

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: ALL
REPORT TITLE London Borough of Camden Children's Statutory Services Complaints Report 2024/2025	
REPORT FROM Director of Relational Practice, Children and Learning	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Children's, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee	DATE 10 November 2025
SUMMARY OF REPORT This report provides information about complaints made to the Children's statutory services in the London Borough of Camden during the twelve months between 1 st April 2024 and 31 st March 2025. It is a statutory requirement to produce an annual report which is published on the Council's website. Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report. Contact Officer: Rachel Greene Service Manager for Quality Assurance and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) 5 Pancras Square, London N1C 4AG Tel: 020 7974 1072 Email: Rachel.greene@camden.gov.uk	
RECOMMENDATION The Committee is asked to consider and note the contents of the report.	



Signed:

Nana Bonsu
 Director of Relational Practice

Date: 28th October 2025

1. Introduction and Background

Purpose of the report

- 1.1 This is the London Borough of Camden's Children's statutory services annual complaints report for the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025. The purpose of this report is for the Committee to scrutinise data and information relating to complaints received about Camden's Children's statutory services during this period, and to provide feedback on the themes, learning and improvements identified, as well as the effectiveness of Camden's approach to responding to and learning from complaints.

Scope of the report

- 1.2 Many representations, comments and complaints are dealt with informally by practitioners and managers every day without the need for the formal complaints process to be followed. Practitioners are encouraged to try to resolve children's and families' dissatisfaction as an integral part of practice, drawing upon relational skills. These are not formally logged or reported on; however, children services continually use this information to improve service delivery.
- 1.3 The report focuses not only on volumes and timeliness of responses but also identifies themes and lessons learnt that result in service improvements.
- 1.4 Learning from complaints contributes to the ambitions in **We Make Camden**:
- Camden is a borough where every child has the best start in life.
 - Camden's local economy should be strong, sustainable, and inclusive everyone should have a secure livelihood to support them to live a prosperous life.
 - Camden actively tackles injustice and inequality, creating safe, strong and open communities where everyone can contribute.
 - Camden communities support good health, wellbeing and connection for everyone so that they can start well, live well, and age well.
 - Everyone in Camden should have a place they call home Camden should be a green, clean, vibrant, accessible, and sustainable place with everyone empowered to contribute to tackling the climate emergency

2. The Complaints Procedure

- 2.1 Camden Council has a single policy and procedure for managing all complaints entering the council, which is situated in Corporate Services and includes all Social Services complaints. This single policy was reviewed, and a new version published in July 2024.
- 2.2 Stage 1 (local resolution) is dealt with by the Team Managers and Service Managers responsible for the service. The emphasis is on trying to reach a resolution. If a resolution is not reached, the complainant has the right to escalate matters to stage 2 (review).
- 2.3 Stage 2 (Review) complaints for children's statutory social care services are handled by an independent investigator. The whole process is overseen and monitored by the complaints service.
- 2.4 Stage 3 is where an independent review is conducted by a panel of professionals and senior managers from the service in which the complaint is from.
- 2.5 The scope of complaints data collection for children services has been updated to now include the Early Help teams. As we move towards the recommendations of the children's national

reforms, Early Help and statutory children's services will be one service called Family Help. Currently both services are situated within the same directorate, Children and Learning. In May 2024 a decision was made to send the complaints for Early Help to the Children Services Social Work (CSSW) complaint's inbox, to enable a comprehensive overview of all complaints that come into children's services.

- 2.6 Currently managers and senior managers meet with children and families, hold appreciative enquiries and gather feedback to resolve complaints, so they do not escalate to the formal process, this in turn maintains a positive relationship between the complainant and children's social care. However, when there is no resolution at this level the complaint escalates to a formal process.
- 2.7 In the revised July 2024 guidance a key change to the process is the introduction of a summary text box. The complainant now receives a summary box that clearly sets out the respondent's understanding of the complaint and specifies the issues that will be addressed in the response. The complainant should receive this within 5 working days of raising their complaint. The changes are made to be in line with the ombudsman guidance for managing complaints.

3. Context – Service provision in 2024/2025

- 3.1 The Children's Social Care teams provide a statutory social work service to support families, protect children and care for looked after children.
- 3.2 We have a duty to help any child under the age of 18 years who lives in the borough and who are defined as 'in need' by the Children Act (1989). This means:
 - a) They are unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services by a local authority under this Part.
 - b) Their health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for them of such services; or
 - c) They are disabled,
- 3.3 Both Children's Social Care and the Early Help provision start at the front door. In 2024-2025 there were 8,583 contacts to Camden children's social care an increase on last year, however, the number of referrals received, and child and family assessments completed has decreased in statutory children's services in the last year. This is indicative of the number of families being supported by Early help as a first line response.

