

Adult Social Care Annual Complaints Report

April 2019 - March 2020

1. Introduction

This report provides information on complaints for the London Borough of Bexley Adult Social Care Services for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, that were 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 by our service users. We achieve this by capturing a range of complaint information including, the nature of the complaint, the action we took to resolve it, the outcome of the complaint and whether we responded to the complaint on time.

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 we upheld. We hope this report also demonstrates our commitment to transparency and our positive approach to dealing with and learning from complaints.

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 that does not fall under these provisions, we will consider under our corporate complaint's procedure instead.

1.1 Key points

In 2019/20 we received 59 Stage 1 complaints. This is a 90% increase from the previous year in which we received 31 Stage 1 complaints. We also responded to 62% of complaints on time, which is up 3% from the previous year.

- Out of the 37 corporate complaints received, seven (19%) progressed to Stage 2 and five (14%) progressed to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
- We responded to 62% of complaints within the target of 15 working days.
- The main complaint reason was due to 'service quality' because the complainant felt the service they received was not to the standard they had expected.
- We found some degree of fault in 51% of complaints investigated at Stage 1. This is the lowest percentage in five years. Please see Section 5 for more information.
- Only 12% of complaints progressed to Stage 2, which shows that we were able to resolve most complaints first time around. Two out of seven (29%) decisions were changed or overturned at Stage 2.

2. Adult Statutory Social Care Complaints Procedure

The current regulations as of 1 April 2009 introduced a one-stage process for adult social care statutory complaints. Stage 1 provides the service area that is the subject of the complaint with the opportunity to resolve the issues raised by the complainant.

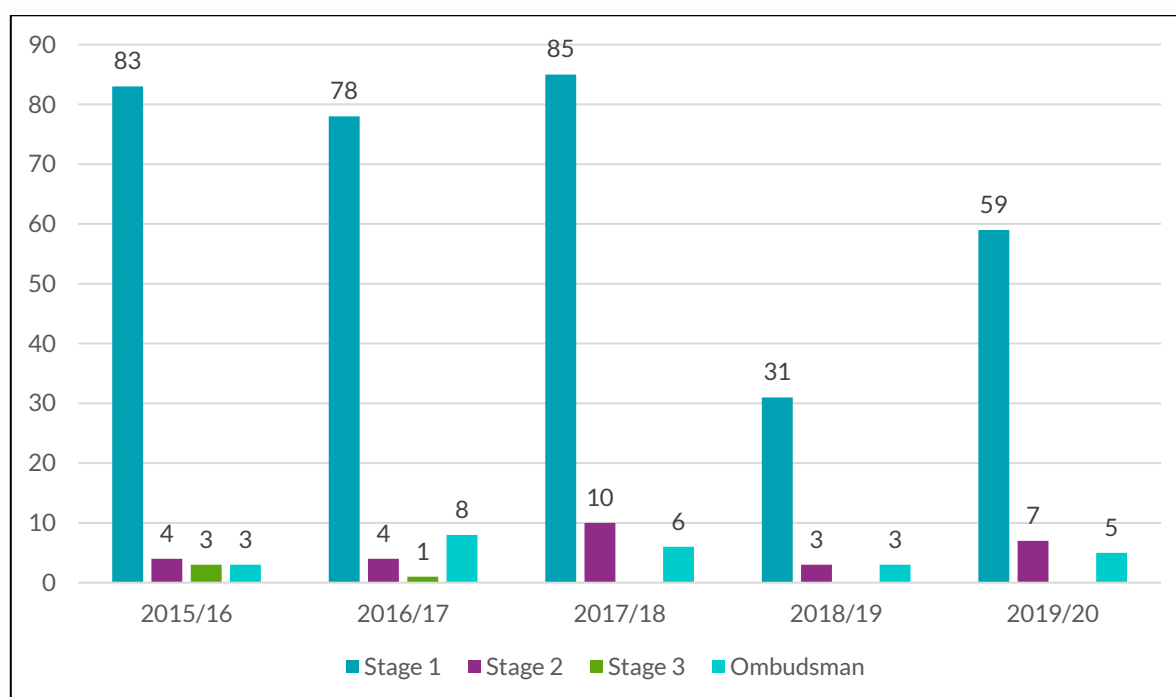
The service area has 15 working days to respond, however, this can be extended in instances where the complaint is complex and requires a more detailed investigation. If the complainant remains unhappy, they can escalate their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).

3. Complaints received

The table below shows the total number of complaints received from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Type	Stage 1	Stage 2	Ombudsman
Statutory complaints	22	N/A	1
Corporate complaints	37	7	4
Total	59	7	5

The graph table below shows the number of complaints received over the last five years.



*Note, we reduced our corporate complaints process to a two-stage process in 2017/18

Analysis

The total number of complaints has increased by 90% compared with 2018/19. The rise in complaints may be attributed to our Adult Services dealing with more complaints on a formal basis compared with the year before. The appointment of an Associate Director for Bexley Care also increased the focus on dealing with complaints in a more formal capacity.

The number of Stage 2 complaints has also increased from three to seven in 2019/20 due to the increased number of complaints received.

