

Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

18 September 2024

Customer Feedback Annual Report 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

Recommendation

That the Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers and comments on the contents of the report.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This is the annual customer feedback report for Adult Social Care and Public Health services covering the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.
- 1.2 The report summarises compliments, complaints, comments received by these two services including learning and service improvement. Data, trends, and themes have been compared over the last three years.
- 1.3 A new customer feedback system was implemented on 15 January 2024, part way through the reporting period.
- 1.4 Following a review in 2023/24, Warwickshire County Council's Customer Complaints Policy, including the updated Childrens and Adults Social Care statutory procedures, was approved by Cabinet on 15 February 2024.
- 1.5 At an organisational level, overall feedback received has returned to pre-pandemic levels and in 2023/24 it is at the lowest over the last six years. The number of complaints decreased by 16% from 1809 in 2022/23 to 1520 in 2023/24.
- 1.7 In Adult Social Care, the overall number of complaints have declined over the last 3 years and have decreased from 189 in 2021/22 to 122 in 2023/24 which is a reduction of 35%. No Public Health service complaints were received in 2023/24.
- 1.8 An accessible version of this report is available if required.

2. Complaints Process

- 2.1 Every Local Authority with a responsibility for Social Care Services is required to provide an annual report, outlining the workings of both their Adults and Children's complaints and representations procedures.
- 2.2 The procedure for dealing with adults' statutory complaints (those that meet the criteria within legislation and are raised by or on behalf of adults relating to our Social Care Services) is determined by the following legislation: The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 (the Regulations)

This is supported by the guidance 'Listening, Responding, Improving: A guide to better customer care' Department of Health February 2009 (the Guidance).

- 2.3 The Regulations cover complaints made in relation to NHS and Adult Social Care Services and/or any of its commissioned services and/or independent services. The Regulations state that:
- i.) Every organisation has a single stage system to deal with complaints.
 - ii.) Complaints should be dealt with within a maximum of 6 months and that this can only be extended with the complainant's agreement.
 - iii.) Following investigation of the complaint by the Council, if the complainant is still unhappy, the next stage is to approach the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).
 - iv.) Every organisation should make the complainant aware of the response period that they work to and the way the response will be handled.
 - v.) Where complaints involve several organisations, these organisations should discuss and agree who will take the lead.
 - vi.) The LGSCO will consider complaints from those people who fund their own social care and will liaise directly with the relevant organisation.
 - vii.) Complainants must approach the Council to highlight their complaint within twelve months of the incident happening, or within twelve* months of discovering the problem.

* To note complaints outside of this timescale will be considered individually by the Council's Customer Relations Team (CRT) and an assessment made regarding whether) the complainant had good reasons for not making the complaint within the time limit and it is still possible to investigate the complaint effectively and fairly.

- 2.4 The Council may also receive complaints that connect to adults but that do not fall within the boundaries of the statutory Social Care Complaints Process. These will usually fall within the remit of the Council's Corporate Complaint Process.

- 2.5 Warwickshire County Council (WCC) takes every submitted feedback case seriously, especially complaints, as it wants to make sure its complainants are dealt with fairly, consistently and within timelines. It is essential that the council deals with all feedback efficiently to provide good service, learning and improvements.
- 2.8 Procedures relating to how WCC deals with and responds to complaints is detailed in [Warwickshire County Council's Complaints Policy](#) and [Adult Social Care Statutory Complaints Procedure](#), which are both published on WCCs website.
- 2.9 These policies have been developed in line with best practice recommendations and legislation that covers complaints about local authorities' services. In the policy, a complaint is defined as:
- “... any expression of dissatisfaction with a service that the Council (or one of its partners or contractors) has provided, and that requires a response.”
- 2.10 Customers can at any time in the process, approach the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) for them to consider their complaint. The proportion of customers that complain to the LGSCO compared to the total number of customer contacts is very small. The annual review and summary of upheld complaints issued by LGSCO in the financial year 2023/24 was recently taken to Cabinet on 5 September 2024. Report available [here](#).
- [Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman – Annual Review and Summary of Upheld Complaints](#)

