



Adult Care: Complaints & Compliments

# Annual Report

April 2021 to March 2022

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## 1.0 Introduction

This is the Adult Care Annual Complaints and Compliments report for the financial year 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. It covers activity in Adult Care relating to complaints received and handled through the Council's statutory complaints procedure.

Whilst our service works closely with adults and their families to ensure they understand what is happening or will happen when they receive care and support from us, there may be times where things go wrong. Our aim is to resolve and learn from those concerns raised to identify when we are not getting things right and what we need to do to improve our services to ensure it does not happen again.

This report provides an overview and analysis of the handling of feedback received in the form of complaints and compliments about Adult Care services. Its objectives are:

- To meet our statutory obligation to produce an annual report.
- To review the effectiveness of the compliments and complaints procedures.
- To provide concise comparable data on feedback received about our services.
- To identify service improvements from complaints and compliments and demonstrate learning to improve our practices and processes.
- To show our commitment to transparency and a positive approach to dealing with and learning from complaints.

Adult Care staff will always try to resolve a concern or issue before it is progressed through the complaints process however, there are occasions when we are unable to achieve this. Complaints in the year concerning communication were related to issues about the quality, accuracy, and

timeliness of information, but primarily about how lack of information creates perceptions of adults feeling uninvolved in decisions affecting them.

Those complaints about staff attitude/conduct have been reviewed to gain a better understanding of the reasons behind those concerns. A common theme was that adults were unhappy with the way information had been given to them and the staff members' language used. It is important to note that complaints regarding staff attitude and behaviour were raised in conjunction with a complaint about a practice decision or action made by the member of staff.

It is common for a complaint to involve different services including for example the NHS, GP practices, and care providers. Each complaint is dealt with on a case-by-case basis with Adult Care taking the lead and liaising with those agencies to ensure the complainant receives one coordinated response.

On occasion there are safeguarding concerns raised within a complaint. Those concerns are referred directly to the Adult Care Safeguarding Team to be progressed through our statutory requirement to carry out enquiries to decide whether any further action should be taken.

## **2.0 Overview of the Statutory Adults Complaints Procedure**

All councils in England who deliver an adult social care service have a statutory duty to investigate complaints about care under the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) regulations 2009.

The regulations provide a framework for those handling a complaint about social care services and any of our commissioned services.

Complaints can be made by the adult receiving the service from Adult Care or commissioned by the Council. A complaint can also be made by a representative acting on behalf of the adult such as a family member, where

the adult has provided their written consent. The Council must be satisfied that the complaint being made by the representative is in the best interests of the adult.

In line with the statutory regulations, we will only investigate concerns raised within 12 months of the incident that is the cause of the complaint. The Council can apply discretion to investigate complaints over the time limit if there are extenuating circumstances.

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council is required under statutory regulations, to report annually on the number of complaints received by Adult Social Care services.

Adult Care complaints are managed through a one stage procedure and have processes in place for all complaints and related feedback to ensure they are dealt with efficiently, effectively, investigated thoroughly, and any faults rectified quickly.

Should a complaint not be resolved through this process, a referral can be made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will independently review the complaint to determine if there is any fault and identify recommendations to remedy that fault. A complaint can only be referred to the Ombudsman after the final response is issued by the Council.

### **3.0 Accessing the Adult Care complaints procedure**

Adult Care encourages adults and their carers who use our services to provide their feedback to us whether it is negative or positive on the care and support they have received.

Our complaints procedure and compliments, concerns and complaints form is readily available from our website and distributed to the public during our involvement with them. We have a dedicated webpage for feedback to adult

social care which contains details of how to make a compliment, concern, or complaint to us.

We also have an easy read version of our complaints procedure which is aimed at adults with learning disabilities and those adults who may find it easier to understand a simplified version.

## 4.0 Role of the Complaints Officer

The Adult Care Complaints Officer oversees and provides complaint management to Adult Care. They offer training, advice, and support to staff in handling complaints and perform a quality assurance role in the complaint process. The Complaints Officer will keep complainants informed on the progress of their complaints and provide advice and guidance to complainants about the Adult Care Complaints Procedure and referrals to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

At the conclusion of the complaint investigation, the Complaints Officer facilitates a lessons learnt meeting with key members of staff involved in the investigation, to capture the learning and improvements from the complaint. This is recorded and monitored by the complaints administration team to give assurance those improvements have been made and any agreed actions completed. Learning from complaints is shared in our Adults Practice Improvement Meetings on a bi-monthly basis to improve our service and practice quality.

## 5.0 Key Findings/Summary

- Adult Care supported 3,425 adults and their carers between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. This includes all direct and commissioned services for short-term, one-off services and longer-term support.
- 62 complaints were received in the same period. This represents 1.8% of the total adults supported in this year.
- The most common theme for complaints was poor service delivery (43%) and staff conduct (25%).

- A total of 39 (63%) complaints had an outcome of upheld or partially upheld.
- 7 (12%) complaints were not upheld. 11(19%) complaints were handled informally.
- Compliments have increased by 51% when compared to the previous year.

