

ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025

Children's Services_ Starting Well

Annual Complaints & Compliments Report



Data sourced from Case Tracker & Liquid Logic
Compiled by Customer Insight, Information & Investigation Team



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Executive Summary

The 2024–2025 Annual Children’s Social Care Report sets out a comprehensive overview of complaints and compliments received across Havering Children’s services supporting children, young people, and families. This year marked a significant increase in recorded complaints, rising by 29% compared to the previous year, with a total of 252 cases logged. This growth reflects both increased engagement from service users and improved data capture following the implementation of a new case tracking system.

Key Highlights:

Complaint Volumes:

The majority of complaints were received under Stage 1 processes, with a higher proportion escalating to Stage 2 than in previous years. Safeguarding services recorded the highest number of complaints, though only 17% were upheld or partially upheld.

Themes:

The most common complaint themes were Attitude and Behaviour of Staff, Dispute Decisions, and Standards of Service, which together accounted for 50% of all complaints. New themes such as Eligibility and Information Not Provided were introduced as part of improved data tracking.

Demographics & Monitoring:

We saw an increase in complaints received in relation to younger age groups (0–14 years), while those for older children declined. Gender, ethnicity, disability, and religion data were analysed to ensure equitable service delivery and identify areas for improvement.

Compliments:

A total of 33 compliments were received, highlighting professionalism, empathy, and impactful support across teams. These positive reflections are vital in recognising staff contributions and reinforcing good practice.

System Improvements:

The introduction of the Case tracker system implemented for Children’s Statutory Complaints in April 2024, has enhanced the accuracy and consistency of data, particularly for Councillor Enquiries and complaint categorisation.

Response Times & Outcomes:

Despite increased volumes, response times remained stable. Most complaints were resolved within 10 working days, and all upheld cases resulted in apologies and appropriate remedial actions.

This report highlights the importance of listening to feedback, learning from complaints, and celebrating positive contributions. The insights gained will inform service improvements, staff development, and strategic planning for the year ahead.

Introduction

Statutory Complaints: Children's Services

Complaints, representations, and compliments relating to Children's Services are governed by the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006. These regulations outline a structured three-stage process for handling statutory complaints:

Stage 1 – Local Resolution

At this initial stage of the complaints process, the aim is to resolve concerns promptly and informally where possible. The target response time is 10 working days, with an extension of up to a further 10 working days if necessary. Where appropriate, an advocate should be provided to support the young person. If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they may request escalation to Stage 2 within 20 working days of receiving the response.

Stage 2 – Formal Investigation

This stage involves a more detailed and independent examination of the complaint. An Independent Investigator and an Independent Person—who must be external to the organisation—are appointed. The investigation should be completed within 25 to 65 working days. Upon conclusion, the complainant receives a copy of the investigation report and an adjudication letter outlining the decision of the Head of Service. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, they may request a Stage 3 Review Panel within 20 working days of receiving the response.

Stage 3 – Review Panel

The Review Panel is convened and managed independently by Democratic Services, ensuring impartiality. The Panel comprises three independent members, including a designated Chair. The hearing must take place within 30 working days of the request. Following the hearing, recommendations are issued within 5 working days to the complainant, the independent panel members, any advocate involved, and the Director of Children's Services. The Director must then provide a final decision within 15 working days of receiving the Panel's recommendations.

Complaints Received

1.1 Ombudsman Referrals

	23-24	24 -25
In Progress		2
Maladministration (No Injustice)		
Maladministration & Justice	1	
No Maladministration after investigation Ombudsman Discretion		
Investigation with Local Settlement		
Outside Jurisdiction		2
Investigation Discontinued		
Paused		2
Premature/Informal Enquiries		
Closed after initial enquiries – No Further Action	6	5
	7	11

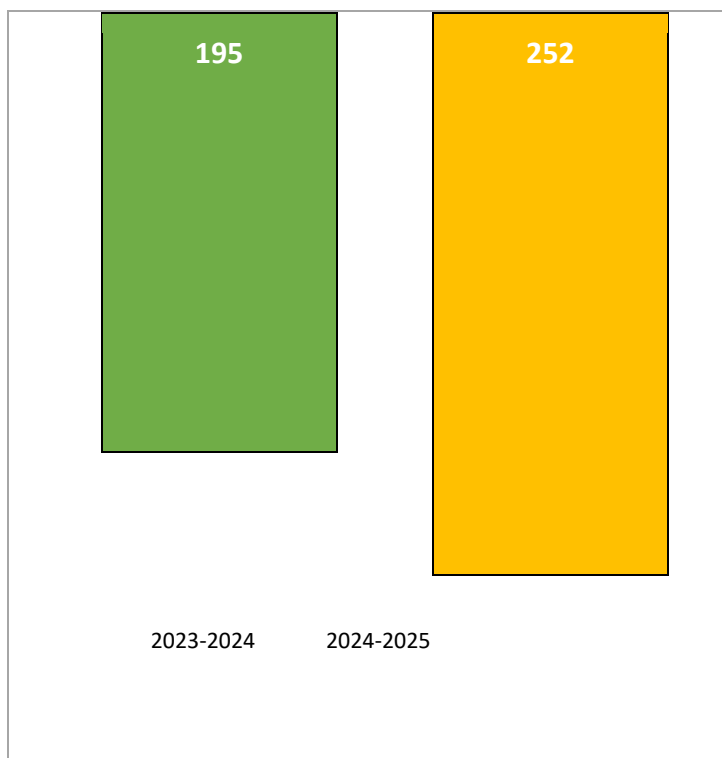
Please note that the figures presented in this report may differ from those published in the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman’s (LGSCO) Annual Review. This is due to a difference in reporting periods: the Council records complaints based on the date they are received, whereas the Ombudsman reports based on the date cases are closed within the financial year. We are currently reviewing our approach to align more closely with the Ombudsman’s reporting for future years.

