

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

9 July 2025

By email

Mr Holmes
Chief Executive
West Berkshire Council

Dear Mr Holmes

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, for the second year in succession, the Council failed to comply with recommendations it agreed to. In a Children's Services complaint, the Council agreed to put the matter through the statutory children's complaint process, however failed to do so. When it did follow the correct process, it failed to meet the deadline for the second stage. Because of this we recorded the case as not compliant and registered a new complaint against the Council.

As you will be aware, we take non-compliance extremely seriously. It is very disappointing to see a further instance during the 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.

More broadly, during the year we recorded concerns with delayed responses to enquiries and in providing evidence of compliance with our recommendations. The Council agreed to the recommendations made in nine cases during the year. However, in two cases there were delays in providing payments and in providing evidence of its actions. We noted many responses to our enquiries or draft findings were late. In one instance, information was provided at the draft decision stage that should have been provided earlier, meaning we had to issue a revised draft.

The noted delays, as well as the case where we were unable to record compliance, particularly affect complaints about children's services. I urge you to consider any steps that can be taken to improve the

complaint handling within this service area. 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,

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