

Part A

Report to: **Audit Committee**

Date of meeting: **Thursday, 16 September 2021**

Report author: **Group Head of Democracy and Governance**

Title: **Ombudsman's Annual Letter 2021**

1.0 **Summary**

1.1 Every year the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman sends every local authority a letter enclosing statistics relating to the number of complaints he has received in the previous year. The year runs from April to March.

1.2 Attached as appendices are the letter received on 21 July 2021 and the table of cases received and decided.

2.0 **Risks**

2.1 Not applicable. This letter is for noting only.

3.0 **Recommendations**

3.1 That the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's letter be noted.

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4.0 **Detailed proposal**

4.1 The council received the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's annual letter on the 21 July 2021. A copy is appended together with the statistics of the number of complaints the Ombudsman received and decided on from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

4.2 Due to the Coronavirus pandemic the Ombudsman stopped taking or investigating complaints from late March 2020 to allow local authorities to concentrate their efforts on vital front line services during that first wave. After consulting with authorities the Ombudsman recommenced taking and investigating complaints in late June 2020. The service has continued throughout the second and third waves.

- 4.3 From the statistics members will note that the Ombudsman received 18 cases during the year. Of those only 6 have actually been forwarded to the council to respond to. During the same period 17 cases were decided. There is a difference in the numbers due to the fact that not all complaints are necessarily determined in the same financial year they are received.
- 4.4 Of the cases decided 3 were upheld which accounted for 100% of those that they investigated. None of the 3 related to complaints received during the year and all 3 have been reported to cabinet due to the finding of maladministration. One related to a housing benefit matter, one related to a homelessness matter and the third related to a planning matter. In the first two cases the Ombudsman also concluded that the complainants had suffered injustice. In both, in addition to an apology the Ombudsman awarded compensation for distress and in both cases the council agreed to review its policy and procedures. In the third case the Ombudsman found the council at fault for failing to refer directly to the question of the effect of the development on the complainant's amenity in the report that was before the Development Management Committee, but found no injustice.
- 4.5 All decisions are reported on the Ombudsman's website in anonymised form.
- 5.0 **Implications**
- 5.1 **Financial**
- 5.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are no financial implications in this report. However as noted above the Ombudsman did order the council to pay compensation in 2 of the 3 upheld complaints. These sums are met from the relevant services' budgets.
- 5.2 **Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)**
- 5.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that there are no legal implications in the report.
- 5.3 **Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection**
- 5.3.1 Not applicable
- 5.4 **Staffing**
- 5.4.1 Not applicable

5.5 **Accommodation**

5.5.1 Not applicable

5.6 **Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

5.6.1 Not applicable

5.7 **Sustainability**

5.7.1 Not applicable

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Annual Letter
- Appendix 2 Statistics for 2020/21

Background papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.