



Blind Justice

INVESTIGATION REPORT

A LAW UNTO THEMSELVES? WHY THE SRA'S FRONT-DOOR DECISIONS NEED A REVIEW RIGHT

In 2023/24 the Solicitors Regulation Authority recorded 8,317 matters closed with no further action at assessment and early resolution, roughly seven in ten of the matters it dealt with. The person who made the report has no rule-based right to require a merits review of that decision, and no independent merits-review route is available to them. Blind Justice UK is calling for that to change.

Blind Justice UK

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Executive Summary

Blind Justice UK is calling for a rule-based right to require a review when the Solicitors Regulation Authority decides to take no further action on a report about a solicitor. It does not argue that the SRA closes too many reports, and it does not claim that any particular closure was wrong. It argues that a gateway now responsible for disposing of most of the reports the regulator receives should not operate without a route by which the person who made the report can require that decision to be checked on its merits.

In 2023/24 the Solicitors Regulation Authority received 11,852 reports about solicitors and firms. Its Assessment and Early Resolution Team dealt with 11,421 matters, and 8,317 of them were closed with no further action, without referral for investigation. That is roughly seven in ten on either published measure, 70.2 per cent of reports received or 72.8 per cent of matters dealt with, and the SRA itself cautions that receipts and disposals in a year are not always the same cases. Of all matters dealt with that year, 56 per cent were reported by members of the public. The ratio of referrals recorded to reports received fell from approximately 53 per cent in 2017/18 to approximately 15 per cent in 2023/24, a comparison of annual flows that spans the introduction of the assessment process itself partway through 2018/19. The people behind those reports discover only when it happens to them that the closure is one they have no right to have reviewed.

Most service complaints never reach this gate. A complaint about poor service, delay or an unfair bill belongs with the Legal Ombudsman, which can order redress, and the SRA redirected 1,217 matters internally or to the Ombudsman in 2023/24. The no-further-action category is nevertheless broader than a single class of misconduct allegation: the SRA's published table notes that matters outside its jurisdiction have, since 2020/21, been absorbed into it. What matters is what the category contains alongside them: reports of solicitor conduct which, once closed, no alternative ombudsman exists to examine. For those reporters, the front door is the only door there is.

The SRA runs a two-tier review system, and the tiers are written into its own rulebook. Annex 1 of its Application, Notice, Review and Appeal Rules grants formal review rights over specified decisions against regulated persons: authorisation refusals, conditions, suspensions, disqualifications, rebukes, fines, decisions to publish. Within that annex, exactly one decision affecting a member of the public is expressly reviewable: a refusal of all or part of a grant from the Compensation Fund. In 2023/24 the SRA recorded 8,317 matters as closed with no further action under its assessment and early resolution process. Its published data does not state how many of those outcomes were formal closure decisions under rule 2.4, the rule that provides the closure power; and neither that rule nor those outcomes appear anywhere in the annex. When the public asks the regulator for money, there is a review right. When the public reports a solicitor, there is a letter.

Challenge the letter and the loop closes, door by door. Door one is the SRA itself. Its published policy sets out considerations for deciding whether a review is appropriate and a one-year outer limit, but it confers no right: a reporter who believes the decision is materially flawed is told to contact 'the team you have been dealing with', and the test is five words: 'If we agree this is the case, then we can review the decision.' The regulator alone decides whether its own decision deserves looking at, with no independent element, no right to require the review, and no published figures on how often it agrees, refuses or changes an outcome.

Door two is the Independent Reviewer, the one external stage in the system, which states its limit in its own words: 'We cannot overturn any regulatory decision taken by the SRA.' Its 2024 report found no failings and made no recommendations in 87 per cent of the 94 reviews it issued, and records in the same document that 'in almost every instance, a complainant's dissatisfaction about a regulatory decision lay at the heart of their complaint'. A reader might take that 87 per cent for the health of the regulatory system. It measures the handling of the complaint, not the decision that prompted it. It is the health of the letters.

Door three is the Legal Services Board, which has no jurisdiction over individual cases and says so. Door four is judicial review, which examines lawfulness rather than retaking the regulatory judgment, and carries permission and costs risks that many ordinary reporters could not realistically bear: the recorded searches run for this investigation found no reported case of a member of the public bringing one against a closure decision.

So at the gatekeeping stage where roughly seven in ten matters dealt with receive no further action, the SRA is investigator, reviewer and final word in one office. The point is not that any individual closure was wrong, but that the reporter cannot require anyone independent to determine whether it was right, because no independent merits-review route exists that a reporter can invoke. As the referral ratio fell, the gatekeeping judgment came to carry more of the regulator's decision-making than ever, and no right to require a review grew with it.

