

**AUDIT COMMITTEE
29 SEPTEMBER 2021**

ETHICAL GOVERNANCE AND MEMBER STANDARDS – UPDATE REPORT

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To update members on issues relevant to member standards and ethical governance.

Summary

2. The report gives members an update of information about issues relevant to member standards since matters were reported to the Committee in April 2021.
3. Also set out in the report are a number of datasets of ethical indicators to assist in monitoring the ethical health of the Council. By reviewing these indicators it is hoped to be able to identify any unusual or significant trends or changes in the volume of data recorded for the relevant period that might provide an alert to any deterioration in the ethical health of the authority.
4. Commentary is included for some data sets to give analysis and explanation for some of the more notable variations. There are no particular issues of concern that have been identified from reviewing the data.

Recommendation

5. Members are asked to note the information presented and to comment as appropriate.

Reason

6. By having information of this nature:
 - (a) Members will be assisted to perform their role.
 - (b) Members will be able to get a better picture of the ethical health of the authority.

**Luke Swinhoe
Assistant Director, Law and Governance
Monitoring officer**

Background Papers

None – save as mentioned in the text

Luke Swinhoe: Extension 5490

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no specific issues which relate to crime and disorder
Health and Well Being	There is no specific health and wellbeing impact
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There is no specific carbon impact
Diversity	There is no specific diversity impact
Wards Affected	All wards are affected equally
Groups Affected	All groups are affected equally
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not affect the budget or policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Council Plan	There is no specific relevance to the strategy beyond a reflection on the Council's ethical governance arrangements
Efficiency	There is no specific efficiency impact
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Update on matters relevant to Ethical Governance and Member Standards

Members Code of Conduct - LGA Guidance

7. As previously advised, the Local Government Association (LGA) carried out a review the member code of conduct (as recommended by the Committee on Standards in Public Life's report into [Local Government Ethical Standards](#)). As a result the LGA published the Model Councillor Code of Conduct on the 23rd December 2020.
8. Members should note that a separate detailed report is also before this Committee specifically looking at the LGA Model Code, to assist this Committee and the Council in considering whether we should adopt the LGA Model Code.
9. In July 2021 the LGA published guidance to assist the interpretation of the Model Code [Guidance on Local Government Association Model Councillor Code of Conduct | Local Government Association](#). This will be particularly helpful to local authorities that have adopted the Model Code, but also in a wider sense as a contribution to the better understanding of issues relevant to member standards.

Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL)

10. The CSPL advises the Prime Minister, national and local government about ethical standards in public life in England. It monitors, conducts broad inquiries and reports on issues relating to the standards of conduct of all public office holders.
11. The practice has been to provide members with update information about the work of the CSPL and in particular anything of relevance to local government. There is not a great deal to

report of direct relevance. Members more generally may be interested to look at the June 2021 CSPL review of the effectiveness of regulation in England (mostly about central government and Parliament). In July the CSPL published a report and recommendations to government on the regulation of election finance. Further information is available from the following link [Committee on Standards in Public Life - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/committees/standards-in-public-life)

Members Code of Conduct/ Register refresh

12. All members have been advised of the need to review the entries that they have made on their register of interests and where necessary to provide an updated form.

