

Adult Social Care Annual Feedback

Report

1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025

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1. Introduction

This report provides information in respect of the statutory complaints responded to by Adult Social Care during the year 2024 - 2025.

The report has been produced in line with The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 which required an annual report to be prepared which details:

- The number of complaints received and processed by Adult Social Care Services in line with the regulations.
- The outcome of complaints that have been responded to.
- A summary of the subject matter of the complaints, any matter of general importance and improvements that have been made as a result of the complaints.
- The number of complaints which we have been informed have been referred to the Health Service Commissioner to consider under the 1993 Act or the Local Commissioner to consider under the Local Government Act 1974.

2. The Statutory Complaints Procedure

Adult Social Care are required to handle and consider complaints in line with the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 which were introduced in April 2009.

The regulations are based on a single approach across health and adult social care with a single stage providing flexibility for the organisation and the complainant to agree on how their complaint will be handled. In instances where the complainant remains dissatisfied, they are advised they can approach the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Complaints that are formally investigated are investigated by officers from the Customer Insight Team who are independent of the Adult Social Care Directorate. If the desired outcome of a complaint is something that can be resolved without the need for a formal investigation, then Adult Social Care staff will review the concerns raised.

The following types of complaints are not required to be dealt with in accordance with the regulations:

- Complaints made by a responsible body (another local authority, NHS body, primary care provider or independent provider).
- Complaints that are made verbally and are resolved to the complainant's satisfaction no later than the next working day after the day on which the complaint was made.
- A complaint the subject matter of which is the same as that of a complaint that has previously been investigated under the regulations.
- A complaint the subject matter of which is being or has been investigated by a Local Commissioner under the Local Government Act 1974 (a) or a Health Service Commissioner under the 1993 Act.

Complaints must be made no later than 12 months after the date on which the concern in which the subject of the complaint occurred or if later, the date on which the matter which is the subject of the complaint came to the notice of the complainant.

That said the 12-month time limit would not apply if the complaints team are satisfied that the complainant had good reasons for not making the complaint within the time limit and, notwithstanding the delay, it is still possible to investigate the complaint effectively and fairly.

There are no timeframes for responding to complaints stipulated in these regulations. They do, however, state that as soon as reasonably practicable after completing the investigation, a written response should be sent to the complainant. If a response is not issued within a period of six months commencing on the day on which the complaint was received, a longer period may be agreed with the complainant.

3. Complaints received within the reporting period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025

The following table details the number of pieces of feedback dealt with within the reporting period over the last three years:

Year	Annual Total
2022/2023	59
2023/2024	142
2024/2025	147

The number of complaints addressed during 2024 - 2025 increased by five on the previous year.

At the close of the reporting period (31 March 2025) 137 of the 147 complaints received during 2024 - 2025 had been concluded. The data detailed in this report are based on those 137 complaints.

4. Outcomes of Complaints concluded on 31 March 2025

The following table provides details of the outcomes of those 137 complaints received during 2024 – 2025 and concluded by 31 March 2025.

Outcome	Total
Upheld	40
Partially upheld	40
Not upheld	55
Unable to reach conclusion	02
Total	137

5. Subject Matter of Complaints

The categorisation of the subject matter of complaints is undertaken by the Customer Insight Team at the point each complaint is concluded.

It should be noted that whilst 137 complaints were concluded in the period there can be more than one subject matter being complained about.

The top three recorded cause of complaints in this reporting period were:

- Delay in Service Provision
- Quality of Service
- Poor communication/information

The table below provides details of the recorded reason for the complaints during 2024– 2025 as of 31 March 2025.

Subject Matter	Total
Conduct and attitude of staff	42
Customer Interpretation	33
Delay in service provision	53
Dissatisfied with policy	06
Lack of support	08
Poor Communication/Information	44
Poor Response/Investigation	12
Quality of Service	45
Non-adherence to process	14
Service Failure to respond	13
Staff/Team error	11
Lack of Process/Procedure	02
Agreed Actions not completed	08
Staff levels	15
Cost of Service	12
Lack of Training	05
System Failure	03
Unsuitable Process/Procedure	06
Total	332

6. Matters of General Importance arising from complaints received 2024 - 2025

The feedback we receive through complaints continues to provide an invaluable insight to how we can improve our services for the people of Sandwell that meet their needs and expectations.

