



Telford & Wrekin
Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest
to create a better borough

Children's Statutory Complaints Report

Improving our Customer Experience

Annual Report 2024/25

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Purpose of the Report

- To report statistical information to Members and Officers detailing Telford and Wrekin Council's Children's Social Care complaints from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.
- To provide an open resource to anyone who wishes to understand feedback about local services.
- To outline the key developments and planned improvements to the complaints processes operated by the Council.
- To consider how the learning from complaints can be used to improve the overall customer experience.

Introduction

This Annual Report covers all complaints made about Children's Social Care that were received by the Customer Relationship team and dealt with under the statutory complaint procedure during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

The 2006 Social Care complaints guidance 'Getting the Best from Complaints' (Department for Education and Skills (DFES), 2006) requires that an Annual Report be arranged by a local authority's Complaints Manager to provide a mechanism by which it can be kept informed about the operation of its complaint procedure. The report should be presented to staff, the relevant local authority committee, and be made available to both the regulator and public. It should provide details about:

1. Representations made to the Council
2. The number of complaints at each stage
3. The types of complaints made
4. The outcome of the complaints
5. Compliance with timescales, and detail complaints resolved within extended, agreed timescales
6. Complaints that were considered by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman
7. A review of the effectiveness of the complaint procedure
8. Learning and service improvements, including changes to services that have been implemented and details of any that have not

Please see the Appendix for details of the legislation and procedure.

Highlights 2024/25

Ofsted rating
Outstanding

87%
Responses sent in
20 working days

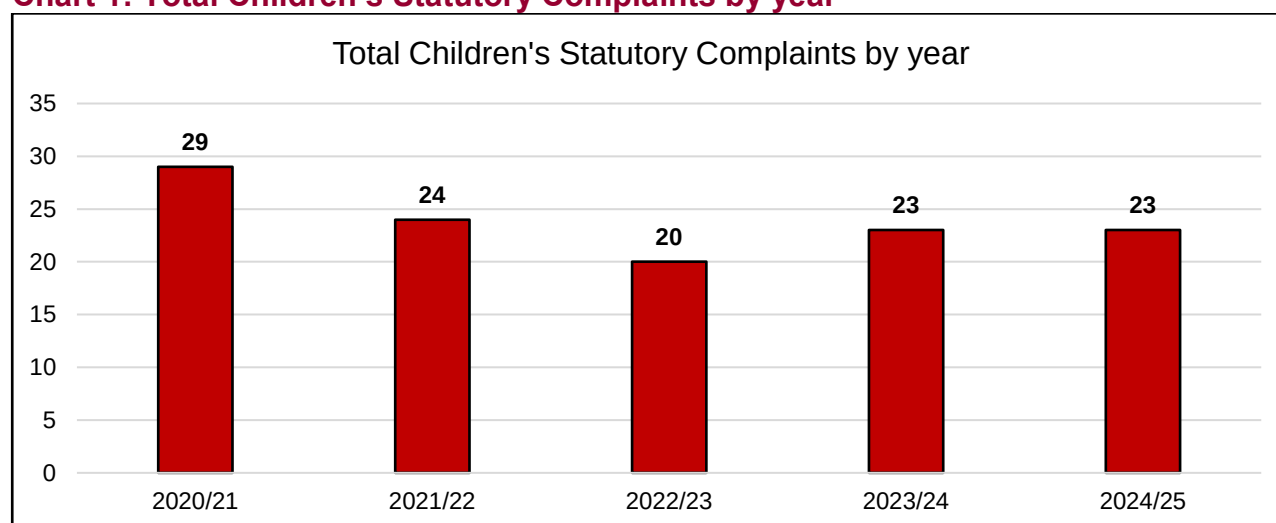
Average of
14 days
to respond to a
Statutory
Complaint

Children's Statutory Complaints 2024/25

We received 23 Children's Statutory Complaints between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. The number of complaints received is in line with the 23 received in 2023/24. To provide some context, Children's Safeguarding and Family Support received a total of 6,687 contacts during the year, this includes telephone calls and emails and had 1,402 referrals into the service completed during the year.

The chart below shows a comparison of the number of statutory complaints over the past seven years.

Chart 1: Total Children's Statutory Complaints by year



The 23 complaints were all dealt with at Stage One, with five progressing to an independent Stage Two investigation.

Stage	Number of complaints
One	23
Two	4
Three	1

Of the 23 Stage One complaints received, 20 were completed prior to 31 March 2025. Four Stage Two complaints were received and independently investigated. One Stage Three Panel was completed in 2024/25.

Contact Types

Children's Statutory Complaints were received from the following in 2024/25:

Complainant	Number of complaints
Parent	13
Former Service User	1
Advocate/representative	2
Child/young person	4
Foster Carer	2
Relative	1
Total	23

Four complaints were received directly from children and young people in 2024/25. Two were received from a representative. One complaint was received from an adult which related to historical matters.

