

Children and Adults Services Complaints Annual Report

1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024

Children & Families

103 Stage One Complaints Closed
30 Stage Two Investigations
1 Stage Three Panels Undertaken
0 LGSCO (Ombudsman) Final Decisions

Education

112 Stage One Complaints Closed
28 Stage Two Investigations
4 LGSCO (Ombudsman) Final Decisions

Adult Social Care

117 Stage One Complaints Closed
19 Internal Reviews
8 Further Reviews
5 LGSCO (Ombudsman) Final Decisions

Commissioning

21 Stage One Complaints Closed
6 Internal Reviews
2 Further Reviews
0 LGSCO (Ombudsman) Final Decisions

Public Health

0 Stage One Complaints Closed
0 Stage Two Investigations
0 LGSCO (Ombudsman) Final Decisions

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Introduction

This report is split in to the five Directorates our team serves and is colour-coded accordingly:

Children and Families

Education

Public Health

Adult Social Care

Commissioning

In each section we look at total numbers of complaints and cases closed and at each stage of the policy which applies to those complaints. We look at trends across the most recent five years and aim to highlight significant results and relevant factors affecting the results.

At the end of this report (from *p.24*) we ask a series of key questions and look at the evidence presented in the report to try to answer them.

This report is published online along with the reports from the four previous years and the report is made available to external parties with an interest in our work. This can include people who have made 'Freedom of Information' requests but also third sector organisations, partner organisations and other local authorities.

We promote a philosophy of investigating concerns objectively, with a view to identifying and 'making-right' any injustice caused to an individual, and identifying where improvements can be made to the services we provide.

The Complaints Team reports and presents to individual services and management groups throughout the year and we try to take these opportunities to set out and reinforce our principles and to discuss best practice in investigating and responding to complaints.

Our activities are overseen by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and in most cases their interpretation of relevant processes and principles becomes the final arbiter in resolving complaints. We believe we best serve our residents' needs by applying their level of scrutiny at the first opportunity, so that a formal complaint is satisfied without the need for the additional time and investigative actions of an external party.

The Council aspires to treat residents in accordance with its published values, which themselves feed in to the Council's published Delivery Plan. Our values are :

- Treating residents as if they were a valued member of your own family
- Being open, honest and accountable
- Spending money as if it was our own
- Working for everyone to realise their own potential
- Making Southwark a place to be proud of
- Always work to make Southwark more equal and just
- Stand against all forms of discrimination and racism

We believe and sincerely hope that our activities continue to assist the Council in achieving these goals.

Stage One Complaints Completed (with assistance of an advocate in brackets)

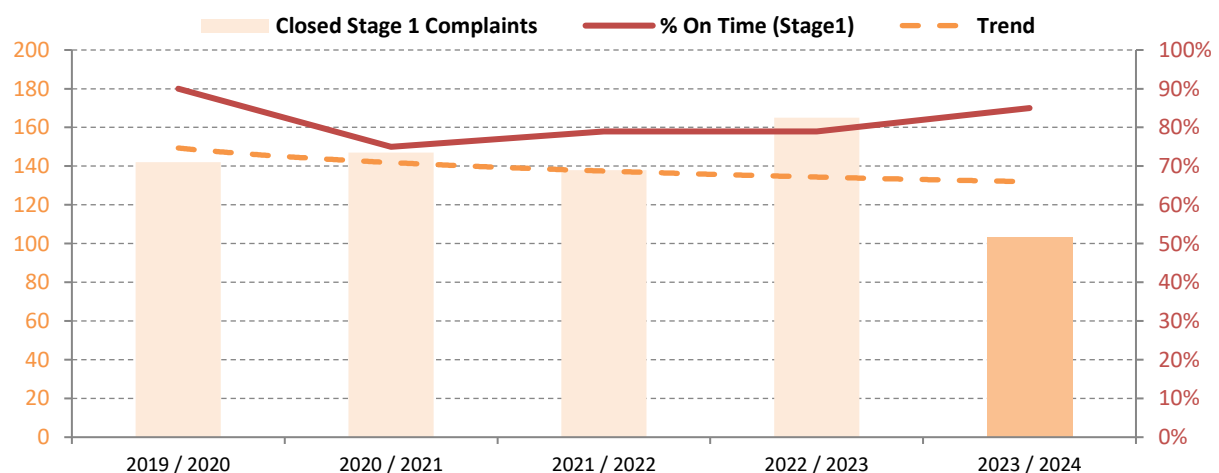
Children and Families	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Care	9 (1)	32 (1)	23 (2)	19 (4)	12.5 (2)
Care Leavers	22 (7)	30 (13)	23 (7)	18 (6)	28 (8)
Fostering, SGO and Connected Persons Team	4 (0)	16 (0)	8 (0)	8 (0)	11 (1)
Placement Sufficiency and Resources	3 (0)				
Family Early Help	6 (0)	6 (0)	3 (0)	3 (0)	2 (0)
Youth Offending	-	-	1 (0)	1 (0)	-
Quality Assurance	5 (0)	7 (1)	6 (0)	8 (1)	3 (0)
Assessment & Intervention	30 (0)	30 (3)	26 (1)	36 (0)	33 (2)
Safeguarding and Family Support	22 (1)	26 (0)	32 (2)	43 (5)	36 (1)
Clinical Service	2 (0)	-	-	-	-
Finance, Business Support, Complaints, Other	-	2 (0)	1 (0)	-	1 (0)
Total	103 (9)	165 * (18)	138 * (15)	147 * (19)	142 * (18)

Of the 103 cases, one third were from stakeholders who we have heard from previously, or on more than one occasion in the period. We need, therefore, to give consideration as to whether we are successfully restoring relationships when responding to the complaints we have received, as far as is possible.

Previous years' totals included 'childrens' complaints from All-Ages Disabilities but this data is now reported in the 'adults' section, (from page 13) to correctly reflect the line of reporting.

* The totals have not been updated so as not to alter the reported figures from previous years.

The complaints process is used to administer appeals. From the 103 cases, only 3 were categorized as 'appeal a decision or package of care'. This can refer to the application of eligibility criteria, a package decrease or any other related decision.



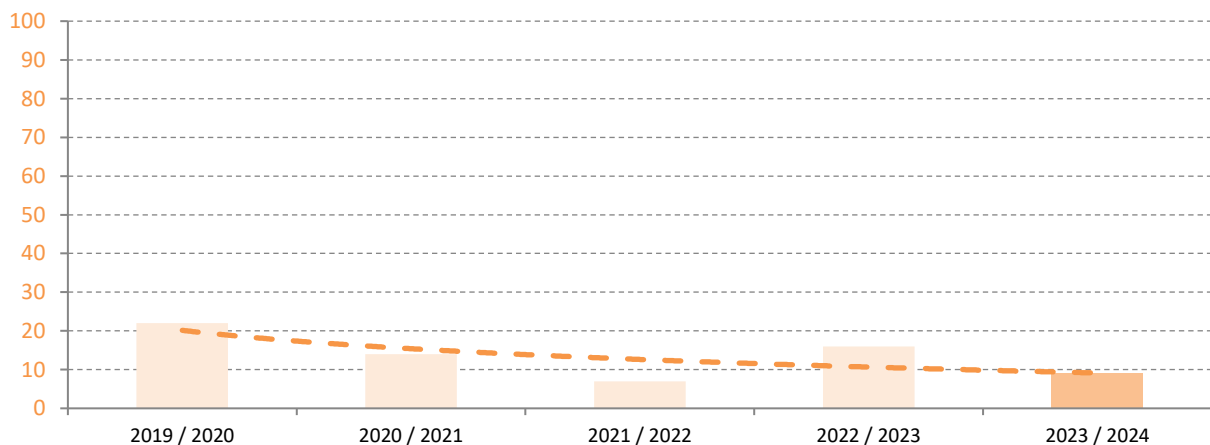
Other Representations (with assistance of an advocate in brackets)

Children and Families	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Care	-	5 (0)	1 (0)	4 (0)	7 (0)
Care Leavers	6 (0)	4 (0)	2 (0)	-	1 (1)
Fostering, SGO and Connected Persons Team	-	-	1 (0)	3 (0)	3 (1)
Placement Sufficiency and Resources	1 (0)	-	-	-	-
Family Early Help	-	1 (0)	-	-	-
Youth Offending	-	-	-	-	-
Quality Assurance	-	1 (0)	-	2 (0)	-
Assessment & Intervention	-	1 (0)	1 (0)	1 (0)	7 (0)
Safeguarding and Family Support	2 (0)	3 (0)	-	4 (0)	3 (0)
Clinical Service	-	-	-	-	-
Finance, Business Support, Complaints, Other	-	-	1 (0)	-	-
Total	9 (0)	16 (0)	7 (0)	14 (0)	22 (2)

There are times when we can agree to resolve issues without the need for full, formal investigations. This requires the agreement of the complainant, and ordinarily a 3 day turnaround time. We record these cases as 'representations'.