What we ask is set out in full in section 10: a rule-based review right for reporters on the grounds the SRA already uses for the profession, an independent merits element for contested closures, published closure and review data, and evidence from the SRA's Chair and Chief Executive to the Justice Select Committee.



Sources: SRA Investigations and Enforcement annual data 2023/24; SRA Complaints Policy; SRA ANRA Rules rule 3.2 and Annex 1; SRA Independent Reviewer Report 2024; LSB published FAQs.

Figure 1. The accountability trap: 8,317 no-further-action outcomes in 2023/24, four closed doors, and no right to require a review.

1. The Front Door: 11,852 Reports and a Three-Question Test

A report about a solicitor arrives at an assessment stage, where the SRA applies what it calls the Assessment Threshold Test. Its published guidance, *Making decisions to investigate concerns*, sets three questions:

'Has there been a potential breach of the SRA's standards or requirements based on the allegations made? Is that breach sufficiently serious that, if proved, is capable of resulting in regulatory action? Is that breach capable of proof?'

This is conduct territory: under rule 1.2 of the SRA's Regulatory and Disciplinary Procedure Rules, a matter is an allegation for these purposes only if it raises professional misconduct, a serious breach of a regulatory obligation, or criminal conduct bearing on legal practice. The threshold process then determines whether a report raises a potential breach that is sufficiently serious and capable of proof, and some initial fact-finding may take place in making that assessment. The 8,317 figure therefore records gatekeeping outcomes, not 8,317 proved or necessarily serious allegations, and this investigation makes neither claim. The accountability question is whether that gatekeeping judgment can be challenged by right. A report is investigated further only where the answer to all three questions is yes. The outcomes of that filter are recorded in the SRA's own published data for 2023/24: 11,852 reports received; 11,421 matters dealt with, not always the same cases, as the SRA notes; of which 8,317 were closed with no further action, 1,763 referred for investigation, 1,217 redirected internally or to the Legal Ombudsman, 101 referred for potential fixed financial penalty, and 23 closed with warning or advice. Blind Justice UK's report *The Complaints Black Hole* analysed the same series, including the fall in the ratio of referrals to reports received from approximately 53 per cent in 2017/18 to approximately 15 per cent in 2023/24; that comparison is of annual flows and spans the introduction of the assessment process itself partway through 2018/19.

The closure power itself is rule 2.4 of the SRA Regulatory and Disciplinary Procedure Rules:

'At any stage, an authorised decision maker may decide to take no further action in respect of an allegation and to close the matter.'

At any stage, by an authorised decision maker. Where a matter is closed under rule 2.4, the SRA's published schedule of delegation, *Who can make decisions at the SRA*, updated 26 January 2026, permits the decision to be taken by 'Adjudication, Directors, All Investigations staff' (decision 45), and the schedule defines Investigations as including the Assessment Team. A rule 2.4 closure can therefore be signed off by any member of investigations staff. What neither the schedule nor the annual data reveals is how many of the 8,317 outcomes were taken under that rule, at what grade, which required supervisory approval, and what sampling, audit or second-line check applied. This investigation asks.

2. The Letter: Everything the Rules Give the Person Who Reported

Rule 2.6 of the same rules contains the reporter's express entitlement under them when a matter is closed, and it deserves to be read in full:

'The SRA must inform the relevant person, their employer (where they were informed of the investigation under rule 2.2) and, where practicable, any person who reported the allegation to the SRA, of any decision to close a matter under rule 2.4, together with reasons.'

Notification, where practicable, with reasons. The SRA's consumer guidance says the same thing in plainer words: 'If we decide not to investigate, we'll write to you to explain how we reached our decision. We won't be able to answer queries about the facts, as we won't have investigated.' Nothing in the rules gives the reporter a step after the letter, and the guidance on repeat reports closes the loop: where the SRA has already considered the potential breaches raised, a further report 'will not generally' be treated as sufficiently serious to investigate.

3. Door One: The SRA Controls the Gateway

The SRA operates a formal review regime, and it knows exactly what a real review looks like, because it wrote one. Rule 3.2 of the Application, Notice, Review and Appeal Rules:

'Subject to rule 3.3, the SRA may review all or part of any of the regulatory decisions set out in annex 1 on the application of the person who is the subject of the decision.'