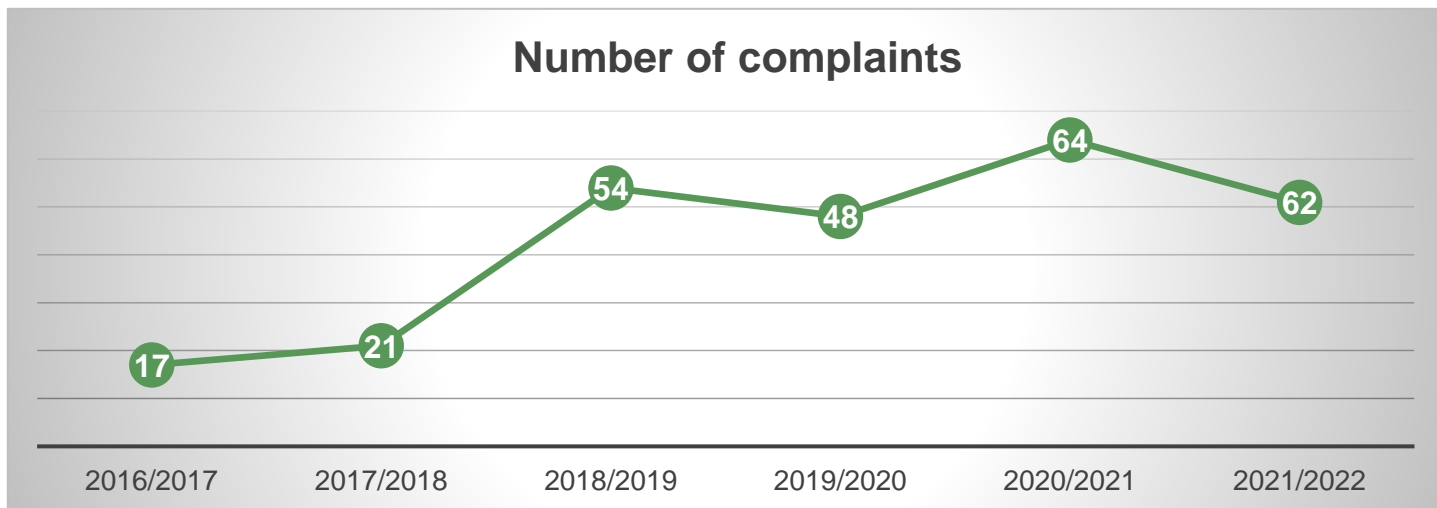
During the 2021-22 reporting period, Adult Care was operating in unprecedented times for a second year, with the priority and focus of our staff on vulnerable residents and ensuring appropriate support was provided.

The complaint outcomes from the period highlighted that there was still a need for workers to ensure that service users and family members received appropriate, relevant, and accurate information. This resulted in social workers being reminded across the service as part of team meetings, 1:1 supervision about the importance of recording decisions and when information is provided and to whom. This is also reinforced with case file audits that are conducted twice a year looking at a random sample across services.

## 6.0 Number of Complaints

62 statutory complaints were received during 2021/22. From the 62 complaints received, 11 were handled informally, and 3 were withdrawn during the investigation at the complainant's request.

The graph below shows the number of complaints received between 2016/17 and 2021/22.



The chart below shows quarterly comparative data for complaints for the last 6 years.



### 6.1 Time taken to respond to complaints in 2021/22

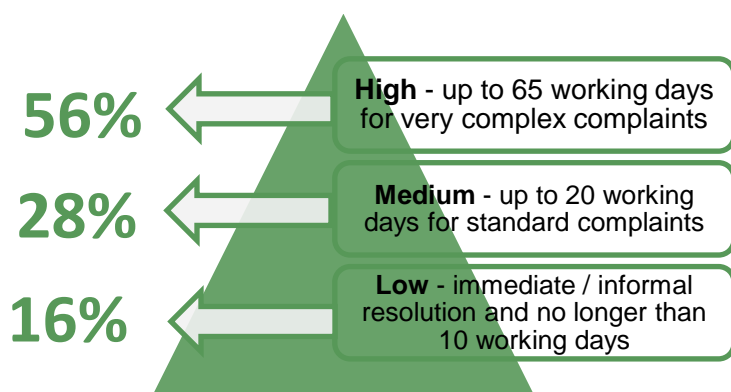
It is important to note that when something is wrong, we act quickly to remedy the issue to ensure adults and their carers are supported and safe; and we do not wait until the outcome of the investigation to put things right.

We have set a general target of twenty working days to provide a full written response to a complaint. In addition to this, Adult Care has an internal process for categorising complaints as low, medium, or high depending on



the complexity of the complaint received, which can be extended with the complainant's agreement. This is to ensure that each investigation can be tailored to allow for a thorough investigation and to endeavour to achieve the desired outcome of the complainant, which at times can take longer than twenty working days. We do our best to categorise each complaint correctly based on the information we receive from the complainant, however, when the investigation is underway there are times when other issues emerge that mean further time is required to investigate all relevant issues, and reach a properly informed conclusion. The complainant is kept informed of the progress of their complaint and any causes for extension or delay. Other issues which can cause delay in meeting the allocated time frame for formal conclusion include absence of staff who need to be interviewed as part of the investigation and waiting for a third party to respond.

