

REPORT TITLE: ANNUAL REPORT: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN 2016/17

31 AUGUST 2017

REPORT OF PORTFOLIO HOLDER: CLLR GODFREY – PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

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WARD(S): ALL

PURPOSE

The report provides details on the complaints and enquiries received by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, and the conclusions reached following their investigations.

Information specific to individual authorities, including complaints referred to the Ombudsman, as well as the publication of the Ombudsman decision and decision statements, by category or authority, can be found on the LGO website; www.lgo.org.uk.

There were no cases against the Council which were upheld by the Ombudsman during 2016/17.

This report also provides a review of contact made by residents via the Council's complaint process during the year to 31 March 2017.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

IMPLICATIONS:1 COUNCIL STRATEGY OUTCOME

- 1.1 The Council is focussed on the services that it provides and improving standards so that they can meet the expectations of its customers. Enhanced information and learning from complaints and their causes will support the Council to achieve this core principle underpinning the delivery of the Council Strategy.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 None directly arising from this report.

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 None directly in this report.

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None directly.

5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None.

6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 Feedback from those who use the Council's services is an important part of continual improvement. The Council has a two stage complaints process, where issues may be raised with the relevant Head of Service in the first instance and followed up by the Chief Executive. If the customer is still dissatisfied with the response provided, they may refer the issue to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO).

7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 None.

8 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 None required arising from the content of the report.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
<i>Property - none</i>		
<i>Community Support – significant numbers of complaints can</i>	Regular monitoring and reporting of the types of complaints the Council receives.	

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
<i>indicate concerns from the community and a lack of community support for the Council.</i>		
<i>Timescales – Delays in responding to complaints can lead to adverse publicity and reputational damage.</i>	Regular monitoring of complaints and the time taken to respond ensures that the Council is responsive to the complaints it receives.	Learning from complaints can enable the Council to develop services ensuring that it remains customer focussed
<i>Project Capacity – none.</i>		
<i>Financial / VFM – cost of investigating and responding to complaints.</i>	Proper recording and monitoring of complaints ensures the Council is alerted to trends before they escalate.	Complaints provide the opportunity to develop or enhance services where appropriate
<i>Legal – none</i>		
<i>Innovation - none</i>		
<i>Reputation – significant numbers of complaints can lead to reputational damage and adverse publicity</i>	Regular monitoring and reporting of the types of complaints the Council receives.	
<i>Government Changes - none</i>		

10 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Annual Report of the Local Government Ombudsman:

- 10.1 The tables below show the number of enquiries and complaints made to the LGO that were settled during 2016/17. Figures for 2015/16 have been included in brackets alongside the 2016/17 figures.
- 10.2 When considering these figures, it should be noted that in particular the figures include a number of general enquiries to the Ombudsman, some by telephone where the Ombudsman has been able to give advice without the need for any actual investigation. These enquiries are often received and decided or responded to on the same day; however, they are still classified as decisions.

- 10.3 These enquiries are often made to the Ombudsman without the knowledge of the Council and therefore the Council's records do not match those of the Ombudsman. For this reason, it has not been possible to reconcile the two sets of records.
- 10.4 There were no upheld cases by the Ombudsman during 2016/17, compared to three during 2015/16. An upheld complaint is one where the Ombudsman decided that an authority has been at fault in how it acted, and that this fault may or may not have caused an injustice to the complainant, or where an authority has accepted that it needs to remedy the complaint before the LGO make a finding on fault. If the Council has decided that there was fault and it caused an injustice to the complainant, usually the Ombudsman will have recommended that the authority take some action to address it.
- 10.5 LGO – Local Authority Report – Winchester City Council
For the year ending 31 March 2017 (2015/16 figures in brackets)

Complaints and enquiries received by the LGO by service area

Benefits and Tax	Corporate and other services	Environmental services and public protection	Highways and transport	Housing	Planning and development	Total
1 (6)	2 (3)	0 (2)	0 (1)	0 (5)	7 (17)	10 (34)

Detailed investigations carried out		Advice Given	Closed after initial enquiries	Incomplete / Invalid	Referred back for local resolution	Total
Upheld	Not Upheld					
0 (3)	4 (2)	0 (5)	5 (6)	0 (2)	3 (13)	12 (31)

- 10.6 The table above shows that during the year 2016/2017 there was significantly fewer complaints referred to the LGO than during 2015/16. As already noted above, there were also no upheld complaints during 2016/17.
- 10.7 Annual Review: WCC recorded complaints
- 10.8 As of October 2014, the Council migrated to using the Covalent Performance Management system, which has a purpose-made feedback module to record, manage and report complaints.
- 10.9 The Covalent system also provides a number of advantages to the Council over the previous system. These include a more robust approach to the management of complaints and FOI requests, as well as having the

functionality to analyse and report complaints by a number of different ways including by complaint type, complaint source and service.

