

## 2024/25 Self-assessment against the requirements of the Complaint Handling Code

Code section	Do we follow the Code:  Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
<b>1: Definition of a service request and complaint</b>	<b>Required Action:</b>	<b>To recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint, and these are defined in our policies and procedures.</b>
1.1 Effective complaint handling enables individuals to be heard and understood. The starting point for this is a shared understanding of what constitutes a service request and what constitutes a complaint. In most cases organisations should be able to put things right through normal service delivery processes.	Yes	LCC policy recognises/outlines the difference between a service request and a complaint and adheres to Ombudsman definition of a complaint.
1.2 A service request may be defined as: ‘a request that the organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision.’	Yes	This definition has been adopted within LCC complaints policy.
1.3 This provides organisations with opportunities to resolve matters to an individual’s satisfaction before they become a complaint.	Yes	LCC policy encourages staff to resolve service delivery issues without recourse to our formal complaints process. LCC will not stop its efforts to address the service request even if a complaint is raised.
1.4 A complaint may be defined as: ‘an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals.’	Yes	This definition has been adopted within the LCC complaints policy.

Code section	Do we follow the Code:  Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
1.5 An individual should not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative should still be handled in line with the organisation's complaints policy.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach.
1.6 Organisations should recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. This should be set out in their complaints policy.	Yes	LCC policy recognises/outlines the difference between a service request and a complaint and adheres to Ombudsman definition of a complaint.
1.7 Service requests are not complaints but may contain expressions of dissatisfaction. Organisations should have the opportunity to deal with a service request before a complaint is made. A complaint may be raised when the individual expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. An organisation should not stop its efforts to address the service request if the individual complains.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach.  Service requests presented to LCC via typical service channels are treated as such and are recorded and actioned accordingly. If a service request is presented via our complaints channel/process, this is logged on our complaints system but then excluded as a service request.
1.8 Service requests should be recorded, monitored, and reviewed regularly.	Yes	All LCC depts have processes whereby service requests are recorded and monitored. Development of the Granicus CRM system with service dashboards will support further progress in this area over the coming 12 months.
<b>2: Exclusions</b>	<b>Required Action:</b>	<b>Complaints policy sets out circumstances where they would not be considered a complaint. These are reasonable and do not deny individuals access to redress.</b>

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2.1 An organisation should accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. If the organisation decides not to accept a complaint, it should be able to evidence its reasoning. Each complaint should be considered on its own merits.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach.
2.2 Organisations should accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring, or the individual becoming aware of the issue. Organisations should consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach.
2.3 A complaints policy should set out the circumstances in which a matter might not be considered or escalated. Organisations should ensure that these are reasonable and should not deny individuals access to redress.	Yes	LCC accepts all complaints unless they clearly fall under one of the exclusion reasons in our policy.
2.4 If an organisation decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation should be provided to the individual setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach.
2.5 Organisations should not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; they should consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach.
<b>3: Accessibility and awareness</b>	<b>Required Action:</b>	<b>To provide different channels through which individuals can make complaints. These are accessible and can make reasonable adjustments where necessary</b>
3.1 Organisations should make it easy for individuals to complain by providing different channels through which they can make a complaint. Organisations must consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of individuals who may need to access the complaints process.	Yes	The council is committed to making this process accessible to all. Complaints can be made via any channel to any member of staff. We also utilise translation facilities and bespoke home visits. All information relating to the council's complaint policy and procedures is available in a resident's preferred format.

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3.2 Individuals should be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff. All staff should be aware of the complaints process and be able to pass details of the complaint to the appropriate person within the organisation.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach. Training workshops have been made available to all staff. Staff would be expected to record complaints on the Granicus CRM system which would then result in them being shared with the appropriate person to respond.
3.3 High volumes of complaints should not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that individuals are unable to complain.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
3.4 Organisations should make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all individuals. This should detail the process, what will happen at each stage, and the timeframes for responding. The policy should also be published on the organisation's website.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
3.5 The policy should explain how the organisation will publicise details of the complaints policy, including information about the Ombudsman and this Code.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
3.6 Organisations should give individuals the opportunity to have a suitable representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with the organisation.	Yes	LCC accepts complaints via 3 <sup>rd</sup> parties. Complaints are only investigated upon receipt of consent.  Elected members are encouraged to use the complaints procedure on behalf of their constituents. Complaints raised by elected members are subject to the same requirements for consent.

