Telford & Wrekin Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest to create a better borough

# Children's Statutory Complaints and Feedback Report

## Improving our Customer Experience

Annual Report 2025/26

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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 2025 to 31 March 2026.
- 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 2025 to 31 March 2026.

The 2006 Social Care complaints guidance 'Getting the Best from Complaints' (Department for Educations 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 2025/26

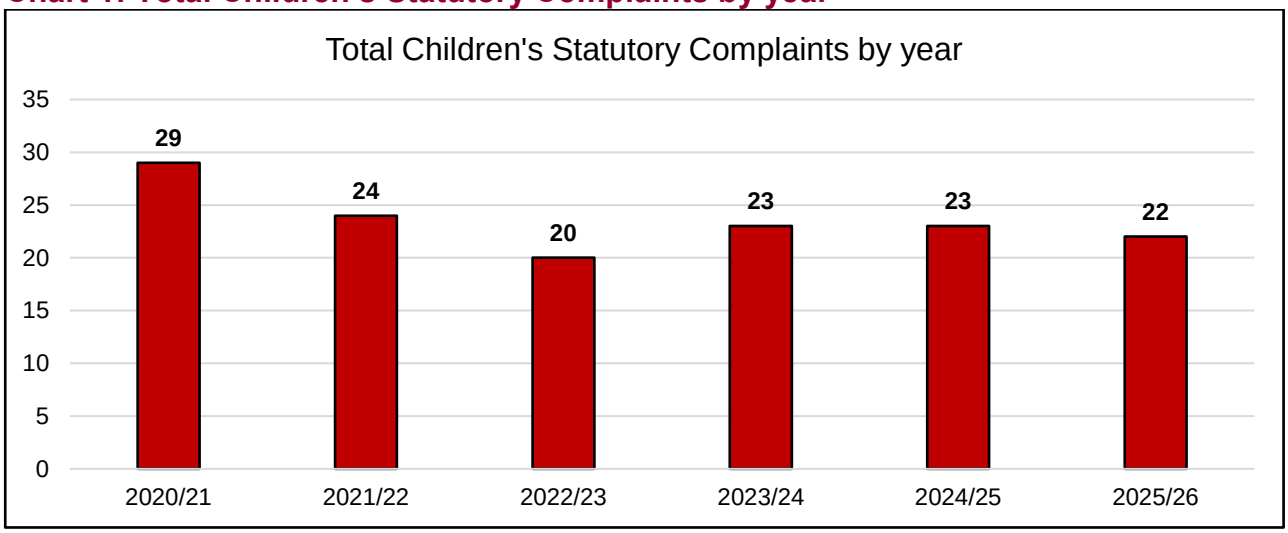
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Ofsted rating**<br>**Outstanding** | **92%**<br>**Responses sent in 20 working days** | **Average of**<br>**13 days**<br>**to respond to a Statutory Complaint** |

# Children's Statutory Complaints 2025/26

We received 22 Children's Statutory Complaints between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026. The number of complaints received is slightly less than the 23 received in 2024/25. To provide some context, Children's Safeguarding and Family Support received a total of 6,670 contacts during the year, this includes telephone calls and emails and had 900 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 22 complaints were all dealt with at Stage One, with four progressing to an independent Stage Two investigation.

| Stage | Number of complaints |
|---|---|
| One | 22 |
| Two | 4 |
| Three | 0 |

Of the 22 Stage One complaints received, all were completed prior to 31 March 2026. Four Stage Two complaints were received and independently investigated. No Stage Three Panels completed in 2025/26.

## Contact Types

Children's Statutory Complaints were received from the following in 2025/26:

| Complainant | Number of complaints |
|---|---|
| Parent | 12 |
| Advocate/representative | 1 |
| Child/young person | 6 |
| Foster Carer | 1 |
| Relative | 2 |
| **Total** | **22** |

Six complaints were received directly from children and young people in 2025/26.

