

Annual Review of Local Government Complaints 2025-2026

July 2026



Contents

Ombudsman's foreword	1
Headline statistics	3
Complaints and enquiries received	4
Oversight and organisational learning	6
2025-26 Statistics by service area	8
2025-26 Statistics by authority type	13
Investigation reports	16

Ombudsman's foreword

The scale of demand on our service this year should give every local authority pause for thought. The number of complaints we received this year has risen significantly and more sharply than at any time over the past 10 years. Last year we saw a 16% increase in the number of complaints we received. This year that figure has more than doubled to 33%. That increase is not concentrated in one area, it is consistent across all services.

This is not a picture unique to local government. There are rising demands across all UK public sector Ombudsman bodies and we are witnessing a broader crisis of public confidence in public services. When people cannot get the help they need, and feel they have no other recourse, they come to us. That so many are doing so tells us something important. It speaks not just about individual service failures, but about the gap between what residents expect and what they are receiving.

The picture painted by the complaints we deal with is consistent and concerning. In special educational needs services, in housing, and in adult social care, we are seeing the consequences of systems under sustained and serious strain.

I am acutely aware of the scale of reform currently underway. It is much needed and long overdue. The Casey Commission's work on adult social care, SEND reforms and the wider

devolution programme all represent genuine opportunities to address problems that have been allowed to deepen for too long. But reform takes time to design, legislate and deliver. The children waiting for education support, and the vulnerable adults without adequate housing or care, cannot wait for those benefits to arrive.

This year, we welcomed the publication of independent research by the University of Manchester, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, examining how local authorities respond to our service improvement recommendations in SEND. The findings of that research, "Set Up to Fail?", echo much of what we see in our own data.

The research confirms that many of the problems driving complaints to us are rooted in national systemic failures: inadequate funding, chronic shortages of educational psychologists, and demand that has consistently outpaced available resource. Local authority officers interviewed for the research described a SEND system that is, in their own words, "fundamentally broken" and a "national crisis". We believe these findings apply across many local services, particularly housing and adult social care.

Despite those pressures, the research demonstrates that our work makes a real difference.



Local authorities universally accept our recommendations, and our service improvement recommendations lead to real change at local level through increased focus and accountability, even in the face of national challenges. Good administration matters. It matters to the people who depend on these services, and we know it matters to the local authorities that are legally responsible for delivering them.

“When people cannot get the help they need, and feel they have no other recourse, they come to us. That so many are doing so tells us something important. It speaks not just about individual service failures, but about the gap between what residents expect and what they are receiving.”

That is why I want to speak directly to local authority Chief Executives and Leaders through this report. The responsibility to act does not rest solely with central government. The “Set Up to Fail?” research is candid that national pressures have shifted blame onto local authorities for failures that are, in significant part, not of their making. We understand that. But it also shows that the way local authorities respond to those pressures, and how seriously they engage with learning from complaints, makes a measurable difference to outcomes for residents. The authorities that work constructively with us, embed learning from our recommendations and invest in strong complaint-handling, consistently demonstrate better practice. That is not a coincidence.

The once-in-a-generation programme of local government reorganisation and devolution now under way presents a genuine opportunity to redesign services, break down the silos that have frustrated joined-up delivery for decades, and find locally-driven solutions to problems that have persisted through successive waves of national reform. New technology, smarter joint commissioning, and integrated approaches to health, care and housing have the potential to make a real difference now, while we wait for the wider benefits of national reform to take effect. A complaints service that works from day one gives new authorities

an immediate window into inherited failures and a live gauge of their own performance, intelligence that, left uncaptured, cannot be recovered.

I also want to be direct about the financial dimension. Poor decisions, delayed action and inadequate services are not only harmful to residents, they are also costly. The cumulative expense of complaints, legal challenges and emergency interventions far exceeds the cost of investment in effective, well-managed services. Getting it right first time is both the right thing to do and, in the long run, the financially prudent course. For local authorities managing significant budget pressures, that is not a secondary consideration.

We see this in our casework. This year we saw a 20% increase in the number of complaints where we were happy with how the complaint was resolved locally. This is evidence of increased levels of good practice in complaint handling within the sector and I hope this will continue as local authorities embed our Complaint Handling Code in local practice and policy.

I recognise that local authorities are operating in genuinely difficult circumstances, with constrained resources, stretched workforces and rising demand. I do not underestimate the complexity of what is being asked of you. But strong and honest leadership, including a genuine commitment to learning from what goes wrong, makes a measurable difference in both efficient service delivery and improving public trust.

The problems documented here are serious. But they are not insurmountable. And the opportunity to address them, at pace and at scale, has rarely been greater.

Amerdeep Clarke
Local Government and
Social Care Ombudsman
July 2026

Headline statistics



27,625

complaints received

33% increase on last year



22,006

complaints decided

12% increase on last year



4,335

**complaints
investigated**



3,707*

**complaints
upheld**



13%

satisfactory remedies**



99.9%

**compliance with our
recommendations**



86%

uphold rate



6.3

**upheld complaints per
100,000 residents*****

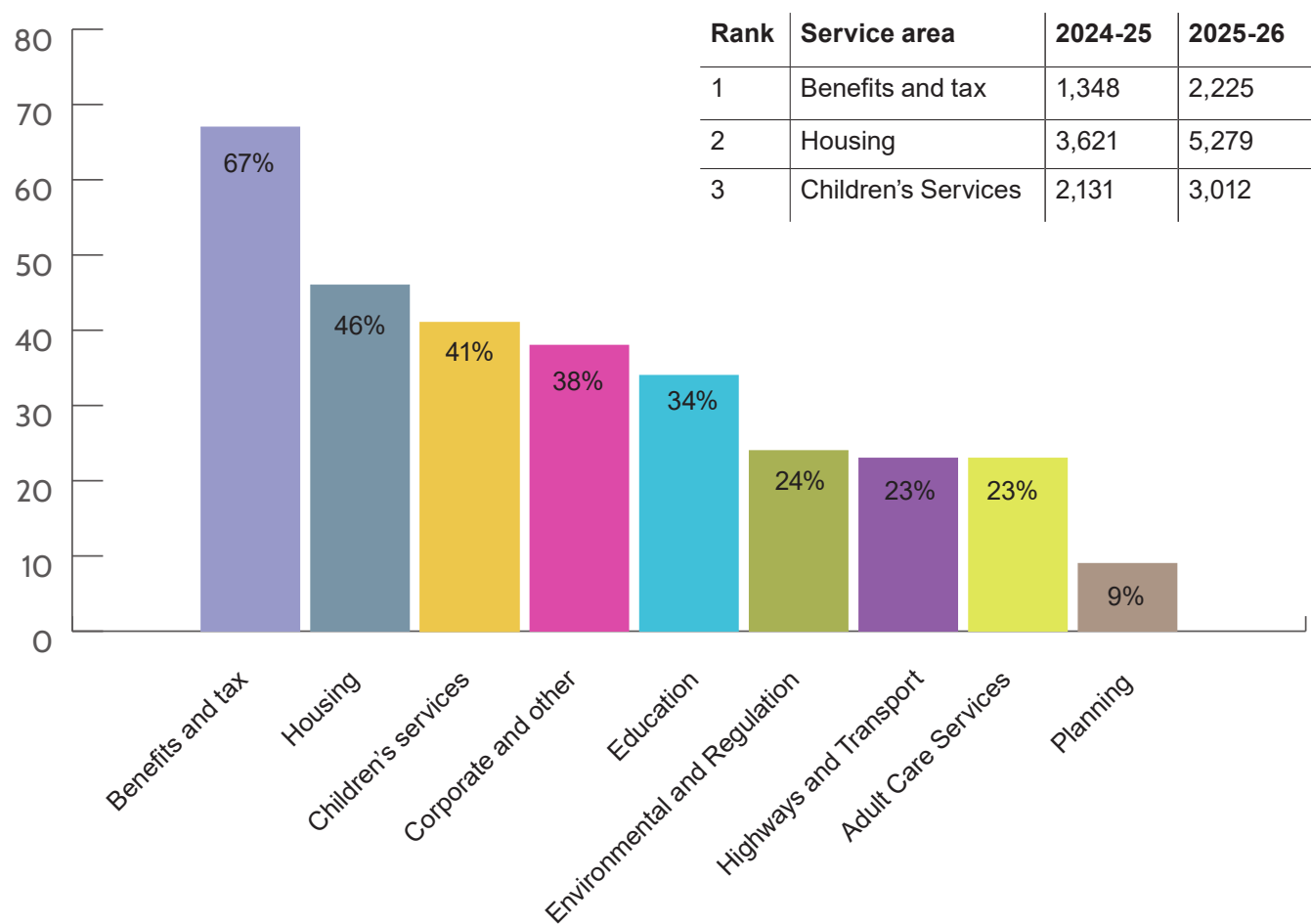
*Includes cases where we found the organisation offered a suitable remedy early on