In 2024–2025, a total of 11 cases were recorded, an increase from 7 cases in the previous year. The majority of these were closed after initial enquiries, with no further action taken. New case outcomes this year included:

- In Progress – 2 cases
- Paused – 2 cases
- Outside Jurisdiction – 2 cases

We remain committed to transparency and continuous improvement in how we handle and report complaints.

1.2 Stages (2 Year Comparison)

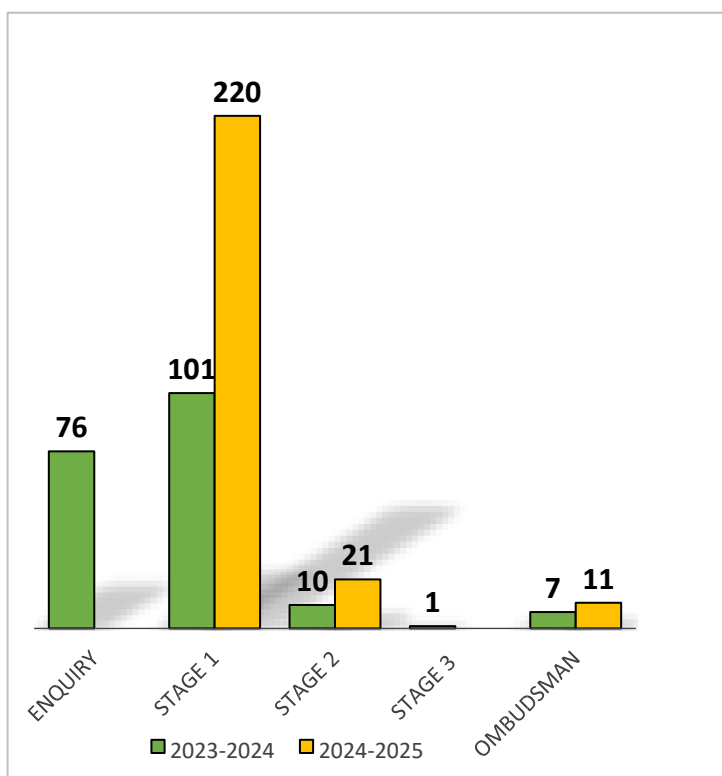


Data for 2023–2024 includes 76 enquiries that were not classified as formal complaints. However, these enquiries were captured within the overall reporting framework to provide a comprehensive view of feedback received.

During 2024–2025, we saw a 29% increase in the volume of complaints received in relation to Children’s Social Care. This rise reflects a notable shift in engagement and improved recording of feedback from service users.

In total, 5,292 children received services during the 2024–2025 reporting period. When compared against the number of complaints received, this equates to 4.7% of service users initiating a complaint, an increase of 2.8% from the previous year.

1.3 Stages (2 Year Comparison)



For the purpose of accurate reporting, the chart opposite illustrates the total number of enquiries received during 2023–2024.

In 2024–2025, these enquiries were incorporated into the Stage 1 complaint process, aligning with updated recording practices. While the data shows 101 Stage 1 complaints, when combined with the 76 enquiries and complaints at other stages, the total number of recorded cases rises to 195.

Despite this change in categorisation and recording processes, there was a notable increase in complaint volumes across several stages. Additionally, the proportion of Stage 1 complaints escalating to Stage 2 increased from 6% to 9.5%, indicating a higher level of dissatisfaction in findings or complexity in initial resolutions.

1.4 Services (2 Year Comparison)

SERVICE	2023-2024	2024-2025
Adopt London East	1	3
Assessment	5	19
Children With Disabilities	5	15
Children's Social Care	0	16
Children's Social Care & Education	0	19
Corporate Parenting	0	21
Corporate Parenting – Fostering	2	11
Corporate Parenting – Leaving Care	5	9
Early Help & Targeted Family Support	6	3
MASH & Targeted Support	14	14
Safeguarding	59	119
Safeguarding & Service Standards Unit	4	2
Virtual School, Safeguarding & Youth Justice	0	1
TOTAL	101	252

The graphic above does not include the 76 enquiries received during 2023–2024. As a result, percentage comparisons between the two reporting years may be slightly affected.

During 2024–2025, we observed an overall increase in complaints across most service areas. The most significant rise was in relation to the Safeguarding services, compared to the previous year.

Key observations include:

Complaints against MASH & Targeted Services remained consistent with 2023–2024 levels.

Adopt London East, Virtual School, Safeguarding, and Youth Justice experienced minimal increases in complaints.

Early Help & Targeted Family Support and the Service Standards Unit saw a slight decrease in complaints.

Additionally, given the creation of new teams under the service reorganisation we saw new service areas recorded complaints for the first time in 2024–2025 including Corporate Parenting

Within Corporate Parenting, both Fostering and Leaving Care saw increases despite low overall volumes, compared to the previous year.

1.5 Themes (2 Year Comparison)

	2023-2024	2024-2025
Attitude/Behaviour of Staff	28	45
Change/Closure of Service	0	1
Data Breach	5	0
Delay in Service	3	19
Dispute Decision	2	39
Eligibility	0	6
Family Dispute	1	0
Financial Issues	5	10
Inaccurate Information	9	20
Information not Provided	0	14
Lack of Communication	19	21
Safeguarding/Welfare Concerns	3	26
Standard of Service Not Met	26	42
In Progress	0	9
TOTAL	101	252

Complaints vary in nature, but they consistently offer valuable insights that help us improve our services and strengthen relationships with children, young people, and their families. Every complaint received is carefully reviewed, allowing us to reflect on our processes and practices.

Due to the implementation of a new software management system in December 2023, some complaint themes were renamed, merged, or reclassified. This may affect the accuracy of percentage comparisons. For this reason, it is more meaningful to analyse the data in terms of volume.

In 2024–2025, we saw an increase in complaints across a range of themes. Notable changes include:

- Dispute Decision rose significantly, from just 2 complaints in 2023–2024 to 39 this year.

