



Cheshire West
and Chester

Cheshire West and Chester Council

Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments

Annual Report
2024 – 2025

1. Introduction

This report provides information about the Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments received by Cheshire West and Chester Council during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. It highlights performance against statutory and internal timescales for complaint handling and provides assurance that improvements or revisions to services have been identified because of listening and responding to both compliments and complaints.

The Council's Customer team, part of the Companies, Compliance and Assurance service within the Governance Directorate, was responsible for the council-wide coordination of Adult Social Care complaints and compliments during this period. Adult Social Care services are responsible for the triage, investigation and responses to complaints and compliments. They must also satisfy themselves that any commissioned providers have also dealt with them appropriately and in line with any contractual or statutory requirements

In accordance with statutory guidance, responses to complaints received by the Council should be proportionate. Officers are encouraged to resolve matters locally at the first point of customer contact to avoid escalation. Concerns raised with the service and resolved by close of play the following day are not counted as statutory complaints. Where this approach does not deliver a satisfactory outcome for the complainant, matters are then directed through the formal complaints' procedure. See Appendix A for full details of Statutory complaints procedure and Appendix B for eligibility criteria.

The objectives of this report are to:

- be open and transparent about our social care complaints process
- meet our statutory obligation to produce an annual report
- provide clear and concise comparative data on compliments and complaints, including details of complaints broken down by subject and service area
- provide a summary of customer profile and type of customer interaction
- identify service improvements as a result of complaints and compliments and demonstrate learning and improved practices and processes from these

Context

Whilst considering this report it is important to see the overall picture of Adults Social Care involvement in the Cheshire West and Chester area. During this period, we provided services to 11,700 adults (age 18 and over and are receiving one or more service). 19 formal complaints were handled representing less than 1% of service users.

PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY 2024/2025

1.1 Summary of Complaint Activity

A total of **86** representations were received this year, of these **19 formal complaints** were accepted.

Of the remaining representations:

- 44 were treated as a 'request for service' (defined as when contact is made for the first time to make a request for something that would not be considered a complaint).
- 2 did not proceed as they were withdrawn by the complainant, usually because the service has resolved the issue to the customer's satisfaction without the need to progress a formal complaint.
- 21 cases were refused as 'ineligible' as there was a more appropriate alternative pathway to address the concerns raised, such as via the Corporate Complaints process.

1.2 Comparison with Previous Years

The table below shows the number of representations and progressed complaints for 2024/25 compared with the previous three years.

Table 1: Total number of complaints considered

Year	Total no. of valid complaints processed	Request for service	Withdrawn/ not pursued	Ineligible / Redirected	Total no. of representations considered
2024-2025	19	44	2	21	86
2023-24	19	78	3	7	107
2022-23	19	40	2	22	83
2021-22	26	50	5	14	95

1.3 Number of Complaints - Observations

The number of complaints received remains consistent with previous years but requests for service received via the complaints route have decreased which suggests our signposting to complaints versus service requests has improved.

In 2024 –2025 the number of enquiries that became formal complaints is 22% which suggests that early resolution continues to be effective.

1.4 Complaint Outcomes

Table 2 - Outcomes and comparisons with previous years

Year	Upheld	Partially upheld	Not upheld	Outstanding	Total
2024-2025	3	11	5	0	19
2023-2024	3	5	11	0	19
2022-2023	3	6	10	0	19
2021-2022	5	10	11	0	26

The percentage of 'upheld' cases remains the same, however there has been an increase in cases that have been partially upheld.

