

CABINET

DATE	20th August 2025
REPORT OF	Councillor Margaret Cracknell, Portfolio Holder for Children and Education
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Ann-Marie Matson, Director of Children's Services
SUBJECT	Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2024/25
STATUS	Open
FORWARD PLAN REF NO.	CB 08/25/01

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 Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments specifically supports the outcome of nurturing our children and building their future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report provides an overview of the activity and analysis of feedback for the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Receives and accepts the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2024/25.
2. Refers the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2024/25 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 feedback received during 2024/25, the service improvements implemented, and lessons learnt as a result of complaints and representations.
- 1.3 During 2024/25 the Council received the following representations concerning children's social care statutory services:

Complaints = 41

Compliments = 1

This compares with 74 complaints and 7 compliments in 2023/24.

- 1.4 41 complaints were responded to at stage one. Four of these escalated to stage two (independent investigation) and three escalated to stage 3 (review panel) during 2024/25.

At stage one, seven complaints (17.1%) were responded to outside of the maximum statutory timescale of twenty working days. This has improved compared to the previous year when 25.6% of complaints were responded outside of the statutory timescale.

Of the four stage 2 complaints responded to, three were outside of the 65 working day timescale and one complaint was withdrawn. All of the stage three complaints were 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, as well as officers having competing priorities arising from recent inspections.

- 1.5 **31.7%** 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 improvements 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 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, OPPORTUNITIES AND EQUALITY ISSUES

- 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 four stage 2 complaints in 2024/25 and three stage 3 panel reviews. Each stage 2 and 3 complaint needs to have additional funding found for external and independent investigation and verification.

6. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

The importance of the feedback process in ensuring effective services are provided to young people and their families is fundamental to Children's Services and its ongoing improvement journey.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE, NATURE RECOVERY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

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

8. CONSULTATION WITH SCRUTINY

Cabinet are advised to refer this report to the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel for their consideration.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. WARD IMPLICATIONS

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

13. 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>

14. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

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PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR
CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

North East Lincolnshire Council

Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025

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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 2024 and 31st March 2025, 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.

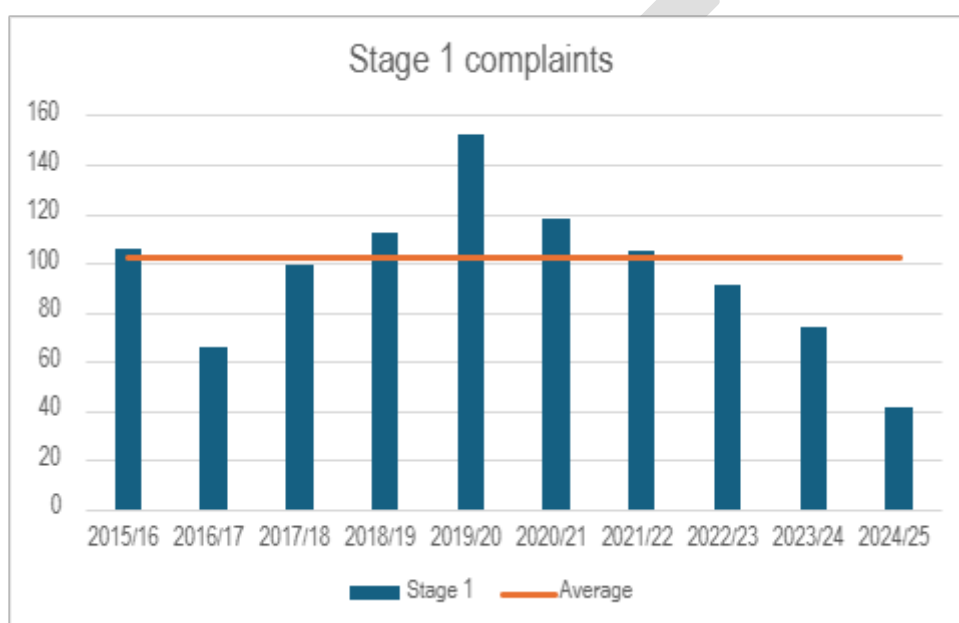
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman - If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the Independent Review Panel, they have the right to take their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), who is empowered to review or investigate where it appears that the 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 Feedback 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 2024/25

Year	Concern	Stage one	Stage two	Stage three	LGSCO
2024/25	7	41	4	3	3
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 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025, the Council responded to 41 stage 1 complaints, compared with 74 in the same period for 2023/24. This shows a decrease of 44.6% in the number of statutory complaints as well as a decrease in the number of concerns raised with the Council.

