

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: ALL
<p>REPORT TITLE</p> <p>London Borough of Camden Children’s Statutory Services Complaints Report 2023/2024</p>	
<p>REPORT FROM</p> <p>Director of Relational Practice, Children and Learning.</p>	
<p>FOR SUBMISSION TO</p> <p>Children’s Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee</p>	<p>DATE</p> <p>11 November 2024</p>
<p>SUMMARY OF REPORT</p> <p>This report provides information about complaints made to the Children’s statutory services in the London Borough of Camden during the twelve months between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024. It is a statutory requirement to produce an annual report which is published on the Council’s website.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information</p> <p>The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.</p> <p>Contact Officer:</p> <p>Rachel Greene, Service Manager for, Quality Assurance and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).</p> <p>5 Pancras Square, London N1C 4AG</p> <p>Tel: 020 7974 1072</p> <p>Email: Rachel.greene@camden.gov.uk</p>	
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>The Committee is asked to consider and note the contents of the report.</p>	

Signed:



Nana Bonsu

Director of Relational Practice

Date: 23/10/2024

1. Introduction and Background

Purpose of the report

- 1.1 This is the London Borough of Camden's Children's statutory services annual complaints report for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

Scope of the report

- 1.2 Many representations, comments and complaints are dealt with informally by practitioners and managers every day without the need for the formal complaints process to be followed. Practitioners are encouraged to try to resolve children's and families' dissatisfaction as an integral part of practice, drawing upon relational skills. These are not formally logged or reported on; however, children services continually use this information to improve service delivery.
- 1.3 The report focuses not only on volumes and timeliness of responses but also identifies themes and lessons learnt that result in service improvements.
- 1.4 Learning from complaints contributes to the ambitions in **We Make Camden**:
- Camden is a borough where every child has the best start in life.
 - Camden's local economy should be strong, sustainable, and inclusive everyone should have a secure livelihood to support them to live a prosperous life.
 - Camden actively tackles injustice and inequality, creating safe, strong and open communities where everyone can contribute.
 - Camden communities support good health, wellbeing and connection for everyone so that they can start well, live well, and age well.
 - Everyone in Camden should have a place they call home Camden should be a green, clean, vibrant, accessible, and sustainable place with everyone empowered to contribute to tackling the climate emergency

2. The Complaints Procedure

- 2.1 Our complaints procedure is for those complaints that the Children's Safeguarding Social Work (CSSW) teams have not been able to resolve by other means outside of the formal process. Currently managers and senior managers meet with children and families, hold appreciative inquiries and gather feedback to resolve complaints, so they do not escalate to the formal process, this in turn maintains a positive relationship between the complainant and children's social care.
- 2.2 The Council has a single policy and procedure for managing complaints which includes the statutory Social Services complaints process. This single policy was reviewed, and a new version published in July 2023.
- 2.3 Stage 1 (local resolution) is dealt with by the Team Managers and Service Managers responsible for the service. The emphasis is on trying to reach a resolution. If a resolution is not reached, the complainant has the right to escalate matters to stage 2 (review).

2.4 Stage 2 (Review) complaints for children’s statutory social care services are handled by an independent investigator. The whole process is overseen and monitored by the complaints service.

2.5 Stage 3 is where an independent review is conducted by a panel of professionals and senior managers from the service in which the complaint is from.

3. Context – Service provision in 2023/2024

3.1 The Children’s Social Care teams provide a statutory social work service to support families, protect children and care for looked after children.

3.2 We have a duty to help any child under the age of 18 years who lives in the borough and who is considered to be ‘in need’ as defined by the Children Act (1989). This means:

- children who need extra help or services to achieve good levels of health and development
- disabled children
- children who are at risk of harm
- children who, for whatever reason, are unable to live at home.

3.3 There has been an increase in contacts and referrals to Camden children’s social care in the last year 2023-24. This also replicates the national landscape where children services continue to experience a high level of pressure and challenge when keeping our most vulnerable children safe.

