

WATERWAYS OMBUDSMAN COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held at
Bentham House, University College London
on Tuesday 5 July 2006

PRESENT:

Mrs Anne Davies
Mr Sam Hollis
Mr Nigel Johnson
Mr Michael Reddy
Mr Miles Smith
Mr Nigel Stevens
Mr Terry Tricker

IN ATTENDANCE:

Ms Hilary Bainbridge Waterways Ombudsman

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Professor Jeffrey Jowell who had been detained on business abroad.

2. CHAIRMAN

In the absence Professor Jowell, the Committee invited Mr Reddy to take the chair which he did.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2005.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Mr Johnson reported that the British Waterways Board had, on 24 November 2005, approved and promulgated Rules of the Waterways Ombudsman Scheme. The Rules so promulgated were in the form recommended by the Committee as the outcome of its consideration of draft Rules at its last meeting.

5. REPORT BY THE WATERWAYS OMBUDSMAN

The Waterways Ombudsman commented upon an early draft of her proposed Report on her first year in office that had been circulated to members of the Committee.

In highlighting certain aspects of the draft report, Ms Bainbridge explained to the Committee the difficulties she encountered in taking on a number of outstanding cases from the previous Ombudsman at a time when the number of cases reaching the Ombudsman generally had increased. This had resulted in some delay in processing cases early in the year though this had by now largely been resolved. In the year 05/06, 29 eligible cases had been received (15 in 04/05). Also in the year 27 decisions had been made (9 in 04/05) and of those 27, the complaint had been upheld in whole or part in 17 cases.

Ms Bainbridge drew the attention of the Committee to the part of her report where she expressed concern about delays by British Waterways in implementing a couple of her recommendations. She indicated she would be keeping a close eye on the situation notwithstanding the recent reassurances she had received from senior management at BW.

Ms Bainbridge also referred to her plans for a quarterly newsletter and a website as well as her plans to meet waterway interest groups. She advised the Committee that it was her intention to distribute a feedback questionnaire in due course.

The Committee asked Ms Bainbridge whether she had adequate resources to fulfil the duties of her office which she confirmed she did, adding that she had had reassurances from BW about the provision of additional resources (including support staff) if she ever identified a need.

Ms Bainbridge advised the Committee that she was progressing the application by her for full membership of the British and Irish Ombudsman Association (BIOA) and had already answered one query raised by the association.

The Committee agreed that they would seek further information about the funding of the Scheme from British Waterways at its next meeting.

6. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

The Committee considered a draft of its proposed first annual report, to be published alongside the annual report of the Ombudsman. Subject to certain agreed changes, the report was approved for publication.

7. NEXT MEETING

The Committee agreed that, by default it would meet on a six monthly basis but that if the Chairman of the Committee and the Ombudsman considered there to be little business to justify a meeting on the default basis it could be cancelled or held on a telephone conference basis. Such arrangement was to be subject to there being a minimum of one full meeting annually.

Subject to that arrangement, it was agreed it would be convenient if the next meeting was held in the first week of December 2006.