



Annual Complaints Report Children's Services

**Wandsworth
2024-25**

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Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Executive summary	3
3. Legislation	4
4. Overview of the Children's Complaints Procedure.....	5
5. Approach to learning from complaints	6
6. Statutory complaint numbers and representations.....	8
7. Complaints by service area and teams.....	13
8. Complaints by issues and outcomes: Stage 1	15
9. Complaints by issues and outcomes: Stage 2	20
10. Complaints by issues and outcomes: Stage 3	22
11. Response times	22
12. Young people's complaints	24
13. Complaints by category of support and equalities breakdown	25
14. Corporate complaints	27
15. Ombudsman cases	29
16. Compliments	33
17. Key Achievements 2024/25.....	35

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report is produced annually as a statutory requirement for the London Borough of Wandsworth: it provides a summary analysis of social care complaints within children's social care services.
- 1.2 There is a duty on all local authorities to maintain and operate a complaints procedure for children's social care services.
- 1.3 Wandsworth Council's Children's Services complaints sit within the remit of the Resident Engagement Service. There is a statutory requirement to have a Statutory Complaints Manager in post. The Complaints Team is led by the Corporate and Statutory Complaints Service Manager who reports to the Head of Resident Engagement. The Complaints Team also comprises of two operational managers: the Adult and Children's Complaints Manager and the Corporate and Ombudsman Complaints Manager. They are supported by five complaint officers.
- 1.4 The Complaints Team is an important corporate function within the Council. Its role is to support the organisation to ensure that the Council has effective and efficient complaints procedures, in line with best practice and statutory requirements. The complaints team also have responsibility to train and support council officers to respond effectively to complaints and ensure learning from complaints feeds directly into service improvement.

2. Executive summary

- 2.1. There is a legal requirement to have in place a complaints procedure and produce an annual report for complaints about the Council's actions under Part 3 and some of Parts 4 and 5 of the Children's Act 1989.
- 2.2. The statutory complaints procedure is a 3-stage procedure with recourse to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) if the Council is unable to resolve the complaint.
- 2.3. Learning from complaints is summarised in Section 5 and case studies are provided throughout the report. This year learning has focused on enhancing communication and transparency by promoting kind, respectful, and timely interactions, especially during sensitive or challenging conversations. There has been a strong emphasis on a child and family-centred approach, ensuring children are actively listened to, families are well-informed, and decisions are clearly explained with emotional sensitivity. Inclusive and holistic assessments now consider all family dynamics, including fathers, and aim to be comprehensive and appropriately shared. Additionally, professional development has been strengthened through targeted training and reflective practice to support emotionally attuned and outcome-focused service delivery.
- 2.4. Children's Services completed 46 statutory complaints in total across all three stages during 2024/25. This represents a 24% increase on the previous year when 37 were completed.

- 2.5. Alongside the 46 formal statutory complaints and 21 corporate complaints, in liaison with Children's Social Care teams, the Complaints Team swiftly resolved 14 low level complaints that had the potential to become formal complaints without this intervention.
- 2.6. 48% of stage 1 complaints were for the Family Help service, with the Children We Care For service receiving 48% of stage 1 complaints.
- 2.7. When broken down by the top 3 principal issues raised, the most frequently raised principal issue at stage 1 was perceived lack of support which accounted for 21% (7) of complaints, and quality of assessment which also accounted for 21% (7) complaints.
- 2.8. At stage 1, not upheld complaints accounted for 36% (compared to 50% last year) partly upheld complaints account for 58% (compared to 43% last year) and fully upheld accounted for 6% (compared to 7%) last year.
- 2.9. Across all 3 stages, 63% of complaints were on time. 58% (19) stage 1 complaints received a response on time. 67% (6) stage 2 complaints received a response on time. All 4 stage 3 panels received the Director's response on time, although only 1 panel was organised within the 30-day timescale due to the availability of attendees.
- 2.10. 12% of stage 1 statutory complaints were received directly from young people. One of these escalated to stage 2 and none escalated to stage 3. Most young people who made complaints were care leavers raising concerns about their supported living placements, both the adequacy of the placement and delays in moving to alternative accommodation, and the adequacy of their pathway plans. The remaining 88% of stage 1 complaints were from parents or guardians.
- 2.11. Children's Services completed 63 stage 1 corporate complaints, a 43% increase from last year's 44. 58 stage 1 corporate complaints were on time (92%) and 24 stage 2 complaints were on time (7%).
- 2.12. During 2024/25, there were 27 complaints made to the Ombudsman about Wandsworth Children's Service with notably higher than the 13 complaints last year. Despite the increase in the number of complainants approaching the Ombudsman, the number of cases the Ombudsman have decided to investigate has not increased. This year for social care there were only 2 formal investigations compared to 4 last year and for education there were only 5 formal investigations compared to 5 last year.
- 2.13. Section 16 provides compliments which evidence the good practice taking place in Children's Services.
- 2.14. Section 15 of this report sets out key achievements this year including the Complaints Team winning Team of the Year for 'Leading by Example' at the annual Staff Awards.

3. Legislation

- 3.1. There is a legal requirement for the Local Authority to have in place a complaints procedure, in accordance with Sections 24(D) and 26 of the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 and the

accompanying statutory guidance published by the DfE: Getting the Best from Complaints: Social Care Complaints and Representations for Children, Young People and Others (01.09.2006) for the management of social care complaints.

- 3.2. The complaints procedure covers complaints about the Council's actions under Part 3 and some of Parts 4 and 5 of the Children's Act 1989. These are Children in Need, Looked after Children and Care Leavers, Special Guardianship Support and post-adoption support. The following areas tend to be exempt; Early Help, Child Protection, S47 enquiries and conferences, assessments for potential foster carers and adopters, foster carer registration and Section 7 and 37 court reports. The Council may decide to investigate these areas under other procedures, such as the Council's corporate complaints process or use the children's complaints procedure if complaint issues fall across both corporate and statutory procedures.
- 3.3. There is also a legal duty for the Local Authority to have in place advocacy arrangements for children and care leavers who wish to make representations or complaints regarding Children's Services and their care pursuant to the Advocacy Services and Representations Procedure (Children) (Amendment) Regulations 2004. Alongside these Regulations there is statutory guidance entitled Providing Effective Advocacy Services for Children and Young People Making a Complaint under the Children Act 1989.

4. Overview of the Children's Complaints Procedure

- 4.1. The complaints procedure is a three-stage process. The first stage is also known as local resolution stage. At Stage 1, complaints are investigated by the team where the complaint issue arose. In these cases, the team manager or service manager will usually investigate and respond to the complaint. The timescale for a stage 1 complaint response is 10 working days. However, where the complaint is complex or requires more time, an extension of up to a further 10 working days can be agreed by the Complaints Manager.
- 4.2. Where the complainant is dissatisfied with the stage 1 response, they can request a Stage 2 investigation. This stage requires an independent investigation, and two independent people are appointed by the Complaints Manager for the role of Independent Investigator and Independent Person. The investigation team produce reports which are passed to a senior officer within Children's Services for adjudication and response to the complainant at Stage 2. The statutory timescale for this stage is 25 to 65 working days.
- 4.3. It is a statutory requirement to commission an independent person (IP) to oversee the integrity of a stage 2 investigation to ensure it remains child focused. It is good practice to appoint an IP who has not been employed by the council for a minimum of three years. Wandsworth Council commission external officers to undertake this role.
- 4.4. Stage 3 is the final stage of the complaint's procedure. If a complainant remains unhappy following the findings of the Stage 2 investigation, they can request that their complaint is reviewed at Stage 3 by an independent panel. The panel hearing must take place within 30 working days of the request. The panel is made up of three people

and the complainant has an opportunity to present their case to the panel alongside the Council. The chair of the panel will then send their decision to the complainant and the Director of Children's Services within five working days of the panel hearing and the Director must respond to the complainant within 15 working days.

- 4.5. A complaint is defined as ***'an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response.'***
- 4.6. Complaints can be made by the young person receiving a direct service from Children's Services or by a person on their behalf such as an advocate or family member where the service user has provided their written consent if they are Fraser competent¹.
- 4.7. Where a service is provided by a contractor on behalf of the Council, a complaint can either be made directly to the external provider service or to the complaints team at Wandsworth Council. Whilst the Complaints Team will encourage a provider service to firstly attempt resolution through its own procedures, if this is not possible, the Commissioning and Contract Monitoring Team will investigate.
- 4.8. Complaints will be considered if they are made within 12 months of the incident although the Council can apply their discretion to waive this time limit in some instances.
- 4.9. The Complaints Team have the discretion to put on hold a complaint (or certain aspects of a complaint), if there is a concurrent process addressing the same issues, for example, the matter will be discussed in court. Once the concurrent process is complete, a complainant has 12 months to request that their complaint is re-opened.
- 4.10. Complaints are counted in the year in which they were responded to or closed: 2024-25 complaint figures include complaints that will have been initiated in the previous year (2023-24) but then closed in this reporting year.
- 4.11. The department commissions its advocacy provision through 'The Advocacy People' to assist children and young people when making a complaint or a representation.

5. Approach to learning from complaints

- 5.1. Getting The Best from Complaints (5.7.1) requires local authorities to monitor the operation and effectiveness of their complaints procedures with quality assurance systems that feed complaint outcomes into operational delivery.
- 5.2. The Complaints Manager works closely with the Practice Assurance Service Manager and Head of Participation to discuss learning from complaints on a quarterly basis. Learning is triangulated with the work undertaken by Practice Assurance and fed back to senior managers through the Practice Assurance Oversight Group. This ensures that learning from complaints feeds directly into service improvements within Children's Services.

¹ Fraser competent is a term used to describe a child under 16 who is considered to be of sufficient age and understanding to fully appreciate what is involved in their treatment.

- 5.3. Case studies are included throughout the report, but in summary, this year key learning focused on:

Communication and Transparency

- Greater emphasis on kind, respectful, and attuned communication, especially during difficult conversations or disagreements with families.
- Commitment to timely and clear responses to emails, including during holiday periods.
- Sensitive topics will be communicated in a way that is understandable and not distressing to young people

Child and Family-Centred Approach

- Reinforcement of the importance of listening to children and making repeated efforts to engage them.
- Ensuring families are not surprised by concerns raised in meetings—issues will be discussed in advance.
- Commitment to explaining decisions and intervention frameworks clearly, with attention to emotional impact and support needs.
- Monthly Learning Episodes of family work, including direct feedback from children and parents, to assess and improve practice.
- Regular casework reviews to ensure service standards are met or appropriately managed.
- Reflection on practice assurance and outcomes will be embedded in service meetings.