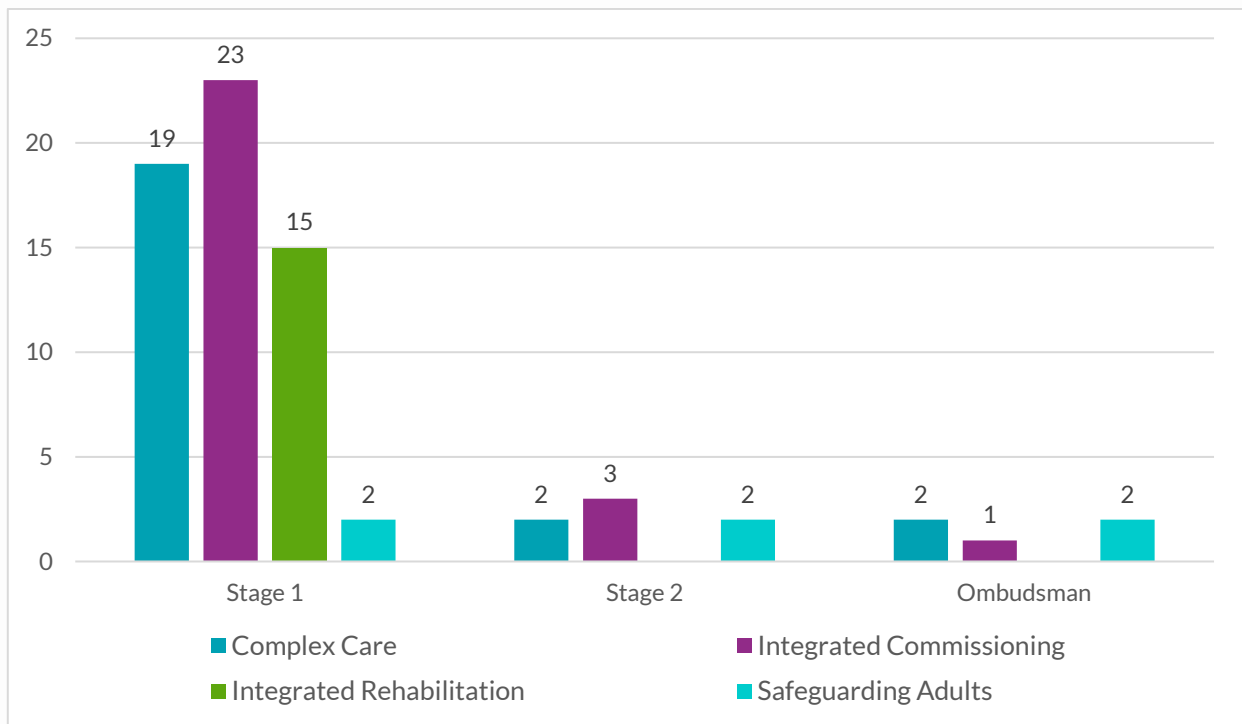
Five Ombudsman complaints were received compared to the three received in the previous year. There is

3.1 Complaints by service area

Adult Social Care comprises of the following four service areas:

- integrated rehabilitation
- integrated commissioning
- complex care
- safeguarding adults

The table below shows complaints by service area in 2019/20.

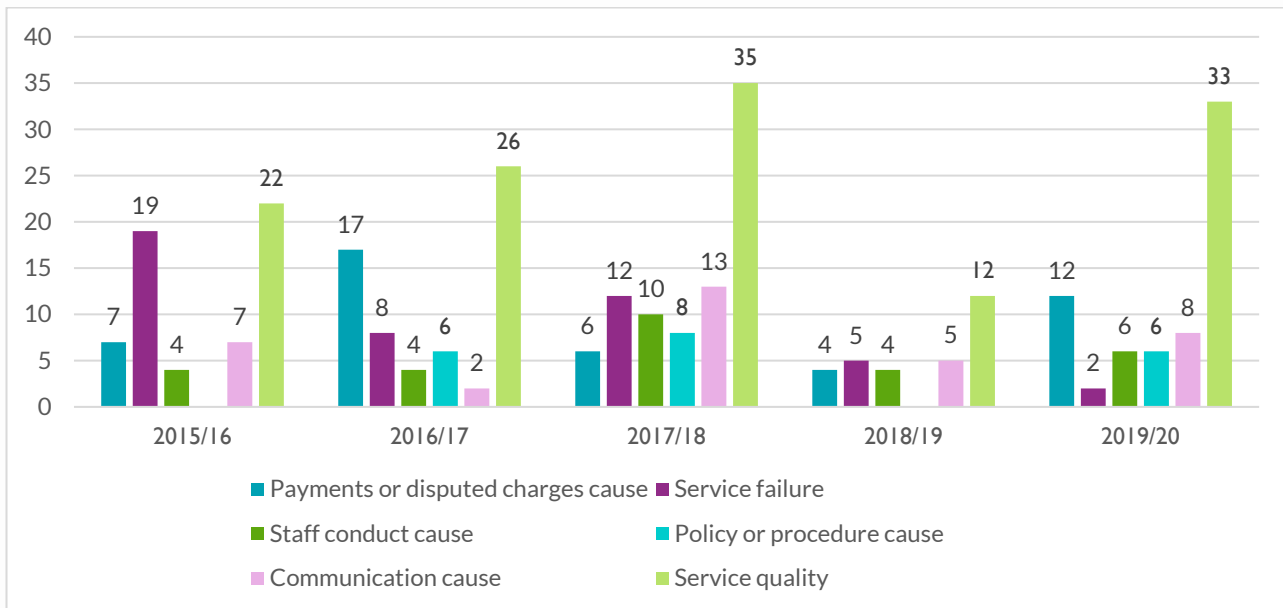


Integrated Commissioning received the most Stage 1 complaints as we would expect. This is because the service area covers the provision of homecare and the majority of our long-term service users.

3.2 Causes of complaints

The table below shows why people complained to us over the last five years.

Please note that the data below does not match the data in table 1 as it relates to complaints ‘closed’ in this period and not complaints ‘received’.



