Adult Social Care

Annual Complaints and Compliments Report 2025-26



West Berkshire Council

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Adult Social Care Annual Complaints and Compliments Report 2025/ 26

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the complaints and compliments which have been received by West Berkshire Council's Adult Social Care Service (West Berkshire Council ASC) during the financial year 2025/26.

The majority of complaints processed by Adult Social Care (ASC) within West Berkshire are undertaken using the framework set out within the West Berkshire Adult Social Care Complaints Process Complaints Procedure - ASC (westberks.gov.uk)

Informal Resolution: Complaints that are logged with a service (such as a Care Home or within a locality team) are resolved informally at a local level. These complaints are not logged formally with the Complaints Manager and therefore are not included in the annual complaints return.

Stage 1: Formal Investigation: Complaints are formally investigated by an appropriate manager within the agreed timescale. Following this, if the complainant remains dissatisfied with the response, the Council may then, if appropriate, choose to offer a complaint meeting with the aim of bringing the matter to a satisfactory close. In some circumstances a meeting of this kind may be beneficial to help communication and understanding of complex and/or emotive subjects.

Should a complainant have further information, or new information that has not been considered by the officer investigating the matter when a response has been issued, then we will review the new information to establish whether it alters the outcome.

In addition to this, a small number of complaints are processed using the Corporate Complaints framework. This process is used when the concerns being complained about relate to issues outside of ASC itself, such as the process used to invoice for care. These complaints are not included in the figures being analysed in this report, despite having come into the service in the first instance.

West Berkshire Council (West Berkshire Council) believe that maintaining effective working relationships with our clients and (where applicable) their families, throughout their involvement with ASC, is an important part of achieving the best outcomes for them and we have continued to adopt a restorative practice approach to complaint resolution where possible.

Where it has not been possible to resolve a dispute using the ASC Complaints Process, the complainant will be directed to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

Should it become apparent that a client or family member, is repeatedly raising the same or similar concerns with the Council or other bodies and that this is having a negative impact on carrying out any on-going work, but they have not officially raised a complaint, the Complaints Manager has the discretion to enter these concerns into the complaints process to help achieve a resolution. In these circumstances, the concerns do not have to have been presented to the Council as a complaint.

Occasionally the Council may deem that it is necessary to implement the Persistent and Unreasonable Complainants Process Complaints Procedure - ASC (westberks.gov.uk) Section 3.58-3.63.

This process can be used;

- Where a complaint has been responded to fully and a complainant continues to raise the same or similar issues.
- Where the frequency and/or length of complaints from an individual is preventing the day-to-day working of the ASC teams. In these circumstances the Council can introduce a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) arrangement and /or can specify the frequency and method of contact with a particular team or the Council as a whole.

The full details of the Persistent and Unreasonable Complainants process can be found on the Council's website.

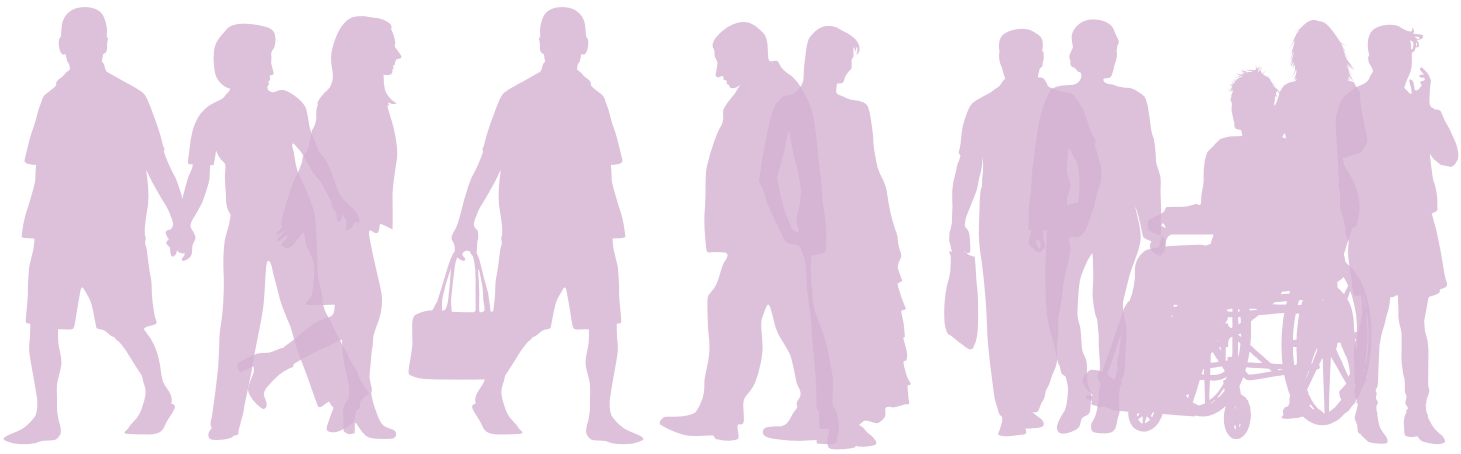
A copy of the Annual ASC Complaints and Compliments Report is published on the Council's website each year.