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3.7 Organisations should provide individuals with information on their right to access the Ombudsman service and how the individual can engage with the Ombudsman about their complaint.	Yes	This is covered in all templated letters. The complainant will be advised of any further steps which they may take if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the review of their complaint. In that they may refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman or Housing Ombudsman.
3.8 Where an organisation asks for feedback about its services through a survey, it should provide details of how individuals can complain so they can pursue any dissatisfaction if they so wish.	No	Internal communication strategy required to implement this as standard practice. Information is included as standard on the Council's Keep Connected site which is the general platform used for surveying residents.
<b>4: Complaint handling resources</b>	<b>Required Action:</b>	<b>To have designated, sufficient resource assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling. Complaints are viewed as a core service and resourced accordingly.</b>

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4.1 Organisations should have designated, sufficient resource assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison with the relevant Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to the governing body (or equivalent).	Yes	<p>Our Customer Service team are equipped to provide a central point for the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public access to the complaints process via multiple channels as per 3.1</li> <li>• Admin resource to record and triage complaints</li> <li>• Oversight and support of complaint handling for LCC staff</li> </ul> <p>Our Information Governance team liaise and send reports directly to the relevant Ombudsman.</p> <p>Plans are underway to create a post solely dedicated to complaints monitoring, reporting and training. This post will be under the oversight of Customer Services management.</p> <p>Some LCC services have a designated officer responsible for overseeing complaints in their area and there is a practice of meeting regularly to discuss active complaints.</p>
4.2 Anyone responding to a complaint should have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They should also have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.

Code section	Do we follow the Code:  Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
4.3 Organisations are expected to prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff should be suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. It is important that complaints are seen as a core service and resourced accordingly	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach. Training workshops have been made available to all staff.
<b>5: The complaint handling process</b>	<b>Required Action:</b>	<b>To have a single policy for dealing with complaints covered by the Code and individuals are given the option of raising a complaint where they express dissatisfaction that meets the definition of the complaint in our policy.</b>
5.1 Organisations should have a single policy for dealing with complaints covered by the Code.	Yes	LCC has one policy document supported by an intranet page of supporting guidance.
5.2 The early and local resolution of issues between organisations and individuals is key to effective complaint handling. Organisations should not have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'informal complaint') as this causes unnecessary confusion.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
5.3 When an individual expresses dissatisfaction that could meet the criteria for a complaint as set out in section 1 of the Code, they should be given the opportunity to make a complaint. Organisations should recognise that individuals may be reluctant to raise complaints out of fear it may impact services they receive in future.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
5.4 The person responding to the complaint should: a. clarify with the individual any aspects of the complaint they are unclear about; b. deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind; c. give the individual a fair chance to set out their position; d. take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and e. consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.	Yes	LCC policy, guidance, training and templated letters support this.

<b>Code section</b>	<b>Do we follow the Code:  Yes/No</b>	<b>Explanations and Commentary</b>
5.5 Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this Code the organisation should inform the individual of when the response will be provided and the reason(s) for the delay.	Yes	Our policy and process adhere to this.
5.6 Organisations must make reasonable adjustments for individuals where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. Organisations should keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments should be kept under active review.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.  Reasonable adjustments can be recorded within our complaints CRM system.
5.7 Organisations should not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless there are valid reasons to do so. Organisations should clearly set out these reasons, and they should align with the approach to exclusions set out in section 2 of the Code.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
5.8 A full record should be kept of the complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This should include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the individual, correspondence with other parties, and any relevant supporting documentation such as reports. This should be retained in line with the organisation's data retention policies.	Yes	A new CRM process has been implemented LCC wide to provide facility for one central record of a complaint.
5.9 Organisations should have systems in place to ensure that a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Organisations should ensure that appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process without the need for escalation to stage 2 or the Ombudsman.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
5.10 Organisations should have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from individuals and/or their representatives. Organisations should be able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and should keep an individual's restrictions under regular review.	Yes	LCC policy covers guidance on restricting a person's access to the council's complaints procedure. The council will notify complainants deemed unreasonably persistent of the action it proposes.



