

CABINET

DATE	8 th September 2022
REPORT OF	Cllr, Margaret Cracknell, Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Joanne Hewson, Interim Director of Children's Services
SUBJECT	Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2021/22
STATUS	Open
FORWARD PLAN REF NO.	Not included on the Forward Plan therefore, to be considered under the General Exception provisions of the Constitution.

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

The Children's Social Care statutory complaints procedure supports the Council's aims of a stronger economy and stronger communities and enables citizens to voice concerns. The outcomes sought from the procedure are healthier and happier lives for children and young people.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report provides an overview of the activity and analysis of complaints and compliments for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Receives and accepts the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2021/22.
2. Refers the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2021/22 to the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel for their consideration.
3. Subsequent to recommendation 2 above, delegates responsibility to the Deputy Chief Executive & Executive Director for People, Health and Care in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People to publish the annual report

REASONS FOR DECISION

It is a requirement of The Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 to produce an annual report regarding the representations made about social care statutory services. The purpose of the attached report is to inform

the general public, elected members and Council officers about the effectiveness of the statutory complaints procedure.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

- 1.1 The Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006, Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Health and Social Care Act 2003 require the Council to operate and maintain a procedure for resolving complaints and representations from children, young people or their representatives concerning statutory services.
- 1.2 The attached Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report provides a breakdown of the complaints, concerns and compliments received during 2021/22, the service improvements implemented, and lessons learnt as a result of complaints and representations.
- 1.3 During 2021/22 the Council received the following representations concerning children's social care statutory services:

Complaints = 105

Compliments = 32

This compares with 118 complaints and 18 compliments in 2020/21.

- 1.4 Of the 105 complaints responded to at stage one, three escalated to stage two (independent investigation) and one escalated to stage 3 (review panel) during 2021/22.

At stage one, fourteen complaints (**13.3%**) were responded to outside of the maximum statutory timescale of twenty working days. This is an improvement on the previous year when 22.1% of complaints were responded outside of the statutory timescale. The three stage two complaints were responded to outside of the 65 working day timescale. The stage three complaint was responded to within the statutory timescale. Contributory factors to the complaints exceeding the statutory timescale are the complex issues raised requiring officer investigation and ongoing dialogue with the complainant, and officers having competing priorities arising from recent inspections.

- 1.5 **30.4%** of stage one complaints were not upheld.
- 1.6 Complaints and compliments provide the Council with useful information in respect of the way Children's Social Services are delivered, identifying good practice and opportunities for improvement which have resulted in changes to our systems. It is to be noted that the greatest number of complaints is with the Assessment and Intervention Service and the Court and Child Protection Services. This is to be expected as these services are a frontline service dealing with a large number of cases with very complex issues to address. Further information on the type of complaints and compliments is contained within section four of the annual report.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- 2.1 The Children's Social Care statutory complaints procedure aims to treat all members of the community equally. The procedure for the handling of complaints is an important contributor to citizen and service user perceptions and informs service improvement, this ensures that an individual's diversity and human rights are promoted through an efficient and effective complaints process.
- 2.2 The arrangements for dealing with Children's Services complaints are critical in ensuring that customer's views on our services are recognised and that feedback received is acted upon. Children's Service Statutory Complaints procedure complies with the Corporate Policy Framework. This includes confidentiality for complainants and keeping complainants fully informed about the progress of their complaints.

3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 3.1 It is a statutory requirement that an annual report is completed for these complaints and the activities undertaken in responding to the complaints follows current guidance. The current approach is set out in the attached report.

4. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 If the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) make a finding of fault against us then we are obliged to make public the findings. All complaints investigated by the LGSCO are available on their website at www.lgo.org.uk

5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 The handling of the Council's complaints is an in-house service funded through the revenue budget. Efficiencies are continuously sought from refining the complaints handling process (better use of systems and expertise) and through making service improvements based on what our customers are telling us, so that any mistakes are not repeated. There has been three stage 2 complaints in 2021/22 and one stage three panel review. Each stage two and three complaint need to have additional funding found for external and independent investigation and verification.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The report will not have any impact on climate change or environmental implications.

