

Local Government &
Social Care
OMBUDSMAN

24 July 2019

By email

Madeline Homer
Chief Executive
Thanet District Council

Dear Ms Homer

Annual Review letter 2019

I write to you with our annual summary of statistics on the complaints made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman about your authority for the year ending 31 March 2019. The enclosed tables present the number of complaints and enquiries received about your authority, the decisions we made, and your authority's compliance with recommendations during the period. I hope this information will prove helpful in assessing your authority's performance in handling complaints.

Complaint statistics

As ever, I would stress that the number of complaints, taken alone, is not necessarily a reliable indicator of an authority's performance. The volume of complaints should be considered alongside the uphold rate (how often we found fault when we investigated a complaint), and alongside statistics that indicate your authority's willingness to accept fault and put things right when they go wrong. We also provide a figure for the number of cases where your authority provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached us, and new statistics about your authority's compliance with recommendations we have made; both of which offer a more comprehensive and insightful view of your authority's approach to complaint handling.

The new statistics on compliance are the result of a series of changes we have made to how we make and monitor our recommendations to remedy the fault we find. Our recommendations are specific and often include a time-frame for completion, allowing us to follow up with authorities and seek evidence that recommendations have been implemented. These changes mean we can provide these new statistics about your authority's compliance with our recommendations.

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 your 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 our annual review of local government complaints. For the first time, this includes data on authorities' compliance with our recommendations. This collated data further aids the scrutiny of local services and we encourage you to share learning from the report, which highlights key cases we have investigated during the year.

New interactive data map

In recent years we have been taking steps to move away from a simplistic focus on complaint volumes and instead focus on the lessons learned and the wider improvements we can achieve through our recommendations to improve services for the many. Our ambition is outlined in our [corporate strategy 2018-21](#) and commits us to publishing the outcomes of our investigations and the occasions our recommendations result in improvements for local services.

The result of this work is the launch of an interactive map of council performance on our website later this month. [Your Council's Performance](#) shows annual performance data for all councils in England, with links to our published decision statements, public interest reports, annual letters and information about service improvements that have been agreed by each council. It also highlights those instances where your authority offered a suitable remedy to resolve a complaint before the matter came to us, and your authority's compliance with the recommendations we have made to remedy complaints.

The intention of this new tool is to place a focus on your authority's compliance with investigations. It is a useful snapshot of the service improvement recommendations your authority has agreed to. It also highlights the wider outcomes of our investigations to the public, advocacy and advice organisations, and others who have a role in holding local councils to account.

I hope you, and colleagues, find the map a useful addition to the data we publish. We are the first UK public sector ombudsman scheme to provide compliance data in such a way and believe the launch of this innovative work will lead to improved scrutiny of councils as well as providing increased recognition to the improvements councils have agreed to make following our interventions.

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 2018-19 we delivered 71 courses, training more than 900 people, including our first 'open courses' in Effective Complaint Handling for local authorities. Due to their popularity we are running six more open courses for local authorities in 2019-20, in York, Manchester, Coventry and London. To find out more visit www.lgo.org.uk/training.

Finally, I am conscious of the resource pressures that many authorities are working within, and which are often the context for the problems that we investigate. In response to that situation we have published a significant piece of research this year looking at some of the

common issues we are finding as a result of change and budget constraints. Called, Under Pressure, this report provides a contribution to the debate about how local government can navigate the unprecedented changes affecting the sector. I commend this to you, along with our revised guidance on Good Administrative Practice. I hope that together these are a timely reminder of the value of getting the basics right at a time of great change.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M King', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael King
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

Local Authority Report: Thanet District Council
For the Period Ending: 31/03/2019

For further information on how to interpret our statistics, please visit our [website](#)

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	6	6	0	10	2	5	12	0	41

Decisions made

Detailed Investigations				Total
Incomplete or Invalid	Advice Given	Referred back for Local Resolution	Closed After Initial Enquiries	Uphold Rate (%)
4	0	14	13	67
			8	43

Note: The uphold rate shows how often we found evidence of fault. It is expressed as a percentage of the total number of detailed investigations we completed.

Satisfactory remedy provided by authority

Upheld cases where the authority had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman	% of upheld cases
2	25

Note: These are the cases in which we decided that, while the authority did get things wrong, it offered a satisfactory way to resolve it before the complaint came to us.

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations

Complaints where compliance with the recommended remedy was recorded during the year*	Complaints where the authority complied with our recommendations on-time [‡]	Complaints where the authority complied with our recommendations late	Complaints where the authority has not complied with our recommendations	Number	Compliance rate**
2	2	0	0		
		100%	-		

Notes:

* This is the number of complaints where we have recorded a response (or failure to respond) to our recommendation for a remedy during the reporting year. This includes complaints that may have been decided in the preceding year but where the data for compliance falls within the current reporting year.

