

Our ref: PT/jm

Ask for: James Merrifield

Your ref:



01656 644 200

Date: 9 July 2013



James.Merrifield@ombudsman-wales.org.uk

Mr Will Godfrey
Managing Director
Newport City Council
Civic Centre
Newport
NP20 4UR

Dear Mr Godfrey

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 Newport City 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, whilst there has been a small increase in the number of complaints received by office compared with 2011/12, this figure remains below the average. There have been no complaints taken into investigation during 2012/13. The outcomes show an above average number of withdrawn complaints. There were no recorded response times for your Council.

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

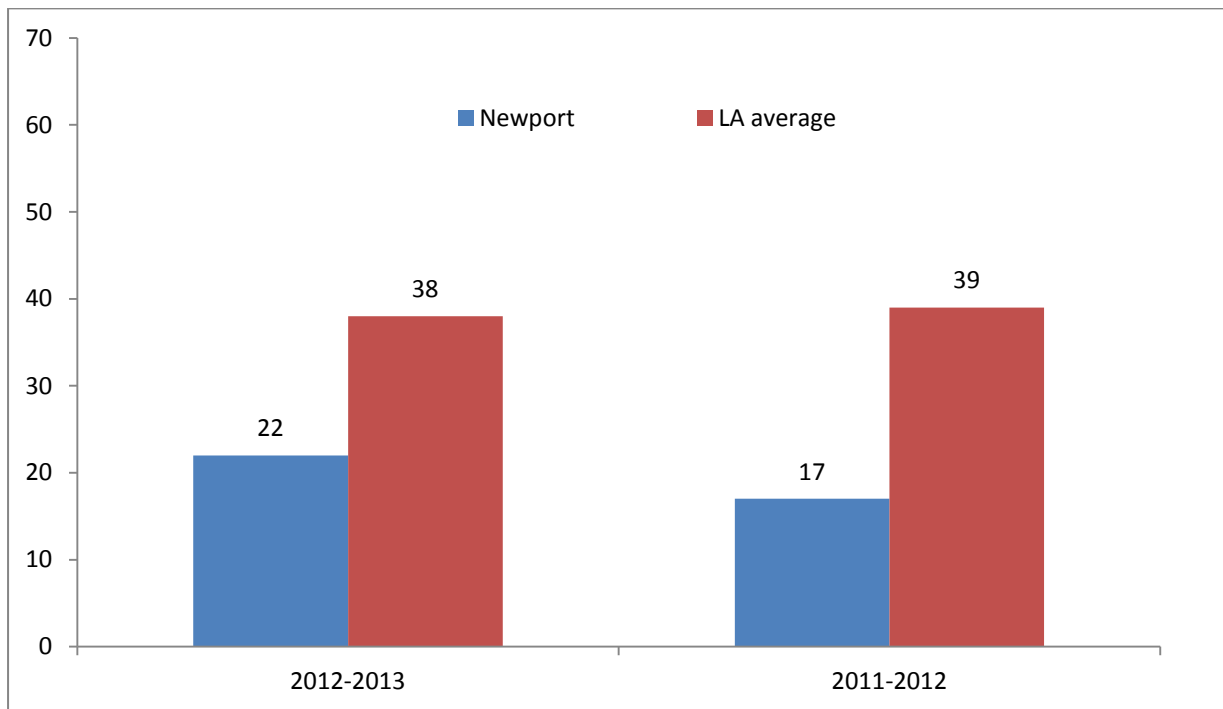
As with previous exercises, the figures for 2012-2013 have not been adjusted to take account of the transfer of housing stock. However, it is noted that there is likely to be a higher proportion of Housing complaints where local authorities have retained their housing stock.