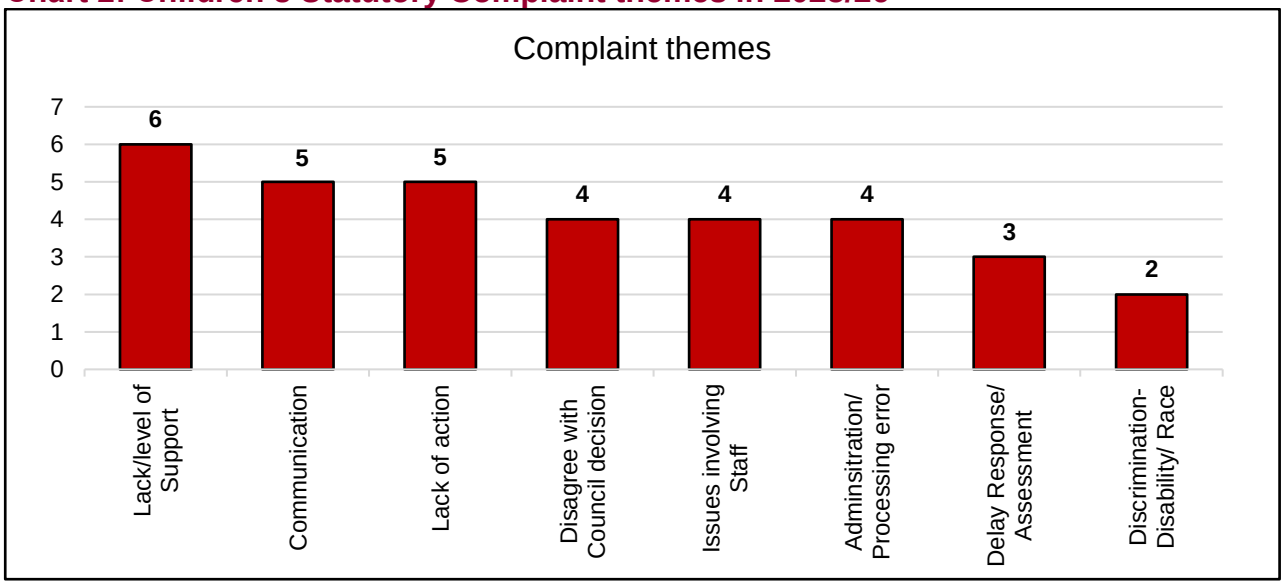
## Customer Access Channels and Digital Contact

| Complainant channel | Number of complaints |
|---|---|
| Email | 14 |
| Web form | 4 |
| Telephone | 3 |
| Letter | 1 |
| **Total** | **22** |