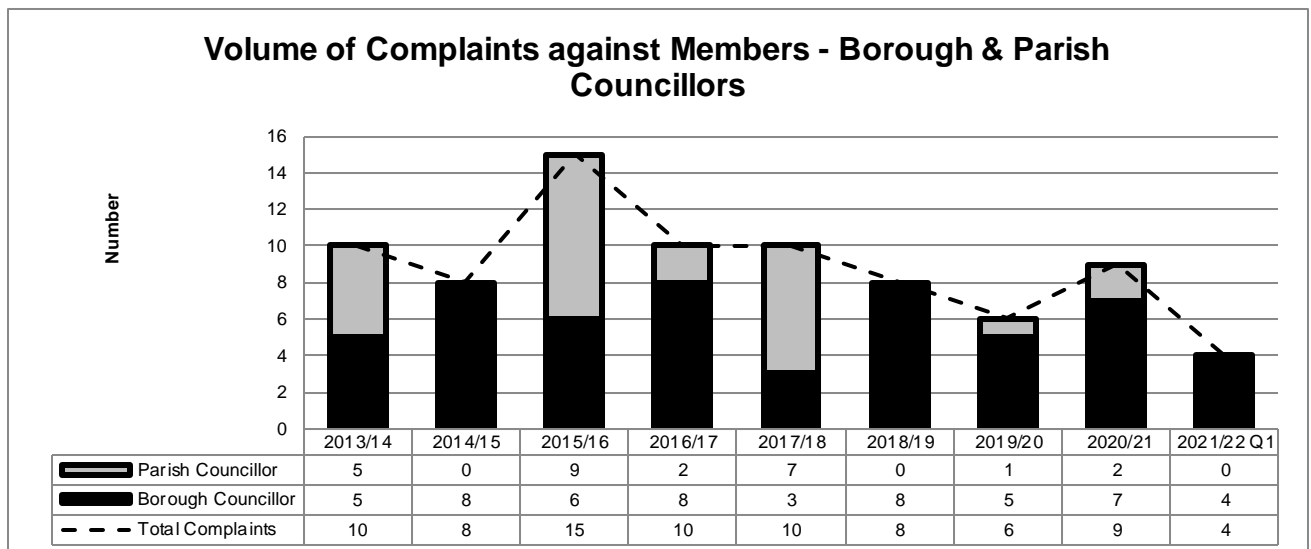
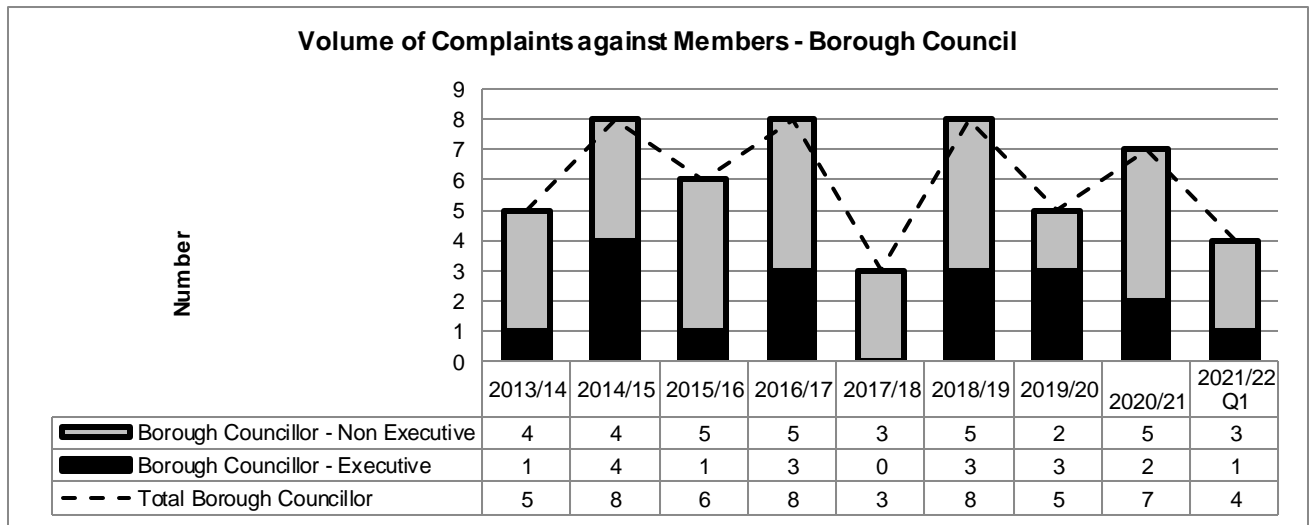
Ethical Indicators

12. Set out in Appendix 1 are a range of data sets that it is hoped will assist in monitoring the ethical health of the Council. By reviewing the indicators, it will be possible to identify any unusual or significant changes in the volume of data recorded for the relevant period that might provide an alert to any deterioration in the ethical health of the authority.

