

Cardiff Council Social Services

Annual Complaint, Compliments and Members Enquiries Report

April 2024 - March 2025



This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg



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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Local Authorities in Wales are legally required to operate a complaints and representations procedure for Social Services in line with the *Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014* and *The Representations Procedures (Wales) Regulations 2014*, both underpinned by the *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014*. These regulations also require each authority to produce and publish an annual report on the operation of its Social Services complaints procedures.

This report provides statistical data, analysis, and commentary on complaints and representations received by Cardiff Council's Adult and Children's Social Services between April 2024 and March 2025.

Cardiff Council is committed to delivering high-quality care and support services for adults and children. However, we acknowledge that at times, standards may fall short. When this happens, individuals or those acting on their behalf have the right to raise concerns or complaints.

We take all complaints seriously and view them as an opportunity to learn and improve. Adult and Children's Services work collaboratively with individuals to resolve concerns, and internally with teams to embed learning where services have not met expectations. The complaints process helps us reflect on people's experiences and drive service improvement.

In Cardiff, Adult Services and Children's Services are structured under different directorates - Children's Services operates as a standalone directorate, while Adult Services is part of the Housing and Communities Directorate. This structure has enabled stronger collaboration between Adult Services, Independent Living Services, and Housing and Community Services, and has enhanced management capacity in both areas. As such, this report is divided into two distinct sections for Adults and Children's Services, while both remain under the leadership of the Corporate Director of People and Communities, who also fulfils the statutory role of Director of Social Services.

All complaints must be acknowledged within two working days. If elements of a complaint fall outside the remit of Social Services, the Complaints Officer coordinates with relevant internal services or external agencies to ensure a joined-up response.

Definition of a Complaint (under legislation):

A complaint is:

- An expression of dissatisfaction or concern (oral, written, or by other means);
- Made by one or more members of the public;
- About the actions, inaction, or standard of service provided by a public service provider.

A complaint is not:

- One previously investigated under the current or former complaints process;
- One already being investigated by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales;
- An alleged failure to comply with a Freedom of Information Act 2000 request;
- A verbal complaint resolved by the end of the next working day.

Two-Stage Complaints Process

- **Stage One: Local Resolution**

Issues are addressed through discussion—either by phone or face-to-face—within 10 working days of receipt. A written response follows within five working days of the resolution discussion.

- **Stage Two: Formal Investigation**

Complainants may request to proceed directly to Stage Two or may do so if their concerns remain unresolved after Stage One. At this stage, a formal investigation is conducted by an independent investigating officer. The timescale for a report to be issued is within 25 working days of agreeing the scope of the investigation. If the complainant is still dissatisfied following this process, they have the right to refer the matter to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

Guidance on how to raise a complaint is available in the Council's 'How to be Heard' documents:

- Adult Services: [Adult Services Compliments and Complaints](#) (Cardiff.gov.uk)
- Children's Services: [Making a complaint or compliment about Social Care services](#) (Cardiff.gov.uk)

The Complaints Teams are supported by senior managers within Adult and Children's Services and by the Corporate Complaints Team.

Implementation of the HALO Complaints Management Portal

In March 2024, the Council expanded its use of the HALO Complaints Management Portal to include all complaints, in addition to Member Enquiries. HALO provides a centralised system for recording, tracking, and managing complaints, ensuring transparency and enhanced oversight.

Members Enquiries








Residents often raise concerns through their local Councillor, Assembly Member, or Member of the Senedd. While not part of the formal complaints process, these Member Enquiries make up approximately one-third of all correspondence managed by the Complaints Teams.

Enquiries are received either via the HALO Portal or by direct email and are logged centrally. Although not a statutory requirement, their inclusion in this report provides a fuller picture of the volume and types of issues raised by citizens. Responses are expected within 10 working days and are managed in collaboration with Cabinet and Member Services staff.

Overview of Complaints, Compliments and Members Enquiries for Adults and Children’s Services

Table 1 below provides an overview of Complaints, Compliments and Member Enquiries received during 2024/25 compared with those received in the preceding year.

Table 1: Comparison of Figures From 2022-23 and 2023-24

 Complaints	 Stage 1 complaints	 Stage 2 complaints	 Days to resolve (av.)	 Members Enquiries	 Days to respond (av.)	 Compliments
2024/2025						
345	323	22	32.5	305	17.5	716
3.9%	3.8%	4.8%	12%	-14.8%	-2.8%	16.2%
332	311	21	29	358	18	616
2023/2024						

The above figures indicate that overall, there has been an increase in the number of complaints received in 2024-25, being managed at Stage 1, and there has also been an increase in Stage 2 Complaints against last year’s figures. This is explored further in the Adult Services and Children’s Services sections below.

There has been an increase in the response times to Complaints and a reduction in response times to Members Enquiries, providing a timelier outcome for those who are raising concerns to the service areas. It is recognised that the teams are not able in every case to respond within the specified timeframes, but when timeframes cannot be achieved, complainants continue to be kept informed throughout the process and are made aware of the reasons for any delays.



SECTION 1: ADULTS SERVICES

1. THE MANAGEMENT OF COMPLAINTS IN ADULT SERVICES

Cardiff Adult social services functions are defined primarily under the **Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014**. These functions are delivered by the local authority and are designed to promote well-being, independence, and safeguarding for adults aged 18 and over, who reside in Cardiff and who are in need of care and support.

Independent Living Services, incorporating the *Community Resource Team, Joint Equipment Services, First Point of Contact, the Community Occupational Therapy Team, and Disabled Facility Services* are managed alongside Adult Services to ensure a more joined up service and better outcome for Individuals accessing services.

Social services functions are governed by the *Social Services Complaints Procedures Wales*, ensuring adherence to set guidelines. Meanwhile, some complaints related to Independent Living Services, that sit outside of social services functions, fall under the *Corporate Complaints Procedures*, providing a structured approach to addressing concerns within this area of service. For consistency all complaints are managed by the Adult Services Complaints Team.

For the purposes of this report, a citizen refers to any individual who engages with services, whether as a service user, a family member, or any other person who has reached out to make a complaint, express a concern or provide a compliment. Concerns and issues raised by Members are referred to later in this report.

The 2024–25 Annual Report for Adult Services presents a comprehensive overview of how we have supported citizens across the directorate, responded to feedback, and continuously improved our services over the past year. This report reflects our commitment to transparency, accountability, and learning that underpins our approach to delivering high-quality care and support to citizens.

This year has seen both growth and challenge. While the number of individuals supported by Adult Services remained consistent, the complexity of cases and the volume of correspondence, including complaints, compliments, and enquiries has increased. These interactions offer invaluable insights into the lived experiences of our service users and provide a foundation for service development and improvement.

Our Compliments and Complaints Team has played a pivotal role in capturing and responding to citizen feedback. Through detailed analysis of complaints at both Stage One and Stage Two, we have identified key themes, addressed systemic issues, and implemented meaningful changes. The rise in compliments, particularly from Independent Living Services and Social Work Teams, highlights the dedication and professionalism of our staff and the positive impact of co-productive working relationships.

This report also showcases the progress we have made in improving communication, strengthening and updating policies, and enhancing collaboration across teams. From strengthening our use of the Halo system, a complaints and correspondence management system, to expanding our pool of Independent Investigators, we have taken deliberate steps to ensure that every concern is heard, every compliment is valued, and every lesson is acted upon.

As we look ahead to 2025–26, we remain focused on embedding a culture of continuous improvement, that values feedback, prioritises citizen experience, and strives for high quality in every aspect of service delivery.

The Adult Services Compliments and Complaints team consists of two Complaints and Engagement Officers and one Complaints Manager, supported by the Operational Manager for Strategy, Quality and Commissioning. The team operates within the Strategy, Performance, and Resource division of Adult Services, alongside Commissioning and Contracts; Service Development; Policy; Learning and Development; Quality Assurance and Adult Safeguarding. This structure ensures that the Team are well-positioned to collaborate with colleagues in addressing issues of quality, learning and development and service improvement through the identification of themes and lessons learnt from complaints, compliments and citizen engagement and using the information gained to inform further service development and training.

Adult Services produces a monthly report on complaints and compliments, along with quarterly statistical analyses, which are regularly presented to the Adult Services Management Board. Monthly meetings with Operational Managers help guide ongoing investigations and shape response drafting, a process coordinated by the Complaints Team.

Additionally, a quarterly analysis of complaints is conducted to monitor key data trends, review recurring themes, and identify lessons learned, ensuring that insights drive continuous service improvement.

Since Halo was introduced in 2022/23 to streamline the complaints and correspondence management across Cardiff Council, Adult Services have supported the development of its use at every stage since it was first introduced. This has included involvement in testing and developing new work streams within Halo to improve the recording and management of complaints across the Local Authority.

Throughout 2024–25, ongoing collaboration with the Halo Team has led to significant enhancements in data recording within the Halo system. The platform now encompasses:

- Councillor and Members Correspondence
- Compliments
- Complaints – Stage One Complaints and Corporate Complaints
- Stage Two Complaints workflow
- Non-Complaints and Appeals
- Chief Executive workflow

These developments ensure that all aspects of complaint management can be efficiently handled within the Halo system. This advancement enhances transparency for senior management across both Adult Services and the wider Council, while also providing improved oversight of the team’s workload and responsibilities.

The Complaints Team engages with citizens following their Social Work assessment to gain insight into their experience with the assessor. Wherever possible this is carried out by telephone to ensure any issues can be explored fully. This feedback contributes to service improvement. By offering an alternative and less formal feedback mechanism, the service provides citizens with a more accessible and approachable avenue to share their perspectives, reducing potential complaints and enabling teams to address individual concerns raised through this mechanism.

Table 2: Adult Services comparison of figures from 2023-24 and 2024-25








 Corres- pondence	 Stage 1 complaints	 Stage 2 complaints	 Days to resolve (av.)	 Members Enquiries	 Days to respond (av.)	 Comp- liments	Total
2024/2025							
208	112	14	21	213	12	596	893
33%	18%	75%	-6	-20%	-2 days	35%	3%
157	95	8	27	266	14	442	865
2023/2024							

Table 2 shows that in 2024/25 Adult Services Compliments and Complaints Team managed 893 items of correspondence from citizens, (including service users, family members and members of the public) and Members. This is a small increase in the overall number of items of correspondence managed by the team compared to the previous year, with an increase in the number of complaints and compliments and a slight decrease in the number of Members Enquiries.

Correspondence submitted to the Compliments and Complaints Team includes compliments, complaints, appeals, concerns, and issues, as well as complaints and concerns that are later withdrawn. Over the past year, the volume of correspondence has risen from 865 in the previous year, evidencing a 3% increase in the work managed by the Team.

Key Observations:

- 1. Overall Complaints:** There has been an increase in the total number of complaints, rising from 103 in 2023/24 to 126 in 2024/25 (+22%).
- 2. Stage One Complaints:** These have increased, from 95 to 112 (+18%), indicating a greater number of initial complaints. This is explored later in the report from page 12.
- 3. Stage Two Complaints:** A notable rise in escalated complaints, from 8 to 14 (+75%), which suggests a higher proportion of cases where the complainant was unsatisfied with the complaint at stage 1. This is explored later in the report from page 19
- 4. Average Days to Resolve Complaints:** The time to resolve complaints has reduced from 27 days to 24 days.
- 5. Members' Enquiries:** There has been a decrease in the number of Members' enquiries, dropping from 266 to 213 (-20%). there has been an increase in the number of requests for services received through Members Enquiries. This is explored later in the report from page 24.
- 6. Average Days to Respond to Members' Enquiries:** The response time has improved slightly, reducing by 2 days (from 14 to 12 days).
- 7. Compliments:** There has been an increase in recorded compliments, rising from 442 to 472 (+7%). This is explored later in the report from page 26.

