

## **CABINET**

<b>DATE</b>	21 <sup>st</sup> August 2024
<b>REPORT OF</b>	Councillor Margaret Cracknell, Portfolio Holder for Children and Education
<b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER</b>	Ann-Marie Matson, Director of Children's Services
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2023/24
<b>STATUS</b>	Open
<b>FORWARD PLAN REF NO.</b>	CB 08/24/03

### **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 2023 to 31st March 2024.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Receives and accepts the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2023/24.
2. Refers the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2023/24 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, 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 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, and compliments received during 2023/24, the service improvements implemented, and lessons learnt as a result of complaints and representations.
- 1.3 During 2023/24 the Council received the following representations concerning children's social care statutory services:

**Complaints = 74**

**Compliments = 7**

This compares with 91 complaints and 9 compliments in 2022/23.

- 1.4 74 complaints were responded to at stage one. Four escalated to stage two (independent investigation) and one escalated to stage 3 (review panel) during 2023/24.

At stage one, nineteen complaints **(25%)** were responded to outside of the maximum statutory timescale of twenty working days. This has slightly increased compared to the previous year when 22% of complaints were responded outside of the statutory timescale.

Of the four stage 2 complaints were responded to three were outside of the 65 working day timescale and one complaint was withdrawn. The stage three complaint was responded to outside of the statutory timescale of 15 working days. 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 Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Service. This is to be expected as this service is 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](http://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 four stage 2 complaints in 2023/24 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. However, as the report makes clear, stage two and three complaints require further funding. Whilst this is met from existing budgets the current processes and procedures need to minimise the number of these to ensure we are maximising budgets for 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 AND EDUCATION**



# North East Lincolnshire Council

## Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024

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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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, 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.

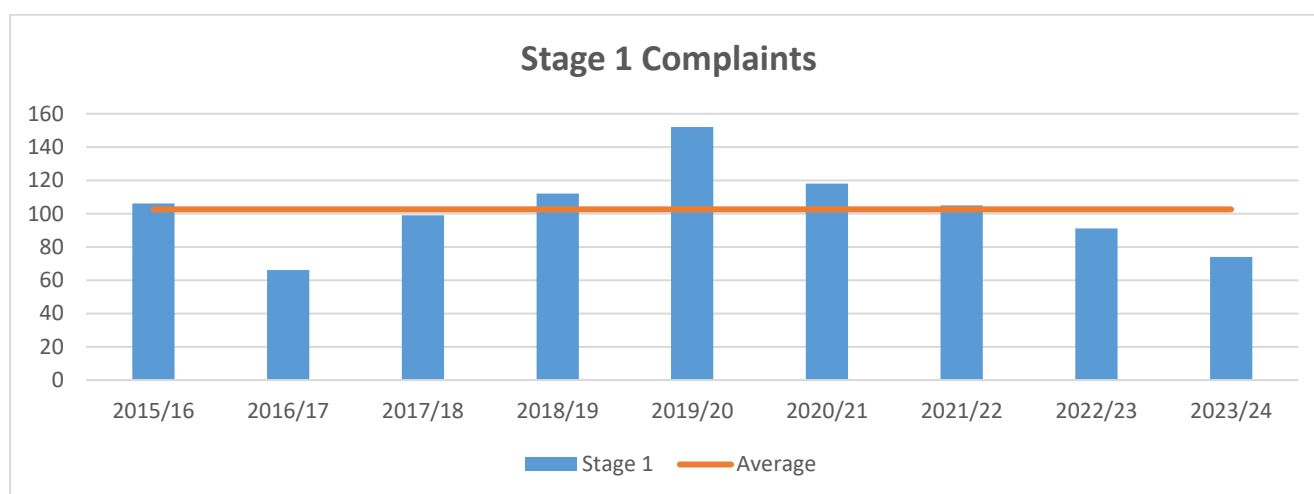
**Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman** - If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the Independent Review Panel, they have the right to take their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), who is empowered to review or investigate where it appears that 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 2023/24

Year	Concern	Stage one	Stage two	Stage three	LGSCO
2023/24	25	74	4	1	6
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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, the Council responded to 74 stage 1 complaints, compared with 91 in the same period for 2022/23. This decrease of 18.6%.

