

# Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service

## Impact & Performance Report

January - March 2025 (Q4)

Supporting residents of West Sussex with their NHS Complaints – providing advocacy in the form of listening to the needs of the client and providing a voice for the individual to be heard.

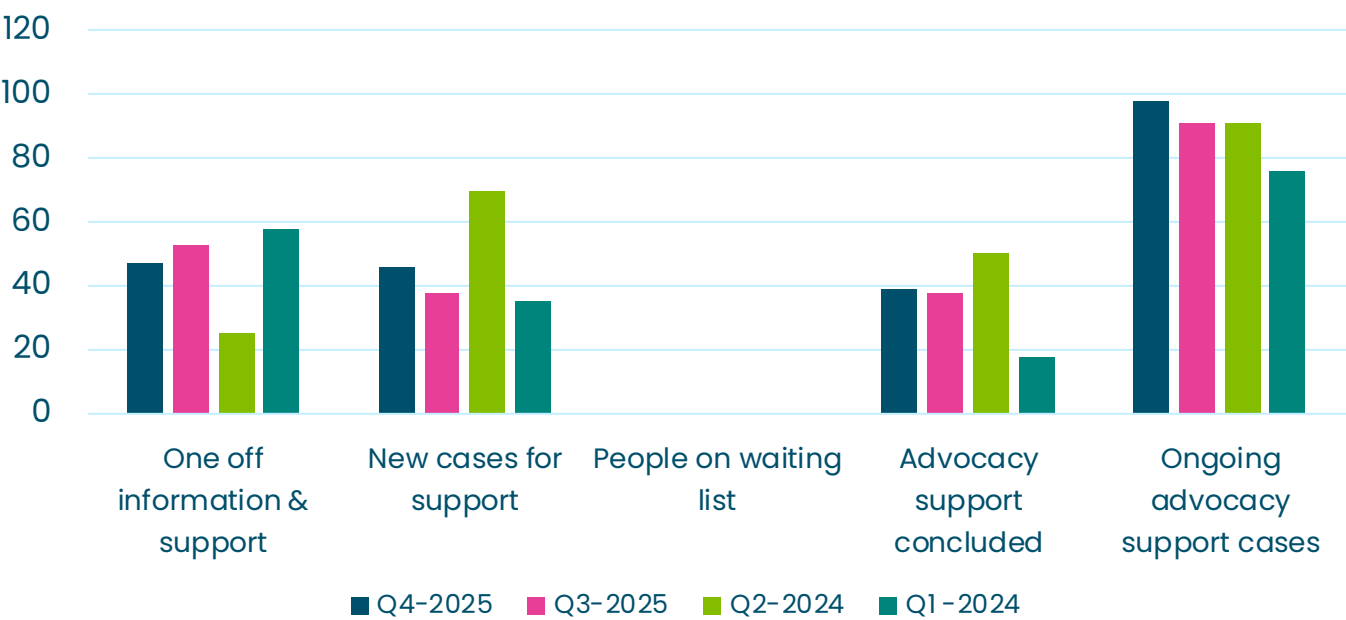


# Our service

Quarter 4 saw a slight increase in people needing full advocacy assistance but a large increase in people who need one off support, such as being signposted to PALS or given information on how to make a complaint.

We are still seeing hospital trust delays in responding to complaints, updating complainants and arranging meetings as a theme for the quarter. Some clients are having to wait over 6 months for a meeting date to be set. The wait time for complaints to be allocated a case worker at Parliamentary Health Service Ombudsman is currently 7 months.

