

## CORPORATE COMPLAINTS UPDATE - LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL LETTER AND LESSONS LEARNT

### Policy and Performance Advisory Committee - 30 November 2017

Report of Jim Carrington-West, Chief Officer Corporate Services

Status For information

Key Decision No

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Fleming

Contact Officer Amy Wilton, Ext. 7280

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### Recommendation to Policy and Performance Advisory Committee

That this report be noted.

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### Introduction and Background

- 1 This is an update to the Committee following the formal annual complaints report which was presented at the meeting in May 2017. At that time the annual letter had not been received from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO). Members requested that information be brought back to this Committee, along with details of lesson learned from Corporate Complaints.

### Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) annual letter

- 2 The Council's formal complaint procedure has 3 stages. Stage 1, investigated by the relevant Service Manager and reviewed and signed off by the Corporate Customer Service and Delivery Manager. Stage 2, if new and additional evidence is provided following the outcome of the stage 1 investigation that may affect the outcome, the complaint will be investigated by an independent Senior Manager and reviewed and signed off by an independent Chief Officer. Stage 3, if the customer remains dissatisfied they can then request the LGO review the complaint.
- 3 During 2016/17 the LGO chose to include the '*Social Care Ombudsman*' in its name. Since 2010 they have operated with jurisdiction over all registered adult social care providers, able to investigate complaints about care funded and arranged privately. The change in name during 2016/2017 is in response to frequent feedback from care providers who tell the LGO that their current name is a real barrier to recognition within the social care sector. They hope that the change will give this part of their jurisdiction the profile it deserves.

- 4 The LGO provide an annual summary of statistics on the complaints made to them about Sevenoaks District Council. This year the letter from the LGO was received on 1 August 2017 and covered the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017.

### **LGO complaints received**

- 5 During 2016/17 the LGO received 10 complaints about the Council, which is a reduction of 52% on the previous year when the LGO considered 21 complaints about the Council.
- 6 The LGO categorised complaints about the District Council by subject area as follows:
- Benefits and Tax - 2 complaints
  - Corporate and other services - 2 complaints
  - Highways and transport - 1 complaint
  - Housing - 1 complaints
  - Planning and development - 4 complaints
- 7 Members may also wish to note that when compared against District Council's in Kent Sevenoaks District Council had the lowest number of complaints received by the LGO in 2016/17. On average the other Kent Districts had 24 complaints (with the lowest being 11 complaints and the highest 47).

### **LGO complaints decided**

- 8 The LGO took 12 decisions on complaints made to them about the Council in 2016/17. None of them were upheld. The previous year the LGO made 22 decisions on complaints about the Council and 1 was upheld.
- 9 The LGO summarised their decisions as:
- Referred back for local resolution - 5 complaints
  - Closed after initial enquiries - 4 complaints
  - Not upheld - 3 complaints
- 10 Members may also wish to note that when compared against District Council's in Kent Sevenoaks District Council had the equal lowest number of complaints decided by the LGO in 2016/17. On average the other Kent Districts had 23 complaints decided (with the lowest being 12 decisions and the highest 50).

- 11 Only two other Kent authorities, alongside Sevenoaks District Council had no complaints upheld by the LGO in 2016/17. Across the rest of the County the LGO upheld a total of 29 complaints.
- 12 Further information on how to interpret the LGO statistics can be found on their website: <http://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/annual-review-reports/interpreting-local-authority-statistics>

### **Lessons learnt**

- 13 An integral part of the Council's corporate complaints process is ensuring that the outcomes are evaluated and any areas where lessons can be learnt to improve the way we do things and prevent similar errors occurring in the future are documented and action is taken.
- 14 Since April this year there have been 12 occasions where learning has been taken from complaints made to the organisation at Stage 1 or Stage 2 in order to improve our service to the customer.
- 15 In the majority of these cases the lessons learnt are about the way information is communicated to customers. That can be the timeliness or clarity of writing to a resident or about a lack of available information that has caused a customer a difficulty.
- 16 Examples of this kind have caused the Council to undertake a wide ranging and ongoing review of the letters it is required to send to customers. Website content has also been reviewed and re-written and training has been provided where necessary to improve Officer's skills.
- 17 There have been no significant findings from complaints that have required fundamental change in the way services are provided to customers. This is evidenced in part by the low number of complaints received by the Council and the fact that the LGO has not been required to uphold complaints about us.

### **Key Implications**

#### Financial

There are no financial implications arising from this report. The Council made no financial payments as compensation in 2016/17 to resolve complaints.

#### Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

There are no legal implications arising from this report. Failure to properly respond to complaints and improve the Council's services as a result would create reputational and financial risk to the Council.

## Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

### **Appendices**

None

### **Background Papers**

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman  
Annual Letter 2017

**Jim Carrington-West**  
**Chief Officer Corporate Services**