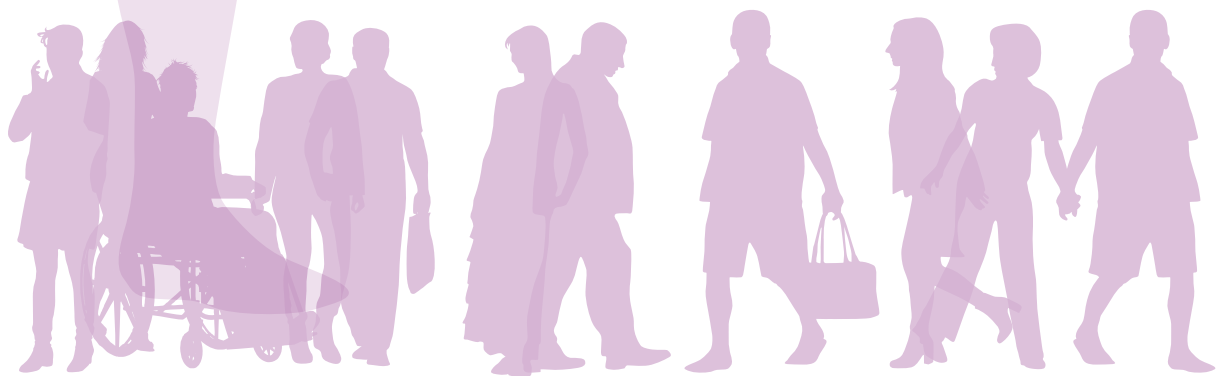




Adult Social Care

Annual Complaints and Compliments Report 2024-25



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Annual Complaints Adult Social Care Report 2024/25

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the complaints which have been received by West Berkshire Council's Adult Social Care Service (WBC ASC) during the financial year 2024/25.

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 \(westberks.gov.uk\)](https://www.westberks.gov.uk/complaints-procedure-asc)

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 (WBC) 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 \(westberks.gov.uk\)](https://www.westberks.gov.uk/complaints-procedure) 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 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 WBC 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 WBC and are then directed to the relevant department depending on the nature of the complaint.



Complaints Figures and Statistical Analysis 2024/25

Introduction

During the financial year **2024/25**, the number of complaints received by ASC Services was **45**.

We note this figure represents a decrease in the number of complaints received by ASC during 2023/24 when **55** complaints were received but reflects the same number of complaints received in 2022/23. **45** complaints represent a decrease of **18%** compared to the number of complaints received during 2023/24. It is noted that the decrease this year is not following the trend that we have noted in previous years of a steady rise in the number of complaints we have received since the pandemic. We are also showing a reduction in the number of complaints made per 100 clients (see Table 1 below) which is positive.

As we saw last year, the complaints we have received during 2024/25 have often taken longer to resolve than in previous years. This year a lot of time has been spent working in partnership with various teams from WBC to address and manage a series of particularly complex complaints consisting of many interconnecting elements, as well as supporting the legal process in one instance. For example, one complaint received took over three months to conclude due to constant communication from the complainant and, at the point at which we concluded the complaints procedure, the complainant remained dissatisfied. We have, however, yet again seen a very positive outcome this year in the number of cases that progressed to the LGSCO for a decision, which suggests that, overall, the complaints process within WBC ASC is working effectively and that clients and their families feel that we resolve complaints 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

Source: Care Director. Number of Long-Term ASC Clients 2024/25

Table 1:

Quarter	Complaints by Quarter				Total
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Volume	13	5	13	14	45

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.

