

Annual Complaints Report 2024-2025

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary 2

1. Epping District Overview..... 3

2. Accountability for Complaints Management 3

3. Complaints Reporting..... 4

4. Total complaints received..... 4

 4.1 Complaints Investigated per Service Area 5

5. Outcomes..... 6

6. Complaint Themes..... 7

7. Complaints Service Level Performance 8

8. Complaints escalated to the LGSCO and HO 9

9. LGSCO Annual Complaints Report 11

11. Learning from Complaints 12

12. The Way Forward 12

Executive Summary

This report sets out a detailed analysis of the complaints received by Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) between April 2024 to March 2025.

- Running quarter statistics relating to complaints are reported weekly to the Service Director for Customer Services, quarterly to our Service Areas, quarterly to our Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) and our Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee.
- EFDC received 1,426 formal complaints, of which 565 fit the criteria of a complaint as per our Complaints Policy, which equates to 119 complaints per month or 27 per week.
- In 2024-2025, 49% of Stage One complaints were upheld, 42% not upheld and 9% fell into the other category.
- For Stage Two complaints 26% were upheld, 64% not upheld and 10% fell into the other category.
- The main themes emerging for complaints in 2024-2025 were customer expectations, services not provided, repair delays, limited communication, conduct of contractors and action not taken.
- In 2024-2025 81% of Stage One responses were sent within 10 working days, while 10% of complainants were sent holding letters, and received responses by the stipulated date in their letters. This means that 91% of responses were sent within the required time, which is an increase of 10% from the previous year.
- 91% of Stage Two responses were sent within 20 working days, while 81% of responses were sent within SLA for the previous year.
- The Council received 28 complaints from the LGSCO, and 16 complaints from the HO. This is an increase of 22% LGSCO complaints and 129% HO complaints compared to the previous year.
- In four out of five, or 80% of complaints investigated by the LGSCO were upheld. This compares to an average of 66% in authorities of a similar size. This equates to EFDC receiving 2.9% upheld decisions per 100,000 residents compared to authorities of a similar size receiving 1.1%.
- It is important that we learn from complaints and identify areas where we can improve our customers' experience. This will help us to assess whether we are currently aligned to our vision.

1. Epping District Overview

The Epping District is a three-tier area with public services split between Essex County Council (ECC), EFDC, Town Councils and Parish Councils. There are 58,892 properties registered for Council Tax and 4,608 properties registered for Business Rates in the district. As of 31st March 2025, EFDC has 6,376 properties in our housing stock, 57 Temporary Accommodation Units, 1,100 leased housing units, and 417 commercial properties.

Census 2021 revealed that there is a population of 135,000 living in the area. Based on the population size, EFDC received 1% district wide complaints for 2024-2025.

2. Accountability for Complaints Management

- EFDC has a two stage Complaints Process. Stage One complaints should be responded to within 10 working days, and Stage Two complaints should be responded to within 20 working days.
- Where the response timescale cannot be achieved, a holding letter is sent to the complainant, explaining why more time is required to complete the investigation.
- Complainants are sent acknowledgements within five working days of receiving their complaints advising them of the specific date to expect a response if the matter is being investigated, to signpost, or to advise that their concerns are raised with the appropriate teams.
- Complainants receive a comprehensive written response from the investigating senior officer, manager, or director.
- All complaints are fully investigated, and findings are based on available information.
- Complainants are advised that they can escalate their complaint to Stage Two if they are dissatisfied with the Stage One investigation outcome.
- Complainants are advised that they can escalate any concerns to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), or the Housing Ombudsman (HO) during the investigation stage and after the conclusion of Stage Two reviews.
- When complaints are received from the Ombudsman, responses are promptly provided to aid with the initial assessment and investigation.

