

AUDIT COMMITTEE

28 November 2018

Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter 2018

Report of Internal Audit and Assurance Manager

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To enable Members to consider the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter for the year ending 31 March 2018.

This report is public

RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) That the report is noted.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Members of the public can request the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) to carry out an independent review if they are not satisfied with a local authority's handling of, or conclusions from a complaint. If the LGO finds the local authority is at fault, he can recommend actions for the local authority to carry out to remedy the fault.
- 1.2 The LGO sends an Annual Review letter to each local authority setting out statistics about complaints that have been referred to him about that authority during the financial year. The LGO also publishes an Annual Review of complaints statistics for all local authorities.

2.0 Annual Review Letter 2018

- 2.1 The LGO's Annual Review Letter for 2018 is appended to this report for Members' information. The LGO received 12 complaints and enquiries against the Council in 2017/18, compared to 15 received in 2016/17.
- 2.2 Members will note that of the 12 complaints and enquires received, no detailed investigations were completed by the LGO during 2017/18 and all 12 cases were either closed with no further action required or referred back to the Council for a local resolution. A list of all the complaints with a summary of decisions is published on the LGO website at: <http://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions/>
- 2.3 A comparison with the other Lancashire district councils suggests that these levels are more in line with the norm and provide a reasonable benchmark to evaluate the Council's future performance in relation to complaints.

3.0 Annual Review of Local Government Complaints

- 3.1 The Ombudsman's overall Annual Review of local government complaints is available online at <http://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/annual-review-reports/local-government-complaint-reviews>

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 There are no outstanding actions that require remedial action, therefore the Annual Review letter 2018 appended to this report is for noting purposes only.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

None directly arising from this report

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None directly arising from this report

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None directly arising from this report

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter 2018

Contact Officer: Joanne Billington

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E-mail: jbillington@lancaster.gov.uk

Ref:

Local Government &
Social Care
OMBUDSMAN

18 July 2018

By email

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Lancaster City Council

Dear Susan Parsonage,

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.

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 therefore be 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 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.

Yours sincerely,



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

Local Authority Report: Lancaster City Council
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
0	2	4	0	0	0	1	5	0	12

Decisions made

Detailed Investigations				Uphold Rate	Total
Incomplete or Invalid	Advice Given	Referred back for Local Resolution	Closed After Initial Enquiries	Not Upheld	Upheld
1	1	5	5	0	0
				0	0%

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
0	0