13. Member's observations about this information are invited.

APPENDIX 1

Member Complaints



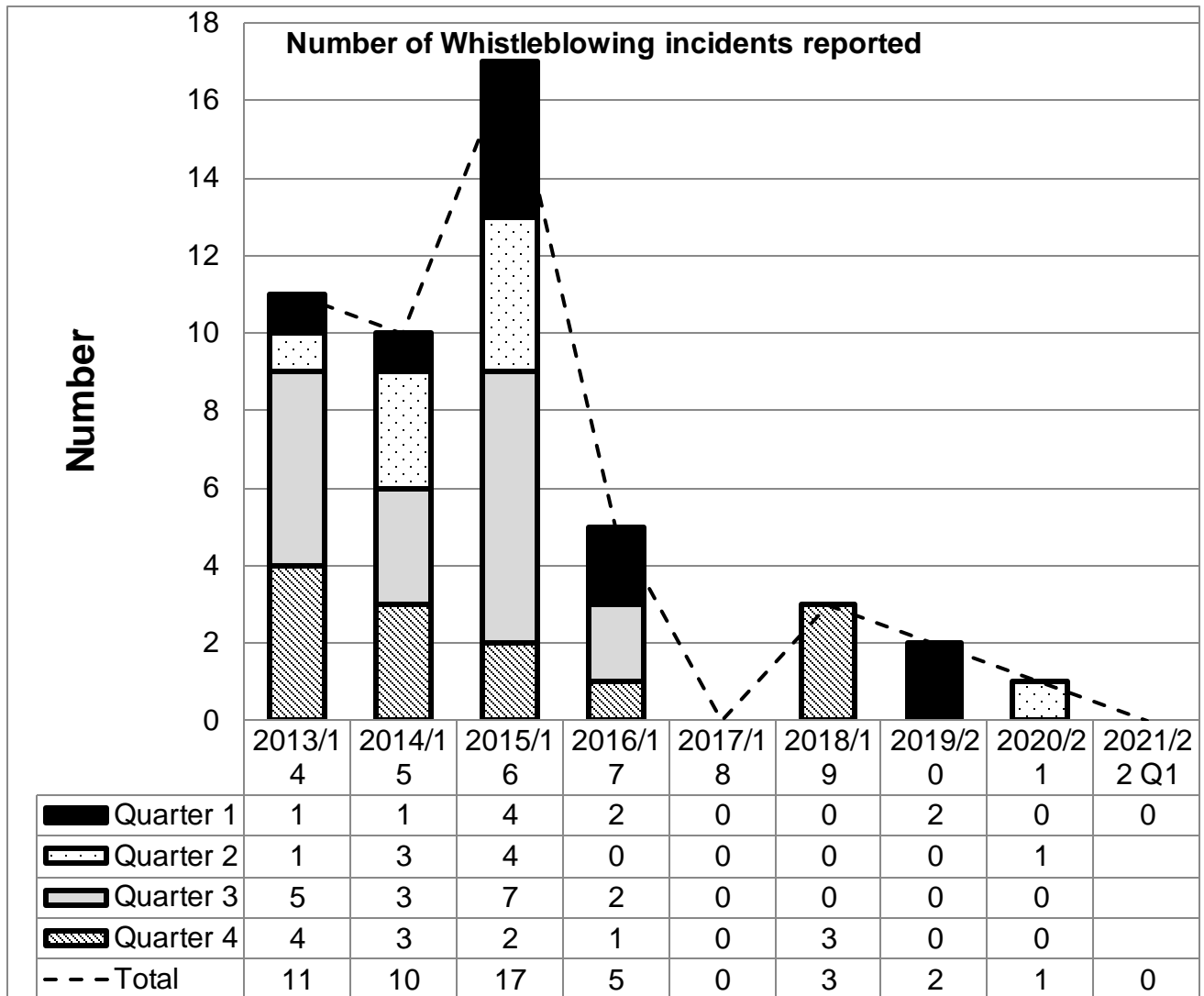
Comments

The average number of Member complaints per year from 2013/14 to 2020/21 was 9.5 per year.

Due to low volumes, interpreting the information needs a degree of caution. It is also the case that there can be spikes in complaints caused by particular concerns (for instance a number of complaints about a particular problem) which can disproportionately affect the overall total.