Complaints: A Definition

A complaint is described as an expression of dissatisfaction with the service the Council has provided. Feedback from individuals is important to the Council as it provides not only an opportunity to identify why people have found our services unsatisfactory, but also a means of identifying how the services being provided can be improved.

Any adult receiving care from West Berkshire Council is entitled to use the complaints process. We also accept complaints from their family or representatives who support them. In this instance we would require consent from the client to pursue the complaint unless there is already existing authority for their representative to act on their behalf. Every person who makes use of the complaint procedure is advised of their right to assistance from an independent advocate and is given information about how to access the advocacy service if they wish to do so.

Complaints may be received via any employee or officer at any level within West Berkshire Council and are then directed to the relevant department depending on the nature of the complaint.



Complaints Figures and Statistical Analysis 2025/26

Introduction

During the 2025/26 financial year, ASC Services received **36** complaints. This represents a decrease from **45** complaints in 2024/25—a reduction of **20%**. This continues the downward trend observed over the previous two years, following a period of steady increases in complaints since the pandemic. There has also been a reduction in the number of complaints per **100** clients (see Table 1 below), which is a positive indicator.

As in the previous year, complaints received in 2025/26 have often taken longer to resolve. Considerable time has been spent working collaboratively with various West Berkshire Council teams to manage a number of complex cases involving multiple interconnected issues, alongside supporting two extended legal processes.

For instance, one complaint took over three months to resolve due to the requirement to initiate a Section 42 Safeguarding Enquiry. Further complaints were subsequently received from the same family, which have also been complicated by an additional, ongoing and complex Section 42 enquiry and legal process. This has impacted our ability to manage the high volume of ongoing communication from the complainants.

There has also been another positive year in terms of the low number of complaints escalated to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), although this figure has risen slightly compared to the previous year (as forecasted). Overall, this suggests that the complaints process within West Berkshire Council Adult Social Care continues to operate effectively, with clients and their families generally feeling that their concerns are handled fairly and thoroughly.

Year	Total number people in receipt of long-term ASC service	Total number of Complaints	Complaints per 100 Service Users
2018/19	2114	146	6.9
2019/20	2161	82	3.8
2020/21	2222	41	1.8
2021/22	2252	39	1.7
2022/23	2335	45	1.9
2023/24	2423	55	2.3
2024/25	2455	45	1.8
2025/26	2452	36	1.5

Source: Care Director. Number of Long-Term ASC Clients 2025/26

Table 1:

Quarter	Complaints by Quarter				Total
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Volume	10	8	7	11	36

Table 2:

Table 1 illustrates the number of complaints received in relation to the number of adults in receipt of a long-term service per year.

Table 2 illustrates an analysis of the complaints received by quarter which show an even spread of complaints received throughout the year apart from a significant fall during Q2. There is no obvious reason for the dip in Q2.

Compliance with Timescales

The national timescales set out for ASC complaints are used to measure compliance for all complaints arising within ASC services.

Overall compliance with time scales has been positive during 2025/26 with **100%** of all complaints being responded to in the first instance **within the 20 working days** timeframe or within an agreed extension.

Complaints Received by Complainant Type

- Following the same pattern as last year, the majority of the complaints received by ASC services were made on behalf of the client by other family members (**69%**). This remains generally consistent with last year (80% being recorded in 2024/25).
- **19%** of complaints were made by the clients themselves, and none of these individuals used or required the support of a professional advocate. This may positively suggest that individuals who lack the capacity or confidence to raise a complaint themselves are generally being supported by family or friends. However, it may also indicate a potential gap for those who lack confidence or capacity and do not have friends or family available to advocate on their behalf.
- **11%** of complaints were submitted by professionals – similar to last year (**9%**).



Complaints from Clients

Enabling clients to raise complaints remains an important way of ensuring that the experiences of people who use our services inform how those services are designed and delivered. Complaints made directly by clients help ensure their voices are heard and allow us to make improvements where appropriate.

