

**Annual Complaints
Report
Children's Services
Wandsworth
2022-23**

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report is produced annually as a statutory requirement for the London Borough of Wandsworth: it provides a summary analysis of social care complaints within Children's social care services.
- 1.1. There is a duty on all local authorities to maintain and operate a complaints procedure for children's social care services.
- 1.2. Wandsworth Council's Children's Services complaints sit within the remit Resident Engagement Service. There is a statutory requirement to have a Statutory Complaints Manager in post. The Complaints Team is led by the Corporate and Statutory Complaints Service Manager who reports to the Head of Resident Engagement. The Complaints Team also comprises of two operational managers: the Adult and Children's Complaints Manager and the Corporate and Ombudsman Complaints Manager. They are supported by five complaint officers.
- 1.3. The Complaints Team is an important corporate function within the Council. Its role is to support the organisation to ensure that the Council has effective and efficient complaints procedures, in line with best practice and statutory requirements. The complaints team also have responsibility to train and support council officers to respond effectively to complaints and ensure learning from complaints feeds directly into service improvement.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. There is a legal requirement to have in place a complaints procedure and produce an annual report for complaints about the Council's actions under Part 3 and some of Parts 4 and 5 of the Children's Act 1989.
- 2.2. The statutory complaints procedure is a 3-stage procedure with recourse to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) if the Council is unable to resolve the complaint.
- 2.3. Learning from complaints is summarised in Section 5 and case studies are provided throughout the report.
- 2.4. A total of 62 complaints were completed across all three stages. Complaint numbers have decreased by 46%. Most complaints were for the Family Safeguarding and supporting Disabled Children Service (which supports Children in Need, Child Protection and Disabled Children) and the Advice, Help and Support Service, responsible for assessing referrals at the 'front door' and the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

- 2.5. When broken down by the top three principal issues raised, the most frequently raised principal issue at stage 1 were placement issues, failures in service/procedures and staff behaviour.
- 2.6. At stage 1, 50% of complaints were partly upheld, 33% were not upheld, 8% were upheld and 8% were withdrawn.
- 2.7. 64% of stage 1 complaints were sent on time, 36% of stage 2 complaints were sent on time and no stage 3 panels were held on time due to the availability of panel members.
- 2.8. 19% of stage 1 complaints were received directly from young people. 3 of these escalated to stage 2 and none escalated to stage 3. Most young people who made complaints were care leavers raising concerns about their supported living placements. The remaining 81% of stage 1 complaints were from parents or guardians.
- 2.9. Children's Services completed 47 stage 1 corporate complaints which is 12% higher than the 42 completed last year. Most were for the SEND teams. There were 17 stage 2 corporate complaints which is the same as last year. 70% of stage 1 corporate complaints and 65% of stage 2 corporate complaints were on time.
- 2.10. There were 15 Ombudsman enquiries this year which is a 36% increase on the 11 in 2021/22. 7 of these were for statutory children's social care services and 8 were for education/SEND¹ and 1 was about both SEND and Children's Services. Only 7 of the 15 enquiries resulted in a full investigation.
- 2.11. Section 16 provides compliments which evidence the good practice taking place in Children's Services.
- 2.12. Section 17 sets out the Complaints Team's key achievements this year and priorities going forward into 2023/24.

3. Legislation

- 3.1. There is a legal requirement for the Local Authority to have in place a complaints procedure, in accordance with Sections 24(D) and 26 of the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 and the accompanying statutory guidance published by the DfE:, Getting the Best from Complaints: Social Care Complaints and Representations for Children, Young People and Others (01.09.2006) for the management of social care complaints.
- 3.2. The complaints procedure covers complaints about the Council's actions under Part 3 and some of Parts 4 and 5 of the Children's Act 1989. These are Children in Need, Looked after Children and Care Leavers, Special Guardianship Support and post-adoption support. The following areas tend to be exempt; Early Help, Child

¹ Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND). A child or young person who has special educational needs and/or a disability and needs special health and education support.

Protection, S47 enquiries and conferences, assessments for potential foster carers and adopters, foster carer registration and Section 7 and 37 court reports. The Council may decide to investigate these areas under other procedures, such as the Council's corporate complaints process or use the children's complaints procedure if complaint issues fall across both corporate and statutory procedures.

- 3.3. There is also a legal duty for the Local Authority to have in place advocacy arrangements for children and care leavers who wish to make representations or complaints regarding Children's Services and their care pursuant to the Advocacy Services and Representations Procedure (Children) (Amendment) Regulations 2004. Alongside these Regulations there is statutory guidance entitled Providing Effective Advocacy Services for Children and Young People Making a Complaint under the Children Act 1989.

4. Overview of the Children's Complaints Procedure

- 4.1. The complaints procedure is a three-stage process. The first stage is also known as local resolution stage. At Stage 1, complaints are investigated by the team where the complaint issue arose. In these cases, the team manager or service manager will usually investigate and respond to the complaint. The timescale for a stage 1 complaint response is 10 working days. However, where the complaint is complex or requires more time, an extension of up to a further 10 working days can be agreed by the Complaints Manager.
- 4.2. Where the complainant is dissatisfied with the stage 1 response, they can request a Stage 2 investigation. This stage requires an independent investigation, and two independent people are appointed by the Complaints Manager for the role of Independent Investigator and Independent Person. The investigation team produce reports which are passed to a senior officer within Children's Services for adjudication and response to the complainant at Stage 2. The statutory timescale for this stage is 25 to 65 working days.
- 4.3. It is a statutory requirement to commission an independent person (IP) to oversee the integrity of a stage 2 investigation to ensure it remains child focused. It is good practice to appoint an IP who has not been employed by the council for a minimum of three years. Wandsworth Council commission external officers to undertake this role.
- 4.4. Stage 3 is the final stage of the complaint's procedure. If a complainant remains unhappy following the findings of the Stage 2 investigation, they can request that their complaint is reviewed at Stage 3 by an independent panel. The panel hearing must take place within 30 working days of the request. The panel is made up of three people and the complainant has an opportunity to present their case to the panel alongside the Council. The chair of the panel will then send their decision to the complainant and the Director of Children's Services within five working days of the panel hearing and the Director must respond to the complainant within 15 working days.

- 4.5. A complaint is defined as ***'an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response.'***
- 4.6. Complaints can be made by the young person receiving a direct service from Children's Services or by a person on their behalf such as an advocate or family member where the service user has provided their written consent if they are Fraser competent².
- 4.7. Where a service is provided by a contractor on behalf of the Council, a complaint can either be made directly to the external provider service or to the complaints team at Wandsworth Council. Whilst the Complaints Team will encourage a provider service to firstly attempt resolution through its own procedures, if this is not possible, the Commissioning and Contract Monitoring Team will investigate.
- 4.8. Complaints will be considered if they are made within 12 months of the incident although the Council can apply their discretion to waive this time limit in some instances.
- 4.9. The Complaints Team have the discretion to put on hold a complaint (or certain aspects of a complaint), if there is a concurrent process addressing the same issues, for example, the matter will be discussed in court. Once the concurrent process is complete, a complainant has 12 months to request that their complaint is re-opened.
- 4.10. Complaints are counted in the year in which they were responded to or closed: 2022-23 complaint figures include complaints that will have been initiated in the previous year (2021-22) but then closed in this reporting year.
- 4.11. Withdrawn complaints are still included in the numbers because the issues raised may still result in changes to how a service is delivered for the person named in the complaint or result in wider practice change. Also, withdrawn complaints still take time and resource from the complaints team and services to record, analyse, and resolve.
- 4.12. The department commissions its advocacy provision through 'The Advocacy People' to assist children and young people when making a complaint or a representation.

5. Approach to learning from complaints/Quality Assurance

- 5.1. Getting The Best from Complaints (5.7.1) requires local authorities to monitor the operation and effectiveness of their complaints procedures with quality assurance systems that that feed complaint outcomes into operational delivery.
- 5.2. The Complaints Manager works closely with the Quality Assurance and Improvement Manager and Head of Participation to discuss learning from

² Fraser competent is a term used to describe a child under 16 who is considered to be of sufficient age and understanding to fully appreciate what is involved in their treatment.

complaints on a quarterly basis. Learning is triangulated with the work undertaken by Quality Assurance and fed back to senior managers. This ensures that learning from complaints feeds directly into service improvements within Children's Services.

5.3. Case studies are included throughout the report, but in summary, this year key learning focused on:

- Putting in place a new 'independently facilitated' forum for parents so they can talk openly about their experiences of being involved with Children's Services. Feedback from the forums will be used to strengthen relationships between professionals and families.
- Ensuring that families are given suitable notice of a change of social worker and that managers support social workers to deliver planned handovers.
- Improving communication with parents by being more mindful of how information can leave parents feeling anxious, avoiding gaps in communication, explaining decisions and the reasons for referrals clearly, and ensuring that both parents' views feature in assessments.
- Considering referrals to Adult Social Care for parents who may require a carers assessment if they are experiencing poor physical or mental health.
- Sharing reports and minutes in a timely way, particularly to ensure that parents have time to read and respond to reports before meetings.
- Reviewing and improving the induction programme for all new social workers.
- Supporting the importance of a visible and transparent complaints process. Social work teams have been reminded to follow the stage 1 statutory complaints process when complaints are raised directly in services (in liaison with the Complaints Team) and that information provided to families should also include information about how to make a complaint.
- Refreshing knowledge of using information governance procedures when there is dispute about records to ensure that service users or their representatives are aware of the right to rectification and deletion.
- Continuing to improve the quality of recording to ensure that records are clear, timely and accurately reflect conversations in their totality.
- Improving transition arrangements for young people moving into Adult Social Care.