Despite the increased challenges, the complaints children services receive at stage 1, make up approximately 1.93% of the open cases. While the complaints raised to children social care are not exclusively from open cases the vast majority are. This demonstrates how well practitioners work to build positive relationships with the children and families they work with, so that together they can resolve any issues that arise.

4. Overview of Complaints Data 2023-2024

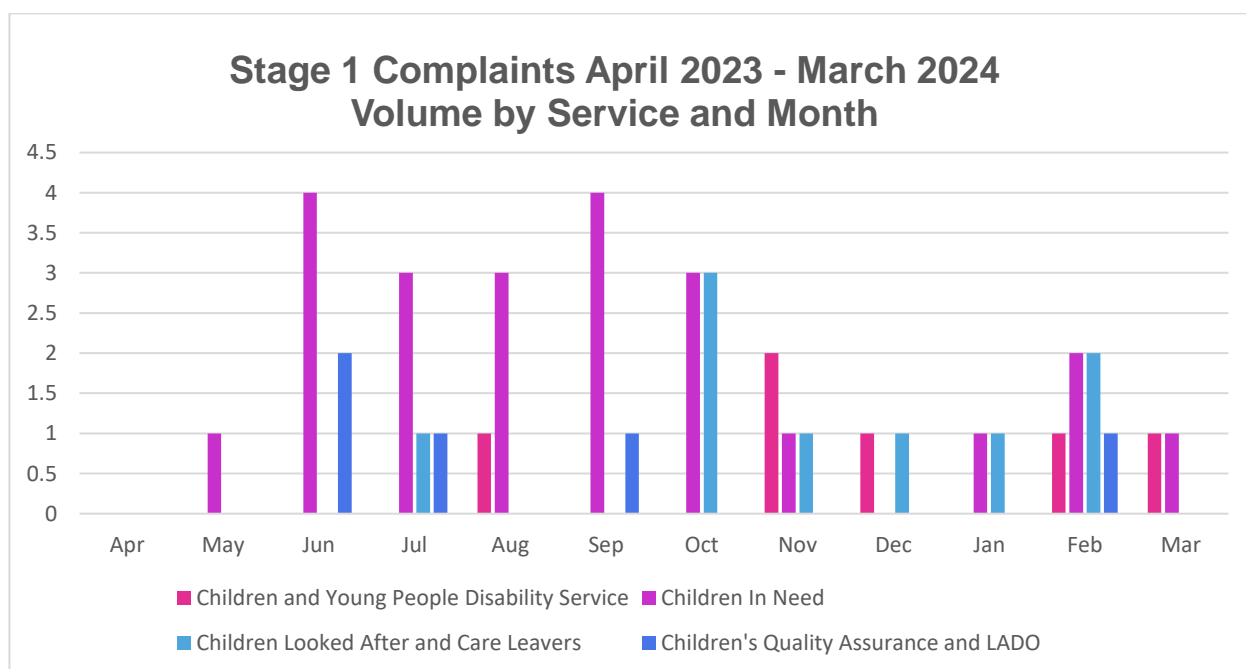
Stage 1 complaints

4.1 There was a total of **43** complaints related to children’s statutory social work services that went through the formal stage 1 process last year (2023/2024). This is an increase of 14 (67%) on 2022/2023, however this is indicative of the increased volume of contacts and referrals Camden Children’s Social Care received last year.

4.2 The table below compares volume, performance and outcome data over the last five years in Camden, for children’s statutory services.

