

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

8 July 2026

By email

Ms Wood
Chief Executive
Essex County Council

Dear Ms Wood

Annual Review Letter 2025–26

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 2026. 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 details of the decisions we have made about your organisation, read the reports we have issued, and view the service improvements your organisation 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 15 July 2026.

Your organisation's performance

In the past year, my staff have met with your Council twice to discuss the disproportionately high number of complaints we receive about its Special Educational Needs (SEN) services. I welcome the steps being taken to address underlying issues, and the open and constructive engagement from your staff.

We encourage councils to take action to provide suitable redress for the complaints it upholds, without the need for us to investigate. Across all councils, in 33% of SEN cases where there is clear fault causing harm, we are satisfied appropriate action has already been taken. By contrast, your Council has done so in only 1% of such cases, which is significantly out of step.

We have discussed steps that could help prevent complaints escalating to us, including improvements to complaint handling. I encourage your Council to consider our Complaint Handling Code and how this could support more effective resolution and remedy.

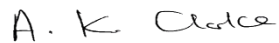
Supporting complaints and service improvement

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 and offers structure and support to your local complaint system. 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 next week, 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