

CABINET MEETING – 10 OCTOBER 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET – PART I

Title of Report:

Ombudsman's Annual Review 2011-2012

Author(s):

Joint report of the Chief Executive and the Executive Director of Commercial & Corporate Services

Purpose of Report:

To advise Members of the number and outcome of complaints considered by the Local Government Ombudsman during 2011-2012. To inform Members of the extended powers of the Ombudsman.

Description of Decision:

Cabinet is asked to note the contents of the Ombudsman's annual review and in particular that there were no findings of maladministration against the council for the municipal year 2011 -2012.

Is the decision consistent with the Budget/Policy Framework? N/A

If not, council approval is required to change the Budget/Policy Framework

Impacts analysed:

Equality Privacy Sustainability Crime and Disorder

Suggested reason(s) for Decision:

It is relevant to note the findings in the context of the council's performance in dealing with complaints.

Alternative options to be considered and recommended to be rejected:

There are no alternative options submitted for consideration.

Is this a "Key Decision" as defined in the Constitution? No

Scrutiny Committee

Is it included in the 28 day Notice of Decisions? No

ANNUAL REVIEW AND COMPLAINTS TO OMBUDSMAN 2011-2012**Report of the Chief Executive and the Executive Director of Commercial & Corporate Services****1. Purpose of Report**

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2. Description of Decision

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3. Background

The Local Government Ombudsman has recently issued her ninth annual review to the council, see Appendix 1 attached. The format remain the same as last year and does not include the Ombudsman's reflections on the Council's performance.

4. Current Position

4.1 A total of 24 complaints were *received* by the Ombudsman for investigation. This represents an increase of seven on the previous year, the highest volume area being Children's Services.

4.2 The Ombudsman made **decisions** on 25 complaints. This figure is different from the number of complaints *received* as not all complaints are determined in the same year they are received.

In only three of the cases determined, did the Ombudsman consider that there was action that should be taken to remedy the situation. There was no financial payment required in any of these cases, and the Ombudsman was satisfied with the administrative action taken by the council.

In her letter to the Chief Executive the Ombudsman stated:

"I am pleased to say that I have no concerns about your authority's response times and there are no issues arising from complaints that I want to bring to your attention."

5. Comparison with Tyne & Wear Authorities

5.1 One of the other Tyne and Wear councils received a maladministration finding during this period and Sunderland City Council remains the only council in Tyne and Wear not to have had such a finding in since 2002.

5.2 It should also be noted that of the Tyne and Wear Authorities, the fewest complaints and enquiries dealt with by the Ombudsman related to Sunderland. Additionally at eight, Sunderland had by far the lowest number of premature complaints made to the Ombudsman. The Tyne and Wear average of 23 indicates that this council's in-house complaints procedure is both visible and trusted by complainants to deal with their concerns. The learning outcomes for each complaint are considered by the complaints team and recommendations are made to service areas to continually develop and improve. The average number of decisions on complaints across Tyne & Wear was 37. In Sunderland 25 decisions were made - the lowest of the five councils.

6. Changes to the Ombudsman's Practice

6.1 During next year the Ombudsmen will publish all final decision statements on their website. They feel this will lead to increased openness, transparency and enhance their accountability. Previously only maladministration reports have been published. The decision statements will not identify the complainant.

7. Reasons for the Decision

It is relevant to note the findings in the context of the council's performance in dealing with complaints.

8. Alternative Options

There are no alternative options submitted for consideration.

9. Impact analysis

There are no specific impacts identified. Where relevant, the council addresses equality, privacy, sustainability and crime and disorder considerations in the context of individual Ombudsman enquiries.

10. Background Papers

Local Government Ombudsman annual review to the council (appendix 1)