- Safeguarding complaints increased from 3 to 36.

- Staff Attitudes & Behaviour rose from 28 to 45 complaints.

- Standards and Delay in Services each received 16 more complaints than the previous year.

- Complaints related to Financial Issues and Inaccurate Information both doubled.

- Lack of Information saw a modest increase of 3 complaints.

Three new complaint themes were introduced this year; Eligibility, Change/Closure of Service; Information Not Provided. Together, these new themes accounted for 8% of all complaints received.

Encouragingly, complaints related to Data Breach and Family Disputes were reduced to zero in 2024–2025

1.6 Themes by Service (2024-2025)

SERVICE	ATTITUDE/ BEHAVIOUR OF STAFF	CLOSURE OF SERVICE	DELAY IN SERVICE	DISPUTE DECISION	ELIGIBILITY	FINANCIAL ISSUES	INACCURATE INFO	INFO NOT PROVIDED	LACK OF COMMS
Adopt London East				1					
Assessment	9		2	4	1		1		
Children With Disabilities	2		5	1				1	1
Children's Social Care	2			1		1	1	3	1
Children's Social Care & Education	2		1	6		1	2	2	3
Corporate Parenting	2		4	3		1	1	2	3
Corporate Parenting – Fostering	1			1	2		5		1
Corporate Parenting – Leaving Care	3					2	1		1
Early Help & Targeted Family Support	1			1					
MASH & Targeted Support	2			2		1	1		1
Safeguarding	21	1	6	19	3	4	8	6	10
Safeguarding & Standards Unit			1						
Virtual School, Safeguarding & Youth Justice									
TOTALS	45	1	19	39	6	10	20	14	21

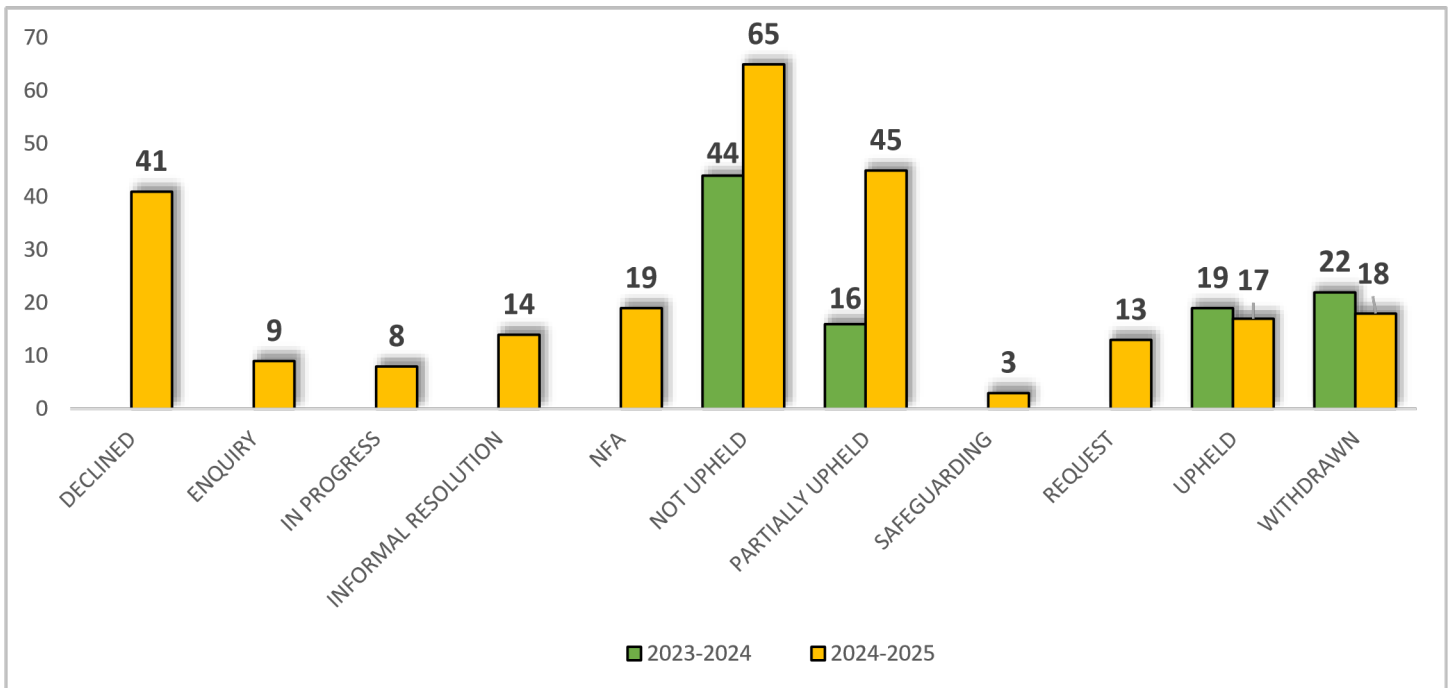
The table above sets out complaints received by theme and service during 2024–2025.