**We agreed with how the organisation had offered to put things right

***Includes the following authority types only: County Councils, District Councils, London Boroughs, Metropolitan Councils, Unitary Authorities

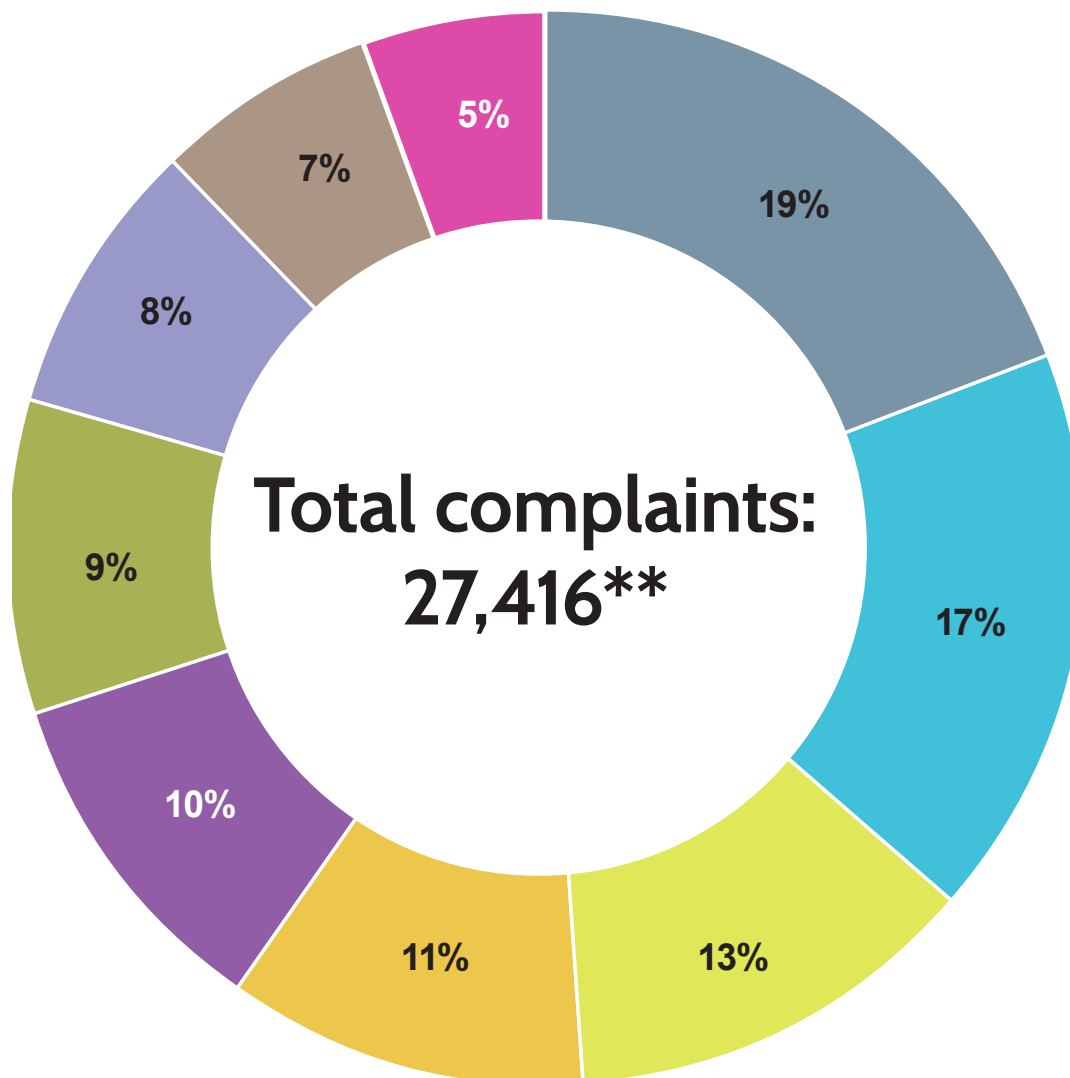
Complaints and enquiries received

PERCENTAGE GROWTH ON PREVIOUS YEAR BY CATEGORY



Complaints and enquiries received

COMPLAINTS AND ENQUIRIES BY SHARE OF TOTAL



Service area	Cases**
Housing	5,279
Education	4,721
Adult Care Services	3,429
Children's Services	3,012
Highways and Transport	2,818
Environmental and Regulation	2,559
Benefits and Tax	2,255
Planning and Development	1,870
Corporate and Other	1,473

Percentages add up to 99% due to rounding.

**This does not include 209 cases where we did not have sufficient information to categorise the complaint.

Oversight and organisational learning

Local authority chief executives, directors and elected members should use the information we publish to strengthen complaint handling and assess the overall health of their local complaint system.

Our [good practice guides](#) for senior leaders and elected members explain how complaint data can be used to understand service performance and strengthen oversight.

USING DATA FOR OVERSIGHT

You can use our [performance map](#) to view key statistics that provide insight into an organisation's approach to complaint handling.

- Uphold rates show the proportion of investigations in which we found fault, including cases where the authority accepted fault and offered a suitable remedy early. How does your authority compare with similar authorities?
- Offering a satisfactory remedy shows an authority is recognising fault and putting things right before a complaint reaches us. How often does this happen in your authority, and how does that compare with others?
- Compliance rates show the proportion of cases in which we were satisfied recommendations had been implemented, based on the evidence provided. Compliance below 100% is uncommon. Does your authority have a 100% compliance rate? If not, what is in place to prevent further non-compliance?
- Timely compliance means recommendations were implemented within the agreed timeframes. How does your authority's timely compliance rate compare with others?
- Service improvement recommendations are intended to prevent the same fault recurring. How does your authority track implementation, and how does it assess whether the agreed changes are making a difference?

Best practice in complaint handling

Effective complaint handling builds public confidence, strengthens oversight and helps services improve.

We support organisations to achieve this through our recommendations, alongside guidance and resources that help strengthen local complaint oversight.

PUTTING THINGS RIGHT

Timely compliance matters. Delivering remedies within the agreed timescale helps rebuild trust and shows that authorities take complaints seriously. This year, authorities were late in implementing agreed recommendations in more than 750 cases (23%). We now publish timely compliance rates on our website.

To ensure the timely delivery of recommendations, authorities should:

- set realistic timescales at draft decision stage
- track agreed recommendations and tell us promptly about any delay
- provide evidence as soon as a remedy has been completed
- have clear processes to ensure apologies and payments are made without delay.

SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

- The Complaint Handling Code sets the standard for fair and effective complaint handling. Since April 2026, we have applied the Code in our casework about local councils. We also provide good practice guides and training resources to support implementation.
- Focus Reports and Good Practice Guides bring together case studies from our investigations on specific topics, highlighting key concerns and offering specialist guidance for practitioners. During the year, we published reports and guides covering disabled housing, supporting children out of school and planning enforcement. Our council performance map brings complaint statistics together in one interactive resource. Users can compare similar councils and review annual letters, investigation reports and agreed service improvements.
- We also publish [data tables](#) with complaint information at local authority level for further analysis.

