

## Summary Report for Adults Social Care Committee

### Adult Social Care Annual Complaints Report 2025/26

The Adult social care annual complaints report 2025-2026 provides assurance that Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has effective arrangements in place for handling complaints, learning from concerns raised by residents, and using feedback to improve Adult Social Care services. The report covers the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

#### Overall Position

Adult Social Care continued to operate in a challenging environment, receiving 16,143 requests for support, providing short-term support to 5,395 people, long-term support to 3,450 people and undertaking over 4,000 reviews during the year. Despite this scale of activity, only 34 formal complaints were received, a slight reduction from 35 complaints in 2024/25.

The report demonstrates a positive complaints culture, with complaints viewed as an important source of learning and service improvement rather than solely as a measure of dissatisfaction. Feedback has led to changes in practice, procedures, training and communication across several service areas.

#### Key Performance Highlights

- Complaints reduced slightly from 35 in 2024/25 to 34 in 2025/26.
- Over half of all complaints (56%) were resolved through Early Resolution compared with 46% in the previous year.
- 90% of Early Resolution complaints were resolved within the target timescale.
- No complaints were received regarding commissioned care services during the year, suggesting concerns are generally being resolved locally by providers before escalation.
- Adult Social Care complaints considered by the Ombudsman did not require investigation because the Council had already acknowledged fault and implemented remedies.

#### Complaint Themes

The most common complaint theme remained care planning and assessment, with 10 complaints recorded. Service accessibility and availability remained unchanged at five complaints.

Several complaint categories showed encouraging reductions:

- Communication and information sharing reduced from 8 to 3 complaints.
- Financial matters reduced from 9 to 4 complaints.
- Quality of care complaints reduced from 7 to 2 complaints.

- Complaints regarding officer attitude and behaviour reduced from 3 to 2 complaints.

An increase was noted in safeguarding-related complaints, rising from 2 to 5. However, the report highlights that learning from these cases has already been used to strengthen practice and improve processes.

### **Complaint Outcomes**

Of the 34 complaints received:

- 19 were resolved through Early Resolution.
- 2 were upheld in full.
- 8 were partially upheld.
- 4 were not upheld.
- 1 complaint remained active at year end.

Where fault was identified, remedies included apologies, reassessments, policy and procedural changes, staff guidance, improved communication and, where appropriate, financial redress.

### **Learning and Service Improvement**

A significant strength of the report is the evidence that complaints have led to tangible improvements. Examples include:

- Improved guidance and support around Court of Protection processes.
- Better recording of legal information and appointment of a Deprivation of Liberty champion.
- Enhanced consultation and communication during DoLS and Court of Protection processes.
- Strengthened homelessness referral and follow-up procedures.
- Refresher training and process improvements in deferred payment arrangements.
- Improved communication with families regarding financial matters and information sharing.
- Service changes following issues related to safeguarding, hospital discharge planning and advocacy provision.

### **Compliments and Positive Feedback**

A new compliments recording process was introduced following feedback from the Care Quality Commission. Initial feedback demonstrates a highly positive picture of Adult Social Care, with recurring themes including staff kindness and compassion and empathy; professionalism and expertise; good communication and listening; going above and beyond expectations; building confidence and independence; quick responses and co-ordinated support and making people feel safe and reassured.

## **Ombudsman Performance**

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman responded to 51 complaints and enquiries about the Council during 2025/26, of which seven progressed to investigation. Two related to Adult Social Care. In both adult social care cases, the Ombudsman decided not to investigate because the Council had already identified the fault, provided an appropriate remedy and implemented learning to prevent recurrence. Our Rosedale Rehabilitation and Assessment Centre has been frequently recognised through compliments in the reporting period.

This provides strong external assurance regarding the quality and robustness of the Council's complaint investigations and its willingness to put matters right.

## **Key Priorities for 2026/27**

The report identifies eight priorities:

1. Strengthen Early Resolution.
2. Improve timeliness and performance monitoring.
3. Further embed learning from complaints.
4. Promote learning from compliments.
5. Continue workforce training and awareness.
6. Enhance the quality and consistency of complaint responses.
7. Strengthen partnership working with health organisations.
8. Maintain oversight and scrutiny arrangements.

## **Conclusion**

The 2025/26 report presents a positive picture of Adult Social Care complaint handling. Complaint numbers remain low relative to service demand, early resolution rates have improved, several complaint themes have reduced significantly, and there is clear evidence that feedback is driving meaningful service improvements. The Ombudsman's decision not to investigate the two Adult Social Care complaints further supports confidence in the Council's complaint handling arrangements. Overall, the report demonstrates a learning culture and a continued commitment to improving outcomes for residents through effective complaints management.

**Carolyn Nice**

**Director of Adults, Health and Wellbeing**

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