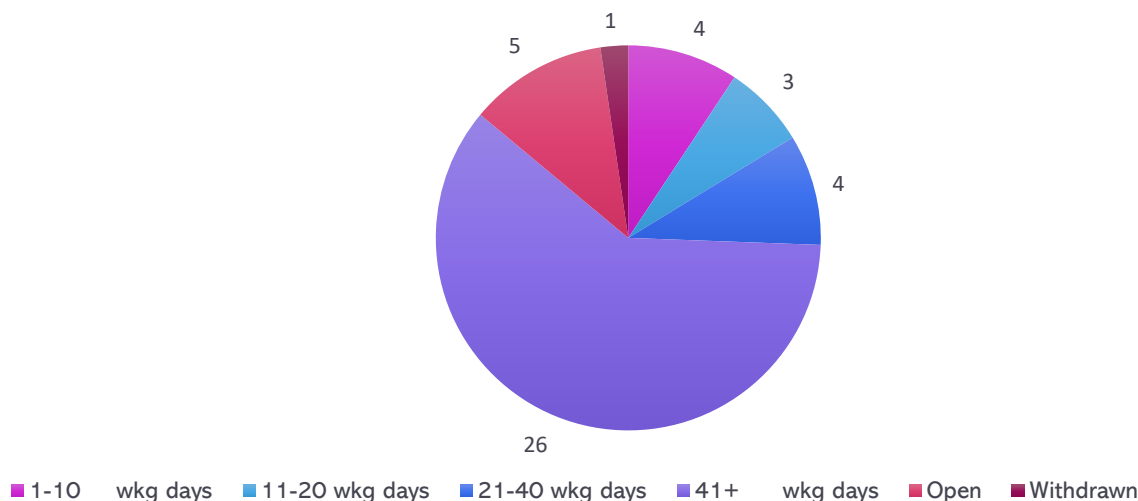
Year	Stage 1	Stage 1 upheld	% upheld	Stage 1 % within 10 days	Stage 1 % within 1-20 days*
2023/2024	43	2	5%	9%	16%
2022/2023	29	0	0%	14%	21%
2021/2022	43	2	5%	7%	23%
2020/2021	49	1	2%	20%	33%
2019/2020	71	6	8%	25%	44%

* = total cases responded to between 1 day and 20 days (includes 1-10 figures)



4.3 The table shows an increased volume of complaints in June and September 2024 for the Child in need service this equals 53.4% of the complaints raised in Children’s Social Care. There is an increase in complaints for the Children Looked After service in October 2023 and February 2024. 20.9% of the complaints raised are from this service, 13.9% are from Children with Disabilities and 11.6% of the complaints were raised for the Quality Assurance service, Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO’s), Child Protections Officers (CPO’s), and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

Stage 1 Performance Time taken to respond



N.B All cases reported as open on 31st March 2024 are now closed.

4.4 The data shows that 9% of complaints made to children services were responded to within 1-10 working days, 7% were responded to within 11- 20 working days, 9% were responded to within 21- 40 working days, and 60% were responded to within 40+ working days. 12% of the complaints remained open on the 31st of March 24 and 2% of the complaints were withdrawn.

4.5 There has been significant quality assurance activity to understand the challenges to responding to more complaints within 10 to 20 working days. It has been found that the delay in responses is due to several reasons, which have been addressed collaboratively by the Corporate Complaints team and Children’s Social Care. As a result, the Quality Assurance service within the Directorate of Relational Practice, has now introduced a new system which will address the delay and improve response times. The new system is discussed in more detail below.

4.8 The regulations provide a deadline of 10 working days for the council to conclude complaints at Stage 1 (local resolution). However, this may be extended to 20 working days if the complaint is complex, and the council requires more time to investigate.

This extension is legitimate if the complainant is kept informed of the extension and communication is maintained with the complainant until the full response is provided. The service must enter the new deadline onto the dashboard and provide reason for the extension.

