

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

22 July 2020

By email

Mr Tuckley
Chief Executive
London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Dear Mr Tuckley

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 one public report about your Council for how it dealt with a pregnant homeless woman after she was evicted from the family home. The investigation found the Council was at fault for several reasons. These included that it did not take enough action to prevent and relieve the woman's homelessness; applied too high a threshold when deciding if it should provide interim accommodation; and did not properly consider the suitability of the interim accommodation it placed her in. We found the Council's actions led to significant injustice.

I recommended the Council consider options to help the woman afford suitable accommodation until her baby was born, review its service resources, issue an apology and pay her £1,000. The Council agreed to these recommendations and I welcome the action taken to implement them, in particular the action plan put in place, which demonstrated it had properly and carefully considered its service resources and planned changes.

While I welcome that the Council agreed to and implemented the recommendations made during the year, it is disappointing that in six cases, remedies were not completed within the agreed timescales, requiring us chase the Council on several occasions in order to record compliance. Four of these cases included personal remedies for complainants, of which three were over 30 days late. While I appreciate the pressures local authorities are under, delays 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 invite the Council to consider how it can make improvements to reduce delays in the remedy process.

More positively, I was impressed with the quality of the Council's apology letter in one case and how it engaged with our pilot of a bespoke support service. Thanks to the Council's commitment to the initiative, we saw a significant improvement in response times to our enquiries in the later part of the year. I look forward to this continuing in the future.

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.

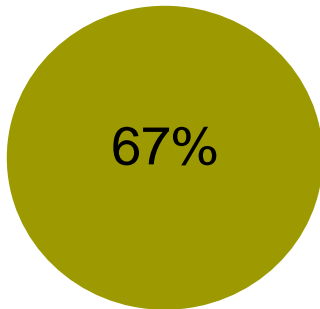
We have a well-established and successful training programme supporting local authorities and independent care providers to help improve local complaint handling. During the year, we delivered 118 courses, training more than 1,400 people. This is 47 more courses than we delivered last year and included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



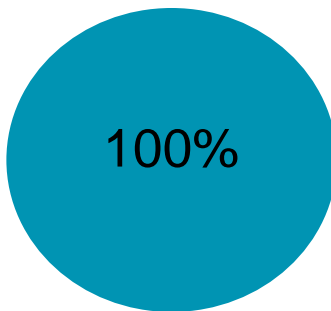
67% of complaints we investigated were upheld.

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

16
upheld decisions

Statistics are based on a total of 24 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations



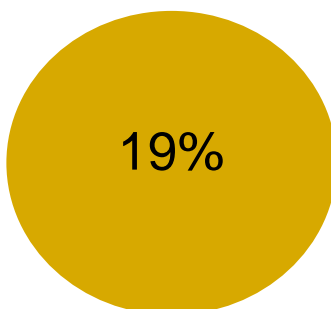
In **100%** of cases we were satisfied the authority had successfully implemented our recommendations.

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

Statistics are based on a total of 13 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 **19%** 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 24 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020