From the data, we can see that the Safeguarding Service which is the largest service in Children's social care made up of 7 teams received the highest volume of complaints. While this service recorded complaints across every theme, it is important to note that only 17% of these were upheld or partially upheld, indicating that many concerns were either not substantiated or resolved through clarification. The most prominent complaint themes were:

- Attitude & Behaviour of Staff
- Standards of Service
- Dispute Decision

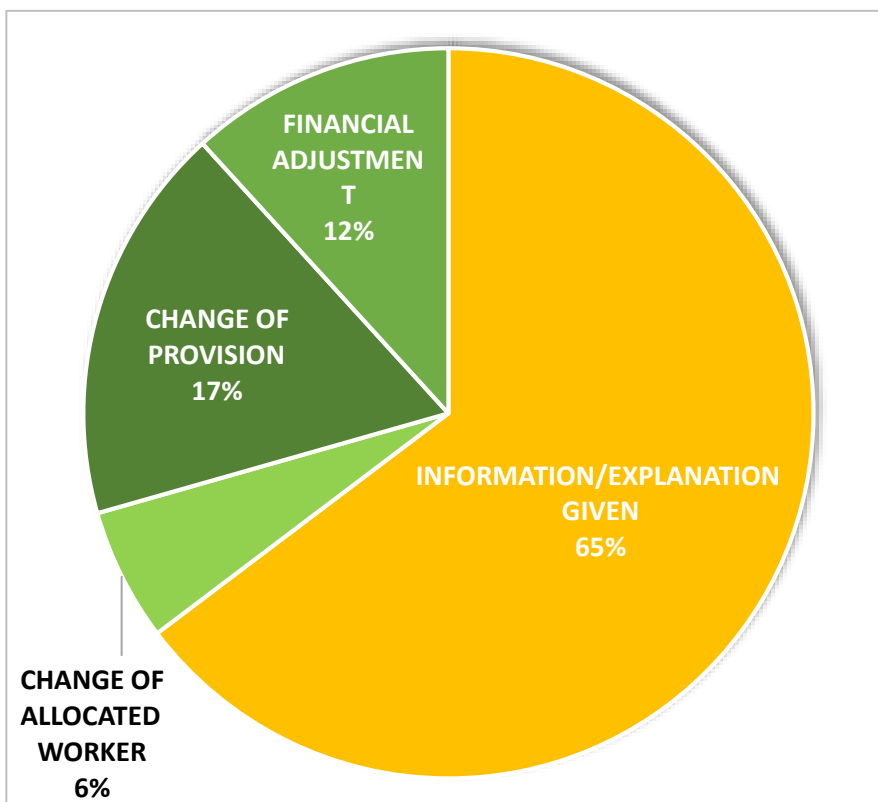
Together, these three themes accounted for 50% of all complaints received across the service.

1.7 Outcomes (2 Year Comparison)



The chart above shows a rise in complaints that were Not Upheld and Partially Upheld, with a small increase in Upheld cases. New outcome categories such as Safeguarding, Request, and others were introduced in 2024–2025, reflecting changes in how complaints are classified under the new case management system.

1.8 Upheld Complaint Actions (2024-2025)



All complaints that were upheld or partially upheld resulted in an apology and were linked to either an explanation, updated information, or adjustments in financial support, service provision, or worker involvement—as shown in the graphic opposite.

Training and QA activity with the services are being delivered as part of the Ofsted improvement plan to address learning from these complaints.

1.9 Response Times (2 Year Comparison)

Response Time	2023-2024	%	2024-2025	%
0-10 Days	47	46%	113	45%
11-20 Days	30	30%	69	27%
	24	24%	62	25%
	0		8	3%

Despite a rise in complaints during 2024–2025, response times remained largely stable. There was a slight drop in responses being completed within 11–20 days and a small increase in those taking 20+ days. Although responses times within 0–10 days fell by 1%, the volume was nearly 2.5 times higher than the previous year.

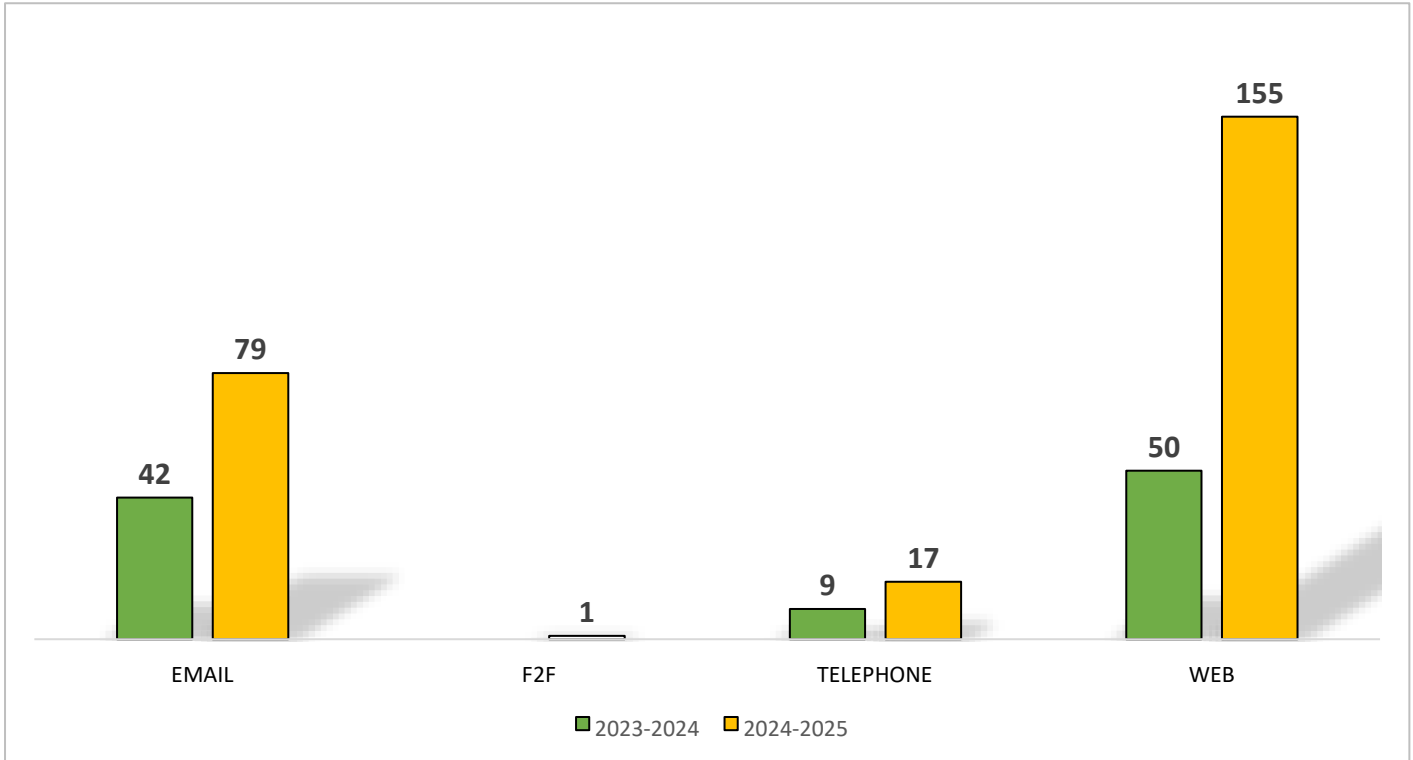
1.10 Expenditure (2 Year Comparison)