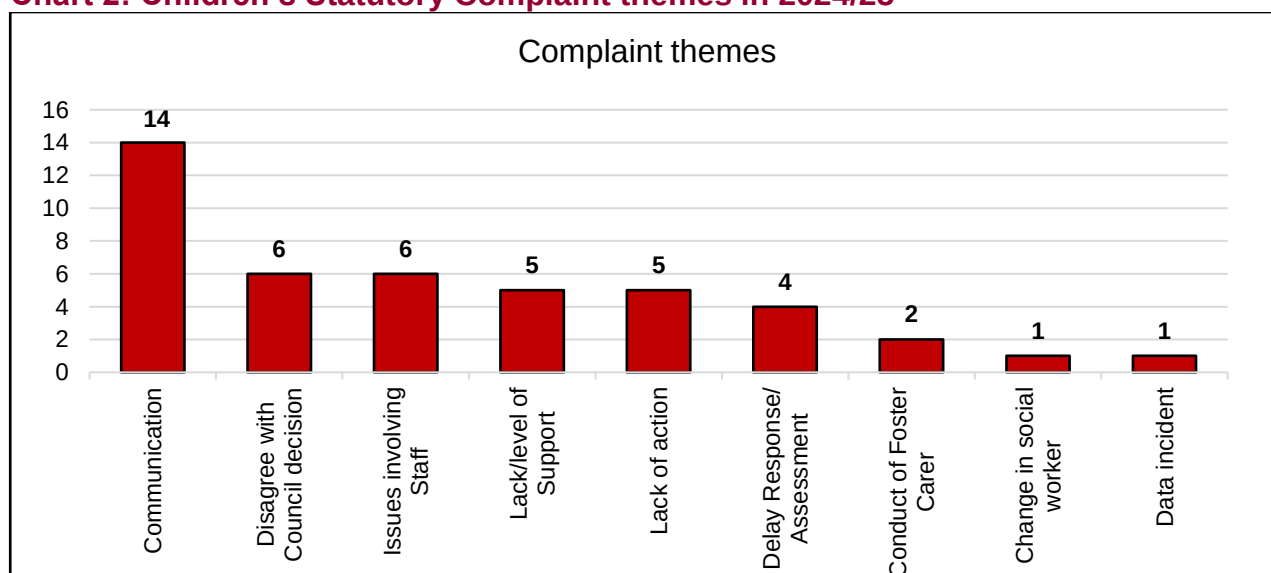
Customer Access Channels and Digital Contact

Complainant channel	Number of complaints
Email	9
Web form	11
Telephone	2
Letter	1
Total	23

In 2024/25, 87% of Children's Statutory Complaints were received via a digital access channel, including via our online complaint web form and by email directly to the Customer Relationship team.

Complaint Themes

Chart 2: Children's Statutory Complaint themes in 2024/25

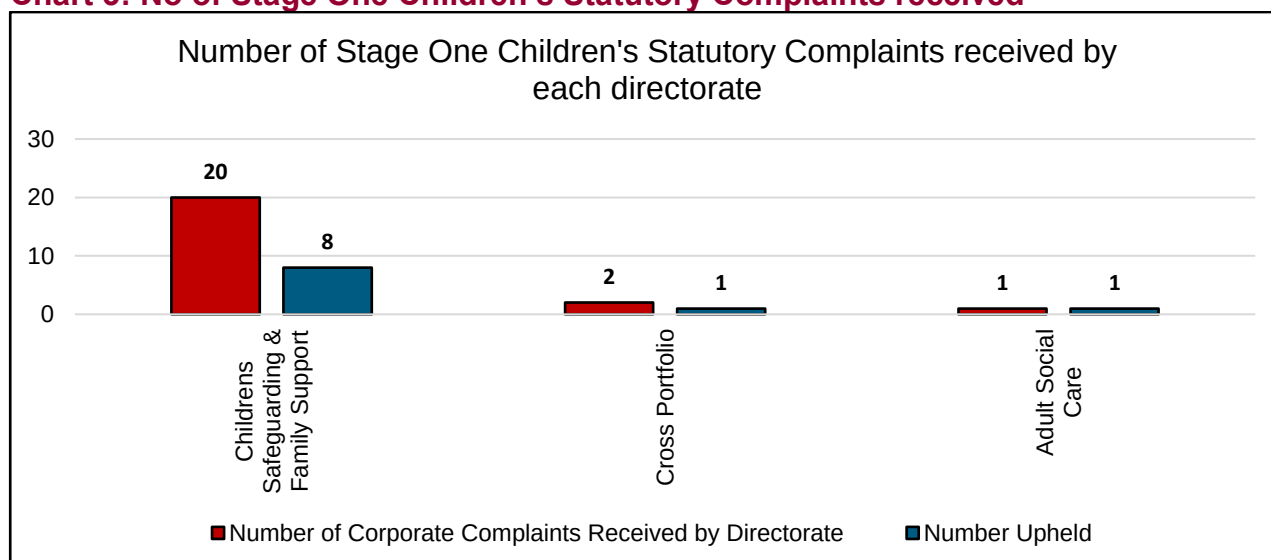


Most of the themes are self-explanatory and give a clear idea about the types of concerns raised in relation to our involvement.