5.4 This year, only 1 investigation by the LGSCO found fault in Children's Services. This was about the way the Children Looked After service supported a potential adopter. The investigation found that there had been delays and poor communication. The following improvements were made:

- The Children Looked After Service now have a weekly report that highlights where any child or carer does not have an allocated worker to avoid delays in allocating new social workers.
- To further improve relationships with carers, regular discussions now take place in supervision, team and service meetings about the principles of respect, good communication and acknowledging the power and influence the social work role can have on the lives of families.
- To avoid delays in processing Subject Access Requests (SARs), a dedicated subject access request team is now in place to manage and process requests in a timely way for both Children’s Services and Adult Social Care. This means that responsibility does not sit with operational staff within Children’s Services, who are managing multiple competing demands.

6. Statutory complaint numbers and representations

6.1. Children’s Services welcomes all feedback, including complaints and representations about its services. Service users, families and carers can provide their views in an open and transparent way and can easily access the complaints procedure.

Table 1: Number of statutory complaints by year

Stage	2019/20	2020/21 Completed	2020/21 Received	2021/22 Completed	2021/22 Received	2022/23 Completed	2022/23 Received
S1	107	75	60	68	85	36	36
S2	13	10	15	22	20	16	8
S3	4	6	7	6	9	10	7
Total	124	91	82	96	114	62	51

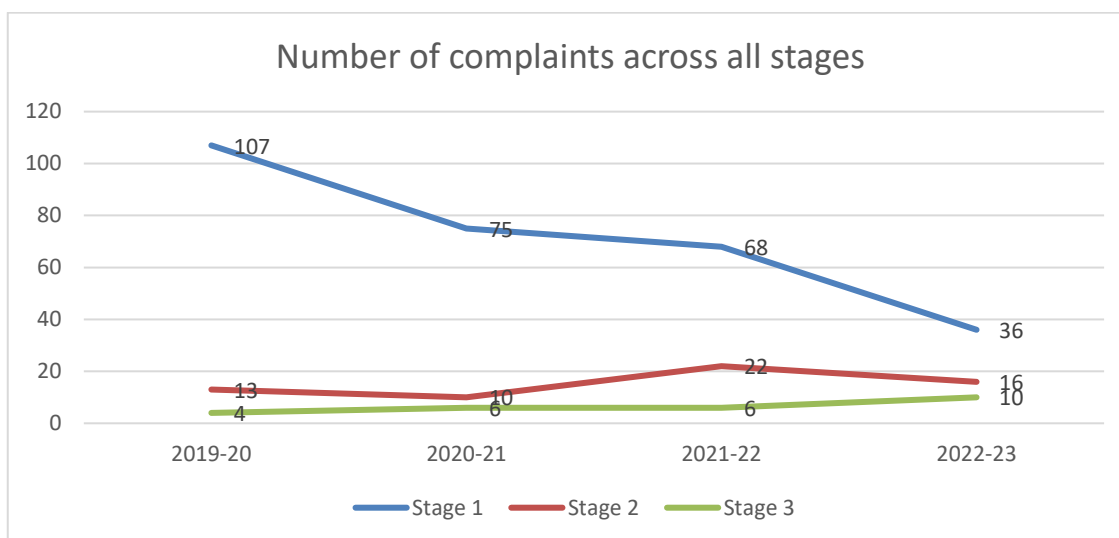
6.2. Children’s Services completed 62 statutory complaints in total across all three stages during 2022/23. These are highlighted in **Table 1**. This represents a 46% decrease on the previous year when 96 were completed. Of these complaints, the vast majority 58% (or 36 complaints³) were completed at stage 1. 26% (or 16 complaints⁴) were

³ Whilst 36 Stage 1 complaints were completed, in total 36 new complaints were received. Five Stage 1 complaints from the previous year (2021-22) were carried over and closed during the first quarter of this year. Four Stage 1 complaints remain open in Quarter 4 and will be carried over and completed in the first quarter of next year (2023-24).

⁴ Stage 2 complaints have been logged in the quarter requested by the complainant and closed in the quarter in which the final response was sent. 10 Stage 2 complaints were carried over from the previous year (2021-22) and completed this year. 3 Stage 2 complaints remain open in Quarter 4 and will be carried over and completed next year (2022-23).

completed at stage 2 and 16% (or 10⁵ complaints) progressed and were completed at stage 3.

Chart 1: Number of statutory complaints by year and stage



6.3. Overall, the proportion of complaints completed at stage 1 has decreased by 47% this year (36 complaints). Also, 3 of these complaints were withdrawn at stage 1 part-way through the process, mainly due to fast resolution and the complainant advising that a written response was no longer necessary.

6.4. Complaints at stage 2 have decreased by 27% in line with the gradual decrease in stage 1 complaints. 5 of the stage 2 complaints were withdrawn after the process started. Whilst stage 3 complaints have increased by 67%, this is in response to the spike in stage 2 complaint last year, and it is expected that stage 3 complaints will reduce next year. This year 2 stage 3 complaints were withdrawn after the process started.

Table 2: Number of statutory complaints completed by quarter: 2021-22

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total completed
Stage 1	15	8	5	8	36
Stage 2	5	3	5	3	16
Stage 3	2	3	4	1	10
Total	22	14	14	13	62

⁵ Stage 3 complaints have been logged in the quarter requested by the complainant and closed in the quarter in which the final response was sent. Three Stage 3 complaints were carried over from the previous year (2021-22) and completed this year. One Stage 3 complaints remain open in Quarter 4 and will be carried over and completed next year (2022-23).

- 6.5. The volume of complaints should be set in context by looking at the overall level of contact and interaction Children's Services has with partners, residents and service users. The 36 stage 1 complaints received this year is a low proportion, given that the department handled 15,166⁶ front door contacts from partners, agencies and families of which 2,2448 resulted in social care referrals, 2,220 social care assessments were undertaken, and 900 new Section 47 (Child Protection) enquires were instigated.
- 6.6. When looking at the complaint figures in context, it is notable that Wandsworth Children's Services responded to 180 Member enquiries⁷ this year in addition to the formal complaints: across both Education and Children's Services. Member enquiries, either through local MPs or Councillors are another way for residents or service users to give feedback or raise concerns about service provision, some of which could have been considered through complaint processes.
- 6.7. Whilst Member enquiries can be requests for information or service enquiries, rather than formal complaints, it is important that these figures are considered alongside the number of complaints as managers are also expected to investigate the issues and provide response, often within shorter timescales than those prescribed by complaint processes.
- 6.8. In addition to the 62 formal complaints, during the year the Complaints Team dealt with an additional 149 enquiries over a wide range of issues or concerns that did not fit within the remit of the statutory complaints process⁸. This means that over the year, the Complaints Team handled 211 issues for Children's Services.
- 6.9. Representations are low level complaint matters that have been resolved informally and quickly to prevent escalation to the formal complaints process. Issues or concerns are other matters that residents have sent directly to the Complaints Team for triaging, signposting, or redirecting to another team or process, for example, school complaints or safeguarding issues. These numbers are included in **table 3** below to demonstrate the breadth of the work undertaken by the Complaints Team alongside the formal complaints completed through the statutory complaints process this year.

⁶ Last year's numbers: 17,072 front door contacts, 2,214 social care referrals, 1,837 social care assessments, 834 new Section 47 enquiries

⁷ Last year Children's Services responded to 221 Member Enquiries. This is a 19% decrease on the 180 responded to last year.

⁸ Formal complaints that have been withdrawn after the complaints process is initiated are still included in the number of formal complaints, so that the issues raised can still be included in the analysis of themes.

Table 3: Representations, issues or concerns handled by the Complaints Team in 2022-23

Type of case	Number
Formal Complaints completed through the Statutory complaints process	62
Representations: low level complaints sent to services for quick resolution	18
Statutory complaint requests rejected (redirected) or no consent	9
Non-statutory complaints/issues passed to other services or directorates	19
Complaints specifically about schools/early years provision (re-directed to school complaints processes)	24
Issues for external partners/agencies	2
Data Protection/FOI requests/Right to Rectification, redirected to Information Governance Processes	1
Safeguarding issues	12
Historical abuse	1
Other	1
TOTAL number of cases handled by the complaints team this year (includes the 28 formal complaints)	149

Learning Case study: Stage 1 "Parents/Carers Forum"

Background

A parent complaint about how they were treated by social workers during child protection processes. The parent told us that at times the involvement in their family's life felt unprofessional and lacked openness and honesty. Prior to the stage 1 investigation, the Assistant Director met with the parent to hear their experiences. Whilst it did not appear that there had been mistakes in the way that statutory processes were carried out, the Assistant Director was keen that the department learn from the parent's experience of their interpersonal interactions with the social work team and asked the Head of Participation to investigate at stage 1.

Learning

Treating families with kindness and compassion is one of the core values and key priorities of Children's Services. The findings were taken very seriously and discussed with the social work, the Head of Service and the Assistant Director. It was recognised that more action was needed to embed these core values in all staff members practice, during all of their interactions and at all stages of involvement.

