

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

22 July 2020

By email

Ms Beasley
Chief Executive
London Borough of Hillingdon

Dear Ms Beasley

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 a public report about your Council and its failure to make reasonable adjustments for a housing benefit claimant who wished to return a benefit overpayment. Our investigation found the Council had failed to help the claimant through its complex systems. It would not provide a named officer to email and often insisted she telephone, which she explained would cause her problems because of her autism. The Council also threatened to put the complainant on its restricted persons register. The Council did not have a policy on making reasonable adjustments or an autism strategy.

I recognise the significant challenges faced by public service providers, including our own service, in adapting business processes to meet the needs of individuals who may require adjustments. This is a particular challenge where someone's disabilities are not immediately obvious or where adjustments require changes to standardised and automated systems. However, that is the duty that councils must meet and the needs that they must anticipate.

I am pleased to say the Council is working on its policy for reasonable adjustments and an autism strategy. The Council accepted fault and agreed to apologise to the complainant and make a payment to her. It also agreed to put information about its restricted persons on its website, provide refresher training for frontline staff on the Equality Act 2010, and record needs and preferred means of contact on its records. I welcome the Council's constructive response to the recommendations and the actions taken to remedy both the personal injustice and avoid a recurrence of similar issues.

I was able to confirm satisfaction with your Council's compliance with our recommendations in 96% 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 was disappointing that in one case, concerning reassessment for a special guardianship support package, the remedy was not complied with and led to a new complaint being raised. You should be aware that 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 am pleased to see the Council has now completed the reassessment in line with the correct standards.

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.

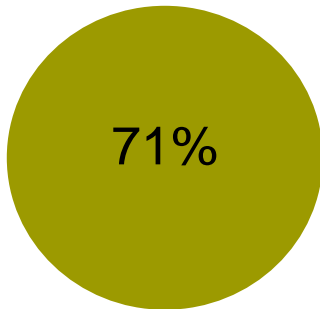
We have a well-established and successful training programme supporting local authorities and independent care providers to help improve local complaint handling. During the year, we delivered 118 courses, training more than 1,400 people. This is 47 more courses than we delivered last year and included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



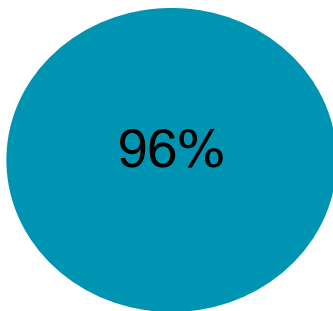
71% of complaints we investigated were upheld.

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

25
upheld decisions

Statistics are based on a total of 35 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations



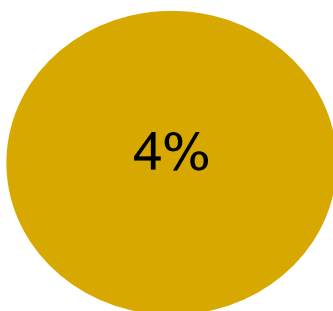
In **96%** of cases we were satisfied the authority had successfully implemented our recommendations.

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

Statistics are based on a total of 24 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 **4%** 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.

1
satisfactory remedy decision

Statistics are based on a total of 35 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020