In 2025/26, 82% 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 2025/26



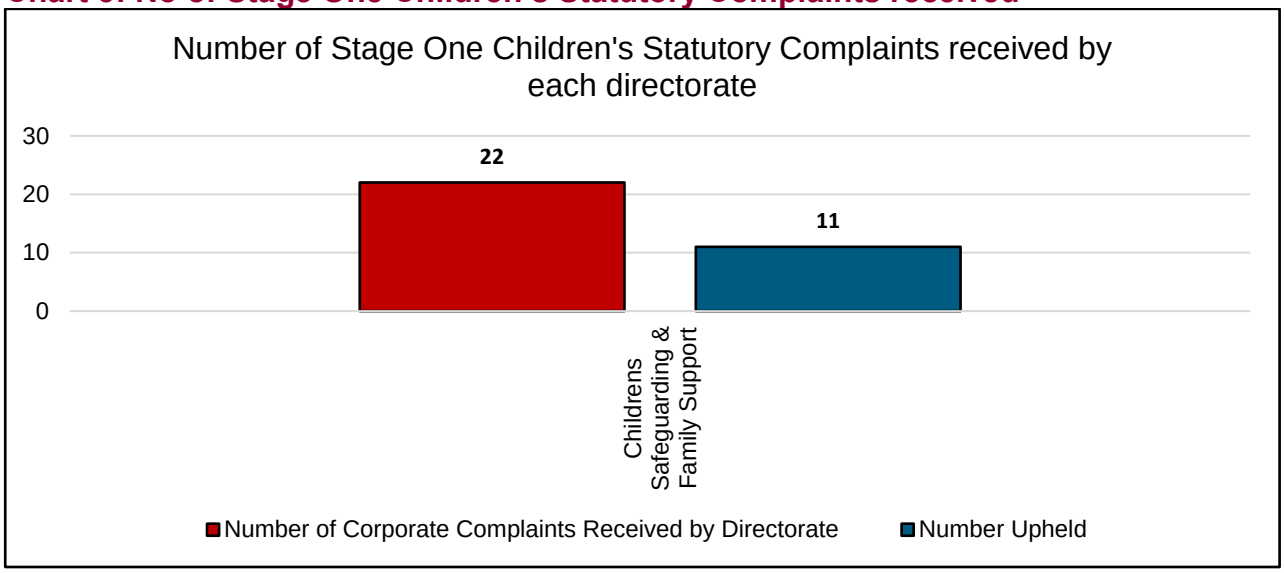

Most of the themes are self-explanatory and give a clear idea about the types of concerns raised in relation to our involvement. Some complaints may have had more than one theme and this is reflected in the numbers above.

No complaints handled under this process involved Child Sexual Exploitation during 2025/26.

## 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**

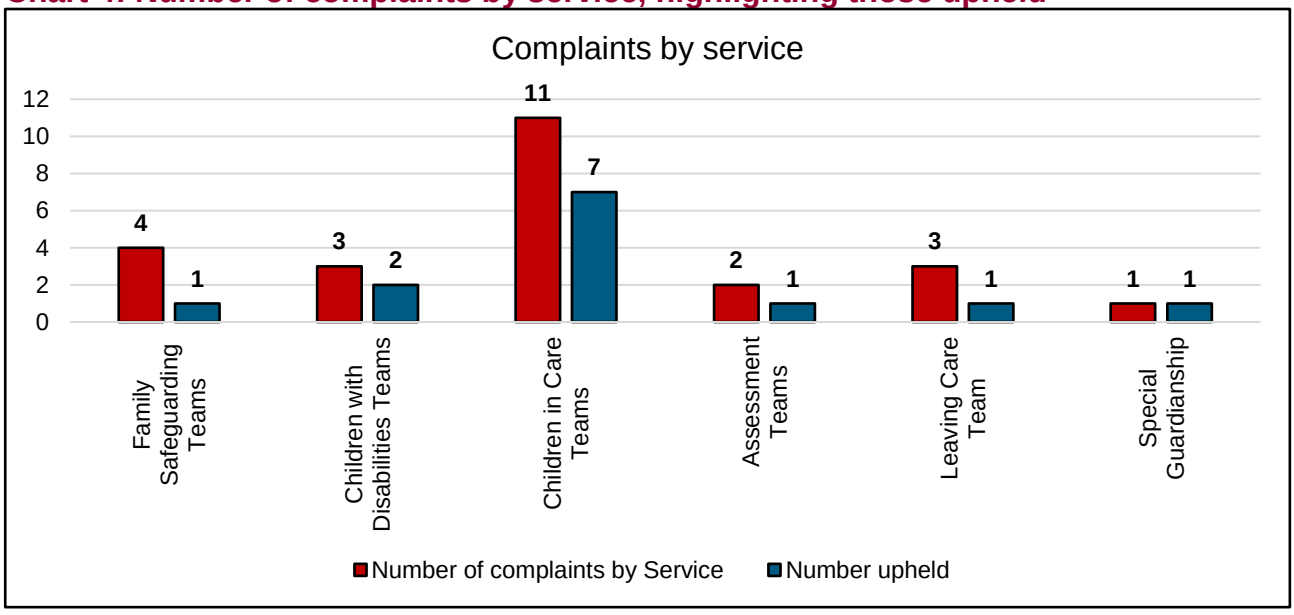



The number of upheld complaints against number received during the year for Children's Safeguarding & Family Support was 50%.

