

CABINET

DATE	23 rd August 2023
REPORT OF	Councillor, Margaret Cracknell, Portfolio Holder for Children and Education
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Janice Spencer, Director of Children's Services
SUBJECT	Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2022/23
STATUS	Open
FORWARD PLAN REF NO.	CB 08/23/01

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 2022 to 31st March 2023.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Receives and accepts the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2022/23.
2. Refers the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2022/23 to the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel for their consideration.
3. Subsequent to recommendation 2 above, delegates responsibility to the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education 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 complaint's 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 2022/23, the service improvements implemented, and lessons learnt as a result of complaints and representations.
- 1.3 During 2022/23 the Council received the following representations concerning children's social care statutory services:

Complaints = 91

Compliments = 9

This compares with 105 complaints and 32 compliments in 2021/22.

- 1.4 91 complaints were responded to at stage one. Two escalated to stage two (independent investigation) and one escalated to stage 3 (review panel) during 2022/23.

At stage one, twenty complaints (**22%**) were responded to outside of the maximum statutory timescale of twenty working days. This has slightly increased compared to the previous year when 13.31% of complaints were responded outside of the statutory timescale. The two 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 **33%** 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

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

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

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 two stage 2 complaints in 2022/23 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

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

7. CONSULTATION WITH SCRUTINY

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

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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 minimise the number of these to assist with maximising budgets to front door delivery of services.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

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

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/ukxi/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)

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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 2022 to 31st March 2023

Table of Contents

1. Context	2
What is a Complaint?.....	2
Who can make a Complaint?	2
2. The Statutory Complaints Procedure.....	3
3. Summary of Findings 2022/23.....	4
4. Lessons Learned and Improvements to Service Delivery	8
5. Compliments received for 2022/23	10
6. Looking Forward – Priorities for 2022/23	12
7. Conclusions	12

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 2022 and 31st March 2023, 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.

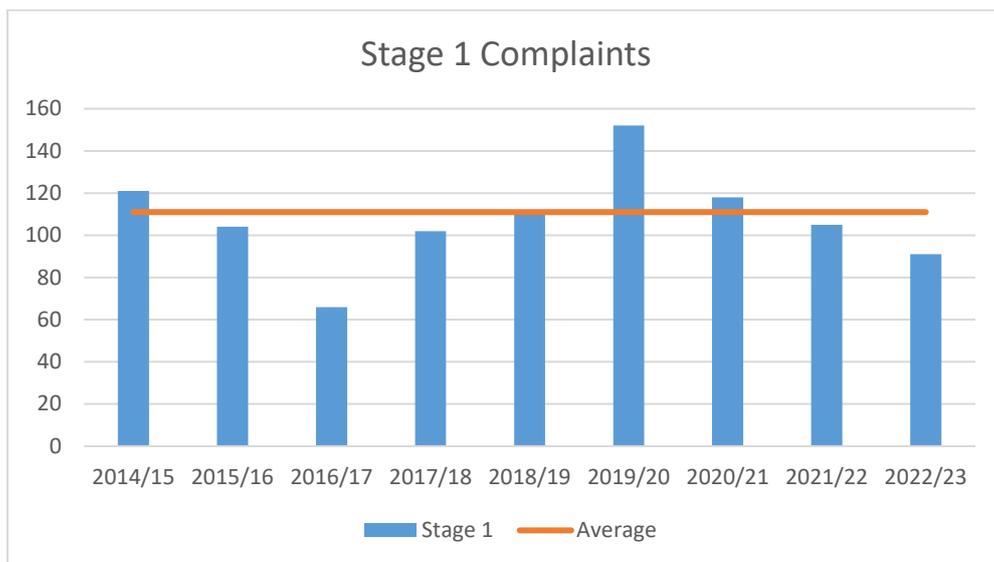
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman - If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the Independent Review Panel, they have the right to take their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), who is empowered to review or investigate where it appears that the Council's own investigations have not resolved the complaint or not been handled appropriately. Complainants can refer their complaint to the LGSCO 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 – Strategic Lead Business Practice and Performance
Adele Beharrell – Information Governance and Feedback Advisor
Shelley Boddy – Information Governance and Feedback Advisor