No complaints handled under this process involved Child Sexual Exploitation during 2024/25.

Complaints received by directorate

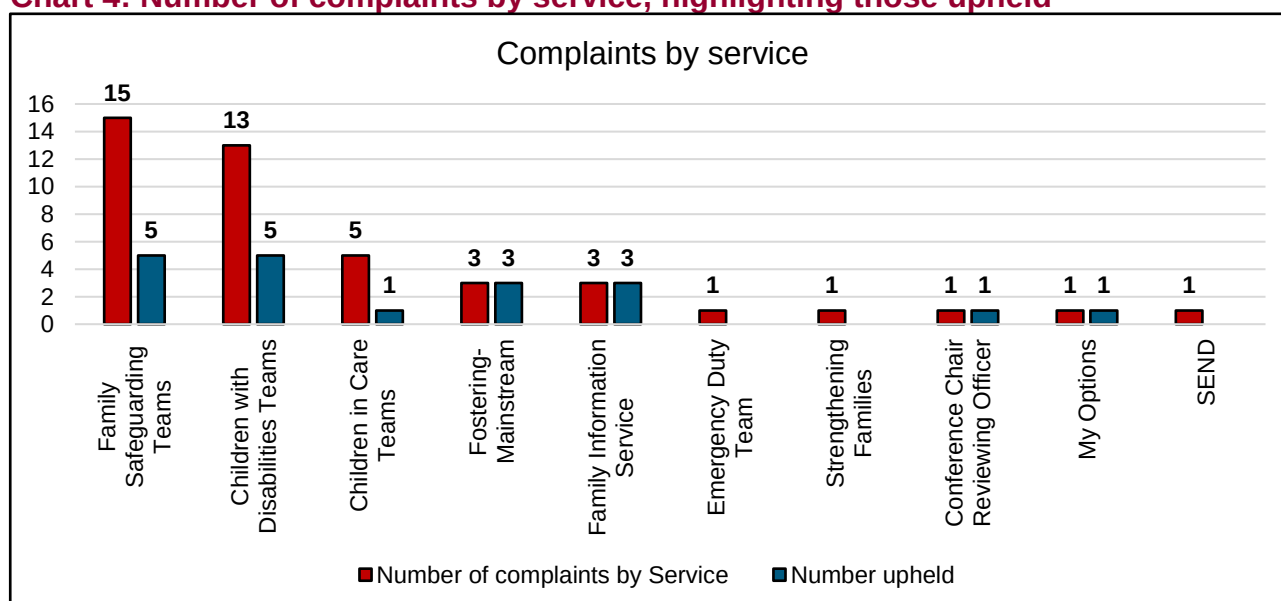
The chart below details the statutory complaints received by each directorate against the number subsequently upheld.

Chart 3: No of Stage One Children's Statutory Complaints received

The number of upheld complaints against number received for Children's Safeguarding & Family Support was 40%. Cross Portfolio saw 50% upheld and Adult Social Care complaints saw 100% upheld, one complaint was received. The Cross Portfolio complaints involved cross cutting issues relating to Children's Services and Education & Skills.

Of the 23 complaints responded to in the year, 43% (10) were upheld, 60% (12) were not upheld and 5% (1) was withdrawn.

The chart below includes the number of complaints received by each service. Please note that the number of complaints detailed below is higher than the overall total because certain complaints had multiple issues raised with different teams. This chart seeks to show all the services against which issues were raised, meaning that an individual complaint may be counted multiple times within it.