Of the 24 complaints responded to in the year, 54% (13) were upheld, 38% (9) were not upheld and 8% (2) were 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**

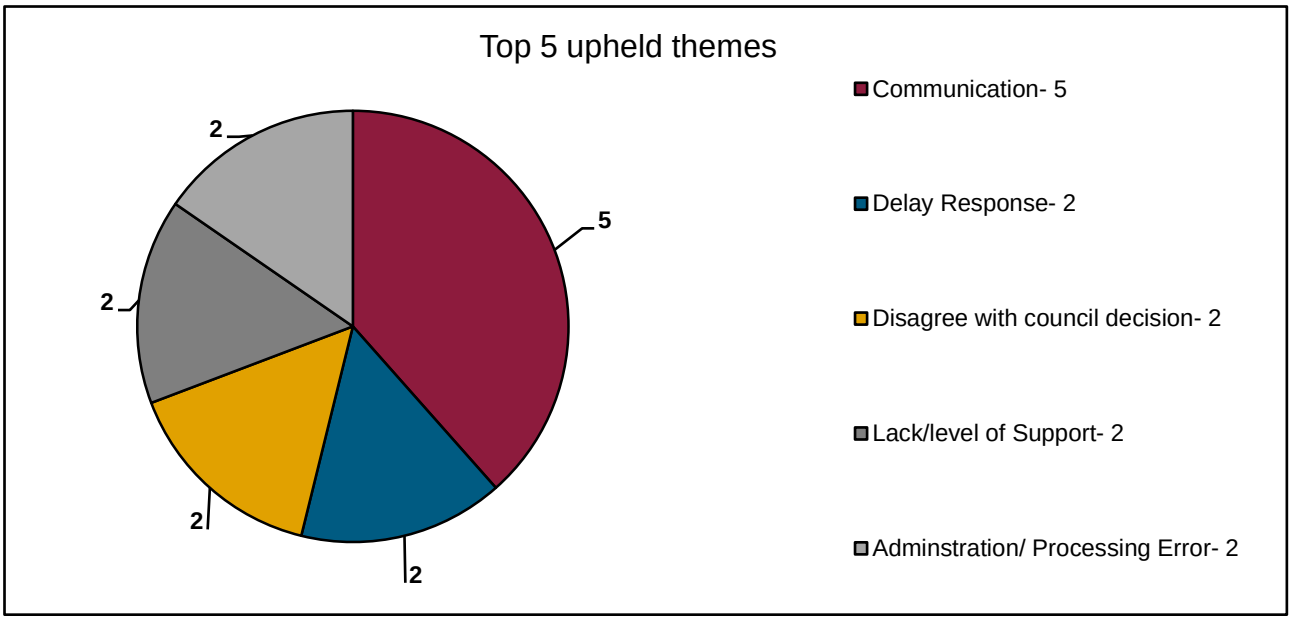



The most upheld complaints were in the Children in Care Teams (7) with 64% upheld and Children with Disabilities Teams (2) where 67% upheld. The Family Safeguarding Teams received four complaints, and one was upheld.

# 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 38% of upheld complaints had an element of the complaint that related to communication. This covers a variety of concerns including lack of communication around rights to advocacy, delays in providing information and minutes from meetings, information provided was not clear, consistent or timely, inappropriate communication, Lack of response to calls due to incorrect details held on file.

Other concerns include complaints involving lack of support from a worker, a delay in assessment and processing recommendations following an assessment.

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

Communication continues to be a recurring theme within the top five upheld complaint categories each year. In response, we will take targeted action to address this issue through a coordinated organisation-wide communications plan. This will seek to reinforce the importance of clear, timely and courteous communication at every customer touchpoint. The campaign will remind colleagues of expected standards, including responding promptly to calls and emails, providing clear and concise explanations, managing expectations effectively, and demonstrating common courtesy in all interactions.

