

Annual Complaints Report

Children's Social Care

2024/25

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Introduction

This report fulfils the council's statutory duty to monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure and produce an annual report for children's services social care complaints.

The Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 (as amended by the NHS & Community Care Act 1990) requires us to establish a procedure for considering complaints in relation to the discharge of, or failure to discharge, any social services functions in respect of a qualifying individual. The Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 provides the legal framework for the procedures in relation to social care functions.

The regulations require the local authority to attempt to resolve complaints as soon as reasonably practicable and within specific timescales. The procedure has three stages, which are set out below, however where appropriate and with the agreement of the complainant the local authority may arrange for alternative dispute resolution to help resolve matters.

- Stage 1 (local resolution by manager) – 10 working days or up to 20 working days for complex cases
- Stage 2 (investigation by someone outside of the service area complained about) – 25 working days with maximum extension to 65 working days
- Stage 3 (independent review) – 30 working days to convene and hold a review panel; then 5 working days for the panel to issue its findings; and a further 15 working days for the local authority to respond to those findings.

All complaints are triaged by the Customer Feedback Team to ensure they are suitable for the process. This ensures matters are managed through the correct procedures, should an alternative process be in place. Any matters which are not suitable for the complaints process are filtered out and passed to the appropriate channel.

If the complainant remains unhappy with the outcome of their complaint, they have the right to approach the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman who may choose to investigate their complaint.

The Children's Social Care Complaints Procedure is administered by the Customer Feedback Team, with oversight from the Customer Feedback Manager.

Children's social care complaints received

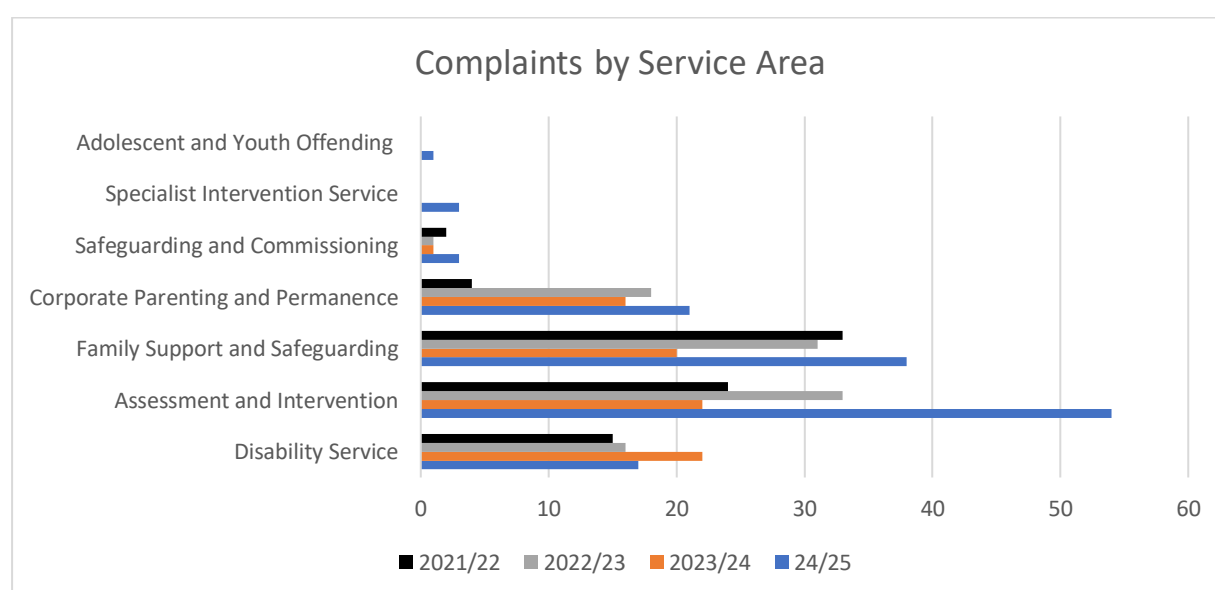
Stage 1 Complaints

The Local Authority 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 process.

Children's Social Care received 136 statutory complaints during 2024/25 this is a increase of 69% on the previous year when we dealt with 81 statutory complaints.

Possible factors which could be contributing to the increase is the growing awareness and understanding of the complaints process, which has empowered more individuals to voice their concerns. We as a service are also actively encouraging our service users to give us insight and information into how they see our services because this is how we learn from our work and improve our processes.