Despite the high volume of contacts to children's services the complaints received at stage 1, make up less than 1% of the contacts received. The complaints raised to children social care are not exclusively from open cases however the vast majority are. This demonstrates how well practitioners work to build positive relationships with the children and families they work with, so that together they can resolve any issues that arise.

4. Overview of Complaints Data 2024-2025

Stage 1 complaints

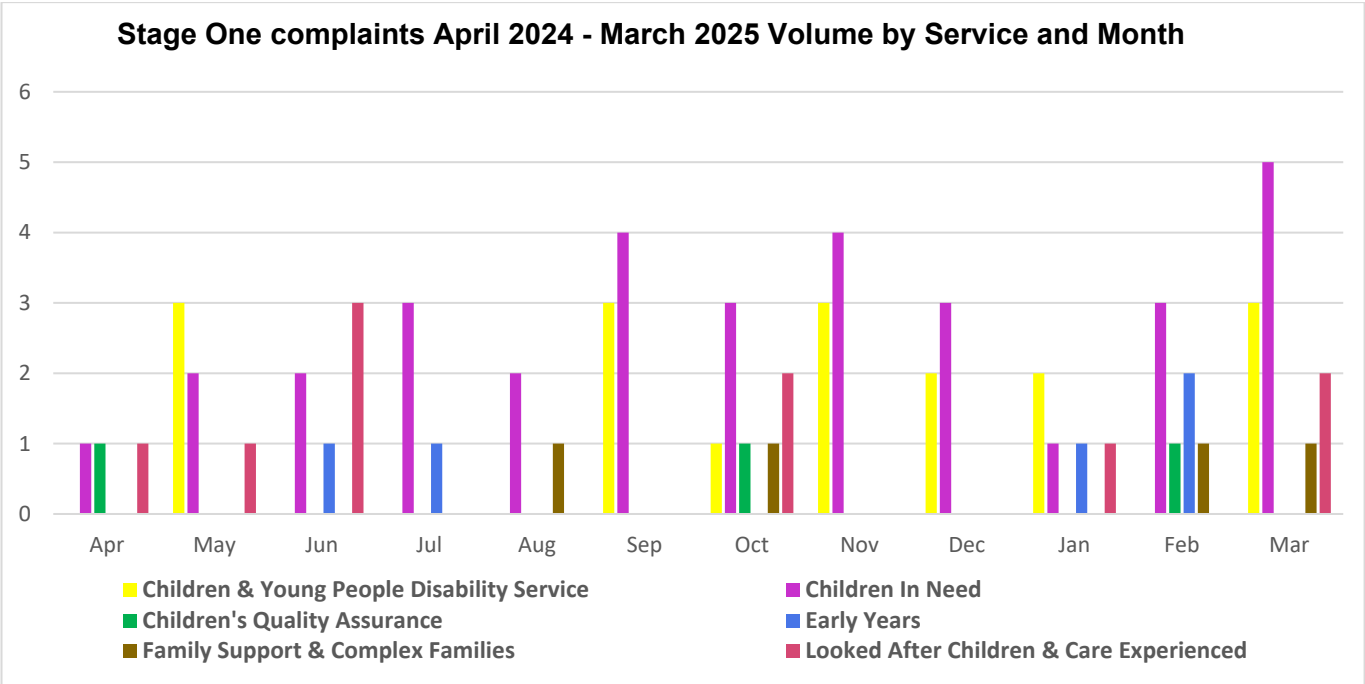
- 4.1 A total of 63 complaints relating to children's social services were processed through the formal Stage 1 procedure during the 2024/2025 period, which is an increase of 20 complaints (46.51%) compared to 2023/2024. This rise may reflect growing public awareness of the right to raise concerns, supported by Corporate Services' introduction of updated, easy to read

procedures. In addition, responding to complaints in a timely way has improved, demonstrating a more open and responsive system that takes complaints seriously and values citizen's participation.

4.2 The table below provides an overview of the last 5 years of complaints received into children services. The complaints upheld at stage 1, the percentage of the complaints upheld, the percentage of the complaints responded to within 10 days, and the percentage of all complaints responded to within 20 working days*. This period is shown as it is in line with the corporate requirements for managing and responding to complaints in Camden.

Year	Stage 1	Stage 1 upheld	% upheld	Stage 1 % within 10 days	Stage 1 % within 1-20 days*
2024/2025	63	17	27%	38%	65%
2023/2024	43	2	5%	9%	16%
2022/2023	29	0	0%	14%	21%
2021/2022	43	2	5%	7%	23%
2020/2021	49	1	2%	20%	33%

* = total cases responded to between 1 day and 20 days (includes 1-10 figures), also figures for 24/25 include complaints from Early Help services, which have not been included in previous years.



