

For local authority chief executives and LGO link officers, and other authorities within LGO jurisdiction

Local Government OMBUDSMAN

LGO Link

Issue number 5, May 2009

Dear Colleague

In this issue of LGO Link you will find information on developments that took effect from the beginning of April. It includes the new arrangements for dealing with complaints about health and adult social care, called '**Making Experiences Count**', and the LGO's '**Council First**' procedure, where the Ombudsmen will normally only accept complaints that have been through all stages of a council's complaints procedure.

We are keen for this newsletter to reach all council staff who may have an interest in the work of the Ombudsmen. The email list includes main link officers and chief executives so please forward on to other colleagues or provide us with their contact details and we will add them to the distribution list. Email [email address removed]

Council First

In our letters to all councils last month we set out the arrangements now in place for dealing with new complaints. The procedure, called 'Council First', builds on the improved handling of complaints by councils and requires complainants to go through all stages of their council's own complaints procedure before we will consider the complaint. There are some exceptions to this general requirement that were covered in the letters.

We will carefully monitor the impact of this change during the course of the year and would welcome your feedback (via your Assistant Ombudsman) on its implementation and any issues that arise.

Guidance revamped

We have reviewed our *Guidance on running a complaints system* to reflect Council First, and an updated version has been published and put on our website www.lgo.org.uk/publications/guidance-notes/. It also takes account of changes in the law and the use of technology that have affected the way people approach their councils to seek services, and the way those services are provided. The

guidance is specifically aimed at those charged with setting up or reviewing complaints systems within councils.

Changes to information for complainants

We have also updated our complaint leaflet and the LGO website to reflect Council First. This includes changes to the subject-specific fact sheets where the exceptions apply, as well as general information.

A new 0300 telephone number for the LGO Advice Team now features on the complaint leaflet and website. These 0300 numbers have been specifically designated for public sector and not-for-profit organisations, and are non-geographic. The new number for the LGO Advice Team is **0300 061 0614**. The 0845 602 1983 telephone number will operate alongside the 0300 number for a year. Our office telephone numbers have not changed.

Council information about the LGO

Councils should review their own information (printed and on-line) about complaints dealt with by us to ensure it reflects Council First. There should be just one contact point included in your information for the public which should be the LGO Advice Team.

Telephone: 0300 061 0614

Website: www.lgo.org.uk

Email: xxxxxx@xxx.xxx.xx

Fax: 024 7682 0001

Text: 'call back' to 0762 480 4299

Write to: Local Government Ombudsman, PO Box 4771, Coventry CV4 0EH

Please do not include details for individual offices.

Making Experiences Count and the LGO

The new arrangements for dealing with complaints across the NHS and adult social care started on 1 April, together with new regulations. They have been simplified to provide a general framework, allowing a more personalised approach to complaints handling.

We recognise that the transition from the existing scheme to the new scheme may cause initial difficulties and that the joined up arrangements between social services authorities and NHS bodies may take longer to forge in some areas than in others. We will take this into account when dealing with complaints during this early phase.

Further information on the LGO's approach including a set of FAQs is on our website at <http://www.lgo.org.uk/news/2009/may/lgo-outlines-approach-new-social-care-complaints-process/>

As part of our continuing support for councils in resolving complaints locally, we have extended our training in effective complaint handling to include a course on adult social care (see below for further details).

The Department of Health has published a guide to help health and social care staff called '*Listening, Responding, Improving: A guide to better customer care*'. To find out more visit: www.dh.gov.uk/mec

Training in complaint handling: an update

A course focused on adult social care is the latest addition to our range of courses for councils on complaint handling. **Effective Complaint Handling in Adult Social Care** is aimed at adult social care complaints officers, adult social care managers and other senior officers who investigate complaints at stage two of the statutory complaints procedures, and for independent investigators.

This is in addition to the existing courses:

- Good Complaint Handling – generic
- Effective Complaint Handling – generic
- Good Complaint Handling in Social Care
- Effective Complaint Handling in Social Care

Prices have increased slightly this year to £1,025 for up to 15 people and £1,735 for up to 30 people (based on council providing venue, lunch and refreshments).

For further details or to book a course go to our website at www.lgo.org.uk/la-training/ or email xxxxxxxx@xxx.xxx.xx

Provisional view improvements

Over the last few months we have been piloting a new-style provisional view letter to complainants in response to research published last year. The aim is to set out more clearly the reasons for our decisions and to help emphasise to complainants that it is an opportunity for them to comment before a final decision is made. We hope to introduce this style more widely across the organisation following further feedback from complainants and an analysis of complaints received about our service.

Statements of reasons

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 made provision for the LGO to publish statements of reasons relating to the individual decisions of an Ombudsman following the investigation of a complaint. The Ombudsmen plan to consult councils in the coming months about their proposal to use statements of reasons.

New website features

The new LGO website was launched in January. In case you haven't had a chance to explore the site yet, here are some of its new features:

- Complaint outcomes: More outcomes of past investigations (presented under broad subject area – such as housing, planning, education, social care etc) with a special search facility that can search for reports against a particular council, on a particular topic, and/or from a particular period. You can also search on a particular type of authority by selecting from the drop down list - for example just searching for reports against county councils. See www.lgo.org.uk/complaint-outcomes/
- An intelligent search facility that uses public sector standards and lists, so the person searching can use their own language and terminology to seek information. So, for example, a search for information on what to do with a 'dumped car' will automatically deliver content on 'abandoned vehicles'.
- More than 50 subject-based fact sheets explaining what we can and cannot do and providing examples of cases. Go to www.lgo.org.uk/publications/fact-sheets/
- Free subscriptions for updates based around subjects. Go to www.lgo.org.uk/Login.aspx
- Greater accessibility: the site is AA-rated for people with reading difficulties, and is enabled for Browsealoud users (speech-assisted browser support).

The site still includes:

- downloadable publications, such as special reports, guidance notes on good administrative practice, and annual reports and statistics;
- press releases on newly-published investigation reports;
- the LGOs' annual letters/reviews to councils on their performance;
- information on training courses on complaint handling for council staff;
- a guide for advisers; and
- information to help young people make complaints.

Visit the site at www.lgo.org.uk