Oversight and organisational learning

We want authorities to have complaint systems that are effective, trusted and able to drive service improvement. Where support is needed, we offer a range of online complaint handling training. To find out more, visit www.lgo.org.uk/training.

Authorities that took part in complaint handling training during 2025-26 are [listed on our website](#).

Learning and Improvement

PUBLISHED DECISIONS AND REPORTS

We are one of the few Ombudsman schemes to publish every decision we make, supporting transparency and enabling wider learning from our casework.

Cases that raise serious issues or matters of public interest are published as investigation reports. During the year, we published 27 reports and three further reports. These are listed at the end of this report.

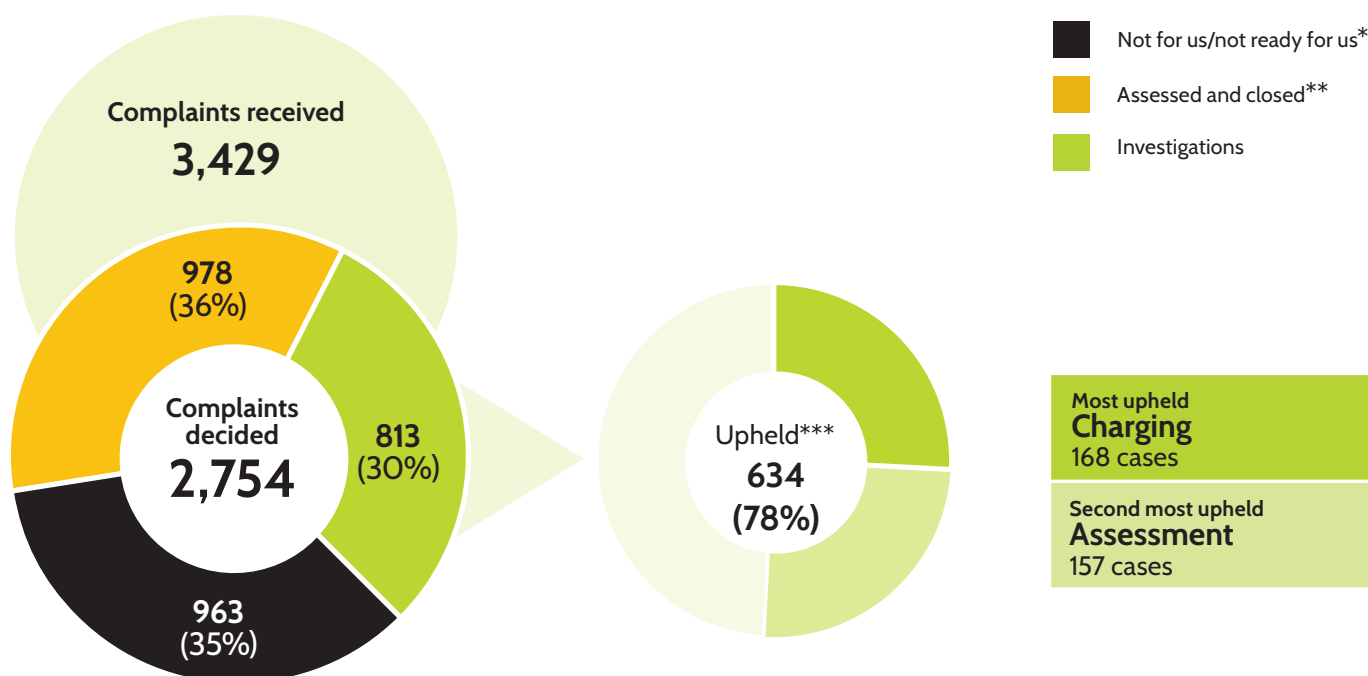
A further report is issued when an authority refuses to implement a recommended remedy or fails to respond to an earlier report. It highlights the non-compliance and may lead us to require the authority to publish a statement of non-compliance in a local newspaper, setting out what action was not taken and why.

A statement of non-compliance promotes accountability by informing the public when an authority has failed to act on our recommendations.

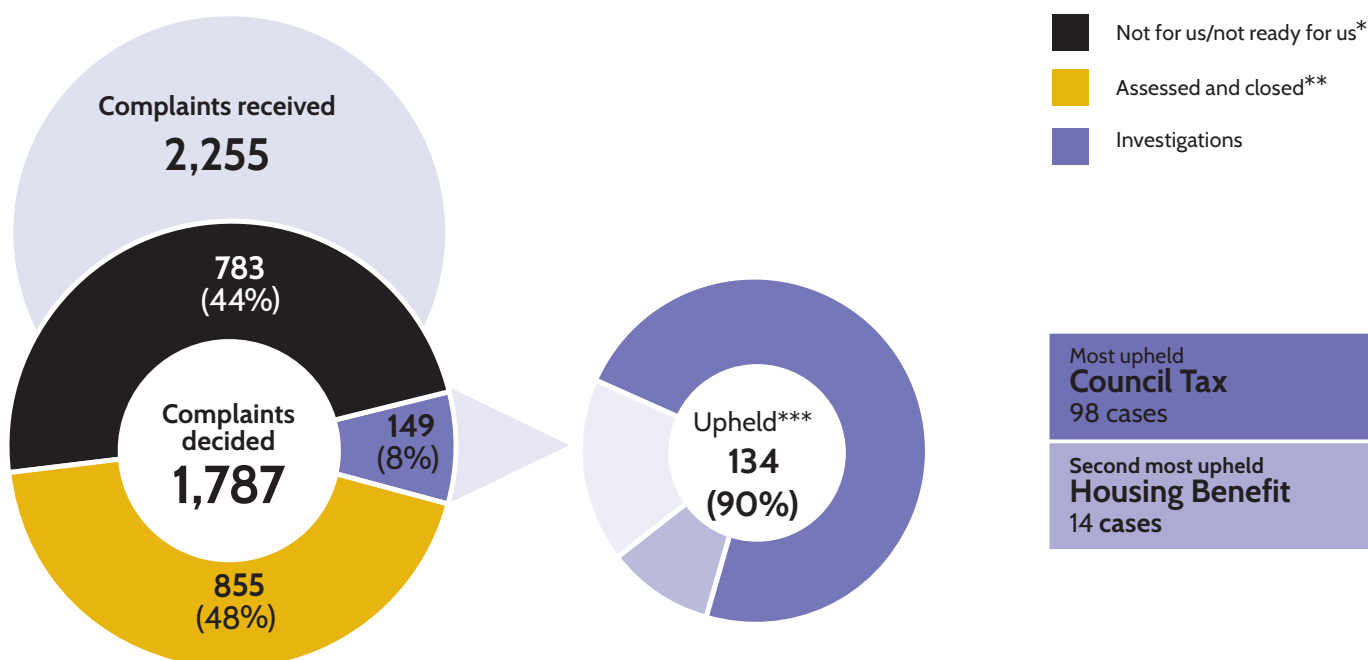
2025-26

Statistics by service area

Adult Care Services



Benefits & Tax



*Not for us – includes complaints brought to us before the organisation was given chance to consider it, or the complainant came to the wrong Ombudsman.

