

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL
AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 2022

Report Title	Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman - Annual Review 2021/22			
Purpose of Report	To report the receipt of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGO) Annual Review for 2021/22 which gives the total number of complaints and enquiries received by the LGO with regard to Stroud District Council.			
Decision	The Committee RESOLVES to: a) Note the Annual Review, and b) Authorise the Strategic Directors and Heads of Service to take appropriate action to ensure that whenever possible complaints are resolved before such matters are referred to the LGO and that requests for information from the LGO continue to be dealt with promptly.			
Consultation and Feedback	The Chief Executive and Strategic Directors have been consulted on this report.			
Report Author	Stephen Taylor, Monitoring Officer Tel: 07866 142209 Email: Stephen.taylor@stroud.gov.uk			
Options	None. This report concerns the receipt of the LGO's Annual Review and no alternative options are proposed.			
Background Papers	None			
Appendices	Appendix A – LGO Annual Review for Stroud 2021/22 Appendix B - Service Area Trends over 2020/21 and 2021/22			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	No	No	No

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The LGO issued an Annual Review Letter in July 2022 to each local authority regarding each local authority's performance in responding to complaints. These are sent to Council Leaders and Chief Executives to support greater democratic scrutiny of local complaint handling and to ensure effective local accountability of public services. The Annual Review letter 2021/22 for Stroud is attached at Appendix A.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1 In total, so far as Stroud DC is concerned, 14 complaints were received and considered for investigation by the LGO during 2021/22, as compared with 12 in 2020/21, 18 in 2019/20 and 17 in 2018/19. It is worth noting that the LGO paused their casework during the early pandemic response period from April 2020 until June 2020. Any escalations received during the period were held and considered once casework reopened.

- 2.2 Of the 14 complaints received by the LGO in 2021/22, 8 were closed after initial enquiries had been made, and 2 were referred back to the Council for local resolution. 4 were fully investigated of which 3 were upheld and one was not upheld. Of the three complaints upheld, one related to anti-social behaviour and the other two related to planning. Of the 2 in planning, one had caused no injustice and the other resulted in an apology, and of the anti-social behaviour (ASB) complaint, some suggested service improvements were recommended by the LGO in relation to the ASB policy and guidance which have since been implemented and a compensatory payment of £250 has been made.
- 2.3 In terms of the service areas involved, the two-year trend is shown at Appendix B. The majority of the complaints related to Planning as is common in shire districts but most of the complaints were closed after the LGO's initial enquiries were completed. It has to be emphasised that there are relatively small numbers involved having regard to the number of matters dealt with by each service area but, nevertheless, they are useful indicators as to the pressures on each service.

Comparison with other Gloucestershire Districts

- 2.4 The LGO has also produced a summary of complaint statistics for every local authority in England, included in the yearly report and published alongside the annual review letters.
- 2.5 For Members' information, the statistics for the Gloucestershire Districts are set out in Table 1 below. For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that some complaints were received and decided in different years and so the complaints upheld may also include complaints received the previous year, and complaints received one year may not all be decided until the following year:

Table 1 Comparison of complaints – 2021/22

Authority and Population as on 21 March 2021 (Census Day)	Total number of complaints received	Total number of complaints upheld after investigation	% of complaints investigated that were upheld
Cheltenham BC -118,800	6	1	50%
Cotswold DC - 90,800	14	2	67%
Forest of Dean DC - 87,000	6	0	N/A
Gloucester City -132,500	12	0	N/A
Stroud DC - 121,100	14	3	75%
Tewkesbury BC – 94,900	6	2	67%

- 2.6 The above data shows the importance of focusing on complaint handing and seeking to resolve complaints wherever possible. Doing so improves the service to our residents and avoids the necessity of a detailed investigation by the LGO, which is resource intensive. This does not, however, minimise the importance of the Council robustly defending its actions where it believes such complaints are not justified.

2.7 It is suggested, therefore, that the Strategic Directors and Heads of Service continue to ensure that requests for information from the LGO are dealt with promptly and that, whenever possible, complaints are resolved before such matters are referred to the LGO. Further, that there be a continuing focus on reducing the number of complaints that have been upheld by the LGO and that relevant processes and procedures be reviewed as necessary.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The Annual Review letter from the LGO gives the local authority the opportunity to take stock of the situation with regard to complaints made against it, look how it compares with its neighbouring authorities, and consider how best to respond to the information provided.

3.2 In this instance, the number of complaints received is less than in previous years and it is suggested that there be a continuing emphasis on the importance of resolving complaints wherever possible and reducing the number of complaints that have been upheld by the LGO.

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial Implications

There are no significant implications within this category

Andrew Cummings, Strategic Director of Resources
Tel: 01453 754115 Email: andrew.cummings@stroud.gov.uk

4.2 Legal Implications

There are no specific legal implications arising from the report or its recommendations.

One Legal
Tel: 01684 272012 Email: legalservices@onelegal.org.uk

4.3 Equality Implications

There are not any specific changes to service delivery proposed within this decision.

4.4 Environmental Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.