It should be noted that whilst there has been a decline over the last two years in the number of statutory complaints, the number of children's services corporate complaints over this time period have increased. The number of corporate complaints have increased from 45 in 2022/23 and 61 in 2023/24 to 66 in 2024/25. This is a result of clearer guidance and assessment of complaints to ensure they are not processed as statutory when they do not meet the criteria. Similarly, the numbers of concerns have decreased because professionals have been referred to Practice Supervisor level in the first instance.

The corporate feedback received highlights a range of experiences and perspectives across children's services, particularly within the Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Service. There have been a range of concerns raised including issues relating to communication, timeliness, and clarity around decision-making processes. Some individuals have also shared suggestions for improving consistency in support and engagement with families and carers. Alongside the Statutory Complaints, these insights present valuable opportunities for learning and development, helping to enhance service delivery, strengthen relationships, and ensure that families feel heard and supported throughout their involvement with children's services.

The last available mid-year population figure is 33,257 under 18s living in North East Lincolnshire, an increase of 0.3% from 33,148 in 2024. The overall number of open cases has decreased by 7% to 1768 as at 31 March 2025 compared with 1900 the previous year. This includes 438 looked after children, which is a 7% reduction on 469 children in our care on 31 March 2024.

The 41 stage one complaints received accounted for 2.3% of the open cases based on this figure, although it should be noted that the number of open childcare cases does vary throughout the year. Last year the number of representations were 3.8% of the open cases.

Of the 41 stage one complaints, four complaints escalated to stage two, all of which were partially upheld. There were three Stage 3 panel reviews during 2024/25.

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 2024/25. Two of the complaints related to Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Service and one related to the Children's Disability Service. Two of the complaints were deemed to be premature, i.e. the Council had not had the opportunity to investigate prior to it being raised with the LGSCO. One of the complaints was outside of jurisdiction and therefore was not investigated by the LGSCO.

Complaints by Service Area

Service area	2024/25	2023/24
Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Service (CASS)	20 (48.8%)	49 (66.2%)
Children in Care Team and New Futures Team	9 (22%)	15 (20.3%)
Children's Disability Service	6 (14.6%)	4 (5.4%)
Fostering and Adoption Services	2 (4.9%)	1 (1.4%)
Residential & Short Breaks	2 (4.9%)	1 (1.4%)
Family Help & Intervention (Previously Children's Safeguarding and Reviewing Service)	1 (2.4%)	1 (1.4%)
Integrated Front Door Services	1 (2.4%)	3 (4.1%)

Nature of Complaints during 2024/25

Complaint types	Number (%)
Concern about the quality of service	12 (29.3%)
An unwelcome or disputed decision	9 (22.0%)
Assessment, care management and review	7 (17.1%)
Attitude or behaviour of staff	6 (14.6%)
Delay in decision making of service	4 (9.8%)
Delivery or non-delivery of services	2 (4.9%)
Other	1 (2.4%)



The Outcome of complaints

2024/25

Stage	1	2	3
Upheld	12 (29.3%)	1 (25%)	0
Partially upheld	16 (39.0%)	2 (50%)	3 (100%)
Not upheld	13 (31.7%)	0	0
Withdrawn	0	1 (25%)	0

Stage	1	2	3
Upheld	17 (22.9%)	0	0
Partially upheld	29 (39.1%)	3 (75%)	1 (100%)
Not upheld	26 (35.1%)	0	0
Withdrawn	2 (2.7%)	1 (25%)	0

Timescales for complaints

Outcome	2024/25	2023/24
Stage 1 response within 10 days	15 (36.6%)	32 (43.2%)
Stage 1 response within 20 days	19 (46.3%)	23 (31%)
Stage 1 response outside of 20 days	7 (17.1%)	19 (25.6%)
Stage 2 response within 25 days	0	0
Stage 2 response within 65 days	0	0
Stage 2 response outside of 65 days	3 (75%)	3 (75%)
Stage 2 investigations withdrawn	1 (25%)	1 (25%)
Stage 3 response within 15 days	0	0
Stage 3 response outside of Timescale	3 (100%)	1 (100%)

There has been a slight decrease in the number of complaints responded to within 10 days at stage one, during 2024/25. During this time 36.6% 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 and can also lead to criticism from the LGSCO.