Summary of Findings

There has been a rise in complaints in 2024-25. A number of reasons for this have been identified as:

The Compliments and Complaints Team have continued to increase their interaction with citizens and capture both positive and negative feedback through the completion of engagement surveys. While overall the comments from the surveys is positive, this has had the impact of increasing the number of complaints recorded at Stage 1 of the complaint's procedure.

The complaints being managed at Stage 1 continue to be complex and reflect multiple issues. Whilst service areas seek to resolve complaints outside of the formal complaints process, this is not always possible. The complaints that progress to the formal process tend to be the more complex ones which have multiple issues within them making them more challenging to resolve within the set timescales. This complexity also makes them more likely to proceed to stage 2 of the complaints process.

There continues to be a pattern of Stage Two complaints relating to payment for residential care and the further impact of citizens having to move when third-party top-up fees can no longer be paid. The reasons for the increase in complaints is explored later in this report.

The number of Members enquiries has reduced during the year and the number of compliments have increased, reflecting that work to improve service delivery and citizen engagement are having a positive effect.

It is also positive that, despite the increase in overall correspondence received, the time taken to deal with both complaints and Members enquiries has reduced during the year demonstrating increased the efficiency of the team.

Withdrawn Complaints

Complainants have the right to withdraw their complaint at any stage of the process. The reasons for withdrawal vary depending on the individual's experience and the outcomes they seek. Upon receiving notification from a complainant of their intention to withdraw, the Complaints Team issues a formal letter confirming the withdrawal and acknowledging the decision. The complainant is informed that they may resubmit their complaint in the future should they wish to do so. In such cases, the complaint will be treated as a new submission, with revised investigation timelines and a fresh assessment process. In the 2024-25 period, a total of 26 complaints were withdrawn.

The main reasons for complaints being withdrawn in 2024-25 were:

- **Resolution Outside the Complaint Process** – The issue was resolved informally, or the complainant received the outcome they were seeking through alternative means.
- **Change of Circumstances** – A change in personal circumstances resulting in the complaint being no longer relevant or necessary.
- **Time Constraints** – The complaints process was likely to take too long to resolve the issue, so it was addressed directly by senior management through immediate support, such as an identified need for an increase in care and support hours, or cases of imminent discharge from hospital.

In all cases where a complaint is withdrawn a written response is provided to identify the reasons and any actions taken to ensure clarity and for completeness.

Appeals, Queries, Issues and Requests

The regulations clearly define the criteria for what constitutes a complaint and what falls outside their scope. The Complaints Team remains committed to supporting individuals who wish to raise concerns that do not meet the formal definition of a complaint. This process will be further enhanced in 2025-26 through the utilisation of Halo for recording such concerns.

To provide clarity, the following summary outlines the issues and concerns addressed by the Complaints Team in 2025-26 that were considered outside the scope of the regulations.

- **Clarifying Financial Invoicing Queries**

The Complaints Team supported citizens by providing clear information on billing issues, promoting transparency and timely resolution.

- **Coordinating Support for Occupational Therapy and Care Services**

Ensuring citizens were directed to the correct teams, with formal communication provided to confirm outcomes

- **Appeals on Funding Decisions**

A rise in appeals was noted, though most aligned with existing policies, reinforcing the consistency and fairness of decision-making.

- **Community Service Changes and Citizen Queries**

Citizens raised queries and sought information about changes in services delivered by the Council and third-sector partners, particularly around day services.

In 2024–25, the Complaints Team successfully managed and resolved 30 citizen-raised matters that fell outside the scope of the formal Complaints Procedures. This accounted for 3.5% of the total correspondence received by the team during this period, demonstrating a continued commitment to addressing concerns and providing appropriate responses.

These matters highlight the critical importance of ensuring citizens have access to clear, timely, and readily available information. Many concerns arise from a lack of understanding of Council processes or challenges in accessing publicly available resources.

Additionally, these issues have provided officers with valuable opportunities to identify additional services, both within the Council and through external organisations, that are available to help individuals maintain their independence, such as support through Meals on Wheels and third sector charitable organisations. In response, Adult Services is actively working to enhance public information related to policies, procedures, and service availability. Efforts are also underway to improve the Adult Services section of the Council's website, ensuring that relevant information is accessible to all citizens.



2. STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS

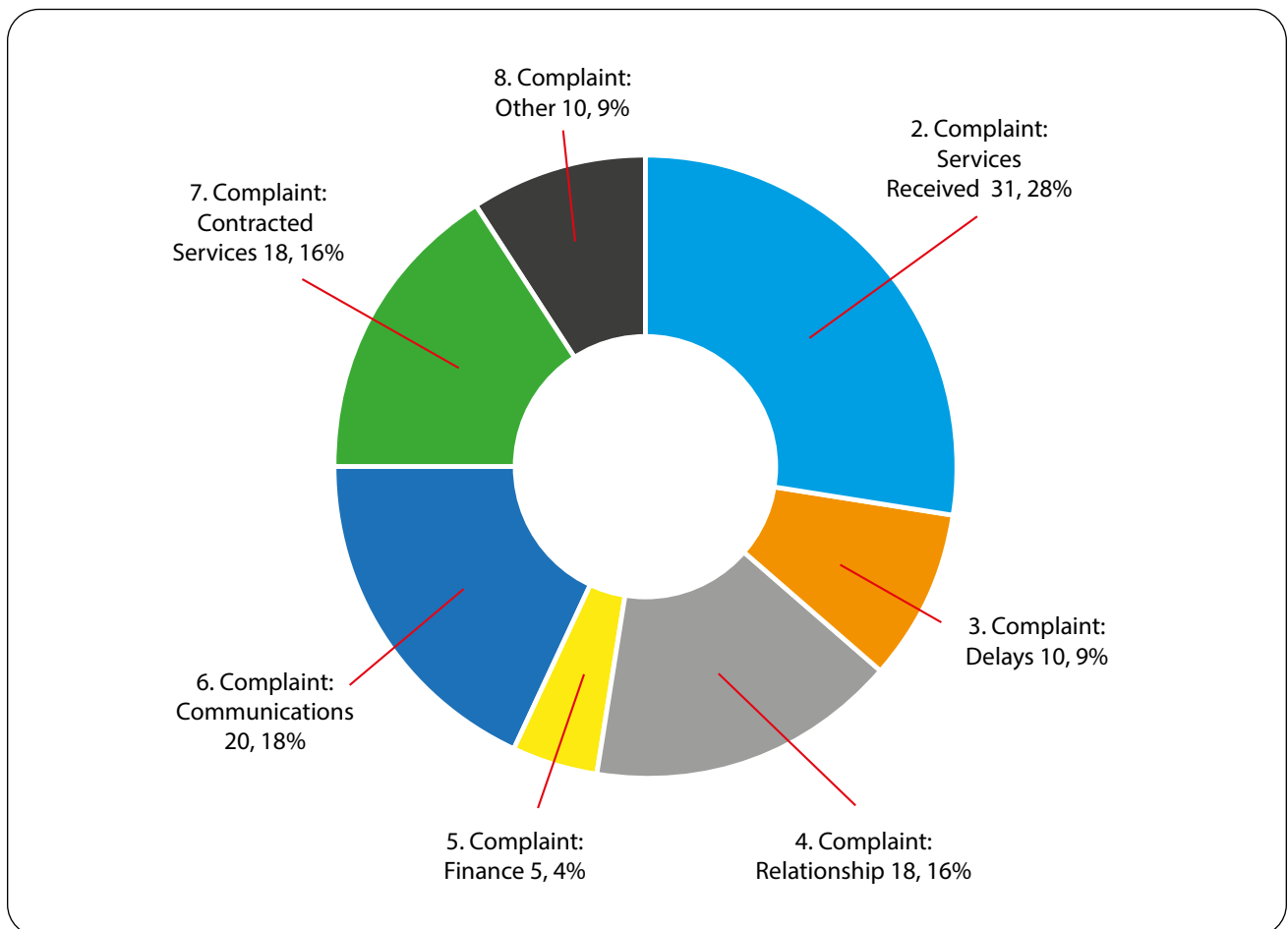
The Stage One complaints process enables individuals and their families to raise concerns regarding services provided by Adult Services under the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014. This process allows teams to assess complaints related to services that have not met the expectations of citizens accessing them.

Additionally, it provides managers with the opportunity to review the citizen’s journey prior to the complaint being raised and evaluate the practices within the service area. Furthermore, the process facilitates a broader review of policies, procedures, and the information available to service users and their families, ensuring continuous improvement in service delivery.

Chart 1: Stage One complaints by theme

The chart below categorises the complaints received at Stage One into key themes.

The chart shows that the highest number of complaints received were in relation to the following themes:



Service received: 31 (28%) - These matters relate to the activities undertaken by Social Work Teams managed under a Stage One complaint across the Directorate. Complaints often arise when citizens are dissatisfied with the level or type of support received from professionals. In many cases, these complaints have secondary components, such as concerns regarding the accuracy or clarity of recorded information, challenges in raising issues with service providers, or difficulties in professional relationships. These aspects are considered alongside the primary complaint about the service. This may also include complaints that have escalated from the Appeals process where the citizen remains unhappy with the outcome from the Appeal.

Each complaint is addressed on an individual basis, with managers identifying appropriate actions and working with staff through supervision to resolve the concerns raised. Additionally, policies and practices are reviewed to ensure that issues are effectively addressed, with the overarching goal of improving service delivery and enhancing the experience for all individuals.

Communication: 20 (18%) - Complaints related to communication primarily stem from individuals feeling they did not receive clear or comprehensive information regarding their care, or did not receive care in a timely way, particularly in relation to financial matters. In response, information leaflets continue to be reviewed and made available to citizens to ensure access to accurate and up-to-date details. Social care staff teams also continue to access training opportunities to ensure that their understanding and practise continues in line with changing and updated regulations.

Additionally, Adult Services expects all social care staff to undertake Collaborative Communication training. The training and ongoing mentoring, coaching and provision of reflective practice groups supports the embedding of strength-based, outcome-focused practice, emphasises the importance of effective communication and fosters equal and inclusive partnerships when working with individuals and their families.

Contracted services: 18 (16%) - Complaints related to commissioned services encompass a range of issues reflecting dissatisfaction with the quality of care received, from delays in care calls to concerns regarding inappropriate practice. When a complaint is raised regarding a contracted service, it is essential that the individual allows the care provider the opportunity to resolve the matter directly with them through the care provider's own formal complaints procedures which form part of their registration requirements with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).

Adult Services remains committed to maintaining strong relationships with service providers, ensuring that complaints are managed effectively through their respective procedures. Social work teams involved in the process are informed and supported in facilitating the complaint resolution. Where a complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved through direct engagement with the care provider, Adult Services formally registers the complaint and provides support through the Contracts and Service Development Team to undertake an investigation to explore and address concerns.

Additionally, all complaints involving safeguarding matters are referred directly to the Safeguarding Unit, which leads on all safeguarding enquiries to ensure appropriate action is taken.

Complaint – Relationship: 18 (16%) - Complaints related to professional relationships typically involve dissatisfaction with a social care practitioner allocated to work with a citizen or their family. These concerns may arise due to the approach taken by the practitioner, delays or failures in sharing critical information, or a belief that the practitioner is not acting in the best interests of the individual or in line with Council procedures or legislation. Additionally, complaints may stem from a loss of confidence in the pace at which the practitioner is progressing agreed actions related to a citizen’s case.