The application right attaches to the regulatory decisions listed in Annex 1, and a decision under rule 2.4 to take no further action is not among them, so there is no listed decision for a reporter's application to attach to. The grounds the SRA uses elsewhere, at rule 4.2, are that the decision 'was materially flawed' or that 'there is new information which would have had a material influence on the decision'. The SRA can also review a decision 'of its own initiative' under rule 3.1(b).

What the reporter gets instead is one passage in the SRA's service complaints policy, quoted here in full because it is the only route the public is offered anywhere in the SRA's published framework:

'If you have reported a firm or solicitor to us and you are unhappy with the outcome (for example, we make a regulatory decision not to investigate), you should let us know if you believe the decision is materially flawed and the reasons why or if you have new information that you believe will affect the outcome. If we agree this is the case, then we can review the decision. Reviews, however, sit outside the Complaints Policy, so please contact the team you have been dealing with.'

Read it whole, because it is fair to. The policy is not contentless. It sets out four considerations for when a review is appropriate: whether the correct procedure was followed, whether all relevant and no irrelevant information was considered, whether the rules were correctly applied, and whether the decision is reasonable. It states that an operational team will not review a decision a year or more after it is made except in exceptional circumstances. The formal review rules even require, at rule 4.6, that a review is not conducted by the decision maker whose decision it is. These criteria structure the SRA's discretion, but they

do not convert it into a rule-based right the reporter can exercise. If we agree, then we can. The request is directed to the team the reporter has been dealing with, and the published policy does not identify who within or outside that team decides whether the gateway is met. Nothing published says whether an accepted request is then treated as a formal own-initiative review attracting rule 4.6's separation, and nothing is published on how many requests are made, how many are agreed to, and how many change an outcome. The position, put fairly, is this: a reporter may ask the operational team to revisit a closure, but cannot require the SRA to initiate a review; if the SRA does initiate a formal own-initiative review, its rules provide for a decision maker other than the original one; and what stays unpublished is who decides the gateway request, whether every accepted request is treated as a rule 3.1(b) review, and how often a review changes an outcome. In every event, there is no external merits stage the reporter can require. For the decisions listed in Annex 1, the affected person's review is a right written into the rules. The reporter's is a discretion with a leaflet.

4. The Two-Tier Rulebook

Annex 1 lists every decision the SRA has made formally reviewable, and its shape is the finding of this investigation. It covers refusals of admission and authorisation, conditions imposed on practising certificates and firms, revocations and suspensions, disqualifications, rebukes and fines, decisions to publish a decision, and, in its miscellaneous part, 'a decision made under the SRA Compensation Fund Rules 2019 or the SRA Compensation Fund Rules 2021 not to make a grant of the whole or part of the amount applied for from the Fund'.

Every decision in that list acts on somebody: a solicitor refused, fined, conditioned or disqualified, or an applicant refused money, and that somebody may make a formal application for review. Annex 1 does not treat the closure as a decision made against, or on an application by, the reporter, and so the reporter cannot apply. The one member of the public in the annex is the one asking the Compensation Fund for money. The member of the public who reports misconduct, the person the reporting system exists to receive, appears nowhere in it. In 2023/24, 8,317 matters received a no-further-action outcome at that stage, and the rules gave the people who reported them reasons, where practicable, and no rule-based right to require a merits review after receiving the reasons.

5. Door Two: The Reviewer Who Cannot Review

Beyond the SRA's internal stages sits its Independent Reviewer of Complaints, the destination the SRA's process offers a dissatisfied member of the public. The complaints policy states the remit: 'The Independent Reviewer of Complaints cannot review or overturn any regulatory decisions we have made. Its role is to consider how we have handled your service complaint at stage 1 and stage 2.' The Reviewer's own 2024 annual report, by Graham Massie, Senior Independent Reviewer, covering 1 November 2023 to 31 October 2024, says it in the first person: 'We cannot overturn any regulatory decision taken by the SRA.'

The same report records what people actually bring to that door. Ninety-four independent review reports were issued in the year, and 'we found no failings and had no recommendations to make in 82 (i.e. 87%) of those reports'; the year before, it was 89 per cent of 82. And then the sentence that indicts the whole

design, repeated in both years' reports: 'in almost every instance, a complainant's dissatisfaction about a regulatory decision lay at the heart of their complaint'.

Hold those two facts together, because together they are the story. Almost everyone who reaches the only independent stage in the system is asking for a regulatory decision to be looked at again. The stage is built so that it cannot do that. It examines the service around the decision, the delay, the tone, the handling of the letters, while the decision itself passes through untouched. The Reviewer himself declines to present his figures as complaint-upholding statistics, and he is right not to. A reader might nonetheless take 87 per cent no failings for evidence that the underlying regulatory system is working. It measures the handling of the complaint, not the merits of the decision that prompted it. It is the health of the letters. The grievance that brought almost every complainant through the door sits outside the question the door is permitted to ask.