Increasing the proportion of complaints made by clients themselves has been identified as a priority in previous years. This year, the number of clients raising complaints on their own behalf has remained consistent, although it continues to represent a relatively low proportion of overall complaints. Where a complaint is submitted on behalf of a client, every effort is made to obtain their consent for it to proceed and to ensure the issues raised accurately reflect their views. Wherever possible, we also seek to engage directly with the client.

In 2025/26, **seven** complaints were received directly from clients, the same as in 2024/25, although this represents a higher percentage due to the overall reduction in complaints.

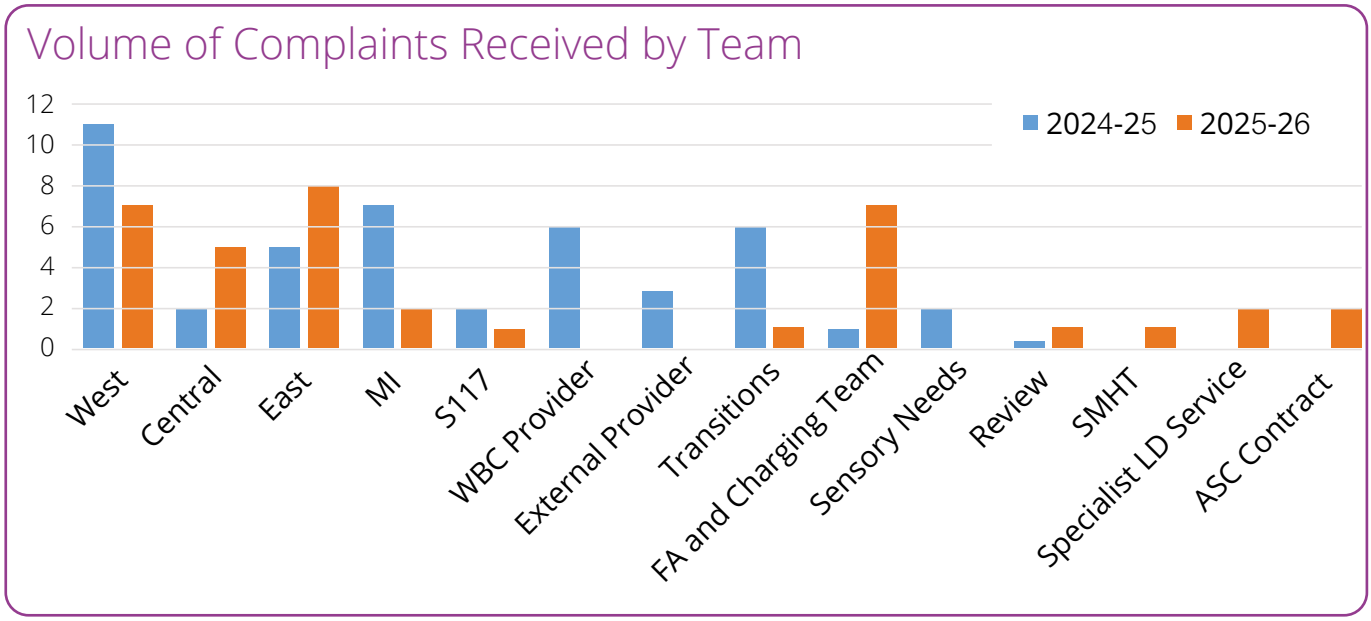
The data for 2025/26 continues to show that the majority of complaints (**25**, or **69%**) were made by family members acting on behalf of clients. Of these, three were submitted following the death of the client. Of the remaining **22** complaints, seven were made by parents, while **15** related to older individuals, typically raised by a son, daughter, or spouse/partner.

Multiple Complaints

By examining the specific detail relating to who has made complaints during 2023/24 there have been occurrences of multiple complaints being made by a single person. These, however, did not meet threshold for implementing The Persistent and Unreasonable Complainants Process.