3. Summary of Findings 2022/23

Year	Concern	Stage one	Stage two	Stage three	LGSCO
2022/23	74	91	2	1	3
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 2022 and 31st March 2023, the Council responded to 91 stage 1 complaints, compared with 105 in the same period for 2021/22. This is a small decrease of 13% and overall when taken into account with the number of concerns shows a fairly consistent number of representations made to the complaint's team. The number of concerns has slightly increased when compared to the previous year figures.

The last available mid-year population figure we have is for 31st March 2023, when there were 33,043 under 18s living in North East Lincolnshire – a decrease of 4.3% from 34,518 in 2022. As of 31st March 2023, the Council had 1,838 open child care cases – a decrease of 29.5% from 2,380 in 2022. This includes 575 looked after children – a decrease of 6.2% from 613 in 2022.

The 91 stage one complaints received accounted for 4.9% 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 4.4% of the open cases.

Of the 91 stage one complaints, Two complaints were escalated to stage two and one panel review was held during 2022/23.

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.

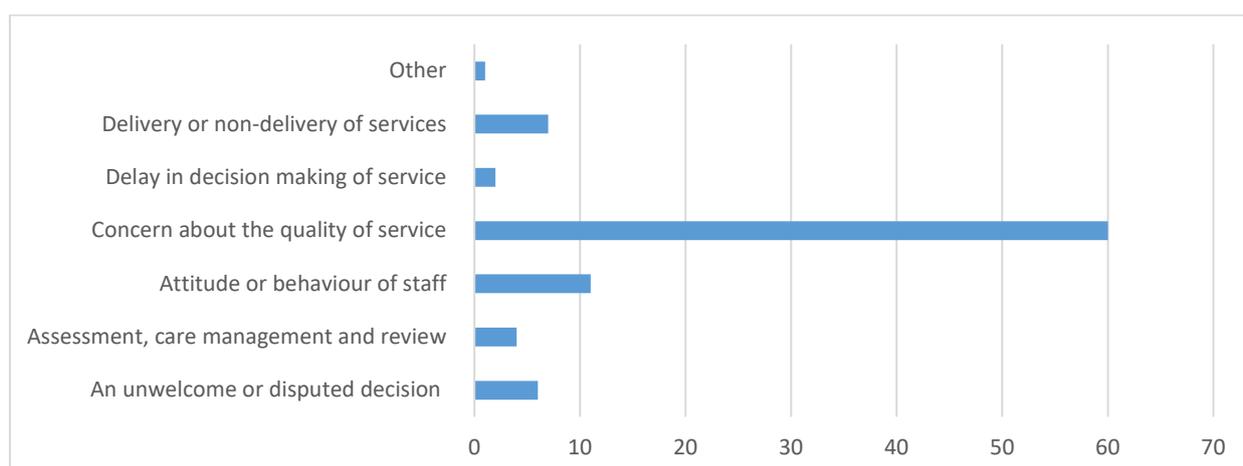
Three complaints were raised with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) during 2022/23, two related to Assessment and Intervention Service and the other related to Court and Child Protection Services. The outcome for one the complaints was that it was deemed to be premature, i.e. the Council had not had the opportunity to investigate. One of the complaints was outside of jurisdiction and therefore was not investigated by the LGSCO. The other complaint was a finding of fault and action was required from the council to remedy the issue.

