

Compliments & Complaints Annual Report 2024 - 2025

Foreword

As the Director responsible for the feedback received into the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, I am very pleased to present the Compliments & Complaints Annual Report for 2024/2025.

I am delighted to report that the Trust received 3,846 compliments throughout the year, and I appreciate the time that people have taken to acknowledge the services provided by our staff and teams.

As a Trust, we welcome the complaints received as this information is used to learn lessons and improve our services.

We are committed to achieving the best outcomes for all of our patients and clients, and when things do not go well, we wish to know so that the appropriate remedial action can be taken to prevent it happening again.

The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, NIPSO, introduced a Model Complaints Handling Procedure in local governments in July 2023. NIPSO will roll this statutory procedure out to all healthcare bodies in July 2025 with an aim of the Trust having this fully implemented by January 2026. The Model Complaints Handling Procedure will focus on early resolution and we look forward to seeing the improvements this makes to our complaints handling service.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our staff for their continued dedication to the resolution of complaints and for their sensitive handling of issues that are important to complainants.



Charlie Martyn
Medical Director

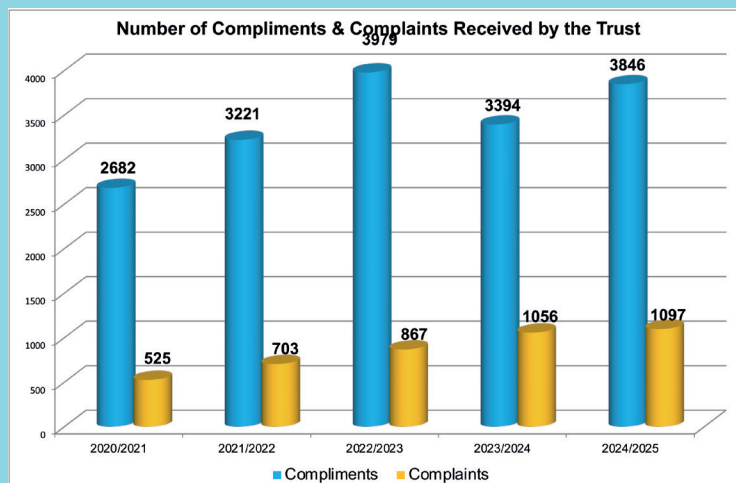
Facts & Figures

In the year 2024/2025:

- **3,846** compliments were received
- **1,097** complaints were received
- **43%** of complaints were responded to within 20 working days
- The top **3** reasons of complaint for both formal and informal complaints were Quality of Treatment & Care; Staff Attitude / Behaviour and issues relating to Communication / Information.

How did we do this year?

During the past year (2024/2025), the Trust received **3,846** compliments and **1,097** complaints (previous year 3,394 compliments / 1,056 complaints). The graph below shows the number of compliments received per year in comparison to the number of complaints.



Care Opinion



Care Opinion is the regional Health & Social Care Online User Feedback System which was launched August 2020 to support the public to share their experience stories with the Trust and have a direct response made by the service where the care experience took place.

We have seen a 43% increase in stories shared compared to the previous year. During 2024/2025, the Trust had 833 stories shared by our service users, families and carers. Every story has a criticality score assigned by moderators (not the public) to stories, on a score from 0 (not critical) to 5 (severely critical). Across 2024/2025, we received no stories rated criticality score 4 or 5, with only 3% of stories rated criticality score 3 (moderately critical). Overall, 87% of stories shared were of an entirely positive nature and rated criticality score 0.

The key theme from the most common tags added by story authors showcase that our staff are being recognised for their attitude and behaviour (friendly, professional, kind). Positive and negative stories are used to make improvements and to widen and accelerate learning.

Compliments

Whilst the Trust recognises that sometimes things go wrong, each year the Trust receives thousands of expressions of appreciation and thanks to acknowledge the excellent services provided.

We are proud of our staff and ensure that positive feedback is shared and celebrated. Our staff certainly appreciate feedback from their patients and clients, and knowing when things go well.

In 2024/2025 the Trust received **3,846** compliments (see below for some examples).

Please see table below which shows the subjects of compliments by the method received.