In 2021/22 the timescales to investigate and formally respond to low, medium, and high categories of complaints, and the percentage investigated in each complaint category, is illustrated below.



Although we categorised 56% of complaints as highly complex, the average length of time to conclude a complaint across all complaint categories was 24 days.

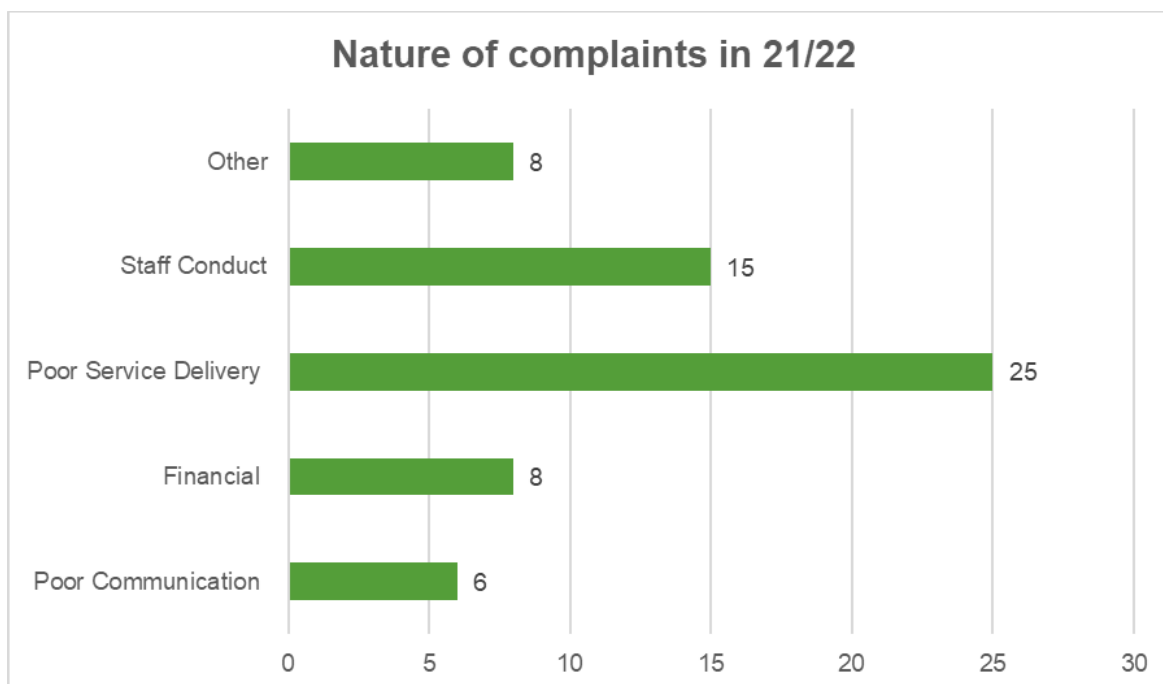
It was a challenging year with many of our staff temporarily focusing on COVID19 related activities and crisis management, to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable adults and their carers. Our complaint response

times in the year were impacted by the availability and pressures of our staff in their efforts to support those adults who were shielding during lockdowns and to continue to try to provide a service where adults feel supported, safe, and involved in decisions about their care. It is anticipated our response times will improve in the 2022/23 year as the pandemic eases and restrictions are lifted.

Despite the challenges and the refocus of our priorities within the reporting year, we continued our complaint investigations and strived to resolve issues in a timely manner. We demonstrated our commitment to ensure concerns and complaints were remedied and any actions were implemented through evidence-based learning to inform training and developmental requirements within the service, identify areas of improvement and celebrate areas of excellence.

## 6.2 Nature of complaints in 2021/22

Due to the complexities of the needs of the adults we support, complaints received by Adult Care will often raise more than one issue however, they are recorded by the “primary” area of concern as shown in the table below:



The categories identified above give an overview of the primary area of concern raised in a complaint. In the reporting year we received complaints about lack of notification of care charges, poor communication about their care planning after a hospital stay and lack of information around discharge to assess funding and associated funding streams.

Of the 8 complaints related to financial matters, all were associated with invoicing and perceived errors in calculations. Many of the key concerns were about the lack of clear information on the charging process following the implementation of the discharge to assess funding during the first part of the pandemic. This new funding model introduced 'up to six weeks' of NHS funded care for new discharges from hospital and rapid response services to prevent avoidable admission to hospital, which later changed to 'up to four weeks' as directed by central government. This change in funding arrangements contributed to a misunderstanding of social care costs and the arrangements following discharge for social care providers to finalise longer term care arrangements.

