

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

21 May 2025

By email

Mr Helps
Chief Fire Officer
County Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue Service

Dear Mr Helps

Annual Review letter 2024-25

I write to you with your annual summary of complaint statistics from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for the year ending 31 March 2025. The information offers valuable insight about your organisation's approach to complaints, and I know you will consider it as part of your corporate governance processes. We have listened to your feedback, and I am pleased to be able to share your annual statistics earlier in the year to better fit with local reporting cycles. I hope this proves helpful to you.

In a change to our approach, we will write to organisations in July where there is exceptional practice or where we have concerns about an organisation's complaint handling. Not all organisations will get a letter. If you do receive a letter it will be sent in advance of its publication on our website on 16 July 2025, alongside our annual Review of Local Government Complaints.

Complaint statistics

[Our statistics](#) focus on three key areas that help to assess your organisation's commitment to putting things right when they go wrong. To provide context for these statistics we provide the total number of decisions we made about your authority during the year, the number of complaints that were not for us or not ready for us, the number of complaints we assessed and closed and the number of complaints we investigated.

Complaints upheld - We uphold complaints when we find fault in an organisation's actions, including where the organisation accepted fault before we investigated.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation - In these cases, the organisation upheld the complaint and we agreed with how it offered to put things right.

Compliance with recommendations - We recommend ways for organisations to put things right when faults have caused injustice and monitor their compliance with our recommendations. Failure to comply is rare and a compliance rate below 100% is a cause for concern.

Supporting complaint and service improvement

In February we published [good practice guides](#) to support councils to adopt our [Complaint Handling Code](#). The guides were developed in consultation with councils that have been piloting the Code and are based on the real-life, front-line experience of people handling complaints day-to-day, including their experience of reporting to senior leaders and elected members; I hope they will be helpful for your organisation. The guides were issued alongside free [training resources](#) councils and other local authority bodies can use to make sure front-line staff understand what to do when someone raises a complaint. We will be applying the Code in our casework about councils from April 2026 and we know a large number have already adopted it into their local policies with positive results.

The Code is good practice for all organisations we investigate (except where there are statutory complaint handling processes in place), and we may decide to issue it as guidance to other organisations, such as yours, in future.

This year we relaunched our popular [complaint handling training](#) programme. The training is now more interactive than ever, providing delegates with an opportunity to consider a complaint from receipt to resolution. Early feedback has been extremely positive with delegates reporting an increase in confidence in handling complaints after completing the training. To find out more contact training@lgo.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amerdeep Somal', followed by a horizontal line.

Amerdeep Somal
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

Complaint overview
Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, we dealt with 1 complaint. 1 was not for us or not ready for us to investigate. We assessed and closed 0 complaints. We investigated 0 complaints.
Complaints upheld
The Ombudsman carried out no investigations in this period
Satisfactory remedies provided by the organisation
The Ombudsman did not uphold any complaints in this period
Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations
No recommendations were due for compliance in this period