Chart 4: Number of complaints by service, highlighting those upheld

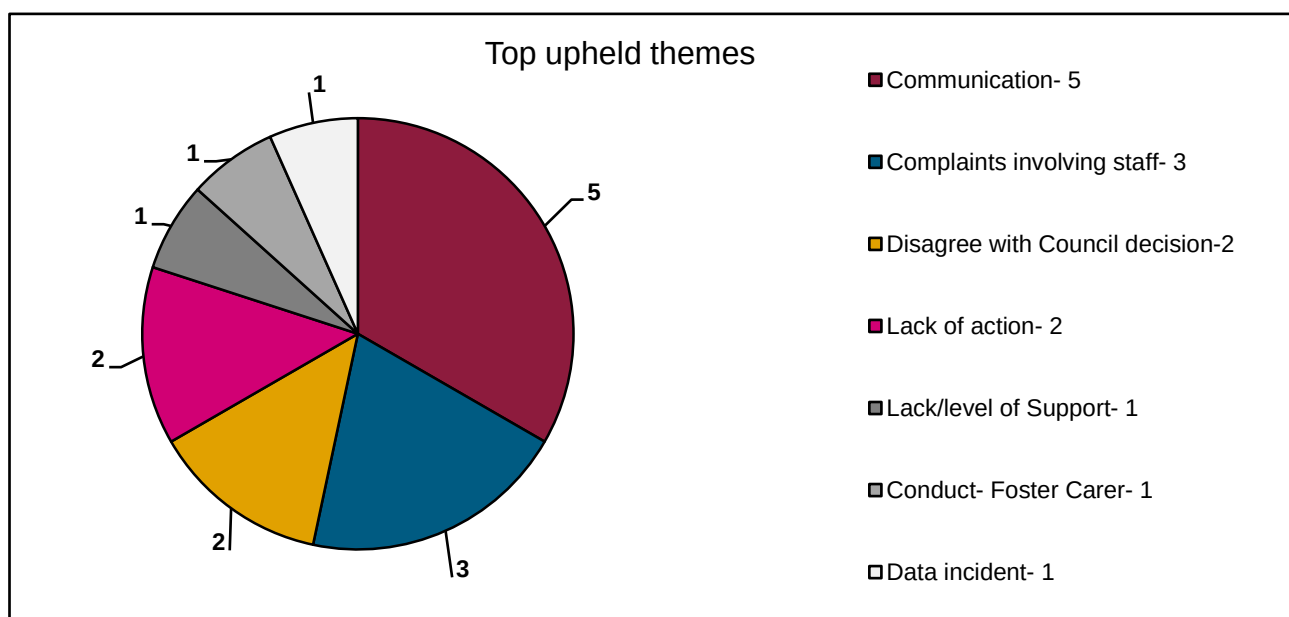
The most upheld complaints were in the Family Safeguarding Teams (5) with 33% upheld and Children with Disabilities Teams (5) where 38% upheld. The Children in Care Teams received 5 complaints and one was upheld.

Upheld issues included communication during and around appointments, delay in responding, lack of support from staff, lack of communication during periods of staff absence, plan prior to contact being unsupervised and foster carer practice, Quality Assurance of IFA's, breach in GDPR and delay of funding support.

Themes of upheld complaints

Of the upheld statutory complaints, the top themes raised were as detailed in the chart below.

Chart 5: Upheld themes



The above categories are self-explanatory and give a clear indication of the overall areas of our service or aspects of our work that had the most upheld complaints. This indicates that 33% of upheld complaints had an element of the complaint that related to communication. This covers a variety of concerns including service acknowledging that communication could have been better, inadequate communication regarding meetings, lack of communication during periods of staff absence. Complaints involving staff were the second most common and many of these were linked to communication issues. For instance, while contact was made, it wasn't directly with the complainant, leading to incomplete information sharing.

Individual management reports are shared with service managers on a regular basis, which allows for greater analysis and interpretation of the data.

Timescales for responses

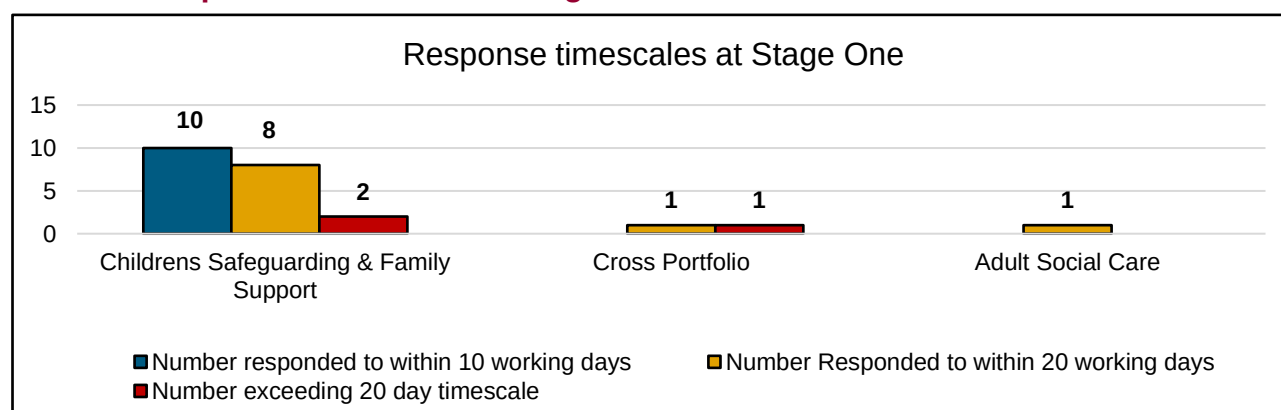
Our Children's Statutory Complaints Policy has been written in line with The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006, which outline how Children's Statutory Complaints should be handled and the three stages involved.