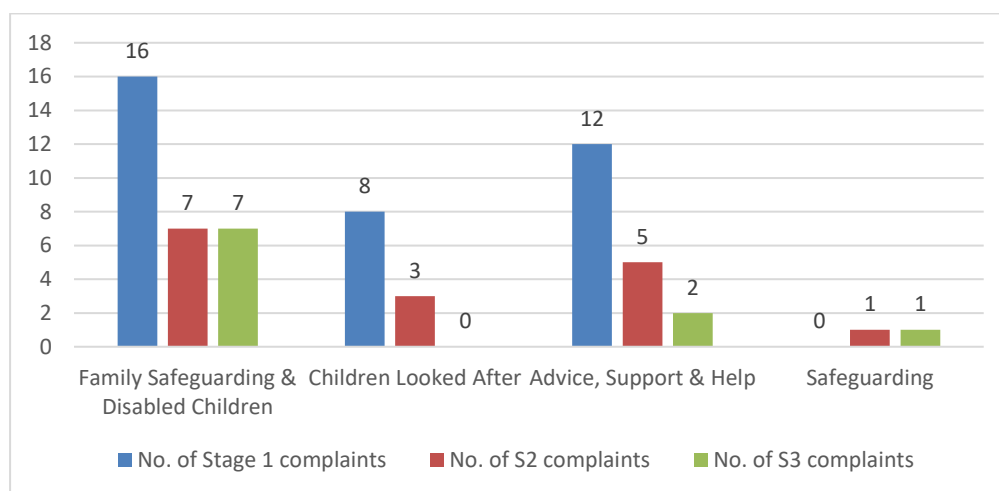
To find tangible ways to monitor and listen to families' experiences a forum will also be set up for parents/carers who have experience working with Children's Services. This will be facilitated independently so that parents/carers are able to talk more openly about their experiences. These parent and carer voices will be used to improve how our services in future are delivered and to feed into staff training, management, and feedback.

7. Complaints by service area and teams

- 7.1 The Family Safeguarding and Disabled Children's Service, which covers Child in Need, Child Protection and Disabled Children, investigated and completed 18 stage 1 complaints (50%). It is expected that there will be more complaints about this area of social work as parents and families in child protection may be unhappy with the intervention from social workers.
- 7.2 The Advice, Support and Help service which covers the Brief Intervention Service and MASH, completed 13 stage 1 complaints (or 33%). The Children Looked After service completed 9 stage 1 complaints (25%). The Safeguarding Standards Team completed 1 stage 1 complaint. **Chart 2** illustrates the number of complaints by service area and stage.
- 7.3 At stage 2 and 3, most complaints were completed by the Family Safeguarding and Supporting Disabled Children Services which support Children in Need and Child Protection and Disabled Children (7 stage 2 complaints and 7 stage 3 complaints).

The majority of the stage 2 and 3 complaints were from families involved in Child Protection

Chart 2: Number of statutory complaints by service area and stage 2022/23⁹



7.4 Broken down by teams within service areas, the teams which completed the highest individual number of stage 1 complaints were the Family Safeguarding Locality Teams which support children on Child in Need or Child Protection plans (15 or 41% of all stage 1 complaints). Next, the Brief Intervention Service, the ‘front-door’ that assess new referrals into Children’s Services, completed 9 stage 1 complaints (24%).

Table 4: Stage 1 statutory complaints completed by service area and team 2022-23

Service Area	Team	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Children Looked After (CLA)	Future First	4	1	1	0	6
	CLA locality teams	1	1	0	0	2
Family Safeguarding and Disabled Children’s service	Family Safeguarding (includes Child in Need and Child Protection)	3	3	2	6	14
	Disabled Children	1	1	0	0	2
Advice, Support and Help Service ^{10/}	Brief Intervention Service ¹¹	5	2	0	2	9
	MASH	1	0	2	0	3
TOTAL		15	8	5	8	36

⁹ 1 stage 2 complaint was adjudicated by the Family Safeguarding & Disabled Children Service Manager but was a joint complaint with the Preparing for Adulthood Team which report into Adult Social Care. This complaint also escalated to Stage 3.

¹⁰ Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub

¹¹ Formally the Referral and Assessment Service

- 7.5 Whilst overall, the number of stage 1 complaints across all services has decreased in the past four years, on an individual service level the proportion of complaints for each area is in line with what we would expect. The social care teams always strive to resolve concerns quickly which at times avoids the need for young people and families to make a formal complaint.

8. Complaints by issues and outcomes: Stage 1

- 8.1 Complaint issues allow us to understand how services are being perceived and what can be learnt from complaints to improve service provision. Complaints are regularly reviewed at senior management level with a primary focus on addressing the learning from complaints which are upheld or partially upheld. Most complaints are multi-faceted and therefore raise multiple issues. For example, whilst communication as a principal issue was only recorded five times, most complaints raise communication issues in some way, but this may not be the main motivation to complain. Therefore, each complaint has been reported by its principal issue, which is the overarching theme or trigger of the complaint and full data on all the complaint issues raised this year is provided further on in section 8.
- 8.2 When broken down by the top three principal issues raised, the most frequently raised principal issue at stage 1 was **placement issues** which accounted for 22% (8) of complaints. Then, 19% (or 7 complaints) were about **failures in service/procedures**. Next, complaints about **staff behaviour** accounted for 17% (6) complaints. Principal issues and times upheld/partly upheld are highlighted in **Chart 3**.
- 8.3 Chart 4 shows the number of complaints by principal issue in 2021-22. Both last year and this year, **placement issues** remain the most raised principal issue of complaint. Complaint about **staff behaviour** have also remained consistent. However, it should be noted the complaints primarily about the **quality of assessments** have dropped this year.

Chart 3 – Number of statutory complaints received by principal Issue at stage 1 and number of times upheld/partly upheld 2022-23

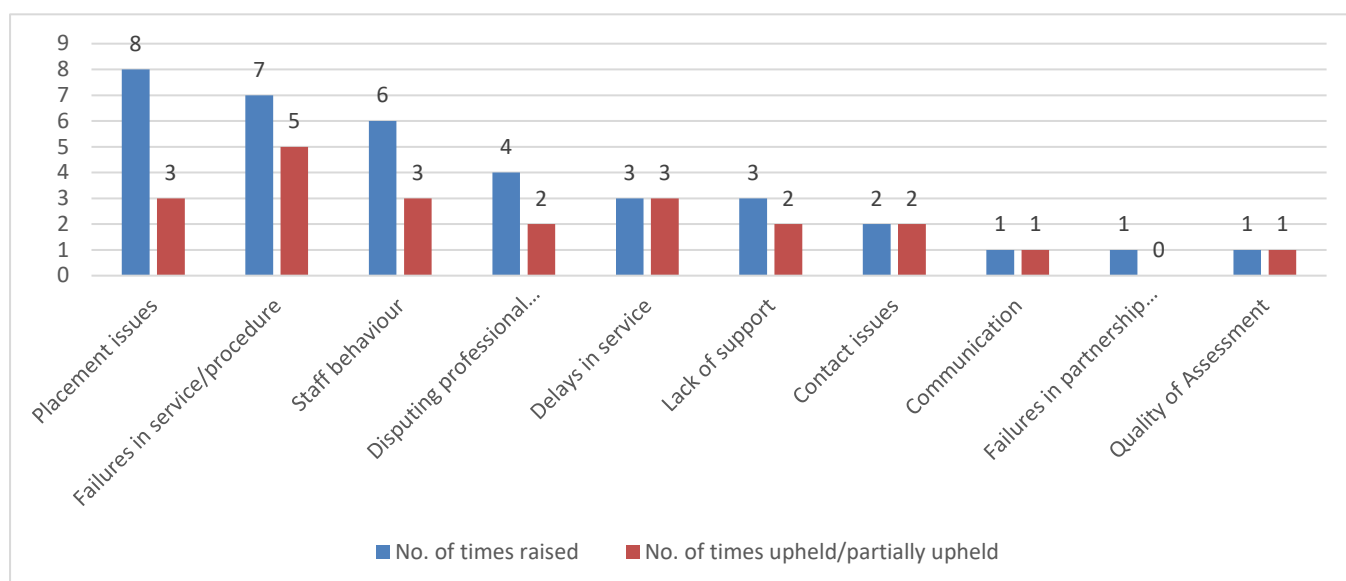
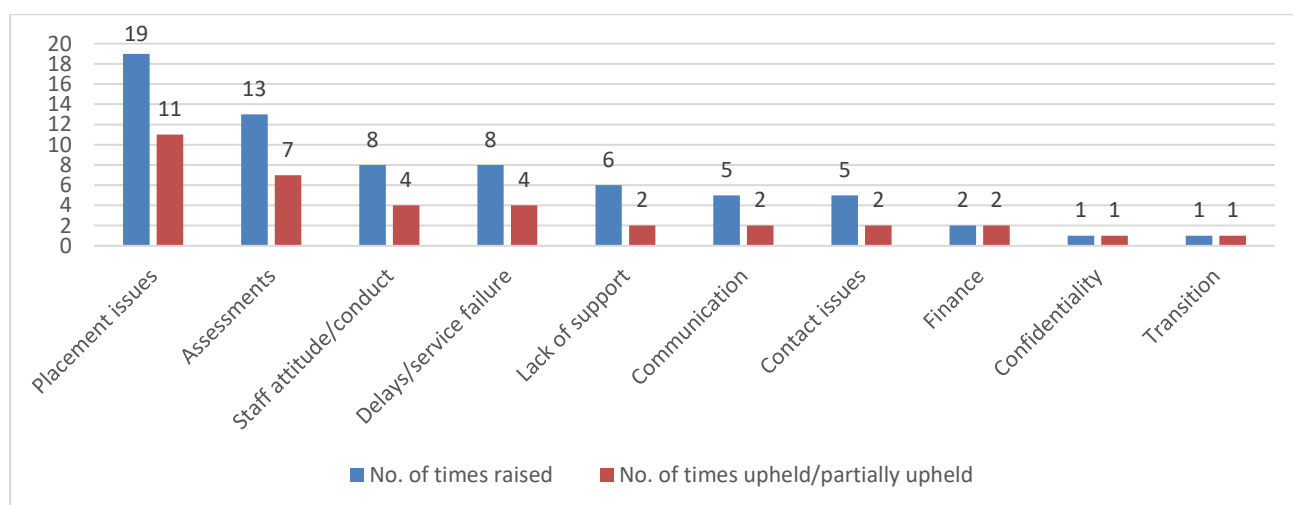


Chart 4 – Number of statutory complaints received by principal Issue at stage 1 and number of times upheld/partly upheld 2021-22



8.4 In total **placement issues** were raised 8 times as a principal issue. 4 complaints were made by parents who said that said they were unhappy with decisions to change or end their child's placement and the quality of care/safeguarding within the placement. One complaint was withdrawn, and two complaints were not upheld. One complaint was partly upheld because it was found that communication with the parent was not as good as it could have been and there were delays putting in place agreed actions.

