

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

21 July 2021

By email

Mr Davies
Chief Executive
London Borough of Enfield

Dear Mr Davies

Annual Review letter 2021

I write to you with our annual summary of statistics on the decisions made by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman about your authority for the year ending 31 March 2021. At the end of a challenging year, we maintain that good public administration is more important than ever and I hope this feedback provides you with both the opportunity to reflect on your Council's performance and plan for the future.

You will be aware that, at the end of March 2020 we took the unprecedented step of temporarily stopping our casework, in the wider public interest, to allow authorities to concentrate efforts on vital frontline services during the first wave of the Covid-19 outbreak. We restarted casework in late June 2020, after a three month pause.

We listened to your feedback and decided it was unnecessary to pause our casework again during further waves of the pandemic. Instead, we have encouraged authorities to talk to us on an individual basis about difficulties responding to any stage of an investigation, including implementing our recommendations. We continue this approach and urge you to maintain clear communication with us.

Complaint statistics

This year, we continue to focus on the outcomes of complaints and what can be learned from them. We want to provide you with the most insightful information we can and have focused statistics on three key areas:

Complaints upheld - We uphold complaints when we find some form of fault in an authority's actions, including where the authority accepted fault before we investigated.

Compliance with recommendations - We recommend ways for authorities to put things right when faults have caused injustice and monitor their compliance with our recommendations. Failure to comply is rare and a compliance rate below 100% is a cause for concern.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority - In these cases, the authority upheld the complaint and we agreed with how it offered to put things right. We encourage the early resolution of complaints and credit authorities that accept fault and find appropriate ways to put things right.

Finally, we compare the three key annual statistics for your authority with similar types of authorities to work out an average level of performance. We do this for County Councils, District Councils, Metropolitan Boroughs, Unitary Councils, and London Boroughs.

Your annual data will be uploaded to our interactive map, [Your council's performance](#), along with a copy of this letter on 28 July 2021. This useful tool places all our data and information about councils in one place. You can find the decisions we have made about your Council, public reports we have issued, and the service improvements your Council has agreed to make as a result of our investigations, as well as previous annual review letters.

I would encourage you to share the resource with colleagues and elected members; the information can provide valuable insights into service areas, early warning signs of problems and is a key source of information for governance, audit, risk and scrutiny functions.

As you would expect, data has been impacted by the pause to casework in the first quarter of the year. This should be considered when making comparisons with previous year's data.

During the year, we issued one public report about your Council. The case was linked to a previous investigation, which found the Council at fault for inadequately assessing a family's homelessness application and delaying a review of the suitability of their accommodation.

The father of the family has limited mobility and uses a wheelchair. His wife is his carer and they have three young children. The accommodation the Council placed the family in was not wheelchair accessible, was in a state of disrepair with mould and a mouse infestation. The family brought a second complaint to us because the Council had not moved them despite deciding the property was unsuitable.

Our investigation found the Council had failed to provide the family with suitable accommodation. It did not consider the family for any properties that became available between April 2018 and January 2019, and the properties it did consider, between February 2019 and October 2019, could not meet their needs. The Council did not have a procurement policy to ensure it had sufficient wheelchair accessible temporary accommodation.

We also found fault with the Council for failing to offer the father an assessment to determine if he was eligible for social care support. Neither did it review whether occupational therapy equipment was fit for purpose nor ensure repairs were carried out on the property. It also failed to accept the family's second complaint.

I am pleased the Council agreed to pay the family £250 for each month they spent in unsuitable accommodation and made sure repairs were completed. It has also offered the father an assessment of his social care needs and checked his occupational therapy equipment was fit for purpose. With a view to improving future practice, it is also encouraging to note the Council has approved a procurement policy for securing accessible properties and provided staff guidance on complaint handling.

More generally, I was disappointed to note there have been around 13 cases this year where my staff have experienced significant delay in receiving responses to our enquiries. On three occasions this has resulted in a threat to issue witness summons to elicit the information we have requested. Concerningly, I was also made aware of a case where the Council attempted to broker a remedy directly with a complainant, on the basis they withdraw their complaint to my office. You

will appreciate this does not represent the level of transparency I expect from councils when responding to our enquiries.

While I appreciate this last year has presented unique and unprecedented difficulties, your Council's complaint handling has fallen below the standards we expect. I ask that you urgently consider your Council's approach to all aspects of its complaint handling, prioritising good standards of administrative practice, and seeking to improve the process and outcomes for people who complain to you. I appreciate the Council is taking steps to address the staffing issues that have led to some of the problems we experienced, and I hope this will lead to improvements in the coming months. Equally, if there is any support we can provide to the Council, please contact us.

Supporting complaint and service improvement

I am increasingly concerned about the evidence I see of the erosion of effective complaint functions in local authorities. While no doubt the result of considerable and prolonged budget and demand pressures, the Covid-19 pandemic appears to have amplified the problems and my concerns. With much greater frequency, we find poor local complaint handling practices when investigating substantive service issues and see evidence of reductions in the overall capacity, status and visibility of local redress systems.

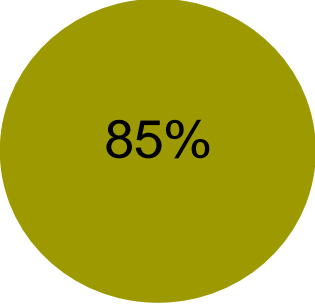
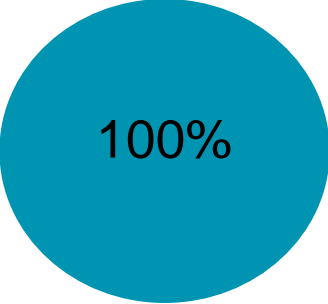
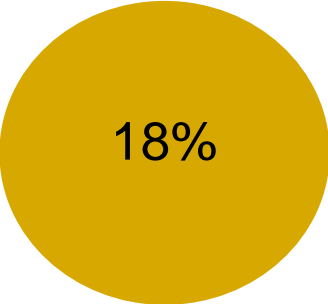
With this context in mind, we are developing a new programme of work that will utilise complaints to drive improvements in both local complaint systems and services. We want to use the rich evidence of our casework to better identify authorities that need support to improve their complaint handling and target specific support to them. We are at the start of this ambitious work and there will be opportunities for local authorities to shape it over the coming months and years.

An already established tool we have for supporting improvements in local complaint handling is our successful training programme. During the year, we successfully adapted our face-to-face courses for online delivery. We provided 79 online workshops during the year, reaching more than 1,100 people. To find out more visit www.lgo.org.uk/training.

Yours sincerely,



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

Complaints upheld		
	<p>85% of complaints we investigated were upheld.</p> <p>This compares to an average of 72% in similar authorities.</p>	<p>17 upheld decisions</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 20 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021</p>
Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations		
	<p>In 100% of cases we were satisfied the authority had successfully implemented our recommendations.</p> <p>This compares to an average of 99% in similar authorities.</p>	<p>Statistics are based on a total of 11 compliance outcomes for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Failure to comply with our recommendations is rare. An authority with a compliance rate below 100% should scrutinise those complaints where it failed to comply and identify any learning.		
Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority		
	<p>In 18% of upheld cases we found the authority had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.</p> <p>This compares to an average of 12% in similar authorities.</p>	<p>3 satisfactory remedy decisions</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 20 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021</p>

NOTE: To allow authorities to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, we did not accept new complaints and stopped investigating existing cases between March and June 2020. This reduced the number of complaints we received and decided in the 20-21 year. Please consider this when comparing data from previous years.