

CABINET

DATE	19 th August 2026
REPORT OF	Councillor Samuel Grice, 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 2025/26
STATUS	Open
FORWARD PLAN REF NO.	CB 08/26/02

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 2025 to 31st March 2026.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Receives and accepts the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2025/26.
2. Refers the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2025/26 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 2025/26, the service improvements implemented, and lessons learnt as a result of complaints and representations.
- 1.3 During 2025/26 the Council received the following representations concerning children's social care statutory services:

Complaints = 35

Compliments = 1

This compares with 41 complaints and 1 compliment in 2024/25.

- 1.4 35 complaints were responded to at stage one. Six escalated to stage two (independent investigation) and zero escalated to stage 3 (review panel) during 2025/26.

At stage one, seven complaints (14.3%) were responded to outside of the maximum statutory timescale of twenty working days. This has improved compared to the previous year when 17.1% of complaints were responded outside of the statutory timescale.

Of the six stage 2 complaints responded to, all six were outside of the 65 working day timescale. Contributory factors to the complaints exceeding the statutory timescale are the complex issues raised requiring an independent investigation and often ongoing dialogue with the complainant.

- 1.5 **14.2%** 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 the findings public. 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 have been six stage 2 complaints in 2025/26. Each stage 2 and 3 complaint need 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. PUBLIC HEALTH, HEALTH INEQUALITIES AND MARMOT IMPLICATIONS

The feedback process provides a structured route for children, young people and their families to raise concerns, enabling the authority to identify barriers, inequalities and service issues that may affect health and wellbeing, and to use this feedback to improve support, reduce disadvantage and promote fairer outcomes.

9. CONSULTATION WITH SCRUTINY

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

10. 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.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Reg 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

12. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

The lessons learned 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

13. WARD IMPLICATIONS

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

14. 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>

15. 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 2025 to 31st March 2026

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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 2025 and 31st March 2026, 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 Children's 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.

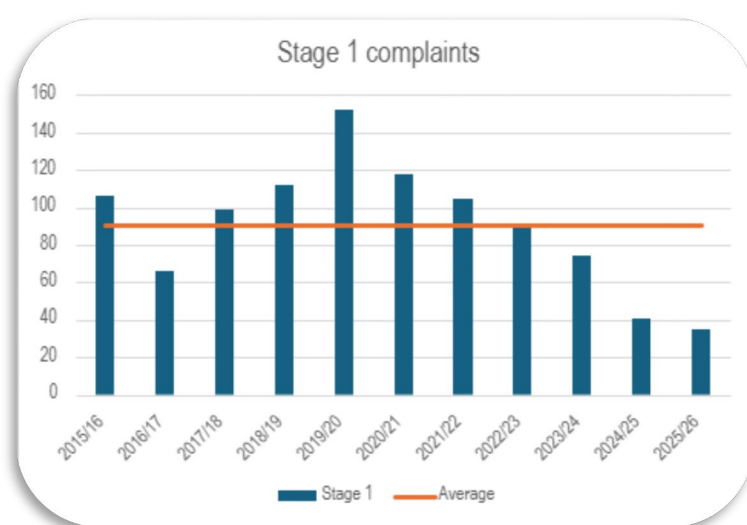
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman - If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the Independent Review Panel, they have the right to take their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), who is empowered to review or investigate where it appears that the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

Year	Concern	Stage one	Stage two	Stage three	LGSCO
2025/26	0	35	6	0	3
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 2025 and 31st March 2026, the Council responded to 35 stage 1 complaints, compared with 41 in the same period for 2024/25. This shows a decrease of 14.6% 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 three 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, 61 in 2023/24, 66 in 2024/25 and 86 in 2025/26 (30% increase). 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 and service users have contacted services directly 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 issues raised relating to concerns about communication with Children's Services, particularly difficulties in contacting social workers, delays in updates, and unclear information. There are also recurring concerns about the way services are delivered, including staff conduct, consistency, and how decisions and processes are applied. Some customers report issues with the accuracy and handling of information, as well as a lack of timely support or follow-through on agreed actions. Overall, feedback reflects a desire for clearer communication, greater consistency, and more responsive support during their interactions with services. 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 33,522 under 18s living in North East Lincolnshire, an increase of 0.8% from 33,257 in 2025. The overall number of open cases has decreased again by 6% to 1660 from, 1768 on 31st March 2025. 416 children were in our care on 31st March 2026, a 5% reduction on 438 on 31st March 2025.

