



Adult Social Care

**ANNUAL REPORT OF
ADULT SOCIAL
CARE
COMPLAINTS AND
COMPLIMENTS
2024/25**



Hartlepool
Borough Council

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1. Executive Summary

In accordance with the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009, this report sets out the complaints received by Hartlepool Borough Council's adult social care during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

How adult social care responds to complaints and any learning arising from them is an integral part of how we improve our services. This also aligns with being open, transparent and accountable.

The feedback we receive from compliments about our adult social care services is also included in this report. Compliments are seen as an indication of good outcomes for those who have used our services.

Both the complaints and compliments received in adult social care serve to provide wider lessons about the quality of our adult social care services.

Summary for 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025:

- 75% of complaints were received electronically in 2024/25.
- 27 complaints were received in 2024/25 compared to 26 complaints in the previous year. This represents an increase of 1 complaint. However, 8 of 27 complaints received in 2024/25 did not progress to investigation leaving 19 complaints for investigation.
- There was an increase of 3 complaints investigated in 2024/25 compared to 2023/24.
- 1 of the 19 complaints investigated in 2024/25 was managed and responded to jointly with health in accordance with statutory complaint regulations.
- 1 of the 19 complainants was represented by a Solicitor in bringing their complaint whereas no complainants chose to have an Advocate support them with their complaint in 2024/25.

- 5 complainants referred their complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman during 2024/25. This included a complaint that was investigated in 2023/24.
- 1 of the 19 complaints investigated in 2024/25 remained ongoing as at 31 March 2025 and has been carried forward to 2025/26.
- 32 compliments were received about adult social care in 2024/25.
- This annual report will be published on the Council's website.

2. Introduction

In accordance with the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009, this annual report covers the complaints received about adult social care services during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. The feedback we receive from compliments about our adult social care services is also included in this report.

The annual report sets out:

- An overview of the complaints framework;
- An analysis of compliments and complaints received by adult social care services during the reporting period;
- An overview of the adult social care complaints adjudicated upon by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman during the reporting period; and
- Highlights the action taken and improvements made to adult social care services following complaint investigations.

The Council's adult social care encourages and welcomes compliments and complaints as a means of continual assessment of the services we provide. Complaints are investigated and, where appropriate, redress is made. Compliments and complaints are valued as an important source of feedback in helping to improve the quality of our adult social care services. Complaint outcomes provide evidence of the action we have taken to learn from the complaints received and drive continual improvement.

3. What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about any aspect of a service that is being delivered, or the failure to deliver a service. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman define a complaint as “an expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided directly by the council or on its behalf by a contactor or partner) that requires a response.”

4. Who can make a complaint?

A complaint can be made by:

- A person who is in receipt of an adult social care service;
- A person who has been refused an adult social care service for which they think they are eligible for;
- A person who is, or is likely to be, affected by the action, decision or omission of the service which is the subject of the complaint; or
- A carer acting on their own behalf.

A person may choose for someone else to represent them in the matter of a complaint. With the person's signed consent, their representative can make a complaint and act on their behalf. In the case of a person who lacks mental capacity (within the meaning of the Mental Capacity Act 2005) to give their informed signed consent, a representative may make a complaint on behalf of the person, but the statutory complaint regulations set out that the Council must be satisfied the representative making the complaint is acting in the person's best interests.

5. How can someone make a complaint?





There are several ways a person can make a complaint. Adult social care services has a publicly accessible Factsheet which outlines the various ways someone can make a complaint together with some information about the Council's adult social care complaints procedure. A complaint can be made:

- Verbally - in person or by telephone; or
- In writing - by letter or by filling in our complaint form and posting it to us;
- Electronically - by email or by filling in our online complaint form through the Council's website.

Every effort is made to assist a person in making a complaint and any member of staff can take a complaint. Most complaints are sent directly to the adult social care complaints team.