** The compliance rate is based on the number of complaints where the authority has provided evidence of their compliance with our recommendations to remedy a fault. This includes instances where an authority has accepted and implemented our recommendation but provided late evidence of that.

Reference	Authority	Category	Received
18000197	Thanet District Council	Benefits & Tax	05 Apr 2018
18000246	Thanet District Council	Benefits & Tax	06 Apr 2018
18000673	Thanet District Council	Highways & Transport	13 Apr 2018
18000855	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	17 Apr 2018
18000982	Thanet District Council	Benefits & Tax	19 Apr 2018
18001240	Thanet District Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	24 Apr 2018
17017488	Thanet District Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	18 May 2018
17019690	Thanet District Council	Housing	18 May 2018
17015269	Thanet District Council	Corporate & Other Services	25 May 2018
18004882	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	29 Jun 2018
18006221	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	20 Jul 2018
18007028	Thanet District Council	Corporate & Other Services	03 Aug 2018
18007910	Thanet District Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	20 Aug 2018
18006675	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	28 Aug 2018
18001708	Thanet District Council	Housing	04 Sep 2018
18008700	Thanet District Council	Corporate & Other Services	04 Sep 2018
18008730	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	05 Sep 2018
18009474	Thanet District Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	18 Sep 2018
18003870	Thanet District Council	Housing	25 Sep 2018
18010068	Thanet District Council	Benefits & Tax	28 Sep 2018
18011172	Thanet District Council	Highways & Transport	19 Oct 2018
18011649	Thanet District Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	27 Oct 2018
18012106	Thanet District Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	05 Nov 2018
18001270	Thanet District Council	Corporate & Other Services	23 Nov 2018
18013264	Thanet District Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	27 Nov 2018
18012024	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	05 Dec 2018
18010203	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	12 Dec 2018
18014407	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	18 Dec 2018
18014786	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	02 Jan 2019
18013535	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	09 Jan 2019

Reference	Authority	Category	Received
18015305	Thanet District Council	Housing	10 Jan 2019
18015439	Thanet District Council	Corporate & Other Services	14 Jan 2019
18015476	Thanet District Council	Benefits & Tax	14 Jan 2019
18016638	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	01 Feb 2019
18017180	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	11 Feb 2019
18017958	Thanet District Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	25 Feb 2019
18018164	Thanet District Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	27 Feb 2019
18018358	Thanet District Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	01 Mar 2019
18018827	Thanet District Council	Corporate & Other Services	11 Mar 2019
18018978	Thanet District Council	Benefits & Tax	12 Mar 2019
18019828	Thanet District Council	Housing	27 Mar 2019

Reference	Authority	Category	Decided	Decision	Decision Remedy	Service improvement recommendations
18000197	Thanet District Council	Benefits & Tax	05 Apr 2018	Premature Decision - advice given	Referred back for local resolution	
17019814	Thanet District Council	Benefits & Tax	18 Apr 2018	Other reason not to investigate	Closed after initial enquiries	
18000855	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	11 May 2018	Not warranted by alleged injustice	Closed after initial enquiries	
18000982	Thanet District Council	Benefits & Tax	22 May 2018	26(6)(a) tribunal Other	Closed after initial enquiries	
17015269	Thanet District Council	Corporate & Other Services	05 Jun 2018	Not warranted by alleged injustice	Closed after initial enquiries	
17018812	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	08 Jun 2018	mal & inj - no further action, BinJ already remedied	Upheld	
17018835	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	08 Jun 2018	mal & inj - no further action, BinJ already remedied	Upheld	
18000673	Thanet District Council	Highways & Transport	20 Jun 2018	At request of complainant	Not Upheld	
16008881	Thanet District Council	Highways & Transport	26 Jun 2018	no mal	Not Upheld	

Reference	Authoriti	Category	Decided	Decision	Decision	Remedy	Service improvement recommendations
18006221	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	20 Jul 2018	Premature Decision - advice given	Referred back for local resolution	Null	
18007028	Thanet District Council	Corporate & Other Services	03 Aug 2018	Premature Decision - advice given	Referred back for local resolution	Null	
18004882	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	07 Aug 2018	Not warranted by alleged mal/service failure	Closed after initial enquiries	Null	
18007910	Thanet District Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	20 Aug 2018	Premature Decision - advice given	Referred back for local resolution	Null	
18008700	Thanet District Council	Corporate & Other Services	04 Sep 2018	Insufficient information to proceed and PA advised	Incomplete/Invalid	Null	
17014087	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	12 Sep 2018	26B(2) not made in 12 months	Closed after initial enquiries	Null	
18000246	Thanet District Council	Benefits & Tax	17 Sep 2018	mal & inj	Upheld	Apology, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/ti me and trouble, Procedure or policy change/re view	By 21 December 2018, the Council has agreed to ask a senior manager to review the process of sending out multiple letters on the same date to the same claimant, with a view to ensuring covering letters become normal practice. In this way, the Council will hopefully be able to avoid a similar issue to that identified in this case in future.