Number of Childrens Social Care complaints		
Department	2024/25	2023/24
Disability Service	17	22
Assessment and Intervention	54	22
Family Support and Safeguarding	38	20
Corporate Parenting and Permanence	21	16
Safeguarding and Commissioning	3	1
Specialist Intervention Service	3	0
Adolescent and Youth Offending	1	0
Total	136	81



Timeliness of dealing with statutory stage 1 social care complaints

In 2024/25 we have seen a significant increase in our performance to 86% (117 of 136) of complaints answered within timescale. While still not at the corporately set target of 90% we have increased our performance by 18% while also seeing an increase of 68% which shows that complaints are taken seriously and prioritised.

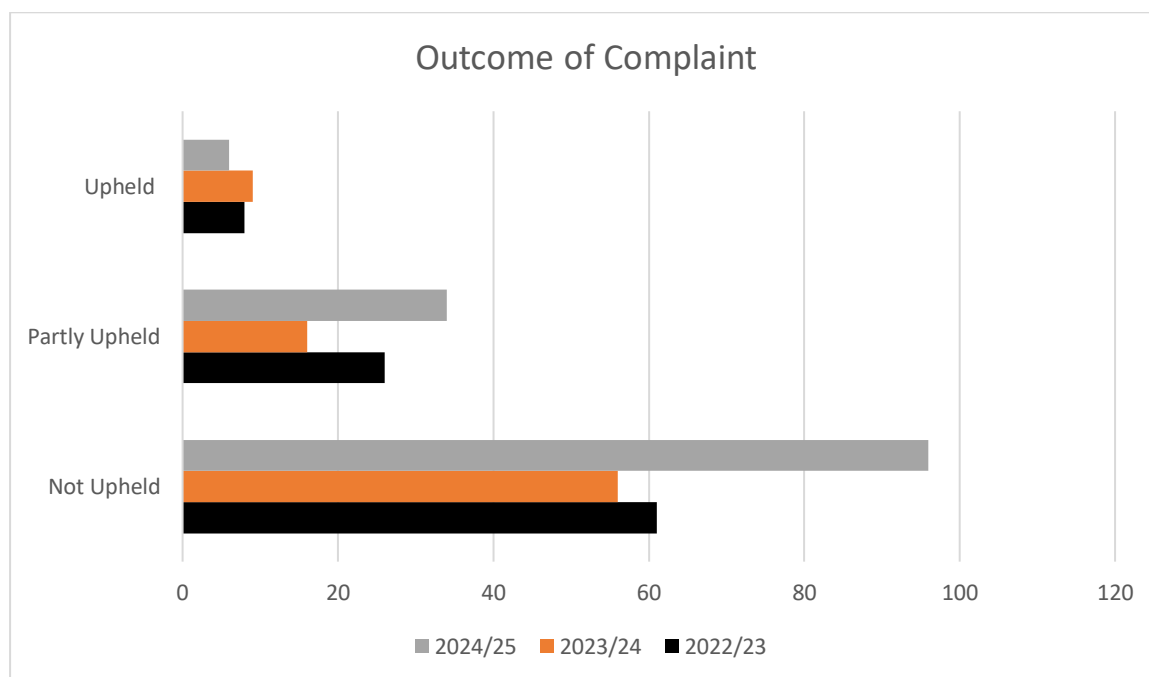
The Complaints Team continues to work more collaboratively with service areas to support the investigation and resolution of complaints, particularly those of a complex nature that require detailed analysis and thoughtful consideration.

The Operational Director remains actively engaged with the team, providing direct support in addressing areas of concern or underperformance.

In addition, the Customer Feedback Team maintains its ongoing support for Children's Social Care by producing weekly insight reports. These reports offer visibility into open complaints across service areas, helping to promote transparency and accountability.

Outcome of Complaints

Not Upheld	96	71%
Partly Upheld	34	25%
Upheld	6	4%



Upon thorough investigation of the complaints, we have determined that there are no grounds to find fault with our handling of the specific concerns raised within our service. In cases where we have been able to find fault with our handling we

continue to strive to adopt a continuous improvement/learning approach to improve our service offering.

Stage 2 and 3 Social Care Complaints

We have seen an increase in the number of complaints being referred for Stage 2 and 3. This is in part due to the higher number of complaints received but also recognition from our services that should service users be dissatisfied with the response provided they have the right to proceed through all stages. In 2024/25 we undertook 8 Stage 2 complaints and 3 Stage 3 across all Children's Social Care. These cases related to Corporate Parenting and Permanence, Children and Young People and Disability, Family Support and Safeguarding and Assessment and Intervention.

