
REPORT TO:	COUNCIL	AGENDA ITEM: 8
DATE OF MEETING:	25TH SEPTEMBER 2014	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	FRANK McARDLE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EXT. 5702)	DOC
SUBJECT:	LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN – ANNUAL REVIEW LETTER 2014 AND UPDATE ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS TO THE OMBUDSMAN SERVICE	TERMS OF REF: G, FM 11
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 To accept the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter 2014.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 This report will provide Members with a summary of complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman ("LGO") against this Authority during the year 2013/14.
- 2.2 It will also bring Members up to date on developments in the LGO service.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 On 7th July 2014, the Council received the Annual Review Letter for the period 2013/14 and a summary of statistics on complaints.
- 3.2 The Ombudsman's Office made decisions on 8 complaints about the Council in 2013/14. Of these complaints, 4 were closed after initial enquiries, 2 were referred back to the Council for local resolution, advice was given to 1 complainant, and 1 complaint was upheld and resolved.
- 3.3 The LGO does not provide any detailed information about the statistics and, therefore, in order to provide some background information for Members, the Council's LGO Link Officer has produced a table of complaint decisions, which is attached at **Annexe 'A'**. This provides a breakdown of the type of complaints received and a summary of the decisions.

LGO Developments

Change to description of complaint decisions

- 3.4 In April 2014, the LGO changed how it classifies the results of complaints. Decisions are now described in terms of upholding and not upholding complaints, which brings the LGO closer in practice with how other Ombudsman schemes and many local authorities describe their decisions.

Local Government Report

- 3.5 This year, the publication of the Annual Review Letters coincides with the publication of an in-depth report reviewing the last year in local government complaints. A summary of complaint statistics for every local authority in England is included in the report. This approach is in response to feedback from Councils who told the LGO they wanted to be able to compare their performance with other authorities. The LGO aim to make the report an annual publication.
<http://www.lgo.org.uk/news/2014/jul/ombudsman-publishes-local-authority-complaint-statistics-new-report/>

The Regulators' Code – Local Authority Complaints Processes

- 3.6 The new Regulators' Code came into force on 6th April 2014. The Code sets out the Government's expectations in respect of the provision by local authorities of clear and accessible complaints and appeals processes, for use by businesses and others that they regulate.
<http://www.lgo.org.uk/news/2014/mar/better-regulation-delivery-office-local-government-ombudsman-encourage-easier-complaints-appeals-procedures-business/>

Future of the Local Government Ombudsman

- 3.7 At the end of March 2014, one of the two Local Government Ombudsmen (Anne Seex) retired. Following an independent review of the governance of the LGO last year, the Government has committed to formalising a single ombudsman structure at LGO.
- 3.8 There has been much discussion in Parliament and elsewhere about the effectiveness of complaints handling in the public sector and the role of ombudsmen. The remaining Local Government Ombudsman (Dr Jane Martin) supports the creation of a single ombudsman for all public services in England, as she considers this is the best way to deliver a system of redress that is accessible for users, provides an effective and comprehensive service, and ensures that services are accountable locally. Consultation with stakeholders on the way forward will take place in the coming months.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 None directly arising from this report.

5.0 Corporate Implications

5.1 A good complaints system is an opportunity for the Council to show that it cares about providing a good service, and that it genuinely values feedback on whether there are any problems which need attention. It is, therefore, imperative that we get feedback, not only through our own complaints system, but also from the Ombudsman, and that this information is widely distributed to show that this Authority takes complaints seriously and deals with them sympathetically.

6.0 Community Implications

6.1 One of the roles of the Local Government Ombudsman is to investigate complaints about Councils from members of the public. Its aim is to get Councils to put things right if they have gone wrong and if this has affected members of the public directly.

7.0 Conclusion

7.1 The Annual Review Letter, the Local Government Report and the publishing of complaint decisions on the LGO website are useful additions to other information held by the Council, highlighting how people experience or perceive its services. They should also be seen as an opportunity to continue to improve the services offered by the Council.

8.0 Background Papers

- Annual Review Letter 2014 from the Local Government Ombudsman
- LGO Link Newsletter (January 2014)
- LGO Link Newsletter (July 2014)