Reference	Authoritl Category	Decided	Decision	Decision Remedy	Service improvement recommendations
17017488	Thanet District Council Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	01 Oct 2018	no mal	Not Upheld	Null
17013382	Thanet District Council Planning & Development	03 Oct 2018	mal no inj	Upheld	Null
18006675	Thanet District Council Planning & Development	09 Oct 2018	26(6)(b) appeal to Minister	Closed after initial enquiries	Null
18001240	Thanet District Council Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	15 Oct 2018	mal & inj	Upheld	Other Remedy
18011172	Thanet District Council Highways & Transport	19 Oct 2018	Insufficient information to proceed and PA advised	Incomplete/Invalid	Null
18011649	Thanet District Council Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	27 Oct 2018	Premature Decision - advice given	Referred back for local resolution	Null
17019690	Thanet District Council Housing	08 Nov 2018	mal & inj	Upheld	Apology, Training and guidance
18010068	Thanet District Council Benefits & Tax	16 Nov 2018	26B(2) not made in 12 months	Closed after initial enquiries	Null
18013264	Thanet District Council Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	27 Nov 2018	Premature Decision - advice given	Referred back for local resolution	Null
					Issue a guidance note to relevant staff about good communication between the homelessness and housing allocation departments to ensure no homelessness applications are missed.

Reference	Authori	Category	Decided	Decision	Decision	Remedy	Service improvement recommendations
18009474	Thanet District Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	03 Dec 2018	No worthwhile outcome achievable by further investigation	Not Upheld	Null	
18012024	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	05 Dec 2018	Premature Decision - advice given	Referred back for local resolution	Null	
18012106	Thanet District Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	21 Dec 2018	Not warranted by alleged mal/service failure	Closed after initial enquiries	Null	
18015305	Thanet District Council	Housing	10 Jan 2019	Premature Decision - advice given	Referred back for local resolution	Null	
18001270	Thanet District Council	Corporate & Other Services	15 Jan 2019	26(6)(a) tribunal ICO FOIA only	Closed after initial enquiries	Null	
18015476	Thanet District Council	Benefits & Tax	29 Jan 2019	Premature Decision - referred to BinJ	Referred back for local resolution	Null	
18010203	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	30 Jan 2019	No worthwhile outcome achievable by investigation	Closed after initial enquiries	Null	
18014786	Thanet District Council	Planning & Development	07 Feb 2019	Not warranted by alleged injustice	Closed after initial enquiries	Null	

Reference	Authorif Category	Decided	Decision	Decision	Remedy	Service improvement recommendations
18017180	Thanet District Council Planning & Development	11 Feb 2019	Premature Decision - advice given	Referred back for local resolution	Null	
18015439	Thanet District Council Corporate & Other Services	13 Feb 2019	Insufficient information to proceed and PA advised	Incomplete/Invalid	Null	
18017958	Thanet District Council Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	25 Feb 2019	Premature Decision - advice given	Referred back for local resolution	Null	
18001708	Thanet District Council Housing	27 Feb 2019	mal & inj	Upheld	New appeal/ review or reconsidered decision	
18018164	Thanet District Council Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	27 Feb 2019	Insufficient information to proceed and PA advised	Incomplete/Invalid	Null	
18018358	Thanet District Council Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	01 Mar 2019	Premature Decision - advice given	Referred back for local resolution	Null	
18018978	Thanet District Council Benefits & Tax	12 Mar 2019	Premature Decision - advice given	Referred back for local resolution	Null	
18018827	Thanet District Council Corporate & Other Services	15 Mar 2019	S27 not by member of the public	Closed after initial enquiries	Null	

Reference	Authorit Category	Decided	Decision	Decision Remedy	Service improvement recommendations	
18008730	Thanet District Council Planning & Development	20 Mar 2019	mal & inj	Upheld	Apology	I am pleased to see the complaint has prompted the Council to write a procedure, that may help in future in clarifying what the Council expects of its officers when they carry our listed building site visits. The Council has also agreed to share with its planning enforcement officers my final decision and the Ombudsman's Principles of Good Administrative Practice guidance.
18019828	Thanet District Council Housing	27 Mar 2019	Premature Decision - advice given	Referred back for local resolution	Null	

Reference	Authority	Category	Decided	Remedy	Remedy Target Date	Remedy Achieved Date	Satisfaction with Compliance
17010079	Thanet District Council	Benefits & Tax	17-Sep-18	Apology Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble Procedure or policy change/review	21-Dec-18	10-Jan-19	Remedy complete and satisfied
18009601	Thanet District Council	Housing	8-Nov-18	Apology Training and guidance	6-Dec-18	10-Dec-18	Remedy complete and satisfied