

Benchmarking with other local authorities – focus on SEND services.

In 2023 we sent a request for all comparable local authorities to share their early stage complaint data with us. After discussion with our counterparts in other local authorities it was agreed that straightforward data comparison is largely unproductive due to the different ways in which each organisation structures and records complaints, for example whether Education are grouped together with Corporate complaints.

We were able to compare data from five local authorities, but it was not sufficient to provide any conclusive insights.

We have instead focused below on the number of LGSCO enquiries related to SEND services.

2022-2023

Local Authority	Total complaints upheld	Of which SEN complaints (%)	Non-SEN complaints (%)	Number of public reports
Surrey	68	26 (38%)	42 (62%)	1
Kent	53	24 (45%)	29 (55%)	0
Hertfordshire	36	23 (64%)	13 (36%)	1
Hampshire	35	17 (49%)	18 (51%)	1
Oxfordshire	30	18 (60%)	12 (40%)	1
Essex	41	12 (29%)	29 (71%)	0

2023-2024

Local Authority	Total complaints upheld	Of which SEN complaints (%)	Number of public reports	Satisfactory remedy decisions
Surrey	141	105 (74%)	1	4 (3%)
Kent*	76	42 (55%)	1	2 (3%)

Hertfordshire	42	25 (59%)	0	3 (7%)
Hampshire	31	10 (32%)	0	1 (3%)
Oxfordshire	34	19 (55%)	0	3 (9%)
Essex**	66	40 (60%)	1	3 (5%)

* Kent Annual Letter mentions 170 complaints where the response was excessively delayed.

** Criticism in Essex Annual Letter of successive complaints about failure to provide alternative education

No selected criticism of Surrey, the only comment in the section on 'your organisation's performance was about the public report.

It is clear that the increase in complaints for 2023-24 have been primarily caused by the delays in EHCP process (specifically capacity of Educational Psychology service) which has been, and is still being addressed through the EHCP Recovery Plan.

The Ombudsman issues an annual review of all complaints across the country, and shares the same observation at a national scale:

"Our casework is dominated by complaints about special educational needs provision. [...] We found fault in 92% of the education cases we investigated, and the numbers are increasing rapidly. The key issues are failures by councils to carry out Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan assessments and reviews in good time and not providing the support stated in a EHC Plan once a child has one. These issues are often compounded by parents not receiving adequate information about what is happening to provide for their child's needs."

<https://www.lgo.org.uk/assets/attach/6627/Annual-Review-of-Local-Government-Complaints-2023-24.pdf>

Guidance on interpreting statistics from the LGSCO recommends taking the following into account:

Demographics. An organisation that serves a large population is likely to see more complaints reach us. This could also influence the kind of complaints that are made to us. For example, a community that includes a high proportion of older people may raise more complaints about adult social care services.

Local conditions. Sometimes, one-off events can generate multiple complaints about the same organisation. For example, we might receive several complaints

from people who oppose a council's decision to grant planning permission for a large housing development.

Expectations. Not everyone who receives a poor service goes on to raise a complaint with us and some people are less likely to complain than others. So, a fall in the number of received complaints may reflect lower expectations rather than an improvement in services.

Signposting. A high number of received complaints might reflect an organisation that is good at letting people know they can ask us for an independent investigation.

<https://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/annual-review-reports/interpreting-local-authority-statistics>

This page is intentionally left blank