

Fairness First

Press pack: the same closed road, in social care

Due to unexpected and exceptional circumstances, this family cannot tell its own story. So the institutions tell it, in their own letters.

The council said sorry after the ombudsman had shut the door twice.

The story in five lines

- 20 September 2018. The council answered six complaints at stage one. None was upheld.
- 20 March 2019. The council's legal department: "many of the claims alleged would now be out of time".
- 1 April 2020. Stage two: "I am unable to uphold your complaint."
- 28 May 2020 and 6 June 2023. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman would not investigate: the complaint was "made late", part of it was "not a finding that we could make: the matter would need to be addressed by a court", and "anything relating to legal proceedings or court action is not within the scope of our role and powers".
- 30 March 2023. A senior manager in the council's children's social care: "I would like to offer my personal apologies to you and your family that your experiences of children's social care and some of the processes have caused long term emotional distress and for this I am very sorry."

Every free route shut, in the institutions' own words. The only route left runs on rule 1.1 of the Civil Procedure Rules, which tells a court to deal with cases justly and at proportionate cost. Cost is in that sentence. Fairly is not. Fairness First asks the Civil Procedure Rule Committee to add that one word.

What is in this pack

- The ombudsman's covering letter of 28 May 2020, with the family's names, the officers' names and direct contacts removed.
- The ombudsman's letter of 6 June 2023, with the family's names, the officers' names and direct contacts removed.

- The council's letter of 30 March 2023, with the family's names and address and the names of officers removed. Every date, reference and role is kept.
- The page itself: uk.globalsafetywatch.org/campaign-fairness-first/the-same-closed-road-in-social-care/

What is not in it, and why

The family is not identified. The children concerned were minors at the time and are adults now. Nothing about them is in this pack, and the family's own account of events is not published. The documents that describe the substance of the complaint, the council's stage one and stage two responses, its legal department's letter and the ombudsman's full decision statement, are held by the campaign and can be shown to a journalist for verification, on terms that protect the children. No individual officer is named anywhere.

Right of reply

Every statement on the page is put to the London Borough of Bexley in writing, with ten working days to reply. Any reply the council makes will be published with the page, and anything shown to be inaccurate will be corrected on the page and in this pack. A council cannot sue for defamation and none of its officers is named.

Contact

change@uk.globalsafetywatch.org. This campaign is not connected to any political party and does not support or oppose any party or candidate. It is not connected with the Civil Procedure Rule Committee. Nothing in this pack is legal advice.

Fairness First press pack, social care, version 1.2, 12 September 2026. Prepared by Fairness First.

Local Government &
Social Care
OMBUDSMAN

28 May 2020

Mr [REDACTED]

Your ref:

Our ref: 19 017 420

(Please quote our reference when contacting us and, if using email, please put the number in the email subject line)

If telephoning please contact: [REDACTED]

email address: [REDACTED]

Dear Mr [REDACTED]

Complaint against London Borough of Bexley

As you know, the Ombudsman asked me to decide if we can and should investigate your complaint. I have carefully considered your emails following my draft decision statement. However, as you will see from the attached final decision statement, although I have amended to reflect the issues you brought to my attention, I have decided we will not consider the complaint further.

I recognise this may disappoint you but thank you for bringing your concerns to our attention. I will also respond here to your email of 25/5/20.

You asked me to confirm three statements, none of which are what I said.

I did not ask you to send me information about the substance of your complaint as my draft decision was that we would not investigate it, as it was made late.

I invited you to comment further on the draft decision, as you had done in your previous email.

We do not accept dissatisfaction with a decision as a service complaint, but if you think that the decision has been made on the basis of inaccurate or incomplete information, you have the right to request a review of it. Please let me know if you wish to receive further information about this.

By law, we must tell the Council of our decision, so I have sent it a copy.

Publishing our decision

We publish our final decision statements on our website. We use false names and do not reveal details that could identify people involved. If you are concerned that publishing our decision will identify you, please let me know as soon as possible.

