

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

20 May 2026

By email

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

Dear Mr Helps

Annual Review letter 2025-26

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 2026.

We recognise that authorities continue to face significant pressures in delivering services to their communities. We hope the data and insight we share with you each year remains a useful tool for reflection and continuous improvement. Please consider it as part of your corporate governance processes.

We will write to organisations in July where there is exceptional practice or where we have concerns about 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 15 July 2026.

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. 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 concerning. In addition, we now provide a timely compliance statistic alongside the overall compliance rate. This statistic shows the proportion of cases where agreed recommendations were recorded as completed on time.

Supporting complaint and service improvement

We remain committed to supporting the sector to embed effective systems of redress. Where authorities are navigating reorganisation and devolution, we are ready to help ensure that robust complaint handling is built into new arrangements from the outset. Please do get in touch if your organisation would benefit from our advice and guidance.

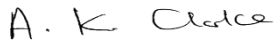
Our [Complaint Handling Code](#), in force since April 2025, is now applied in our casework about councils and offers structure and support to your local complaint system. The Code is good practice for all organisations we

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.

Our training programme provides a flexible, expert-led route to building complaints capability across your teams, with courses open for individual delegates to book. Contact training@lgo.org.uk for more information.

Our Annual Review of Local Government Complaints will be published in July 2026, setting out the national picture of complaints, trends across service areas, and emerging systemic issues. We encourage you to read it alongside your own organisation's data.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. K. Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

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

Complaint overview
Between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, we dealt with 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