Inclusive and Holistic Assessment

- Practitioners will include fathers—both supportive and those who have caused harm—in assessments and planning. Specifically, an all-staff practice session with a workshop on the barriers social workers and practitioners experience when working with fathers was held. This was cross referenced with findings from practice assurance to understand current practice. Since then, a best practice working group focussed on further developing our practice working with men (including fathers) has been set up.
- Assessments will be holistic, especially when triggered by external safeguarding concerns, and shared with families where appropriate.
- Children will be assessed in all living arrangements, with both homes and family dynamics considered.

Training and Professional Development

- Refresher training on the Setting Up Home Grant in relation to supporting care leavers.
- Training on outcome-focused planning and time management.
- Practice-focused sessions on domestic abuse to build confidence in working with victims and perpetrators. Ongoing reflection on how to support emotional wellbeing through written and verbal communication.

Case Study (stage 1): Balancing Safety and Communication: A Case Study on Family Time Arrangements

Background

A carer raised a Stage 1 complaint regarding the handling of family time arrangements between their niece and the child's mother, who is the carer's sister. The complaint followed a decision by Wandsworth Children's Services to cease unsupervised contact between the mother and child after the carer reported that the mother had appeared to be under the influence of alcohol on two occasions. The carer expressed concern about the timing and communication of this decision, its impact on both the mother and child, and the subsequent notification to the Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) on the same day a recommendation was due.

Findings

The investigation partially upheld several aspects of the complaint. It was acknowledged that while the carer had reported concerns about the mother's alcohol use the night before school drop-offs, the mother appeared sober in the mornings. The decision to end the unsupervised arrangement was made based on this information and the social worker's assessment, prioritising the child's safety. However, the complaint was upheld in part due to the lack of clear guidance and communication about the arrangement and the sudden nature of the change, which caused distress to all parties involved.

The complaint also highlighted the emotional impact on the mother, who was described as a vulnerable adult, and on the child, who had been positively engaging with the arrangement. While the decision to inform FDAC of the mother's alcohol use was deemed necessary, the timing and its effect on the mother's wellbeing were acknowledged as contributing to her distress.

Learning from the Complaint

This situation highlights the importance of clear, timely, and sensitive communication when making changes to family time arrangements, particularly involving vulnerable individuals and children. While safeguarding remains the paramount concern, the emotional and relational impacts of decisions must be carefully managed.

Wandsworth Children's Services recognised that the communication around the change in family time arrangements could have been handled better. As a result, the team committed to sharing the learning from this complaint in regular team briefings, with a focus on improving communication in sensitive situations. This serves as a reminder of the need for transparency, empathy, and clarity when working with families navigating complex and emotionally charged circumstances.

6. Statutory complaint numbers and representations

- 6.1. Children's Services welcomes all feedback, including complaints and representations about its services. Service users, families and carers can provide their views in an open and transparent way and can easily access the complaints procedure.

Table 1: Number of statutory complaints by year

Stage	2021/22 Completed	2021/22 Received	2022/23 Completed	2022/23 Received	2023/24 completed	2023/24 received	2024/25 completed	2024/25 received
S1	68	85	36	36	28	25	33	35
S2	22	20	16	8	6	9	9	6
S3	6	9	10	7	3	4	4	5
Total	96	114	62	51	37	38	46	46

- 6.2. Children's Services completed 46 statutory complaints in total across all three stages during 2024/25. These are highlighted in **Table 1**. This represents a 24% increase on the previous year when 37 were completed. Of these complaints, the vast majority 72% (or 33 complaints²) were completed at stage 1. 20% (or 9 complaints³) were completed at stage 2 and 9% (or 4⁴ complaints) progressed and were completed at stage 3.
- 6.3. Whilst Corporate Complaints are addressed in more detail in Section 14 of the report, 21 complaints for children's social care were triaged through the corporate complaints process. Across both statutory and corporate complaints, children's social care responded to 54 complaints at stage 1.
- 6.4. Alongside the 46 formal statutory complaints and 21 corporate complaints, in liaison with Children's Social Care teams, the Complaints Team swiftly resolved 14 low level complaints that had the potential to become formal complaints without this intervention.
- 6.5. The reduction in complaints should be considered in the context of the overall number of representations dealt with by the Complaints Team during this year. These are set out in Table 3, and whilst only 33 complaints were dealt with as statutory complaints, the Complaints Team dealt with an additional 159 issues and enquiries on behalf of Wandsworth Children's Services.
- 6.6. The volume of complaints should also be set in context by looking at the overall level of contact and interaction Children's Services has with partners, residents and service users. The 33 stage 1 complaints completed this year is a low proportion, given that

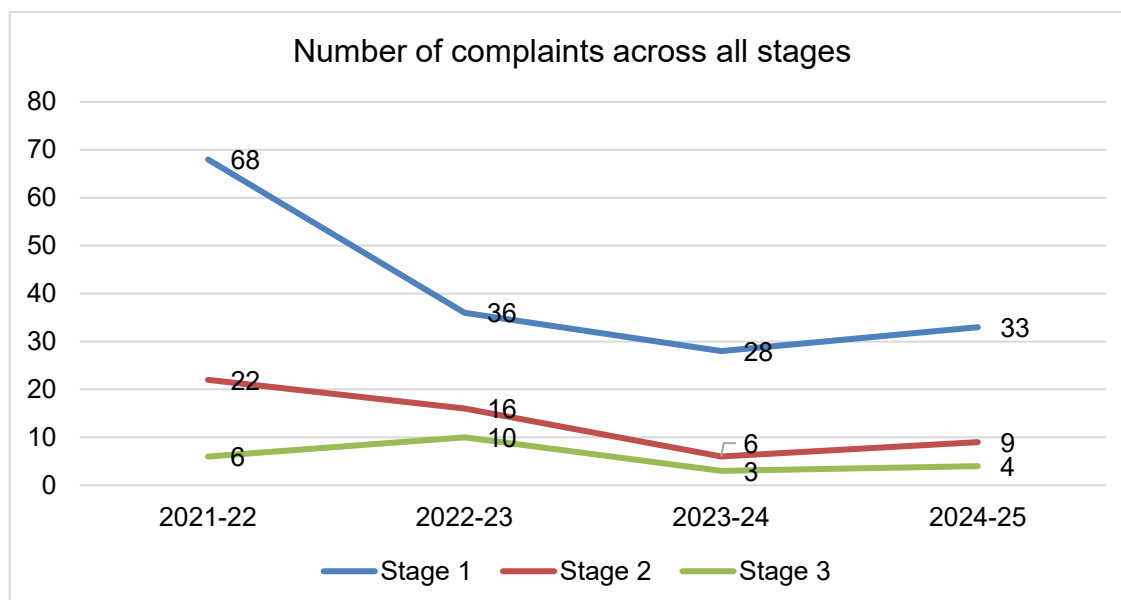
² Whilst 33 Stage 1 complaints were completed, 35 new complaints were received. Two Stage 1 complaints from the previous year (2023-24) were carried over and closed during the first and second quarter of this year. Four Stage 1 complaints remain open in Quarter 4 and will be carried over and completed in the first quarter of next year (2025-26).

³ Stage 2 complaints have been logged in the quarter requested by the complainant and closed in the quarter in which the final response was sent. 6 Stage 2 complaints were carried over from the previous year (2023-24) and completed this year. 1 Stage 2 complaint remained open in Quarter 4 and will be carried over and completed next year (2025-26).

⁴ Stage 3 complaints have been logged in the quarter requested by the complainant and closed in the quarter in which the final response was sent. 1 Stage 3 complaint was carried over from the previous year (2023-24) and completed this year. Two Stage 3 complaints remain open in Quarter 4 and will be carried over and completed next year (2025-26).

the department handled 12,028⁵ front door contacts from partners, agencies and families of which 2,017 resulted in social care referrals, 1,586 social care assessments were undertaken, and 541 new Section 47 (Child Protection) enquires were instigated.

Chart 1: Number of statutory complaints by year and stage 2021-22 to 2024-25



- 6.7. Overall, the proportion of complaints completed at stage 1 has increased by 18% this year (33 complaints). However, an additional 20 complaints for Children's Services were triaged through the Corporate Complaints Process following assessment by the Statutory Complaints Manager. Therefore, the number of formal complaints for Children's Services this year at both stage 1 of the statutory and corporate complaints processes is 53.
- 6.8. Corporate complaints are briefly referenced in Section 14 of this report but analysed in further detail in the Wandsworth Corporate Complaints Report 2024-25. The Corporate Complaints process is used when the issues being raised are not covered under Part 3 and some of Parts 4 and 5 of the Children Act 1989 which are generally Children in Need, Children Looked After and Care Leavers, Special Guardianship Support and post-adoption support (see **Section 4**).
- 6.9. Complaints at stage 2 of the statutory process have increased by 50% although this is only an additional 3 complaints. Statutory Stage 3 complaints have only increased by 1 complaint this year.

⁵ Last year's numbers: 12,995 front door contacts, 1,833 social care referrals, 1,370 social care assessments, 479 new Section 47 enquiries

Table 2: Number of statutory complaints completed by quarter: 2024-25

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total completed
Stage 1	2	8	5	18	33
Stage 2	2	4	3	0	9
Stage 3	1	0	3	0	4
Total	5	12	11	18	46

- 6.10. When looking at the complaint figures in context, it is notable that Wandsworth Children's Services responded to 166 Member enquiries⁶ this year in addition to the formal complaints. Member enquiries, either through local MPs or Councillors are another way for residents or service users to give feedback or raise concerns about service provision, some of which could have been considered through complaint processes.
- 6.11. Whilst Member enquiries can be requests for information or service enquiries, rather than formal complaints, it is important that these figures are considered alongside the number of complaints as managers are also expected to investigate the issues and provide response, often within shorter timescales than those prescribed by complaint processes.
- 6.12. In addition to the 46 statutory complaints, during the year the Complaints Team dealt with an additional 159 enquiries and representations over a wide range of issues or concerns that did not fit within the remit of the statutory complaints process. This means that over the year, the Complaints Team handled 192 issues for Children's Services.
- 6.13. Representations are low level complaint matters that have been resolved informally and quickly to prevent escalation to the formal complaints process. Issues or concerns are other matters that residents have sent directly to the Complaints Team for triaging, signposting, or redirecting to another team or process, for example, school complaints or safeguarding issues. These numbers are included in **Table 3** below to demonstrate the breadth of the work undertaken by the Complaints Team alongside the formal complaints completed through the statutory complaints process this year.