It should be noted that there will be more key issues as recorded above (332) than complaints concluded (137) as some complainants raise more than one issue.

The table below shows the outcome of each subject matter recorded for those complaints concluded as of 31 March 2025, and whether the complaint was upheld or not.

	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Unable to Reach a Conclusion	Total
Conduct and attitude of staff	10	20	10	02	42
Customer Interpretation	02	13	16	02	33
Delay in service provision	26	13	14	0	53
Dissatisfied with policy	0	02	04	0	06
Lack of support	01	02	05	0	08
Poor Communication/Information	15	19	10	0	44
Poor Response/Investigation	01	02	09	0	12
Quality of Service	12	17	16	0	45
Non-adherence to process	07	05	02	0	14
Service Failure to respond	06	04	03	0	13
Staff/Team error	02	07	02	0	11
Lack of Process/Procedure	0	0	02	0	02
Agreed Actions not completed	02	05	01	0	08
Staff levels	11	03	01	0	15
Cost of Service	02	05	05	0	12
Lack of Training	03	01	01	0	05
System Failure	0	03	0	0	03
Unsuitable Process/Procedure	0	05	01	0	06
Total	100	126	102	04	332

7. Service Improvements from Statutory Complaints 2024 - 2025

As part of an investigation the Investigating Officer is required to identify any recommended future actions or service improvements that are made as a result of the complaint findings. This analysis draws together all the service improvements that were identified during 2024 - 2025.

Review of Information:

- Senior Managers to review the information on Sandwell MBC website regarding Carers Assessment to ensure carers are aware that it is their responsibility to apply each year for their carers assessment.

- To populate Sandwell MBC's website with information as to what they can expect from Adult Social Service if their loved one is being discharged to an EAB placement.

Written reminders to staff:

- Reinforcing the importance of timely responses to emails from service users and their families.
- Importance of sending copies of completed care assessments to service users and their representatives.
- Ensure that carer assessments are offered to all identified carers.
- Reaffirm the timeline for responding to Subject Access Requests.
- Senior Management should issue a written reminder to all managers in relation to adhering to the guidance in place for reporting potential data breaches.
- Reaffirm that staff should aim to address informal complaints in the first instance and not encourage service users to make formal complaints before attempting to resolve the matter informally.

Process reviews:

- Review the Annual Carers Assessments and consider what resources could support clearing this to at least a more manageable level.
- Develop and implement a process to keep people informed when a carers assessment application is received that includes advising the current waiting times.
- Develop a process for managers to follow when they become aware that an employee is either a service user or related to a service user to ensure records are appropriately locked down.

- Consideration of a letter/email template that accompanies the distribution of CHC checklists completed by Sandwell MBC practitioners clearly advising of who the checklist has been shared with and how customers can raise any dissatisfaction with the outcome.

8. Adult Social Care – Director’s response to the Annual Report

We continue to see an increased pressure on adult social care services in Sandwell through growing demand and greater complexity of people’s social care needs. This is the picture nationally, although different areas will have varying pressures depending on their demography. The reasons for this increasing pressure are and complex and multi-faceted. As an example, however, two key drivers are of note:

- ***Increasing demand and complexity of presenting need(s):*** *Sandwell’s population is forecast to grow by 6.1% population by 2040. In line with other parts of England, our population is ageing, with an expected increase of +33.6% in people aged 65+ and, and +50% in people aged 90+ by 2040. Whilst longer life is to be celebrated, many people are likely to spend part of their life with one or more long-term conditions and will require support from health and care services. This is particularly so in areas of relative deprivation, like Sandwell, where people are likely to spend more years of their life in poorer health. Healthy life expectancy in Sandwell is lower than the England average for men at 61.6 (63.1 for England) years and women 60.5 (63.9) years*
- ***Increasing challenges in the workforce market for adult social care.*** *As a service based industry we are reliant upon a stable and experienced workforce to deliver care. Both internally and externally, we are seeing increasing numbers of vacancies and approximately 25% staff turnover.*

Overarching actions underway to address key issues:

Complaints and compliments are a critical source of intelligence for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and are central to understanding the experiences of people who use Adult Social Care. We are proactive in using this feedback to drive improvement, with a continued focus on reducing delays in service provision, strengthening the quality of

practice, and ensuring effective and timely communication with residents. Learning from complaints is systematically shared with frontline staff and formally reported through the Practice Governance Board to ensure it informs practice expectations, service improvement, and policy development across Adult Social Care.