	PUBLICITY/LEAFLETS	INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIONS	PAYMENTS	TOTAL
2023-2024		£2700	£350	£3050
2024-2025				

Due to the implementation of a new case tracking system and the wider restructure of the complaints service, the system used for Children’s Social Care was not configured to record financial remedies or payments associated with complaints. Given the significant rise we saw increased spend for 24-25.

This gap has been identified as a priority for improvement and is now part of the service’s forward planning. Enhancements are being made to ensure that from 2025–2026 onwards, all payments and financial outcomes linked to complaints are accurately recorded and monitored. This will support greater transparency, improve data quality, and strengthen the Council’s ability to learn from complaints and deliver better outcomes for residents.

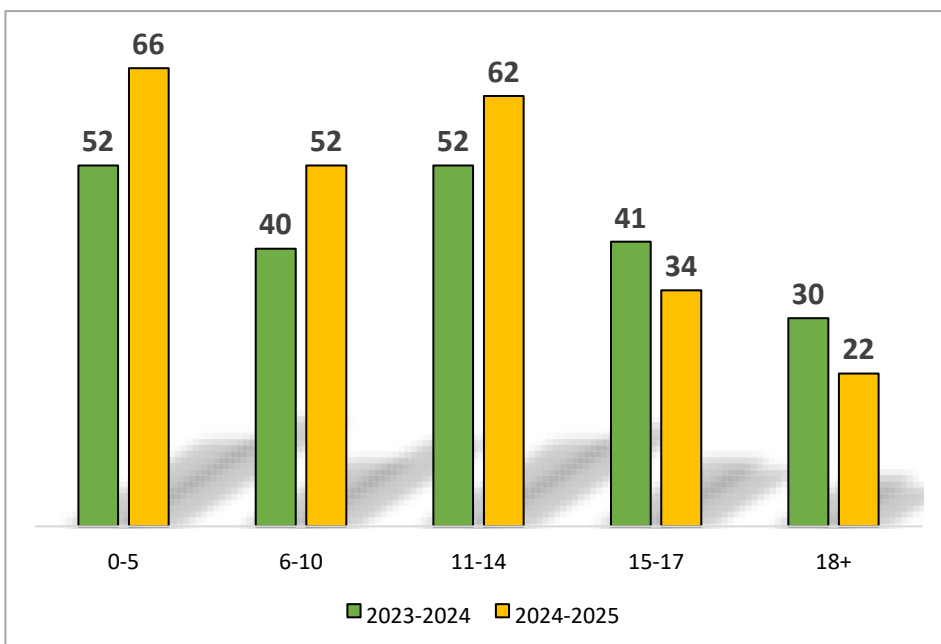
1.11 Method of Contact (2 Year Comparison)



The chart shows a clear shift in how complaints were submitted. Use of the web form more than tripled, while email submissions nearly doubled. Telephone contact also increased, and face-to-face complaints were recorded for the first time.

Monitoring

2.1 Age (2 Year Comparison)



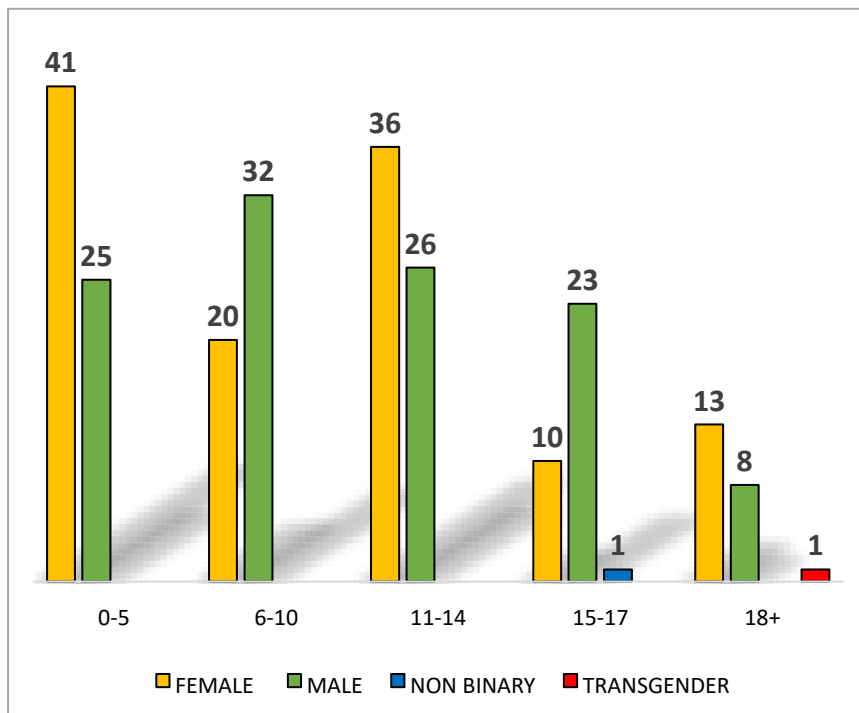
Monitoring data includes all children within a family unit unless stated otherwise. In 2024-2025, complaints rose among younger age groups:

- ☐ **0-5 years:** ↑ 27%
- ☐ **6-10 years:** ↑ 30%
- ☐ **11-14 years:** ↑ 19%

In contrast, complaints decreased for older age groups:

- ☐ **15-17 years:** ↓ 20%
- ☐ **18+ years:** ↓ 27%

2.2 Age by Gender (2024-2025)

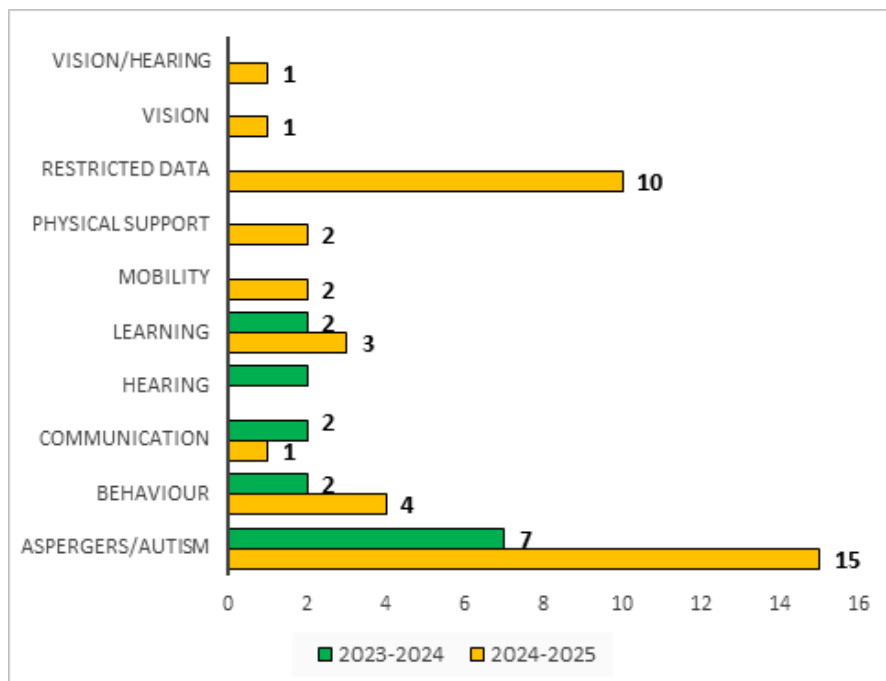


Overall, 5% more complaints were received in relation to female children than males. However, gender differences varied by age group:

- 0–5 years: 64% more complaints for females
- 6–10 years: 60% more for males
- 11–14 years: 28% more for females
- 15–17 years: 130% more for males
- 18+ years: 38% more for females

These variations highlight the importance of considering both age and gender when analysing complaint trends

2.3 Disability (2 Year Comparison)



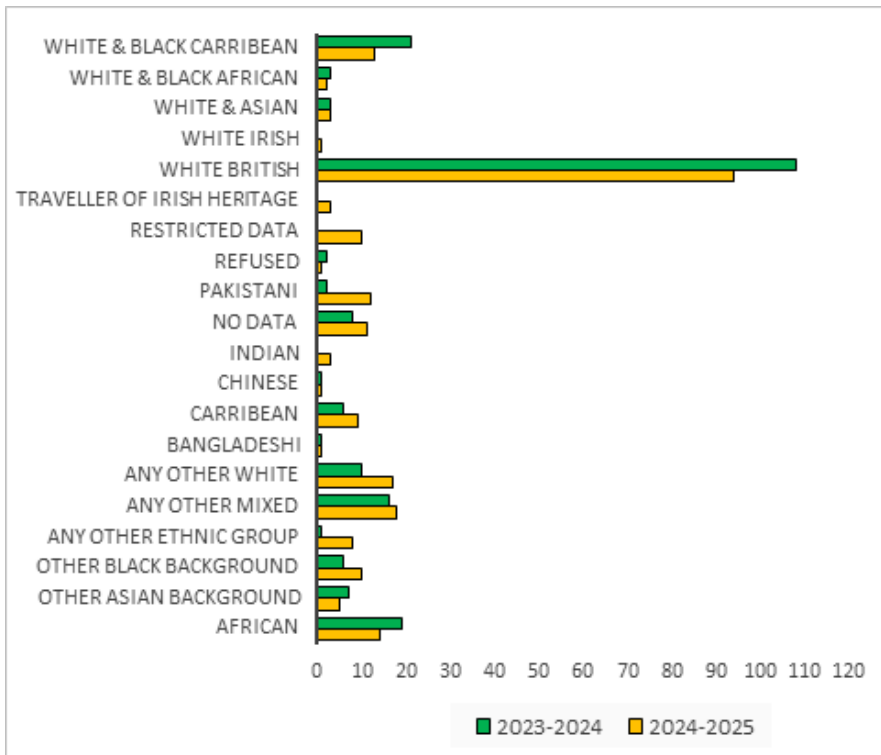
As per the previous year complaints from individuals with Asperger’s Autism formed the largest category, though overall volumes remain low.