Our ambition is to increase the number of 'representations' where it is not considered to be an inappropriate course of action. For example when the circumstances are complex or particularly serious.

We would like to increase the proportion of representations but we must remain led by the complainant and we must be careful to act in full compliance with the regulations and guidance available. We must also be careful only to offer this pathway for resolution when the outcome is very likely to prove rapid and successful.



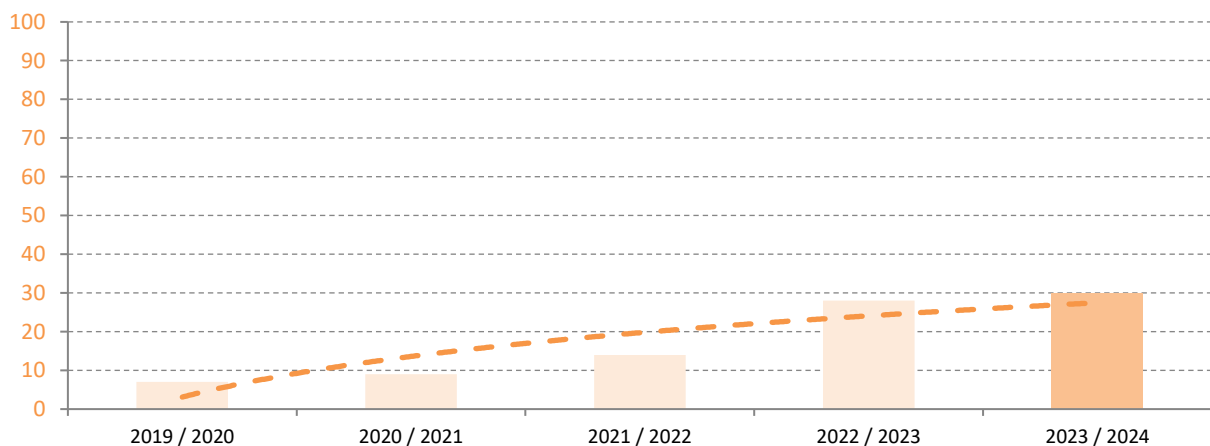
Stage Two Complaints Investigations Completed

Children and Families	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Care	3	2	-	-	-
Care Leavers	11	4	-	-	-
Fostering, SGO and Connected Persons Team	1	4	5	1	2
Placement Sufficiency and Resources	-				
Family Early Help	-	2	-	1	-
Youth Offending	-	-	-	-	-
Quality Assurance	4	1	1	1	1
Assessment & Intervention	5	7	2	-	2
Safeguarding and Family Support	5	2	6	4	-
Clinical Service	1	-	-	-	-
Finance, Business Support, Complaints, Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total	30	28	14	9	7

There were 18 investigations commenced under the statutory procedure and 12 cases under the corporate procedure.

We were able to find early agreements for 8 stage two cases, meaning an earlier resolution for the complainant and for the service.

30 escalated cases is a significant number although for 10 cases, there was no new learning acquired from the stage two complaint which suggests the stage one findings were fair in those cases. Where new learning was acquired at stage two, this is suggestive that a deeper interrogation of the facts may have resulted in a satisfactory outcome more quickly. We must be mindful of this and must ensure our stage one responses are objective and fair and we must guard against any defensiveness.



Stage Three Panel Reviews (Cases Closed)

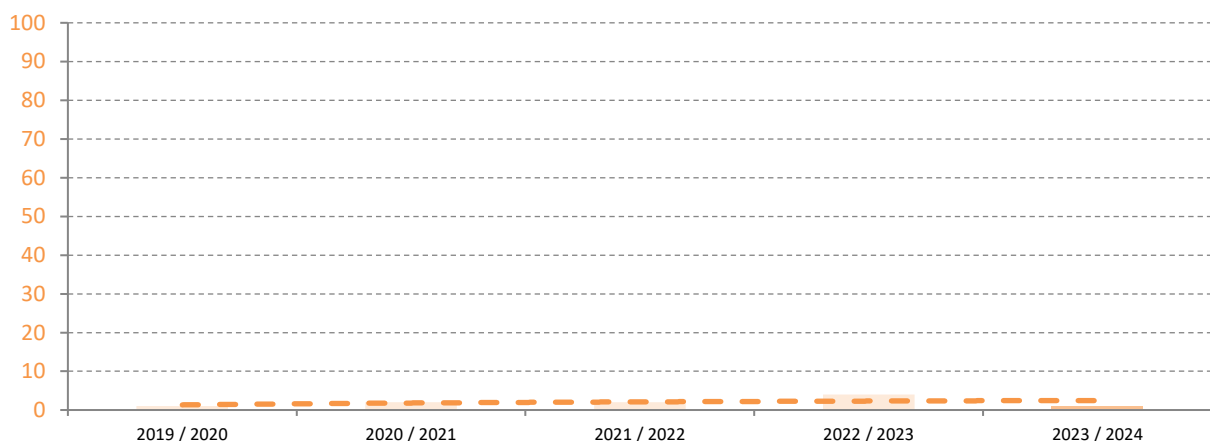
Children and Families	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Care	1	-	-	-	-
Care Leavers	-	1	-	-	-
Fostering, SGO and Connected Persons Team	-	2	-	-	-
Placement Sufficiency and Resources	-				
Family Early Help	-	-	-	-	-
Youth Offending	-	-	-	-	-
Quality Assurance	-	-	-	1	-
Assessment & Intervention	-	1	-	-	-
Safeguarding and Family Support	-	-	2	-	-
Clinical Service	-	-	-	-	-
Finance, Business Support, Complaints, Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total	1	4	2	2	1

Stage three panels are required when a complainant does not agree with the independent findings of a stage two complaint, or does not agree with how the Council proposed to address the independent findings.

The regulations make no provision for a stage three panel to be declined based on merit.

There was one panel held early in the period for a case where earlier investigations had identified some fault for which the local authority had proposed a number of remedial actions.

There were two additional panels held for the All-Ages Disabilities Team, also early in the period, although they are reported later in this report. (see page 16)



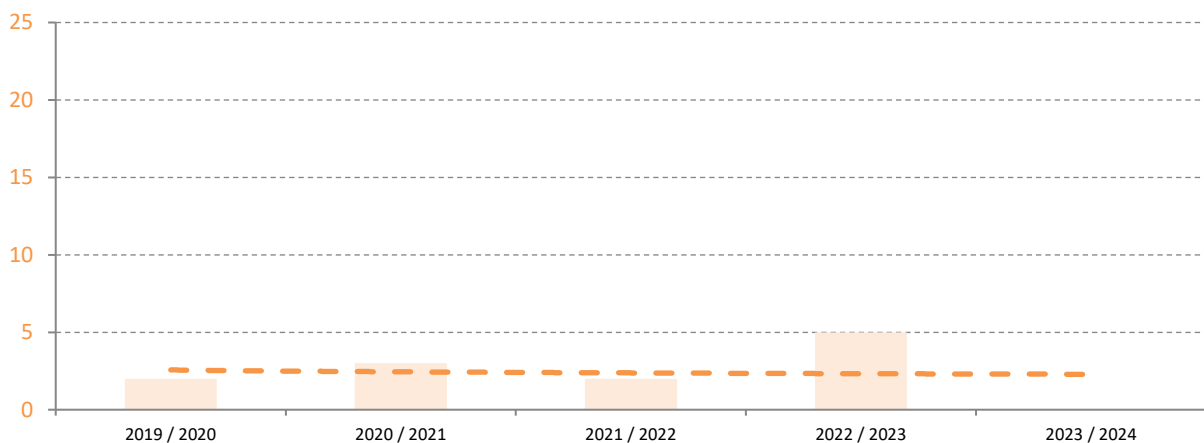
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Investigations (Final Decisions)

Children and Families	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Care	-	1	-	-	-
Care Leavers	-	-	-	-	-
Fostering, SGO and Connected Persons Team	-	2	-	-	-
Placement Sufficiency and Resources	-				
Family Early Help	-	-	-	-	-
Youth Offending	-	-	-	-	-
Quality Assurance	-	-	-	-	1
Assessment & Intervention	-	2	1	3	-
Safeguarding and Family Support	-	-	-	-	-
Clinical Service	-	-	-	-	-
Finance, Business Support, Complaints, Other	-	-	-	-	1
Total	0	5	2	3	2

The Ombudsman will decide whether to investigate complaints after their initial examination and enquiries. We only report here the complaints where the Ombudsman did decide to investigate, and so reached a 'final decision'.