## Advocacy – one year comparison



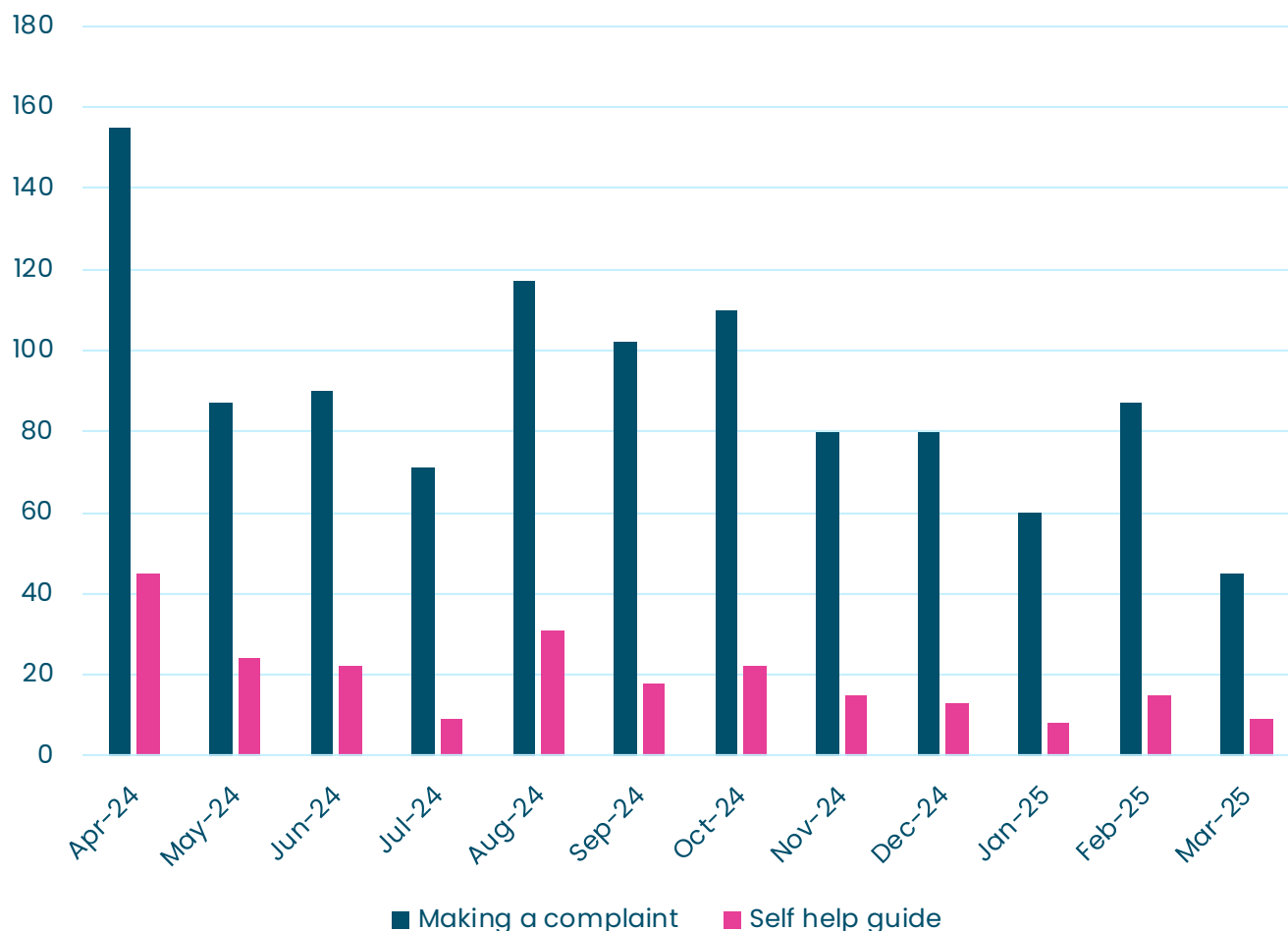
## Last quarter comparison

	Key performance metrics for current and previous quarter	
	Q4	Q3
One off information and advice	47	53
New cases for support	46	38
People on waiting list	0	0
Advocacy support concluded	39	38
Ongoing advocacy support cases	98	91