8.5 4 complaints about **placement issues** were made directly by young people. These were about the quality of support from personal assistants, decisions change a young person's placement, delays in support with housing applications and support with re-accommodation when a young person had to leave due to the standard of the accommodation. Two complaints were not upheld, and two were partially upheld; one

because there were delays in starting the SQC application process and the other because a young person had to leave their accommodation due to a rodent infestation.

8.6 All of the 7 complaints were **failures in service/procedure**, 6 were made by parents/guardians and 1 by a young person.

- Two complaints were not upheld; one was that a child had no care package due to failures to complete and assessment and the other was about the way the MASH responded to a parent's concerns.
- Three complaints were partly upheld. One was about the disruption caused to services when the social workers was changed and there was learning about effective communication and better handover process. The other was about not informing parents about health issues concerning their Looked After child; learning was put in place to remind social workers of the importance of sharing information with the family network.
- Two complaints were upheld. One was that MASH did not update parents that they were escalating the referral to a strategy meeting and learning was put in place to review communication at the 'front door' to ensure that families are fully aware of what is happening. The other complaint disputed the actions parents were required to take to prevent escalation to child protection. There was learning to improve the transparency of information and actions with Child in Need plans to ensure parents/guardians are clear about what is required.

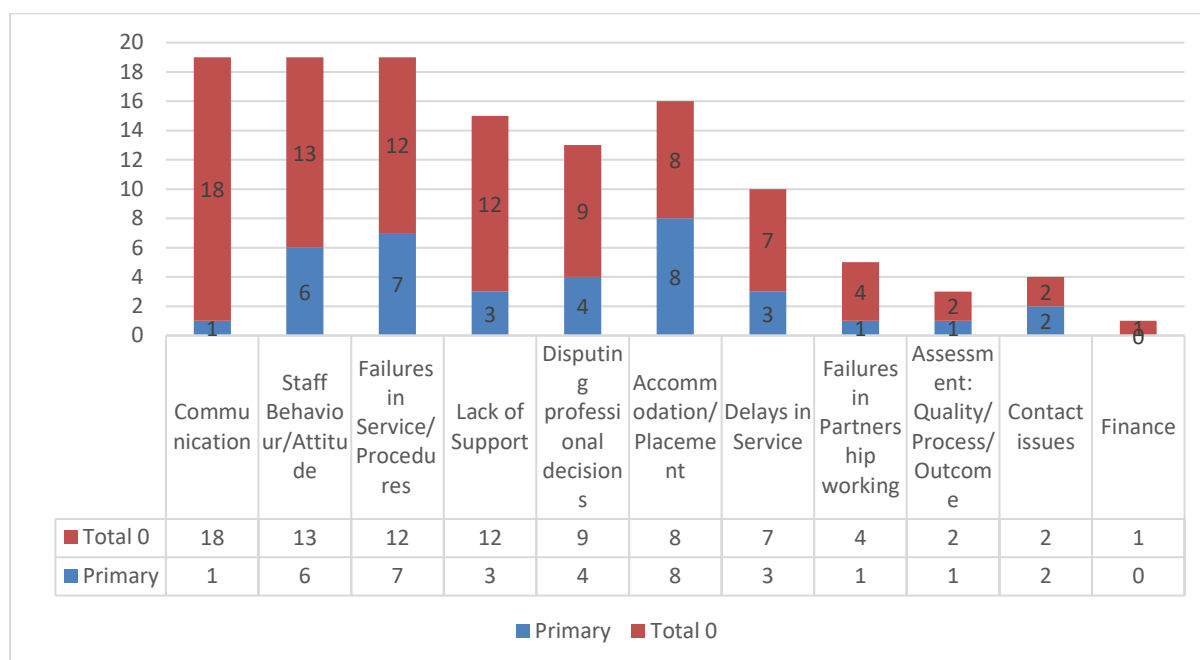
8.7 The young person who complained about **failures in service/procedure** felt that they felt they had not received a lawful pathway plan or support to access education, but whilst the complaint was partially upheld, the investigation did not find that there were failures to offer the correct support and some of the problems had arisen because the young person had not engaged fully in the processes.

8.8 All of the 6 complaints where **staff behaviour** was the principal issue were made by parents or guardians.

- 2 complaints were not upheld. One complaint was about a parent's unhappiness that escorts taking their child to school discussed inappropriate topics such as 'religion'. The other complaint was from a parent who felt that the social worker was not robust enough to carry out their role.
- From the 3 complaints that were partly upheld two were from parents who felt that the social workers were not transparent; there was learning from both complaints to remind teams to ensure that child protection processes are explained clearly to parents, the intent behind questions to parents should be clear and the social workers should always take a strength's-based approach which recognises positives as well as areas of worry. The other complaint was from a parent who felt that they had not been treated with respect; from this an independently facilitated panel for parents will be set up to provide a safe forum to provide experiences of working with social workers (see case study on page 12).
- The 1 withdrawn complaint was about the behaviour of a social worker but the complainant decided not to progress their complaint before a finding could be made.

8.9 Whilst **Chart 3** has set out the principal issues for each stage 1 complaint, **Chart 5** below sets out each issue raised within the 20 stage 1 complaints. Across the 20 stage 1 complaints a total of 88 issues were raised, demonstrating the complexity of children’s statutory complaints. This can present a challenging in determining the key motivation for making the complaint, as often issues like communication and delays are a thread through an entire complaint, yet the complainant’s desired outcome is, for example, to have an assessment amended or a professional decision changed.

Chart 5: Full data on the issues raised from the 36 statutory stage 1 complaints



8.10 With regards to complaint outcomes, as demonstrated in **Chart 6** and **Table 6** below, at stage 1, partly upheld complaints account for 50% of complaints, not upheld 33% and upheld 8%. Withdrawn complaints accounted for 8%.

Chart 6: Outcome by % statutory stage 1 complaints

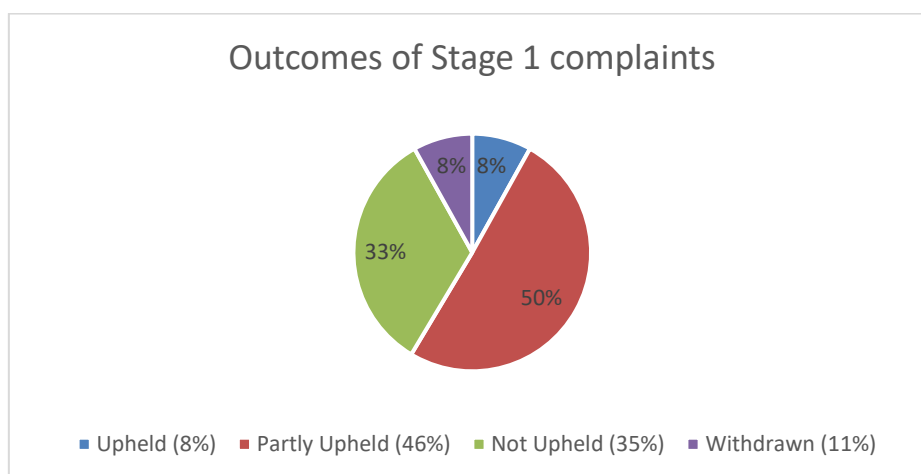


Table 7: statutory stage 1 complaint outcomes 2022/23

Outcome	Total number	Percentage (out of 36)
Partly Upheld	18	50%
Not Upheld	12	33%
Upheld	3	8%
Withdrawn	3	8%
	36	

Learning from complaints: Stage 1 Case study "Dad's Matter"**Background**

A common theme from complaints made by father's are perceptions that they are not always fully involved in social care decisions and actions, particularly if they are living away from the family home. Sometimes this is complicated by allegations towards them of abuse and control. A stage 1 complaint handled by the Advice and Support Service (front door), left a father feeling like the social worker had made assumptions rather than ask their opinion in key issues concerning their child and they were not informed of key meetings or provided with a copy of their child's assessment.

Learning

Children's Service are fully committed to ensuring that both parents or guardians are appropriately included and following this complaint, the service discussed ways of managing communication in situations where there are allegations of abuse, to ensure that both parents views are included (and wider family network if appropriate), even if these are different to the views of the social worker. Expectations were also set that 'family meetings' will be a key feature of the work with families in the future.

Additionally, the Quality Assurance Team and Social Care Academy discussed the theme of ensuring fathers are included. This was fed into a multi-agency learning event called "Dads Matter". The Social Care Academy will also focus on work with parents where there are allegations of abuse and control through workshops which will support social workers to develop systemic skills to manage communication effectively in these contexts.

9. Complaints by issue and outcomes: Stage 2

- 4 9.1 In total 16 complaints escalated to stage 2 this year; 5 of these were withdrawn¹². were withdrawn as the complainants felt it was not worthwhile to pursue their complaint and 1 withdrew as the issues were diverted through the court process.
- 9.2 Stage 2 complaints were mainly raised by parents or guardians; 3 of the complaints were directly from young people.