Code section	Do we follow the Code:  Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
5.11 Any restrictions placed on an individual's contact due to unacceptable behaviour should be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
<b>6: Complaints stages (Stage 1)</b>	<b>Required Action:</b>	<b>Process stage 1 complaints in line with timescales and processes set out in the Code.</b>
6.1 Organisations should have processes in place to consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further consideration. Organisations should consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the individual is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the individual.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
6.2 Complaints should be acknowledged and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure within five working days of the complaint being received.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view. Our CRM system uses the identified SLA to auto-generates regular reminder notifications to relevant staff.  In 2024-25 LCC achieved this target in 64% of cases we recognise further work is required to increase performance in this area.
6.3 Organisations should provide a full response to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view. Our CRM system uses the identified SLA to auto-generates regular reminder notifications to relevant staff.  In 2024-25 LCC achieved this target in 65% of cases we recognise further work is required to increase performance in this area
6.4 Organisations should decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform individuals of the expected timescale for response. Any extension should be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) should be clearly explained to the individual.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.

Code section	Do we follow the Code:  Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
6.5 When an organisation informs an individual about an extension to these timescales, they should be provided with the details of the relevant Ombudsman.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view. Also included in template letters.
6.6 A complaint response should be provided to the individual when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. <b>Outstanding actions should still be tracked and actioned promptly, with appropriate updates provided to the individual.</b>	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view. Follow up to outstanding actions and their completion can be captured against a complaint case within our CRM.
6.7 Organisations should address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate. Organisations should be clear which aspects of the complaint they are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view. Templated letters take complaint responders through the requirements for a response.
6.8 At the conclusion of stage 1 organisations should provide details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view. This is included in templated correspondence.
6.9 Where individuals raise additional complaints during stage 1, these should be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related, and the stage 1 response has not been provided. Where the stage 1 response has been provided, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being considered, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues should be logged as a new complaint.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
6.10 Organisations should have systems in place to ensure that a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Individuals should not have to escalate a complaint in order to get an appropriate remedy.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.

Code section	Do we follow the Code:  Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
<b>6: Complaints stages (Stage 2)</b>	<b>Required Action:</b>	<b>To process stage 2 complaints in line with timescales and processes set out in the Code.</b>
6.11 If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the individual's satisfaction at stage 1, it should be progressed to stage 2 of the organisation's procedure. Stage 2 is the organisation's final response.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
6.12 Requests for stage 2 should be acknowledged and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within five working days of the escalation request being received. Within the acknowledgement, organisations should set out their understanding of any outstanding issues and the outcomes the individual is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the individual should be asked for clarification.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view. All such requests are recorded by Customer Services and then allocated to an appropriate Chief Officer to respond to.  In 2024-25 LCC achieved this target in 33% of cases we recognise further work is required to increase performance in this area, although our CRM now auto-generates regular SLA reminder notifications.
6.13 Individuals should not be required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration. Organisations should make reasonable efforts to understand why an individual remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
6.14 The person considering the complaint at stage 2 should not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.	Yes	The review is undertaken by a Chief Officer (or their delegated senior officer) which is not the subject of the complaint.

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6.15 Organisations should issue a final response to the stage 2 within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view. Our CRM auto-generates regular SLA reminder notifications.  In 2024-25 LCC achieved this target in 35% of cases we recognise further work is required to increase performance in this area.
6.16 Organisations should decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform individuals of the expected timescale for response. Any extension should be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) should be clearly explained to the individual.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
6.17 When an organisation informs an individual about an extension to these timescales they should be provided with the details of the relevant Ombudsman.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view. Also included in template letters.

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6.18 Organisations should confirm the following in writing to the individual at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language: a. the complaint stage; b. the organisation's understanding of the complaint; c. the decision on the complaint; d. the reasons for any decisions made; e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right; f. details of any outstanding actions; and g. details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman if the individual remains dissatisfied.	Yes	LCC policy, guidance, training and templated letters support this.
6.19 Stage 2 should be the organisation's final response and should involve all suitable staff members needed to issue such a response.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
6.20 A process with more than two stages will make the complaint process unduly long and delay access to the relevant Ombudsman. A process with a single stage means the organisation may lack the ability to check its response before an individual comes to the Ombudsman.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
6.21 Where an organisation's complaint response is handled by a third party (e.g. a contractor) or independent adjudicator at any stage, it should form part of the two stage complaints process set out in this Code. Individuals should not be expected to go through two complaints processes.	Yes	The council will in most cases manage and operate its own complaint procedures, however, if a third party is involved as part of the investigation process, it would still comply with the council's policy and procedures and adhere to all timelines.
6.22 Organisations are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code.	Yes	As 6.21