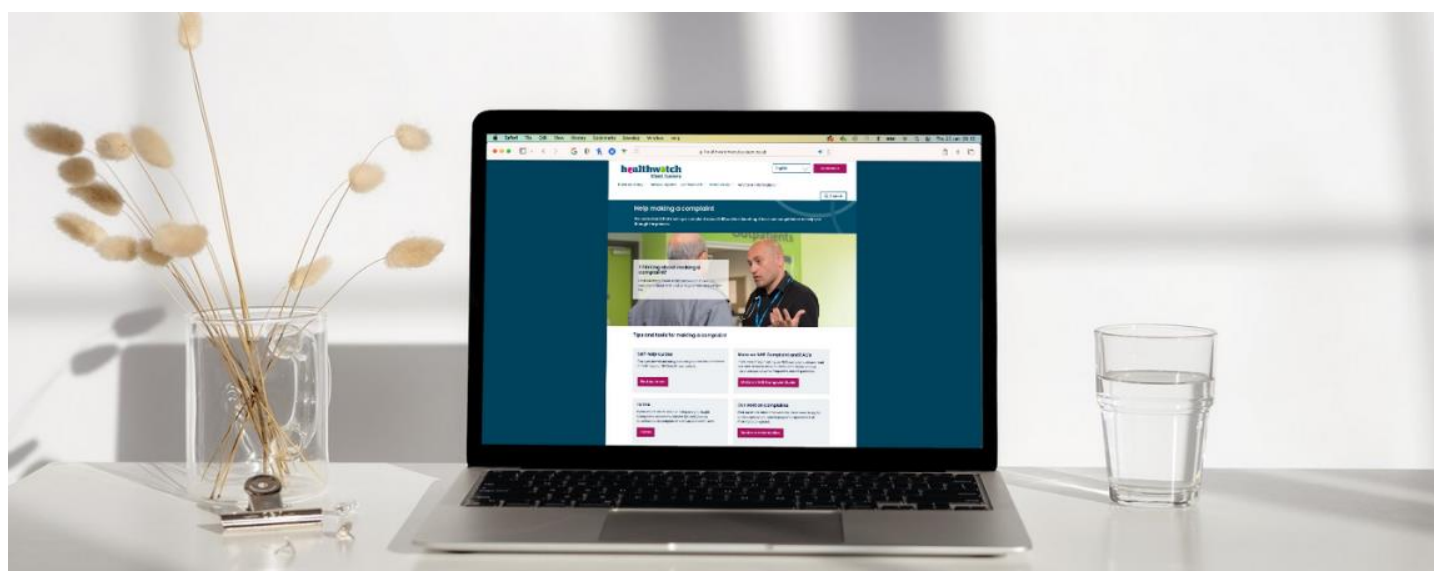
## Impact and support for residents this quarter

- Supported a client to submit a service complaint about poor communication during the investigation by the case worker at the parliamentary health service ombudsman (PHSO). Instructions were given to the case worker about the communication preferences, the result of the complaint to PHSO confirmed “Overall, I can see inadequacies in our communication with you and we are extremely sorry for this. We will reflect on these to make sure these are avoided going forward”
- As a result of a complaint about a pharmacy in West Sussex, following a medication dispensing error, a new system has been implemented to ensure this event does not happen again.
- Following a local resolution meeting with a hospital trust, they confirmed that palliative care support will now be provided 7 days a week instead of the current 5 days a week.
- Following the outcome of an inquest for a family that had advocacy with their NHS complaint, support has been provided to help the family take their complaint to the PHSO, as they were not satisfied with the outcome of the inquest.
- There has been a significant rise in the number of clients that are not satisfied with their NHS complaints response letters, and after writing second letters or attending local resolution meetings, the only option left is to take the complaint to PHSO. One advocate for the IHCAS service has currently 14 complaints logged with the PHSO. This adds significant delays to the process. The current wait time for the allocation of a case worker is up to 7 months and can be longer if the complaint involves a death and a need for a senior case worker.

## Website views in the past year



The above data shows the number of people seeking help with making a complaint and although this is variable, the continued access demonstrates the importance of having good quality information available to West Sussex residents. The website provides information on how to make complaints, and a self help guide, all designed to support and promote self advocacy.



## Challenges faced during the NHS Complaints Process

Back in the Quarter 1 report (April to June 2024), we shared some of the challenges faced during the NHS Complaints Process. These challenges are still being faced a year later, and some would say the situation has not improved and declined further.