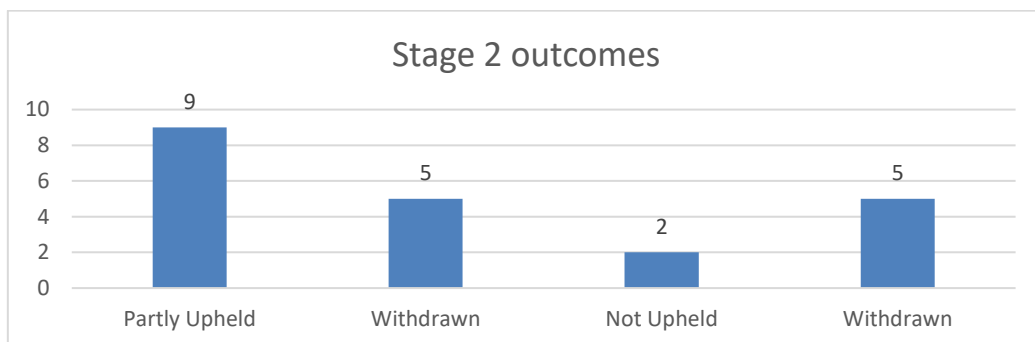
¹² 3 of the withdrawn stage 2 complaints were for Family Safeguarding & Disabled Children and 2 were for Advice, Help and Support

- 9.3 At the start of the stage 2 process a statement of complaint is agreed with an independent officer and independent person. The date the statement is signed commences the start of the 65 working day timescale. As stage 2 investigations are detailed and cover multiple issues, it is to be expected that most complaints are partly upheld. Therefore, it is difficult to determine one principal theme from stage 2 complaints.
- 9.4 The 3 complaints from 2 different young people raised concerns about lack of services from the Future First team and not receiving a lawful placement plan or support with education.
- One complaint about lack of services from Future First was upheld and the young person received back monies that were owed to them, an apology and a review by the team on what went wrong with their case.
 - One complaint about a pathway plan was partly upheld on the basis that whilst the services were available, there were some inaccuracies and lack of clarity in the pathway plan, for example the plan did not specify the level of contact from the Personal Advisor (PA) and was not clear whether the department were in support of the young person continuing their studies.
 - A third complaint was from a care leaver who did not feel that they received an adequate level of support from the Future First team or their PA. The complaint was not upheld but the young person was encouraged to take up the support that was still on offer to them.
- 9.5 There were 6 other stage 2 complaints made by parents that were partly upheld. Key issues and learning are summarised below:
- Dissatisfaction with Section 20¹³ processes; new training for social workers is being developed to ensure best practice is in place for young people accommodated under Section 20.
 - Two complaints about delays in information; one was about delays in sending out a child protection conference report and another about the timeliness of sharing completed reports and assessments; in both cases it was recognised that practice could have been better and social workers have been reminded of their responsibilities.
 - Not fully involving both parents in social care planning or providing interpreters for virtual contact sessions; guidance was issued to social workers that all reasonable steps should be taken to ensure both parents can attend Child in Need meetings and feedback was provided to the Commissioning Team that the contracted provider could not allocate an interpreter as requested.

¹³ A Section 20 agreement means that parents/guardians or a young person have voluntarily agreed to be accommodated by the Local Authority (without the need for a court order)

- A father perceived that he was not involved with social care planning to the same extent as his ex-partner. The issue of split Child Protection conferences was raised particularly as the professional working with the family was not able to attend the session with the father which created a perception of unfairness. Learning from the complaint clarified that the department are committed to maximising participation in Child Protection conferences and the current hybrid model supports this as whilst families are present in the room, professionals can attend online if there are difficulties with travel.
- Unhappiness with the way social workers followed Child Protection procedures and poor communication with the parent. The complaint raised a number of learning points that will be implemented; consideration of providing written information on Child Protection processes to help parents understand what will happen, reminding social workers of the need to communicate well, of their duties in relation to Data Protection, of the importance of complying with the statutory complaint procedure when people complain directly to them, and the importance of following case recording procedures so that information is accurate and complete.

Chart 7: statutory stage 2 outcomes 2022/23



Learning Case study: Stage 2 'Social Worker Induction'

Background

A stage 2 complaint about a Looked After child raised concerns that placement and case reviews had not been undertaken in accordance with the Children's Act and that there were delays in sending minutes and copies for care plans for Looked After Child Review meetings.

Learning

To improve the service for other Looked After children and their parents, the induction for new social workers was reviewed to ensure it adequately reflects Care Planning Regulations. Alongside this, the Resource Hub for social workers was reviewed and updated with procedures, for example, statutory timescales to share reports with families. These updates were communicated to all social work teams and the Children's Services Leadership Team reinforced the need for learning from complaints to be a standing agenda item at service meetings.

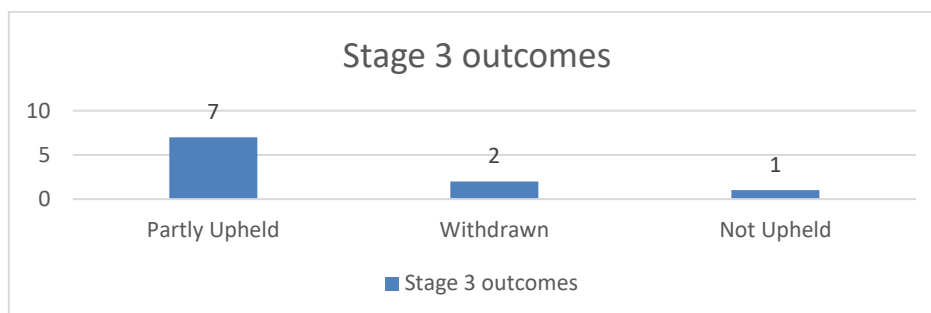
10. Complaints by issue and outcomes: Stage 3

- 10.1 This year 10 complaints escalated to stage 3. Of these, 2 were withdrawn¹⁴ as the complainants decided not to pursue their complaints.
- 10.2 No stage 3 complaints were made by young people this year.
- 10.3 Below is a summary of the 7 complaints that were partly upheld:
- 5 complaints raised issues about factually inaccurate information in social care documents; social work teams have been reminded of the correct process to signpost people to if they raise factual inaccuracies in records (right to rectification) and of the importance of keeping contemptuous and accurate records. It was also highlighted to staff that they should always make people aware of their right to complain as the department value the importance of a visible and transparent complaints process.
 - 1 complaint raised concerns that Children's Services had a lack of understanding, from a cultural perspective, of parenting a black child with ASD. The Director, in their response, arranged for the parent to meet with the Head of Service to understand more about the families experiences and confirmed that the Local Authority have developed and Equalities Diversity and Inclusion Pledge with work being undertaken in all departments across the Council.

¹⁴ One withdrawn stage 3 complaint was for Quality Assurance and the other was for Family Safeguarding and Disabled Children

- 1 complaint about delays in transition arrangements from Children’s to Adult Social care provided assurances that work has been undertaken to improve how young people are supported into adulthood which includes a joint protocol with Social Care, Health and Education.

Chart 8: Statutory stage 3 outcomes 2022/23



Learning Case study: “Record keeping and communication”

Background

A family carer, supporting young person receiving Child in Need services, was unhappy with social work practice in relation to inaccuracies in record keeping, the timeliness of reports and assessments, and failures to liaise with the school about progressing actions from the EHCP Review. The investigation found that there could be improvements in the quality of records and the way social workers communicate and explained the scope of their responsibilities with regards Child in Need processes and how these work within a partnership framework (in this case Education).

Learning

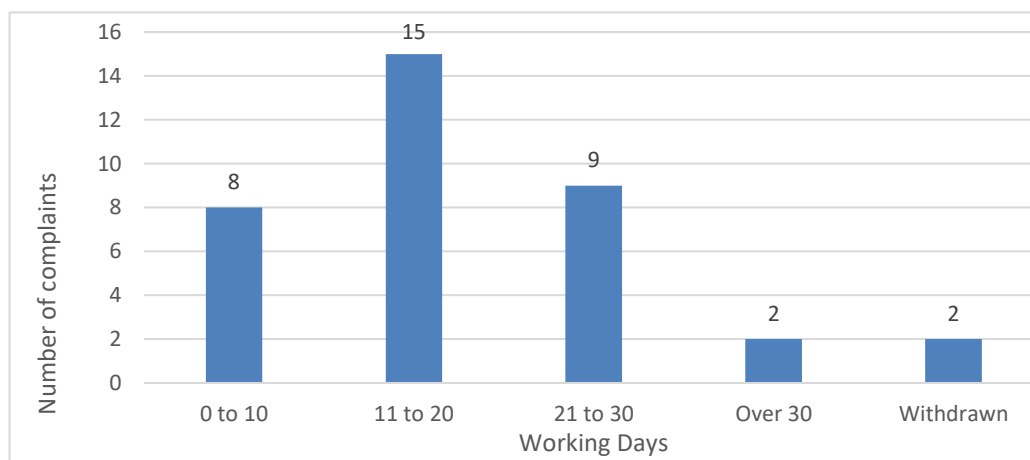
The Director’s response to the Stage 3 Panel review, acknowledged that there were a number of areas identified where improvements could be made including communication, record keeping, and better explanations about processes and the legal framework under which the Child in Need service operates. A new quality assessment framework has now been introduced which as well as reviewing the quality of written records, also seeks feedback from families and key partners.