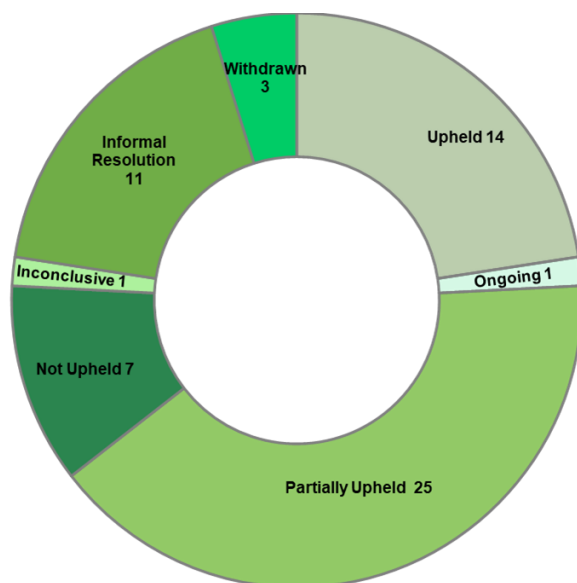
Several complaints were about poor service delivery as the Council experienced difficulties in sourcing new packages of care. This was due to the ongoing national workforce shortage issues which impacted on the local domiciliary care market and our reablement services. Whilst Adult Care strived to increase the number of hours and sourced care packages for those most in need, it is recognised that some adults and their families may feel they received a poor service from the Council as packages of care and choice of care were at times not as readily accessible as in previous years.

## 6.3 Complaint outcomes

When reaching a decision on the outcome of a complaint, we use one of the following definitions:

- Informal Resolution
- Not Upheld
- Partially Upheld
- Upheld

Adult Care complaints are frequently multi-faceted and cover several elements with often multiple resolutions. It is therefore expected some of those complaints will have a mix of outcomes. The below graphic shows the number of outcomes of complaints investigated in the reporting year.



The percentage of ‘upheld’ complaints was 23%, ‘partially upheld’ 40% and ‘not upheld’ complaints were 12%.

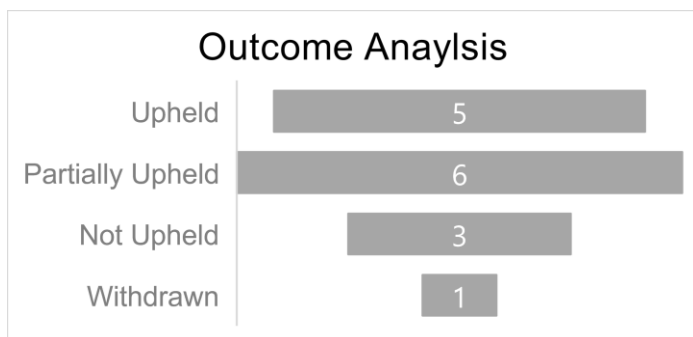
- Withdrawn complaints (5%) were resolved informally to the complainant’s satisfaction.
- One complaint decision (1%) was ‘inconclusive’ as no determination could be made based on differing version of events.
- One complaint remains under investigation from last year which represents 1% of
- the overall figures.

- 18% of complaints were resolved informally and did not progress through the complaints process, they are still included within our overall figures as the themes are fed into organisational learning.

### 6.4 Breakdown of complaints by service area

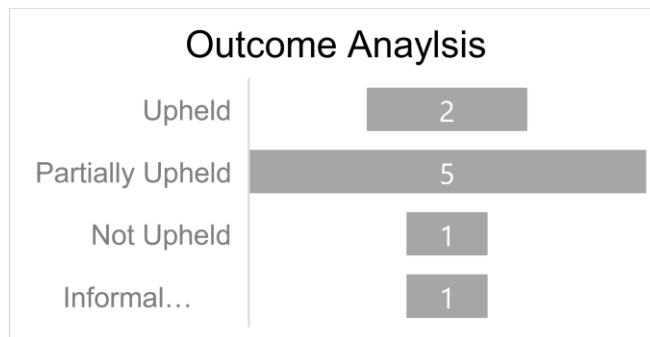
Detailed below is a breakdown of complaint determinations per service area.

#### Learning Disabilities & Mental Health Social Work Services



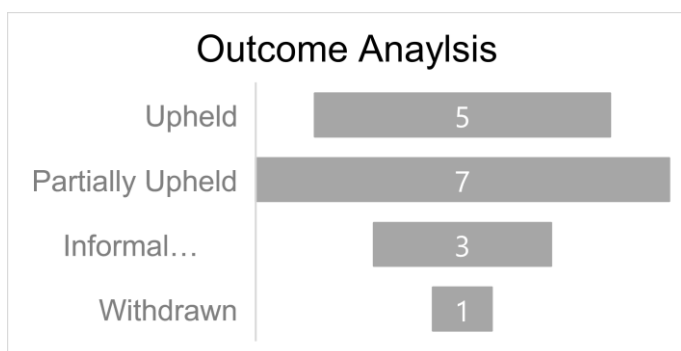
The service area covers social work for Adult Mental Health, Older Persons Mental Health, Adults with Learning Disabilities, and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards.