1.5 Breakdown of complaints received by Service Area

Table 3 – Breakdown of complaint by service area

Service Area	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22
Prevention and Wellbeing				
Northwich & Winsford Patch Team	3	5	1	2
Chester, E.Port & Rural Patch Team	12	7	11	8
Learning Disability Team (Including Transitions)	0	4	2	4
Occupational HealthTherapy	1	0	0	3
Review Team	0	3	1	1
Reablement and Provider Services	0	0	0	0
Community Mental Health Hospitals	1	0	0	1
Social Work Teams	1	0	2	3
Safeguarding Team*	0	0	0	0

Service Area	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22
Commissioning	0	0	1	1
Emergency Duty Team	0	0	0	0
Community Access Team	0	0	0	0
Home Assessment Team (HAT) & Placement Assessment Team	1	0	0	1
Total	19	19	19	26

**Relates to complaints about the safeguarding process or the complaint doesn't meet the threshold for initiating a safeguarding investigation.*

The higher number of complaints for the Chester, Ellesmere Port and Rural patch, is the usual pattern and reflects the higher population in this area.

1.6 Complaints by Subject

By their nature, adult social care complaints are very specific to the circumstances of the individual and cover a wide range of individual experiences, often relating to more than one aspect of a service that has been received. Complaints received by the Council have been classified based on the 'primary' area of concern (subject) raised by the complainant.

Detailed below are the numbers of complaint that fall within each category:

Table 4 – Complaint Subject

Complaint Subject (primary area of concern)	2024-2025	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22
Standard / Quality / Appropriateness of Service	10	12	12	14
Ignoring Concerns	0	0	2	3
Appropriateness of service (care package)	1	4	1	1
Issues with Provider	0	1	1	1
Inaccuracies in assessments	0	0	4	0
Lack of support (including delay)	9	5	2	5
Standard of care	3	2	2	4

Complaint Subject (primary area of concern)	2024-2025	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22
Social Worker – Attitude or Behaviour	0	0	0	0
Social Worker – Communication & Information	4	3	2	4
Financial / Cost Issues*	2	4	5	8
Total	19	19	19	26

1.7 Complaint Response Times

Table 5 – Compliance Rates

No. of Working Days	2024-2025	2023-2024	2022-2023	2021-2022
20 working days or less	5	5	2	12
21-40 working days	7	7	4	6
41-60 working days	1	3	8	3
61-80 working days	0	1	0	1
81-100 working days	1	1	2	0
Over 100 working days	5	2	3	4
Total	19	19	19	26

There is no statutory requirement to respond to complaints within 20 days, this is a locally agreed target. Adult social care cases are often complex, involve the wider family, and can take longer to investigate and form an appropriate response. Still, most of these complaints (60%) were answered within 40 working days, reflecting the same timeframe for a complex stage 2 corporate complaint, this remains the same as last year.

1.8 Point and Method of Receipt of Complaints

The Customer Relations Team has recorded both the 'point of receipt' and 'method of receipt' of complaints into the Council. This intelligence can help support service improvement decisions.

Table 6 shows that the established systems for ensuring that complaints are directed to the Customer Relations Team for initial assessment are working well,

with those sent into the service re-directed to the Customer Relations Team for triage and logging.

Table 7 shows a continued preference by customers in contacting the Council using the on-line complaint form/email.

We do however recognise that not all our residents will want to use digital methods and complaints can still be posted or made verbally at all points of access into the council.

Table 6

Point of receipt	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
Service Area	2	1	2	5	9
Customer Relations Team	16	18	14	14	18
Director/Head of Service	0	0	1	4	1
Chief Executive	1	0	1	0	0
Other	0	0	1	3	0
Total	19	19	19	26	28

Table 7

Method of receipt	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22
Letter	3	3	3	3
Telephone/verbal	0	0	0	0
Email	0	1	2	13
Online complaints	0	0	6	9
Feedback Form	0	0	0	1
Firmstep (Council website)	16	15	8	N/A
Total	19	19	19	26

1.9 PROFILE/CATEGORY OF COMPLAINANTS

A summary of customer profile and type of customer interaction has shown that most complaints continue to be raised by the son/daughter.

Table 8

Person making the complaint	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22
Care recipient	4	0	6	2
Parent/s	0	4	0	6
Grandchild	0	0	0	0

Husband / Wife	1	2	3	2
Sibling	0	1	2	0
Solicitor	1	0	0	0
Son / Daughter	12	11	7	15
Advocacy service	1	0	1	0
Friend	0	0	0	1
Other	0	1	0	0
Total	19	19	19	26

2.0 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

The Ombudsman reports on local authority figures based on the number of cases it receives in the reporting year; the number of decisions it makes in the reporting year (which may include cases ongoing from the previous year) and the Council's compliance with any recommendations.

