

7 July 2014

*By email*

Ms Jane Robinson  
Chief Executive  
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council

Dear Ms Jane Robinson

**Annual Review Letter 2014**

I am writing with our annual summary of statistics on the complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) about your authority for the year ended 31 March 2014. This is the first full year of recording complaints under our new business model so the figures will not be directly comparable to previous years. This year's statistics can be found in the table attached.

A summary of complaint statistics for every local authority in England will also be included in a new yearly report on local government complaint handling. This will be published alongside our annual review letters on 15 July. This approach is in response to feedback from councils who told us that they want to be able to compare their performance on complaints against their peers.

For the first time this year we are also sending a copy of each annual review letter to the leader of the council as well as to the chief executive. We hope this will help to support greater democratic scrutiny of local complaint handling and ensure effective local accountability of public services. In the future we will also send a copy of any published Ombudsman report to the leader of the council as well as the chief executive.

In the last year the Council's response to enquiries was unsatisfactory in two cases. One of these involved a complainant who had to return to my office to query a remedy the Council had offered to settle a complaint. The resulting investigation found the Council at fault and recommended a substantially increased remedy.

In the other case, the Council failed to provide all the correspondence requested. The complainant provided her own copies of the missing correspondence that the Council had recently given her in response to a subject access request under the Data Protection Act. It then became clear that the Council had failed to make part of the SEN provision specified in the complainant's child's Statement of SEN for almost ten years.

I hope that you will review the way the Council has dealt with complaints this year and take the opportunity to deliver improvements in your complaints handling.

***Developments at the Local Government Ombudsman***

At the end of March Anne Seex retired as my fellow Local Government Ombudsman. Following an independent review of the governance of the LGO last year the Government has committed to formalising a single ombudsman structure at LGO, and to strengthen our

governance, when parliamentary time allows. I welcome these changes and have begun the process of strengthening our governance by inviting the independent Chairs of our Audit and Remuneration Committees to join our board, the Commission for Administration in England. We have also recruited a further independent advisory member.

### ***Future for local accountability***

There has been much discussion in Parliament and elsewhere about the effectiveness of complaints handling in the public sector and the role of ombudsmen. I have supported the creation of a single ombudsman for all public services in England. I consider this is the best way to deliver a system of redress that is accessible for users; provides an effective and comprehensive service; and ensures that services are accountable locally.

To contribute to that debate we held a roundtable discussion with senior leaders from across the local government landscape including the Local Government Association, Care Quality Commission and SOLACE. The purpose of this forum was to discuss the challenges and opportunities that exist to strengthen local accountability of public services, particularly in an environment where those services are delivered by many different providers.

Over the summer we will be developing our corporate strategy for the next three years and considering how we can best play our part in enhancing the local accountability of public services. We will be listening to the views of a wide range of stakeholders from across local government and social care and would be pleased to hear your comments.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jane Martin', with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr Jane Martin  
Local Government Ombudsman  
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

## Local authority report – Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council

For the period ending – 31/03/2014

For further information on interpretation of statistics click on this link to go to <http://www.lgo.org.uk/publications/annual-report/note-interpretation-statistics/>

### Complaints and enquiries received

| Local authority | Adult care services | Benefits and tax | Corporate and other services | Education and children's services | Environmental services and public protection and regulation | Highways and transport | Housing | Planning and development | Total |
|-----------------|---------------------|------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------|---------|--------------------------|-------|
| Gateshead MBC   | 8                   | 6                | 4                            | 12                                | 7   | 4                      | 16      | 7                        | 64    |

### Decisions made

|                 | <u>Detailed investigations carried out</u> |            |              |                                |                    |                                    |       |
|-----------------|--|------------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|-------|
| Local authority | Upheld                                     | Not upheld | Advice given | Closed after initial enquiries | Incomplete/Invalid | Referred back for local resolution | Total |
| Gateshead MBC   | 9  | 9          | 10           | 14                             | 3                  | 24                                 | 69    |