Analysis

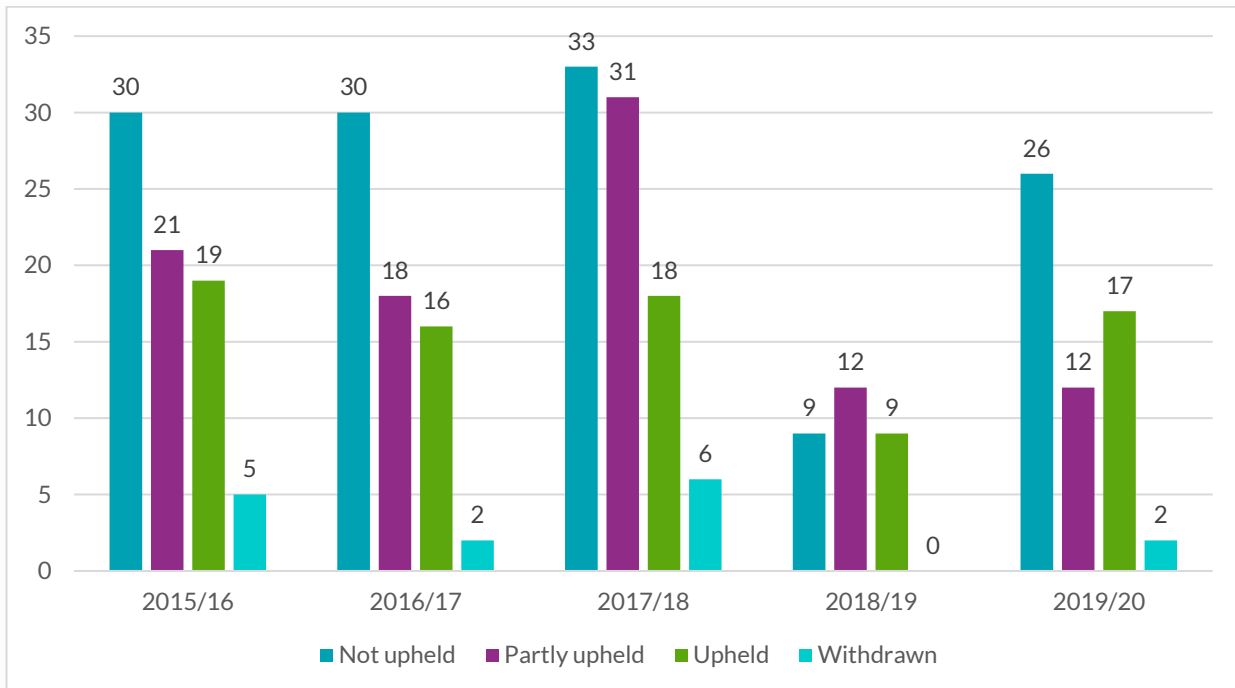
The table above shows that although the causes of complaints varies from year to year, the main cause of complaints relates to the quality of service received. These numbers are expected as this area covers a broad area of issues such as allegations of ‘insufficient service knowledge’, ‘poor record keeping’, ‘service not to the quality or standard expected’ and ‘incorrect information or advice given by an officer’.

- 12 complaints were due to a dispute with a payment or a charge we had levied.
- Eight complaints were due to poor communication and a further six complaints were about complainant’s failing to agree with our policy or because they felt that we had not followed our stated procedures.
- We received six complaints about staff conduct and a further two complaints were due to the service failure, where the complainant felt we did not provide the service expected.

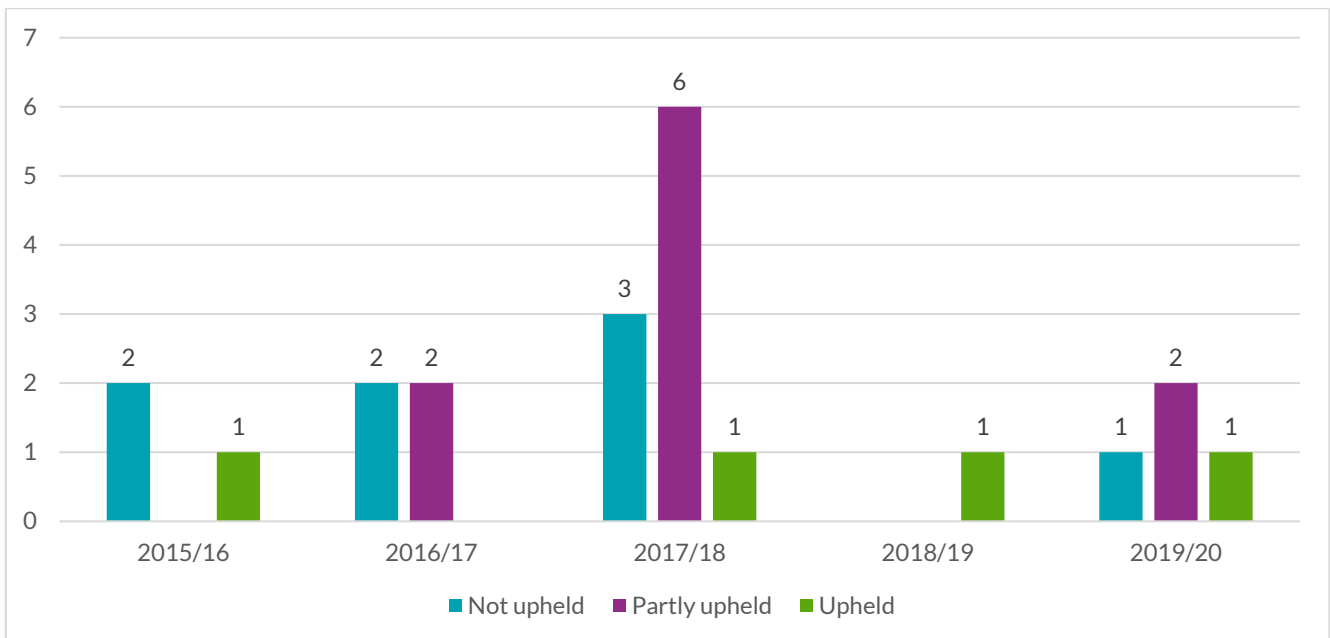
3.3 Complaint outcomes

The tables below show the percentage breakdown of our complaint decisions for the last five years.

