

Annual Review of Local Government Complaints 2024-25

July 2025



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Ombudsman's foreword

I am pleased to present our review of local government complaints for 2024-25.

We received a record number of complaints during the year, exceeding 20,000 for the first time – the result of a 16% increase in each of the past two years. Education & Children, Adult Care and Housing services continue to dominate our casework, accounting for 58% of the decisions we made.

The increase in complaints and the level of fault we find – we uphold 83% of the complaints we investigate – illustrates the systemic nature of the issues across local government.

Education & Children's complaints, and in particular the growing issues with special educational needs provision, made up 27% of the cases we received during the year, and made up 48% of cases we upheld. We found fault in more cases this year, with 91% upheld. We continue to maintain the view that urgent change is required to national policy on support for young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and we await the Government white paper, now expected in Autumn 2025.

Housing complaints accounted for 17% of the cases we received, a higher proportion than last year. We upheld 85% of the complaints we investigated and, while issues remain particularly prevalent in London, there are

similar issues repeated across the country. We see people being denied access to housing registers, being given the wrong priority, and not being treated fairly when homeless or faced with homelessness, including the use of unsuitable temporary accommodation. There is no doubt that the challenges around the supply of affordable housing are acute, and we recognise the commitment made to build more homes. Whilst construction takes place, councils need to look at implementing their policies, and the law, consistently and fairly – as many do despite the challenges – with people at the heart of their services and approach.

13% of the cases we received were about adult social care. Our casework tells us that delays in the assessment process and poor communication with individuals and families continue to be key themes. We upheld 78% of the adult social care complaints we investigated, slightly less than last year, but still a high proportion. Again we believe there are systemic problems at play and hope the current independent commission into adult social care will identify short, medium, and long-term solutions that help alleviate pressure in the system.



We know that change is needed to deliver sustainable and effective local government services. We published our Triennial Review during the year setting out the changes to our powers that would help to push up complaint handling standards and give more people access to redress.

The Review proposes four solutions:

- **Recommendation One:** Simplified legislation to ensure we can investigate all local government services, now and into the future, particularly as devolution promises to impart more decision making to new regional bodies.
- **Recommendation Two:** The statutory power to monitor compliance with our Complaint Handling Code.
- **Recommendation Three:** Requiring independent care providers to signpost to us, to drive up people's awareness of their rights.
- **Recommendation Four:** Extend our remit past the school gate, so we can look at how Education, Health and Care Plans are implemented, and how children are admitted and excluded in schools.

We look forward to the government's response.

“Despite the obvious pressures within local government, pleasingly, compliance with the recommendations we make remains high at 99.7%. This demonstrates the sector’s commitment to redress and improvement and the importance of good governance and leadership within complaint handling.”

Within our current powers, we issue investigation reports to highlight recurrent or significant fault, injustice, or remedy, highlight systemic problems or non-compliance with our recommendations. We published 26 reports during the year. Just over three quarters of these were on investigations about Education & Children's Services and Housing.

Authorities are required to consider our reports at a high decision-making level, such as council meetings. These reports are a great tool for learning from our casework.

Despite the obvious pressures within local government, pleasingly, compliance with the recommendations we make remains high at 99.7%. This demonstrates the sector's commitment to redress and improvement and the importance of good governance and leadership within complaint handling.

Our Complaint Handling Code offers further support and structure for council complaint systems. Published last year, we have worked with 20 pilot local authorities to understand the opportunities and challenges presented by the Code, resulting in the publication of a series of good practice guides and free training resources to support organisations in adopting it successfully.

Finally, I encourage councils to review the data and lessons from our casework in the report, use it to draw comparisons, evaluate performance, and make improvements.

Amerdeep Somal
Local Government and
Social Care Ombudsman
July 2025

Headline statistics



20,773
complaints received



19,660
complaints
decided



4,298
complaints
investigated



3,552*
complaints
upheld



12%
satisfactory remedies**



99.7%
compliance with our
recommendations



83%
uphold rate



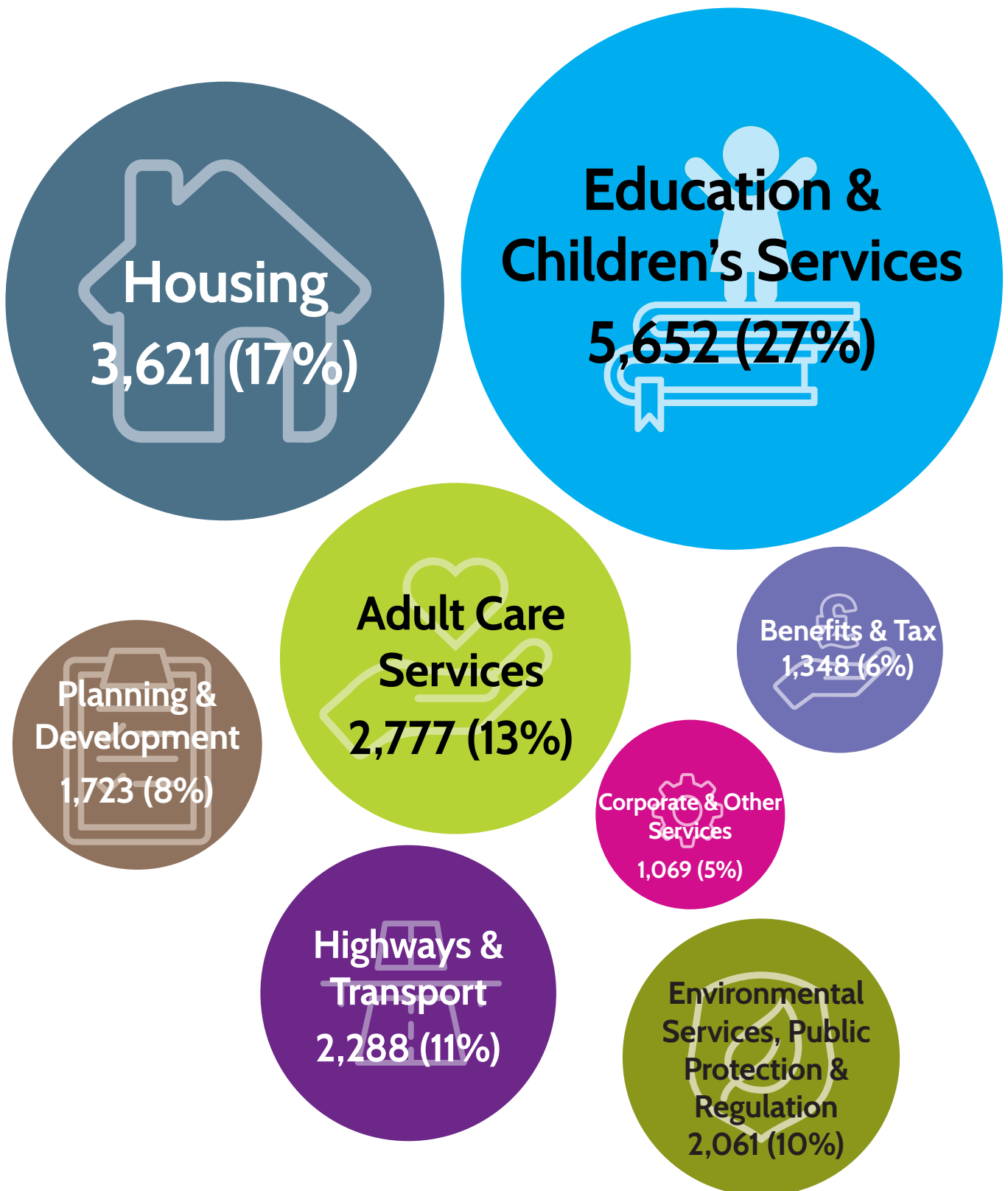
6.2
upheld complaints per
100,000 residents***

*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



Percentages add up to 98% due to rounding.