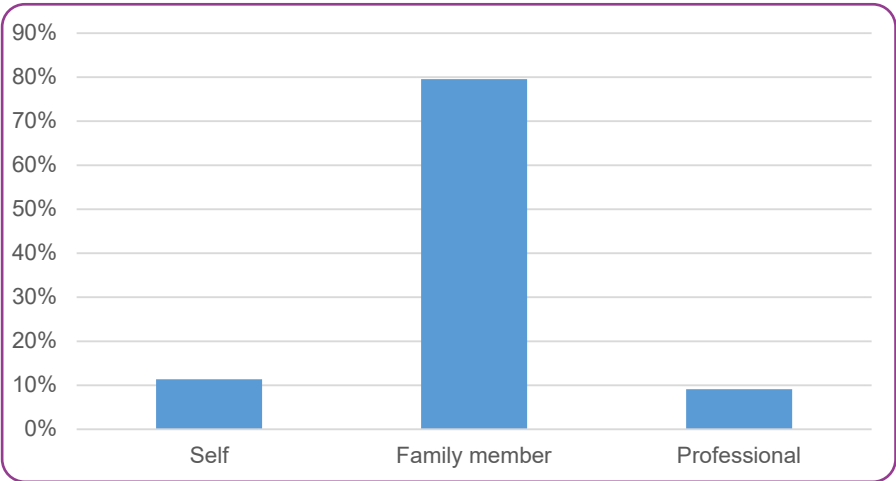
Compliance with Timescales

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 2024/25 with **98%** of all complaints being responded to in the first instance within the **20 working days** timeframe. The one complaint response that was out of the agreed 20-day response time was due to unforeseen exceptional circumstances. In this instance the complainant was contacted on the day the response was due, and a further extension was agreed.

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 (**80%**). This remains generally consistent with last year (**75%** being recorded in 2023/24).
- 11%** of the complaints were made by the client themselves. Of these, none used or required the services of a professional advocate. This figure is the same as that recorded last year.
From this we are potentially able to surmise that this is generally because those who lack the capacity or confidence to make a complaint themselves are supported by family or friends. This therefore may indicate a potential gap for those who lack confidence or capacity but have no friends or family to complain on their behalf.
- 9%** of complaints were submitted by professionals -again the same as last year.



Complaints from Clients

Enabling complaints from clients continues to be an important mechanism for ensuring the experience of the people who use our services informs our service design and delivery. Complaints from clients themselves help us to ensure that their voices are heard and that we

can, where justified, make improvements to the services we are delivering to them.

Improving the number of complaints received by clients directly is an area that we have highlighted for action in previous years. This year we have seen a consistency in the number of people who have made a complaint on their own behalf, although this remains a disappointingly low percentage of overall complaints. When a complaint is made on behalf of a client all attempts are made to seek direct consent from them for the complaint to proceed, as well as to ensure that the complaint being made accurately reflects their views. Where possible we will then pick up the complaint directly from the client themselves.