6. Door Three: The Overseer With No Jurisdiction

The Legal Services Board oversees the SRA, and its own public guidance disposes of the third door in one sentence: 'The LSB is an oversight regulator for the 10 approved regulators, and does not have jurisdiction to review approved regulators' decisions or process on individual cases.' Its role is systemic. Nothing in the Legal Services Act 2007 provides otherwise. Section 112, the provision governing complaints procedures, requires authorised persons to maintain procedures for resolving complaints and empowers the Board to specify requirements those procedures must satisfy. It creates no mechanism by which anyone can ask the Board to review a regulator's decision in an individual case. There is no statutory merits-review route for an individual closure, at the Board or anywhere else.

7. Door Four: Judicial Review Is Not a Merits Appeal

Judicial review exists, and the SRA is amenable to it. A court on judicial review examines lawfulness, rationality and procedural fairness, and a prospective claimant is not entirely without tools: the pre-action protocol lets them request fuller reasons and relevant documents, and public bodies owe duties of candour and cooperation once proceedings are under way. What judicial review is not is a merits appeal. The court asks whether the closure was a decision a reasonable regulator could lawfully reach, not whether it was right, and the regulatory judgment is precisely what it does not retake. A reporter starts from the closure letter and the rule 2.6 reasons, not the file; the claim carries permission and costs risks with no general costs protection; and it runs against a regulator defending its core discretion. It is not, and could never be, a routine review mechanism for thousands of closure decisions a year. The recorded searches run for this investigation found no reported case of a member of the public bringing a judicial review against an SRA decision not to investigate: every judgment involving the SRA opened in this research was brought by a solicitor challenging action taken against them, or by the SRA itself. That record is not evidence the closures are sound. It is what a record looks like when a class of decision sits beyond the practical reach of the people it affects. And where courts do look at regulatory judgments in adjacent contexts, their posture is deference: in *Asghar v The Law Society* [2008] EWHC 342 (Admin), the Administrative Court described the decision maker as 'a specialist tribunal with whose views this Court should be very slow to interfere'.

8. The Rule Did Not Change. The Gateway Did.

None of this is new, which makes it worse, not better. In March 2012 the SRA published its response to the first annual report of its then external reviewer, the Independent Complaints Resolution Service, and stated the same boundary in the same shape: ‘complaints about the outcome of regulatory decisions are not something that the ICRS is able to consider’. Trade press coverage of that report recorded the reviewer warning the SRA to be sensitive to the perception that it was unwilling to respond to legitimate complaints and intent on ‘looking after its own’, and recorded that the SRA’s practice at the time was not to tell informants the outcome of their reports at all.

Rule 2.6 is the improvement since: the reporter is now told, with reasons, where practicable. The structure around the letter has not moved in fourteen years. The regulator was warned about the perception in 2012. It kept the architecture.

9. The Regulator’s Defences, Answered

There are five defences available to the SRA. Each is stated here at full strength, and each fails.

We must prioritise: 11,852 reports a year cannot all be investigated. True, and this investigation does not dispute it. No regulator investigates everything, and a serious filter at the front door is not a failing. But prioritisation explains the closure rate. It does not explain the absence of any check on the closures. A system whose referral rate fell from 53 per cent to 15 per cent while offering the public no right to require a review has answered a workload question, not an accountability one, and the two must not be confused. Nor does this investigation claim any individual closure was wrong. It does not need to. The point is that the reporter cannot require anyone independent to determine whether the closure was right, because no independent review of the merits can be required.

Reporters can ask us to look again, and there are published criteria. There are, and this investigation quotes them. But the criteria govern a discretion, not a right: the request goes to the team the reporter has been dealing with, the SRA alone decides whether it qualifies, and it publishes nothing about how often it is asked, how often it agrees, or how often anything changes. A discretionary reconsideration on published criteria and unpublished outcomes is not a review in any sense the SRA itself would accept for decisions made about regulated persons. Its own Annex 1 machinery, with rule 4.6’s guarantee that the reviewer is not the original decision maker, shows what it considers a real review to look like.

The Independent Reviewer provides external scrutiny. Of the service, and only the service. In its own words it cannot overturn any regulatory decision, and its own report records that a regulatory decision is what almost every complainant comes about. Scrutiny that is forbidden to touch the thing being complained about is not scrutiny of the thing being complained about.