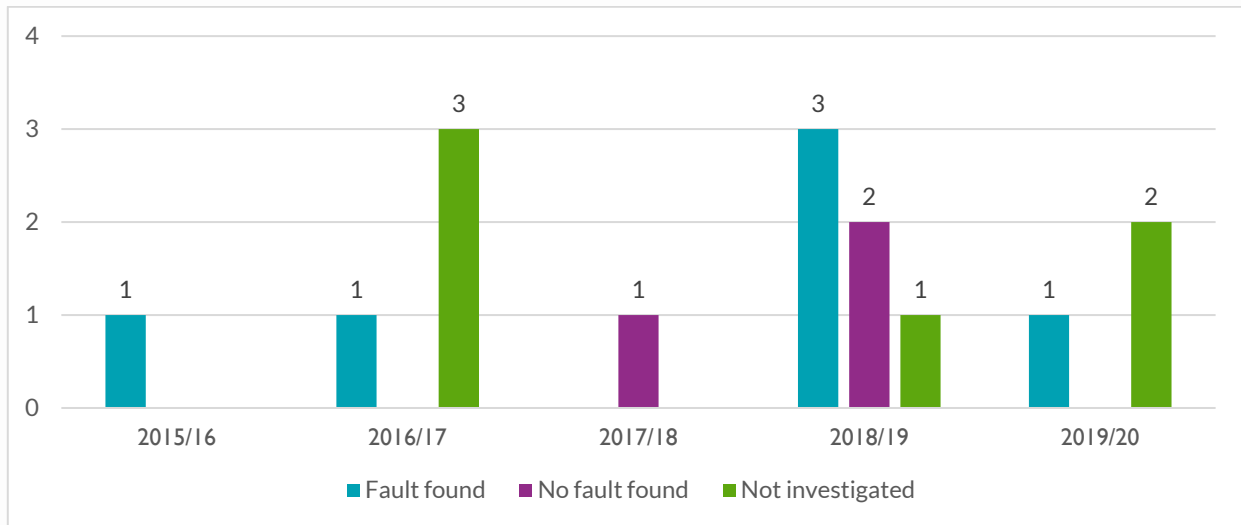
Stage 1 complaints



Stage 2 complaints



Ombudsman investigations



Please note these figures are for Ombudsman cases closed during this period. Some of the complaints were however initially received in the previous financial year.

Analysis

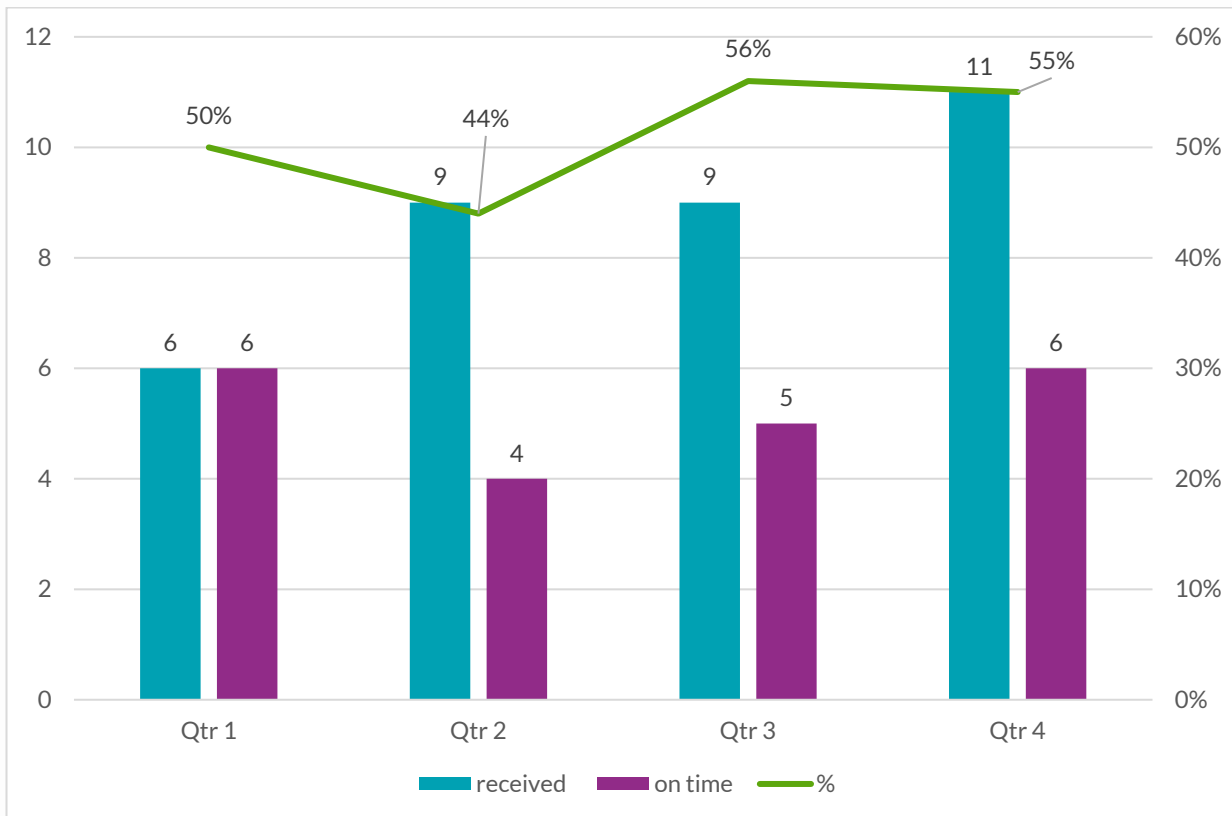
- The charts above show that we found fault in 51% of complaints investigated at Stage 1. Eight out of 23 (35%) decisions were changed or overturned at Stage 2 in 2019/20.
- Only 19% of complaints progressed to Stage 2 of our complaint process. We think this demonstrates that we were able to resolve most complaints at the first stage of our complaints process by offering fair and reasonable resolutions.
- The Ombudsman found fault in 33% (1 of 3) complaints.

Note, the figures above show the outcomes of complaints that were “closed” in 2019/20. This means some of the complaints may have been originally received in the previous financial year.

3.4 Corporate complaint performance

The table below shows the total number of Stage 1 corporate complaints we received and the percentage of complaints that we replied to on time.

We dealt with 60% of Stage 1 complaints on time, which was a decrease of 7% from last year. This performance was due in part to staff availability and caseload as there was a significant increase in the number of complaints received.

