

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

9 July 2025

By email

Mrs Ridgwell
Chief Executive
Hertfordshire County Council

Dear Mrs Ridgwell

Annual Review letter 2024-25

I wrote to you in May with your annual summary of complaint statistics from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for the year ending 31 March 2025. In that letter I explained that where we had concerns about your organisation's complaint handling or to highlight exceptional performance I would write again, and I have set out our experience of your organisation's complaint handling below.

As a reminder, [your annual statistics are available here](#).

In addition, you can find the detail of the decisions we have made about your Council, read the public reports we have issued, and view the service improvements your Council has agreed to make as a result of our investigations, as well as previous annual review letters.

This letter will be published on our website on 16 July 2025.

Your organisation's performance

While it is disappointing that your Council failed to complete an agreed recommendation in an Education and Children's Services case during the year, I welcome the steps you have since taken to prevent a reoccurrence in future. Thank you for taking the time to consider the learning from the case.

Aside from this case, we noted the Council's responses to our requests for information were sometimes late. In one instance, we took the unusual step of threatening to issue a witness summons before we received the information we required. This is not a step we take lightly. I understand a technical issue was the cause of the delay in this instance, but we were not advised of this at the time. Late responses delay our investigations and cause unnecessary frustration and distress to complainants; I encourage the Council to keep us updated where it is aware of delays so that we can better manage expectations.

In addition, we recorded a number of cases where the Council's own complaint responses were poor; we noted insufficient investigations, the failure to respond to all issues and insufficient redress offered. In October 2024, the Council confirmed it had allocated additional resources to its Resolution and Reconciliation team, and stated its commitment to improving its complaint handling, training staff, and reviewing its procedures. I welcome this and look forward to seeing how this improves matters in the year ahead.

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. We issued the guides alongside free [training resources](#) councils 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 from April 2026 and we know a large number of councils have already adopted it into their local policies with positive results.

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