Complaints by Service Area

Service area	Number of complaints in 2022/2023	Number of complaints in 2021/2022
Assessment and Intervention Service	28 (30.8%)	37(35.2%)
Court and Child Protection Service	28 (30.8%)	27 (25.7%)
Children in Care Team and New Futures Team (Formerly Through Care Services)	20 (22%)	29 (27.6%)
Integrated Front Door Services	2 (2.2%)	4 (3.8%)
Fostering and Adoption Services	0 (0%)	2 (1.9%)
Children's Disability Service	11 (12.1%)	1 (0.9%)
Residential Unit A	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Residential Unit B	0 (0%)	2 (1.9%)
Residential Unit C	0 (0%)	1 (0.9%)
Residential Unit D	0 (0%)	1 (0.9%)
Residential Unit E	1 (2%)	1 (0.9%)
Residential Unit F	1 (2%)	0 (0%)

Nature of Complaints

Complaint types	Number of complaints in 2022/23
An unwelcome or disputed decision	6
Assessment, care management and review	4
Attitude or behaviour of staff	11
Concern about the quality of service	60
Delay in decision making of service	2
Delivery or non-delivery of services	7
Other	1



The Outcome of complaints

2022/2023

Stage	1	2	3
Upheld	20 (22%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Partially upheld	36 (39.6%)	2 (100%)	1 (100%)
Not upheld	30 (33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Withdrawn	5 (5.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
No Finding	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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%)

Timescales for complaints

Outcome	2022/23	2022/23	2021/22	2021/22
	No.	%	No.	%
Stage 1 response within 10 days	29	31.9	53	50.4
Stage 1 response within 20 days	42	46.2	38	36.1
Stage 1 response outside of 20 days	20	22	14	13.3
Stage 2 response within 25 days	0	0	0	0
Stage 2 response within 65 days	0	0	0	0
Stage 2 response outside of 65 days	2	100	3	100
Stage 2 investigations ongoing	0	0	0	0
Stage 2 investigations withdrawn	0	0	0	0
Stage 3 response within 15 days	1	100	1	100
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 2022/23. During this time 32% 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. The Complaints Team will continue to monitor timescales and will report any overdue complaints to the relevant Head of Service and Assistant Director. The team are also developing an assurance dashboard that amongst other things will include compliance with statutory functions such as complaints, this will allow service managers to review their complaint activity and timescales for their service area.

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.

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. This will be in cases 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 financial year 2022/23, there has been one payment for financial compensation of £650.00 for one case.

In the financial year 2021/22 the total compensation paid was also £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 44% 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:

- Reviewing contact arrangements and sessions.
- Ensure minutes of meetings are shared with family.
- Continue to search for a foster placement closer to the home address.
- Ensuring that the appropriate arrangements for school transport have been put into place.
- Assigning a new social worker where this is beneficial to the case and in the interests of the children/young people being supported.
- Ensure family time is implemented.
- Ensure relevant police checks are carried out on family members.
- Providing information to parents and carers to ensure they have a clear understanding of what support and services are available to them.
- 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.
- 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.
- Provide a supporting letter for housing.
- 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.
- Completing relevant assessments, such as a parenting assessment or a single assessment, when it is considered valuable to the development of the services involvement.
- Ensuring that planning around life story work is planned into the timetable of the adoption hearings to try and prevent delay.
- Arranging a discussion with the family regarding contact arrangements and frequency.
- Where it is identified as beneficial to the case, family group conferencing is offered.
- Meeting with family to complete a full assessment of need.
- Direct Payment support to be provided.
- Ensure all relevant parties are invited to meetings.

Examples of the service improvements made following complaint investigations include:

For **Court and Child Protection Services**, it has been recognised that any delay in outstanding life story work is not appropriate and therefore care planning has changed so there is no longer a delay in getting this crucial work completed.

Discussions have taken place with the family time service about the need to communicate with senior managers about decisions to cease family time when final orders are made in respect of children. The legislation is clear and family time should reduce slowly and cease only when a placement has been identified.

The service now hold monthly meetings with business support staff to ensure that any communication issues are addressed as appropriate.