The last available mid-year population figure we have is for 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, when there were 33,148 under 18s living in North East Lincolnshire an increase of 0.3% from 33,043 in 2023. As of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, the Council had 1900 open child care cases, a slight increase of 3.3% from 1,838 in 2023. This includes 472 looked after children, a decrease of 17.9% from 575 in 2023.

The 74 stage one complaints received accounted for 3.8% 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. During 2022/23 the number of representations were 4.9% of the open cases.

Of the 74 stage one complaints, Four complaints escalated to stage two, however one stage 2 investigation was suspended, therefore Three Stage 2 complaints were responded to during 2023/24. We had one Stage 3 panel review during 2023/24.

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.

Six complaints were raised with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) during 2023/24. Three complaints related to Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Service and three related to the Children in Care Team. The outcome for three of the complaints was that they were deemed to be premature, i.e. the Council had not had the opportunity to investigate.

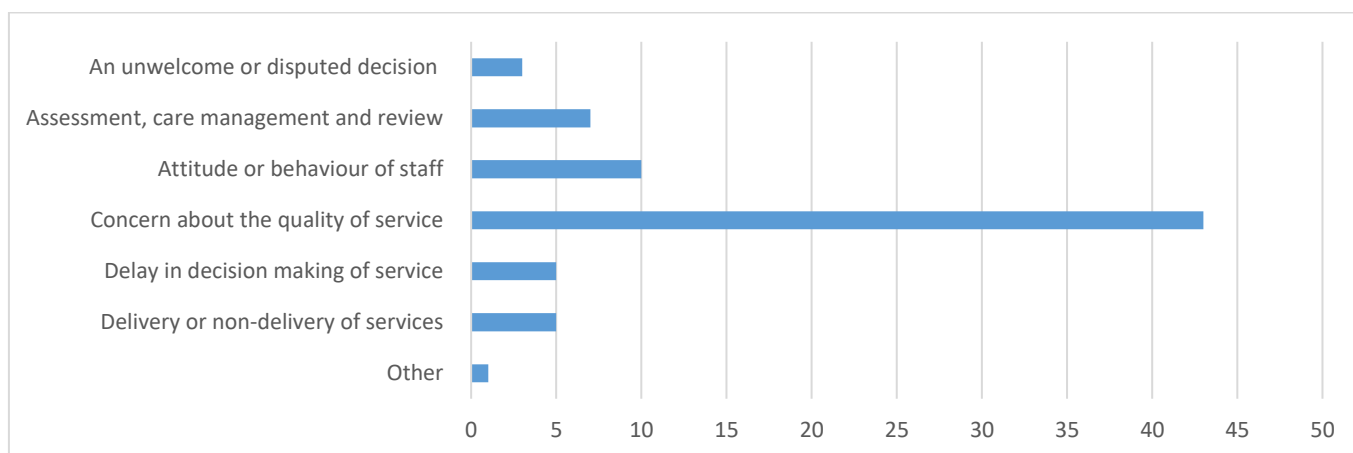
One of the complaints was outside of jurisdiction and therefore was not investigated by the LGSCO. One of the complaints was deemed to be outside of timescale for the LGSCO to investigate. The other complaint was not investigated by the LGSCO as they were satisfied with the explanation and further actions the Council had set out to resolve the issue.