The performance of Southwark and other boroughs can be found here : <https://www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance/>

The Ombudsman's annual letter to the Local Authority is also published here, along with information relating to upheld complaints and details of recommendations made.



Outcomes, all Stage One and Representations

Children's Services	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Partly Upheld	42%	42%	44%	29%	31%
Upheld	11%	15%	15%	13%	10%
Not Upheld	29%	25%	28%	28%	29%
No Findings / Resolved	9%	9%	8%	14%	13%
Unresolved and Escalated (representations only)	2%	1%	0%	1%	1%
Withdrawn / Rejected	7%	8%	5%	15%	16%

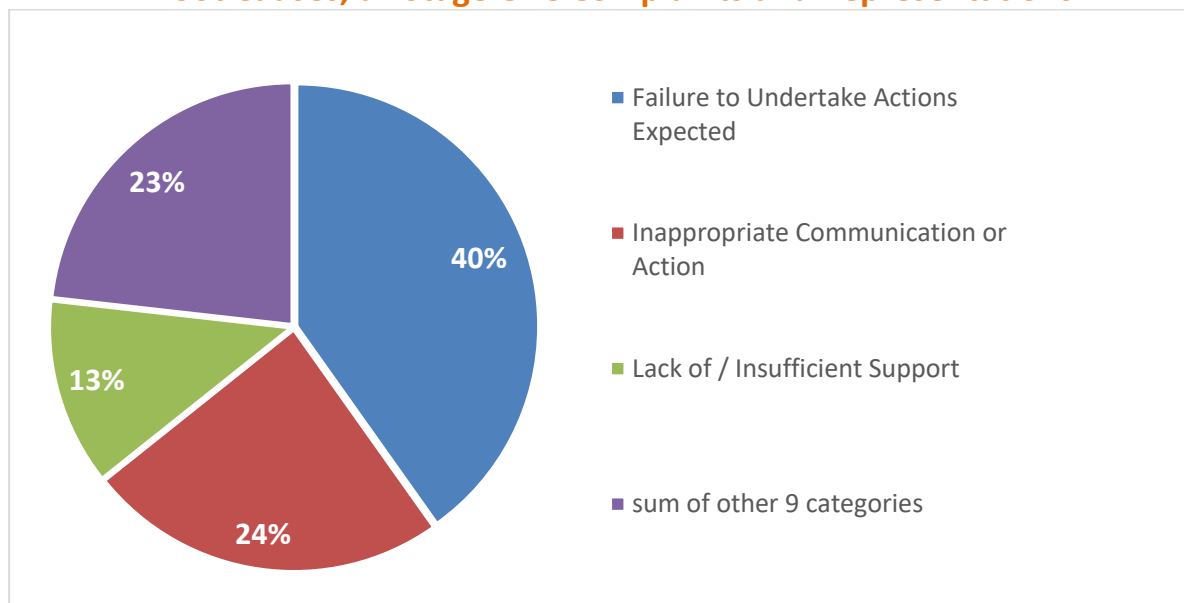
Maintaining very similar figures, year-on-year helps to reassure us that we continue to apply investigative standards and principles consistently.

We regard upholding (in part, or in whole) as a relatively positive outcome because it provides reassurance that we are looking at issues reported with objectivity.

We are careful not to describe a reduction in upheld complaints as any measure of success, or progress.

The chart below summarises the issues reported under Childrens Services and is based on all cases brought, irrespective for whether the complaint was eventually upheld or not. The results are remarkably similar to the 2022 / 2023 across all 12 categories.

Root Causes, all Stage One Complaints and Representations

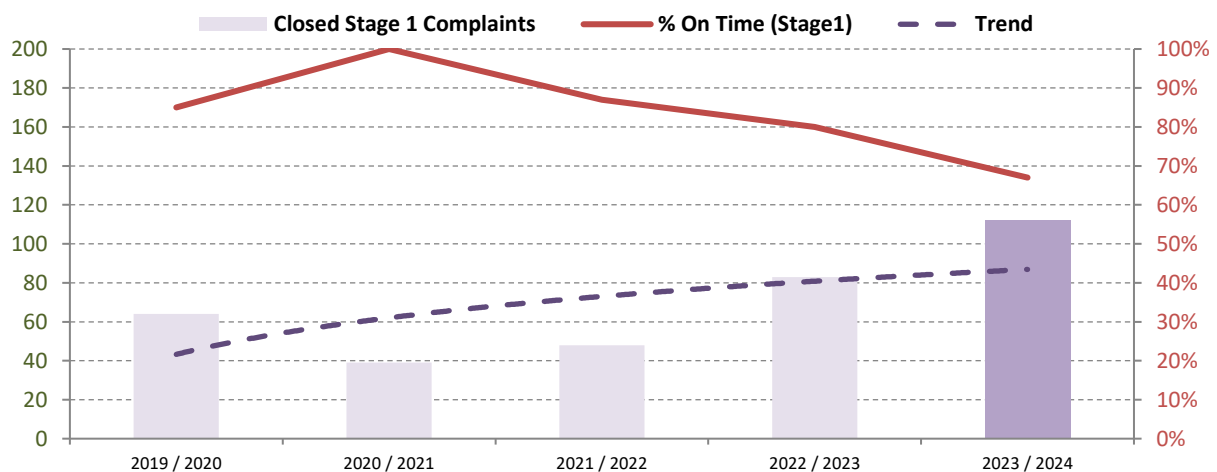


The full range of 12 categories are listed in **appendix a** on page 28.

Stage One Complaints Completed (with assistance of an advocate in brackets)

Education	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Admissions & Benefits	18 (1)	15 (0)	11 (0)	6 (0)	7 (0)
Alternative Provision	1 (0)	1 (0)	-	-	-
Virtual School	1 (0)	-	-	-	-
Travel Assistance / Transport	7 (1)	9 (0)	12 (0)	16 (0)	13.5 (0)
Southwark Information & Advice (SIAS)	-	1 (0)	0 (0)	2 (0)	1 (0)
Early Years	1 (0)	2 (0)	0 (0)	-	1 (1)
Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND)	83 (22)	50 (0)	25 (0)	12 (0)	36.5 (1)
Learning and Achievement	1 (0)	5 (0)	0 (0)	3 (0)	5 (1)
Total	112 (24)	83 (0)	48 (0)	39 (0)	64 (3)

Southwark Information Advice and Support (SIAS) is an arms-length service which offers impartial advice to parents and young people and this includes providing advice and/or assistance to make a complaint. Our records indicate that SIAS assisted a minimum of 25 families to make complaints in 2023-2024. We feel this is a positive sign that families are aware of the additional support, and that families are actively accessing the additional support. We did not report SIAS as 'advocacy' in previous years' totals but it was provided.



Other Representations (with assistance of an advocate in brackets)

Education	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Admissions & Benefits	4 (0)	-	7 (0)	3 (0)	2 (0)
Alternative Provision	-	-	-	-	-
Virtual School	-	-	-	-	-
Travel Assistance	1 (0)	-	2 (0)	1 (0)	-
Southwark Information & Advice (SIAS)	1 (0)	-	-	-	-
Early Years	-	-	-	-	2 (0)
Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND)	8 (1)	10 (1)	10 (0)	1 (0)	-
Learning and Achievement	-	-	-	1 (0)	1 (0)
Total	14 (1)	10 (1)	19 (0)	6 (0)	5 (0)

Stage Two Investigations (Corporate Reviews)

Education	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Admissions & Benefits	1	-	-	1	-
Alternative Provision	1	-	-	-	-
Virtual School	-	-	-	-	-
Travel Assistance	2	2	1	-	-
Southwark Information & Advice (SIAS)	-	-	-	-	-
Early Years	-	-	-	-	-
Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND)	24	12	6	2	3
Learning and Achievement	-	-	-	1	-
Total	28	14	7	4	3

Although there are many more stage two complaints, the rate of escalation is less pronounced. The Local Authority is focusing closely on this area and there are signs that increased focus in this area will return much-reduced complaints numbers in 2024-2025.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Investigations (Final Decisions)

Education	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Admissions & Benefits	-	-	-	-	-
Alternative Provision	-	-	-	-	-
Virtual School	-	-	-	-	-
Travel Assistance	-	-	-	-	1
Southwark Information & Advice (SIAS)	-	-	-	-	-
Early Years	-	-	-	-	-
Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND)	4	3	1	1	-
Learning and Achievement	-	-	-	-	-
Total	4	3	1	1	1

The Ombudsman will decide whether to investigate complaints after their initial examination and enquiries. We only report here the complaints where the Ombudsman did decide to investigate, and so reached a 'final decision'.

The performance of Southwark and other boroughs can be found here : <https://www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance/>

The Ombudsman's annual letter to the Local Authority is also published here, along with information relating to upheld complaints and details of recommendations made.

