

Report to: Standards Committee

Date: 20th September 2022

Report Author: Executive Director (Legal & Democratic Services)

Title of Report: Annual Ombudsman's Letter 2022

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report informs Committee about the annual Local Government Ombudsman's (LGO's) letter for 2022

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 2021 to 31st March 2022. This data is produced in respect of every local authority in the same format.
- 3.2 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. 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 During 2021/22 the LGO completed 1 detailed investigation in response to a complaint about the Council, and this complaint was not upheld. This complaint was actually received in 2020/21, but concluded in 2021/22.
- 3.4 During 2021/22 the LGO received 8 complaints about the Council, but none of these were referred for formal investigation. We have the following information about those complaints:

No.	Service area	decision
1	Benefits and Council Tax	Premature complaint – referred back to Council
2	Benefits and Council Tax	Closed after initial enquiries
3	Environmental Services	Not upheld
4	Environmental Services	Premature complaint – referred back to Council
5	Environmental Services	Premature complaint – referred back to Council

6	Environmental Services	Premature complaint – referred back to Council
7	Environmental Services	No decision yet
8	Planning	Premature complaint – referred back to Council
9	Planning	Closed after initial enquiries

- 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:

Council	Complaints upheld by LGO	% of complaints upheld after detailed investigation (the average for similar council is 45%)
Hyndburn	0	0%
Burnley	3	75%
Pendle	3	100%
Rossendale	3	100%
Ribble Valley	1	25%
Chorley	0	0%
South Ribble	2	50%
Preston	0	0%
West Lancs	2	50%
Lancaster	3	60%
Wyre	1	100%
Fylde	2	100%

- 3.6 The table below shows the performance data for 2019/20 and 2020/21, which are the first years for which data was produced in this format:

Council	Number of complaints investigated by LGO	% of complaints upheld after detailed investigation (the average for similar council is 45%)
Hyndburn	2019/20 1	0%
	2020/21 1	0%
Burnley	2019/20 0	0%

	2020/21	4	75%
Pendle	2019/20	1	0
	2020/21	3	100%
Rossendale	2019/20	6	33%
	2020/21	3	100%
Ribble Valley	2019/20	0	0%
	2020/21	4	25%
Chorley	2019/20	1	100%
	2020/21	0	0%
South Ribble	2019/20	1	0%
	2020/21	4	50%
Preston	2019/20	8	13%
	2020/21	2	0%
West Lancs	2019/20	1	0%
	2020/21	4	50%
Lancaster	2019/20	2	0%
	2020/21	5	60%
Wyre	2019/20	3	33%
	2020/21	1	100%
Fylde	2019/20	3	33%
	2020/21	2	100%

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.