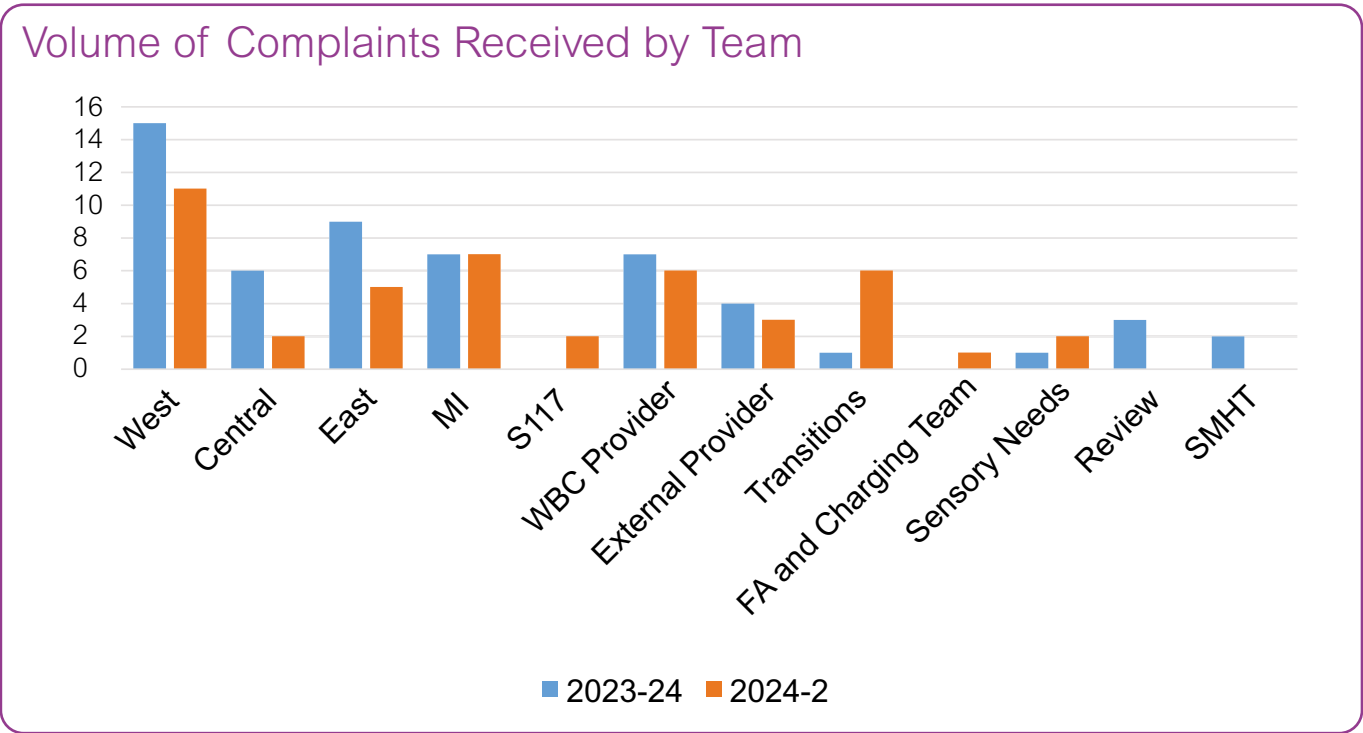
Five complaints were received from clients during 2024/25 in comparison to **six** in 2023/24 although the overall percentage remains the same.

The figures for 2024/25 continue to highlight that most complaints (36 – or 80%) received by ASC continue to come from other family members who are acting on behalf of the client. Of these, seven were made after the client had sadly passed away. Of the remaining 29 complaints, ten were made by a parent and 19 in relation to older people and the complaints were usually made by the son/daughter or a 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



Data

Team	2023-24		2024-25	
	Volume	%	Volume	%
West	15	27%	11	24%
Central	6	11%	2	4%
East	9	16%	5	11%
MI	7	13%	7	16%
S117	0	0%	2	4%
WBC Provider	7	13%	6	13%
External Provider	4	7%	3	7%
Transitions	1	2%	6	13%
FA and Charging Team	0	0%	1	2%
Sensory Needs	1	2%	2	4%
Review	3	5%	0	0%
SMHT	2	4%	0	0%

Of the **45** complaints made, the allocation of complaint by service is as follows (including comparison to 2023/24 figures):

As with previous reports West locality are seen to have the most complaints. It is, however, fair to note they have a larger number of clients in their area than the other locality teams and their complaints have reduced in 2024/25 in comparison to the previous year (2023/24 – **15 complaints** or **27%** of the total number of complaints). However, generally the complaints this year are spread evenly across all the locality teams, except for Central locality, the Sensory Needs team and the S117 team, who have had a positive year with only two complaints each made in 2024/25 and the Financial Assessment and Charging team with only one complaint recorded. Complaints in relation to WBC provider services have decreased by one this year. Complaints relating to external providers have also reduced by one this year and remain very low, which is a positive reflection on the services that WBC ASC are commissioning.

