

ADULT SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS 2013

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For the first time the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) is publishing its complaints statistics for private social care providers and local authorities in a report issued today.

The report highlights the impact that people feel when services let them down. The individual stories published in this report remind us that behind the statistics are the real experiences of people who are relying upon care providers to deliver the services they need.

As England's social care ombudsman, the LGO receives complaints about a wide variety of issues across social care from the administration of blue badge schemes to safeguarding.

The LGO has seen a 130 per cent increase in adult social care complaints since it took on responsibility for registered private care providers in 2009; making it the fastest growing area of the LGO's work, with the highest uphold rate for all areas of complaints. In the last year, there has been a 14 per cent increase in the number of complaints and enquiries received about adult social care.

In 2013 the LGO received 2,456 complaints and enquiries about adult social care. This is a small number in the context of 1.3 million users of adult social care in England. Forty per cent of the total number of complaints the LGO receives relate to 25 council areas.

Dr Jane Martin, Local Government Ombudsman, said:

“Our complaints data suggests there is more to do to provide

assurance about complaints handling. “Over the last few years there have been a number of reviews that have looked at healthcare complaints. We must not wait for a crisis in adult care to examine more closely the way social care commissioners and providers deal with complaints.

I hope that by publishing these statistics, I will encourage care providers to scrutinise their approach to ensure that the public are given a complaints process that is easy to access, effective and accountable. I also hope that by raising these issues more people will be aware of how to raise concerns and seek redress, and feel reassured that there is an independent ombudsman that they can turn to when providers fail to resolve complaints.”

In setting out a vision for future social care complaints, the LGO also calls for a set of common standards for complaint handling, with mandated data returns to CQC, clear signposting obligations, and the right to advocacy support when complaining about care services.

Anna Bradley, Chair of consumer champion Healthwatch England, said:

“It may seem counter intuitive but we should look on the increasing number of complaints as a good thing. It means that more people feel able to make their voices heard when the standard of care they receive from their carer or care home isn’t up to scratch.

Providers of social care services, whether they be local authorities or private companies, need to learn to see complaints as a vital source of information to help them improve and ensure others don’t have to suffer the same poor standards in future.

The Local Government Ombudsman is absolutely right to publish statistics for public and private providers and challenge them all to get their complaints handling processes right first

time, so they can improve services without service users needing to reach for the Ombudsman.

We also need to make complaining easier for people. In particular, there needs to be an independent, unified and properly funded health and social care complaints advocacy service to provide practical support for those who don't have the confidence or determination to make their voices heard. And there needs to be some rationalisation of the more than 75 public and private organisations involved in dealing with complaints in health and social care."

Andrea Sutcliffe, Chief Inspector of Adult Social Care at the Care Quality Commission, said:

"I welcome today's report which demonstrates how important it is for adult social care services to respond positively to the concerns that may be raised by people using these services or their family and friends.

"When we look at whether services are safe, caring, effective, responsive and well led we will be considering how well complaints are handled and acted upon. This will help to inform our judgement of whether services are outstanding, good, require improvement or inadequate."