

ADULT SOCIAL CARE ANNUAL COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS

PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024/2025

Date: June 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report focuses on Adult Social Care complaints and compliments received for the period 1 April 2024 to the 31 March 2025. The report makes extensive use throughout of data, feedback received, as well as insight and learning from operational services.

During the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, 499 Adult Social Care complaints were considered under the statutory complaints process, which is lower than the 572 received for previous period 2023/2024.

During this period 45% of resolved cases were responded to within 20 working days.

TABLE: DAYS TO RESOLVE STATUTORY CASES

Case Age Group	Resolved	% Resolved
0-10	65	12%
11-20	184	33%
21-30	126	23%
31-40	53	10%
41-50	22	4%
50+	103	19%
Total	553	100%

Cases taking over 50 days were the following topics:

- **Finance** (42 cases)
- **Quality of Care** (24 cases)
- **Assessments** (21 cases)
- **Staff Conduct** (12 cases)
- **Safeguarding** (4 cases)

Summary of complaint outcomes for current year

- During financial year 2024/25 533 complaints were resolved, 57% of cases were upheld this is 5% higher than the previous year.

TABLE: UPHELD/PARTIALLY UPHELD STATUTORY CASES BY QUADRANT

Quadrant	Received	Resolved	Upheld Cases	Partially Upheld Cases	% Upheld/Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	% Not Upheld	Average Days to Respond
Mid	131	148	50	42	62%	38	26%	30
South	107	116	34	23	49%	46	40%	20
North	96	111	32	33	59%	34	31%	22
West	78	82	36	14	61%	21	26%	19
Countywide	72	78	24	22	59%	26	33%	29
Not Recorded	15	18	2	4	33%	5	18%	19
Total	499	553	178	138	57%	170	31%	24

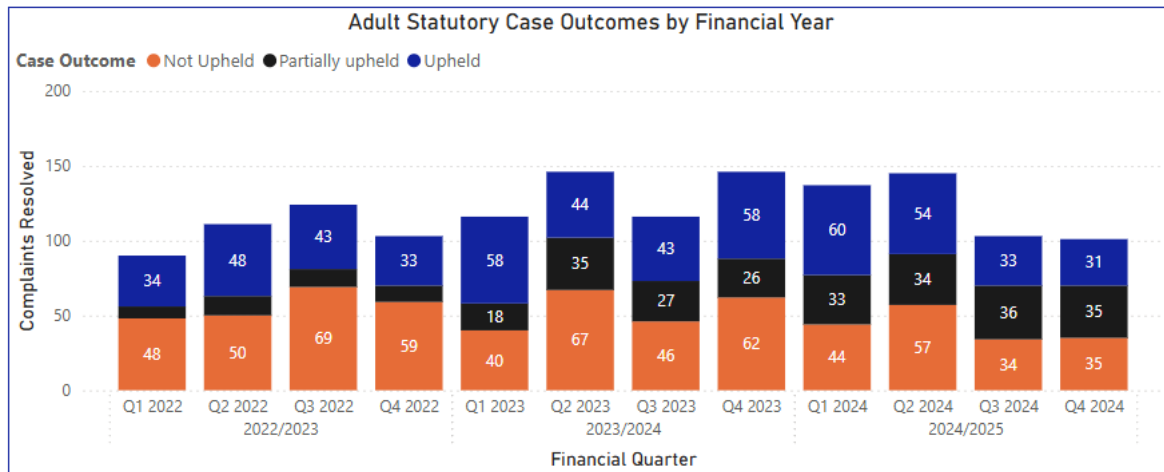
TABLE: TOPIC BY STATUTORY CASE OUTCOME

- 29% of Statutory cases were regarding Finance issues which is consistent with 2023/24, 24% about Assessments which is consistent with 2023/24 and 23% were regarding Quality of Care which is a 4% increase from 2023/24.

Topic	Non-ECC	Not Relevant	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Assessments	2	2	44	45	41	16	150
Finance	1	2	45	44	66	9	167
Quality of Care	2	6	56	28	36	14	142
Safeguarding	2	0	9	5	8	4	28
Staff Conduct	0	0	16	16	27	7	66
Total	7	10	170	138	178	50	553

GRAPH: ADULT STATUTORY CASES BY FINANCIAL YEAR

- Trend graphs showing the number of upheld and partially upheld statutory complaints over time, indicating an increase in these outcomes.
- Partially Upheld cases are used in instances where there are multiple complaint points - where some are Upheld, and some are not.



