

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>The Ombudsman's Annual Letter</b>
<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>Standards Committee</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>15<sup>th</sup> September 2015</b>
<b>DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:</b>	<b>All</b>

**1. PURPOSE:**

To inform Standards Committee members of the Ombudsman's annual letter to the council.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

To note the contents of the annual letter.

**3. KEY ISSUES:**

The Ombudsman produces an annual report which can be found on his website, [www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk](http://www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk). The annual letter is information relevant to the Monmouthshire County Council. The annual letter is attached as an appendix to this report.

The annual report states that the Ombudsman has dealt with 2296 complaints, of which there were 938 complaints against county councils, representing a 5% increase on 2013/14. Housing (15%) and planning (12%) were the service areas accounting for the greatest number of complaints.

There were 231 complaints of alleged breaches of the code of conduct for members, of which 125 were against county councillors and 106 against community councillors. This represents a 13% increase in code of conduct complaints from the previous year against county councillors. Of the 231 code of conduct complaints, 34 were investigated by the Ombudsman: 17 were found not to have any evidence of a breach of the code, 8 required no further action, 8 were referred to a standards committee and 1 went to the Adjudication Panel for Wales. The majority of code of conduct complaints relate to equality and respect issues (35%), the next largest areas being the disclosure and registration of interests (22%), followed by integrity (16%).

Turning to the Ombudsman's annual letter, members will note that the Ombudsman dealt with 19 complaints against Monmouthshire County Council in 2014/15, compared with 16 in 2013/14, both figures below the local authority average for Wales. Planning and building control continue to attract the most complaints being 7, whilst there were no complaints against Environment and Environmental Health compared to 2 in 2013/14, Highways also

had double the number of complaints from 2 to 4, compared to 2013/14. Only 2 of the 19 complaints were upheld in whole or in part. Details of the upheld complaint can be found on page 9 of the annual letter.

Of the 3 code of conduct complaints received by the Ombudsman in respect of Monmouthshire County Councillors, 2 were not investigated, while for the remaining case, no evidence of a breach of the code was found.

**4. REASONS:**

The role and function of Standards Committee within the Council's constitution includes to promote and maintain high standards of conduct for councillors, and ensure that the Council's complaints procedure operates effectively.

**5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

None.

**6. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS:**

None.

**7. SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS:**

NONE.

**8. CONSULTEES:**

None.

**9. BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

The annual report of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales 2014/15

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