

11. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW LETTER 2020/21 (RC)

1. Purpose of the report

This report provides details of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (the Ombudsman) Annual Review of complaints for the period April 2020 to March 2021.

Key Issues

- **The Ombudsman's Annual Review has not stated any concerns about the Authority's performance.**
- **The complaint statistics provided focus on 3 key areas – Complaints Upheld, Compliance with Recommendations and Satisfactory remedies provided by the Authority.**

2. Recommendation

- 1. To note the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2021 at Appendix 1 of the report.**

How does this contribute to our policies and legal obligations?

3. Quarterly reports on complaints received were considered by the Audit, Resources & Performance Committee up to May 2019; then following the changes to the Authority's Committee structure, they have been received and considered at the Authority meetings since July 2019. The quarterly reporting has since changed to bi-annual reporting in Quarters 2 and 4 each year. These reports 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 Ombudsman. Learning from complaints will contribute to the Authority's outcome as an 'agile and efficient organisation'.

Background Information

4. The Authority changed from annual reporting on complaints to quarterly reporting in 2011; however, it was agreed that the annual review letter from the Ombudsman would still be reported annually. Appendix 1 shows the Ombudsman's annual review for the Authority covering the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.
5. At the end of March 2020, the Ombudsman took the unprecedented step of temporarily stopping casework to allow authorities to concentrate efforts on vital frontline services during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. Casework was restarted in June 2020. Following feedback from authorities, the Ombudsman decided it was unnecessary to pause casework again during the further waves of the pandemic.
6. The letter shows that the Ombudsman received only 1 complaint and made 3 decisions in relation to the Authority during this period. The complaint received was regarding Planning and Development.
7. As can be seen in Appendix 1, of the 3 decisions the Ombudsman made during the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021:
 - 2 were not upheld (Planning and Development)
 - 1 was closed after initial enquiries (Planning and Development)

8. Appendices 2 and 3 show the benchmark figures for complaints and enquiries received and determined by the Ombudsman for National Park Authorities.

Proposals

9. It is proposed that the details of the Ombudsman’s annual review, as set out in Appendix 1 of this report, be noted.

Are there any corporate implications members should be concerned about?

Financial:

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

Risk Management:

11. The following risks have been identified at this time:
- Failure to ensure action is taken to improve service or address a problem as appropriate in response to complaints received.
 - Failure to improve the way we handle and respond to customers making complaints.
 - 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 complaints help us to mitigate these risks.

Sustainability:

12. The Authority’s complaints procedure highlights that:
- All comments and complaints are treated in confidence and will not disadvantage complainants in any future dealings they might have with the Authority.
 - Everyone will be treated fairly.

Equality:

13. There are no issues to raise.

Climate Change

There are no issues to raise.

15. Background papers (not previously published)

None.

16. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman’s Annual Review Letter 2021, 21 July 2021

Appendix 2 - Benchmark figures for complaints received by the Ombudsman for National Park Authorities

Appendix 3 - Benchmark figures for complaints determined by the Ombudsman for National Park Authorities

Report Author, Job Title and Publication Date

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