

**CHILDREN & FAMILIES
SCRUTINY & IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE
TUESDAY 26TH JULY 2022 AT 10:00AM
CIVIC CENTRE, RIDLEY STREET, REDCAR, YORKSHIRE, TS10 1TD**



CONTACT
Rae Puggmurr
(01642) 771741
18 July 2022

CIRCULATION

Councillors Rider (Chair), Hannaway (Vice Chair), Cook, Cutler, Gray, Head, C Holmes, King, Rees, Thomson, Turner, Williams and Wilson.

Councillors Barnes, Kay, and Lanigan (Cabinet Members - For Information)

All Members of the Council (For Information)

Corporate Director for Children and Families

The Press [except for Confidential item(s)]

A G E N D A

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1. Apologies for Absence.	
2. To confirm the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 th June 2022	2-6
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4. Relevant Cabinet Reports.	
Would Members please bring their copy of the Cabinet Workbook with them to the meeting (these papers will follow)	
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14 JUNE 2022

CHILDREN & FAMILIES SCRUTINY AND IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Children & Families Scrutiny and Improvement Committee was held on 14 June 2022 at the Civic Centre.

PRESENT Councillor Rider (Chair),
Councillors Cook, Hannaway, Head, Thomson,
Turner, Wells and Williams.

OFFICIALS K Boulton, E Dale, N Hall, E McFadyen,
C Mahoney, V McLeod and A Pearson.

IN ATTENDANCE Councillors Barnes and Kay

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Gray, C Holmes, King, Rees and Wilson.

1. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Children & Families Scrutiny and Improvement Committee held on 3 May 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

2. **CABINET REPORTS**

Delegated Powers.

A Member referred to the works to the roof at Highcliffe School and suggested that we should get a guarantee for the works.

A Member requested that Blue Cabin Pilot be brought back to the next meeting for discussion before approval.

:- NOTED.

3. **QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT.**

The Corporate Director for Children and Families presented her Quarter 4 Performance Report which included the following:-

- The Directors Opening Statement;
- Corporate Plan Action Updates;
- Early Help, Safeguarding and Children in our Care;
- Early Help, Safeguarding and CIOC;
- Virtual School, SEND, Careers & NEETS and Inclusion;

As part of the ensuing debate the following points were made:-

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- A Member asked how a Social Worker would get experience of child protection and asked how difficult it was to get Social Workers with 5 years experience;
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families advised that their managers also had caseloads and that management structures were becoming more fluid;
- A Member asked whether there were a lot of hidden domestic abuse cases?;
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families advised that there was a tendency to over refer and to be more cautious. The Pandemic had perpetuated the figures however, we were getting better at recognising abuse;
- A Member asked about the success rate around troubled/supportive families and how many employees focused on the Supportive Family Programme?;
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families advised that the programme was managed within the Early Help Establishment who mapped the cases they were working with against the criteria. She advised that they had a 100% success rate but were looking to strengthen the work further;
- The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing advised that there had been two recent crises, Covid and now the economic crisis and he asked to what extent we had contingency plans to deal with these and any future crisis?;
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families reminded Members that before Covid there had been the Cyber Attack and that our response to that had been swift and that there was now a backup in place should it happen again. There had also been a rapid response when Covid hit and there was now a blueprint in place to deal with any future pandemics. With respect to the current economic crisis, it would be important to keep a close eye on the data in order to be able to respond quickly and to work with partner agencies;
- A Member asked why 2 people had been declined an Early Help Assessment?;
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families advised that often families did not want to engage however, this would be logged onto our system in case there was a further referral;
- A Member asked whether a caseload of 18-27 was an ideal target and how we could get there?;
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families advised that our average case load was currently 20-22 and that it had increased due to sickness and vacancy levels;
- A Member asked about the shortage of school places in the Greater Eston area;
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families advised that this had been an issue this year and would be again next year however all the school were academy trusts and we could only encourage them to take extra children. She advised that there were a number of children this year who had not been allocated their first choice of