Enhancing resident satisfaction: best practice in complaint management

Listening to public concerns is an essential component of a well-run, accountable authority that is committed to public engagement, learning and improvement.

Putting things right when they go wrong

When we find fault, we make recommendations to put things right. These recommendations are non-binding yet, in almost all cases, authorities agree to comply with them. To assure ourselves we monitor compliance in a credible way, we demand evidence of what organisations have, or will, do to carry out each recommendation they have agreed to.

We were satisfied with authorities' compliance with our recommendations in 99.7% of cases.

There were 10 cases in which we were not satisfied the authority had complied with our recommendations. When this happens, we consider a range of actions, including issuing a report and opening a new investigation into the authority's failure to provide the agreed remedy. Non-compliance is also reported publicly on our website.

Timely compliance is important; it helps to rebuild people's confidence when an organisation carries out recommendations within the agreed timeframe. There were more than 500 cases (18%) where compliance was late because our recommendations were not carried out on time. To ensure remedies are implemented on time, authorities should consider:

- The timescales proposed at the draft decision stage to ensure they are achievable
- Keeping track of agreed recommendations and informing us of any delays
- Providing us with the evidence as soon as a remedy is completed
- Establishing processes that ensure apologies and payments to complainants are made promptly

Best practice: systems and oversight

Our performance data is a key part of the measures set out in the government's statutory guide for best value authorities, published in May 2024. The guidance says best value authorities:

- are willing to work with us to proactively identify areas for improvement and respond promptly to recommendations, and
- implement our service improvement recommendations at the earliest opportunity.

Our investigation reports are also considered, alongside other data, as potential indicators of failure.

We encourage staff and elected officials to use our guidance and the information we publish to implement effective processes and to determine the health of their local complaints system.

WHAT TO LOOK AT

- The [Complaint Handling Code](#) sets out a process that allows organisations to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. We will be applying the Code in our casework about councils from April 2026. We have good practice guides and training resources available to support organisations to adopt the Code.
- Our [good practice guides](#) for senior leaders and elected members explain how complaint data can be used to better understand the performance of services they are responsible for.
- Our [council performance map](#) has our council complaint statistics in a single, interactive hub. It is a mine of searchable information and allows comparisons to be made between similar councils. You can find annual review letters, investigation reports, and service improvements a council has agreed to make.

We also publish [data tables](#) with complaints information at local authority level, which can be freely analysed and segmented.

Enhancing resident satisfaction: best practice in complaint management

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- **Uphold rates** show the proportion of investigations in which we find some fault, or we found the authority accepted fault early on. How does your authority compare against the average for similar type authorities?
- **Offering a suitable remedy** to a complaint before it comes to us is a good sign your authority is offering appropriate ways to put things right. How often does your authority do this, and how does it compare with others?
- **Compliance rates** show the proportion of cases in which we are satisfied our recommendations have been implemented (based on the evidence authorities give us). Compliance below 100% is rare. Does your authority have a 100% compliance rate – if not, what is it doing to scrutinise complaints where it failed to comply?
- **Service improvement recommendations** aim to prevent a fault from reoccurring and affecting others in the same way. How do you track the way service improvements your authority agrees to make are implemented? How is their impact monitored?

We want authorities to operate, and benefit from, excellent complaint systems. Where support is needed to achieve this, we offer online complaint handling training and can deliver bespoke training to target specific issues. To find out more visit www.lgo.org.uk/training.

Authorities that took part in complaint handling training during 2024-25 can be found on our [website](#).

Learning & improvement: reports and good practice guides

We are one of the only Ombudsman schemes to **publish the decisions** we make. We do this to share learning and be transparent.

Cases that raise serious issues or highlight matters of public interest are issued as reports. We published **26 reports** during the year. These are listed at the [end of this report](#).

Focus Reports and good practice guides collate case studies from our investigations on certain subjects where we highlight our most serious concerns or provide specialist practitioner advice. During the year, we published:

Focus reports

People not structures: putting people at the heart of integrated care

July 2024

In this report, produced with the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, we said Integrated Care Systems (ICS) are not doing enough to put the vulnerable people they support at the heart of what they do.

ICS are made up of representatives from local authority social services and NHS partnerships that work together to support the needs of people in their areas. The cases we highlight show the impact when people's experiences are not put front and centre.



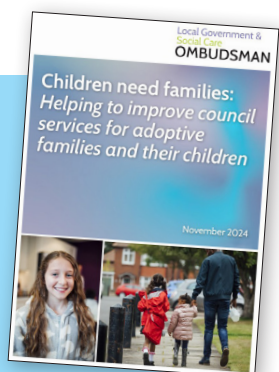
“Local authorities and the NHS need to work as equal partners to put people at the heart of their services on every occasion. However, we are finding cases where disagreements about responsibility and funding are having a significant impact on people’s quality of life.”

Learning & improvement: reports and good practice guides

Children need families: helping to improve council services for adoptive families and their children

November 2024

We want to help improve the support councils provide to people throughout the adoption process. While we receive relatively few complaints from adoptive families, every single upheld case reflects a vulnerable child's fresh start in life being affected. This can either be in the support provided post-adoption, or the support and information given to potential adoptive parents.

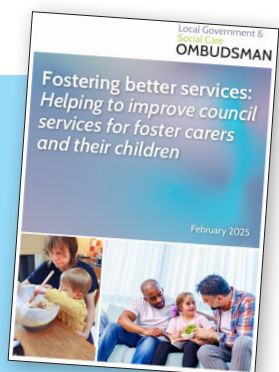


“Adopted children often have some of the most challenging starts to life, lacking in stability and continuity of care, so it is all the more important that councils get things right for them and their families. Councils need to get their processes, and the support they offer to these families right or they risk family units breaking down.”

Fostering better services: helping to improve council services for foster carers and their children

February 2025

This report is a companion piece to our Adoption report and looks at issues faced by both fostered children and the carers who support them, when councils don't get things right. The stories included a young woman, who came forward after she had left care with a claim she had suffered abuse, and her local council did not look into it properly. Other common issues include inaccurate advice to foster carers prior to placements starting, failing to follow correct processes to remove children and maintaining contact with birth family members.



“Foster carers play a key role in helping to provide stability for these children but need to be given the right tools to do it well. Councils need to ensure they provide the right information and support for the foster carers who look after the children they have ultimate responsibility for.”

Learning & improvement: reports and good practice guides

Good practice guides

Medical assessments for housing applications

July 2024

This guide shared the learning from our investigations on medical assessments in housing allocation cases, highlighting the common issues we see, based on around 20 detailed investigations we carry out a year.

The key learning points are grouped into three themes: councils making independent decisions about medical need, using good evidence of decisions, and in a timely way.