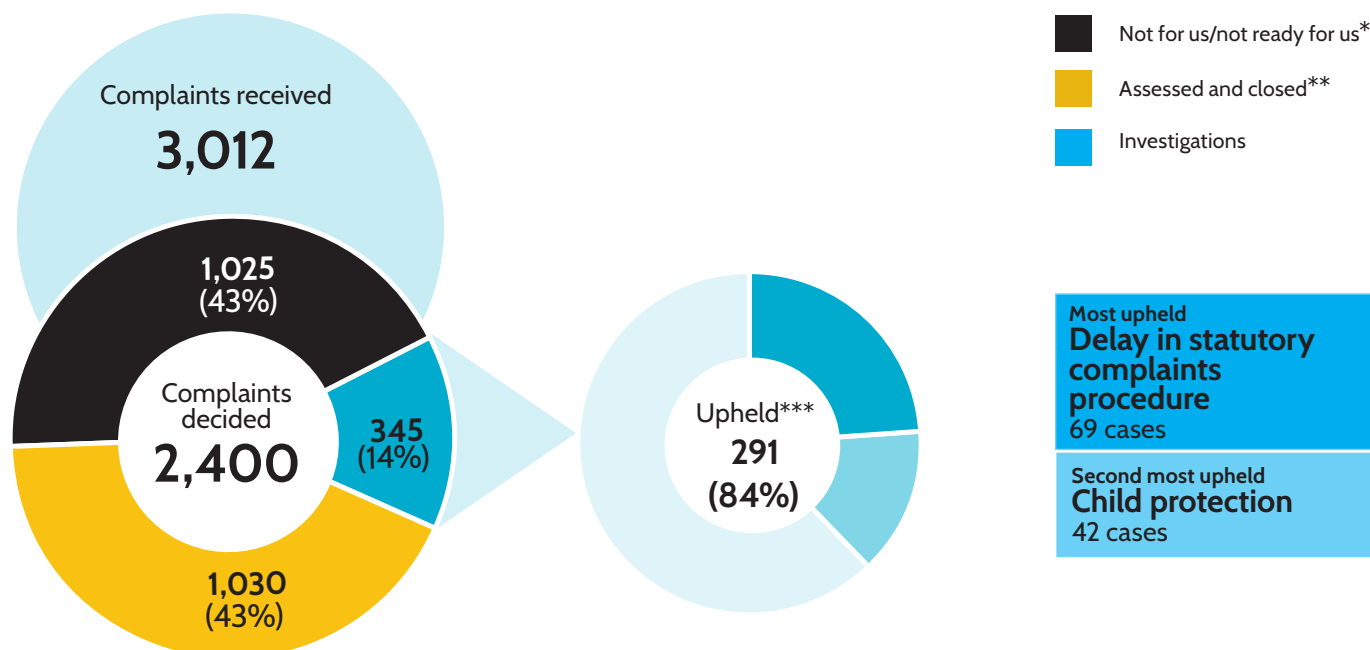
** Assessed and closed – we assessed the complaint but decided against carrying out a further investigation. This might be because the law says we're not allowed to investigate it, or because it would not be an effective use of public funds if we did.

*** Upheld: we completed an investigation and found evidence of fault, or we found the organisation offered a suitable remedy early on.

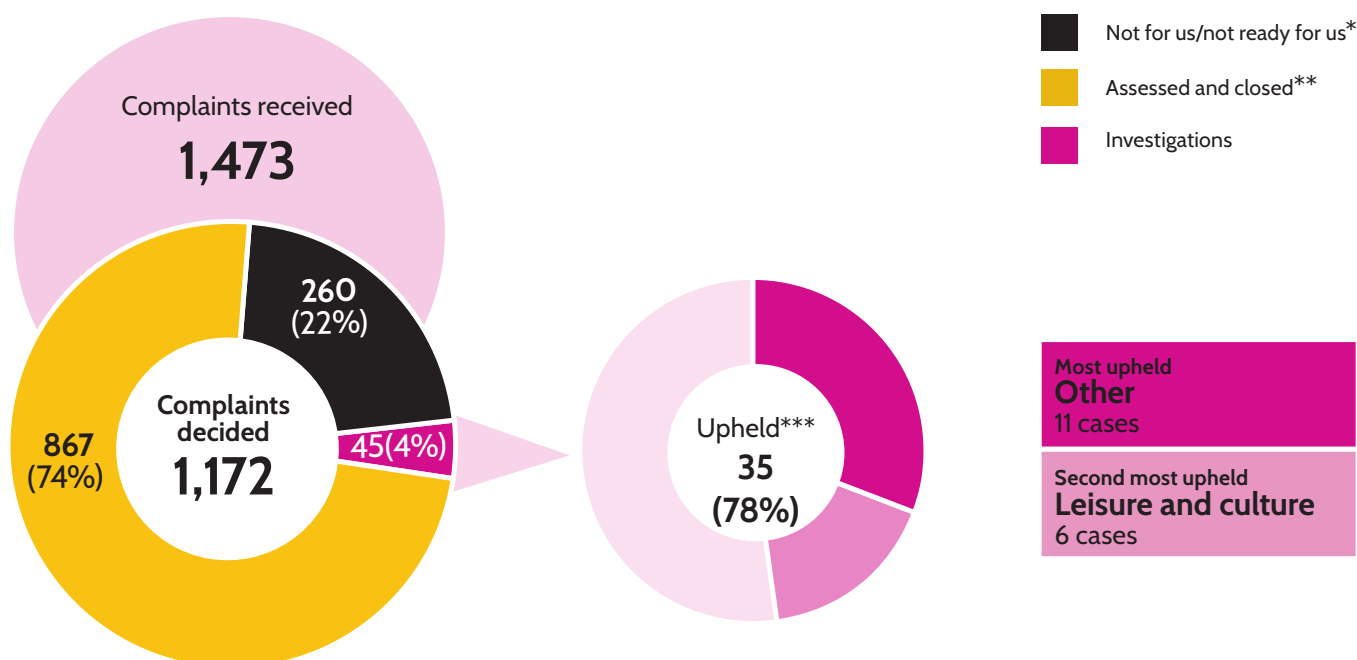
2025-26

Statistics by service area

Children's Services



Corporate & Other Services

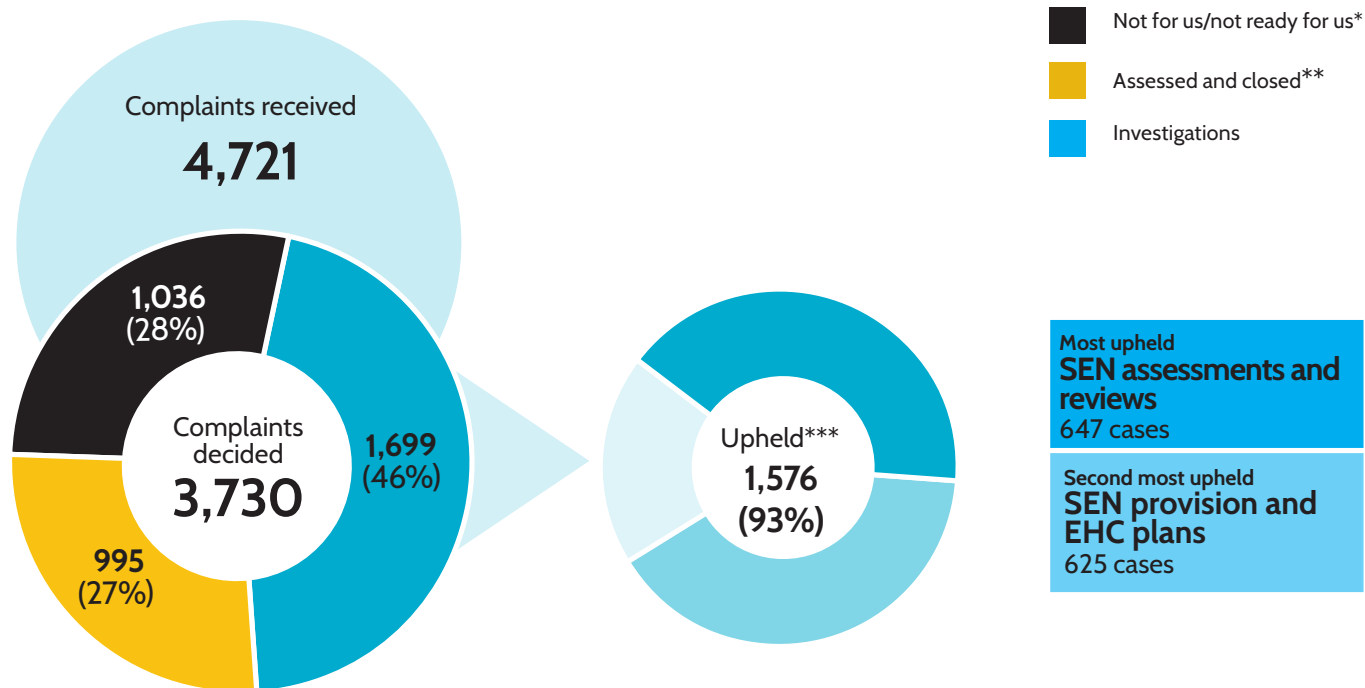


*Not for us – includes complaints brought to us before the organisation was given chance to consider it, or the complainant came to the wrong Ombudsman.
 ** Assessed and closed – we assessed the complaint but decided against carrying out a further investigation. This might be because the law says we're not allowed to investigate it, or because it would not be an effective use of public funds if we did.
 *** Upheld: we completed an investigation and found evidence of fault, or we found the organisation offered a suitable remedy early on.