Complaints involving strained professional relationships can be particularly difficult to resolve, as they often arise only after trust has been lost and the relationship feels beyond repair. To help prevent such breakdowns from occurring in the first place, Adult Services strive to take a proactive approach. Officers receive regular supervision and are encouraged to discuss complex or sensitive cases with their managers and peers. These reflective sessions provide early opportunities to identify and address potential issues before they escalate. Additionally, staff are supported through training and guidance that promote clear, empathetic communication and collaborative working practices. These measures aim to build strong, respectful relationships with citizens from the outset, fostering trust and improving outcomes. Given the increase in complaints of this nature in 2024/25 this work will be strengthened going forward, with more bespoke training that supports the practical application of strength-based approaches in teams.

Table 3: Comparison of percentages of all Complaints by Theme 2023-24 and 2024-25

	2023-24	2024-25	Difference
2. Complaint - Services	21%	26%	+5%
3. Complaint - Delays	12%	6%	-6%
4. Complaint - Relationship	3%	10%	+7%
5. Complaint - Finance	5%	5%	0%
6. Complaint - Communication	12%	10%	-2%
7. Complaint - Contracted Services	9%	9%	0%
8. Complaint Other	3%	9%	+6%

The analysis of complaint and enquiry data for the period 2024–25 reveals several notable trends when compared to the previous year. These findings provide valuable direction for service improvement and highlight areas of evolving concern among service users.

Key Increases

- **Complaint** - Services rose from 21 % to 26 %, indicating a growing number of concerns related to the delivery or quality of internal services provided to citizens. Where a complaint is identified as 'Services' this is normally when a complainant has raised multiple concerns regarding the overall service received and may be raising complaints that relate to multiple themes. For example, a complainant may raise a concern relating to the work undertaken, communication from the team regarding the matter and a relationship breakdown with the social worker. As these matters could be considered under multiple areas, but are in relation to one team, this would be an example of a case that would be recorded under Services.
- **Complaint** - Relationship saw a significant increase from 3 % to 10 %, suggesting a rise in issues related to interpersonal interactions between service users and staff. Many of these concerns arise due to a disagreement between a social work professional and a citizen or their family. This can lead to a breakdown in trust and result in the professional relationship being untenable. There is a trend noted where a citizen is supported by both Adult Services and Health colleagues, and the joint working has resulted in ambiguity and concern about one or both services. In some of these cases the concern has been related to Health staff and has been referred to the University Health Board for review under their own complaints process. However, it is recognised in these cases that raise concerns about one service area can cause a relationship breakdown across both services.

Key Decreases

- **Complaint** - Delays dropped from 12 % to 6 %, which reflects improvements in timeliness and responsiveness of service areas.
- **Complaint** - Communication decreased slightly from 12 % to 10 %, suggesting some progress in how information is conveyed to service users.

Complaints received have been more complex in 2024-25 and have often contained multiple issues, such as a combination of an issue being raised with a care provider or hospital discharge plan and the subsequent way that this issue was managed by the social work team.

These findings highlight the need for ongoing investment in staff training, effective communication, and meaningful service user engagement. Complaints handling is now closely aligned with Quality Assurance auditing processes, so that any wider training needs can be identified and addressed. An ongoing training programme to develop collaborative communications and strength-based approaches in day-to-day social work practice is to continue into the coming year to drive continuous improvement across teams.

Table 4: comparison of response times for Stage One complaints in Adult Services

The table below summarises the length of time taken to respond to Stage One complaints and highlights those that were concluded within the statutory timescales and those that fell outside of the required timescale.

Stage One Responses (Target - 15 working days)	2023/24		Within deadline	2024/25		Within deadline
0-7 Days	21	22%	45%	22	20%	42%
7-14 days	23	24%		26	23%	
14+ working days	53	55%		64	57%	
Average	27 Days			21 Days		

Under the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014, Adult Services has 15 working days to respond to a complaint raised at Stage One. Giving a full response to the issues raised is considered more important than meeting the target time, and where more time is required to provide a full response, the Adult Services Compliments and Complaints team ensure that the citizen is informed and provided with a new date when a complaint response can be expected. While achieving the target of 15 days remains a challenge, the average response time for Stage One complaints in the 2024-25 period has reduced, despite an overall increase in the volume of complaints received. This improvement is attributed in part to the team's experience in complaint management and more collaborative working with both the Social Work Teams and complainants. Work will continue throughout 2025-26 to improve the response times in line with the regulatory requirements.

Adult Services continues to adopt a proactive and constructive approach to all correspondence. As stated above a key focus remains on concluding any ongoing work with a citizen related to a complaint before issuing a formal response. While this approach increases response times, it ensures that a complaint is fully responded to.

Outcomes from complaints raised.

When reviewing complaints, it is essential to consider the desired outcome from the complainant's perspective. Adult Services classifies complaint outcomes into three categories: Upheld, Not Upheld, or Progress to Stage Two. Additionally, cases recorded as Not Applicable pertain to complaints that have been withdrawn or resolved through mutual agreement before formal closure.

All complaints, regardless of their outcome, provide valuable insights into service delivery. Even those that are not upheld serve as opportunities to assess and refine existing processes, ensuring continuous improvement in the quality of services provided.

Table5: Outcomes from Stage One complaints 2023-24 and 2024-25

The table below summarises the categories of outcomes achieved for all Stage One complaints during 2023-24 and 2024-25.

Outcomes	2023-24	2024-25
Upheld	12	24
Not upheld	66	74
Not Applicable	17	14
Total	95	112

The data shows that 66 % of complaints were not upheld at Stage One while 21 % of cases were identified as upheld. A complaint might be upheld if it identifies an error or area for improvement and this may often lead to constructive change or improvement. For example, a valid complaint can prompt a review that results in better standards, fairness, or transparency.

The Welsh Government emphasises that complaints should be used to identify areas where social services can be enhanced. When a complaint is upheld, it can result in better policies, fairer treatment, and improved support for vulnerable individuals. For example, complaints about poor service quality, delays, or staff behaviour can prompt investigations and lead to changes in practice.

When a complaint is upheld, this allows services to reflect on areas of practice improvements, which includes links with quality assurance and training, as well as policy reviews across service areas.

It is recognised that there has been a significant increase in the number of requests for Stage Two Independent Investigations and whilst the overall outcomes from these have generally reflected the outcomes from the Stage One complaint, these provide important recommendations to ensure that the services offered continue to improve.



Learning Outcomes from Stage One Complaints

The following is a summary of some of the learning outcomes and improvements undertaken to reflect the learning arising from Stage One complaints received in 2024-25:

- **Review of Ethnicity Data and Future Improvements**

In 2024–25, a review of ethnicity data was initiated following a complaint that highlighted an instance of incorrect recording. While social work staff are required to document data as expressed by the citizen, it is essential that this information is accurately recorded. Where necessary, professionals are encouraged to engage in discussions with citizens to ensure clarity and correctness in data entry.

This review process will contribute to ongoing data cleansing efforts, supporting the transition to a new record-keeping system across Adult Services during 2025–26. By strengthening accuracy in data collection, the service aims to enhance reliability and consistency in recording demographic information.

- **Enhancing Communication and Procedures in Supported Living**

Processes have been strengthened to ensure a consistent approach across all supported living environments when citizens are admitted to hospital, with a clear emphasis on respecting the individual's wishes and needs. This improvement aims to provide greater reassurance to both citizens and their families regarding the communication and decision-making processes involved.

Additionally, further work has been undertaken to establish clear recording protocols regarding what should happen when a citizen in supported living passes away. These measures ensure that loved ones are informed appropriately and in a timely manner, fostering transparency and sensitivity during difficult circumstances.

- **Enhancing Post-Complaint Engagement and Resolution**

The Compliments and Complaints Team has always aimed to provide citizens with the opportunity to meet with a senior officer should further queries arise following the conclusion of a complaint. However, at the end of the 2024–25 period, this practice was formally strengthened by incorporating it into all response letters.

By offering this opportunity, service areas have been able to address any aspects of the response that a citizen may find unclear, ensuring that their interactions throughout the complaints process remain meaningful. Additionally, this proactive engagement has, in some cases, prevented the escalation of complaints to Stage Two or referral to the Ombudsman, promoting resolution at an earlier stage.

3. STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

Table 6: Stage 2 Complaints Received

	2023-24	2024-25
Total	8	14

Summary of Stage Two Complaints

The number of Stage Two investigation requests increased from 8 in 2023-24 to 14 in the 2024-25 period. Of these:

- Three complainants opted to bypass Stage One, preferring to proceed directly to Stage Two.
- One complainant chose to withdraw early in the Stage Two process after alternative solutions were identified to support them.
- The remaining ten complainants had previously undergone a Stage One investigation, and a Stage 2 Investigation was concluded.

Where both a Stage One and Stage Two complaint investigation had been carried out, the overall outcomes of Stage Two investigations aligned with the findings from Stage One. This consistency suggests that the conclusions reached at Stage One were made appropriately and that the Local Authority continues to engage effectively with the individuals it supports and administers complaints in line with procedures.

However, it should also be recognised that the number of Stage Two complaints has increased significantly in the 2024-25 period, indicating that even when a complainant has been through the Stage One process, the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome.

An overview of the themes from the Stage Two complaints have been identified below:

- 1 Stage Two complaint was raised due to perceived delays in providing a service.
- 2 of the Stage Two complaints were in relation to the support offered to citizens in residential care facilities. These had both been considered by the residential care homes involved and been considered at Stage One.
- 2 Stage Two complaints were in relation to finances and paying for care in residential care homes.
- 4 complaints raised at Stage Two were in relation to Learning Disabilities Services and Supported Living. One further complaint was withdrawn by the complainant having not been raised at Stage One. This was resolved without it becoming a complaint.

- 5 Stage Two complaints were in relation to the Adult Community Teams. 2 of these complaints were in relation to the same individual and were raised simultaneously. 2 of these complaints were in relation to a need to move citizens to a different care setting due to finances.

Table 7: Response timeframes from Stage Two complaints

The table below provides a summary of the length of time taken to respond to Stage Two complaints.

Stage Two Responses (Target - 25 working days)	2023/24		Within deadline	2024/25		Within deadline
0-25 Days	0	0%	0%	0	0%	0%
25-100 days	7	87%		12	92%	
100+ working days	1	13%		1	8%	
Average	67 Days			55 Days		

Under the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014, Adult Services has 25 working days to respond to a complaint raised at Stage Two. While this timescale has not been met in any cases, the average time for issuing a Stage Two response has been reduced throughout during 2024/25, this includes the whole time from the initiation of the complaint to the delivery of a full response to the citizen. This improvement aligns with the decreased number of days taken to respond to Stage One complaints and may be attributed, in part, to the greater experience of staff within the complaints team.

To fully complete a Stage Two complaint does inevitably take a considerable amount of time. Before a complaint can be formally opened at Stage Two the complainant must first meet with the Independent Investigator to confirm and discuss the key points of the complaint. Once this is achieved the Independent Investigator begins the complaint investigation, reviewing relevant documentation and meeting with key staff members to ensure that a thorough review is undertaken. Whilst the Independent Investigator is undertaking their investigation, they will continue to keep the complainant informed as to the progress of the investigation.

Once Adult Services receive the report from the Independent Investigator Officers let the complainant know this has been received and provide a response time within 10 working days. The reports are typically lengthy and can take some time to review. The Director, Adults Housing and Communities considers and responds personally to all Stage Two Complaints regarding Adult Services.

Responding to the 25-day timeframe prescribed by regulations is a challenge that appears to be consistent across all Local Authorities. In addition to the lengthy process as set out above there are also challenges in identifying suitable Investigators, further information on this is set out later in the report:

The time taken to respond to Stage Two complaints will continue to be monitored and reviewed during 2025/26, and opportunities for improvement will be explored.