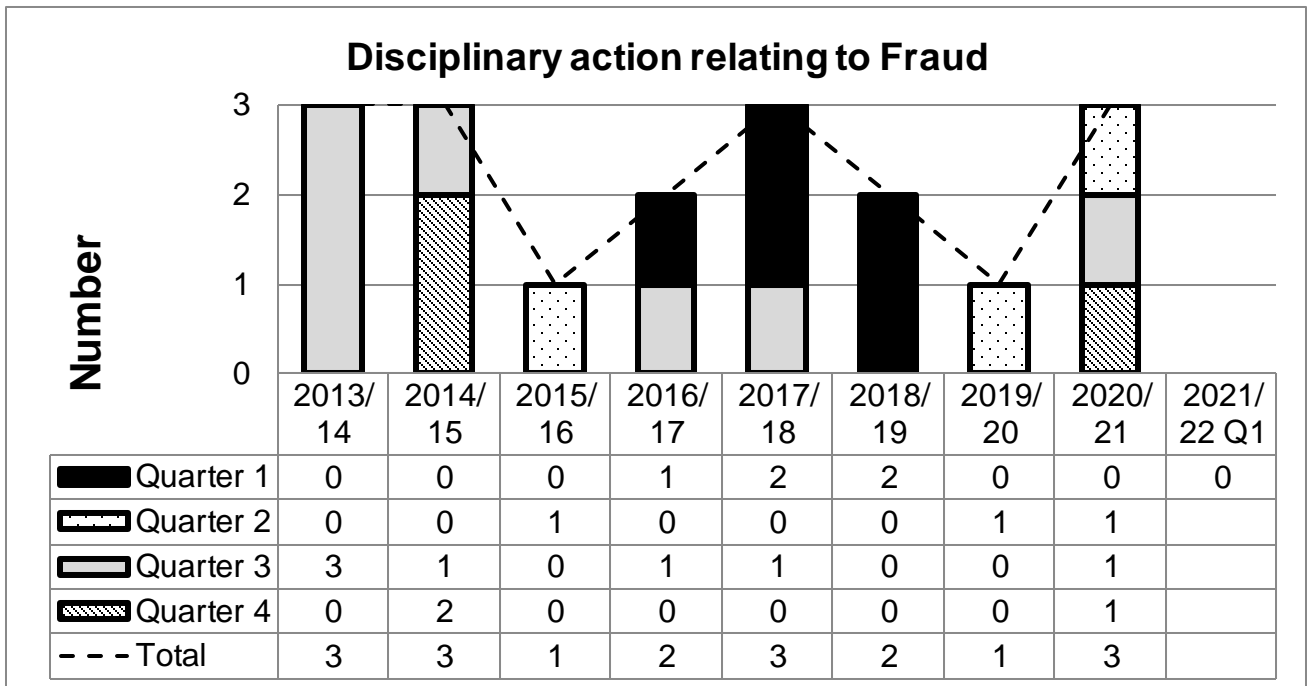
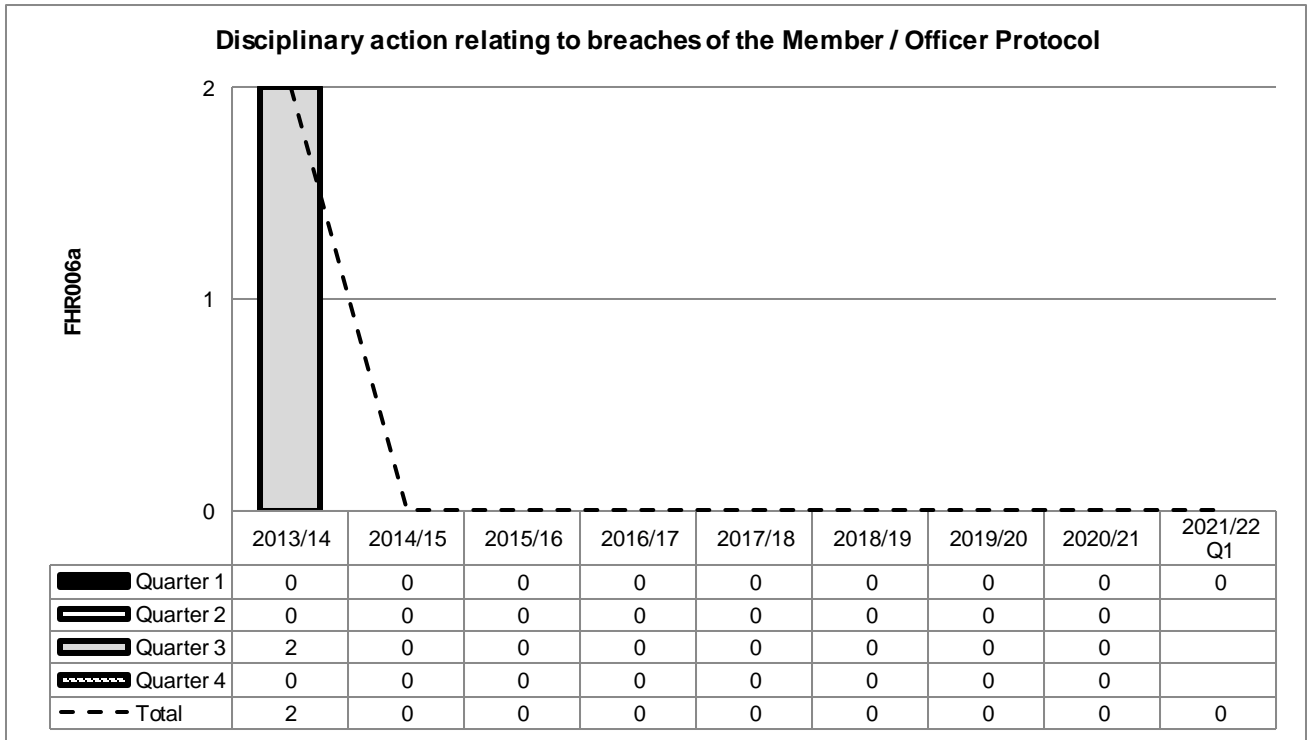
Over the period 2013/14 to 2020/21 there have been 26 complaints made in respect of Parish Councillors and for the same period 50 complaints relating to Borough Councillors. The fact that there are more complaints in respect of Borough Council members is perhaps unsurprising given the types of decisions they are involved in making and the more prominent role that they play compared to Parish Councillors.