Domestic abuse and housing decisions

October 2024

This guide drew on our experience investigating housing complaints, since the new duties for councils were introduced in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which amended the definition of priority need for homelessness to include people homeless because of domestic abuse.

The guide draws out important learning for councils to use the right definitions of domestic abuse and priority need and apply the right tests to decide if an applicant is homeless.



Household waste offences

October 2024

With this guide, we urge councils to take a proportionate approach to enforcing household waste offences, after upholding several cases with heavy handed fines being issued.

Councils have different powers at their disposal to handle apparent waste offences and must properly consider the details of the offence before deciding which of these to apply.



In 2024-25

We published

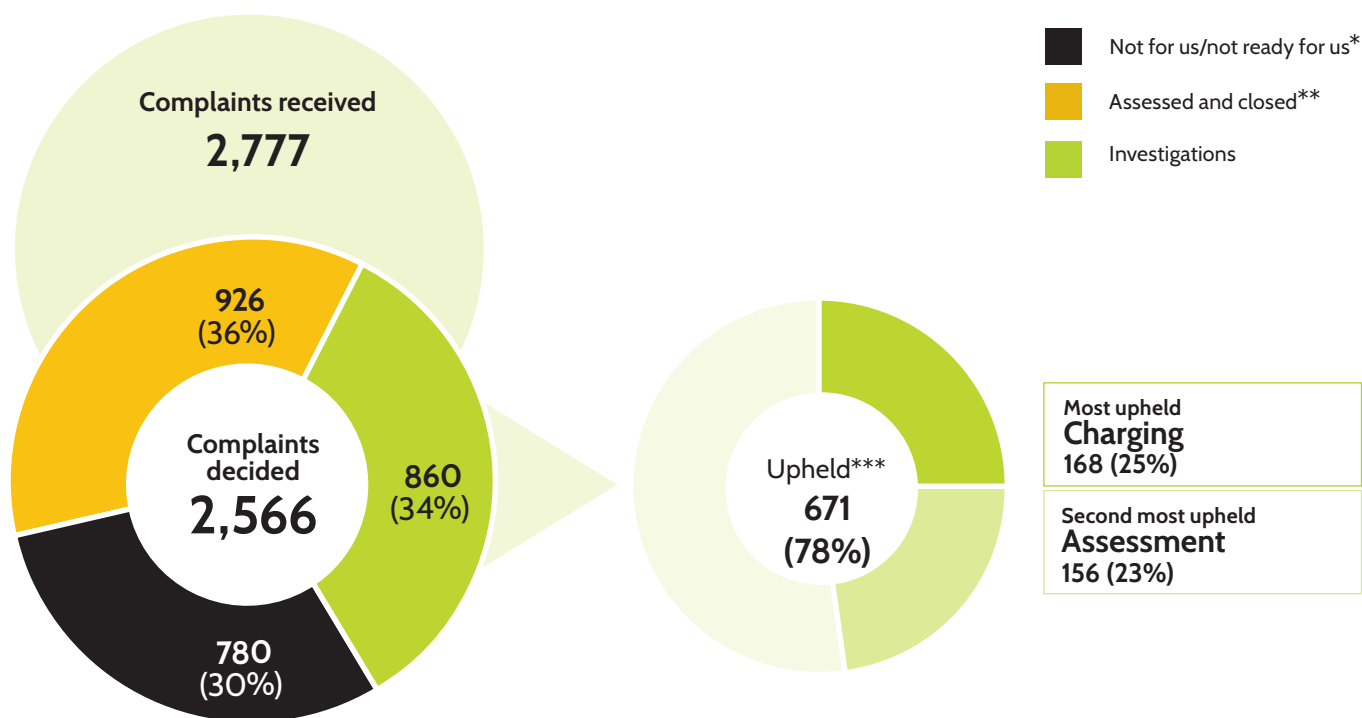
26

investigation reports

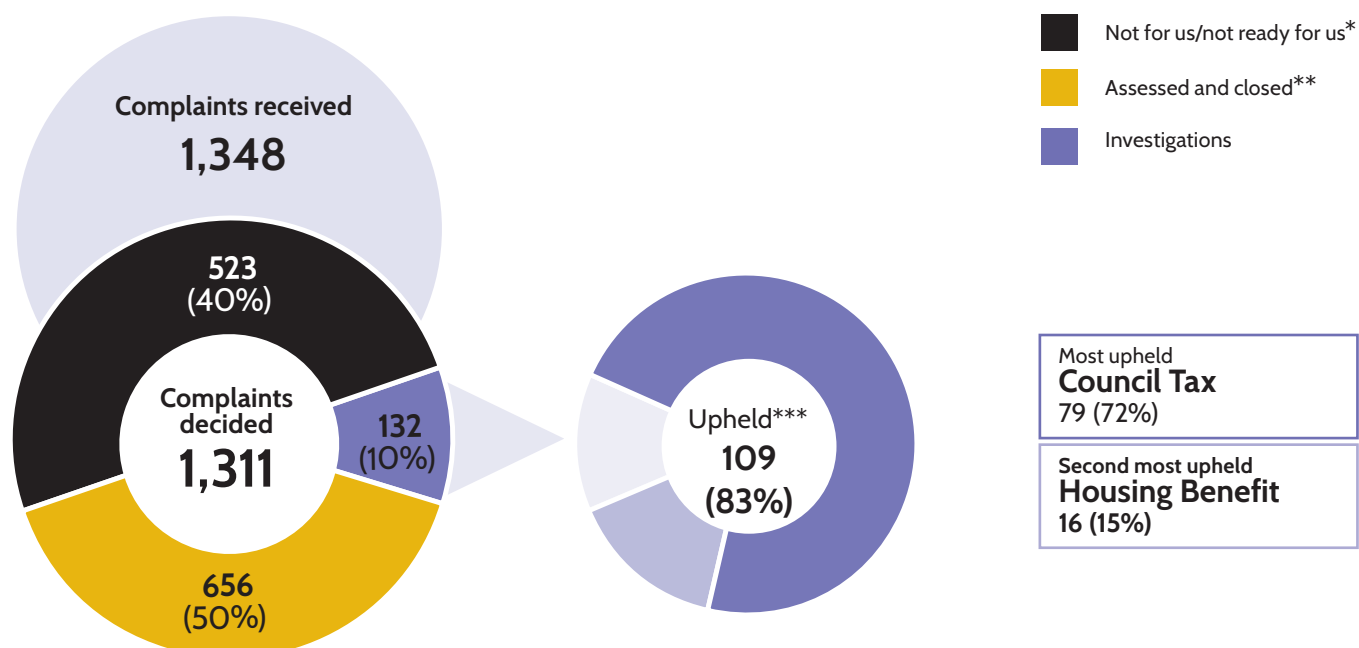
2024-25

Statistics by service area

Adult Care Services



Benefits & Tax

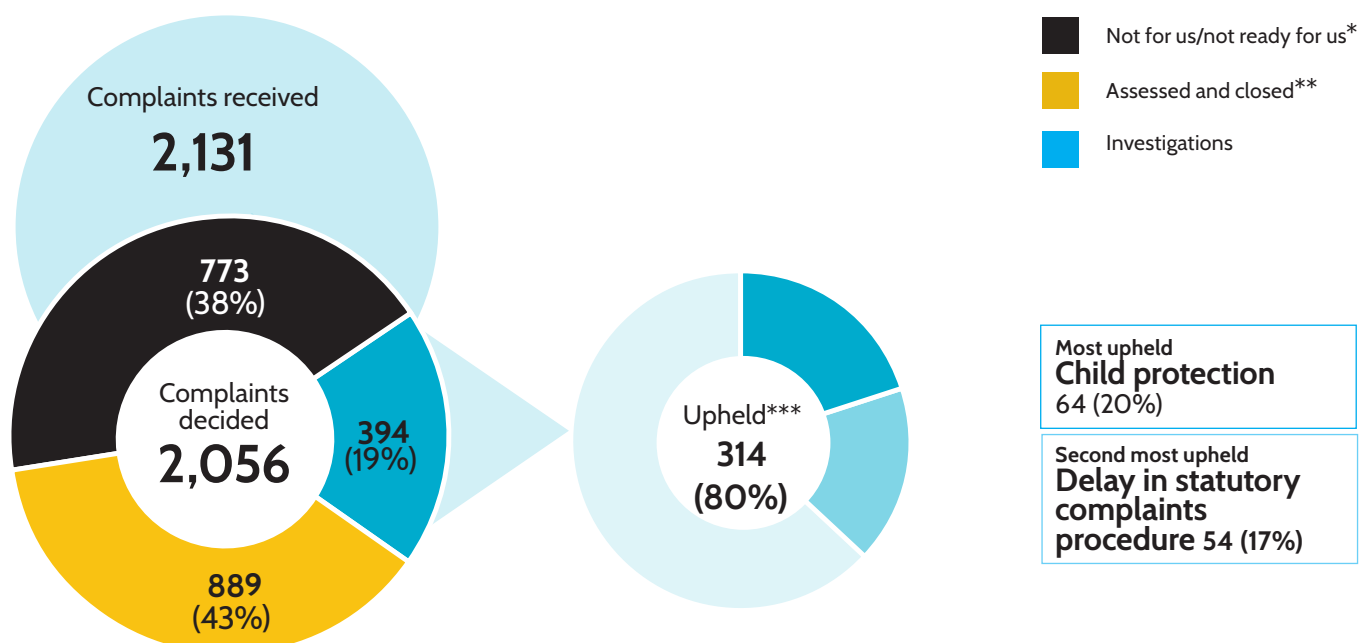


^{*}Not for us – includes complaints brought to us before the council was given chance to consider it, or the complainant came to the wrong Ombudsman.
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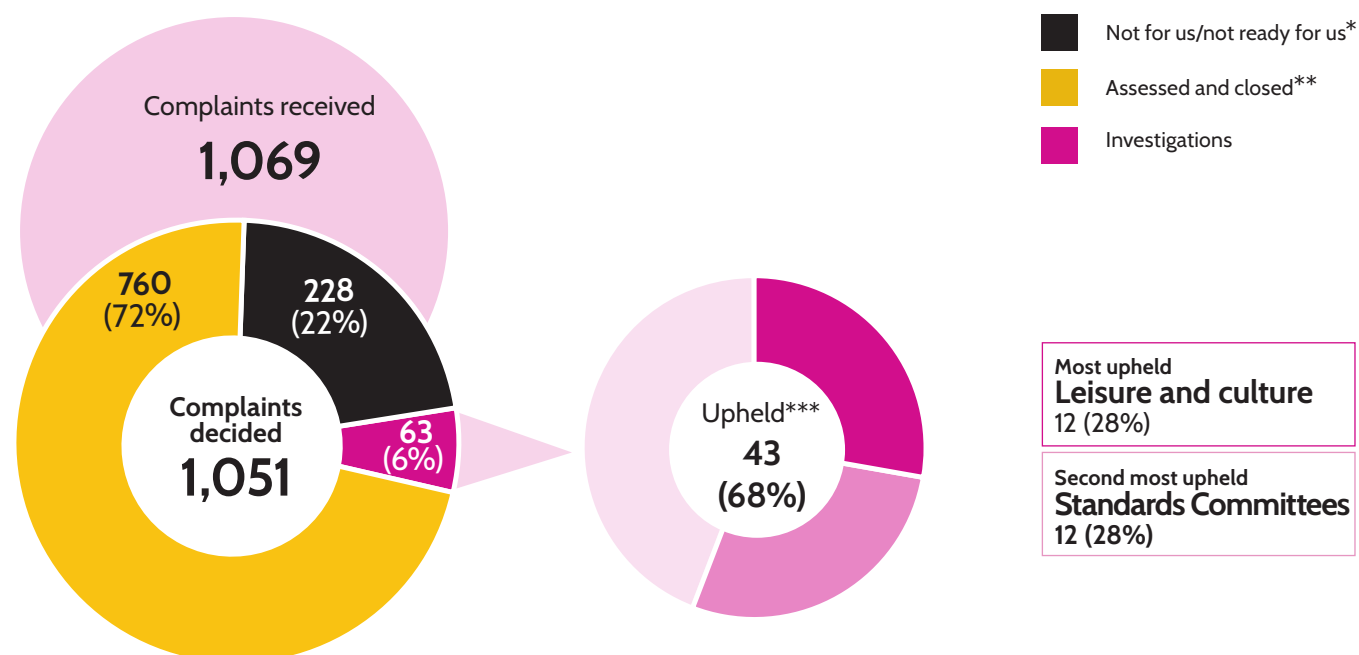
2024-25