INTRODUCTION

This report provides information on complaints for Adult Social Care Services for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, dealt with through either the statutory social care complaints procedure or the corporate complaints process. The complaints process provides us with the opportunity to monitor performance, improve service quality and learn from complaints made. We achieve this by capturing a range of complaint information including, the nature of the complaint, the action we took, the outcome of the complaint and whether we responded to the complaint on time. Alongside capturing this information, we also working closely with leaders in Adult Social Care, helping them to understand any themes and learning opportunities from complaints and compliments. By publishing an annual complaint report, we hope to demonstrate our commitment to transparency and a positive approach to dealing with and learning from complaints.

BACKGROUND

Under statutory regulations, we are required to prepare an annual report about the previous year that examines how well we dealt with Adult Social Care complaints, including the numbers received and how many were upheld. Our Adult Social Care service is required to operate a statutory complaints procedure in accordance with the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 and the Local Authority Social Services Complaints (Amendment) Regulations 2009. Any complaint, which does not fall under these provisions, we will consider under our corporate complaint's procedure.

ANALYSIS OF ALL COMPLAINTS

In recent years, the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in analysing complaints has revolutionised the way organisations handle customer feedback. AI technologies, such as natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning, have been employed to sift through vast amounts of complaint data efficiently and accurately. This approach not only saves time but also uncovers valuable insights that might be overlooked by manual analysis.

The primary reasons for utilising AI in complaints analysis include its ability to identify recurring themes, detect patterns, and extract actionable insights from unstructured data. AI can quickly categorise complaints, highlight common issues, and suggest potential improvements.

In this context, the use of AI to analyse the ASC complaints for the year has provided a comprehensive overview of the themes, actions, and learnings embedded within the complaint descriptions. By leveraging AI, we can gain a deeper understanding of the underlying issues and take proactive measures to address them, ensuring a more responsive and customer-centric approach.

AI analysis of all Adult Social Care complaints provided the following results:

UPHELD AND PARTIALLY UPHELD COMPLAINTS

THEMES AND ISSUES:

1. Quality of Care

- **Issues Raised:** Inadequate support, poor hygiene, food quality, medication errors.
- **Learnings:** Consideration for improving care standards, ensuring proper hygiene, and addressing medication errors. Training for staff on providing consistent and high-quality care is essential.
- **Considerations:** These cases will often be around commissioned quality of care.

2. Staff Conduct

- **Issues Raised:** Rudeness, unprofessional behaviour, poor communication, negative attitude.
- **Learnings:** The service is exploring how to ensure all adults have regular reviews, and coproduction work is underway to help users of care and social care staff to prepare for reviews to ensure they are an effective use of time and a positive experience.

3. Finance

- **Issues Raised:** Payment issues, incorrect invoices, funding problems, high costs.
- **Learnings:** Better financial management and transparency are needed. Ensuring accurate invoicing and timely payments can reduce stress for people and their families.

4. Assessments

- **Issues Raised:** Delays in assessments, inaccurate evaluations, lack of reviews.
- **Learnings:** Are there any actions that can be taken to further streamline the assessment process and ensuring timely and accurate evaluations. Regular reviews and updates can help address changing needs.

5. Safeguarding

- **Issues Raised:** Safety concerns, abuse, lack of protection.
- **Learnings:** Strengthening safeguarding measures and ensuring prompt action on safety concerns are always high priority for the service.

NOT UPHELD COMPLAINTS

THEMES AND ISSUES:

1. Quality of Care

These complaints often highlight areas where people's expectations may not align with service capabilities or where misunderstandings occurred.

2. Staff Conduct

These complaints about staff behaviour are often found to be unsubstantiated or based on misunderstandings.

3. Finance

Complaints regarding disputes over payments and invoices but often resolved with clarification or found to be misunderstandings.

4. Assessments

Complaints about the assessment process but often found to be based on misunderstandings or unrealistic expectations.

5. Safeguarding

Safety concerns that were investigated but found to be unsubstantiated.

KEY DIFFERENCES

- **Evidence:** Upheld complaints often had clear evidence
- **Communication and Expectations:** Many not upheld complaints stemmed from misunderstandings or unrealistic expectations, highlighting the need for clear communication and managing expectations.
- **Resolution and Learning:** Upheld complaints often led to actionable learnings and improvements.

