

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

24th October 2018

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL SERVICES – MR C GRIFFITHS

Matter for Information

Wards Affected: All

Public Service Ombudsman for Wales Annual Report 2017/2018

Purpose of the Report

1. To advise Members of the receipt of the Ombudsman's Annual Letter and the publication of his Annual Report.

Background

2. In recent years the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales ("the Ombudsman") has adopted the practice of sending an annual letter to each local authority which comes within his jurisdiction. A full copy of the letter and Factsheet is reproduced for Members at Appendix 1.
3. Comparatively little commentary is required on the Annual Letter. The number of service complaints received by the Ombudsman is set out in Table A of the Factsheet. As compared with a national local authority average of 35 complaints (adjusted for population) there were 35 complaints against this Council. Therefore the number of complaints received is in line with what one would expect from the population size of the Council area. The number of complaints has decreased from 38 in the previous year to 35. This is to be welcomed.
4. The mix of complaints is dealt with in Table B of the Factsheet. The numbers in the various categories are similar to the Welsh average overall.
5. The comparison of complaint outcomes with average outcomes for Local Authorities (Table C) is again broadly in line with the national average.

6. The percentage of cases requiring intervention from the Ombudsman is comparatively low (see Table D).
7. The number of national Code of Conduct complaints increased by 14% in the past year, this is attributed to a 33% increase in Code of Conduct complaints involving Community Councils. Many of these complaints have arisen following changes in the membership of councils. In the Neath Port Talbot locality, while the number of Code of Conduct complaints against County Borough Councils is considerably low, there being just 1, which was closed after initial consideration (Table E) (which was a similar figure to 2016/2017). However, there was an increase in the number of complaints against community councils (Table F) (going from 0 to 7), but as will be shown no further action was taken in respect of these matters and they were either closed after initial consideration, discontinued or withdrawn.
8. Reproduced at Appendix 2 is the Ombudsman's Annual Report (2017/18) intended to give Members a flavour of the business handled by the Ombudsman's office in the year. It would appear that overall the number of complaints and enquiries received by the Ombudsman office has increased by 5% this year, this is attributed to an 8% rise in enquiries. However, there was an overall 10% reduction in complaints against local authorities.
9. Overall, cuts in public expenditure create an environment in which there can be a mismatch between public expectations and the service which can be provided. This will make it even more important to deal promptly with any complaints which arise and look for practical and achievable solutions. However, to date the Council has suitable processes in place to respond to any concerns or complaints that could be made which negate the need for any referrals to the Ombudsman.

Financial Impact

10. There are no financial impacts associated with this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

11. There are no equality impacts associated with this Report

Workforce Impacts

12. There are no workforce impacts associated with this Report

Legal Impacts

13. There are no legal impacts associated with this Report

Consultation

14. There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations

15. That Members note the content of this report

Appendices

16. Appendix 1 – Annual Letter of the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales for Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
17. Appendix 2 – Public Service Ombudsman for Wales Annual Report

List of Background Papers

18. The Constitution of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council incorporating the Members Code of Conduct

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