

Annual Complaints Report

Children's Social Care

2025/26

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

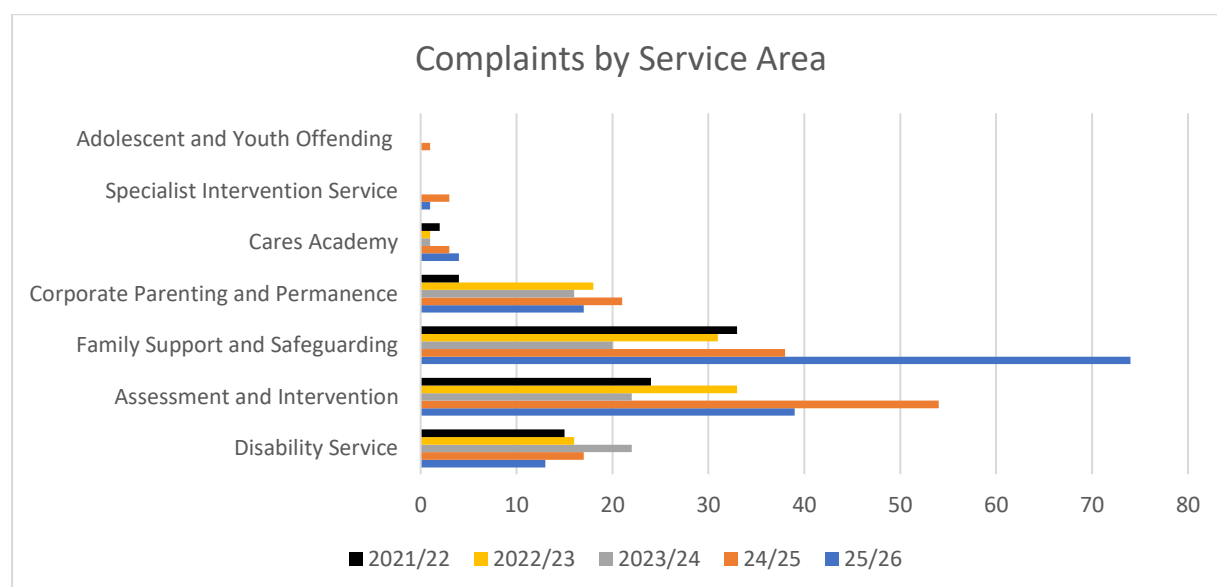
Stage 1 Complaints

The Local Authority welcomes all feedback, including complaints and representations regarding its services. Service users, families and carers are encouraged to share their views in an open and transparent way, with easy access to the complaints process.

Children's Social Care received 148 statutory complaints during 2025/26, representing an increase of 9% compared to the previous year, when 136 complaints were received.

This increase may in part reflect a growing awareness and understanding of the complaints process, enabling more individuals to voice their concerns. The service also actively encourages feedback from service users, recognising that their insight is essential in helping us learn from our practice and continuously improve the services we provide.

Number of Childrens Social Care complaints		
Department	2025/26	2024/25
Disability Service	13	17
Assessment and Intervention	39	54
Family Support and Safeguarding	74	38
Corporate Parenting and Permanence	17	21
Cares Academy	4	3
Specialist Intervention Service	1	3
Adolescent and Youth Offending	0	1
Total	148	136



Timeliness of dealing with statutory stage 1 social care complaints

In 2025/26, performance has significantly improved, with 91% (134 of 148) of complaints responded to within timescales, exceeding the corporate target. This improvement reflects the continued strengthening of the collaborative working relationship between the Complaints Team and Children's Social Care.

