

Complaints Annual Report 2024 – 2025

Appendix B – Children’s Social Care Statutory Complaints

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of statutory complaints made about Brent Council Children’s Social Care Services as required under The Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.
- 1.2 This report provides information about all statutory complaints made during the twelve months between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 under the complaints and representations procedures.

2. Statutory Complaints Process

- 2.1 The purpose of the Children’s Act 1989 and Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 is to ensure local authorities have a formal complaint handling procedure in place for children and young people who wish to make a representation or complaint about social care.
- 2.2 It is helpful to be clear on what constitutes a complaint. The guidance “Getting the best from Complaints” produced by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) provides advice for local authorities on implementing the Children Act 1989 complaints procedure for children and young people. It defines a complaint as: ***‘A complaint may be generally defined as an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response.’***

2.3 Who Can Make a Complaint?

Section 26(3) and section 24D of the Children Act, 1989 and section 3(1) of the Adoption and Children Act, 2002 require Councils to consider complaints made by:

- any child or young person (or their parent or someone who has parental responsibility for them) who is being looked after by the local authority, or is not looked after by them but is in need
- any local authority foster carer (including those caring for children placed through independent fostering agencies)
- children leaving care
- special guardians
- a child or young person (or parent of his) to whom a Special Guardian order is in force
- any person who has applied for an assessment under section 14F (3) or (4) of the Children Act 1989
- any child or young person who may be adopted, their parents and guardians
- persons wishing to adopt a child
- any other person to whom arrangements for the provision of adoption services extend
- adopted persons, their parents, natural parents, and former guardians

- such other person as the local authority considers has sufficient interest in the child or young person's welfare to warrant his or her representations being considered by them.

2.4 The Council will accept complaints received through any medium, through contact with the Complaints Service, phone, email, online complaint form, by post or in person.

2.5 The regulations set out three stages:

- **Stage 1: Local Resolution** – this is the most important stage of the complaints procedure. The department and external contractors provide services on behalf of the Council and are expected to resolve as many complaints as possible at this initial stage. The statutory social care complaints procedure requires first stage complaints to be responded to within 10 working days. However, Heads of Service can request an extension of a further 10 working days where a complaint is considered complex or there is a need for a number of external organisations to be consulted. They will need to consult with the Complaints Service before an extension can be applied and also inform the complainant of the new timescale.
- **Stage 2: Independent Investigation** – this stage is triggered when the complainant is dissatisfied with the response at Stage 1. As a first step, the Complaints Service will consider mediation to resolve ongoing concerns at the end of the Stage 1 process, and before commencing the Stage 2 process. If a complaint does progress to Stage 2, this requires an investigation by an 'Independent Officer', a person external to the service and usually independent of the Council. In addition, the Council is also required to appoint an "Independent Person" who is independent of the Council and not related to any members or officers of the Council. The purpose of the 'Independent Person' is to represent the complainant in the process. The Stage 2 investigation report is then considered by the Director, who provides an adjudication letter to the complainant to confirm whether they agree with the report and the steps to be taken to address any recommendations. Stage 2 complaints which fall within the statutory process must be dealt with in 25 working days. Where it is not possible to complete the investigation within this timeframe an extension can be applied up to a maximum of 65 working days.
- **Stage 3: Review Panel** – where complainants are dissatisfied with the result of a Stage 2 investigation and wish to continue with their complaint about statutory social service functions, the Council is required to establish a Complaint Review Panel. The Panel consists of three independent panellists who have no connection to the Council; a Chair who is appointed by the Complaints Service and is also separate from the Council. The Chair consults with the Complaints Service on the selection of the other two panel members. The Panel undertakes an investigation and makes recommendations via a panel report. This will then be adjudicated by the Corporate Director for Children and Young People (CYP) who makes the final decision on the complaint.

- 2.6 If the Complainant remains unhappy with the outcome of their complaint, they have the right to refer their concerns to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). The LGSCO will carry out their own investigation requesting information from both parties and provide an outcome with any recommendations if appropriate.