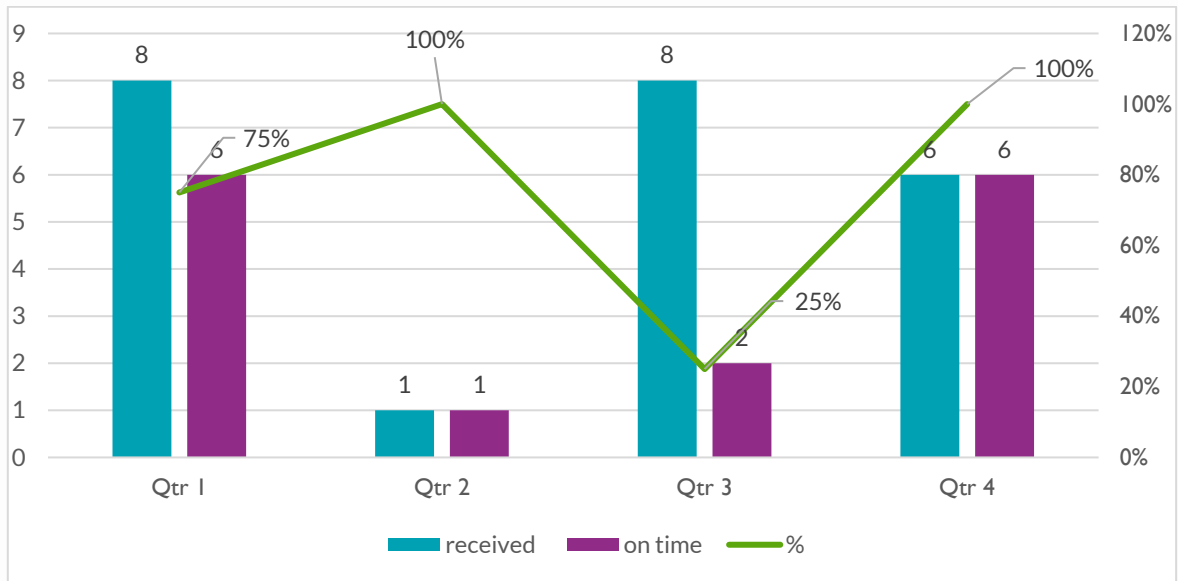


3.5 Statutory complaint performance

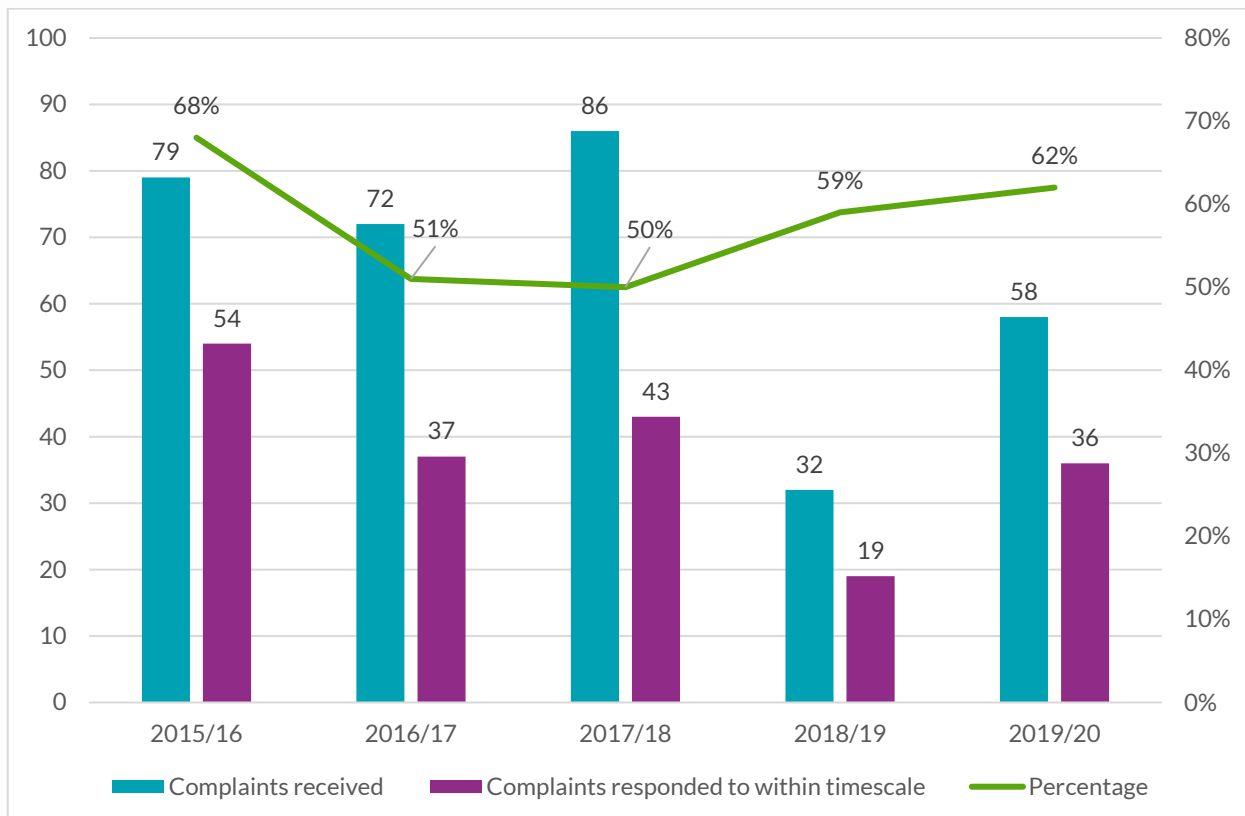
The table below shows the total number of Stage 1 statutory complaints we received and the percentage of complaints we replied to on time.

We dealt with 65% of Stage 1 statutory complaints on time, which was an increase of 12% from last year. Although performance improved significantly, unfortunately it was not consistent, and this is something we need to address to provide a better service next year.

Statutory complaint performance



The graph below shows the performance over the last five years.



We dealt with 62% of complaints on time when statutory and corporate complaints are combined. Whilst this represents an improvement on the previous years it falls short of where we would expect to be.

