

**SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**

**STANDARDS AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 14 SEPTEMBER 2022**

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW LETTER**

**REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE**

**PART A – SUMMARY REPORT**

**1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS**

To bring the Local Government Ombudsman’s Annual Review Letter to the attention of Members.

**2. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

POLICY/COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Council Plan objectives?	
	Yes	Effective oversight of complaint matters assist with the Council’s ability to deliver the services required.
	Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) been completed?	
	No	Not required – report for information.
SCRUTINY POWERS APPLICABLE	No	
KEY DECISION	No	
TARGET COMPLETION/ DELIVERY DATE	N/A	
FINANCIAL IMPACT	No	
LEGAL ISSUES	No	
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	None	
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	No	

**PART B – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

3.1 The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) offers an independent, impartial and free service to any member of the public dissatisfied with the way the Council has dealt with their complaint. Each year the Ombudsman writes to the Chief Executive commenting on the Councils performance. The Standards and Resources Committee has oversight responsibility in respect of complaint matters.

3.2 The Council had 8 complaints referred to the LGO in the period covered by the 2023 Letter with half (4) related to Planning and Development. This is consistent with previous years both in terms of overall number of complaints and the main service area. This is not unexpected as planning is a contentious and emotive area that gives rise to strong views and thus to a higher number of complaints than other service areas. Outside of adult and childrens care complaints (which are not functions of South Staffordshire Council), planning and development is the second largest complaint area nationally (after housing). The other complaint areas were Benefits & Tax and Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation (2 each).

However, it is important to note **no cases** were decided against the Council. Four cases were referred back for local resolution; three of these cases were classed as a premature decision and advice given and in one case it was a premature enquiry. Two cases were closed by the LGO after the initial enquiry. In one case the complaint was not upheld and no fault was found. There is a discrepancy in numbers between cases received in the time period and cases decided. In total 7 cases were decided in the period; one case was still undergoing assessment by the LGO at year end.

Nationally, the LGO upholds around three quarters of all the complaints investigated.

The Annual Review Letter for 2022/23 for South Staffordshire is attached as Appendix 1.

Complaints and enquiries received:

Planning and Development	Benefits & Tax	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	Total
4	2	2	8

LGO Decisions made:

Referred back for local resolution	Closed after initial enquiry	Advice Given	Not Upheld	Upheld	Total
4	2	0	1	0	7
1 Planning & Development; 2 Benefits & Tax; 1 Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	1 Planning; 1 Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation		Planning & Development		

3.3 In his foreword to the Review of Local Government Complaints 2022-23 (Appendix 2), the Interim Ombudsman, Paul Najsarek, again raises concerns with regard to the general operation of complaints systems. The Council co-operates fully with the LGO and responds to requests for information in a timely manner.

Within South Staffordshire Council, no issues with regard to the operation of the complaints system have been raised by the Ombudsman. The complaints system at the Council has clear visibility on the website and within correspondence. The Ombudsman has not raised any concerns with the Council in respect of capacity to respond to complaints or to cases being handled by the Ombudsman.

The Council is currently reviewing and refreshing its Customer Feedback Policy (Comments, Compliments and Complaints) and will ensure any recommendations from the LGO Review are taken into account.

4. IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

None

5. PREVIOUS MINUTES

None

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

LGSCO Annual Review Letter 2022/23 dated 19 July 2023  
LGSCO Review of Local Government Complaints 2022-23

**7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 7.1** That the Standards and Resources Committee notes the contents of the Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review Letter.