3. Headlines

- 3.1 The main performance headlines from Children’s Social Care are as follows:

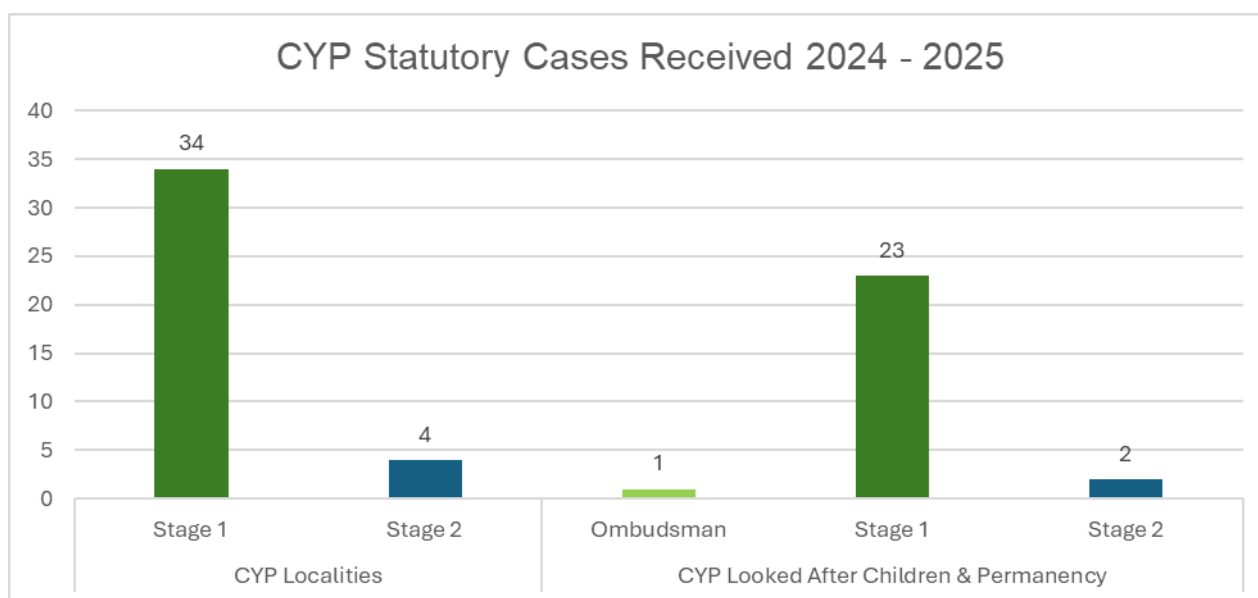
- The department received 59 statutory stage 1 complaints in 2024/25
- Stage 1 statutory complaint numbers increased by 39% in 2024/25
- There were eleven stage 2 investigations received and six of those investigations closed compared to seven the previous year
- 78% of stage 1 statutory complaints were responded to within target in 2024/25, against a target of 100%. This is the same as the previous year.
- £4,715 was paid in compensation for the period 2024/25, a slight decrease from £6,095 paid in the previous year.

4. Children’s Social Care Service Users

Subject to formal returns being received, Children’s Social Care received a total of 3,571 referrals and completed 3,110 Child & Family Assessments. The Council had 2,829 open Children in Need cases and 329 children were the subject of a Child Protection Plan. There were 296 Looked After Children and the Council had 618 care leavers aged 18-25 eligible for services.

5. Complaints Received

- 5.1 Brent Council CYP received a total of 57 stage 1 statutory complaints in 2024/25, an increase of 39% from last year where 41 complaints were recieved. There were six stage 2 requests received which is one less than last year.



- 5.2 The number of stage 1 complaints received for Localities was 34 which is an increase of 54.5% in comparison to the previous year with 22 complaints received. The number of complaints received at stage 1 for Looked After Children and Permanency increased by 28% from 2023/24 with 23 complaints received in 2024/25.
- 5.3 The Localities Service accounted for 34 complaints, 60% of the total number of stage 1 complaints received. These are split between East Localities, West Localities, Children with Disabilities and Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)/Family Front door/ Families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). These complaints concerned the communication and attitude of social workers, the accuracy of reports and assessments and disagreements over the size of support packages.
- 5.4 The Children with Disabilities team received 18 stage 1 complaints in 2024/25 and four were escalated to stage 2. These cases commonly related to reductions in care packages and disagreements relating to this. Another common theme was around communication and information contained within records and reports. The Family Front Door/MASH/NRPF team received 11 stage 1 complaints, these generally concerned unhappiness with the behaviour of the allocated social worker and the process following a referral to Brent Family Front Door (BFFD).
- 5.5 Looked after Children accounted for 40% of the total number of stage 1 complaints received. The complaints received are split between Care Planning, Young People in Care, Fostering and Adoption and Kinship. Cases within Looked After Children are typically raised by the young person themselves so the Complaints Service will give the option of an advocate to help them navigate the complaints process, should this be required.
- 5.6 The Council received 6 Stage 2 requests in 2024/25, compared to 7 in 2023/24. Two of these complaints related to the Looked after Children and Permanency Service. The other four cases fell under Localities, more specifically the Children with Disabilities Service received three stage 2 requests, and one for the East Locality Team.
- 5.7 Under the children's statutory procedure, a complainant has a right for their complaint to be heard by an Independent Review Panel at Stage 3. In the later part of 2024/25 the Council received 2 requests for Stage 3 panels however they will be closed in the new financial year.

