

17 July 2024

By email

Mr Heath
Chief Fire Officer
Tyne & Wear Fire & Rescue Service

Dear Mr Heath

Annual Review letter 2023-24

I am writing to outline the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) role in complaints about Fire and Rescue Authorities, the resources and support we have available, and to provide you with a summary of your organisation's complaint statistics for the year ending 31 March 2024. I encourage you to share the letter and accompanying data with colleagues with scrutiny and oversight responsibilities and to consider it as part of your corporate governance processes.

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 to ensure we continue to harness the value of individual complaints and drive and promote systemic change and improvement across the local public service 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.

Our role and resources to support your organisation

You will be aware that referral to the LGSCO is the final stage of the complaints process for Fire and Rescue Authorities; we have a useful [factsheet](#) aimed at helping those with a complaint.

In addition, we have a range of complaint handling [guidance](#) and support available on our website. This includes some [frequently asked questions](#) to help organisations to understand our role and powers. We also offer a highly regarded [online complaint handling training course](#), delivered by our experienced investigators. We were pleased to deliver three online complaint handling courses to your staff during the year. I welcome your authority's investment in good complaint handling training and trust the courses were useful to you.

To support your complaint handling and liaison with our office, our External Training & Relationship Lead, Cameron Black, is your first point of contact for general complaint handling queries and advice. You can contact him on c.black@lgo.org.uk or 0330 403 4184.

We value transparency and accountability and publish the [decisions](#) we make on our website. The decisions are easily searchable and demonstrate the approach we take to our investigations and offer an opportunity to learn from others.

Our annual review letters are another transparency tool and allow us to place on record our experience of organisations' complaint handling during the year. The 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, as well as where the organisation accepted fault before we investigated. We include the total number of investigations completed to provide important context for the statistic.

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.

From next year, we will publish a copy of your annual review letter on our website.

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. Twenty councils have volunteered to take part in an implementation pilot over the next two years that will develop further guidance and best 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 including Fire and Rescue Authorities, and we may decide to issue it as guidance to other organisations such as yours in future.

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,



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

Complaints upheld

The Ombudsman carried out no investigations in this period

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations

No recommendations were due for compliance in this period

Satisfactory remedies provided by the authority

The Ombudsman did not uphold any complaints in this period