Stage One should be an opportunity to resolve the complaint at service level and should be completed within 10 working days. This may be extended to 20 working days in exceptional circumstances and with the prior agreement of the complainant.

Stage Two is an independent investigation that should be completed within 25 working days. This may be extended to 65 working days in more complex cases.

Stage Three is a Panel where the investigations at Stage One and Stage Two are reviewed.

Chart 6: Response timescales at Stage One



Of the 23 complaints that were responded to in the year, 10 were responded to within the 10-working day timescale and 10 were completed within the 20-day extended timescale. Three complaints exceeded the extended 20 working day timescale.

The average number of days to respond in Children's Statutory Complaint was 14 working days, which is in line with the 14 days achieved in 2023/24.

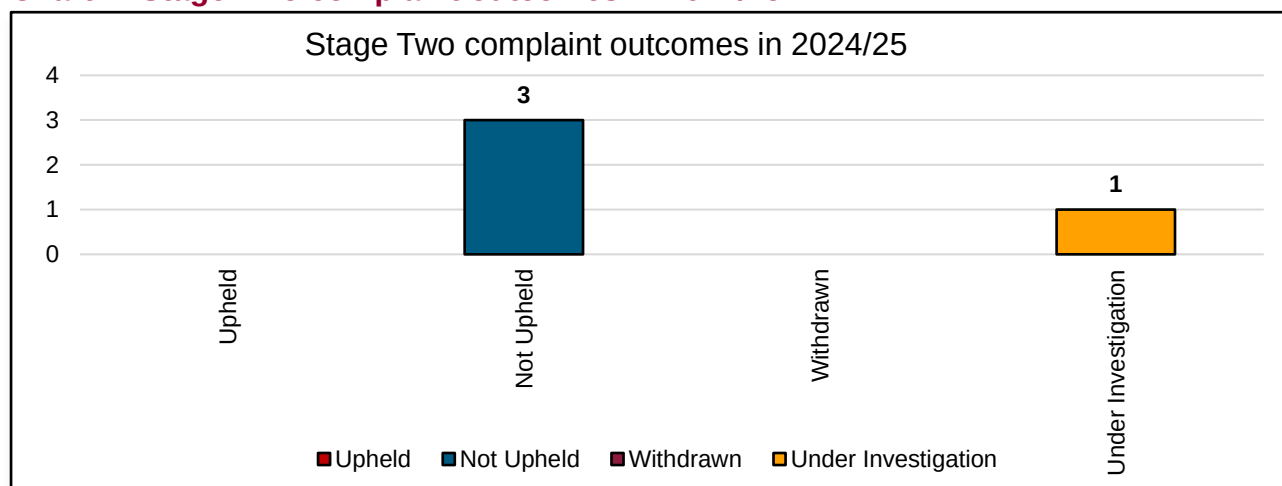
Since November 2020 new procedures have been put in place to improve timescales for responses. Outstanding complaints are highlighted to the Director, Executive Director and Service Delivery Managers on a weekly basis. Six-weekly meetings take place with Directors to review all outstanding cases and learning. The work that has been completed since November 2020 has improved timescales from the levels experienced in 2020/21, more work will be done in 2025/26 to improve these timescales further going forward.

During this year there has been further progress in upskilling Team Managers and Team Leaders in complaint handling which has also improved timescales in some teams. Generally, timescales have improved in the year. However, a few complex cases have impacted the average number of days to respond.

Statutory Stage Two & Stage Three complaints

During 2024/25, four (17%) Statutory Stage One complaint progressed to Stage Two of the process. One case remained outstanding at 31 March 2025.

Chart 7: Stage Two complaint outcomes in 2024/25



Three stage three investigations were not upheld.

The number of statutory Stage Two investigations in 2024/25 remained the same as the previous year where 5 investigations took place. The majority of complaints were resolved locally at Stage One of the procedure.

The average number of days to complete a Stage Two investigation was 71 days, an increase on the 65 days in 2023/24.

Two complaints were resolved at Stage Two of the procedure; however, one proceeded to a Stage 3 Panel. The outcome of which confirmed that the complaint was upheld. As this was a historical case improvement had already been made to the service, however it was agreed that on the balance of probabilities there was a lack of professional curiosity at the time in respect of the concerns raised.