6. Profile of complainants and method of contact

- 6.1 When complaints are received, they are directed to the Complaints Service for triaging. Of all the statutory children's stage 1 complaints received, the team received 70% by email and 30% by self-service online. The number of complaints received via email remains similar compared to last year. We received 5% of cases via telephone last year and none this year. There also hasn't been much change in the percentage of complaints received via the online portal. The complaint legislation explicitly states that the Council must receive children's statutory complaints by any means.

- 6.2 The varied method of contact demonstrates that this is happening. Whilst the team has provided a telephone number on the web site, especially for children's social care complaints, email appears to be the preferred mode of delivery for complainants. There are three options to log complaints online through the customer portal: anonymously, unregistered or registered. The portal allows complainants to log and monitor the progress of their complaints all in one place. There are also other mechanisms in place by which children and young people can raise issues before needing to raise a formal complaint. This is via a commissioned Advocacy service and Looked After CYP have an Independent Reviewing Officer who is able to advocate on CYP's behalf as well.
- 6.3 The Council has limited information about the ages of complainants as many complainants do not provide this information. 23 complainants provided their age out of a possible 59 complaints that were received. Two of the complainants were under the age of 18, four of the complainants were aged between 22 – 25 years old. The remaining complainants who lodged complaints were 28 or over. The majority of complaints received in relation to Localities are raised by parents regarding their children, however, the majority of complaints received by the Looked after Children service are raised by the young person themselves.
- 6.4 In terms of ethnicity of complainants, 16 complainants selected an option when submitting their complaints through the portal. The data captured is as follows:

Any other ethnic group	2
Asian Indian	1
Asian Other	0
Asian/Asian British: Indian	2
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	1
Black British	1
Black/ African/Caribbean/Black British: African	4
Black/ African/Caribbean/Black British: Caribbean	1
Mixed Other	1
Other Arab	1
White British	0
White Other	2

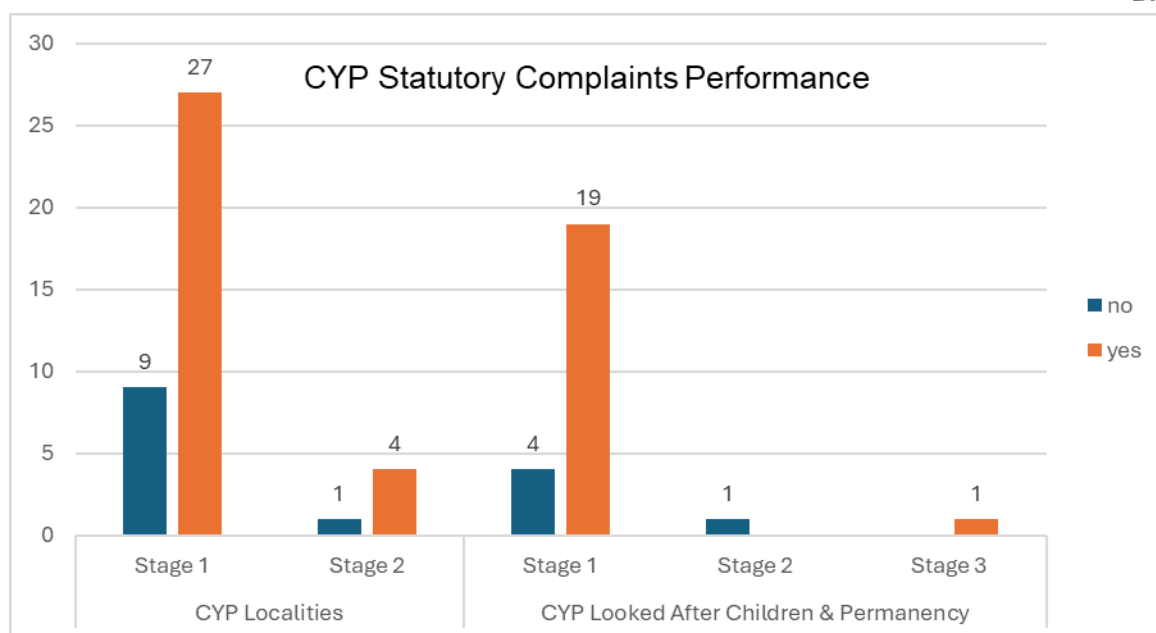
7. Nature / Reasons for Complaints

- 7.1 The main reason for complaints received in 2024/25 related to service failure which is the same as last year. Complaint root causes are categorised in three main categories: Communication, Service Failure and Policy and Procedure. In 2024/25 56% of the stage 1 complaints closed were categorised under the category service failure. Communication accounted for 32% of cases and policy and procedure for 12%. Complaints concerning communication generally related to complainants not feeling they were kept informed or updated on key issues. The Directorate continue to make improvements on how they communicate with service users to manage expectations.