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

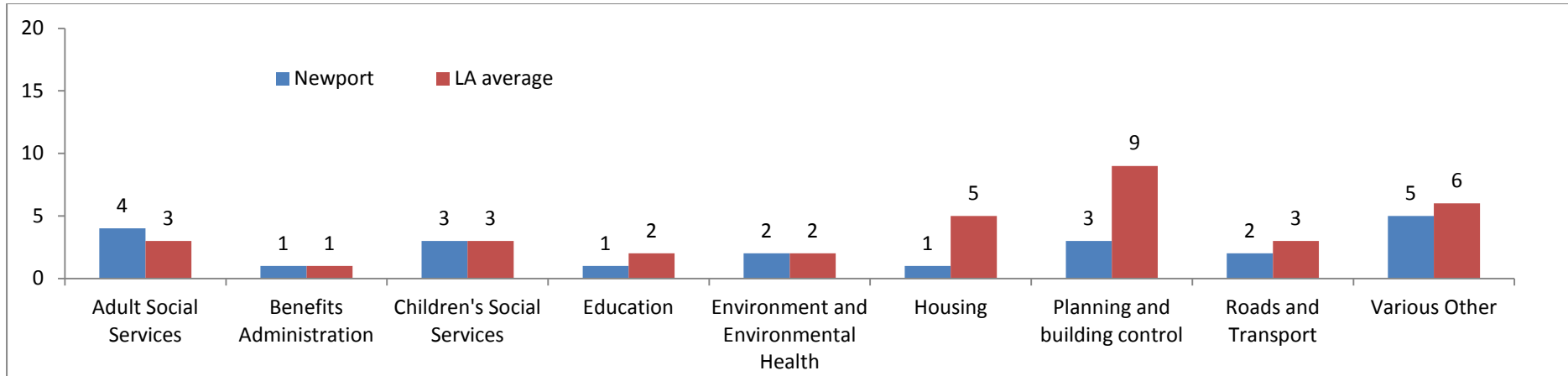


B: Complaints received by my office

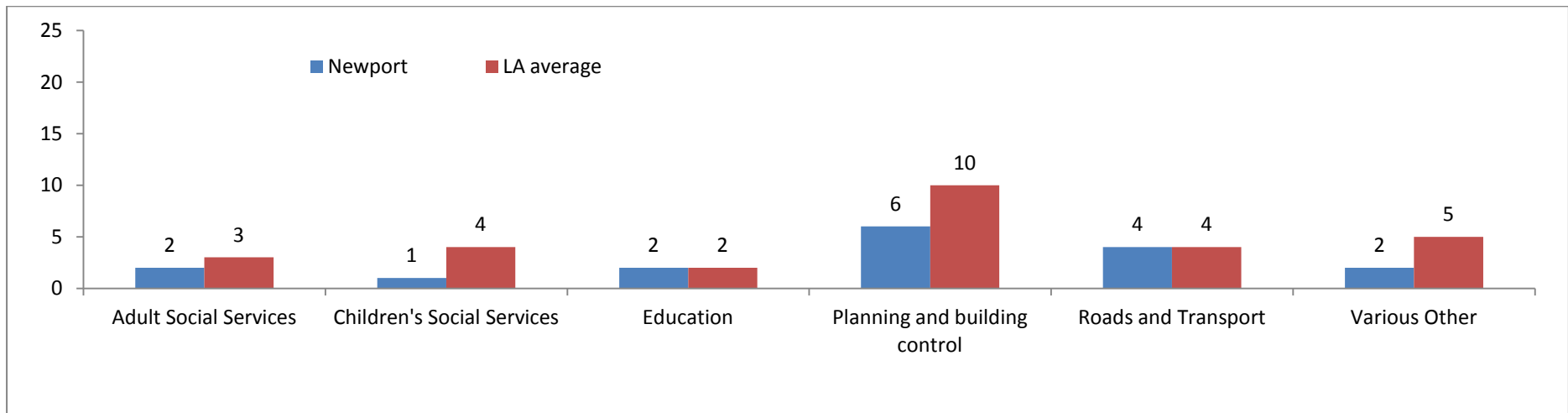
Subject	2012-2013	2011-2012
Adult Social Services	4	2
Benefits Administration	1	0
Children's Social Services	3	1
Community facilities, recreation and leisure	0	0
Education	1	2
Environment and Environmental Health	2	0
Housing	1	0
Planning and building control	3	6
Roads and Transport	2	4
Various Other	5	2
Total	22	17

