

17 July 2024

By email

Ms Plum
Chief Executive
Westmorland and Furness Council

Dear Ms Plum

Annual Review letter 2023-24

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 2024. The information offers valuable insight about your organisation's approach to complaints, and I know you will 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 ensure effective ownership and oversight of complaint outcomes, which offer valuable opportunities to learn and improve. In addition, this year, we have encouraged Monitoring Officers to register to receive the letter directly, supporting their role to report the decisions we uphold to their council.

There are a number of cases I am due to report about authorities abolished in April 2023 and I have included separate statistics for Cumbria County Council, Barrow-in-Furness Borough Council and South Lakeland District Council in this letter. There is no data to report for Eden District Council.

For most of the reporting year, Paul Najsarek steered the organisation during his tenure as interim Ombudsman, and I was delighted to take up the role of Ombudsman in February 2024. I look forward to working with you and colleagues across the local government sector to ensure we continue to harness the value of individual complaints and drive and promote systemic change and improvement across the local government landscape.

While I know this ambition will align with your own, I am aware of the difficult financial circumstances and service demands that make continuous improvement a challenging focus for the sector. However, we will continue to hold organisations to account through our investigations and recommend proportionate actions to remedy injustice. Despite the challenges, I have great confidence that you recognise the valuable contribution and insight complaints, and their swift resolution, offer to improve services for the public.

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. This year, we also provide the number of upheld complaints per 100,000 population.

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 agreed with how it offered to put things right. We encourage the early resolution of complaints and give credit to 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 24 July 2024. 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 public report](#) about former authority Cumbria County Council's failure to promptly investigate complaints at stage two of the children's statutory complaints procedure. We were aware of the fault from a separate investigation and used our powers to investigate the impact on others who were affected but who had not complained to us. Our investigation found six complainants (living within the new Westmorland & Furness Council area) who had waited, or were still waiting, for their complaints to be investigated after the statutory timescale of 65 days had passed. The delays caused frustration and distress and, in some cases, meant complaints remained unresolved.

To remedy the injustice caused, the Council agreed to apologise and pay a financial remedy to those complainants who had not already approached us in recognition of the frustration and distress caused by the delay. It also implemented a service improvement plan. I welcome your Council's positive response to the report and the steps it has taken to learn from the findings.

Supporting complaint and service improvement

In February, following a period of consultation, we launched the [Complaint Handling Code](#) for councils, setting out a clear process for responding to complaints effectively and fairly. It is aligned with the Code issued to housing authorities and landlords by the Housing Ombudsman Service and we encourage you to adopt the Code without undue delay. Twenty councils have volunteered to take part in an implementation pilot over the next two years that will develop further guidance and best practice.

The Code is issued to councils under our powers to provide guidance about good administrative practice. We expect councils to carefully consider the Code when developing policies and procedures and will begin considering it as part of our processes from April 2026 at the earliest.

The Code is considered good practice for all organisations we investigate (except where there are statutory complaint handling processes in place), and we may decide to issue it as guidance to other organisations in future.

Our successful complaint handling training programme continues to develop with new modules in Adult Social Care and Children's Services complaint handling available soon. All our courses include practical interactive workshops that help participants develop their complaint handling skills. We delivered 126 online workshops during the year, reaching more than 1,700 people. To find out more visit www.lgo.org.uk/training or get in touch at training@lgo.org.uk.

We were pleased to deliver three online complaint handling courses to your staff during the year. I welcome your Council's investment in good complaint handling training and trust the courses were useful to you.

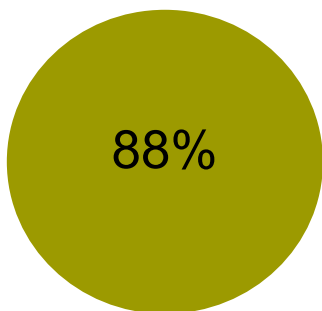
Returning to the theme of continuous improvement, we recognise the importance of reflecting on our own performance. With that in mind I encourage you to share your view of our organisation via this survey: <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/ombudsman/>. Your responses will help us to assess our impact and improve our offer to you. We want to gather a range of views and welcome multiple responses from organisations, so please do share the link with relevant colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amerdeep Somal', followed by a horizontal line.

Amerdeep Somal
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

Complaints upheld



88% of complaints we investigated were upheld.

This compares to an average of **79%** in similar organisations.

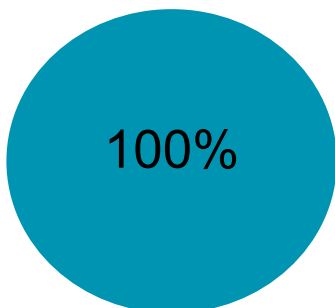
7
upheld decisions

This is 3.1 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents.

The average for authorities of this type is 4.6 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents.

Statistics are based on a total of **8** investigations for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations



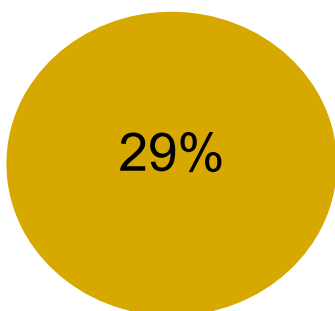
In **100%** of cases we were satisfied the organisation had successfully implemented our recommendations.