11. Response times

Stage 1

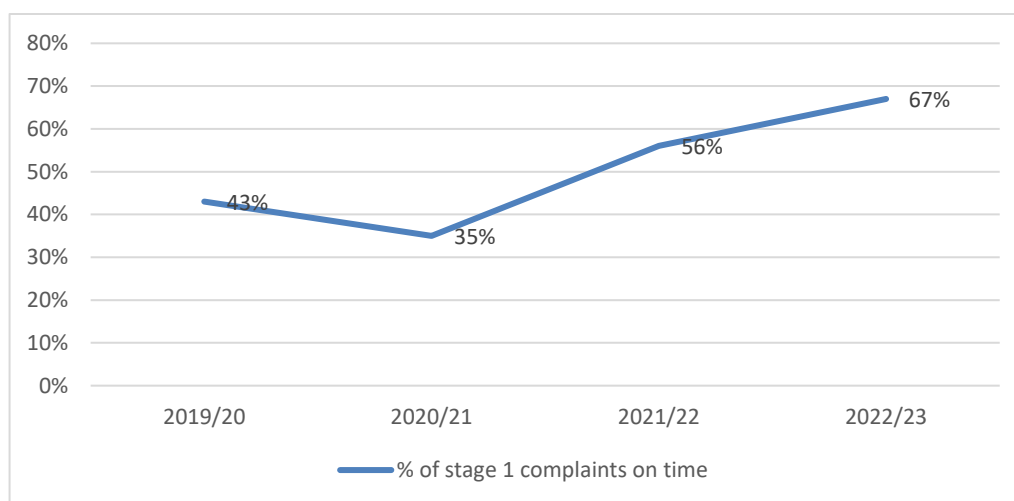
11.1 From the 36 completed stage 1 complaints, 2 were withdrawn. Therefore, timescales to measure stage 1 complaints ‘on time’ have excluded these complaints.

Chart 9– Stage 1 response times – complaints completed during 2022-23



11.2 ‘On time’ means complaints that received a response within 20 working days. Stage 1 complaints should be investigated and completed within a timescale of 10 working days. This can be extended up to 20 working days for more complex complaints or in other instances where an extension is agreed by the Complaints Manager.

Chart 10 % of stage 1 statutory complaints on time 2019/20 – 2022/23



11.3 Excluding the 2 withdrawn complaints, 67% (23) stage 1 complaints received a response on time which is shown on **Chart 8**. This is an improvement on the 56% completed on time in 2022-22 and 35% in 2020-21. The Complaints Team support Children’s Services by quality assuring all complaint responses and producing high quality bi-weekly complaint tracker reports, which is a reliable system to remind managers of complaint deadlines.

Stage 2

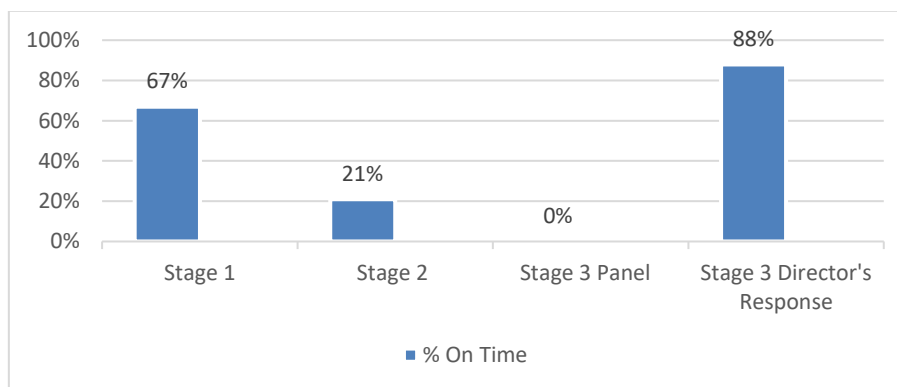
11.4 Stage 2 complaints have a statutory timescale of 25 to 65 working days. Excluding the five withdrawn complaints, only 3 of the 14 stage 2 complaints completed this year received a response within this timescale which, excluding the five withdrawn or rejected complaints, is 21%. The challenge in completing stage 2 investigations on time has continued to be compounded by the availability of Independent Investigators.

Stage 3

11.5 Stage 3 panels must be held within 30 working days of the request and the panel report sent to the complainant within five working days of the panel. The Director’s response should be sent no later than 15 working days after the panel report is received. This year no stage 3 panels were held on time. However, the Director’s report, which is sent within 15 working days of the panel report being received, achieved 88% compliance (only 1 was late).

11.6 As per stage 2 complaints, external factors are the primary cause of delays in completing Stage 3 panels within the prescribed 30-day timescale. This is mainly due to the availability of independent panel members and at time, complainants.

Chart 11: Percentage of statutory complaints completed on time at all stages



Learning Case Study: "Adherence to Complaints and Data protection processes"

Background

A stage 2 complaint addressed concerns with the way that Children's Service had dealt with a parent's concerns, some of which were about the accuracy of factual information within an Initial Child Protection Conference report. The investigation identified failings in the way that the team managed some of the issues that gave rise to a complaint, such that the parent was not signposted to the Complaints or Information Governance processes.

Learning

The Council's response to this complaint committed to ensuring that there is clear process information to staff about the action to be taken if there is a dispute about record keeping and Right to Rectification. An apology was also given that the stage 1 complaints process was not followed. Since the complaint was made, new processes have been put in place with rigorous oversight by the Complaints Team and Heads of Service.

12. Young people's complaints

- 12.1 Of the 36 stage 1 complaints completed for this reporting period, just over three quarters (81% or 29 complaints) of Stage 1 complaints were received on behalf of parents or carers. The remaining 7 (or 19%) complaints were received directly from a child/young person. This is a 56% decrease on the 16 complaints directly from young people last year (2021-22) and is 50% less than the previous year (2020-21) where 14 complaints were made by young people.
- 12.2 Additionally, three of the stage 2 complaints from young people that had raised complaints at stage 1. None were received for Stage 3.
- 12.3 Of the complaints received from young people across all 3 stages¹⁵:
- 67% (or six) were from young males and 33% (or three) were from young females
 - 78% (or 7) were from young people aged between 18-24, and two complaints were received from children under 18.
 - 67% (or 6) of complaints were from Care Leavers, 22% (or two) were from Children Looked After and 11% (or 1) was from a Disabled Child.

¹⁵ Where a young person has escalated their complaint to stage 2 and 3 of the complaints process, they have only been counted once.

- 12.4 The Complaints Team are always keen to receive complaints from children and young people directly. If it is considered that a complaint is best made from a children or young person, we aim to work directly with them and always offer advocacy support.
- 12.7 The main themes emerging from complaints received directly from young people during this reporting period is placement issues. These were summarised in **Section 6** of the report.

Learning Case study: ‘Transition to Adult Social Care’

Background

A stage 2 complaint raised concerns about delays in a Transition Review for a young adult moving into Adult Services. The delay resulted in missed opportunities as there was not enough time to put in place the correct support before the young person turned 18. Also, information was not provided on what adult support was available and the funding/financial arrangements, as the young person had the potential to be funded by Continuing Health Care.

Learning

Children’s Services are committed to working in close partnership with Adult Social Care to make sure that all young people receive an effect transition. In this case, it was acknowledged that there were delays allocating a social worker from the Preparing for Adulthood team and there was also delays from Health partners in assessing eligibility for Continuing Health Care Funding.

Children’s Services and Adult Social Care have been undertaking work in the last year to improve how young people are supported into adulthood. A joint protocol has now been developed which sets out expectations for social care, health and education. The learning from this complaint was also disseminated across Children’s, Adults and the Health Integrated Care Board (ICB), as it was recognised that continued improvement in this area is needed.

13. Complaints by category of support and equalities breakdown

13.1 The following section reviews the breakdown of complaints completed at stage 1 by the category of support that the young people have received. The section will then go onto review the breakdown of equalities data of these young people.

Table 7: number of stage 1 statutory complaints completed by category of support 2022/23

Category of support	No. of complaints	%
Children in Need	8	22%
Child Protection	8	22%
Children Looked After	6	17%
Care Leavers	5	14%
Disabled Children	4	11%

MASH/brief intervention stage/ Early Intervention	4	11%
Unknown	1	3%
Total	36	100%

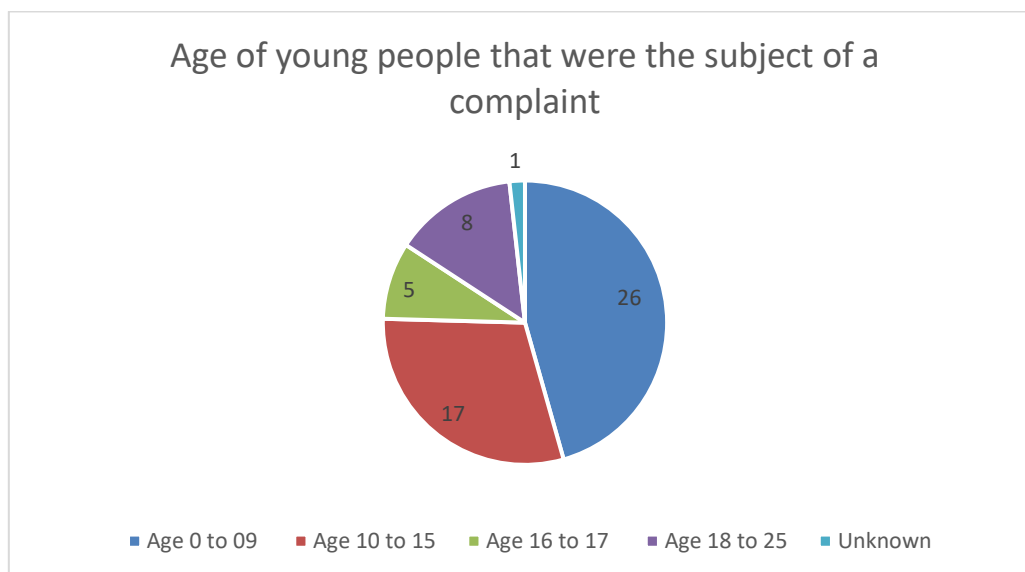
13.2 **Table 7** above demonstrates the number of completed stage 1 complaints split by category of support. Whilst most complaints concerned Children in Need or those subject to Child Protection, the numbers are fairly level across all types of support.