6. Method used to submit a complaint in 2024/25

For complaints received during 2024/25, 74% were received electronically. The method of contact is broken down as follows:

-  41% of complaints received were from someone who used the online electronic complaint form.
-  33% of complaints received were from someone who sent an email to us.
-  7.5% of complaints received were from someone who telephoned to make a complaint.
-  18.5% of complaints received were from someone who posted a complaint form or letter to us.

7. Adult social care complaint framework?

The adult social care complaint function sits within the Quality and Review Team under the management of the Head of Service (Quality and Review). The remit of the Complaints Manager's function is to:

- Develop, manage and administer the adult social care complaints procedure;
- Provide assistance and advice to those persons who wish to make a complaint;
- Oversee the investigation of complaints;
- Monitor and report on complaints activity; and
- Support and train staff.

Adult social care staff will always try to resolve problems or concerns before they escalate into complaints and this ensures that, wherever possible, complaints are kept to a minimum. The Council's adult social care complaints procedure aims to be as accessible as possible and is available for anyone to access on the Council's website. It is flexible to ensure that the needs of the complainant are paramount and allows for a complaint handling approach based upon the best way to reach a satisfactory resolution.

The adult social complaints procedure is underpinned by:

- Being fair, clear, robust and accessible;
- Support being available to those wishing to make a complaint;
- Timely resolution following a complaint investigation;
- Action taken following complaints to improve the quality of the service provided; and
- Monitoring as a means of improving performance.

Good complaint handling involves:

- Keeping the complainant informed and at the centre of the complaints process;
- Being open, accountable and transparent;
- Responding to complaints in a way that is fair and reasonable;
- Being committed to try and get things right when they have gone wrong; and
- Seeking to continually improve services.

The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009:

- Sets a 12 month time limit from when the subject matter being complained about occurred or came to the attention of the person making the complaint, to when a complaint may be made. After this time, a complaint will not normally be considered although there is discretion to accept a complaint after the 12 month time limit if the Council is satisfied that the complainant had good reason(s) for not making the complaint within the time limit and it is still possible to investigate the complaint effectively and fairly;
- Places a duty on adult social care and NHS bodies to coordinate the handling of complaints received across their respective jurisdictions and provide a joint response
- Sets a mandatory timescale of 3 working days to acknowledge receipt of a complaint; and
- Allows for a maximum timescale of 6 months to investigate and respond to a complaint.

Some complaints can take considerably longer to investigate than others and the statutory timescale provides a flexible approach to complaint response times depending upon the nature and complexity of the complaint. The person allocated to investigate a complaint usually seeks to negotiate the timescale for responding to the complaint with the complainant wherever possible. There are a range of factors that can impact upon a timescale such as the number of points of complaint for investigation, the availability of key people and conducting interviews, reading material relevant to the complaint, consideration of all available information and writing a report or proportionate response.

If, at the end of the adult social care complaints procedure, the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome and/or in the way which their complaint has been handled, they may refer their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, the independent body who investigates complaints about Councils. The time limit for raising a complaint with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is 12 months but, like Councils, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman may choose to waive the time limit if there is good reason(s) to do so.

Learning from complaints is shared and discussed within relevant management forums to ensure that the improvements identified are cascaded throughout the workforce.

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8. Compliments received in 2024/25

During 2024/25, 32 compliments were received relating to adult social care services.

The compliments received range from an expression of thanks and appreciation in the form of a thank-you card to written communication. They broadly reflect the work being delivered across adult social care with someone expressing their thanks for a piece of equipment which improves their daily life as well as a general appreciation of the social work teams who have made a difference to their lives.

The table below provides some examples of the compliments received during the reporting period.

