

**NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MONITORING OFFICER'S REPORT TO STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**23<sup>rd</sup> JULY 2013**

**1. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL LETTER ARRANGEMENTS**

**Submitted by:** LGO Link Officer, Mrs. J. Johnston

**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Purpose of the Report**

To inform the Members of the Committee of recent changes in the way that the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) deals with complaints and the publication of its decisions.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the report be received.**

**Reasons**

Part of being an open and accountable Ombudsman service is having transparent decision making processes.

**Background**

- 1.1 In previous years, the LGO has provided an annual summary of complaints they had received against the Council. This annual letter covered a 12 month period from April to March and included statistics on the number of enquiries and complaints received by the LGO Advice Team.
- 1.2 This year the LGO is not producing annual letters for individual councils about complaints received against them in the same way it has done in previous years. This is because part way through the year, the LGO began to make changes in the way it handles complaints, and therefore it was felt that any statistics would not provide a comparable picture throughout the year. However, I can inform Members that complaint outcomes from April 2012 to March 2013 show that no reports have been issued against this Council.
- 1.3 In July the LGO will be sending a letter to all councils which will include high level information about complaints which have been made and also giving the Council the opportunity to contribute to a consultation on what annual letters will look like in the future and how they can better meet the Council's needs. At the time of preparation of this report this letter has not been received. If it is received by the date of your meeting, it will be circulated to you.
- 1.4 The LGO will also be publishing all of the decisions on complaints it receives after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013, making them the first public sector Ombudsman scheme to do so. Decision statements will be published on the LGO website no earlier than three months after the date

of the final decision. The information published will not name the complainant or any individual involved with the complaint. A small number of examples of decisions on complaints received before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 will also be published.

- 1.5 Part of being an open and accountable Ombudsman service is having transparent decision making processes. The LGO will publish its decisions so that the public and bodies within its jurisdiction see the full range of decisions and can feel reassured that they are fair, thorough and impartial.
- 1.6 Publishing decisions also recognises the key role the LGO plays in helping to ensure that public services are accountable to the public, who use and fund those services. Greater transparency of the LGO's decisions means greater transparency of public services.
- 1.7 The LGO does however retain discretion not to publish a decision, for example where it would not be in the interests of the person complaining to publish or where there is a reason in law not to.

## 2. Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities

The LGO service contributes to the Council's priority of delivering high quality community driven services.

## 6. Legal and Statutory Implications

There are no new legal or statutory implications.

## 7. Equality Impact Assessment

No differential equality impact issues have been identified.

## 8. Major Risks

There are no specific risk issues.

## 9. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications flowing from this report but the Council does face the risk of financial penalty should there be a finding of maladministration in any future complaints.

## 10. List of appendices

None