive Team for consideration and action. Graham has a wealth of professional experience in quality and complaint handling, including 37 years with the Metropolitan Police, recently retiring as a Chief Inspector. Graham also has extensive experience in a range of voluntary roles and has been an active member of the LGO’s external advisory forum since it was established in October 2013.

*June 2014*