⁶ Last year Children's Services responded to 217 Member Enquiries.

Table 3: Representations, issues or concerns handled by the Complaints Team in 2024-25

Type of case	Number
Formal Complaints completed through the Statutory complaints process (stages 1 to 3)	46
Representations: low level complaints sent to services for quick resolution	14
Statutory complaint requests rejected (redirected) or no consent	16
Non-statutory complaints/issues passed to other services or directorates	60
Complaints specifically about schools/early years provision (re-directed to school complaints processes)	38
Issues for external partners/agencies	3
Data Protection/FOI requests/Right to Rectification, redirected to Information Governance Processes	5
Safeguarding issues	6
Historical abuse	1
Complainant disengaged	16
TOTAL number of cases handled by the complaints team this year (includes the 33 formal complaints)	205

Case Study Stage 1

Bridging the Gap: Engaging Fathers in Assessments

Background

The father alleged bias against him as a male parent, unprofessional conduct by social workers, a lack of transparency in communication, and impartiality in decision-making. He also felt that his legal rights as a parent were not upheld. His primary desired outcome was a review of how his child's case had been managed.

Investigation Findings

The investigation acknowledged that the father was not involved early enough in the assessment process, despite the presence of domestic abuse concerns. While the social worker acted cautiously to avoid escalating potential risks, the delay in contacting the father was found to be an area for development. This aspect of the complaint was upheld, and an apology was issued. However, the claim of ongoing bias was not upheld, as the social worker had documented efforts to engage the father and had explained the rationale behind family time arrangement recommendations. The complaint regarding lack of support was also not upheld, as the father had been offered various services, including anger management and parenting classes.

The investigation partially upheld the complaint regarding a lack of transparency, particularly in the early stages of the work. It was acknowledged that the father's views were not sought until several months into the intervention. However, the complaint about unprofessional conduct was not upheld, as the responsibility for certain communication lapses lay with the other parent, not the local authority. The complaint regarding impartiality in decision-making was also not upheld, as social workers can only make recommendations, not enforce decisions. Similarly, the father's legal rights were found not to have been infringed upon by Children's Services.

Learning

This situation highlights the importance of early and inclusive engagement with both parents, particularly fathers, in assessments. It underscores the need for social workers to balance safeguarding concerns with the rights of all parents to be involved in their children's lives. As a result, Wandsworth Children's Services has reinforced training on working with fathers and working with families where domestic abuse is a feature. A recent practice session was held to build confidence among social workers in engaging with both victims and alleged perpetrators of domestic abuse, supported by access to specialist Domestic Abuse Practitioners and Workers.

7. Complaints by service area and teams

- 7.1 The Family Help service, investigated and completed 16 stage 1 complaints (48%). The social care teams always strive to resolve concerns quickly which at times avoids the need for young people and families to make a formal complaint which is reflected in the lower numbers.

7.2 The Children We Care For service, which covers Disabled Children, Children Looked After and care leavers also completed 16 stage 1 complaints (48%). **Chart 2** illustrates the number of complaints by service area and stage. Early Help completed one complaint (3%).

7.3 At stage 2 and 3, most complaints were completed by the Family Help service (six stage 2 complaints and two stage 3 complaints). The Children We Care For service completed three stage 2 complaints and two stage 3 complaints.

Chart 2: Number of statutory complaints by service area and stage 2024/25

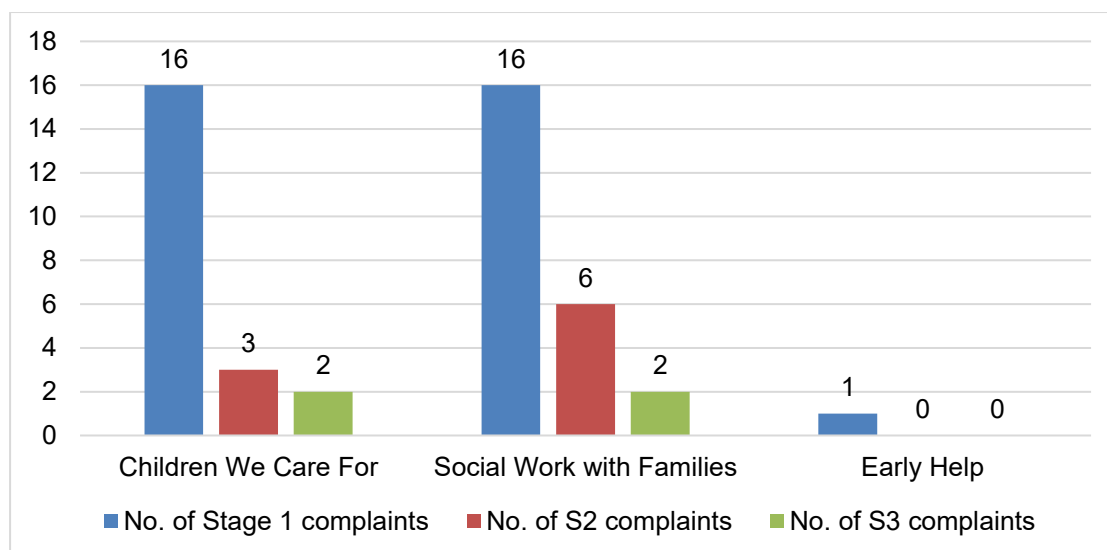


Table 4: Stage 1 statutory complaints completed by service area and team 2024-25

Service Area	Team		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Children We Care For	Future First		0	1	0	1	2
	CLA teams		0	1	2	5	8
	Kinship		0	0	1	1	2
	Disabled Children		0	1	1	0	4
Social Work with Families							
	Family Help - Battersea		1	1	0	3	5
	Family Help - Tooting		1	3	1	5	10
	MASH		0	0	0	1	1
Early Help	Early Help		0	0	0	1	1
TOTAL			2	8	5	18	33

8. Complaints by issues and outcomes: Stage 1

- 8.1 Complaint issues allow us to understand how services are being perceived and what can be learnt from complaints to improve service provision. Complaints are regularly reviewed at senior management level with a primary focus on addressing the learning from complaints which are upheld or partially upheld. Most complaints are multi-faceted and therefore raise multiple issues. For example, whilst communication as a principal issue was only recorded five times, most complaints raise communication issues in some way, but this may not be the main motivation to complain. Therefore, each complaint has been reported by its principal issue, which is the overarching theme or trigger of the complaint and full data on all the complaint issues raised this year is provided further on in section 8.
- 8.2 When broken down by the top 3 principal issues raised, the most frequently raised principal issue at stage 1 was a perceived **lack of support** which accounted for 21% (7) of complaints, and **quality of assessment** which also accounted for 21% (7) complaints (or 5 complaints). Last year, these were also the most frequently raised principal issues of complaints. After this **staff behaviour** was raised in 15% (5) of complaints. Principal issues and times upheld/partly upheld are highlighted in **Chart 3** and last year's comparisons are in **Chart 4**. Overall, numbers of complaints are low and there is only a minor variation in the times issues have been raised when compared to last year. This demonstrates that there are no particular areas of concern.
- 8.3 Themes from complaints raising these issues have been summarised as:
- **Lack of Support:** Themes included perceptions of insufficient support, perceived bias against fathers, not taking parents work arrangements into account for meetings, support with contact arrangements, and expectations of the level of support that should be provided for children we care for.
 - **Quality of Assessment:** Parents raised concerns about the level of support in care packages, the quality and accuracy of the information with assessment, how information was obtained to inform assessments and the level of parental input into assessments.
 - **Staff Behaviour:** Complaints included feeling disrespected by staff, perceiving a lack of empathy and dismissive attitudes from children's services regarding incidents, and dissatisfaction with the approach taken by social workers involved with families.

Chart 3: Number of statutory complaints received by principal Issue at stage 1 and number of times upheld/partially upheld 2024-25