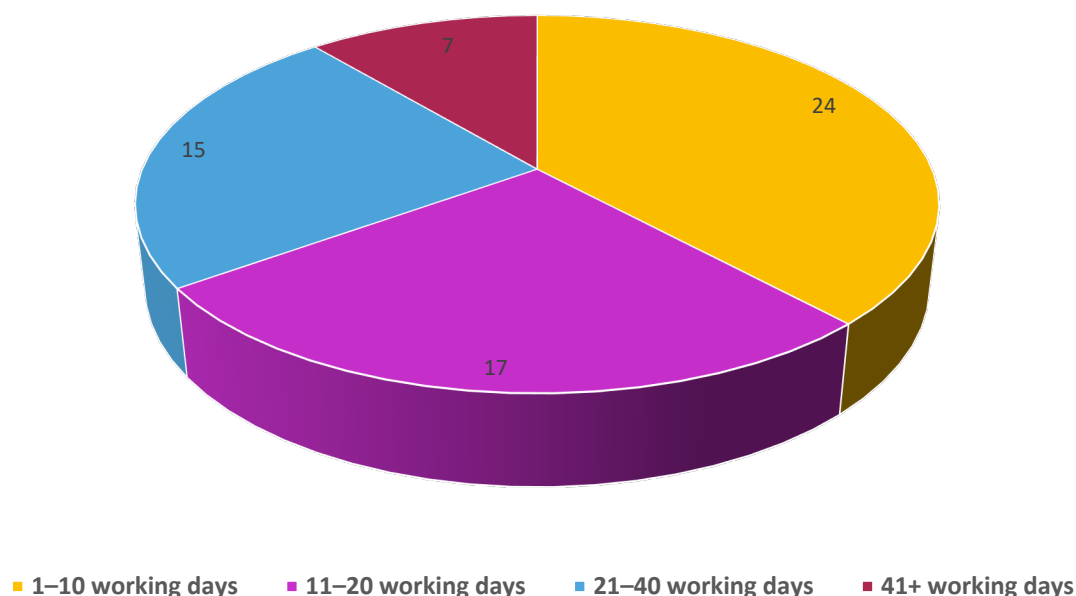
4.3 For this reporting period the highest number of complaints were received for the Child in Need service, with 32 complaints making up 51% of the total. This was followed by 16 complaints (26%) for the Children and Young People with Disabilities service, 7 complaints (12%) for Looked After Children and Care Experienced service, 4 complaints (7%) for the Early Years services, and 2 complaints each (4%) for both Family Support and Complex Families, and the Children's Quality Assurance service.

4.4 The child in need service consistently has the highest number of complaints through the years, the service has the most cases per team and have more contact with families during periods of high distress. The child in need service sees the journey of the child from the first contact with

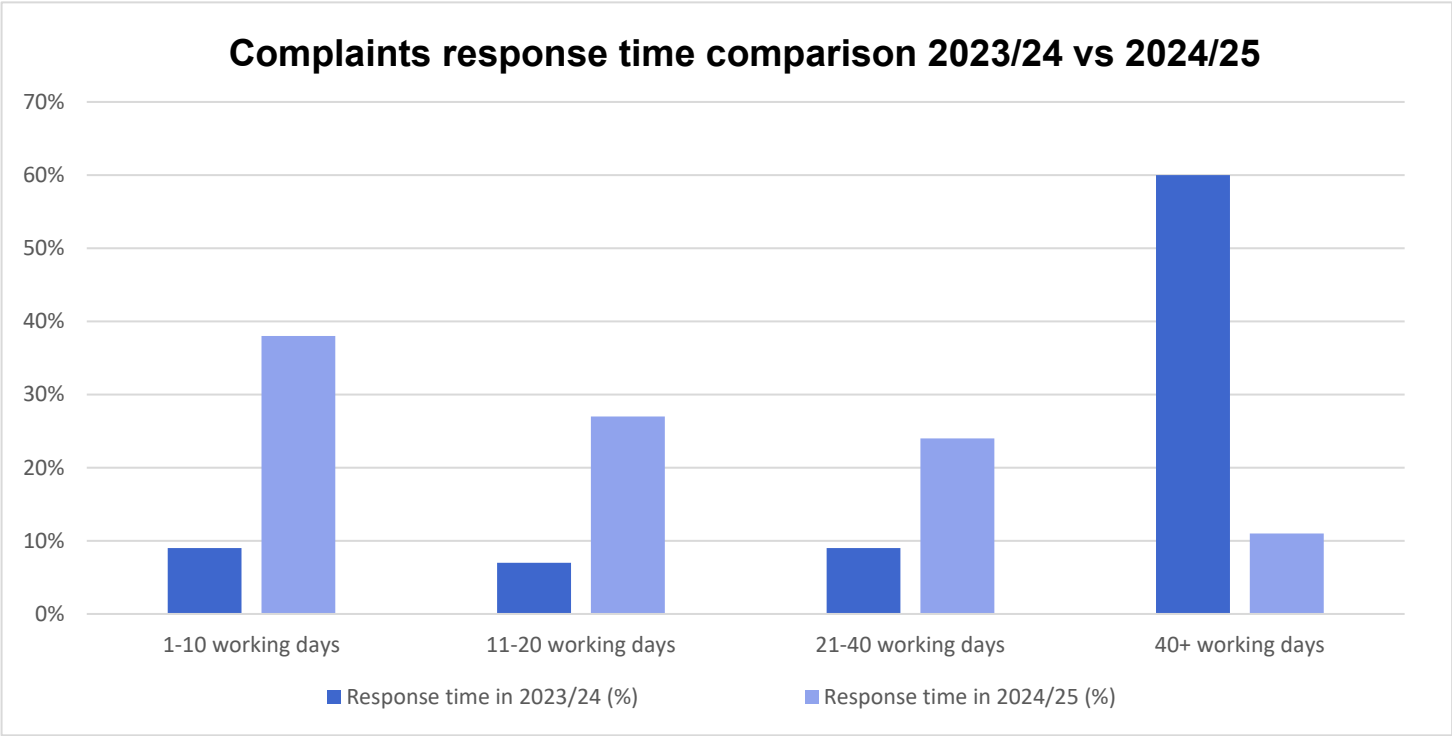
children services to possible escalation to court from section 17, child protection to the public law outline (PLO) and care proceedings. Therefore, challenging conversations and difficult decisions are made in CIN about safety and risk, which leads to some families experiencing dissatisfaction, which leads to scrutiny and gaps between expectations and outcomes.

