

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

9 July 2025

By email

Mr Blake-Herbert
Chief Executive
London Borough of Havering

Dear Mr Blake-Herbert

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 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

I welcome that your Council agreed to and implemented the recommendations we made in 14 cases during the year. However, in four of those cases recommendations were not completed within the agreed timescales. These delays ranged between seven and 59 days. It is particularly disappointing as this is the third consecutive year we have raised this concern with your Council.

In one case there were delays in a personal apology and a remedy payment being made to a complainant, which were issued only after we chased for evidence of compliance. Such actions should be simple to administer and any delay risks further frustrating the complainant.

There were also delays in carrying out service improvement recommendations. I would encourage the Council to engage in discussion at the draft decision stage of our process if the timescales suggested for service improvement recommendations are not achievable or realistic. If the timescales we propose are not achievable, the Council needs to explain why this is the case before a decision is finalised.

During the year, we made enquiries on 17 cases. There were multiple cases where our investigations were delayed by your Council's failure to respond to us in a timely manner. Enquiry responses to nine of these cases were received after the 20 working-day deadline we set as standard. Of those nine cases, six took your Council 30 or more days to respond to. One of the longer delays resulted in the threat of a witness summons to prompt your Council to send its response.

In addition to the delays, there were instances of poor-quality responses with missing evidence, missing covering notes providing the Council's comments to our enquiries, the same evidence sent multiple

times or emails that were oversized and repeatedly re-sent as such despite the Council being advised of this.

Further to this, there were three occasions where your Council failed to respond to a draft decision within the stated timescale. This included one instance that resulted in a reminder of our powers to issue a public interest report for non-compliance to prompt a response. This is unacceptable.

I ask that you take action to improve responses to our enquiries; both in terms of timeliness and quality and to respond to draft decisions in a timely manner. It is important we are provided with the information and comments we have asked for promptly, and that, where you encounter delays, you keep us informed. If there is any support my office can provide to help improve the situation, please do let me know.

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,



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