CONCLUSION

This report is produced independently of Adult Social Care Services and as such does not capture all learning and actions taken as a result of customer feedback and complaints. Throughout the year learning from complaints is undertaken by teams and services based on feedback from people who use the services and professional reflections.

The analysis shows that while both upheld and not upheld complaints raise important issues, the key differences lie in the evidence and clarity of communication. Addressing these areas can help improve service quality and user satisfaction.

This year, ECC received 499 statutory Adult Social Care complaints and 103 Corporate Complaints. Many of the statutory complaints received are complex, involving different council service areas and other organisations, such as care providers and health services. Complaints relating to finance being amongst our more complex, often being largely related to services and systems that arrange invoices and payments.

TABLE: COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY TOPIC FOR CURRENT AND PREVIOUS YEAR

- There has been a 13% reduction in complaints received in 2024/25 when compared to 2023/24. The most significant reduction (19%) was in the number of Finance related complaints received. Quality of Care complaints is the only category showing an increase year on year of 9%.

Topic	Received 2024/25	Received 2023/24
Finance	175	216
Assessments	148	169
Quality of Care	144	132
Staff Conduct	94	108
Safeguarding	43	72
Total	604	697

TABLE: COMPLAINTS BY LOCATION

- Complaints have reduced in most locations, but the biggest reduction is Chelmsford where there were 20% less complaints. The areas that increase were Braintree, Countywide, Epping Forest, Brentwood and Uttlesford. The biggest increase was Countywide which increase by 42%.

District	Received 2024/25	Received 2023/24
Chelmsford	84	105
Colchester	82	98
Basildon	55	69
Tendring	54	68
Braintree	51	47
Countywide	44	31
Epping Forest	43	40
Castle Point	40	41
Brentwood	30	28
Harlow	28	44
Maldon	26	26
Uttlesford	22	14
Rochford	21	33
Other	20	12
Not Applicable	4	0
Total	604	697

TABLE: TOPICS BY QUADRANT

- The quadrant that received the most complaints was the Mid quadrant and the quadrant with the least was West.

Topic	Countywide	Mid	North	Not Recorded	South	West	Total
Finance	59	39	23	4	21	29	175
Assessments	17	41	33	6	30	21	148
Quality of Care	6	35	30	10	40	23	144
Staff Conduct	9	30	18	4	20	13	94
Safeguarding	8	11	6	1	14	3	43
Total	99	156	110	25	125	89	604

During 2024/25, 52 Adult Care Services cases were escalated to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, this is 42% higher than the 42 escalated in 2023/24. 18 were progressed to formal investigation. Of the cases investigated 13 were upheld. This compares to 13 cases being upheld the previous year. 4 of the upheld cases were deemed that the council had already provided a satisfactory remedy. The other 9 upheld cases saw remedies consisting of the following: Apology (seen in 7 cases), financial remedy (seen in 6 cases), and training and guidance (seen in 4 cases).

The summaries published by the LGSCO on their website for 13 upheld cases are copied below. To maintain confidentiality, LGSCO does not publish all their decisions.

- Case 1: The Council delayed in explaining to Mr and Mrs X the requirement for a mental capacity assessment for their son D. The Council then agreed to proceed without an assessment due to the family's concerns. It also failed to respond promptly to that aspect of their complaint. The Council agrees to acknowledge its failings here and pay Mrs X a sum which recognises the additional distress and anxiety its delay caused
- Case 2: Mr G's daughter, Mrs T, complains the Council told Mr G that it would extend a six-week care home placement for a further three weeks and that it would not charge him for this. She also complains about poor care at the home. There were failings in the care provided to Mr G by the care home. The Council has agreed our recommended remedy.
- Case 3: We will not investigate this complaint about the way the Council dealt with the implementation of Mr X's son's care plan. Mr X complains there was a breakdown in communication, the Council refused to explain how his son's contribution became nil, and about the Council's to only fund one hour per week to cover the management of his son's care package. This is because the alleged faults have not caused any significant injustice. In addition, there is no ongoing significant injustice.
- Case 4: Ms X complained on behalf of Ms Y, who has complex additional needs. Ms X complained the Council did not provide a suitable personal assistant, concerns about Ms Y's assessments and issues contacting the budget holder. There was fault in the way the Council did not ensure Ms Y had a suitably trained support worker. There was also fault in the way the Council did not ensure a suitably trained and experience worker completed Ms Y's assessment, did not ensure Ms Y could contact her budget holder, did not consider an advocate, did not make reasonable adjustments and poor complaint handling. Ms Y was distressed and frustrated by this fault. The Council should apologise, provide a financial payment and issue guidance to its staff.
- Case 5: There was no fault the Council could not find Mr X a more suitable placement after it assessed his care and support needs. The evidence shows it recorded his views on preferences and made efforts to accommodate these, by consulting with care providers. However, there was fault it did not update its records after his needs changed and ask care providers to reconsider whether they could accommodate Mr X at that point. However, I cannot say this fault caused Mr X an injustice, because I cannot say whether he missed out on any offers of accommodation. The Council agreed to take steps to avoid this happening again.

