

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

9 July 2025

By email

Ms Beer
Chief Executive
Kent County Council

Dear Ms Beer

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

It is disappointing that, in one case and for the second year in succession, the Council failed to evidence compliance with recommendations it had agreed to. We recommended actions to resolve issues with a complainant's direct payment package. Despite raising no concerns during the investigation process about its ability to comply and being given several opportunities to evidence compliance, the Council failed to do so. In response, we opened a new case which resulted in us recommending a further financial remedy.

As you will be aware, we take non-compliance extremely seriously. It is very disappointing to see a further instance during this year and suggests any action the Council has taken previously to address this has been ineffective. I ask this is looked at as a matter of urgency to prevent any reoccurrence of the issues.

Beyond this case, I welcome that your Council agreed to the recommendations we made in 64 cases during the year. However, it is disappointing that in 17 of those cases recommendations were not completed within the agreed timescales. It is particularly disappointing that this is the third consecutive year we have had to raise such concerns with your Council.

We have also noted concerns with delay in responding to our investigation enquiries, with 38 out of 67 responses received late. Our records show there were also cases where you asked for more time to respond but only did so within a day of the deadline or after it had passed. It is particularly troubling to note there were two cases during the year where we had to take the exceptional action of threatening to

issue a witness summons in order to receive information we had requested as part of an investigation. That is not a step we take lightly. Such delays often result in additional work for both our organisations and further frustration for complainants.

We have also noted complaints that receive no response or an ambiguous response from your Council. This leads to an increased number of contacts to our service, the majority of which we cannot help with. This creates a very unsatisfactory situation for complainants, and I would urge you to continue to focus on reducing delays in your own complaint handling processes.

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