13.3 The volume of these complaints should be taken in the context of the overall level of interaction as of 31st March 2022 there were 182 children on an open Child Protection plan, 237 open Looked after Children, and 1,997 children in need (including open assessments).

13.4 Whilst 62 complaints were completed across all stages, some complaints concerned families with multiple children, and others featured across multiple stages of the process and were only recorded once. Therefore, the total number of children for which equalities data is recorded against in the charts below is 57.

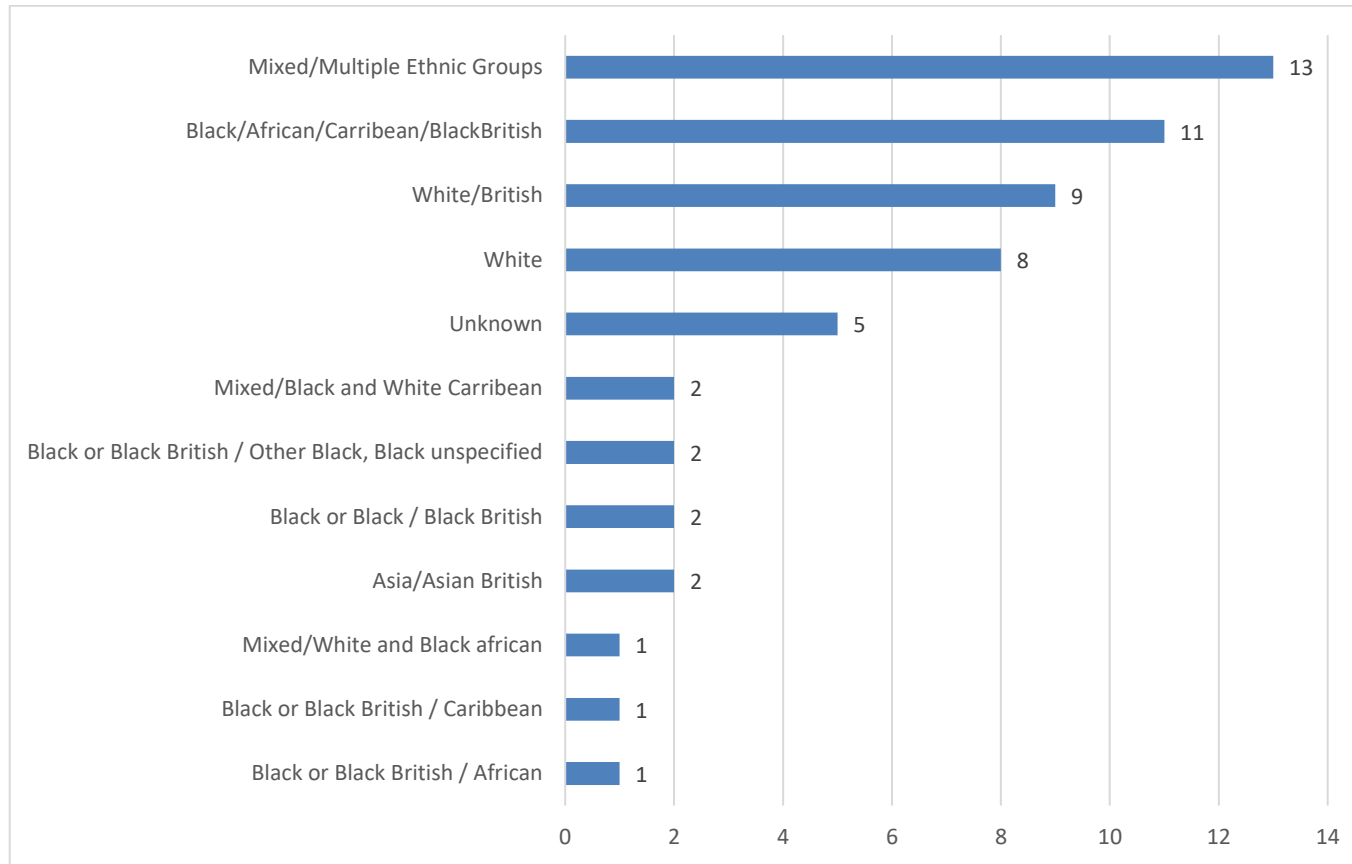
13.5 Chart 13 below sets out the age range of children and young people subject of a complaint. Most complaints concerned children aged 0 to 9 years (26 children), followed by children between 10-15 years of age (17 children). Whilst less complaints were received concerning older children, five young people aged 16-17 were the subject of a complaint and a further eight were aged 18 to 25. The complaints received directly from children tended to be from older children. The age of one child concerned in complaints were unknown.

Chart 13: Age range of the 57 young people subject of a statutory complaint



13.7 There were 22 (39%) young females and 33 (59%) young males subject of a complaint. One child the complaints concerned genders were unknown.

Chart 14: Ethnicity of the 57 young people that were the subject of a statutory complaint



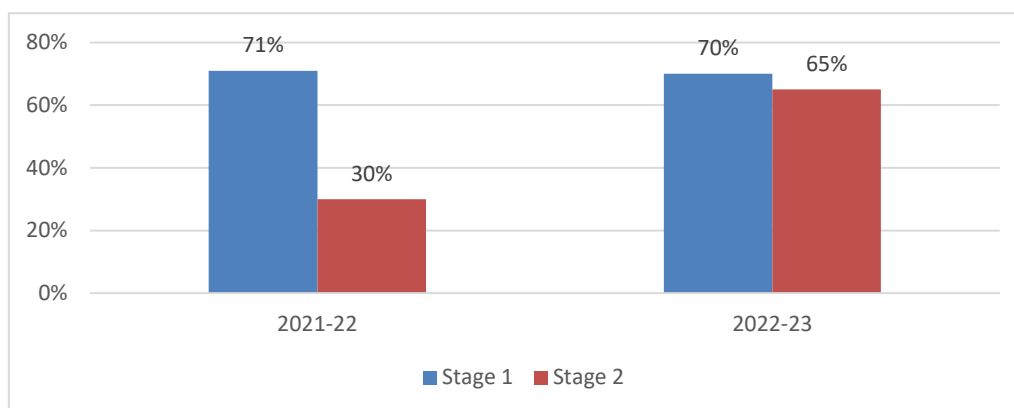
14 Corporate complaints

- 14.1 This report provides a brief overview of Corporate Complaints closed by Children's Services and includes numbers for both social care and education. Detailed reporting on Corporate Complaints is within Richmond Council's Corporate Complaints Report 2021-22.
- 14.2 Children's Services completed 47 stage 1 corporate complaints which is 12% higher than the 42 completed last year but 46% lower than the 87 closed in 2020/21.
- 14.3 Of the 47 stage 1 complaints, 36 were for SEND/Education, 5 were for Children's Services¹⁶, 1 was for Early Help, and 5 were for Business Resources. This is a 48% decrease on the 87 stage 1 complaints closed last year.
- 14.4 Breaking down the numbers across service areas, the 36 complaints for SEND/Education is a 67% increase on the 22 stage 1 complaints last year. The 5 complaints for Children's Services is a 55% decrease on the 11 last year. The reduction in corporate complaints for Children's Services is also reflects the overall reduction in statutory complaints which is highlighted in section 6 of this report.
- 14.5 This year 37% (17 escalated to stage 2, which is the same as last year when 40% (17¹⁷) last year. Whilst the number that escalated remains the same, there has been a 10% increase in stage 1 complaints which means that overall, there has been a slight decrease in the number of complaints that have escalated to a stage 2 review.
- 14.6 70% (32) of stage 1 complaints were sent out on time, which is 20 working days. This is the same as last year when 71% of stage 1 complaints were completed on time.
- 14.7 65% (11) of stage 2 complaints were sent out on time, which is 15 working days. This is a significant improvement on last when 30% of stage 2 complaints were sent on time.

¹⁶ Some parts of the 1988 Children's Act are excluded from the Children's Statutory Complaint Regulations. Sometimes the Complaints Team assess that it is correct to investigate these through the Council's own Corporate Complaints Procedure. Also, sometimes parents or adults without parental responsibility, make complaints about how the actions of Children's Social Care have impacted them personally. These complaints, which are not child centred, are investigated through the non-statutory complaints route.

¹⁷ Stage 2 complaints are counted separately as they involve a full review of the stage 1 investigation and follow different timescales.

Chart 14: Number of stage 1 and 2 corporate complaints completed on time



15 Ombudsman Cases

15.1 This report provides a brief overview of Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) closed by Children’s Services. Detailed reporting on Corporate and Ombudsman Complaints across all services is within Wandsworth Council’s Corporate Complaints Report 2022-23.

15.2 A complainant has the right to refer their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSO) at any time. Generally, the Ombudsman will seek to ensure that the Local Authority has been provided with the opportunity to first respond to the complaint in accordance with the Council’s own statutory complaints process.

15.3 During 2022/23, there were 15 Ombudsman enquiries which is a 36% increase on the 11 in 2021/22. 7 of these were for statutory children’s services and 8 were for education/SEND¹⁸ and 1 was about both SEND and Children’s Services.

15.4 For Children’s Services, only 3 of the 8 enquiries resulted in a full investigation and fault was found on 1 occasion. For Education, 4 of the enquiries resulted in a full investigation and fault was found in services, fault was found in 2 cases. More detail is provided in **Table 6**.

¹⁸ Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND). A child or young person who has special educational needs and/or a disability and needs special health and education support.