7. CONSULTATION WITH SCRUTINY

- 7.1 Cabinet may wish to refer this report to Scrutiny for consideration.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The report is providing information on complaints, concerns and compliments received. As such there are no direct additional financial implications arising from the report itself. However, as the report makes clear each stage two and three complaint requires further funding which although met from existing budgets the current processes and procedures need to restrict the number of these to assist with maximising budgets to front door delivery of services.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Section 13 (1) of the Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 requires that for the purposes of monitoring, every Local Authority must as soon as possible after the end of the financial year compile a report of representations. This report ensures that the Council meets the statutory requirement within the regulations. The attached report is thorough and contains within it lessons to be learned from this valuable process.

10. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The lessons learnt and improvements in practice contained within Section four of the annual report, includes reference to actions taken with employees to address concerns/issues highlighted via the statutory complaints process. Remedial action has been taken in the provision of additional training, re-emphasising effective communication and improving procedural processes.

11. WARD IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 People who might make use of the complaints process may live in any ward of the Borough.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/1738/contents/made>

Department for Education and Skills 'Getting the Best from Complaints'.
September 2006.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-getting-the-best-from-complaints>

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>

Adoption and Children Act 2002.
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/38/contents>

Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003.
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/43/contents>

13. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

Paul Ellis, Head of Information Governance and Complaints, North East Lincolnshire Council, Telephone: (01472) 323372

COUNCILLOR MARGARET CRACKNELL
PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE



www.nelincs.gov.uk

North East Lincolnshire Council

Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022

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1. Context

The Children's Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006, Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Health and Social Care Act 2003 require the Council to operate and maintain a procedure for resolving complaints and representations from children, young people, or their representatives.

This report provides an overview of Children's Social Care complaints and representations made to North East Lincolnshire Council during the period 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022, in accordance with the Children's Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 and the accompanying guidance 'Getting the Best from Complaints'.

What is a Complaint?

A complaint can be generally defined as 'any expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet about a service that is being delivered or a failure to deliver a service'.

The Statutory Complaints Procedure aims to ensure those children, young people and their parents or carers who make representations have their concerns resolved swiftly and wherever possible by the people who provide the service.

Who can make a Complaint?

Section 26(3) and section 24D of the Children Act 1989, section 3(1) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Adoption and Support Services Regulations 2005 require the responsible authority to consider representations including complaints made to it by:

- any child or young person (or a parent of them or someone who has parental responsibility for them) who is being looked after by the local authority or is not looked after by them, but is in need
- any local authority foster carer (including those caring for children placed through independent fostering agencies)
- children leaving care
- Special Guardians
- a child or young person (or parent of them) to whom a Special Guardian order is in force
- any person who has applied for an assessment under section 14F (3) or (4), (Adoption and Support Services Regulations 2005)
- any child or young person who may be adopted, their parents and guardians
- persons wishing to adopt a child
- any other person for whom arrangements for the provision of adoption services extend
- adopted persons, their parents, natural parents, and former guardians
- such other person as the local authority consider has sufficient interest in the child or young person's welfare to warrant their representations being considered by them.

Where a complaint is made by a child or young person, an advocate is offered to support the young person through all stages of the complaint's procedure.

2. The Statutory Complaints Procedure

The complaints procedure has three stages, with a strong emphasis on resolving complaints at the first stage:

Concern - When a customer contacts us with an issue which can quickly be resolved prior to going through the statutory complaint's procedure, these are logged as a concern and where possible responded to within 5 working days.

Stage one (Local Resolution) - This stage of the complaint's procedure is where we would aim to resolve all issues through a quality and timely response, reducing the need for further stages. Council social care service teams and external contractors providing social care services on our behalf are expected to resolve as many complaints as possible at this level. Team managers provide a written response to the complainants within 10 working days. This can be extended to 20 working days if the complaint involves complex matters, or to allow time for appointing an advocate where a vulnerable person is involved. The complaints team, work in partnership with managers to ensure that quality responses are provided within the specified timescales.

Stage two (Independent Investigation) - This stage is usually implemented where the complainant is dissatisfied with the findings of stage one. Stage two is an investigation conducted by an external investigating officer together with an independent person who oversees and ensures the fairness and transparency of the investigation process. The findings from the investigation and any recommendations are set out in a report to the head of service who provides a written response to the complainant on behalf of the Council. The timescale for responding to a complaint at stage two is 25 working days, with an extension of up to 65 working days for complex cases.

Stage three (Independent Review Panel) - Where complainants wish to proceed with complaints following dissatisfaction with the outcome of the complaint at stage two, the Council is required to establish a Complaints Review Panel. Complaints Review Panels are made up of three independent panellists. The Panel's role is to ensure that the process has been followed and to consider the complaint/s and wherever possible work towards a resolution. The Panel makes recommendations to the Director of Children's Services who then makes a decision on the complaint and on any action to be taken.

