

# Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

19 July 2023

*By email*

Ms Josephs  
Chief Executive  
Sheffield City Council

Dear Ms Josephs

## **Annual Review letter 2022-23**

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 2023. The information offers valuable insight about your organisation's approach to complaints. As always, I would encourage you to consider it as part of your corporate governance processes. 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.

The end of the reporting year, saw the retirement of Michael King, drawing his tenure as Local Government Ombudsman to a close. I was delighted to be appointed to the role of Interim Ombudsman in April and look forward to working with you and colleagues across the local government sector in the coming months. I will be building on the strong foundations already in place and will continue to focus on promoting improvement through our work.

## **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.

Over the past two years, we have reviewed our processes to ensure we do the most we can with the resources we have. One outcome is that we are more selective about the complaints we look at in detail, prioritising where it is in the public interest to investigate. While providing a more sustainable way for us to work, it has meant that changes in uphold rates this year are not solely down to the nature of the cases coming to us. We are less likely to carry out investigations on 'borderline' issues, so we are naturally finding a higher proportion of fault overall.

Our average uphold rate for all investigations has increased this year and you may find that your organisation's uphold rate is higher than previous years. This means that comparing uphold rates with previous years carries a note of caution. Therefore, I recommend comparing this statistic with

that of similar organisations, rather than previous years, to better understand your organisation's performance.

**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 were satisfied 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 26 July 2023. 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**

During the year, we [issued a report](#) about your Council's failure to meet a young person's care and support needs following problems with their care provider. Our investigation found the Council delayed completing a safeguarding investigation into concerns about the care provision, and victim blamed the young person in the outcome of the safeguarding investigation. The Council produced an action plan, which it failed to follow, further compounding the distress to the young person and their mother and allowing the poor service to continue for many years. Because of the problems with care services, and lack of appropriate support, the young person could not attend college and suffered from anxiety and depression. The Council failed to properly review the Education, Health and Care plan between 2016 and 2021 and did not provide education between September 2017 and 2021, as it failed to consider alternative provision.

The Council's significant and prolonged errors meant the young person did not get the right support when transitioning to adulthood, delaying their progression in education and work life. The young person has now returned to studying, which could have been achieved much sooner, with the right support.

It is to the Council's credit that during our investigation it promptly accepted the fault and, since the report, has been keen to improve its services. We recommended the Council refund an overpayment the young person made towards their care and support, pay the young person and their mother a sum to acknowledge their distress, pay the young person a sum for every month they were out of education, and consider its discretion to provide educational support to them beyond the age of 25, given its earlier failings.

The Council demonstrated its ability to learn from this complaint and made a range of improvements to its services for young people transitioning to adulthood. A report made to the Council's strategy and resources committee said it was clear that support was required earlier in a young person's journey to adulthood to shift the approach from crisis intervention, triggered by

insufficient support and planning, to longer-term, person-centred support and planning for adulthood. A new transitions team of seven social workers and care managers have been recruited to help young people from the age of 18 to 25 develop their independence and autonomy. They will also work with young people who have reached 25 and may need further support. A separate 'preparation for adulthood' team will be working with under-18s. I commend the Council for taking this action and hope it results in improved services for young people in its area.

I was pleased to see that, after raising concerns last year about your Council's lack of timely responses to our enquiries, there has been a significant improvement in this area. Following my letter last year, all the responses we received were on time. Thank you.

### **Supporting complaint and service improvement**

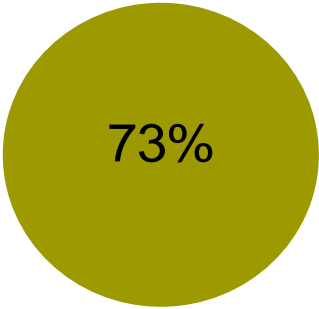
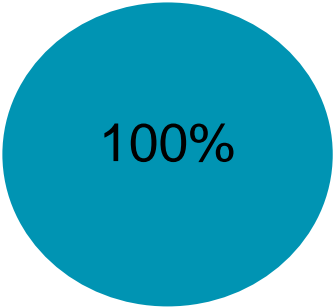
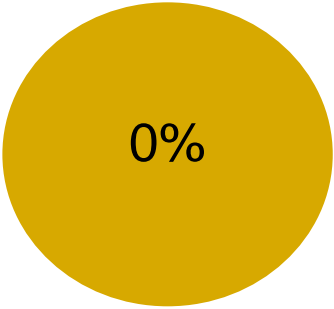
I know that complaints offer organisations a rich source of intelligence and insight that has the potential to be transformational. These insights can indicate a problem with a specific area of service delivery or, more broadly, provide a perspective on an organisation's culture and ability to learn. To realise the potential complaints have to support service improvements, organisations need to have the fundamentals of complaint handling in place. To support you to do so, we have continued our work with the Housing Ombudsman Service to develop a joint complaint handling code that will provide a standard for organisations to work to. We will consult on the code and its implications prior to launch and will be in touch with further details.

In addition, our successful training programme includes practical interactive workshops that help participants develop their complaint handling skills. We can also offer tailored support and bespoke training to target specific issues your organisation might have identified. We delivered 105 online workshops during the year, reaching more than 1350 people. To find out more visit [www.lgo.org.uk/training](http://www.lgo.org.uk/training) or get in touch at [training@lgo.org.uk](mailto:training@lgo.org.uk).

Yours sincerely,



Paul Najsarek  
Interim Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman  
Interim Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

Complaints upheld		
	<p><b>73%</b> of complaints we investigated were upheld.</p> <p>This compares to an average of <b>77%</b> in similar organisations.</p>	<p><b>19</b> upheld decisions</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of <b>26</b> investigations for the period between 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023</p>
Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations		
	<p>In <b>100%</b> of cases we were satisfied the organisation had successfully implemented our recommendations.</p> <p>This compares to an average of <b>99%</b> in similar organisations.</p>	<p>Statistics are based on a total of <b>18</b> compliance outcomes for the period between 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>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.</li></ul>		
Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation		
	<p>In <b>0%</b> of upheld cases we found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.</p> <p>This compares to an average of <b>10%</b> in similar organisations.</p>	<p><b>0</b> satisfactory remedy decisions</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of <b>19</b> upheld decisions for the period between 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023</p>