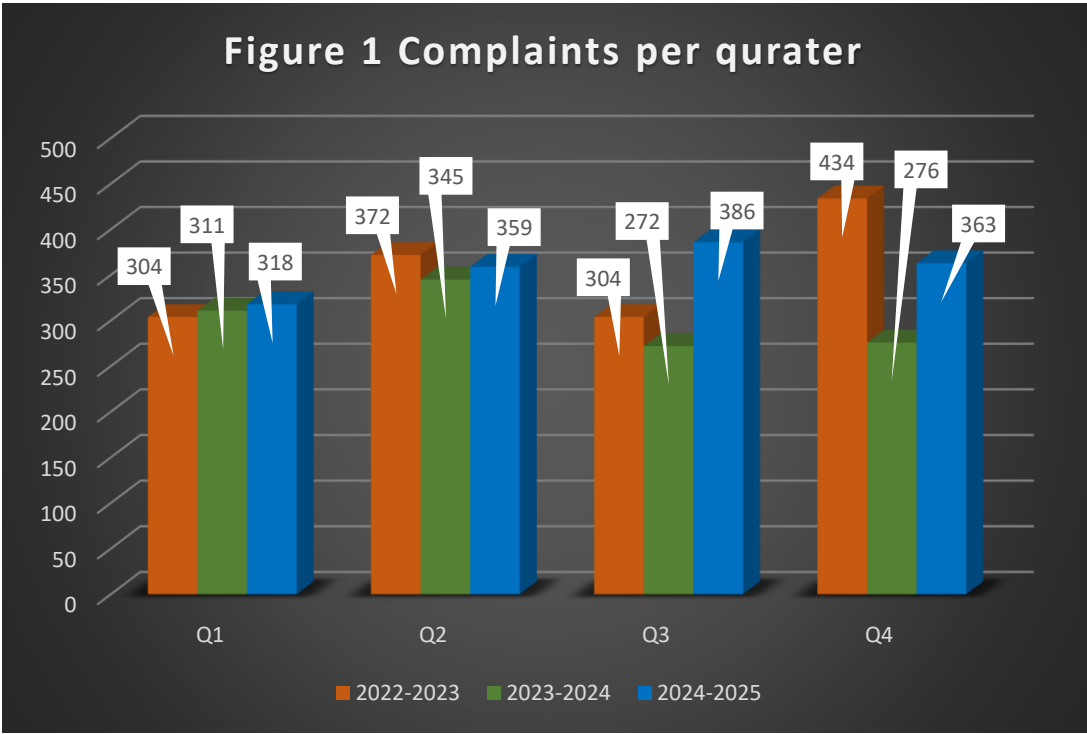
The Complaints Team consisted of the Team Manager – Customer Services, Lead Customer Service Officer and Complaints Officer for 2024-2025. The team is responsible for overseeing our Corporate Complaints Process to ensure that we are adhering to the service level agreement outlined in our Complaints Policy. The team also acts as a liaison to the LGSCO and HO when complaints are escalated to them.

3. Complaints Reporting

Running quarter statistics relating to complaints are reported weekly to the Service Director for Customer Services, quarterly to our Service Areas, quarterly to our Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) and our Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee. To improve our service level performance and complaints handling, quarterly complaints review meetings are held with Service Areas to explore learnings from complaints, discuss recommendations, and agree necessary amendments. Additionally, we conduct a yearly self-assessment to ensure that we are adhering to the Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code. We will be posting our Annual Complaints Report on our website along with our Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) findings, to meet our quality reporting requirements as per the Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code.

4. Total complaints received

Figure 1 shows the total number of complaints received per quarter during 2024-2025 compared to the two previous years.



EFDC received 1,426 formal complaints, of which 565 fit the criteria of a complaint as per our Complaints Policy, which equates to 119 complaints per month or 27 per week. This compares to 1,204 formal complaints received by EFDC for the previous fiscal year. This is an increase in complaints of approximately 18%.