The courts provide ultimate oversight. Judicial review tests lawfulness rather than merits, begins from the closure letter rather than the file, and is brought at the claimant’s own costs risk. The recorded searches for this investigation found no reported instance of it being used this way. A remedy that the recorded searches found no reporter using cannot plausibly amount to routine oversight of the 8,317 no-further-action outcomes recorded in 2023/24.

The fifth defence is the deepest, and it deserves to be met squarely: a regulated person receives review rights because a coercive decision has been made against them, while a reporter is an informant who does not own the regulatory proceedings and has no right to compel enforcement. All of that is true, and nothing in this investigation contradicts it. The proposal is not to hand reporters control of an investigation, a prosecution or a sanction. It is a right to require reconsideration of the threshold decision, on the narrow grounds the SRA already uses, material flaw or materially significant new information, conducted by someone other than the original decision maker, with the reviewer free to uphold the closure and proportionate safeguards against abuse. A sanctioned solicitor and an informant do not occupy identical legal positions, and this investigation does not pretend they do. The case is that a gatekeeping judgment exercised more than eight thousand times in 2023/24 alone is important enough to be checkable by right rather than by grace.

10. What Must Happen

A rule-based review right for reporters. The SRA should amend rule 3.2 and Annex 1 of the Application, Notice, Review and Appeal Rules, or introduce a specific provision, to permit an identifiable person who made a report and was notified of its closure under rule 2.6 to apply for a review of an assessment-stage closure under rule 2.4, on the grounds the SRA already uses at rule 4.2: material flaw or materially significant new information, conducted, as rule 4.6 already requires elsewhere, by a person other than the original decision maker. Amending the annex alone would not be enough, because the application right attaches to ‘the person who is the subject of the decision’; the standing of the reporter must be provided for expressly. The machinery exists. The SRA built it, and applies it, in the same annex, to a refused Compensation Fund claim.

An independent merits element. The Independent Reviewer’s remit, or a successor mechanism, should include a merits review of contested closure decisions, so that the only independent stage in the system is no longer forbidden to examine the one thing almost every complainant brings to it.

Mandatory transparency. The SRA should publish, at least annually: the number of rule 2.4 closures and the stage at which they were made; the number of reporter requests to revisit closure decisions, the number agreed, and the number that changed an outcome; the quality assurance applied to closure decisions, including any sampling or audit and the proportion covered; and, alongside its published schedule of delegation, the grades at which closures are actually signed off and which require supervisory approval.

Parliamentary scrutiny. The Justice Select Committee should take evidence from the SRA’s Chair and Chief Executive on why a gatekeeping process in which roughly seven in ten matters dealt with receive no further action carries no right to require a review and no independent check, and the Legal Services Board should examine, in its next performance assessment, who if anyone checks the quality of those decisions. The Board does not lack the tools, and it has already shown it can commission exceptional, systemic scrutiny of the SRA’s assessment and decision-making: the independent review of the SRA’s handling of SSB Group examined precisely those functions, and led the Board, in March 2026, to direct performance targets under section 31 of the Legal Services Act 2007 and to censure the SRA publicly under section 35, in a notice recording ‘systemic deficiencies in regulatory processes rather than isolated incidents’. But that scrutiny arrived after the harm, and it gave no individual reporter a review they could require. What remains absent is the individual route: a merits review a reporter can invoke before failures accumulate into systemic harm. Blind Justice UK will supply this investigation and its sources to the Committee and to the Board.

11. The Questions

The following are put to the Solicitors Regulation Authority. They were transmitted on the day of publication by an open letter addressed jointly to the Chief Executive of the SRA and the Chief Executive of the Legal Services Board, with a separate open letter to the Chair of the Justice Select Committee, and a substantive response requested by 30 September 2026. Blind Justice UK undertakes to publish any reply, from any recipient, in full and unedited.

How many matters were closed under rule 2.4 of the Regulatory and Disciplinary Procedure Rules in each of the last five years, and how many of those were closed before any investigation was commenced?

Decision 45 of Who can make decisions at the SRA authorises rule 2.4 closures by 'Adjudication, Directors, All Investigations staff'. Which Assessment Team grades fall within that authorisation, how many of the 2023/24 closures were made at each grade, and which required supervisory approval?

Of the 8,317 matters closed with no further action at assessment and early resolution in 2023/24, how many were closures under rule 2.4?