# Timescales for responses

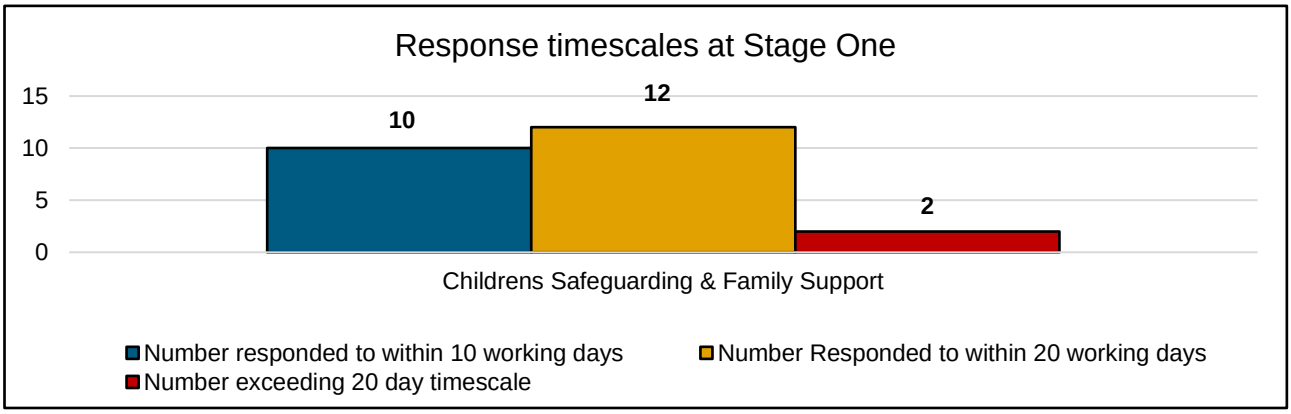
Our Children's Statutory Complaints Policy has been written in line with The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006, which outline how Children's Statutory Complaints should be handled and the three stages involved.

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 24 complaints that were responded to in the year, 10 were responded to within the 10-working day timescale and 12 were completed within the 20-day extended timescale. Two complaints exceeded the extended 20 working day timescale; these were particularly complex cases.

The average number of days to respond in Children's Statutory Complaint was 13 working days, which is an improvement on the 14 days achieved in 2024/25.

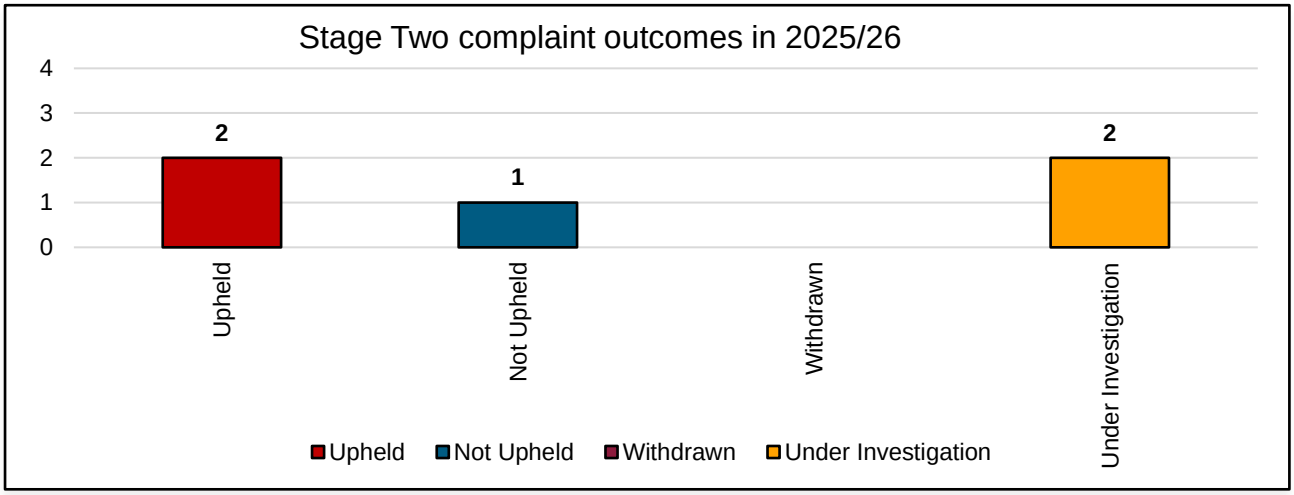
Since November 2020 new procedures have been put in place to improve timescales for responses. Outstanding complaints are highlighted to the Director, Executive Director and Service Delivery Managers on a weekly basis. Six-weekly meetings take place with Directors to review all outstanding cases and learning. More work has been done in 2025/26 to improve timescales further including the continued upskilling of Team Managers and Team Leaders in complaint handling, which has further impacted 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 2025/26, four (17%) Statutory Stage One complaints progressed to Stage Two of the process. One case remained outstanding at 31 March 2026.

**Chart 7: Stage Two complaint outcomes in 2025/26**




The number of statutory Stage Two investigations in 2025/26 slightly reduced on the 5 received in the previous year, where 5 investigations took place. Most complaints were resolved locally at Stage One of the procedure.