The 35 stage one complaints received accounted for 2.1% 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. This is a decrease from last year when the number of representations was 2.3% of the open cases.

Of the 35 stage one complaints, four complaints escalated to stage two, all of which were partially upheld. There were no Stage 3 panel reviews during 2025/26.

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.

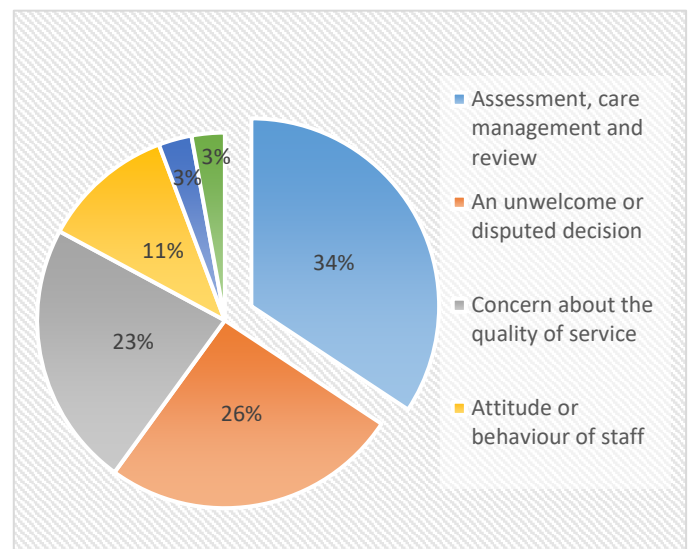
There were three statutory children's complaints raised with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) during 2025/26. None of these complaints resulted in a finding of fault. Two of the complaints related to Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Service and one related to the Children in Care Team. One of these complaints was 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. The other complaint was not investigated as the LGSCO determined that they were unlikely to find fault.

Statutory Complaints by Service Area

Service area	2025/26	2024/25
Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Service (CASS)	19 (54.2%)	20 (48.8%)
Children in Care Team and New Futures Team	7 (20%)	9 (22%)
Children's Disability Service	3 (8.5%)	6 (14.6%)
Fostering and Adoption Services	2 (5.7%)	2 (4.9%)
Residential & Short Breaks	0 (0%)	2 (4.9%)
Family Help & Intervention	0 (N/A)	1 (2.4%)
Integrated Front Door Services	1 (2.8%)	1 (2.4%)
Children's Safeguarding and Reviewing	1 (2.8%)	N/A
Regulated Services	2 (5.7%)	N/A

Nature of Complaints during 2025/26

Complaint types	Number (%)
Assessment, care management and review	12 (34.2%)
An unwelcome or disputed decision	9 (25.7%)
Concern about the quality of service	8 (22.8%)
Attitude or behaviour of staff	4 (11.4%)
Delay in decision making of service	1 (2.8%)
Application of eligibility and assessment criteria	1 (2.8%)



The Outcome of complaints

2025/26

Stage	1	2	3
Upheld	5 (14.2%)	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)
Partially upheld	11 (31.4%)	4 (66.6%)	0 (N/A)
Not upheld	18 (51.2%)	2 (33.3%)	0 (N/A)
Withdrawn	1 (2.8%)	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)

LGSCO	Finding
0 (N/A)	Finding of Fault
1 (33.3%)	Not investigated unlikely to find fault
1 (33.3%)	Outside Jurisdiction
1 (33.3%)	Premature

