

24 June 2011

Mr R Leak
Chief Executive
London Borough of Enfield
PO Box 63, Civic Centre
Silver Street
Enfield EN1 3XW
#NBS

Dear Mr Leak

Annual Review Letter

We are writing with our annual summary of statistics on the complaints made to us about your authority for the year ending 31 March 2011. We hope the information set out in the enclosed tables will be useful to you.

The statistics include the number of enquiries and complaints received by our advice team, the number that the advice team forwarded to my office and decisions made on complaints about your council. Not all complaints are decided in the same year that they are received. This means that the number of complaints received and the number decided will be different.

The statistics also show the time taken by your authority to respond to written enquiries and the average response times by type of authority.

Enquiries and complaints received

Last year there were 171 enquiries and complaints about your council, up from 137 in 2009/10. Fifty three complaints were premature because the council had not yet had an opportunity to deal with the matter itself, and in 46 cases enquirers were given advice. The remaining 72 complaints were forwarded to my investigative team to consider. The complaints were fairly spread across service areas, although housing (19) and education (14) had the highest numbers.

As you know, we consider it important to deal with complaints as swiftly as possible and council response times to our enquiries are a significant factor in achieving timely outcomes. From formal enquiries made on 37 complaints this year, your average response time was 19.3 days, which is within the 28 day target and a further improvement on last year's already good figure.

Complaint outcomes

Last year we came to a decision on 73 complaints against your council: 13 of these were 'local settlements', mostly concerning housing or education. A local settlement is a complaint where, during the course of our investigation, a council takes or agrees to take some action that we consider to be a satisfactory response to the complaint. Nationally, 27.1% of decisions on

complaints within my jurisdiction were local settlements.

Housing

Four of the settlements involved housing matters and of these, two were about housing repairs. In the first, there was a five month delay before the complainant's boiler was replaced. In the meantime the council provided temporary storage heaters which eased the strain upon the complainant, but we concluded the works took too long and the council agreed to pay compensation for the distress caused. The other also involved a delay of around six months in carrying out repairs, this time to a roof. There were water leaks into the complainant's flat and we concluded the council should provide compensation for the time, trouble and inconvenience to which the complainant was put. The other local settlements within the housing area concerned housing allocations and housing management.

Education & children's services

Four settlements involved education matters, of which three concerned special educational needs (SEN). In the first of these cases, the council was in dispute with another council over responsibility for a pupil's statement of special educational needs and providing the necessary help. We saw no reason to question the council's view that it did not have primary responsibility but it had contributed to the uncertainty surrounding the matter and delay. The council agreed to a payment of compensation to account for its role in the problem. In the second SEN case, the council did not assess the needs of a child or provide full time education for more than a year. It did make efforts to find a school, and to recruit a tutor in the meantime, but there was unreasonable delay before it met its statutory duties for a school year. It agreed to pay compensation for its failure to provide suitable full time education which met the child's needs. Similarly in the third case, the child was deprived of full time education for almost a year. The council had made an attempt to meet the child's needs through a behaviour support service but its efforts were insufficient. It did not act rigorously in searching out a suitable placement for the child. The council agreed to review its policy and procedures and to pay compensation.

Communicating decisions

We want our work to be transparent and our decisions to be clear and comprehensible. During the past year we changed the way we communicate our decisions and reasons. We now provide a stand-alone statement of reasons for every decision we make to both the citizen who has complained and to the council. These statements replace our former practice of communicating decisions by letter to citizens that are copied to councils. We hope this change has been beneficial and welcome comments on this or any other aspect of our work.

In April 2011 we introduced a new IT system for case management and revised the brief descriptions of our decisions. Our next annual letter will use the different decision descriptions that are intended to give a more precise representation of complaint outcomes and also add further transparency to our work.

Extended powers

During 2010/11 our powers were extended to deal with complaints in two significant areas.

In October 2010 all complaints about injustice connected to adult social care services came under our jurisdiction. The greater use of direct payments and personalised budgets mean that it is particularly important for us to be able to deal with such complaints irrespective of whether a council has arranged the care. The increasing number of people who arrange and pay for their own social care now have the right to an independent and impartial examination of any complaints and concerns they may have about their care provider.

