

Complaints Annual Report 2024 – 2025

Appendix A – Adult Social Care Statutory Complaints

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of statutory complaints made about Brent Adult Social Care (ASC) services from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, as required under The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009, the Health and Social Care Community Health & Standards Act 2003 and the Local Authority Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2006.

2. Statutory Complaints Process

- 2.1 The Department of Health defines an adult social care complaint as, *“an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet about the actions, decisions or apparent failings of a Council’s adult social care provision which requires a response”*.
- 2.2 Anyone who has received a service, is currently receiving a service or is seeking a service from the Council can make a complaint. This includes anyone affected by decisions the Council makes about social care, including a service provided by an external provider acting on behalf of the Council. In such a case, they can complain directly to the provider or to the Council. External providers are required to have their own complaints procedures and must comply with them. They are also required to share information on complaints and outcomes with the Council.
- 2.3 Legislation states that there is only one stage in the statutory process, however the Council has interpreted this as a provisional response (stage 1) and a final decision (stage 2) so that it is in line with the corporate procedure. All complaints made to the Council are logged and acknowledged on our internal complaints database. The Council will try to resolve the provisional complaint as soon as possible, and within 25 working days of receipt. If delays are anticipated, the complainant is consulted and informed appropriately. All responses, regardless of whether a timescale has been agreed with the complainant or not, must be completed within six months of receiving the complaint.
- 2.4 The Head of Service should sign all provisional complaint responses and if complainants are still unhappy, they will be given the opportunity to have their complaint reviewed by the Director, Adult Social Care or the Corporate Director, Community, Health and Wellbeing. In some cases, complaints may need to be passed to the Safeguarding leads as appropriate and the complaints process suspended in order to allow the safeguarding process to be completed. In cases where the complaint relates to several organisations, a single organisation will act as the lead and co-ordinate a joint response to the complainant. The final complaint response must advise the complainant of their right to approach the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) should they remain dissatisfied.

3. Headlines

3.1 The main performance headlines from ASC statutory complaints are as follows:

- 114 complaints were received at the initial stage of the complaints process in 2024/25, a reduction of 14% from 2023/24.
- The volume for service areas for first stage complaints are as follows – Access, Information and Long Term Support (50%), Learning Disability and Mental Health (20%), Commissioning, Contracting and Market Management (10.5%), Intermediate Care and Principal Occupational Therapist (17.5%) and Safeguarding and Principal Social Worker (2%).
- 78% of provisional responses were upheld or partly upheld.
- 74% of stage 2 cases were upheld or partially upheld.
- 92% of stage 1 complaints were responded to on time which is a significant improvement on the 79% performance last year.
- There was a significant increase in the amount of compensation paid between 2023/24 and 2024/25 (further details in section 9 of this report)

4. ASC Service Users

4.1 In order to provide some context in relation to complaints submitted, in 2024/25 ASC recorded a total of 11,526 contacts, 3,680 via Brent Customer Services, 3,690 via ASC supported Hospital Discharge Team. ASC carried out 12,133 assessments as well as 7,036 reviews. Currently 1,751 people are receiving homecare and 499 people are receiving support in supported living or extra care sheltered housing, and 265 people are receiving Extra Care. At the end of March 2025, ASC was providing funded support to 4,478 people.

5. Complaints Received

- 5.1 In 2024/2025, ASC received 114 stage 1 statutory complaints compared to 131 in 2023/2024 which is a 14% decrease. In recent years, the overall number of stage 1 complaints received continually increased.
- 5.2 When complaints are received, they are directed to the Complaints Service for triaging. The Team will receive complaints by email, online through the web form or My Account, telephone and by letter. Brent Customer Services will also refer complainants to the Complaints Service. The ASC complaint legislation is explicit that the Council must receive complaints by any means. The ASC complaints process should be easy for all to access, and therefore the Team have provided a telephone number on the website especially for ASC clients. Staff within the Complaints Service will assist complainants as necessary, and if required will assist them in obtaining an advocate.
- 5.3 Statutory complaints received in this period are largely related to a service users' care needs assessment or the provision of social care needs through either homecare services or residential care. Anyone can approach the Council and is entitled to receive a care needs assessment. The main areas where ASC received complaints were Access, Information and Long-Term Support, Commissioning Contracting and Market Management and Learning Disability and Mental Health.

Details of the services they provide and the figures relating to complaints across these areas are as follows:

- ***Access, Information and Long Term Support:***

- 5.4 In 2024/2025, the service received 50% of all statutory complaints made to ASC at stage 1 (62 of 114). This is a significant increase on the previous year where 35% of cases received in 2023/2024 were for Access, Information and Long Term Support. This team deals with more complex support cases and have to manage service users' and families' expectations about the packages of care to which they are entitled. The complaints that are received by the team relate to disagreements with the decisions around care packages / assessments, delays in receiving an assessment and complaints concerning communication from social workers. The service users and their families will often have a higher expectation of the services they should receive than the Council can provide. The Council has to consider value for money, as well as the needs of the service user when providing services. These are complex and often sensitive matters and can lead to understandable disputes between the parties involved. This Team serves as the front-door to services within ASC and take on a larger number of cases compared to other services. There has been a concerted effort to improve complaint handling throughout the service and develop a more robust working relationship with the Complaints Service to help reduce the number of complaints, an example being fortnightly case conferences and complaints training.