- Case 6: Miss X complains the Council failed to support her in her carer role and confirm respite; changed her son's support package and failed to confirm what it will be; and retracted some provision it had previously offered. We find the Council was at fault. This caused significant distress to Miss X. We make several recommendations to address this injustice caused by fault.
- Case 7: Ms X complained the Council charged her mother, Mrs Y, for care the family had been told was free of charge. We found fault as the Council failed to properly communicate when free care ended and chargeable care began or to communicate in a timely manner when Ms X challenged the charges. This caused avoidable distress and frustration for the family. The Council has already apologised and completed an appropriate remedy which Ms X and Mrs Y accepted.
- Case 8: Miss X complained about the Council's decision to stop funding activities that were previously included in her daughter, Y's care plan, and said the Council failed to consider Y's disability related expenditure. We find the Council at fault for the removal of an activity, miscommunication, and delay considering Y's disability related expenditure. This has caused uncertainty, distress, and a loss of funding. The Council has agreed to apologise, make a payment to Miss X, and improve its service.
- Case 9: Ms B says the Council failed to properly consider her hidden disability when deciding a blue badge application. There was fault by the Council, but it has already remedied this, and it will consider a new application.
- Case 10: Mrs B complained the Council and the ICB failed to pay for her late mother's, Mrs G, residential care home placement in line with the Mental Health Act 1983 after the family moved Mrs G to a care home. We found the Council took too long to review Mrs G's care and support arrangements after she left hospital and when she lived in the community. The Council acted to improve its processes and reminded its officers of completing reviews without delay. We did not find the delay to review Mrs G's care and support arrangements led to the claimed injustice that the Council and the ICB should have paid for her residential care costs in line with the Mental Health Act 1983 after her family moved her to the care home.
- Case 11: Mrs X complained about the Council's decision to move her late husband Mr X from a local residential care setting to another one which was further away. She said the Council failed to consider her objections and denied her an opportunity to pay top up fees for Mr X. The Council only responded to her complaint after moving Mr X to another residential care setting.
- Case 12: Mrs X complains the Council has failed to renew her blue badge despite her condition not changing. Mrs X says this has caused her distress. We have found fault in the actions of the Council for failing to advise why it could not accept information provided by Mrs X. The Council has apologised for this failing which is a suitable remedy.
- Case 13: We will not investigate Mr X's complaint about the Council delaying its safeguarding investigation into his wife Mrs X's fall during a care home respite stay, delaying in giving him some documents, officers not replying to some contacts and not disclosing other documents to him. Investigation of the fall incident would not add to the Council's investigation nor achieve a different outcome. There is insufficient unremedied personal injustice to warrant us investigating. It would be reasonable for Mr X to take the document disclosure issue to the Information Commissioner's Office.

COMPLIMENTS ANALYSIS

There were 203 compliments received this year using the official process however it is likely that there has been more received outside of this process.

AI analysis of these showed the following main themes and learnings:

MAIN THEMES AND LEARNINGS

1. **Quality of Care**

Compliments often highlight the compassionate and attentive care provided by the staff. People and their families appreciate the positive impacts on their lives, effective communication, and the dedication shown by the care providers. Many compliments mention significant improvements in the wellbeing and quality of life of people due to the care received.

2. **Staff Conduct**

Many compliments focus on the professionalism, empathy, and dedication of staff members. Social workers and other staff are praised for their supportive, caring, and respectful attitudes.

