

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: TUESDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2013
 title: OMBUDSMAN'S ANNUAL REVIEW REPORT 2012/2013
 submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE
 principal author: DIANE RICE, HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To inform Committee about changes to the way the Local Government Ombudsman reports to this Authority about complaints.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Community Objectives - } The Council aims to be a well-managed Council providing efficient services based on identified customer needs. Complaints to the Ombudsman and the process of resolving complaints and responding to the Ombudsman's investigation helps to inform the way the Council delivers services to its customers.
- Corporate Priorities - }
- Other Considerations - }

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 As will be seen from the letter attached as Appendix 1 the LGO changed its business processes during the course of 2012/13, and cannot therefore provide the detailed information provided in previous years about complaints, ie the complaints information supplied is not broken down into service areas.

2.2 The LGO has however confirmed that there were only 4 complaints in 2012/13 about this Authority, as compared with an average for District/Borough Councils of 10 per annum.

2.3 The attached letter also provides some useful information to explain other changes to the structure of the LGO's office, and draws the Council's attention to the new arrangements for publishing LGO decisions on the LGO website and the adoption of a new Assessment Code.

3 RISK ASSESSMENT

3.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – No implications identified.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – No implications identified.
- Political – No implications identified.
- Reputation – No implications identified.
- Equality & Diversity – No implications identified.

4 **CONCLUSION**

4.1 Note the information as set out above.

DIANE RICE
HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

MARSHAL SCOTT
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1 None.

For further information please ask for Diane Rice, extension 4418.

P&F/10091303/DER/CMS

16 July 2013

By email

Mr Marshal Scott
Chief Executive
Ribble Valley Borough Council

Dear Mr Scott

Annual Review Letter

I am writing with our annual summary of statistics on the complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) about your authority for the year ended 31 March 2013. This year we have only presented the total number of complaints received and will not be providing the more detailed information that we have offered in previous years.

The reason for this is that we changed our business processes during the course of 2012/13 and therefore would not be able to provide you with a consistent set of data for the entire year.

In 2012/13 we received 4 complaints about your local authority. This compares to the following average number (recognising considerable population variations between authorities of a similar type):

District/Borough Councils-10 complaints
Unitary Authorities-36 complaints
Metropolitan Councils-49 complaints
County Councils-54 complaints
London Boroughs-79 complaints

Future development of annual review letters

We remain committed to sharing information about your council's performance and will be providing more detailed information in next year's letters. We want to ensure that the data we provide is relevant and helps local authorities to continuously improve the way they handle complaints from the public and have today launched a consultation on the future format of our annual letters.

I encourage you to respond and highlight how you think our data can best support local accountability and service improvements. The consultation can be found by going to www.surveymonkey.com/s/annualletters

LGO governance arrangements

As part of the work to prepare LGO for the challenges of the future we have refreshed our governance arrangements and have a new executive team structure made up of Heather Lees, the Commission Operating Officer, and our two Executive Directors Nigel Ellis and Michael King. The Executive team are responsible for the day to day management of LGO.

Since November 2012 Anne Seex, my fellow Local Government Ombudsman, has been on sick leave. We have quickly adapted to working with a single Ombudsman and we have formally taken the view that this is the appropriate structure with which to operate in the future. Our sponsor department is conducting a review to enable us to develop our future governance arrangements. Our delegations have been amended so that investigators are

able to make decisions on my behalf on all local authority and adult social care complaints in England.

Publishing decisions

Last year we wrote to explain that we would be publishing the final decision on all complaints on our website. We consider this to be an important step in increasing our transparency and accountability and we are the first public sector ombudsman to do this. Publication will apply to all complaints received after the 1 April 2013 with the first decisions appearing on our website over the coming weeks. I hope that your authority will also find this development to be useful and use the decisions on complaints about all local authorities as a tool to identify potential improvement to your own service.

Assessment Code

Earlier in the year we introduced an assessment code that helps us to determine the circumstances where we will investigate a complaint. We apply this code during our initial assessment of all new complaints. Details of the code can be found at:

www.lgo.org.uk/making-a-complaint/how-we-will-deal-with-your-complaint/assessment-code

Annual Report and Accounts

Today we have also published *Raising the Standards*, our Annual Report and Accounts for 2012/13. It details what we have done over the last 12 months to improve our own performance, to drive up standards in the complaints system and to improve the performance of public services. The report can be found on our website at www.lgo.org.uk

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Martin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Dr Jane Martin
Local Government Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England