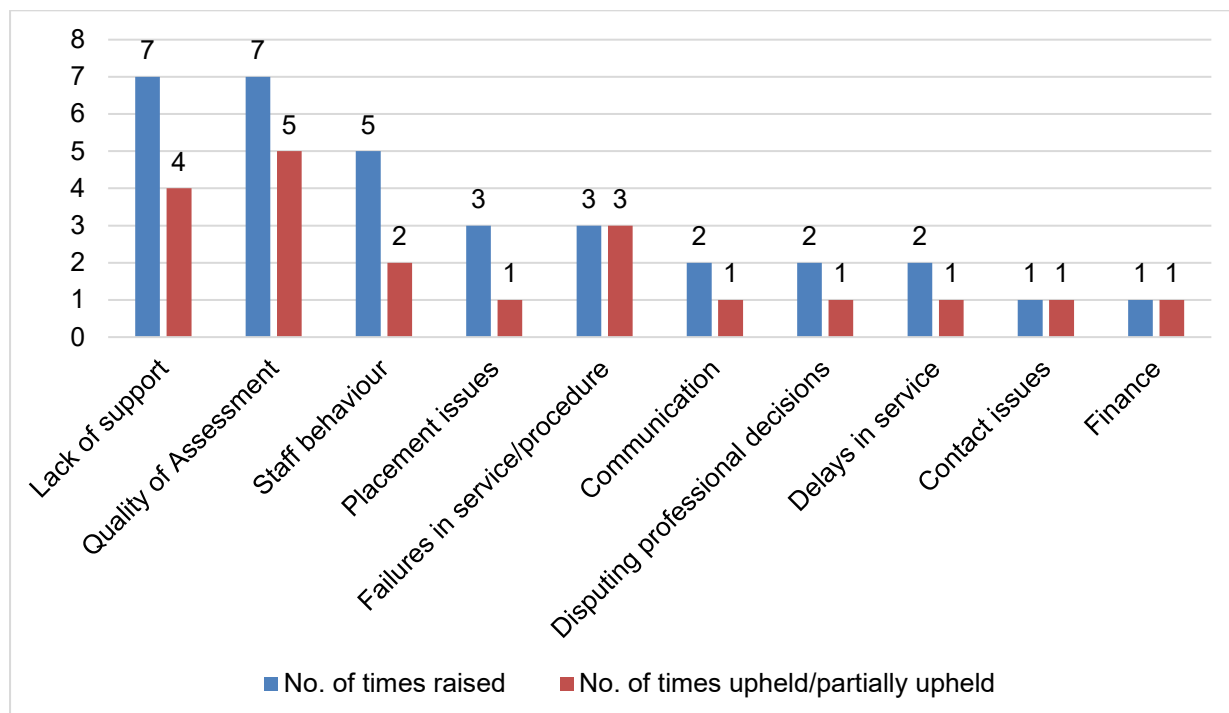
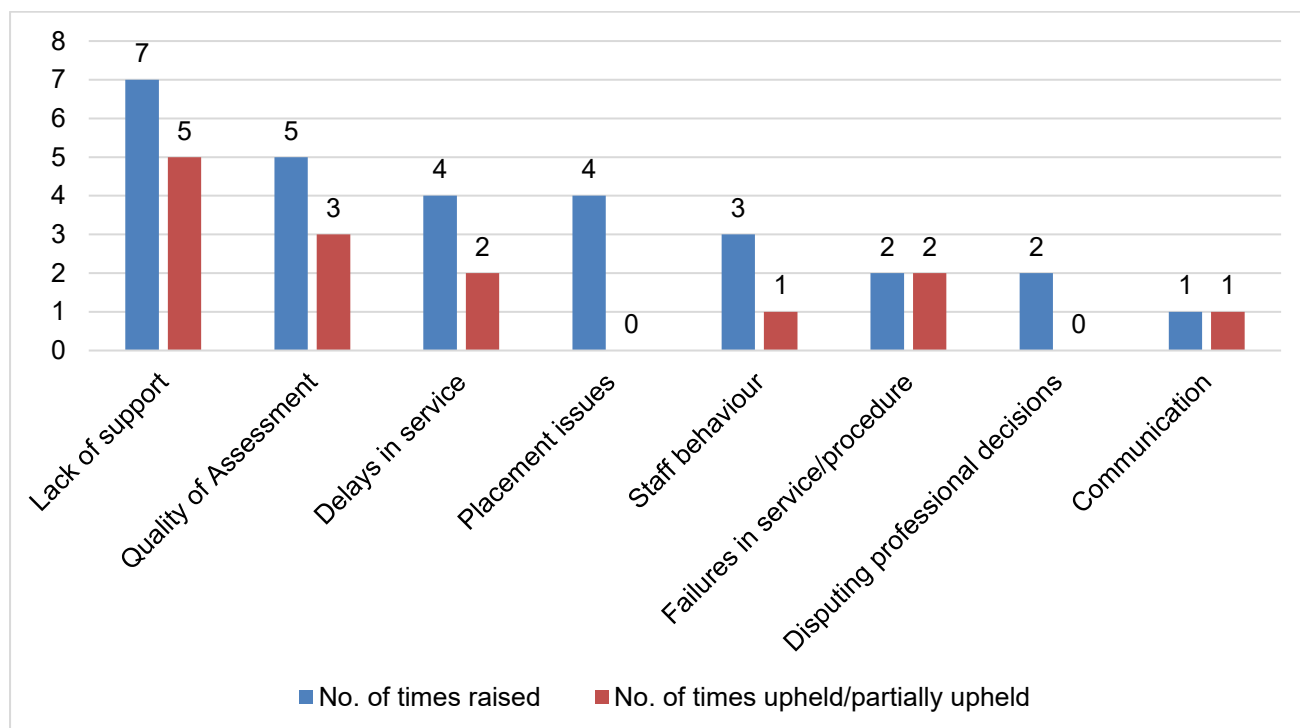
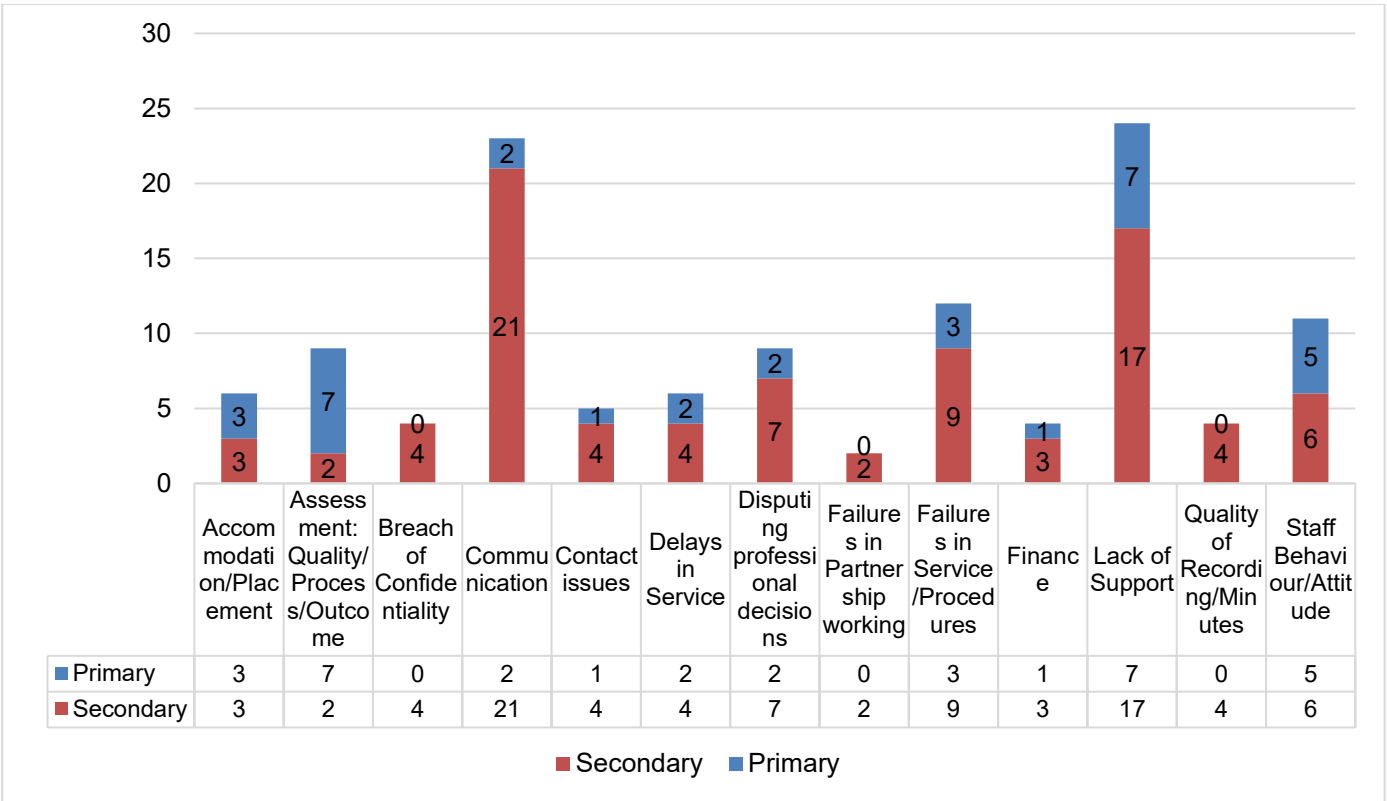


Chart 4: Number of statutory complaints received by principal Issue at stage 1 and number of times upheld/partially upheld 2023-24



8.4 Whilst **Chart 3** has set out the principal issues for each stage 1 complaint, **Chart 5** below sets out each issue raised within the 33 stage 1 complaints. Across the 33 stage 1 complaints a total of 119 issues were raised, demonstrating the complexity of children’s statutory complaints. This can present a challenging in determining the key motivation for making the complaint, as often issues like communication and delays are a thread through an entire complaint, yet the complainant’s desired outcome is, for example, to have an assessment amended or a professional decision changed.

Chart 5: Full data on the issues raised from the 33 statutory stage 1 complaints 2024-25



8.5 With regards to complaint outcomes, as demonstrated in **Chart 6** and **Table 5** below, at stage 1, not upheld complaints accounted for 36% (compared to 50% last year) partly upheld complaints account for 58% (compared to 43% last year) and fully upheld accounted for 6% (compared to 7%) last year.

Chart 6: Outcome by % statutory stage 1 complaints 2024-25

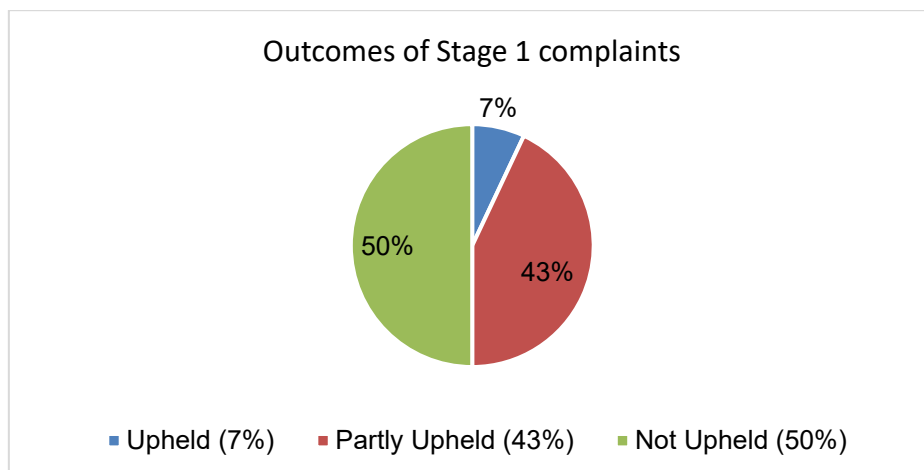


Table 5: statutory stage 1 complaint outcomes 2024/25

Outcome	Total number	Percentage (out of 33)
Not Upheld	12	36%
Partly Upheld	18	58%
Upheld	2	6%

Case Study (Stage 2): Supporting Care Leavers into Independence

Background

A care leaver submitted a Stage 2 complaint to Wandsworth Children's Services, raising concerns about the support received from the Future First team during the transition to independent living. The complaint included issues around housing support, financial assistance during an apprenticeship, the condition of accommodation, and the adequacy of pathway planning. The complainant also sought acknowledgment of service shortcomings, improved support, and compensation for the distress experienced.