Where the SRA agrees to a reporter's request to review a closure, is that review conducted as an own-initiative review under rule 3.1(b), and does rule 4.6's requirement that a review is not conducted by the original decision maker apply to it?

In each of the last five years, how many people who reported a solicitor or firm asked the SRA to review a decision not to investigate on the ground that it was materially flawed or that new information existed? In how many cases did the SRA agree to review, and in how many did the outcome change?

Was the exclusion of assessment closure decisions from Annex 1 of the Application, Notice, Review and Appeal Rules a considered decision, and if so, where is the reasoning recorded?

What quality assurance process does the SRA apply to decisions under rule 2.4 not to investigate, including any second review, supervisory sampling or audit, and what proportion of closure decisions is subject to that process?

Where quality assurance identifies that a closure decision was incorrect or materially flawed, is the matter reopened, and does the SRA record how often that occurs?

Does the SRA accept that the person who reported has no right to a review of a decision not to investigate, and that no independent body examines such decisions on their merits? If it does not accept that, which route does it say provides that review?

Methodology

This investigation was prepared from published sources, principally primary official materials, opened between 29 August 2026 and the date of publication: the SRA Regulatory and Disciplinary Procedure Rules (rules 1.2, 2.4, 2.6 and 3.1); the SRA Application, Notice, Review and Appeal Rules (rules 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2 and 4.6 and Annex 1 in full); the SRA guidance Making decisions to investigate concerns (30 December 2021); the SRA page Reporting a solicitor or firm to us; the SRA Complaints about our service policy (updated 28 July 2025); the SRA schedule of delegation Who can make decisions at the SRA (updated 26 January 2026), decision 45; the SRA Investigations and Enforcement annual data 2023/24, from which the 11,852, 11,421, 8,317, 1,763 and 1,217 figures and the reporter breakdown are taken; the SRA Independent Reviewer Report 2024 (Graham Massie, Senior Independent Reviewer, 1 November 2023 to 31 October 2024), published in the SRA's board papers, with the 2023 report as the prior year comparator; the Legal Services Board's published frequently asked questions and its Decision Notice of 5 March 2026; section 112 of the Legal Services Act 2007; the SRA's response to the ICRS's first annual report (March 2012), with contemporaneous trade press reporting for the 2012 coverage; and Blind Justice UK's report The Complaints Black Hole (June 2026), which the SRA answered in writing. Percentages are stated against both published denominators, reports received and matters dealt with, and the SRA's caution that receipts and disposals in a year are not always the same cases is reflected wherever the figures are used.

The case law position was tested on 29 August 2026 by web searches surfacing judgments held on the National Archives' Find Case Law service. Eight judgments involving the SRA or the Law Society were opened and read: *Asghar v The Law Society* [2008] EWHC 342 (Admin); *Faniyi v SRA* [2012] EWHC 2965 (Admin); *Moosavi v The Law Society* [2016] EWHC 1821 (Admin); *Sancheti v SRA* [2017] EWHC 86 (Admin); *Newell-Austin v SRA* [2017] EWHC 411 (Admin); *SRA v Sheikh* [2020] EWHC 3062 (Admin); *Hetherington v SRA* [2022] EWHC 2722 (Admin); and *SRA v Tsang* [2024] EWHC 1150 (KB). Every one was brought by a solicitor or by the SRA. No reported case was found of a member of the public judicially reviewing a decision not to investigate. The searches were not exhaustive, and the finding is stated as the result of recorded searches, not as a proof of absence.

Limitations. This research is based on publicly available documents. It makes no finding that any individual closure decision was wrong, no finding about any individual case, firm or member of SRA staff, and no finding of bad faith by anyone: the subject is the architecture, established from the rules and reports that define it. No complaint by or known to the author forms any part of the analysis. Quotations were verified against the source documents before publication.

Sources and Notes

All sources were accessed on 29 August 2026 and will be re-verified against the live versions on the date of publication.

1. SRA Regulatory and Disciplinary Procedure Rules, rules 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.6 and 3.1.
sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/regulatory-disciplinary-procedure-rules.