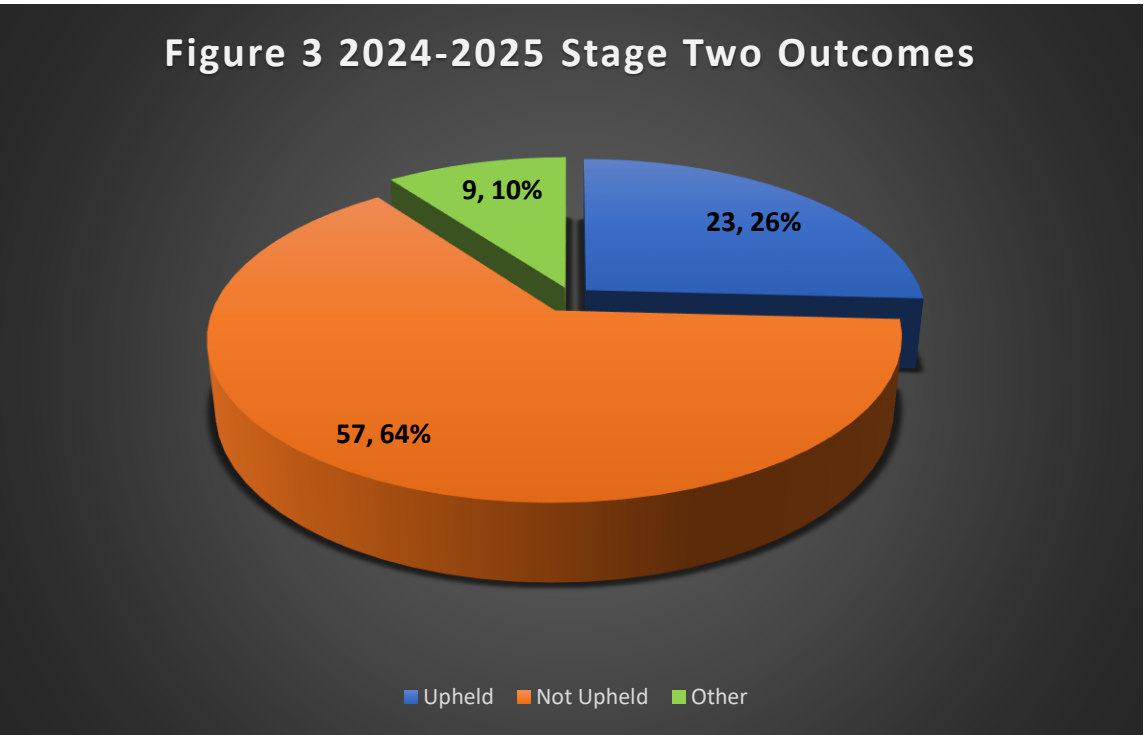
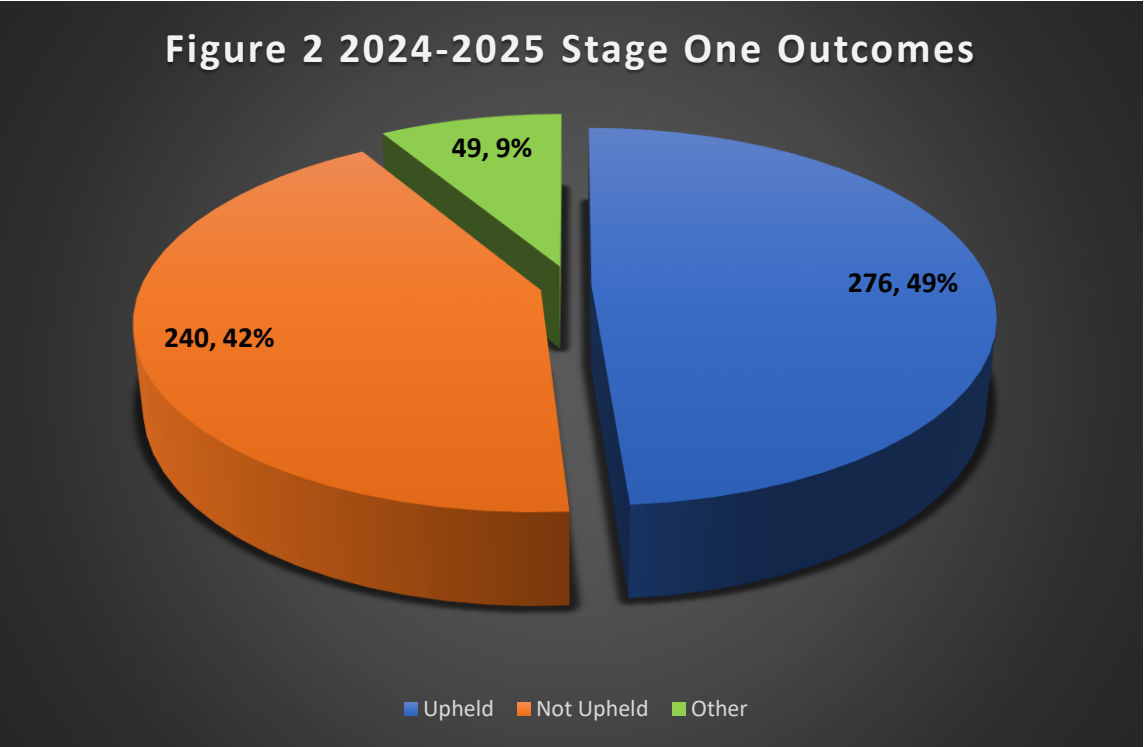
4.1 Complaints Investigated per Service Area