Findings

The investigation into the complaint revealed several areas where the support provided by Children's Services and the Future First team fell short of expectations. While some aspects of the complaint were not upheld, the adjudicating officer acknowledged that the transition to independent living could have been better managed. The complainant experienced confusion and inconsistent communication regarding housing eligibility, and there was a lack of proactive support during a critical period of adjustment, particularly as a new mother. Financial planning and support during an apprenticeship were also found to be insufficient, with missed opportunities to explore budgeting strategies or temporary financial assistance.

Concerns about the condition of accommodation were not addressed with the urgency required, resulting in the complainant and their child living in unsuitable conditions for an extended period. Although some action was taken, the delay in response was significant and avoidable. Additionally, the pathway planning process did not adequately support the complainant's goals for stable housing and educational progress. While individual staff efforts were acknowledged, the overall coordination and responsiveness of the service were found to be lacking in key areas.

Learning from the Complaint

This case highlights the importance of clear communication, timely intervention, and proactive support for care leavers transitioning to independence. The complaint revealed gaps in housing guidance, financial planning, and responsiveness to accommodation concerns.

In response, Wandsworth Children's Services committed to several improvements:

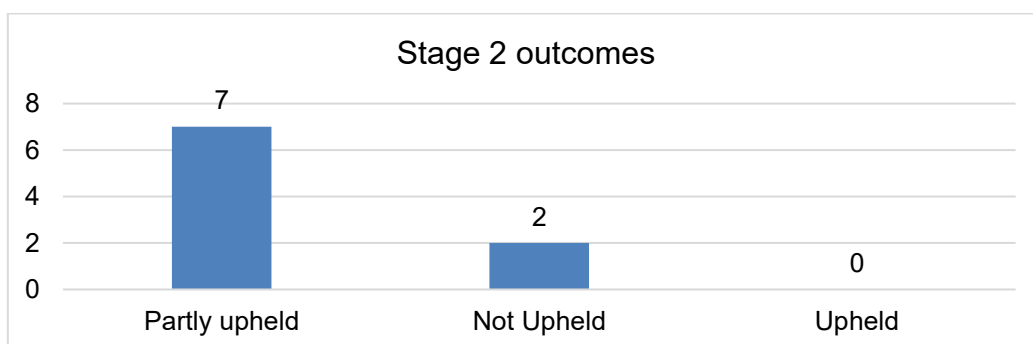
- A joint protocol between Children's Services and the Housing Department to better coordinate housing support for care leavers.
- Commissioning of floating support services to assist with tenancy transitions.
- A planned review of housing options for care leavers who are parents.
- Reinforcement of good practice guidance for staff, including more frequent visits and better documentation during tenancy transitions.

These actions reflect a commitment to learning from complaints and enhancing the support provided to care-experienced young people.

9. Complaints by issues and outcomes: Stage 2

- 9.1 At the start of the stage 2 process a statement of complaint is agreed with an independent officer and independent person. The date the statement is signed commences the start of the 65 working day timescale. As stage 2 investigations are detailed and cover multiple issues, it is to be expected that most complaints are partly upheld, and it is difficult to determine one principal theme of complaint
- 9.2 In total 9 complaints escalated to stage 2 this year compared to 6 last year.
- 9.3 Of the 9 Stage 2 complaints, 7 were raised by parents or guardians and 2 were directly from young people who are care leavers.
- 9.4 The 2 complaints from young people who are care leavers both raised issues about level of support provided by Future First such as supporting with housing needs when becoming 18 and supporting with finances. One of these complaints is explored further in the case study on **page 19**.
- 9.5 The remaining 7 complaints from parents were about:
- Delays in proving a direct payment following an increase in care package and providing assistance to access PA support
 - Receiving an inconsistent service, with regular opening and closing of the child's case, changes in social workers and not feeling listened to (complaint from father)
 - 3 complaints were from fathers who felt that social workers had been biased towards them when investigating allegations against them.
 - Delays in providing Occupational Therapy and social care provision for a child with an EHCP
 - A parent unhappy that their child's case had been closed, that the social worker did not fully understand the circumstances of the incident that led to involvement, did not promote family time with their child and did not share assessment reports.

Chart 7: Stage 2 Outcomes



Case Study (stage 2): Improving Direct Payment communication and complaints handling

Background

A parent submitted a Stage 2 complaint to Wandsworth Children's Services regarding the handling of her daughter's Direct Payment care package and the associated support services. The complaint raised concerns about delays in receiving increased funding, lack of assistance in accessing personal assistant (PA) support, and the overall impact on both the parent and child. Additionally, the complainant expressed dissatisfaction with the way her Stage 2 complaint request was handled, citing delays and poor communication.

Findings

The adjudicating officer reviewed the reports from the Investigating Officer and the Independent Person and agreed with their conclusions. While several elements of the complaint were not upheld—particularly those relating to the timing and delivery of Direct Payments and the support for sourcing PA services—some aspects were upheld or acknowledged as having caused distress. A key finding was the error in the Stage 1 complaint response, which incorrectly stated the date the increased care package was agreed. This mistake was upheld, and an apology was issued for the confusion and distress it caused. Additionally, the handling of the Stage 2 complaint request was found to be delayed and not in line with statutory timescales. The Local Authority accepted responsibility for these delays, attributing them in part to ICT issues but acknowledging broader failings in complaints handling. As a remedy, a financial redress of £200 was offered in recognition of the time and trouble experienced. Although the complaint regarding the lack of Direct Payment funds and PA support was not upheld, the adjudicating officer acknowledged the emotional toll of the process and apologised for the need to escalate the complaint. The response also recognised the importance of maintaining clear communication and accurate records in all interactions with families.

Learning from the Complaint

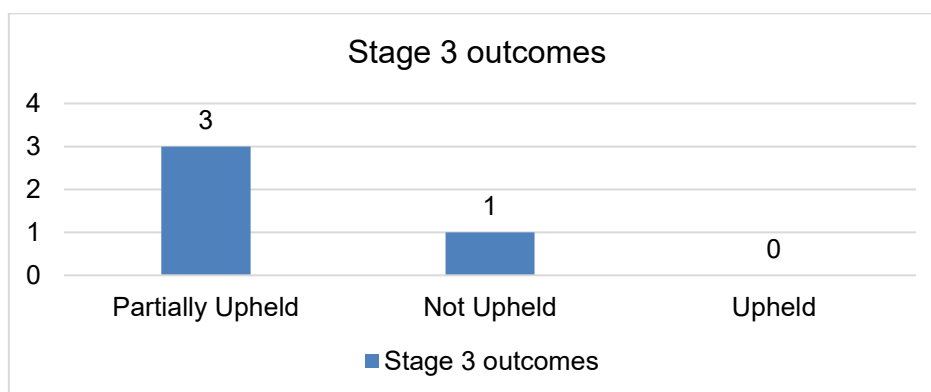
This situation highlights the critical importance of accurate communication, timely complaint handling, and clear documentation in service delivery. The investigation revealed that even when decisions are made correctly, failures in how they are communicated and recorded can lead to significant distress and mistrust.

In response, Wandsworth Children's Services committed to several actions. These included organising a workshop for practitioners, business support, and finance staff to clarify responsibilities around Direct Payments, improve communication protocols, and ensure that all decisions made outside of formal panels are properly recorded and followed up. The department also emphasised the need for social workers to understand the Direct Payment process thoroughly and to monitor its use during visits.

10. Complaints by issues and outcomes: Stage 3

- 10.1 This year 4 complaints escalated to stage 3 compared to 3 last year. 2 of these complaints were made by young people and 2 were made by parents/guardians.
- 10.2 The complaints were escalations of the issues raised at stage 2. Complaints from the young people were about the support provided by Future First with regards to their housing and general support. A complaint from a parent/guardian was about how social care had supported their child, and the final parental complaint was from a father who felt bias towards them and lack of involvement in social care planning.

Chart 8: Statutory stage 3 outcomes 2024/25



11. Response times

Stage 1

- 11.1 Stage 1 complaints should be investigated and completed within a timescale of 10 working days. This can be extended up to 20 working days for more complex complaints or in other instances where an extension is agreed by the Complaints Manager. From the 33 completed stage 1 complaints, 19 were completed within the statutory time frame which allows a maximum of 20 working days.

Chart 9: Stage 1 response times – complaints completed during 2024-25

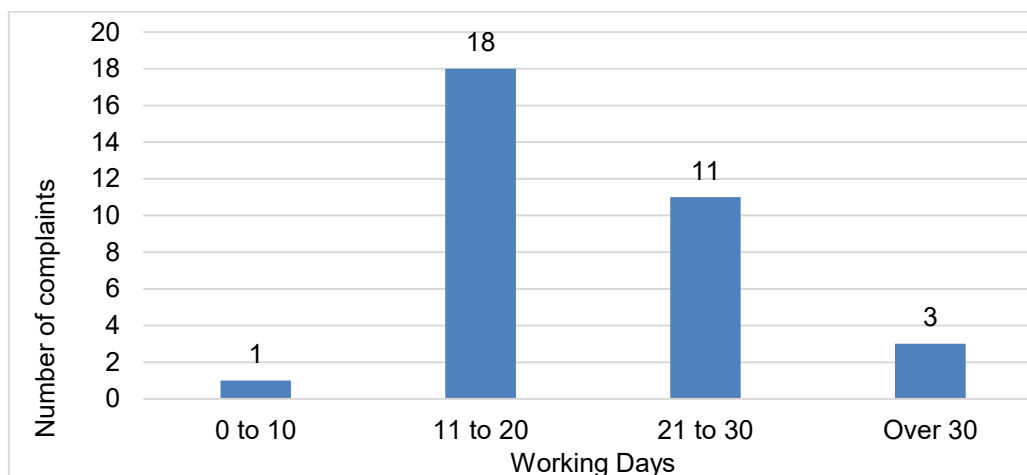
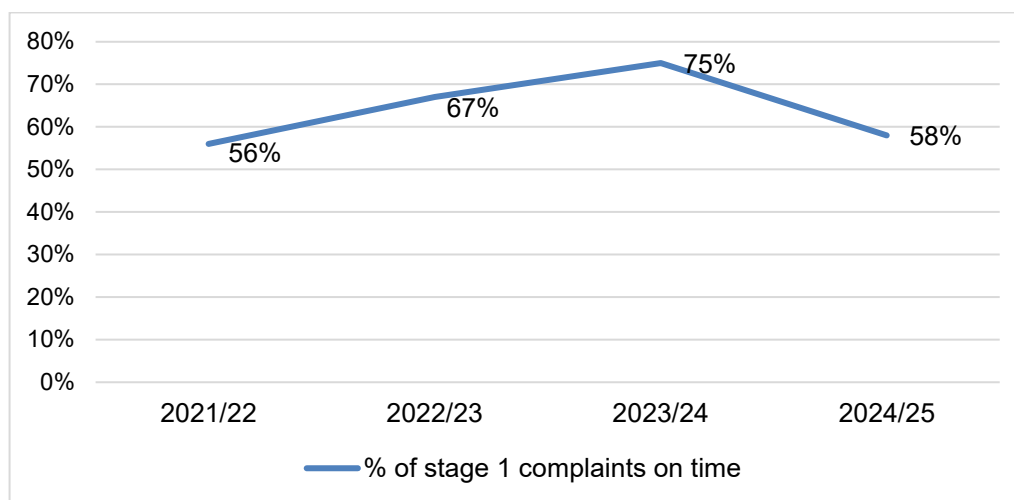


