

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

8 July 2026

By email

Mr Lal
Chief Executive
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Dear Mr Lal

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

It is disappointing that we have seen recurring issues previously raised with the Council, with limited evidence of effective improvement.

During the year, we made 14 enquiries, of which seven were responded to outside our 20-day timescale. Delays were particularly evident in Children's and Education Services, where some responses took more than twice the expected timeframe. We also received responses that were incomplete or of insufficient quality.

These delays hinder our investigations and contribute to avoidable frustration for complainants. This is especially concerning where there is an ongoing relationship between the complainant and the Council, as in many Education and Children's Services cases, where delays can further damage already fragile relationships.

We also experienced delays in the Council providing evidence of compliance with our recommendations. We recorded compliance with recommendations in 12 cases. It is disappointing that in five of those cases, compliance was late. The delays affected both service improvements and personal remedies, including apologies and financial payments, which should be straightforward to implement.

We encourage the Council to raise any concerns about the achievability of timescales at draft decision stage. While we do not accept open-ended timescales, we are willing to engage constructively where deadlines may not be realistic.

The Council should reflect on the issues identified in this letter and set out how it will achieve sustained improvement. I would welcome a meeting to discuss the actions it intends to take.

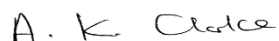
Supporting complaints and service improvement

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