Our principle is to work to the same standards as the Ombudsman so that any cases which are presented to them show the same findings and outcomes that they would reach. By taking this approach we should hopefully limit the numbers of cases they have to consider and we should hopefully provide fair outcomes for families at the earliest opportunity.

Outcomes, all Stage One and Representations

Education	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Partly Upheld	17%	16%	16%	27%	18%
Upheld	44%	31%	21%	24%	20%
Not Upheld	21%	18%	24%	25%	39%
No Findings / Resolved	11%	22%	28%	13%	14%
Unresolved, Escalated (representations only)	1%	0%	2%	0%	0%
Withdrawn / Rejected	6%	13%	9%	11%	9%

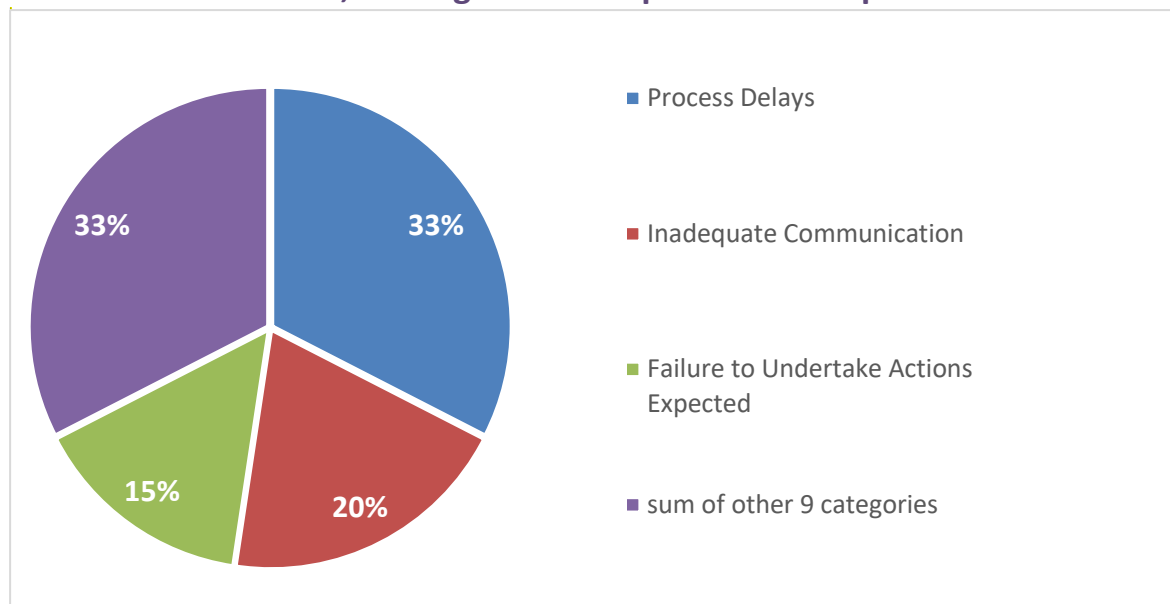
There are a large number of complaints which are received but which are for schools to investigate using their own procedures. In these cases we write to the complainant to signpost the school's own policy and to advise how complaints about schools are dealt with. Those cases are not included in table above. If they were the proportion of rejected complaints would be significant, and potentially confusing.

We are content that 61% of cases are upheld in whole or in part. It is important than, if a mistake has been made, that we are open and objective.

We are not concerned that the upheld rate is marginally higher in this area than some others as it suggests objective investigations and fair outcomes.

The chart below shows the complaint categorisation, irrespective of whether fault was found.

Root Causes, all Stage One Complaints and Representations



The full range of 12 categories are listed in **appendix a** on page 28.

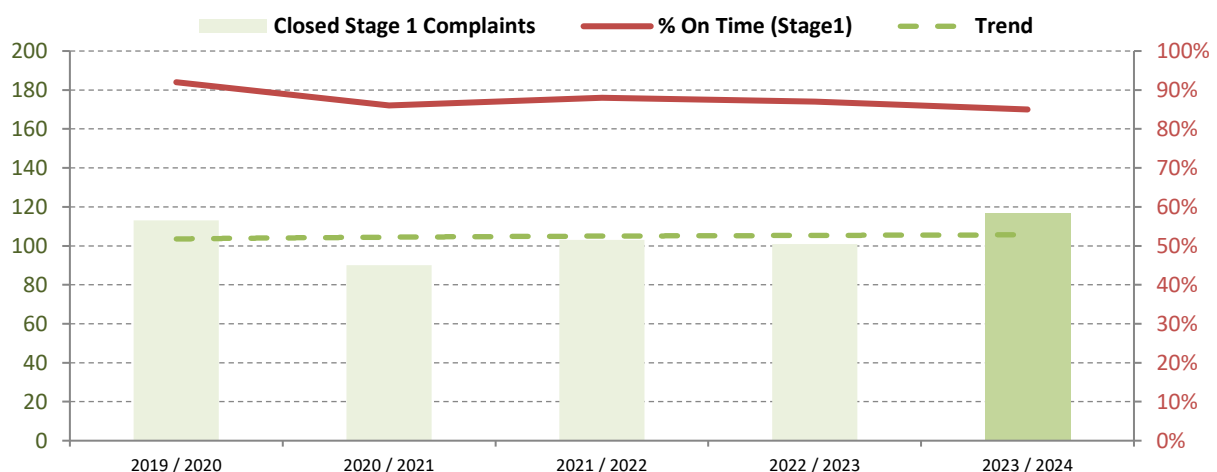
Stage One Complaints Completed (with assistance of an advocate in brackets)

Adult Social Care	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Mental Health Long Term / Substance Misuse	5 (0)	6 (0)	3 (0)	4 (0)	4 (0)
Mental Health Short Term Services	6 (2)	6 (0)	4 (0)	4 (0)	4 (0)
All-Ages Disabilities [0-18]	18 (2)	(16 (0))	(16 (3))	(11 (3))	(15.5 (4))
All-Ages Disabilities [18-25]	10 (0)	2 (0)	3 (0)	9 (0)	14 (1)
Learning Disabilities [25+]	6 (1)	12 (0)	15 (0)	4 (0)	22 (2)
Family Link / Orient Street	-	-	-	-	-
OPPD Assessment & Intake	13 (1)	8 (1)	9 (0)	15 (3)	7 (0)
OPPD Case Management	14 (1)	14 (2)	13 (2)	8 (1)	16 (0)
OPPD Occupational Therapy	7 (0)	3 (1)	9 (0)	2 (1)	4 (0)
OPPD Contact Team	13 (0)	15 (0)	9 (0)	9 (0)	11 (0)
OPPD Review Team	2 (0)	1 (0)	6 (0)	4 (0)	6 (0)
OPPD Intermediate Care Team	4 (0)	7 (0)	10 (0)	8 (0)	6 (0)
OPPD Transfer of Care Team	3 (0)	1 (0)	-	-	-
OPPD Telecare and Sensory Team	1 (1)	-	-	-	1 (0)
Client Finance Service	14 (0)	23 (1)	20 (3)	23 (2)	16 (0)
Personal Budget Service	1 (0)	3 (0)	2 (0)	-	-
Business Support, Customer Resolutions, Other	-	-	-	-	2 (0)
Total	117 (8)	101 (5) *	103 (5) *	90 (7) *	113 (3) *

All-Ages Disabilities [0-18] data is reported here to correctly reflect that the lines of reporting.

Otherwise, the total complaints show a reduction on each of the last the last two years. The total is lower still when adding also the numbers of 'representations' (see next page)

* The totals have not been updated so as not to alter the reported figures from previous years. The same applies to all tables in [this section](#).

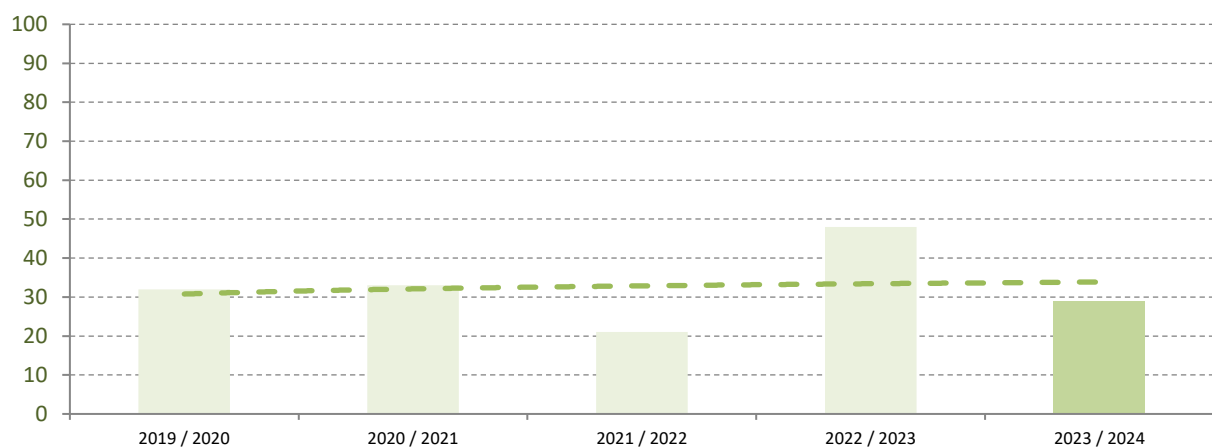


The complaints process is used to administer appeals. From the 117 cases on the previous page, 17 were categorised as ‘*appeal a decision or package of care*’. This can refer to the application of eligibility criteria, a package decrease or any other related decision.