This year we have seen a rise in the number of complaints in relation to the Transition services. We have received six complaints this year as compared to only one last year. An increase from this client group was forecast due to one specific case in Children's Services moving across to ASC. However, the remainder of these complaints (from other parents) have been complex and challenging to manage, raising concerns about how the expectations of parents when their child is transitioning to adult services are managed, both in terms of service provision available but also their rights to information and their own changing role. It must be noted, however, that none of these complaints were upheld.

In 2024/25 we have seen two complaints in relation to individuals receiving S117 funding, which is an area that has not previously featured in a complaints report. This could potentially be attributed to the 2023 S117 Supreme Court judgment regarding ordinary residence, increasing the number of individuals we now support who receive S117 funding:

31 March 2024 = 136
31 March 2025 = 147

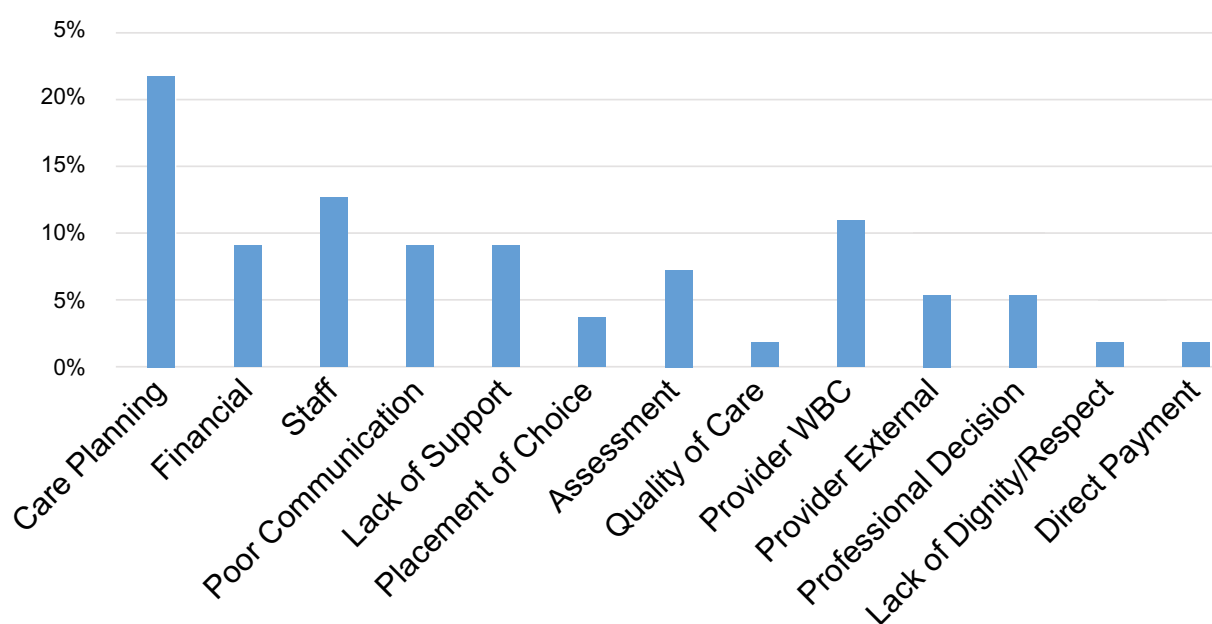
Source: Care Director. Snapshot of number ASC clients in receipt of S117 funding as of 31/03/24 and 31/03/25

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 2024/25.

