

Our ref: PT/jm

Ask for: James Merrifield

Your ref:



01656 644 200

Date: 9 July 2013



James.Merrifield@ombudsman-wales.org.uk

Mr Darren Mepham
Chief Executive
Bridgend County Borough Council
Civic Offices
Angel Street
Bridgend
CF31 4WB

Dear Mr Mepham

Annual Letter 2012-2013

Following the recent publication of my Annual Report, I am pleased to provide you with the Annual Letter (2012-2013) for Bridgend County Borough Council.

As outlined in my Annual Report, the number of new complaints to my office increased by 12% compared with 2011/12. Health complaints continue to be the most numerous type of complaint and now account for more than a third of all complaints received. Housing and planning are the next largest areas of complaint, however, planning complaints are noticeably fewer in number compared to housing for the first time since the office came into existence (accounting for 16% and 12% of the caseload respectively).

In reference to the overall performance of County/County Borough Councils in Wales, whilst there has been a 35% increase in the number of investigation reports issued by my office during 2012/13 compared with 2011/12, I am pleased to note that, despite this increase, there has been no increase in the average number of 'upheld' reports issued against County/County Borough councils. Whilst I have had cause to issue a number of Public Interest Reports identifying serious concerns and failings, these reports have all concerned health bodies. Nevertheless, I would urge all bodies in Wales to read the reports to learn any general lessons appropriate to the services they deliver.

I note that the average number of 'Quick Fixes' and 'Voluntary Settlements' achieved with local authorities has decreased compared with 2011/12, from 5 to 4 cases. Such settlements are an effective way to resolve complaints at an earlier stage and without the need for a full investigation. As such, in order to maximise the

opportunities to learn lessons from these types of cases, you can now find the summaries of quick fixes and voluntary settlements included in my quarterly publication, The Ombudsman's Casebook.

However, I am disappointed to note that the amount of time taken by public bodies in Wales in responding to requests for information from my office has not improved. I am concerned that 45% of all responses took longer than five weeks, with 28% of responses taking in excess of 6 weeks. Whilst I appreciate that resources are stretched at this time, such delays obstruct me from providing complainants with the level of service which they should rightly expect to receive and I urge all Welsh public bodies to review their performance.

In reference to your Council, I note that the number of complaint received and taken into investigation has decreased compared with 2011/12, and that both figures remain below the average. The majority of complaints during 2012/13 related to 'Finance and Taxation'. It is disappointing to note that the responses received from the Council took more than six weeks.

As with previous exercises, a copy of this letter will also be published on my website. I would also be glad to meet with you to discuss the contents of this letter and the work of my office if you consider it beneficial.

Yours sincerely

Peter Tyndall
Ombudsman

Appendix

Explanatory Notes

Section A compares the number of complaints against the Council which were received by my office during 2012-2013, with the local authority average (adjusted for population distribution¹) during the same period.

Section B provides a breakdown of the number of complaints about the Council which were received by my office during 2012-2013. Section C compares the number of complaints against the Council which were received by my office during 2012-2013, with the local authority average for the same period. The figures are broken down into subject categories.

Section D provides the number of complaints against the Council which were taken into investigation by my office during 2012-2013. Section E compares the number of complaints taken into investigation with the local authority average (adjusted for population distribution) during the same period.

Section F compares the complaint outcomes for the Council during 2012-2013, with the average outcome (adjusted for population distribution) during the same period. Public Interest reports issued under section 16 of the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2005 are recorded as 'Section 16'.

Section G compares the Council's response times during 2012-2013 with the average response times for all local authorities, and all public bodies in Wales during the same period. This graph measures the time between the date my office issued an 'investigation commencement' letter, and the date my office receives a full response to that letter from the public body.

Section H provides a breakdown of all Code of Conduct complaints received against Councillors during 2011-2012. Finally, Section 'I' contains the summaries of all reports issued in relation to the Council during 2012-2013.