Statistics by service area

Children's Services



Corporate & Other Services

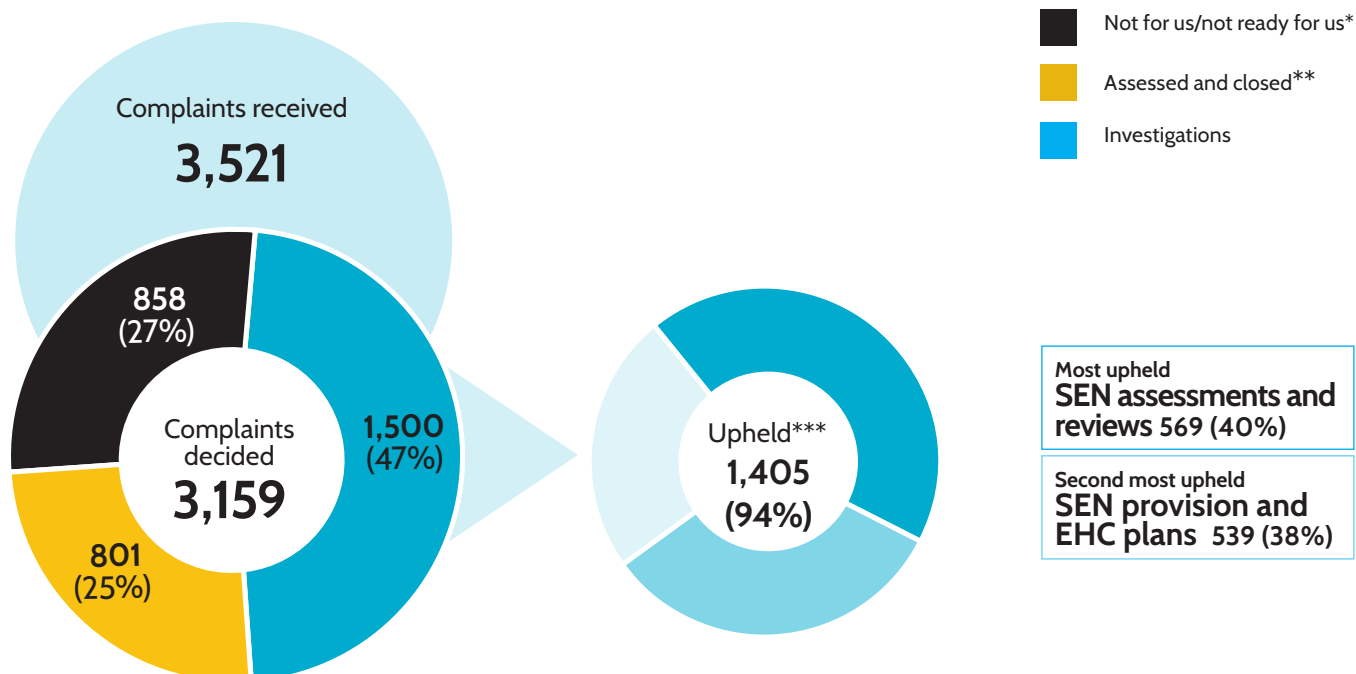


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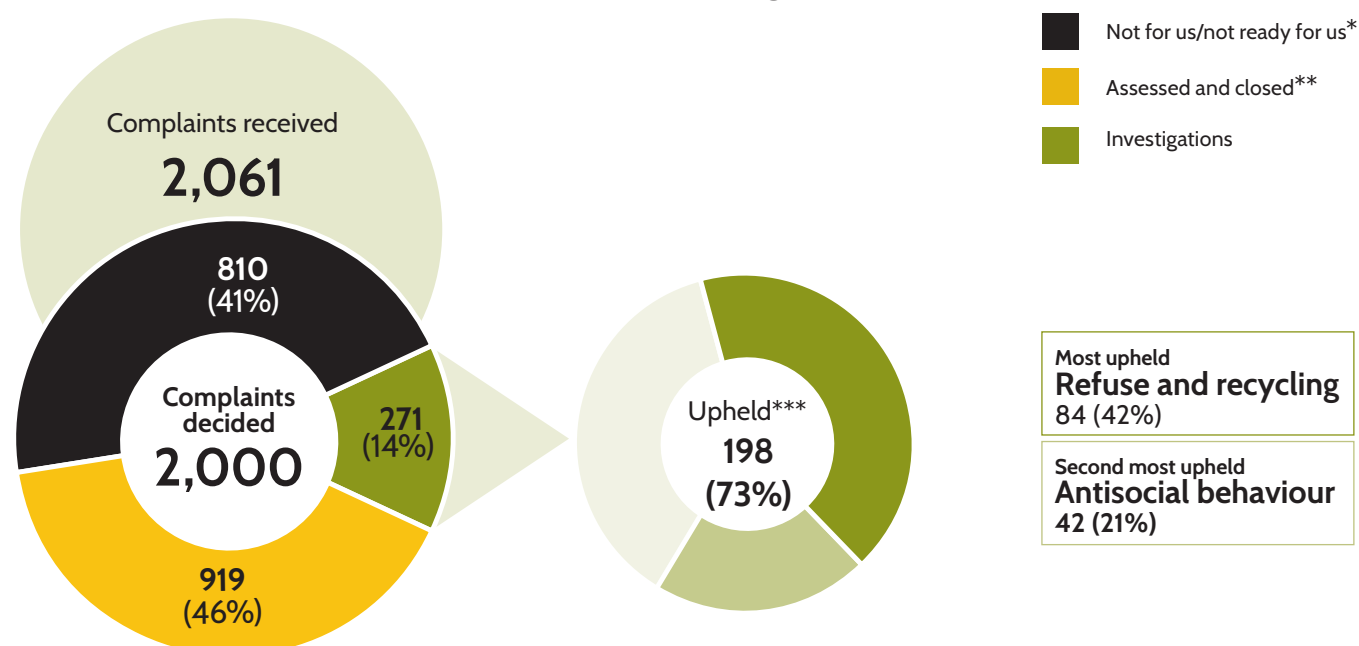
2024-25