3. Analysis of customer feedback received during 2023/24

- 3.1 During 2023/24 feedback from members of the public was recorded on both the previous 'Contact Us' system and from 15 January 2024, the new customer feedback system.
- 3.2 Feedback can be shared through an online portal, by telephone, by post or via email and it is categorised into complaints, compliments, and comments. Questions from the public are not recorded on the system but are dealt with directly by the appropriate service.
- 3.3 The following analysis covers data, trends and themes compared over the last three years and, where relevant, also before and after the pandemic. This offers a clearer understanding of changes in customer feedback during these periods.

Feedback cases over time – All WCC Services

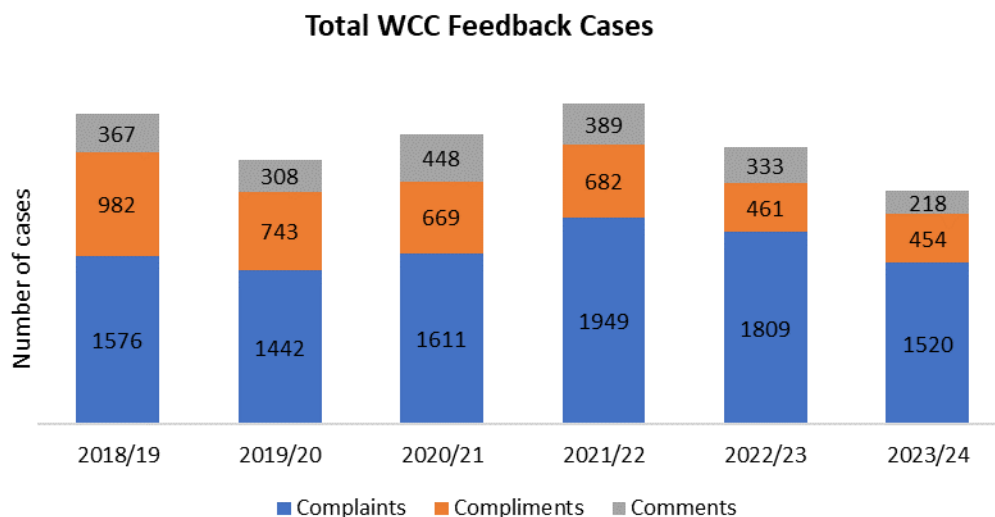


Figure 1: Number of complaints, compliments and comments received from 2018/19 to 2023/24 across all WCC services.

Overall cases:

3.4 The total number of cases raised over the last three years decreased by 27% from 3,020 in 2021/22 to 2192 in 2023/24. As figure 1 indicates, overall feedback received has returned to pre-pandemic levels and in 2023/24 it is at the lowest over the last six years.

Complaints:

3.5 Complaint numbers peaked in 2021/22, due to increased customer interaction following the end of the lockdown period. The number of complaints decreased by 16% from 1809 in 2022/23 to 1520 in 2023/24.

Compliments:

3.6 The previous reduction in compliments over time has continued with a 33% decrease from 682 in 2021/22 to 454 in 2023/24. As figure 1 indicates, the number of compliments received across all services has reduced by 54% since 2018/19. Previous initiatives to encourage positive feedback have not been undertaken across all services since the pandemic and in addition, this type of feedback is not always shared and recorded in the corporate feedback system but is instead held locally.