3. **Assessments**

Compliments related to assessments mention thorough and timely evaluations, clear communication, and effective collaboration with people and their families.

4. **Safeguarding**

Compliments related to safeguarding highlight the importance of treating people with dignity and respect, listening to their concerns, and ensuring their safety.

5. **Finance**

Compliments related to finance mention the helpfulness of staff in resolving financial issues, providing clear guidance, and supporting people during difficult times. Financial staff are praised for their professionalism and understanding.

EXAMPLES OF COMPLIMENTS

Here are some examples of compliments received this year:

- **Example 1:** " THE COMPLIMENT EXPRESSES DEEP GRATITUDE FOR THE EXCEPTIONAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE COMMUNITY SUPPORT WORKER. THE WRITER FEELS SEEN AND VALUED, HIGHLIGHTING THE WORKER'S EMPATHY, PROFESSIONALISM, AND ABILITY TO SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVE THEIR QUALITY OF LIFE AND CONFIDENCE. THE WORKER'S EFFORTS IN FINDING THE RIGHT CARE COMPANY AND ADDRESSING HOUSING NEEDS HAVE MADE A PROFOUND IMPACT, MAKING THE WRITER FEEL SAFE AND UNDERSTOOD FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS. THEY WANT THE MANAGER TO KNOW WHAT AN INCREDIBLE ASSET THE WORKER IS TO THE TEAM."
- **Example 2:** " CUSTOMER STATES THAT ADDITIONAL HOURS WERE SOUGHT TO COMPLEMENT THE SU'S CARE PACKAGE. THE TEAM'S DEDICATION AND COMMITMENT TO PROVIDING HIGH-QUALITY CARE HAS SIGNIFICANTLY CONTRIBUTED TO UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT GOOD CARE LOOKS LIKE. CUSTOMER EXPRESSES SINCERE GRATITUDE FOR EXEMPLARY PRACTICE."
- **Example 3:** " CUSTOMER WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE SOCIAL WORKER FOR THEIR EFFORTS IN SECURING MONEY TO COVER SITTING EXPENSES FOR HER HUSBAND. CUSTOMER HAS DESCRIBED THE SOCIAL WORKER AS KIND AND PROFESSIONAL."
- **Example 4:** " COMPLIMENT RECEIVED FROM THE DAUGHTER - THIS COMPLIMENT IS ABOUT EXPRESSING DEEP GRATITUDE AND APPRECIATION FOR THE POSITIVE CHANGES AND IMPROVEMENTS EXPERIENCED BY THE FATHER. THE FATHER IS MUCH HAPPIER NOW, AND HE HAS NOTICED A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE IN THE ENERGY AND ATTITUDE OF THE STAFF, INCLUDING THE CLEANERS, WHO TREAT HIM WITH RESPECT. HE HAS MADE NEW FRIENDS AND ENJOYS INTERACTING WITH OTHER ELDERLY PEOPLE. ADDITIONALLY, HE APPRECIATES THE BETTER QUALITY OF FOOD AND THE SOUTH-FACING ROOM THAT ALLOWS HIM TO WAKE UP TO SUNSHINE. OVERALL, THE SENDER IS THANKING THE RECIPIENT FOR MAKING SUCH A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THEIR FATHER'S LIFE."
- **Example 5:** "CUSTOMER STATES - THEY WANTED TO REITERATE THEIR THANKS AND APPRECIATION FOR THE WORK SW HAS CARRIED OUT SUPPORTING THEIR SON. THEY KNOW THEY'RE NOT THE EASIEST PERSON TO WORK WITH BUT SW HAS PERSEVERED AND HOPEFULLY FOUND A SOLUTION TO HELP SUPPORT THEIR SON IN THE COMING YEARS. SW HAS BEEN PATIENT, PROFESSIONAL & KIND BUT ABOVE ALL SHE HAS REALLY LISTENED TO THEM AND THEIR WIFE IN THEIR REQUESTS AND CONCERNS REGARDING THEIR SON."
- **Example 6:** " CUSTOMER WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE SOCIAL WORKER FOR HER HELP SUPPORTING THEIR SON. CUSTOMER HAS DESCRIBED THE SOCIAL WORKER AS PATIENT, PROFESSIONAL AND KIND."