- 7.2 Numerous complaints also concerned a reduction in a care package. Service users often felt that the decision to reduce the package was unfair and the reason for this was not communicated well. In the majority of these cases, the complaint was upheld. As a result of a stage 2 investigation, it was recommended that the cases that were impacted by care package reductions were audited to ensure the decisions were in line with the policy.
- 7.3 Complaints concerning parents who are in a conflict situation, with regards to access and care of their children, are on the rise. Usually this has been where the partners disagree about the care the child or children are receiving from the other parent. Some feel that the Child and Family Assessment or court reports are not completed in an impartial way and that the social worker has failed to communicate with them at an early enough stage in proceedings. This presents a challenge for social workers who must find a balanced approach through these relationships.
- 7.4 Examples of the types of root causes of complaints that arise are listed below: -
- ***Alleged poor staff attitude*** - much of the work of Localities staff involves them taking actions in connection with highly sensitive child protection or child in need issues, which parents or carers may often disagree with. There have been a number of comments about social workers where the family member perceives a bias, leading to complaints about the alleged impartiality of assessments.
 - ***Service failure*** - on completion of a Child and Family Assessment, or reports to the Initial Child Protection Conference, social workers had not kept all the interested parties updated with the completed assessment and reports. In addition to this, not all parties agree to the information within reports which has been recorded as 'not up to standard.'
 - ***Looked After Children*** - the main area of complaints related to leaving care. Most of the root causes are recorded as young people not being kept informed. This suggests the need for more awareness around time scales and procedures which need to be made clearer to customers.

8. Timeliness of Responses

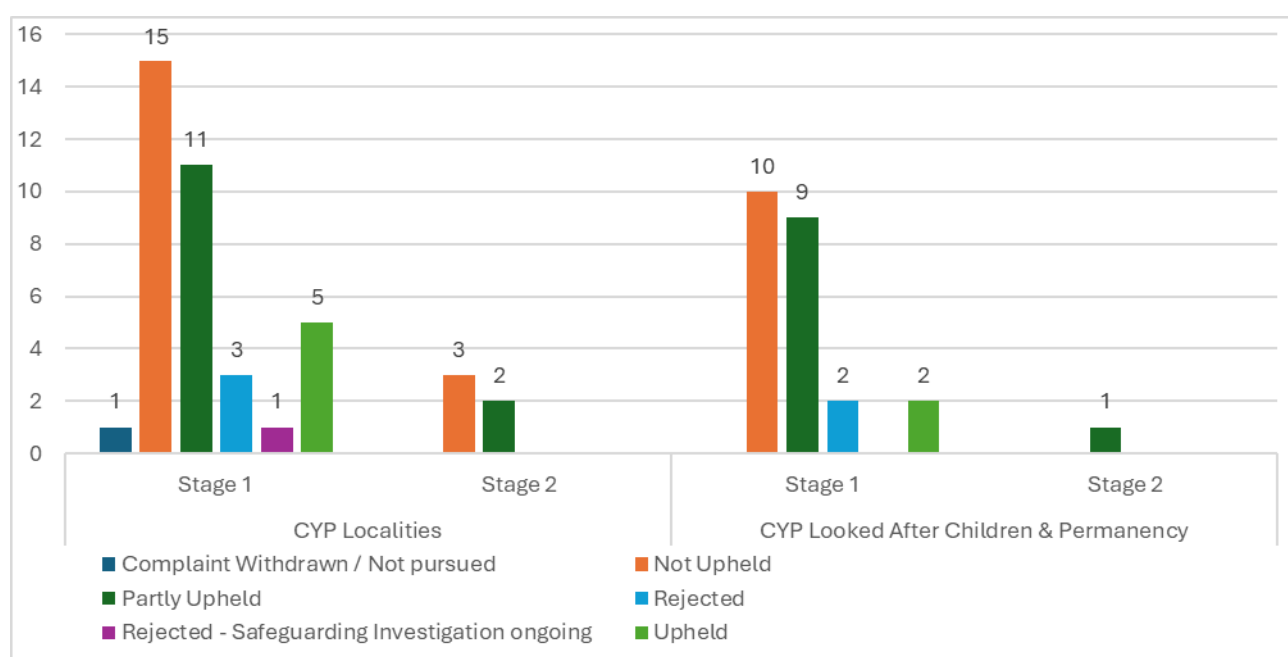
- 8.1 The Council responded to 78% of all children's statutory complaints within the appropriate timescales. This is a decrease of 16% compared to the previous year. However, there is a significant increase in cases received compared to the previous year.



