

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

18 July 2018

By email

Jo Negrini
Chief Executive
London Borough of Croydon

Dear Jo Negrini,

Annual Review letter 2018

I write to you with our annual summary of statistics on the complaints made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) about your authority for the year ended 31 March 2018. The enclosed tables present the number of complaints and enquiries received about your authority and the decisions we made during the period. I hope this information will prove helpful in assessing your authority's performance in handling complaints.

Complaint statistics

In providing these statistics, I would stress that the volume of complaints does not, in itself, indicate the quality of the council's performance. High volumes of complaints can be a sign of an open, learning organisation, as well as sometimes being an early warning of wider problems. Low complaint volumes can be a worrying sign that an organisation is not alive to user feedback, rather than always being an indicator that all is well. So, I would encourage you to use these figures as the start of a conversation, rather than an absolute measure of corporate health. One of the most significant statistics attached is the number of upheld complaints. This shows how frequently we find fault with the council when we investigate. Equally importantly, we also give a figure for the number of cases where we decided your authority had offered a satisfactory remedy during the local complaints process. Both figures provide important insights.

I want to emphasise the statistics in this letter reflect the data we hold, and may not necessarily align with the data your authority holds. For example, our numbers include enquiries from people we signpost back to the authority, some of whom may never contact you.

In line with usual practice, we are publishing our annual data for all authorities on our website, alongside an annual review of local government complaints. The aim of this is to be transparent and provide information that aids the scrutiny of local services.

During the year we issued two public reports about your Council. The first concerned a failure to provide suitable respite care and to ensure continuity of care through transition from children to adult services. This caused a young man with complex needs, extreme distress from a lack of planning and maintaining a routine and placed undue pressure on his grandmother who provided his care.

As well as apologising for the person affected and his carer for the faults identified, the Council were also asked to pay £5000 for the harm caused to each for the lack of respite for two years and a further £1,250 for the carer. A range of service improvements including an urgent review of the Council's Transition to Adulthood policies and procedures were also recommended.

Throughout the complaint, we were concerned by the Council's lack of engagement with the process. It took from 22 August to 3 October (6 weeks) for the Council to respond to pre-allocation enquires. Then when investigation enquires were made on the 22 November it took a further six weeks until 5 January for a response. The Council then failed to respond to the draft report. This was particularly concerning given the significant failings identified by the investigation and the resultant injustice to a young man with complex disabilities and his carer.

In another case we issued a report about the Council's failure to provide support to a young woman with a life limiting condition for over a year resulting in her father using his own funds which did not cover the full package of care. To remedy the injustice as well as issuing an apology the Council agreed to pay a total of £ 4,750 to the young woman and her family. In this case I am pleased to say that the Council were quick to accept the faults identified by the investigation and in implementing the remedy.

In another case, a report was averted at the eleventh hour. The Council's approach was very defensive and challenged the Ombudsman's conclusions between September 2017 and March 2018 and only at the stage when the draft report was ready to be sent out were the recommendations accepted. This caused a lot of unnecessary work and delay in getting the right outcome for the complainant.

In both cases I am pleased that all the recommendations have now been actioned.

Future development of annual review letters

Last year, we highlighted our plans to move away from a simplistic focus on complaint volumes and instead turn focus onto the lessons that can be learned and the wider improvements we can achieve through our recommendations to improve services for the many. We have produced a new [corporate strategy](#) for 2018-21 which commits us to more comprehensively publish information about the outcomes of our investigations and the occasions our recommendations result in improvements to local services.

We will be providing this broader range of data for the first time in next year's letters, as well as creating an interactive map of local authority performance on our website. We believe this will lead to improved transparency of our work, as well as providing increased recognition to the improvements councils have agreed to make following our interventions. We will be therefore seeking views from councils on the future format of our annual letters early next year.

Supporting local scrutiny

One of the purposes of our annual letters to councils is to help ensure learning from complaints informs scrutiny at the local level. Sharing the learning from our investigations and supporting the democratic scrutiny of public services continues to be one of our key priorities. We have created a dedicated section of our website which contains a host of information to help scrutiny committees and councillors to hold their authority to account – complaints data, decision statements, public interest reports, focus reports and scrutiny questions. This can be found at www.lgo.org.uk/scrutiny. I would be grateful if you could encourage your elected members and scrutiny committees to make use of these resources.

Learning from complaints to improve services

We share the issues we see in our investigations to help councils learn from the issues others have experienced and avoid making the same mistakes. We do this through the [reports](#) and other resources we publish. Over the last year, we have seen examples of councils adopting a positive attitude towards complaints and working constructively with us to remedy injustices and take on board the learning from our cases. In one great example, a county council has seized the opportunity to entirely redesign how its occupational therapists work with all of its districts, to improve partnership working and increase transparency for the public. This originated from a single complaint. This is the sort of culture we all benefit from – one that takes the learning from complaints and uses it to improve services.

Complaint handling training

We have a well-established and successful training programme supporting local authorities and independent care providers to help improve local complaint handling. In 2017-18 we delivered 58 courses, training more than 800 people. We also set up a network of council link officers to promote and share best practice in complaint handling, and hosted a series of seminars for that group. To find out more visit www.lgo.org.uk/training.

We were pleased to deliver three adult social care complaint handling courses to your staff during the year. I welcome your Council's investment in good complaint handling training and trust the courses were valuable.

Yours sincerely,



Michael King
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

Local Authority Report: London Borough of Croydon
For the Period Ending: 31/03/2018

For further information on how to interpret our statistics, please visit our website:
<http://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/annual-review-reports/interpreting-local-authority-statistics>

Complaints and enquiries received

Adult Care Services	Benefits and Tax	Corporate and Other Services	Education and Children's Services	Environment Services	Highways and Transport	Housing	Planning and Development	Other	Total
23	48	12	37	19	18	41	24	4	226

Decisions made

Decisions made				Detailed Investigations			
Incomplete or Invalid	Advice Given	Referred back for Local Resolution	Closed After Initial Enquiries	Not Upheld	Upheld	Uphold Rate	Total
9	2	104	48	18	33	65%	214

Notes

Our uphold rate is calculated in relation to the total number of detailed investigations.
 The number of remedied complaints may not equal the number of upheld complaints. This is because, while we may uphold a complaint because we find fault, we may not always find grounds to say that fault caused injustice that ought to be remedied.

Complaints Remedied

by LGO	Satisfactorily by Authority before LGO Involvement
29	2