

22 June 2012

*By email*

Mr H Dunnachie  
Chief Executive  
London Borough of Hillingdon  
Civic Centre  
UXBRIDGE  
Middlesex UB8 1UW

Dear Mr Dunnachie

### **Annual Review Letter**

I am writing with our annual summary of statistics on the complaints made to me about your authority for the year ended 31 March 2012. I hope the information set out in the enclosed tables will be useful to you.

The statistics include the number of enquiries and complaints received by our Advice Team, the number forwarded by the Advice Team to my office and decisions made on complaints about your authority. The decision descriptions have been changed to more closely follow the wording in our legislation and to give greater precision. Our guidance on statistics provides further explanation ([see our website](#)).

The statistics also show the time taken by your authority to respond to written enquiries.

### **Complaints about schools**

For the year 2011/12, we received 235 complaints about schools in 14 pilot areas. This included nine complaints about schools in your area. These were about teacher conduct (three), bullying (two), behaviour and discipline, a medical issue, a special educational needs issue and one miscellaneous issue.

In this period we closed 202 complaints about schools, ten of which were in your area. In five cases the school has agreed to investigate and we found no fault in two. The remaining two were closed at the discretion of the Ombudsman during the investigation.

### **Complaint outcomes**

We decided 54 complaints against your Council during the year. In six cases, we decided that we did not have jurisdiction to investigate and in another 12 cases we decided not to investigate for other reasons. We made decisions following an investigation in 36 cases.

I issued one report during the year, jointly with the Health Services Ombudsman, on a social services and health matter. Because of the nature of the report, it was not made public.

The investigation of 17 complaints was discontinued where we considered there was not enough evidence either of fault or a significant injustice to warrant pursuing the matter further. In the other 18 other cases, the investigation was discontinued because your Council provided a reasonable remedy for any injustice in the course of the investigation.

In one case, your Council readily agreed to pay compensation to a resident who was affected by a developer's failure to complete works after your Council had served notices. The payment of £500 was in recognition of the additional time and trouble caused by your Council's delay in taking enforcement action. I am pleased that my investigator's recommendations were readily accepted.

In another complaint, your Council had made direct payments to a complainant who is a wheelchair user to help with her personal and daily care needs. She had spent over £1,000 on cleaning services which you considered to be a misuse of the funds, but which she might reasonably have assumed from the Council's actions could be met by the payments. She complained that you sought to recover the money from her. You accepted her actions were not fault, agreed to stop recovery, and pay her compensation for her time and trouble.

Two other cases relating to adult residential care services cause me some concern. In both, my investigators commented that there was a lack of cooperation from your Council and a significant delay in agreeing the action proposed. I would appreciate your following up this matter.

### ***Changes to our role***

I am also pleased to have this opportunity to update you on changes to our role. Since April 2010 we have been exercising jurisdiction over the internal management of schools on a pilot basis in 14 local authority areas. This includes your area so you will be aware that this was repealed in the Education Act 2011 and the power restored to the Secretary of State for Education. During the short period of the pilot we believe we have had a positive impact on the way in which schools handle complaints. This was endorsed by independent research commissioned by the Department for Education which is available [on their website](#).

Our jurisdiction will end in July 2012 and all complaints about internal school matters will be completed by 31 January 2013. We intend to produce a report on the common themes and lessons that have emerged from our work in this area.

From April 2013, as a result of the Localism Act 2011, local authority tenants will take complaints about their landlord to the Independent Housing Ombudsman (IHO). We are working with the IHO to ensure a smooth transition that will include information for local authority officers and members.

### ***Supporting good local public administration***

We launched a new series of Focus reports during 2011/12 to develop our role in supporting good local public administration and service improvement. They draw on the learning arising from our casework in specific service areas. Subjects have included school admissions, children out of school, homelessness and use of bankruptcy powers. The reports describe good practice and highlight what can go wrong and the injustice caused. They also make recommendations on priority areas for improvement.

We were pleased that a survey of local government revenue officers provided positive feedback on the bankruptcy focus report. Some 85% said they found it useful.

In July 2011, we also published a report with the Centre for Public Scrutiny about how complaints can feed into local authority scrutiny and business planning arrangements.

We support local complaint resolution as the most speedy route to remedy. Our training programme on effective complaint handling is an important part of our work in this area. In 2011/12 we delivered 76 courses to councils, reaching 1,230 individual learners.

We have developed our course evaluation to measure the impact of our training more effectively. It has shown that 87% of learners gained new skills and knowledge to help them improve complaint-handling practice, 83% made changes to complaint-handling practice after training, and 73% said the improvements they made resulted in greater efficiency.

Further details of publications and training opportunities are on our [website](#).

### ***Publishing decisions***

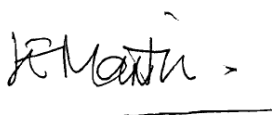
Following consultation with councils, we are planning to launch an open publication scheme during the next year where we will be publishing on our website the final decision statements on all complaints. Making more information publicly available will increase our openness and transparency, and enhance our accountability.

Our aim is to provide a comprehensive picture of complaint decisions and reasons for councils and the public. This will help inform citizens about local services and create a new source of information on maladministration, service failure and injustice.

We will publish a copy of this annual review with those of all other English local authorities on our website on 12 July 2012. This will be the same day as publication of our Annual Report 2011/12 where you will find further information about our work.

We always welcome feedback from councils and would be pleased to receive your views. If it would be helpful, I should be pleased to arrange a meeting for myself or a senior manager to discuss our work in more detail.

Yours sincerely



J. Martin

**Jane Martin**  
**Local Government Ombudsman**

**LGO advice team**

Enquiries and complaints received	Adult Care Services	Benefits & Tax	Corporate & Other Services	Education & Childrens Services	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	Highways & Transport	Housing	Planning & Development	Total
Advice given	0	5	0	2	1	0	6	1	15
Premature complaints	6	11	4	6	4	1	6	6	44
Forwarded to Investigative team (resubmitted)	0	2	1	0	0	0	2	2	7
Forwarded to Investigative team (new)	12	1	1	14	5	2	8	5	48
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>114</b>

**Investigative team - Decisions**

Not investigated			Investigated			Report	Total
No power to investigate	No reason to use exceptional power to investigate	Investigation not justified & Other	Not enough evidence of fault	No or minor injustice & Other	Injustice remedied during enquiries		
2	4	12	10	7	18	1	54

	No of first enquiries	Avg no of days to respond
Response times to first enquiries	25	22.2