



Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	AUDIT COMMITTEE – 26 JANUARY 2023
Subject	ANNUAL OMBUDSMAN LETTER 2021/22
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Joe Harris, Leader of the Council Email: joe.harris@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Angela Claridge, Monitoring Officer Email: angela.claridge@cotswold.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	This report informs Audit Committee about the annual Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's (LGO's) letter 2022
Annexes	Annex A – LGO's 2021/22 annual review letter dated 20.07.2022 Annex B - complaints received in 2021/22 Annex C – complaints decided in 2021/22 Annex D – compliance with the Ombudsman's recommendations
Recommendation(s)	<i>That the Committee note the Ombudsman's letter</i>
Corporate priorities	Delivering our services to the highest standards
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO



1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 At Full Council on 14 July 2021, the responsibilities for Audit Committee were amended to include:

”Formulating and keeping under review the Council’s arrangements for handling complaints and investigations by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)”.

- 1.2 The Annual Review Letter 2021/22 (attached at Annex A) sets out the complaints that were made against the Council in 2021/22, as well as the outcome of those complaints. Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a summary report on the LGO complaints as part of the 2022-23 Q1 performance monitoring report.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1 The LGO received 14 complaints/enquiries about this Council (attached at Annex B), half of these related to Planning and Development. The other complaints related to Environmental services and Public Protection (four), Corporate and Other services (two), and Benefits and Tax (one). In the previous year, the Council received eight complaints/enquiries, of which four related to Planning and Development.
- 2.2 During the first wave of the Covid-19 outbreak, the LGO temporarily paused its casework for three months to allow authorities to concentrate efforts on vital frontline services. This will have reduced the overall number of complaints the LGO received and decided in the 2020-21. However, note that during the pre-Covid year (2019/20), the Council received six complaints/enquiries.
- 2.3 Fifteen decisions were made by the LGO in 2021/22 (attached at Annex C); six complaints were closed after initial enquiries, and a further six complaints were referred back to the Council for a local resolution. Three complaints were investigated in detail, of which two were upheld.
- 2.4 The number of complaints received and the number of complaints decided are different as not all of the complaints received in the year will have had a decision made in the same year.
- 2.5 The two upheld complaints related to Planning and Development and to Benefits and Tax.



2.6 Table 1 Complaints/enquires received, decided and upheld in 2021-22 for Cotswold District Council, Forest of Dean District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council

Council	Received	Decided	Upheld
Cotswold	14	15	2
Forest	6	7	0
West	7	9	1

- 2.7** The LGO's letter noted that it published a public report during 2021/22 about one of the upheld complaints relating to the Council's administration of council tax and the handling of a council tax arrears case. The LGO determined that the complainant had suffered an 'injustice'.
- 2.8** The public report, the Council and Publica's response to the complaint, and the actions taken in response to the Ombudsman's recommendations were reported to the Cabinet on 6 September 2021.
- 2.9** The LGO was satisfied that the Council had successfully implemented its recommendations and remedies in response to both upheld complaints (attached at Annex C).

3. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1** The Ombudsman's letter gives an indication of the Council's approach to dealing with complaints. A fair and open complaint handling process is one indicator of the strength of the Council's corporate governance arrangements.

4. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 4.1** Cabinet report 06.09.2021: Ombudsman Decision – Reference 20 008 553 & Council Tax Section 13A Policy

(END)