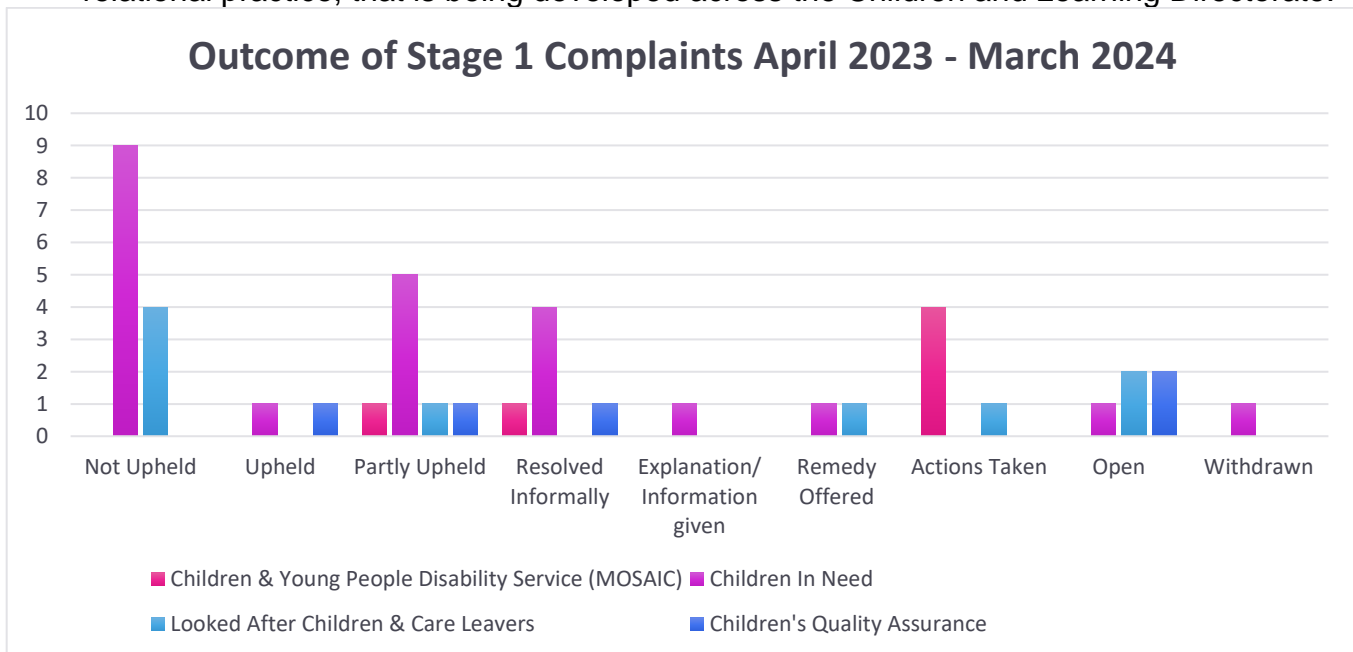
5. Types of complaints at Stage 1 by service area

Service	Lack of Communication	Disagree with a	Quality of Service	Lack of Information/ Advice/	Staff behaviour / poor	Delay in providing a service	TOTAL

		decision/ action		Access to service	customer service		
Children Looked After	4 (5)	2 (0)	1 (2)	1 (0)	1 (0)	0 (1)	9 (8)
Children In Need	11 (7)	6 (4)	4 (2)	1 (0)	1 (2)	0 (2)	23 (17)
Children and young people with Disabilities	3 (1)	1 (1)	0 (1)	1 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0)	6 (3)
Quality Assurance	3 (1)	0 (0)	2 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	5 (1)
TOTAL	21	9	7	3	2	1	43
2022/2023	(14)	(5)	(5)	(0)	(2)	(3)	(29)

N.B The figures in brackets are for (2022/2023)

The data shows that our children and families complain mostly about the lack of communication from practitioners. Attending to communication is an integral aspect of relational practice, that is being developed across the Children and Learning Directorate.



Above are the outcomes provided to the complainant at stage 1 for 2023/2024. 29% of the complaints raised in the last year were not upheld, 18% were partly upheld and 13% were resolved informally 13% had actions taken by the service, and in 4% of the cases a remedy was offered to the complainant. 4% of the complaints at stage 1 for 2023/2024 were upheld.