2024/25

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

LGSCO	Finding
0 (N/A)	Finding of Fault
0 (N/A)	Not investigated unlikely to find fault
1 (33.3%)	Outside Jurisdiction
2 (66.6%)	Premature

Timescales for complaints

Outcome	2025/26	2024/25
Stage 1 response within 10 days	14 (40.0%)	15 (36.6%)
Stage 1 response within 20 days	16 (45.7%)	19 (46.3%)
Stage 1 response outside of 20 days	5 (14.3%)	7 (17.1%)
Stage 2 response within 25 days	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)
Stage 2 response within 65 days	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)
Stage 2 response outside of 65 days	6 (100%)	3 (75%)
Stage 2 investigations withdrawn	0 (N/A)	1 (25%)
Stage 3 response within 15 days	0 (N/A)	0 (N/A)
Stage 3 response outside of Timescale	0 (N/A)	3 (100%)

There has been a slight increase in the percentage of complaints responded to within 10 days at stage one, during 2025/26. During this time 40.0% 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.

Following a stage 2 complaint investigation the council provided a remedy payment of £500.00 in addition to the backdated payment of fees

4. Lessons Learned and Improvements to Service Delivery

Approximately 43% 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 the 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 two training sessions which were delivered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. In addition, the complaints team have also developed training and resource packages to support staff when investigating complaints.

Putting People First: How Feedback is Helping Us Improve

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 their families.

Here's how your voices have helped shape real change across our services:

Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Service

Feedback has led to a sustained focus on improving how the service communicates and works alongside children, young people and families, with actions including providing clearer explanations of decisions, ensuring timely updates, and improving how contact and case information are recorded so that families receive consistent and accurate information.

There is also to be a stronger emphasis on involving families in planning and decision-making, with increased opportunities for meetings, clearer timelines, and better follow-up actions. Practice improvements include strengthening safety planning, improving the quality and timeliness of assessments, and ensuring key information is shared appropriately across teams.

Staff learning has been supported through enhanced supervision, targeted training, and updated guidance, helping to promote more consistent, respectful, and child-centred practice. Together, these changes aim to ensure families feel listened to, better informed, and fully involved in decisions affecting them.

Children in Care and Care Leavers

Feedback from complaints has driven improvements in how young people, families, and carers are kept informed and involved in their care. Services have strengthened arrangements for sharing decisions, assessment outcomes, and review information more clearly and consistently. There is now a greater focus on providing timely updates and ensuring that agreed actions, such as meetings or follow-up support, are delivered as expected. Improvements also include increased opportunities for direct engagement with professionals, helping to build stronger relationships and trust.

These changes are supporting a more transparent approach to care planning, ensuring young people and their families better understand what is happening and why, and feel more confident in the support they receive.

Children's Disability Service

Learning from complaints has prompted improvements in communication, care coordination, and inclusive practice. The service has strengthened how it involves parents and carers in planning and reviewing support, ensuring their views are clearly reflected in decisions.

Actions have been taken to improve the accuracy of records and reduce the risk of errors, alongside clearer communication about visits, reviews, and next steps in support. There is also an increased focus on timely delivery of care plans, including prompt visits and responsive follow-up actions.

These improvements are helping to ensure that children and families experience a more coordinated, reliable, and transparent service.

Fostering

Feedback has identified the need for clearer and more accessible information for carers, particularly in relation to financial support and entitlements. In response, guidance and documentation are being reviewed and updated to ensure they are accurate, easy to understand, and in line with current policy. This work is helping prospective and existing carers to make informed decisions and better understand the support available to them. By improving clarity and consistency of information, the service aims to strengthen trust with carers and support more stable and sustainable placements for children.

Regulated Services

Improvements within regulated services have focused on strengthening communication, consistency, and the quality of care planning. Actions include ensuring that families and young people receive regular updates and reports in line with care plans, alongside clearer communication about expectations and next steps. Operational changes have also been made to improve how placements are matched and how transitions between services are managed, helping to reduce disruption for young people.