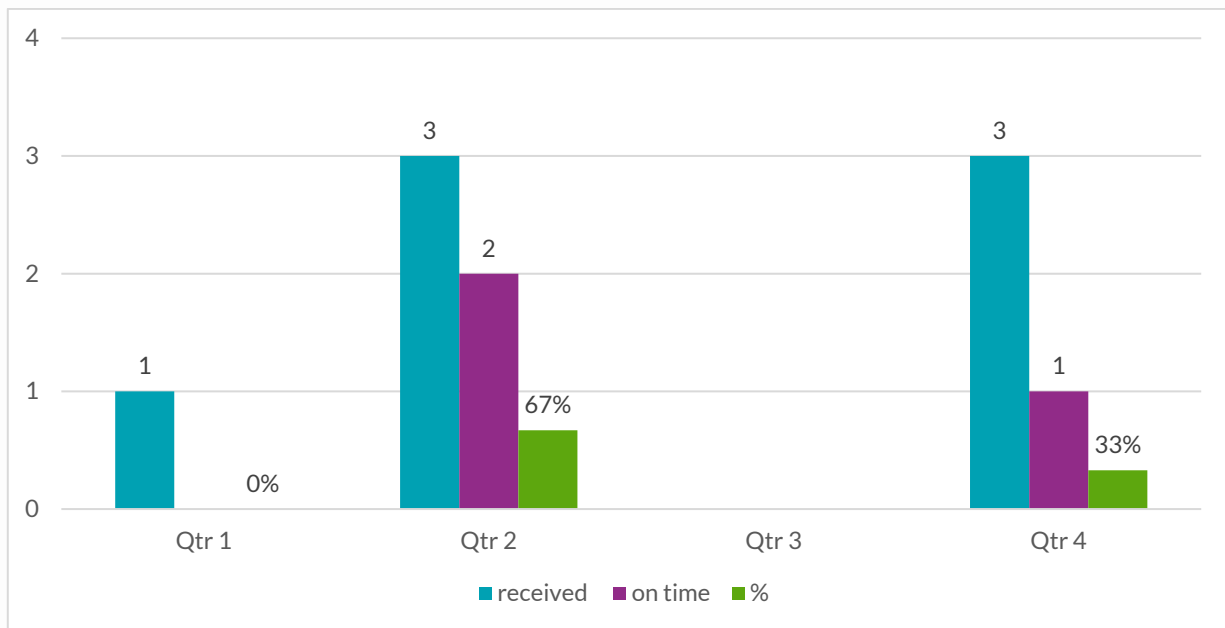
The Complaints Team will continue to work closely with each service area to improve performance by meeting with senior managers, producing weekly open case reports and providing detailed complaint analysis reports every month.

3.6 Stage 2 corporate complaint performance

The table below shows the total number of Stage 2 corporate complaints received and the percentage of complaints we replied to on time.

Overall, we dealt with 43% of Stage 2 complaints on time. There were no Stage 2 complaints responded to in Quarter 3.

Stage 2 complaint performance



4. Improving and learning from upheld and partly upheld complaints

We have a proactive and positive attitude to complaints. They offer a valuable insight into people's experience of our social care services as well as showing us what we do well and where we could improve.

We use complaints to improve the service we offer to our residents. We do this by regularly looking at individual complaints and by analysing complaint statistics, performance and themes. All remedial actions are recorded on our case management system for every complaint we uphold or partially uphold. We encourage teams to have reflective discussions about complaint themes and use case studies in their staff meetings. This is because we believe that every mistake should be taken seriously, and that steps should be taken to avoid the same failure in future.

Last year, we improved our complaint feedback form, which has enabled us to capture feedback about our complaints process more effectively. We also provided internal complaints training to all social care managers to ensure they are better able to respond to complaints. In addition, managers are now sent detailed complaints data every month. This allows them to quickly identify recurring themes or performance issues.

In this report, we attempt to show the main areas where we have improved because of the complaints that were investigated over the last financial year. It may take time to see the benefits in some areas however

we have attempted to show that positive improvements are being made thanks to the feedback we receive, and that learning from our service users is an on-going priority.

Key learning points identified in 2018/19

Four key issues identified in upheld complaints during 2018/19 were:

- difficulties with the Blue Badge assessment process
- communication with families
- quality of care or service
- partnership working

Key learning points identified in 2019/20

Four key issues identified in upheld complaints during 2019/20 were:

- quality of care or service
- partnership working
- finance and invoicing
- communication and handling of complaints

Analysis

In 2018/19, several actions were taken across to prevent reoccurring complaints. By continuing to analyse closed complaints in 2019/20, we found that some themes from the previous year did not come up again. We believe this is likely to be because the service worked proactively to avoid repeated mistakes.

However, the action taken to prevent complaints about 'quality of care or service' and 'partnership working' has not been as effective as we had hoped. The complaints received against last year have significantly risen across service areas, most notably under the category 'service quality' and 'finance and invoicing'. These issues continue to be on-going issues across service areas.

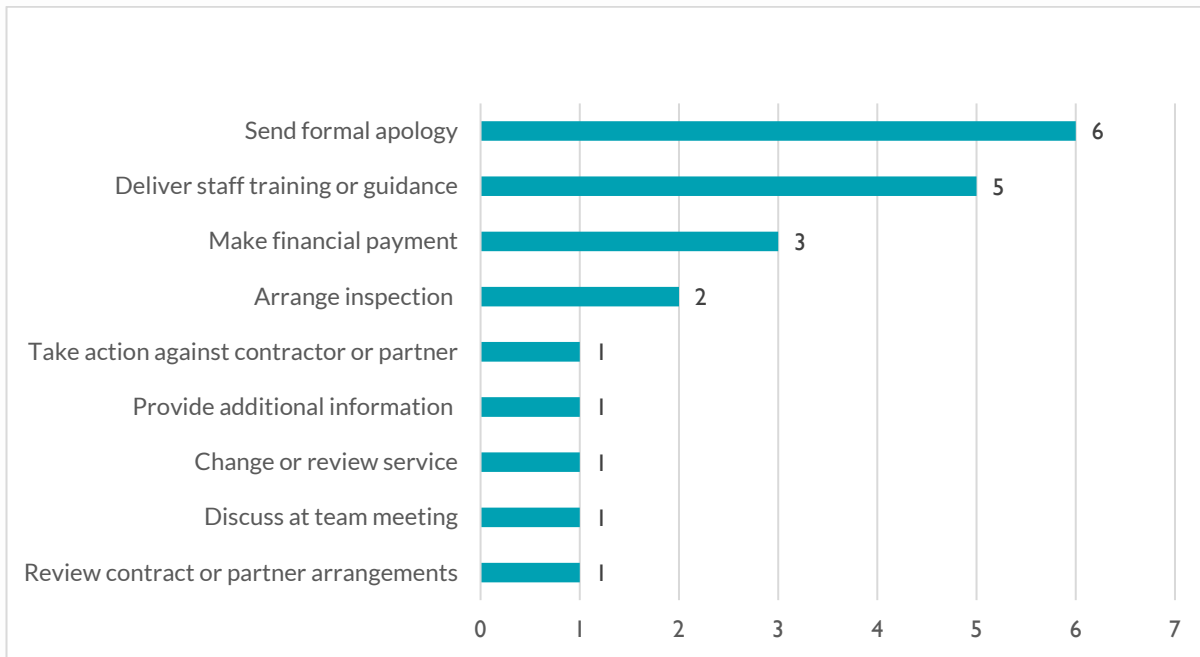
Throughout the year, we have continued to work with service managers and their teams to identify how they can improve service delivery to prevent complaints about the four key issues identified during 2019/20, particularly those which have been recurring key themes since the previous year. Because of this, services identified various training opportunities and implemented several changes to improve service delivery.