Learning and outcomes from Children's Statutory Complaints

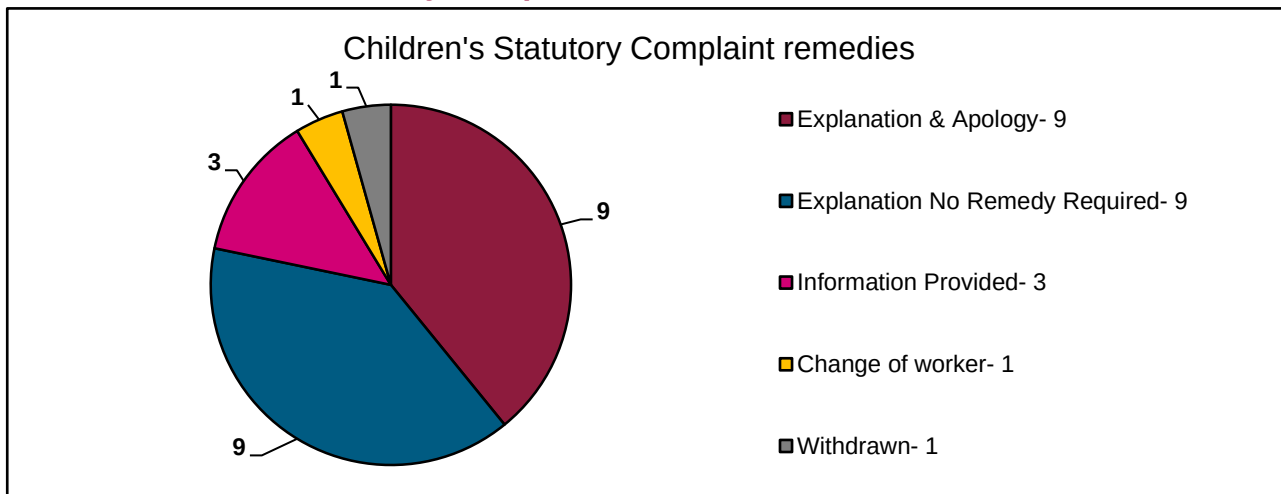
Complaints are a valuable source of information that can help to identify recurring or underlying problems and potential improvements. We know that numbers alone do not tell us everything about attitudes towards complaints and how they are responded to locally. Arguably, it is of greater importance to understand the impact that complaints have had on people and to learn the lessons from them to improve the experience of others.

Lessons can usually be learned from complaints that were upheld, but also in some instances where no fault was found, the Council recognises that improvements to services can still be made.

Occasionally, during an investigation, issues will be identified that need to be addressed over and above the original complaint. The Customer Relationship team will then work with services to ensure that they see the “bigger picture” so that residents receive the best possible service from the Council. The Customer Relationship team will continue to provide daily advice and support to managers around complaints management and resolution, and when responding to representations.

Outcomes are discussed in detail in Quality Assurance meetings which are held monthly. The Quality and Complaints Officer for Children's Services attends this meeting on a quarterly basis where Service Delivery Managers consider the themes and identify additional activities that should be undertaken to share the learning with practitioners.

Chart 8: Children's Statutory Complaint remedies in 2024/25



The top four remedies recorded against Children's Statutory Complaints in 2024/25 were:

- 39% were to provide an explanation and apology
- 39% were to provide an explanation and no remedy was required
- 13% were to provide information
- 4% Change of worker

Positive Improvements

Throughout the year, we record the learning identified from each complaint to build up a picture of common themes or trends. Learning from corporate complaints is considered alongside that from statutory complaints as part of our quality assurance activities.

Below are examples of positive changes that have resulted from learning from complaints:

- Individual remedies have been completed concerning support plans and working agreements, assessments, referrals, meetings, and documentation
- Social workers have been asked to contact carers directly when arranging statutory visits to children and communicate any constraints around times with Foster Carers

- Introduced measures to ensure that changes of address are marked confidential and not shared within other documents bundles
- Training has been provided on the importance of both parents being contacted when reviewing needs of children
- It has been agreed that social workers will support with technology if required in meetings
- Family Hubs are in the process of reviewing communication for separated parents and will be developing a practice guidance that is agreed through family support, and this will be completed by the 1 September 2025 in co-production with parents with lived experience of working with Family Hubs. DWP have also agreed funding for new family hub practitioners to undergo training or triple transitions to support parents who are separating or divorced.
- A reminder has been issued to ensure there are procedures in place to ensure that visits and appointments continue to be completed and where necessary cancelled in the event of staff absence a reminder of the importance of communicating meeting arrangements effectively has also been issued.
- There is an ongoing review into the arrangements and communication between services in respect of moving from Children's Services to Adult Services
- Learning from complaints regarding staff conduct have been shared with Practitioners to improve and support awareness of practice
- New guidance has been drafted relating to the finances around shared care/short breaks.
- Data protection refresher training has been undertaken.