In 2024/5 the Ombudsman:

- Received 84 complaints (an increase of 11% on the previous year)
- Made decisions on 78 complaints
- Upheld 10 complaints (a decrease of 23%)

Of the 10 Upheld complaints 2 related to Adult Social Care, a decrease of 1 case compared to last year. This year the remedial payments recommended by the Ombudsman (and actioned by the Council) totalled £8,117.06, an amount similar to last year. In this case, this was a refund of overpayments.

3.0 COMPLIMENTS RECEIVED

Table 9

Year	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
No. of Compliments	135	80	91	177	83

Below are some extracts from the Adults' Compliments Dashboard report:

"Based on our experience with "SJ" and her colleague, we feel that both she and he were very professional, that they genuinely care and are able to make balanced decisions based on fact. During one particular visit, when they visited to reassess actual needs, they were very observant and took the time to explain the rationale behind their recommendations, which we found very helpful".

"Excellent support to cover emergency respite for me whilst my sole carer was hospitalised at very short notice. This was very importance to be and made me feel safe, and removed all support worries for my carer".

“Social workers have been very competent, have listened to concerns from us as a support provider and worked with us and the family to build relationships and improve the lives of the service users we support”.

“To all the lovely ladies who have been taking care of me for the past few weeks. Thank you each and every one of you for making my life easier. The inspiration and encouragement I received each and every day was excellent as I face my daily challenge. I think I must of met all of you and I looked forward to you coming through the door and giving the banter which has given me a kick start. So thank you all again it has been a pleasure to meet you all, the privilege has been all mine”.

“The service has been extremely helpful after coming out of the hospital, as I want to stay in my own home and this service has enabled this to happen. All the staff have been positive and helpful and kind”.

4.0 LEARNING AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

The Council has identified areas and opportunities from which learning can be taken from the complaints and the compliments process and used to improve future service delivery, below is learning from complaint investigations:

We are currently reviewing how we communicate the complicated process relating to financial contributions for Adult Social Care. Currently people are signposted to an online financial assessment portal when they receive a copy of their assessment but more accessible information needs to be made available to people on their discharge from hospital so that they are aware of the requirement for a financially assessed contribution at the earliest possible stage. We will ensure that this information is available in paper form for those who do not use digital platforms.

Feedback to management regarding the third party top up form and a request if this can be reviewed so it is clear for families the difference between a client contribution and a third party top up arrangement.

Resources have been utilised to deal with the long waiting times people were experiencing due to high volumes of people being referred into the service. We continue to strive to reduce the wait times for assessments being undertaken post discharge

- Discussions with workers in supervision and in team meetings are continuously being undertaken regarding accurate recording of conversations, also workers regularly being reminded to update their knowledge on the case file recording policy.*
- It is discussed further in team meetings and supervisions about financial discussions and when it is appropriate to have them and with whom.*

As a result of the investigation we have addressed the issue of what information should be included within an assessment within the team. We have paid particular attention to how to handle information relating to safe guarding enquiries. We will be including further training relating to this in future team meetings.

For the 2023/24 reporting year we had the benefit of a Customer Experience Lead for the Health and Wellbeing directorate recruited in September 2023 who worked with Adult Social Care to achieve the :

- Support with identifying and delivering service improvements
- Developed a network of Customer Ambassadors to promote and embed good customer experience within services. Adult Social Care is well represented with four Ambassadors from different areas of the service
- Launch and lead on the coordination of a Councillor Portal. Whilst this does not directly relate to a reduction in complaints, it is another channel for keeping residents informed via their elected representatives
- Alongside the Performance and Assurance Delivery Officer, coordinated and delivered the Customer Experience survey launched to obtain feedback and drive continuous improvement
- Contributed to the Quarterly ASC Customer Experience Group Coordinated Adult Social Care engagement with the Community Inspirers, embedding co-production and feedback from residents with lived experience

