

Report to: Standards Committee

Date: 5th October 2015

Report Author: Executive Director (Legal & Democratic Services)

Title of Report: Annual Ombudsman's Letter

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report informs Committee about the annual Local Government Ombudsman's (LGO's) letter for 2014/15

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Committee welcomes the Ombudsman's letter and notes this report.

3. Background and Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 A copy of the LGO's letter is attached to this report at Appendix 1.
- 3.2 The LGO receives a low level of complaints about Hyndburn, which makes it difficult to identify trends from the statistical information provided. The low level of complaints may however reflect good service delivery and / or a good internal complaint handling process.
- 3.3 In summary, in 2014/15 the LGO received 12 complaints about the Council. The complaints related to the following service areas:
- Benefits / Council Tax – 5
- Housing – 1
- Planning - 6
- 3.4 During this period the LGO also determined 13 complaints about the Council. Detailed investigations were carried out in respect of 5 of the complaints, with 4 of these complaints being upheld and 1 not being upheld. Three of the complaints that were withheld following investigation related to Planning and the other related to Benefits / Council Tax.
- Of the remaining 8 complaints, 1 was closed after initial enquiries and 7 were referred back to the Council for resolution, probably because the complaint to the Ombudsman was made before the complainant had been through the Council's own complaints procedure.
- 3.5 Most importantly the Ombudsman's letter does not flag up any areas of concern about either the Council's services or its procedures for dealing with complaints.
- 3.6 Appendix 2 shows a comparison between the Council's position and that of neighbouring District Councils over the same period. This exercise also does not indicate any obvious cause for concern in respect of the Council, with Hyndburn receiving a comparable number of complaints to its neighbours.

4. Alternative Options considered and Reasons for Rejection

4.1 None.

5. Implications

Issue	Comments
Financial (including mainstreaming)	No costs identified.
Legal	No issues identified. The Ombudsman's letter gives an indication of the Council's approach to dealing with complaints. A fair and open complaint handling process is one indicator of the strength of the Council's corporate governance arrangements.
Assessment of Risk	No risks identified.
Equality	No equality issues identified.

6. Consultations

6.1 None.

7. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985: List of Background Papers

Ombudsman's letter dated 18th June 2015

8. Freedom of Information

8.1 The report does not contain exempt information under the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A and all information can be disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.