

Press Release 9 July 2008

Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman Annual Report

Speed of response is essential towards creating the climate of confidence necessary to any complaints process, the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman, Karamjit Singh, said today.

The Ombudsman was commenting as his second Annual Report, which covers the period from 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008, was published. Mr Singh pointed out that handling complaints quickly and in a businesslike manner was a key factor towards ensuring that those with a grievance believed that the issues they had raised were being dealt with and given the necessary importance. He said:

“In this my second report, I have focused on the complaints adjudicated during the past year. Whilst the main focus in each case was to investigate and report the complaint, of equal importance was the valuable opportunity provided for those administering appointing schemes or internal complaints mechanisms to reflect on the processes and how they might be improved. To this end I made a number of recommendations which were accepted or are being considered by the bodies concerned.”

The Ombudsman considered two complaints in his capacity as Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman. These took the form of a complaint made against the Northern Ireland Court Service with a second, related complaint, made against the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission. Neither complaint was upheld.

During the period under Mr Singh also dealt with two other complaints, not related to Northern Ireland, in his capacity as Temporary Ombudsman for England and Wales.

The Ombudsman's Report is available to view or download on the website www.nijao.gov.uk

Notes for Editors

1. The Constitutional Reform Act 2005 provided for the establishment of a Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman. The creation of this new post followed the establishment of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission. The Ombudsman was appointed with effect from 25 September 2006 for an initial period of 5 years. The post is part-time. The Ombudsman is independent of government, the judiciary, the Northern Ireland Court Service and the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission.
2. The Ombudsman's remit is to investigate complaints, where maladministration or unfairness is alleged to have occurred during the judicial appointments process by the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission or Committees of the Commission, the Northern Ireland Court Service or the Lord Chancellor. The NI Ombudsman does not investigate complaints relating to judicial conduct as these are dealt with by the Lord Chief Justice for Northern Ireland.
3. The Constitutional Reform Act 2005 provides for the Lord Chancellor to appoint a Temporary Ombudsman in circumstances where there is a potential conflict of interest for the Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman in England and Wales.
4. The Constitutional Reform Act 2005 provides for the Ombudsman to submit an annual report on the performance of his functions to the Lord Chancellor and who in turn is required to present it to both Houses of Parliament.
5. The offices of The NI Judicial Appointments Ombudsman are independent of the Northern Ireland Court Service.
6. The contact details for the Ombudsman's office are:
Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman
6th Floor, Bedford House, Bedford Street
Belfast BT2 7FD
Tel: (028) 9072 8930, Fax: (028) 9072 8936. Website: nijao.gov.uk

Pen Picture

Mr Karamjit Singh took up his office on 25 September 2006. His earlier career has covered academia, the voluntary sector and local government. Since January 2001 he has held a United Kingdom wide role on the Electoral Commission and currently has a special responsibility for the English regions. He was previously the Electoral Commissioner with special interest in Northern Ireland matters (2001 – 2007). He also chairs an NHS Trust in the West Midlands and serves as a non legally qualified member of the Queens Counsel Selection Panel for England and Wales.

Mr Singh's previous public appointments in England and Wales have covered such areas as investigating suspected miscarriages of justice, adjudicating on parole applications, investigating complaints against the police, judicial training, regulation of financial services and recruitment to senior civil service positions.

His voluntary interests include being a Trustee of the British Lung Foundation and organising a medical camp in India each year. He has previously been a Trustee of the Citizenship Foundation and the Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales. During 1990-1991 he was awarded a mid career Harkness Fellowship to the United States with a focus on the relationships between institutions and their communities.

He was awarded the CBE in 1999 for services to the administration of justice.

If you have any further queries about this press release please contact:

**The Press Officer
Northern Ireland Court Service
Windsor House
9-15 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7LT
Tel: 02890412387
Mb: 07789938457**

communicationsgroup@courtsni.gov.uk

www.courtsni.gov.uk