- ***Commissioning Contracting and Market Management:***

- 5.5 In 2024/2025, complaints relating to these services accounted for 10.5% of all complaints received by ASC which is a significant decrease from 21% in the previous year. Overall, 14 complaints were received for this service area in 2024/2025 at stage 1 and stage 2 compared to 31 received in the previous year.

- ***Intermediate Care and Principal Occupational Therapist:***

- 5.6 Of the 114 cases received at Stage 1 for ASC, this service received 20 complaints (17.5% of all complaints received by ASC at stage 1). At stage 2, five complaints were received from this service.

- ***Learning Disability and Mental Health:***

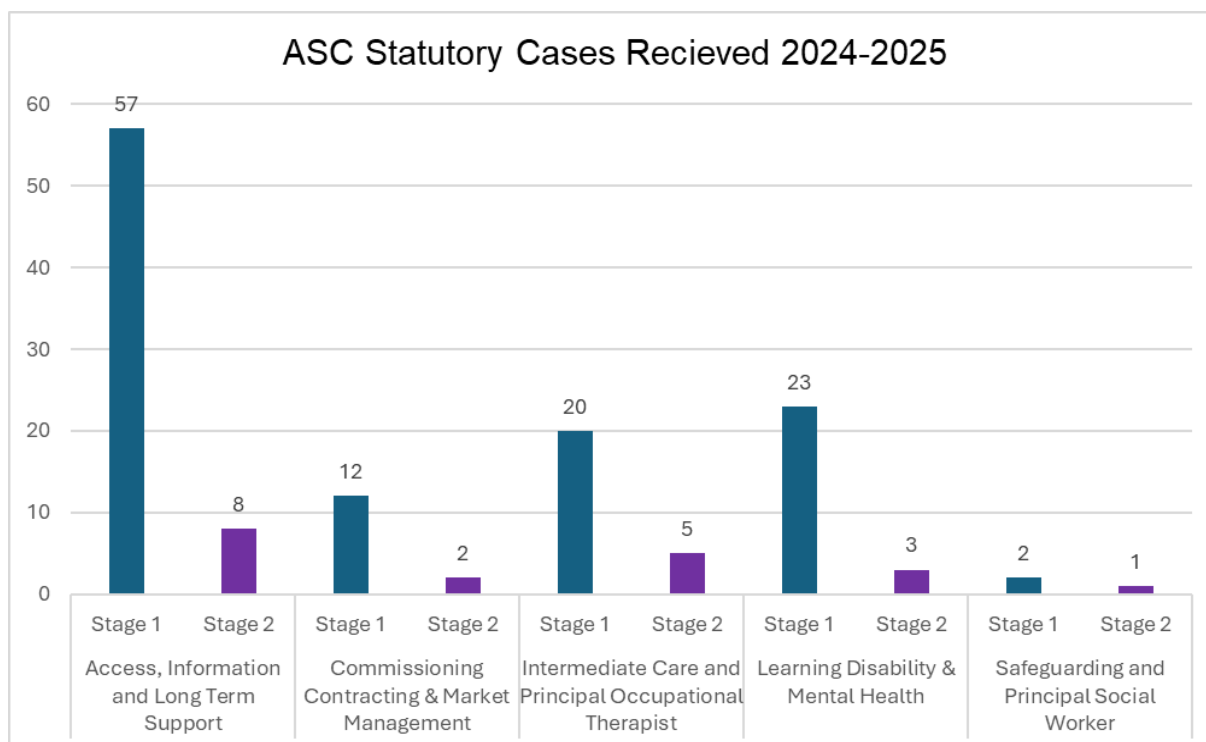
- 5.7 This service accounted for 20% of all complaints received by ASC at stage 1 in 2023/2024, a marginal decrease of 3% from the previous year. This service is smaller in comparison to others in ASC however this service deal with cases of a complex nature.

- ***Safeguarding and Principal Social Worker:***

- 5.8 This service rarely receives complaints because issues of safeguarding are usually reviewed within the service areas in which customers are provided support. The one

case received related to a Doctor from a GP practice who made a safeguarding referral regarding one of their patients. The Safeguarding Team closed their enquiries however the complainant was not happy about this so requested a complaint investigation.

- 5.9 The chart below shows the number of ASC statutory complaints received in 2024/2025. Of the 114 statutory complaints received at stage one, 19 were escalated to the final review stage, which is more than last year. In 2023/2024, 11 complaints were escalated and in 2022/2023 12 were escalated to the final review stage. This year saw a significant increase in escalations.

