Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

8 July 2026

By email

Ms Bennett
Chief Executive
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

Dear Ms Bennett

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

We have experienced several issues with how the Council has responded to us during the year.

We recorded your Council's compliance with our recommendations in eight cases. It is disappointing that in four of those cases, compliance was late. Delays affected both personal remedies such as apologies and payments, resulting in unnecessary waiting and added 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.

In addition, there were some unhelpful responses to our investigation enquiries and draft decisions. On one occasion, the Council refused to provide information we requested about mediation in a Special Educational Needs case. We had to write to the Council to remind it of our powers to obtain the information we had asked for. This step should not have been necessary as our powers are clearly detailed in the guidance we issue to councils and significantly delayed the progress of the case.

In another case, the Council's legal services department responded late to a draft decision, referred to the Council as "our client," and sought to negotiate a reduced remedy despite accepting the fault we had identified. This reflected a fundamental misunderstanding of our role and process. We treat councils as corporate bodies, including internal legal services departments. While we will consider comments on

findings of fault and injustice, we do not negotiate the level of remedy. In this case, the draft decision had already explained how we had assessed the injustice and why the financial remedy proposed was at the lower end of our range. It was therefore inappropriate for the Council to approach the matter in this way.

I ask that you reflect on these concerns and remind staff of the need to respond to us promptly, appropriately, comply with our information requests and cooperate with our investigations.

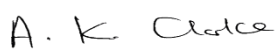
Supporting complaints and service improvement

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