Statistics by service area

Education



Environmental Services, Public Protection & Regulation

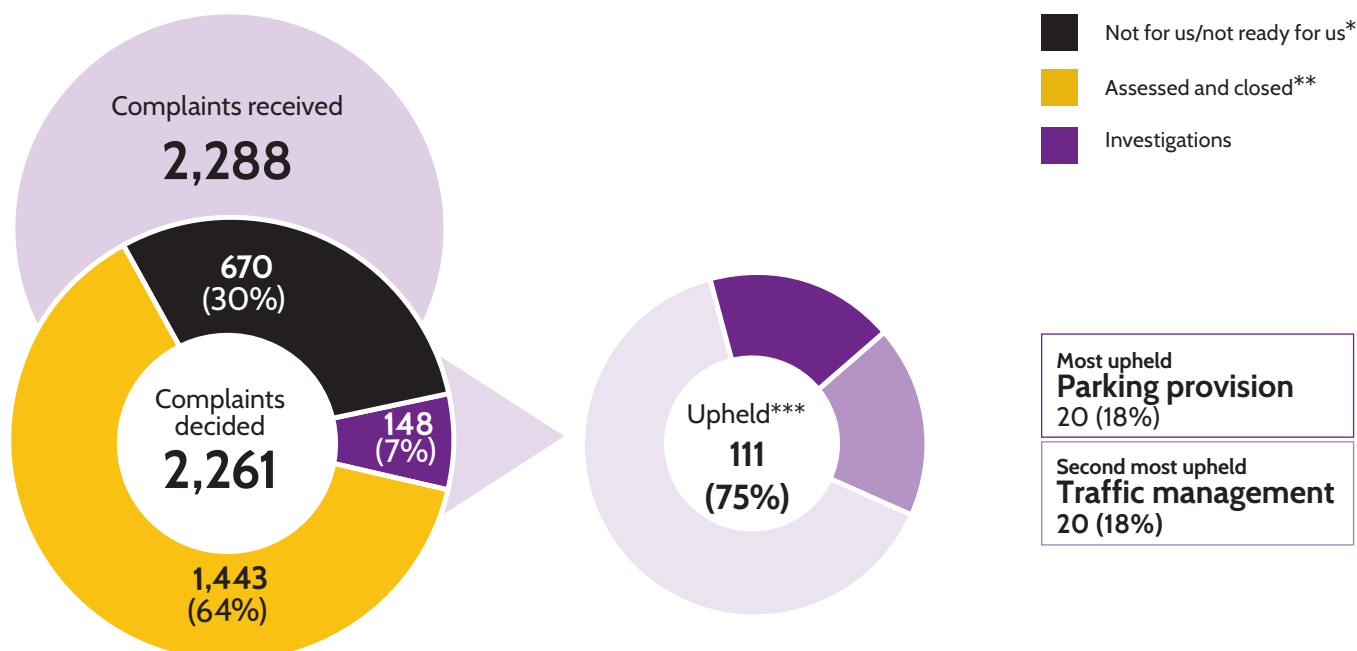


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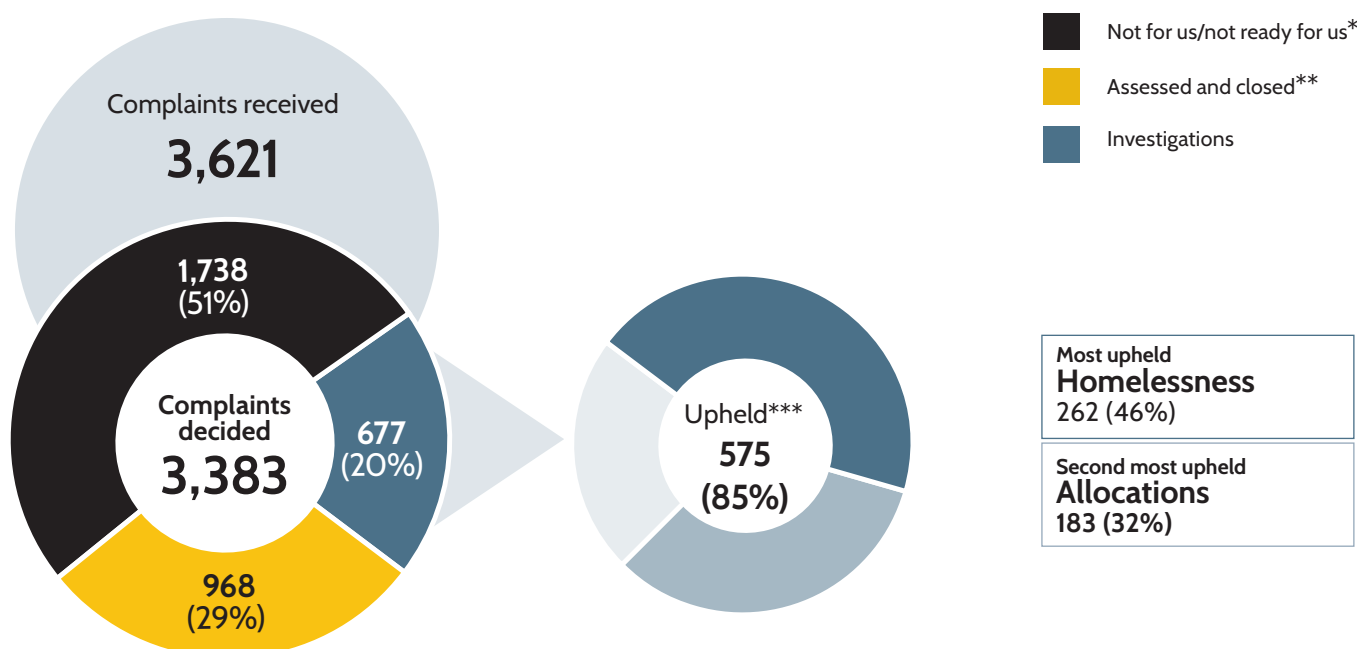
2024-25

Statistics by service area

Highways & Transport



Housing



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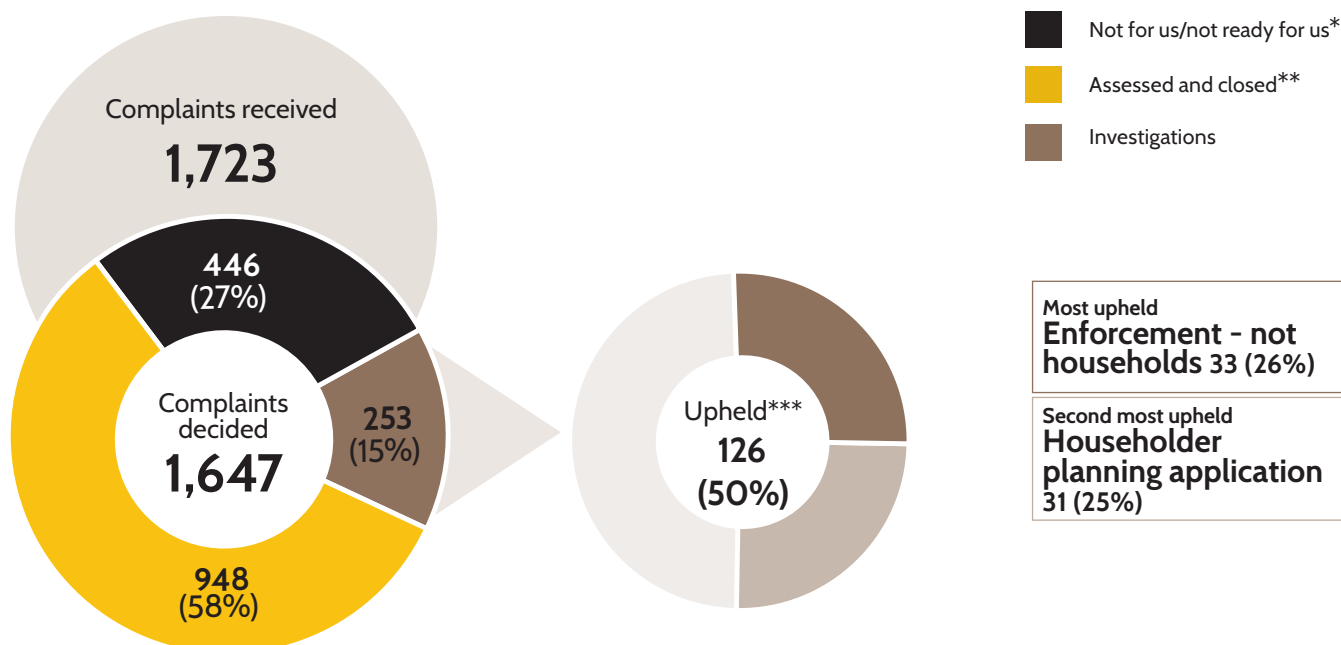
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2024-25