C: Comparison of complaints by subject category with LA average

2012-2013



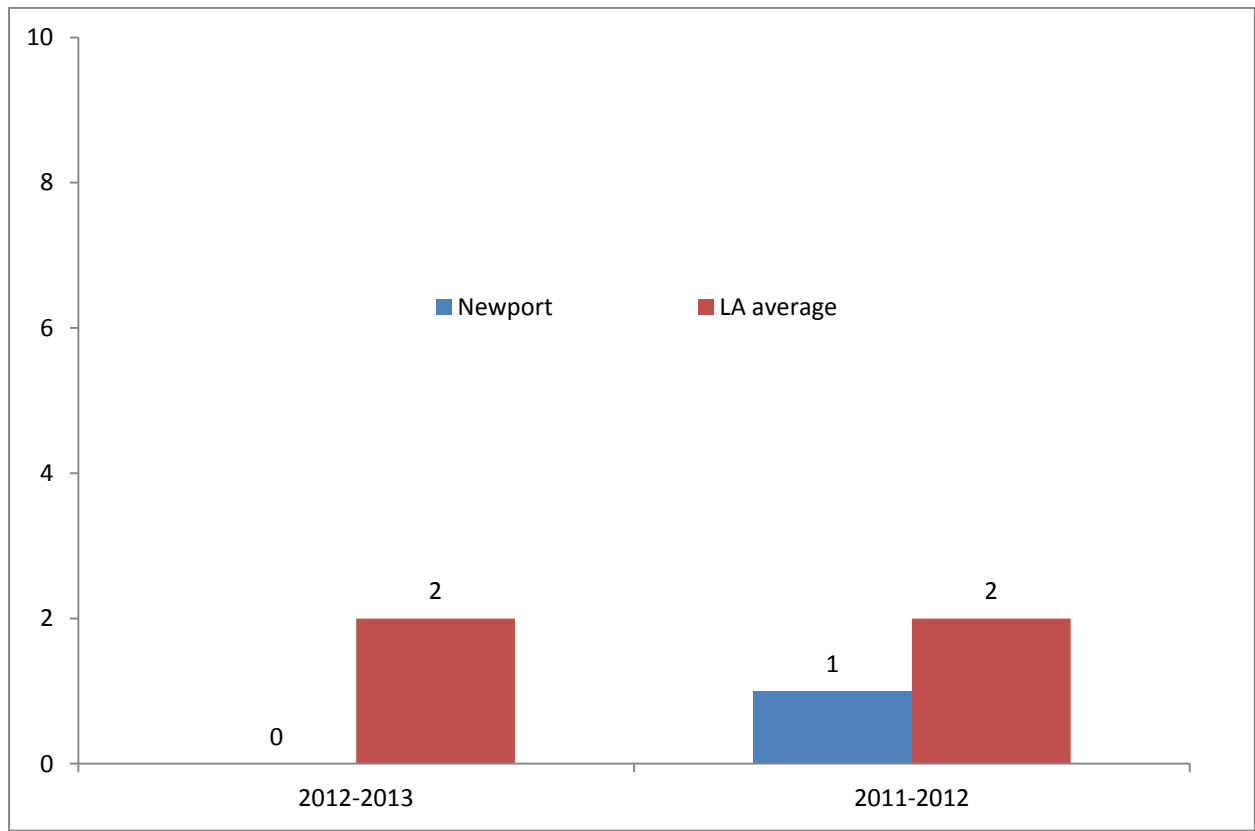
2011-2012



D: Complaints taken into investigation by my office

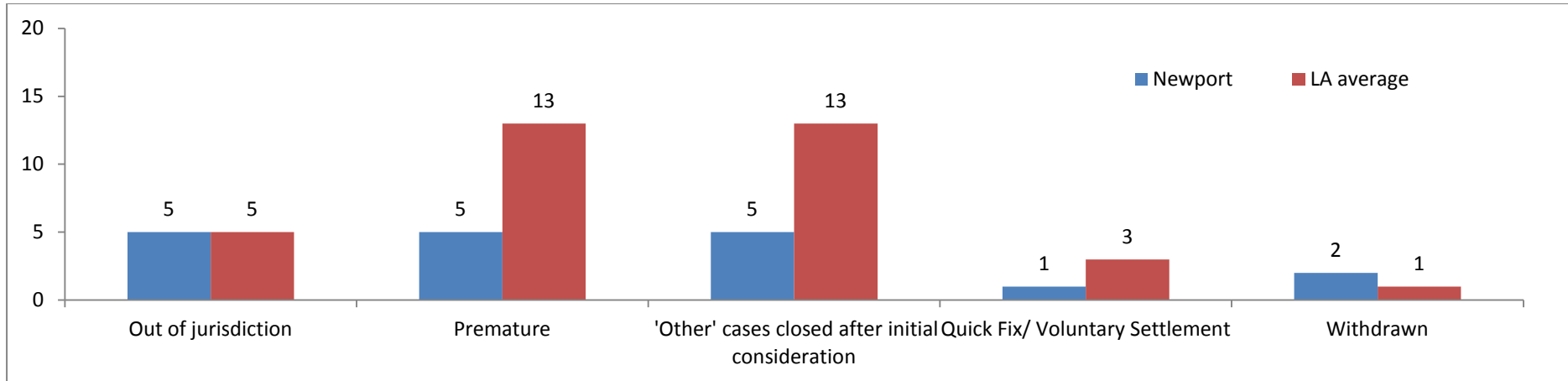
	2012-2013	2011-2012
Number of complaints taken into investigation	0	1