5.1 FUTURE PLANS FOR COMPLAINT HANDLING

- We continue to review our website and signposting to our complaints process to ensure that customers know where to raise complaints, and where to raise routine business/service requests to reduce the number of non-complaint contact via the complaints route.
- We will work with the service to improve our remedy offers at an early stage.
- Plans for Customer Experience Lead to arrange “drop-in complaints sessions” open to all Health and Wellbeing services. This will provide services with the opportunity to discuss possible barriers affecting compliance and also seek advice on remedy payments.
- Ongoing support and development for staff through training workshops on the case management system and complaint handling, complemented by new and updated training materials. The focus is on strong administrative practices, effective case management, timely communication, adherence to compliance timescales, and empowering staff to work confidently and efficiently.
- Customer Network Conference took place in June 2025 with a focus on complaints handling and using attendance feedback a second conference will take place Spring 2026 to continue to develop and support staff who handle complaints.
- Reunion of our Customer Ambassador network with a focused work plan to ensure engagement and co-production in developing and advocating complaint handling best practices.

End Report

APPENDIX A

STATUTORY COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Adult Social Care Complaints Procedure

The Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, as amended by the National Health Services Act and Community Care Act 1990 and the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009, require the local authority to have a procedure for the handling and consideration of complaints received by, or on behalf of, adult service users. A local authority must also ensure that action is taken if necessary, in the light of the outcome of a complaint. To comply with the above requirements, Cheshire West and Chester have adopted the operational procedures set out in section 1 of this report.

Role of the Customer Relations Team

The Customer Relations Team is responsible for the handling and consideration of complaints and acts as a central point through which complaints can be made to the Council. Complaints can be made via telephone; in writing; through the online social care complaints portal; or directly to the dedicated social care complaints email inbox. Complaints received directly by the Service should be referred to the Customer Relations Team to be assessed for eligibility.

The Customer Relations Team, often in liaison with the Service, will determine whether a complaint is eligible for consideration under the statutory framework or whether an alternative route (for example safeguarding or through the corporate complaints process if the issue complained about is not related to the quality of care provided) would be more appropriate.

The Customer Relations Team offer training, advice and support to staff in their consideration of complaints and perform a quality assurance role in the preparation of complaint responses. The Team also liaise with complainants to keep them informed on progress with their complaints and provide advice about the complaints process and the role of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

The Team also coordinates the completion of Learning Action Reports for the service, which capture the learning and improvements identified through responding to complaints. This is recorded and reported centrally and monitored to ensure that the implementation of identified, agreed actions following the outcome of complaints is carried out. Learning is shared with other services, where it is relevant to do so, in order to improve service delivery Council-wide.

What is a Complaint?

Any expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided by the council or by a contractor, commissioned provider or partner) that requires a response. There is no difference between a 'formal' and an 'informal' complaint. Both are expressions of dissatisfaction that require a response.

Who Can Make a Complaint?

Anyone can make a complaint if they receive a service from Adult Social Care. Complaints can also be accepted from individuals acting on behalf of a service user, for example from an advocate or family member, if the service user has given consent. Where a service user's capacity to make informed decisions may be in question, the Customer Relations Team (in conjunction with the Service Team Manager) will look at whether the person pursuing the complaint is acting in the service user's best interests.

People who fund their own care (self-funded users) for services that are regulated by the Care Quality Commission do not fall under this procedure as they are not using Council services.

Adult Social Care and Health Complaints Procedure

The current Adult Social Care and Health complaints procedure consists of a single response to the complainant, followed by a right of referral to the independent Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Complaints are always assessed, or 'triaged', by the Customer Relations Team to identify any potential safeguarding risks or concerns that need immediate attention. Where safeguarding issues are identified, those matters are redirected to be considered under the appropriate safeguarding procedures without delay. Where there are no obvious safeguarding concerns complaints are referred via the Customer Relations Team to a Senior Manager to be considered through the social care complaints procedure. All, or parts of, a complaint may not be eligible under the social care complaint process. Where this is the case all non-social care elements will be referred to the corporate complaints policy or a more appropriate 'alternative path' and the customer kept informed about how their complaint, or parts of their complaint, will be dealt with.