### Delays in receiving complaint response letter and local resolution meetings

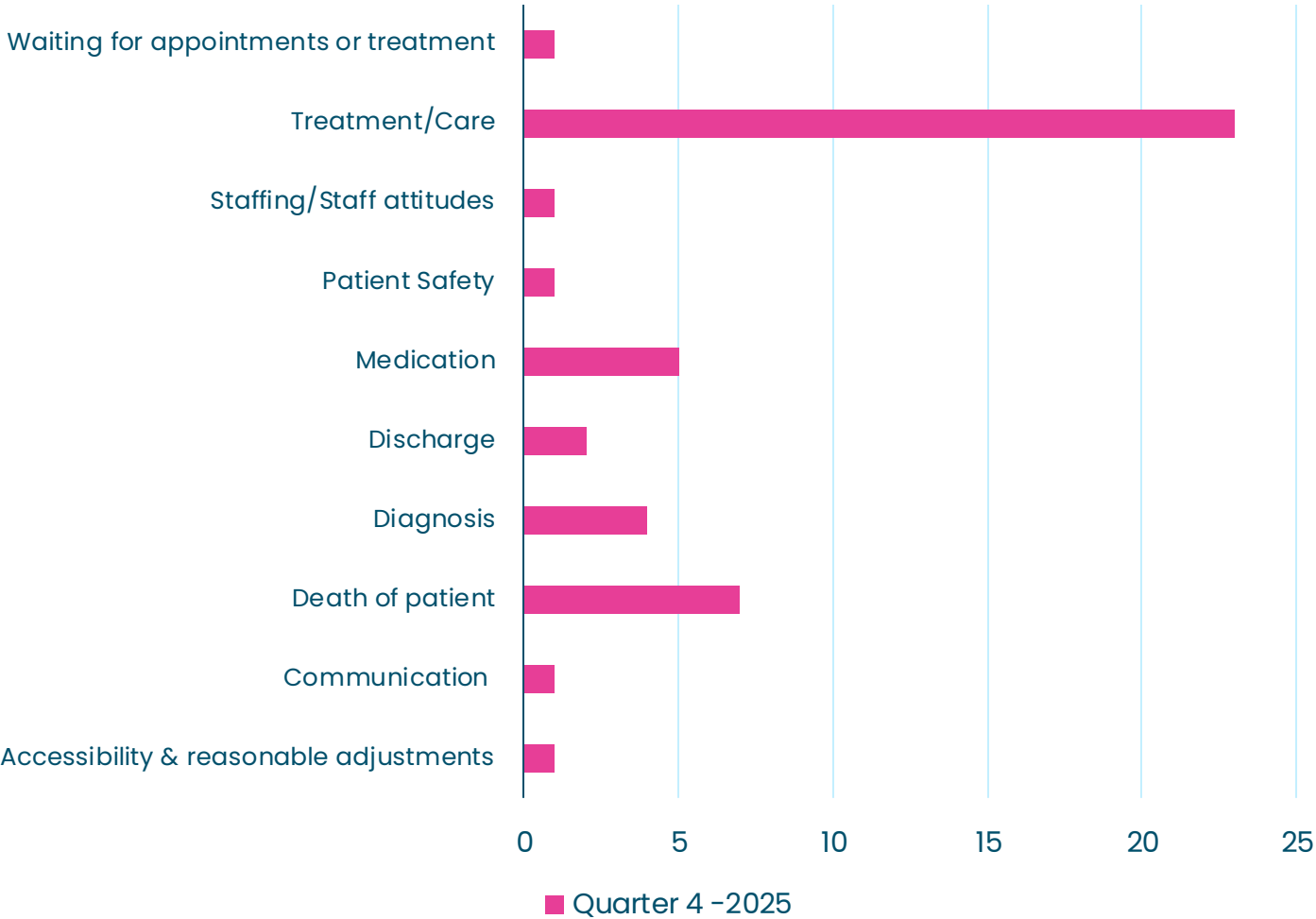
- A complaint was submitted to the Acute Hospital Trust in April 2023. When the family received their response, they were not satisfied and sought advocacy assistance. We provided support and requested a local resolution meeting, which took place in November 2024. As a result, a further investigation was required and the family are still waiting on a written response. In the meantime, the family are on hold whilst dealing with their grief.
- One Acute Hospital Trust took 7 months to reply to a maternity complaint.
- After a poor experience in a London Hospital, a complaint was submitted and advocacy support requested. A response letter was received after 5 months, with an unsatisfactory outcome for the client. A local resolution meeting was requested, which took 17 months for the meeting to take place.