Chart 10: Percentage of stage 1 statutory complaints on time 2022/23 – 2024/25



11.2 58% (19) stage 1 complaints received a response on time which is shown on **Chart 10**. Whilst less complaints were completed within the statutory 20 working days, the average number of days to respond was 20.8 days. Additionally:

- Teams sometimes take more time to provide thorough, well-considered responses rather than rushing to meet deadlines. This can lead to better outcomes and higher satisfaction in the long run. Only 4 complaints escalated through all 3 stages of the process.
- Complaints can be nuanced or multifaceted complaints and sometimes require deeper investigation and collaboration across departments, which naturally extends response times but ensures fairness and accuracy.
- When teams are under pressure, resources may sometimes be intentionally redirected to prioritise safeguarding or urgent issues.

Stage 2

11.3 Stage 2 complaints have a statutory timescale of 25 to 65 working days. 6 of the 9 stage 2 complaints, were completed with 65 working days. Of the remaining 3:

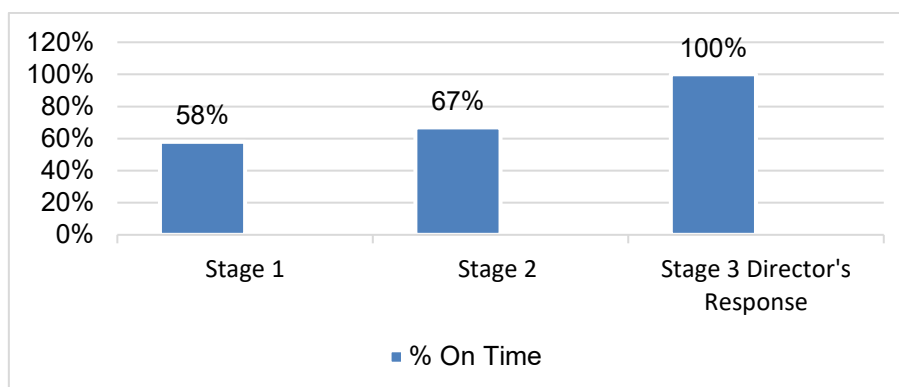
- 1 was completed in 70 days
- 2 were completed in 80 days

Stage 3

11.4 Stage 3 panels must be held within 30 working days of the request and the panel report sent to the complainant within five working days of the panel. The Director's response should be sent no later than 15 working days after the panel report is received. This year one stage 3 complaint was withdrawn before the panel was held. The Director's report, which is sent within 15 working days of the panel report being received, was sent on time for each of the 4 complaints.

11.5 It continues to be a challenge to hold stage 2 panels within the prescribed 30-day timescale. Only 1 stage 3 panel could be arranged within 30 days. This is due to the availability of independent panel members and at time, complainants.

Chart 11: Percentage of statutory complaints completed on time at all stages 2024-25



12. Young people's complaints

12.1 Of the 33 stage 1 complaints completed for this reporting period, over three quarters (89% or 29 complaints) of Stage 1 complaints were received on behalf of parents or carers. The remaining 4 (or 11%) complaints were received directly from a child/young person. This is consistent with 4 complaints received directly from young people last year (2023-24) and is 57% less than the previous year (2022-23) where 7 complaints were made by young people. This year, two Stage 2 and 3 complaints were raised directly by young people.

12.2 Of the complaints received from young people across all 3 stages⁷:

- 57% (or 4) were from young females and 43% (or 3) were from young males
- 57% (or 4) were from young people aged between 18-24. 43% (or 3) complaints were received from children under 18.
- 57% (or 4) of complaints were from children looked after and 43% (or 3) were received from Care Leavers.

12.3 The Complaints Team are always keen to receive complaints from children and young people directly. If it is considered that a complaint is best made from a children or young person, we aim to work directly with them and always offer advocacy support.

12.4 The main themes emerging from complaints received directly from young people during this reporting period is placement issues. These were summarised earlier in the report.

⁷ Where a young person has escalated their complaint to stage 2 and 3 of the complaints process, they have only been counted once.

13. Complaints by category of support and equalities breakdown

- 13.1 The following section reviews the breakdown of complaints completed at stage 1 by the category of support that the young people have received. The section will then go onto review the breakdown of equalities data of these young people.

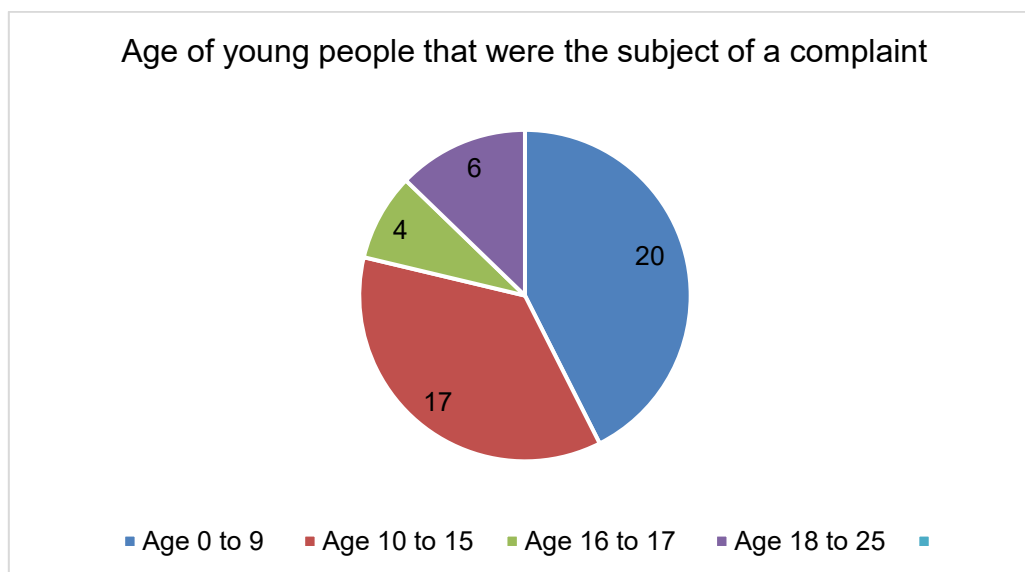
Table 6: Number of stage 1 statutory complaints completed by category of support 2024/25

Category of support	No. of complaints	%
Children in Need	11	33%
Children Looked After	11	33%
MASH/brief intervention stage/ Early Intervention	4	12%
Care Leavers	3	9%
Disabled Children	2	6%
Child Protection	1	3%
Special Guardianship Order	1	3%
Total	33	100%

- 13.2 **Table 6** above demonstrates the number of completed stage 1 complaints split by category of support. Whilst most complaints concerned Children in Need or Children Looked After, the numbers are fairly level across all types of support.
- 13.3 The volume of these complaints should be taken in the context of the overall level of interaction as of 31st March 2024 there were just 81 children on an open Child Protection plan, 240 open Children Looked After, and 1,665 Children in Need (including open assessments)⁸.
- 13.4 Whilst 46 complaints were completed across all stages, some complaints concerned families with multiple children, and others featured across multiple stages of the process and were only recorded once. Therefore, the total number of children for which equalities data is recorded against in the charts below is 50.
- 13.5 **Chart 12** below sets out the age range of children and young people subject of a complaint. Most complaints concerned children aged 0 to 9 years (20 children), followed by children between 10-15 years of age (17 children). Whilst less complaints were received concerning older children, four young people aged 16-17 were the subject of a complaint and a further six were aged 18 to 25. The complaints received directly from children tended to be from older children.

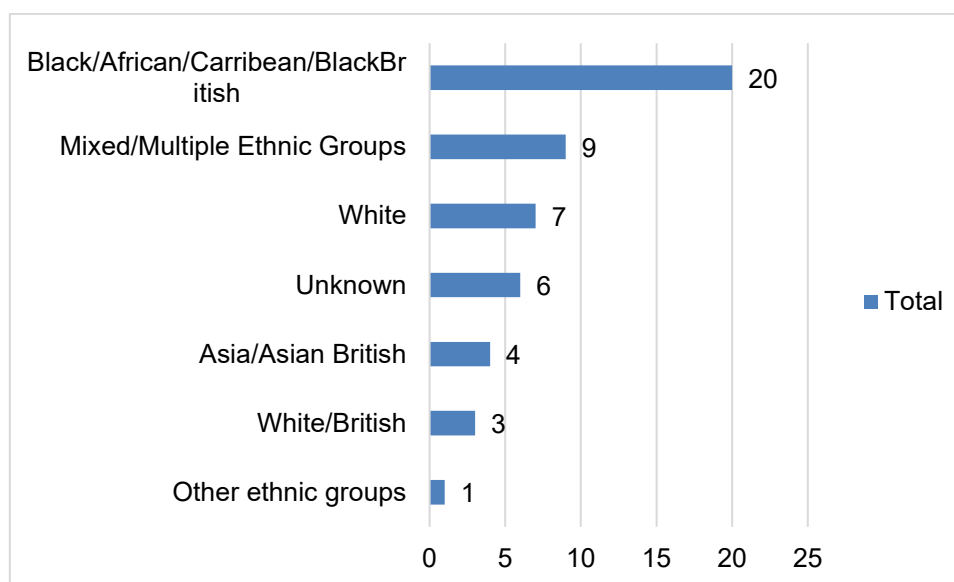
⁸ This compares to 79 children on an open Child Protection Plan, 218 Looked After Children and 1,681 Children in Need as of 31st March 2023

Chart 12: Age range of the 50 young people subject of a statutory complaint 2024-25



13.6 There were 29 (58%) young males and 20 (40%) young females subject of a complaint. One child the complaints concerned gender was unknown as they were unborn at the time of the complaint.