Commissioned providers are expected to have robust complaint procedures in place, and an appropriate reporting mechanism for these in order to keep the Council updated. As the Council retains overall accountability for the services delivered by commissioned providers, it reserves the right to accept a complaint into its own ASC complaint process if it considers it warrants further investigation, for example, if it decides that the provider's response does not answer the complaint, address the injustice or offer a reasonable remedy. Where there are immediate contractual concerns these will be followed up outside of the complaint process by the Commissioning Service.

The Customer Relations Team will work with the Service and the Commissioning Team to monitor these complaints and provide advice and support.

Initial Expressions of Dissatisfaction

Complaints received directly by the Service (or elsewhere) that, from initial assessment, look like they can be resolved by close of play the following day, are not required to proceed through the complaints process. These concerns/issues are often relatively minor, and resolution can most easily be addressed locally through the service. The customer is always advised how they can progress their complaint if they remain dissatisfied.

Formal Resolution

Complaints considered under the formal procedure are acknowledged within three working days and information is provided to the customer about the complaints process and how to access advocacy support.

Complaints are allocated to the relevant Senior Manager who will discuss the complaint, where necessary, with the complainant. The scale and the nature of the investigation are intended to be proportionate to the complaint and may include an initial telephone call; face to face meetings with complainants; interviews with staff; paper reviews of records; policies and procedures examination, etc.

Responses to all complaints should be concluded within the statutory 6 months deadline unless exceptional circumstances prevent it and an alternative deadline is agreed in advance with the complainant or their representative. However, the Council has set itself a challenging, much shorter, internal target to aim to complete non-complex complaints within 20 working days. It is intended that, as far as possible, most complaints should be resolved by a single thorough response. Due consideration will be given to any request from a complainant to consider further the outcome of any complaint and this is at the Customer Relations Manager's discretion following consultation with the service. An expression of general dissatisfaction with the outcome of the complaint will not normally lead to the response being revisited.

Following conclusion of the complaint process the complainant has the right to pursue the matter further with the independent Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) if they feel the matter remains unresolved.

Safeguarding

The Customer Relations Team liaises directly with the Adult Safeguarding Team, and with the relevant Social Care Team as appropriate. Contact is maintained with the Safeguarding Unit to discuss individual complaints and agree appropriate approaches if there are any safeguarding concerns. When Safeguarding thresholds are met, the contact will be dealt with via a Safeguarding investigation, rather than through the complaint process.

APPENDIX B

What makes a valid complaint under the Adults Social Care Complaints Process

Eligibility is established by the Customer Relations Team in conjunction with the Service as follows:

- That the person complaining is eligible to make a complaint : Anyone who receives an adult social care service, or who has been refused a service, can make a complaint. A carer, friend, relative or advocate can also complain on their behalf. If making a complaint on behalf of another person we will need to ask them their consent.
- A complaint may be generally defined as an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual which requires a response. You can complain about any aspect of the service provided to you by Adult Social Care – about its quality or reliability, about the way you have been treated, or about the way that decisions have been taken by our staff.

Exemptions from the Complaints Procedure

- If the person complaining does not meet the requirement of “who can complain”
- If the complaint is not in relation to the actions or decisions of the Adult Social Care Service within the Local Authority, or of any Body acting on its behalf.
- If the same complaint has already been dealt with via the complaint process
- Data Protection Matters
- Out of Time (needs to be within 12 months of when the issue happened)

The Local Authority has the discretion to not deal with a complaint if they feel it would prejudice the following concurrent investigations:

- Court Proceedings
- Tribunals
- Disciplinary Proceedings
- Criminal Proceedings

If this is the case, the Local Authority will write to the complainant explaining the reasons for the decision.