

12. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW LETTER 2016 (RC/A.157)

Purpose of the report

1. This report provides details of the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Annual Review of complaints for the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016.

Key issues

- The LGO annual review has not stated any concerns about the Authority's performance.

Recommendations

2. **1. That the Local Government Ombudsman annual review letter in Appendix 1 of the report be noted.**

How does this contribute to our policies and legal obligations?

3. Quarterly reports on complaints received are considered by the Audit, Resources and Performance Committee as part of its agreed work programme. This is to give Members the opportunity to discuss lessons learnt and improvements made as a result of this feedback including from complaints which have been referred to the LGO. Learning from complaints received will contribute to one of our four cornerstones: 'Our organisation – develop our organisation so we have a planned and sustained approach to performance at all levels (people, money, outputs)'.

Background

4. The change from annual reporting on complaints to quarterly reporting on complaints was made in 2011, however it was agreed that the annual review letter from the LGO would still be reported annually. Appendix 1 shows the LGO's annual review for the Authority covering the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016.
5. The letter shows that the LGO made a total of 4 decisions in relation to the Authority during this period. It is important to note that this figure includes enquiries dealt with by the LGO where they have offered advice on, made initial enquiries with the Authority or referred complainants back to the Authority. In these situations there is not always contact between the LGO and the Authority and therefore we do not hold a record of the complaints. Of the 4 decisions made 3 were Planning and Development related issues, 1 was Corporate and other services. Appendices 2 and 3 show the benchmark figures for complaints and enquiries received and determined by the LGO for National Park Authorities.
6. As can be seen in Appendix 1 during the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016, the LGO took decisions on 4 complaints of these:
 - a. 2 were closed after initial enquiries
 - b. 1 was referred back for local solution
 - c. 1 was upheld
7. All complaints received under the Authority's complaints process are included in the quarterly report on complaints made to the Audit, Resources and Performance Committee along with decisions received from the LGO. Of the decisions closed after initial inquiries 1 was reported in Quarter 2 and 1 was reported in Quarter 4 of 2015-16 The decision referred for local solution was the subject of an initial enquiry by the LGO but following that no further contact was received so it was not recorded as an official

complaint. In these 3 matters it was determined that no changes in processes/practices were required. The decision upheld by the LGO was reported in Quarter 3 of 2015-16 and was also the subject of a separate report to this Committee on 6 November 2015 and the Planning Committee on 11 December 2015. This decision was also the subject of a micro scrutiny review and the recommendations from this were reported to this Committee at its meeting on 4 March 2016.

Proposals

8. It is proposed that the details of the LGO annual review, as set out in Appendix 1 of this report, be noted.

Are there any corporate implications members should be concerned about?

9. **Financial:**

We handle complaints within existing resources. However when a complaint has to be investigated it is often time consuming and distorts planned work programmes.

10. **Risk Management:**

The following risks have been identified at this time:

- a. Failure to ensure action is taken to improve service or address a problem as appropriate in response to complaints received.
- b. Failure to improve the way we handle and respond to customers making complaints.
- c. Unreasonable cost in time and staff resource spent in dealing with complaints.

Action taken as a result of complaints received and our procedure for handling unreasonably persistent complainants help us to mitigate these risks.

11. **Sustainability:**

The Authority's complaints procedure highlights that:

- a. All comments and complaints are treated in confidence and will not disadvantage complainants in any future dealings they might have with the Authority.
- b. Everyone will be treated fairly.

12. **Background papers** (not previously published) – None

Appendices -

Appendix 1: LGO Annual Review Letter 2016

Appendix 2: Benchmark figures for complaints received by the LGO for National Park Authorities

Appendix 3: Benchmark figures for complaints determined by the LGO for National Park Authorities

Report Author, Job Title and Publication Date

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