

18 June 2015

By email

Mr Stuart Sugarman
Chief Executive
Rossendale Borough Council

Dear Mr Sugarman

Annual Review Letter 2015

I am writing with our annual summary of statistics on the complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) about your authority for the year ended 31 March 2015. This year's statistics can be found in the table attached.

The data we have provided shows the complaints and enquiries we have recorded, along with the decisions we have made. We know that these numbers will not necessarily match the complaints data that your authority holds. For example, our numbers include people who we signpost back to the council but who may never contact you. I hope that this information, set alongside the data sets you hold about local complaints, will help you to assess your authority's performance.

We recognise that the total number of complaints will not, by itself, give a clear picture of how well those complaints are being responded to. Over the coming year we will be gathering more comprehensive information about the way complaints are being remedied so that in the future our annual letter focuses less on the total numbers and more on the outcomes of those complaints.

Supporting local scrutiny

One of the purposes of the annual letter to councils is to help ensure that learning from complaints informs scrutiny at the local level. Supporting local scrutiny is one of our key business plan objectives for this year and we will continue to work with elected members in all councils to help them understand how they can contribute to the complaints process.

We have recently worked in partnership with the Local Government Association to produce a workbook for councillors which explains how they can support local people with their complaints and identifies opportunities for using complaints data as part of their scrutiny tool kit. This can be found [here](#) and I would be grateful if you could encourage your elected members to make use of this helpful resource.

Last year we established a new Councillors Forum. This group, which meets three times a year, brings together councillors from across the political spectrum and from all types of local authorities. The aims of the Forum are to help us to better understand the needs of councillors when scrutinising local services and for members to act as champions for learning from complaints in their scrutiny roles. I value this direct engagement with elected members and believe it will further ensure LGO investigations have wider public value.

Encouraging effective local complaints handling

In November 2014, in partnership with the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman and Healthwatch England, we published *'My Expectations'* a service standards framework document describing what good outcomes for people look like if complaints are handled well. Following extensive research with users of services, front line complaints handlers and other stakeholders, we have been able to articulate more clearly what people need and want when they raise a complaint.

This framework has been adopted by the Care Quality Commission and will be used as part of their inspection regime for both health and social care. Whilst they were written with those two sectors in mind, the principles of *'My Expectations'* are of relevance to all aspects of local authority complaints. We have shared them with link officers at a series of seminars earlier this year and would encourage chief executives and councillors to review their authority's approach to complaints against this user-led vision. A copy of the report can be found [here](#).

Future developments at LGO

My recent annual letters have highlighted the significant levels of change we have experienced at LGO over the last few years. Following the recent general election I expect further change.

Most significantly, the government published a review of public sector ombudsmen in March of this year. A copy of that report can be found [here](#). That review, along with a related consultation document, has proposed that a single ombudsman scheme should be created for all public services in England mirroring the position in the other nations of the United Kingdom. We are supportive of this proposal on the basis that it would provide the public with clearer routes to redress in an increasingly complex public service landscape. We will advise that such a scheme should recognise the unique roles and accountabilities of local authorities and should maintain the expertise and understanding of local government that exists at LGO. We will continue to work with government as they bring forward further proposals and would encourage local government to take a keen and active interest in this important area of reform in support of strong local accountability.

The Government has also recently consulted on a proposal to extend the jurisdiction of the LGO to some town and parish councils. We currently await the outcome of the consultation but we are pleased that the Government has recognised that there are some aspects of local service delivery that do not currently offer the public access to an independent ombudsman. We hope that these proposals will be the start of a wider debate about how we can all work together to ensure clear access to redress in an increasingly varied and complex system of local service delivery.