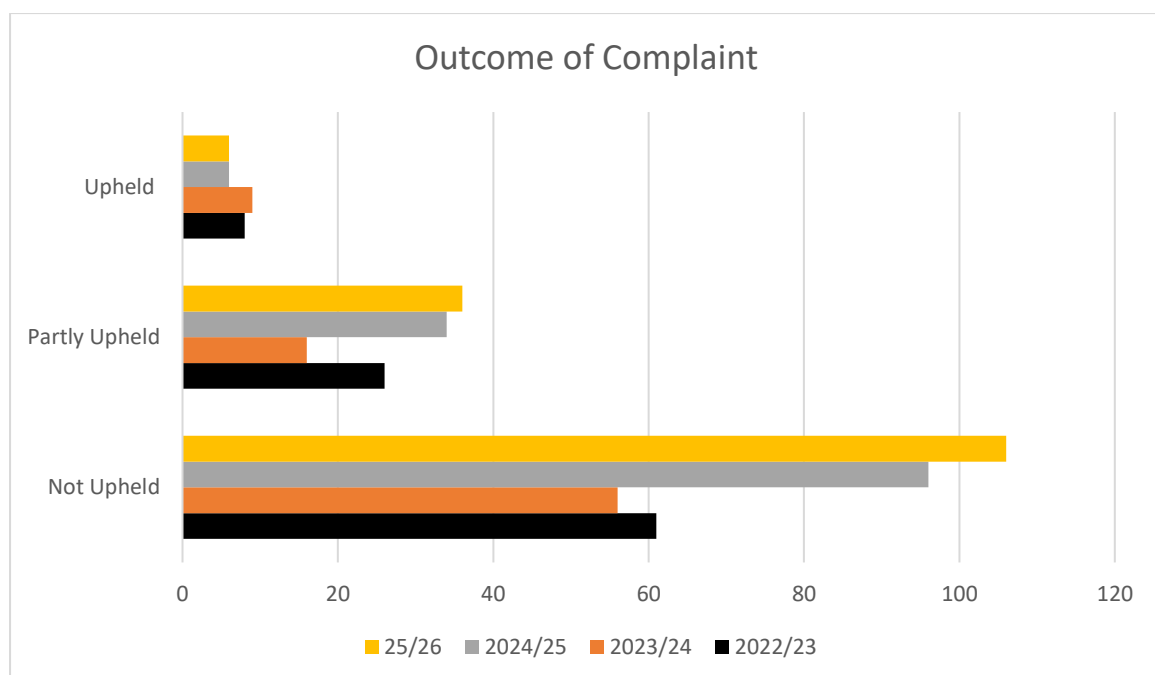
There is now a more integrated approach to managing complaints, with closer day-to-day engagement between teams supporting more timely investigations and resolution, particularly in complex cases requiring detailed consideration.

The Operational Director remains actively engaged, providing visible leadership and direct support in addressing areas of concern and driving performance improvements where required.

In addition, the Customer Feedback Team continues to support Children's Social Care through the provision of weekly insight reports. These reports offer clear oversight of open complaints across service areas, promoting transparency, strengthening accountability, and enabling timely management of performance.

Outcome of Complaints

Not Upheld	106	72%
Partly Upheld	36	24%
Upheld	6	4%



Stage 2 and 3 Social Care Complaints

We have observed a significant increase in the number of complaints progressing to Stage 2 and Stage 3 during the year. This reflects growing awareness among service users of their right to escalate complaints, alongside a greater willingness to pursue concerns through the later stages of the process.

In line with the statutory guidance *Getting the Best from Complaints*, service users are entitled to request progression between stages without needing to provide justification. The Council has adhered to this principle, which has contributed to the higher volume of escalated cases.

To manage this increase effectively, we have strengthened our approach by securing access to a robust and compliant pool of independent investigators, ensuring that Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints continue to be handled in a timely and thorough manner.

Outcome and Recommendations from Stage 2

We received requests for 26 Stage 2 complaints with the assistance of independent investigators. 5 of these are still actively being investigated so no outcomes can be provided for this reporting period.

Ms C

The complaint related to concerns about actions taken by Children's Social Care in relation to a safeguarding assessment, communication with parents, and decision-making regarding a child's care arrangements. The complainant raised issues about consent, alleged inaccuracies in records, the conduct of professionals, and the handling of contact arrangements with the child's father.

The case was investigated at Stage 2 under the statutory children's complaints procedure, including a review of records, professional interviews, and consideration of the complainant's account.

Complaint Outcomes

0 were upheld

0 were partly upheld

8 were not upheld

The investigation concluded that the local authority acted in line with its statutory duties and safeguarding responsibilities, with no evidence found to substantiate the concerns raised.

Mr U

The complaint related to concerns about the conduct and quality of a Children's Social Care assessment. Issues raised included the level of parental involvement in the assessment process, the accuracy and balance of information recorded, communication with professionals, and whether allegations and third-party information were appropriately verified and reflected. The complainants also raised concerns about procedural fairness, transparency, and the handling of disagreements regarding a child's medical care.

The Stage 2 investigation found evidence of some shortcomings in practice, particularly in relation to engagement with one parent, record keeping, and the handling of disputed information. However, other aspects of the complaint were not substantiated, and some concerns related to differences in professional judgement rather than factual inaccuracies.

Complaint Outcomes

5 were upheld

1 was partly upheld

7 were not upheld

1 was inconclusive

Overall, while the investigation identified areas where practice fell below expected standards, particularly in relation to communication, inclusion, and evidential robustness, it also concluded that several concerns reflected differences in interpretation rather than demonstrable fault.

Ms D

This investigation was initiated at the request of the complainant but was later withdrawn due to no engagement which meant we were unable to proceed.