- 4.5 There has been a significant (nearly 50%) increase in complaints raised against the Children and Young People with Disabilities Service (CYPDS) compared to the previous year. This rise is likely linked to the increase in referrals, demand/change in need and complexity experienced by CYPDS in the financial year 24/25. 419 children under 18 are being supported in 2024/2025 compared to 317 for the same cohort and period 2023/2024. The change in need amongst disabled children and their complex health needs, means that commissioned provision is limited most likely contributing to the rise in complaints.
- 4.6 The table below shows a peak in complaints in March and less complaints in the summer months. This pattern possibly reflects the school holidays as families are less likely to raise issues during school breaks or while they are on holiday. The complaints rise again in September to October when schools reopen, at which time potentially new referrals are made, and families re-engage with interventions and support. A comparison on last year will provide more insight into the reasons for this trend.

Stage One Performance and Response Time



- 4.7 Children's Services have shown clear improvement in responding to complaints more promptly this year. Of all complaints received, 38% were answered within 1-10 working days, 27% within 11-20 days, 24% within 21-40 days, and 11% of complainants waited for more than 40 working days for a response to their complaint. Although there are improvements to be made this marks a significant step forward in ensuring complainants receive timely responses and reflects a more efficient and responsive complaints process.

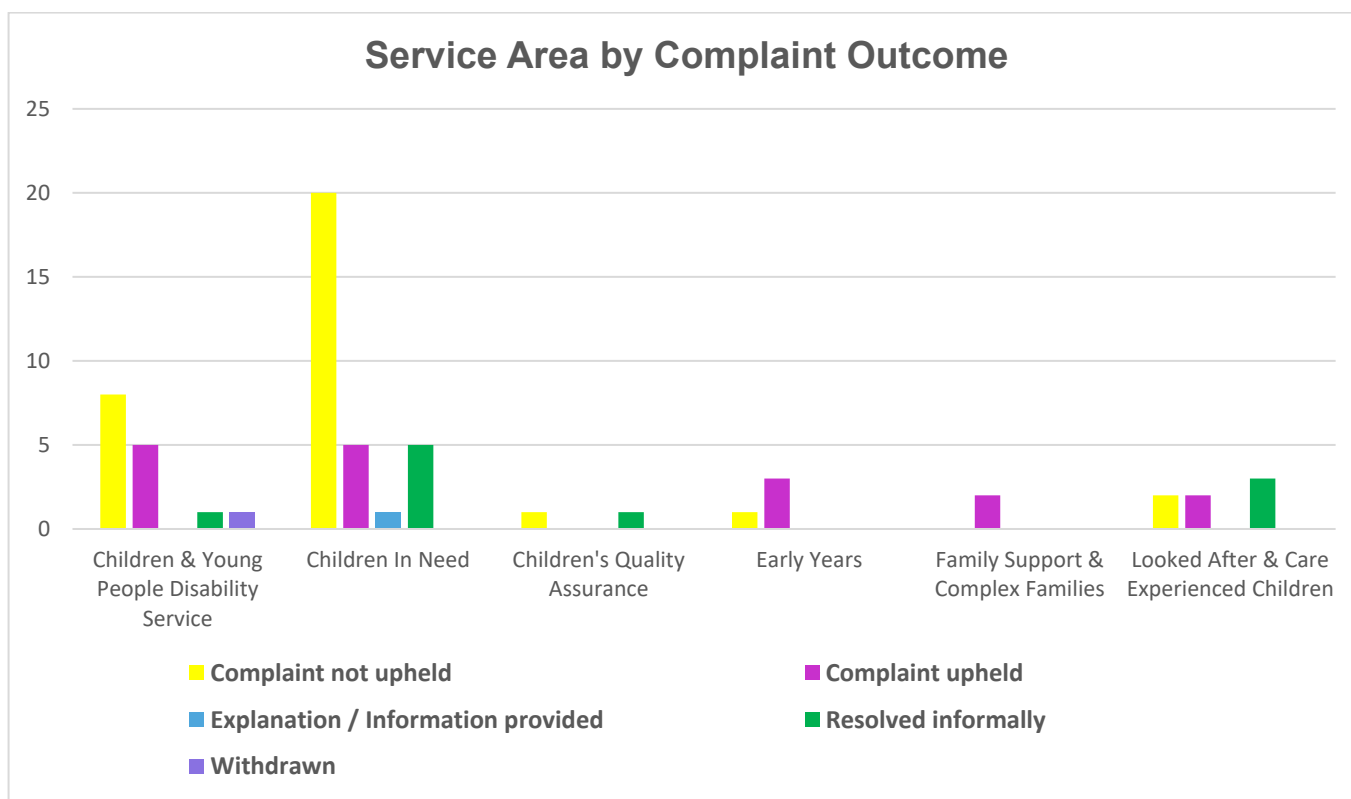


- 4.8 The regulations provide a deadline of 10 working days for the council to conclude complaints at Stage 1 (local resolution). However, this may be extended to 20 working days if the complaint is complex, and the council requires more time to investigate. This extension is legitimate if the complainant is kept informed of the extension and communication is maintained with the complainant until the full response is provided.