The service are working hard to ensure that families have an allocated Social Worker that doesn't change regularly so they can ensure plans are progressed. The service have managed to provide some stability in the workforce so that there has been a significant reduction in changes of social workers for families as they recognise how damaging and intrusive this is. The merger between child protection & court and assessment & intervention service also supports the reduction in changes of social workers. 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.

Assessment and Intervention Service has seen a significant change from point of referral. Call takers in the integrated front door record the information and a decision is made for this to be either sent to Early Help or children assessment and safeguarding service. Referrals are now screened by the duty team manager, the full duty team then completes case mapping, including compiling a genogram, history of involvement, what the service are worried about, complicating factors, safety, bottom lines, best questions for the first visit, plan of work, 10 day review and 20 day supervision dates. Social Workers then visit families to gain consent and share why the service are visiting. Social Workers are discussing the process of assessment at the outset, so families know what to expect. Families are aware of what we are worried about at the outset of our intervention, agree bottom lines, safety plans and what the network will do to keep children safe. The 10 day reviews and 20 days supervisions have ensured assessments are completed in a timely manner (expectation by day 35) and this is preventing drift and delay. Assessments include family and partner agency information so holistic assessments are being completed with clear plans for intervention being created.

Social Workers continue to be reminded about confidentiality and measures are in place for room bookings to ensure they have somewhere confidential to sit and attend meetings including virtual meetings. Initial child protection conferences are now in person meetings, with further work around review meetings, also being in person. This will ensure that confidentiality is maintained at all times.

The team now have weekly meetings where key messages are shared, performance is discussed, and reflective discussions are held.

Performance meetings are held weekly with Team Managers, Service Managers, Head of Service, SLIP partner and Assistant Director. This focusses on timeliness of visits, assessments, core groups, child in need meetings etc. This work is ongoing and will assist with preventing drift and delay in progressing plans and sharing minutes of meetings with families and professionals in a timely manner.

All social workers have been reminded to ensure telephone calls are returned in a timely manner to support better communication, Social workers now have work mobiles, and these numbers are shared with families and professionals. Families and professionals also have the main office number in the event the social worker is unavailable, and the matter is urgent, each team has a duty worker who will assist the caller, ensuring we are responding in a timely manner.

It has been identified that social workers should be taught to take a balanced approach and look at all angles of a case so they can manage this effectively. Discussions have taken place with lead members of the Social Work Academy and assurances have been given that all new social workers are now provided with specific training as part of their induction. Part of this training focuses on the importance of understanding the family tree and ensuring that the voice of all family members is heard and recorded as part of the assessment processes.

The training model also promotes the use of family network meetings where all the family are brought together to ensure that everyone involved in the child's life understands why a social worker is involved, to share their own worries and highlight things that are going well and to be part of any safety planning. Communicating effectively with all family members is also central to this model of working.

It is highlighted that communication with families is not always as effective as it should be. As part of North East Lincolnshire Council's workforce development plan, the service are providing training to all social workers and managers in relation to effective communication with families, this includes strengthening early conversations with parents regarding potential assessments of family members.

It is important to ensure that social work staff are aware of the complex nature of grooming and the implications for parents as well as children and the impact this can have. There is a clear expectation that all social workers are aware of grooming and the implications this has for children, parents, and wider family members. As part of the workforce development plan learning, training, and awareness in relation to grooming will be revisited, and refresher training will be provided to all staff.

Children in Care Team and New Futures Team (formerly Through Care Services) have confirmed that since January 2023 a new senior management team has been established in children in care and new futures, further supplemented with the appointment of a head of service in May 2023. In terms of the management of complaints in children in care and new futures they have revised the process they use, and all complaint correspondence is escalated through the service manager and all complaint responses require authorisation from the service manager prior to being sent to the customer. Any themes arising from complaints are analysed quarterly for discussion at team meetings to inform practice improvements. The team are also developing an action tracker for ensuring follow up of completion of actions identified in complaint responses.

There is a clear expectation of the service to ensure effective and respectful correspondence with children, families, and partner professionals including communication about meetings.