Complaints Received by Team

Of the **36** complaints made, the allocation of complaint by service is as follows (including comparison to 2024/25 figures):



Data

Team	2024-25		2025-26	
	Volume	%	Volume	%
West	11	24%	7	19%
Central	2	4%	5	14%
East	5	11%	8	22%
MI	7	16%	2	6%
S117	2	4%	1	3%
WBC Provider	6	13%	0	0%
External Provider	3	7%	0	0%
Transitions	6	13%	1	3%
FA and Charging Team	1	2%	7	19%
Sensory Needs	2	4%	0	0%
Review	0	0%	1	3%
SMHT	0	0%	1	3%
Specialist LD Service	0	0%	2	6%
ASC Contract	0	0%	1	3%
Volume	**45**	100%	**36**	100%

MI	*Maximising Independence Team*
S117	*Section 117*
FA and Charging Team	*Financial Assessment and Charging Team*
SMHT	*Specialist Mental Health Team*
Specialist LD Service	*Specialist Learning Disability Service*

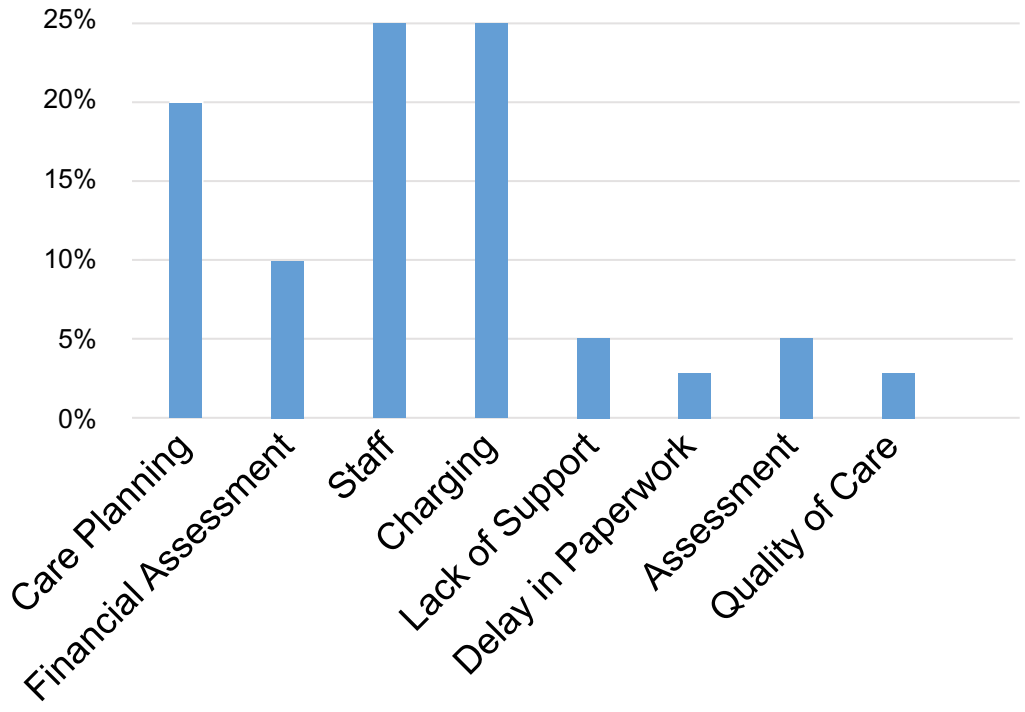
The data shows that the overall number of complaints decreased from **45** in 2024/25 to **36** in 2025/26, indicating an overall improvement. Complaints are now more evenly distributed across the three locality teams, with East locality receiving the highest number at 8 complaints (**22%**), followed by both West locality and the Financial Assessment and Charging Team with **7** complaints each (**19%**), and Central locality with **5** complaints (**14%**). This represents a notable increase for Central and East locality teams, and particularly the Financial Assessment and Charging Team, which rose significantly from just 1 complaint (**2%**) last year to **7** complaints (**19%**) this year, although there are no identifiable trends. In contrast, complaints relating to the Maximising Independence Team, Transitions, West Berkshire Council Provider Services, and External Providers have reduced considerably, with no complaints received this year for either West Berkshire Council Provider Services or External Providers. This is a positive reflection of the quality of commissioned and in-house services. Complaints relating to Transition Services also fell significantly, from 6 to 1, while some service areas such as Review, Specialist Mental Health Team, Specialist Learning Disability Service, and ASC Contract recorded complaints this year where none were received previously.

Types/ Causes of Complaints

NB: A complaint can be complex in its nature, sometimes comprising of multiple issues and there may not always be only a single cause. Therefore, it should be noted the number of complaint types recorded will exceed the total number of complaints received.

The table below is included in order to provide information about the areas of ASC activity about which we have received complaints about during 2025/26.