#### Social Work & Safeguarding



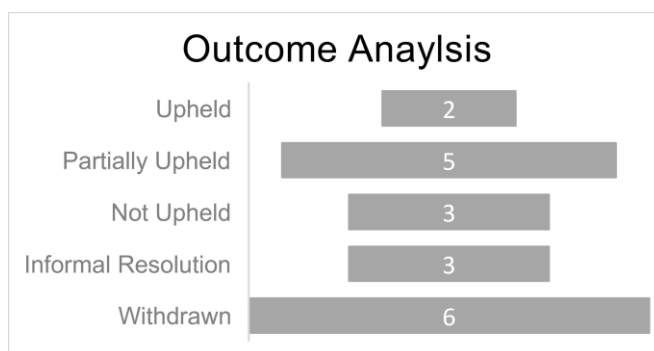
The service area covers social work for Adult Access, Locality Assessment Teams, and the Hospital Social Work Team.

#### Occupational Therapy, Partnerships & Provider Services



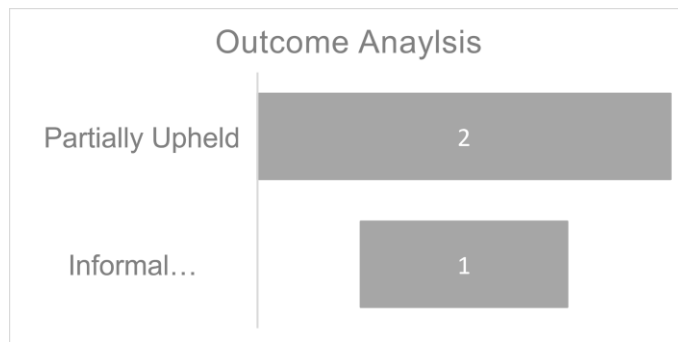
The service area covers the Occupational Therapy Team, Pathways to Independence Teams and other Provider Services.

#### Commissioning & Social Care Finance



The service area covers Commissioning, Brokerage, Social Care Income & Payments, and Property & Financial Affairs.

### Other Service Areas



### 6.5 Complaints to the Local Government Social Care Ombudsman

The Local Government Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) investigates a complaint when it has not been resolved by the Council through our complaints procedure. The Adult Care complaints procedure is a one stage process for all Adult Social Care complaints in Redcar and Cleveland. Complainants can refer their complaint to the Ombudsman should they remain dissatisfied with the response received from us.

Four cases were referred to the Ombudsman during 2021/22. This represents 6% of the complaints received in this year.

In two cases, the Ombudsman decided not to investigate as the Council had apologised for any distress caused by poor communication and were satisfied the remedy had addressed any injustice.

For the remaining two cases, the Ombudsman found fault and recommended a financial remedy. The Ombudsman will recommend a remedy where there has been fault resulting in an injustice to the adult. A financial remedy is recommended only when the complaint has resulted in a quantifiable financial loss as a reimbursement or to acknowledge identified distress.

The two upheld complaints against the authority required actions to be completed and confirmed to the Ombudsman’s office. Those remedies were:

**Case 1** – Within one month of the final decision Adult Care were asked to apologise for distress and frustration caused and pay £250 to the complainant.

**Case 2** – The Council were asked to remedy the outstanding injustice caused by their fault, and recommended £400 for distress caused, to ensure procedural guidance is followed in relation to assessment and any revisions to existing needs assessments are completed by the practitioner involved. Information sharing and communication with adults and their families should be completed in a timely manner.

The LGSCO confirmed the remedy had been completed and outcome satisfied in both cases. The total financial remedies as a result of an Ombudsman investigation in 2021/22 was £650.

## 7.0 Lessons learnt

The focus in dealing with all complaints is seeking a timely and satisfactory resolution, where lessons are learnt and where outcomes from complaints can inform service improvements. Learning from complaints gives us opportunities for improvement to be realised, for issues to be prevented where possible going forward, and to inform our future plans for service delivery.

Through our engagement strategy and activities, we identify a set of commitments and actions we will take to fulfil our promise to put people at the heart of everything we do in Redcar. We achieve this by listening and involving the adults we support as they are best placed to tell us about how we can make positive changes to our services. By analysing trends in complaints, we can use this intelligence to inform our commissioning activities and service delivery. We share new developments/changes in guidance and practice updates, by disseminating through team meetings plus integrating within our quality assurance process. Individual issues and staff/team specific learning is addressed through training, reflection, and supervision.



In addition, further links have been established this year with the Principal Social Worker in order that any learning can be shared, actions are monitored and embedded into practice, and professional development activities for our staff. This open, transparent approach supports our key objective to help adults have longer and healthier lives and be independent for as long as possible.

