

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

Advisory Forum notes - meeting 30 January 2018

Name	Representing
M King (MK)	Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
N Ellis (NE)	Chief Executive
J Spence (JS)	Head of Policy and Communications
EL	Assistant Ombudsman
CS	Policy and Research Manager
SP	External Communications Officer
DK	Policy and Research Analyst
AJ	Service User
TS	Service User
MG	Service User
CW	Service User
LN	Service User
AA	Service User
BS	Service User
CP	Link Officer
BF	Link Officer
JF	Citizens Advice Coventry

1. Welcome and Introduction

Members of the Advisory Forum were welcomed by Nigel Ellis (NE) and thanked for attending the second meeting of this membership cycle.

Michael King (MK) talked about how we use the feedback we receive from the Advisory Forum to inform service delivery, and how videos of previous participants were used at recent Leadership and Commission events.

2. Discussion 1: Customer research and the surveys

DK introduced the Customer Survey sent to people who have been through our complaints process. He spoke about the feedback we receive about our work through this medium, and how it helps improve services.

DK introduced two new surveys, which are split between those who received a decision at the assessment stage of the complaints journey, and those whose complaints were investigated in more detail.

He said from the current survey it is not always clear what we should be focusing on to improve, and gave examples of the sort of things the current survey cannot tell us.

The new surveys will help people tell us about the kind of service they expect from us, to understand why people rate us the way they do, to find out what matters most to people and to identify where we should focus efforts on service improvements.

One service user asked whether the survey could be done over the phone – DK said it could in cases where that sort of reasonable adjustment was required.

Another service user asked what triggers the feedback form to be sent out. DK said it was when the case was closed.

Feedback included:

- Could be too long and that would be intimidating
- Ask the 'all about you' questions at the time a complaint is first raised
- Ask the 'how did you find out about us' question when a complaint is first raised
- Use a 1-5 scale rather than a 1-10 for responses
- If the demographic section is only filled in at the end of the process maybe missing out on the opportunity to find out about everybody who has contacted the Ombudsman. Many people may give up through the process
- If we asked questions at the start and end of the investigation process we could compare the two
- Disability questions should be asked at the start to help identify reasonable Adjustments
- Found it easier to read and 'softer' on the eye
- The front page (of the complaints form) gives quite a lot of information about the service
- Did like the layout – looks better and looks quicker to complete
- The outcomes are quite formal, not inviting, new one was very easy to read
- New one looks quite similar to Trip Advisor with the grumpy/smiley face so that's helpful I've done things like that before
- Could link some of the questions to the organisation's values, eg were you treated fairly, demonstrated empathy
- Equalities section – need a question about religion
- Missing question – if you have disabilities, how well did your investigator understand your disability
- There's nothing about use of internet – eg how easy was it to upload forms

- What about forms that are filled in by representatives, rather than the people on whose behalf they are complaining – needs to work for the complainant not just the representative
- Accessibility – are there eg large print versions, easy read versions
- Might need other options in question 1, for example mediation, and might need to be able to provide more than one answer
- Empathy – hard to pick up from a form like this – found (the investigation) a very emotionally wearing experience and there's nothing to reflect that in the survey.
- Asking whether they would recommend the Ombudsman to family or friends.

The group fed back more generally about the need for users to feel the process was transparent and how important is it to be kept in touch with what's happening.

NE summarised by saying the discussion had given some helpful feedback as we need to ensure the survey itself does not come across as intimidating.

To address some of the points, the forum discussed whether it would be good to add in a new question about whether as a user you would recommend the LGSCO to other people – like the NHS friends and family approach.

3. Discussion 2: Remedies Project

MK said the remedies project was something he really cared about as the whole point of what we do is to put things right for individuals and improve services for the future.

He outlined why we need to change so we make sure the remedies we recommend happen and have an impact.

EL talked about this project fundamentally changing the way we record and report remedies. He spoke about:

- Our guiding principles
- Recommendations available to us
- Remedies guidance
- Subject forums
- Factsheets on recommendations
- Online decisions and future developments for an interactive map and information people can see on remedies, by local authority

Forum comments included:

- Apology is an easy option for an authority – but it does not always feel sincere
- There should be some penalty for authorities if they have an Ombudsman complaint
- There should be things in place to prevent the councils doing these things again
- Link Officer described the impact on an authority's reputation of having a decision go against them – it's a big thing for authorities
- There should be stronger penalties – I would have liked to see the authority punished more severely than they were
- I had to go through an awful experience so they did not get away with it

- A lot of people aren't capable of going through the process, which was one of the reasons I came to the LGSCO in the first place: I wanted to shine a light on what's gone wrong
- Complainants don't know if a remedy has been delivered so being able to see it online will be helpful
- It's important to know people are accountable and answerable
- A map is a good idea but needs to be high awareness of it so it stands out easily

EL spoke about the project's aims and objectives and what the data will show about an authority's:

- Uphold rate
- Resolution rate
- Service improvements
- Compliance
- Benchmarking

One user suggested there should be an 'avoidability report' – ie how many complaints came to the Ombudsman which really should have been resolved locally first.

MK spoke about the information contained in the annual letters to councils and how these are published on the website and heavily covered in local media.

4. Item 3: Digital Principles

Jayne Spence (JS) thanked the group for the input they had given to developing a set of digital principles. Not only had they completed a survey, but they gave helpful suggestions at the last Advisory Forum meeting. She confirmed our plans for improving online accessibility while maintaining other traditional channels.

She confirmed the digital principles would now be used to underpin the things we do.

The forum suggested it was important that it should be as easy to access the service online as it is using traditional channels.

Feedback:

- One of the principles should refer to good customer service
- I was disappointed I could only send the decision letter from the council to the Ombudsman online – made it more long-winded
- Felt I got a less good service going online
- Need to make sure it works for phones and tablets too and that it is clear, easy to use and accessible
- Forms shouldn't jump around when you're adding text – it would be good if they grew and expanded and didn't lose formatting
- Need to be able to 'screen dump' – if you have to selectively respond it makes it harder
- Need to keep questions simple

Closing remarks

NE thanked people for attending and suggested following items for discussion at next meeting:

- The way we communicate –
 - How can we demonstrate empathy and convey difficult messages
 - Keeping in Touch – when? How?
- Being a learning organisation

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 30 May 2018.