

Meeting of the Cabinet – 14th September, 2011

Report of the Director of Corporate Resources

The Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter 2010/11

Purpose Of Report

1. To consider the Annual Review Letter for 2010/11 from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) in respect of complaints received against this Council and dealt with by the Ombudsman's office over the year ending 31st March, 2011.

Background

2. Attached as Appendix 1 to this report is a copy of the Annual Review Letter of the Local Government Ombudsman for the year ended 31st March, 2011. The Letter differs from those of previous years in that the content is of a general nature with only the statistics being applicable to this Council. There were also no specific issues to be raised with the Council. Members are asked to indicate whether they would prefer this particular style or one giving more detail of the work of the Council.
3. Although there is no specific commentary, certain conclusions can be drawn from the statistical information and related details on the Council's activities, as follows:-
 - The number of enquiries and complaints received in 2010/11 - 88 - reduced slightly from 91 in 2009/10, with a reduction from 40 to 36 in the number of complaints passed to the investigative team.
 - Of the 88 enquiries and complaints received the largest number (28) were in respect of housing, down by 7 on the previous year. The next highest category was environmental services, public protection and regulation (14) followed by planning and development and education and children's services (12 each). Although having reduced over the last two years, housing continues to be the subject of the highest number of complaints.

- In respect of the 34 complaints determined in the year to 31st March, 2011 (down from 46 in the previous year) and continuing a downward trend, no formal reports finding maladministration causing injustice were issued. This is a similar position to the last three years.

No formal reports finding maladministration, causing no injustice to the complainant, and formal reports finding no maladministration by the Council were issued by the Ombudsman.

8 complaints, down from 17 in 2009/10, were determined by way of local settlement whilst in respect of 14 complaints no maladministration was found. Of the remaining complaints, 3 were discontinued at the Ombudsman's discretion and 9 were outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.

- Regarding the 8 complaints determined by way of local settlement, 5 related to housing issues, 2 to education issues with 1 relating to development control. Total compensation of £2,850 was paid in respect of local settlements.
- The average response time of 21.2 days, taken for the Council to respond to formal enquiries, is a significant improvement on the time taken in 2009/10 – 26.8 days (the target set by the Ombudsman is 28 days). The Council makes maximum use of electronic communications to improve response times.

Finance

4. There are no direct financial implications arising from the content of this report. Any compensation determined, arising from an investigation by the Local Government Ombudsman, is met from existing Directorate budgets.

Law

5. The Commission for Local Administration was created under Parts 1 and 3 of the Local Government Act, 1974.

Equality Impact

6. This report accords with the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy. The role of the Ombudsman affords a system of complaint and redress to members of the public who feel they have been subject to maladministration by the Council. Some of the complaints made concern children and young people and so, dependent on the remedy proposed, if any, there may have been either a direct or indirect impact on them.

Recommendations

7. That the information contained in the report, and Appendix, be noted and that the Chief Executive and Directors be requested to:
 - (a) review their internal arrangements, as appropriate; and
 - (b) continue to ensure that requests for information on complaints received are dealt with by the date requested. This will ensure that responses can be submitted to the Ombudsman's office within the timescales set and the Council's excellent performance on response times can be maintained.
8. That all Directorates continue to impose rigorous monitoring of complaint activity to ensure ongoing good practice and a continued reduction in complaints being received.
9. That the Annual Review Letter be posted on the Council's website.
10. That a copy of this report be forwarded to the Ombudsman, together with a copy of the decision taken, as the Council's formal response to her Annual Review Letter together with any views expressed on the changed format.



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DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter for the year ended 31st March, 2011.