Table 8: Outcomes from Stage 2 Complaints

The table below summarises the outcomes from Stage One complaints and Stage Two Complaints in 2023-24 and 2024-25.

Outcomes	2023-24	2024-25
	Stage 2	Stage 2
Upheld	0	1
Not upheld	8	12
Not Applicable	0	1
Total	8	14

The total number of complaints managed at Stage Two has increased, as has the complexity of these. In 2023-24, 8 complaints were managed at Stage Two, however only 4 of these had been through the Stage One process. The number of Complainants that have requested to go straight to Stage two in 2024-25 has decreased slightly, which is reflective of the pro-active approach taken to support citizens through the full complaints process.

In 2024-25 the above table highlights that only one Stage Two complaint was upheld, showing that the Independent Investigators generally found the work and decisions made by Officers at Stage One of the process to be appropriate and consistent with the regulatory frameworks governing their respective teams.

Learning from Stage Two Complaints

Whilst only one of the Stage Two complaints have been upheld, there has been learning from these to support the development of services and improvement of practice to enhance citizens' experience. This learning has included:

- **Enhancing Advocacy Support in Social Services**

Since 2023, all acknowledgement letters related to social services complaints have included details on how to contact Llais – Your Voice in Health and Social Care, an advocacy organisation that supports individuals in raising concerns. However, it is recognised that various other advocacy organisations also provide vital support to citizens across the social care sector.

To ensure social care staff remain informed about available advocacy resources, the Training and Development Team organises regular Community in Practice events. These events provide advocacy organisations with a platform to engage with social workers and share insights into their work across social care. Several advocacy groups have participated, offering valuable information on the services they provide. This initiative strengthens social care staff's awareness of advocacy options, enabling them to better support the citizens they work with. In 2025/26 awareness raising will be strengthened further with the provision of specific training related to the Advocacy services that Adult Service commission and how these can be accessed.

- **Work to support providers and individuals to better understanding funding**

A Stage Two complaint in 2024–25 highlighted the need to ensure that residential care providers are fully aware that social services will not automatically fund placements that have been privately agreed with a citizen when their personal funding has depleted. The complaint revealed a misunderstanding by both the care provider and the family, who had assumed that, upon the citizen's inability to continue self-funding, the Local Authority would cover the costs. However, as the citizen did not have an assessed need, the Local Authority was unable to accept financial responsibility, leading to a breakdown in trust between the family, the provider, and the Local Authority.

To address this issue, discussions have taken place with providers through the Residential Care Forums to reinforce clarity on funding processes. Additionally, support continues to be offered to citizens considering residential care, ensuring they have access to accurate information regarding financial responsibilities.

- **Enhancements in Safeguarding Recording and Feedback**

A Stage Two report identified areas for improvement in the recording of safeguarding outcomes and the communication of these findings to citizens. In response, training across the team has been strengthened to promote the use of clearer language in Safeguarding Strategy Meetings, minimising ambiguity and improving the overall quality of language used in investigations and reports.

Additionally, the report highlighted the importance of considering the number of partner agencies involved before proceeding with a strategy meeting. While the service remains committed to conducting these meetings as swiftly as possible, the findings of the Independent Investigator emphasised the necessity of ensuring key partner agencies are available. This consideration is now a fundamental aspect of convening any strategy discussion.

Arrangements for Commissioning Stage Two Independent Investigators.

Many Local Authorities across South Wales continue to experience a backlog of Stage Two investigations due to availability of Independent Investigators. This is not an issue experienced by Cardiff Adult Services due to the approach taken to working with a small team of Independent Investigators that was introduced in 2023-24.

During 2024/25, Adult Services expanded its team of Independent Investigators to include specialists with expertise in key areas, enabling the Council to engage them for specialised work as needed. This enhancement includes the addition of an Investigator with a specialism in Human Resources and another with expertise in Adult Safeguarding. Their involvement offers complainants increased reassurance regarding the skills and experience of the investigators handling specialised cases, while also equipping the Local Authority with more robust guidance and constructive feedback upon the completion of investigations.

To maintain flexibility and responsiveness, the Complaints Team also regularly reviews and updates its list of Investigators, ensuring minimal delays when a Stage Two investigation is required.



4. OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINTS FOR ADULT SERVICES

A complainant can refer their case to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint after completing the Local Authority's formal complaints process. However, the Ombudsman will usually only consider a complaint if:

- The local complaints process has been fully completed (i.e., both Stage One and, Stage Two).
- The complaint is made within 12 months of the individual becoming aware of the issue.
- The matter involves potential maladministration, service failure, or injustice that has not been adequately addressed by the Local Authority.

In some cases, the Ombudsman may accept a complaint earlier if there are exceptional circumstances.

The following summary outlines how Adult Services complaints referred to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales were considered during 2024/25. A total of eight complaints were referred to the Ombudsman in this period. All were subsequently closed for various reasons, and notably, none progressed to a full investigation requiring a formal report. This reflects the proactive approach taken by Adult Services in addressing concerns.

- **2 were closed as premature complaints**, meaning they had not yet gone through the local authority's formal process.
- **2 were resolved through Early Resolution Settlement**, where the Ombudsman identified issues and directed corrective actions such as formal apologies and reopening complaints.
- **1 was dismissed as out of time (too late for review)**. The Ombudsman would not normally investigate issues unless it was made to them within 12 months of the complainant first becoming aware of the problem.
- **3 complaints were closed after initial consideration**, where the Ombudsman found no evidence of maladministration or service failure, no indication of personal hardship or injustice, and concluded that little further would be achieved by pursuing the matter.

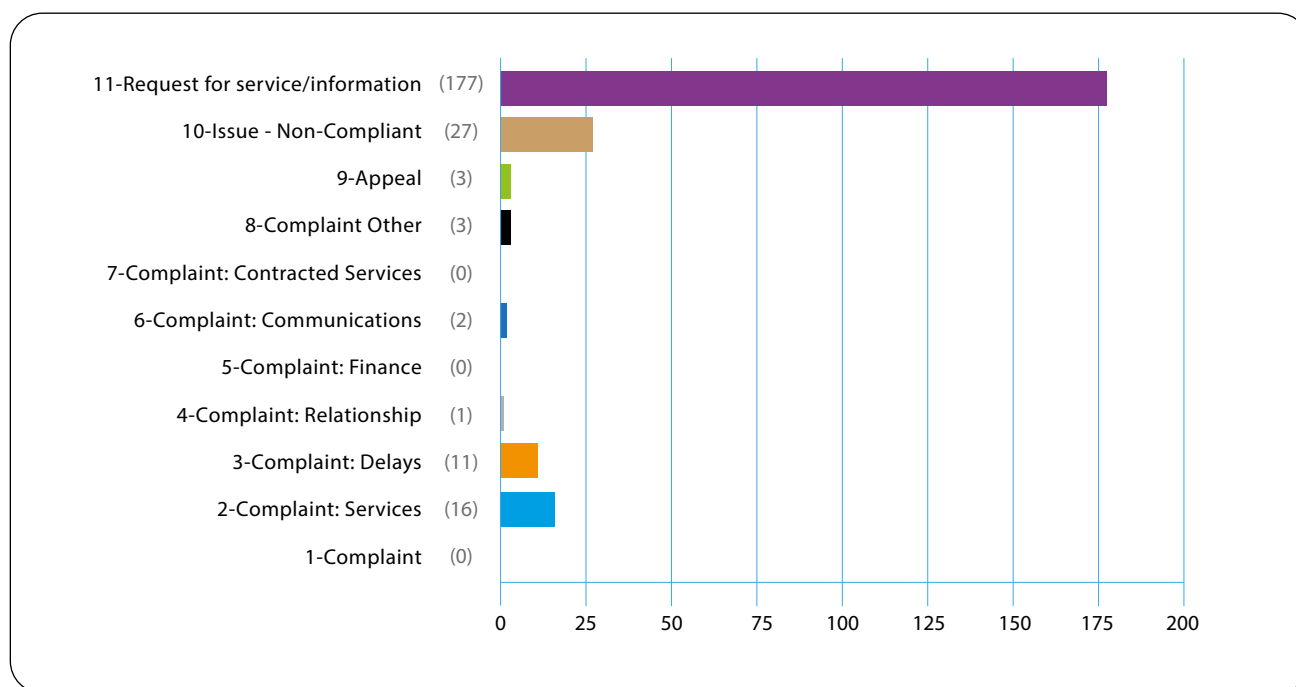
In summary, these outcomes demonstrate the strength of Adult Services' internal complaints handling processes and its commitment to early and effective resolution. The increase in referrals to the Ombudsman reflects greater public awareness and accessibility of the complaints process, supported by improved communication tools and guidance. Adult Services has enhanced transparency and availability of information regarding the complaints process, making complaint procedures clearer and more accessible through documents like How to be Heard and other communications. By treating every complaint as an opportunity for learning and service enhancement, Adult Services continues to foster a culture of accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement.

5. MEMBERS ENQUIRIES

During the 2024-25 period, the Adult Services Complaints Team managed 275 Members Enquiries, reflecting an increase of 3.8% compared to the previous year, however, 35 of these were withdrawn. The main reasons for withdrawal included: insufficient information from the Member, the citizen choosing not to proceed, no identified care or support needs, or the case being more appropriate for another team, such as Housing. To better understand why citizens use this route, a thematic review was conducted, to help gain a better understanding into the key issues raised.

Chart 2: Thematic review of Members Enquiries

The chart below summarises by theme, the type of Members Enquiries raised to Adult Services in 2024-25



The analysis of Members Enquiries indicates that requests for information or services represent the most common theme. In 2024-25, 177 requests were received for assistance in accessing services or obtaining information, marking an increase from 135 in the previous year.

Requests for service are primarily directed to the Independent Living Services (ILS), where an initial 'What Matters' conversation is conducted to help identify additional support options that may be beneficial for the citizen. The remaining enquiries consist of requests for information about service delivery approaches or statistical data related to specific service areas.

Table 9: Response times to Members Enquiries

The table below summarises the response times for Members Enquiries for 2024-25 and compares these with the response times for the previous year. NB: this does not include the withdrawn Members Enquiries.

Members Responses (Target - 10 days)	2023/24		2024/25	
0-10 Days	112	44 %	109	51 %
11+ working days	140	56 %	104	49 %
Average	16 Days		12 Days	

Improved Collaboration and Workload Management

The Adult Services Complaints Team has strengthened its collaboration with the Members Teams to identify cases where a Members Enquiry can be withdrawn. While the overall correspondence managed in 2024-25 has increased, removing withdrawn enquiries has effectively reduced the workload on the team.

This improvement has allowed the Complaints Team to focus more efficiently on incoming enquiries, enabling quicker response times and enhancing the quality of service provided.

A recurring pattern has been observed where citizens raise complaints both through the Stage One complaints process and via their Elected Member. In such cases, the focus remains on addressing the complaint before providing a formal response to the Elected Member, with the team ensuring that this approach is clearly communicated at the time the enquiry is raised.

Where appropriate, the Stage One Social Services Complaints Procedure is followed, allowing Adult Services a slightly extended response timeframe of 15 days instead of 10. While this process helps ensure thorough handling of complaints, it has also contributed to some delays in delivering definitive responses to certain Members Enquiries.

Adult Services strive to fully investigate the work undertaken with citizens before responding to Councillors and Elected Members. This approach ensures they receive a broader understanding of the actions taken and the outcomes achieved for the constituent who sought support. Any urgent issues are addressed immediately with the appropriate teams.