The Feedback Team continue to monitor timescales and will report any overdue complaints to the relevant Deputy Service Director. All services have access to a dashboard, detailing numbers of complaints and timescales.

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 complaints also have other competing priorities in respect of their workload. It is important that in such cases officers notify the Feedback Team who can then escalate to Deputy Service Directors when there are identified issues with completing investigations within timescale.

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 2024/25 there were no compensation payments made following LGSCO investigations. There were no payments made during 2023/24 either. The last payment made was for £650 made during 2022/23 in relation to one case.

4. Lessons Learned and Improvements to Service Delivery

Approximately 61% of the complaints we investigated identified some form of action or improvement. Many of these can be very specific to the individual complaint and include actions such as updating details held on record, carrying out additional assessments, referring to other agencies to request specific support, liaising between parties to resolve issues and setting up additional meetings with professionals.

To support and raise awareness of the complaint's procedure and complaint handling across the Council. The Feedback Team organised three training sessions specifically for children's services staff. The training was delivered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman with the first training session taking place in July 2024.

Putting People First: How Feedback is Helping Us Improve

At North East Lincolnshire Council, we are committed to listening, learning, and acting on the feedback we receive from our residents. Every concern raised is an opportunity to reflect, improve, and deliver better services for children, young people, and families. Here's how your voices have helped shape real change across our services:

Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Service

- Further improvements have been made to ensuring that details held in relation to family members are accurate and subsequently updated. To support this from the start of a child's journey within the Integrated Front Door, development sessions have been held regarding enquiry expectations, along with a guide to support practice. In addition to this improved allocations and closure processes are in place to review recorded information on a child's records. There is a clear expectation that Family Networks are explored within all assessments completed, therefore all details should be gathered and confirmed as correct.
- To support learning opportunities regarding ensuring that meeting invites 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. All meeting records for children in need (CIN) and child protection (CP) have to be overseen and signed off by a Practice Supervisor. There is also a clear expectation that all meetings are held face to face with families. To ensure workforce understanding of this, it has been discussed within their supervisions, team meetings and within team development sessions.
- All actions and considerations such as mediation and support needs should be considered and discussed within Core Group Meetings and conferences, with multi agency oversight and agreement. All actions and the planning agreed are overseen by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and also Practice Supervisor. Further to this the Risk Analysis Framework is now embedded to support exploring risks and needs for the family to underpin planning and recommendations.
- To further support assurance regarding meeting invites being shared, the business support offer has been revisited and redesigned to ensure support across Children's Assessment and Safeguarding (CASS) teams. Further to this there are also monthly assurance meetings that dip sample work and reflect upon compliance matters.

- The stability of the workforce continues to improve, with minimal agency workers in post compared to previous years. The only changes to social workers occurs now when workers leave the authority or there is an unexpected event. Any changes will be planned as much as possible with handover meetings and visits, along with supervision occurring before final handover. Any changes to social workers also have to have Service Lead oversight and approval. To further support consistently, there is also now a weekly case allocation meeting that occurs, attended by CASS managers within its entirety.
- Discussions have taken place with the teams regarding the importance of carrying out visits and communicating with families in a timely manner to ensure that they feel listened to and supported, this has also been discussed and reaffirmed within team development team and full team meetings.
- To support recognition regarding the importance of arranging four weekly child in need meetings and acting on recommendations in a timely manner and communicating better, Practice Supervisor oversight of all records is now in place, team meetings and workforce development sessions have been held and there has also been a full rewrite of the forms that are used for recording purposes.
- Strong partnership relationships have continued to be developed with Humberside Police, with appropriate reflection and challenge afforded where required, colocation of police within the Integrated Front Door has supported this further. Wider to this there are monthly partnership meetings that reflect upon partnership practice and needs such as the Partnership Assurance Group and the Learning and Audit development group, where joint case reviews are held. There is now also a weekly section 47 review meeting held with the police to assure of progression of enquiries appropriately.

Integrated Front Door Service

- All practice developments identified across Children's Social Care, are reflected and understood with the Integrated Front Door. The expectations apply across all teams. Therefore, learning opportunities from complaints are routinely shared into the team meetings and supervisions with the workforce within Integrated Front Door accordingly.