In addition, services have reviewed key procedures to improve responsiveness and ensure staff are supported to deliver consistent, high-quality care. These changes are aimed at improving the overall experience for young people and ensuring care is delivered in a more coordinated and reliable way.

5. Compliments received for 2025/26

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.

During the year, nine additional compliments were received across children's statutory services. The majority related to Children in Care and Care Leavers (6), recognising compassionate support, permanence planning, adoption work, life story activity, and helping children and young people feel valued, listened to and supported. Children's Safeguarding and Reviewing (1) was praised for sustained support that helped a young person build confidence and self-esteem during a

challenging period. Integrated Front Door EDT (1) received positive partner feedback for clearer processes, robust responses, improved outcome letters and stronger professional communication. Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Service (1) was recognised for decisive safeguarding action that helped protect family wellbeing in urgent circumstances. Overall, the compliments highlight committed, child-centred practice, effective multi-agency working, and the positive difference staff make for children, young people and families.

6. Looking Forward – Priorities for 2026/27

Our main priorities remain ensuring that we have robust arrangements in place for the timely and compliant handling of complaints that meet the needs of our young people and community, and promoting a positive complaints culture across the council, that ensures that learning from complaints is systematically identified, recorded and used to drive improvements to service delivery, service user / customer experience and council decision making.

For 2026/27, we will be focusing on:

The implementation of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's new Code of Practice for complaint handling which came into force from April 1st, 2026. Whilst this Code of Practice is not focussed specifically on Statutory Children's Complaints it has provided the opportunity to review how all complaints are handled and implement developments which will help to ensure they are investigated in a way which is consistent with the good practice set out in the Code.

Identifying emerging good practice, risks and innovations to improve our feedback processes, through:

- reviewing Ombudsman decisions and guidance.
- analysing internal and external complaint trends to identify risks and opportunities.
- engaging with professional networks, regulators and peer authorities.
- attending and participate in local and national meetings and forums to maintain networks with other local authorities and our local partners, share learning and good practice, benchmark performance and identify effective approaches.

The Feedback Team has also now taken on responsibility for the handling of Adult Social Care complaints. Whilst the statutory process for Adult's differs from both that of Corporate and Children's Statutory complaints, it again presents the opportunity to identify good practice, unify processes and simplify arrangements for our community.

Continuing to raise the awareness of officers across the Council in the handling of complaints:

- Handling feedback and particularly complaints is now part of the corporate induction session all new starters attend on their first day of employment.
- A new 'Feedback' area has been created on the SharePoint platform to raise general awareness of the stages for the handling of a complaint and provide specific guidance and good practice to support investigating officer handling and investigating complaints.
- We will again be arranging for the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to deliver their 'effective complaint handling training'. This training will support officers undertaking complaint investigations to ensure they are familiar with the procedures and are fully equipped with effective complaints handling skills.

Continuing to ensure that our young people and community, have access to clear and timely information about the complaints process, through the ongoing review of the information available to them and how this information is available to them. A specific element of this will be promoting awareness of the role of the Feedback Team in supporting young people to be heard.

Ensuring compliance with timescales, by using independent officers for the handling of stage 2 Independent Investigations and stage 3 Review Panels, to expand the resources available to the Council for the undertaking of these stages of the process.

Promoting the identifying and recording of compliments by services across the council to ensure that they are accurately represented in our reporting and can inform our service delivery, the service user experience and council decision making.

Whilst significant progress has been made in ensuring concerns are being handled in the best way possible there is still progress to be made to ensure that all feedback is being dealt with in a timely and most appropriate manner. This may be through the formal complaints route or directly with the service through their day-to-day contact, which if done effectively is the most effective approach. To support this, assurance reports are provided to and continue to be developed for 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 potential barriers or delays, with the Feedback continuing to raise the importance of ensuring all feedback is reported, both positive and negative.

7. Conclusions

The 2025/26 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 concerns raised. This demonstrates the positive impact of ongoing efforts to stabilise the workforce, improve communications, 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 2026/27 and beyond.