8.2 It is important to note that the statutory children's complaint legislation allows the Complaints Service to extend the target deadline by 10 working days in complex cases.

8.3 In 2024/25, 59 stage 1 statutory complaints were due for a response. The performance rate at stage 1 was 78%, with 46 out of 59 complaints responded to on time, whereas the performance rate for stage 2 complaints increased on last year with 3 out of 5 cases responded to on time. Two cases were overdue due to delays in independent investigators providing their reports as a result of the complexity of the cases. We have since better managed the relationships with the independent investigators to encourage reports being completed in a timely manner.

9. Complaint Outcomes



- 9.1 There are four possible outcomes for complaints: withdrawn/not pursued/rejected, not upheld, partly upheld and upheld. The chart below shows the outcomes of statutory complaints at stage 1, stage 2 and stage 3 in 2024/25 as recorded on the Council's case management system.

The key findings are:

- Of the 59 cases closed at stage 1 during 2024/25, the Council found some merit in 46% of complaints with 27 complaints either upheld or partly upheld. The percentage is lower than last year however the number of complaints that were upheld or partly upheld remains the same. A not upheld outcome was decided in 25 cases at stage 1.
- The Council closed 5 stage 2 statutory complaints during 2024/25 which is one less than the previous year. Three complaints were not upheld and two were partly upheld.
- In 2024/25 one stage 3 panel was completed, which was not upheld. We received two stage 3 panel requests in 2024/25 however these will be closed in the new financial year.

10. Analysis and Learning from Complaints

- 10.1 Lessons learnt from complaints can help shape and improve services and the customer experience. CYP managers and staff are committed to using this learning to improve outcomes for service users.
- 10.2 Detailed below is a summary of the cases escalated to stage 2 and where a detailed investigation was undertaken. It also includes any learning points and service improvements identified as a result of the complaint. The Council wishes to learn from its complaints and improve the service it provides.
- 10.3 Localities had five stage 2 investigations in 2024/25 which is a significant increase from last year where there was only one case. The reason for the influx is due to the changes in care packages across the Children with Disabilities service. The recommendations resulting from these complaints included:
- It was strongly recommended that the Council arrange training for its SEND staff around ceasing EHCPs and ensuring officers fully understand their duties with regards to consulting young people and their parents/carers.
 - Following Resource Panels, such as the 18 Plus Panel, decision letters should be sent to service users' families. These letters should clearly outline the rationale for any changes to the support plan and also provide details as to how families can appeal the panel's decision
 - Children's Service undertakes an audit of the information provided to parents in regard to the Resource Allocation System (RAS) questionnaire to establish if some parents were provided with the incomplete document. If this is found to be the case then appropriate action should then be taken to address this issue with parents.

- Mandatory staff training/updating to be implemented in regard to the application of the RAS tool.

10.4 Looked after Children and Permanency had one stage 2 investigation. This case related to the lack of support from Children Services following a full care order which resulted in siblings being placed with different foster carers. The recommendations included:

- A review of the relationship between Children Services and the Finance Team in regard to the payment of subsistence allowance to young people.
- Staff were reminded to ensure that young people who are eligible for a Pathway Plan shortly after their 16th birthday are fully involved in the drafting of the plan and their voice is fully represented within this document.
- Children Services must ensure that all young people have a fully allocated Personal Assistant before their 18th birthday.

10.5 There was a single stage 3 review panel adjudication during the year, a summary of which is provided below:

- The complainant raised various concerns regarding the lack of support received by the Leaving Care Team mainly around support with making a Legal Claim for compensation following a road traffic accident. LAC were unable to support him with this due to liability concerns as advised by our Legal Team. The complainant also raised concerns about support for Housing however the concerns he raised fell within Housing's remit rather than CYP.

11. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Decisions in 2024/25

11.1 There were fifteen corporate and statutory Education & Children's Services complaints escalated in 2024/25 which is nine less complaints than the previous year 2023/24. The LGSCO made decisions on twelve cases during 2024/25 of which five were closed after initial enquiries were made, one was invalid/incomplete, three were referred back to the Council for local resolution, and three were upheld. In summary, from the twelve cases decided, fault was found in three of the cases, which provides a 25% uphold rate. This is more than last year where the uphold rate was 14% however there were 10 more detailed investigations undertaken in 2023/24.

11.2 Two of the cases upheld fall under the corporate complaints process so are summarised in the covering Annual Complaints Report. The statutory complaint that was upheld related to services provided to a former looked after child. The Ombudsman found fault in delays in the administration of the children's statutory complaints procedure. The Ombudsman recommended £200 compensation for the frustration this caused, as well as a reminder to relevant officers of the need to complete the children's statutory complaints procedure within the statutory

timescales. The delays in completing this complaint were due to the Complaints Service attempting to mediate a resolution by meeting with the complainant and his advocate as some aspects of the complaint did not fall within Children Services.

12. Compensation

12.1 Children's Social Care awarded a total of £4,715 in compensation in 2024/25 across ten cases. This is a decrease of 25.5% from £6,095 which was awarded in 2023/24, across ten cases. This breaks down as follows:

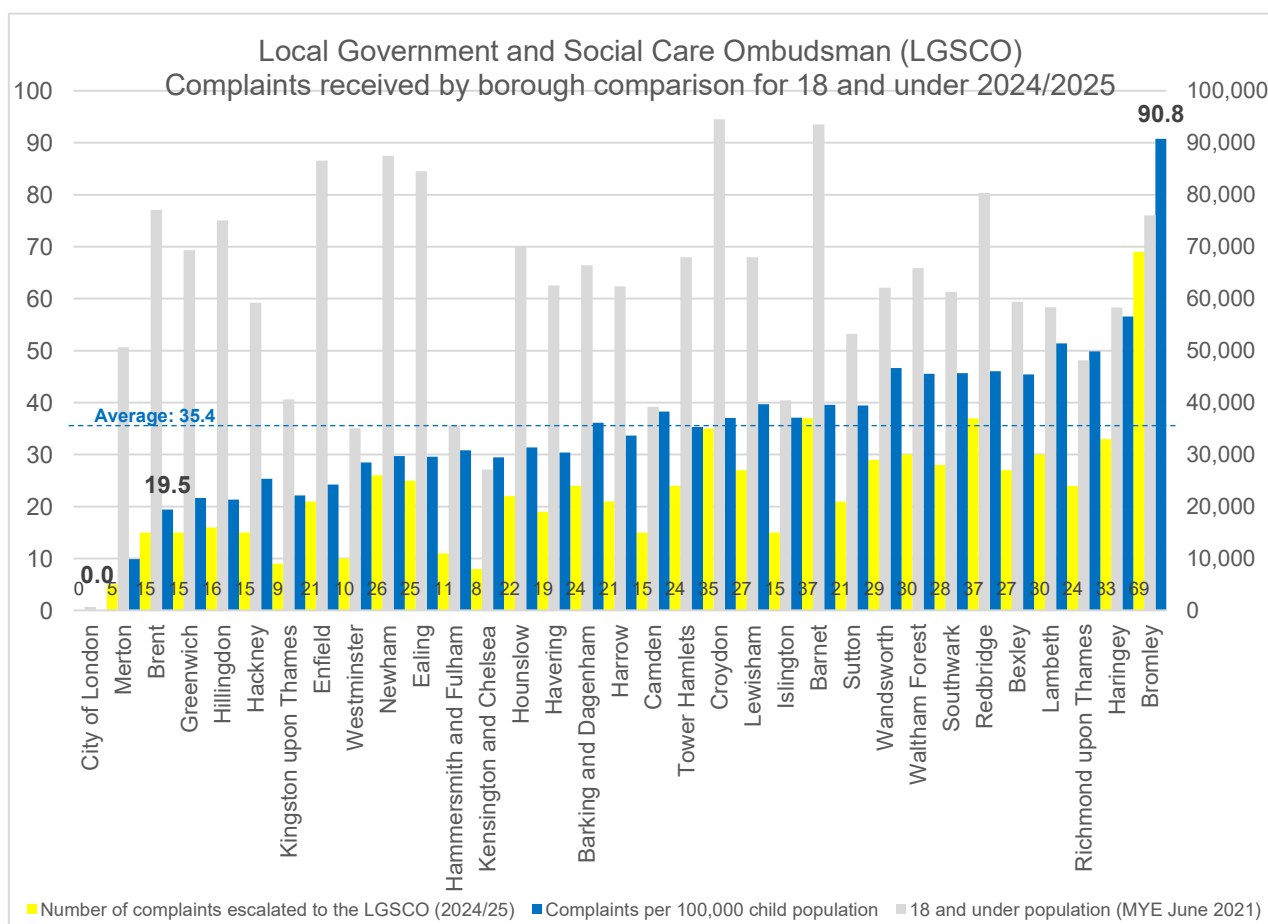
- A total of £2,065 was offered in three cases at stage 1 of the statutory complaints procedure. The compensation was paid for delays in making savings payments to a young person, delays in providing services and costs incurred.
- A total of £2,450 was paid out at stage 2 across six cases. In five of these cases, compensation was paid due to a failure or delay in providing a service. In one case compensation was paid due to time and trouble. There was also one case where £250 was awarded for complaint handling errors at stage 1 and issues not being identified prior to the stage 2 request.
- The Ombudsman awarded £200 on a case for delays during the stage 2 and 3 process which were as a result of sourcing independent investigators and mediation attempts with the young person and his advocate.