2. SRA Application, Notice, Review and Appeal Rules, rules 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2 and 4.6, and Annex 1 (reviewable decisions), including the Miscellaneous entry for Compensation Fund refusals. sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/application-notice-review-appeal-rules.
3. SRA, Making decisions to investigate concerns, guidance, 30 December 2021: the three-stage Assessment Threshold Test and the treatment of repeat reports. sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/investigations-decisions-investigate-concerns.
4. SRA, Reporting a solicitor or firm to us: 'If we decide not to investigate, we'll write to you to explain how we reached our decision. We won't be able to answer queries about the facts, as we won't have investigated.' sra.org.uk/consumers/problems/report-solicitor.
5. SRA, Complaints about our service, our policy, updated 28 July 2025: the reporter reconsideration passage quoted in section 3, the four review considerations, the one-year limit, and the Independent Reviewer's remit. sra.org.uk/sra/complaints-service/complaints-policy.
6. SRA, Who can make decisions at the SRA, schedule of delegation, updated 26 January 2026, decision 45 and the definition of Investigations. sra.org.uk/sra/decision-making/schedule-delegation.
7. SRA, Investigations and Enforcement annual data 2023/24: 11,852 reports received; 11,421 matters dealt with; 8,317 closed with no further action; 1,763 referred for investigation; 1,217 redirected; 101 referred for potential fixed financial penalty; 23 closed with warning or advice; 56 per cent of matters dealt with reported by the public; the caution that receipts and disposals are not always the same cases; the note that matters not in the SRA's jurisdiction have been absorbed into the no-further-action category since 2020/21; and the statement that AERT and its process were introduced partway through 2018/19. sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/investigations-enforcement-annual-data-2023-24.
8. SRA Independent Reviewer Report 2024, Graham Massie, Senior Independent Reviewer, covering 1 November 2023 to 31 October 2024, published in the SRA board papers (June 2025): 94 reports issued; no failings and no recommendations in 82 (87 per cent); 'We cannot overturn any regulatory decision taken by the SRA'; and the finding that in almost every instance dissatisfaction about a regulatory decision lay at the heart of the complaint.
9. SRA Independent Reviewer Report 2023, same author, prior year comparator: 82 reports issued, no failings in 73 (89 per cent), published in the SRA board papers (July 2024).
10. Legal Services Board, published frequently asked questions: 'The LSB is an oversight regulator for the 10 approved regulators, and does not have jurisdiction to review approved regulators' decisions or process on individual cases.' legalservicesboard.org.uk.
11. Legal Services Board, Decision Notice given under sections 31 and 35 of the Legal Services Act 2007, 5 March 2026, paragraph 8: 'systemic deficiencies in regulatory processes rather than isolated incidents'. legalservicesboard.org.uk.
12. Legal Services Act 2007, section 112. legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/29/section/112.
13. SRA, response to the ICRS's first annual report, March 2012: 'complaints about the outcome of regulatory decisions are not something that the ICRS is able to consider'. sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/sra-response-icrs-report.

14. Legal Futures, coverage of the ICRS first annual report, 12 June 2012 (trade press source for the 2012 warning and the practice of not informing informants of outcomes).

15. Blind Justice UK, The Complaints Black Hole, June 2026, and the SRA's written response of 30 June 2026. blindjustice.org.uk/research.

16. Judgments opened: Asghar v The Law Society [2008] EWHC 342 (Admin); Faniyi v SRA [2012] EWHC 2965 (Admin); Moosavi v The Law Society [2016] EWHC 1821 (Admin); Sancheti v SRA [2017] EWHC 86 (Admin); Newell-Austin v SRA [2017] EWHC 411 (Admin); SRA v Sheikh [2020] EWHC 3062 (Admin); Hetherington v SRA [2022] EWHC 2722 (Admin); SRA v Tsang [2024] EWHC 1150 (KB). National Archives, Find Case Law.

17. Pre-Action Protocol for Judicial Review, Ministry of Justice, for the availability of pre-action requests for reasons and documents. [justice.gov.uk](https://www.justice.gov.uk).

About Blind Justice UK

Blind Justice UK (Registered Charity No. 1217562) is a registered charity that works to improve access to justice for litigants in person. Edward Romain ACILEX is its Founder and CEO. This investigation completes the analysis begun in The Complaints Black Hole (June 2026) and forms part of the charity's published research series on legal regulation and consumer information, available at blindjustice.org.uk/research.

Contact: Edward Romain, Founder & CEO. Email: edward@blindjustice.org.uk. Web: www.blindjustice.org.uk.

Status of this document. This document is a research report prepared by Blind Justice UK in its capacity as a registered charity providing access to justice support. It does not constitute legal advice and should not be relied upon as such. Recipients are advised to seek independent legal advice before taking any action in relation to the matters discussed.