In the six months to April 2011 we received 89 complaints under our new adult social care powers. Between 2009/10 and 2010/11 complaints about care arranged or funded by councils doubled from 657 to 1,351.

The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children & Learning Act 2009 introduced powers for us to deal with complaints about schools by pupils or their parents. This was to be introduced in phases and currently applies in 14 council areas. By the end of 2010/11 we had received 169 complaints about schools in those areas and 183 about schools in other areas where we had no power to investigate. The Education Bill currently before Parliament proposes to rescind our new jurisdiction from July 2012.

Our new powers coincided with the introduction of treasury controls on expenditure by government departments and sponsored bodies designed to reduce the public spending deficit. This has constrained our ability to inform care service users, pupils and their parents of their new rights.

Assisting councils to improve

For many years we have made our experience and expertise available to councils by offering training in complaint handling. We regard supporting good complaint handling in councils as an important part of our work. During 2010/11 we surveyed a number of councils that had taken up the training and some that had not. Responses from councils where we had provided training were encouraging:

- 90% said it had helped them to improve their complaint handling
- 68% gave examples of how the knowledge and skills gained from the training had been applied in practice
- 55% said that complaints were resolved at an earlier stage than previously
- almost 50% said that citizens who complained were more satisfied.

These findings will inform how we develop and provide training in the future. For example, the survey identified that councils are interested in short complaint handling modules and e-learning.

Details of training opportunities are on our web site at www.lgo.org.uk/training-councils/

More details of our work over the year will be included in the 2010/11 Annual Report. This will be published on our website at the same time as the annual review letters for all councils (14 July).

If it would be helpful to your council we should be pleased to arrange for a senior manager to meet and explain our work in greater detail.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Martin', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Dr Jane Martin
Local Government Ombudsman

For further information on interpretation of statistics click on this link to go to www.lgo.org.uk/CouncilsPerformance

LGO Advice Team

| Enquiries and complaints received | Adult Care Services | Benefits & Tax | Corporate & Other Services | Education & Childrens Services | Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation | Highways & Transport | Housing | Other | Planning & Development | Total |
|---|---------------------|----------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|---|----------------------|-----------|----------|------------------------|------------|
| Formal/informal premature complaints | 3 | 12 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 15 | 0 | 8 | 53 |
| Advice given | 3 | 4 | 0 | 11 | 3 | 6 | 16 | 0 | 3 | 46 |
| Forwarded in investigative team (resubmitted) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 11 |
| Forwarded to investigative team (new) | 7 | 5 | 4 | 14 | 4 | 6 | 16 | 0 | 5 | 61 |
| Total | 14 | 22 | 9 | 28 | 16 | 15 | 50 | 0 | 17 | 171 |

Investigative Team

| Decisions | Reports: maladministration and injustice | Local settlements (no report) | Reports: Maladministration no injustice | Reports: no Maladministration | No Maladministration (no report) | Ombudsman's discretion (no report) | Outside jurisdiction | Total |
|--------------------|--|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|
| 2010 / 2011 | 0 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 29 | 17 | 13 | 72 |

Adult social care decisions made from 1 Oct 2010*

| | Not to initiate an investigation | Total |
|-------------|----------------------------------|-------|
| 2010 - 2011 | 1 | 1 |

*These decisions are not included in the main decisions table above. They use the new decision reasons from 1/10/10.

| Response times | First enquiries | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| | No of first Enquiries | Avg no of days to respond |
| 01/04/2010 / 31/03/2011 | 36 | 19.3 |
| 2009 / 2010 | 28 | 17.4 |
| 2008 / 2009 | 34 | 24.3 |

Provisional comparative response times 01/04/2010 to 31/03/2011

| Types of authority | <= 28 days % | 29 - 35 days % | > = 36 days % |
|----------------------------|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| District councils | 65 | 23 | 12 |
| Unitary authorities | 59 | 28 | 13 |
| Metropolitan authorities | 64 | 19 | 17 |
| County councils | 66 | 17 | 17 |
| London boroughs | 64 | 30 | 6 |
| National parks authorities | 75 | 25 | 0 |

| Response times adult social care 1/10/10 - 31/3/11 | First enquiries | |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| | No of first Enquiries | Avg no of days to respond |
| 2010/2011 | 1 | 22.0 |