Two stage two investigations were upheld.

It was identified that investigators should meet directly with all children and young people who submit a complaint through the statutory complaint's procedure. This is essential to ensure that their concerns are fully understood and that an appropriate and meaningful outcome is achieved.

The organisation should use learning from complaints to enhance children's experiences by ensuring relevant and thorough questions are asked at the outset of a foster placement. This will support better matching and informed choice of foster carers, promote placement stability, and help ensure that children feel safe, content, and confident in their placement.

Additionally, it is important that children are reassured that they can trust their social worker and feel able to raise serious concerns if needed. Professionals must remain open and transparent in their decision-making processes, and case notes should clearly and accurately record these decisions to avoid ambiguity or misunderstanding.

The average number of days to complete a Stage Two investigation was 48 days, an improvement on the 71 days in 2024/25 and within the extended timescale of 65 working days.

All complaints were resolved at Stage Two of the procedure however; No case proceeded to a Stage 3 Panel.

# Learning and outcomes from Children’s Statutory Complaints

Complaints provide valuable insight into how our services are experienced and help us to identify recurring issues, root causes and opportunities for improvement. While complaint volumes and outcomes are important indicators, they do not on their own capture the full impact that a complaint can have on an individual or reflect how concerns are addressed at a local level. Understanding the lived experience of residents and the effect that service failures or misunderstandings can have on them is essential to improving the experience of others in the future.

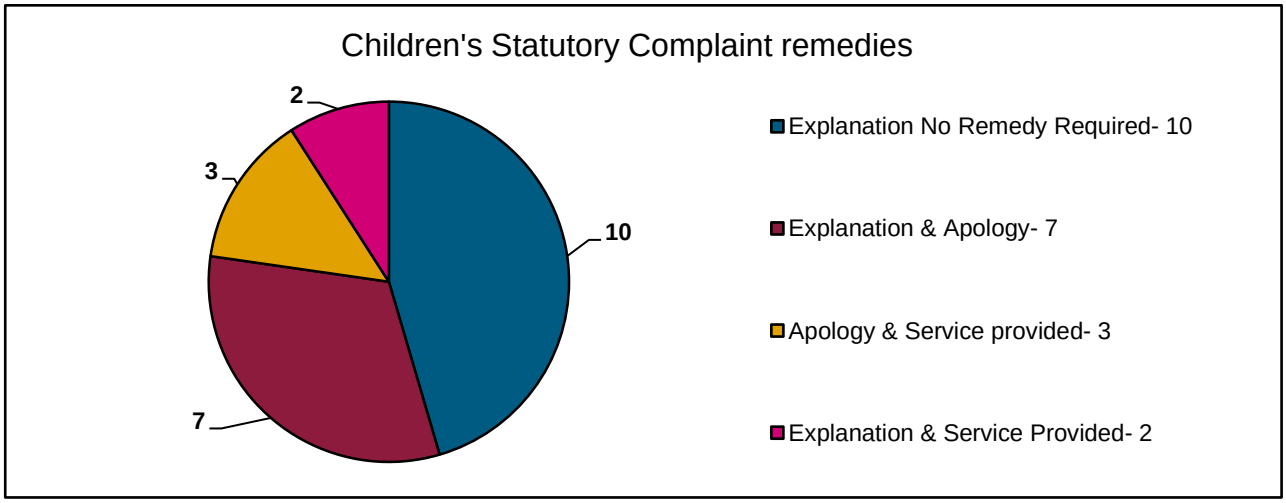
Learning is most often drawn from upheld complaints; however, the Council also recognises that valuable lessons can be identified in cases where no fault is found. In these circumstances, there may still be opportunities to strengthen communication, improve processes, or enhance customer experience.

During investigations, additional service issues are sometimes identified that extend beyond the scope of the original complaint. When this occurs, the Customer Relationship Team works collaboratively with services to ensure that the wider context is considered and that learning is applied effectively, supporting the delivery of the best possible outcomes for residents.

The Customer Relationship Team continues to provide day-to-day advice and support to managers on complaints handling, resolution and responses to representations, helping to promote consistency, fairness and a customer-focused approach.