Other Representations (with assistance of an advocate in brackets)

Adult Social Care	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Mental Health Long Term / Substance Misuse	2 (0)	-	-	-	-
Mental Health Short Term Services	2 (0)	2 (0)	-	-	-
All-Ages Disabilities [0-18]	1 (0)	(1 (0))	(1 (0))	(-)	(1 (0))
All-Ages Disabilities [18-25]	2 (0)	1 (0)	1 (0)	2 (0)	1 (0)
Learning Disabilities [25+]	-	2 (0)	1 (0)	1 (0)	2 (0)
Family Link / Orient Street	-	-	-	-	4 (0)
OPPD Assessment & Intake	5 (0)	6 (0)	3 (0)	7 (2)	4 (0)
OPPD Case Management	3 (0)	1 (0)	2 (0)	-	5 (0)
OPPD Occupational Therapy	2 (0)	4 (0)	1 (0)	-	1 (0)
OPPD Contact Team	8 (0)	18 (1)	6 (0)	8 (0)	9 (0)
OPPD Review Team	-	2 (0)	-	4 (0)	4 (0)
OPPD Intermediate Care Team	-	2 (0)	3 (0)	1 (0)	2 (0)
OPPD Transfer of Care Team	1 (0)	-	-	-	-
OPPD Southwark Resource Centre	-	-	-	-	-
Client Finance Service	2 (0)	9 (0)	4 (0)	10 (0)	-
Personal Budget Service	1 (0)	1 (0)	-	-	-
Business Support, Customer Resolutions, Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total	29 (0)	48 (1) *	21 (0) *	33 (2) *	32 (0) *

It is our aim for an increasing proportion of new cases to be administered as ‘representations’ but this is entirely contingent on the agreement of the complainant, and the matter in hand.

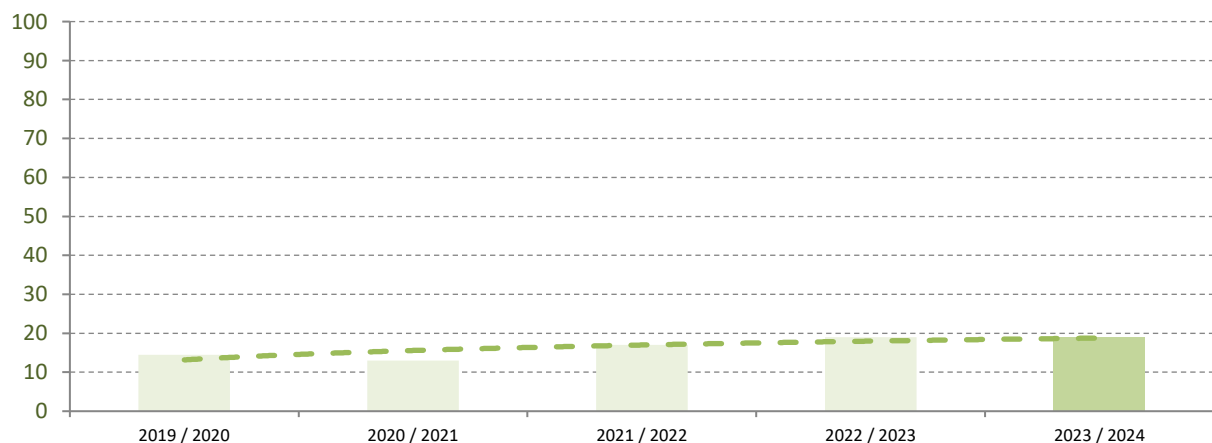


Internal Complaint Reviews

Adult Social Care	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Mental Health Long Term / Substance Misuse	-	1	-	-	3
Mental Health Short Term Services	1	-	-	-	-
All-Ages Disabilities [0-18]	3	(6)	(-)	(2)	(2)
All-Ages Disabilities [18-25]	3	1	-	-	6
Learning Disabilities [25+]	2	4	3	5	-
Family Link / Orient Street	-	-	-	-	-
OPPD Assessment & Intake	-	-	1	1	-
OPPD Case Management	-	3	3	-	0.5
OPPD Occupational Therapy	3	-	1	-	1
OPPD Contact Team	2	4	1	1	-
OPPD Review Team	-	-	1	1	1
OPPD Intermediate Care Team	-	2	2	4	0.5
OPPD Transfer of Care Team	-	-	-	-	-
OPPD Telecare and Sensory Team	1	-	-	-	-
Client Finance Service	4	3	5	1	2.5
Personal Budget Service	-	1	-	-	-
Business Support, Customer Resolutions, Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total	19	19 *	17 *	13 *	14.5 *

Where a service user, representative, or stakeholder is dissatisfied with the stage one complaint response, they may request an internal review.

Cases for AAD 0-18 are not 'internal reviews' but either 'corporate' or 'statutory stage two' complaints. Timescales and ownership differ but each of the above are escalated complaints, irrespective of the policy followed.

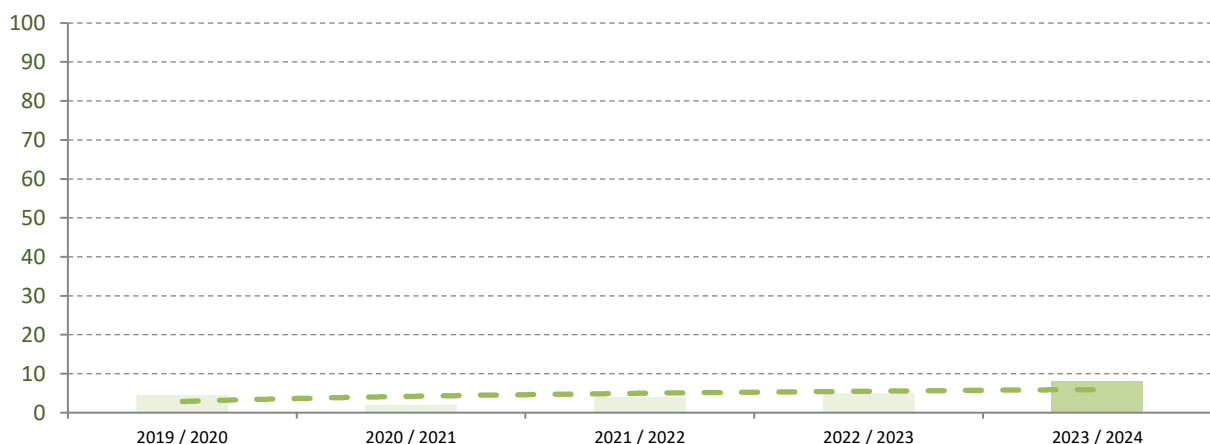


Further Complaint Reviews

Adult Social Care	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Mental Health Long Term / Substance Misuse	-	-	-	-	-
Mental Health Short Term Services	1	-	-	-	-
All-Ages Disabilities [0-18]	2	(-)	(-)	(1)	(1)
All-Ages Disabilities [18-25]	1	1	-	2	1
Learning Disabilities [25+]	1	-	-	-	-
Family Link / Orient Street	-	-	-	-	-
OPPD Assessment & Intake	-	-	-	-	2
OPPD Case Management	-	-	1	-	-
OPPD Occupational Therapy	1	-	-	-	-
OPPD Contact Team	-	2	-	-	-
OPPD Review Team	-	-	-	-	-
OPPD Intermediate Care Team	-	-	-	-	-
OPPD Transfer of Care Team	-	-	-	-	0.5
OPPD Telecare and Sensory Team	-	-	-	-	-
Client Finance Service	2	2	3	-	1
Personal Budget Service	-	-	-	-	-
Business Support, Customer Resolutions, Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total	8	5 *	4 *	2 *	4.5 *

There were 146 cases received (complaints + representations) and only 5% reached the final stage of the applicable procedure, which we should regard as a satisfactory achievement.

Cases recorded above for 'AAD 0-18' are not be 'further reviews' but are 'statutory stage three panels'. There are two such cases. All cases above represent the final stage of the Council's process.



