

## **CASE SUSTAINED**

**CS/594**

### **COMPLAINT AGAINST THE DEPARTMENT OF BUILDINGS AND WORKS FOR UNDUE DELAY IN REPAIRING THE COMPLAINANT'S WASHBASIN**

On 7 July 2004 the Complainant (a government tenant) contacted the Housing Department's Reporting Office regarding a problem with her washbasin. The Department of Buildings and Works ('B&W') categorised her case as 'urgent' to be carried out within two days.

Following the Ombudsman's advice the Complainant contacted the Reporting Office pointing out that the required works which had been classified as urgent had still not been carried out. She was allegedly told to chase the workers and to contact the 'North Front Depot'.

On 1 September 2004, in response to the Ombudsman's enquiry B&W confirmed that the works had been carried out the day before. They went on to admit that the Reporting Office should not have asked the Complainant to chase up the works the way it did and that it should have done so for her.

The Ombudsman referred to B&W's own 'Response Maintenance Coding Classification' pointing out that according to B&W's own classifications list 'urgent' works should be carried out within one week and in this case it had taken them two months. He went on to condemn the fact that the Reporting Office had directed the Complainant to chase up the works with the North Depot instead of doing the chasing itself.

B&W explained to the Ombudsman that one of its biggest concerns was the huge amount of minor works requisitions that had created the present backlog and as a direct consequence the delays in carrying out the minor works requested by the Complainant. B&W informed the Ombudsman that considering the availability of present resources, they had introduced as from the beginning of September 2004, a new strategy to try to deal with the historical backlog. At the expense of placing in abeyance planned "desirable" works for 2004, the Major Works Annual Programme had been revisited to free as much time as possible to tackle the backlog, which would be split and redistributed between two Works Depots as opposed to the single depot which had dealt with them up to now. B&W pointed out that morale was now higher than it had been for months and in general the response the tenants and management were receiving from those on the workshop floor was much more positive and therefore conducive to increases in efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity.

The Ombudsman expressed his despair at B&W's constant and repeated failures to meet time frames and to improve its service to the public. The Ombudsman pointed out that he had spent kilometres of ink writing about this department and he was loath to use even more ink saying things which he had said countless times before.

The Ombudsman recalled that in his Annual Report for the year 2003 he had said that he had met B&W's management team and was able to ascertain that there was a willingness on their part to address their department's appalling track record. The Ombudsman also pointed out in his Annual Report that he had expressed cautious optimism at the fact that B&W was in the process of being revamped, but he had warned against complacency. (See Public Services Ombudsman's Annual Report 2003, page 55). The Ombudsman stated that it seemed that his warning against complacency had been fully justified.

The Ombudsman expressed the hope once again that B&W would at long last eliminate the historical backlog of works to be carried out and finally start providing the efficient service that the public deserved. He pointed out however, that he would monitor their progress for future comment. With these words the Ombudsman closed his report.