



Hartlepool
Borough Council

**ANNUAL REPORT OF
ADULT SOCIAL CARE
COMPLAINTS AND
COMPLIMENTS
2025/26**

1. Introduction

In accordance with the Local Authority Social Services and NHS Complaints (England) Regulations 2009, this annual report covers the complaints received about adult social care services during the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. Compliments about adult social care services are 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 adult social care complaints adjudicated upon by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman during the reporting period; and
- The action taken and improvements made to adult social care services following complaint investigations.

The Council's adult social care service encourages and welcomes compliments and complaints as a means of continual assessment of the services provided. 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 adult social care services. Complaint outcomes provide evidence of the action taken to learn from the complaints received and drive continual improvement.

2. What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about any aspect of an adult social care service that is being delivered, or the failure to deliver a service. The Council defines a complaint as:

'An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, action or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals.'

3. Who can make a complaint about adult social care services?

A complaint can be made by:



- A person who receives or has received a service;
- A person who has been refused a service 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;
- Someone acting on the person's behalf (including acting on behalf of a child); 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.

4. How can someone make a complaint about adult social care services?

There are several ways someone can make a complaint. A complaint can be made:

- Verbally, in person or by telephone;
- In writing, by letter;
- Electronically, by email; or
- By filling in the online complaint form through the Council's website.

During 2025/26, 68% of complaints were received electronically. The method of contact used was:

- 36% of complaints received were from someone who used the online electronic complaint form;
- 32% of complaints received were from someone by email;
- 24% of complaint received were from someone who posted a complaint form or letter; and
- 8% of complaints were received from someone who telephoned to make a complaint.



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.

5. Adult Social Care Statutory Complaint Procedure

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 staff responding to complaints.

The adult social care complaint 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 central to the complaint 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 Council's adult social care complaint 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.

Staff and service providers acting on behalf of the Council will always try to resolve problems or concerns early before they escalate into complaints and this ensures that, wherever possible, complaints are kept to a minimum.

The Local Authority Social Services and NHS 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 the Council's adult social care and NHS bodies to coordinate the handling of complaints received across their respective jurisdictions and provide a joint response.
- Allows for a service provider to respond to a complaint on behalf of the Council under these regulations.
- Sets a mandatory timescale of 3 working days to acknowledge receipt of a complaint;
- Allows for a maximum 6-month timescale to investigate and respond to a complaint; and
- Sets out that a complaint made orally and resolved to the complainant's satisfaction not later than the next working day after the complaint was made is not required to be dealt with under the statutory complaint regulations.

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 provide the complainant with an indication of the timescale for responding to the complaint wherever possible.

There are a range of factors that can impact upon a timescale such as whether the complaint spans more than one body, 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 complaint procedure, the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome 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 investigate 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.

6. Complaints received about adult social care in 2025/26

26 complaints were received during 2025/26. The number of complaints has decreased by 1 from the previous year.

Of the 26 complaints received, 3 complaints made orally were resolved within 24 hours so were not required to be considered further. Of the remaining 23 complaints, 8 complaints were not considered further, leaving 15 complaints investigated. This represents a decrease of 4 complaints investigated compared to the previous year.

Of the 8 complaints not considered further, this was because:

- 3 complaints were withdrawn by the complainants and were therefore not considered any further;
- 3 complaints were not accepted because the complainants were making their complaint to the wrong organisation. The complainants were



signposted to the organisations responsible for the subject matter being complained about;

- 1 complaint was not accepted for investigation because the matters being complained about needed to follow adult safeguarding procedures rather than the complaints procedure; and
- 1 complaint was not accepted for investigation because the person making the complaint did not have the signed written consent to act on behalf of the person who was eligible to make the complaint.

Of the 15 complaints investigated in 2025/26:

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

There was 1 complaint, from the 15 complaints accepted for investigation in 2025/26, which spanned 2 NHS bodies as well as adult social care. Statutory complaint regulations set out that NHS bodies and adult social care have 'a duty to co-operate' and provide a joint response to a complainant. The co-ordination in relation to this complaint has been led by adult social care.

Complaints are assessed upon receipt and those which are 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 2025/26, 1 of the 15 complaints investigated was allocated to an independent investigator and the remaining 14 complaints have been investigated internally.

Of the 15 complaints accepted for investigation in 2025/26, 14 have concluded the adult social care complaint procedure, and those complainants have been informed of their right to progress their complaint onto the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman should they remain dissatisfied. The 1 remaining complaint from 2025/26 remains ongoing and has been carried forward to 2026/27.



The table below shows a breakdown of the complaints received by service area in 2025/26 together with the comparative data for the previous 2 years.