Housing Stock

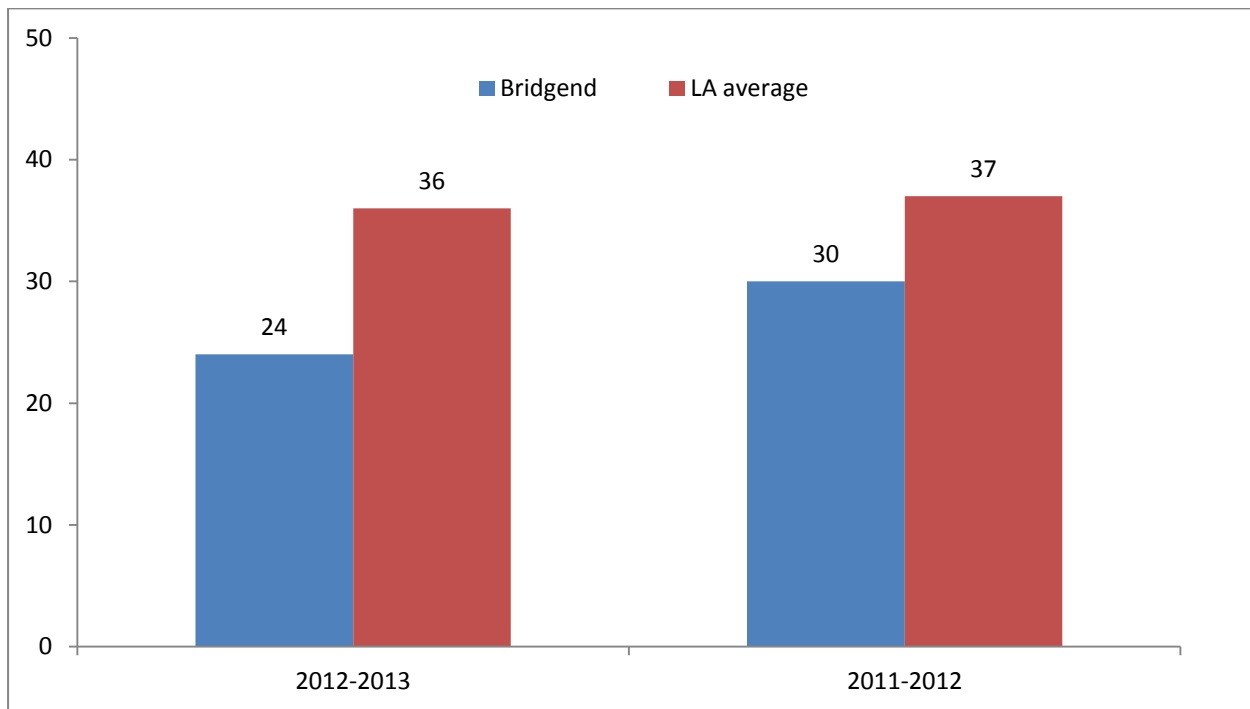
As with previous exercises, the figures for 2012-2013 have not been adjusted to take account of the transfer of housing stock. However, it is noted that there is likely to be a higher proportion of Housing complaints where local authorities have retained their housing stock.

Feedback

We welcome your feedback on the enclosed information, including suggestions for any information to be enclosed in future annual summaries. Any feedback or queries should be sent to james.merrifield@ombudsman-wales.org.uk.

¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-262039>.

A: Comparison of complaints received by my office with average, adjusted for population distribution