We normally delete your complaint documents 12 months after the date of our decision. We will keep the final decision statement and cover letters for five years, after which we will delete them.

Yours sincerely



Assessment Team Leader

Enc: Final decision statement

Local Government &
Social Care
OMBUDSMAN

6 June 2023

Mr [REDACTED]

Your ref:

Our ref: 23 002 163

(Please quote our reference when contacting us and, if using email, please put the number in the email subject line)

If telephoning please contact: [REDACTED]

email address: [REDACTED]

Dear Mr [REDACTED]

Complaint about London Borough of Bexley

I have received your complaint for assessment.

We will not, however, consider the matter. This is because we have previously considered and decided the substantive matter. We do not re-open and consider cases where we have previously made a decision. The complaint is therefore invalid.

You asked us previously to review that decision, and I explained why we would not do so. You have now sought to make a new complaint about the Council's actions in relation to legal proceedings regarding this matter.

However, we will not treat this as a new complaint, because any legal proceedings you may have tried to bring are still in relation to the same matter. Additionally, anything relating to legal proceedings or court action is not within the scope of our role and powers – we are not able to consider such issues.

I am sorry to disappoint you, but this case is closed and we will take no further action in respect of it.

Yours sincerely



[REDACTED]
Assessment Manager

Mash, Referral & Assessment, Family Support & Child Protection

London Borough of Bexley
Civic Offices
2 Watling Street
Bexleyheath
Kent
DA6 7AT
www.bexley.gov.uk

m/r

y/r

The person dealing with this matter is:

Direct Dial
Date



30 March 2023

Dear

Re: Meeting with senior manager

Firstly, I want to say thank you for taking the time to meet with me on 28 March 2023 and for your patience as you were expecting to meet with my colleague [REDACTED] unfortunately was unwell.

I want to express my personal thanks to you for sharing your lived experiences of Bexley Children's Social Care, CAMH's, NHS and other professional agencies. You spent time discussing your past experiences that I know must have been very difficult for you to retell and explain to me.

I understand from meeting with you that you would like to meet with [REDACTED] children's services director and/or [REDACTED] Chief Executive to which you are seeking a direct apology for the decisions made by children's social care for the decisions made in respect of your now adult daughter, [REDACTED] were you are of the view that were incorrect decisions made and have caused long term emotional harm and distress to you and your family. You have made it clear to me that without this acknowledgement you feel that you will have no option then to take legal action against Bexley Children's Social Care and sue for the reasons outlined. You have also stressed to me the importance of an apology as you are further giving considerations to journalists.

I understand from meeting with you that you in addition to this, your experiences have led you to create a business plan and you have publications pertaining to this where you feel you will be able to reach other families that you wish [REDACTED] consider. From my meeting with you, I understand that you see this as an opportunity to work with children's social care.

As a member of the senior leadership team, I would like to offer my personal apologies to you and your family that your experiences of children's social care and some of the processes have caused long term emotional distress and for this I am very sorry. I want you to know that I especially took from you the importance of sharing information regarding to the process of an Initial Child Protection Conference, what parents can expect to happen during and after is really important. I plan to discuss this with the management team and ensure we have adequate information about this. I really took note of this from your experiences you shared with me about the initial child protection conference that took place in 2018.

I do take all complaints seriously, and I hope that I have demonstrated this to you in my response to you that very salient point. I hope that I have adequately captured the nature of your concerns and addressed each one of them with clear reasons for my responses.

However, if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of our meeting and wish to progress our complaints process, in which your complaint will be passed to a Senior Manager to investigate and respond, please either email the Complaints Team at [REDACTED] or write to the Complaints Team at the address below within the next 20 working days with the following details:

- why my response has not resolved your complaint, and
- what action you would require as a resolution

The address to write to is:

The Complaints Team
London Borough of Bexley
Civic Offices
2 Watling Street
Bexleyheath
Kent
DA6 7AT

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several fluid, overlapping strokes.

[REDACTED]
Interim Service Manager