Percentage of complaints by type



Data

Nature of Complaint	Vol	%
Care Planning	12	22%
Financial	5	9%
Staff	7	13%
Poor Communication	5	9%
Lack of Support	5	9%
Placement of Choice	2	4%
Assessment	4	7%
Quality of Care	1	2%
Provider WBC	6	11%
Provider External	3	5%
Professional Decision	3	5%
Lack of Dignity/Respect	1	2%
Direct Payment	1	2%
Total	55	100%

The most common reason for making a complaint during 2024/25 was care planning issues. This is a change from last year when the highest volume of complaints made were in relation to charging for services. In social care, care planning is a structured process used to determine the individual needs of a person receiving support and then create a plan to meet those needs. It's a collaborative effort involving the individual, their family (if they wish), and social care professionals. The care plan outlines the specific support services, how they will be provided, who will provide them, and when they will be provided. **22%** of complaints, or **12** cases, have included an element of care planning. Effective care planning should be the cornerstone of delivering personalised and high- quality support, ensuring individual needs are met and aligned with regulatory standards and best practice so it is therefore of concern that this is cited as the main area of ASC complaints this year. However, it is recognised that this relates to only **12** cases: a small number in comparison to **2455** individuals in receipt of long-term services.

The second most prevalent reasons for making a complaint in 2024/25 relate to staff attitude, which is the same as last year. However, those complaints have decreased by four in comparison to last year which is a more positive indicator. 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. Of the seven complaints that included staff attitude as an element, only **three (43%)** were either upheld or partly upheld. Whilst this is of concern it must be noted that this is in the context of extremely low numbers and, positively, it reflects a drop from last year in which **64%** of complaints where staff attitude was included as an element were upheld.

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 2024/25 the number of complaints relating to providers (**nine**) was a decrease compared to the previous years reported figure (**11**).

A total of nine complaints were made that related to providers, which equates to **16%** of the overall number of complaints made.

Of the **nine** complaints about providers made, the Council were made aware of only **three** complaints about services delivered by external providers commissioned by WBC. However, we do know that external providers receive additional complaints directly and that the Council are not notified of those unless those providers have not been able to resolve them satisfactorily.

Six of the complaints made in relation to providers concerned the Council's in-house services. This is slightly lower than the previous year (**seven**). Of the complaints made in relation to in-house services, **five** were made about the quality of care (**two** by the same person) and **one** was made in relation to poor communication. Of the **six** complaints made **one** was not upheld, three were partly upheld, one was upheld and one was refused.