- 4.9 The table shows 65% of complaints were responded to within 1- 20 days, which is a significant improvement on last year where 16% of citizens were receiving answers to their complaints in 1- 20 working days. The table above demonstrates that the system implemented 16 months ago to improve complaint response times has been effective in addressing previously identified challenges. The Corporate Complaints Team and the Quality Assurance Service have a more cohesive and collaborative working relationship, which has improved understanding. Additionally, Children's Services now maintain their own internal record of complaints received via their inbox, which has enhanced oversight and strengthened governance of complaints data within the service. There are still several complainants waiting more than 41 days for a response. This is where the complaint crosses over more than one department and requires a collective response. This cohort also have a number of citizens who have complained on more than one occasion about the same or similar issues and there are meetings that are taking place with the complainant to try and address this.

5. Types of complaints at Stage 1 by service area

Service	Lack of Communication	Disagree with a decision/action	Quality of Service	Lack of Information/ Advice/ Access to service	Staff behaviour/ poor customer service	Delay in providing a service	Safeguarding and Child Wellbeing	TOTAL
Children Looked After and Care Experienced	2 (4)	1 (2)	2 (1)	(1)	2 (1)	(0)	(0)	7 (9)
Children In Need	(11)	4 (6)	6 (4)	2 (1)	11 (1)	0	9 (0)	32 (23)
Children and young people with Disabilities	1 (3)	3 (1)	4 (0)	(1)	4 (0)	4 (1)	(0)	16 (6)
Quality Assurance	(3)	2 (0)	(2)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	2 (5)
Early Years	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	4
Family Support and Complex families	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
TOTAL (23/24 total in brackets)	3 (21)	10 (9)	14 (7)	2 (3)	17 (2)	5 (1)	9 (0)	63 (43)