### Complaints by Service Area

Service area	Number of complaints in 2023/24	Number of complaints in 2022/23
Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Service (CASS)  <b><i>Please note:</i></b> Assessment and Intervention Service & Court and Child Protection Service <b><i>are now recorded under one team named CASS.</i></b>	49 (66.2%)	56 (61.6%)
Children in Our Care Team and New Futures Team	15 (20.2%)	20 (22%)
Integrated Front Door Services	3 (4%)	2 (2.2%)
Fostering and Adoption Services	1 (1.3%)	0 (0%)
Children's Disability Service	4 (5.4%)	11 (12.1%)
Children's Safeguarding and Reviewing Service	1 (1.3%)	0 (0%)
Residential Unit A	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Residential Unit B	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Residential Unit C	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Residential Unit D	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Residential Unit E	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
Residential Unit F	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
Residential Unit G	1 (1.3%)	0 (0%)

### Nature of Complaints

Complaint types	Number of complaints in 2023/24
An unwelcome or disputed decision	3 (4%)
Assessment, care management and review	7 (9.4%)
Attitude or behaviour of staff	10 (13.5%)
Concern about the quality of service	43 (58.1%)
Delay in decision making of service	5 (6.7%)
Delivery or non-delivery of services	5 (6.7%)
Other	1 (1.3%)



## The Outcome of complaints

### 2023/24

Stage	1	2	3
Upheld	17 (22.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Partially upheld	29 (39.1%)	3 (99%)	1 (100%)
Not upheld	26 (35.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Withdrawn	2 (2.7%)	1(1%)	0 (0%)

### 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%)

## Timescales for complaints

Outcome	2023/24 No.	2023/24 %	2022/23 No.	2022/23 %
Stage 1 response within 10 days	32	43.2	29	31.9
Stage 1 response within 20 days	23	31	42	46.2
Stage 1 response outside of 20 days	19	25.6	20	22
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	3	100	2	100
Stage 2 investigations ongoing	0	0	0	0
Stage 2 investigations withdrawn	1	100	0	0
Stage 3 response within 15 days	0	0	1	100
Stage 3 response outside of Timescale	1	100	0	0

There has been an increase in the percentage of complaints responded to within 10 days at stage one, during 2023/24. During this time 43.2% of stage 1 complaints were responded to within 10 working days. The 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 Deputy Service 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.

Complex issues raised can also result 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 in respect of their workload.

### **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.

During financial year 2023/24, we did not pay out any financial compensation related to cases concluded in this time.

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 54% 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:

- Complete a financial assessment.
- Provide contact number for team manager to family.
- Ensure minutes of meetings are shared with family.
- Ensure current support is in place for a child with complex needs.
- Team to apply for child's birth certificate.
- Additional actions are added to the plan for encouraging your contact with the children.
- Assigning a new social worker where this is beneficial to the case and in the interests of the children/young people being supported.
- Ensure clear timescales provided for completion of assessments.
- Ensure SGO assessment is shared with family, and they are given the opportunity to comment on this.
- Ensure safety plan is shared with parents.
- Ensure family time is implemented.
- 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 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.
- Meeting with family to complete a full assessment of need.
- Ensure all relevant parties are invited to meetings.
- Ensure that the children's wishes and feelings are considered and taken into account when planning their future.
- Ensure that carers are aware of the process of when children go missing from care.

Examples of the service improvements made following complaint investigations include:

##### For **Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Service**,

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 can be. The Local Authority are continuing with their improvement journey with a strong focus on retainment of staff, recruitment of a stable workforce and growing our own staff, investing in students and apprenticeships. This will aim to ensure cases progress swiftly and reduce the impact of frequent changes on families.

Additional training is ongoing with the service to ensure all Social Workers are confident in referring into the Access Pathway and with referring all Children in Our Care for an advocate. Along with ensuring that all plans are coproduced with children and their families.

The service now offer separate core groups and CIN meetings to parents whereby they are not able to be present within the same meeting.

All social workers have been reminded of the importance to ensure telephone calls are returned in a timely manner to support better communication; there is an increased line of sight by Practice Supervisors/Service Leads to ensure that social workers and managers respond to requests when parents call into the service.

It has been reiterated with Social Workers to seek assurance when speaking to callers to ensure that they are able to speak freely when discussing sensitive matters.

All staff are aware that it is their responsibility to assure that they have fully understood the child and family's history upon case allocations. Robust risk analysis and reflection upon the history is to occur within all assessment and cases, to reflect upon appropriate history and take into consideration the current presenting concerns. Risk analysis training is being completed with all of the workforce, along with case recording and chairing of meetings.