Other feedback and the actions taken to improve our services

We gather feedback from various sources to improve the service we provide to children and young people, parents, carers and foster carers. For example;

- Childs voice postcard
- Childs Voice Group
- During family time
- Review forms
- Dandelion Group
- Kinship Care Group
- Fostering Forum
- Corporate Parenting and Young People Panel
- Practice Evaluations
- Childs voice apprentices – Voice of the Child Team

Actions which have been informed through this feedback include.

- The Child's voice postcard has been created to capture feedback
- Views are being sorted at family time which has influenced training and leaflet design
- Introduced review forms for children and young people who are care experienced
- Young people who have experienced homelessness have supported with relevant leaflets design and training for practitioners
- We have a Voice of the Child Team within the service, which includes four young people with lived experience who are completing apprenticeships with the Council. Their goal is to drive positive change by making sure young people's voices are truly heard. They have launched youth forums, delivered participation events all designed to connect, uplift and empower. They are also representing young voices nationally. They are supporting ideas to engage with children and young people
- Corporate Parenting and Young People panel have provided feedback to the police on their experiences and have supported in implementing the promise to children and young people who are care experienced. "The Promise" refers to a series of commitments made to improve the lives of residents, particularly children and young people, and to ensure everyone benefits from a thriving economy and a great place to live. It's a broad initiative encompassing various aspects of community life, including education, social care, and environmental protection
- Introduction of the peer parent drop in so that parents can get the right advice at the right time with strengthening families
- We have critiqued our information, making then more family friendly and accessible this has included development of leaflets
- We have introduced a parent report for conference ensuring parental planning and voice
- Developed the website for family hubs so that it is more family friendly
- Undertaken some peer led training to ensure parental perspective relational working
- We have developed our mental health offer in family safeguarding which has been informed by parent experiences, mental health training has also been provided to foster carers and professionals
- We have reviewed and amended court documentation for parents so they can easily understand the process
- Parental feedback has been added to our requirement for audit activity
- We have ensured multi-agency input from parents to aid core groups/ conferences

- Kindship Care Group has been set up to explore what works well and the additional information to support with their rights
- A fostering forum has been created to understand the strengths and barriers to working alongside foster carers

All feedback from both complaints and other sources is used to continually improve our services. We will continue to develop our services based on this feedback and also develop new and innovative ways to gather feedback from children and young people to ensure that we continue to provide the best possible service to them.

Complaints made to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) has the authority to investigate complaints when our own process has not resolved them. Complainants can refer their complaint to the LGSCO at any time, although the Ombudsman will generally refer them back to us if they have not been through our process first. In exceptional circumstances, the Ombudsman will look at things earlier; this usually being dependant on the vulnerability of the person concerned.

At 31 March 2024 one case was still being investigated by the Ombudsman, this case has been concluded and was upheld but the ombudsman confirmed that the case had already been remedied.

Three statutory cases were escalated to the LGSCO in 2024/25. One was not upheld and one was not investigated, one case remained outstanding at 31 March 2025.

The Council continues to ensure that it complies with any recommendations made by the LGSCO, and learning is taken forward to improve practices.

Concluding Comments

This Annual Report shows that the number of Children's Statutory Complaints received in 2024/25 remained in line with the previous year. Our services continue to receive a low number of complaints at a time when there have been major reductions in government funding for local authority service provision. Despite this financial backdrop, the Council continues to manage complaints well and is committed to putting right anything that has gone wrong.

Response times have also remained in line with 2023/24 with the average number of days to respond to a statutory complaint remaining at 14 working days. Overall, in 2024/25, 87% of complaints were responded to within the statutory timescale of 20 working days and 43% were responded to within ten working days, an improvement on the 42% in 2024/25.

The Customer Relationship team continued to update complainants concerning any delays or extended response timescales. They also continued to work with services to further improve on the timescales achieved.

Recommendations

Our recommendations for this year are:

- That a local complaint procedure is adopted that outlines the expectations for complaint handling, including contacting complainants within 3 days of the complaint being allocated, clear timescales for completing the investigation, response and quality check. A complaint investigation template should also be introduced which ensures that there is a clear record of the actions taken to investigate the complaint.
- When completing a complaint investigation and response, services should assess whether any element of the customer journey could have been improved, even if this does not form part of the complaint. i.e. Could improved communication have prevented the customer's concerns being escalated to a formal complaint?
- Services should continue to upskill Team Managers and Team Leaders in complaint handling to that there are more resources available to meet timescales.
- Services should continue to ensure that they are prioritising complaints and responding within the stated timescales. If there are unforeseen delays, the Customer Relationship team should be notified immediately so that we can notify the customer and advise them of the date they should expect their response.

