

LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINTS – 2021/22 ANNUAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Each year the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) produces statistics for each local authority showing how many complaints it received, what they were about and how they were resolved.

The statistics included within this report cover the period of 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 for Somerset West and Taunton Council.

This ‘for information’ paper provides the headlines from the report including a comparison of statistics between SWT and the other Somerset district councils in order to show how we performed in relation to others.

[Insert other comments]

TOTAL LGO COMPLAINTS RECEIVED – BY AUTHORITY

The table below provides the **total number** of complaints received by the LGO for each of the 4 Somerset districts. The table also splits the total by broad complaints subject.

Council	Benefits & Tax	Corporate Services	Environmental & Public Protection	Housing	Planning & Development	Other	Total
Mendip	1	2	2	1	16	0	22
Sedgemoor	0	1	0	3	5	0	9
South Somerset	6	4	6	0	9	0	25
Somerset West and Taunton	2	2	5	6	10	1	26

The main source of LGO complaints for SWT during this period was Planning & Development which tends to be the highest each year. The number of Planning & Development complaints we received during this period was lower than the average of 12 across all councils.

This year the number of complaints received by the LGO for our Council was lower than last year’s figures of 32 complaints received.

The national average for total complaints received by the LGO during this period was 88, compared to 2020-21 which had an average of 33 and 2019-20 which had an average of 91. Please note that this covers all local authorities including county and unitary councils. This shows that the reduction due to the Covid-19 pandemic has ceased and the volume has returned to a more normal level.

OUTCOME OF LGO COMPLAINTS – DECISIONS ISSUED

The following tables shows the outcomes of the complaints that were made to the LGO. Please note that this table covers decisions received during the 2021/22 period, therefore it includes complaints received during 2020/21 for which decisions were not issued before 1st April 2022 and excludes any complaints received during 2021/22 which have yet to be decided.

Complaints received during 2021/22 that have yet to be decided will be included in the 2022/23 annual report in a year's time.

Council	Invalid or incomplete	Advice given	Referred back for local resolution	Closed after initial enquiries	Not upheld	Upheld
Mendip	0	0	6	13	0	3
Sedgemoor	2	0	0	4	2	0
South Somerset	0	0	12	7	4	3
Somerset West and Taunton	1	3	6	11	4	6

Outcome descriptions

- **Invalid or incomplete** - Withdrawn, insufficient information, etc.
- **Advice given** – LGO provided early advice to complainants or explained where to go for the correct help.
- **Referred back for local resolution** – Premature (Council's internal complaints procedure has not yet been completed).
- **Closed after initial enquiries** – Other statutory appeals process is available, outside of LGO jurisdiction, not warranted (insufficient evidence of injustice or maladministration).
- **Not upheld** – Investigation has taken place. Council not at fault.
- **Upheld** – Investigation has taken place. Council at fault – LGO may or may not have recommendations for remedy.

UPHELD COMPLAINTS

You will see that for SWT there were 6 complaints marked as upheld. This compares to 7 upheld for last year. Our upheld rate is again higher than the other districts as it was in 2020-21 however still much lower than the national average, which was 15 for 2021-22.

The below table shows the comparison between this period and the previous periods for SWT/TDBC&WSC

Period	Complaints received	Complaints upheld
2018/19 for TDBC & WSC combined	35	6
2019/20 for SWT	28	3
2020/21 for SWT	32	7
This period: 2021/22 for SWT	26	6

REMEDY AND COMPLIANCE

The LGO also report on the recommendations that were made in order to remedy complaints and whether the local authority complied with those recommendations.

Upheld complaints are broken down into two outcomes:

- **Authority provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman** - The LGO recognise cases where an authority has taken steps to put things right before the complaint went to them. These are complaints that the authority upheld and the LGO agreed with the remedy offered.
- **Ombudsman issued recommendation(s)** - In cases where the ombudsman has made a recommendation, they monitor authorities to ensure compliance with said recommendations. The compliance rate records the percentage of cases where the authority provided satisfactory evidence of compliance.

In 2 of the upheld cases no further action was required as although the LGO found fault they decided that remedy action had already been completed. In the remaining 4 cases the LGO recommended remedy action with all 4 cases requiring a formal apology and financial remedy and one case require a revised assessment of the complainant's circumstances.

During this period our compliance with recommendations was 100% however we were late to comply in 1 case.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT

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