Revised oversight in relation to all legal tracking and decision-making processes is now in place to assure of no drift and delay in relation to court proceedings and report completion.

A revised and enhanced Child Experience and Audit meeting is now in place to assure that there is regular oversight and independent scrutiny of case work.

The service have developed a new Supervision Policy which has been devised and shared with the workforce, with increased manager oversight of all case work. This policy will support and underpin case supervision and oversight of planning and case recording.

To ensure that statutory timescales are being adhered to for ongoing assessments an assessment assurance meeting takes place on a weekly basis to ensure statutory timescales are being adhered to. In addition robust daily oversight takes place of performance management to provide assurance that all statutory timescales are being adhered to. 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.

The service have been reminded about ensuring invites for meetings are sent out in a timely manner and good practice in ensuring that the date for the next meeting is set at the previous meeting.

'What good looks like' guidance has been shared with all of the workforce to aligned practice standards for all work completed.

Discussions are now held within team meetings in respect of any complaints that have been made appropriately. A line of sight is also held monthly by Deputy Service Directors in respect of all ongoing complaints, linking closely with the complaints team to assure that all timescales are adhered to.

The service are ensuring that at all points of contact and enquiries being made, all contact details are confirmed with family members and any changes updated to ensure contact details held are correct.

Group learning and reflection sessions are held with the teams, focussing on learning opportunities and reflecting upon quality of work completed, the quality of intervention and decision making.

The service now hold monthly team meetings and development sessions with each team, this is inclusive of managers, to assure of the 'golden thread' of learning, development and information being shared with the workforce.

Reflective discussions are now held with social workers helping them to understand the impacts social care interventions can have on a family when they feel communication is poor and they do not understand the processes. Reflective discussions have supported a change in practice for colleagues with their commitment to ensure a more detailed introduction to families moving forward to avoid such conflict in the future. This has been reinforced again within supervisions and will also be discussed with wider team meetings so the learning can be shared.

### **Children in Our Care Team and New Futures Team.**

There has been a high turnover of social workers. The Local authority is working hard to reduce the turnover of staff as we recognise the impact that this has on children we care for and those supporting the children. We have successfully recruited to all first and second line management positions within the teams, meaning we now have a fully established and permanent management team. This is ensuring that current social workers feel well supported at work. A bespoke recruitment campaign for Children in Our Care social workers is also due to go live shortly, to support our ongoing recruitment of permanent social workers.

Practice Supervisors are holding supervision on Children's cases on a regular basis and in line with their individual level of need, and this is allowing for more efficient tracking of children's care plans, and this will allow more focused targeting of care planning, which will cover such areas of health assessments, contact, passports.

There is a clear plan of improvement that is being implemented by the service in how the residential placements are managed. This is captured within our wider transformation delivery plan.

The service are also making clear efforts to notify carers when a worker is off and provided contact details for contact to be made when required. There is a robust duty system in place that enables the effective management of urgent situations.

The service is ensuring that that the service lead for Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) is notified of the process of holidays and ensure that they are fully aware of the correct process regarding holiday requests. This process has also been recently reviewed and an updated process has been clearly distributed to all relevant teams.

It has been identified that communication has not been as effective as it could have been, to try to prevent this being an issue in the future I have asked that whenever a social worker leaves, a standard letter is sent to all families they are working with notifying them of this and providing them with a point of contact.

The service have implemented a new procedure for tracking the completion of passport applications to ensure that a manager maintains oversight of any application requested until we know they have been provided to the child(ren) in question. This is now being considered within the updated service level agreement within our Business Support functions, to ensure a closer line of sight on this key area of practice.



The service have been reminded of the importance of ensuring that service improvements identified within a stage 1 complaint responses are actioned and implemented.

