

Harborough District Council

Report to Audit and Standards Committee 7 September 2022



Title:	Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman annual review letter
Status:	Public
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Portfolio Holder:	Cllr King
Appendices:	1. Annual letter from the LGSCO dated 20 July 2022 2. Annual letter from the LGSCO dated 21 July 2021

Executive Summary

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman issued a routine annual review letter to the Council on 20 July 2022, confirming that in the municipal year 2021 – 2022, no investigations were undertaken in respect of the Council. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman also published the data it holds on complaints about the Council on its website on 27 July 2022, confirming there were no outstanding issues. Members are also asked to note the annual review letter for 2020 – 2021, which was not reported in 2021.

Recommendations

That the annual review letters issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for 2020- 2021 and 2021 – 2022, be noted.

Reasons for Recommendations

To inform Councillors about the annual review undertaken by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

1. Purpose of Report

To inform members of the content of the annual review letter issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (“the Ombudsman”) for the municipal year 2021 – 2022 and to update members on the letter received in respect of 2020 – 2021.

2. Background

A local government ombudsman has existed since 1974 with the statutory functions of:

- a. investigating complaints against councils and some other authorities;
- b. investigating complaints about adult social care providers from people who arrange or fund their own adult social care;
- c. providing advice and guidance on good administrative practice.



Each year the Ombudsman provides a report on the complaints and enquiries received for the Council. The report provides information on the number and type of complaints. Where an investigation has been carried out, the outcome is summarised. The Ombudsman also provides guidance in the letter, which reflects trends in complaints and priorities identified as requiring further consideration. The annual review letters are published on the Ombudsman's website (www.lgo.org.uk) with more detailed performance statistics.

3. Details

A copy of the annual review letter, dated 22 July 2022, is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. It confirms that in respect of Harborough District Council:

- a. The Ombudsman carried out no detailed investigations in 2021 – 2022;
- b. No recommendations were uncompiled with;
- c. There was no remedy required to be offered by the Council in the period.

The Ombudsman focuses on these areas to assess the Council's commitment to putting things right when they go wrong.

To support the complaints process, and promote service improvement, the Ombudsman also issues advice to local authorities. Not surprisingly, the advice this year relates to the continued adaptation of service provision post pandemic. The Ombudsman comments that complaints functions were under-resourced before the pandemic, and that this has been exacerbated by the challenges of the pandemic. He goes on to state:

“Properly resourced complaint functions that are well-connected and valued by service areas, management teams and elected members are capable of providing valuable insight about an organisation's performance, detecting early warning signs of problems and offering opportunities to improve service delivery.”

Confirmation was also provided that the Ombudsman is working with the Housing Ombudsman Service to develop a joint complaint handling code. Once agreed, this will be supported by the adoption of harmonised guidance.

Once the joint complaint handling code is launched, the Ombudsman will assess compliance with the joint complaint handling code during investigations and report performance in the annual review letter.

Whilst preparing this report, it became apparent that although the Committee received a report in respect of Ombudsman activity in July 2021, this did not include the 2020 – 2021 annual review letter, but rather reported the review letter from 2019 – 2020. Accordingly, the 2020 – 2021 annual review letter is attached at Appendix 2, dated 21 July 2021. Members will note that the Ombudsman received one complaint in respect of the Council in municipal year 2020 – 2021, and that this complaint was not upheld. Members will also note that 100% of the recommendations made by the Ombudsman were complied with.

4. Implications of Decisions

4.1 Corporate Priorities

The Corporate Plan 2022 - 2031 sets out the Council's vision, priorities and ambition and commits to working with residents, businesses and partner organisations to deliver the

vision. It also confirms that continuous improvement, financial sustainability, value for money and a focus on resident and business needs will underpin the Council's activities.

As the Council tries to deliver the vision, it is likely that there will be instances where things go wrong. It is important that, in those rare cases where things do not go as planned, the Council responds swiftly and appropriately to address the issues, and learns from them to avoid any repetition. This approach is designed to achieve the adopted priorities of:

1. Community leadership to create a sense of pride and belonging;
2. Promoting health and wellbeing and encouraging healthy life choices;
3. Creating a sustainable environment to protect future generations;
4. Supporting businesses and residents to deliver a prosperous local economy.

Analysis of complaints, and how they are handled, is vital to ensure that the Council keeps learning and evolving, particularly as it develops new ways of working to address current challenges.

4.2 Financial

Handling complaints has a cost to the Council in respect of officer time. Further, if complaints are justified, the Council may be required to offer financial redress. It is important that the cost of managing complaints is visible within the Council. However, this report has no direct financial implications for the Council.

4.3 Legal

Often, a complaint is the first indication that there may be a potential liability on the Council. Handling complaints in a timely and transparent way allows the Council to identify these issues swiftly and respond appropriately.

4.4 Policy

The content of this report does not impact directly upon any Council policy.

4.5 Environmental Implications including contributions to achieving a net zero carbon Council by 2030

The content of this report does not impact directly upon the Council's ambition to achieve net zero by 2030

4.6 Risk Management

Complaints frequently identify issues which may result in a legal liability for the Council. Handling the complaint promptly and comprehensively can provide an early resolution which satisfies the complainant and therefore reduces the likelihood of a claim materialising.

Further, analysis of complaint trends enables the Council to address working practices which are provoking the complaints, thus driving improvements in service delivery which in turn benefit residents and which stops many complaints from becoming a claim. It is therefore important that managers are aware of the risk profile of their service and utilise complaint data as part of the performance management process.

4.7 Equalities Impact

The content of this report is for noting only therefore no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

4.8 Data Protection

There are no data protection impacts as a consequence of this report.

5. Summary of Consultation and Outcome

This report is for information only therefore no consultation has been undertaken.

6. Alternative Options Considered

This report provides members with information only therefore no alternative options have been considered.

7. Background papers

Members are referred to the previous Audit and Standards Committee minutes and to the documents contained on the Ombudsman's website (www.lgo.org.uk).