Service Area	2025/26	2024/25	2023/24
Older People (including User Property and Finance)	12	12	10
Young Adult Transition and Learning Disability	4	2	1
Occupational Therapy (including Reablement)	1	1	4
Preventative Mental Health, AMHP, DoLS and safeguarding functions	2	6	3
Commissioned Services	3	6	8
Carers	1	0	0
Complaints made to the wrong organisation	3	0	0
Total number of complaints received	26	27	26

The table below provides some examples of the complaints received during 2025/26 and the actions taken as a result.

Complaint	Actions taken
The complainant was concerned that he had paid for a care service he had not received or agreed to.	The Team Manager spoke to the complainant who outlined the support he had received from the commissioned care provider. The Team Manager reviewed records and agreed the support which the complainant had received and agreed to was non chargeable and he should not have been charged for the support. An apology was made to the complainant and a refund provided.



The complainant expressed their dissatisfaction about information having been shared inappropriately.	The complaint was investigated internally by a Head of Service. It was found that information had been shared, as expressed by the complainant, who had a reasonable expectation that their information would not be shared. An apology, as well as an acknowledgement for the frustration caused, was made to the complainant. As a result of the complaint, the Head of Service addressed matters with the staff member concerned to enable reflective practice and guidance was given.
The complainant was unhappy about a lack of care and support provided to their family member following a hospital discharge.	A face-to-face discussion was held between the complainant and the Head of Service which allowed for a meaningful conversation to take place about the family's experience of the service their family member received. The investigation found that changes to the family member's health should have prompted a reassessment at the point of hospital discharge rather than a restart of the family member's previous care and support package. An apology was provided to the family and learning was identified and shared across adult social care and health.



The complainant outlined that the cost of his relative's care home had not been clearly explained or communicated to him.	The complaint was investigated by relevant Team Managers. Although explanations had been provided and communicated at various stages of the care management and financial assessment processes, it was recognised that the explanations could have caused some confusion. This had been compounded further by an error made by the care home which was subsequently rectified. An apology was provided for the confusion which had been caused, and options were explored to improve the quality of communication with families about financial matters.
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7. Complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman about adult social care in 2025/26

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is the independent body that investigates complaints about Councils. The Council received no contact or enquiry from the Ombudsman about its adult social care services during 2025/26.

8. Compliments received in 2025/26

During 2025/26, 50 compliments were recorded relating to adult social care services. This is an increase of 18 from the previous year.

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 real difference to people's 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 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>
Handyperson Service	<i>"I booked the handy person service to adjust doors and to fit a shelf and I cannot praise the service enough. Your handy person was a credit to the service, he was prompt, professional, extremely helpful and I could not fault anything. He truly represented this service and should be highly commended."</i>
Direct Care and Support	<i>"We would like to thank all you girls for the help and support we have received over the past few weeks. You've all been great. I know my mam will miss you all as not only have you helped with her day-to-day tasks you've all been great company and lifted her spirits when she has been low."</i>
Occupational Therapy	<i>"What a joy being able to enjoy a bath again which certainly enhances the quality of my life. I find it easy to use and so beneficial. I would like to thank you and all the OT team for the professional and friendly manner you have handled my case, I'm a very satisfied service user indeed."</i>



Social Work Team	<i>"I am writing to formally express my sincere gratitude and admiration for the outstanding care and professionalism demonstrated by "D" in her role as a social worker for my grandad and my uncle.</i> <i>I want to highlight the consistently warm, friendly and caring manner in which "D" conducts herself. Every interaction I have has with her has left me feeling reassured that both my grandad and uncle are in safe hands. She communicates clearly, listens attentively, and treats both cases with genuine respect and empathy.</i> <i>It is no secret that social workers do not always receive the recognition that they deserve, and the profession can sometimes attract unwarranted criticism. It seems right then for me to take the time to acknowledge "D". She is clearly an exceptional social worker, taking her responsibilities seriously, going above and beyond what is required, and bringing a genuine sense of care to everything she does. She is, without question, a tremendous asset to your team."</i>
Preventative Mental Health Team	<i>"I just wanted to let you know what "D" has done for my family in the last year or so. To that end "D" 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 piece 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>

9. Conclusions

The Council's adult social care service will continue to:

- promote the Adult Social Care Complaint Procedure;
- monitor its complaint handling process and performance; and
- record compliments which reflect the quality of adult social care services.



This allows the Council's adult social care service to 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 services.

The compliments received not only reflect the positive contribution adult social care services have made to people living healthier, safe and independent lives but also serve to demonstrate that quality standards are being met.