Outcome and Recommendations from Stage 2

Having undertaken 8 Stage 2 complaints with the assistance of independent investigators, it has been identified that 5 were partly upheld, 2 not upheld and 1 withdrawn at the request of the complainant.

Mr I

This particular complaint comprised of 3 points of investigation with all 3 points not being upheld. The complaint was regarding decisions believed to be taken against a non-resident parent.

As the complaint was not upheld there were no recommendations which the Local Authority were required to review and implement.

Mr N

The complaint comprised of 6 points of investigation with the outcomes being 3 upheld 1 unable to prove or disprove, 1 not upheld and 1 partly upheld. The complaint was regarding a parent believing that social care was not ensuring his children's safety whilst living with their mother and disagreeing with decisions taken.

4 recommendations were made which included a direct apology to the parent, an offer of financial remedy to be applied and to ensure that the children involved were provided an independent advocate so that they could provide support. The Local Authority accepted all recommendations and considered how we could improve the service to address the identified failures.

Ms R

The complaint consisted of 5 points of investigation with, 2 points upheld, 3 points not upheld. The complaint was regarding disagreement with decisions made and being informed she was excluded from education meetings.

5 recommendations were made, which included a direct apology, the remaining were related to improvement of communication with the parent and the child directly ensuring they knew their voices would be heard in the process of the work being undertaken.

Ms H

The complaint comprised 1 point of investigation which was spilt into 2 headings of which 1 was upheld and 1 not upheld. The complaint itself was surrounding payments for Special Guardianship Placements.

6 recommendations were made including an apology and a symbolic financial gesture, alongside service improvements for the special guardianship financial service.

Ms J

The complaint comprised 11 points of investigation with the outcomes 1 partly upheld, 1 unable to prove or disprove, 9 not upheld. This complaint related to accommodation post leaving care and the support provided whilst in new accommodation.

2 recommendations were made a direct apology for the partly upheld aspect of the complaint and the remaining recommendation related to service improvements which could be made for the management of licence agreements.

Mr H

The complaint comprised 5 points for investigation with the outcomes being 4 upheld and 1 not upheld. The complaint was regarding disagreement with the decisions taken by social care and lack of information sharing for meetings which had been undertaken.

5 recommendations were made which included a direct apology, a communication to be drafted for how and when the social worker would communicate with the father. There were also recommendations made in relation to service improvement to be made within service.

Ms H

The complaint comprised of 7 points for investigation with the outcomes being 2 upheld and 5 not upheld. The complaint was regarding the manner in which social care dealt with a sensitive family issue and was researching and including historical information which the mother did not feel it was warranted.

2 recommendations were made which included a direct apology and issuing a service improvement notice to the social workers.

Outcome and Recommendations from Stage 3

The Local Authority undertook three 3 stage panels upon the request from the complainants. As part of the getting the best from complaints guidance should complainants feel the stage 2 outcomes are flawed, they are able to request further investigation.

Ms A

While the panel did not materially change the outcomes from the Stage 2 which had been undertaken, they did find that further recommendations could be made and as such they made a further 6 recommendations within their panel report. This included a further apology to be made, assistance with application for the complainant's visa as a former looked after child, and service improvements which could be made.

Ms J

The panel again did not materially change the outcomes from Stage 2 but offered 3 further recommendations which included updating the case record with further evidence of action taken.

Mr H

While the panel did not materially change the outcomes from the Stage 2 which had been undertaken, they did find that further recommendations could be made and as such they made a further 3 recommendations within their panel report. This included advice provided for the complainant to engage legal representatives for the private proceedings being undertaken and to develop a communication plan for future contact with you.

Local Government Ombudsman

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman remains the final step in the process where complainants can approach the service directly and ask for a further independent investigation into their complaint.

In 2024/25 the LGO approached the Local Authority on 4 cases relating to Children's Social Care and of these 2 were taken via the formal investigation route, all were upheld by the LGO. The 2 other cases were determined to be closed after initial enquires were made and information provided.

When we benchmark ourselves against other councils with a similar geodemographic make up, we are in line with other councils.

Council	Number of Cases	Upheld	Not Upheld	Closed After Initial Enquires
Barking and Dagenham	4	2	0	2
Blackburn and Darwen	6	2	0	4
Bolton	3	0	0	3
Oldham	3	1	0	2

Comparison against Statistical Neighbours

Council	Number of Cases	Upheld	Not Upheld	Closed After Initial Enquires
Barking and Dagenham	4	2	0	2
Redbridge	10	3	0	7
Waltham Forest	5	1	1	3
Bexley	6	1	1	4

Recommendations from the LGO

The below recommendations are directly quoted from published LGO reports at the following link [LGO Children's Social Care Decisions](#)

I find fault with the Council for not carrying out an assessment under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 and for failing to provide Miss B with any support, causing her distress and frustration. The Council have proposed remedies which I am in agreement with.