EFDC Service Area	Complaints 2023-2024	Complaints 2024-2025
Community Culture & Wellbeing	1	0
Community Resilience (ASB, noise, fly tips etc.)	15	21
Compliance ICT	0	2
Corporate Services	1	0
Customer Services	2	8
Democratic Services (elections etc.)	1	5
Home Ownership	0	1
Homelessness	22	6
Housing Allocations	9	18
Housing Assets & Maintenance	60	34
Housing Development	2	0
Housing Income Recovery	6	6
Housing Options	0	3
Housing Tenancy & Estates	30	31
Independent Living	1	3
Legal Shared Services	1	1
Leisure/Car Parking	2	13
Planning & Enforcement	52	46
Qualis (Grounds Maintenance) (verge cutting, etc.)	10	9
Qualis (Repairs)	135	181
Regulatory & Commercial (environment, licencing etc.)	5	3
Revenues & Benefits (council tax, benefits, etc.)	58	52
Technical (trees, drainage, etc.)	5	6
Waste	160	116
Total	578	565

Qualis (Repairs), Housing Allocations and Leisure/Car Parking teams saw increases in the number of complaints received in 2024-2025 with 46 (34%), 9 (100%) and 11 (550%) respectively. These increases were due to delays in carrying out repairs, high demand from residents to be rehoused, and EFDC taking over control of Cottis Yard Car Park. The Homelessness, Housing Assets & Maintenance and Waste teams saw reductions with 16 (73%), 26 (43%) and 44 (28%) less complaints received in this period.

5. Outcomes

Figures 2 and 3 shows the categories of complaints outcomes.



Complaints outcomes are categorised as upheld, not upheld and other.

Upheld: If evidence presented substantiates the concerns and shows that the Council was at fault, this should be recorded as upheld.

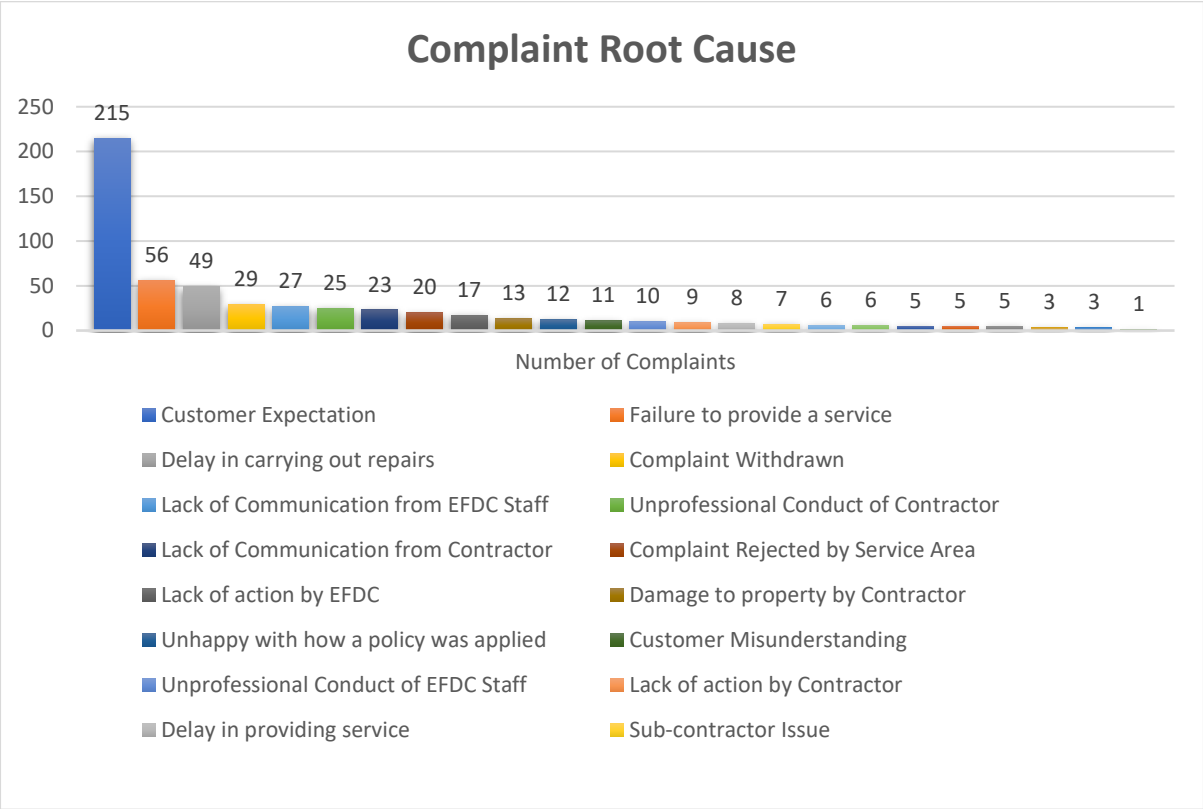
Not Upheld: If no evidence has been presented to prove that the Council has been at fault, this should be recorded as not upheld.