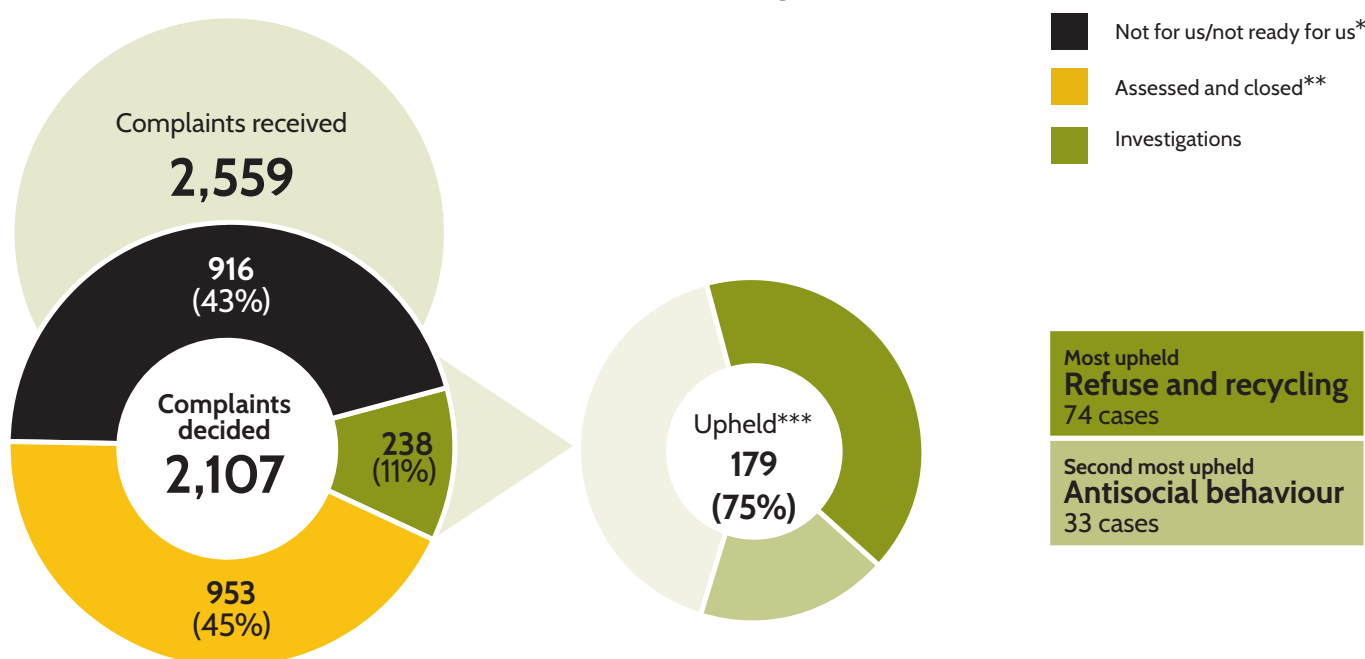
2025-26

Statistics by service area

Education



Environmental Services, Public Protection & Regulation



*Not for us – includes complaints brought to us before the organisation was given chance to consider it, or the complainant came to the wrong Ombudsman.

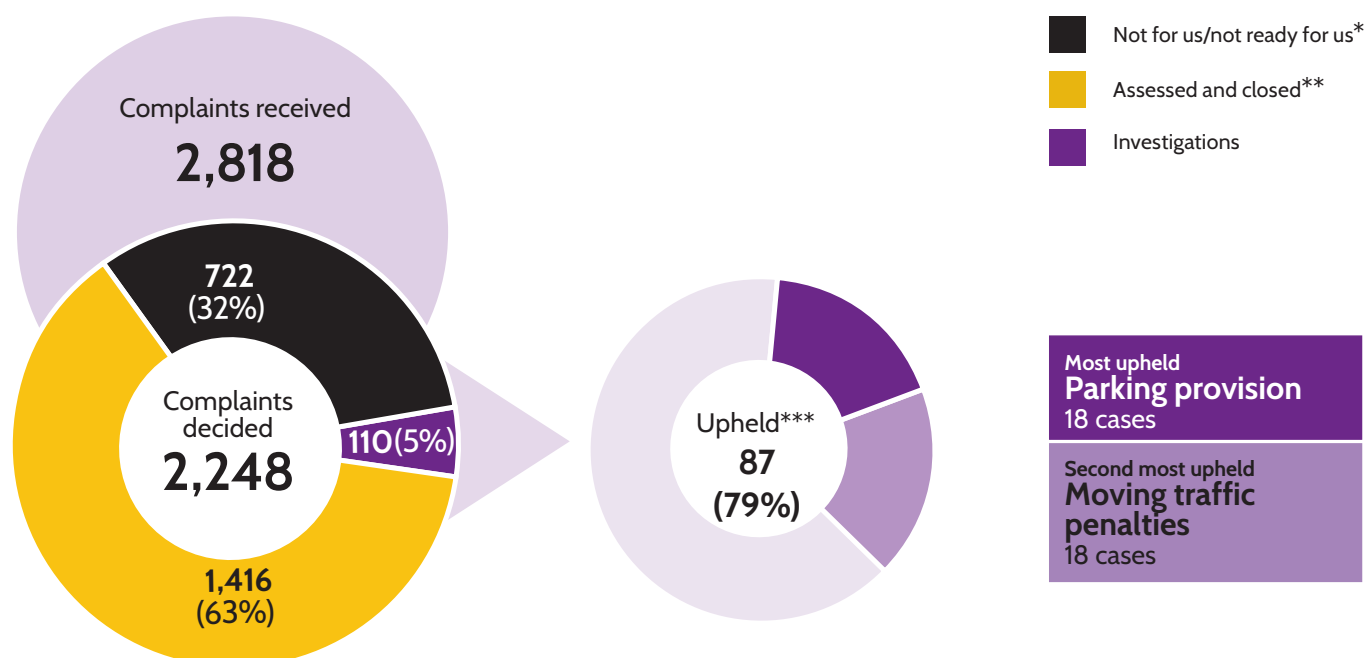
** Assessed and closed – we assessed the complaint but decided against carrying out a further investigation. This might be because the law says we're not allowed to investigate it, or because it would not be an effective use of public funds if we did.

*** Upheld: we completed an investigation and found evidence of fault, or we found the organisation offered a suitable remedy early on.