I have completed my investigation. The Council accepted the findings and recommendations of a thorough independent investigation. This is a satisfactory outcome.

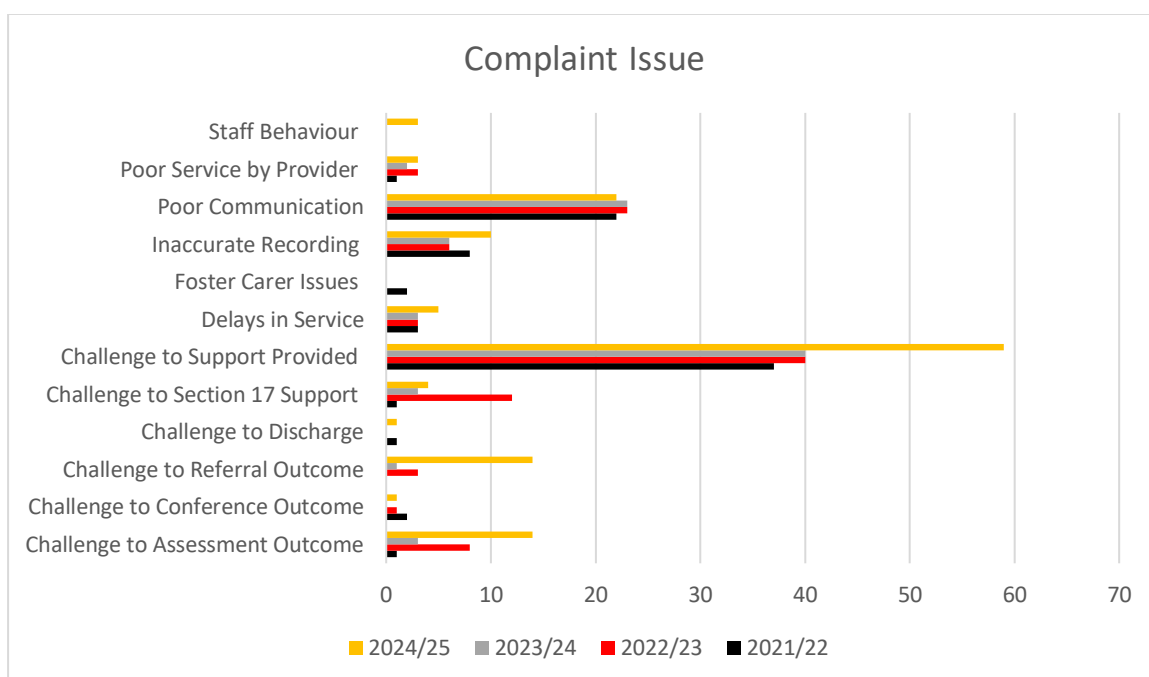
Complaints by issue

Complaints received provide valuable insight into how services are perceived by the clients and how a culture of continuous improvement can be embedded across the service.

When broken down by reason for complaint the most frequently mentioned concern relates to challenging the support provided followed by poor communication

Reason for complaint

Reason	2024/25	2023/24
Challenge to Assessment Outcome	14	3
Challenge to Conference Outcome	1	0
Challenge to Referral Outcome	14	1
Challenge to Discharge	1	0
Challenge to Section 17 support	4	3
Challenge to Support Provided	59	40
Delays in Service	5	3
Foster Carer Issues	0	0
Inaccurate Recording	10	6
Poor Communication	22	23
Poor Service by Provider	3	2
Staff Behaviour	3	0
Total	136	81



Social work is a dynamic and complex field, and there is always scope for growth and development. Complaints play a vital role in highlighting areas where social workers and agencies can enhance their practices. It is therefore essential that services remain committed to continuous learning and improvement, using feedback as a catalyst for change.

As a Local Authority, we are dedicated to learning from the experiences of our service users when they express dissatisfaction. This commitment is demonstrated through several key actions:

- Leveraging complaint feedback to amplify the voices of children, young people, and their families.
- Ensuring that case recording is clear and includes the rationale behind decisions, making them understandable to children and families.
- Promoting transparency in both our actions and communications.

Below are examples of learning that we can take from our complaints and implement into our processes to show a desire and willingness to improve.

1. **Strengthen Communication Protocols**

- Ensure timely, respectful, and transparent communication with families.
- Provide written summaries of meetings and decisions.