It was identified that further consideration was required for care planning of any foreign nationals to ensure that all parties have clear guidance on possible outcomes should any positions change for the child/family so there is no future delays that impact on practical and emotional wellbeing. The services procedures in relation to support to unaccompanied asylum seeking children are in the process of being refreshed and will be published on the children's services procedures manual.

The process of obtaining police checks in relation to a connected person has been revisited with the whole team for clarity. This will now be incorporated into the induction pack that new workers to the team receive. The process for requesting police checks is clearly defined and well understood. The general induction process has been reviewed and relaunched by the social work academy; there is work ongoing in the service to append this induction with service specific information, this is reflected in the service plan and is expected to be completed by September.

It has been highlighted that changes of social workers has resulted in drift and delay in the progressing care plans which has resulted in not being able to seek permanence sooner. There has been a reduction in staff turnover since December 2022 and Service redesign work is underway, under the direction of the Director of Children's Services, the implementation phase of this work will include strategic plans for staffing sufficiency and retention.

Children's Disability Service have undertaken training with the team to ensure that actions required for children and their families are undertaken in a timely way to avoid drift and delay. A fortnightly workshop has been implemented within service to share best practice, look at research, map cases, review and understand all the legislations and policies that cover all children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

It was identified that a weekly meeting is required to oversee the resource requests for the children and families. Therefore a resource panel has now been implemented and takes place every week. Social workers and support workers are expected to present their request for support and ensure all other potential options have been explored, the service requested will meet need with expected outcomes, and timescales for the support needed are also expected to be rationalised.

The service has considered how they can best meet the needs of children and families following an assessment being completed. The Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO) has met with universal providers to look at extending some of the service to meet the needs of SEND children and young people. There are more opportunities within the community and social workers and support workers are signposting to these services instead. The staff are working with the DSCO to explore other community-based resources to refer families to for support. The service have two social workers who have been trained by the Council for Disabled Children in respect of Education Health Care Planning and the contribution of social care advice. This is to ensure social care needs are better identified.

Integrated Front Door Service identified that the checking of information contained within letter is required prior to sending out to the customer. A process has now been implemented to ensure the checking of letters prior to them being sent out.

5. Compliments received for 2022/23

There has been nine compliments recorded this year.

Service area	No.	Summary of compliment
Assessment and Intervention Service	3	Social worker is extremely proactive with the whole family and has quickly established a good rapport with the child. Social Workers assessment and communication on this case has been brilliant. Social worker has managed to put in place family time arrangements despite the practical difficulties. Complimenting Social worker as to how she managed a difficult meeting
Integrated Front Door Service	1	Worker is a great asset to the team, she has gone above and beyond in every way to help us.
Children in Care Team and New Futures Team	1	Social worker is doing an excellent job, she is amazing.
Court and Child Protection Services	2	Complimenting worker for her engagement and contribution in meetings. Worker has a pragmatic and sensible approach and comes across in such a professional manner in all the meetings. Complimenting the work carried out by social worker on case.
New Future	1	Complimenting worker for everything she has done and always providing help when needed.
Residential Unit	1	Staff are a lovely team and provide quality care for all young people.

6. Looking Forward – Priorities for 2023/24

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 2023/24.

Reporting dashboards continue to be developed to enable managers to see, monitor and understand 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. Further dashboard reporting has been produced for senior management.

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, assurance 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 to tackle any significant delays. We will continue to raise the importance of ensuring all feedback is reported, both positive and negative.

Training for managers handling complaints will be implemented as part of their induction period in addition we are working on developing an internal WIKI page to provide guidance and assistance for officers who are responding to complaints.

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.

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.

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.

The complaints team will continue to monitor timescales for responding to complaints and will escalate as appropriate when required. Through the use of assurance reporting all managers will be able to see whether they are meeting timescales for response. This will also enable them to see what feedback relates to and whether investigations are identifying appropriate improvements.

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.