

Part A

Report to: Audit Committee

Date of meeting: Thursday, 14 September 2023

Report author: Group Head of Democracy and Governance

Title: Ombudsman's Annual Letter 2023

1.0 Summary

1.1 Every year the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman publishes statistics of complaints received by him relating to each council in England. Attached at appendices 1 and 2 are the Annual Letter for Watford and statistics of complaints received by the Ombudsman and complaints upheld for the year 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

1.2 Audit Committee is asked to note the report.

2.0 Risks

2.1

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate or transfer)	Risk Rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
That lessons learned are not followed	Similar findings of fault will lead to reputational damage	Implement any recommendations suggested by the Ombudsman or considered by officers as a result of the complaint	treat	3

3.0 Recommendations

3.1 That the Annual Letter and statistics be noted.

Further information:

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4.0 Detailed proposal

- 4.1 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman annually publishes statistics on complaints received and determined from all councils in England. Attached as appendices 1 and 2 is Watford's Annual Letter and statistics for the year 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.
- 4.2 As members can see from the statistics the Ombudsman received 9 complaints during the period and resolved 13. The reason for the disparity is that the extra 4 were complaints resolved were received in the previous year. All 9 of this years complaints have been resolved in the same year.
- 4.3 In relation to the resolved complaints only 2 were investigated. Both of which were upheld and findings of maladministration causing injustice were determined. Both these cases related to complaints about delays in investigating noise nuisance complaints. Both were formally reported to cabinet as required under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. The third complaint that is registered in the statistics as upheld was not investigated as the council admitted fault on receipt of the complaint. This related to the council erroneously cancelling a council taxpayer's direct debit and the long delay in noticing the error.
- 4.4 Of the other matters, 3 related to planning and related to complaints from neighbours about perceived lack of enforcement action or unhappiness with planning decisions relating to neighbouring land. In these the council was found to have dealt with the matters properly. 2 related to complaints about the customer complaints process. 2 related to decisions relating to the housing register and 1 related to burial charges for non-residents. In all cases no investigation was instigated the Ombudsman being satisfied the council had acted properly. In 2 cases (including one related to planning) the complaints were not formally referred as they were deemed premature.
- 4.5 With regard to those complaints which are upheld the council has accepted the remedy suggested by the Ombudsman and lessons have been learned with regard to improving communication and processes to avoid similar situations arising in the future.

5.0 Implications

5.1 Financial

5.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that any payments of compensation suggested to be paid where complaints are upheld are met from the relevant services budget.

5.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

5.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that reviewing the Ombudsman's Annual Letter contributes to the overall governance of the council.

5.3 **Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection**

5.3.1 Having had regard to the council's obligations under s149, it is considered that there are no equalities implications arising from this report.

5.4 **Staffing**

5.4.1 No implications

5.5 **Accommodation**

5.5.1 No implications

5.6 **Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

5.6.1 No implications

5.7 **Sustainability**

5.7.1 No Implications

Appendices

- Annual Letter 2023
- Watford Statistics 2023

Background papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.