2. **Enhance Staff Training**

- Focus on trauma-informed care, cultural competence, and safeguarding.
- Address unconscious bias and professional boundaries.

3. **Improve Complaint Handling**

- Acknowledge complaints promptly and provide clear timelines for resolution.
- Use complaints as learning tools to inform practice.

4. **Co-Produce Support Plans**

- Involve families meaningfully in planning and decision-making.
- Tailor support to individual needs, especially around mental health and housing.

Compliments

It is important to balance the complaints with evidence directly from services users that their experiences with the Local Authority have been positive.

An extract of compliments received 2024/25

She is very nice and Polite and kind lady. When I call her, she pick my call and solve my problem she help me a lot I have no words to how to thankful to her . Thank you for all your hard work and dedication. "I truly appreciate your support and guidance. "You've made a positive difference in my life." "I feel very grateful to have you as my social worker."

I would like to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude for the exceptional support provided by A. Her professionalism, kindness, and unwavering dedication have profoundly impacted M's life, and I cannot thank her enough.

From the very beginning, A has been more than just a social worker—she has been a source of strength, reassurance, and guidance during one of the most challenging periods in our lives. She provided invaluable emotional support, creating a safe and trusting space where M could share her concerns without fear of judgment. At every

step, she listened with patience and understanding, never dismissing our worries but instead offering practical solutions, encouragement, and hope when it was needed the most. Her presence alone has made a world of difference, and for that, we will always be grateful.

I'm getting in contact to express our gratitude to The Reparation Team who supported us at The Vibe last week and this week, in painting our planters and arch ready for our gardening project. They have been professional and very helpful.

The planters are so beautiful and bright and has really helped brighten up the community building outdoor area for our young people and other youth services to use.

As a result of their support, we have now been able to access our gardens to teach our young people with disabilities new horticulture and life skills in growing their own vegetables.

Going forward, we would love for the team to continue to support us with other gardening projects.

Just wanted to say you are a brilliant and amazing woman and social worker and you have been amazing to both L and Me and i am so glad that L has had your help best social worker i have ever encountered Thank you so much for everything you have done and im sure will still carry on doing 🙏 AMAZING 🙏

Hi D just want to thankyou so much for everything you have done for me and O. You have gone above and beyond to help us and been so kind and generous, you are the only one to have helped me and ollie and I cant thank you enough. God must have seen we were struggling and sent us his most favourite angel...that's you. You are worth your weight in gold and I just hope your managers appreciate you as much as O and I do. Your one amazing lady and dont let anyone tell you different. We love you and thank you unconditionally.

I wanted to say thankyou for much for the support you've given me this week. Firstly, you arranged to contact transport very very quickly despite the fact you were due to finish work soon. And the contact ended up going amazingly, I needed to see J more than I realised x

'I wanted to take a moment to express my gratitude for the support and guidance I received during my time at the yjs working alongside such a lovely education worker. She made the experience truly enjoyable and taught me so much. I really look up to her and hope one day I will be even half the woman she is. Her patience and dedication not only helped me learn the ropes but also created a positive and welcoming environment. Thank you for making my journey so memorable'.

Mother shared that the two workers have both been amazing “ they have helped us with a big understanding of how to keep S safe and helping her to understand how to keep herself safe. They have helped me when I have needed advice. They have been so understanding, and have always been there if needed and they have been so kind’. ‘We had a couple of SWs prior and we did not feel we could talk to them, but I feel we can get on with Rand I, and we can reach out to them when we need support. My husband is quite reserved and he does not really open up and talk about things, has offered to meet with him separately and we appreciate this. They have helped me in a lot of ways, I don’t think I could have done this without them. I think Should feel they same, we have spoken about this, she has even reached out to them personally when she has needed them’. We are kept up to date on the plans and included in everything that is happening. thank you. ”

I just wanted to take a moment to extend my sincere and heartfelt gratitude for everything you have done, not just during yesterday’s CIN meeting, but throughout your continued involvement with M and our family. To be completely honest, at the beginning of this journey, I wasn’t sure that you fully understood our family situation or the true extent of M’s needs. I felt unheard and overwhelmed. However, as things became clearer and you took the time to truly listen, I’ve seen a remarkable shift. You have been advocating for M in a way that fills me with hope and reassurance. Your commitment to his well-being and your focus on ensuring that his specific needs are met have truly touched me. You’ve helped me see that I’m not alone.

a huge thank you for everything! Your support means a lot to me/us and I really appreciate all the help you’ve given. Whether it was your advice or just being there to chat, it’s made a big difference