

**Report to:** **Standards Committee**

**Date:** **30th November 2016**

**Report Author:** **Executive Director (Legal & Democratic Services)**

**Title of Report:** **Annual Ombudsman's Letter 2016**

## **1. Purpose of Report**

1.1 This report informs Committee about the annual Local Government Ombudsman's (LGO's) letter for 2015/16

## **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 2015/16 the LGO received 9 complaints about the Council. The table below shows the service areas to which the complaints related and compares this to the position in 2014/15:

<b>2015/16</b>		<b>2014/15</b>	
Benefits and Council Tax	2	Benefits and Council Tax	5
Environmental Services	3	Environmental Services	0
Housing	1	Housing	1
Planning	3	Planning	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>

3.4 During this period the LGO also determined 8 complaints about the Council. Details are set out in the table below, which also compares this to the position in 2014/15:

<b>2015/16</b>		<b>2014/15</b>	
Complaint invalid	1	Complaint invalid	0
Advice given	0	Advice given	0

Sent back to HBC	4		Sent back to HBC	7
Closed after initial enquiry	2		Closed after initial enquiry	1
Detailed investigation	1		Detailed investigation	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>		<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>

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.

The complaint referred for detailed investigation in 2015/16 was upheld. Of the 5 cases referred for detailed investigation in 2015/14, 4 were upheld and 1 was dismissed.

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	9	8	1
Burnley	12	13	0
Pendle	15	16	2
Rossendale	9	13	2
Ribble Valley	9	8	1

#### 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 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016

## **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.