### Delays in the Parliamentary Health Ombudsman Service (PHSO)

- Following the death of a child, a complaint was made and went through the whole process at the local level. The complaint is now with PHSO, and we are 45 months into the process and are still awaiting the outcome of the PHSO investigation.
- Two different clients came to the service during Covid lockdown about being discharged from mental health services. Complaints were made and after response letters were received, one client decided to write a second letter the other client attended a local resolution meeting. Both complaints are currently with PHSO for investigation as to whether it was right to discharge these two people. It is nearly four years and the PHSO have still to make a final decision.

The NHS complaints process is not quick, and we always tell residents that it takes a long time to get to the end of the process. We can never advise how long the process will take; some complaints are quick and can result in an outcome to the person in a relative short period of time, others can take years and still not provide the outcome the person is looking for, but when the PHSO make their decision that tends to be the end of the process.

## Q4 Complaint Themes



The top theme again is treatment and care, the main reason why people want to make complaints is due to the feeling they have been provided with a low standard of care and treatment. Some people want to make a complaint to highlight their concerns to ensure it does not happen again and to improve the experience for others going forward.

We continue to provide support when a loved one has died and the relative feels there is a need to make a complaint, these type of complaints can be complex and include multiply providers. One current case the services is providing advocacy support for includes 4 different commissioners and 6 providers. These type of complaints take up a great deal of time for the service, and there can be a need to provide emotional support to the family, as they will be dealing with a death and will have lots of other issues that will need to be addressed.

Diagnosis can be a reason for a complaint, when the patient is not happy with their diagnosis, or they have not been given one. The complaint can be raised to question the formal diagnosis or in a recent case the patients had mixed diagnosis on their medical files. The complaint will hopefully confirm everything and provide a clear diagnosis for the advocacy client.

Patient safety has come up this quarter. There is a need to feel safe when you are receiving treatment and care at a hospital and unfortunately sometimes, events happen, and this can result in a complaint being made.

## Case Study

### Trapped – the story of a family that lived at home for 3 years.

Damian was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) aged six, in 2018. The Flamingo family were out shopping when Damian had an autistic meltdown in public, this resulted in him being arrested and placed in a cell at the police station for a few hours. As a result, Damian's mental health declined, attachment issues intensified, and he did not want to leave the family home. Damian was attached to his mother, he would not leave her side, he followed her everywhere, even to the bathroom and sleeping next to her.

Children Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) diagnosed Damian with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and he needed trauma counselling, but he was about to turn 18 years old and was transferred to the adult mental health service. The adult treatment service (ATS) declined the referral, and he was signposted to other services. Two years later, Damian was assessed by ATS after numerous referrals from his GP, they suggested medication and his diagnosis was removed and he was discharged.

The family felt trapped at home with no support for Damian. Marie fell pregnant and had a home delivery, she had two children under five, they had no social life, the full case study shares some of the challenges the family faced. An NHS complaint was submitted and after a local resolution meeting took place, Damian was offered treatment. Over time the family finally were able to leave their home and one of their first trips was to their local library, a safe space for Damian. The NHS complaints process helped Damian to access treatment.

#### Feedback from Flamingo family

We were very unsure about making a complaint against the NHS as they have a huge, important job to do, that they usually do so well. Sadly, in this case, they failed us, which then affected our family. We were put in touch with an amazing advocate who helped us through the complaint journey. She kept us updated and informed throughout the whole process. She was easy to talk to and never made us feel that we could not talk to her or ask her about anything that we did not understand or needed clarifying.

We would like to say a huge thank you to our advocate, she has been so helpful, kind, and caring.





## Feedback from people we have supported

- Thank you so much for all your help. I feel you are literally changing a life here, and I am incredibly grateful you are here and for all your help, time, & patience.
- Thank you so much for your email & the drafts yesterday, they are great, no wonder you are team leader & senior advocate! I was very impressed! When I was reading the draft complaint form, I very much felt that you had my back, whereas with a previous advocate from (organisation name removed) , I did not.
- Thank you for all your help trying to sort all this mess out for me, so I appreciate your help.
- PHSO, form you have completed was just perfect and very professional. Don't underestimate your "best", you have included all the relevant information. The report is better than I had anticipated. Thank you.





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