
REPORT TO:	COUNCIL	AGENDA ITEM: 14
DATE OF MEETING:	7th NOVEMBER 2013	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	FRANK McARDLE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EXT. 5702)	DOC:U:\JAYNE\Commtee\COMMRE P\LGO Annual Review 12_13.docx
SUBJECT:	LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN – ANNUAL REVIEW LETTER 2012/13 AND UPDATE ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS TO THE OMBUDSMAN SERVICE	REF: J Beech
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 To accept the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review 2012/13.
- 1.2 To note that there were no decisions of maladministration causing injustice against the Authority during 2012/13.

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 2012/13.
- 2.2 It will also bring Members up to date on developments in the LGO service.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 On 16th July 2013, the Council received the Annual Review Letter for the period 2012/13 from the LGO. In contrast to previous years, the LGO has only stated how many complaints were received, but has not provided any statistical data. The reason for this is that the LGO has changed its business processes considerably during the course of 2012/13 and would, therefore, be unable to provide a consistent set of data for the entire year.
- 3.2 The Ombudsman's Office received 11 complaints about the Council in 2012/13. The Ombudsman decided not to investigate 8 of the complaints, 2 investigations were discontinued and 1 complaint was not in the LGO's jurisdiction. There were no findings of maladministration causing injustice during this period.
- 3.3 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.

- 3.4 The LGO has stated that it is committed to sharing information about the Council's performance and will be providing more detailed information in next year's Annual Review Letter. However, the format of such information is currently being reviewed, to ensure that the data is relevant and can best support local accountability and service improvements.

LGO Developments

LGO governance arrangements

- 3.5 As part of the work to prepare the LGO service for the challenges of the future, it has refreshed its governance arrangements and has a new executive team structure which will be responsible for the day to day management of the service.
- 3.6 Due to the sickness absence of one of the two Local Government Ombudsmen, the LGO service has had to adapt to working with a single Ombudsman and has formally taken the view that this is the appropriate structure with which to operate in the future. A review is currently being undertaken to enable the LGO to develop its future governance. Delegations have been amended so that investigators are able to make decisions on the Local Government Ombudsman's behalf on all local authority and social care complaints in England.

Publishing Decisions

- 3.7 Last year, the LGO stated that it would be publishing the final decisions on all complaints on its website. This was considered to be an important step in increasing transparency and accountability, as it was felt that the public and bodies should be able to see the full range of decisions and feel reassured that the LGO was fair, thorough and impartial. The LGO retains discretion not to publish a decision if, for example, it would not be in the interests of the complainant to publish, or where there is a reason in law not to.
- 3.8 Publication will apply to all complaints received after 1st April 2013 and the first decisions are due to appear on the LGO website over the coming weeks.

Assessment Code

- 3.9 Earlier in the year, the LGO introduced an Assessment Code to help determine the circumstances where it would investigate a complaint. This code is applied during the initial assessment of all new complaints. Details of the code can be found at: www.lgo.org.uk/making-a-complaint/how-we-will-deal-with-your-complaint/assessment-code

Annual Report and Accounts

- 3.10 The LGO has published *Raising the Standards*, its Annual Report and Accounts for 2012/13. This details what has been done over the last 12 months to improve performance, drive up standards in the complaints system and to improve the performance of public services. The report can be found on the LGO website at: www.lgo.org.uk

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 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 2012/13 from the Local Government Ombudsman
- LGO Link Newsletter No. 15 (June 2013)
- LGO Link Q & A Sheet (July 2013)