Subjects of Compliments by Method Received	Card	Email	Feedback Form	Formal Verbal	Letter	Social Media	Care Opinion	Total
Quality of Treatment and Care	1195	159	148	252	35	12	526	2327
Staff Attitude & Behaviour	249	121	198	57	15	5	296	941
Information & Communication	17	12	6	7	1	9	131	183
Environment	5	3	2	0	0	5	47	62
Other	77	2	15	219	4	4	12	333
Total	1543	297	369	535	55	35	1012	3846

“Great care and professionalism was shown when I brought my son in following an incident when he fainted and split his head. We were seen promptly and the staff took care in explaining what was happening at all stages. A positive experience following a scary incident. Thank you.”

“The nurse was amazing during my 9 week admission to the mental health inpatient unit. She held me while I cried and went above & beyond for me. She made time for me when I was struggling, encouraged me to eat and engage in healthier coping strategies.”

“The doctor and nurse at the diabetes clinic were great with my dad, explaining everything clearly regarding his diabetes and any testing he is to do. The nurse has kept in touch adjusting his insulin as required, very helpful service.”

“We had a fabulous team of community physiotherapists, helping my father in law regain strength and stamina in his walking. They were friendly, warm, and professional in their care. My father in law looked forward to them coming. He suffers with dementia so having the physiotherapist communicate so well with him and have him participate so well in his exercises has been great to watch.”

“From arriving at Downpatrick Hospital, I have nothing but praise for all the staff - meet and greeter, porter, receptionist and nurses. My mother is 94 years old and she is now not dreading coming for the procedure, her insecurities have been put to rest.”

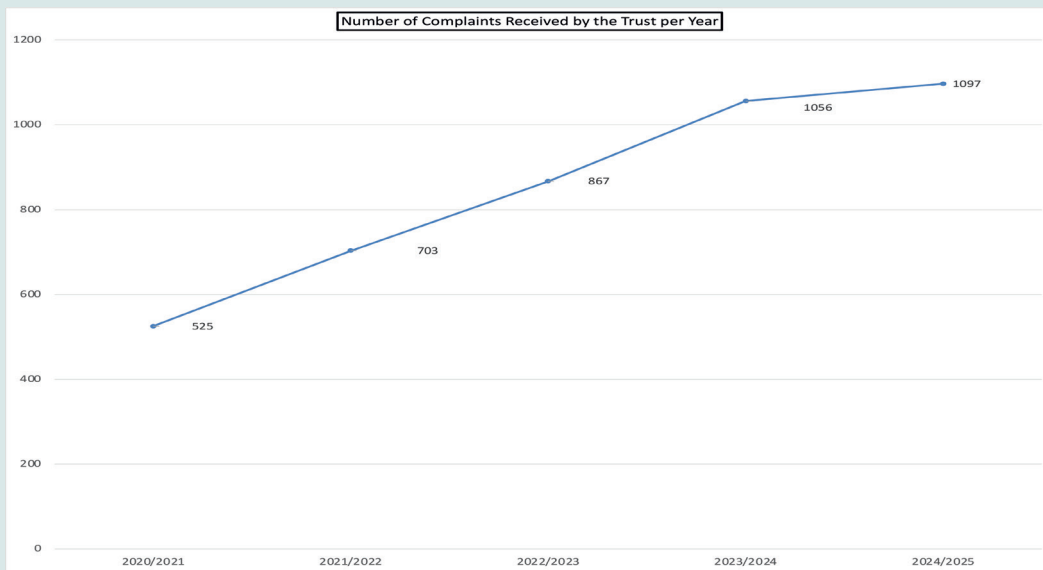
“I am very grateful for the support I have received from my health visitor. She has visited me both before and after the birth of my son. At each visit, she has been warm and professional. She takes time to listen, which as an anxious new mother I am thankful for.”

