



COUNCIL – 17TH NOVEMBER 2015

SUBJECT: ANNUAL LETTER FROM PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES 2014-2015

REPORT BY: INTERIM HEAD OF LEGAL SERVICES AND MONITORING OFFICER

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The attached report was presented to the Standards Committee on the 4th November 2015. The Annual Letter, received from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, provides a breakdown of all complaints received and investigated by his Office during 2014/15 and the response times to requests for information.
- 1.2 The Standards Committee noted that in relation to Caerphilly, whilst there has been a noticeable increase in the number of complaints received by the Ombudsman compared with 2013/14 this figure remains below the Local Authority average.
- 1.3 The Committee were informed that the figures show that the Authority's largest area of complaints is Planning and Building Control with the number of complaints received at the Ombudsman's office for this year totalling 12, compared with 3 the previous year. This is slightly above the Local Authority average. However, this data has been analysed and of the 12 complainants, 5 were made prematurely i.e. had been referred to the Ombudsman before exhausting the Council's Corporate Complaints Process.
- 1.4 Members noted that overall 19 premature complaints were received by the Ombudsman. This is equal to the Local Authority average and is beyond the control of the Authority.
- 1.5 Members attention was drawn to the response times of the Authority when responding to requests for information by the Ombudsman and were asked to note that the Graph on page 8 of the Annual Letter which indicated that all responses were received more than four weeks after the request. This data relates to two complaints investigated by the Ombudsman. Following clarification with the Ombudsman's office it was agreed to amend the Letter to clarify that one response was received by the time limit agreed with the investigator, although that this would not change the graph at Appendix G. The Standards Committee Members were advised that the amended Annual Letter had now been received and a copy was provided to Members, which is also appended to this covering report. Members attention was drawn to the additional sentence at the end of paragraph 7 of the covering letter and the additional wording added below Graph G.
- 1.6 The Ombudsman has "upheld" one report against the Council issued in October 2014. This matter has been the subject of a Report to the Standards Committee on 24th November 2014, Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on the 3rd March 2015 and Audit Committee on the 15th June 2015. In addition the Ombudsman has not upheld one report issued in February 2015. Details of both reports are contained in Section I of the Annual Letter.
- 1.7 Details of the Code of Conduct complaints for elected Members will be found at Section H of the appendix to the letter. The Ombudsman decided not to investigate four matters, and one was discontinued. There were no findings against any elected Members.

- 1.8 The Standards Committee noted the content of the amended Annual Letter and were advised that it will be presented to Council.
- 1.9 Members are asked to note the content of the amended Annual Letter, received from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

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Appendices:

- Appendix 1 Amended Annual Letter circulated to the Standards Committee on 4th November 2015
- Appendix 2 Report to Standards Committee – 4th November 2015