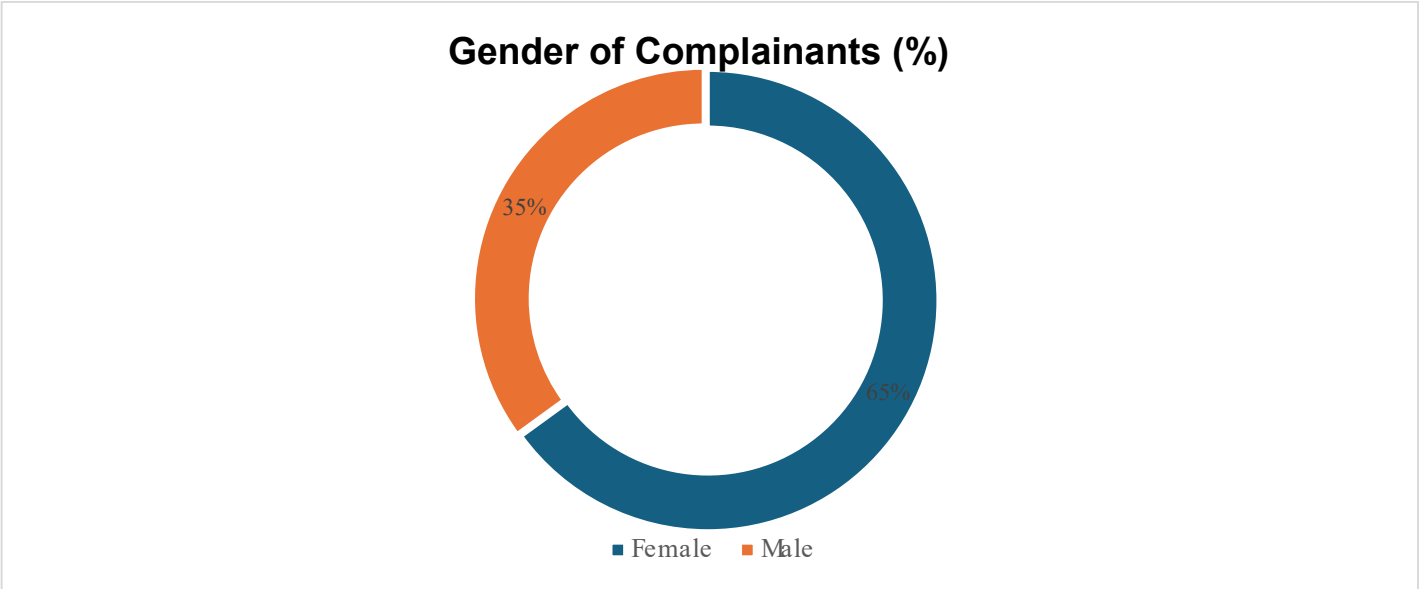
- 5.1 The headings above are called Enquiry Type's on the complaint's dashboard. This is selected by the complainant from a drop-down list on the complaint's dashboard, which serves more as a title than an accurate reflection of the issue. This year, there's been a noticeable shift in complaint themes, with a decline in concerns about poor communication between practitioners and families. While it is a positive sign that last year's feedback has led to meaningful improvements there has been an increase in complaints about staff behaviour and customer service rising from 2 to 17. The complaints under these categories include issues such as parents feeling unheard, mistrust, limited collaboration, and disagreements of care plans and childcare arrangements.
- 5.2 In the table above we can see the complaints relating to the quality of service doubled, rising from 7 to 14. The complaints under the Safeguarding and Child Wellbeing heading, which did not have a value in 2023/24, emerged this year with 9 cases. Here are some examples of the complaints raised in these areas: families said the practitioners are causing them distress, practitioners have shared information with family members or ex-partners without consent, and one complainant said they felt coerced into signing a written agreement. A complainant raised that a practitioner sided with wider family members when making decisions about a child's welfare. The Children and Young People with Disabilities service also saw an increase in the range of complaints, with issues including delays in service provision, staff behaviour, and the overall quality of the service.
- 5.3 Some of the issues raised by complainants last year have not reoccurred this year showing that learning is being embedded into practice. However, while progress is evident, areas for improvement remain. These are being addressed through team and service meetings, as well as practice and leadership forums that are focused on navigating difficult conversations and embracing feedback.
- 5.4 It is noted that there is a lower number of complaints raised this year by the Looked After Children and Care experienced in Camden. This is due to developments in resolving more complaints outside of the formal complaints process.