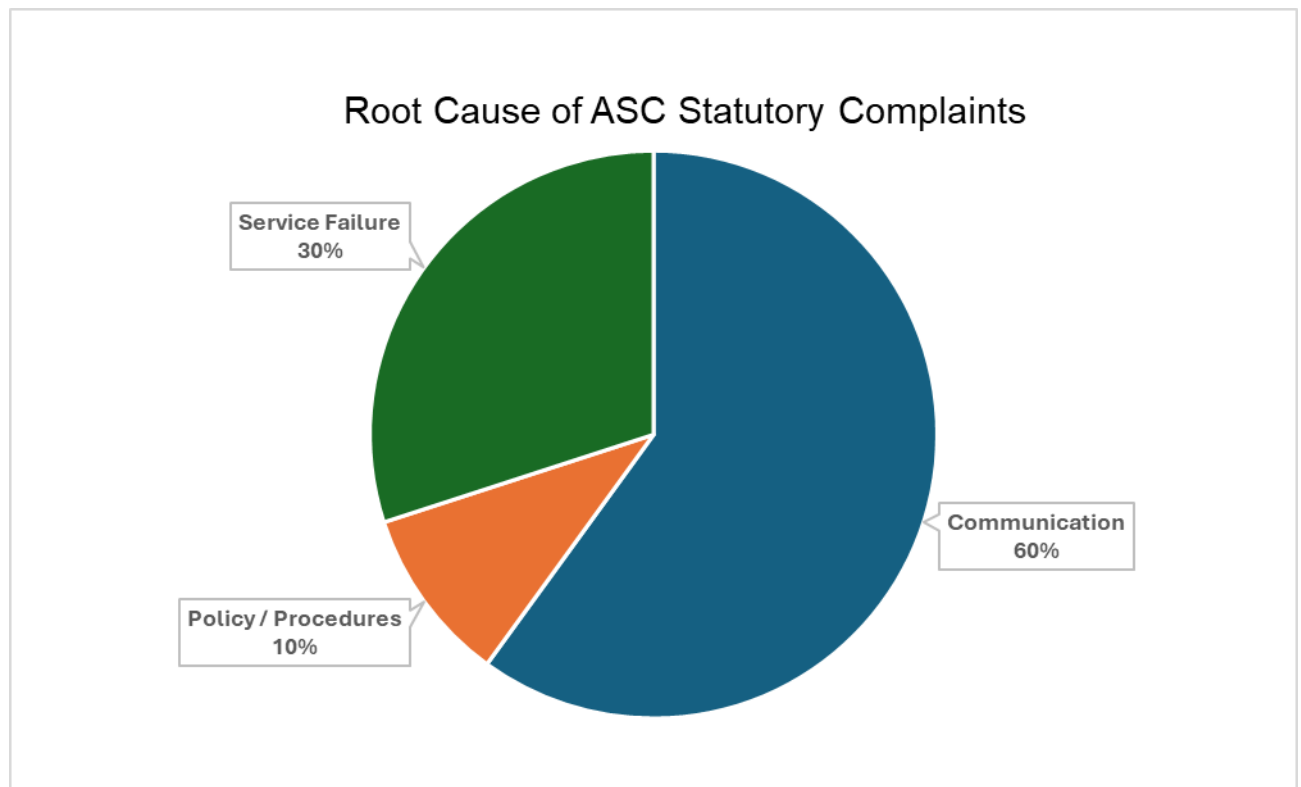


- 5.10 In 2024/2025, the escalation rate for statutory complaints is 17% compared to 8% in 2023/2024 and 11% in 2022/23. This is partly due to the increased demand on services and more education around complaints investigations needed. ASC actively tries to resolve concerns, however, despite this, some of the more complex cases are escalated. Access, Information and Long-Term Support received 8 cases and Intermediate Care and Principle Occupational Therapist services received 5 cases. These services have the highest number of stage 2 escalations. Both services received 3 stage 2 escalations each last year. This issue became apparent mid-way through the year and as a result, the Complaints Service set up fortnightly case conferences to assist with the quality of stage 1 responses.