Statistics by service area

Planning & Development

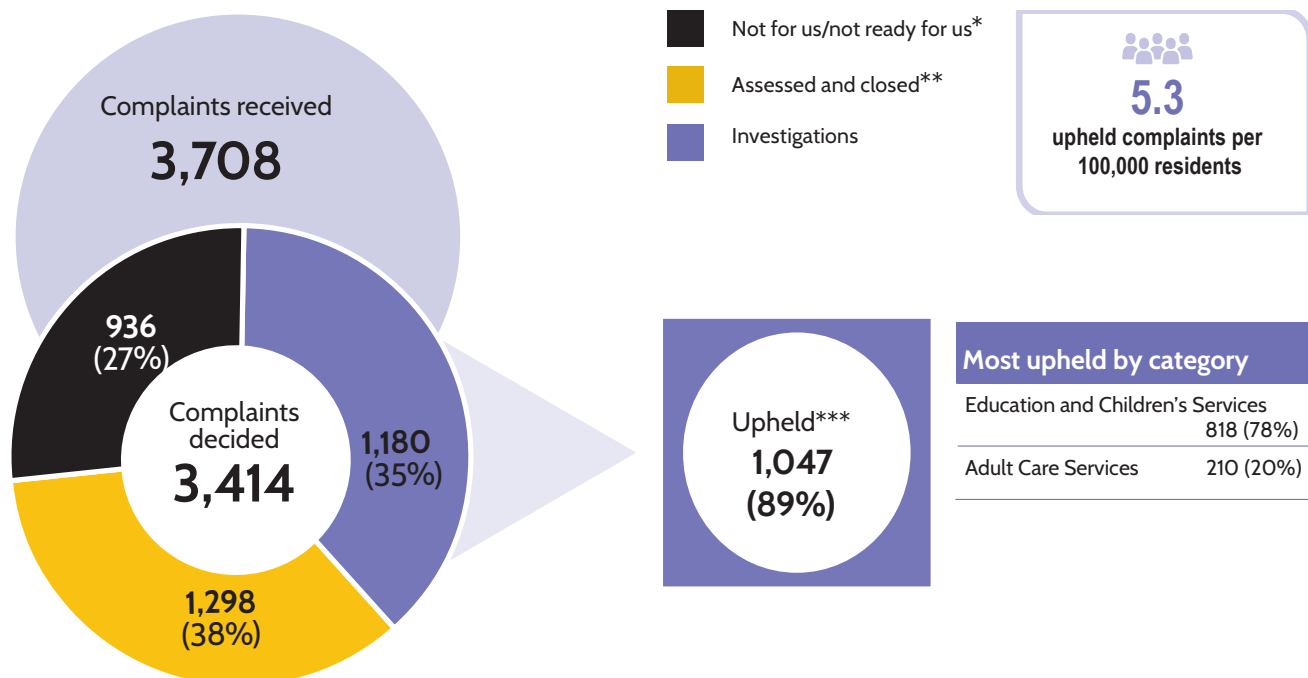


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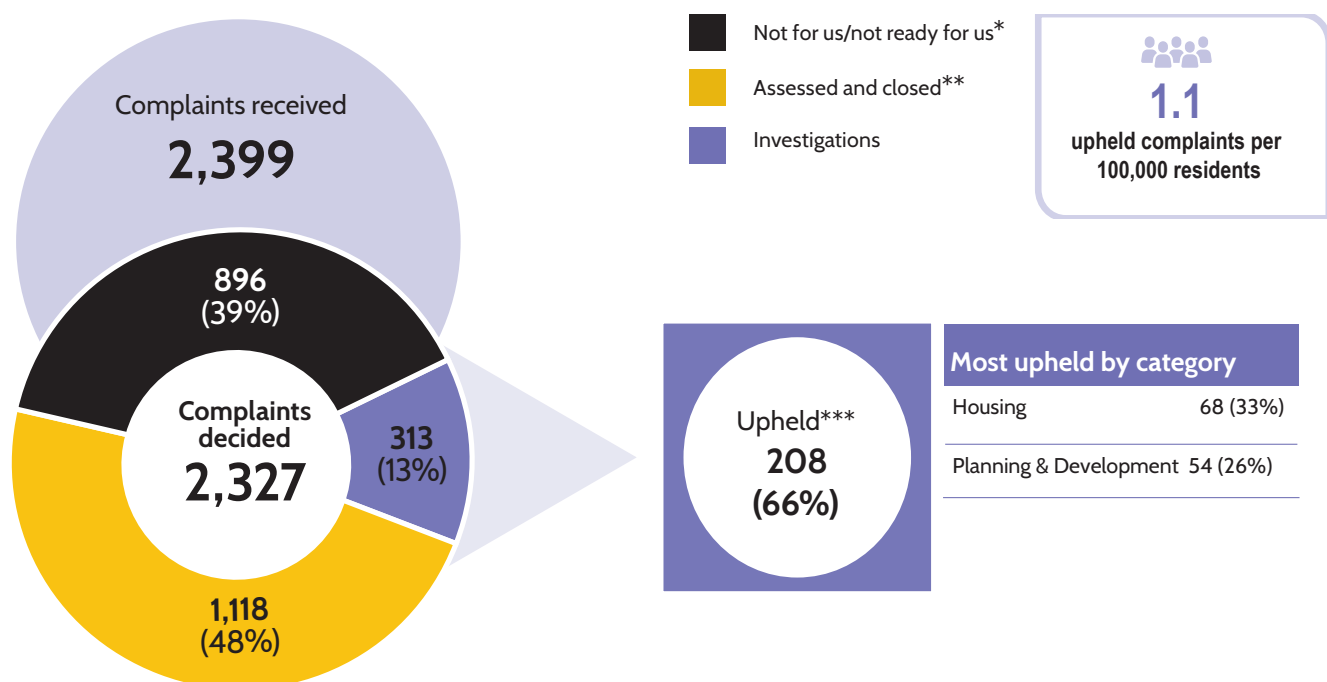
2024-25