Percentage of complaints by type



Data

Nature of Complaint	Vol	%
Care Planning	8	20%
Financial Assessment	4	10%
Staff	10	25%
Charging	10	25%
Lack of Support	2	5%
Delay in Paperwork	1	3%
Assessment	4	10%
Quality of Care	1	3%
Total	**40**	**100%**

The data shows that the most common nature of complaints during 2025/26 related to Staff and Charging, which each accounted for **10** complaints (**25%**), together making up half of all complaints received. Care Planning was the next most frequent area of concern, with **8** complaints (**20%**), followed by Financial Assessment and Assessment, both with **4** complaints each (**10%**). Complaints relating to Lack of Support were lower at **2** cases (**5%**), while Delay in Paperwork and Quality of Care were the least common issues, with just 1 complaint each (**3%**). Overall, the figures suggest that the main areas generating dissatisfaction continue to centre around staff interactions, financial matters, and care planning processes, highlighting these as key areas for ongoing service improvement.

As per last year, complaints made about staff typically relate to situations where people feel that they have not been treated with courtesy or professionalism. We are cognisant that these complaints may also be influenced by people objecting to the outcome of the work by a particular staff member. Every complaint about a member of staff that is either upheld or partially upheld is escalated to that member of staff via their line manager and reflection in supervision is encouraged. This is in addition to any other actions that may have been considered appropriate in the circumstances.

Complaints Relating to Providers

In 2025/26, no formal complaints were recorded in relation to providers. This is a significant improvement compared to 2024/25, when **nine** formal complaints relating to providers were received, accounting for **16%** of all complaints. This represents a very positive outcome. However, we do know that external providers may receive additional complaints directly and that the Council are not notified of those unless those providers have not been able to resolve them satisfactorily.

A small number of informal complaints (**16**) were recorded as being received and resolved locally by in-house providers. These mainly related to communication issues between the home and family members. One further example involved a concern about a decision to allow a diabetic individual to have a piece of cake; the family felt he should have been able to make that choice himself, as he had capacity. There was also an informal complaint from Shared Lives carers who had left the service, expressing that they felt unsupported and dissatisfied with decisions made by the Shared Lives team. These concerns were reviewed through CQ1 processes (NB: a CQ1 is a form used to notify us of a Care Quality issue) or safeguarding procedures and related to historic issues.

In all of the cases above the provider was able to resolve the issues locally and none were then subsequently escalated through the formal complaints process.

Emerging Areas for Future Focus

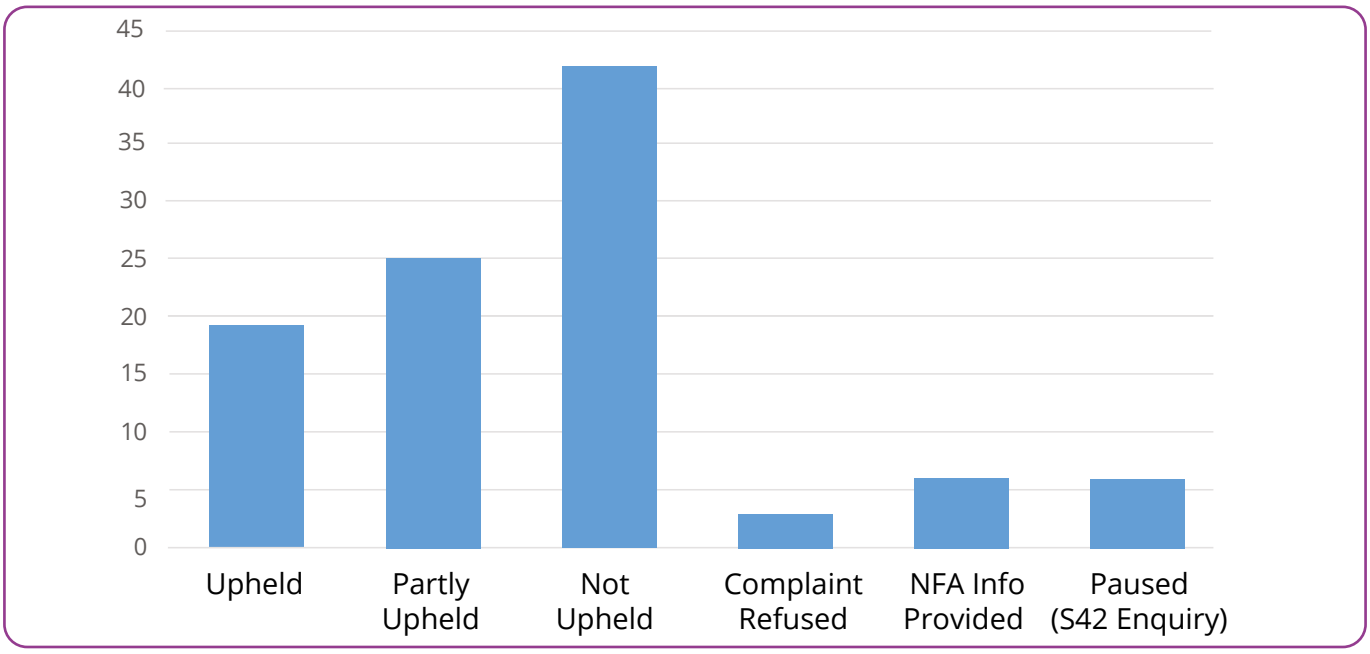
Whilst these must be taken in the context of a small overall number of complaints the following can be identified as potential areas of focus going forward:

- As stated above, the data highlights that the main emerging areas of concern during 2025/26 relate to Staff and Charging. This suggests that issues around communication, staff conduct, responsiveness, and the clarity or fairness of charging processes continue to be the most significant sources of dissatisfaction for clients and their families.
- Complaints about staff will always be an area for focus and improvement, however these do need to be looked at in the context described above.
- Care Planning also remains a notable area of concern, with **8** complaints (**20%**), indicating ongoing challenges in ensuring that care plans are timely, person-centred, and clearly understood by those involved. Complaints about care planning are concerning as this is the fundamental part of the social work process. We do recognise that the number of complaints about care planning (**8**) is against the backdrop of **2452** people receiving a long-term service from ASC in this reporting period, indicating that most of our clients were happy with the support received via their care plans and felt that it reflected their needs appropriately.
- Complaints relating to Financial Assessments (specifically those raised with the Financial Assessment and Charging Team about the financial assessment process) and ASC Assessments each accounted for **10%** of complaints, highlighting that financial processes and decision-making continue to be particularly sensitive issues for service users.
- While complaints relating to Quality of Care, Delay in Paperwork, and Lack of Support remain relatively low, the concentration of complaints around staffing, charging, and planning highlights where service improvement efforts should continue to be focused.

Complaints Findings/ Outcomes

In summary (based on **36** complaints received during 2025/26):

Complaint Findings/ Outcome (Volumes)



Data

Outcome of Complaint	Vol	%
Upheld	7	19%
Partly Upheld	9	25%
Not Upheld	15	42%
Complaint Refused	1	3%
NFA Info Provided	2	6%
Paused (S42 Enquiry)	2	6%

In summary, for the 2025/26 reporting period:

The outcomes of complaints show that the largest proportion, **42%** (**15** cases), were not upheld, indicating that in most instances the original actions or decisions were found to be appropriate. A further **25%** (**9** cases) were partly upheld, where some aspects of the complaint were found to have merit, while **19%** (7 cases) were fully upheld. In **6%** (**2** cases), no further action was required as additional information was provided to clarify the situation, and another **6%** (**2** cases) were paused due to Section **42** enquiries being undertaken. Only **3%** (**1** case) of complaints were refused. Overall, the data suggests that while a substantial proportion resulted in either full or partial acknowledgment of concerns, the most significant number of complaints were not upheld.

Complaints Progressed Beyond Local Resolution

Where it has not been possible to resolve a complaint via restorative practice or via the Council's complaints process, complainants may choose to approach an external regulatory body; The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). The LGSCO will determine if the complaint that is presented to them meets their criteria for investigation.

Six complaints were referred to the LGSCO during the year. Of these, **four** were not investigated, including three submitted by the same complainant in early 2025/26. These related to complaints originally raised with West Berkshire Council in 2024/25 and subsequently escalated to the LGSCO in 2025/26. They were forecast to be included in last year's report, but decisions were not issued until this year.

The remaining two investigations are still awaiting an outcome.

Comparison with Neighbouring Local Authorities

Comparison with neighbouring authorities can be problematic as there are differences in how complaints are recorded. For example, we are mindful that we work hard to identify potential complaints at an early stage and manage them informally. These are therefore not recorded nor translate into formal complaints. It is possible that other Local Authorities deal with emerging complaints differently and record them all regardless of whether they progress or not.