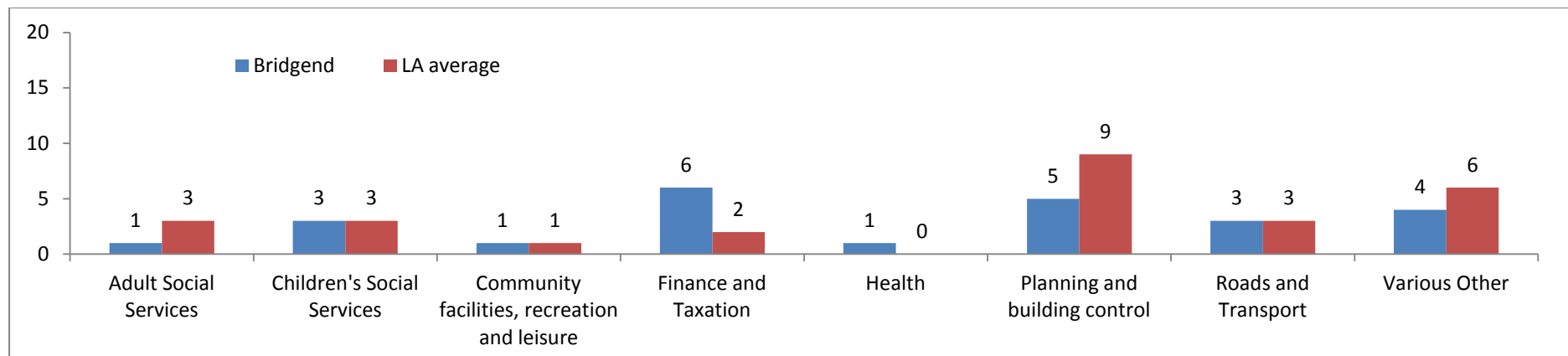


B: Complaints received by my office

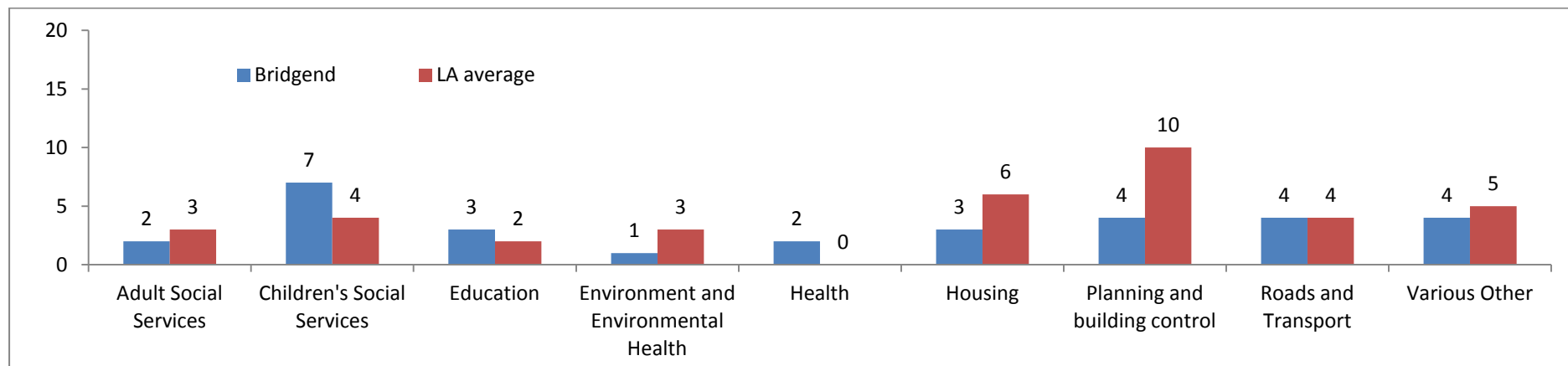
Subject	2012-2013	2011-2012
Adult Social Services	1	2
Benefits Administration	0	0
Children's Social Services	3	7
Community facilities, recreation and leisure	1	0
Education	0	3
Environment and Environmental Health	0	1
Finance and Taxation	6	0
Health	1	2
Housing	0	3
Planning and building control	5	4
Roads and Transport	3	4
Various Other	4	4
Total	24	30