While the complexity of cases and the involvement of multiple teams can sometimes extend response times beyond standard timeframes, this thorough approach helps ensure that Elected Members are fully informed. By sharing the steps taken to address concerns and the resolutions already in place, the service minimizes repeat enquiries on the same issues, reducing the need for constituents to seek further intervention.

6. COMPLIMENTS

Since the introduction of Independent Living Services into the Adult Services Directorate in 2023-24 there was a significant increase in the number of compliments received at that time. The 2024-25 report continues to see an upward trend with an increase of 7% from the previous year. Many of these compliments continue to originate from the Independent Living Services, which have well established mechanisms for routinely engaging with citizens following support interventions to gather feedback and insights on their experiences.

However, additionally, Social Work Teams have observed a notable rise in the number of compliments received for their services. This trend reflects a broader shift in practice that emphasises the importance of citizen feedback, allowing lessons to be drawn from positive experiences while identifying and addressing areas for improvement.

The excellent examples below show the positive impact that services have had on individuals and the positive outcomes citizens are experiencing from the positive co-productive work undertaken by Social Workers. Some examples of the compliments received from varying sources are captured below.

Adult Services Feedback from External Professionals

"... I wanted to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude for the incredible effort you all put into this case. Your prompt responses and thorough approach have far exceeded expectations.

On a personal note, your involvement has profoundly impacted the citizen who previously resided at this address. During our visit, she was astonished at the transformation, realizing the chaos she had lived in. It meant the world to her to retrieve her cherished ornaments and some clothing. Additionally, the caretaking services that assisted in moving some furniture greatly alleviated potential stress for both her and her daughter. She was moved to tears upon learning that your services could provide such support and asked me to pass on her heartfelt thank you and gratitude.

This experience truly highlights how effective collaboration between services can significantly benefit those we aim to support.

Thank you once again for your hard work, seamless coordination, and the genuine empathy you demonstrated in such a challenging situation."

Adult Service User's Family Member

"L is my social worker and provided me with your email address, as I said I wanted to let her manager know how helpful she is.

The respite that L arranged (and you kindly agreed to extend) has been such a godsend to me. L is always empathic and helpful. I'm really grateful for her help.

We are so appreciative as a family for all you have achieved for Dad. His welfare has been in your hands; you have done the best for him. Thank you so much.

This increased support has now been in operation for a few months, and I cannot overstate how life changing it has been. Prior to the Social Worker's visit, everything had become a struggle: D was deteriorating emotionally as well as physically and the additional care I was providing was taking a toll on my health. The situation felt untenable and the unwelcome prospect of long-term residential care seemed to be looming. However, the additional hours have produced a disproportionately beneficial outcome. D is so much happier, feels well cared for and, most importantly, he feels safe again in his home. The increase has allowed me to get my life back too: I feel more optimistic and energised and my contact with D can once more be on a social basis. As well as the additional support she arranged for us, the Social Worker was so caring in her approach. She was adept in quickly understanding our situation and knowledgeable in how she could alleviate it. She was also amazingly quick in achieving the increase in hours. I cannot praise her professionalism, efficiency and expertise enough. Her visit provided light and hope in what was becoming quite a dark place."

Service Users Accessing Mental Health Services

"You have been an ultimate lifeline for us both. My partner really took to you; that's a lot for him. Neither of us could have gotten here without you. Thank you so much, I know how hard working in social services can be, from a professional level and as a parent, and it's frightening.... The gentleman on the end of the EDT line restored our faith. Thank you again. You have renewed our faith in social services x.

I just wanted to email to say thank you for yesterday. All your encouragement and support meeting me in town... and after meant I went to the pottery activity, and I felt so good afterwards. I've been struggling in me recovery and feeling like things won't change and getting in dark places easily. Once I got myself to feel safe at home, I haven't got to feel fully safe going outside but after getting home yesterday I felt really eager for going out next time which I haven't felt before".

Family Member of a Service User I receipt of Support from the Learning Disability Team

"Thanks for all your hard work, I would not have this placement if it wasn't for you and we wouldn't have been aware of the company and what it could offer.

Myself and S have read through them (care and support plans) and we are both really pleased with all aspects of them! It's so refreshing that all of the information passed to you all has been reflected in such detail and there's no amendments needed!

I received a call from a parent expressing her thanks regarding the calm quick thinking and actions 2 of our staff made on the morning of the 3rd.

She had an accident in her kitchen, cutting her hand on broken crockery, the wound was bleeding quite a lot and the as they had only just moved into the house, she could not find the first aid kit.

The staff arrived at the house as usual to take Z out for his planned day, she answered the door very distressed, she asked the staff to go to the local chemist to purchase some dressings, the staff immediately went to the vehicle and gave her the first aid kit from there to dress the wound.

She expressed she wanted the staff to be acknowledged for their support in a very stressful situation, she felt they went above and beyond and deserved additional praise."

External professional Regarding a Support Worker in the Hospital Team

"Thanks, C, for your continued support.

The trust that Mr & Mrs B have in you is testament to your professionalism & dedication to supporting some of the most vulnerable citizens in Cardiff, facing exceptionally difficult circumstances.

Awesome piece of work"



Citizen Regarding staff in the Community Resource Team

“She really liked the Carers coming, she enjoyed the chats and how cheerful they always were as she sometimes struggles to stay positive. She said she was very grateful for their help.

Daughter, wanted to thank all the excellent CRT Carers, we couldn't have wished to have met such lovely, pleasant people. Please thank D and B two amazing helpful carers, a credit to you. Also felt that they saw Dad as a person and not a patient.”

Citizen Regarding Support by Independent Living Services First Point of Contact Team

“You've been great, you've been so great with Mum. It's so nice to talk to someone who understands and gets it”.

Professional Regarding the Social Services Training and Development Team

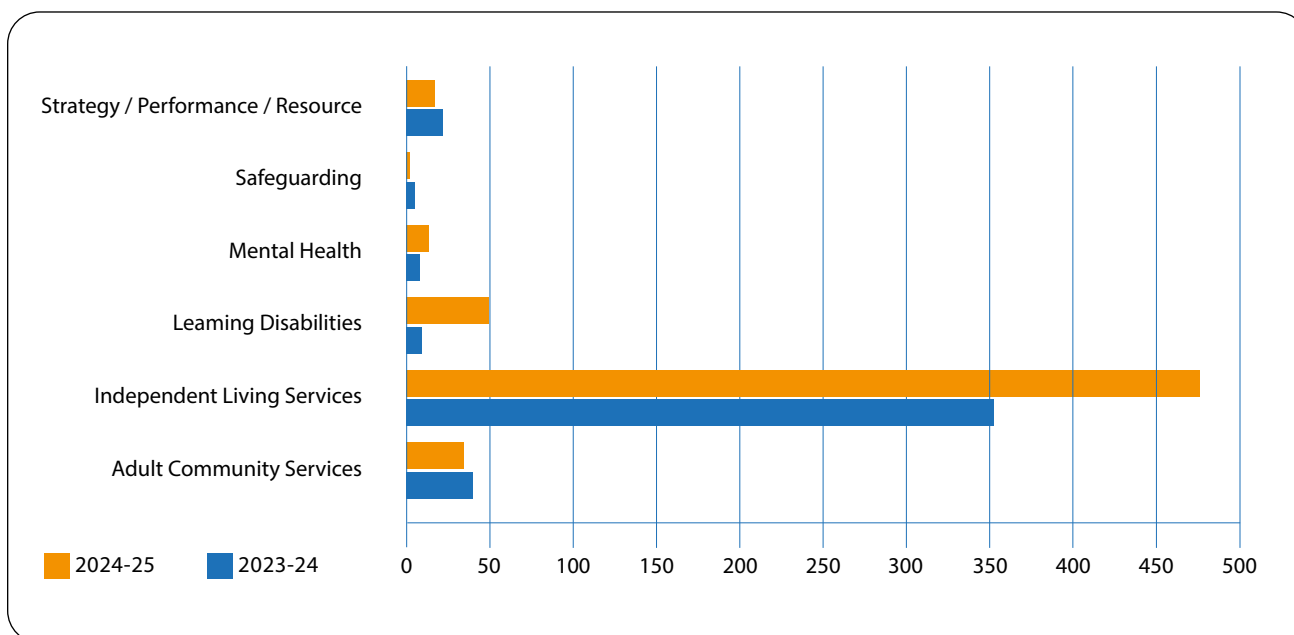
“...hope you don't mind but , before you agreed for me to attend, I had informed my Head of Service of how responsive Cardiff's learning and training department has been to the feedback I have shared about the trends and patterns we have seen in the workforce, particularly in response to the issue of cultural awareness and sponsorship. I'm also grateful for the support you've given to providers we've signposted your way and the priority you have given to offering providers the opportunity to access learning around sepsis. My feedback will be shared with our LA inspector for Cardiff too as an example of good practice and effective joint working between CIW and your dept within your organisation.

Compliments, like complaints, provide valuable insight into the experiences of both citizens and professionals and play a crucial role in service development. They highlight examples of good practice carried out by individual social workers and teams, contributing not only to the improvement of services but also to the professional growth of staff.

Recognising and celebrating compliments is essential for boosting workforce morale, reinforcing positive practices, and ensuring that staff feel valued for their contributions. Acknowledging these successes supports a culture of continuous improvement and enhances the overall quality of service delivery.”

Chart 3: Comparison of compliments from 2023-24 to 2024-25

The below chart provides an overview of the compliments received with a comparison to the previous year's compliments, recorded by team.



There has been a further increase in the number of compliments received for Independent Living Services, as they continue in their proactive approach to gather feedback and insights from citizens through exit surveys.

Throughout the 2024-25 period, ongoing efforts have been made across all Social Work teams to encourage the reporting of compliments and to emphasize their significance. More work will be done in the coming year to help staff recognise and report compliments

The Compliments and Complaints Team gathers feedback through post-assessment surveys conducted with citizens. This feedback and the findings from these surveys and from complaints and compliments are reported regularly to senior management meetings and help inform improved practice and identify areas for service improvement.



7. SUMMARY

This year's report reviews complaints across Adult Services, identifying patterns and themes to support service improvement. It also outlines the role of the Compliments and Complaints Team in guiding both citizens and staff through the complaints process.

Complaints have proven valuable in identifying service challenges such as delays, poor communication, and unmet needs. They've driven improvements in policies, procedures, and staff training, informed strategic planning, and enhanced accountability. Importantly, they've supported staff development and encouraged citizen engagement by demonstrating that feedback leads to real change.

In 2024–25, there was an increase in both Stage One and Stage Two complaints, alongside a rise in complexity—particularly around financial decisions regarding care placements. This shift from confusion about care costs to more specific funding concerns reflects improved staff training and clearer communication with citizens.

Despite the rise in complaints, average response times have improved, and most complaints were not upheld. These cases still offered valuable learning, especially around information sharing and practice enhancement. The Compliments and Complaints Team continues to promote a supportive, transparent approach, ensuring complainants are kept informed and empowered throughout the process.

Auditing and quality assurance have been strengthened, with citizen engagement through post-assessment surveys helping shape care plans. Collaboration across teams has improved, and the extended use of the Halo system will further support tracking and learning from complaints. Actions from previous years remain under review, feeding into broader service improvement initiatives.





**SECTION 2:
CHILDREN
SERVICES
COMPLAINTS**

8. CHILDREN SERVICES OVERVIEW

THE MANAGEMENT OF CORRESPONDENCE IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Cardiff Children's Social Services operate under the framework of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, which shapes how care and support are assessed and delivered across Wales. Social services functions are governed by the Social Services Complaints Procedures Wales, ensuring adherence to set guidelines.