Feedback cases over time –Adult Social Care and Public Health

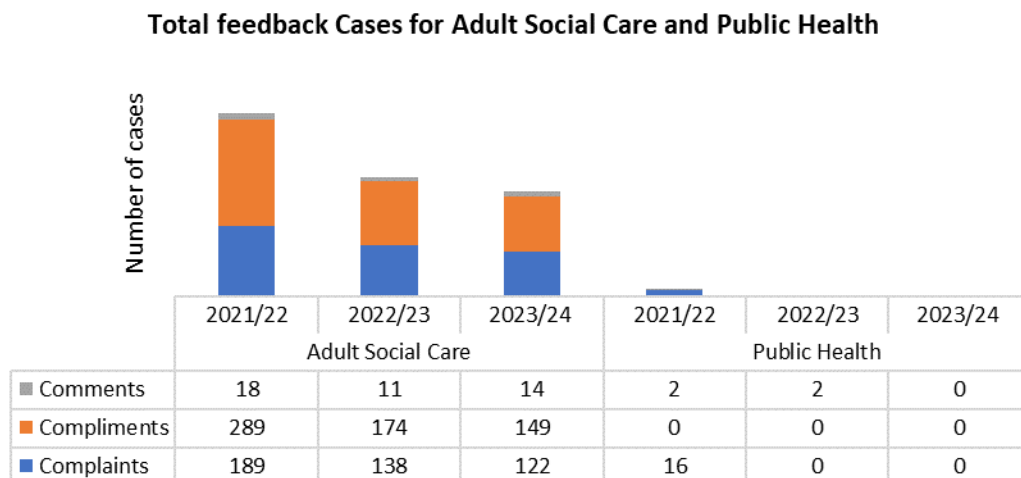


Figure 2: Number of cases assigned to Adult Social Care and Public Health by type from 2021/22 to 2023/24.

Adult Social Care:

Complaints:

3.7 The above figure shows a steady decline in complaints over the last 3 years. An overall reduction of 35% from 2021/22 (189) to 2023/24 (122). The consistent downward trend in complaints suggests potential service improvements have been put in place.

Compliments:

3.8 The above figure shows a decline in compliments collected over the last 3 years. A reduction of 48% from 2021/22 (289) to 2023/24 (149). Compliments are also collated locally via the feedback app.

Comments:

3.9 The above figure shows the comment collection to be consistently low over the 3 years but does show a slight upturn in 2023/24 from 2022/24.

Public Health:

3.10 The above figure shows that for the year 2023/24 no feedback has been collected via the two feedback systems or the Customer Relations Team. Service complaints are dealt with directly by the commissioned services.

Initial feedback contact method for Adult Services

3.11 The 'type of initial feedback contact method' (figure 3) is new data collected since 15 January 2024 due to improvements made when developing the new customer feedback system. There is, therefore, no comparative data and the figures below do not include all cases raised in these services in 2023/24, however by using percentages of data held for January to March 2024, trends can still be identified.

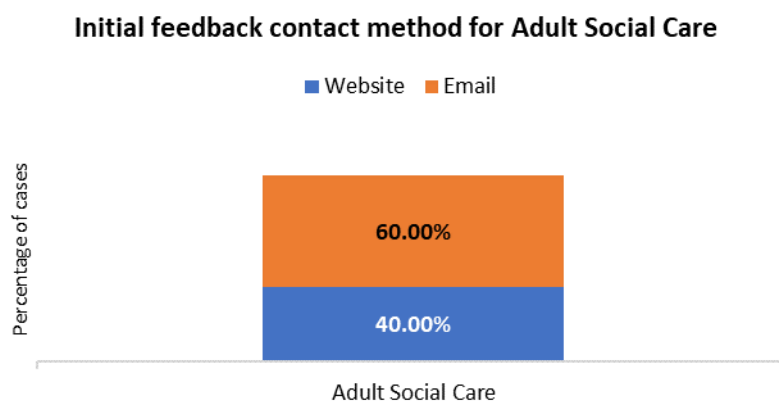


Figure 3: Percentage breakdown of original contact method for complaints, comments and compliments received since 15th January 2024.

- 3.12 The data shows that whilst submitting feedback by post or phone are options, no postal or telephone feedback was received between 15 January and 31 March 2024.
- 3.13 Figure 3 highlights shows the majority of feedback is received by email and this could indicate a correlation with the ability of Adult Social Care customers being able to contact social workers directly to try and resolve issues in the first instance.
- 3.14 In 2023/24, the Customer Relations team continued to invest time speaking directly to prospective complainants, regardless of how the initial contact was made or the service that their feedback relates to. This proactive approach provides an important opportunity to build a trusting relationship with the complainant/service user, particularly critical when handling more complex complaints. This allows for a more thorough understanding of the concerns raised and desired outcomes, and in turn supports investigating managers to provide more precise and detailed responses.
- 3.15 Talking directly to complainants also ensures that where it is appropriate and possible, that concerns are resolved, without the need to progress to the formal complaints process. This can prove to be a quicker and more beneficial means of resolution for all concerned.