Ms H

The complaint related to the quality and handling of Children's Social Care involvement following a young person's disclosure of abuse and subsequent care arrangements. Concerns were raised about the tone and content of an assessment, the accuracy of recorded information, communication and transparency around health support, confidentiality, management of mental health needs, placement expectations, clarity of parental responsibility, accommodation decisions, and responsiveness from professionals.

The Stage 2 investigation found that while some aspects of practice met statutory requirements, there were shortcomings in the way information was recorded, communicated, and responded to, particularly in relation to trauma-informed practice, record keeping, and professional responsiveness. Other aspects of the

complaint were not substantiated, with evidence showing that statutory duties were largely met and that concerns reflected differing perceptions of professional actions.

Complaint Outcomes

3 were upheld

0 were partly upheld

6 were not upheld

Overall, the investigation identified learning in relation to trauma-informed assessment writing, clarity and transparency of records, and ensuring timely responses to young people, while concluding that most areas of practice were consistent with legal and procedural requirements.

Ms R

This investigation was initiated at the request of the complainant but was later withdrawn due to no engagement which meant we were unable to proceed.

Mr Z

The complaint related to Children's Social Care involvement following allegations of domestic abuse within the family and subsequent assessments of risk and contact with children. The complainant raised concerns about the recording of safeguarding issues despite no further police action, alleged inconsistencies in the other parent's account, and whether concerns about parental alienation had been appropriately considered.

The Stage 2 investigation found that Children's Social Care acted in line with statutory duties, appropriately recording and assessing safeguarding concerns based on children's disclosures, professional observations, and multi-agency information. It also concluded that the assessment process reasonably considered differing accounts and that there was no evidence to support claims of parental alienation.

Complaint Outcomes

0 were upheld

0 were partly upheld

3 were not upheld

Overall, the investigation concluded that the local authority's actions were consistent with safeguarding responsibilities and that the concerns raised were not substantiated.

Mr R

The complaint related to concerns about contact arrangements between a child in care and a family member, as well as the impact of a specialist out-of-area school placement on maintaining family relationships. Issues raised included missed contact sessions, the quality and clarity of communication from professionals, the appropriateness of suggested contact methods, and whether the placement decision properly considered the child's best interests and family connections.

The Stage 2 investigation found that the local authority had taken a child-centred approach, particularly in prioritising the child's transition to a new placement and meeting specialist needs. However, there were shortcomings in communication and the way changes to contact arrangements were conveyed, which caused frustration and uncertainty for the complainant.

Complaint Outcomes

0 were upheld

2 were partly upheld

3 were not upheld

Overall, the investigation concluded that while decisions were made appropriately in line with the child's needs and statutory duties, improvements were required in communication and engagement with family members when managing changes to contact arrangements.

Ms B

The complaint related to the assessment and provision of support for a disabled child and their family, including concerns about the accuracy and quality of a short breaks review, reductions to support hours, lack of consideration of the parent carer's needs, insufficient notice of changes, transition planning to adult services, and whether the needs of a sibling acting as a young carer were appropriately identified and supported.

The Stage 2 investigation found that there were significant shortcomings in the assessment process and communication. In particular, the investigation identified failures to properly assess the parent carer's needs, reliance on inaccurate information when making decisions about support, and insufficient notice provided to the family when changes were made. While some aspects of practice were found to be in line with statutory duties, the investigation concluded that improvements were required in assessment robustness, communication, and recognition of wider family needs.

Complaint Outcomes

2 were upheld

1 was partly upheld

3 were not upheld

Overall, the investigation concluded that while some decisions were appropriate, there were clear failings in process, particularly around assessment quality, transparency, and recognising and responding to family-wide support needs.

Mr A

The complaint related to Children's Social Care involvement with a family supporting a child with complex disabilities, including concerns about assessment processes, communication, timeliness of support, professional conduct, accuracy of information, and delays in making referrals. The complainants reported that they were not provided with key documents, experienced delays in receiving an appropriate support package, and raised concerns about communication, case management, and the handling of risks associated with their child's care needs.

The Stage 2 investigation found that while appropriate steps were taken to assess needs and increase support over time, there were several failures in communication, transparency, and procedural compliance. Key issues included not sharing assessments and plans with the family, unclear communication regarding case closure, inaccuracies in reporting partner agency information, and a delay in an urgent referral which had a direct impact on the family.

Complaint Outcomes

4 were upheld

1 was partly upheld

1 was not upheld

1 element had no definitive finding (unable to prove or disprove)

Overall, the investigation concluded that although the child's needs were eventually met through increased support, there were clear shortcomings in communication, record keeping, and adherence to procedures, which affected the family's experience and confidence in the service.

Mr A

This was initiated as per the request from the complainant but a decision was later taken to initiate separate legal proceedings directly so withdrew from the complaints process.