6. Nature / Reasons for Complaints

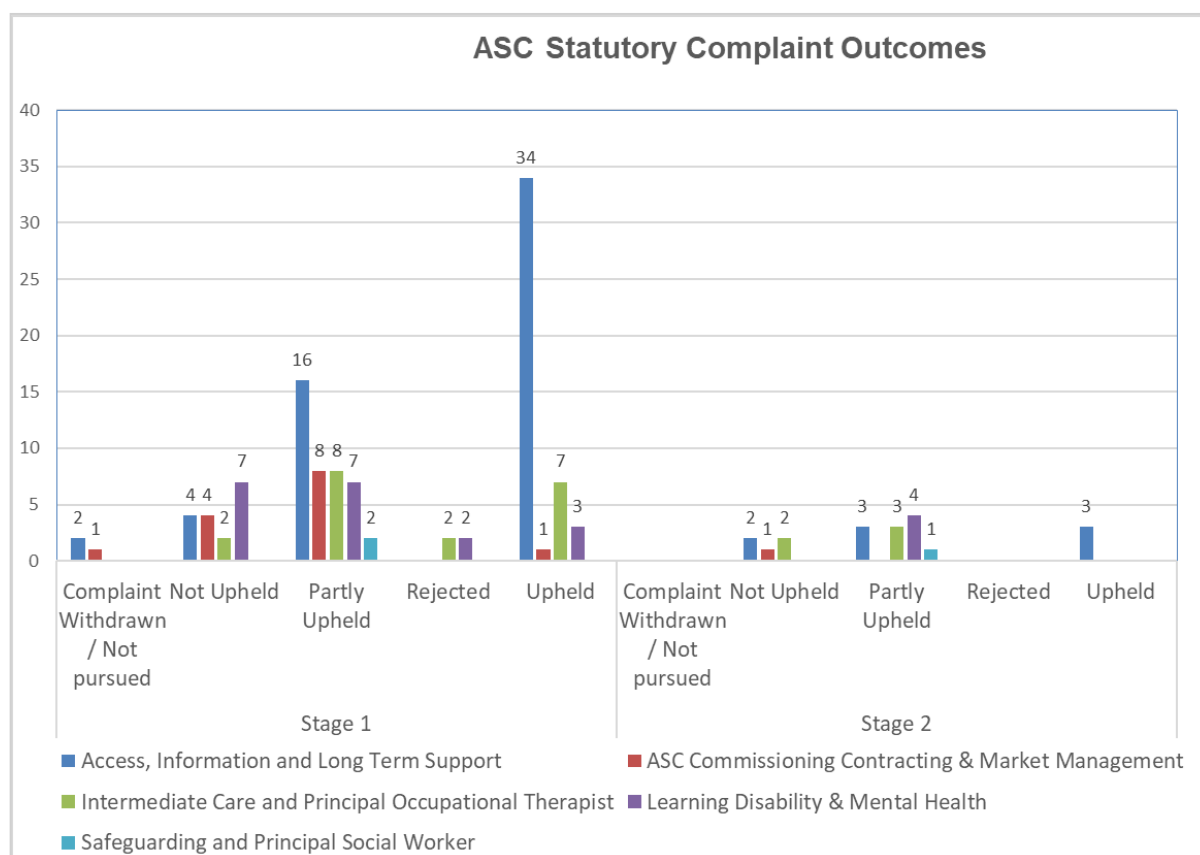
- 6.1 In 2024/2025, communication issues accounted for 60% of all complaints received, demonstrating a slight increase from 2023/2024 when this was the case for 57% of complaints. This rise suggests there are still ongoing challenges with keeping service users informed and updated. Service failure accounted for 30% of complaints, showing a slight decrease from 33% the previous year, indicating some

improvement in services. Complaints related to policy or procedure remains the same as last year at 10% of all complaints received.



7. Complaint Outcomes

- 7.1 The chart below shows the outcome of statutory complaints at stage 1 and final review stage:



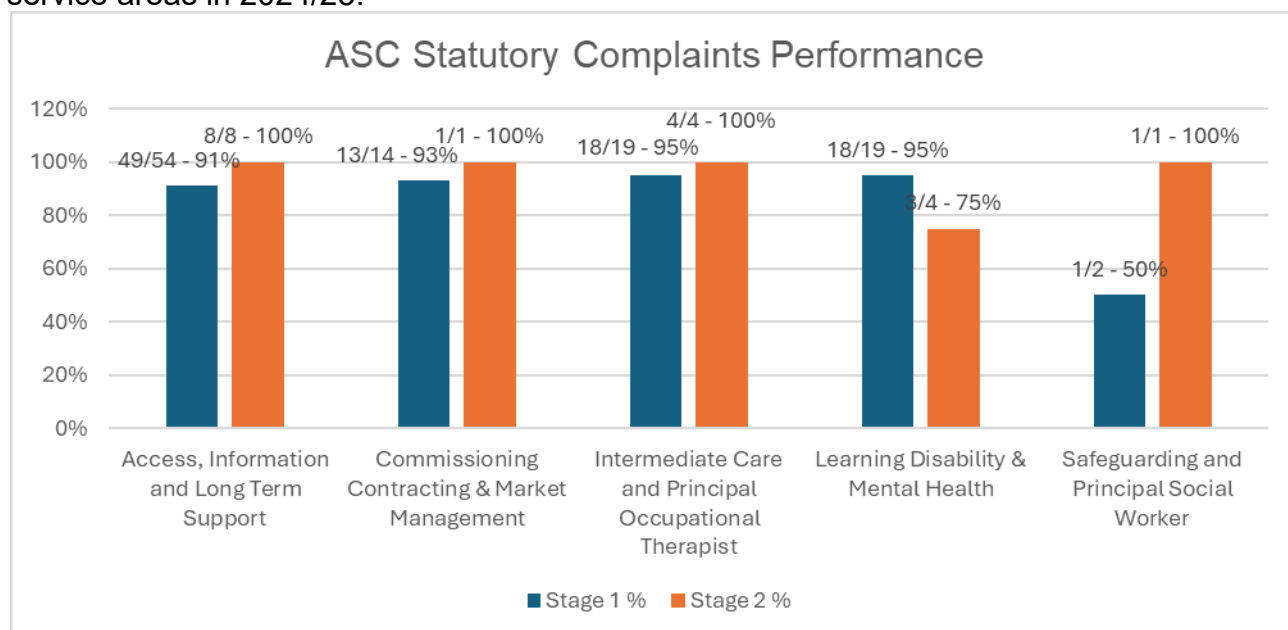
- 7.2 Complaints received at stage 1 show that some fault (upheld or partly upheld) by the Council was found in 78% of cases, showing a significant increase compared to some fault being found in 66% of cases in 2023/2024. The increase in cases upheld shows services are continually willing to accept fault and make service improvements.
- 7.3 Complaints of a complex nature and which involve a number of teams are more typically escalated to stage 2. At stage 2, some fault was found in 74% (14/18 stage 2 complaints received) of cases, this is a significant increase from 2023/2024 where some fault was found in 36% of cases as well as from 2022/23 where 61% of complaints were either upheld or partly upheld. The Complaints Service has worked with colleagues in ASC to identify appropriate service improvements through stage 1 quality assurance. The figures above shows that this has had a significant impact with outcomes (upheld/not upheld) at stage 2 remains the same as stage 1. However, there are some instances where only part of the service improvements have been identified and at stage 2, a wider approach is needed to resolve a complainant's concerns.
- 7.4 The Complaints Service continues to work with ASC to review the accuracy and quality of stage 1 responses, where they have escalated to the final stage, and report the findings to the ASC Management Team in order to implement strategies to reduce the number of escalations.
- 7.5 The Complaints Service are also working to ensure that the different departments within ASC are better coordinated when dealing with complaints about services that crossover the various teams by providing advice and regular complaints training. As a result of the recent changes in leadership across the service area, the Complaints

Service have identified a need to retrain senior members of staff and to advise them on timescales and quality of responses. Since November 2024, the Complaints Service began fortnightly case conferences to assist ASC on how to respond to complex complaints.

- 7.6 Some service improvements identified at the final review stage have been included in point 14 - Learning from Complaints.

8. Timeliness of Responses

- 8.1 The chart below shows complaint response timeliness across the various ASC service areas in 2024/25:



- 8.2 In 2024/2025, ASC responded on average to 92% of all stage 1 complaints within timescales which is a significant improvement on the 79% in the previous year. Stage 2 response times have remained consistent from last year, with one case being overdue as a result of a low staffing period.

9. Compensation

- 9.1 The below table provides a comparison to last year of the compensation paid on ASC cases across all stages of the complaints process.

ASC	2024/25 Amount	2023/24 Amount
Stage 1 / Provisional	£1,715	£100
Stage 2 / Final	£17,052.43	£800
Ombudsman	£4,100	£1,850
Total	£22,867.43	£2,750

- 9.2 At stage two, compensation was awarded on 13 cases. Some of these cases were escalated to stage 2 as a result of the lack of compensation awarded at stage 1 or,

where the need to pay compensation was identified, there was a failure to pay the sum awarded.

- 9.3 The Complaints Service have been working with ASC to encourage offers of compensation where it is warranted and deemed appropriate. As part of this effort, the Complaints Service has offered to deliver training to ASC staff to support them in processing compensation payments.
- 9.4 We continue to advocate for the implementation of a streamlined payment process, in collaboration with the relevant department and the ASC Finance Partner and await further updates on the progress of this development.
- 9.5 Significant payments were made on two cases, one for £5,150 and one for £7,052.43. The Ombudsman awarded a further £4,100 on two cases with one case being awarded an additional £4,000 to the £5,150 that was awarded at stage two.
- 9.6 All compensation awarded by the Council is in accordance with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman remedies guidance.

10. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Decisions in 2024/2025

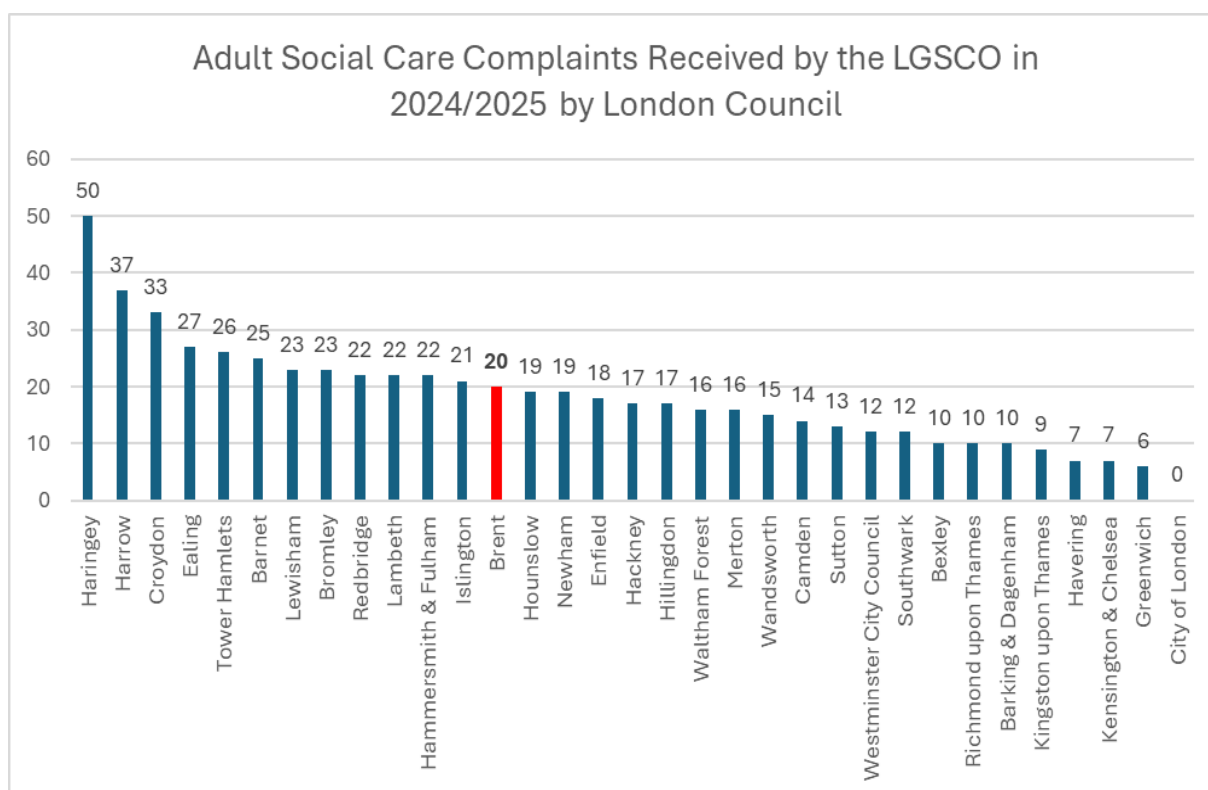
- 10.1 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) provide statistics for cases received and decisions made during a financial year as a complaint that has been received in one period may be decided in the following financial period. In the financial period 2024/2025 the LGSCO received 154 complaints (corporate and statutory) and enquiries across the Council and of those, 20 related to Adult Social Care, which is three less than the previous year. In total, 138 decisions were made by the LGSCO in the 2024/25 financial year for Brent of which 17 decisions related to ASC, which is eight less when compared to the previous year where 25 decisions related to ASC. The LGSCO's decisions included referring four cases back to the Council for local resolution as the Council's complaints process had not been completed. Two cases were closed by the Ombudsman as there was insufficient information or invalid information to proceed, one case was closed as advice had been given and four cases were closed after initial enquiries as there was no worthwhile outcome achievable by investigation. Detailed investigations were carried out in 6 cases. Of those, 5 were upheld (one less than in 2023/24) and 1 was not upheld. Three of the cases upheld were statutory cases and a summary for them has been provided in section 10.3. The other two cases were corporate cases and a summary has been provided in the Annual Complaints cover report.
- 10.2 The uphold rate to the LGSCO for ASC cases is 80%, which is less than the previous year at 86%.
- 10.3 A summary of the complaints upheld by the LGSCO is provided below:
- In the first upheld complaint, a mother complained about various issues regarding her son's supported living placement. The Ombudsman found some fault and recommended the following actions: apologies to both mother and son; £100 time and trouble compensation to the mother; completion of a financial mental capacity assessment and best interest decision for the son; a reminder to relevant officers of

their duties in in safeguarding adults; a reminder to relevant officers of the importance of effective complaint handling.

- In the second upheld complaint, the Ombudsman recommended additional compensation of £4,000 for injustice arising from the delays in setting up an increased personal budget for a young adult with significant care and support needs, and for failing to respond properly to the first stage complaint. The Ombudsman also decided in this instance that the compensation should not be offset against debt owed to the Council.
- The third upheld complaint related to issues with a care and support package. The Ombudsman recommended an apology to the complainant's family for the distress and uncertainty caused by the failure to share the outcome of the review of the complainant's care package and removing funds from his direct payment account without warning. The Ombudsman also recommended a reminder to all relevant officers about the importance of promptly sharing details of care package reviews with service users, their carers and their family, and ensuring that at least one week's notice is given prior to recouping funds from a direct payment account.

