

REPORT TO:	Standards Committee	
DATE:	6 th February 2020	
PORTFOLIO:	Councillor Joyce Plummer, Portfolio Holder for Resources	
REPORT AUTHOR:	Executive Director (Legal & Democratic Services)	
TITLE OF REPORT:	Annual Ombudsman's Letter 2019	
EXEMPT REPORT (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A)	No	Not applicable
KEY DECISION:	No	If yes, date of publication:

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report informs Committee about the annual Local Government Ombudsman's (LGO's) letter for 2019.

2. Recommendations

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

3. Background and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 The LGO has now published its annual complaint figures in respect of each local authority.

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 2018/19 the LGO received 8 complaints about the Council. The table below shows the service areas to which the complaints related and compares this to the position in the last two financial years:

2018/19		2017/18		2016/17	
Benefits & CT	3	Benefits & CT	1	Benefits & CT	0
Environmental Services	1	Environmental Services	4	Environmental Services	2
Housing	1	Housing	2	Housing	1
Planning	3	Planning	7	Planning	2
Corporate Services	0	Corporate Services	0	Corporate Services	1
Total	8	Total	14	Total	6

3.4 During this period the LGO also determined 11 complaints about the Council. Details are set out in the table below, which also compares this to the position in the last 2 financial years:

2018/19		2017/18		2016/17	
Complaint not upheld	4	Complaint not upheld	3	Complaint not upheld	0
Sent back to HBC	5	Sent back to HBC	6	Sent back to HBC	3
Closed after initial enquiry	2	Closed after initial enquiry	2	Closed after initial enquiry	3
Upheld	0	Upheld	0	Upheld	1
Total	11	Total	11	Total	7

Complaints will usually be referred back to the Council for resolution 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 The table below 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:

Council	Complaints received	Complaints decided	Complaints upheld after detailed investigation
Hyndburn	8	11	0
Burnley	7	7	0
Pendle	8	8	1
Rossendale	18	19	2
Ribble Valley	8	9	1
Chorley	10	12	3
South Ribble	16	15	0
Preston	26	25	3
West Lancs	9	11	1
Lancaster	9	7	0

3.7 A copy of this report was also considered by the Cabinet on 13th November 2019. The Cabinet welcomed the Ombudsman's letter for 2018/19 and noted the report.

4. Alternative Options considered and Reasons for Rejection

4.1 None. This is a report for information.

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 24th July 2019

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.