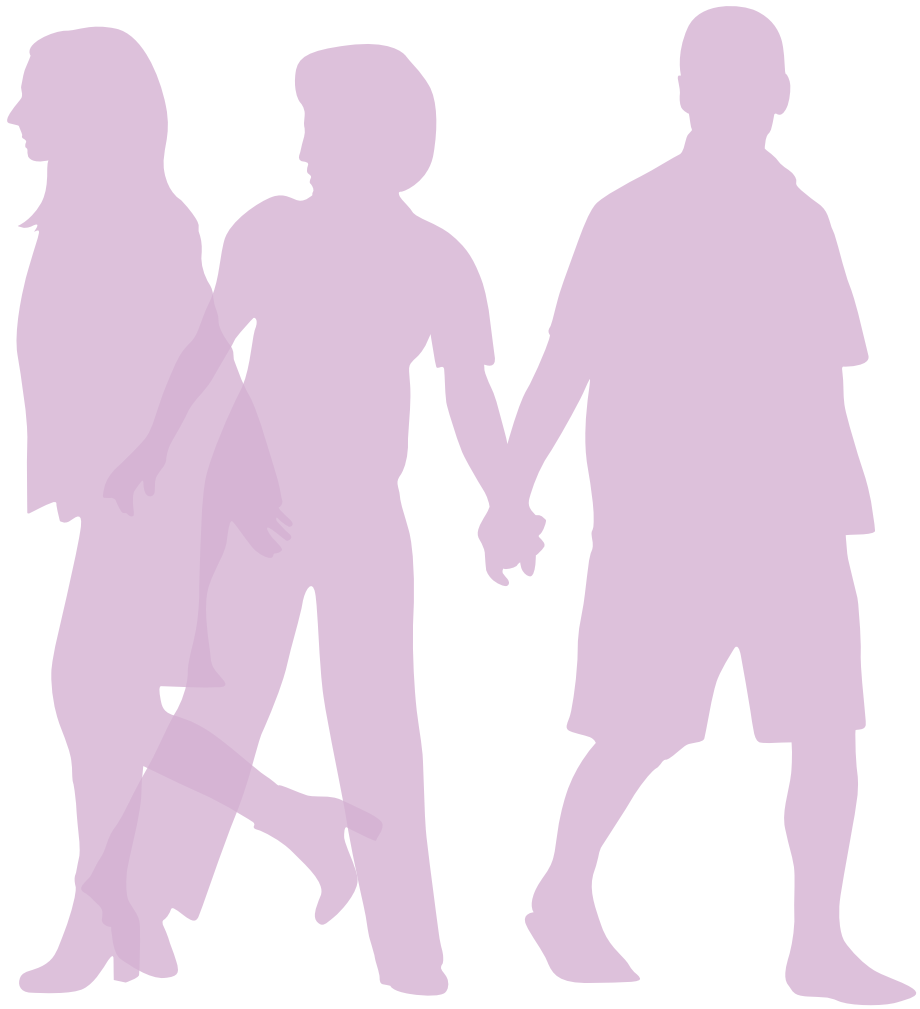
It has been previously identified that amongst the LA's in the Southern Region Complaints Managers Group the Isle of Wight (IOW) consistently seems to follow a similar trajectory to West Berkshire Council regarding numbers and trends of ASC complaints.

In 2024/25 IOW recorded **65** ASC complaints. In 2025/26 they recorded **51** complaints which represents a **22%** decrease, not dissimilar to West Berkshire Council (**20%**) and **4** referrals to the LGSCO.

The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead, one of our neighbouring authorities also received **36** complaints during 2025/26 with **two** referrals to the LGSCO, whilst Bracknell Forest Council recorded only **23** complaints during 2025/26, but with **nine** referrals to the LGSCO.

Based on a straightforward comparison, this suggests therefore that West Berkshire Council is performing broadly in line with neighbouring local authorities and is not an outlier.

We have no concerns about the accessibility of the ASC Complaints Process. All ASC staff are aware of the complaint process and how to refer people into the service if required. Our website is clear in respect of how to make a complaint about ASC and we are transparent and open with providers and external services.



Examples of Complaints Received During 2025/26

The following represents some examples of complaints received during 2025/26:

> *We write this email whilst sat in the care home waiting for an ambulance to attend to my father who has, as predicted, fallen within 24 hours of your disgraceful decision to remove the funding for 1-1 care because apparently, he no longer needs it.*

I have just received a call from the lady who attended the property this morning to see XXX. I am extremely disappointed that she was accompanied by a colleague who openly admitted he knew nothing about the case and only works Wednesday and Thursday. Why was he not briefed on the case? Why was a multi-disciplinary meeting not held beforehand so everyone was briefed?

> *I am writing to raise a formal complaint under the adult social care complaints procedure about the handling of my case. Over the past seven days, I have received three phone calls from your team with no clear plan, no follow-up, and no support put in place... I have been asking for support from Adult Social Services for over two months. Instead, I have experienced poor communication, no clear plan, and a complete lack of safeguarding.*

I'm writing to complain about the lack of support I've been given by the adult social care team.

