

Report to: Standards Committee

Date: 9th December 2021

Report Author: Executive Director (Legal & Democratic Services)

Title of Report: Annual Ombudsman's Letter 2021

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report informs Committee about the annual Local Government Ombudsman's (LGO's) letter for 2021

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 for the period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021. This data is produced in respect of every local authority in the same format.
- 3.2 For many years the LGO has received 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 Last year the LGO changed their reporting format and less detail is now provided about the complaints received. As a result, we no longer receive any information to identify the service area(s) to which complaints relate or any indication of the number of complaints received. However, the Ombudsman's letter does not specifically flag up any areas of concern about either the Council's services or its procedures for dealing with complaints.
- 3.4 During this period the LGO carried out 1 detailed investigation in response to a complaint about the Council, and this complaint was upheld.
- 3.5 The table below shows a comparison between the Council's position and that of neighbouring District Councils over the same period. This exercise does not indicate any obvious cause for concern in respect of the Council, with Hyndburn's performance being comparable to its Lancashire neighbours. In addition, the level of complaints across the County is so low as to make it difficult to draw any specific conclusions from the statistics available, although it is worth noting that the LGO ceased to deal with complaints for several months at the height of the pandemic, and this may have suppress the figures shown below:

Council	Complaints investigated by LGO	% of complaints upheld after detailed investigation (the average for similar council is 45%)
Hyndburn	1	100% (i.e 1 upheld)
Burnley	3	67% (i.e 2 upheld)
Pendle	2	0%
Rossendale	3	67% (i.e 2 upheld)
Ribble Valley	0	0%
Chorley	2	50% (i.e 1 upheld)
South Ribble	2	0%
Preston	1	100% (i.e 1 upheld)
West Lancs	0	0%
Lancaster	0	0%
Wyre	0	0%
Fylde	2	0%

3.6 The table below shows the performance data for 2019/20, which is the first year for which data was produced in this format:

Council	Complaints investigated by LGO	% of complaints upheld after detailed investigation (the average for similar council is 45%)
Hyndburn	1	0%
Burnley	0	0%
Pendle	1	0%
Rossendale	6	33% (i.e 2 upheld)
Ribble Valley	0	0%
Chorley	1	100% (i.e 1 upheld)
South Ribble	1	0%
Preston	8	13% (i.e 1 upheld)
West Lancs	1	0%
Lancaster	2	0%
Wyre	3	33% (i.e 1 upheld)
Fylde	3	33% (i.e. 1 upheld)

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 a general 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. Nothing in letter indicates that there is cause for concern about the Council's current 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 July 2021

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.