Other: Where matters that are initially raised as formal complaints but are resolved informally, as appeals, or withdrawn by complainants, this should be recorded as other.

In 2024-2025, 49% of Stage One complaints were upheld, 42% not upheld and 9% fell into the other category. When compared to the previous year, 4% less stage one complaints were upheld, 7% more not upheld and 3% more fell into the other category. For Stage Two complaints 25% were upheld, 64% not upheld and 10% fell into the other category. When compared to the previous year, 2% more Stage Two complaints were upheld, 8% more not upheld and 5% less fell into the other category.

6. Complaint Themes

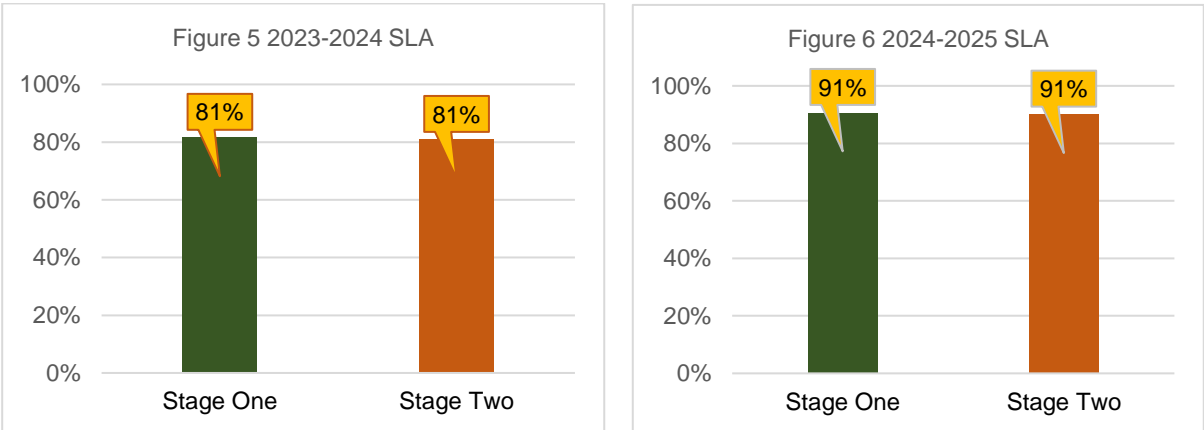
Figures 4 shows the root cause of complaints for 2024-2025.



The main themes emerging for complaints in 2024-2025 were customer expectations, services not provided, repair delays, limited communication, conduct of contractors and action not taken. These complaints spanned different departments across the council with most concerns being raised about repair related matters. When compared to the previous year, similar themes emerged. However, most concerns raised during that period were about waste related matters.