Examples of learning from complaints for this reporting year are detailed below:

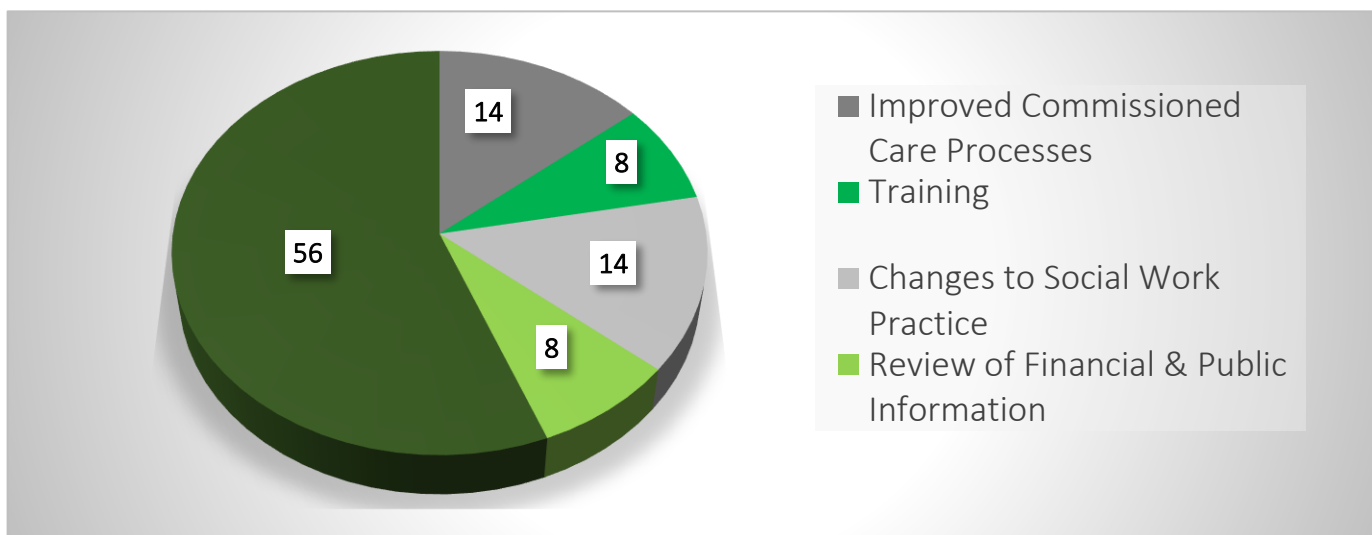
Theme	Recommendation for improvement
Communication	Review of standard letters to adults and/or their representatives explaining the hospital discharge process, alternative contact details and for all appropriate information to be provided when being discharged from hospital.
	Where possible identify a named point of contact/named professional to improve communication between adult care staff and adults using our services.
	Ensure clear communication on the role of the trusted assessor and decision making around placement options.
	Communication improved during the discharge planning process, with relatives being informed about what would happen about long-term care planning and any temporary arrangements, for example discharge arrangements when there is a delay in sourcing a home care provider.
Quality of care	To remind care homes to ensure changes to an adult’s presentation is shared within social care staff at the earliest opportunity, so the suitability of the care placement can be checked, and a review undertaken where necessary.
	We have liaised with care homes to assess and implement safer ways to restrict residents from entering other resident’s rooms.

	<p>Visits not taking place at the scheduled times impacting on important routines such as medication administration; mealtimes and bedtimes.</p> <p>Care home management staff were reminded of the importance of working with adults and their carers to ensure a person-centered care is provided, as family members are a vital part of the adult's life.</p>
Finance	<p>Developed a frequently asked questions (FAQ) on the financial assessment process.</p> <p>All staff were reminded of the importance of discussing financial assessments and charges for services early when talking to adults and their families/carers about next steps after a needs assessment.</p> <p>Bitesize training to all teams regarding finance packs and reiterating the process.</p> <p>Ensure staff are clear about information relating to charging - referring to the finance pack.</p>
	<p>Remind staff to ensure comprehensive case notes are written at time of assessment.</p> <p>Ensuring people have as much information as possible to hand, when making decisions about which provision to choose.</p> <p>The importance of evidencing decision making clearly has continued to be highlighted to teams.</p>

Where a complaint concerns a commissioned service, this is addressed through contract management procedures with lessons learned fed back to the service by the Adult Care Commissioning Team. This shapes the work of the Commissioning Team to review working practices, procedures, policies, and contract compliance with providers to improve the quality of care provision across the social care sector within the borough. The quality

of care is monitored by the team through those contract compliance mechanisms which includes quality assurance visits, working with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) where a provider is not meeting the standard of care or their regulated function, and following up on safeguarding concerns where appropriate.

### 7.1 Learning actions



Of the 62 complaints investigated last year, 34 investigations identified actions such as training for staff, improvements to our processes, changes to working practices and revision of our documentation to be implemented.

The table above shows an overview of the actions taken as a result of learning from complaints.

### 8.0 Equal opportunities monitoring

Whilst efforts have been made to monitor the ethnic origin of the Councils’ complainants many have elected not to complete the diversity questionnaire. Due to the limited data returned, a true and accurate reflection of equalities monitoring cannot be reported.