Complaints

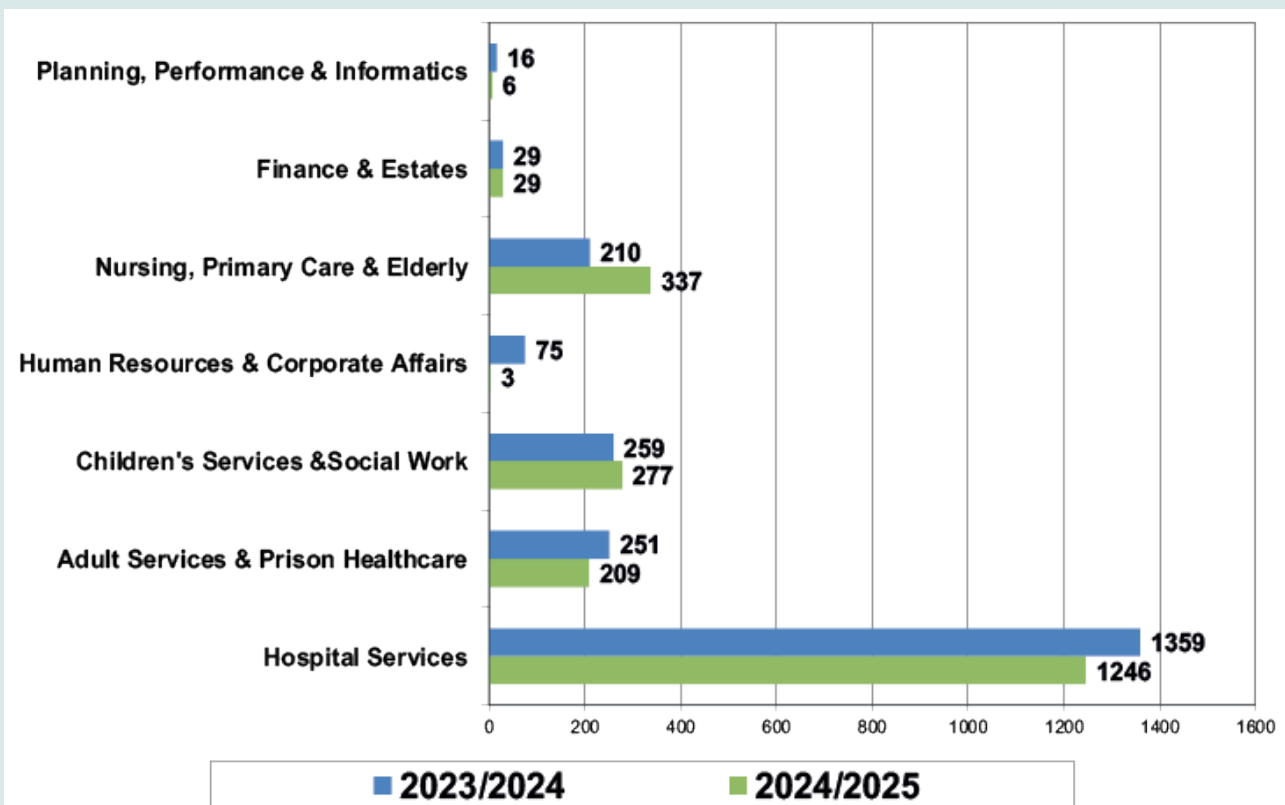
The number of complaints continues to be low considering the large geographical area the Trust covers and the number of contacts Trust staff have with patients and clients. The Trust:

- Serves a population of approximately 374,560
- Employs over 11,858 staff
- Provides a wide range of health and social care services to people in their own homes, in community settings and in the Ulster, Lagan Valley, Downe, Newtownards and Bangor Hospitals
- In addition, approximately 180,000 people attended our Emergency Departments during the year with approximately 43,000 people treated in hospital as daycases and about 42,000 people being admitted to our 3 main hospitals. This is a notable increase from 2023/2024.

The number of complaints received continues to increase - see the graph below denoting a significant increase since 2020/2021.



This graph below shows the breakdown by directorates of formal complaints for 2024/25 in comparison to the previous year (per issue – a complaint can have more than one issue).



What people complained about

The chart below shows the number of complaints by subject for the past year (2024/2025) in comparison to the previous year.

The figures are per issue of complaint, as a complaint can have more than one issue. For 2024/2025 we had complaints made by **1,097** complainants and these raised **2,107** issues, compared with 2023/2024 figures of **1,056** complainants and **2,127** issues.