There are various timescales relating to stage three complaints. These include:

- setting up the Panel within 30 working days of the complainant's request
- producing the Panel's report within five working days
- sending the Council's response to the complainant within 15 working days of the Panel's report.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman - If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the Independent Review Panel, they have the right to take their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), who is empowered to review or investigate where it appears that the Council's own investigations have not resolved the complaint or not been handled appropriately. Complainants can refer their complaint to the LGO at any time, although the Ombudsman normally refers the complaint back to the Council if it has not been considered under the relevant procedures in the first instance.

Team Structure - the NELC Complaints Team consists of:

Paul Ellis – Head of Information Governance and Complaints
Adele Beharrell – Information Governance and Complaints Officer
Ian Hollingsworth – Information Governance and Complaints Officer

3. Summary of Findings 2021/22

Year	Concern	Stage one	Stage two	Stage three	LGSCO
2021/22	55	105	3	1	2
2020/21	51	118	1	0	4
2019/20	0	152	3	0	9
2018/19	0	112	0	1	2
2017/18	0	99	3	0	2
2016/17	1	66	2	0	0
2015/16	7	106	4	2	6

Between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022, the Council responded to 105 stage 1 complaints, compared with 118 in the same period for 2020/21. This is a decrease of 11% but overall shows a fairly consistent number of complaints with the previous year's figures and the average. The number of concerns when compared to the previous year figures also remains consistent.

The last available mid-year population figure we have is for 31st March 2022, there were 34,518 under 18s living in North East Lincolnshire. As of 31st March 2022, the Council had 2,380 open child care cases including 613 looked after children. When compared to the previous year as of 1st April 2021, the Council had 2,376 open childcare cases, including 558 looked after children. This is an increase of 4 open childcare cases and an increase of 55 looked after children

The 105 stage one complaints received accounted for 4.4% of the open cases based on this figure, however it should be noted that the number of open childcare cases does vary throughout the year. Last year the number of representations were 5% of the open cases.

A total of 105 stage one complaints were processed and responded to. Three complaints were escalated to stage two and one panel review was held during 2021/22.

The high percentage of complaints resolved at stage one reflects the time and effort put in at this stage to address the complaint without the need for escalation to stage two. The emphasis of the complaints process is to reach a resolution and efforts made to resolve complaints at stage one focus on ensuring the complainant understands the response they have received and what outcome can be realistically achieved. This may be done through further correspondence if it is felt that this might resolve the issue, or the service managers or team managers may meet with complainants.

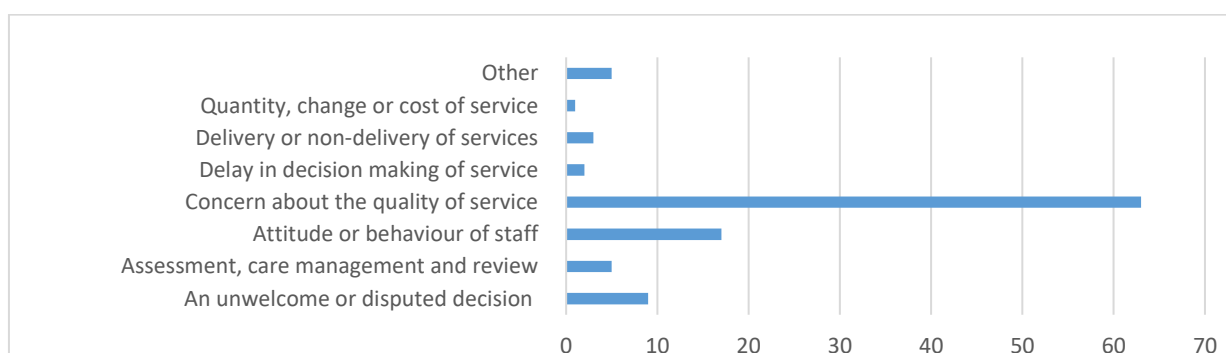
Two complaints were raised with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) during 2021/22, both of which related to Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Services. The outcome for both complaints was that they were deemed to be premature. The LGSCO determine a complaint to be premature when the Council has not been given the opportunity to investigate the concerns. In this case the complainant is directed to follow the Council's complaints process.