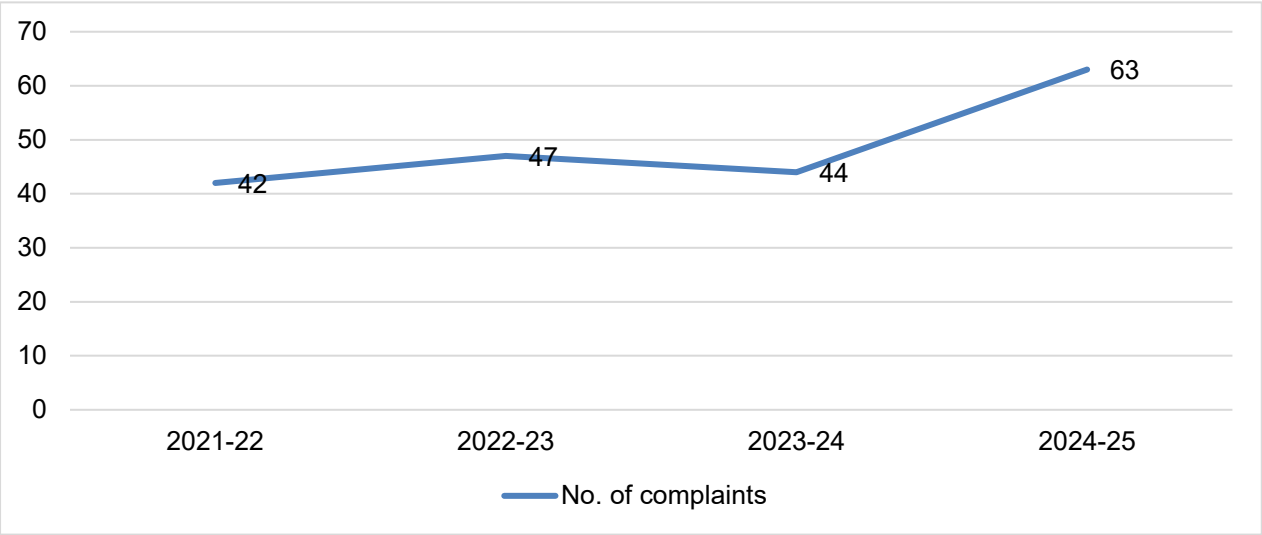
Chart 13: Ethnicity of the 50 young people that were the subject of a statutory complaint 2024-25



14 Corporate complaints

- 14.1 This section of the report provides a brief overview of Corporate Complaints closed by Children’s Services and includes numbers for both social care and education. Detailed reporting on Corporate Complaints is within Wandsworth Council’s Corporate Complaints Report 2024-25.
- 14.2 Children’s Services completed 63 stage 1 corporate complaints, a 43% increase from last year’s 44 stage 1 corporate complaints. This rise is due to more complaints being triaged through the corporate process, particularly for social care teams. The Ombudsman allows discretion in choosing the correct process, but each route has its legal framework and procedures. For instance, complaints about child protection (Section 47) are generally excluded from statutory regulations⁹. More complaints in this area were directed through the corporate process this year, explaining the lower number of stage 1 statutory complaints.

Chart 14: Number of stage 1 corporate complaints 2022-23 to 2024/5



- 14.3 Of the 63 stage 1 complaints:
- 35 were for Education which 30% higher than the 27 stage 1 complaints last year. 6 of these complaints were for School Admissions. The remaining 29 were for SEND¹⁰ but it should be noted that 5 of these were from a single parent (also 5 of the stage 2 corporate complaints for SEND were from the same parent).
 - 21 were for Children’s Social Care compared to 11 last year (+91%).
 - 6 complaints were for Business and Resources (which covers School Transport complaints) compared to 5 last year which is marginally the same as last year.

⁹ Some parts of the 1988 Children’s Act are excluded from the Children’s Statutory Complaint Regulations. Sometimes the Complaints Team assess that it is correct to investigate these through the Council’s own Corporate Complaints Procedure. Also, sometimes parents or adults without parental responsibility, make complaints about how the actions of Children’s Social Care have impacted them personally. These complaints, which are not child centred, are investigated through the non-statutory complaints route.

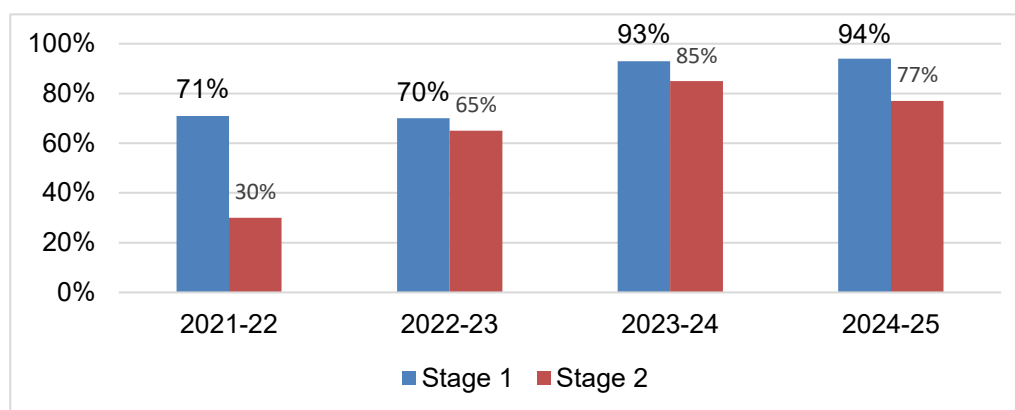
¹⁰ One of the stage 1 corporate complaints for SEND was a joint response with Children’s Social Care.

- 1 complaint was for Place and Partnerships (Early Help) which is the same as last year.

14.4 This year 31 (49%) complaints escalated to stage 2 compared to 20 stage 2 last year. The increase in stage 2 complaints is due to the increase in social care complaints being investigated through the corporate process.

14.5 Performance against timescales remains high. 59 stage 1 corporate complaints were on time (94%) and 24 stage 2 complaints were on time (77%).

Chart 15: Number of stage 1 and 2 corporate complaints completed on time 2021-22 to 2024-25



14.6 Learning from SEND complaints from stage 2 corporate complaints has focused on:

- **Improving EHCP Quality:** Wandsworth is reinforcing the importance of issuing high-quality Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Additional training will be provided to the SEND team to ensure all relevant appendices — including those from independent professionals — are consistently included in Section K.
- **Strengthening the Annual Review Process:** Over the past six months, the service has reviewed and refined all processes and procedures. Staffing levels have been increased to reduce caseloads and improve responsiveness. A full data audit was conducted to better track and manage Annual Reviews in line with legal requirements. A clear action plan has been developed and targeted training delivered to prevent delays in Annual Reviews for children and young people with EHCPs.
- **Addressing Therapy Provision Gaps:** The Local Authority is working closely with the NHS Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) provider to identify and address gaps in therapy caused by staffing shortages and maternity leave. A comprehensive list of therapists assigned to schools has been compiled to support continuity and planning.

14.7 Learning for School Admissions from stage 2 corporate complaints has focused on:

- **Improving the school admissions portal:** This has been revised to improve clarity for parents, particularly in cases where applications are being considered

under special medical or social circumstances. This change was prompted by feedback indicating that the information displayed was not always easily understood.

- **Strengthening communication:** Concerns were raised about communication during the application process for school placements. In response, the service has acknowledged the need for families to feel informed and involved throughout the process and put measures in place to strengthen supervision and provide enhanced training for staff.

14.8 Finally, below are some examples of learning from stage 2 corporate complaints for children's social care:

- **Improving support for foster carers:** The role of Placement Support Lead has been introduced and embedded to provide enhanced, ongoing support to foster carers and residential placements, with the aim of promoting stability and continuity of care.
- **Front Door assessments:** The Family Front Door service has taken steps to improve the quality and timeliness of outcome-focused planning with families. Supervisors delivered training to staff on how to develop effective plans following an initial assessment, with a strong emphasis on time management and the importance of implementing actions promptly. Regular Learning Episodes are now conducted by Practice Supervisors, which include direct contact with children and their parents to gather feedback. This process will help assess the quality of practice and identify areas for improvement.
- **Strengthening safeguarding processes:** All advice from the LADO, even if it does not lead to a formal investigation, must now be clearly recorded. The Education Safeguarding Lead Officer will remind all schools—including independent ones—of their obligation to report allegations against professionals to the LADO. This reminder will be regularly reinforced in Designated Safeguarding Lead forums.

15 Ombudsman cases

- 15.1 This section of the report provides a brief overview of Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) complaints closed by Children's Services. Detailed reporting on Corporate and Ombudsman Complaints across all services is within Wandsworth Council's Corporate Complaints Report 2024-25.
- 15.2 A complainant has the right to refer their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSO) at any time. Generally, the Ombudsman will seek to ensure that the Local Authority has been provided with the opportunity to first respond to the complaint in accordance with the Council's own statutory complaints process.
- 15.3 During 2024/25, there were 27 complaints made to the Ombudsman about Children's Services, which is higher than the 13 complaints last year. Despite the increase in the number of complainants approaching the Ombudsman, the number of cases the Ombudsman have decided to investigate has not increased. This year for social care

there were only 2 formal investigations compared to 4 last year. For Education there were 3 formal investigations (2 were for SEND and 1 was for Emerging Needs Pathway). 2 formal investigations were for Business Resources (school transport).