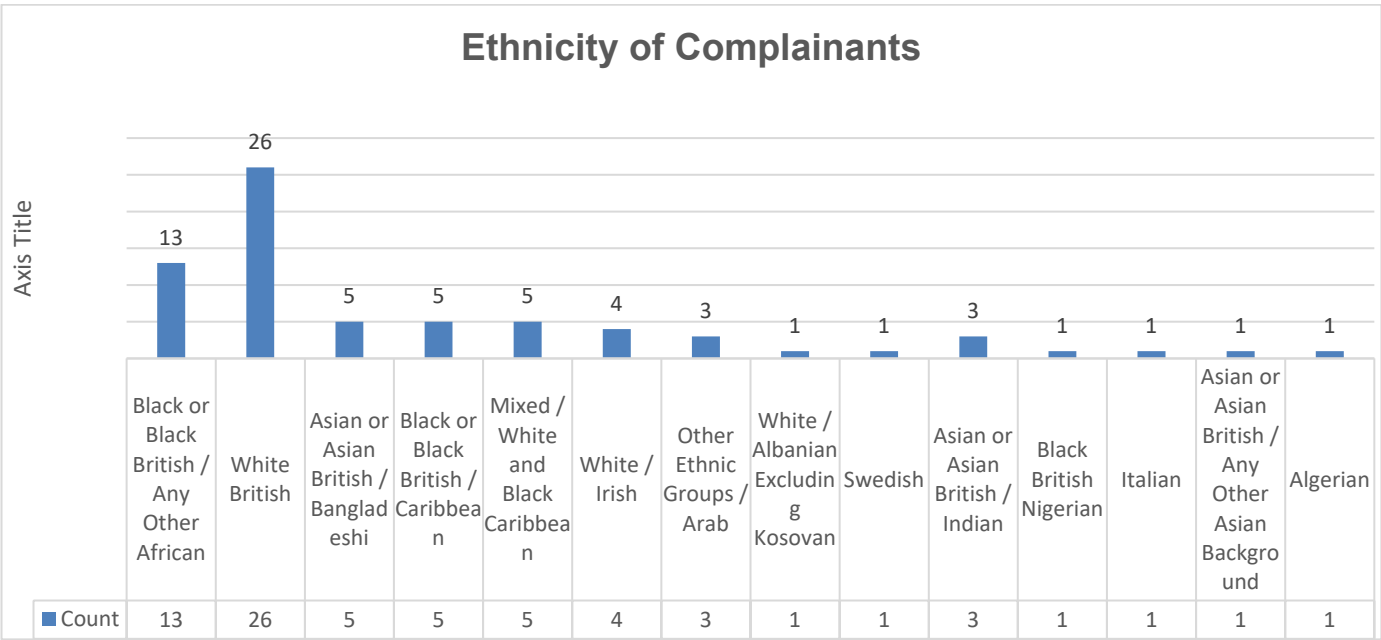
- 5.5 Above are the outcomes provided to the complainant at stage 1 for 2024/2025. 53% of the complaints raised in the last year were not upheld, 28% upheld, 16% were resolved informally meaning a remedy was found before the complaint was answered formally, 1.5% of the complaints offered an explanation to the complaint about decisions made and 1.5% of the complaints were withdrawn.
- 5.6 The information shows that over half of Stage 1 complaints were not upheld. The majority of these relate to complaints relating to staff behaviour and disagreements with decisions made. These areas are often subjective and, in most cases, lack the recorded evidence necessary to substantiate or unsubstantiate such claims. As a result, there is insufficient evidence to uphold the complaint. However, all complaints about staff conduct are taken seriously and issues are addressed as part of 1:1 supervision. This is helpful and provides a space for the practitioner and manager to reflect on the practitioners conduct and approach even when the complaints are not upheld.
- 5.7 When analysing the complaints about service quality it was found that changes in service provision led to most of the complaints under this category. Families who had previously received a certain type of support such as care packages, found adjusting to limitations on resources a challenge which in some cases has led to dissatisfaction even though services were still sufficiently meeting their needs. This context explains the high proportion of complaints not upheld and highlights the importance of practitioners being realistic and transparent about potential changes in provision and discussions about where else they may be able to receive the support.
- 5.8 It was anticipated that the corporate complaints team would update the dashboard to include demographic data on complainants as part of the system upgrade in July 2024. However, this proposal was not taken forward, as concerns were raised that collecting such information could be perceived as discriminatory and potentially marginalise individuals engaging with the complaints process.
- 5.9 In response, the Children's Services complaints team took the initiative to begin collating demographic data. This approach aims to better understand who is accessing the complaints process and, importantly, to identify and support groups who are underrepresented. By doing so,

children services are working to promote inclusivity, strengthen collaboration, and ensure that all voices especially those we hear from less are actively encouraged and supported to participate. The challenge is the data is collated from Mosaic; the recording system used in the service, is reliant on the accuracy of what is recorded by practitioners.

6. It is not currently possible to provide data relating to disability or sexual orientation of complainants, as there is no current standardised method for collection of this special category. The **following ethnicity and gender*** data has been obtained.



*Gender refers to what is recorded from the mosaic system rather than self-determination.



7. The ethnicity of the complainants has been sourced manually by checking the children services intergrated system called Mosaic, the information shows that the demographic that raises the most complaints are white, followed by black British citizens. Although there is no current comparative data on last year, this information is proportionally accurate to the families we work with in Camden.

8. The themes from stage 1 complaints and how these will be included in the learning across Children Services.

We recognise that complaints are a valuable source of feedback from the children and families we work with, and we welcome them as an opportunity to reflect, improve, and strengthen our service. Recent complaints have highlighted several themes. These include delays and inconsistencies in sharing reports for meetings and reviews with parents, inaccuracies in the information shared in reports, lack of timely support in securing alternative nursery placements, concerns about the information being shared with wider family members or ex-partners. Families have also raised concerns about unmet promises regarding service provision such as vouchers, equipment, or support during holidays and short breaks as well as a desire for more active involvement in interventions and care planning. Additional concerns include staff behaviour, perceived power imbalances, and a lack of clarity around rights and entitlements. Some parents of children with disabilities have expressed the need for better access to structured support, while care experienced children have asked for more responsive support with placements, and transitions.

