

16 July 2013

By email

Ms Kersten England
Chief Executive
City of York Council

Dear Ms England

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 28 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

Over the course of the year I issued two public reports on complaints about your local authority. In the first the Council housed the complainant and his family in a property where the bedroom was too small by law for his two daughters and then failed to give him adequate priority on the housing register to enable him to move to a bigger property within a reasonable period of time. The complainant and his family were forced to live in overcrowded conditions for over two years and the two daughters had to share a bedroom barely big enough for two single beds.

I am pleased that during the investigation the Council placed the complainant in Gold band from the date he accepted the tenancy of this property and the complainant successfully bid on a three bedroom property. The Council also paid him £2000 and agreed to review its guidance and arrange training for housing officers on overcrowding legislation and guidance.

In the second case the complainant was a vulnerable elderly woman with learning difficulties. She applied to the Council for assistance with roof repairs and insulation. I found many faults with the way the Council and the Agency acting on its behalf provided technical assistance.

These failures caused a significant degree of distress and anxiety as a result of which the complainant no longer trusts anyone to carry out work in her house and will not answer the door to anyone she does not know. I am pleased that the council agreed to my recommendation to make a remedy payment of £2000.

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:

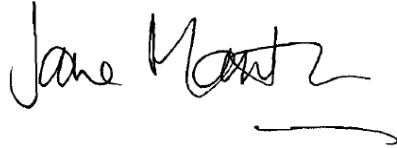
www.lgo.org.uk/making-a-complaint/how-we-will-deal-with-your-complaint/assessment-code

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, appearing to read 'Jane Martin', with a horizontal line underneath.

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