Complaints data trends by month:

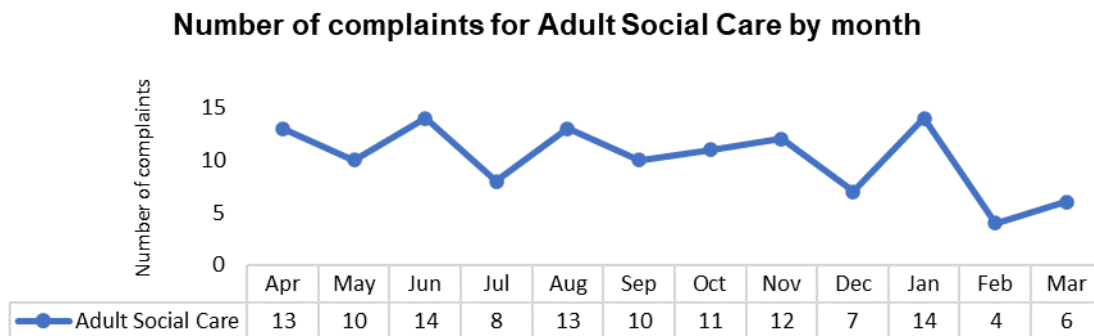


Figure 4: Number of complaints assigned to Adult Social Care by month for 2023/24.

- 3.16 Figure 4 highlights complaints trend by month for 2023/24. The highest complaint numbers were received in June (14) and January (14). The latter aligns with the introduction of the new customer feedback system, which involved transferring 9 cases from the old system. There was also a relaunch of the complaint process and the dissemination of training to teams now advising of a change in process to a centralised loading and initial triage of all feedback by Customer Relations team.
- 3.17 Seasonal trends over the last 3 years (Appendix 1) show that previously December has seen higher numbers of complaints indicating a seasonal affect or increased activity towards the year end with February consistently having lower numbers across all years. In comparison to previous years, 2023/24 has a more even distribution with no extreme peaks like in previous years.
- 3.18 Public Health received no complaints in 2023/24, and this is consistent with last year. Sixteen complaints were received in 2021/22 as this was post the Covid pandemic.

Complaint categories by subject

3.19 The data in the table below indicates differing trends for service areas in terms of categories of concern, and facilitates more targeted, specific training in each of the services areas.

	Adult Social Care	
	Number of complaints	%
Protection of user	21	17%
WCC Service Standards	11	9%
Staff conduct	9	7%
Communication	22	18%
Financial Issues	30	25%
Policy	1	1%
Discrimination	0	0%
Physical environment issues	0	0%
Commissioned Service Provision	6	5%
Outside Complaints process	22	21%

Figure 5: Breakdown of subject categories in Adult Social Care for 2023/24.

- 3.20 Figure 5 highlights the highest complained about subject is financial issues at 25% of all complaints in 2023/24. This would usually be centred around financial assessments that have taken place. This is consistent with the analysis in 2022/23, which also showed 25% (Appendix 1).
- 3.20 In 2021/22, the highest category of complaints at 41% was in reference to communication and by 2023/24 this reduced to 18%. This indicates that significant progress has been made to improve communication across the service and with customers. (Appendix 1).
- 3.21 The next highest category is “Outside the complaints process” at 21%. This includes complaints that are deemed to be outside of the “What is a complaint” policy definition or when an investigation concludes the complaint has been made by persons who do not have the right to complain as per policy.
- 3.22 Public Health received no complaints in 2023/24, and this is consistent with last year. Sixteen complaints were received in 2021/22 as this was post the Covid pandemic.