### **Children's Disability Service**

The service are undertaking taking training with the workforce in respect of Practice Standards. This has already begun during our team development workshops on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2023. There are regular team meetings and wider service meetings to ensure practice standards are understood and work is completed to the appropriate standard. In development are monthly Practice Standards which will be reviewed by all the management team, including senior management to ensure continued progress.

The Practice Improvement Team will complete Child In Need training and our statutory responsibilities. There is a significant workforce development plan in place including child in need training, there is also independent audit work being completed in this area to support future development and training.

The service have increased management oversight and supervision on children's files, where there is drift and delay and escalate practice concerns through to our human resources team and senior management. The procedures relating to supervision and management oversight have been reviewed, there are also daily performance meetings to ensure supervision and other areas of practice are progressed in a timely manner. There has also been supervision training delivered to all of the management team to ensure improved quality and focus within supervision.

It has been highlighted that there is a lack of choice in the short breaks provision. The current provision is being reviewed and the service are working with the commissioning team to increase provision in the community and our inhouse provision.

The service will continue to work with our parents and carers, health and education colleagues and co-produce our Short Breaks Service Statement. There is a full review of short breaks including the service statement underway. This will ensure a wide range of availability of targeted short breaks within the community. This review has included consultation with families and partner agencies, and this will continue as the development progresses.

### **Integrated Front Door Service**

The service have identified the importance of communicating with parents when they contact the Integrated Front Door Service asking for advice on keeping their children safe. The service will ensure that all parents resident in and outside of the family home are communicated with to inform enquiries.

The team have revisited and continue to discuss the importance of effectively communicating with parents and listening to their views, ensuring that plans are coproduced.

It has been reiterated with the team of the importance for our Social Workers to ensure all safeguarding enquiries are robust and comprehensive and we explore with our partner agencies and families all information to assure we are making safe informed decisions for all children.

## 5. Compliments received for 2023/24

There has been 7 compliments recorded for 2023/24.

Service area	No.	Summary of compliment
Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Service	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Complementing social worker for the professionalism and hard work when handling a complex child in need meeting.</li><li>• Complementing social worker for all her hard work in dealing with a court case.</li></ul>
Children in Care Team	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thanking the service for all the support they have offered and provided to family.</li><li>• Thanking social worker for all her hard work on the case file recording and advocacy support provided for the child.</li><li>• Thanking the service for doing the Solihull training.</li><li>• Complimenting social worker for all her hard work. Social Worker goes above and beyond to support family and the child.</li><li>• Thanking the service for the hard work and support provided to a young person .</li></ul>

## 6. Looking Forward – Priorities for 2024/25

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 2024/25.

The team are in the process of developing reporting dashboards 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.

To support and raise awareness of the complaint's procedure and complaint handling across the Council. The complaints team have planned 3 training sessions for staff, the training will be delivered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman with the first session taking place in July 2024. This training will support staff to ensure they 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 service areas 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. The team 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.

The complaints team are working with the people and culture team to make efforts to recruit independent investigating officers to ensure a wider pool of people are available to investigate stage 2 complaints. The team are also in the process of producing an independent person recruitment pack.

The team will continue to attend the regional complaints managers group meetings to allow us to 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 appropriate 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 Complaints Team to young people.

The complaints team will continue to promote compliments across the council to ensure that services are sending them through to the Feedback Team so they are recorded centrally and can feed into central reporting.

## **7. Conclusions**

The service have provided 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 can be. The Local Authority are continuing with their improvement journey with a strong focus on retainment of staff, recruitment of a stable workforce and growing our own staff, investing in students and apprenticeships. Moving forward this will aim to prevent drift and delay and will ensure cases progress swiftly and reduce the impact of frequent changes on families.

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.

It is recognised that complaint compliance needs to be improved. Complaints should be extended within reasonable time if necessary and this should be the exception. The complaints team will continue to monitor timescales for responding to complaints and will escalate 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.

The complaints team will continue to support Children's Services to manage and learn from complaints. The complaints team has planned effective complaint handling training sessions to be held during 2024/25 which will be delivered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. This will help ensure managers understand their role and are supported in managing and responding to complaints effectively.