This compares to an average of **100%** in similar organisations.

Statistics are based on a total of **4** compliance outcomes for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

- 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.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation



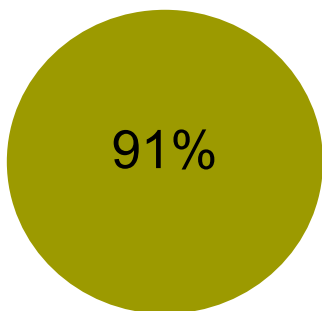
In **29%** of upheld cases we found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

This compares to an average of **13%** in similar organisations.

2
satisfactory remedy decisions

Statistics are based on a total of **7** upheld decisions for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

Complaints upheld

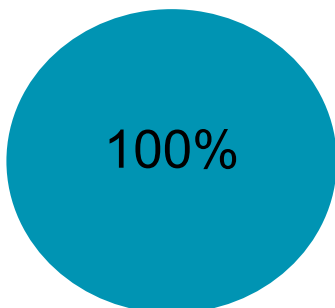


91% of complaints we investigated were upheld.

9 upheld decisions

Statistics are based on a total of 10 investigations for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations

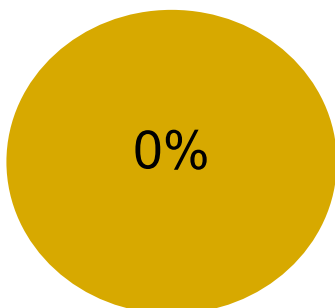


In 100% of cases we were satisfied the organisation had successfully implemented our recommendations.

Statistics are based on a total of 12 compliance outcomes for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

- 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.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation

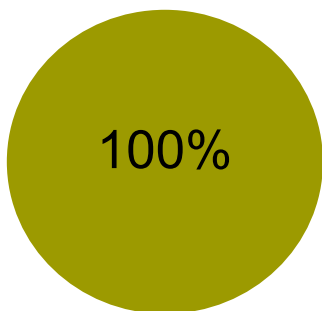


In 0% of upheld cases we found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

0 satisfactory remedy decisions

Statistics are based on a total of 9 upheld decisions for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

Complaints upheld

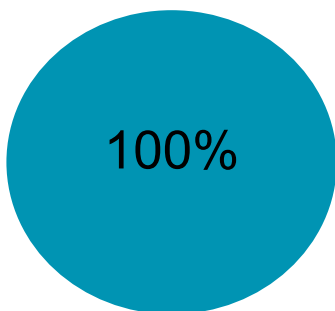


100% of complaints we investigated were upheld.

1
upheld decision

Statistics are based on a total of **1** investigation for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations

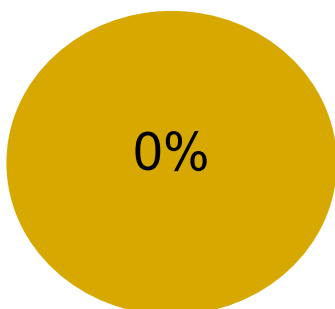


In **100%** of cases we were satisfied the organisation had successfully implemented our recommendations.

Statistics are based on a total of **1** compliance outcome for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

- 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.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation

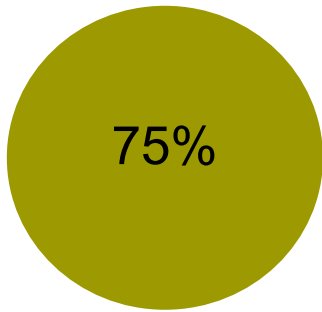


In **0%** of upheld cases we found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

0
satisfactory remedy decisions

Statistics are based on a total of **1** upheld decision for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

Complaints upheld

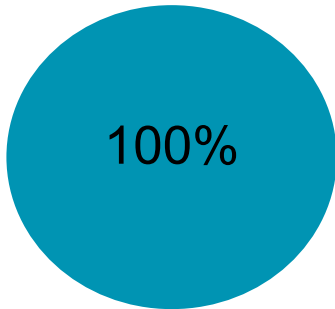


75% of complaints we investigated were upheld.

3
upheld decisions

Statistics are based on a total of **4** investigations for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations

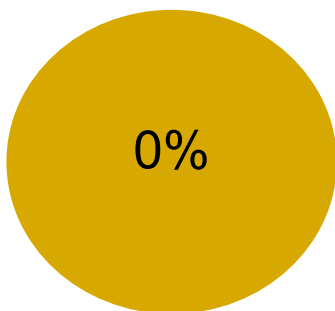


In **100%** of cases we were satisfied the organisation had successfully implemented our recommendations.

Statistics are based on a total of **3** compliance outcomes for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

- 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.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation



In **0%** of upheld cases we found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

0
satisfactory remedy decisions

Statistics are based on a total of **3** upheld decisions for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024