Complaints per team

3.23 With the introduction of the new customer feedback system, the opportunity was taken to refine and update teams. This has meant that this analysis is not a direct comparison with previous years. The data in figures 6 and 7 below is shown by system and a yearly trend analysis has taken place for those teams with the highest number of complaints in each.

Adult Social Care – Contact Us (1 Apr 2023 – 14 Jan 2024)	Complaints	%	Adult Social Care – Customer Feedback System (15 Jan 2024 – 31 Mar 2024)	Complaints	%
Adult Disabilities Physical	20	20%	Adult Stratford Older People Team and QIC Team	3	15%
Adult Disabilities Learning	16	16%	Adult Physical Disabilities and Sensory Services Team	2	10%
Adult Older People Northeast	14	14%	Adult Disability Transitions Team	1	5%
Adult Financial Services	10	10%	Adult Learning Disability Team	2	10%
Adult Older People Warwick	9	9%	Adult Mental Health	1	5%
Adult Integrated Care Hospital	8	8%	Adult Safeguarding Team	2	10%
Adult Strategic Commissioning	8	8%	Adult Strategic Commissioning	7	35%
Adult Integrated Care Reablement	4	4%	Adult Warwick Older People	2	10%
Adult Older People Stratford	4	4%			
Adult Safeguarding	4	4%			
Adult Mental Health	3	3%			
Adult Disabilities Transitions	1	1%			
Adult Supporting People	1	1%			

Figure 6: Breakdown of complaints per team for Adult Social Care for 2023/24.

3.23 With the introduction of the new customer feedback system, the opportunity was taken to refine and update teams. This has meant that this analysis is not a direct comparison with previous years. For most of the year (April 23 to Jan 24) the team with the highest number of cases was Adult Disabilities Physical (20%) followed by Adult Disabilities Learning (16%) then Adult Older People Northeast (14%).

3.24 Yearly trend analysis (Appendix 1) highlights in past years Social Care and Health commissioning had the highest percentage of complaints 2021/22 (28%) and 2022/23 (25%) whereas in 2023/24 they had 8%.

3.25 The updating of teams in the new feedback system will allow for further analysis to enable targeted support for teams with the highest cases.

Remedies:

3.26 A remedy is used when someone has suffered injustice, the Local Government Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) states the council should provide remedy to “try to put them back in a position they would have been had that error not occurred.” More information on remedy guidance can be found here: [LGSCO Guidance on remedies](#)

3.27 Remedies can take many forms, including apologising, taking corrective action to put things right such as the service provided, a change in process or policy, or a quantifiable financial remedy.

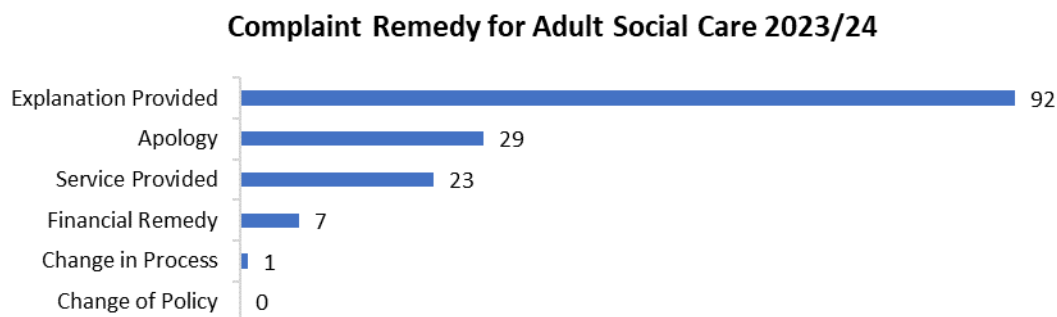


Figure 7: Closed complaint remedies for Adult Social Care in 2023/24.

3.28 The remedy applied to most complaints 2023/24 (75%) is explanation provided. This would usually take the form of a fuller, more person-centred explanation, which may include clarifying of the process or language being used. This has remained the top remedy for all previous years (see appendix 1).