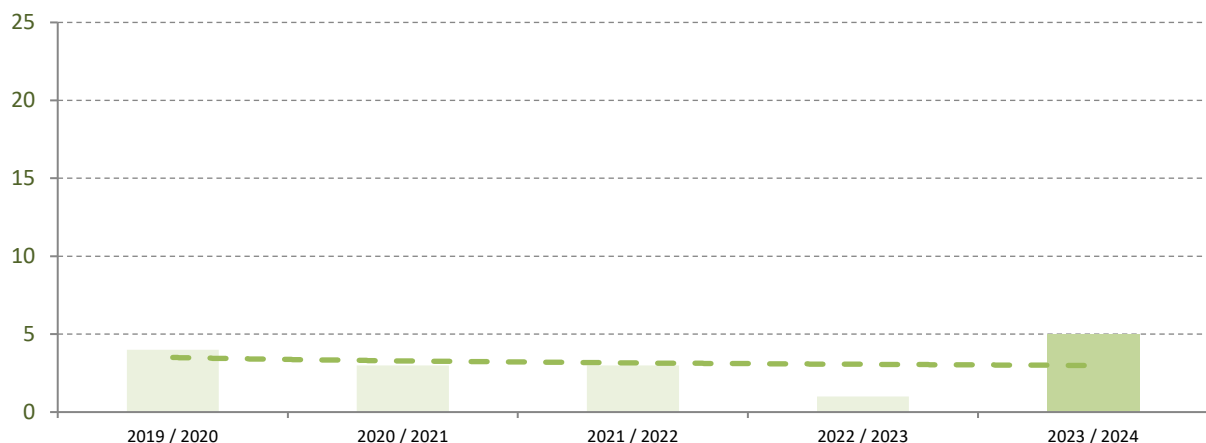
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Investigations (Final Decisions)

Adult Social Care	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Mental Health Long Term / Substance Misuse	-	-	-	-	-
Mental Health Short Term Services	-	-	-	2	1
All-Ages Disabilities [0-18]	3	(-)	(1)	(-)	(-)
All-Ages Disabilities [18-25]	-	-	-	-	-
Learning Disabilities [25+]	-	-	-	-	-
Family Link / Orient Street	-	-	-	-	-
OPPD Assessment & Intake	-	-	-	-	-
OPPD Case Management	-	1	-	-	1
OPPD Occupational Therapy	-	-	1	-	2
OPPD Contact Team	-	-	-	-	-
OPPD Review Team	-	-	-	-	-
OPPD Intermediate Care Team	1	-	2	-	-
OPPD Transfer of Care Team	-	-	-	-	-
OPPD Telecare and Sensory Team	-	-	-	-	-
Client Finance Service	1	-	-	1	-
Personal Budget Service	-	-	-	-	-
Business Support, Customer Resolutions, Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total	5	1 *	3 *	3 *	4 *

We report here the complaints where the Ombudsman investigated and made a 'final decision'.

The performance of Southwark and other boroughs can be found here : <https://www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance/>

The Ombudsman's annual letter to the Local Authority is also published here, along with information relating to upheld complaints and details of recommendations made.



Outcomes, all Stage One and Representations

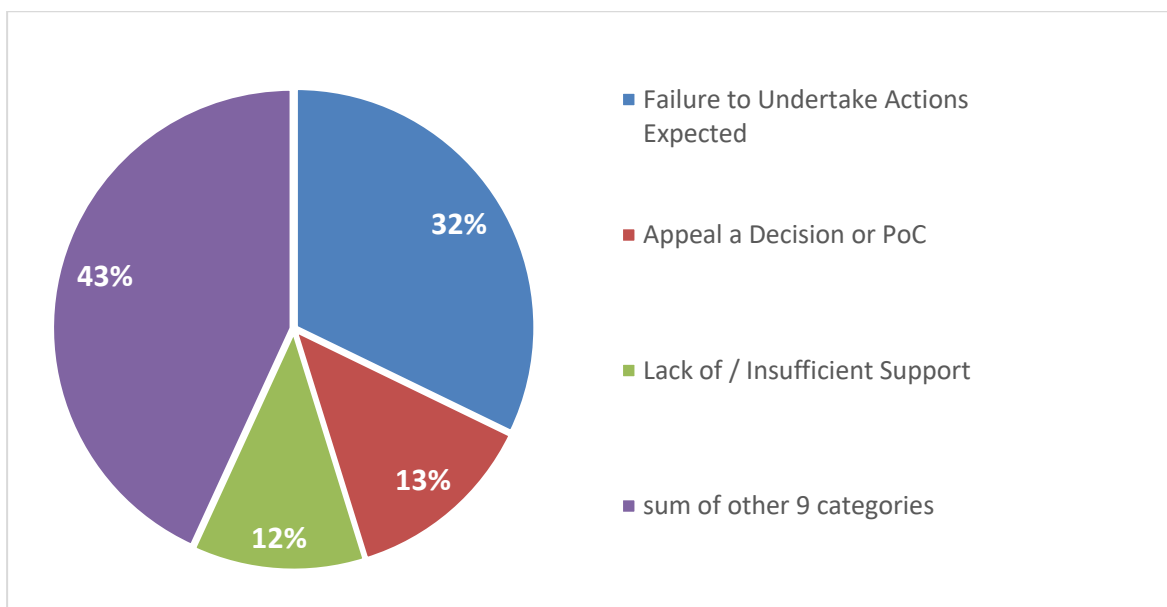
Adults Social Care	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Partly Upheld	31%	17%	28%	21%	19%
Upheld	19%	15%	17%	20%	16%
Not Upheld	15%	23%	24%	26%	34%
No Findings / Resolved	20%	27%	18%	24%	25%
Unresolved, Escalated (representations only)	1%	3%	0%	3%	0%
Withdrawn / Rejected	14%	15%	13%	6%	6%

There has been an unusually high number of complaints which were rejected. These complaints are more commonplace in Education, where many powers of investigation are conferred upon schools and colleges.

Examining the individual cases there were a number of cases where the issue raised was the subject of a safeguarding investigation, via another alternative process. When this happens we advise the person making the complaint to contact us once that process is concluded, should they have any persisting concerns.

The chart below shows the complaint categorisation, irrespective of whether fault was found.

Root Causes, all Stage One Complaints and Representations



Although the three most-frequent categories are not those reserved for 'communication', the principles of timely and effective communication do remain a relevant feature in complaints received. The full range of 12 categories are listed in **appendix a** on page 28.

Stage One Complaints Completed (with assistance of an advocate in brackets)

Commissioning	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Care at Home Providers	17 (1)	18 (0)	18 (0)	15 (0)	34 (0)
Care Homes	3 (0)	7 (0)	1 (0)	2 (0)	-
Other	1 (0)	5 (0)	0 (0)	2 (0)	-
Total	21 (1)	30 (0)	19 (0)	19 (0)	34 (0)

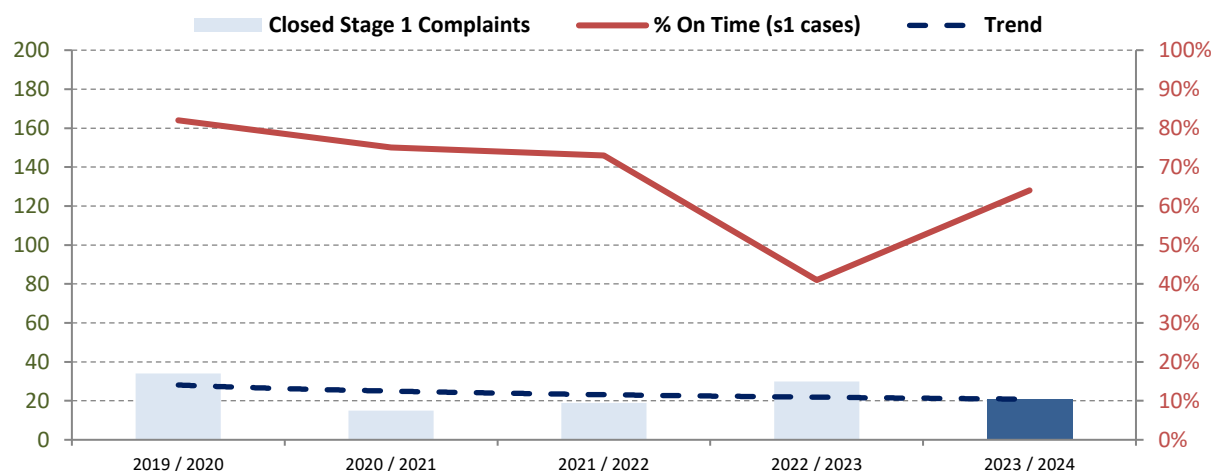
It is important to note that service users may choose to contact their provider, or Care Home, directly and request a complaint response in accordance with the provider's own policy.

