

## **WATERWAYS OMBUDSMAN COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held at  
Bentham House, University College London  
on Wednesday 2 May 2007

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### **PRESENT:**

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

### **IN ATTENDANCE:**

Ms Hilary Bainbridge      Waterways Ombudsman

#### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies had been received from Professor Jeffrey Jowell and Mr Terry Tricker.

#### **2. CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING**

The Chairman of the Committee (Professor Jowell) having been delayed abroad by flight problems, the Committee agreed that Mr Reddy should take the chair for the meeting.

#### **3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2006. There were no matters arising not otherwise appearing on the agenda of the meeting.

#### **4. REPORT BY THE WATERWAYS OMBUDSMAN TO THE COMMITTEE**

The Waterways Ombudsman commented upon her written report to the Committee that had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The report was shorter than that before the last meeting of the Committee since many matters were covered in her draft Annual Report that would be considered next on the Agenda.

The Ombudsman advised that she had met with the Executive Directors of British Waterways in committee, and with the Chief Executive in private, on 30 April 2007. She had provided appropriate feedback in each meeting and in particular had advised on ways that she considered British Waterways could improve its complaints handling. She referred to two publications she had recommended British Waterways make reference to in the management of its complaints procedures – “Guide to principles of good complaint handling” published by the British and Irish Ombudsmen Association; (BIOA) and “Principles of Good Administration” published by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. She agreed to provide copies of the former to those Committee members who requested it.

The Ombudsman advised the Committee that since the meeting in December last year (when she had reported a decline in the number of complaints reaching her) numbers had increased again to the extent that she was considering obtaining the services of one or more assistants. Due to the unpredictability of the workload she proposed that, if necessary, she would engage assistants on a casual basis – i.e. would use them ‘as needed’ when workloads required it. She had in mind a number of persons who work from their homes for the Parliamentary Ombudsman on that basis, and so would be

suitably experienced. She confirmed that British Waterways had agreed to fund such use of assistants. The Committee noted and endorsed her proposal.

The Ombudsman informed the Committee that she would be attending the biennial conference of the BIOA on 26-27 April.

## **5 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE WATERWAYS OMBUDSMAN.**

The Ombudsman commented on the early draft of her Annual Report that had been circulated to members of the Committee. She explained that she intended to add a passage that made reference to her concerns that British Waterways had not, in a minority of cases, implemented her recommendations in a timely manner or had failed properly to follow up that implementation in full. This issue had been one matter raised in her discussions with the British Waterways executive directors and the Chief Executive and she intended to state in her report that she would be more proactive in following up actions agreed to by British Waterways in the light of her decisions.

The Ombudsman advised the Committee that she would make arrangements for the printing and distribution of the report this year rather than ask British Waterways to take on the task. Given the availability of the report on the website, the routine distribution of printed copies to Council library departments would be reduced.

## **6 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE**

The Committee considered the draft of the Annual Report of the Committee prepared by the Ombudsman on its behalf. Subject to a few minor changes and to some corrections to the biographies, the Committee approved the draft Report subject to any comments Professor Jowell may have on his return to the UK. The Ombudsman agreed to liaise with Professor Jowell direct to finalise the Report.

The Committee thanked the Ombudsman for preparing the draft Report.

## **7. NEXT MEETING**

The Committee had a brief discussion about whether a half-yearly meeting was necessary but no conclusion was reached. It was noted that at any time the Ombudsman had concerns sufficiently serious to require a meeting of the Committee to be called mid-year, she could approach the Chairman with them directly. It was agreed to leave the date of the next meeting to be fixed by the Chairman in due course.