

Audit and Governance Committee

Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter 2021

Date: 21 January 2022

Agenda No:

Title of Report	Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter 2021
Purpose of Report	To review the Council's arrangements for handling complaints and investigations by the Local Government Ombudsman.
Recommendations:	To note the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter 2021
Officer(s) Contact:	Rob Ayliffe, Monitoring Officer and Head of Strategic Planning, Performance & Change (01452) 328506
Key Risks:	Strategic Risks SR 1.1: Failure in corporate governance, which leads to service, financial or reputational damage or failure.

Local Government Ombudsman's Review of Local Government Complaints 2021

1. Responding to and learning from complaints is an important element of the corporate governance of an organisation and the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) annual review letter is a helpful indicator of the quality of the Council's governance arrangements. The Audit and Governance Committee is responsible for formulating and keeping under review the Council's arrangements for handling complaints and investigations by the LGSCO.
2. The Local Government Ombudsman produces an annual summary of statistics on complaints made to them about all councils. The report for Gloucestershire for the year ended 31 March 2021 is attached at Appendix 1.
3. In 2020/21 the LGSCO recorded 56 complaints about Gloucestershire County Council. This compares to 83 last year, 67 in 2018/19, 67 in 2017/18 and 70 in 2016/17. The decrease in complaint numbers for 2020/21 can partly be attributable to the LGSCO's temporary suspension of investigatory work between March and June 2020 as a result of the pandemic.
4. Out of the 56 complaints, there were 20 detailed investigations carried out. Of the 20 detailed investigations, 9 were not upheld and 11 were upheld. This compares to 12 cases upheld in 2019/20.
5. The Council's own data records can be different to those referred to the Ombudsman. The LGSCO only provides the number of complaints received and not the detailed data which sits behind it so the Council's data means it is not always possible to reconcile the two sets of data. The number of LGSCO complaints and enquiries will include some which were not pursued. It is also the case that some complaints are concluded in a different financial year to them being received.

Local data on complaints

6. The majority of complaints were in relation to education and children's services. However, regardless of service area, local resolutions have been achieved in all of the complaints that were upheld.
7. A breakdown of the complaints in relation to service area is as follows:

2020 - 2021						
Service area	Up-held	Not up-held	Closed after initial enquires	Incomplete/invalid	Referred back for local resolution – Premature complaint	Total
Adults	4	4	3	1	4	16
Corporate and other	0	0	0	0	0	0
Education and Children Services	5	5	5	2	8	25
Environmental	1	0	0	0	0	1
Highways and Transport	1	0	10	0	1	12
Planning and Development	0	0	1	0	1	2
Total	11	9	19	3	14	56

8. A summary of each of the 11 upheld complaints, together with the remedial recommendations is attached at Appendix 2.

Review and follow-up

9. Each report received is carefully considered by the relevant service area. In addition, the cases are reviewed on a regular basis by the Chief Executive, the Monitoring Officer and the Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer). They are particularly looking at the broader organisational risks and

governance issues.

8. Members receive information on complaints, including Ombudsman findings, as part of the quarterly strategic reviews of performance. This is in addition to the formal annual report, here today.
9. Both Adults Social Care and Children's Social Care have separate statutory complaints procedures. They are both required to produce annual reports which will be considered by the relevant scrutiny committee.
10. Any comments or suggestions on how reporting could be improved are welcome.

Conclusion

11. The LGSCO's Annual Review Letter for 2021 gives a summary of statistics on the complaints made about Gloucestershire County Council. Of the 20 complaints which they investigated, 11 were upheld, all of which were resolved locally.