For the purposes of this report, the term "citizen" refers to any individual who interacts with services—whether as a service user, a family member, or someone who has contacted us to make a complaint, raise a concern, or share a compliment. Matters raised by Elected Members are addressed separately later in this report.








This report demonstrates our ongoing commitment to openness, responsibility, and continuous improvement, which are central to our efforts in delivering high-quality care and support.

This year has been marked by both advancement and complexity. Although the number of individuals supported by Children's Services has remained steady, the nature of the cases has become more intricate, and the volume of correspondence—including complaints, compliments, and enquiries—has risen. These exchanges provide meaningful insights into the experiences of those accessing our services and form a crucial basis for shaping and enhancing future service delivery.

The Children's Services Complaints Team compiles a weekly report summarising complaints and compliments, which is shared with the Children's Services Senior Management Team. In addition, the team holds weekly meetings with Operational Managers to support ongoing investigations and contribute to the drafting of responses.



Table 10: Children Service Complaints of Figures from 2023-24 and 2024-25

 Complaints	 Stage 1 complaints	 Stage 2 complaints	 Days to resolve (av.)	 Members Enquiries	 Days to respond (av.)	 Compliments
2024/2025						
219	211	8	44	92	23	131
-4.3%	-2.3%	-38.5%	41%	0%	4.5%	25%
2023/2024						
229	216	13	31	92	22	174

The **211** stage 1 complaints received in 2024/25 represent **5.9%** of the total children, young people and families (3603) that were supported, and just **0.41%** of the total number of contacts received across Children’s Services (51,453).

This is a percentage decrease in comparison to the **216** stage 1 complaints received in 2023/24, which represented **6.14%** of the total children, young people and families (3516) that were supported, and just **0.42%** of the total number of contacts that were received across Children’s Services (50,540).

Children’s Services have continued to strengthen the support available to young people, ensuring they have clear and accessible channels to express their concerns and provide feedback. We have continued to focus on making our services more responsive to the needs and voices of young people.



9. ALL CORRESPONDENCE

Children's Services have received a total of **477** cases of feedback in 2024/25

- **211 Stage 1 Complaints**
- **8 Stage 2 Complaints**
- **92 Member enquiries**
- **35 'Fast Track' requests for service**
- **131 Compliments**

A decrease was seen in both the number of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints. Member enquiries saw no change compared to the previous year.

The decrease in complaints received by Children's Services in 2024/25 compared to the previous year may be attributed to improved service delivery and communication, with a continued focus on early resolution. Increased use of informal resolution methods, such as facilitated meetings between complainants and service managers, has also helped address concerns before they escalate.

Stage 1 complaints continue to present a high level of complexity, often involving multiple interconnected issues. While service areas make efforts to resolve concerns informally, this isn't always achievable. The complaints that do enter the formal process are typically more intricate, making timely resolution more difficult. Their complexity also increases the likelihood of escalation to Stage 2 of the complaint's procedure.

Queries, Issues and 48 Hour Call Back Requests

The criteria for what qualify as a formal complaint—and what falls outside that definition—are clearly outlined in the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014. While not all concerns meet the threshold for a formal complaint, the Complaints Team remains committed to supporting individuals who wish to raise such matters.

The Children's Services Complaints Team also handles 48-hour call-back requests for matters that do not meet the criteria for a formal complaint. These requests are promptly passed on to the relevant officer and team manager to ensure timely follow-up and resolution. This proactive approach not only supports individuals in having their concerns addressed but also helps prevent issues from escalating into formal complaints.

In 2024–25, the Complaints Team successfully managed and resolved **35** 'fast track' 48 hour call back requests that fell outside the scope of the formal Complaints Procedures.

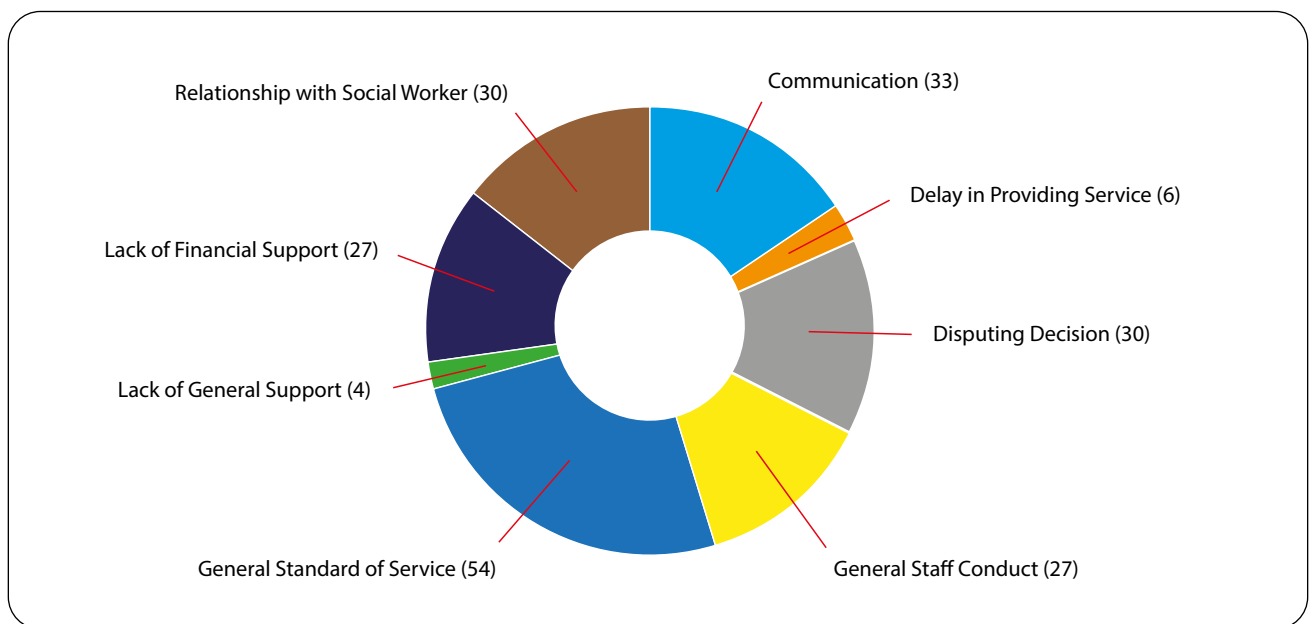
10. STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS

The Stage One complaints process offers individuals and their families a formal route to express concerns about services delivered by Children’s Services, in line with the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014. It provides an opportunity for teams to reflect on instances where service delivery may not have aligned with the expectations of those accessing support.

Beyond addressing specific complaints, the process enables managers to review the service user’s experience leading up to the concern and assess operational practices within the team. It also supports a wider evaluation of existing policies, procedures, and the accessibility of information provided to service users and their families—contributing to ongoing improvements in how services are delivered.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS FROM CHILDRENS SERVICES STAGE 1 COMPLAINTS

Chart 4: Compliant Themes 2024-25



Communication / Relationship with Social Worker was the most reported theme, making up 29% of total complaints. This theme covers concerns about the adequacy and clarity of communication from the Local Authority, particularly from social workers. Common issues include delays in responding to phone calls or messages, or a lack of regular updates regarding case progress.

General Standard of Service was the second most common theme in Children’s Services complaints for 2024/25, accounting for 26% of all complaints received. This category encompasses a wide range of concerns relating to the overall quality of service and often includes complaints involving multiple issues. These typically reflect dissatisfaction with the perceived consistency or effectiveness of the support provided by Children’s Services.

‘Disputing Decision’ ranked third in 2024/25, representing 14% of complaints. This theme includes concerns raised by families and carers who disagreed with decisions made by Children’s Services, such as changes to a child’s placement or care arrangements. These decisions are often complex and must be made in the best interest of the child, which can sometimes lead to differing views between the service and those involved.

Chart 5: Yearly Comparison of Themes 2024-25

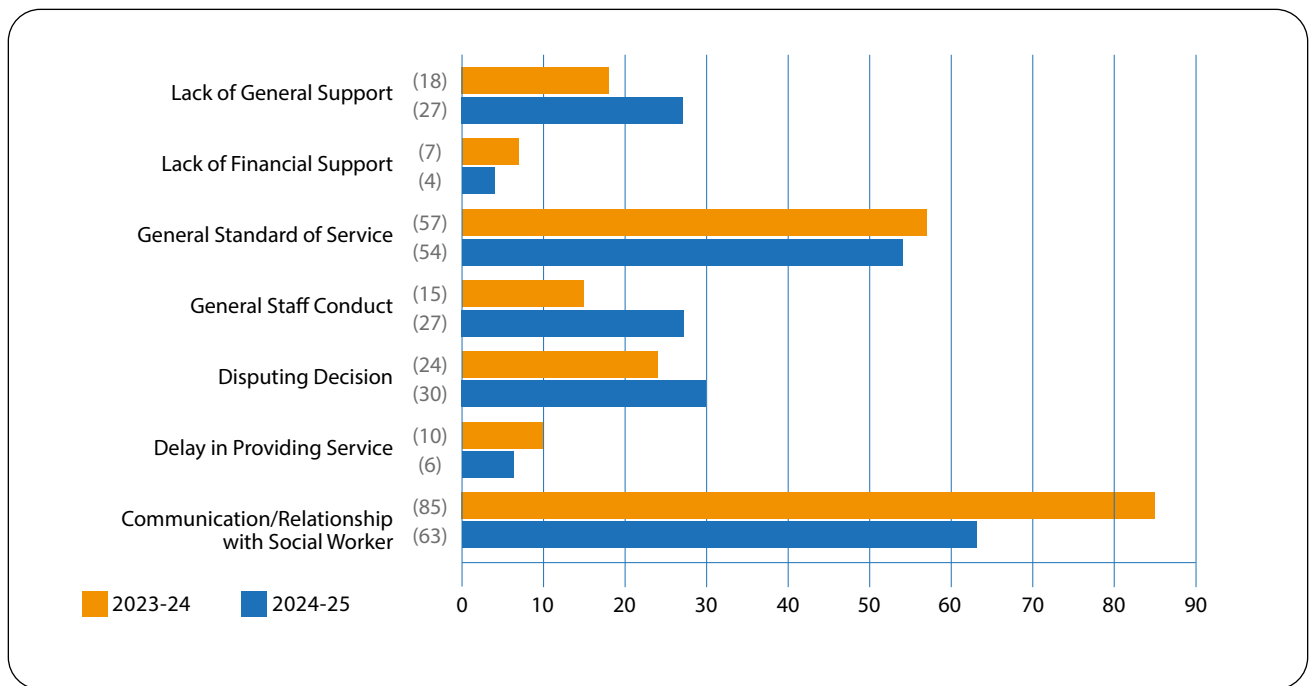


Table 11: Comparison of percentages of all Complaints by Theme 2023-24 and 2024-25

	2023-24	2024-25	Difference
Lack of General Support	8.3%	12.8%	+4.5%
Lack of Financial Support	3.3%	1.9%	-1.4%
General Standard of Service	26.4%	25.6%	-0.8%
General Staff Conduct	6.9%	12.8%	+5.9%
Disputing Decision	11.1%	14.2%	+3.1%
Delay in Providing Service	4.6%	2.8%	-1.8%
Communication / Relationship with Social Worker	39.4%	29.9%	-9.5%

Key Increases

General Staff Conduct increased from 6.9% to 12.8% and this could be due to the nature of the work in Children’s Services, where decisions must be made in the best interest of the young person. Similarly to general standard of service, these complaints relate to the conduct of the wider social work team, such as social work assistants and IRO’s

Lack of General Support increased from 8.3% to 12.8%, this theme refers to dissatisfaction with the overall support received from Children’s Services, encompassing allegations such as perceived poor service, inadequate assistance or handling of cases.