Complaints by Service Area

Service area	Number of complaints in 2021/2022	Number of complaints in 2020/2021
Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Service (CASS) Please note CASS is now recorded under two different teams: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment and Intervention Service Court and Child Protection Service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 37(35.2%) 27 (25.7%) 	104 (88.1%)
Children in Care Team and New Futures Team (Formerly Through Care Services)	29 (27.6%)	7 (5.9%)
Integrated Front Door Services	4 (3.8%)	0 (0%)
Fostering and Adoption Services	2 (1.9%)	4 (3.3%)
Children's Disability Service	1 (0.9%)	0 (0%)
Contact Services	0 (0%)	1 (0.8%)
Children's Safeguarding and Reviewing Service (CSRS)	0 (0%)	1 (0.8%)
Residential Unit A	0 (0%)	1 (0.8%)
Residential Unit B	2 (1.9%)	0 (0%)
Residential Unit C	1 (0.9%)	0 (0%)
Residential Unit D	1 (0.9%)	0 (0%)
Residential Unit E	1 (0.9%)	0 (0%)

Nature of Complaints

Complaint types	Number of complaints in 2021/22
An unwelcome or disputed decision	9 (8.5%)
Assessment, care management and review	5 (4.7%)
Attitude or behaviour of staff	17 (16.1%)
Concern about the quality of service	63 (60%)
Delay in decision making of service	2 (1.9%)
Delivery or non-delivery of services	3 (0.9%)
Quantity, change or cost of service	1 (4.7%)



The Outcome of complaints

2021/2022

Stage	1	2	3
Upheld	22 (20.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Partially upheld	45 (42.8%)	3 (100%)	1 (100%)
Not upheld	32 (30.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Withdrawn	2 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
No Finding	4 (3.8%)	0 (0%) (0%)	0 (0%)

2020/2021

Stage	1	2	3
Upheld	15 (12.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Partially upheld	43 (36.4%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)
Not upheld	51 (43.2)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Withdrawn	6 (5.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
No Finding	3 (2.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Timescales for complaints

Outcome	2021/22 No.	2021/22 %	2020/21 No.	2021/22 %
Stage 1 response within 10 days	53	50.4	64	54.2
Stage 1 response within 20 days	38	36.1	28	23.7
Stage 1 response outside of 20 days	14	13.3	26	22.1
Stage 2 response within 25 days	0	0	0	0
Stage 2 response within 65 days	0	0	1	100
Stage 2 response outside of 65 days	3	100	0	0
Stage 2 investigations ongoing	0	0	0	0
Stage 2 investigations withdrawn	0	0	0	0
Stage 3 response within 15 days	1	100	0	0
Stage 3 response outside of Timescale	0	0	0	0

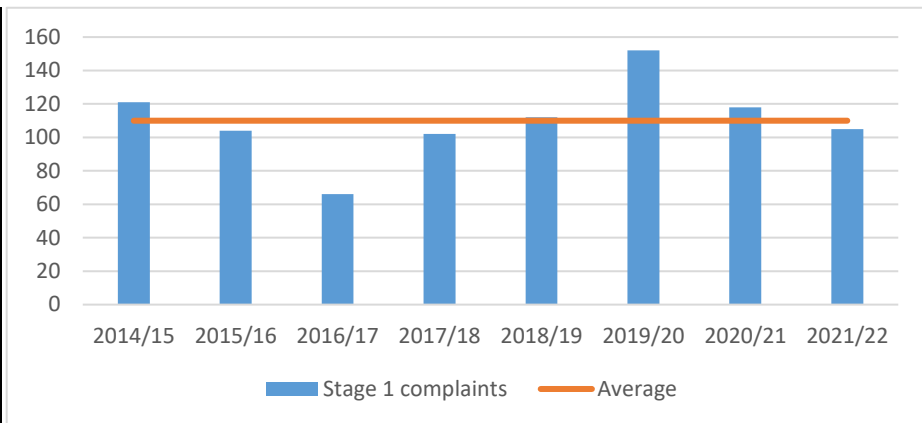
There has been a slight decrease in the number of complaints responded to within 10 days at stage one, during 2021/22. During this time 50.4% of stage 1 complaints were responded to within 10 working days. The low percentage of complaints being dealt with in the 10 working day timescale is of concern, as it can lead to customers waiting longer than necessary for issues to be resolved. Whilst work has been undertaken to address this, the high turnover of staff and changes at team manager level have impacted on the effectiveness of any efforts to address the extended timescales.