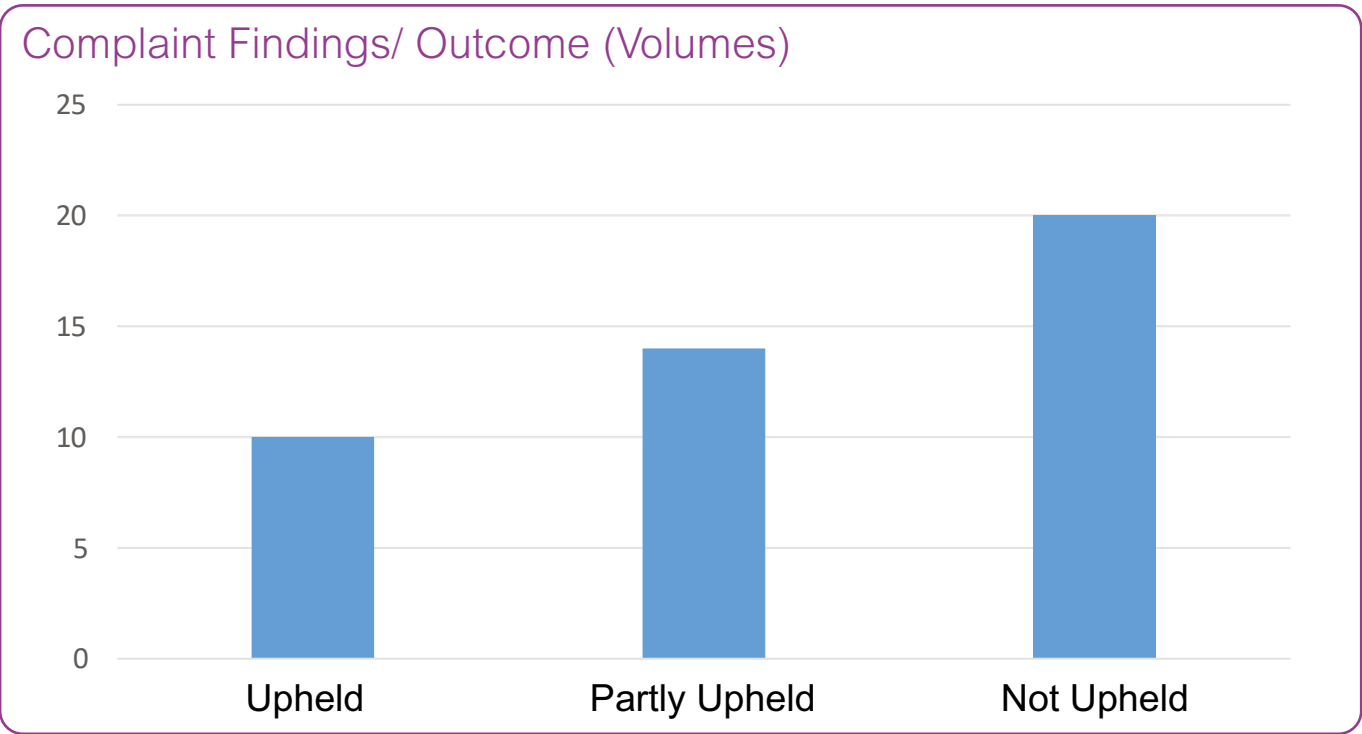
Emerging Areas for Future Focus

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:

- 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 (**12**) is against the backdrop of **2455** 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 about staff will always be an area for focus and improvement, however these do need to be looked at in the context described above.
- Complaints regarding the transition from Children’s Services to ASC have increased this year. The complaints received about transition cases have been challenging and complex. The complaints made regarding the Transition Team have always been made by the parents (not the client themselves) and have not been upheld on any occasion. This suggests that there may be a disconnect between the expectations of parents and what is possible, indicating that more collaborative work between children and adult services needs to be done at an earlier stage in order to help those parents to understand the myriad of differences between adult and children services, including the type and nature of provision alongside their changing role as the parent to a young adult.
- In recognition of the increasing number of clients transitioning to adult services from children services, and the waiting list that had accrued, ASC have invested in additional workers within the team. This will allow us to work with young adults and their families at an earlier stage, and start the transition process a little earlier than has been possible.

Complaints Findings/ Outcomes

In summary (based on 45 complaints received during 2024/25):



Data

Outcome of Complaint	Vol	%
Upheld	10	22%
Partly Upheld	14	31%
Not Upheld	20	44%
Complaint Refused	1	2%
Total	45	100%

In summary, for the 2024/25 reporting period:

- **22%** of the complaints received were upheld (**22%** upheld in 2023/24)
- **44%** of the complaints received were not upheld (**38%** not upheld in 2024/25).
- **31%** of complaints were partially upheld (**27%** partially upheld in 2024/25).

We are reflecting **zero%** change in the number of complaints that were upheld last year, whilst the percentage of complaints partially upheld has slightly increased. The percentage of complaints not upheld has also increased. This suggests that we have made an improvement in our delivery of services and the experience of the client. However, it is important to stress that the numbers are so small it is difficult to make reasoned judgments about what the data can tell us.

Of the remaining complaints:

- In **2%** of cases the complaints were refused (as the issue being complained about had been addressed already via the complaints procedure).

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.

Of the complaints made in 2024/25 only **1** progressed to the LGSCO during the year. This complaint was not investigated by the LGSCO as it was judged to be out of time and, in any event, already appropriately dealt with by the Council.

Whilst we were forecasting an increase in LGSCO referrals during 2024/25, this has not been the case.

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



Based on a comparison WBC therefore appears to be performing very well this year. IOW are showing a small increase in complaints from their figures in 2023/24. They have also had **six** referrals to the LGSCO which is **9%** of their overall complaints.