Yours sincerely



Dr Jane Martin
Local Government Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

Local authority report – Rossendale Borough Council

For the period ending – 31/03/2015

For further information on interpretation of statistics click on this link to go to <http://www.lgo.org.uk/publications/annual-report/note-interpretation-statistics/>

Complaints and enquiries received

Local Authority	Adult Care Services	Benefits and tax	Corporate and other services	Education and children's services	Environmental services and public protection	Highways and transport	Housing	Planning and development	Total
Rossendale BC	1	4	2	0	7	1	1	9	25

Decisions made

Local Authority	Detailed investigations carried out		Advice given	Closed after initial enquiries	Incomplete/Invalid	Referred back for local resolution	Total
	Upheld	Not Upheld					
Rossendale BC	0	2	0	5	1	13	21

Rossendale BC
Complaints received in period (Apr 2014 - Mar 2015)

	Ref	Authority	Category	Received Date
1	14001397	Rossendale BC	Benefits & Tax	25/Apr/2014
2	14002246	Rossendale BC	Benefits & Tax	09/May/2014
3	14002207	Rossendale BC	Housing	09/May/2014
4	14003330	Rossendale BC	Planning & Development	28/May/2014
5	14003498	Rossendale BC	Planning & Development	30/May/2014
6	14004962	Rossendale BC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	25/Jun/2014
7	14004961	Rossendale BC	Planning & Development	25/Jun/2014
8	14006127	Rossendale BC	Planning & Development	14/Jul/2014
9	14006493	Rossendale BC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	18/Jul/2014
10	14011205	Rossendale BC	Highways & Transport	06/Oct/2014
11	14011519	Rossendale BC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	13/Oct/2014
12	14011830	Rossendale BC	Corporate & Other Services	16/Oct/2014
13	14011942	Rossendale BC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	17/Oct/2014
14	14012042	Rossendale BC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	20/Oct/2014
15	14012345	Rossendale BC	Adult Care Services	24/Oct/2014
16	14003694	Rossendale BC	Planning & Development	24/Oct/2014
17	14013014	Rossendale BC	Benefits & Tax	06/Nov/2014
18	14013525	Rossendale BC	Corporate & Other Services	13/Nov/2014
19	14014173	Rossendale BC	Benefits & Tax	01/Dec/2014
20	14014641	Rossendale BC	Planning & Development	04/Dec/2014
21	14012850	Rossendale BC	Planning & Development	08/Jan/2015
22	14016142	Rossendale BC	Planning & Development	12/Jan/2015
23	14018557	Rossendale BC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	23/Feb/2015
24	14019820	Rossendale BC	Planning & Development	16/Mar/2015
25	14021019	Rossendale BC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	31/Mar/2015

Rossendale BC
Decisions made in period (Apr 2014 - Mar 2015)

	Ref	Authority	Category	Decision date	Decision
1	13020740	Rossendale BC	Corporate & Other Services	08/Apr/2014	Closed after initial enquiries
2	14001397	Rossendale BC	Benefits & Tax	25/Apr/2014	Incomplete/Invalid
3	14002207	Rossendale BC	Housing	09/May/2014	Referred back for local resolution
4	14002246	Rossendale BC	Benefits & Tax	09/May/2014	Referred back for local resolution
5	14003330	Rossendale BC	Planning & Development	28/May/2014	Referred back for local resolution
6	14004961	Rossendale BC	Planning & Development	26/Jun/2014	Referred back for local resolution
7	14004962	Rossendale BC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	26/Jun/2014	Referred back for local resolution
8	14006493	Rossendale BC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	18/Jul/2014	Referred back for local resolution
9	14011205	Rossendale BC	Highways & Transport	06/Oct/2014	Referred back for local resolution
10	14011830	Rossendale BC	Corporate & Other Services	16/Oct/2014	Referred back for local resolution
11	14011942	Rossendale BC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	17/Oct/2014	Referred back for local resolution
12	14006127	Rossendale BC	Planning & Development	20/Oct/2014	Not Upheld
13	14012345	Rossendale BC	Adult Care Services	24/Oct/2014	Referred back for local resolution
14	14011519	Rossendale BC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	28/Oct/2014	Closed after initial enquiries
15	14003498	Rossendale BC	Planning & Development	31/Oct/2014	Not Upheld
16	14013014	Rossendale BC	Benefits & Tax	06/Nov/2014	Referred back for local resolution
17	14003694	Rossendale BC	Planning & Development	07/Nov/2014	Closed after initial enquiries
18	14012042	Rossendale BC	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	21/Nov/2014	Closed after initial enquiries
19	14013525	Rossendale BC	Corporate & Other Services	24/Nov/2014	Closed after initial enquiries
20	14014173	Rossendale BC	Benefits & Tax	01/Dec/2014	Referred back for local resolution
21	14014641	Rossendale BC	Planning & Development	10/Dec/2014	Referred back for local resolution