Ms O

The complaint related to Children's Social Care assessment and child protection processes, including concerns that the assessment did not fairly reflect both parents' views, contained inaccuracies, was not shared in a timely way, and that the complainant was not properly informed about key processes. Additional concerns

were raised about procedural fairness during a child protection conference, lack of direct observation, and inaccuracies continuing in subsequent proceedings.

The Stage 2 investigation found that while statutory processes such as progressing to a child protection conference were broadly appropriate, there were notable shortcomings in communication, quality of assessment, timeliness of sharing information, and follow-up actions. In particular, the investigation identified weaknesses in how information was gathered and evidenced, delays in sharing reports, and a failure to resolve disputed inaccuracies in a timely manner.

Complaint Outcomes

3 were upheld

2 were partly upheld

2 were not upheld

Overall, the investigation concluded that although the core safeguarding actions taken were appropriate, there were clear failings in transparency, engagement with the complainant, and the robustness and clarity of assessment and recording practices.

Ms B

The complaint related to Children's Social Care support for a disabled child following a transfer between local authorities. Concerns were raised about delays in accepting the transfer and putting support in place, the adequacy and accessibility of the support offered, lack of clear communication and explanation of decisions, staff communication, and whether the needs of both the parent carer and a younger sibling were properly assessed.

The Stage 2 investigation found that while the local authority took steps to assess needs and ultimately increased the support package, there were shortcomings in the quality and transparency of the assessment process, delays during the transfer stage, and weaknesses in communication and recording. In particular, the investigation identified issues with how needs were evidenced at the outset, failure to properly explain decisions, and insufficient consideration and articulation of parent carer needs.

Complaint Outcomes

5 were upheld

3 were partly upheld

3 were not upheld

Overall, the investigation concluded that although appropriate support was eventually put in place, there were clear failings in communication, assessment clarity, and the handling of the transfer process, which contributed to delays, confusion, and avoidable distress for the family.

Ms R

The complaint related to Children's Social Care involvement with a family following a Special Guardianship Order. Concerns were raised about delays in securing a passport for a child, poor communication about the passport process, advice given during the complaints process, failure to properly confirm post-order contact arrangements, and the suitability of staff allocated to the case.

The Stage 2 investigation found that while some actions were taken to progress the passport application and overall case management, there were significant shortcomings in timeliness, coordination, and communication. In particular, there were avoidable delays in obtaining key documentation, inconsistent updates to the carer, and failures to clearly agree and confirm contact arrangements following the court order.

Complaint Outcomes

3 were upheld

0 were partly upheld

2 were not upheld

Overall, the investigation concluded that although some aspects of practice were appropriate, there were clear failings in communication, coordination, and timeliness which resulted in avoidable delay and distress for the family.

Mr H

The complaint related to Children's Social Care core group meetings and the recording and distribution of minutes. Concerns were raised that minutes were inaccurate, delayed, and not amended when challenged. The complainant also raised issues about lack of access to recordings or transcripts, how consent for recording meetings was obtained, and the use of technology to generate minutes.

The Stage 2 investigation found that while meetings were being recorded and minutes produced, there were significant weaknesses in accuracy, timeliness, communication, and process transparency. In particular, there was no clear policy in place for recording meetings or using transcripts, delays in issuing minutes, inconsistent handling of correction requests, and poor practice in obtaining consent for recording.

Complaint Outcomes

4 upheld

1 partly upheld

1 no finding made (treated as not upheld for reporting purposes)

Overall, the investigation concluded that there were clear failings in governance, communication, and procedural clarity, particularly in relation to minute-taking, consent, and transparency in recording practices.

Ms E

The complaint related to Children's Social Care involvement with a child, including concerns about changes in social worker, decision-making around parental contact, school attendance expectations, escalation to child protection procedures, conduct of meetings, and whether appropriate support was provided to both the child and parent. Additional concerns were raised about school enforcement action, recognition of mental health needs, and the adequacy of support offered to the parent.

The Stage 2 investigation found that the local authority acted in line with its statutory safeguarding and education duties. While the complainant strongly disagreed with the approach taken, the investigation concluded that decisions were based on professional assessment, multi-agency evidence, and legal responsibilities, particularly in relation to prolonged non-attendance at school and safeguarding concerns.

Complaint Outcomes

0 were upheld

0 were partly upheld

9 were not upheld

Overall, the investigation concluded that there was no fault identified in the actions of the local authority, and that intervention, including child protection planning and education enforcement concerns, was appropriate and proportionate to the risks identified for the child.

Ms A

The complaint related to Children's Social Care involvement with a family following concerns about a young person's mental health and safeguarding risks within the home. Issues raised included the conduct and communication of the allocated social worker, the handling of a Section 47 enquiry, sharing of information and reports, accuracy of records, consent for assessments, and whether safeguarding concerns were appropriately investigated.