Key complaint learning

The table below outlines some of the learning identified from complaints upheld in 2019/20.

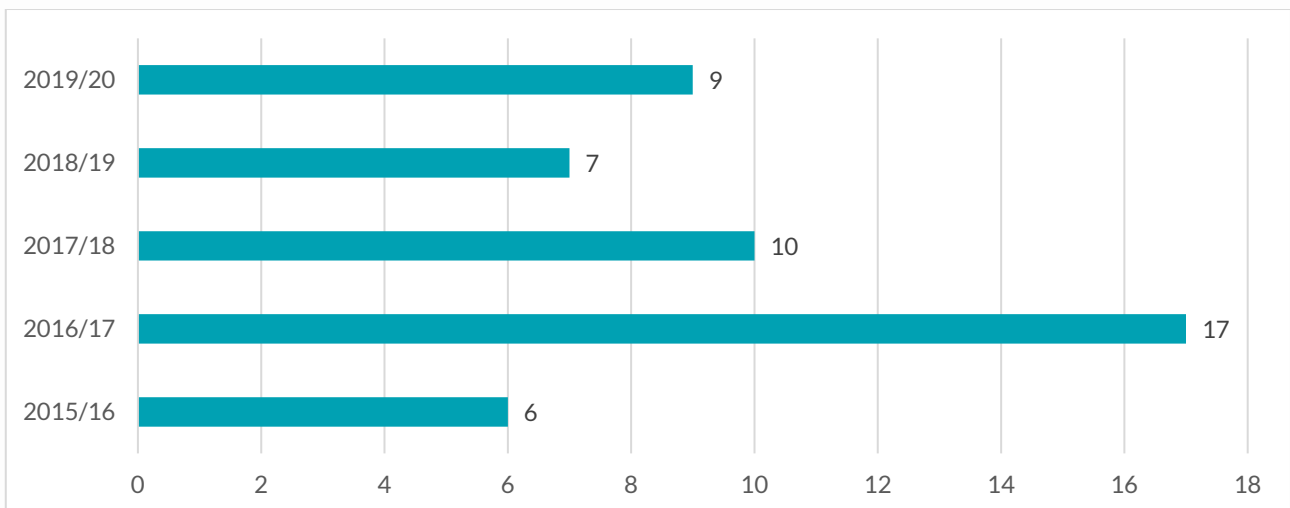
Service Area	Learning from complaints
Quality of care or service-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We promised to ensure improved guidance for student social workers. • Management reporting arrangements have been developed to enable managers and the Adult Safeguarding Team to monitor progress of section 42 enquiries more closely. • Improved management of call times. • We will develop quality assurance framework and practice standards that influences providers' practice, contract and reporting expectations. • Quality Assurance to monitor agencies following complaints, to improve their service delivery and standards of communication. • Improved standards regarding carers assessments will be overseen by the carers partnership board and implemented through ASC pathway reforms.
Partnership working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement to administrative procedures to ensure accuracy in letters sent by our service providers. • We recognise that we need to proactively liaise with care homes when we are aware of a difference in opinion, to avoid conflicting information.
Finance and invoicing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process created to ensure letters are sent in a timely way. • We recognised that closer work is required to prevent unnecessary payment demands being sent. • Staff reminded of the support we can offer regarding diminishing funds. • Introduced a standard letter for self-funders, that supports people and families about the decisions they must make and in an easy to read format. • Improved training to ensure better service delivery.
Communication and handling of complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We promised that in future consultation we will ensure all involved have appropriate representation. • Anonymised case studies to be used in team meetings. • Action plans put in place by Quality Assurance following complaints, to ensure appropriate training takes place. • Enhanced complaints handling training. We also introduced a pre-planning meeting check list, which draws information triangulation together and improved timelines through clear expectations.

Corrective actions arising from complaints



5. Ombudsman complaints

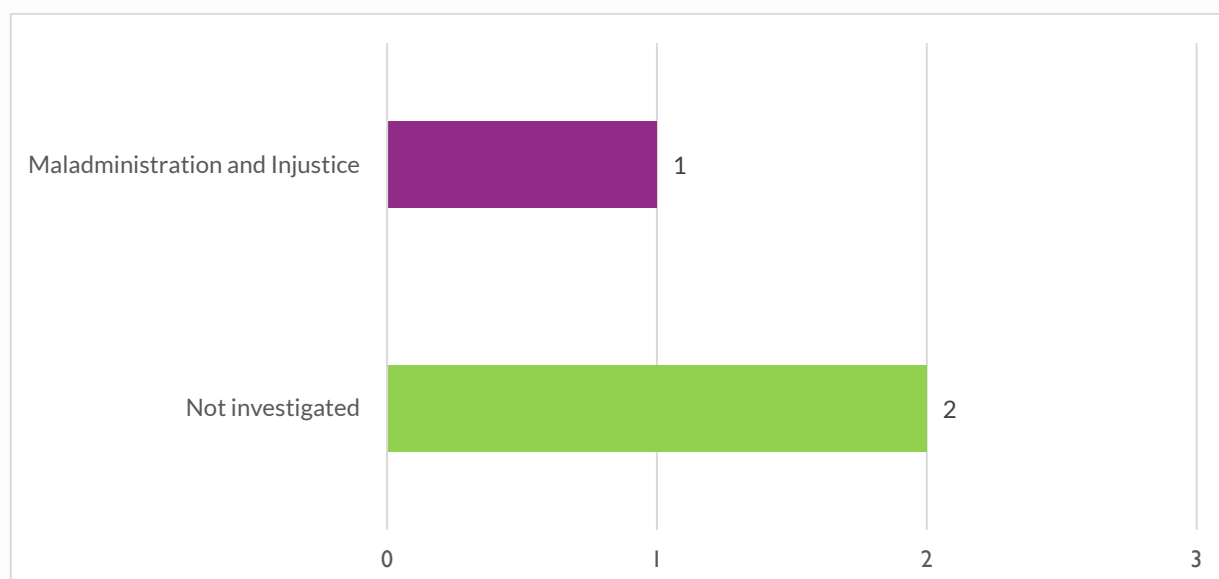
The Ombudsman reported that they received nine complaints in this financial year, however, they have only contacted the Council regarding five complaints, therefore we have not included the other four complaints in this report.



