Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

8 July 2026

By email

Mr Flaherty
Chief Executive
Staffordshire County Council

Dear Mr Flaherty

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

Last year, I raised concerns about your Council's timeliness in responding to our enquiries and complying with our recommendations. It is disappointing that these issues have continued.

Delays in responding to our requests for information hindered our investigations. In one Education complaint, we had to threaten to issue a witness summons before the Council provided the information.

We also recorded late compliance with our recommendations in 24 of 60 cases. These delays affected both personal remedies, such as apologies and payments, causing unnecessary waiting and frustration for complainants, as well as service improvement actions.

Where timescales for recommendations are not achievable, the Council should raise this at the draft decision stage of the process. We aim to set realistic timeframes but cannot accept indefinite deadlines given the continued risk of similar issues affecting others.

It is particularly concerning that this is the seventh consecutive year we have raised this issue. I ask the Council to ensure there is effective oversight of responses to our enquiries and agreed recommendations, and that any anticipated delays are communicated in advance.

We met with officers in January 2026 and it was encouraging to hear that steps are being taken to address these concerns. I encourage continued engagement with my office and expect to see sustained improvement in the year ahead.

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,



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