

Report subject	Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report 2022/23
Meeting date	25 October 2023
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) provides an independent and impartial service to investigate complaints about Councils, or actions taken by another body on behalf of the Council.</p> <p>The LGSCO provides a report annually which details the number of enquiries, investigations and resolved complaints for each authority in the previous financial year.</p> <p>BCP Council's annual report for 2022/23 is attached as Appendix A.</p> <p>The report shows that the number of complaints upheld by the LGSCO is comparable to that of like organisations, that compliance with recommendations is at 100% - compared to 99% average in others.</p> <p><i>It notes that we are below average for providing a satisfactory remedy to complaints before they reached the LGSCO and notes delays in receiving responses from the Council, which we are working to ensure improves in the future.</i></p> <p>It also includes some detail on the number of complaints to BCP Council during 2021/22 however, inconsistencies within identification, recording and monitoring of complaints remains a challenge so detailed analysis is not possible.</p> <p>Adults and Children's Social Care complaints follow a different statutory process and their reports will be reviewed separately at Overview and Scrutiny committees.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Receive and note the content of the report
Reason for recommendations	To ensure good oversight of complaint management

Portfolio Holder(s):	Leader of the Council – Councillor Vikki Slade
Corporate Director	Director of Operations - Jess Gibbons
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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Update

Background

1. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) is the final arbitrator of complaints relating to the services provided by BCP council (excluding housing landlord complaints which are handled by the Housing Ombudsman).
2. The LGSCO publishes an annual report which details the interactions that the Ombudsman has had with complaints about each local authority for the preceding year.
3. Their report appended to this paper relates to enquiries or complaints received during 2022/23 and to investigations that were concluded during that year.
4. The Ombudsman investigated 38 complaints relating to services provided by BCP council.
5. They upheld 26 giving a 68% percentage uphold rate which is slightly better than the national uphold rate for similar authorities of 72%.
6. The Ombudsman investigated 34 complaints in 2021/22 and upheld 22.
7. Where the Ombudsman made recommendations, we complied in 100% of cases and in three cases where the Ombudsman found fault, they considered that we had already provided a satisfactory remedy.
8. As in the previous year, the Ombudsman's report highlights delays in receiving responses to their enquiries from the Council and notes that in several instances they did not receive requests for extensions to deadlines.
9. Services have been reminded of the requirement to do this. Early indications are that closer monitoring and more autonomy for the services to engage directly with the Ombudsman have led to a significant improvement for the first part of the current financial year.
10. At the time of the report, there were no overdue responses due to the LGSCO.
11. In their report, the Ombudsman offers support to help us improve complaint handling. They provided face to face training to almost 200 service managers earlier this month.
12. They also talked through the draft Joint Complaint Handling code they are developing with the Housing Ombudsman. This is likely become a mandatory code,

introducing a single standard for complaint handling in the public sector, outside of the statutory children's and adults' processes.

13. This is expected to be in place by spring 2024, when the Council will review its current complaints handling processes, policy, and practice to ensure it aligns to the new code.

Inhouse Activity and management

14. Initial LGSCO enquiries come into a BCP complaints central mailbox, now managed in the Customer Directorate. All enquiries are logged in a central register and Service Unit complaints contacts are encouraged to respond directly to the LGSCO.
15. The LGSCO log is the only central complaints log we have in the Council. There is no other central case management system for complaints which means that we cannot get an accurate picture of the complaints received by BCP, or what happens to them after they are received.
16. Although there is a single online point of entry for complaints, this is not supported by a casefile management system and people do use this to report issues that are better resolved via the Customer Contact Centre.
17. Complaints are also made by post, email, over the phone or in person so these are in addition to the those recorded in the current online Dynamics system.
18. As such there are no reliable internal figures to report for last year to help put the number of Ombudsman investigations into context, however progress is being made to resolve this.
19. First point resolution remains the key objective of the complaints process and the development of the Customer Frontdoor through the Customer Service workstream of the Transformation programme will, together with appropriate training and support to officers, help to improve current complaint handling processes in the council.
20. The centralising of complaints handling and creation of a central complaints file management system is progressing. This will improve oversight of all complaints and provide more independent review, quality assurance and management reporting.

Summary of Financial Implications

21. There are no financial implications from this report however, there may be some in year remedy costs that have yet to be determined. Summary of legal implications.

Summary of Legal Implications

22. There are no legal implications from this report.

Summary of human resources implications

23. There are no human resource implications from this report.

Summary of sustainability impact

24. There are no identified sustainability impacts from this report there are no identified public health implications from this report.

Summary of public health implications

25. There are no identified public health implications from this report.

Summary of equality implications

26. There are no identified equality implications from this report.

Summary of risk assessment

27. The absence of a single complaints management system makes it difficult to understand the full impact of complaint investigation on service units operational activity. The ombudsman has highlighted increased delays in responses to complaints and two enquiries from them. It is expected that both these issues will be improved and or resolved once a single system for managing complaints is in place and when the service is properly functioning as a single central service.

Appendices

Appendix 1: LGSCO 2022/23 Annual Report