

Report to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee



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| Date of Meeting | 24 November 2020 |
| Portfolio | Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods, Community & Culture |
| Report Author | Carolyn Whitham |
| Public/Private Document | Public |

LGSCO Annual Report 2019-20

Executive Summary

1. The report provides Members with the Annual Review of complaints made to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) about Rochdale Borough Council in the year ending 31 March 2020.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that Members note the content of the report and Annual Review letter.

Reason for Recommendation

3. Part of the Council's performance management process is to ensure the Authority's ambition to continuously improve services is realised. The Annual Review provides an overview of the effectiveness of the Council's complaints procedures and customer satisfaction with Council services.

Key Points for Consideration

4. The Annual Review letter provides local authorities with the LGSCO's assessment of the Council's performance in complaint handling for the previous financial year. In addition, the review provides a general update on developments affecting the LGSCO and includes details of the Council's compliance rate with the Ombudsman's recommended remedies.
 - 4.1 The review shows the relatively small number of complaints received against Rochdale Council by the Ombudsman during 2019/20. In total 51 complaints and enquiries were received which was a slight increase on the number received last year. The number of decisions made by the LGSCO differs from the number of complaints and enquiries received, as complaints may be received and decided upon in different financial years.
 - 4.2 Of 49 decisions made during 2019/20, only 15 complaints were subject to detailed investigation. 16 complaints were referred back to the Council as

premature to be considered under the Council's own complaints procedure, 15 complaints were closed after initial enquiries, and advice was given on a further 3 complaints.

- 4.3 Of the 15 complaints that were investigated, 47% were found to be upheld. This compares to an average of 67% in similar authorities. The LGSCO recommended remedies for all of the upheld complaints, which were accepted and implemented.

Details of the complaints that were upheld can be found below.

| LGO Category | Nature of complaint |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Benefits & Tax | Housing Benefit |
| Benefits & Tax | Council Tax exemptions |
| Education & Children's Services | Special Guardianship Policy |
| Education & Children's Services | Support for Foster Carers |
| Education & Children's Services | School Admissions Appeal |
| Planning & Development | Planning Enforcement |
| Planning & Development | Planning Enforcement |

- 4.4 In addition to Annual Review letters, the LGSCO also publishes an Annual Review of Local Government Complaints and a summary of complaint statistics for every Local Authority in England. Appendix 2 contains an extract from the review which highlights Rochdale Council's performance in comparison with neighbouring authorities.

As can be seen from the extract, both the number of enquiries / complaints received by the LGSCO and the number of complaints decided in 2019-20 was lower for Rochdale BC than for most neighbouring authorities. The compliance rate for Rochdale implementing the LGSCO's agreed remedies was 100%.

- 4.5 The LGSCO also issued a public report during 2019-20 following the upheld complaint regarding the Council's policy for Special Guardianship Allowance. Further details can be found in Appendix 1.

4.6 **Alternatives Considered**

None. Information is provided annually by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

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| Costs and Budget Summary |
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5. 5 of the upheld complaints resulted in a financial remedy. The total cost of agreed local settlements for LGSCO complaint decisions during 2019-20 was £11,810.56. A breakdown is shown below. This is an increase on the previous year when the total cost was £1,550.

| Service | £ |
|----------------|----------|
| Benefits & Tax | 100 |
| Benefits & Tax | 150 |

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|------------------------|------------------|
| Children's Social Care | 7,760.56 |
| Planning & Development | 2,000 |
| Planning & Development | 1,800 |
| Total | 11,810.56 |

In addition to the above, the Public Report issued this year included a recommendation for the Council to reconsider the policy for Special Guardianship Allowances and to arrange for all Special Guardians affected by the Policy since 2013 to receive backdated payments. The total cost of these payments was £562,975.

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| Risk and Policy Implications |
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6. There are no specific risk issues for Members to consider arising from this report. The Special Guardianship Allowances Policy was revised as a result of a complaint considered by the LGSCO.

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| Consultation |
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7. Not applicable.

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| Background Papers | Place of Inspection |
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| 8. None. | |
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