WBC ASC had had far fewer LGSCO referrals in comparison which might suggest that the way complaints are dealt with inhouse, WBC is more robust. This is a suggestion only and not the conclusion of rigorous analysis.

Another possibility for our low figures that should be considered is that people are not complaining about ASC services in West Berkshire because overall they are satisfied with them.

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 2024/2025

The following represents some examples of complaints received during 2024/25:

“

*We want to challenge his placement, especially given no-one for social services visited the residential setting we preferred for ***. They had plenty of time to do so and were even suggesting visiting another place altogether!*

”

“

How are we supposed to believe or trust anything in meetings or anything anyone states verbally, as nobody seems to know what they are doing and there are far too many contradictions, inconsistencies and retractions.

”

“

The call was vague and in a rush The questions asked seemed irrelevant... At this point I refused to continue and was forced to end the call. In my opinion the call was unprofessional.

”

“

I cannot recommend her or her company. We don't mind paying for a service but not being insulted by her crass remarks

”

“

Nothing has been explained to us at all about any stage of the process... If I am honest, I do not see the point of the team or a Social Worker as I really do not understand the purpose of their role.

”

“

Unfortunately, Mum is deeply unhappy in her current placement. She is extremely confused, feeling isolated, and struggling with depression. The staff are not deaf-aware, and there is no one available to communicate with her in sign language, which has further increased her distress. As a family, we are disappointed with how this situation has been handled and frustrated by the lack of appropriate support.

”

Examples of Compliments Received During 2024/2025

The number of compliments received by ASC continues to outweigh the number of complaints. In 2024/25 WBC ASC received a total of 321 recorded compliments in relation to both services and individual practitioners (a 54 % increase on the 208 recorded last year). 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:

“With kind regards and thanks for the services and support provided by this small but vital team.”

*“I cannot thank *** enough for helping my brother as she went above and beyond her duty to ensure he was safe and secure. As I live a long way from my brother, I do worry about him but *** kept me updated on every visit. *** is certainly an asset to the services and deserves praise on how she dealt with my brother’s case.”*

*“We wanted to thank you for supporting *** and *** so brilliantly over the last few months. This has been one of the most stressful periods of all our lives. You have both been incredibly effective and generous with your time and nothing has been too much trouble. We all felt that you genuinely cared about achieving a fair and just outcome.”*

*“Please tell *** thank you so much, he was so attentive and patient and went through everything so well with Mum. It’s a thank you from me too.”*

“It’s been brilliant-communication has been great- mum is really happy - she’s eating much better and whole place is loads cleaner- we have regular deliveries ordered which means we don’t have to travel as much - I think it’s been game changing for everyone and the carer has been lovely.”

*“They both said how wonderful it was to have such a kind, warm and caring OT visit *** at this difficult time for them.”*

“Simply awesome!”

Conclusion

Based on the 2024/25 figures, WBC is reporting an 18% decrease in the number of complaints received about ASC services in comparison to 2023/24. Figures remain very low and reflect the lower end of the general trend in our neighbouring authorities.

2024/25 has been a very positive year in respect of the number of complaints we have been able to resolve successfully, measured by the very low number of referrals to the LGSCO but this trend is not forecast to continue into 2025/26 due to several complex cases being transferred from Children's Social Care.

The Complaints Team continue to offer both virtual and face to face meetings as well as telephone calls to offer complainants flexibility and accessibility about how their complaints are managed.

ASC continues to receive a large volume of outstanding compliments from our clients and their families praising both the efforts of our staff and the services that we provide to support the people of West Berkshire. We have recorded a 54% increase in the number of compliments received in comparison with last year which is very positive and demonstrates that the vast percentage of the people who use ASC services are happy with the support they receive. This also reflects the continuing hard work and dedication of our ASC staff.

Despite the low number of complaints and higher number of compliments, WBC is not complacent and continues to strive to offer the best possible service to our clients and their families despite challenging environmental and societal factors that have, and continue to, exist.