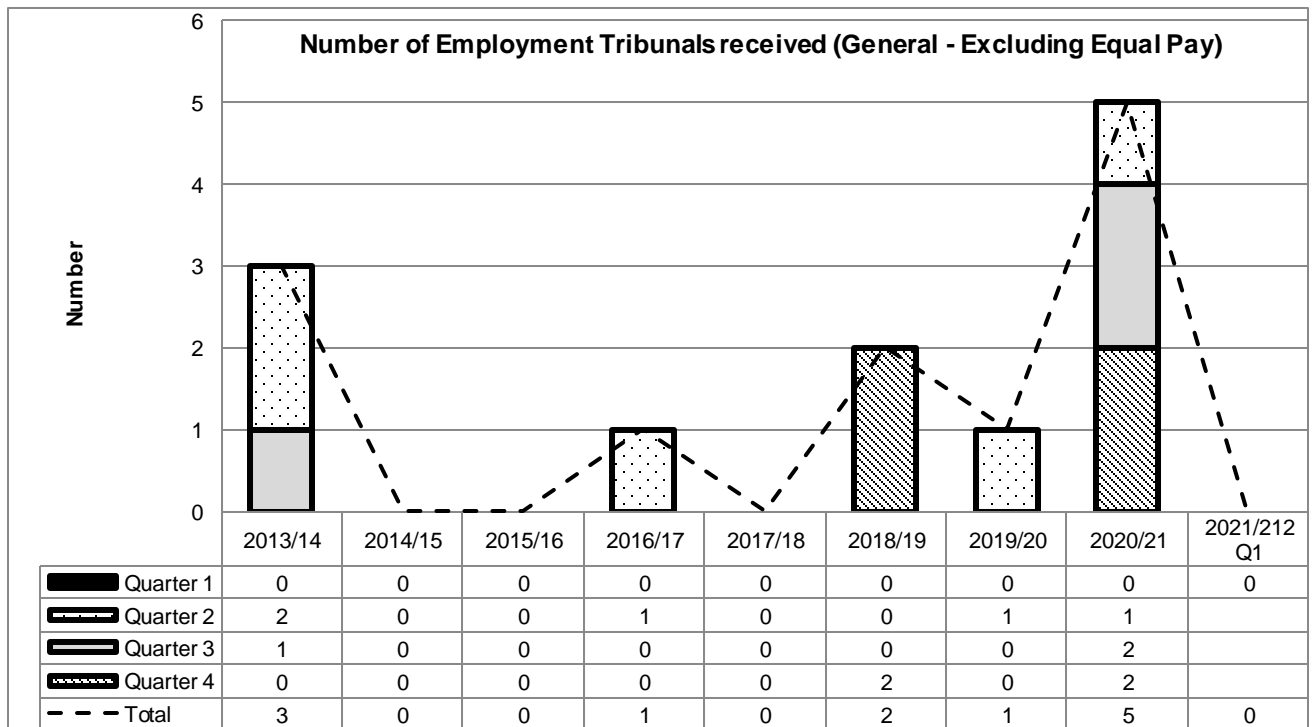
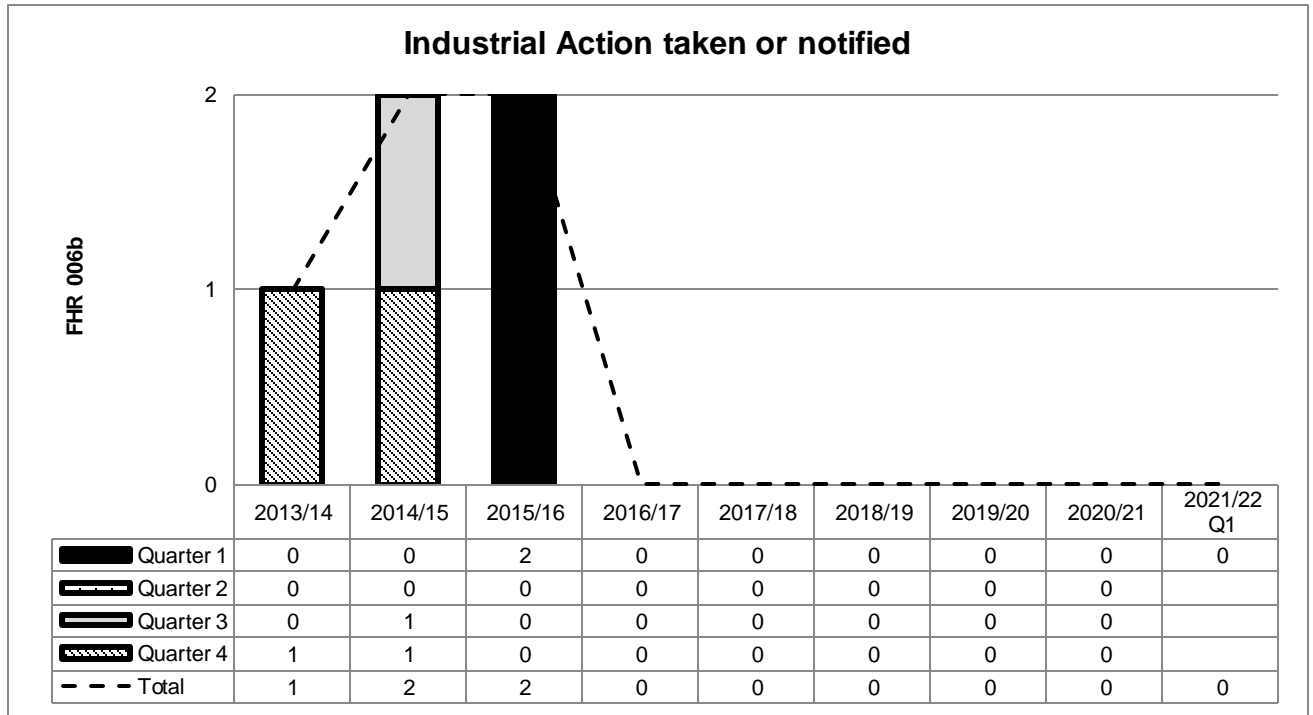
Whistleblowing