The Stage 2 investigation found that, overall, the local authority acted in line with statutory safeguarding duties. However, there were identified shortcomings in administrative accuracy, record keeping, and timeliness, particularly in relation to sharing reports and recording consent, which did not meet expected professional standards.

Complaint Outcomes

5 were upheld

0 were partly upheld

Remaining elements were not upheld

Overall, the investigation concluded that while safeguarding decisions were appropriate, improvements were required in communication, recording accuracy, and adherence to procedural timescales to ensure transparency and maintain confidence in the process.

Ms S

The complaint related to Children's Social Care involvement following a police referral and the subsequent decision to place a child on a Child Protection Plan. Concerns were raised about the threshold for escalating from Child in Need to Child Protection, the rationale for continuing the plan, the conduct and management of child protection conferences, communication and clarity of the plan, and the fairness of the Stage 1 complaint process.

The Stage 2 investigation found that statutory safeguarding processes were largely followed appropriately, including decision-making at conference and the application of threshold criteria. However, there were limitations identified in aspects of communication and the handling of the Stage 1 complaint, where the response did not sufficiently reflect a balanced view.

Complaint Outcomes

1 upheld

0 partly upheld

Most elements not upheld

Some elements inconclusive (treated separately from upheld/not upheld)

Overall the investigation concluded that while safeguarding decisions and processes were appropriate, there was a service failure in the handling of the Stage 1 complaint, and evidence relating to meeting conduct was inconclusive, with no definitive finding of fault but some professional concerns noted.

Ms W

The complaint related to Children's Social Care involvement with a family where there were ongoing safeguarding concerns, including domestic abuse history, contact arrangements, and risks associated with extended family members. The complainant raised concerns about how the local authority responded to safeguarding issues, communication and engagement with social workers, contact arrangements, and the handling of specific incidents such as injuries and supervision during contact.

Overall, the investigation found that the local authority had consistently responded to concerns, maintained oversight, and acted in line with statutory safeguarding duties. While the complainant disagreed with decisions and felt unsupported, the evidence demonstrated that concerns were acknowledged, assessed, and managed appropriately, with issues escalated where necessary through professional discussions and court processes.

Complaint Outcomes

Upheld: 0

Partly upheld: 0

Not upheld: 10

All complaint elements were not upheld, with the investigation concluding that there was no evidence of fault or service failure in how the local authority managed safeguarding, communication, or contact arrangements.

Overall the investigation concluded that the local authority's actions were proportionate, evidence-based, and compliant with statutory guidance, with appropriate safeguarding measures in place throughout.

Ms G

The complaint concerned Children's Social Care involvement with a family where one child was subject to a Child Protection Plan. The concerns raised related to the conduct of the allocated social worker, including the way safeguarding concerns were communicated, engagement with the children without parental agreement, the approach taken during home visits, communication support (interpreters), and the handling of meetings and documentation.

A central issue was the appropriateness of raising concerns about potential exploitation in the context of informal employment, alongside wider concerns about communication, professionalism, and procedural practice. The investigation found that while safeguarding responsibilities were generally exercised in line with statutory duties, there were shortcomings in recording, communication clarity, and aspects of process, particularly in relation to how concerns were evidenced and documented.

Complaint Outcomes

Upheld: 0

Partly upheld: 2

Not upheld: 3

Inconclusive / unable to determine: 1

Overall the investigation concluded that core safeguarding actions were appropriate, but there were identified weaknesses in professional practice, particularly in evidencing decision-making, record-keeping, and ensuring clarity of communication with the family.

Outcome and Recommendations from Stage 3

The Local Authority undertook 4 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 C

The Panel made no material difference to the outcomes which had already been provided at Stage 2 of the process. Requests for further assessment of the child and an apology were not warranted as there were no failings by the Local Authority which would require this action to be taken.

Mr H

The Panel again did not make any material difference to the outcomes and recommendations from the Stage 2 complaint. Panel were not satisfied that the Stage 2 had covered off all relevant investigation points and provided satisfactory recommendations.

Mr R

The Panel made no changes to the outcomes which were presented within the Stage 2 complaint but after consideration made further recommendations for the Local Authority to undertake in order to bring this matter to a satisfactory conclusion.

Ms H

The Panel made no changes to the outcomes of the Stage 2 but made one further recommendation for the Local Authority to act on.

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 2025/26 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	7	2	0	5
Blackburn and Darwen	4	1	0	3
Bolton	3	0	0	3
Oldham	2	1	0	1

Comparison against Statistical Neighbours

Council	Number of Cases	Upheld	Not Upheld	Closed After Initial Enquires
Barking and Dagenham	7	2	0	5
Redbridge	9	2	2	5
Waltham Forest	4	1	0	3
Bexley	9	1	0	8

Recommendations from the LGO

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

We will not investigate Mr X's complaint about contact with his grandchild because an investigation by us would not lead to a different outcome and we are satisfied with the Council's responses to his concerns. We will not investigate the other parts of his

complaint because we previously responded to a complaint about contact with the child.