C: Comparison of complaints by subject category with LA average

2012-2013



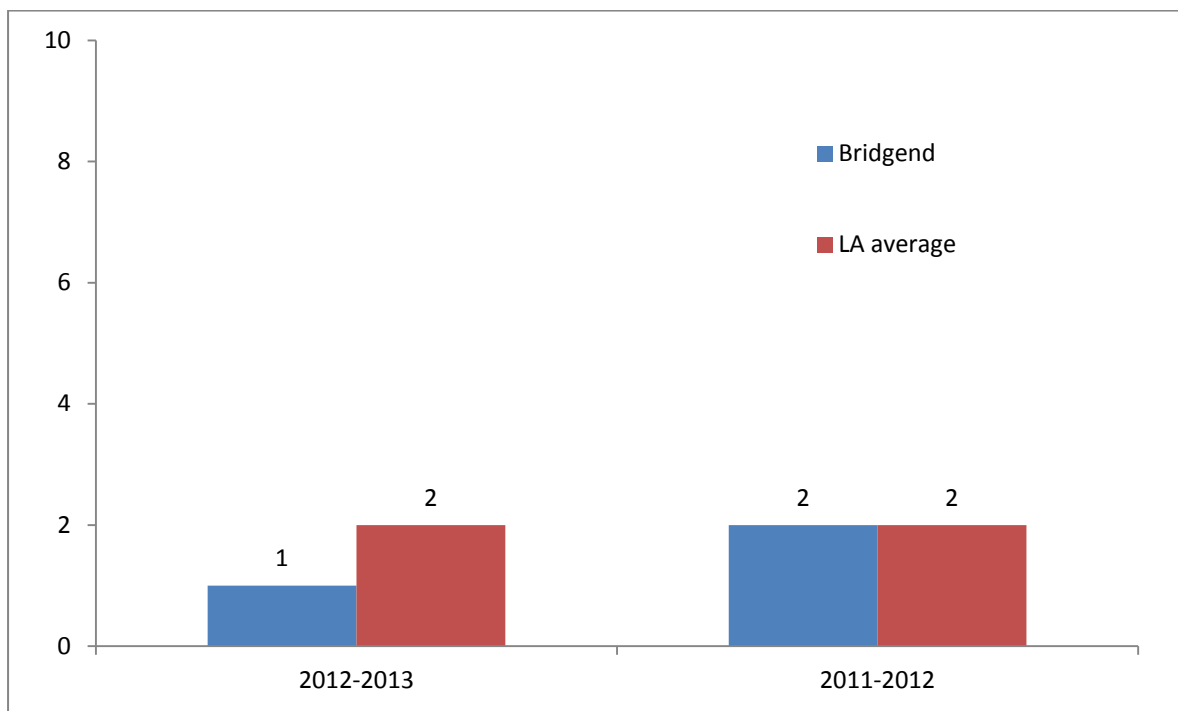
2011-2012



D: Complaints taken into investigation by my office

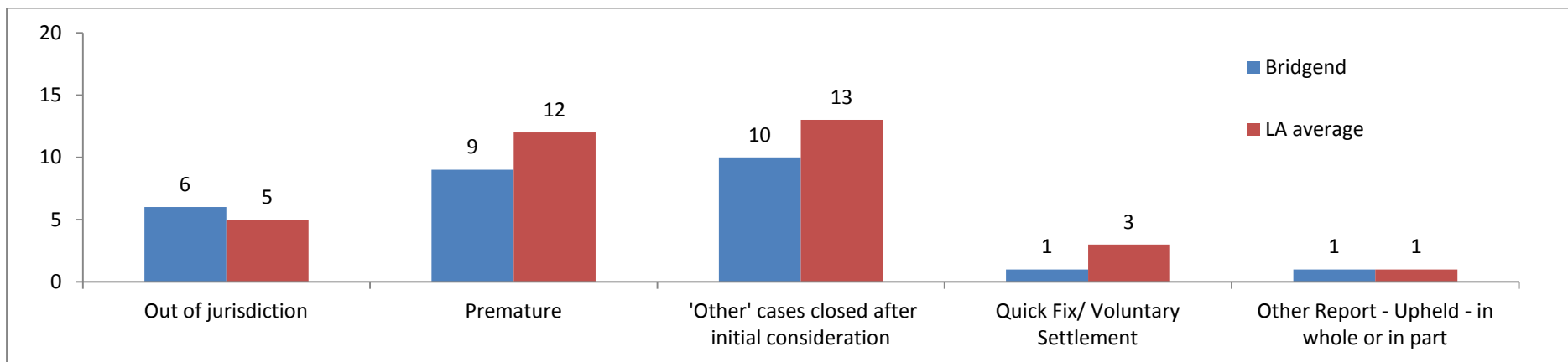
	2012-2013	2011-2012
Number of complaints taken into investigation	1	2

E: Comparison of complaints taken into investigation by my office with average, adjusted for population distribution