Children's Social Care	Amount
Stage 1	£2,065
Stage 2	£2,450
Stage 3	£0
Ombudsman	£200
Total	£4,715

13. Benchmarking

13.1 Brent Council belongs to the North West London Social Care Complaint Managers Group. The majority of Councils have not yet completed their Annual Complaints report or have chosen not to share data. Comparative data has therefore been provided below on Education and Children's services cases that were received by the LGSCO during 2024/2025. Data from the Office of National Statistics for 2021 was also used to illustrate the number of complaints received relative to size of population of children within each borough. The average for all London Councils is 35.4 per 100,000 population whereas Brent is 19.5.

13.2 This means that Brent Council is performing better than average and better than all London Councils bar the City of London (which didn't receive any complaints) and Merton for complaints received by the LGSCO when compared to its projected population in 2021 of children 18 and under. There were 15 complaints escalated to the LGSCO in relation to Education and Children's Services in 2024/2025, which is a decrease of nine complaints compared to 2023/2024. Out of all the London Councils, Brent were joint 7th with Greenwich, Hackney, Camden, and Islington with the least amount of complaints escalated to the Ombudsman. The estimated population for children 18 and under within Brent for mid-year 2021 was 77,113.



14. Compliments

- 14.1 The Service doesn't just learn from complaints. Positive feedback can also provide useful insights. In the period covered by this report, the Children and Young People department logged 49 compliments on the Council's complaints and compliments database, which is fewer than those logged than the previous year. Managers are encouraged to log all compliments they receive. CYP Good News is a regular forum where CYP staff hear about, celebrate and learn from positive feedback.

The Complaints Team are currently working with the Digital Team to implement a compliments section so that service users can log this via MyAccount in the same manner as logging a complaint or service request.

Below are examples of some of the compliments received in 2024/25.

- Localities – East Locality team**

My name is xxx and we met briefly today in a call about a child whose care is shared care by GOSH. I am one of the nurses.

This is going to sound very strange, however I felt compelled to email you after our meeting. I just wanted to say that in my current job, I have worked with a lot of local teams, social workers, local authority workers etc – and today was the first time I felt heard. You have a really great manner about you and you felt really

approachable, and I left today's meeting feeling valued, heard and hopeful that we are doing the right thing – which is a first for any patient I have cared for!

You took time to understand the medical background and gave everyone a platform to share concerns. It was really clear that you have a lot of expertise and it was so helpful to hear everything you had to say as it helped me understand the situation we are. Hearing your ideas were really enlightening and I feel like I learned something today. I just wanted to say that I am really glad to be working with you on this and look forward to speaking to you again. Thank you – and I hope this wasn't really weird!

- **Early Help – Early Years**

My name is xxx, and I am a parent who regularly attends sessions at the Family Wellbeing Centre. I want to take a moment to share my feedback as a way of giving back for the invaluable support I have received.

I first learned about the Family Wellbeing Centre (FWC) through my health visitor during my daughter's one-year review. As a first-time mom without much support in the UK, I was looking for a space that could provide me with both guidance and community. From the moment I started attending the sessions, I found them incredibly helpful, enjoyable, and supportive.

One person who really stood out to me was xxx, who gave me invaluable advice on potty training—a challenge that had been weighing heavily on me, especially with my second child on the way. Her guidance helped me feel much more confident in navigating this new phase.

I also received great support from xxx, who were incredibly culturally sensitive in their approach. Their understanding and respectful support made me feel truly appreciated and seen.

Before coming to the FWC, I often felt isolated on this journey of motherhood, but the support I received there made all the difference. I felt looked after, and it gave me a sense of belonging. My child loves the messy play sessions, which we regularly attend, and it's clear she enjoys them just as much as I do.