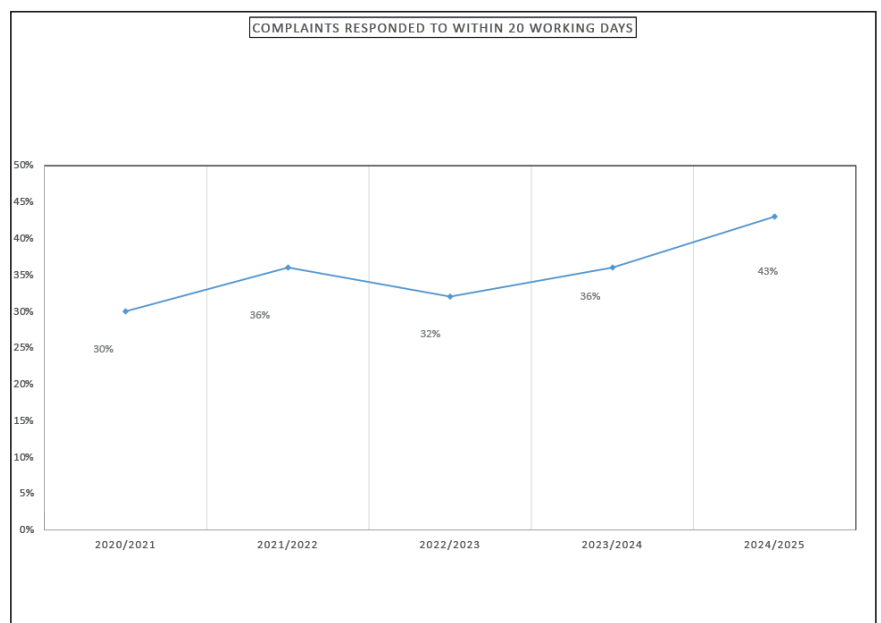
The top three subjects of complaint in the past year were: Quality of Treatment & Care, Communication / Information and Staff Attitude / Behaviour. These are the same top subjects as last year, and this is similar across other Health & Social Care Trusts.

Subjects (per issue)	2023/2024		2024/2025	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Quality of Treatment & Care	586	28%	640	30%
Communication / Information	489	23%	412	19%
Staff Attitude / Behaviour	289	14%	287	14%
Waiting List, Delay / Cancellation Outpatients Appointments	84	4%	133	6%
Clinical Diagnosis	84	4%	90	4%
Other	69	3%	82	4%
Environmental	25	1%	61	3%
Waiting List, Delay / Cancellation Community Based Appointments	44	2%	56	3%
Privacy / Dignity	55	3%	45	2%
Discharge / Transfer Arrangements	44	2%	43	2%
Quantity of Treatment & Care	31	1%	38	2%
Waiting Times, A&E Departments	46	2%	37	2%
Records / Record Keeping	29	1%	35	2%
Property / Expenses / Finances	30	1%	33	1%
Confidentiality	41	2%	31	1%
Professional Assessment of Need	58	3%	22	1%
Discrimination	21	1%	20	1%
Hotel / Support / Security Services	22	1%	17	1%
Access to Premises	52	2%	13	1%
Waiting List, Delay / Cancellation Planned Admission to Hospital	28	1%	12	1%
Totals:	2127	100%	2107	100%

Response Times to Complaints

43% of complaints were responded to within the target of 20 working days, which is an increase of 7% from the previous year (36%), as shown in the graph below.

In 2024 the recording of complaints in the Trust moved to a web based system which has improved how we manage the overall complaints process. This has also provided improved oversight and assisted Directorates with responsiveness to complaints overall. Our emphasis continues on the Quality of the responses and ensuring issues raised have been addressed and resolved.



If people are dissatisfied

Sometimes people are not always happy with the outcome of the investigation into their complaint. We encourage people to let us know if they are unhappy, and we consider other options to attempt to resolve their concerns. We have continued to offer meetings with complainants, as this allows the opportunity for more detailed discussions, either virtually or face-to-face.

In the last year 16% of complainants contacted us to tell us they were not entirely satisfied, which is a decrease from 2023/2024 (17%).

Ombudsman

For those people who remained dissatisfied, they had the option to approach the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (Ombudsman) directly.