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

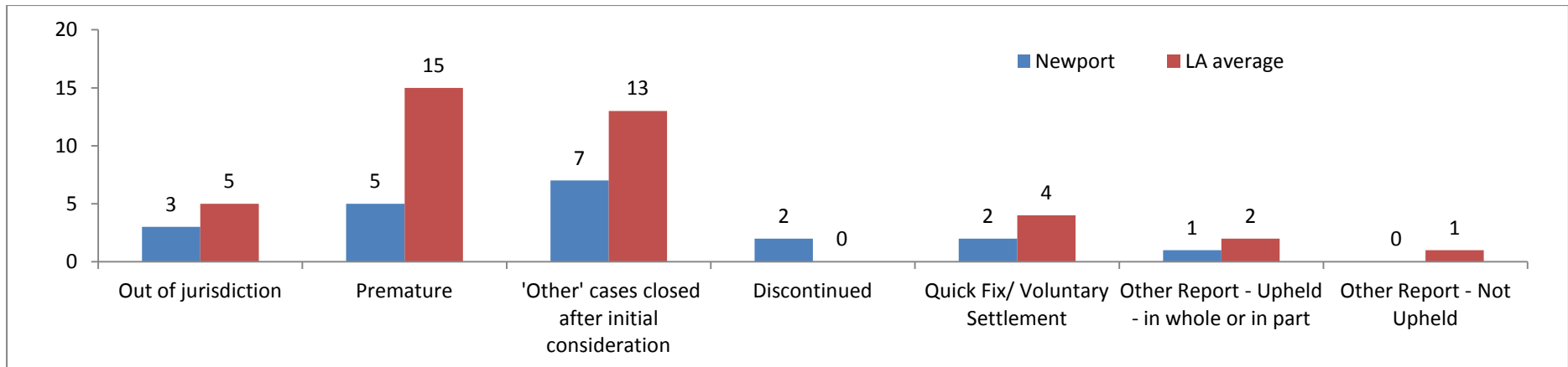


F: Comparison of complaint outcomes with average outcomes, adjusted for population distribution