Service Area	Compliment
ISPA	<i>"I just wanted to say a heartfelt thank you for your lovely support, especially during such a difficult time. You made sure all of my dad's needs were met with care and dignity, and that means the world to us. You've got a heart of gold — keep doing what you're doing, because you truly make a difference."</i>
Preventative Mental Health Team	<i>"I just wanted to let you know what 'X' has done for my family in the last year or so. To that end 'X' has been incredible. She has dealt with my family with endless compassion, patience, understanding and competence. She has been invaluable in helping me understand the situation my family are in and the support that is available to us. She has given me such peace of mind that I cannot adequately put into words. She is a credit to herself and your organisation and I wanted to try and ensure it is recognised."</i>

User Property and Finance Team (and other service areas)	<i>"Thanks for your email. I was going to contact you about this but now I don't need to. And thanks for the information about the refund. Of all the organisations I have been in touch with since my mother was diagnosed with dementia, Hartlepool Council is the only one where every contact (with social care officers, finance staff, receptionists, registrar service, etc.) has been great, and I have never had to chase up anyone. Everyone who said they would get back to me always did. This has made the last few years easier than it could have been. Please pass this on to the Chief Executive and thank you for what you have done in your role over the last 18 months."</i>
Locality Team	<i>"Thank you so very much for all your support over the last few years with both my mother and my father. It has been a really difficult time for me and you have been absolutely invaluable not just in helping me through all the administrative complexities but also in giving me advice and moral support. I can't tell you how much it has meant to me to know that I could pick up the phone to you and that you would understand what was going on and would be able to apply friendly common sense to it all. Your kindness and professionalism has made all the difference and I will be forever grateful to you."</i>
Occupational Therapy Team	<i>"Would just like to say that you for all your help and advice. The equipment you have provided has made my life a lot easier and safer so thanks."</i>

Young Adults Transition and Learning Disability Team	<i>"Thank you for everything, you are simply the best."</i>
Locality Team	<i>"Thank you for your care, help and guidance when looking after 'X'. It was a great comfort knowing we had someone to rely on in troublesome times. Your support was a great help."</i>

9. Complaints received in 2024/25

A total of 27 complaints were received during 2024/25. The number of complaints received has increased by 1 from the previous year.

Of the 27 complaints received, 2 complaints were resolved within 24 hours and 6 complaints were not considered further, leaving 19 complaints investigated. This is an increase of 3 complaints investigated from the previous year.

Of the 6 complaints not considered further, this was because:

- 2 complaints were withdrawn by the complainants and therefore not considered any further;
- 1 complaint was not accepted for investigation because the Council was not satisfied the representative making the complaint was acting in the deceased person's best interests;
- 1 complaint was not accepted for investigation because the person making the complaint was not eligible to do so;
- 1 complaint was withdrawn by the Council when the complainant did not communicate further despite repeated efforts by the Council to engage with the complainant; and
- 1 complaint was not accepted for investigation because the matters being complained about needed to follow the adult safeguarding procedure rather than the complaints procedure.

Of the 19 complaints investigated in 2024/25:

- 3 complaints were received directly from the person concerned;
- 5 complainants who signed their consent for someone else to represent them and act on their behalf in the matter of the complaint;
- 4 complainants represented a deceased relative in bringing their complaint; and
- 7 complainants represented someone who lacked mental capacity within the meaning of the Mental Capacity Act 2005, 1 of whom chose to have a Solicitor represent them with their complaint.

There was 1 of the 19 complaints investigated which spanned both health and adult social care. In this case, a joint response to the complainant from the relevant NHS health body and adult social care was sent to the complainant in accordance with statutory complaint regulations.

Complaints which are assessed upon receipt and determined to be complex are usually investigated by someone independent of the Council. This adds credibility and demonstrates accountability in the complaint handling process. In 2024/25, 3 of the 19 complaints investigated were allocated to an independent investigator, 15 complaints were investigated and responded internally, and the remaining complaint was responded to by a contracted care provider acting on the Council's behalf.

The table below shows a breakdown of the complaints received by service area together with comparative data for the previous 2 years.

