

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

22 July 2020

By email

Ms Etheridge
Interim Chief Executive
London Borough of Haringey

Dear Ms Etheridge

Annual Review letter 2020

I write to you with our annual summary of statistics on the decisions made by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman about your authority for the year ending 31 March 2020. Given the exceptional pressures under which local authorities have been working over recent months, I thought carefully about whether it was still appropriate to send you this annual update. However, now, more than ever, I believe that it is essential that the public experience of local services is at the heart of our thinking. So, I hope that this feedback, which provides unique insight into the lived experience of your Council's services, will be useful as you continue to deal with the current situation and plan for the future.

Complaint statistics

This year, we continue to place our focus on the outcomes of complaints and what can be learned from them. We want to provide you with the most insightful information we can and have made several changes over recent years to improve the data we capture and report. We focus our statistics on these three key areas:

Complaints upheld - We uphold complaints when we find some form of fault in an authority's actions, including where the authority accepted fault before we investigated. A focus on how often things go wrong, rather than simple volumes of complaints provides a clearer indicator of performance.

Compliance with recommendations - We recommend ways for authorities to put things right when faults have caused injustice. Our recommendations try to put people back in the position they were before the fault and we monitor authorities to ensure they comply with our recommendations. Failure to comply with our recommendations is rare. An authority with a compliance rate below 100% should scrutinise those complaints where it failed to comply and identify any learning.

Satisfactory remedies provided by the authority - We want to encourage the early resolution of complaints and to credit authorities that have a positive and open approach to resolving complaints. We recognise cases where an authority has taken steps to put things right before the complaint came to us. The authority upheld the complaint and we agreed with how it offered to put things right.

Finally, we compare the three key annual statistics for your authority with similar types of authorities to work out an average level of performance. We do this for County Councils, District Councils, Metropolitan Boroughs, Unitary Councils, and London Boroughs.

This data will be uploaded to our interactive map, [Your council's performance](#), along with a copy of this letter on 29 July 2020, and our Review of Local Government Complaints. For further information on how to interpret our statistics, please visit our [website](#).

This year, I issued two public reports about your Council. One report dealt with the Council's repeated failure to calculate a service-user's housing benefit correctly. The Council's miscalculations led to her being pressured to leave her rented property. It then failed to progress her homelessness application. When the service-user wanted to appeal the Council's calculations, the Council failed to refer her to the tribunal.

I am pleased to note the Council responded well to the recommendations and exceeded what was asked by completing a second audit of cases to ensure similar mistakes had not affected other service users. The Council also approached the service user's lost furniture claim generously, reimbursing the full amount sought and acknowledging the service failure in the case.

In the second case, our investigation found the Council was at fault in the action it took to pursue a business rate debt. The Council decided to start bankruptcy proceedings to recover the debt but used inaccurate information when it decided the individual liable had sufficient realisable assets to cover the debt and any costs incurred. The Council also delayed in pursuing the debt. The Council was asked to apply to annul the bankruptcy proceedings and cover costs incurred. It was also recommended to make a payment for the distress caused.

The Council initially indicated it would not comply with the recommendation that it apply to annul the bankruptcy proceedings. I confirmed if it refused to do so, I would consider issuing a further report about the failure to comply. Subsequently, the Council reviewed its position and accepted the recommendations in full. I welcomed this change in view and was able to confirm satisfaction.

I was able to confirm satisfaction with your Council's compliance with our recommendations in 95% of cases during the year. I welcome that the Council accepted our recommendations and agreed to provide the proposed remedies in these cases. However, it is disappointing that in one case the remedy was not complied with and has not yet been completed (which has led to a new complaint being raised). Additionally, in a further seven cases, remedies were not completed within the agreed timescales and we had to chase the Council to achieve compliance. While I appreciate the pressures councils are under, delay in implementing remedies adds to complainants' injustice. Additionally, the actions you agree to take, and your performance in implementing them, are reported publicly on our website, so are likely to generate increased public and media scrutiny in future. I would ask the Council to reflect on the way it implements remedies, with a view to reducing any avoidable delay in the process.

Resources to help you get it right

There are a range of resources available that can support you to place the learning from complaints, about your authority and others, at the heart of your system of corporate

governance. [Your council's performance](#) launched last year and puts our data and information about councils in one place. Again, the emphasis is on learning, not numbers. You can find the decisions we have made, public reports we have issued, and the service improvements your Council has agreed to make as a result of our investigations, as well as previous annual review letters.

I would encourage you to share the tool with colleagues and elected members; the information can provide valuable insights into service areas, early warning signs of problems and is a key source of information for governance, audit, risk and scrutiny functions.

Earlier this year, we held our link officer seminars in London, Bristol, Leeds and Birmingham. Attended by 178 delegates from 143 local authorities, we focused on maximising the impact of complaints, making sure the right person is involved with complaints at the right time, and how to overcome common challenges.

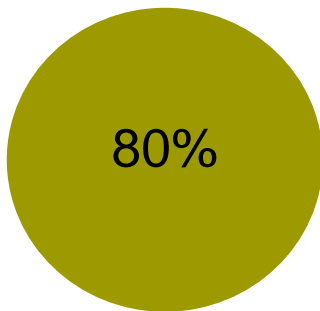
We have a well-established and successful training programme supporting local authorities and independent care providers to help improve local complaint handling. During the year, we delivered 118 courses, training more than 1,400 people. This is 47 more courses than we delivered last year and included more training to adult social care providers than ever before. 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



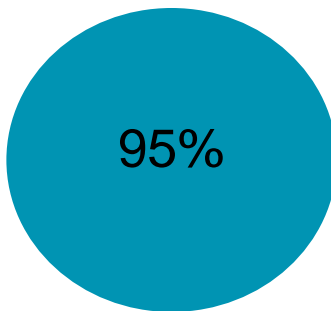
80% of complaints we investigated were upheld.

This compares to an average of **70%** in similar authorities.

33
upheld decisions

Statistics are based on a total of 41 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations



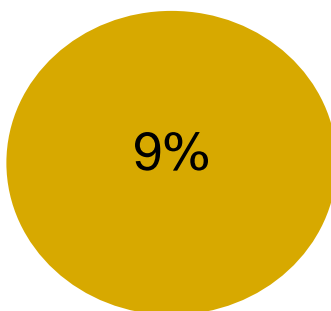
In **95%** of cases we were satisfied the authority had successfully implemented our recommendations.

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

Statistics are based on a total of 22 compliance outcomes for the period between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020

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

Satisfactory remedies provided by the authority



In **9%** of upheld cases we found the authority had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

This compares to an average of **15%** in similar authorities.

3
satisfactory remedy decisions

Statistics are based on a total of 41 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020