6. Learning Outcomes from stage 1 complaints

6.1 Colleagues from different services should agree who leads on collating a reply for complaints.

6.2 Advocates to be offered for all meetings.

- 6.3 An apology offered at an earlier stage to resolve issues quickly.
- 6.4 Better communication with clear explanations should be provided to families consistently.
- 6.5 Difficulties in securing housing can lead to parents making complaints.
- 6.6 Better explanation of the role of the LADO, Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) Checks and Sarah's law. *Sarah's Law, or the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme allows parents, carers and guardians to ask the police to tell them if someone has a criminal record for child sexual offences.*
- 6.7 Better planning is needed when visiting families.
- 6.8 More transparent communication with families about process.
- 6.9 It is important to provide families with adequate notice of home visits and dates for key meetings.
- 6.10 Managers should have a more robust review of the work when social workers are off sick to avoid delays in actions.
- 6.11 It is important to inform families if social workers are on sick leave.
- 6.12 Consideration to be given as to whether the threshold criteria should be shared with parents.
- 6.13 Better more appropriate support to be given to parents with dyslexia.
- 6.14 Be aware of communication with family members when cases are very busy and immediate actions to safeguard a child needs to be taken.
- 6.15 More clarity needed about the role of Children Services Social Worker (CSSW) in sharing information with the family members. Ensure only family members with PR receive information if consent is not given.
- 6.16 Ensure rationale for decisions are clearly recorded on the case file.
- 6.17 Decisions should be made more routinely in collaboration with the family members.

7. Children Social Care Summary Stage 1

- 7.1 Overall, there has been an increase of 14 complaints to Children Social Care for last year that have escalated to stage 1. There is a decline in the response times with the data showing that the majority (60%) of our complainants wait 40+ days for a response.
- 7.2 There have been thorough investigations into the reasons complaints are not being responded to in a timelier way. There have been some system and process challenges, which have been addressed collaboratively by the Corporate Complaints Team and Children Social Care. As a result, Children's Social Care now have a dedicated single point of contact complaints inbox. All complaints are now sent to the CSC inbox, which is monitored by a service manager in the quality assurance service.
- 7.3 This ensures complaints are seen, opened and responded to in line with the complaints policy and procedures. This failsafe should significantly improve the service and response times in this area. The service manager ensures the complaint is sent to the correct manager and service area, then followed up within 5 days. If there is a delay in the response this is explored resolved or investigated and escalated to senior managers as necessary.
- 7.4 There are weekly checks of the complaint's dashboard and an updated tracker that is shared with all senior managers. The aim of the new system is to track, monitor and provide weekly updates to the senior leadership team to ensure escalation, challenge and accountability as part of the process. This new way of working has already been

presented to the Senior Managers within Children’s Social Care. The changes have already increased performance and is expected to show significant improvement in the next reporting year.

8 Outcomes at Stage 2 by service area

- 8.1 If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, the complainant can request a full investigation (Stage 2), leading to a report. An external Investigating Officer is commissioned, and an independent person is appointed to observe and ensure the investigation is carried out fairly and impartially.
- 8.2 Both the Investigating Officer and Independent Person will submit reports to the Council, making recommendations. A senior officer will then act as Adjudicating Officer and approve a response to the report, either accepting or disputing the findings. These adjudications are prepared by the complaints team with input from the relevant service areas.

(2022/2023 figures in brackets)

Service	Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not Upheld	With drawn	Open	Total
Children and Young People with Disabilities Service (CYPDS)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (0)	1 (0)	3 (0)
Children Looked After & Care Leavers	0 (0)	0 (1)	0 (0)	1 (2)	1 (0)	2 (3)
Children in Need	1 (0)	0 (1)	1 (0)	2 (3)	0 (1)	4 (5)
Quality Assurance	0 (0)	1 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0)	0 (0)	2 (0)

N.B All complaints open after the 31st March 24 are now closed.

- 8.3 Out of 43 complaints raised at stage 1, 11 (25.5%) were not resolved and escalated to stage 2. 1 was upheld, 1 partially upheld, 1 not upheld, 6 were withdrawn, which means resolutions were found outside of the complaints process and 1 remained open after the 31st March 24.