We also saw increases across all disability categories, and received complaints in:

- Vision / hearing
- Vision
- Physical Support
- Mobility

Additionally, 10 complaints were received where disability status information was restricted

2.4 Ethnicity (2 Year Comparison)

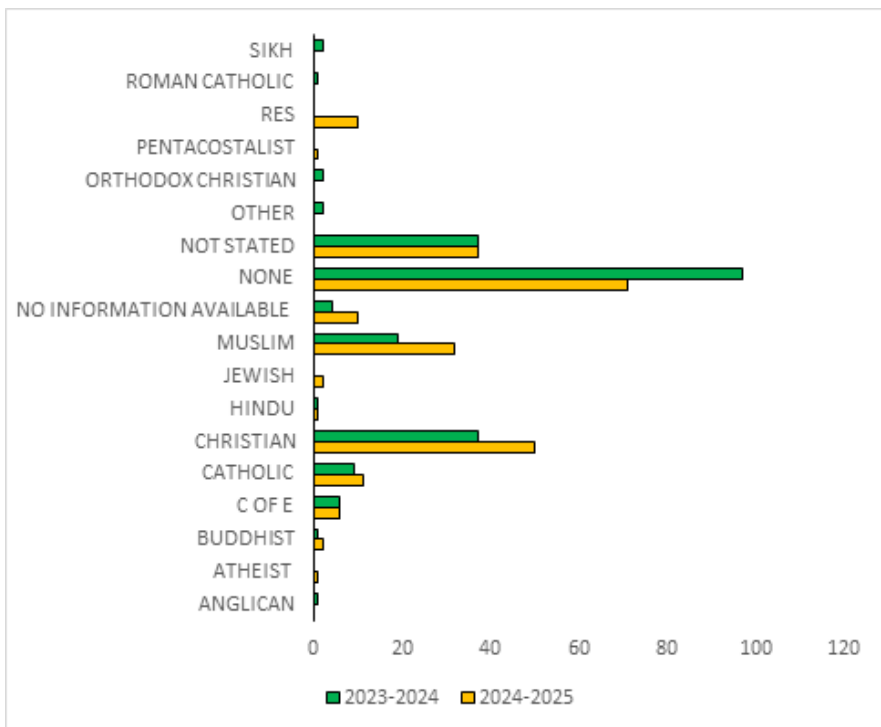


The higher number of White British complainants reflects Havering's population but not the full diversity of service users in Children's Services.

While complaints were received from a range of ethnic background, slight decreases were noted among White, Black Caribbean and African groups.

We aim to ensure all families and young people feel empowered to share complaints, compliments and feedback.

2.5 Religion (2 Year Comparison)



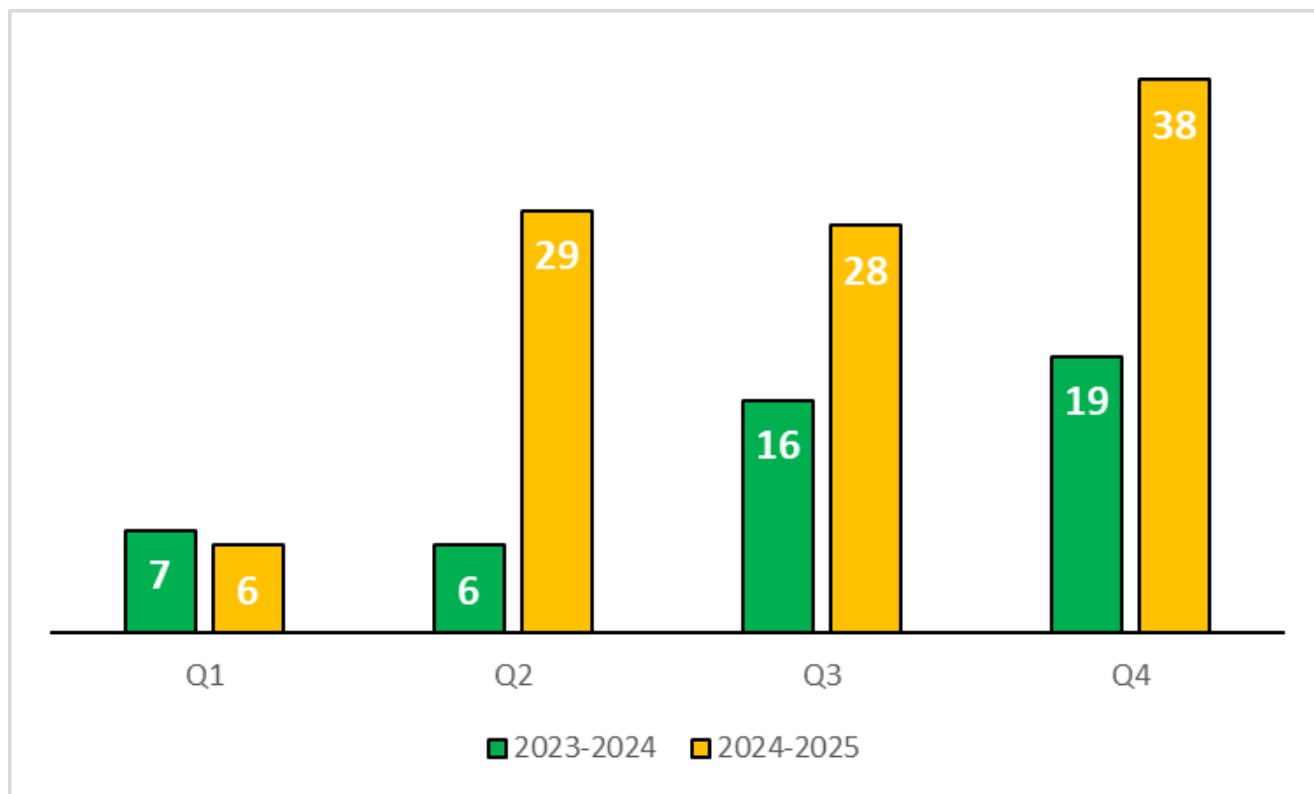
The chart highlights shifts in case outcomes across two reporting areas.

Notable increases were seen in not upheld complaints and declines.

Partially upheld and upheld outcomes remained relatively stable, while categories such as Safeguarding, No further action and Informal Resolution saw modest growth.

New classifications like request and enquiry were introduced, reflecting broader categorisation under the new updated system.

Members Enquiries



The chart illustrates a comparison of Members enquiries received across four quarters between the financial years 2023–2024 and 2024–2025.

Q1 remained steady (6 vs. 7 cases). Q2 to Q4 saw sharp increases, with Q4 peaking at 38 cases—double the previous year. Please note that from December 2024, all Councillor Enquiries began being recorded through the Council’s CAS tracking system. This change has enabled more consistent and accurate reporting of enquiries received, helping to improve data quality and case management.