Children in Care

- The voice of the child will continue to be sought outside of the home environment, however, there needs to be some consideration on who the best placed professional is to elicit this. This may continue to be the social worker, however consideration needs to be given to the wider professional group as appropriate. We need to collate a clear understanding of the children's voice and their lived experiences to ensure that informed decisions are made moving forward around the appropriate level of support.
- Social worker and Practice Supervisor to ensure visits are completed to enable transparent conversations to take place around the local authorities' decision making
- We endeavour to ensure that children's family time is resumed and promoted as quickly as possible.
- Changes in the way case files are handed over from a social worker to the Children leaving care team have been made ensuring action points are not missed which would be at the detriment of the child.

Children's Disability Service

- There have been a number of court workshops held to support in the writing of court statements. In addition there is practical support available from the wider service including the court liaison officer. All court statements are supported and signed off by a Practice Supervisor with oversight and agreement from legal Services.

- Where possible, there is a clear handover expectation to ensure outstanding matters are completed and transfer visits undertaken to all families. This is not always possible if the worker is off sick or leaves the authority unexpectedly, however where possible this is adhered to, to ensure the best outcomes for families.

Adoption

- Policy Development: We're working with regional partners to explore new policies that ensure all adoption applicants, including those with pets, are assessed fairly and consistently.

Residential & Short Breaks

- Respite Care Reinstatement: We've committed to improving communication with families and ensuring that missed respite sessions are rebooked promptly.

This is just a snapshot of how feedback is helping us build more responsive, compassionate, and effective services. We're proud of the progress we're making—and we're not stopping here. Thank you for helping us grow stronger together.

5. Compliments received for 2024/25

There has been one formal compliment recorded this year for the Children in Care Team. This complimented the social worker and reported that they were excellent. While the number of formal compliments recorded is relatively low, there is clear evidence that the service receives positive feedback reflecting the meaningful support and effective interventions provided to children and families. Further action will be taken to ensure that where possible compliments are logged formally.

6. Looking Forward – Priorities for 2025/26

As well as the improvements to service delivery identified in the earlier part of the report, the Council has a number of priorities to focus on during 2024/25.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has recently published a new Code of Practice which comes into force from April 1st 2026. Whilst this is not focussed specifically on Statutory Children's Complaints it does provide the opportunity to review how Statutory complaints are handled and implement developments which will help to ensure they are handled in a way which is consistent with new Code of Practice. Training for managers handling complaints will also 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.

We are in the process of further 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 further developed to ensure an overview and understanding of the challenges are seen at senior levels.

An effective complaint handling training session, delivered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, focussed specifically for Children's social care staff has been arranged for September 2025. This training will support staff to ensure they are familiar with the procedures and are fully equipped with effective complaints handling skills. In addition to support the adherence to timescales a new approach is being taken to the recruitment of independent officers for stage 2 and 3 investigations. This greatly expands the number of officers available and will help to ensure that complaints can be allocated and addressed swiftly.

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.

The Feedback 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 review of information specifically for young people, including ensuring they understand the role of the Feedback Team in supporting young people being heard.

The Feedback Team will 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 2024/25 reporting year has marked a period of meaningful progress for North East Lincolnshire Council's Children's Services with an overall reduction in the number of statutory complaints. This demonstrates the positive impact of ongoing efforts to stabilise the workforce, improve communication, and resolve concerns at the earliest opportunity.

The successful resolution of the majority of complaints (90%), reflects the Council's strong commitment to early resolution and a focus on listening to families and acting swiftly. This is further supported by the Council's investment in staff development, improved case management, and a growing culture of learning from feedback.

While timeliness in responding to complaints remains an area for improvement, the introduction of targeted training, and clearer escalation processes are already helping to strengthen accountability and responsiveness across the service.

Looking ahead, the Council is well-positioned to build on this momentum. Continued collaboration with regional partners, a focus on recruiting and supporting independent investigators, and a renewed emphasis on transparency and accessibility will ensure that the voices of children, young people, and families remain central to service development.

This report highlights not only the challenges faced but also the resilience and dedication of teams across Children's Services. With a strong foundation in place, the Council is confident in its ability to deliver even better outcomes in 2025/26 and beyond.