15.5 Non-statutory Ombudsman cases (Education)

Table 8: Ombudsman enquiries/investigations and outcomes: Education

Quarter	Service Area	Details and LGSCO decision
1	SEND ¹⁹	<p>The Council delayed in issuing an education, health and care plan, a service commissioned by the Council failed to assess the child’s special educational needs and shared details with a third party without consent.</p> <p>The LGSCO found that the Council failed to adhere to statutory timeframes and £250 was paid to remedy the injustice. However, the Council was not at fault in how it handled the complaint.</p>
1	SEND	<p>The Council failed to implement a plan to reintegrate a child back to school and failed to provide transport assistance detailed in the plan.</p> <p>The LGSCO did not find the Council at fault however, the Council agreed to carry out a review of the transport arrangements.</p>
1	SEND	<p>Complaint about Community paediatric therapies team and provision delivery by SWL and St George's NHS Trust and the impact on the EHCP Annual Review process.</p> <p>The LGSCO determined that this was not a complaint for the Council to answer.</p>
2	School Transport	<p>About the decisions made regarding a child’s school transport arrangements.</p> <p>The LGSCO discontinued its investigation as the Council offered transport place and therefore there was no longer an injustice to remedy.</p>
2	School Transport	<p>Complaint that the Council failed to properly consider a school transport appeal.</p> <p>The LGSCO did not investigate as the Council offered a further appeal and this was a suitable remedy.</p>
2	SEND/Disabled Children’s Team	<p>The council has not acted in the best interests of the child and treated them differently to other young people who have education and social care packages.</p>

¹⁹ Special Education Needs and Disabilities

		The LGSCO determined the complaint was premature.
3	Pupil Services	Complaint that a young person out of school is not receiving any education. The LGSCO determined the complaint was premature.
3	SEND	Complaint that fault on the part of the Council caused a young person to miss 1 year of education. The LGSCO did not investigate as they considered the complaint out of time.
4	EECP ²⁰	Errors in Early Years funding and clawing back an overpayment which caused distress to the complainant. the correct funding is provided to a nursery. The LGSCO investigated and found fault and the Council apologised and reimbursed the complainant.

15.6 Statutory Ombudsman cases (Children's Services)

Table 9: Ombudsman enquiries/investigations and outcomes: Social Care

Quarter	Service Area	Details and LGSCO decision
1	Children's Services (Brief Intervention Service)	Complaint about distress caused when the Council and police turned up at a family home. The LGSCO assessed that there were no grounds for them to investigate.
1	Children's Services (Leaving Care)	About historical abuse as a Looked After child. The LGSCO ended their investigation into this complaint because they were satisfied an investigation would not achieve anything more.
2	Children's Services (Looked after Children)	After approving a person as an adopter, the Council failed to maintain an adoption file and follow up on agreed actions regarding potential adoptions. The LGSCO found fault as the Council failed to bring the case back to the

²⁰ Early Education and Childcare Places service

Quarter	Service Area	Details and LGSCO decision
		Adoption Panel, did not pursue recommendations, failed to provide the complainants file, and provided incorrect information about missing documents. The Council apologised and paid £1,000 for the injustice and carried out a review of the failings.
2	Children's Services (Child Protection)	Failure to adequately protect a young person and provide therapeutic care. The LGSCO determined that the complaint was premature.
2	Children's Social Care (Child Protection)	Complaint that the Council provided a false report to Court which influenced the decision to place a child into care. The LGSCO determined that the complaint was premature.
3	LADO ²¹	About the LADO's decision to refer the complainant to the Teaching Regulation Agency due to allegations against them. The LGSCO investigated but did not find fault with the way the LADO carried out their processes.
4	Children's Services (Children in Need)	The Council failed to properly respond to a complaint about a safeguarding investigation into allegations made by the complainant's child. The LGSCO decided not to investigate as it was unlikely to provide a worthwhile outcome.

16 Compliments

16.1 Positive feedback regarding staff or service delivery is another way in which the department can learn how well things are going. Compliments remind us of the excellent practice within services and reinforce that the promises made to learn from complaints are sincere. Staff are reminded to report compliments they receive so we can record as much positive feedback as possible to evidence the commitment to good social care practice.

²¹ Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). Responsible for coordinating the response to concerns that an adult who works with children may have caused them or could cause them harm.

16.2 Examples of compliments received from both service users and partner organisations are outlined below:

- “We would also like to thank you for your support, it’s the most positive and best support we have had ever from Wandsworth Council since having [child]. We are very grateful for your professionalism, support, understanding and patience in handling this delicate issue/case. Thank you for all your help and guidance throughout the time you spent with us”.
- “I have just received the copy of your Child and Family Assessment and would like to just thank you for all your hard work. I have read it all and did not realise the amount of work you had to do so thank you. It was really lovely speaking with you even though it was very short and sweet, but we really appreciated you being there for us all. [Child] is doing really well at the moment so things are looking really positive for us all right now. You take care and thank you”.
- “[Social Worker] is the only one who has followed through on what they have agreed that our grandson needed. They have stuck to their guns and really fought for us – they have over delivered and all of the changes that we are seeing now in our grandson’s attitude, learning and socialising is due to all of the work that they have done”.
- “[Social Worker] received high praise for the quality of their social worker from the judge, the guardian and the advocates. The life story work, which was in a very advanced state at the final hearing, was of such high quality some of the advocates were in tears. The Judge noted the unusual extent of their efforts to involve family members, even trying to meet paternal family members in the week before the final hearing”.
- “The biggest of thank you and congrats for being such a superstar! You have worked tirelessly for the good of the family and have never shied away from challenging conversations. Your persistent approach to supporting the family has been appreciated and your work has ensured that [child] is a far less anxious and happy. I was particularly struck by mum's final comment that you have changed her thinking about the role of a social worker and how happy she would be to now encourage support from a social worker for other families. What an impact you have had! Well done and THANK YOU!”

17 Going forward: key achievements and priorities for 2023/24

17.1 Below are some of the key achievements from this year:

- We have introduced the use of consortiums to commission our independent officers for stage 2 and 3 complaints. Consortiums commit to producing high quality investigations that are completed within statutory timeframes. Whilst the Complaints Manager still approves any independent reports before they are released, this new way of working has reduced the administrative burden on

complaint officers with regards to sourcing independent officers, arranging dates for stage 3 panels and carrying out audits of insurances and DBS checks.

- Our external webpages, complaint leaflets, and internal staff guidance on complaints handling have been reviewed and improved to ensure the complaints service remains inclusive and accessible.
- We have worked with services to drive up complaints performance which has resulted in stronger adherence to timescales across all complaint types. Of particular note are corporate stage 2 complaints; 68% were responded to on time across the year (against a KPI of 50% on time) compared to 36% on time in 2021-22. The co-ordinated focus on performance by the central complaints team and directorates own business support teams resulted in particularly strong results in the last two quarters of 2022/23 with 78% and 83% of stage 2 complaints responded to on time.
- The Complaints Manager has progressed work on learning from complaints to ensure that it provides added value by directly feeding into service improvement. For example, in children's services, quarterly meetings take place with the Head of Participation and the Quality Assurance Manager to triangulate themes and learning from complaints with work undertaken by the Children's Quality Assurance Team. This is then fed into quarterly Senior Management Team meetings, chaired by the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care, to complete the information loop.
- The new Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour Policy was launched in January 2021 and has been put into practice during 2022-23 to good effect. The policy provides a structure for the Complaints Team to manage complainants who take up a disproportionate amount of time, freeing up resources for other complainants to ensure a fair and equitable service. The policy has been aligned with the Unreasonable Customer Behaviour policy and is now overseen by a bi-monthly senior level working group which reviews customers who have had their communication restricted under one or policies to ensure that decisions have been made fairly, reviewed regularly and staff are applying consistent approaches.
- Information on the Council's complaints processes is now included in the Member Induction pack (following 2022 elections) and will be included in mandatory staff induction for all new starters from 1 April 2024. Both actions help to support a healthy complaints culture within the organisation.

7.2 In 2023-24 our priorities will be to:

- Support directorates through the changes to the corporate complaints process so that their current high performance continues. From 1st April 2023 the new timeframe for stage 2 responses of 25 working days (from 15 working days) will allow more time to provide quality reviews and identify further learning. However,

the KPI of '50% on time' will be increased to 80% on time, which following a benchmarking exercise, is in line with other boroughs.

- Work closely with the Ombudsman to ensure our complaint handling remains effective. This includes reviewing, updating and publishing the Council's self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code and preparing to respond to a consultation from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman who are proposing a new joint complaint handling code with the Housing Ombudsman.
- Further strengthen our complaint training offer to Directorate for both statutory and corporate complaints. Statutory: The Complaints Team are already planning, in liaison with the Children's Services Quality Assurance and Multi Agency Safeguarding Lead, to host a training event for team managers and supervisors on good complaints practice and with Adult Services, a bespoke complaints training session for the Learning Disabilities service. Corporate: Briefings on the corporate process are available to all council-wide services but have not been delivered in the last six months due to limited team resources following a noticeable increase in stage 2 complaints and LGSCO and HO investigations. There will be renewed promotion of the briefings to services which have shown they would benefit from training, and these will include the recent changes to the stage 2 process.
- Developing complaints procedures, policies and literature into Easy Read format to further improve the accessibility of the complaints service.
- Creation of public facing adult and children's statutory complaint procedures that set out how the Council apply the Statutory Complaint Regulations when making decisions on how to manage complaints, and any exceptions or cross-over with other policies/rights of appeal.
- Work with colleagues in the Consultation Team to explore opportunities to engage with residents to obtain feedback on the accessibility of complaints processes.
- Further roll out of Respond Case Management System to Corporate complaints to enhance strategic oversight and streamlined responsive reporting. The system is now operational for Adult complaints and Freedom of Information Requests.
- Enhance work on learning from complaints to include detailed learning case studies in reports and ensure that learning from Ombudsman complaints is included in quarterly complaint insight reports for senior managers.