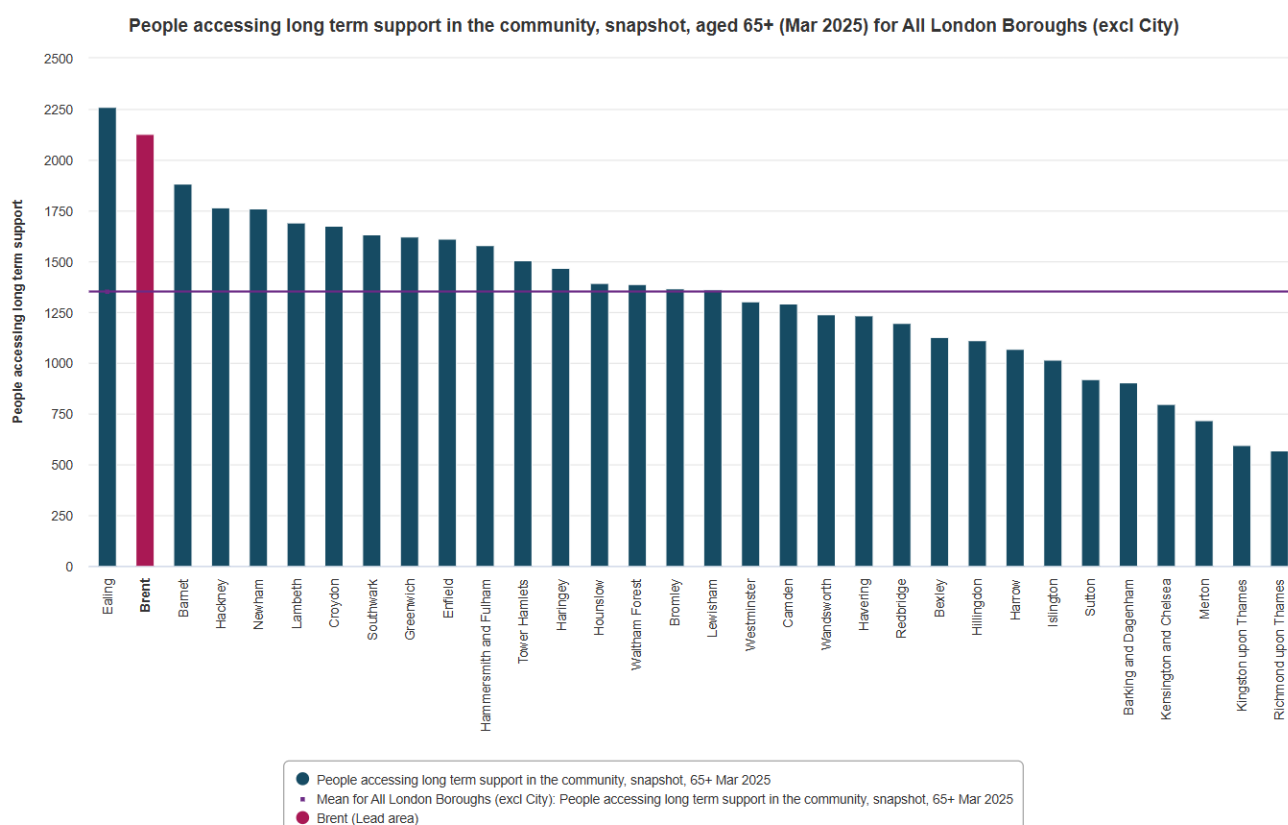
11. Benchmarking Data

- 11.1 Brent Council belongs to the North West London Social Care Complaint Managers Group. Unfortunately, many Councils have not yet completed their Complaints Annual Report or are reluctant to share their data.
- 11.2 The graph below shows data provided by the LGSCO with regards to the number of Adult Social Care complaints/enquiries received for each London borough.



11.3 The graph includes corporate as well as statutory complaints. In terms of complaints/enquiries received by the Ombudsman in relation to ASC, Brent has a high number of complaint/enquiries compared with other Councils. There are twelve London boroughs that had a higher number of complaints received. The complaints received are seven higher than the previous year for Brent, however, generally the number of complaints received regarding ASC across London is increasing, with a total of 491 received last year compared to 598 received this year for all London Councils. The figures provided do not necessarily mean that the complaint/enquiries were warranted but does show that ASC complaints continue to increase.

11.4 The data below from the Local Government Association also shows that Brent is supporting almost the most people aged over 65+ which means more complaints are to be expected. In addition to this, there are Councils supporting fewer people who are seeing more ASC LGSCO complaints than Brent (see bench marking graph in section 11.2 - Haringey for example is supporting less people but has highest amount of complaints escalated to the LGSCO for instance).



Source:
Department of Health and Social Care

12 Customer Feedback and Engagement

- 12.1 The majority of customer contact with the Complaints Service is reactive in that the Team responds to direct contact from customers and their representatives when they report a problem. Through this initial contact, the team, in conjunction with ASC managers, has been able to informally resolve a number of complaints at an early stage of contact, e.g. delayed OT assessments / care assessments, identifying resolutions to invoicing / billing queries that could have progressed to formal complaints.

