

Wiltshire Council

Standards Committee

24 October 2012

Subject: Commission for Local Administration in England and Wales (Local Government Ombudsman) – Annual Report

Purpose of Report

1. To provide the Standards Committee with a copy of the Ombudsman's Annual Report for Wiltshire Council.

Background

2. The Local Government Ombudsman issues an annual report for each local authority within her jurisdiction. The handling of complaints to the Ombudsman falls within the council's wider arrangements for complaints management, oversight of which is the constitutional responsibility of the Standards Committee.
3. Operational responsibility for responding to complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman lies with the Governance Service.
4. The 2011/12 Annual Report for Wiltshire Council is attached at Appendix One.

Main Considerations for the Committee

5. In her covering letter accompanying her Annual Report the Ombudsman says: "I am pleased to say that I have no concerns about your authority's response times and there are no issues arising from the complaints that I want to bring to your attention". This opinion is welcome, but officers are not complacent about the position regarding complaints handling.
6. In May 2012 a restructure of the council's complaints management arrangements was completed. The restructure was conducted in order to reduce the direct costs of the complaints handling function and to introduce operational efficiencies. The service was centralised in the Governance Service in a newly constituted complaints response team.
7. The anticipated savings have been achieved as a result of the restructure. Recruitment to the posts within the structure has now been completed,

and work is beginning to design and embed new working practices across the organisation.

8. As with any change of this nature, it will take time to realise the benefits of the new structure and processes for complaints management. However, the intention is that the changes, once they have been implemented and embedded, will deliver increased oversight of complaints across the council, better quality responses to complaints, and improved accountability.

Proposal

4. Members of the Standards Committee are asked to note this report.

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Date of report: 12 October 2012

Background Papers

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report: None