Overall, the data reflects a notable increase in member’s activity throughout 2024–2025, particularly in the latter three quarters.

Compliments

4.1 Compliments by Service

SERVICE	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	TOTAL	PROFESSIONAL
									1				1	1
	1		1	3		1			1				7	1
														2
														1
	1								2			1	4	8
Leaving Care									1				1	3
Fostering	1			1	1	1		2					6	3
Early Help -Years	1		1	2		1		1	1			4	11	6
SSSU														2
LADO -														1
Specialist Safeguarding					1								1	3
Children with Disabilities				1			1						2	2
TOTAL	4	0	2	7	2	3	1	3	6	0	0	5	33	33

4.2 Compliments

EARLY HELP

"Both of you have helped us so much. Assistance was outstanding. She is very attentive, understanding and has brilliant personality. My daughter has attached to her so much and was very sad that she will no longer be coming to see us. Once again thank you for everything."

SAFEGUARDING

"She is a very patient women and understanding with the short time we had, she got me in a good placement and she made sure I was comfortable here"

Fostering

"I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to express my sincere gratitude for your support and cooperation during the recent immigration appeal concerning my granddaughter"

LEAVING CARE

"Your kindness, dedication, and genuine care have truly made a difference in my life. I especially want to thank you for helping me with my house move. That kind of support goes above and beyond, and it showed me how much you care about the well-being of those you help. It's clear how hard you work to ensure the best for your clients, and I feel so fortunate to have you by my side!"

ASSESSMENT

"Please allow me to express that you have been a bright light for our family during this unexpected and stressful episode. Your support, politeness, and excellent communication with our son and daughter have helped them feel at ease and see you as someone they can trust. This has meant a great deal to us as parents. Thank you for all the advice you have provided throughout this process, as well as for your discretion."

Conclusions & Recommendations

The 2024–2025 reporting period has seen a significant increase in recorded complaints across Children’s Social Care services, with volumes increasing by 29% compared to the previous year. This growth reflects both further understanding from service users on the complaint process and improved recording practices following the implementation of the new case tracking system.

Key themes such as Attitude and Behaviour of Staff, Dispute Decisions, and Standards of Service accounted for half of all complaints received. While the Safeguarding Service recorded the highest number of complaints, only 17% were upheld or partially upheld, indicating that many concerns were resolved or not substantiated.

Encouragingly, the number of compliments received remained steady, with positive feedback highlighting professionalism, empathy, and impactful support from staff across various teams.

Recommendations:

Improve early resolution

Enhance Stage 1 resolution processes to reduce escalation rates and improve satisfaction at the initial point of contact.

Further strengthen staff training on customer services

Focusing on communication, empathy, and decision-making transparency to address recurring themes such as staff behaviour and dispute resolution.

Refine Data Systems

Ensure the complaints system is fully configured to capture financial remedies and outcomes, supporting transparency and accountability.

Promote Accessibility

Continue to expand and promote digital access points, including the web form, which saw a threefold increase in usage.

Monitor Equity and Inclusion

Use demographic data to identify and address disparities in complaint trends across age, gender, ethnicity, and disability.

Celebrate Positive Practice

Share compliments and success stories internally to reinforce good practice and boost staff morale.

Align Reporting Periods

Review and adjust internal reporting timelines to better align with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's framework.

By acting on these recommendations, Children's Services can continue to improve the quality of care, strengthen interventions with families, and ensure that feedback—both positive and negative—is used constructively to shape future service delivery

Complaints & Compliments Action Plan

Based on the findings from the 2024–2025 Annual Report, the following action plan outlines key priorities to improve service delivery, strengthen feedback mechanisms, and ensure that both complaints and compliments are used constructively to drive positive change

ACTION		AIM	Responsible officer	Date
1. Enhance complaint resolution processes	1a	Review Stage 1 procedures to improve early resolution and reduce escalation rates.	Sarah Birtles, Jannine Layhe	By April 2026
	1b	Introduce targeted training for staff on conflict resolution and communication skills.	Charmaine Malcolm Sophie Forder	By April 2026
2. Improve data accuracy and reporting	2a	Fully configure the complaints system to record financial remedies and outcomes	Sarah Birtles	By April 2026
	2b	Align internal reporting periods with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to ensure consistency	Sarah Birtles	By April 2026
3. Strengthen staff development	3a	Use complaint themes (e.g. staff behaviour, dispute decisions) to inform team-level learning and development plans	Charmaine Malcolm Sophie Forder	By April 2026
	3b	Share compliments and positive feedback to reinforce good practice and boost morale.	Sarah Birtles Charmaine Malcolm	By April 2026
4. Promote Accessibility and Inclusion	4a	Expand awareness of complaint channels, especially digital options like the web form.	Sarah Birtles	By April 2026
	4b	Ensure materials are accessible to all service users, including those with disabilities or language barriers.	Sarah Birtles	By April 2026
5. Monitor Equity in Feedback	5a	Continue analysing complaints by age, gender, ethnicity, and disability to identify trends and address disparities.	Sarah Birtles	By April 2026
	5b	Engage with underrepresented groups to encourage feedback and improve trust.	All staff	By April 2026
6. Celebrate and Share Positive Feedback	6a	Further develop the quarterly complaints and compliments report to highlight strong practice across teams.	Sarah Birtles and Emmy	By April 2026
	6b	Encourage managers to use compliments in staff appraisals and 'Star of the Month'.	Charmaine Malcolm	By April 2026

7. Embed Learning into Practice	7a	Ensure all upheld complaints result in clear actions, such as apologies, service changes, or financial adjustments.	Sarah Birtles / AD's in Starting Well, Emmy Tomsett	By April 2026
	7b	Track implementation of complaint outcomes to ensure follow-through and accountability.	Sarah Birtles / Johanna Philp	By April 2026