We recognise that changes in allocated workers can undermine continuity for residents and contribute to dissatisfaction. This has been further intensified by reliance on agency staff, who tend to remain in post for shorter periods. To address this, we have strengthened and prioritised the recruitment of permanent social workers, redesigning our advertising approach and delivering targeted recruitment campaigns to stabilise teams and improve consistency for service users.

At a regional level, the West Midlands Memorandum of Commitment on agency social worker pay represents a significant step towards creating a more sustainable workforce market. This approach is already delivering positive impact; since its introduction in October 2025, a number of long-term agency staff have been successfully appointed into permanent roles, supporting workforce stability and increasing customer satisfaction.

Our ambition is to enable residents in Sandwell to live the lives they choose, maximising independence and autonomy wherever possible. Where complaints relate to practitioner practice, this is most often linked to style, approach, and relationship-based working. In response, we have embedded a strengths-based approach across Adult Social Care, ensuring practice is focused on what matters most to people rather than solely on process.

Our quality assurance framework has been strengthened to ensure we consistently capture and analyse feedback from service users and their families, including complaints and compliments. This intelligence underpins continuous learning and improvement, supports workforce development, and strengthens accountability. As a result, we are better placed to build and maintain trust and confidence among service users, their families, and the wider community.

9. Health Service Commissioner complaints

During the 2024 – 2025 reporting period, Adult Social Care have not been informed that any complaints have been referred to the Health Service Commissioner to consider.

10. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Enquiries and Complaints (Local Commissioner)

The following table details the number of pieces of feedback (enquiries and complaints) received from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman within the reporting period over the last three years:

Year	Annual Total
2022/2023	16
2023/2024	14
2024/2025	13

During the 2025 – 2025 reporting period, Adult Social Care received 11 enquiries from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) which were not progressed for the following reasons:

Outcome	Total
Premature	03
Closed after initial enquiries – invalid	01
Closed after initial enquiries – no further action	05
Awaiting response from LGO	02
Total	11

Adult Social Care received two complaints from the LGSCO during this reporting period compared to the five received during the 2023 – 2024 reporting period.

Both complaints were concluded at 31 March 2025. The outcome of those investigations was:

Outcome	Total
Upheld – fault and injustice – no further action – organisation already remedied	01
Upheld – no further action – organisation already remedied	01
Total	02

The nature of these two complaints was:

Council failure to follow procedure in respect of collecting arrears.
Council failed to carry out annual review of complainant's account.
Council failed to give proper advice about the likely costs of care.
Council restricted the family's choice of care home.

As a result of the LGO findings the following actions were taken by Adult Social Care:

- A 40% reduction in the amount owed by the complainant, an agreement to find a suitable repayment plan and a review of its processes to ensure similar mistakes do not happen again.

11. Compliments

The team registered 121 compliments received for Adult Social Care during the year 2024 – 2025.

Detailed below are some examples of compliments received by service area:

Community Social Work Team – Oldbury & Smethwick

I just want to say thank you for the all the help that you have provided for my brother. I am astounded that everything has happened so quickly and thank you for it. You are a credit to Social Care. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, it is putting my mind at rest that he is being cared for.

Community Social Work Team – Wednesbury & West Bromwich

Please can I also say how kind and supportive you have been. Please do share this feedback with your manager also. The whole situation is and has been so stressful, and your approach was so understanding and empathetic. I cannot express in words how much it meant. Your guidance, help and support has been so valued. Thank you.

Community Social Work Team – Rowley & Tipton

XXX would like to compliment XXX with how she processed her carers one off payment. Mrs B would like XXX to be nominated for an award and would like her to be permanently assigned to her case.

Mental Health Social Work Team

I would like to highlight the interaction between you and XXX. Normally XXX would only reply with a yes or no answer to questions. I have never seen XXX so engaging with any of his reviews.

You engage with him on topics that he was interested in, so the conversation was flowing. He was answering the questions that was asked and giving more information.

You took the time to listen to him talking about the various activities that he has been on.

Young Adults Team

XXX would like to compliment you on your exemplary work and the positive difference you have made to our client's life.

Your approach to assessing and engaging with our client has been a breath of fresh air, the empathy shown, your critical thinking, organisation and listening skills shone through.