2012-2013

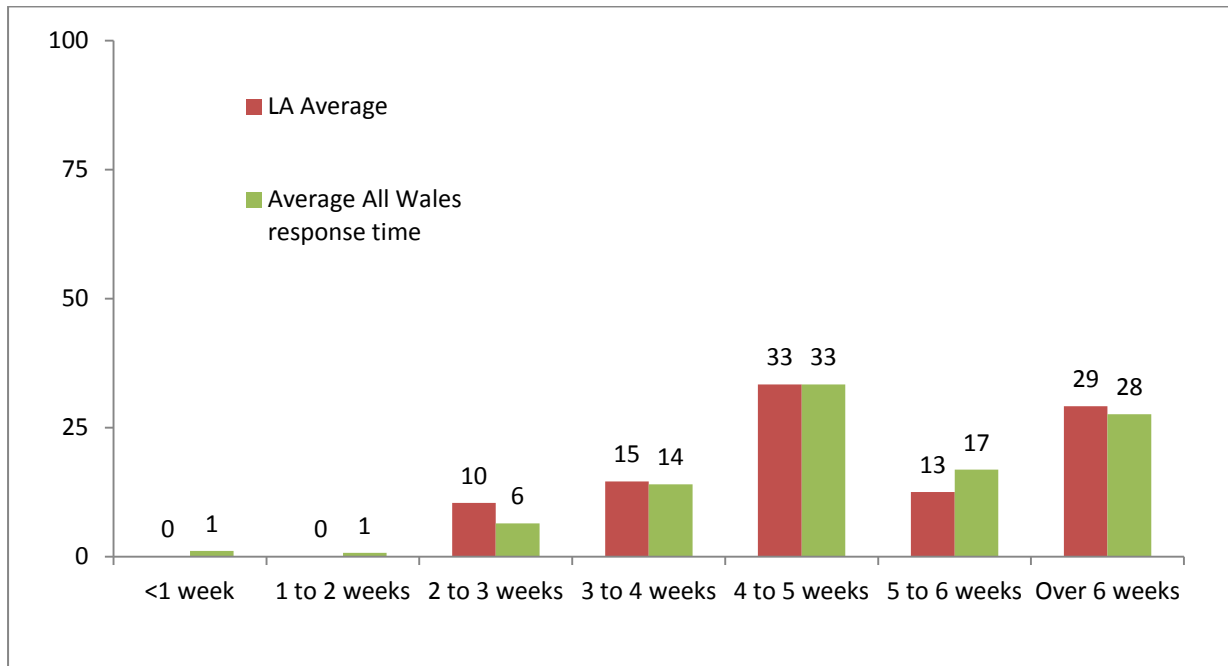


2011-2012

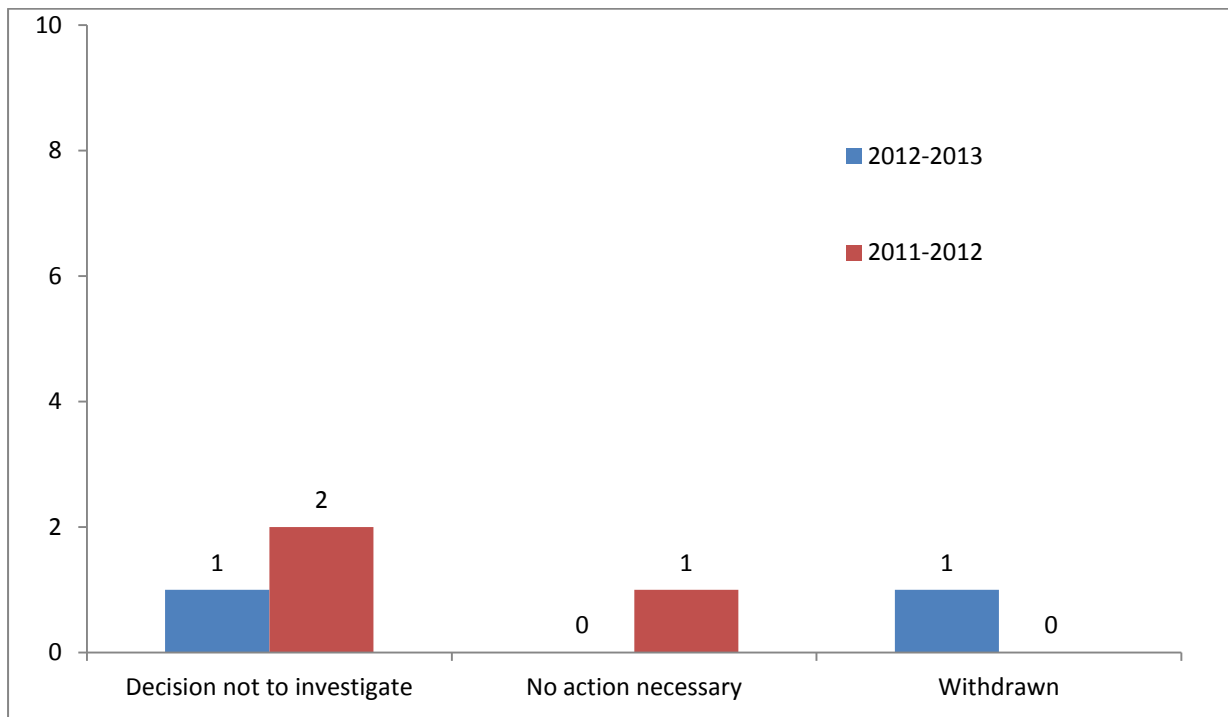


G: Comparison of Council times for responding to requests for information with average LA and average All Wales response times, 2012 – 2013 (%)

Graph G relates to those investigations which were commenced during 2012-2013. As there were no investigations commenced against Newport, there are no response times for Newport. However, we have included the average Local Authority response times and the average response times for all bodies in Wales for your information.



H: Code of Conduct complaints



I: Report summaries

Social Services - Adult

Quick fixes & Voluntary settlements

February 2013 – Services for older people – Newport City Council

Following the complainant's discharge from hospital in June 2011, the complainant was advised by the District Nurse to contact the Social Services department of the Council to request an Occupational Therapy assessment. Having followed this advice, the complainant was placed on the non-urgent waiting list for assessment. She complained that she remained on the waiting list for a period of 15 months before she was eventually contacted by the department enquiring as to whether she still required the assessment. During that time, the complainant had already spent approximately £120 of her own money purchasing mobility aids for her home.

She complained to the Council but was dissatisfied with its Stage 1 response so wrote a further letter. It asked her to confirm what would be a satisfactory resolution to her complaint. She stated that she wished to be reimbursed for the cost of the equipment that she had already purchased. The Council refused this resolution.

My office contacted the Council to discuss concerns and dissatisfaction regarding the unacceptable length of time that it had taken the relevant department to contact the complainant regarding the Occupational Therapy Assessment (15 months), and the fact that she had found it necessary to purchase her own mobility aids in the meantime.

My office requested that the Council reimburse the complainant for the costs that she incurred in purchasing her own equipment/mobility aids, to a total of £120. My office also requested that the Council contact the complainant directly to arrange a date for a home visit to complete an Occupational Therapy Assessment and ensure that she is using the correct mobility aids, as well as assessing whether any additional items are required. The Council agreed to carry out these requests.

Case reference 201204199