There have also been some complex issues raised which have resulted in officers requiring more time to complete an investigation and further ongoing work and dialogue following the initial response. It should also be acknowledged that the officers allocated to investigate the complaints

have also had a number of other competing priorities resulting from increased focus on the activities of the service arising from recent inspections. During this time, the service has also been engaged in significant improvements which has led to changes in the structure of the service, new management arrangements and increased officers within the service.

The number of complaints has been relatively consistent in recent years. Although the most recent figures show a slight decrease compared to 2020/21, they are in line with the average received.

Year	Stage 1 complaints
2014/15	121
2015/16	104
2016/17	66
2017/18	102
2018/19	112
2019/20	152
2020/21	118
2021/22	105



Compensation payments

Compensation can be provided to a complainant by the Council as either part of the investigation or on the recommendation of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman following their investigation, where it is concluded that there has been maladministration by the Council causing injustice to the complainant. Any payments made as a result of the investigation identifying late or missing payments which have then subsequently been paid are not included in these compensation figures.

In the financial year 2021/22 the total compensation paid was £650.00 for one case. During the financial year 2020/21, we did not pay out any financial compensation related to cases concluded in this time.

4. Lessons Learned and Improvements to Service Delivery

A number of actions can arise from a complaint investigation which are specific to the individual complaint. Approximately 46% of complaints had some form of action or improvement identified as a result of the investigation. In some instances, actions are very specific to the case being investigated, below are some examples:

- Assigning a new social worker where this is beneficial to the case and in the interests of the children/young people being supported.
- Providing information to parents and carers to ensure they have a clear understanding of what support and services are available to them.
- Reviewing contact arrangements and sessions.
- Ensuring that families are kept informed of any changes, updates, or decisions to a case in a timely way, including the issuing of case closure letters.
- Provide further support to families by the Social Worker meeting to discuss and explain the content of reports in further detail and clarify other aspects the case.
- Apologising to complainants where communication from the service could have been better and taking action to ensure it is improved.
- Ensuring appropriate financial assistance is in place to support families caring for children in their care.
- Completing relevant assessments, such as a parenting assessment or a single assessment, when it is considered valuable to the development of the services involvement.
- Where it is identified as beneficial to the case, family group conferencing is offered.

- When contact is via the internet through a camera considerations to be given to ensure that the environment is appropriate and other people are not present.

Examples of the service improvements made following complaint investigations include:

For **Court and Child Protection Services**, it was highlighted that consistency is required following the change of a social worker. The manager of the previous social worker will seek to retain oversight of the case to ensure consistency. This is so that the child's journey through social care is understood by the service.

It was identified that the importance of ensuring service users are responded to within an appropriate timescale and also that they are given all relevant contact details, particularly in relation to where they should go if they cannot contact their allocated social worker. North East Lincolnshire Council is doing all it can to recruit and retain permanent social workers in order to avoid unnecessary change and disruption for children and families. This will aim to ensure cases progress swiftly and reduce the impact of frequent changes on families.

Consideration to be given to the procedures for arranging meetings when a number of service users are involved. This should include whether this is appropriate for different individuals to be present at the same meeting and how any related personal information may be shared or discussed.

An information sheet is to be produced explaining what private fostering arrangements are and where to find further information about this.

Assessment and Intervention Service have ensured ongoing learning and development to social workers to minimise drift, delay, and miscommunication. Where any issues are identified, reminders are issued to all social workers, for example, about ensuring that single assessments are shared with parents or carers. It is important in all cases to ensure that all relevant parties are made aware and informed of any social care intervention. This should always be done in a timely way to ensure that any important decisions or progress are communicated directly from the service, rather than via a third party.

Performance meetings are now held every week with every member of the team and these focus on tasks being completed in statutory timescales, such as assessments. There is continual development and key messages shared in team meetings about sending assessments to parents as soon as these are completed.

The changing ways of working have led to a number of developments in how arrangements for things like contact sessions are undertaken. This has led to the service being more pro-active in considering unexpected events, such as covid 19, to ensure they have minimal impact on contact sessions.

All social workers have been reminded to ensure telephone calls are returned in a timely manner. The importance of ensuring that customer expectations with regards to when calls will be returned and the frequency of contact, has also been emphasised.