<b>Code section</b>	<b>Do we follow the Code:  Yes/No</b>	<b>Explanations and Commentary</b>
<b>7: Putting things right</b>	<b>Required Action:</b>	<b>When something has gone wrong we take action to put things right.</b>
7.1 Where something has gone wrong an organisation should acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right. These can include: > Apologising; > Acknowledging where things have gone wrong; > Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons; > Taking action if there has been delay; > Reconsidering or changing a decision; > Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum; > Providing a financial remedy; > Changing policies, procedures or practices.	Yes	LCC policy, guidance, training and templated letters support this.
7.2 Any remedy offered should reflect the impact on the individual as a result of any fault identified.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
7.3 The remedy offer should clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the individual where appropriate. Any remedy proposed should be followed through to completion.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
7.4 If a proposed remedy cannot be delivered, the individual should be informed of the reasons for this, provided with details of any alternative remedy and reminded of their right to complain to the Ombudsman,	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
7.5 Organisations should take account of the good practice guides issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
<b>8: Performance reporting and self-assessment</b>	<b>Required Action:</b>	<b>To produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge which includes a self-assessment against the Code.</b>

Code section	Do we follow the Code:  Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
<p>8.1 Organisations should produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. an annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure its complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements.</li> <li>b. a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the organisation's complaint handling performance. This should also include a summary of the types of complaints the organisation has refused to accept;</li> <li>c. any findings of non-compliance with this Code;</li> <li>d. the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints.</li> <li>e. the annual letter about the organisation's performance from the Ombudsman; and</li> <li>f. any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the organisation.</li> </ul>	No	In 2025 the Council has produced its first annual report for areas within scope of the LGSCO. The annual report covers some required elements. The development of the Granicus CRM system will support better compliance by April 2026.
8.2 The annual complaints performance and service improvement report should be reported through the organisation's governance arrangements and published on the section of its website relating to complaints. The response to the report from the relevant governance arrangement should be published alongside this.	Yes	The annual complaints performance and service improvement plan will be reported at September 2025 Cabinet and published on the Council's website alongside the required response to the report from our 'governing body'.
8.3 Organisations should also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.	Yes	This will be undertaken as required. The Council will be particularly mindful of this as Local Government Reorganisation progresses.
<b>9: Scrutiny &amp; Oversight</b>	<b>Required Action:</b>	<b>We have appropriate senior leadership and governance oversight of the complaints process and performance.</b>

Code section	Do we follow the Code:  Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
9.1 Organisations should look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.  Random sampling of quality assurance checks are performed to identify good practice, key learning points, implement corrective measures, and improve services. This work is led by the Chief Officer responsible for Customer Services, and reports will be made available to the Senior Leadership Team and Member responsible for complaints.
9.2 A positive complaint handling culture is important to the effectiveness with which organisations resolve disputes. Organisations should use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.
9.3 Accountability and transparency are also integral to a positive organisational culture. Organisations should report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as citizens' panels, staff and relevant committees.	No	As part of the quarterly meeting with senior representatives, a review of complaints and lessons learnt is completed. This information is shared with the Member with Responsibility for Complaints. Further work is required to evidence wider transparency to local residents / other stakeholders.
9.4 The organisation should appoint a suitably senior person to oversee its complaint handling performance. This person should assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.	Yes	This responsibility has been assigned to senior staff responsible for Customer Services.  Plans are underway to create a post solely dedicated to complaints monitoring, reporting and training. This support post will be under the oversight of the Customer Services management.



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9.5 In addition to this, organisations should assign lead responsibility for complaints in governance arrangements to support a positive complaint handling culture. We refer to this as the 'Member Responsible for Complaints' (the Member). This role could be carried out by an individual or committee depending on the governance arrangements in place.	Yes	The Council has an appointed Member Responsible for Complaints who sits on the Council's Cabinet.
9.6 The Member should receive regular information on complaints that provides insight on the organisation's complaint handling performance. The Member should have access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.	Yes	A quarterly report is issued to The Member and discussed in the quarterly Complaints panel.
9.7 As a minimum, the Member should receive: a. regular updates on the volume, categories, and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance b. regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling; and c. the annual complaints performance and service improvement report.	Yes	As above. The Member will also receive the complaints performance and service improvement report.
9.8 Organisations should have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees or third parties that reflects the need to: > have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments. > take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others; and > act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body.	Yes	LCC policy and guidance has adopted this approach/view.  Our organisation works collaboratively with other services.  One of our core values is 'being accountable', as so we take responsibility for failures as a collective, rather than promoting a blame culture. We are committed to acting within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set out by the Ombudsman.