13 Compliments

- 13.1 Compliments are as valuable as complaints in helping to improve services. When individuals take the time to tell the Council what is working well, it allows us to acknowledge excellent practice and reinforce our strengths.
- 13.2 Many compliments are given verbally through face-to-face conversations or phone calls and are not formally recorded, meaning they are not fully reflected in the annual figures.

13.3 A total of 18 compliments were formally recorded in 2024/25, compared to 27 in 2023/24. This represents a decrease and highlights the importance of recognising good practice as part of our quality assurance approach. Below are examples of compliments that staff in ASC have received:

- **Access Information Safeguarding and Well-Being Services**

“thank you so much for all your help with my father - the family really appreciate it. Thank you for all your efforts, time and assistance to get the appropriate equipment to make dad’s life a bit easier. This will help the team to keep him safer. Thank you for the paperwork too which I hope will help us to move forward so dad can be assessed for financial help etc. Wishing you all the best. Once again a very big thank you”.

- **Personalisation and Customer Reviews**

“[staff member] came to visit my mum, to carry out an assessment on her. My mum was a lot better than a couple of months ago as her mobility and personal capabilities had improved immensely. Therefore, my mum did not need the carers package as before. [staff member] was extremely professional and carried out my mums physical and mental assessment with great care and understanding, taking in to account my mums limited English. [staff member] was empathetic and listened, providing ideas and planned a care package which is the most effective and realistic for my mother. [staff member] assessed my mother in great detail and care, taking her through every obstacle that she may face day to day and how my mother is able to carry these out or not according to her capabilities. My mother felt so much warmth from [staff member] at the end of the meeting, my mother wanted to keep her longer. You are really lucky to have [staff member] working with you, I wish there were more like her, who care and are very passionate about their work”

- **Learning Disability, Mental Health and Autism**

“I am writing to commend your team, especially [staffs’ name) for their stellar support in dealing with the social care issues that we have encountered on Shore ward, and more specifically, for all the support they provided to our team in managing a particularly challenging case we recently had on the ward. They were able to raise concerns as needed and respond to our concerns in a very timely manner. They also attended all the required meetings to discuss the case. This is not something that I have always found during my tenure at PRCMH, which is why I felt the need to highlight it and say a big thank you. [staff member] in particular has shown that she is a valuable member of the senior management team and someone I have found to be professional but quite easy to liaise with. I look forward to continuing to work with them to ensure that patients are well looked after and provided with the care and support to help them stay well and safe in the community”

- **Intermediate Care and Occupational Therapy Service**

“I greatly appreciate your services and thank you and your team for the great job you do. [staff member] has been a great support in understanding my needs in this

difficult time I am going through because of my accident. He has arranged for the right Care Package, who also in turn are very supportive and deal empathically. I am truly very thankful to [staff member] for dealing in most professional manner, compassionately assessing the client's needs and arranging the right care package. He is a good listener who motivates and encourages me to come out of this difficult situation soon. His visits have been nice and peaceful. In short, I feel he is a great asset to your team and I wish him a great success in his career. Wishing your team and [staff member] a great success in your field"

14 Learning from Complaints

14.1 Learning from complaints offers a vital opportunity to improve services based on real-life experiences. Staff and managers responding to complaints are expected to identify any lessons learned, with learning outcome action plans developed for more complex cases.

14.2 Throughout 2024/25, Adult Social Care has continued to analyse a wide range of feedback from service users and carers, including that gathered via the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF) and locally collected data. Complaints, enquiries, and requests have also informed our learning.

14.3 According to the most recent Adult Social Care Survey (2024/25), 83% of individuals reported feeling extremely, very, or quite satisfied with the care and support they receive. The majority also stated that they enjoy a good quality of life and feel safe.

14.4 Brent Adult Social Care considers feedback from both compliments and complaints to be an integral part of its Quality Assurance process. Depending on the learning identified, ASC uses a variety of approaches to share and embed improvements across the service. These include:

- Developing and issuing updated practice guidance amongst staff and providers.
- Sharing updates during supervision, team meetings, ASC Quarterly meetings, dedicated learning forums and developing action plans to address areas of learning.
- Conducting case file audits to monitor and improve the quality of practice
- Sharing relevant complaint insights with other departments, such as Brent Customer Services

14.5 Where the learning is case-specific, it may not warrant changes to broader policy or procedure, but targeted learning is still addressed through team training, supervision, reflective practice, and development sessions.

14.6 Learning from residents' experiences also highlights areas where policy or service improvement is needed. It ensures senior leaders are aware of residents' concerns, strengthens communication, and supports service development. Brent's Co-production and Community Partnership approach actively engages residents and partners to co-design services that better meet local needs—helping to reduce complaints and improve satisfaction.

14.7 ASC also conducts quarterly reviews of complaints through the Improvement and Assurance Board. These reviews enable the sharing of learning, tracking of actions, and clarification of service standards directly with staff in response to complaint findings.