



Cabinet

Item

5 September 2018

Report of	Monitoring Officer	Author	Andrew Weavers
Title	Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman – Annual Review Letter 2017/2018		282213
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman produces an annual report on the number of complaints it has received regarding each local authority. This report provides details of Colchester Borough Council's Annual Review Letter for 2017/2018.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To note the contents of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter for 2017/2018.

3. Reasons for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 To inform the Cabinet of the contents of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter relating to Colchester Borough Council for 2017/2018.

3. Alternative Options

- 3.1 No alternative options are presented.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman issues an Annual Review Letter to each local authority. The Annual Review Letter for Colchester for the year ending 31 March 2018 is attached to this report at Appendix 1.
- 4.3 It is worth noting that anyone can choose to make a complaint to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman. Accordingly, the number of complaints is not an indicator of performance or level of customer service. In most instances there was no case to answer. The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman will normally insist that the Council has the opportunity to resolve the complaint locally through its own complaints procedure before commencing its own investigation.
- 4.4 The Governance and Audit Committee has an overview of Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman investigations and the contents of the Annual Review will be reported to the Committee in due course.

5. Key Headlines

- 5.1 There were no findings of maladministration against the Council and no formal reports were issued.

5.2 In 2017/2018 the Council received 266,882 direct customer contacts by telephone, email and in person in the customer services area. However this figure does not include ad hoc customer contacts across the organisation. The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman in the same period received 21 complaints and enquires in relation to how the Council had dealt with its customers. This is an increase from the previous year's figure of 16.

5.3 The following table provides a comparison of complaints and enquires received.

Year	Benefits and Tax	Corporate and other services	Environment Services	Highways and Transport	Housing	Planning and Development	Other	Total
2015/16	3	2	3	2	6	8	0	25
2016/17	2	0	2	0	5	7	0	16
2017/18	1	1	5	2	8	3	1	21

5.4 The following table provides a comparison of decisions made.

Year	Incomplete or Invalid	Advice Given	Referred back for Local Resolution	Closed after Initial Enquiries	Detailed Investigations			Total
					Not Upheld	Upheld	Uphold Rate	
2015/16	2	3	12	4	1	1	50%	23
2016/17	0	1	4	5	2	1	33%	13
2017/18	1	2	8	5	4	1	20%	21

As can be seen from the table above, 5 detailed investigations were undertaken. Of which:

- 4 not upheld,
- 1 upheld.

(The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman decided that the Council had been at fault in how it acted and the fault may or may not have caused injustice to the complainant, or where the Council accepted that it needed to remedy the complaint before the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman made a finding on fault. If the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman decided there was fault and it caused an injustice to the complainant, usually it will have recommended the Council take some action to address it).

5.5 The upheld case was in relation to a complaint regarding the processing of a rehousing request by Colchester Borough Homes. The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman upheld the complaint because there was some fault in Colchester Borough Homes' record keeping in this case. However the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman determined that this did not affect the outcome of the applicant's review and appeal so did not cause any injustice.

6. Financial Considerations

6.1 No direct implications other than mentioned in this report.

7. Strategic Plan References

- 7.1 The lessons learnt from complaints to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman link in with our Strategic Plan aims to be efficient accessible, customer focused and always looking to improve. Having an effective complaints process helps us to achieve the Strategic Plan's themes of a vibrant, prosperous, thriving and welcoming Borough.

8. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications

- 8.1 No direct implications.

9. Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 Details of the Annual Review Letter are published on the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's website and will also be published on the Council's website.

10. Consultation, Community Safety, Health and Safety and Risk Management Implications

- 10.1 No direct implications.

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

18 July 2018

By email

Adrian Pritchard
Chief Executive
Colchester Borough Council

Dear Adrian Pritchard,

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: Colchester Borough 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	1	1	0	5	2	8	3	1	21

Decisions made

Decisions made				Detailed Investigations			
Incomplete or Invalid	Advice Given	Referred back for Local Resolution	Closed After Initial Enquiries	Not Upheld	Upheld	Uphold Rate	Total
1	2	8	5	4	1	20%	21

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