

7 July 2014

By email

Mr Ged Fitzgerald
Chief Executive
Liverpool City Council

Dear Mr Ged Fitzgerald

Annual Review Letter 2014

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 2014. This is the first full year of recording complaints under our new business model so the figures will not be directly comparable to previous years. This year's statistics can be found in the table attached.

A summary of complaint statistics for every local authority in England will also be included in a new yearly report on local government complaint handling. This will be published alongside our annual review letters on 15 July. This approach is in response to feedback from councils who told us that they want to be able to compare their performance on complaints against their peers.

For the first time this year we are also sending a copy of each annual review letter to the leader of the council as well as to the chief executive. We hope this will help to support greater democratic scrutiny of local complaint handling and ensure effective local accountability of public services. In the future we will also send a copy of any published Ombudsman report to the leader of the council as well as the chief executive.

In 2013-14 we published a report about your Council. It highlighted that the Council failed to recognise that when the complainant cared for her nephew, the child should have been considered a 'looked after child' and the Council should have provided her with appropriate financial support. In addition once she had obtained a Special Guardianship Order for her nephew the Council's decision as to what it should pay her was flawed. I recommended that the Council should pay backdated allowances at the correct rate. As a result the complainant was paid £10,912.

The fault identified in this complaint affected 146 people in receipt of Special Guardianship Allowance and a further 194 foster carers caring for children aged 0-4. The Council agreed to correct the fault and make backdated payments from April 2010 to all of the people affected. I am pleased to note that the Council have now made all the agreed payments which demonstrated the constructive approach that you took to our investigation.

Developments at the Local Government Ombudsman

At the end of March Anne Seex retired as my fellow Local Government Ombudsman. Following an independent review of the governance of the LGO last year the Government has committed to formalising a single ombudsman structure at LGO, and to strengthen our

governance, when parliamentary time allows. I welcome these changes and have begun the process of strengthening our governance by inviting the independent Chairs of our Audit and Remuneration Committees to join our board, the Commission for Administration in England. We have also recruited a further independent advisory member.

Future for local accountability

There has been much discussion in Parliament and elsewhere about the effectiveness of complaints handling in the public sector and the role of ombudsmen. I have supported the creation of a single ombudsman for all public services in England. I consider this is the best way to deliver a system of redress that is accessible for users; provides an effective and comprehensive service; and ensures that services are accountable locally.

To contribute to that debate we held a roundtable discussion with senior leaders from across the local government landscape including the Local Government Association, Care Quality Commission and SOLACE. The purpose of this forum was to discuss the challenges and opportunities that exist to strengthen local accountability of public services, particularly in an environment where those services are delivered by many different providers.

Over the summer we will be developing our corporate strategy for the next three years and considering how we can best play our part in enhancing the local accountability of public services. We will be listening to the views of a wide range of stakeholders from across local government and social care and would be pleased to hear your comments.

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

Local authority report – Liverpool City Council

For the period ending – 31/03/2014

For further information on interpretation of statistics click on this link to go to <http://www.lgo.org.uk/publications/annual-report/note-interpretation-statistics/>

Complaints and enquiries received

Local authority	Adult care services	Benefits and tax	Corporate and other services	Education and children's services	Environmental services and public protection and regulation	Highways and transport	Housing	Planning and development	Total
Liverpool City C	32	47	9	36	22	11	5	7	169

Decisions made

	<u>Detailed investigations carried out</u>						
Local authority	Upheld	Not upheld	Advice given	Closed after initial enquiries	Incomplete/Invalid	Referred back for local resolution	Total
Liverpool City C	21	13	2	50	4	92	182