## 9.0 COMPLIMENTS

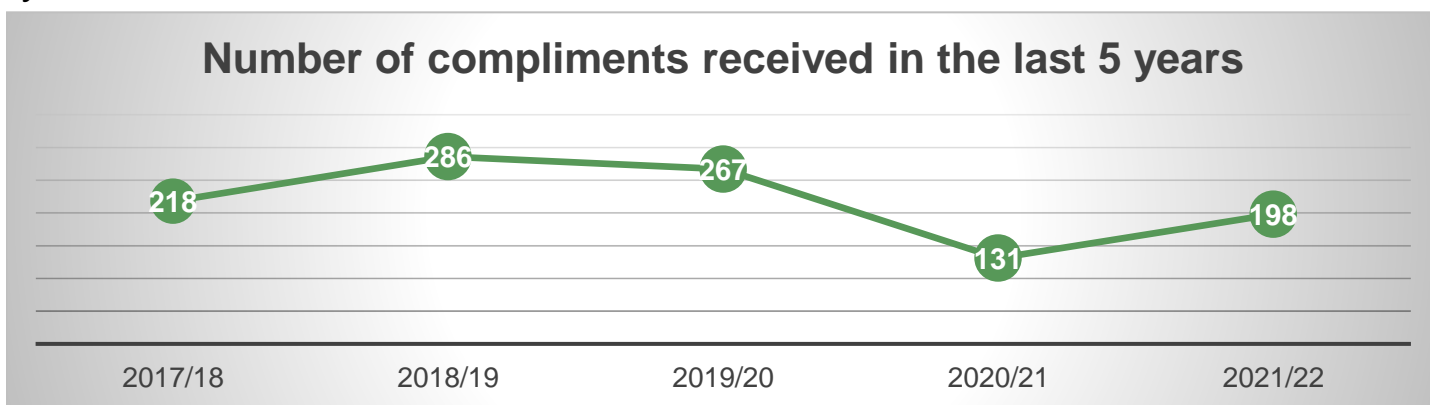
### 9.1 What is a compliment?

Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council’s Adult Care Complaints and Compliments Policy states a compliment is: *“When someone is happy with the service they have received and wishes to express their thanks or appreciation.”*

### 9.2 Number of compliments

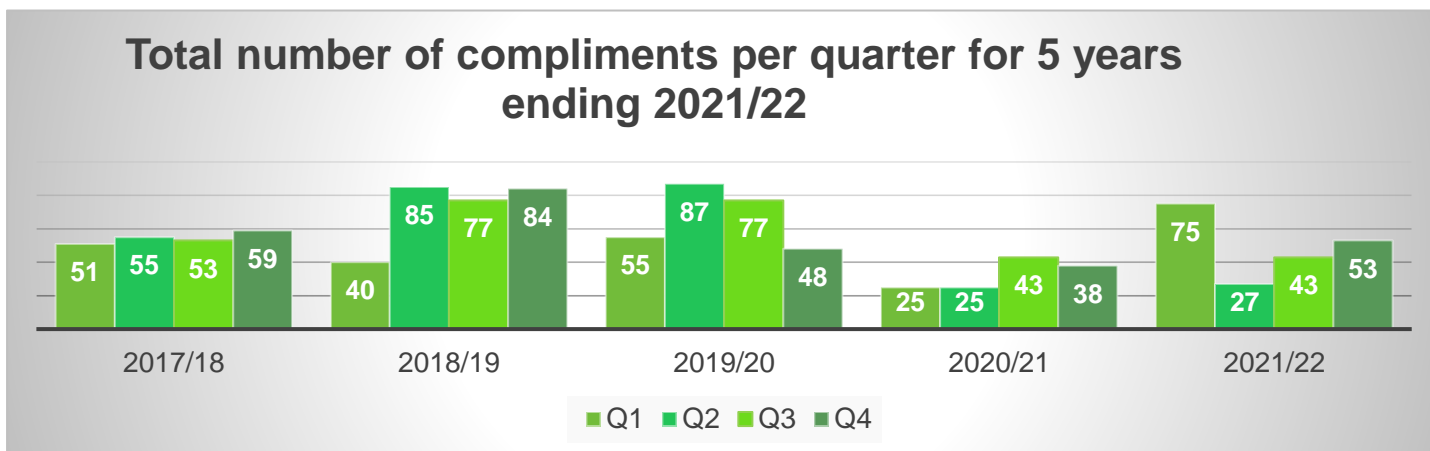
We received 198 compliments in 2021/22; compared to 131 in 2020/21. Compliments evidence how Adult Care is meeting the key qualities adults and their carers expect from a social care service such as being treated with dignity, respect, staff being caring, responsive to people’s needs, being effective and well-led.

The table below shows the number of compliments received over the last 5 years.



Compliments are received by letter, email, thank you cards and feedback forms. They are recorded and the members of staff involved are congratulated by the senior management team on their good practice. We use feedback received from compliments to affirm when services are working well and have made a positive impact on adults accessing our service.

The chart below shows the quarterly breakdown of compliments over the last five years.