In **2024/2025** there were **27** complainants (2.5%), who approached the Ombudsman for investigation of their complaint, which is an increase from last year (16). Of these 27, 2 were not accepted for investigation by the Ombudsman, 5 were settled without investigation and 20 are ongoing.

A total of 14 complaints were closed by the Ombudsman during 2024/2025:

- 2 were not accepted for investigation by the Ombudsman
- In 3 cases the Ombudsman did not uphold any of the complaint
- In 4 cases a settlement was reached without investigation
- 5 had some areas of failings identified and recommendations made by the Ombudsman for remedy / improvement to services.

Trends in Ombudsman cases

Decrease in cases that were settled without further investigation by Ombudsman

2023 - 2024	2024 - 2025
5	4

Examples of actions taken to settle cases:

- Trust to respond to complainant directly in order to resolve issues
- Trust agreed to reconsider original decision regarding direct payments and appointed an Independent Assessor to conduct the review
- Apologise for administering medication against parents' wishes.

Examples of recommendations made as a result of failings:

- Staff to read complaint letters fully and address all the issues of complaints
- Staff to ensure they follow Trust procedures and maintain accurate records of treatment administered and advice given to patients
- Learning to be shared with all staff.

Decrease in cases where failings identified by Ombudsman

2023- 2024	2024 - 2025
7	5

Themes in the failings identified continue to relate to:

- Record keeping
- Quality of treatment and care
- Communication.

Independent Sector Complaints

Social care providers in the Independent Sector, who hold a contract with the Trust, are required to report all complaints to the Trust to comply with the terms and conditions of their contract and other relevant regulations and legislation. Keyworkers will work collaboratively with complainants and providers to ensure that all complaints are fully investigated. In the year 2024/2025, a total of 152 informal and formal complaints were reported by the Independent Sector of which 62 were related to Domiciliary Care, 87 related to Care Homes, 2 for Supported Living and 1 for Community Services.

Complaints Procedure - Children Order

Complaints by, or on behalf of, children about services provided to them under Part IV of the Children (NI) Order 1995, are dealt with under a separate procedure – the Children Order Representations & Complaints Procedure.

Over the year, there were 3 complaints dealt with at the informal 'problem-solving' stage. These were resolved with 0 ongoing at this point, and none progressed to Stage 1 of the procedure.

Lessons Learnt / Improvements from Complaints

We welcome complaints so that we can learn lessons and improve our services. The web based system for recording complaints has given the Trust greater visibility of learning identified, actions taken and allows better trend analysis to be completed. Following feedback from service users, Trust responses should record lessons learnt where applicable so patients can clearly see what has happened following their complaint. Complaints are also discussed with staff concerned and brought to team meetings for discussion as to how services can be improved. A number of improvements have been put in place over 2024/2025 following complaints.

You said, We did

There were many of service improvements as a result of complaints in 2024/2025 and a few examples are listed below:

You Said:

Information about the Ward setting was not explained to patient before admission.

We Did:

Staff will ensure that the patient is aware of the Ward setting and protocol before admission.

You Said:

Unhappy with the communication with service and time for phone calls being returned

We Did:

Contact was delayed due to staff member having left the South Eastern Trust. Apologies offered and new keyworker assigned.

You Said:

A full length cast was applied unnecessarily causing discomfort and hampered mobility.

We Did:

Staff reminded to refer to the Trust policy and engage with patients as to the right casting for them.

You Said:

Requests for 1 to 1 package has not been actioned, and the service user feels at risk.

We Did:

Trust met with the service user and referrals have been made. Additional support has been offered while referrals are pending.

You Said:

Staff member made to feel uncomfortable and intimidated in their own home as they had to have contact with their estranged partner

We Did:

Staff to be more mindful of difficult situations and ensure everyone is safe and comfortable with the situation

You Said:

Quality and variety of food offered as an inpatient was poor with little options for vegetarians/vegans

We Did:

New menus have been designed and being implemented in spring 2025. More vegan options will be available.

You Said:

Family not happy that parent was placed in a ward with an outbreak of COVID and they were not informed. The patient was then discharged without them knowing of the potential risks to the rest of the family.

We Did:

Trust apologised that family were not informed – the Trust will ensure that all interactions with family regarding patients is documented.

Complaints/Patient Liaison Department

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