> *I am writing to make a formal complaint about multiple failures by West Berkshire Adult Social Care (ASC) in its handling of XXX's care, which have resulted in exclusion of the family, procedural irregularities, and serious concerns over fairness, transparency, and safeguarding.*

Despite repeated requests and communications over a sustained period, the following critical issues have not been addressed: The COP assessment required for me to apply for deputyship has not been initiated or completed....no review of her care and support plan has been conducted. Under the Care Act 2014, such reviews are required especially when there has been a significant change in status or living arrangement. This omission fails to meet statutory obligations and compromises her safety, wellbeing, and quality of care... I have not been provided with updates, timelines, or a named point of contact. This lack of responsiveness is unacceptable.

Examples of Compliments Received During 2025/26

The number of compliments received by ASC continues to outweigh the number of complaints. In 2025/26 WBC ASC received a total of 310 recorded compliments in relation to both services and individual practitioners. Clients and their families gave positive and heartfelt feedback to many different teams including our Shared Lives Team, and the Maximising Independence Team as well as each of the locality and specialist teams.

Some examples of the types of compliments we have received are listed below:

> *Her son asked me to pass on his gratitude to the reablement service*
>
> *and specifically, to XX, XX and the OT he said that the service and care have been exceptional. He also thanked me for answering all his questions and queries and for explaining everything he said we do an amazing job.*

I've been in care for most of my career and found your notes are written in a personal and more person-centred approach than I've ever read before. I think the way you have broken down each issue and activity in a clear and again person-centred way using language that can be easily understood by others is refreshing. I hope that you are able to pass on the above skills to other social workers and professionals as I think it would be very much appreciated by clients and those you are responsible for going forward.

> *We would like to thank you sincerely for all the support, guidance, and time you have given to XXX and to us.... It has truly been a pleasure having you as XXX's social worker, and we really appreciate everything you have done.*

> *One pillar that I have so often leant on for support, advice, and assistance is all of you. Without exception you have willingly given of your time, experience, greater knowledge and guidance to help me navigate some tricky situations. I tell all the clients in West Berks that they really have the best services in the county.*

I wanted to contact you to say thank you so much for helping with Mum.

You were so kind and I valued your gentle and supportive manner. I really appreciated the way in which you listened attentively to my concerns and worries, at such a difficult and worryingly time for our family

You have not only been a star, you have been a 5 Star!. Brilliant, thank you so much for your help

She was very happy with the service XXX has provided. She said she was a breath of fresh air, and she welcomed her visits. Just wanted you to know that you were lovely, caring and professional.

XXX had visited my parents several times over the past few years, and the continuity of care and her prior knowledge of their circumstances made a real difference. It was incredibly reassuring to have someone so understanding and supportive during such a challenging process. I feel very fortunate to have received such high-quality support at such a difficult time and would be very grateful if you could please pass on my heartfelt thanks to XXX and to her manager.

I want to thank you for your home visit; you made the experience a comfortable one with your friendly and positive manner. Your advice and support was extremely helpful

As a family we would just like to reaffirm our deep appreciation for the care and sensitivity you and your team continue to provide for us.

Subject Access Record

The complaints service also processes any subject access record requests where ASC records are required. The process of providing those records include retrieving and downloading all case notes, assessments, documents, attachments etc and then redacting third party information within those records. This process is to ensure we are compliant with data protection expectations.

In this reporting year 110 requests were made. In one case alone over 4000 pages of records had to be retrieved, reviewed and redacted before sending out. In some cases, where hard copies are required, that also means printing and posting those redacted records.

Conclusion

Based on the 2025/26 figures, WBC has recorded a 20% reduction in complaints relating to ASC services compared with 2024/25. Overall numbers remain low and are consistent with trends seen across neighbouring authorities.

The year has remained positive in terms of complaint resolution, as evidenced by the consistently low number of referrals to the LGSCO. As expected, there has been a slight increase in referrals this year, largely due to complex cases transitioning from Children's Social Care.

The Complaints Manager continues to provide flexibility and accessibility by offering virtual meetings, face-to-face discussions, and telephone contact, allowing complainants to engage in a way that best suits their needs.

ASC has also received a high number of compliments from service users and their families, recognising both the quality of support provided and the commitment of staff. This indicates that the majority of people accessing ASC services in West Berkshire are satisfied with the care they receive and highlights the ongoing dedication of the workforce.

Despite the relatively low number of complaints and high level of positive feedback, WBC ASC remains committed to continuous improvement and to delivering the best possible service for clients and their families, particularly in the context of ongoing environmental and societal challenges.