CLOSING SUMMARY

In 2024/25, ECC saw a notable reduction in Adult Social Care complaints, with **499 statutory complaints** received - a **13% decrease** from the previous year. The most common themes remained consistent, with **finance**, **assessments**, and **quality of care** comprising the majority of concerns. The proportion of upheld or partially upheld complaints rose to 57%, indicating a continued commitment to transparency and accountability. Key learning from the year's data focuses on improving communication, ensuring timely assessments, and enhancing care quality and staff conduct. There are recognised nuances in the way in which compliments and complaints may focus and report slightly differently upon commissioning services and the ASC workforce, and we aim to be better understand and report these in future. Furthermore, we recognise there are challenges in use of 'countywide' service complaints being placed together, despite their diverse ASC functions.

We are committed to working closely with ASC colleagues over the coming year to improve the efficiency and quality of our response to complaints and to develop improved recording and reporting methods to demonstrate the positive work completed by the teams.

In contrast to complaints, ECC received **203 formal compliments**, highlighting the dedication and professionalism of the ASC workforce. Compliments often praised compassionate care from staff, effective communication by our workforce, and timely assessments being completed. Adults and their families expressed deep appreciation for the positive impact of care services on their wellbeing and quality of life. These acknowledgements serve as a valuable counterbalance to complaints, reinforcing the importance of recognising and learning from both positive and negative feedback to guide potential processes and operational changes our service delivery could further improve people's experience of using ASC

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) received **52 escalated cases** from Essex County Council, a 42% increase from the previous year. Of the 18 cases formally investigated, 13 were upheld, with remedies including apologies, financial compensation, and staff training. While the number of escalated cases has increased, the consistent number of upheld decisions suggests that we continue to take early corrective action in many cases. These outcomes reinforce the importance of robust internal complaint handling and the value of external oversight in driving service improvements and maintaining public trust.

APPENDIX 1: COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The way we deal with representations and complaints relating to Adults Social Care is set down by Central Government. As a result, the process and timescales for dealing with them may vary dependent upon the type of complaint or representation being made.

Who can use this process?

- a person who receives or has received services from Essex County Council; or
- a person who is affected by, or likely to be affected by, the action, omission, or decision of Essex County Council.
- by a person acting on behalf of a person mentioned above who:
 - has died
 - is a child
 - is unable to make the complaint themselves because of physical incapacity or lack of capacity within the meaning of the Mental Capacity Act 2005

If the complainant has a private arrangement with a social care organisation or provider, they will need to raise their complaint with them.

Our complaints policy cannot change decisions made by a court of law. We may not be able to help if the event you are complaining about occurred longer than 12 months ago.

STEP 1 – LOCAL RESOLUTION

Most problems are resolved by speaking to the person you are dealing with or their manager. If you are not able to resolve it this way, please tell us the details of your complaint. We will investigate the complaint quickly and thoroughly and give you a detailed response, this will:

- summarise the nature and substance of the complaint
- describe our investigation process and summarise its conclusions and findings; and,
- include any apology, remedy, outcome or explanation or planned action

If the complaint is about both health and social care, we will work with our health colleagues and the complainant to try to reach a resolution. To do this we will need the complainant's permission to share the details of their complaint.

Everyone who funds their own care, including those using a direct payment, have the right to refer any complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, once the residential home or domiciliary care agency has had an opportunity to investigate and resolve the complaint. Although any complaint can be referred to the Ombudsman at any time for their consideration.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the recommendations of the Council's complaints process, it remains open to them to make a formal written complaint to the Ombudsman: <http://www.lgo.org.uk/>

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) is independent, impartial and gives a service which is confidential and free of charge. The Ombudsman has the same powers as the High Court to require people to provide information or produce documents for investigation.

Any member of the public can complain to the Ombudsman if they feel there has been maladministration or injustice. However, the Ombudsman usually suggests that the complainant should first exhaust the local complaints procedure, as detailed above.

REMEDIES

In most cases if a complaint is upheld or partially upheld, an apology will be offered and information will be given to the complainant as to what action the service will take to ensure the same situation does not arise again, for the complainant or future people.

The apology should be given by the manager on behalf of the service complained about, although this can also be sent from a senior officer within the Compliance and Complaints Team.

If a case has been poorly handled causing an injustice to the individual, consideration will be given as to whether a financial remedy would be appropriate

This information is issued by:
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