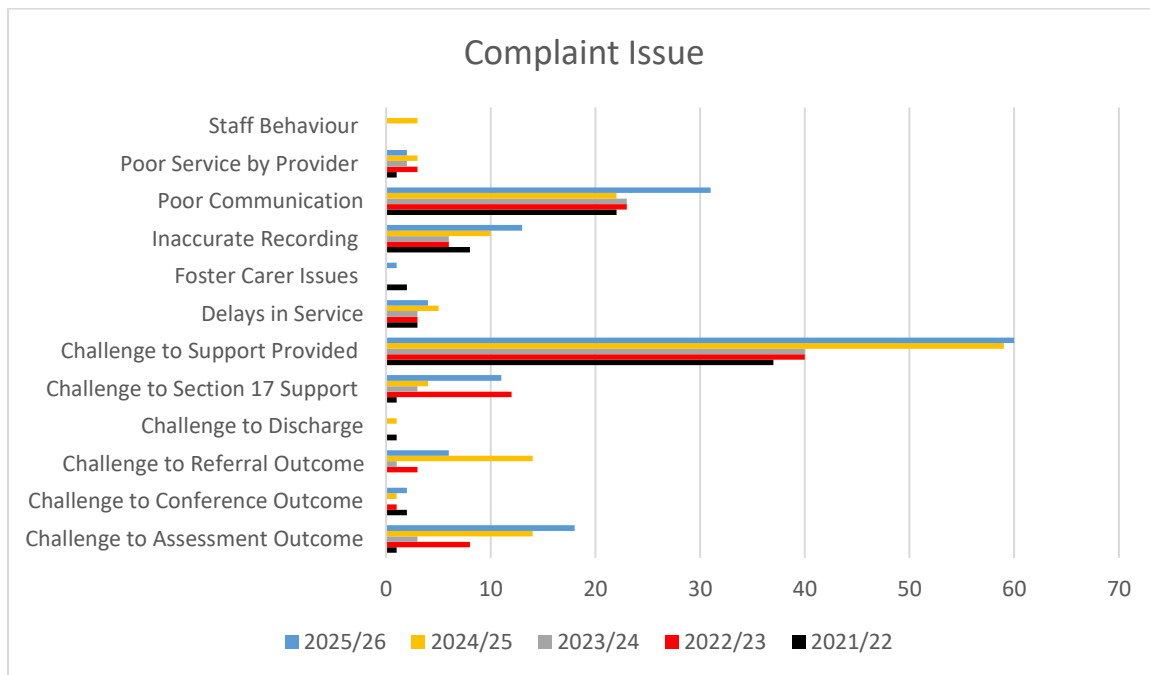
We will not investigate Mrs X's complaint about the Council's delay in carrying out an occupational therapy assessment. This is because the Council has already taken suitable action to remedy the matters.

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	2025/26	2024/25
Challenge to Assessment Outcome	18	14
Challenge to Conference Outcome	2	1
Challenge to Referral Outcome	6	14
Challenge to Discharge	0	1
Challenge to Section 17 support	11	4
Challenge to Support Provided	60	59
Delays in Service	4	5
Foster Carer Issues	1	0
Inaccurate Recording	13	10
Poor Communication	31	22
Poor Service by Provider	2	3
Staff Behaviour	0	3
Total	148	136



Learning and Service Improvement from Complaints – Children’s Social Care

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 services can strengthen practice, enhance professional standards, and improve outcomes for children and families. It is therefore essential that services remain committed to continuous learning and improvement, using feedback as a catalyst for meaningful change.

As a Local Authority, we are committed to learning from the experiences of children, young people and their families when they express dissatisfaction. This commitment is demonstrated not only through reflection, but through clear actions taken this year to strengthen practice across Children’s Social Care.

Our approach has focused on amplifying the voices of children and families, improving transparency in decision-making, and embedding learning into everyday practice to drive continuous service improvement.

Strengthening Recording Quality and Decision-Making Transparency

Learning from complaints has highlighted that, while decisions made by practitioners were often appropriate and in line with statutory duties, the rationale underpinning those decisions was not always consistently or clearly recorded. This created challenges for families in understanding why certain actions were taken and, in some cases, impacted the transparency and defensibility of practice.

In response, the service has strengthened expectations around case recording. Social workers are now required to clearly document not only decisions, but also the analysis and evidence that informed those decisions. This includes explicitly

recording the source of information, distinguishing between fact and professional opinion, and evidencing management oversight where safeguarding thresholds are considered.