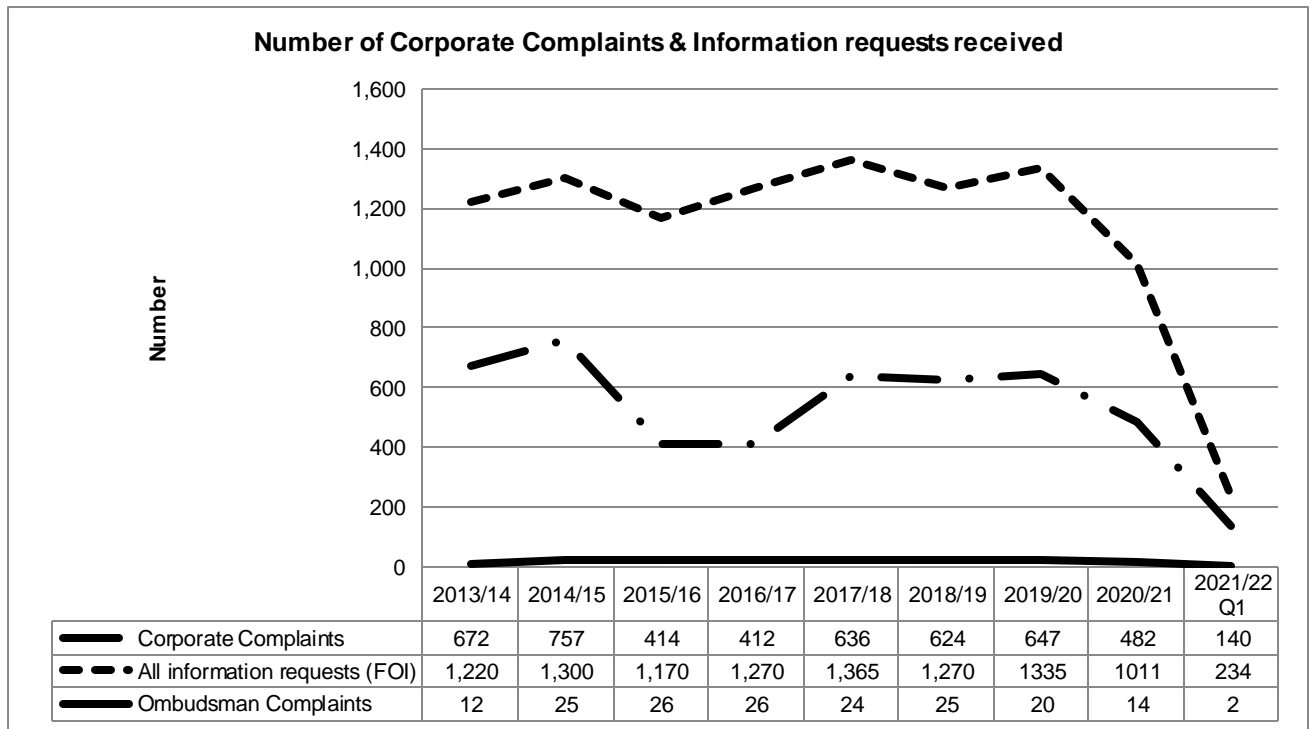


Comments

Publicity about the whistleblowing policy took place in the Autumn of 2018 and it has continued to be raised annually in newsletters to officers. Work has also undertaken to highlight the Council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy.







Comments

2016/17 – the number of Corporate Complaints and Ombudsman Complaints received was similar to the number received in 2015/16, while there was an increase of 100 information requests.

2017/18 – One of the major factors in the increase in corporate complaints was the introduction of the Council’s policy to no longer provide a recall service for missed refuse collections. There was also a significant increase in corporate complaints about Customer Services following a restructure, the most common theme was dissatisfaction with telephone waiting times. Additional staffing resource was brought in, as a response to the complaints about telephone waiting times.

2018/19 – The Council received 624 corporate complaints, a slight decrease from 636 the previous year. While there were increases in some areas, those which saw a decrease in complaints included Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support, Customer Services, Development Management and Parking Appeals.

2019/20 – The Council received 647 corporate complaints, an increase from 624 in 2018/19. The new Garden Waste service received 70 complaints while there were increases in a number of areas including, Refuse and recycling, ASB and Civic Enforcement Ops and Grounds Maintenance. Housing and Building Services saw a significant decrease in complaints while there were also decreases in other areas including Planning, Development Management and Environmental Health.

2020/21 - The Council received 482 complaints, a decrease from 647 in 2019/20. The Council also saw a decrease in complaints across its other complaints procedures during this period. This coupled with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman’s decision to cease its investigations during the early stages of the pandemic have likely been a contributing factor in the continued decrease in the number of Ombudsman complaints received.