Where there is evidence for this happening, it should hopefully serve to demonstrate that service users are not so displeased or discouraged that they require the additional scrutiny provided by the Council's complaint investigations.

Where cases are presented to the local authority, we investigate with the support of the commissioned provider and it is the Council who writes to the person who made the complaint, to explain the Council's findings.

The Council is responsible for the performance of those organisations and the Council works in partnership with management at the provider when a complaint is raised directly with us. Monitoring arrangements exist to understand those issues which are instead raised by a service user, or their family, with the provider directly.

Southwark reports on complaints in this area on a quarterly basis. The report summarises the details of the complaint which has been made and the report explicitly details the learning derived from each case. This information provides the Commissioning team with additional evidence with which to assist the process of service development.



Other Representations (with assistance of an advocate in brackets)

Commissioning	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Care at Home Providers	1 (0)	6 (0)	1 (0)	6 (0)	6 (0)
Care Homes	-	0 (0)	-	1 (0)	-
Other	-	0 (0)	-	1 (0)	-
Total	1 (0)	6 (0)	1 (0)	8 (0)	6 (0)

Because it is often not possible to address concerns about contracted providers without meaningful dialogue with them, so it follows that the opportunity for 'representations' is much-reduced.

Internal Complaint Reviews

Commissioning	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Care at Home Providers	2	3	1	2	1.5
Care Homes	2	1	-	-	-
Other	2	0	1	-	1
Total	6	4	2	2	2.5

Further Complaint Reviews

Commissioning	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Care at Home Providers	2	2	1	1	0.5
Care Homes	-	0	-	-	-
Other	-	0	1	-	-
Total	2	2	2	1	0.5

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Investigations (Final Decisions)

Commissioning	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Care at Home Providers	-	1	-	1	-
Care Homes	-	0	1	-	-
Other	-	0	-	-	-
Total	0	1	1	1	0

The performance of Southwark and others, and the Ombudsman's annual letter to the Local Authority can be found here : <https://www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance/>

Outcomes, all Stage One and Representations

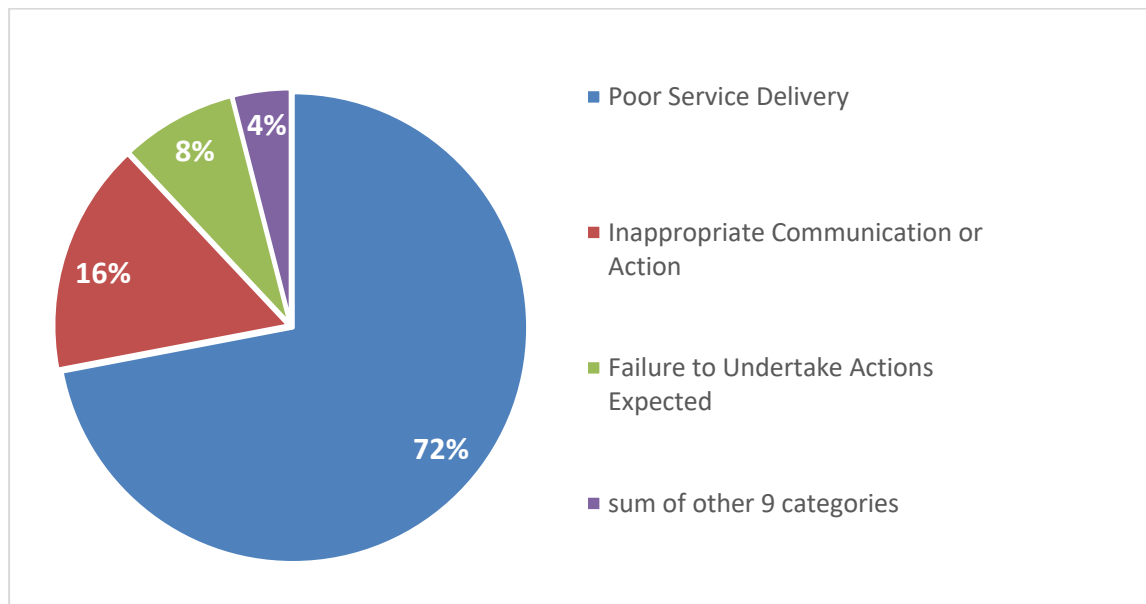
Commissioning	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Partly Upheld	18%	28%	32%	22%	10%
Upheld	36%	22%	42%	30%	53%
Not Upheld	27%	14%	5%	11%	7%
No Findings / Resolved	14%	17%	5%	30%	18%
Unresolved, Escalated (representations only)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Withdrawn / Rejected	5%	19%	16%	7%	12%

The numbers of complaints investigated in the year may be too low to reliably draw significant intelligence from the 'uphold rates' reported above. When case numbers are low, we should expect the figures reported above to deviate more markedly and this is evident in the table above.

The chart below records the complaint categorisation, irrespective for whether fault was found in an individual case.

The category 'poor service delivery' is intended to highlight that it is the performance of the service provider which was questioned, rather than the activities of the Local Authority.

Root Causes, all Stage One Complaints and Representations



The only intelligence we can derive from this is the confirmation that the issues raised relate to the provider, rather than our own activities, directly. However, case-specific learning is reported internally, each quarter.

The full range of 12 categories are listed in **appendix a** on page 28.

Stage One Complaints Completed (with assistance of an advocate in brackets)

Public Health	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Children, Young & Health Protection	0	There is no data recorded			
Healthy Adults	0				
Place and Health Improvement	0				
Intelligence and Partnerships	0				
Total	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Public Health support a number of initiatives that are delivered outside the visible sphere of the local authority. Many schemes have their own processes to explore dissatisfaction, and many locations also have their own published and publically-available processes.

Hence the number of issues reported to our team is, as expected, very low.

Other Representations (with assistance of an advocate in brackets)

Public Health	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Children, Young & Health Protection	0	There is no data recorded			
Healthy Adults	0				
Place and Health Improvement	1				
Intelligence and Partnerships	0				
Total	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Stage Two Investigations (Corporate Reviews)

Public Health	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Children, Young & Health Protection	0	There is no data recorded			
Healthy Adults	0				
Place and Health Improvement	0				
Intelligence and Partnerships	0				
Total	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Investigations (Final Decisions)

Public Health	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Children, Young & Health Protection	0	There is no data recorded			
Healthy Adults	0				
Place and Health Improvement	0				
Intelligence and Partnerships	0				
Total	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

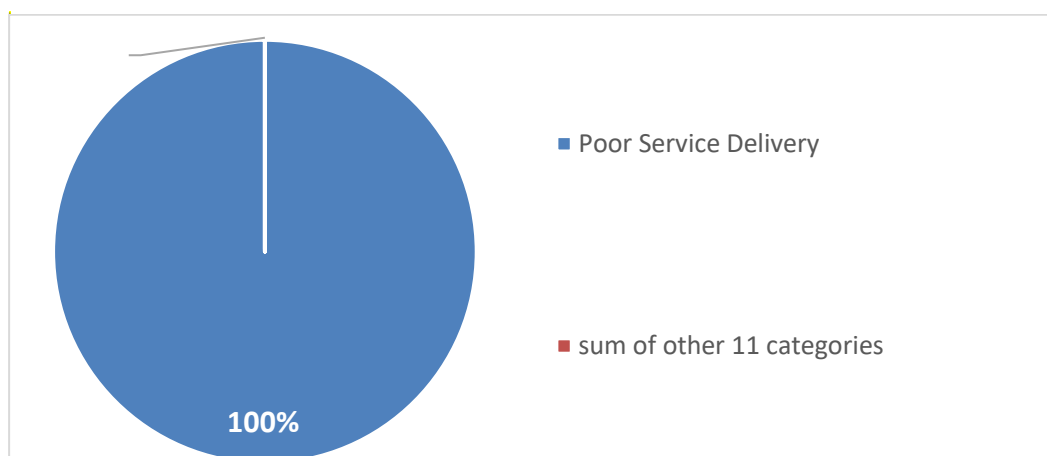
Whether any complaints fell under the jurisdiction of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman would be a matter for them to explore if and when presented with any cases.

There also exists a Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman with similar powers.

Outcomes, all Stage One and Representations

Public Health	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Partly Upheld	-	There is no data recorded			
Upheld	-				
Not Upheld	-				
No Findings / Resolved	100%				
Unresolved, Escalated (representations only)	-				
Withdrawn / Rejected	-				

Root Causes, all Stage One Complaints and Representations



Should the number of complaints grow, so too would the value of this chart, and all data in this section.

The full range of 12 categories are listed in **appendix a** on page 28.

Complaints System Review

Are our investigations objective, sufficient and successful ?