Additional improvements have focused on ensuring that verbal conversations and informal discussions are routinely recorded, recognising their importance in demonstrating the full context of decision-making. Enhanced quality assurance processes have also been introduced, with audits now providing greater oversight of recording standards and ensuring that practice is consistently clear, transparent, and accountable.

Improving Professional Judgement and Use of Safeguarding Language

A key area of learning has been the importance of ensuring that safeguarding concerns, particularly those involving serious terminology, are proportionate, evidence-based, and appropriately assessed before being communicated to children and families.

Complaints identified instances where safeguarding language may not have been supported by a sufficiently robust evidential framework at the point it was used. In response, the service has reinforced expectations around professional judgement, ensuring that concerns are subject to appropriate threshold analysis, supervisory oversight, and, where necessary, multi-agency consultation before being escalated.

Practitioners have been supported to strengthen their understanding of safeguarding thresholds, ensuring that risks are identified and explored appropriately, while avoiding premature conclusions. This has improved consistency across the service and ensures that interventions are both proportionate and defensible, while maintaining a strong focus on safeguarding outcomes.

Strengthening Communication and Engagement with Families

Complaints have consistently reinforced the importance of effective communication, particularly in ensuring that families feel heard, understand decisions, and are able to engage meaningfully in the process.

In response, the service has placed a renewed focus on the quality of communication with children and families. This includes ensuring that discussions are clear, respectful, and transparent, and that professionals take time to explain decisions in a way that is accessible and easy to understand. There has also been greater emphasis on providing written summaries and documentation to support understanding, particularly where complex safeguarding processes are involved.

Practice has been strengthened to ensure that families are actively involved in discussions and that their views are meaningfully considered. This approach supports a more relationship-based model of practice, helping to build trust and ensuring that families feel listened to, even where difficult decisions are required.

Strengthening Use of Interpreters and Inclusive Practice

Learning from complaints has identified that, while interpreter services were often provided, this was not always consistently recorded or evidenced. This created uncertainty regarding whether communication needs had been fully met.

In response, the service has strengthened its approach to inclusive practice by reinforcing expectations that language needs must be clearly identified, recorded, and routinely reviewed. Professionals are expected to actively offer interpreter support and ensure that families are able to fully understand and participate in all aspects of the process.

Improvements have also been made to documentation standards, with clearer recording of when interpreters are present and how communication needs have been supported. This ensures greater transparency and demonstrates compliance with statutory responsibilities, while promoting equitable access to services for all families.

Embedding Statutory Practice Standards and Visit Expectations

Complaints have also highlighted the need for greater clarity and consistency in how statutory visits and direct work with children are undertaken and recorded.

In response, the service has reinforced expectations around statutory practice, ensuring that children subject to Child Protection Plans are seen regularly, and that visits are purposeful, child-focused, and analytical. There is now a stronger emphasis on capturing the lived experience of the child, ensuring that their voice is central to decision-making.

Quality assurance processes have been strengthened to monitor compliance with statutory requirements, including frequency of visits and the quality of engagement. This ensures that safeguarding practice remains robust, consistent, and focused on achieving the best outcomes for children.

Improving Complaint Handling and Early Resolution

Learning from complaints has also informed improvements in how concerns are responded to at the earliest stages of the complaints process.

It was identified that Stage 1 responses could be strengthened by ensuring that they reflect a balanced view and draw on all relevant information available. In response, the service has reinforced expectations that complaint handling must be thorough, proportionate, and evidence-based, with input sought from all relevant professionals where appropriate.

There is now a stronger focus on ensuring that responses clearly explain the outcome, the rationale for decisions, and any actions taken. Complaints are also increasingly used as a mechanism for service-wide learning, rather than being

viewed solely as individual case issues. This approach supports earlier resolution and helps to improve confidence in the complaints process.

Strengthening Clarity and Communication in Care Planning

Complaints have highlighted that families do not always fully understand Child Protection Plans or the reasons for ongoing intervention, even when processes have been followed correctly.

In response, the service has strengthened its approach to care planning by ensuring that plans are clearly explained, proportionate, and focused on meaningful outcomes. There is a greater emphasis on co-production, ensuring that families are involved in developing plans and understand what is expected of them.

Professionals are encouraged to ensure that plans are accessible and transparent, with clear links between identified risks, actions, and expected outcomes. This supports a shared understanding between professionals and families and ensures that safeguarding plans are both effective and clearly understood.

Overall Position

Learning from complaints this year demonstrates that while core safeguarding decisions are generally appropriate and aligned with statutory duties, there are areas where practice has been strengthened to improve clarity, consistency, and transparency.