Statistics by authority type

County Councils



District and Borough Councils

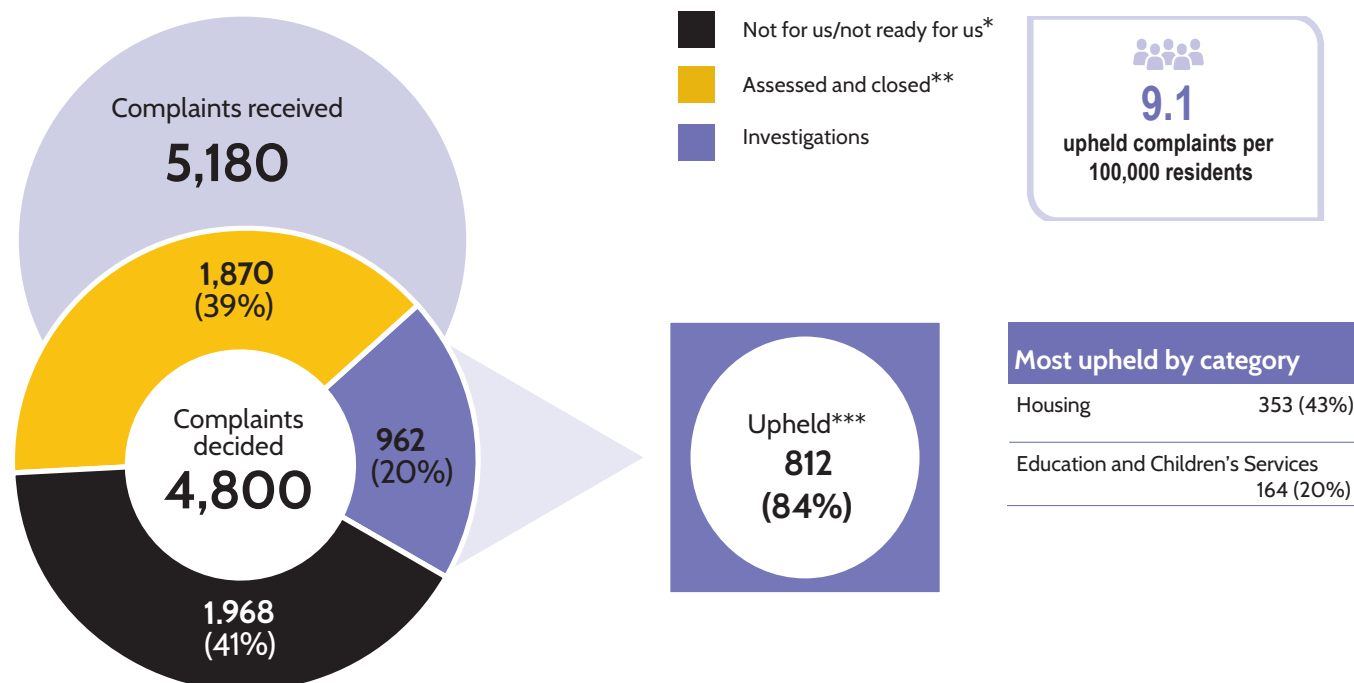


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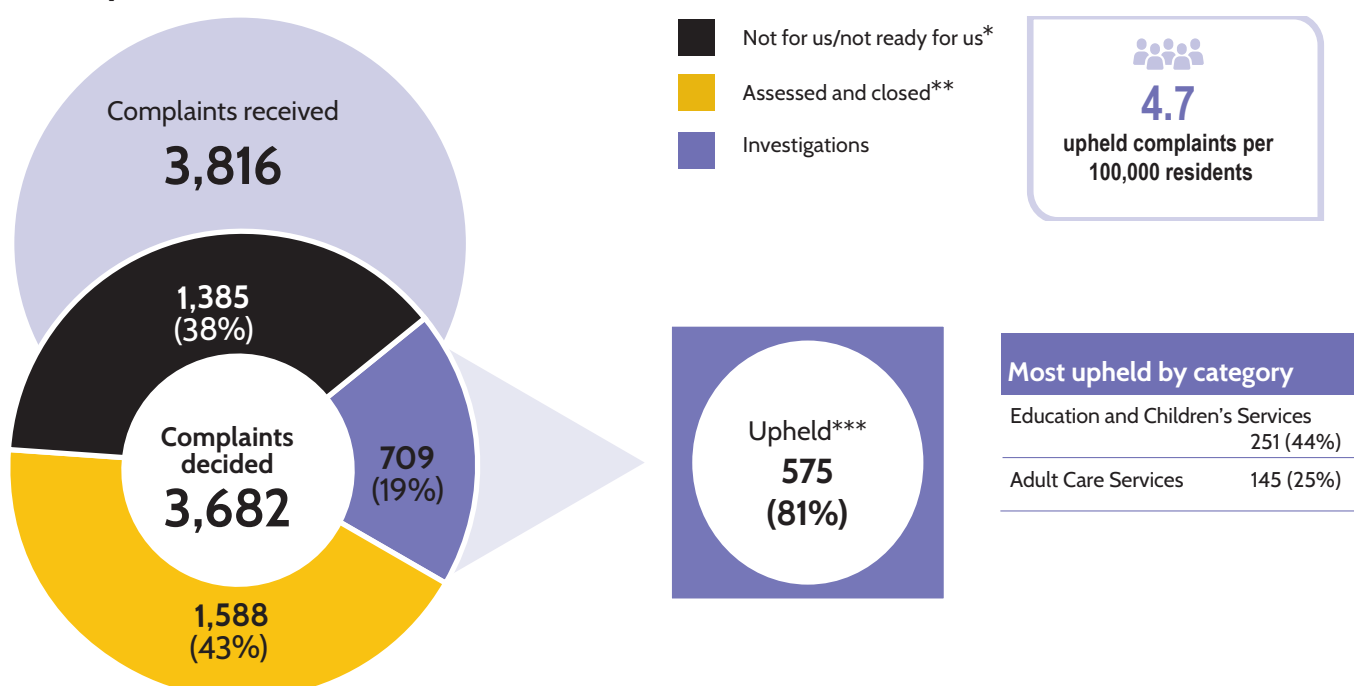
2024-25

Statistics by authority type

London Boroughs



Metropolitan Councils

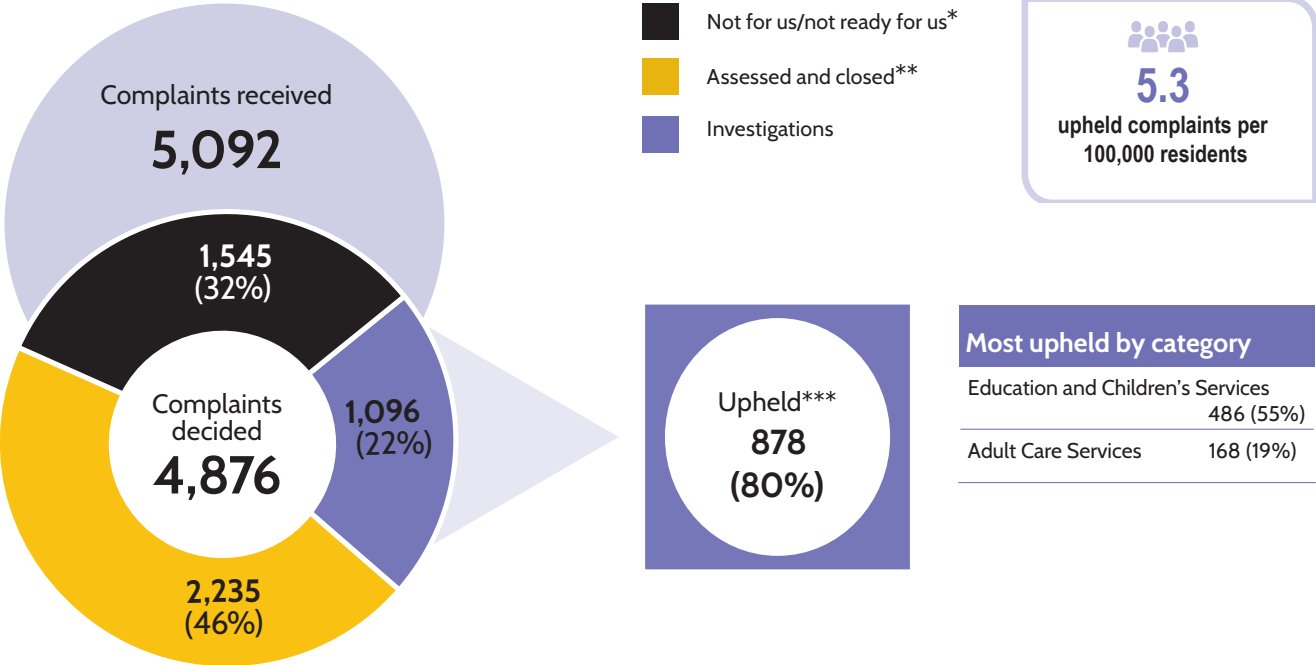


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2024-25

Statistics by authority type

Unitary Authorities



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Investigation reports

 Children's Services		
Devon County Council	Transition from children's to adult services	23001435
Worcestershire County Council (with Bromsgrove District Council 23004976)	Disabled child	23004979
Worcestershire County Council	Education of Looked After Child	23014839

 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

 Adult Care Services		
Essex County Council	Assessment	24001445
London Borough of Croydon	Direct payments	23000973
London Borough of Islington	Assessment	24000360

Investigation reports

 Housing		
Brentwood Borough Council	Homelessness	23018930
Bromsgrove District Council (with Worcestershire County Council – 23004979)	Disabled facilities grants	23004976
Leicester City Council	Domestic abuse	23015268
London Borough of Ealing	Domestic abuse	23014586
London Borough of Lewisham	Homelessness	22016576
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	Domestic abuse	22012133
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	Homelessness	23012189
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	Homelessness	23002608
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	Allocations	22013057
Manchester City Council	Homelessness	23017649

 Environmental Services & Protection		
North Hertfordshire District Council	Noise	23014065
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames	Pollution	23011888

 Benefits & Tax		
Luton Borough Council	Housing benefit	23016145

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