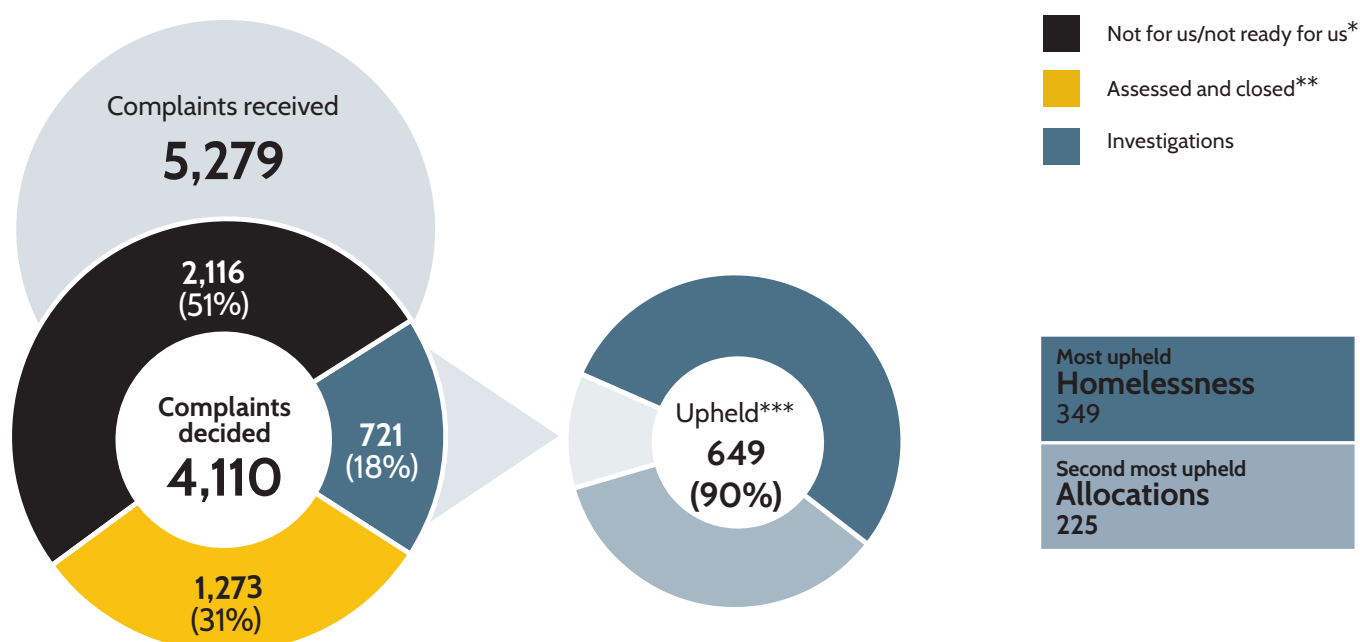
2025-26

Statistics by service area

Highways & Transport



Housing



*Not for us – includes complaints brought to us before the organisation was given chance to consider it, or the complainant came to the wrong Ombudsman.

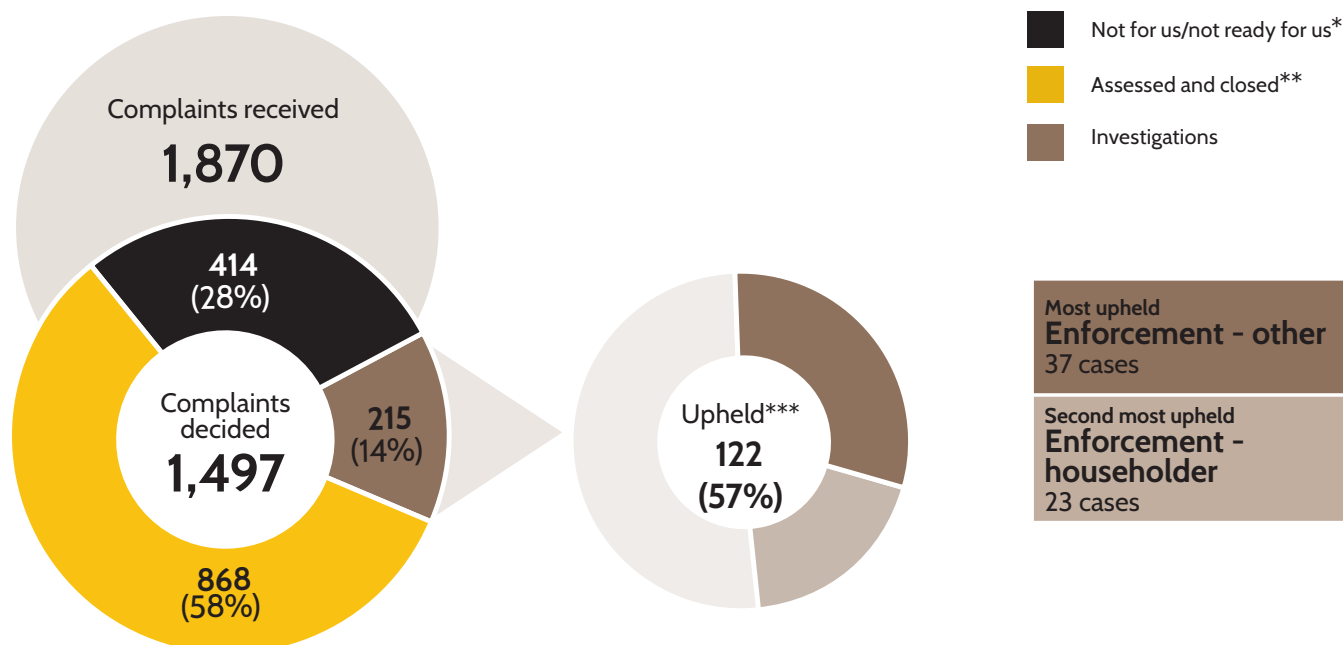
** Assessed and closed – we assessed the complaint but decided against carrying out a further investigation. This might be because the law says we're not allowed to investigate it, or because it would not be an effective use of public funds if we did.

*** Upheld: we completed an investigation and found evidence of fault, or we found the organisation offered a suitable remedy early on.

2025-26

Statistics by service area

Planning & Development



*Not for us – includes complaints brought to us before the organisation was given chance to consider it, or the complainant came to the wrong Ombudsman.

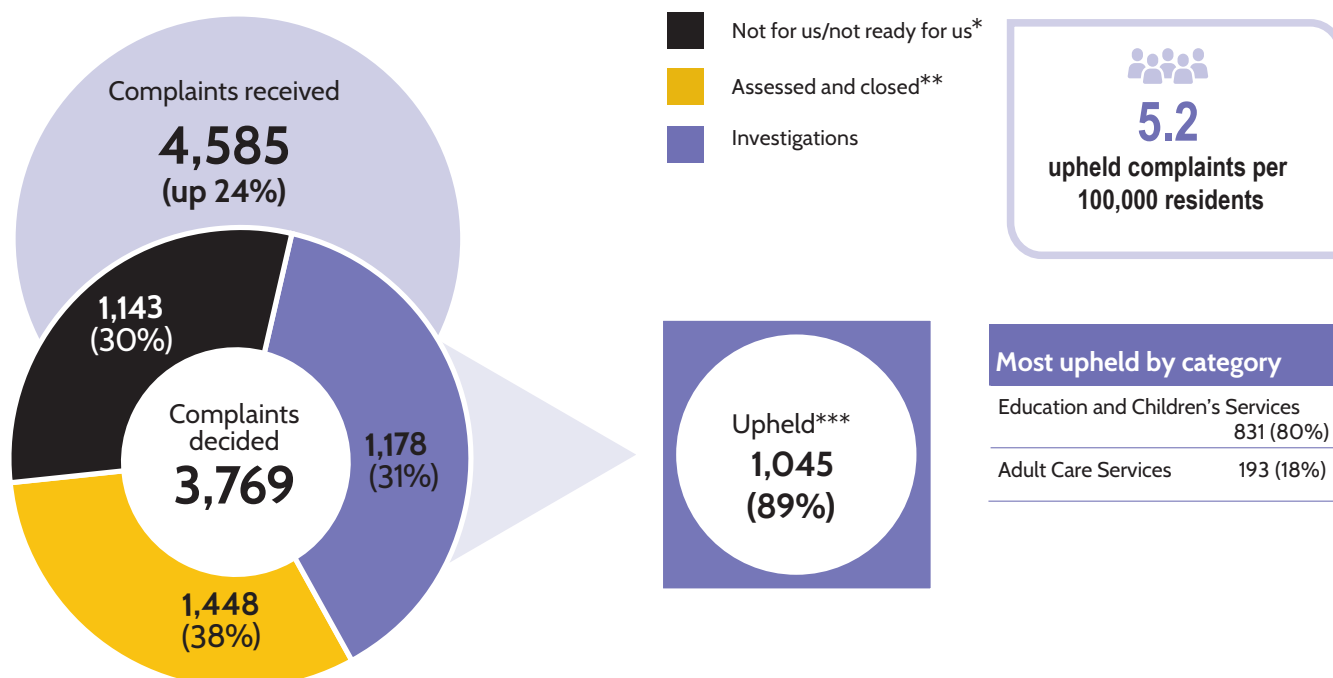
** Assessed and closed – we assessed the complaint but decided against carrying out a further investigation. This might be because the law says we're not allowed to investigate it, or because it would not be an effective use of public funds if we did.

