

16 July 2013

By email

Mr Nathan Elvery
Interim Chief Executive
London Borough of Croydon

Dear Mr Elvery

Annual Review Letter

I am writing with our annual summary of statistics on the complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) about your authority for the year ended 31 March 2013. This year we have only presented the total number of complaints received and will not be providing the more detailed information that we have offered in previous years.

The reason for this is that we changed our business processes during the course of 2012/13 and therefore would not be able to provide you with a consistent set of data for the entire year.

In 2012/13 we received 109 complaints about your local authority. This compares to the following average number (recognising considerable population variations between authorities of a similar type):

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------|
| District/Borough Councils- | 10 complaints |
| Unitary Authorities- | 36 complaints |
| Metropolitan Councils- | 49 complaints |
| County Councils- | 54 complaints |
| London Boroughs- | 79 complaints |

During the year I issued two reports against your council. The first was where the council failed to make any educational provision for two children for six months. They moved to the area during the school year and the London Boroughs agreed policy is to allocate a school place within 20 school days of receiving an application. However the council neither allocated a place nor made alternative provision. I am pleased that during the investigation the council offered to pay £6500 to the two children for loss of education at a time when they should have been studying for public examinations and to review its procedures to ensure that it meets its legal duty in future.

The second report was about the way the council dealt with a woman and her family who presented as homeless having fled a violent attack in her previous home. The council delayed in making a decision on her application and failed to consider whether the interim accommodation offered was suitable. It also failed to consider whether the offer of bed and breakfast accommodation was suitable in the circumstances of this application when government guidance indicates that it is not except as a last resort, and then only for a maximum period of six weeks. I recognised that the council faces significant pressures which make it hard to offer anything other than bed and breakfast accommodation. But I considered that the complainant's circumstances should have been treated as exceptional, which they were not. I recommended that the council should pay the complainant £2500,

The Oaks No 2
Westwood Way
Westwood Business Park
Coventry
CV4 8JB

T: 024 7682 0000
F: 024 7682 0001
W: www.lgo.org.uk

Helpline: 0300 061 0614

review its policies and practices concerning homeless applications and provide training to front line staff taking homeless applications. I am pleased that the council has provided these remedies.

Future development of annual review letters

We remain committed to sharing information about your council's performance and will be providing more detailed information in next year's letters. We want to ensure that the data we provide is relevant and helps local authorities to continuously improve the way they handle complaints from the public and have today launched a consultation on the future format of our annual letters.

I encourage you to respond and highlight how you think our data can best support local accountability and service improvements. The consultation can be found by going to www.surveymonkey.com/s/annualletters

LGO governance arrangements

As part of the work to prepare LGO for the challenges of the future we have refreshed our governance arrangements and have a new executive team structure made up of Heather Lees, the Commission Operating Officer, and our two Executive Directors Nigel Ellis and Michael King. The Executive team are responsible for the day to day management of LGO.

Since November 2012 Anne Seex, my fellow Local Government Ombudsman, has been on sick leave. We have quickly adapted to working with a single Ombudsman and we have formally taken the view that this is the appropriate structure with which to operate in the future. Our sponsor department is conducting a review to enable us to develop our future governance arrangements. Our delegations have been amended so that investigators are able to make decisions on my behalf on all local authority and adult social care complaints in England.

Publishing decisions

Last year we wrote to explain that we would be publishing the final decision on all complaints on our website. We consider this to be an important step in increasing our transparency and accountability and we are the first public sector ombudsman to do this. Publication will apply to all complaints received after the 1 April 2013 with the first decisions appearing on our website over the coming weeks. I hope that your authority will also find this development to be useful and use the decisions on complaints about all local authorities as a tool to identify potential improvement to your own service.

Assessment Code

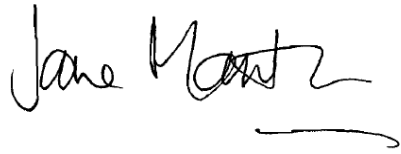
Earlier in the year we introduced an assessment code that helps us to determine the circumstances where we will investigate a complaint. We apply this code during our initial assessment of all new complaints. Details of the code can be found at:

www.lgo.org.uk/making-a-complaint/how-we-will-deal-with-your-complaint/assessment-code

Annual Report and Accounts

Today we have also published *Raising the Standards*, our Annual Report and Accounts for 2012/13. It details what we have done over the last 12 months to improve our own performance, to drive up standards in the complaints system and to improve the performance of public services. The report can be found on our website at www.lgo.org.uk

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Martin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Dr Jane Martin
Local Government Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

