

18 July 2018

*By email*

Doug Patterson  
Chief Executive  
London Borough of Bromley

Dear Doug Patterson,

### **Annual Review letter 2018**

I write to you with our annual summary of statistics on the complaints made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) about your authority for the year ended 31 March 2018. The enclosed tables present the number of complaints and enquiries received about your authority and the decisions we made during the period. I hope this information will prove helpful in assessing your authority's performance in handling complaints.

#### **Complaint statistics**

In providing these statistics, I would stress that the volume of complaints does not, in itself, indicate the quality of the council's performance. High volumes of complaints can be a sign of an open, learning organisation, as well as sometimes being an early warning of wider problems. Low complaint volumes can be a worrying sign that an organisation is not alive to user feedback, rather than always being an indicator that all is well. So, I would encourage you to use these figures as the start of a conversation, rather than an absolute measure of corporate health. One of the most significant statistics attached is the number of upheld complaints. This shows how frequently we find fault with the council when we investigate. Equally importantly, we also give a figure for the number of cases where we decided your authority had offered a satisfactory remedy during the local complaints process. Both figures provide important insights.

I want to emphasise the statistics in this letter reflect the data we hold, and may not necessarily align with the data your authority holds. For example, our numbers include enquiries from people we signpost back to the authority, some of whom may never contact you.

In line with usual practice, we are publishing our annual data for all authorities on our website, alongside an annual review of local government complaints. The aim of this is to be transparent and provide information that aids the scrutiny of local services.

As with last year's letter to the Council I am again disappointed to have to raise my concerns about your Council's poor response to my office during our investigations. We ask councils to respond to enquiries within one month, a target met in most cases. Whilst there has been

some improvement since one of my Assistant Ombudsman visited a few years ago there were still too many incidents where the length of time taken to respond to enquires was unacceptable. In case 17003280 the response took 10 weeks and in case 16013260 it took 15 weeks and a witness summons threat to receive a response. One of my Assistant Ombudsman visited your Council again during the year and I believe she was able to clarify a misunderstanding about responses to enquiries. As I understand it you believed that if you requested an extension and it was granted and you adhered to the new timeframe that you had not missed the target. It was made clear that this is not correct and the target is a response within 4 weeks.

I am reassured that you have made various changes to how your Council monitors complaints and this will hopefully lead to improvements.

It was however disappointing that shortly after the visit in relation to an adult social care investigation copies of all correspondence were requested, even after allowing an extension for a response to enquiries, not all the documents were sent leading to further enquiries being made. Information was sent and a draft decision was issued. When the Council commented on the draft decision it provided documents which had not previously been sent. The draft decision was then revised and reissued. When the Council commented on the revised draft decision, it submitted new evidence. This completely changed the decision. The Council said it didn't see these records previously as they were stored elsewhere. However, I am sure you would agree the correct documents not being sent lead to a considerable waste of the investigators time and delayed the complainant receiving an outcome to the complaint. I hope we can avoid similar problems in future investigations.

### **Future development of annual review letters**

Last year, we highlighted our plans to move away from a simplistic focus on complaint volumes and instead turn focus onto the lessons that can be learned and the wider improvements we can achieve through our recommendations to improve services for the many. We have produced a new [corporate strategy](#) for 2018-21 which commits us to more comprehensively publish information about the outcomes of our investigations and the occasions our recommendations result in improvements to local services.

We will be providing this broader range of data for the first time in next year's letters, as well as creating an interactive map of local authority performance on our website. We believe this will lead to improved transparency of our work, as well as providing increased recognition to the improvements councils have agreed to make following our interventions. We will be therefore seeking views from councils on the future format of our annual letters early next year.

### **Supporting local scrutiny**

One of the purposes of our annual letters to councils is to help ensure learning from complaints informs scrutiny at the local level. Sharing the learning from our investigations and supporting the democratic scrutiny of public services continues to be one of our key priorities. We have created a dedicated section of our website which contains a host of information to help scrutiny committees and councillors to hold their authority to account – complaints data, decision statements, public interest reports, focus reports and scrutiny questions. This can be found at [www.lgo.org.uk/scrutiny](http://www.lgo.org.uk/scrutiny). I would be grateful if you could encourage your elected members and scrutiny committees to make use of these resources.

### **Learning from complaints to improve services**

We share the issues we see in our investigations to help councils learn from the issues others have experienced and avoid making the same mistakes. We do this through the [reports](#) and other resources we publish. Over the last year, we have seen examples of councils adopting a positive attitude towards complaints and working constructively with us

to remedy injustices and take on board the learning from our cases. In one great example, a county council has seized the opportunity to entirely redesign how its occupational therapists work with all of its districts, to improve partnership working and increase transparency for the public. This originated from a single complaint. This is the sort of culture we all benefit from – one that takes the learning from complaints and uses it to improve services.

### **Complaint handling training**

We have a well-established and successful training programme supporting local authorities and independent care providers to help improve local complaint handling. In 2017-18 we delivered 58 courses, training more than 800 people. We also set up a network of council link officers to promote and share best practice in complaint handling, and hosted a series of seminars for that group. To find out more visit [www.lgo.org.uk/training](http://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

**Local Authority Report:** London Borough of Bromley  
**For the Period Ending:** 31/03/2018

For further information on how to interpret our statistics, please visit our website:  
<http://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/annual-review-reports/interpreting-local-authority-statistics>

## Complaints and enquiries received

Adult Care Services	Benefits and Tax	Corporate and Other Services	Education and Children's Services	Environment Services	Highways and Transport	Housing	Planning and Development	Other	Total
27	36	5	30	3	22	23	18	1	165

## Decisions made

				Detailed Investigations			
Incomplete or Invalid	Advice Given	Referred back for Local Resolution	Closed After Initial Enquiries	Not Upheld	Upheld	Uphold Rate	Total
3	3	67	38	24	30	56%	165

### Notes

Our uphold rate is calculated in relation to the total number of detailed investigations.  
 The number of remedied complaints may not equal the number of upheld complaints. This is because, while we may uphold a complaint because we find fault, we may not always find grounds to say that fault caused injustice that ought to be remedied.

### Complaints Remedied

by LGO	Satisfactorily by Authority before LGO Involvement
24	1