*** Upheld: we completed an investigation and found evidence of fault, or we found the organisation offered a suitable remedy early on.

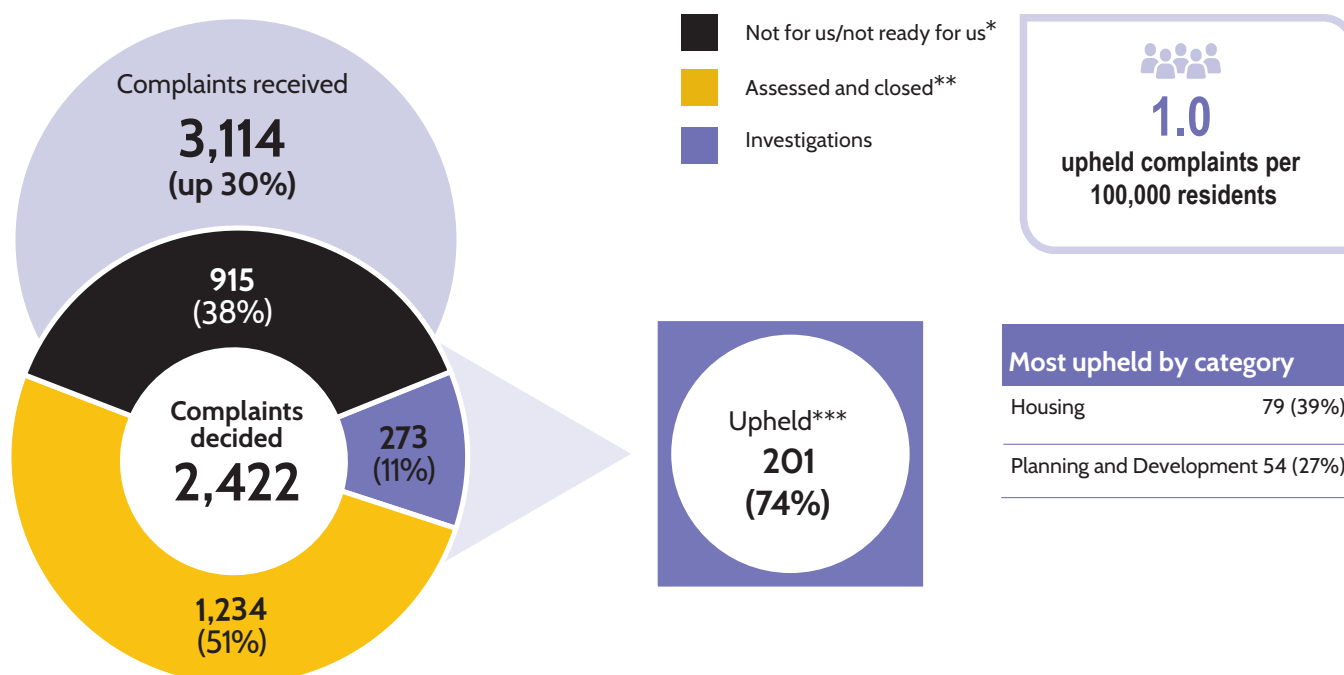
2025-26

Statistics by authority type

County Councils



District and Borough Councils



*Not for us – includes complaints brought to us before the organisation was given chance to consider it, or the complainant came to the wrong Ombudsman.

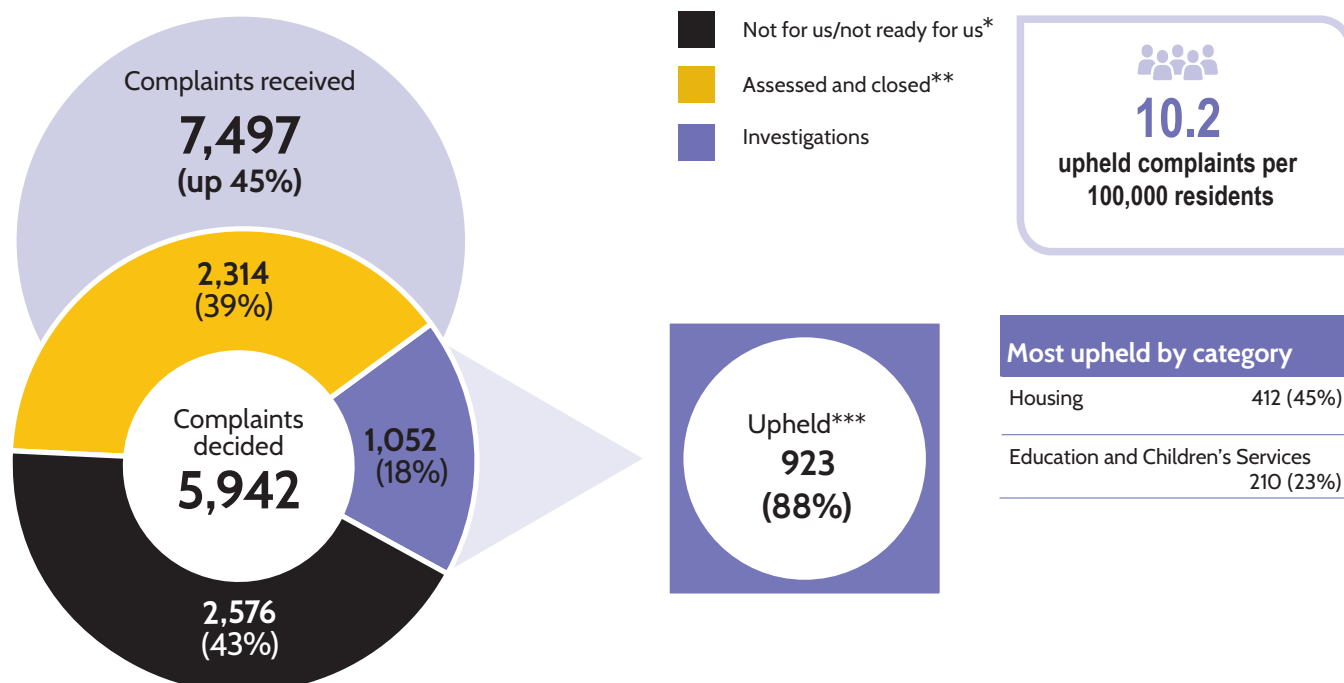
** Assessed and closed – we assessed the complaint but decided against carrying out a further investigation. This might be because the law says we're not allowed to investigate it, or because it would not be an effective use of public funds if we did.

*** Upheld: we completed an investigation and found evidence of fault, or we found the organisation offered a suitable remedy early on.