9. Children Social Care Summary Stage 2

Children Social Care have a variety of methods to try and resolve complaints at this stage such as having face to face meetings with children and families, holding an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) session, learning from complaints as part of auditing activity, gaining face to face feedback from families, and sharing best practice with the partnership. The emphasis is to continue to work swiftly and robustly to resolve issues. Attending to a relational approach is key, a respectful stance to the children and families we work with as an approach to resolve issues. It remains more important to find a timely suitable resolution to complaints rather than to uphold or not uphold an outcome.

10. Learning Outcomes from Stage 2

- CSSW are to ensure information shared is factually correct.
- CSSW are to recognise the impact and distress to the complainant.
- Consideration to be given to how managers share learning from complaints in supervision as a way of improving practice.
- Being open and transparent, apologising when necessary and putting apologies in writing.
- Ensure agreements reached at child protection conferences are adhered to and reconvened if plans are to be amended.

All the learning outcomes are shared in practice and learning forums and service meetings to ensure children's social care are learning from the complaints received.

11. Sources of Complaints

Most of the complaints received are from parents and carers.

12. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

- 12.1 Residents may complain to the LGSCO at any stage of the complaints process. However, the Ombudsman expects the resident to utilise the Council's procedures before they begin their investigation.

13. LGSCO Cases Reviewed for 2023/2024

The LGSCO made decisions on **10** cases under its category: 'Education and Children's Services'

Decision	Total
Upheld – maladministration & injustice	1 (3)
Upheld – maladministration no injustice	0 (0)
Not Upheld	0 (1)
Incomplete/Invalid	0 (0)
Closed in 12 months)	1 (0)
Closed (Court proceedings)	1 (0)
Premature (referred back for local resolution)	7 (2)
TOTAL	10 (6)

N.B LGSCO Cases for 2022-2023 in brackets

From LGSCO Annual Review Letter 2023~2024 Click on link: [London Borough of Camden - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)

14. LGSCO cases detail – Upheld

No.	Service	Summary of case	Findings	Remedies & Service Improvements
1	Education & Children's Services 23007502	Mr B complained that the Council in respect of his statutory complaint about children's services, had failed to recognise the injustice caused by the identified fault and failed to offer a sufficient payment to put matters right. This has caused Mr B distress and inconvenience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delay in completing all three stages of complaints process • failed to give Mr B sufficient notice of the move, the opportunity to visit before he moved and failed to carry out a risk assessment to identify the mobility issues with the first accommodation. • did not hold a separate pathway plan review or properly involved Mr B in that review 	<p>Financial remedy: Avoidable distress/time and trouble –</p> <p>10 weeks of delay in complaint handling £80 offered by the Council is reasonable.</p> <p>the disruption, poor planning and short notice of the moves, combined with the lack of involvement in the pathway plan review, the Council should increase the compensation from £200 to £400.</p> <p>Overall: increased payment from £280 to £480.</p>

15. Finance Comments of the Executive Director Corporate Services

The report is noted by the Director of Finance and there are no significant financial implications.

16. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

The Council is required by Section 26 of the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 to have a complaints process. The regulations require the Council to produce an annual report as soon as possible at the end of each financial year.

The Council should follow the statutory guidance in relation to children's social care unless exceptional circumstances justify a departure. The statutory guidance requires that the report should cover:

- representations made to the local authority;
- the number of complaints at each stage and any that were considered by the Local Government Ombudsman;
- which customer groups made the complaints;
- the types of complaints made;
- the outcome of complaints;
- details about advocacy services provided under these arrangements;
- compliance with timescales, and complaints resolved within extended timescale as agreed;
- learning and service improvement, including changes to services that have been implemented and details of any that have not been implemented; - a summary of statistical data about the age, gender, disability, sexual orientation and ethnicity of complainants; and
- a review of the effectiveness of the complaints procedure.

17. Environmental Implications

There are no environmental implications within this report.

18. Appendices

Appendix 1 ~ Coram Voice – Advocacy Services Report 2023/2024

REPORT ENDS