7. Complaints Service Level Performance

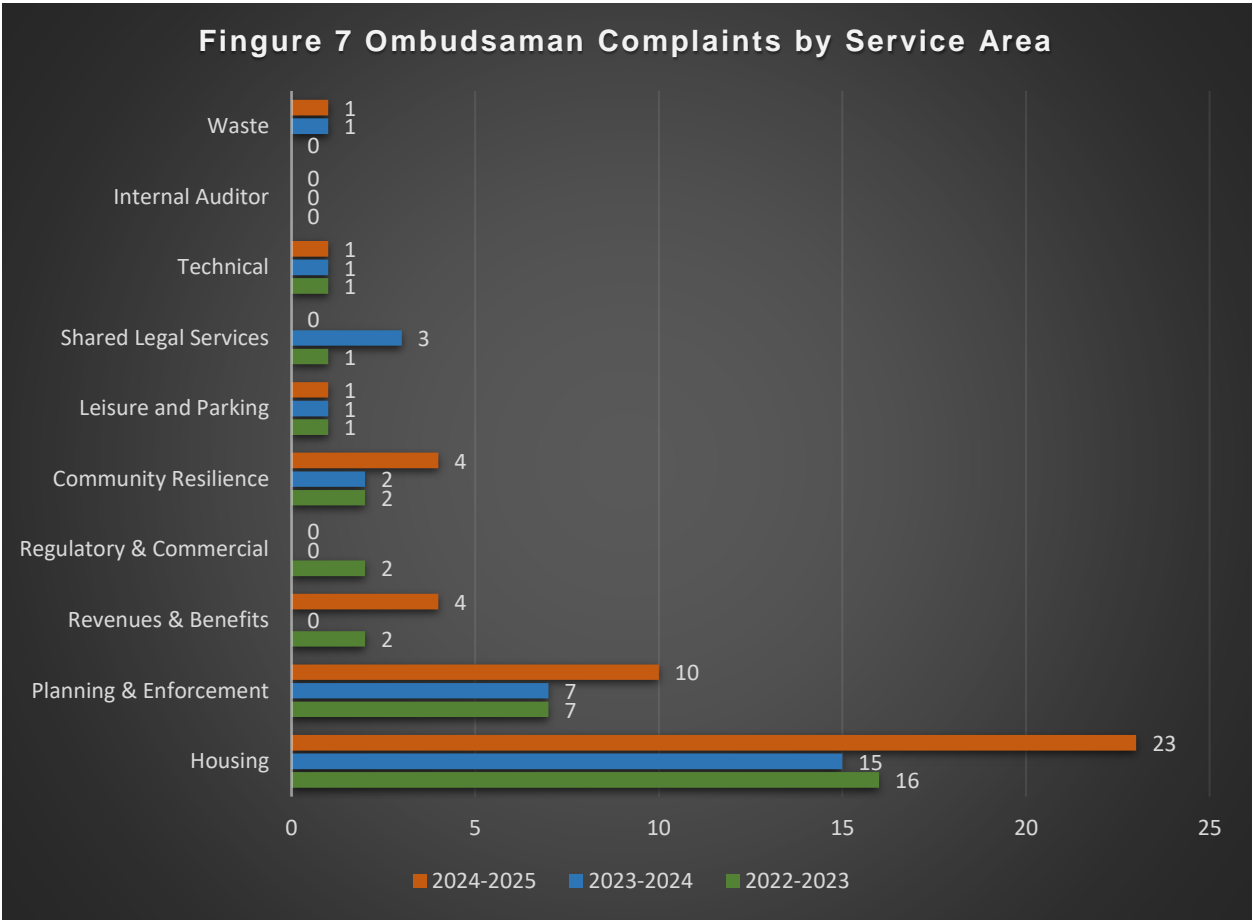
Figures 5 and 6 shows service level performance for 2023-2024 and 2024-2025.



All complainants were sent acknowledgements within five working days of receiving their complaints advising them of the specific date to expect a response if the matter was being investigated, to signpost, or to advise that their concerns were raised with the appropriate teams. In 2024-2025 81% of Stage One responses were sent within 10 working days, while 10% of complainants were sent holding letters, and received responses by the stipulated date in their letters. This means that 91% of responses were sent within the required time, which is an increase of 10% from the previous year. 91% of Stage Two responses were sent within 20 working days, while 81% of responses were sent within SLA for the previous year. We did not achieve our SLA target for complaints due to our Key Performance Indicator (KPI) being changed from 85% to 100% in July 2024. However, we have seen steady upward movement since the change.