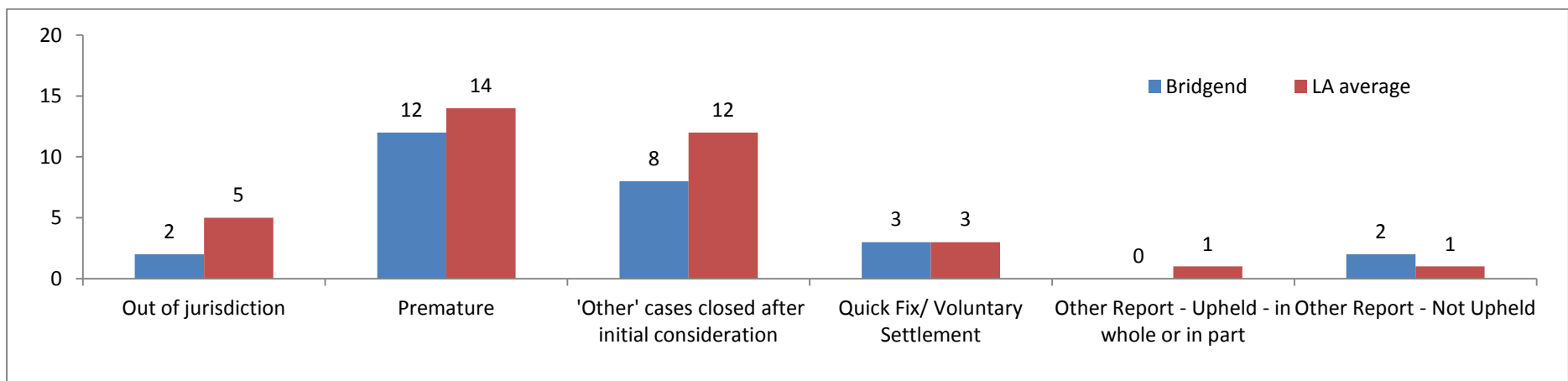


F: Comparison of complaint outcomes with average outcomes, adjusted for population distribution