3.29 An apology ranked second as the most used remedy. Recently, the Customer Relations team provided training to services emphasising that apologies should be a "matter of course" for all upheld complaints.

3.30 “Service provided” is the third ranked remedy selected by services and is again consistent with previous years. This would be entered when the original service requested via the complaint, has been delivered or granted following the complaint e.g. the service that was late has now been provided (see appendix 1).

3.31 The new customer feedback system allows multiple remedies for various stages of the complaint, so there may have different remedies applied at different points e.g. Stage 1 ends an apology, Stage 2 may end up with financial remedy.

Outcomes:

3.32 Categories of outcomes have changed in the new feedback system to improve data accuracy e.g. previously a case may initially be recorded as a complaint but later closed as a “question answered” once clarification was received from the member of public, however, it remained recorded as a complaint as this is what it was initially categorised as. The new feedback system allows for a reallocation if the wrong feedback type was initially selected, and outcomes are only recorded against complaints.

3.33 The categories have been analysed in respect of the three statutory reportable categories “upheld, not upheld and partially upheld” and excludes complaints in the old system that were closed as “questions answered” and any withdrawn complaints (44%) Withdrawn complaints include issues with consent. This data has been analysed from both systems.

Outcomes	Complaints	% of Stage 1 Complaints
Upheld	14	14%
Partially Upheld	17	16%
Not Upheld	27	26%

Figure 8: Complaints closed by outcome (excluding withdrawn complaints and questions).

3.34 During 2023/24 the outcome “not upheld” was the highest category at 26%. This indicates that the complaint had no failings identified during the investigation. However, the second highest outcome was “partially upheld,” and accounts for a smaller percentage of complaints at 16%, which shows after investigation some failings have been identified and a recommendation in the form of remedy and/or service improvement is likely to have been implemented.

3.35 Yearly data (Appendix 1) indicates that in 2021/22 this was consistent, however in 2022/23 the highest outcome was “partially upheld”.

Timescale compliance:

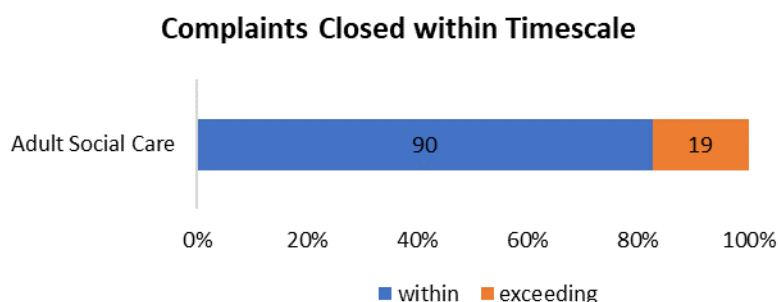


Figure 9: Timescales for closed complaints for Adult Social Care for 2023/24. The graph does not include the 9 closed migrated cases as they span two systems and timescale reporting date is incorrect.

3.36 The timescales are set by policy and the above figure reveals that over 80% of adult complaint investigations are concluded within the timescale. This is in line with the last three years (Appendix 1).

Lessons learned and actions taken to improve services:

3.37 Identifying, actioning, recording, and sharing of 'Lessons Learned' is critical in improving customer experience with council services. It is an opportunity for staff to reflect on how that case could have been prevented/gone better and how, as a Council, it can improve with future cases. This is then used for learning and training purposes for not only the team who have handled the case, but also for the wider council.

3.38 Examples of lessons learned, and actions taken from past cases within Adult Social Care Services and Public Health services include:

- Improvements to letters to make them clearer.
- A recorded presentation for staff on choice of accommodation and charging.
- Improvement of assessments via the better care finance roll out.

3.39 The Customer Relations Team have also implemented several actions following feedback from customers and local services, which include:

- Updated policies and procedures to make it easier for both services and complainants to understand the complaints process.
- Updated letter templates for service use.
- Day to day guidance for services on process and system-based issues.
- Additional training on how to handle complaints and use the new customer feedback system.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

5. Environmental Implications

5.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 ASC & Public Health OSC Feedback Data

Background Papers

None

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:
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