- We look at the proportion of complaints which were not successfully resolved at the first opportunity and we look at whether subsequent investigations return the same findings.
- The escalation rates after stage one across each of the Directorates are 29%, 25%, 16% and 29%. There is an increase across all areas this year.
- We look at the outcomes from subsequent investigation stages to see where additional learning was derived at successive stages and we see that. We see that 56% of all complaints identify additional points of learning at the second stage.
- A stage two complaint either has longer timescales or necessitates the involvement of more senior service staff. The stage two investigation also has the benefit of new information from the complainant and so we must expect that stage two complaints will uncover new points of learning.
- In the annual report for 2022/23 we identified the need to ensure we remain objective with stage one complaints and we should reflect on the 56% figure with the same desire and with the same intention of reducing escalation rates by focusing on a right-first-time attitude.

Are Complaints activities understood and are our services being accessed equally and fairly ?

Information here is provided by the Office for National Statistics, via the 2021 Census. The reason we look at these statistics is to compare the local demographic with the background of those who make complaints. It is interesting for us to learn that in Southwark, over the last 10 years, there are 15.5% more people aged 65 years and over and there are 3.8% fewer children aged under 15 years.

- The 2021 Census showed the average age for a Southwark resident is **32.4 years**
The mean age, where known, of our complainants in the period is in the **35 - 44 range**
- The ratio of male to female, in the 2021 census was Male **48% : 52%** Female
The ratio of male to female complainants this year was : Male **28% : 72%** Female

Ethnicity (where known)	Complainants 2022 - 2023	Previous Year	Previous Year	Last Census (2021)
English or White British	29%	43%	31%	52%
All Black Backgrounds	44%	38%	52%	25%
All Asian Backgrounds	8%	2%	1%	10%
Mixed Backgrounds	10%	10%	8%	7%
All Other	9%	8%	8%	6%

We can only analyse demographic data when this is offered by those completing online complaint forms, and only when the person completing the information wishes to share it for this purpose.

We do have enough data to recognise that females are much more likely to undertake the process of making a complaint.

And whilst we know that, as of 2021, 40% of Southwark residents were born outside the UK and Ireland, we can see the reported ethnicity of people making complaints does not necessarily align with the data we have collected.

We also have to be mindful that, for a majority of complaints, we do not have demographic information. We cannot say whether any person with any particular background is more or less likely to provide their personal background details because of it, and for the purpose of our analysis.

We realise that a complainant's age can clearly impact their complaint-making need and complaint-making capacity but our evidence does show that 'middle aged' people are more likely to be making a complaint.

We can see no correlation relating to whether a complaint is upheld, or not, and no trends relating to those complaint gave rise to an offer of a financial remedy.

We stated in 2022/23 that we have be alert to any minority groups appearing to have a greater need to report concerns and that we have to be alert to any potential under-representation.

In 2022-23, there were 4% of new complaints made with the assistance of a formal advocate and we can see that this year, the comparable figure is : 10% Previously we did not include 'SIAS' as Advocacy, and without SIAS the comparable rate is 5%. This is a small increase using either calculation. It reassures us that 'some' complaints are made with the support of an Advocate and reassuring that the support the Complaints Team provides is apparently adequate for the vast majority of complainants.

[Are we learning from complaints ?](#)

In 2022/23 we reported an increase in new case numbers (stage one complaints + representations) but the data shown in this report shows a decrease in total case numbers in excess of 10%

There is an increase in complaints for SEND, where Southwark's ability to respond is as sensitive to the challenging national picture as it is for other local authorities. It may be argued that '*learning from complaints*' is not sufficient to train and deploy large numbers of Educational Psychologists, for example.

Removing SEND complaints from the calculation would show new cases are down by over 20%

An increase in the number of complaints received can indicate an increased faith on the part of complainants, that a formal complaint will help them to achieve the outcome they desire. We should therefore also look at whether we are upholding complaints more often, to get some measure for whether these complaints are meritorious.

Looking at adverse Ombudsman 'final decisions', and any trend for those, is a useful exercise. There were only 9 cases in which 'fault' or 'some fault' was found this year, and this compares very well with other departments and other local authorities. At the time of writing the number of cases open is very low. If this was not the case we would need to give serious thought and time as to whether we are learning, and improving, and whether this is supported by complaints processes.

The following table records payments made in complaints responses which were accepted :

	2023 - 2024	2022 – 2023	2021 - 2022	2020 - 2021	2019 – 2020
Children & Families	£ 15774.76	£ 18433.70	£ 9250.00	£ 7900.00	£ 6240.00
Education	£ 21995.00	£ 2950.00	£ 300.00	£ 0.00	£ 0.00
Adult Social Care	£ 3300.00	£ 500.00	£ 1900.00	£ 2596.40	£ 7200.00
Commissioning	£ 0.00	£ 0.00	£ 1300.00	£ 0.00	£ 0.00
Public Health	£ 0.00	Data unavailable			

Proposed payments are often not accepted. This year 17 out of 37 payments were declined and this includes those payments recommended by the Ombudsman. The complainant does not always explain why they did not accept a payment but in many cases this is because they prefer to consider their options for escalation either through our own process, via a legal route or via the Ombudsman. It may also highlight that many people are not motivated by a financial outcome. The data above is for accepted payments made. Because the data above can be so strongly impacted by just one case, we consider it best not to apply too much weight to the overall value, as a measure of complaints team performance, or service delivery standards.

[Survey Results](#)

At the time of writing a number of aspects of compliant handling are being reviewed at the corporate level, and an updated direction for surveying is expected to be confirmed and rolled-out.

[Habitual Contact / Single Point of Contact](#)

There are four individuals for whom their complaint-related contact is subject to restrictions under the Habitual Contact Policy. Given there are 307700 Southwark inhabitants (Census, 2021), it appears that the restriction is being applied as it is intended – strictly only as a last course of action. These restrictions are formally reviewed every year with specific consideration given to each individual and their contact in the period. The Habitual Contact Policy is presently being reviewed so that management can consider if the existing process supports officers efficiently and will all due fairness to service users.

[Compliments](#)

We cannot say that an increased number of compliments evidences improved performance, neither a reduction being suggestive of the opposite. We therefore do not report on numbers of compliments. Rather what we must do is ensure a system exists to record praise received from external parties and that it is used alongside learning from our mistakes, to inform good practice.

Complaints Team Update

We are small team and we benefit from having worked together for a number of years now and this helps us to be efficient in our work and consistent with our advice and with the application of our principles.

Southwark undertook a root-and-branch review of our *corporate* complaints procedure in late 2023 and this gave rise to a number of enhancements that may inform how *our* team works. Simultaneously, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman have been consulting on their own complaint handling code and as a result we are about to publish new complaints policies which embody the most up to date standards, and guidance, available. In doing this we will ensure they are easy for everybody to understand and follow.

Otherwise this team has benefited from a settled landscape, and from settled structure and infrastructure, and this has assisted in our focusing on the specific complaints we have received.

We should be careful before measuring success as reduced numbers of complaints but when we have a strategy to learn from complaints and generate service development then, after a period of time, we would hope to see a reduction. There are some very positive figures reported across many areas which provide us with reassurance for the work we are doing to address, and put-right any shortfalls and errors which our residents and service users have encountered.

We continue to increase visibility and access to the complaints process. We continue to work with colleagues to ensure compliant use of the complaints process and we will continue to give thought to these matters. We have new functionality this year to assist with transcribing complaints made over the phone which is a small but helpful step forward in serving the needs of those with additional accessibility needs.

We have added a QR code to complaints leaflets to help young people, particularly, to engage in a way which is convenient to them. We have distributed new leaflets more widely than ever before, to Council buildings and to individual teams.

This year we piloted a process for Mediation, as an alternative pathway for dispute resolution. Formal mediation was offered to complainants across a number of teams, with the agreement from the Children and Adults Board. Very positive feedback was received from all quarters and recommendations have been made to provide mediation in the future, where the circumstances lend themselves to it, and particularly with the express agreement and participation of the complainant.

In January 2024 training was arranged for 75 delegates, with whom we collaborate on complaints investigations, looking specifically at complaint ownership and behaviours. The programme was led by an external management trainer and the feedback was especially positive. The scope of this training differed from the well-known Ombudsman 'Effective Complaint Handling' training and complements that training. This programme will influence future training support.

Appendix a All 'root cause' categories

The full list of complaint root causes, which are referred to primarily on pages **9, 12, 18, 21 and 23**, are :

Failure to Undertake Actions Expected

Lack of / Insufficient Support

Inadequate Communication

Process Delays

Invoicing or Account Issue

Appeal a Decision or Package of Care

Poor Service Delivery

Payment Failure

Inappropriate Communication or Action

Assessment or Reports

Case Handover / Ownership

Multiple or Other Concerns

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We report, under the 'Finance' Directorate to :

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Web www.southwark.gov.uk/complaints

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