

20 July 2022

By email

Ms Rowlands
Chief Executive
London Borough of Camden

Dear Ms Rowlands

Annual Review letter 2022

I write to you with your annual summary of complaint statistics from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for the year ending 31 March 2022. The information offers valuable insight about your organisation's approach to complaints. As such, I have sought to share this letter with the Leader of your Council and Chair of the appropriate Scrutiny Committee, to encourage effective ownership and oversight of complaint outcomes, which offer such valuable opportunities to learn and improve.

Complaint statistics

Our statistics focus on three key areas that help to assess your organisation's commitment to putting things right when they go wrong:

Complaints upheld - We uphold complaints when we find fault in an organisation's actions, including where the organisation accepted fault before we investigated. We include the total number of investigations completed to provide important context for the statistic.

Compliance with recommendations - We recommend ways for organisations 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 organisation upheld the complaint and we agreed with how it offered to put things right. We encourage the early resolution of complaints and credit organisations that accept fault and find appropriate ways to put things right.

Finally, we compare the three key annual statistics for your organisation with similar authorities to provide an average marker of performance. We do this for County Councils, District Councils, Metropolitan Boroughs, Unitary Councils, and London Boroughs.

Your annual data, and a copy of this letter, will be uploaded to our interactive map, [Your council's performance](#), on 27 July 2022. This useful tool places all our data and information about councils in one place. You can find the detail of the decisions we have made about your

Council, read the public reports we have issued, and view the service improvements your Council has agreed to make as a result of our investigations, as well as previous annual review letters.

Your organisation's performance

During the year, we issued two public reports about your Council. The first related to the Council's administration of business grant schemes, set up to provide support during the Covid-19 pandemic. Our investigation found your Council failed to properly take account of Government guidance. In one case we found this created uncertainty for the business affected, while in a second case we found the Council's fault had resulted in the non-payment of a £25,000 grant. In both cases the businesses were also put to unnecessary time and trouble in making their complaint.

We asked the Council to review both decisions and pay an amount equivalent to the grant in the second case identified. The Council carried out these recommendations. We also asked the Council to ensure that if it received representations from similar businesses affected it would put a procedure in place to consider those. This was after our report highlighted some poor practice by the Council which had failed to register complaints about its administration of business grants, nor offer guidance to complainants about contacting this office.

It is unfortunate there has been a lengthy delay in the report being considered by elected members, a legal requirement when we issue a report. I do hope therefore, that I am soon able to declare that we are satisfied with the actions taken by the Council in response to the report.

We also published a public report about your Council's delay in completing actions it had agreed to take on an earlier case we had decided. In the original decision we found fault in your handling of a complaint about the Council's children's services team. The Council had agreed to apologise for its poor handling of a 2018 complaint and tell us how it would ensure that its staff would properly address and respond to complaints in future. Unfortunately, the Council delayed in completing the action by a year and only did so after both the complainant and our office chased this up. When it did eventually make the apology, it was incomplete.

Whilst it is unusual and disappointing that we needed to issue a public report for the Council to complete the action it had already agreed to take, we are pleased the Council agreed to take the action detailed in that report. This included completion of the actions it had originally agreed, a further apology and a payment to the complainant to recognise the further frustration caused. We also asked the Council to tell us how it monitors and ensures implementation of our recommendations to ensure similar errors did not happen on future decisions from our office. I am pleased to say the Council satisfactorily completed this further agreed action, too.

This final recommendation is particularly important, as, in the past two years I have written to express concern about your Council not completing remedies within the agreed timescales. I am disappointed to find this issue has persisted during the last 12 months. While it is positive we recorded our satisfaction with your Council's compliance in all 15 cases where we recommended a remedy, in four of them the remedies were completed late. We invite comment on the proposed timescales at the draft decision stage and in the four cases in question the delays on your part are not easily understandable. In one instance you took five months to produce a charging policy document having agreed to do it in three. In two other cases you took five and seven more weeks respectively than the agreed timeframe to provide evidence you had completed a remedy.

As I have already asked you to take steps to better monitor the implementation of our recommendations, I hope to see improvements in the year ahead.

Supporting complaint and service improvement

I know your organisation, like ours, will have been through a period of adaptation as the restrictions imposed by the pandemic lifted. While some pre-pandemic practices returned, many new ways of working are here to stay. It is my continued view that complaint functions have been under-resourced in recent years, a trend only exacerbated by the challenges of the pandemic. Through the lens of this recent upheaval and adjustment, I urge you to consider how your organisation prioritises complaints, particularly in terms of capacity and visibility. Properly resourced complaint functions that are well-connected and valued by service areas, management teams and elected members are capable of providing valuable insight about an organisation's performance, detecting early warning signs of problems and offering opportunities to improve service delivery.

I want to support your organisation to harness the value of complaints and we continue to develop our programme of support. Significantly, we are working in partnership with the Housing Ombudsman Service to develop a joint complaint handling code. We are aiming to consolidate our approaches and therefore simplify guidance to enable organisations to provide an effective, quality response to each and every complaint. We will keep you informed as this work develops, and expect that, once launched, we will assess your compliance with the code during our investigations and report your performance via this letter.

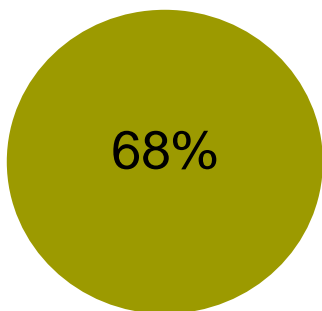
An already established tool we have for supporting improvements in local complaint handling is our successful training programme. We adapted our courses during the Covid-19 pandemic to an online format and successfully delivered 122 online workshops during the year, reaching more than 1,600 people. To find out more visit www.lgo.org.uk/training.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M King', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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

Complaints upheld



68% of complaints we investigated were upheld.

This compares to an average of **71%** in similar organisations.

17
upheld decisions

Statistics are based on a total of **25** investigations for the period between 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations



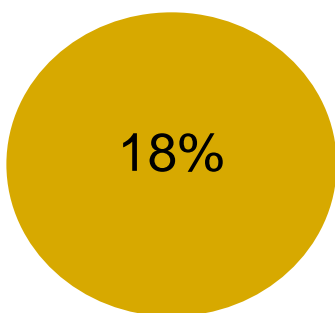
In **100%** of cases we were satisfied the organisation had successfully implemented our recommendations.

This compares to an average of **99%** in similar organisations.

Statistics are based on a total of **15** compliance outcomes for the period between 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022

- Failure to comply with our recommendations is rare. An organisation with a compliance rate below 100% should scrutinise those complaints where it failed to comply and identify any learning.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation



In **18%** of upheld cases we found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

This compares to an average of **11%** in similar organisations.

3
satisfactory remedy decisions

Statistics are based on a total of **17** upheld decisions for the period between 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022