

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

20 July 2022

By email

Mr Farrant
Chief Executive
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council

Dear Mr Farrant

Annual Review letter 2022

I write to you with your annual summary of complaint statistics from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for the year ending 31 March 2022. The information offers valuable insight about your organisation's approach to complaints. As such, I have sought to share this letter with the Leader of your Council and Chair of the appropriate Scrutiny Committee, to encourage effective ownership and oversight of complaint outcomes, which offer such valuable opportunities to learn and improve.

Complaint statistics

Our statistics focus on three key areas that help to assess your organisation's commitment to putting things right when they go wrong:

Complaints upheld - We uphold complaints when we find fault in an organisation's actions, including where the organisation accepted fault before we investigated. We include the total number of investigations completed to provide important context for the statistic.

Compliance with recommendations - We recommend ways for organisations to put things right when faults have caused injustice and monitor their compliance with our recommendations. Failure to comply is rare and a compliance rate below 100% is a cause for concern.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority - In these cases, the organisation upheld the complaint and we agreed with how it offered to put things right. We encourage the early resolution of complaints and credit organisations that accept fault and find appropriate ways to put things right.

Finally, we compare the three key annual statistics for your organisation with similar authorities to provide an average marker of performance. We do this for County Councils, District Councils, Metropolitan Boroughs, Unitary Councils, and London Boroughs.

Your annual data, and a copy of this letter, will be uploaded to our interactive map, [Your council's performance](#), on 27 July 2022. This useful tool places all our data and information about councils in one place. You can find the detail of the decisions we have made about your

Council, read the public reports we have issued, and view the service improvements your Council has agreed to make as a result of our investigations, as well as previous annual review letters.

Your organisation's performance

This year, we issued one public report about your Council after we found it failed to accept an aunt and uncle as family foster carers, when they were caring for their nephew and niece, who would have otherwise been looked after by the Council. This meant the complainants were not supported financially and were caused avoidable distress. It was encouraging that the Council's investigation had already found fault for not financially supporting the complainants or safeguarding the children properly, although we found the remedy suggested by the Council did not go far enough.

We recommended the Council paid the complainants backdated fostering allowance, and make a payment for their avoidable distress, and a payment for the avoidable harm to the children. In addition, we recommended the Council consider complaints from other family carers who, in the past five years, might have been disadvantaged in the same way.

I welcome that the Council fully accepted our recommendations and its commitment to learn from the complaint. We issued a public report in this instance to highlight the important message that family carers should be treated fairly and supported in the same way as foster carers.

More generally, I have been made aware of several cases this year where there was significant delay in the Council responding to our enquiries, across all areas of service. At its most serious, we threatened to issue a witness summons in one investigation. It is concerning that we needed to resort to this action to get the information we needed. I would therefore ask that if the Council is unable to respond to our enquiries in a timely fashion, to please communicate any difficulties with us promptly. If there is any support we can provide, please feel free to contact my office.

Supporting complaint and service improvement

I know your organisation, like ours, will have been through a period of adaptation as the restrictions imposed by the pandemic lifted. While some pre-pandemic practices returned, many new ways of working are here to stay. It is my continued view that complaint functions have been under-resourced in recent years, a trend only exacerbated by the challenges of the pandemic. Through the lens of this recent upheaval and adjustment, I urge you to consider how your organisation prioritises complaints, particularly in terms of capacity and visibility. Properly resourced complaint functions that are well-connected and valued by service areas, management teams and elected members are capable of providing valuable insight about an organisation's performance, detecting early warning signs of problems and offering opportunities to improve service delivery.

I want to support your organisation to harness the value of complaints and we continue to develop our programme of support. Significantly, we are working in partnership with the Housing Ombudsman Service to develop a joint complaint handling code. We are aiming to consolidate our approaches and therefore simplify guidance to enable organisations to provide an effective, quality response to each and every complaint. We will keep you informed as this work develops, and expect that, once launched, we will assess your compliance with the code during our investigations and report your performance via this letter.

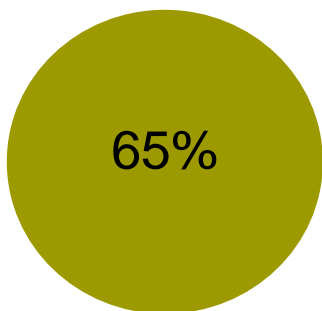
An already established tool we have for supporting improvements in local complaint handling is our successful training programme. We adapted our courses during the Covid-19 pandemic to an online format and successfully delivered 122 online workshops during the year, reaching more than 1,600 people. To find out more visit www.lgo.org.uk/training.

Yours sincerely,

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

Michael King
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

Complaints upheld



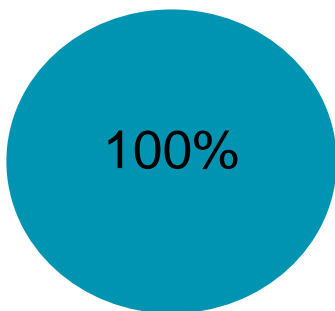
65% of complaints we investigated were upheld.

This compares to an average of **64%** in similar organisations.

22
upheld decisions

Statistics are based on a total of **34** investigations for the period between 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations



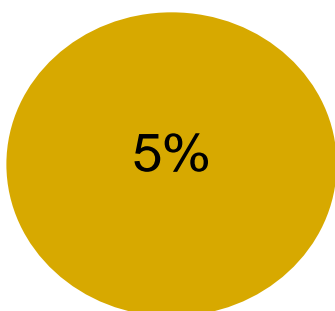
In **100%** of cases we were satisfied the organisation had successfully implemented our recommendations.

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

Statistics are based on a total of **15** compliance outcomes for the period between 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022

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

Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation



In **5%** of upheld cases we found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

This compares to an average of **12%** in similar organisations.

1
satisfactory remedy decision

Statistics are based on a total of **22** upheld decisions for the period between 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022