Service area	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23
Older Persons (including User Property and Finance)	12	10	10
Young Adult Transition and Learning Disability	2	1	1
Occupational Therapy (including Reablement)	1	4	5

Preventative Mental Health, AMHP, DoLs and Adult Safeguarding functions	6	3	4
Commissioned Services	6	8	4
Carers	0	0	0
Total number of complaints received	27	26	24

Of the 27 complaints received in 2024/25, 12 complaints were received within the older person's service followed by 6 complaints within the mental health/adult safeguarding area and 6 complaints about commissioned services. There were 2 complaints received in the learning disability service area, leaving 1 complaint within Occupational Therapy.

Whilst complaints received about the older person's and learning disability services have slightly increased within the past year, complaints received about mental health/adult safeguarding service areas have doubled whereas complaints received about occupational therapy and commissioned services have decreased. There have been no complaints received from carers year on year.

Of the 19 complaints investigated in 2024/25, 18 complaints have concluded the adult social care complaints procedure and 1 complaint remains ongoing which will be carried forward to 2025/26.

10. Complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2024/25

There were 5 complainants who referred their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2024/25. Of these:

- 2 of the 5 complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman had been investigated internally in 2024/25. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decided not to investigate the complaints. This was because in 1 complaint they found that it was unlikely that further investigation would find evidence of fault or injustice and, in the other complaint, that an investigation would not lead to any different findings or outcomes;
- 1 of the 5 complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2024/25 had been investigated by someone independent of the Council in 2023/24. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decided to investigate the complaint but they found no fault with the Council's actions;
- 1 of the 5 complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman was responded to by a care provider acting on the Council's behalf in 2024/25. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decided not to investigate the complaint because they found an investigation would not lead to any different findings or outcomes; and
- In the case of the remaining complaint, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decided that as there was an ongoing independent complaint investigation which the Council had commissioned, it was not proportionate for the Ombudsman to also consider the complaint at the same time.

11. Actions and improvements from complaints investigated in 2024/25

An integral part of complaints management is ensuring that when service delivery failures are identified, proportionate and timely action is taken to remedy any personal injustice to the complainant and action is taken to improve the quality of service being provided.

The table below provides some examples of the complaints received during the reporting period and the actions taken as a result.

Complaint	Actions taken
<p>The complainant was unhappy with the delay she had encountered between the completion of an assessment and the implementation of the support plan.</p> <p>The complaint was investigated by a Head of Service.</p>	<p>The Head of Service met with the complainant and investigated the matters she raised. An apology was provided to the complainant because it was found the time needed to implement the direct payment arrangements (a named Personal Assistant) had not been explained clearly or interim commissioned services offered whilst the direct payment was being arranged. The complainant was grateful for the apology and explanation provided.</p> <p>As a result of the complaint, staff were reminded to ensure that when a delay is likely (when exceptional circumstances within a Support Plan requires senior management approval), families are made aware of the steps that need to be undertaken and the implications of this so they can make informed interim decisions.</p>

<p>The complainant was unhappy with aspects of his family member's care. The complaint was investigated internally.</p>	<p>A face-to-face discussion with the complainant was arranged which allowed for a meaningful conversation to take place and a resolution was found which the complainant expressed his satisfaction with.</p> <p>The approach of a face-to-face discussion to try and resolve the matters was welcomed by the complainant who expressed that he had felt listened to.</p>
<p>The complainant raised a number of concerns about his interactions with adult social care staff with regards to his mother's assisted technology.</p> <p>The complaint was investigated by a Head of Service.</p>	<p>Having investigated the matters raised, the Head of Service found that whilst the adult social care had offered advice and information they believed to be correct, this had not always been accurate. An apology as well as an acknowledgment of the frustration this had caused was made to the complainant. The Head of Service addressed the inaccurate information that had been given directly with the staff members concerned.</p> <p>Additionally, as a training and learning opportunity, the scenario being complained about was used as an anonymous example within the relevant service area's team meeting.</p>

12. Conclusion

The Council's adult social care will continue to monitor its complaint handling process and performance so that we can further improve the experience of someone making a complaint and continue to make every complaint count as a learning opportunity to improve the quality of its adult social care services.