Key Decreases

Communication / Relationship with Social Worker decreased from 39.4% to 29.9%, showing that progress in how information is conveyed to service users and their relationship with officers has improved.



11. STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

Stage 2 Complaints Opened in 2024/25

8 Stage 2 complaints were opened in 2024/25, compared to 13 in the previous year.

Building on last year’s work, actions arising from Stage 2 outcomes and recommendations continue to be implemented. This work will be further developed to strengthen learning and development opportunities for staff, ensuring that feedback from complaints continues to drive service improvement and deliver high standards of support for children and families

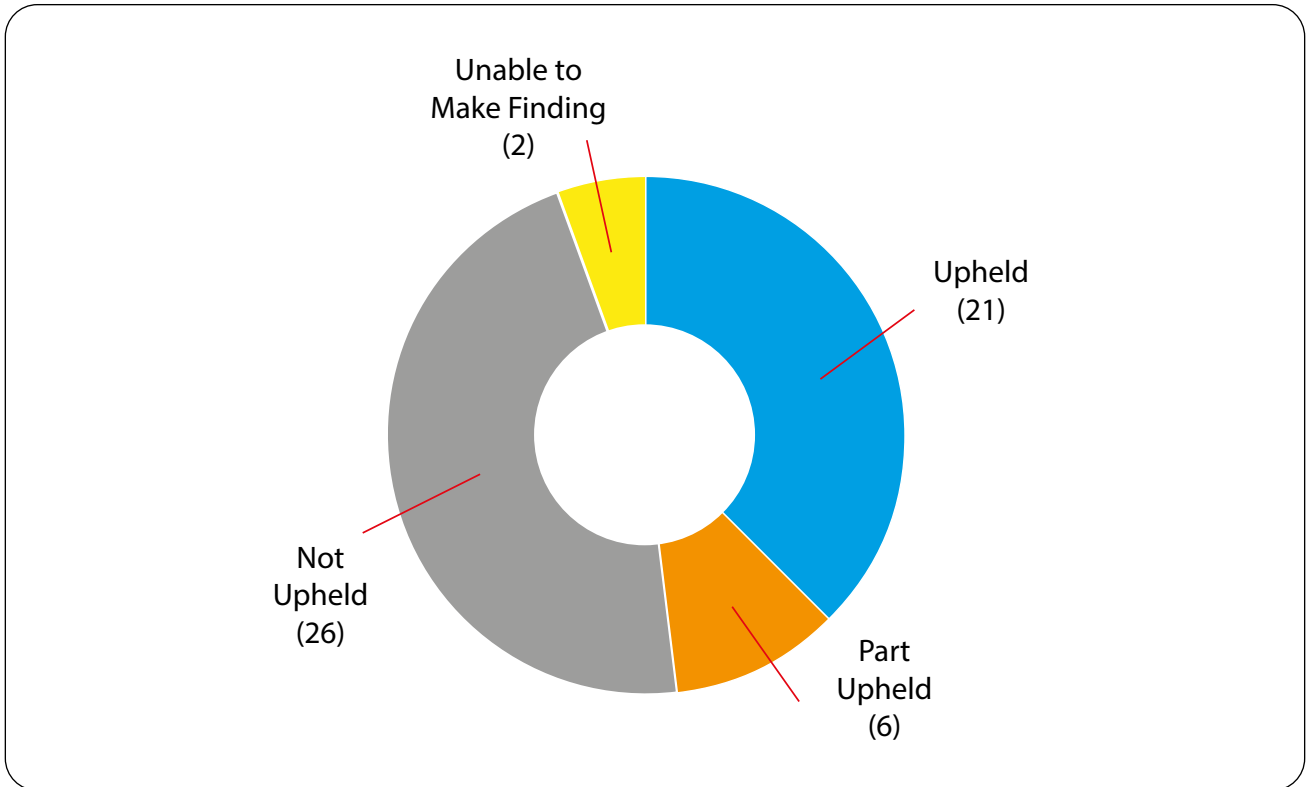
Stage 2 Complaints Closed in 2024/25

7 stage 2 complaints were closed in 2024/25. This figure includes investigations that may have started in the previous year 2023/24.

Of the 7 Stage 2 Complaints closed in 2024/25, 4 were not upheld, and 3 were upheld.

There were **56** complaint points across the 7 stage 2 investigations that were closed. The complaint points were either upheld, not upheld, part upheld, or the investigator was unable to make a finding.

Chart 6: Stage 2 Complaint Findings 2024-25



Stage 2 Investigation Themes

- 4 Stage Two complaints were disputing decisions and these included disagreeing with placements being changed or ending, disagreeing with information in reports and documents, and contact arrangements. 3 of these complaints were not upheld and 1 was upheld.
- 2 of the Stage Two complaints were in relation to relationship with social worker / communication. Both of these complaints were upheld.
- One Stage 2 complaint was regarding general lack of support. This complaint was not upheld.

Under the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014, Adult Services are expected to respond to Stage Two complaints within 25 working days. However, before a complaint can formally progress to this stage, the complainant must first meet with an Independent Investigator to clarify and agree the core issues. Once confirmed, the Investigator begins a detailed review, examining relevant documentation and engaging with key staff to ensure a comprehensive investigation.

In practice, meeting the 25-day timeframe has proven challenging. Investigations often extend beyond this period due to the complexity of cases and the need to coordinate with staff whose availability may be affected by leave or workload. Throughout the process, the Investigator maintains communication with the complainant to provide updates on progress. Once the investigation is complete, Children's Services notify the complainant that the report has been received and aim to issue a formal response within 10 working days.

Stage Two complaints typically follow an initial Stage One review, allowing the Complaints Team to provide Independent Investigators with detailed background information. This not only supports a more informed investigation but also ensures that relevant officers are already familiar with the case, which can aid in resolution.

It is important to note that the 25-day response target remains difficult to achieve, a challenge shared across local authorities. This is largely due to the time required to schedule interviews with staff and the depth of analysis involved. Reports produced by Independent Investigators are often extensive, and where recommendations or actions are identified, additional time may be needed to consider and respond appropriately.

It is also important to recognise that complaint investigations must be carried out with care, accuracy, and due diligence to ensure that the complainant receives a fair and meaningful resolution. While timeliness is a priority, the complexity of some cases means that a thorough review may take longer than anticipated. Taking the necessary time to fully understand the issues, engage with relevant staff, and consider all available information is essential to delivering a well-informed and constructive outcome.

12. LESSONS LEARNT FROM CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMPLAINTS

Children's Services remain committed to learning from complaints in order to improve practice and ensure better outcomes for children and families. Each complaint is reviewed not only on an individual basis, but also in the wider context of identifying themes and service development needs.

In 2024/25, complaints continued to highlight the importance of clear communication, proper recording, and involving families in decision-making.

One complaint revealed that a grandparent had not been informed about restrictions on contact with their grandchild and was not given the opportunity to respond to allegations. It was acknowledged that the communication and handling of the case fell below expected standards. As a result, the following actions were taken:

- Staff were reminded of the need for clear, timely communication with families, especially when decisions affect contact or relationships.
- Training was delivered to improve the accuracy and consistency of case recording, including documenting key conversations and decisions.
- Reflective supervision sessions were held with the staff involved to address gaps in practice and support learning.
- A review of the Professional Concerns process was carried out, with staff-wide retraining to ensure correct procedures are followed.

These steps demonstrate Children's Services' commitment to learning from complaints and improving the quality, transparency, and effectiveness of support provided to children and families.



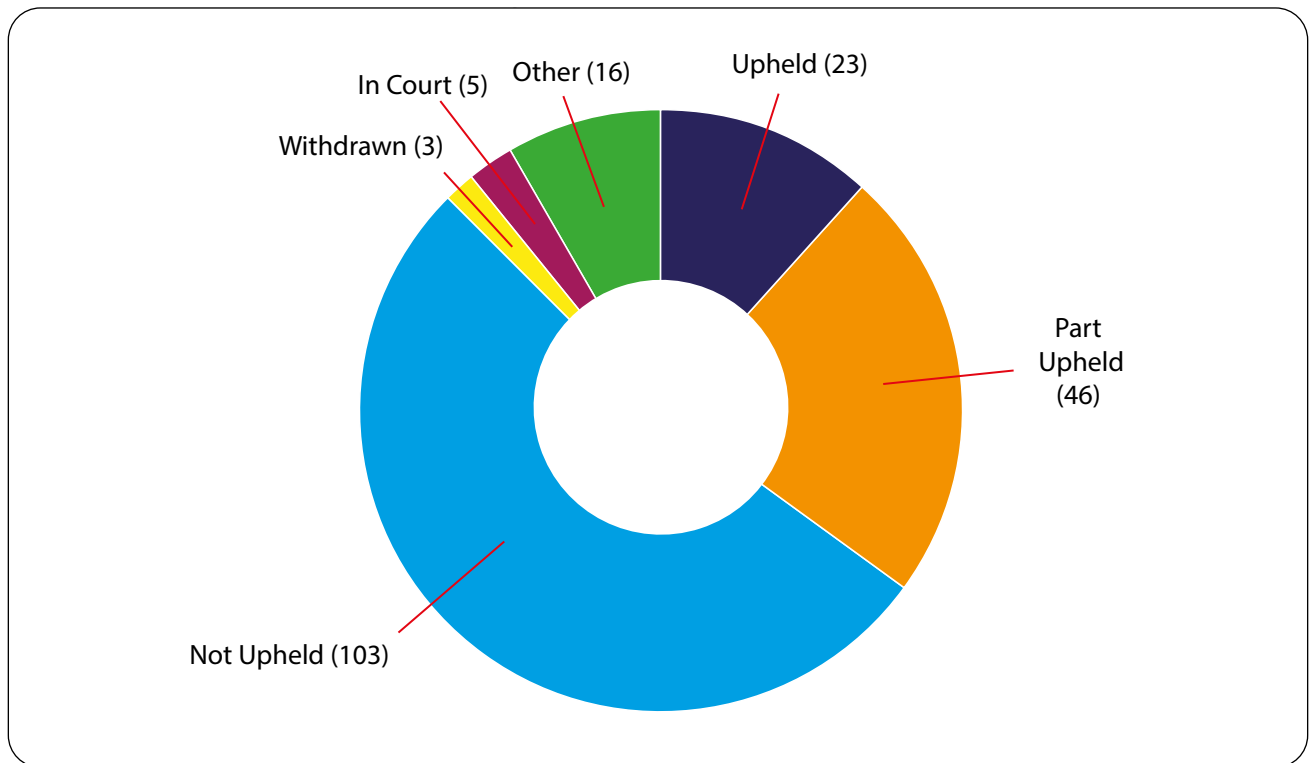
13. OUTCOMES

Understanding the complainant’s desired outcome is a key part of the complaints review process. Within Children’s Services, complaint outcomes are categorised as Upheld, Not Upheld, Part Upheld, Withdrawn, In Court, or ‘Other’ which could involve a lack of consent, or the complaint has been escalated to Stage Two.

Regardless of the outcome, every complaint offers an opportunity to reflect on service delivery. Even when a complaint is not upheld, it can highlight areas for improvement and prompt a review of current practices, helping to drive continuous enhancement in the quality of care and support provided.