The improvements implemented have focused on enhancing recording quality, strengthening communication, supporting more robust professional judgement, and ensuring that families are able to understand and engage with services. Through these actions, Children's Social Care has demonstrated a clear commitment to continuous improvement, ensuring that feedback from complaints leads to meaningful and sustained change.

This approach ensures that complaints are not only resolved but are used constructively to improve the experience of children, young people and their families and to strengthen the quality of practice across the service.

Compliments and Positive Feedback

In addition to learning from complaints, Children's Social Care continues to receive a high level of positive feedback from children, young people, families, carers, and partner agencies. This feedback provides valuable insight into what is working well and highlights the strengths of our workforce and services.

Quality of Professional Practice

Families and professionals consistently praised the high standard of social work practice across a range of services. Feedback highlighted the professionalism,

expertise and ability of practitioners to manage complex and sensitive situations with confidence.

Partner agencies commented positively on practitioners' ability to facilitate challenging meetings and coordinate multi-agency responses effectively. One partner reflected that complex cases were managed "extremely well" and described the facilitation of a recent meeting as "perfectly handled."

This feedback demonstrates the high regard in which our practitioners are held and the confidence partner organisations have in their professional skills.

Building Trusting Relationships with Families

A strong theme across compliments was the ability of social workers to build trusting and respectful relationships with children and families. Families described feeling supported, listened to and valued, even where their initial experiences of services had been challenging.

One parent shared that their social worker was "very kind, supportive and easy to talk to," adding that "it really did just take one person to believe in you and that changes were made." Another family highlighted that their worker "made us feel at ease" and provided communication "like no other."

This feedback reflects the impact of relationship-based practice in rebuilding trust and improving engagement, particularly where families may have previously felt unsupported or judged.

Positive Impact on Children and Young People

Feedback from children, young people and carers demonstrates the meaningful difference that practitioners make in supporting outcomes and building confidence.

Carers and professionals described how children had developed strong and positive relationships with their social workers, with one noting that children "look forward to seeing her regularly" and that they feel "special and important" during interactions.

In another example, a young person's journey was highlighted where they were supported to grow in confidence and fully participate in meetings about their future. Feedback reflected how professionals help children and young people to feel heard, respected and involved in decisions about their lives.

Advocacy and Going Above and Beyond

Families frequently praised the commitment of social workers in advocating for their needs and going beyond expectations to provide both emotional and practical support.

One family shared that their social worker "goes above and beyond" and had "changed our lives for the better," providing "guidance, stability and hope at a time

when everything felt overwhelming.” Another described the support as “invaluable,” with practitioners offering clear advice, practical solutions and consistent reassurance.

This feedback highlights the dedication of staff in ensuring families receive holistic and responsive support, particularly during times of crisis or uncertainty.

Supporting Children with Additional Needs

Specialist services for children with disabilities and additional needs received particularly strong feedback from families.

Parents described practitioners as having “incredible support and guidance,” with one stating that advice provided was “easy to understand” and had led to clear and positive progress for their child. Another reflected that the support received was “invaluable” and had helped them better meet their child’s communication and learning needs.

This demonstrates the positive impact of tailored, specialist interventions and the importance of accessible and practical support for families.

Experience of Contact and Family Time

Families also provided positive feedback regarding supervised contact and family time arrangements. Parents reported feeling welcomed and supported by staff, highlighting the importance of a safe and supportive environment.

One parent reflected, “I cannot fault the staff at all... I feel supported and not judged,” adding that their children “feel comfortable there because of the staff you have.” This feedback highlights how thoughtful and compassionate practice can support positive family relationships during supervised contact.

Collaboration and Teamwork

Feedback also recognised the strong collaboration across teams and with partner agencies. Families highlighted the benefit of coordinated support, with one parent commenting that for the first time they felt “there is a proper support network and everyone is working together.”

Professionals noted the positive impact of practitioners who communicate well, share information effectively, and work together to achieve the best outcomes for children and families.

Dedication and Professional Values

Across all compliments, a consistent message emerged regarding the commitment, compassion and professionalism of staff.

Families described social workers as “kind, caring and attentive,” with practitioners demonstrating patience, empathy and a genuine commitment to improving

outcomes. One parent expressed that “words cannot express how grateful we are,” while another described their social worker as “amazing to both me and my child.”

This feedback reflects not only the quality of individual practice but also the values that underpin the service as a whole.

The compliments received during the year demonstrate the positive and lasting impact that Children’s Social Care continues to have on the lives of children, young people and families.

The inclusion of direct feedback highlights the importance of:

- Building strong, trusting relationships
- Providing clear, compassionate and consistent support
- Delivering high-quality, child-centred practice

These examples provide assurance that alongside learning from complaints, the service continues to deliver **high-quality, effective and compassionate support**, and remains committed to building on these strengths through ongoing improvement.