Complaint outcomes and learning are reviewed in detail through monthly Quality Assurance meetings. The Quality and Complaints Officer for Children’s Services attend these meetings on a quarterly basis, providing additional oversight and supporting Service Delivery Managers to identify themes, agree actions and determine how learning can be shared with practitioners to drive ongoing service improvement.

**Chart 8: Children’s Statutory Complaint remedies in 2025/26**



The top remedies recorded against Children's Statutory Complaints in 2025/26 were:

- 42% were to provide an explanation and no remedy was required
- 29% were to provide an explanation and apology
- 13% apology and remedy provided
- 8% Explanation and remedy provided

## 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

- There has been a review of processes where foster carers are deregistered to ensure that this is clearer and the process is communicated

- Discussions will take place with young people prior to their 18th birthday to explain the accommodation process and outline the locations of available accommodation providers. Young people will be informed that, depending on the housing options offered, a move to a different area may be required. These conversations may be undertaken by the Personal Advisor, Social Worker, Independent Reviewing Officer, or the accommodation adviser within the Leaving Care team during face-to-face visits, care planning meetings, and Child Looked After reviews

- Where a social worker goes off sick and leaves tasks unfinished, procedures will ensure that there is better communication to ensure that tasks do not drift

- Young people should be provided with access to the Local Offer (website and leaflets available) as this provides information about their leaving care entitlements. Payment forms should be completed as soon as possible for any reimbursements. Social workers have been asked to contact carers directly when arranging statutory visits to children and communicate any constraints around times with Foster Carers

- A review of Child in Need planning processes has concluded that if visits were not unannounced there should have been a mixture of both visits undertaken as part of the Child in Need planning

- Team learning sessions have taken place between Adults and Children's services to ensure that preparing for adulthood and transition referral is seamless and customers are updated throughout the process

- Family Hubs have reviewed communication for separated parents and have updated standard operating procedures in co-production with parents with lived experience of working with Family Hubs. Standard operating procedures have been updated to include that parents with PR not in the family home, are contacted where it is safe to do so to update on the work being completed. The offer for separated families has been expanded under family Hubs, and new practitioners have been

trained in Triple P transitions. Family Transitions Triple P assists parents who need extra support to adjust and manage the transition from a two-parent family to a single-parent family. It focuses on skills to resolve conflicts with former partners and how to cope positively with stress

- Reminder has been sent to teams to remind them that minutes from meetings should be shared in a timely manner

- Family time schedules will be sent out to parents/ carers in advance and with enough notice

- Staff across the service have been made aware of processes and timeframes linked to kinship, in order to support potential kinship carers in making decisions and also within the assessment process

- Social workers will be required to record consent on the case file, so it is accessible to all relevant officers if needed

- Reconfirmed the necessity and importance of social workers being aware of the cultural and religious needs of the families they are working with, ensuring practice is attuned to this

- The Disabled Facilities Grant process has been reviewed to ensure that there is a nominated individual who will confirm when funding has been agreed with all parties and clarity is provided to customers to avoid confusion in the future

- Learning from complaints regarding staff conduct have been shared with Practitioners to improve and support awareness of practice

# 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
- Leavers Come First Forum
- Separate Migrant Care Leavers Forum
- Kinship Forum
- Children in Care Council
- Young Futures Forum

Please find below examples of feedback received from Children and Young People and the positive actions that have been taken as a result;

**Young People Said… They want participation to feel simple, relational, and authentic**

- Conversational approaches work better than forms; prefer yes/no or short questions
- Don't want complicated or overly formal processes when sharing their voice
- Want to feel practitioners speak "like we are friends," not formally
- Value simple opportunities to connect, have fun, and build relationships (games, crafts, experiences)

**WE DID**

- Shifted practice to conversation-based voice gathering in Child Abused Through Exploitation (CATE) Team and Family Hubs
- Redesigned participation events around low-pressure connection (e.g., pumpkin carving, crafts, games, Lego, baking)
- Practitioners focused on relational, strengths-based approaches, increasing positive feedback (e.g., "she listens", "he helps me feel calm")

**Young People Said… They want clear understanding of roles, decisions, and why services are involved**

- Many children do not understand why they have a practitioner, with only a few able to clearly articulate the purpose (e.g., "to keep us safe")
- Young people want information in accessible formats