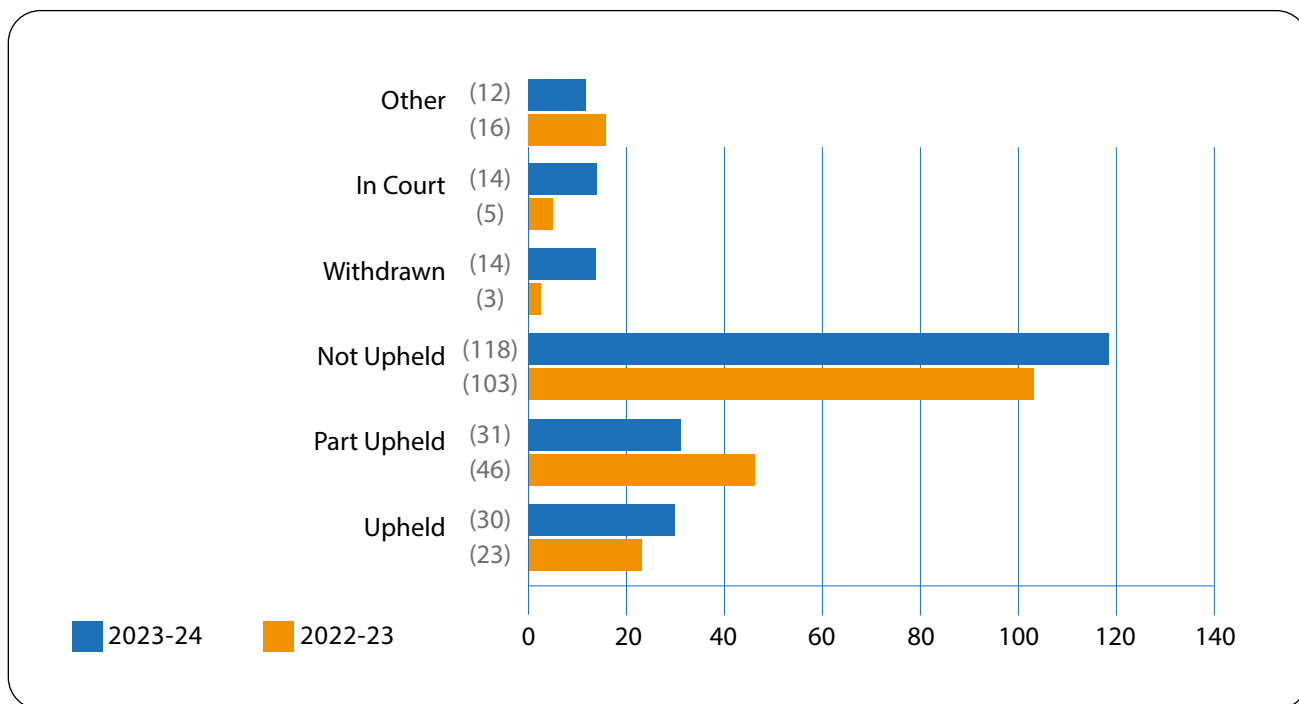
196 complaints were resolved between April 2024 and March 2025.

Chart 7: Complaint Outcomes 2024-25



Just 11.7% of Stage 1 complaints received by Children’s Services in 2024-25 were upheld. 23.5% were part-upheld, with the majority (52.6%) not upheld. 1.5% were withdrawn, 2.5% were not able to be investigated as they were in Court, and the remaining 8.2% were categorised as ‘other’; this category includes complaints which, for example, we had no consent.

Chart 8: Yearly Comparison of Outcomes 2024-25



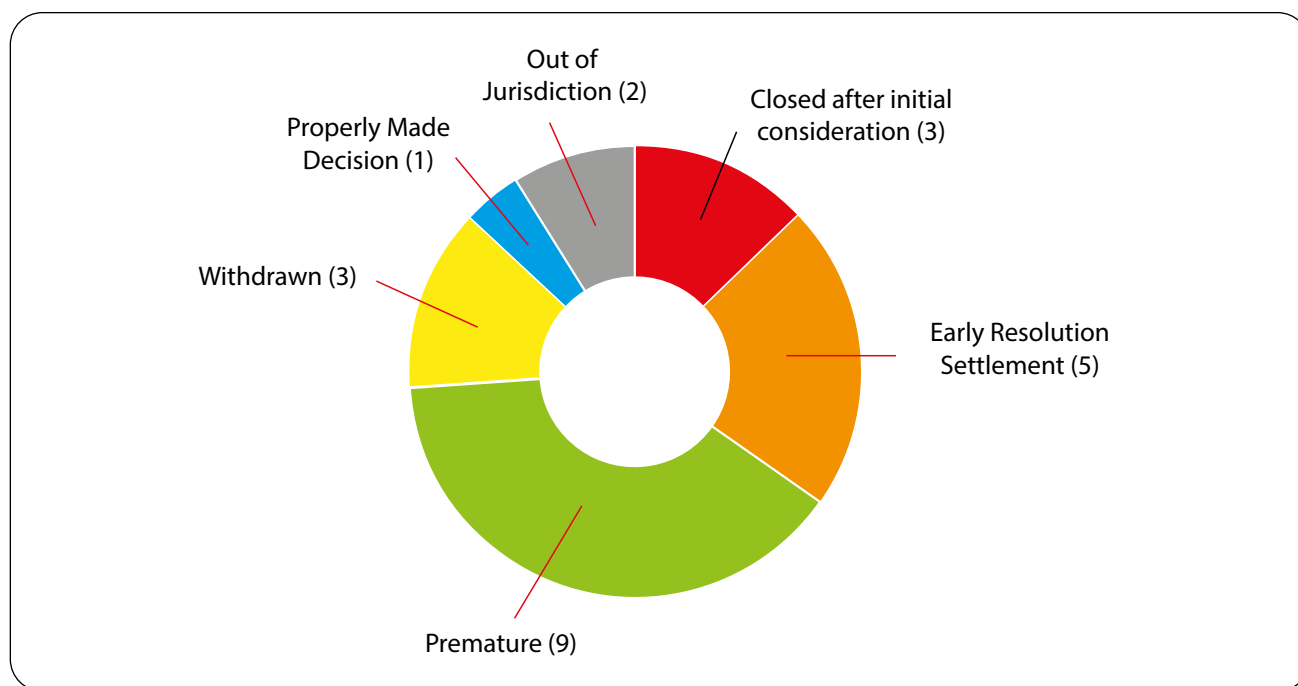
The Welsh Government encourages the use of complaints as a tool for identifying opportunities to strengthen social services. When a complaint is upheld, it can lead to tangible improvements—such as more equitable service delivery, enhanced support for vulnerable individuals, and revisions to existing policies. Issues raised around service delays, staff conduct, or quality of care often prompt internal reviews and can result in changes to practice.

An upheld complaint also provides a valuable opportunity for services to reflect on operational standards, linking directly to quality assurance measures, staff training, and broader policy evaluation across teams. This reflective process supports a culture of learning and continuous improvement.



14. OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINTS FOR CHILDRENS SERVICES

Chart 9: Children’s Services Ombudsman Complaint Outcomes 2024/25



24 complainants approached the Ombudsman in 2024-25 about Children’s Services, 23 cases were closed with 1 remaining open. None reached formal investigations that led to reports.

Table 12: Outcomes

Outcomes	2023-24	2024-25
Closed after Initial Consideration	5	3
Premature	6	9
Out of Jurisdiction	2	2
Withdrawn	3	3
Early Resolution Settlement	3	5
Properly Made Decision	0	1

15. COMPLIMENTS

Table 13: Compliments

2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
178	152	180	174	131

The commitment and hard work demonstrated throughout the service area is reflected in the 120 compliments received in 2024-25, although this is a decrease compared to the previous year at 31%. The complaints team will continue to seek out improved methods of gathering positive feedback.

When compliments are received, they are shared with the individual concerned as well as the Director and the relevant Operational Manager.

The 131 compliments received by Children’s Services in 2024-25 were received from a variety of individuals, including young people, families, foster carers, and other professionals.

Some feedback from the people we support in Children’s Services:

“I just wanted to share some lovely feedback in relation to F and B who have been working with IG. I have spoken to I’s mum who said she cannot praise enough the positive work that F and B have been doing to support I. She said, ‘they have been absolutely amazing, and I don’t know what we would have done without them.’”

“Thanks to L and the team for all the help they have given our daughter she was going through some issues that was causing her to go a bit off the rails, she wouldn’t talk to us and her behaviour was becoming an issue at home, but with the teams help my daughter is back to her happy little self, she’s more open with us around her concerns and she has been an absolute pleasure lately and for that our family thanks you all for all you have done, brilliant service would definitely recommend to anyone and everyone.”

“Hi, thanks for the report. Could you please feedback to someone in the /RO team how happy we are with the way in which this report was worded. I’m not sure if this is a service wide change, or just this report, but it feels far more personal centred, and less ‘professional’ than previous reports. Although A doesn’t read these reports, if he does decide to in the future, I am sure this will make him feel far more valued.”

Some feedback from other professionals both within and outside Children's Services:

"N is absolutely amazing, I'm so impressed with the way she works, her creativity and her approach is really impressive. She has implemented support for staff and young people in a brilliant way' and I have been told that 'N is the best manager I've ever had."

"I would like to bring to your attention the good work that W has completed with O. It was evident that he has developed a good working relationship with O within the short period of being involved. W has worked tirelessly to ensure that O's care planning is thorough in line with the identified risks. The Part 6 Care and Support Plan was informative, clear and identified all the interventions needed to help S move forward positive with the right support in place. The information within the GASP was made available by the allocated social worker Wand was written by B. Additionally, it was identified within review that a Safety Plan was needed, and W actively took on this task and agreed to complete this today. This is commendable considering how busy the social work teams are."

"I just wanted to quickly drop a line to let you know how well/ have found both South and East Panels to have gone in their early stages. I am very grateful to L, N and R for all the hard work that has gone into it to date. I am already in the place where it is hard to imagine working without it and I certainly could not function across the East and South as I'm currently doing with the support R and N provide."

"Thank you for taking the time to feed this back. I agree this is not an isolated incident, C (much to her embarrassment) receives compliments from so many different professionals and parents on a regular basis. She was recognised as the star of the week last week nominated by several other members of staff, for her fantastic work and dedication to children. C, we are very lucky to have you. Thank you again for your commitment to improving the lives of the children you support, keep up the fantastic work!"

16. SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

In 2024/25, Children's Services have seen a continued reduction in the overall number of complaints, reflecting progress in service delivery, early resolution, and communication with children, young people, and families. The decrease in Stage One and Stage Two complaints, alongside stable volumes of Member Enquiries and a significant number of compliments, suggests that the service is responding more effectively to concerns and recognising the importance of public feedback.

While the number of upheld complaints remains low, every complaint continues present a learning opportunity. Responses are tailored and transparent, with complainants kept informed throughout the process.

Although there has been a reduction in compliments received this year, the feedback received continues to reflect the dedication and professionalism of staff across the service. Compliments are acknowledged and shared with individuals and teams, recognising the impact of their work and contributing to staff morale.

Over the past year, Children's Services has observed a notable rise in the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools by complainants when drafting and submitting complaints. While individuals are fully entitled to use such technologies, this trend has introduced new challenges for the service. AI-generated complaints often reference broader and more complex legislative frameworks, which is sometimes not relevant to the service, resulting in submissions that are more detailed and technical in nature. Consequently, responding to these complaints now frequently requires additional time, specialist input, and legal advice. The service remains committed to providing thorough and timely responses but acknowledges the operational impact in responding.

Looking ahead, Children's Services remain committed to strengthening the complaints process, ensuring children, families, and professionals feel heard and supported. Learning from complaints will continue to inform practice improvements, helping to build trust, accountability, and better outcomes for children and young people.



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Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg



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