## 9.3 Detailed analysis



Across the Adult Care service, the Reablement and Independence Team within our in-house Provider Service continues to receive by far the highest number of compliments from external parties.

The next section shows ten anonymised quotes from compliments we have received in the reporting year.

## 10.0 Adult Social Care 2021/22 Compliments

*“I wish to thank X for the help she provided related to my mother-in-law’s move to X Care Home. X provided excellent service with keeping us informed and advised through what could have been a difficult time. She showed care and respect for my mother-in-law and ensured that she fully understood her options and so was able to make an informed decision about her care”.*

*“To all the staff at X, a very big thank you for all of the care and support I have received from a fantastic team.”*

*“I feel I need to take this opportunity to express my appreciation of X. X is a fantastic social worker; she is so invested in the people she supports. She is a credit to your team. Extremely efficient, and reliable.”*

*“The service & help was 1st class when my wife suffered following two separate falls. The care worker went above her line of duty to make possible my wife’s entry into X Care Home for respite.”*

*“Thank you for your support and getting things moving very quickly after your assessment. It was very much appreciated by all the family and prevented me from having to make a formal complaint relating to the lack of communication and timescales of assessments. We need more people like you working with families having to deal with difficult situations.”*

*“I am wanting to just make you aware of the amazing progress X has made so far with one of our residents at X Care Home. We have struggled for some time, to ensure we get his support right. X came in for a visit last week, has made such a positive impact to this gentleman and we are most grateful.”*

*“During a consultation meeting held with X Care Home yesterday, the manager expressed her gratitude and wanted to specifically acknowledge the support that you have provided.”*

*“All the staff are lovely. I have changed my life completely. I have hope. I am not frightened.”*

*“Just writing to say thank you for all your help with my mum’s care. It was a difficult time for us, so it was nice to deal with someone as caring as yourself. I know you will probably say you were only doing your job, but we appreciated everything you did for us.”*

*“Can I say a massive thank you to X who went above and beyond to help me with the help in getting my mum an adjustable chair that is as fully supported and cushioned so that she could be hoisted out of bed and have some quality of life in her twilight year. X was amazing she never gave up on my mum and her needs never minded my phone calls and met me at the care home to go through mums needs with myself and staff.”*

## 11.0 Conclusion

Adult Care has continued to see complaints as an opportunity and a valuable resource to continuously improve our service. Our complaints and compliments procedure aims to offer adults and their families with a process to solve problems or disagreements as well as provide an opportunity to make positive suggestions, comments, and compliments. All feedback is welcomed to ensure we keep the person at the heart of everything we do, and do our utmost to provide the best service possible.

We acknowledge our complaint response times were affected during the pandemic at the start of the year. Many of our services were closed or reduced as we focused on supporting vulnerable adults and those shielding. Our staff completed welfare checks and regular calls to those residents to ensure they had the required support. However, as restrictions were easing in 2021/22, our response times improved as we started to return to a normal service delivery as the impact of the pandemic showed signs of lessening.

We are committed to involve, engage, consult and work with adults and their carers, to help them understand what we do, to voice their opinions on our services, know how to get involved and have access to information and advice about care and support.

Within Adult Care we are reviewing our engagement approach to enhance the adult's experience by introducing new communication features and developing a new engagement platform to publish and promote all consultations in a single, easily accessible point. This new site will aim to give residents an opportunity to take part in consultations through online surveys to help us target resources smartly and reinvest in our services to deliver excellent value for money and achieve better outcomes for residents. It is envisaged this open and transparent approach will identify what our service standards are, where advice can be sought, work collaboratively with our staff, our residents, and providers to gain insight to inform decision



making when designing our transaction journey. A new two-way consultation process will further enhance this work by giving us the opportunity to use the site to inform the public how we acted on the results of those consultations and provide feedback to demonstrate we have listened to their views.

In addition to the engagement platform, we are implementing other service forums, groups, panels and focus groups for local people to get involved and have their say. We will use consultation methods that make best use of our resources and give the best results for the target audience. We will be prepared to try new ideas and different approaches to improve our approach to consultation and engagement.

We continue to refresh and improve our information portfolio to empower people to get consistent, quality, and accurate information about the services available, so they can make informed choices about their own health and wellbeing as well as those they care for and support.

We have collaborated with colleagues in our corporate communications team to revise our webpages by making it quicker and easier to access with improved navigation and search functions. Work has also taken place to improve the relevance and consistency of content across the Adult Care webpages.

We will continually learn from complaints to improve monitoring of actions and make improvements to our service provision. We will do this by better monitoring of learning lessons through agreed action plans, open dialogue with our staff, and regular monitoring to the Adult Care management team and practice improvement meetings.

As we now return to a sense of normality, it is positive to see our teams recommence face-to-face social care contact, to have our frontline services such as day centres reopened, and for families to have contact with their loved ones. Adult Care has had some exceptional challenges in recent years, but we are confident we can continue to grow, learn, and improve

from feedback to help adults and their families to achieve their desired outcomes and support them to make a difference to their lives and wellbeing.