

Report to Cabinet

Subject: Review of complaints received by the Council and Annual Review Letter – Local Government Ombudsman 2014/15

Date: 30 July 2015

Author: Council Solicitor and Monitoring Officer & Corporate Director
(Chief Financial Officer)

Wards Affected

Not applicable.

Purpose

To inform Members of the receipt of the Annual Review letter from the Office of the Local Government Ombudsman and the complaints dealt with by the Council through the internal Complaints Procedure during the year 2014-15.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision

Background

- 1.1 Members will be aware of the Council's arrangements for dealing with formal complaints full details of which are available on the website. The departmental analysis of complaints by Service Manager appears below. Members are to note that some of the columns will not add up because some complaints have not been dealt with entirely within the year and therefore fall outside the monitoring period.
- 1.2 Between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015, the Council received 323 complaints which are broken down into individual service areas as follows:

Service	Number of complaints received	Upheld/partially upheld at Stage 1	Not Upheld at Stage 1
Communications	1	1	0
Customer Services and IT	47	28	18
Housing	11	0	10

Service	Number of complaints received	Upheld/partially upheld at Stage 1	Not Upheld at Stage 1
Legal Services	1	1	0
Leisure and Culture	83	36	33
Parks and Street Care	3	2	0
Planning & Economic	25	9	10
Public Protection	20	5	7
Revenue Services	115	54	49
Waste Services	17	11	6
Totals	323	147	133

- 1.3 Where a complaint is not upheld in full or in part, the complainant may ask for it to be considered further under Stage 2 of the complaints procedure. 27 complaints were considered under Stage 2 between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015 as follows:

Service	Number of complaints considered at Stage 2	Upheld/partially upheld at Stage 2	Not Upheld at Stage 2
Communications	0	0	0
Customer Services and IT	1	1	0
Housing	0	0	0
Legal Services	0	0	0
Leisure and Culture	7	2	2
Parks and Street Care	1	1	0
Planning & Economic	3	1	2
Public Protection	4	0	4
Revenue Services	11	5	4
Waste Services	0	0	0
Totals	27	10	12

- 1.4 If the complainant is not happy with the response at Stage 2 he or she is entitled to refer the complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman. Between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015, 14 complaints were received by the Council via the Ombudsman, which is a small increase on the 13 complaints received the previous year. A summary of the decisions of the LGO appears in the table below.

Service	Decision of LGO
Revenues Services	Not to initiate an investigation
Planning Services	Not upheld: no maladministration.
Planning Services	Not upheld: no further action.
Public Protection	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
Public Protection	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action

Planning Services	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
Planning Services	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action
Public Protection	Not upheld: no maladministration
Legal Services	Closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction.
Planning Services	Not upheld: No further action
Revenues Services	Complaint upheld: maladministration and injustice. Council agreed to pay £100 in recognition of fault.
Revenues Services	Closed after initial enquiries - no further action.
Public Protection	Not upheld: no maladministration
Revenues Services	Not upheld: no maladministration

- 1.5 Members will note that the Ombudsman's decision on one of the complaints received this year was maladministration and injustice. This related to the way the Council handled Council Tax demand for a rented property. A report detailing the complaint and the outcome was presented to Cabinet on 25 March 2015 and circulated to all members of the Council.
- 1.6 The Annual Review letter for the year ended 31 March 2014 is attached at Appendix 1. The statistics include all the complaints and enquiries received by the Ombudsman in 2014/15. Members are to note that the number of complaints and enquiries received do not match the Council's figures as a number of cases will have been received and decided in different business years. In addition, those categorised as 'incomplete/invalid' and 'referred back for local resolution' by the Ombudsman include those who are signposted back to the Council and therefore are not treated as an Ombudsman complaint.
- 1.7 Since April 2013, the Ombudsman has been publishing all decisions on complaints they receive. Decision statements are published on the Ombudsman website at www.lgo.org.uk no earlier than three months after the date of the final decision. The information published does not name the complainant or any individual involved with the complaint. The Ombudsman also retains discretion not to publish a decision, for example where it would not be in the interests of the person complaining to publish or where there's a reason in law not to.
- 1.8 In addition, the Ombudsman has published its Review of Local Government Complaints for 2014/15. The report provides complaint statistics for each English local authority, all in one place. A copy of the review is available on the Ombudsman website.

Proposal

2 It is proposed that Cabinet note the report.

Alternative Options

3 There are no Alternative Options.

Financial Implications

4 None arising from this report.

Appendices

5 Appendix 1 – Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review Letter.

Background Papers

6 None identified.

Recommendation

THAT Cabinet notes the contents of the report.

Reasons for Recommendations

7 To alert the Executive to the contents of the Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review Letter and raise awareness of the complaints received by the Council during 2014-15.