Even though I travel 30-40 minutes to reach the centre, it's worth every moment because of the value and support it brings to both me and my child. The FWC has truly played a key role in building my confidence as a mother and giving my child a space to grow and explore.

- **Looked after Children & Permanency**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation for all your great efforts and continuous support. Today's court sessions went well, and we are very happy with the outcome. We truly appreciate your dedication, the well-structured plan you implemented, and the positive impact it has had. Rest assured that you will always be a source of trust and will diligently follow all your guidance.

Once again, thank you for your hard work and ongoing support

- **Localities – NRPF and Homeless Team**

I wanted to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude for all the support and care you have provided to me and my daughters during the summer holidays. Despite the short period of just two weeks, your assistance has made an incredible difference in our lives, and I am truly grateful for everything you've done. From the very beginning, you have gone above and beyond in your role as our social worker, always checking in on us and working tirelessly to communicate with the council on our behalf. Your dedication to ensuring that we have suitable accommodation has been nothing short of remarkable.

You are, without a doubt, the best social worker my family and I have ever encountered since moving to London. The level of commitment, compassion, and professionalism you have shown in such a brief time is truly exceptional, and I often find myself wishing there were even stronger words to express just how highly I think of you. You have earned my deepest respect and sincere gratitude, and I believe it's important to give credit where it is due—xxxx, you have been a lifeline for us during a very challenging time. My daughters, too, have been greatly impacted by your kindness and support. They often ask about you, and it's clear they feel a sense of safety and happiness because of your presence in our lives. They speak so fondly of you, and it's heartwarming to see how much your efforts have positively influenced them. Your ability to connect with them and provide reassurance has been invaluable, and I cannot thank you enough for the sense of stability you have brought into their lives.

What stands out to me most is the way you've gone out of your way to communicate with us and Westminster council even after your shifts, to ensure we had a safe and secure place to sleep. Your dedication to your work and to the well-being of my family is something I will never forget. You did so much especially in such a short time and I am eternally grateful.

I was hoping to see you before you transfer us to Camden social service or Westminster, but I understand how incredibly busy you must be, especially with the numerous families and individuals who rely on your support. I know that your time and energy are in high demand, and it's entirely understandable. I just wanted to make sure you know how much we appreciate everything you've done for us.

Thank you once again, xxxx, for being such a remarkable support system for my family and me. Your dedication, kindness, and professionalism have made an immeasurable difference in our lives, even within just two weeks, and I will always be grateful for your help. My daughters and I are fortunate to have had you by our side, and I wish you all the best in your continued work.

With heartfelt appreciation,

- **Inclusion – SEND Service**

I would like to say a big thank you from the bottom of my heart for your perseverance and putting up with my constant bombarding of emails . I am actually crying with joy to hear today's news one because finally xxxx has got somewhere where there will be a sense of belonging and not segregated all the time . Think today was the last straw of having to deal with an executive head that has done nothing but complain about funding and all negativity regarding xxxx . I felt like today was a threat when said gonna permanently exclude or I agree to name of school coming of the EHCP plan. I can now relax knowing that will hopefully go into a new environment that will bring the best out of him. Ek outreach have done nothing but compliment Kasey. I hope you both have a lovely weekend .

Once again as the happiest ever mother right now that has had a very long journey and feeling like I have harassed you .

- **Early Help – Early Years**

To all the team at Three Trees,

I just want to say a big thank you for all the amazing support you give to our families at Anson Primary.

It is so reassuring to know that when I make an EH referral, you are at the other end. Having an open channel of communication is key and so often, we raise concerns about our families and never know the outcome or what support they are receiving. That is not the case with Three Trees - all I have to do is ask and you are there with answers.

C has been so supportive to me as a new-to-the-job DSL, and that has really helped my confidence to grow. From welcoming me into the Three Trees Centre and explaining all they have to offer to presenting parent coffee mornings - she has helped to make Anson a place where families feel heard and supported.

I have also had the pleasure of working with J - she is just brilliant with our families and has such a warm, fun and caring spirit.

P has been fantastic with Global Girls Thinking, which provided well-needed support for one of our Year 6 students and also recently demonstrated just how effective the triage system is working, when she was instrumental in helping one of our families in crisis. A single mum with three children was about to be made homeless, so I advised her to go to the triage service at Three Trees for help and Pauline helped her to secure a new home for her family and a crisis was averted without a need to escalate to an EH referral.

Well done to all of you that make Three Trees the success that it is!