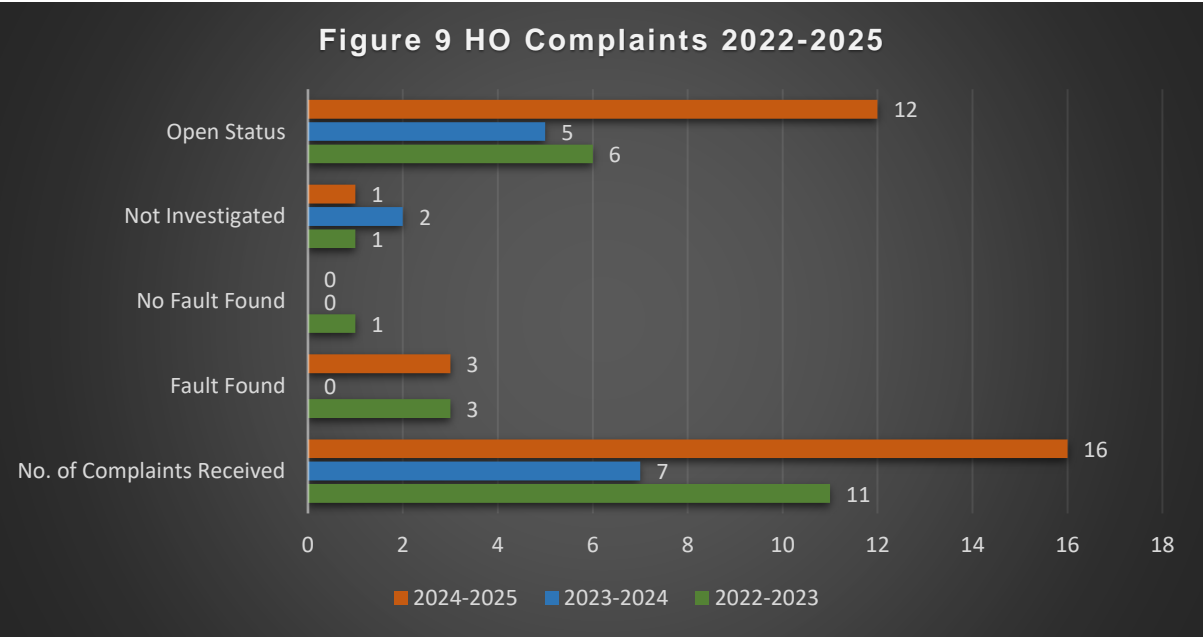
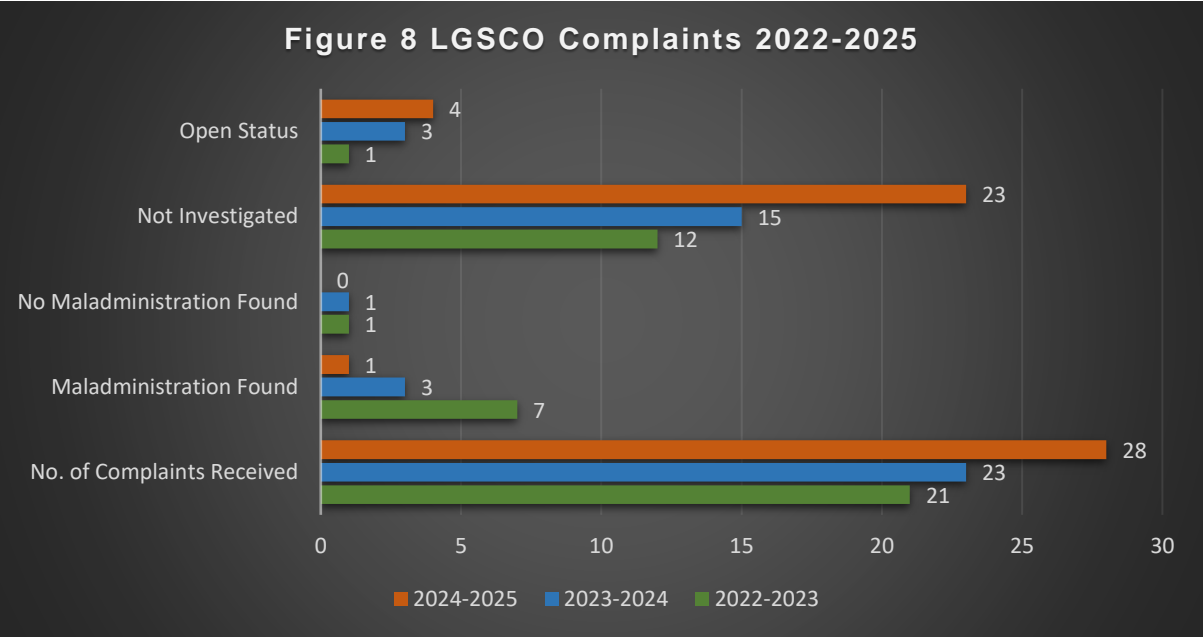
8. Complaints escalated to the LGSCO and HO

Figure 7 shows Ombudsman complaints escalations per Service Area for 2024-2025 compared to two previous years.