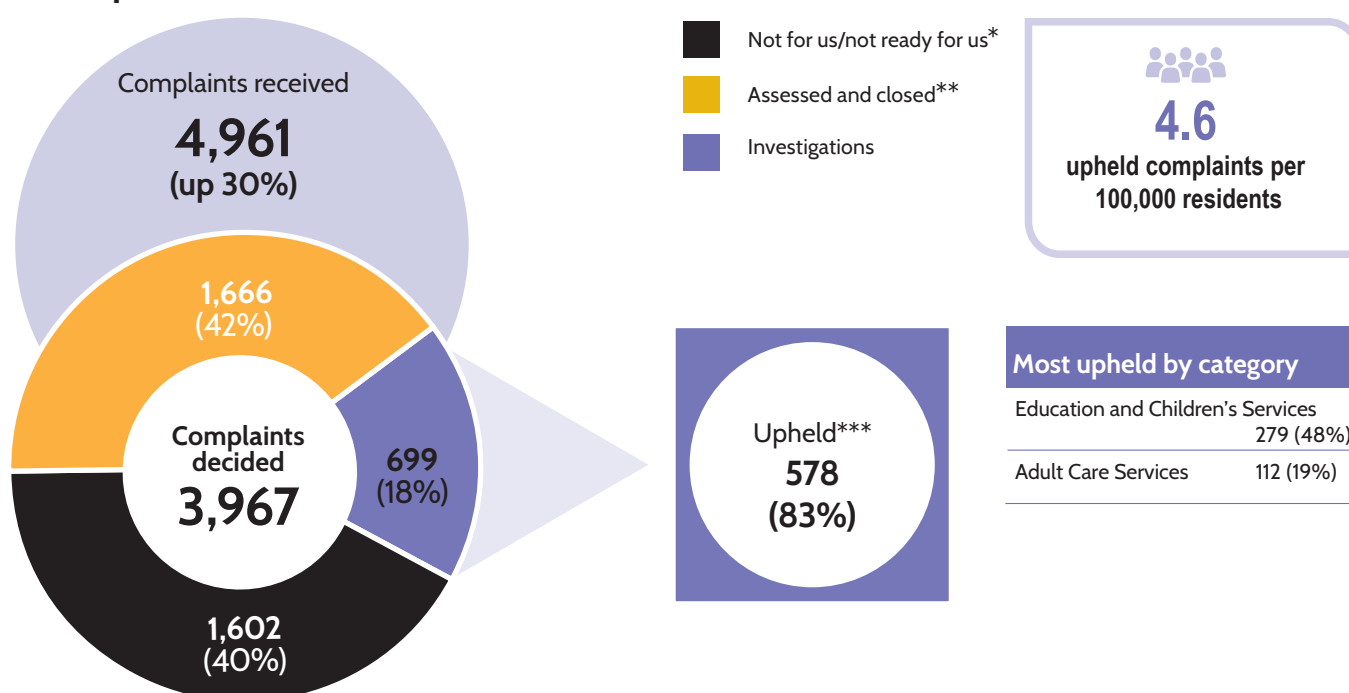
2025-26

Statistics by authority type

London Boroughs



Metropolitan Councils



*Not for us – includes complaints brought to us before the organisation was given chance to consider it, or the complainant came to the wrong Ombudsman.

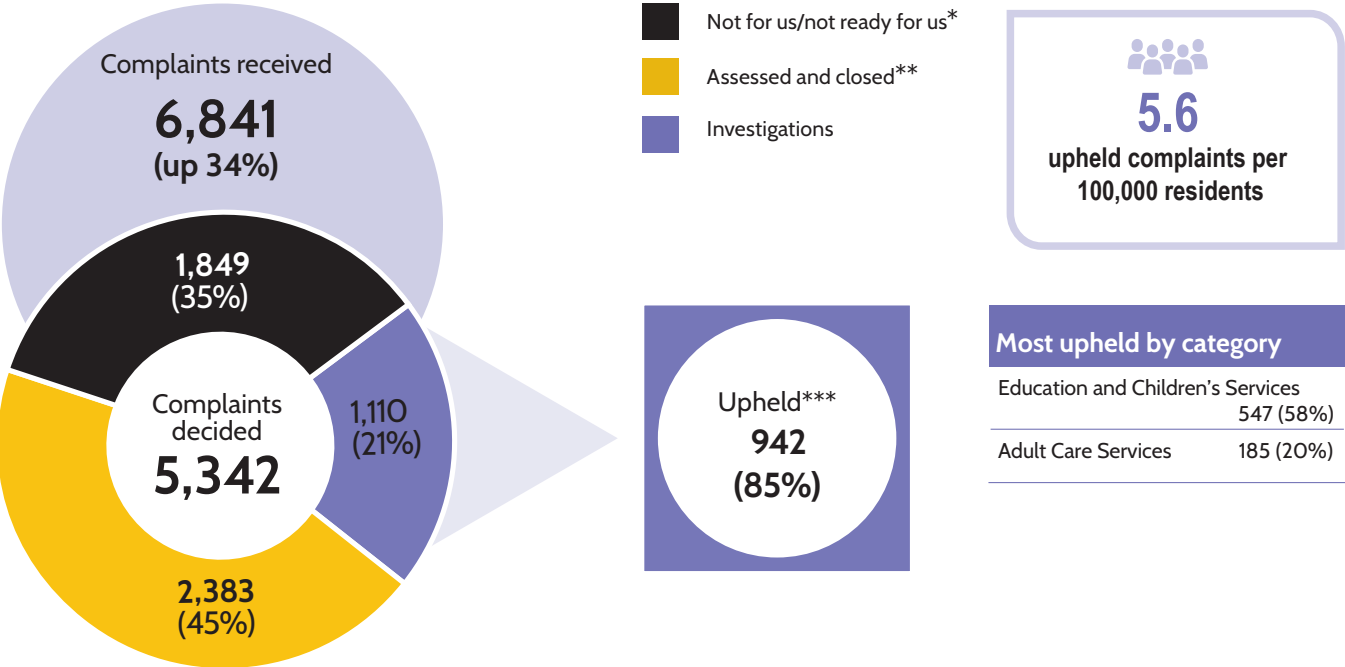
** Assessed and closed – we assessed the complaint but decided against carrying out a further investigation. This might be because the law says we're not allowed to investigate it, or because it would not be an effective use of public funds if we did.

*** Upheld: we completed an investigation and found evidence of fault, or we found the organisation offered a suitable remedy early on.

2025-26

Statistics by authority type

Unitary Authorities



*Not for us – includes complaints brought to us before the organisation was given chance to consider it, or the complainant came to the wrong Ombudsman.

** Assessed and closed – we assessed the complaint but decided against carrying out a further investigation. This might be because the law says we're not allowed to investigate it, or because it would not be an effective use of public funds if we did.

*** Upheld: we completed an investigation and found evidence of fault, or we found the organisation offered a suitable remedy early on.

Investigation reports

 Adult Care Services		
London Borough of Hackney	Transport	24003887
London Borough of Haringey	Safeguarding	24014203
West Sussex County Council	Transport	24009730

 Children's Services		
Cheshire East Council	Child protection	24009262
London Borough of Harrow	Delay in statutory complaints procedure	24022000
London Borough of Lewisham	Delay in statutory complaints procedure	24015996
London Borough of Waltham Forest	Disabled child	24010138
Southend-on-Sea City Council	Disabled child	23004755

 Education		
Essex County Council	SEN assessments & reviews	23003950
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council	SEN assessments & reviews	24010066
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council	School transport	23013127
Somerset Council	SEN personal budgets & direct payments	23017883
Somerset Council	SEN assessments & reviews	24003239
Suffolk County Council	SEN assessments & reviews	23005778
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council	SEN assessments & reviews	24000621
Trafford Council	Alternative provision	23019685

Investigation reports



Environmental Services & Protection



London Borough of Enfield

Antisocial behaviour

[24017695](#)



Highways & Transport



Transport for London

Other

[24021232](#)



Housing



Halton Borough Council

Homelessness

[23005581](#)

Leicester City Council

Homelessness

[24005927](#)

Leicester City Council - further report

Homelessness

[24005927](#)

Leicester City Council - further report

Domestic Abuse

[23015268](#)

London Borough of Croydon

Homelessness

[23015996](#)

London Borough of Hounslow

Homelessness

[24001000](#)

London Borough of Lewisham

Homelessness

[24016564](#)

London Borough of Waltham Forest

Homelessness

[24000033](#)

North Yorkshire Council

Disabled Facilities Grants

[24012483](#)

Norwich City Council

Allocations

[24018523](#)

South Kesteven District Council

Homelessness

[24010719](#)

South Kesteven District Council - further report

Homelessness

[24010719](#)

**Local Government & Social
Care Ombudsman**

PO Box 4771

Coventry

CV4 0EH

T: 0300 061 0614

W: www.lgo.org.uk

Local Government &
Social Care
OMBUDSMAN