Social workers have been reminded of the importance of ensuring that all relevant documents particularly those signed by parents or carers are uploaded to the child's electronic record. This has led to the development of a checklist to support and ensure that documents are uploaded. This applies to case notes on the records as well to ensure they are kept up to date. They should always record the nature of discussions and what paperwork has been provided to parents or carers. Social Workers are reminded of the timeliness of recording discussion and visits onto the child's file. This is shared in the performance meeting and team meetings.

It was identified that managers need to be proactive in overseeing cases especially around data protection and information governance policy. This has led to the development of a checklist to

assist with this. To prevent any data incidences, there is now a system in place whereby if the referrer wishes to remain anonymous but gives their name – this will not be recorded in the referral and there will be a discussion with the team managers, so this can be recorded in case notes and will be marked “DO NOT SHARE”.

It is important to ensure that all social workers are clear on the advice they are giving, such as what a child arrangement order involves, particularly around financial assistance and it not automatically being granted. Further training and guidance has been provided also around connected carers. Training continues to be offered to all social workers to ensure they have up-to-date knowledge especially around issues such as Special Guardianship Order’s and connected carers.

The importance of ensuring consistency of service delivery in the event of a social worker being unexpectedly absent has been highlighted. All social workers should ensure service users are notified of who they should be contacting in this event. A solution has also been developed to ensure an automatic out-of-office message is in place when any member of staff leaves to ensure that service users do not continue to email an officer who may have left the authority.

Where it is identified that staff will be away from work for more than one week, managers have been reminded to be pro-active in the management of the cases. Procedures to be put in place to ensure that families are kept up-to-date and informed of any potential cancellations of meetings or other case actions, including where necessary who will be handling the case in the interim period. It is an expectation that all social workers inform the family when they are on leave and who they can call, if needed. Allocated social workers have been reminded that they must visit their families prior to going on leave, and to arrange meetings around annual leave.

As part of the overall improvement plan action is being taken to address high caseloads. To date, caseloads have reduced for social workers, and this continues to be reviewed to ensure social workers have a manageable caseload.

A recruitment and retention project is underway, which is focusing on increasing the permanent social care workforce and supporting staff to remain working at North East Lincolnshire Council. In addition, the programme of work includes introducing a new induction programme, which will ensure all permanent and agency staff are equipped with the core knowledge, skills and behaviours necessary to practice effectively and to comply with legislative requirements.

Children in Care Team and New Futures Team (formerly Through Care Services) have identified that staff recruitment and retention and the lack of consistency of social worker and social worker teams, is impacting on case progression. This is impacting on relationships with young people and their families. The service has identified the need to increase staff to ensure that all young people get access to their Personal adviser earlier. Heads of Service are reviewing the impact of multiple social workers being allocated to children in our care and taking appropriate action to address it.

The service needs to ensure that a telephone number is always included in care and pathway plans so that service users can easily contact the right person with any queries.

In order to prevent drift and delay in care planning, it has been reinforced with social workers that any hand overs are undertaken thoroughly including meeting the service user and discussing the case with the current social worker. Social workers have been reminded of the importance of ensuring that relevant parties are kept informed and provided with updates as appropriate.

For children to have the opportunity to have their voice heard through their independent reviewing officers, to identify any issues and seek resolution before the potential need to escalate to a complaint. The emphasis should be on ensuring that young people are confident in raising any concerns and knowing that they will be listened to and helped.

The Local Authority accepts that staff recruitment and retention is an area which needs to be improved. The Local Authority is continuing its recruitment programme, with the aim of recruiting social workers to all the vacant roles, within the local authority, including the posts currently covered by agency social workers. This will lead to all young people having more stability with a permanent social worker allocated to them.

In relation to **Fostering and Adoption Service**, it has been agreed to include any incident of bruising on an incident form and this will be shared with the fostering social worker and children's social worker. These will be reviewed by the Service Manager and any concerns will be raised with the child care team and investigated as appropriate.

All appointments are to be shared in a contact book, and outcomes of the appointments to be communicated with the children's social worker within 24 hours of the appointment who will then share it with the service user.

Residential units will review procedures and arrangements for any incident of children being missing from care to ensure that cases are escalated at the appropriate time.

Arrangements have been reviewed to ensure there is greater availability of transport for residential units.

5. Compliments received for 2021/22

There has been an increase in compliments recorded this year which may be a reflection of the service being more pro-active in ensuring such compliments and feedback is reported.