Hospital Team

I just wanted to email to let you know my husband and myself met with XXX today to continue with the CHC assessment for my father-in-Law. I want to express my thanks for her support and perseverance. She has been very supportive in the really distressing time and I don't think you get enough praise for the role you guys have to do.

Brokerage

Both, XXX and XXX have been absolutely brilliant in providing support and guidance when it comes to difficult tasks, breaking them down step-by-step

The response after a task has been sent to service brokerage has been very speedy and prompt

XXX and XXX are very thorough on information that needs tweaking and what needs to be corrected e.g. on service provisions etc.

Overall, I am confident in approaching the team for support and have also shared my positive

Enquiry

I apologise for my tardy reply.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to reiterate my comments on two members of your staff namely XXX and XXX

Their professionalism was second to none

I was cross to receive the letter from your department to maybe remove my entitlement for a Blue Badge. Unfortunately, so had 'Both Barrels'. She was polite, professional, never raised her voice, the perfect person to answer my call.

I am appalled with my behaviour; I should and do know better.

XXX was wonderful also, a perfect team. She calmed me down explaining the situation. What an asset!

I apologised for my behaviour on the day, and I would like to do it again.

I would like my comments noted on their personal files and my thanks extended to them for enabling me to return my 'lifeline' blue badge.

Thank you

Therapy & Wellbeing

I contacted XXX who has helped me enormously. When I rang first, I spoke to XXXX who was very kind and supportive to me without belittling me at all. I am 66 years old and people in shops etc. treat me like a child but with XXX and XXX I have been treated like an ordinary human being.

They haven't spoken down to me. In XXX case she has come to my house for an assessment.

XXX is coming back on 3rd May to measure up for bath rails. The kindness shown to me by XXX and XXX has been outstanding and I really do appreciate this. I congratulate you on your staff and the way they treat people in my condition. Thank you for taking the time to read my letter and please pass on my comments as well as your own to these ladies.

Community Alarms

I just wanted to take time to recognise the great support you were to XXX last week. XXX unfortunately suffered a stroke and as part of his discharge, he agreed with some apprehension to have a community alarm.

You came and immediately put XXX at ease, explaining the functionality and benefits of the system, taking time to chat with XXX which he thoroughly enjoyed. XXX hasn't removed the pendant since, he has got re-assurance with it, and it has offered me some respite from consent worry. Thank you

Stores

Not only did I receive the equipment with which I was very pleased, the gentlemen who came was most friendly and very helpful.

Sensory

XXX was most impressed with the level of service provided by XXX and XXX from Adult Sensory Team. XXX booked the request to repair the doorbell and XXX arrived the next day. He was very polite, nice man and replaced the doorbell. Thank you so much.
Thank you both for providing an excellent service.

Learning Disabilities Day Opportunities/Shared Lives

I must praise you as you are so good to my son, he always comes back with a big smile on his face and can't wait to tell me what he has done and how much he has enjoyed himself. He has not been very well, but you have made his day, so I really think you deserve a compliment.
Thank you.

STAR

XXX was assessed by one of the STAR assessors XXX. XXX was really happy with the way in which XXX conducted the assessment and said that she was calm, compassionate and empathetic towards his mom.

Willow Gardens

I would like to say that Carer XXX is a really good carer and when she has completed my care call, I am left feeling great. XXX takes time to speak to me and is really good at her job, carrying out all tasks well and in a caring manner. I would like to thank XXX for her hard work and caring attitude.

Community Care Business Unit

I would like you to be acknowledged for your response to my phone call. You took all the details, checked the system, and knew exactly what to do. Despite me being a little grumpy with you, which I apologised for at the time. About an hour later you called me back with an update and a solution to my issue.
You are a credit to your department.

Direct Payment Team

I wish to compliment XXX from Direct Payments who has gone over and above her job role to help me.
XXX has assisted me in dealing with an enquiry that wasn't even for her to sort out and resolve for me. She has gone over and above her job role and contacted the relevant people involved to get this resolved for me.

XXX is a lovely person. She emailed and contacted people on my behalf to resolve for me for the carers one off payment and went out of her way to contact social services on my behalf and payments department. XXX needs to be recognised within Sandwell Council and even consider giving her a pay rise.

Appointeeship Team

Can I just thank you and anyone who's helped/worked with XXX over the years, I'm sure it hasn't been easy and I'm really grateful.