- 15.4 The increase in people approaching the Ombudsman is not reflective of the quality of services being offered. Firstly, there has been a significant improvement in public awareness of the LGSCO and the complaints process more broadly. Local authorities have enhanced the visibility and accessibility of their complaint procedures, which has empowered more residents to escalate concerns when they feel local resolution has failed.
- 15.5 Secondly, the public is increasingly informed and assertive about their rights, particularly in areas such as adult social care, housing, and education. This shift in expectations has led to a greater willingness to challenge perceived service failings. Social media and online communities have also played a role in normalising the act of complaining and seeking redress. We see this shift in complaints culture as positive. More detail is provided in **Tables 7 and 8**.

15.6 **Statutory Ombudsman cases (Children's Services)**

Table 7: Ombudsman enquiries/investigations and outcomes: Childrens Services

Q	Service Area	Details	Outcome
1	Social Care (Child Protection)	Complaint that children were taken into care with false information.	Not investigated: The LGSCO determined that the matters were related to legal proceedings
1	Social Care (Future First and Housing)	Complaint that the Council is not honouring its corporate parenting responsibilities by offering unsuitable accommodation	Investigated: The LGSCO found fault although the Council had already provided remedy. An additional fault with record keeping was found and further remedy was provided.
3	Social Care (Children we Care For)	Complaint that council failures led to the breakdown of a long-term foster placement	Not investigated: The LGSCO determined that any investigate would not lead to a different outcome.
3	Social Care (Child Protection)	Complaint about how the Council investigated child protection concerns relating to the school and failed to support the family; also concerns about how the complaint was handled	Not investigated: The LGSCO determined that the complaint was made late without good reason.
3	Social Care	Complaint with how a referral for their child was dealt with and	Investigated: The LGSCO found that the Council had already offered a suitable

Q	Service Area	Details	Outcome
		incorrectly being told a home visit was mandatory	remedy by apologising and identifying fault.
3	Social Care (Children we Care For)	Complaint about child allowance not being backdated from when placed in a relative's care	Not investigated: the LGSCO determined there was not enough evidence of fault to justify an investigation.
4	Social Care (MASH)	Complaint that the council discriminated against parent's religious beliefs	Not investigated: the LGSCO determined they would not investigate a complaint about the Council's obligations under the Equalities Act and there was not enough evidence of fault to justify an investigation
4	Social Care	Complaint from father about bias towards them during social care involvement with the family	Not investigated: the LGSCO determined there was not enough evidence of fault to justify an investigation
4	Social Care (Disabled Childre's Service)	Complaint about Occupational Therapy support	Premature: referred back to the Complaints Process
4	Social Care (child protection)	Complaint about lack of support when transferring to a different Council, which affected the service the family received	Out of time: the LGSCO would not investigate as the complaint was made late
4	Social Care (child protection)	Complaint about how a case was handled by a social worker following an allegation made against an adult which impacted on a court outcome	Not investigated: the LGSCO would not investigate as the matters were too closely related to legal proceedings

15.7 Non-statutory Ombudsman cases (Education and Business Resources)

Table 8: Ombudsman enquiries/investigations and outcomes: Education

Q	Service Area	Details	Outcome
1	Education (Emerging Needs Pathway)	Complaint about lack of clarity transparency in the pre-school Autism diagnostic pathway	Not investigated: The LGSCO closed the complaint as it related to matters being investigated by an NHS Trust
1	Education (Pupil Services)	Complaint about distance from school once family had been placed in temporary housing	Not investigated: The LGSO considered the complaint premature as the council had not yet responded

1	Education (SEND)	Complaint about Council's failure to provide support through an ECHP	Investigated: The LGSCO found fault, an apology and symbolic payment was offered. However, the LGSCO did not recommend service improvements as there was no evidence of poor practice
2	Business & Resources (school transport)	Complaint about the quality of the home to school transport	Not investigated: The LGSCO determined that they could not add anything to the Council's response that would achieve the complainant's desired outcome
2	Education (School Admissions)	Complaint about standard of education delivered and the school application process/decision	Not investigated: The LGSCO determined that complaints about schools are outside of their jurisdiction and the complainant can appeal the school admissions decision
2	Business and Resources (school transport)	Complaint about the decision to not provide home to school transport	Not investigated: The LGSCO determined that there was not enough evidence of fault
2	Business and Resources (school transport)	Complaint about failure to backdate payments for home to school transport	Not investigated: The LGSCO determined that there was not enough evidence of fault and complainant had access to the Appeals process.
2	Education (SEND)	Complaint about failure to deliver support as per the EHCP	Investigated: The LGSCO found that the Council were at fault for failing to deliver speech and language therapy and being slow at looking at what areas were being delivered; however, a suitable remedy had already been provided including service improvements
3	Education (SEND)	Complaint about EHCP provision	Withdrawn: complainant withdrew so the LGSCO would not investigate
3	Education (SEND)	Complaint about the assessment process for and EHCP and complaint handling	Not investigated: The LGSCO determined that the issues are not

			separate to those that can be appealed at Tribunal and will not consider complaint handling in isolation
3	Education (SEND)	Complaint that the Council failed to finalise school provision in the final EHCP which prevented a timely appeal to Tribunal and deferred the start of school	Investigation: Fault was found in the way the EHCP was amended and how the council applied policy which delayed the child starting school. A symbolic payment was offered and service improvements put in place to avoid issuing ECHPs which specify a type of education when parents have specified a specific school
4	Education (SEND)	Complaint about lack of delivery of speech and language therapy as set out in the EHCP	Not investigated: the LGSOC would not investigate as there was not enough evidence of fault and the complainant had appealed to the Tribunal
4	Education (SEND)	Complaint about refusal to update and EHCP whilst under appeal and lack of provision	Not investigated: the LGSCO would not investigate as the complainant had used their right of appeal
4	Business Resources (school transport)	Complaint about the decision to refuse an application for school transport	Formal Investigation: fault found as not all supporting evidence was taken into account. Apology, symbolic payment and service improvements were put in place.
4	Business Resources (school transport)	Complaint about the decision to refuse an application for school transport	Formal Investigation: fault found in the way the procedure was carried out. A fresh appeal was offered and service improvements were put in place

16 Compliments

- 16.1 Positive feedback regarding staff or service delivery is another way in which the department can learn how well things are going. Compliments remind us of the excellent practice within services and reinforce that the promises made to learn from complaints are sincere. Staff are reminded to report compliments they receive so we can record as much positive feedback as possible to evidence the commitment to good social care practice.

16.2 Examples of compliments received from both service users and partner organisations are outlined below:

- *"I must say, out of the numerous people I have dealt with in the council, your assistance stood out as exceptional. Despite the brevity of our interaction, I found you to be incredibly helpful and understanding of the circumstances. Your willingness to assist and your professionalism have made this process much smoother and more manageable for me. You are undoubtedly a credit to your team, and your dedication to providing excellent service does not go unnoticed. Your approachability and competence are commendable qualities that make working with you a pleasure". (Parent)*
- *"I wish to inform the court of the exceptional conduct and work completed by the allocated Social Worker in this case. I have been very impressed by their commitment to this family and children. I am of the view that this consistent relationship has mitigated some of the impact of the delay in this case for the children. I have found them to be a keen communicator, and this has been of significant benefit when being allocated this case at this late stage". (Childcare lawyer)*
- *"I would like to extend a massive thank you to you and the team at Wandsworth. This decision means the world to us and will significantly improve my son's future. I understand that making the right decision may not have been easy, and I commend the fantastic work you and the SEND team are doing. Thank you for all your time, support and excellent communication throughout". (Parent)*
- *"You have such a difficult job as there are so many stressed out, overwhelmed families and the whole system is at breaking point. We've really appreciated so much how each time you have gone over and above and beyond to help us. Your support has been such a blessing to us" (Parent to the SEND team).*
- *"We have some 'angels' amongst us. So very grateful. Mother's sharing this image with you shows the very humane approach you have taken on this. We thank you". (Virtual School regarding Pupil Services)*
- *"The Judge said your evidence on the stand was clear, "balanced, sympathetic and impressive". They also said your parenting assessment was detailed, thorough and also impressive. For me, it was both the Mother saying on the stand that she found you to be the only SW over the years who has actually helped her, despite us being in court etc. I think this is something you should be proud of". (Judge and line manager)*
- *"To all the social work team who have helped to secure [name's] future, we can never thank you enough. With all our love". (Family)*
- *"Thank you for being part of our journey from struggle to settled in our new place, I can't thank you enough for all the effort you made for us and will be forever grateful and remembered all the help you gave us from the beginning to the end.*

May God bless you more as you have a golden heart to help people like us".
(Family)

- *"I genuinely believe you listen to us. You may not always say yes but we do feel we get a fair hearing. That's all we want".* (Parent for the SEND team)

17 Key Achievements 2024/25

- 17.1 This year, the Complaints Team has demonstrated a strong commitment to ensuring the council remains fully compliant with the Complaints Handling Code jointly developed by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS). Through continuous review and refinement of internal processes, the team has worked diligently to embed the principles of fairness, transparency, and accountability into every stage of complaint handling. Regular training, a new Corporate Complaints Policy, adding complaint handling responsibilities to all new job descriptions, improving induction information on complaints practice, and collaborating with service areas have fostered a culture of learning and improvement. The Complaints Manager also held a session with the Think Bigger Network to look at complaints through the perspective of storytelling, to further embed a positive complaints culture that prioritises listening to our residents. As a result, the council is better equipped to respond to complaints effectively and in line with national standards, reinforcing public trust and driving service excellence.
- 17.2 This work led to the Complaints Team being honoured with the Team of the Year award at the December 2024 Staff Awards for exemplifying the organisational value of Leading By Example. This value recognises that leadership is not confined to roles or titles - it's about stepping up, taking responsibility, and setting a standard that others aspire to. Throughout the year, we consistently demonstrated dependability, professionalism, and a commitment to continuous improvement. We tackled complex and sensitive complaints with empathy and integrity, supported each other and staff through challenging cases, and proactively refined processes to improve outcomes for residents. Beyond our own performance, we played an important role in supporting services across the organisation to improve their own complaint handling. Through tailored guidance, collaborative briefings, and constructive feedback, we have helped further embed a culture of learning and accountability, enabling services to respond more effectively, robustly, more confidently and compassionately to residents' concerns.