11 Customer complaints recorded on the Council complaints system

11.1 During the financial year 2016/17 there was an increase of 22% in the overall number of complaints when compared to the previous year. A total of 329 complaints were recorded during 2016/17 and 269 in 2015/16.

11.2 The following table compares the total number of complaints recorded for the last four years.

Year	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
No. of complaints recorded	611	452	269	329

11.3 The complaints recorded during the period April 2013 to March 2017 can be analysed by service area as follows:

Service Area	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Benefits and Welfare (<i>previously recorded with Revenues below</i>)	n/a	n/a	n/a	16
Building Control	7	0	0	0
Community Safety & Neighbourhood Services	0	1	0	0
Corporate Communications	0	0	1	0
Corporate Management Team	31	5	1	0
Cultural Services	5	1	0	0
Customer Services	6	7	0	1
Development Management	74	61	57	55
Engineering & Transport	0	16	1	6
Environment & Licensing	0	23	12	21
Estates	8	5	0	0
Historic Environment	0	1	0	0
Finance	3	3	0	0
Housing Services	185	124	104	107
I M & T	2	0	1	0
Joint Client (Waste)	183	102	33	54
Landscape & Open Spaces	0	9	6	14
Legal & Democratic Services	6	10	5	2
Organisational Development	0	1	0	1
Partnerships & Communication	2	0	0	0
Parking Services & CCTV	49	43	20	42
Policy and Projects	0	0	1	0
Revenues	49	27	25	9
Sport & Physical Recreation	0	1	1	1
Strategic Planning	1	12	1	0

Service Area	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
TOTAL	611	452	269	329

- 11.4 Complaints recorded against Corporate Management Team during 2013/14 include requests for information from constituents via the local Member of Parliament. As these are not complaints, they are now recorded separately on the Covalent system.
- 11.5 There were 101 MP requests for information of the Council during the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017, By way of comparison there 110 MP requests for information of the Council during the period 1 October 2014 to 31 March 2015 and 123 during the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016.

Review of complaints received

- 11.6 Development Management is one of the most complex and high volume areas of Council business and the number of complaints and LGO cases is an extremely small percentage of the total cases handled. However, there were fewer complaints in 2016/17 compared to the figures recorded for the preceding, so the downward trend continued.
- 11.7 There was a significant increase in the number of complaints received in Parking and CCTV last year compared to the previous year, albeit the figure of 42 is in line with historical levels. This was due in part to concerns raised about the Park and Ride Service leading up to Christmas. Some disruption to the service was caused by general congestion at peak times. However, this year, the Council will be running an additional festive service to increase capacity and overall the number of complaints compared to the number of people that use the service is very small. In 2017, there have been very few issues raised about the service despite its increasing popularity.
- 11.8 The number of complaints received by the Landscape and Open Spaces team has increased this year. This is due in part to the Council taking over the management of land previously managed by other groups like parish councils. However it is mainly attributable to a rise in tree related matters particularly regarding Council trees. The Team is aware of the issue and is addressing it by undertaking surveys of Council trees which should help to reduce complaints. However, it should be noted that, given the scope and nature of work undertaken by the Team and the number of trees owned by the Council, the number of complaints about the service is still low.
- 11.9 As well as reporting complaints by team or service, by using the Covalent system it is now possible to analyse complaints by type. This brings together complaints across services and gives a better insight into the reasons for the complaints.
- 11.10 The following table provides an analysis of the complaints that were recorded onto Covalent for the period 1 October 2015 to 31 March 2017.

Complaint Type	Number recorded 2015/16	Number recorded 2016/17
Administration – All other	11	4
Administration – Liability for Charges	12	2
Administration – Recovery Action	2	2
Administration – Wording of Council Letters	3	6
General Services – Contractor	14	43
General Services – Council Decision	26	47
General Services – Council Policy	10	9
General Services – Council Procedure	8	5
General Services – Delay in Service	13	20
General Services – Enforcement Action	11	9
General Services – Lack of Information	12	8
General Services – Missed Cyclical Service	9	19
General Services – Other	9	19
Housing Services – Allocations	3	10
Housing Services – Estate Services	2	2
Housing Services – Repairs and Maintenance	78	69
Housing Services – Tenancy Management	12	14
Housing Services - other	0	11
Premises Related	8	7
Staff Related	11	13
Non Council Related	0	6
Other	15	6
TOTAL	269	329

11.11 The area with the largest number of complaints relates to Housing repairs and maintenance. However, it should be noted that the Council is responsible for maintaining over 5,000 residential properties and raises over 20,000 individual repairs jobs each year. The Tenant Satisfaction Survey undertaken recently highlighted that 91% of tenants were happy with the service they received from the Council.

11.12 The second largest area of complaint relates to Council Decisions and these predominantly relate to complaints about planning decisions.

12 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

12.1 None.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

[OS152](#) – Annual Complaints Received by the Council 2016/17

Other Background Documents:-

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2017:-

<http://www.lgo.org.uk/documents/councilperformance/2017/winchester%20city%20council.pdf>

APPENDICES:

None