Service area	No.	Summary of compliment
Assessment and Intervention Service	10	Thanking the service and social worker for the work undertaken with family. Thanking service and social worker for the support and assistance provided when dealing with a difficult situation. Thanking social worker who has done a brilliant job. The service has done a very good job dealing with a case. Social Worker was very helpful from start to finish and was really supportive. Complimenting the social worker for completing a great section 7 report. Thanking social worker for all the hard work done with the family. Thanking social worker for their kindness & efficiency. Thanking the service for mediating a meeting and ensuring actions were completed. Thanking the service for their support during a difficult time.
Integrated Front Door Service	9	Worker has been an excellent support and has done a great job. Officers have done an amazing job working on a project and offering support to develop cohorts. Thanking service for all their help and support. Officer has been committed and dedicated to the family throughout. They have worked tirelessly with the children and completed lots of direct work.

Service area	No.	Summary of compliment
		Officer has been amazing, working with our family. She is kind, caring, funny, non-judgemental. Thanking service for the support provided. Thanking service for the over whelming support offered. Thanking service for all the support provided to family. Thanking officer for helping and been very understanding.
Children in Care Team and New Futures Team (Formerly Through Care Services)	6	Thanking the service and workers for the hard work, dedication and support given to a young person. Positive comments about the support offered to a young person Thanking social worker for the fantastic work she is doing with complex young people. Thanking service for all the help and support given and helping through some tough times. Thanking social worker for their help and support. Thanking the social worker and service for all the help support provided.
Court and Child Protection Services	3	Social worker has been fantastic and has carried out amazing work with the family. Judge complimenting the service for the way they have managed a difficult and complex case. Social worker has been amazing and has really helped and supported the family.
Fostering and Adoption Service	2	Complimenting the worker for the outstanding way they have been advocating for children. Complimenting social worker for her high level of support and understanding.
GRAFT (Gaining Respect and Finding Trust)	2	Very happy with the support given by the service. Thanking service for help and support provided.

6. Looking Forward – Priorities for 2022/23

As well as the improvements to service delivery identified in the earlier part of the report, the complaints team also has a number of priorities to focus on during 2022/23.

To support electronic sharing of information interactive reporting dashboards continue to be developed to enable managers to see and examine the feedback being received. The information being reported as part of the Council Plan will also be reviewed and developed to ensure an overview and understanding of the challenges are seen at senior levels.

The team will continue to raise awareness of the complaint's procedure across the Council, ensuring staff are familiar with the procedures and fully equipped with effective complaints handling skills. Significant efforts need to be made to ensure that all customers are being dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner, whether this is through the formal complaints route or directly with the service through their day-to-day contact. To support this, regular reports are provided to Assistant Directors to inform them of any outstanding feedback. Further work will be undertaken to ensure that this information is accessible by other managers and appropriate escalation procedures are used tackle any significant delays.

It is positive to note the increase in compliments being reported and the team will continue to raise the importance of ensuring all feedback is reported, both positive and negative.

The team will also maintain networks with other local authorities and our local partners, to share good practice and contribute to the development of policy and practice, both locally and nationally.

Further efforts will be made to recruit independent investigating officers to ensure a wider pool of people are available to investigate any complaints. We are exploring the opportunities that virtual meetings offer in enabling us to broaden our pool of officers and the effectiveness and timeliness of investigations.

All available information in relation to complaints will continue to be reviewed and updated as necessary to ensure it is as clear as possible for all customers. This will include the revision of all information specifically for young people, including further work to publicise and explain the role of the Feedback Team to young people.

7. Conclusions

There have been significant changes within the Council over the past few years and moving forward it is expected that there will be more stability. This is particularly the case within Children's Services following improvement plans and the drive to retain and recruit social workers. This should result in significant improvements in the handling of cases and consistency for service users. We should also expect to see better timescales for dealing with complaints. With less changes taking place, the management of cases should lead to less issues being raised. The increased number of social workers also means that the caseloads will be reduced allowing improved and consistent communication to service users.

Significant effort has been put into developing the electronic childcare management system to ensure it supports social workers and improves the case recording. The service has also implemented the procedures and policies reference system called Tri-x and this continues to be developed. This is to ensure consistent and easy access to all the information needed for social workers and parents or carers. This will support the consistency of service delivery and advice given to families and carers. It is important to ensure that all social workers use and reference this information when making decisions.