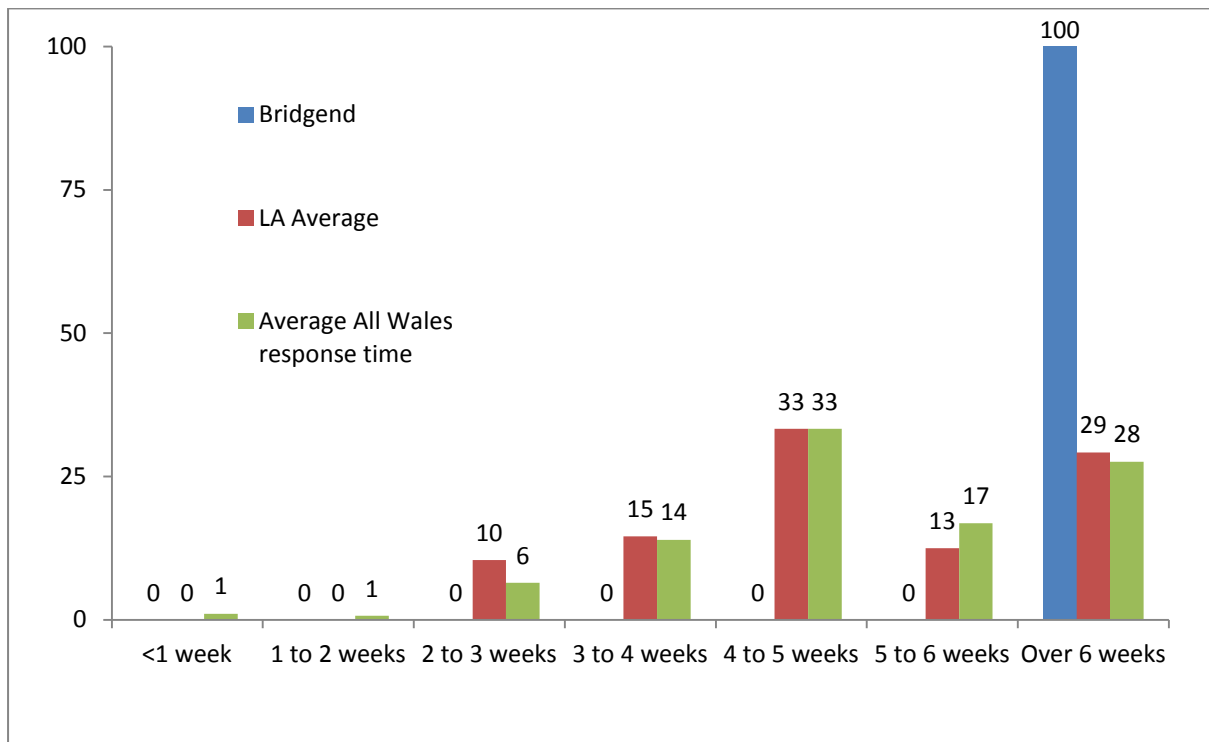
2012-2013



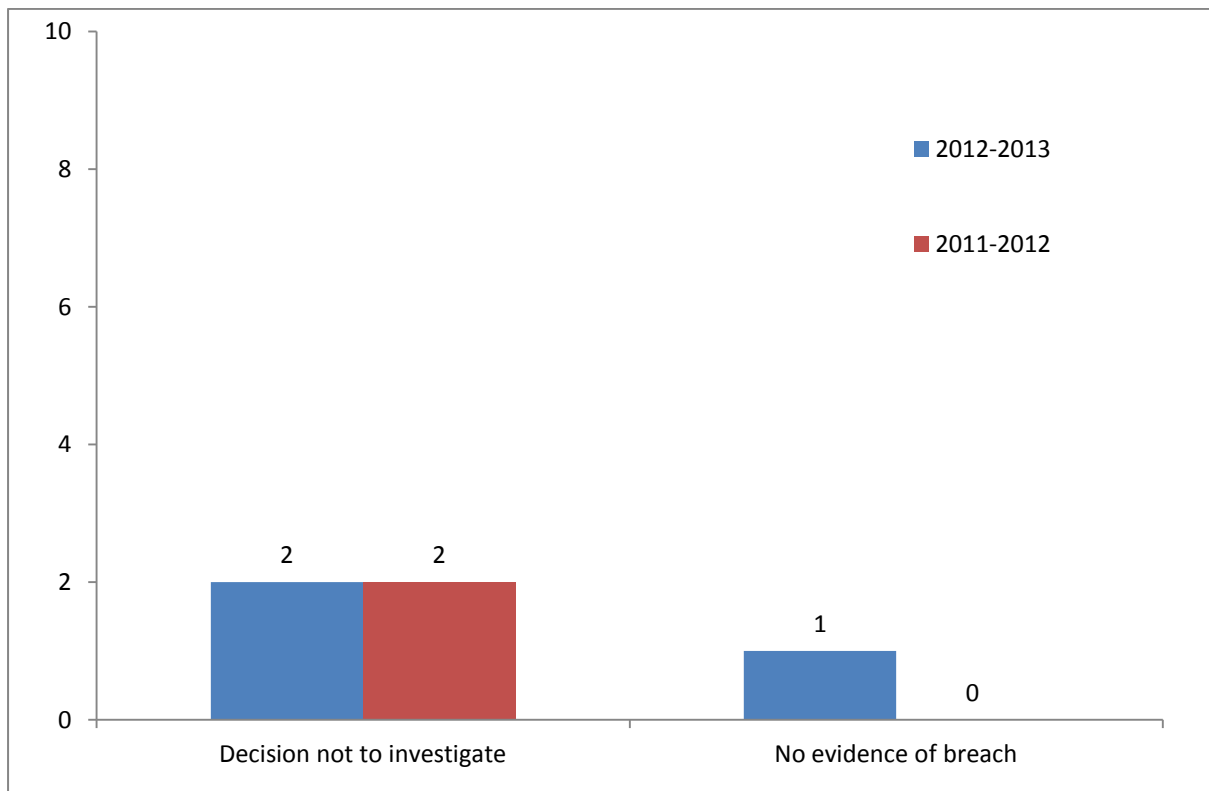
2011-2012



G: Comparison of Council times for responding to requests for information with average LA and average All Wales response times, 2012 – 2013 (%)



H: Code of Conduct complaints



I: Report summaries

Education

Upheld

January 2013 – Special Educational Needs – Bridgend County Borough Council

Mr B complained about the support provided by the Council to enable his son (who has special educational needs) to attend mainstream school, and also about the way in which his complaint was handled by the Council. He said that although the Council had agreed to provide extensive support for his son, the support had been either absent, fragmented or uncertain, and his son had only been able to attend school because Mrs B had attended with him and provided the support he needed.

The Ombudsman partly upheld the complaint. He found that the Council had made strenuous efforts to recruit a support assistant for Mr B's son, but its efforts had on occasions been unsuccessful, resulting in a total of six different support workers working with him over a period of some 18 months. Although this was not always the fault of the Council, more effort should have been made to provide continuity of support. The Ombudsman therefore upheld this part of the complaint. However, he found that the Council had not failed to comply with its complaints policy, although he urged the Council to respond to complaints within a reasonable period. The Ombudsman made the following recommendations:

- the Council should apologise to Mr & Mrs B;
- the Council should ensure wherever possible that it is an experienced support worker who is first allocated to work with a child on starting school; and,
- the Council should minimise where possible the allocation of short-term support workers.

The Council agreed to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations.

Case reference 201103596