Oversight and support provided by the Customer Relationship Team

The Customer Relationship team continues to support Service Areas to both manage and learn from complaints. The key services they offer are:

1. Complaints advice and support
2. Quality assurance of statutory complaint responses
3. Act as a critical friend to challenge service practice
4. Support with persistent and unreasonable complainants
5. Assistance in drafting comprehensive responses to complaint investigations
6. Continue to escalate overdue complaints to Directors

Customer Relationship Team priorities for 2025/26

During 2025/26, the Customer Relationship team and the Children's Safeguarding and Family Support Quality and Complaints Officer will focus on a number of key priorities:

- Helping to improve the Council's record of timely complaint responses
- Helping to improve the quality of responses and ensure that they comply with the statutory guidance
- Continuing to improve and add to the resources available to managers when responding to complaints and other correspondence, while encouraging self-help
- Providing complaint data to senior management monthly, as part of corporate monitoring
- Working to maintain low levels of maladministration findings by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman
- Continuing to provide a quarterly and monthly reporting dashboard of performance data to senior management so that improvement can be driven forward continuously during the year

Appendix

Legislation

The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 underpin all representations received from children and young people, their parents, foster carers or other qualifying adults about social care services provided or commissioned by Children's Social Care. The act and regulations set down procedures that councils with social care responsibility must follow when a complaint is made.

The Children's Statutory Complaints Procedure is a three stage process. Stage One is where complaints are investigated at service level, Stage Two is where an independent investigation takes place and Stage Three is where a Panel of Independent Persons will review the investigations undertaken at Stage One and Stage Two.

The Corporate complaints process is used for anyone else who makes a complaint.

What is a complaint?

We define a complaint as:

'A statement, written or verbal, which expresses dissatisfaction about any aspect of the social services provided by or on behalf of the Service Delivery Units responsible for services to children.'

The purpose of a complaints process is to resolve concerns raised by service users and their representatives, to deliver outcomes that are appropriate and proportionate to the seriousness of the issues, and to ensure that changes are made in response to any failings that are identified.

To achieve this, the approach to handling complaints must incorporate the following elements:

- Engagement with the complainant or representative throughout the process
- Agreement with them about how the complaint will be handled
- A planned, risk-based and transparent approach
- Commitment to prompt and focussed action to achieve the desired outcome
- Commitment to improvement and the incorporation of learning from all complaints

A complaint must be made within 12 months of the event complained about, or when the customer became aware of the matter/ event. Nevertheless, the Council has the discretion to waive this time limit if:

- It would not be reasonable to expect the complainant to have made the complaint sooner, and
- It is still possible to deal with the complaint effectively and fairly

Who can make a complaint?

A complaint may be made by:

- Children or young people who are receiving, or have received, services provided by the Council, or are entitled to receive such a service because the Borough after looks them, or because they are deemed to be 'in need', as defined by the Children Act 1989
- People who have parental responsibility for these children and young people
- Advocates and representatives of any of the above children and young people (providing that it has been established, as far as possible, that the advocate or representative is reflecting the child's or young person's own wishes)
- Foster carers who want to comment or complain about the service being provided to a child or young person for whom they are caring
- Any other person, providing that they are deemed to have sufficient interest in the child's or young person's welfare to justify the Council considering the complaint

Complaints may be received through a variety of media (phone, letter, email, feedback form, personal visit, etc.) and at various points within the Council (to staff members, via respective web addresses, direct to the Customer Relationship team, etc.).

Complaint Procedure

When a complaint is first received, the Customer Relationship team will conduct an initial assessment of it to determine its issues, severity and potential impact, and to identify any other organisations that maybe involved.

Whenever a complaint is received from a child or young person, the Customer Relationship team will notify Children's Social Services of the need to offer the complainant an advocacy service within the remit of the 2004 Advocacy (Services & Representations) Regulations. A child or young person whose complaint is being considered within this procedure is entitled to advocacy services throughout the process. Subject to the approval of the child or young person, all correspondence regarding the complaint will be copied to the advocate, who will be entitled to accompany the complainant at any meeting or interview about the complaint they attend.

When someone contacts the Customer Relationship team to make a complaint, they will acknowledge their complaint within two working days. The Customer Relationship team will then pass details of the complaint to the appropriate Service Delivery Manager.

We aim to respond to all Stage One Children's Statutory Complaints within ten working days. However, due to the nature and complexity of some issues, it may take longer, and - in agreement with complainants - the timescale may be longer (subject to a maximum of 20 working days).

When the investigation is complete, the manager concerned will write a letter explaining what they have found and will do to put things right.

If the complainant is not happy with the response or how we have dealt with their complaint, they can request that it is considered at Stage Two of the procedure, where it will be investigated by an independent investigator.

Following this investigation, the findings will be sent to the complainant, at which point they may request that the investigations undertaken at Stage One and Stage Two are reviewed at Stage Three by a Panel.

Following the Panel meeting, if the customer is not happy with the final decision or how we have dealt with their complaint, they can refer the matter to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).