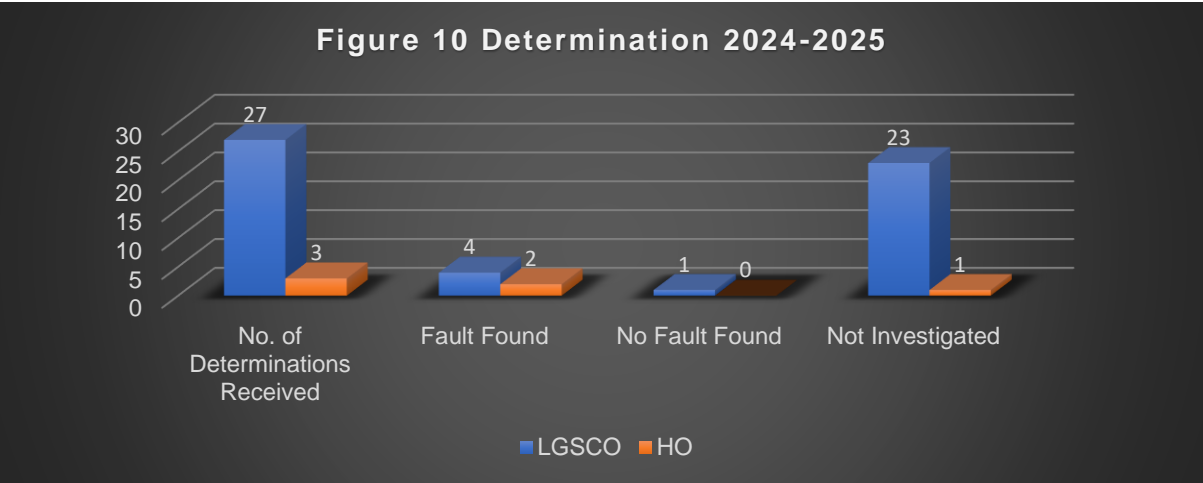
In 2024-2025, Housing and Planning received the highest number of Ombudsman complaints. Combined they represent 75% of complaints escalated to the Ombudsman. When compared to the previous year there is a 2% increase in their combined complaints escalation numbers.

Figures 8 and 9 shows Ombudsman complaints escalations for 2024-2025 compared to two previous years.



The Council received 28 complaints from the LGSCO, and 16 complaints from the HO. This is an increase of 22% LGSCO complaints and 129% HO complaints compared to the previous year.

Figure 10 shows Ombudsman Determinations for 2024-2025.



There were 27 determinations received from the LGSCO during 2024-2025 of which the outcomes were: 4 Fault Found/Maladministration, 1 No Fault Found/No Maladministration, and 23 Not Investigated. While 3 determinations were received from the HO of which the outcomes were: 2 Fault Found/ Maladministration, 0 No Fault Found/No Maladministration and 1 Not Investigated.

85% LGSCO cases and 33% HO cases escalated in 2024-2025 were not investigated.

9. LGSCO Annual Complaints Report

LGSCO Annual Complaints Report 2024-2025			
LGSCO	Upheld	Satisfactory Remedy	Compliance
	4	1	2
	80%	25%	100%

In four out of five, or 80% of complaints investigated by the LGSCO were upheld. This compares to an average of 66% in authorities of a similar size. This equates to EFDC receiving 2.9% upheld decisions per 100,000 residents compared to authorities of a similar size receiving 1.1%. In one out of four or 25% of upheld cases EFDC had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint was escalated to the Ombudsman. This compares to an average of 15% in authorities of a similar size. In two out of two, or 100% of cases EFDC complied with the recommendation from the LGSCO. This compares to an average of 100% in authorities of a similar size.

11. Learning from Complaints

It is important that we learn from complaints and identify areas where we can improve our customers' experience. This will help us to assess whether we are currently aligned to our vision.

Below are key learnings we have gathered from customer complaints.

- Failure to provide service and repair delays are the main drivers of complaints.
- The highest root cause of complaints was what customers expected versus what the Council or our contractors could provide. Therefore, there is room for improvement in communicating what the Council and its contractors can and cannot do.
- Internal collaboration between Service Areas have improved and we are now able to respond to multi-department complaints in a faster time.
- Though our communication with residents has improved, we are still receiving complaints about delayed responses to initial enquiries.
- Closer scrutiny of complaints has yielded great results in our service level and number of escalations after Stage One.

12. The Way Forward

We are always seeking to improve our complaints handling and service delivery, as we want to give the best service to customers. The following measures will help us reach our ultimate goal to provide a great customer experience.

- Closing general enquires/ service request in a timely manner will reduce our overall number of complaints.
- Complaints prevention, complaints handling and Ombudsman determinations will be a key focus of Service Area Review discussions.
- We will continue conducting frequent Trends Analysis to identify concerns that may become a major problem.
- We will continue to conduct Complaints Handling Workshops to ensure that all new starters/investigators are aware of our complaints process and the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
- We will continue to conduct complaints refresher training with all investigating officers, managers, and directors bi-annually.
- We will continue to conduct quality sampling of complaint response letters to ensure that we are compliant with the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
- We will continue to have regular service reviews with QPS to ensure that we remain coordinated when responding to complaints.