In 2019/20, five complaints progressed to the Ombudsman, however, they have only notified us of three outcomes. The other two cases are still under investigation and will be reported on in next year’s report.

The Ombudsman found fault (maladministration and injustice) in one case and two cases were not investigated by the Ombudsman.

Complaints from the Local Government Ombudsman



Details of the three Ombudsman complaints are summarised below:

1. The complainant complained on behalf of her husband, who suffers from dementia, about respite care at the Sidcup Care Home. He was made to apologise for inappropriate behaviour and comments made to staff before being told he was not welcome at the care home again. The complainant felt this showed a lack of understanding of her husband's condition which made him feel upset and depressed by the incident and wanted to clear his name.

In response, we apologised for the distress he experienced after we failed provide up to date information about his dementia. We also reviewed existing referral procedures to ensure key information is provided at the time of referral and at all future points when care takes place sporadically. We also held a learning event to reflect on this complaint and to reinforce the processes of sharing appropriate information. We also agreed to implement random audits of practice to ensure compliance.

2. The complainant was unhappy with the Council's decision not to issue them with a Blue badge.

The Ombudsman did not investigate this complaint as it had not gone through the Council's complaints procedure. The complainant was advised to contact the Council If he still wished to make a formal complaint but to date, not further communication was received from the complainant.

3. The complainant raised concerns with the Council in January 2019 and this was registered as a safeguarding alert. However, the Complex Care team did not act on this referral in June 2019.

The Ombudsman did not investigate this complaint as the Council was not a body under investigation as the care home was privately funded. Although the Council had been involved with a safeguarding enquiry, when the Ombudsman spoke with the complainant, she confirmed that she longer wanted to pursue this aspect of the complaint.

6. Compliments received

We received 56 compliments in 2019/20 and a small selection of these are detailed below by service area.

Complex Care

“Whilst writing I take this opportunity to commend to your personal attention the excellent service provided to Mum and myself by Charlene. We both very much appreciate her professional, caring and compassionate approach in providing us with invaluable support and guidance. Charlene is a credit to your department and a pleasure to deal with. Although Mum is 91, thankfully, to date, we have been able to soldier on without the need for help, however as Charlene is aware this has recently significantly changed. This has therefore been my first experience in dealing with Bexley Social Services and I have very impressed by the range of services and support Bexley provides its residents - thank you to all. Feel free to show this email to whoever you wish within Social Services, people are generally slow to praise!”

“I would like to thank you for your understanding and compassion for my families upsetting experience. When visiting my mother's home, you conducted yourself in a professional manner but listened to my problems with understanding and sympathy. You are a credit to your profession and a major asset in my opinion to Bexley Council.”

Integrated Commissioning

“A resident came into Civic Offices today to thank me for my help setting up the respite and day care for her husband. She said that I was 'the only person who has gone out of my way to help' and 'really appreciated all that I have done for her'. She kindly gave me a box of chocolates, which I have shared with the team.”

“I just wanted to write to express mine and my family's thanks in relation to how Paula has supported us over the last few weeks. It is a particularly difficult time when a family member must go into care, and Paula's help and assistance has been with exemplary. She has been kind, considerate and professional and is a credit to the local authority. Paula has made a massive difference - thank you and thank her so much.”

Integrated Rehabilitation

“I just wanted to say thank you to your super teams and give you some good feedback. My mum (who is 84 with COPD and Heart Failure) was admitted to QE on 26 December 2018 with double pneumonia and sepsis. QE were amazing and got her stable but referred her to Bart's Hospital for thoracic (lung) surgery. Mum was released with a care package from Bexley and support from the Rapid Response Team. Because of this, my mum has regained full independence, she only required care for the first 4 weeks; she has returned most of the equipment to Inspire and is now better than before. She is living independently, back to driving, has good quality of life for her age. We doubt she would have made this amazing recovery without the support and confidence given by your teams. A massive thank you for all the good work your teams do and the extra help and support they gave to my mum during this period.”

“I write to you following reablement provided for my mum. I would like to let you know that myself and my family are very grateful for the help given to us by Katie Wright, who I believe is one of your

team. Katie was very kind to my mum when she visited her recently, assuring her and explaining what would be happening very patiently. She has also helped the family set up private care and alarm pendant assistance which has been extremely helpful. Please pass on our thanks.”

Safeguarding Adults

“Please accept this email as a professional compliment following recent audits carried out by LBB and Kevin Murphy. On reflection of recent medication & H&S audits carried out by Kevin, I would like to say thank you for the support and professional advice in relation to good practise advice and support with quality systems which in turn has supported me to improve day to day operations within the services I manage. In a culture where time is precious, and we have limited resources the support from Kevin and the quality assurance team is valuable. I look forward to working in partnership in the future and once again Thank you.”

“Here attached is a copy of our latest inspection result from the CQC. Your immense support has helped in achieving this result. When I think to break out and give in, where all things seem impossible you have both been there for me and the team and made it possible to continue. I am forever grateful for all your support and I thank you and your team for all they have done for us. Have a great day and God bless you.”

If there is anything in this report which requires further clarification, please contact the complaints team at complaints@bexley.gov.uk.