1 September 2026

Sarah Rapson, Chief Executive, Solicitors Regulation Authority
Richard Orpin, Chief Executive, Legal Services Board
By email. Published at blindjustice.org.uk/research

Re: A Law Unto Themselves? An investigation into the absence of any right to require review of SRA decisions not to investigate

Dear Ms Rapson and Mr Orpin,

Today Blind Justice UK publishes *A Law Unto Themselves?*, an investigation into a question that affects everyone who reports a solicitor to the Solicitors Regulation Authority: what can they do if they believe the decision to close their report is wrong? The report is enclosed and is published at blindjustice.org.uk/research.

The answer, established from the SRA's own rules, its own policies, its own published data and its own Independent Reviewer's reports, is that they can do nothing the regulator cannot decline. In 2023/24 the SRA's Assessment and Early Resolution Team closed 8,317 matters with no further action, roughly seven in ten of the matters it dealt with. Annex 1 of the SRA's Application, Notice, Review and Appeal Rules gives regulated persons formal rights to a review of specified decisions and gives a member of the public exactly one: when they are refused money from the Compensation Fund. A closure with no further action is not in the list. The Independent Reviewer cannot overturn any regulatory decision and says so in its own reports. The Legal Services Board has no jurisdiction over individual cases and says so. The reporter's entire entitlement under the rules is a letter with reasons.

The report makes no claim that any individual closure was wrong and no allegation of bad faith against anyone. Its subject is the architecture: a gatekeeping judgment exercised more than eight thousand times a year which nobody outside the SRA can be required to look at.

Ms Rapson, section 11 of the report puts nine questions to the SRA, including how many of the 2023/24 closures were made under rule 2.4 and at what grade, what quality assurance applies to those decisions, and whether the SRA accepts that no person or body can currently be required to review such a decision on its merits. We ask for a substantive response by 30 September 2026, and we undertake to publish it in full and unedited.



Blind Justice

Mr Orpin, the report asks the Legal Services Board to examine, in its next assessment of the SRA's performance, who if anyone checks the quality of these closure decisions. The Board's Decision Notice of 5 March 2026 shows that the statutory tools exist and that the Board will use them where the evidence requires it. We ask that the front door of the SRA's enforcement system now receive the same attention as the failures that follow when it is wrongly closed.

We have today written separately to the Chair of the Justice Select Committee, asking the Committee to consider taking evidence from the SRA's Chair and Chief Executive on the questions this report raises. That letter is also published alongside the report.

This letter is open. It is published alongside the report, and any reply from either recipient will be published in full.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Romain ACILEX

Founder & CEO

1 September 2026

The Chair, Justice Select Committee, House of Commons
By email. Published at blindjustice.org.uk/research

Re: A Law Unto Themselves? An investigation into the absence of any right to require review of SRA decisions not to investigate

Dear Chair,

Today Blind Justice UK publishes *A Law Unto Themselves?*, an investigation into a question that affects everyone who reports a solicitor to the Solicitors Regulation Authority: what can they do if they believe the decision to close their report is wrong? The report is enclosed and is published at blindjustice.org.uk/research.

The answer, established from the SRA's own rules, its own policies, its own published data and its own Independent Reviewer's reports, is that they can do nothing the regulator cannot decline. In 2023/24 the SRA's Assessment and Early Resolution Team closed 8,317 matters with no further action, roughly seven in ten of the matters it dealt with. Annex 1 of the SRA's Application, Notice, Review and Appeal Rules gives regulated persons formal rights to a review of specified decisions and gives a member of the public exactly one: when they are refused money from the Compensation Fund. A closure with no further action is not in the list. The Independent Reviewer cannot overturn any regulatory decision and says so in its own reports. The Legal Services Board has no jurisdiction over individual cases and says so. The reporter's entire entitlement under the rules is a letter with reasons.

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We ask the Committee to consider taking evidence from the SRA's Chair and Chief Executive on the questions this report raises. Section 11 of the report puts nine questions to the SRA, including how many of the 2023/24 closures were made under rule 2.4 and at what grade, what quality assurance applies to those decisions, and whether the SRA accepts that no person or body can currently be required to review such a decision on its merits. The Committee has published Blind Justice UK's evidence on litigants in person before, and we will supply the report's underlying sources, all of them public documents, in whatever form assists the Committee.



Blind Justice

We have today written separately to the Chief Executives of the SRA and the Legal Services Board. The SRA has been asked for a substantive response to the nine questions by 30 September 2026, which we will publish in full and unedited, and the Board has been asked to examine, in its next assessment of the SRA's performance, who if anyone checks the quality of these closure decisions. That letter is also published alongside the report.

This letter is open. It is published alongside the report, and any reply will be published in full.

Yours sincerely,



Edward Romain ACILEX

Founder & CEO