To ensure we learn from these experiences and embed improvements into our practice, these themes are shared and explored in 1-1 supervision, team and service meetings, and practice leadership forums. These forums provide opportunities for reflective discussion, shared learning, and the development of consistent, relational approaches that promote transparency, trust, and collaboration. By embedding this learning across all levels of the service, we aim to foster a culture of accountability, responsiveness, and continuous improvement ensuring that children and families feel heard, supported, and empowered.

9. Outcomes at Stage 2 by service area

- 9.1 If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, the complainant can request a full investigation (Stage 2), leading to a report. An external Investigating Officer is commissioned, and an independent person is appointed to observe and ensure the investigation is carried out fairly and impartially.
- 9.2 Both the Investigating Officer and Independent Person will submit reports to the Council, making recommendations. A senior officer will then act as Adjudicating Officer and approve a response to the report, either accepting or disputing the findings. These adjudications are prepared by the complaints team with input from the relevant service areas.

Service	Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not Upheld	With drawn	Open/ In Progress	Total
Children and Young People with Disabilities Service (CYPDS)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (2)	3 (1)	5 (3)
Children Looked After & Care Leavers	1 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (1)	0 (1)	1 (2)
Children in Need	0 (1)	0 (0)	4 (1)	2 (2)	5 (0)	11 (4)
Quality Assurance	0 (0)	0 (1)	1 (0)	0 (1)	0 (0)	1 (0)
Family Support and Complex Families	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total (2023/24 total in brackets)	1 (0)	0 (0)	5 (1)	4 (5)	6 (2)	19 (9)

9.3. 19 complaints raised at stage 1 (30%) were not resolved and escalated to stage 2. 1 was upheld, 5 were not upheld, 4 were withdrawn, which means resolutions were found outside of the complaints process and 6 remain open after the 31st of March 25.

10. Children Social Care Summary Stage 2

Children Social Care have a variety of methods to try and resolve complaints at this stage such as having face to face meetings with children and families, holding an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) session, learning from complaints as part of auditing activity, gaining face to face feedback from families, and sharing best practice with the partnership. Children social care ensure that our children looked after have access to advocacy support via Action for Children throughout the complaints process. The emphasis is to continue to work swiftly and robustly to resolve issues. Attending to a relational approach is key, a respectful stance to the children and families we work with as an approach to resolve issues. It remains more important to find a timely suitable resolution to complaints rather than to uphold or not uphold an outcome.

11. Learning Outcomes from Stage 2

- Complainants do not want documents redacted.
- Complainants would like clarity around timescales.
- Disagreements regarding decisions for care planning
- Disagreements about who is informed about the process i.e. father's etc.
- Concerns about timely support.

All the learning outcomes are shared with the workforce through team and service meetings, Practice and Learning forums, and in 1:1 supervision to ensure children's social care are learning from the complaints received.

12. Sources of Complaints

Most of the complaints received are from parents and carers.

13. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

Residents may complain to the LGSCO at any stage of the complaints process. However, the Ombudsman expects the resident to utilise the Council's procedures before they begin their investigation.

14. LGSCO Cases Reviewed for 2024/2025 as per LGSCO report sent to Corporate Services.

The LGSCO made decisions on **6** cases under its category: 'Education and Children's Services'

Decision	Total
Upheld – maladministration & injustice	(1)
Upheld – maladministration no injustice	0 (0)

Not Upheld	0 (0)
Incomplete/Invalid	2 (0)
Closed in 12 months)	0 (1)
Closed (Court proceedings)	1 (1)
Premature (referred to council for local resolution)	3 (7)
TOTAL	6 (10)

Note: B LGSCO Cases for 2023-2024 in brackets

15. Finance Comments of the Director of Finance

The Director of Finance has been consulted and has no comments to add.

16. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

The Council is required by Section 26 of the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 to have a complaints process. The regulations require the Council to produce an annual report as soon as possible at the end of each financial year.

The Council should follow the statutory guidance in relation to children's social care unless exceptional circumstances justify a departure. The statutory guidance requires that the report should cover:

- representations made to the local authority.
- the number of complaints at each stage and any that were considered by the Local Government Ombudsman.
- which customer groups made the complaints.
- the types of complaints made.
- the outcome of complaints.
- details about advocacy services provided under these arrangements.
- compliance with timescales, and complaints resolved within extended timescale as agreed.
- learning and service improvement, including changes to services that have been implemented and details of any that have not been implemented.
- a summary of statistical data about the age, gender, disability, sexual orientation and ethnicity of complainants; and
- a review of the effectiveness of the complaint's procedure

17. Environmental Implications

There are no environmental implications to this report

REPORT ENDS