**WE DID**

- Voice Apprentices produced child friendly leaflets explaining roles (e.g. Social Worker, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), Personal Assistants) and reasons for involvement
- enhanced direct work tools to support practitioners in explaining involvement
- began digital redevelopment of consultation tools to enable clearer, more focused dialogue

**Young People Said… They want more say in meetings & decisions affecting them**

- Young people want to attend more of their meetings
- School timetables and timings are barriers

**WE DID**

- Services now routinely ask and plan for Young Peoples attendance
- Exploring timing adjustments and school collaboration to facilitate involvement
- Voice Apprentices routinely contribute to recruitment of key posts, IRO service development, Corporate Parenting Board, Bright Spots survey interpretation

**Young People Said… They want fun, meaningful, inclusive participation opportunities**

- Want more visits, more activities, and more creativity (e.g. pamper activities, crafts, gaming, sports, prizes)
- Want opportunities to meet peers, feel belonging, and have positive experiences
- Request more accessible community-based options

**WE DID**

- Expanded the offer across services:
  - 4 CATE events annually, redesigned based on youth feedback
  - Family Hubs sessions with crafts, baking, games, emotional regulation tools
  - Virtual School arts, sports, theatre, and music participation including Care to Dance, band performances, trips and workshops
  - Care Leavers events: wellbeing sessions, cookery, budgeting, Xmas lunch, podcasting, driving initiative
  - Forums: Kinship (11–17), Children in Care Council (8–14), Youth Forum (11–16), Young Futures (4–11), Beauty & Gaming Special Interest Groups
- Enhanced community safety and positive activity offer (Urban Games, Kicks, youth led projects)

**Young People Said… They want practitioners who are kind, consistent, on time, and follow through**

- want practitioners who listen, understand, show humour, and build trust
- noted punctuality and clear endings of work as improvement areas ("be on time", "better exit plans")

**WE DID**

- reinforced expectations with teams via operational groups
- embedded relational practice training and reflective opportunities
- ensured planned endings, preparation time, and expectation setting are emphasised in service guidance

**Young People Said… They want safer communities and support understanding local opportunities**

- do not always know what community activities exist
- some feel unsafe in areas of the community
- want more support navigating online safety, local spaces, school transitions, and police interactions

**WE DID**

- Voice Apprentices' newsletters now promote community events, safe activities, and youth opportunities
- partnership work strengthened in:
  - Police interactions (Corporate Parenting Board sessions)
  - Community safety projects (Make a Change, surveys, youth led improvements)
  - "Crucial Crew" transition programme reaching 2,500 children annually
- Toucan CAMHS engagement shaped future emotional wellbeing support

**Young People Said… They want their personal journeys recognised and amplified**

- want creative ways to express experiences (poetry, music, art)
- want their stories to drive service design

**WE DID**

- funded individual creative opportunities (e.g. studio session for song writing)
- expanded arts-based participation through Virtual School (dance, graffiti, performing arts)
- embedded youth voice in:
  - therapeutic research
  - mental health programme design
  - anxiety workshop development for schools.

**Overall Impact:**

- Participation is now embedded, multi layered, and maturing, with clear evidence of influence on service design and delivery
- Youth Voice now actively shapes strategic priorities: Corporate Parenting Board, Youth Partnership Board, Bright Spots, SEND Local Offer
- Creative and relational practice is consistently strengthening engagement, belonging, and trust across service areas

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.

On 31 March 2025 one case was still being investigated by the Ombudsman, this case has been concluded and was closed after initial enquiries by the ombudsman.

No statutory cases were escalated to the LGSCO in 2025/26.

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

# Concluding Comments

This Annual Report shows that the number of Children's Statutory Complaints received in 2025/26 remained marginally 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 improved during the year with the average number of days to respond to a statutory complaint improving from the 14 working days in 2024/25 to 13 working days in 2025/26. Overall, in 2025/26, 92% of complaints were responded to within the statutory timescale of 20 working days an improvement on the 87% in 2024/25 and 43% were responded to within ten working days, a slight reduction on the 43% 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.

# Priorities for 2026/27

During 2026/27, 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

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

# 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).