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- school;
- A Member referred to the reduction in the number of children travelling out of the area and asked what the percentage of SEN special school places was compared to the rest of the country and in particular in an Authority with similar demographics to ours?;
- A Member asked why Redcar College was not on par with Prior Purslove, Guisborough?;
- A Member asked why the Permanent Exclusion Task and Finish Group had not met yet and asked whether the work of the Task and Finish Group would be completed before Purdah?;
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families advised that the second meeting of the Task and Finish Group would be taking place next week and that school visits could be completed during the Autumn Term;
- A Member requested a breakdown of the reasons for permanent exclusions?;
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families advised that a full breakdown of the reasons would be supplied to the Task and Finish Group Members, along with which school had suspended and at what stage;
- A Member asked whether the number of children dropping out of college was worse than last year and whether it took account of those children who had dropped out of Redcar and possibly gone to Middlesbrough?;
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families confirmed that the numbers dropping out of college were worse this year than during the last 5 years but she reminded Members that there had been no exams for the last 2 years and that COVID had also had an impact;
- A Member asked whether there was any mental health provision within the college system?;
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families that there was no mental health provision within the colleges but that there was some support from Headstart.

- **:- NOTED.**

4. **FAMILY HUB ANNUAL REPORT.**

The Corporate Director for Children and Families presented the Family Hub's Service Annual Report 2021.

As part of the ensuing debate the following points were made:-

- A Member referred to the 55 individual mums who had been supported with breast feeding and asked where the service was advertised?;
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families advised that the scheme was promoted through the Breast Friends Group, our Facebook page, Council Website, leaflets circulated through Health

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Visitors and through our links with maternity services;

- A Member asked whether there was any ongoing support for breast feeding?
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families advised that they worked alongside Health Visitors who had gone through UNICEF accreditation and that the hospital also had an infant feeding lead who provided support;
- The Cabinet Member for Children stated that it was important to concentrate on breast feeding rates as we were behind the rest of the country and other countries like Norway where 98% of new mothers choose to breast feed;
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families advised Members that there was an Infant Feeding Task Group across the South Tees who publicised and promoted breast feeding;
- A Member stated that the current rate of 26% was nothing to be proud of despite the amount of effort that was being invested. He asked how the resources could be better challenged?;
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families advised that whilst we were way off the national rates, the rates had doubled over the last 4 years;
- The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing asked how many weeks you had to breast feed for before you were classed as a breast feeder?
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families advised that there were two sets of data collected by Public Health, those Mums who were breast feeding from birth and those who were still breast feeding between 6-8 weeks;
- A Member stated that access to family hubs referred to the age range 0-19 yrs(25 SEND) whereas previously it had been 0-7 yrs and asked how the older children would benefit;
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families advised that 0-19 yrs was the government vision. Whilst we had concentrated on the 0-5yrs offer we had a range of services in the Family Hubs for the 0-18yrs age range. The vision was that we would have older children's services in our hubs including with our partner organisations. The Youth and Community Service were part of the family hubs and would be part of the offer going forward;
- A Member asked whether we were just going back to Sure Start and putting services back in that were previously removed?;
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families stated that the focus was different to Sure Start and that it was more about collaborative working with the 0-19yrs age group;
- A Member stated that keeping the children's hubs open was a major achievement and that they operated differently to Sure Start as it was more universal targeted work;
- The Corporate Director for Children and Families advised that Health Visitors were mandated to have 5 contacts with an individual family and they were based in the Family Hubs. The Health Visitors were appraised of the services that were available and how they could refer into those services;

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The Corporate Director for Children and Families invited Members to visit the offices and witness the work of an officer first hand and have the opportunity to use the virtual reality headsets.

:- NOTED.

5. **UPDATE FROM THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP.**

The Chair of the Task and Finish Group reminded Members that he had reported on the first meeting at the last Scrutiny Committee and that the Group were holding their second meeting next week.

:-NOTED.

6. **ACTION UPDATE.**

The Governance Manager presented an update on the progress made against outstanding actions from previous meetings of the Children & Families Scrutiny and Improvement Committee: – **NOTED.**

Children and Families Scrutiny Committee

ATTENDANCE RECORD - 2022/23

Surname	First name	14.06.22	26.07.22	dd.mm.yy	dd.mm.yy	dd.mm.yy	dd.mm.yy	dd.mm.yy	dd.mm.yy	dd.mm.yy	Total Meetings Attended / total possible
Rees	Dan	Apols									
Williams	Geraldine	✓									
Cook	Carrie	✓									
Head	Malcom	✓									
King	Karen	Apols 2									
Wilson	Margaret	Apols 1									
Turner	Andrea	✓									
Holmes	Craig	Apols									
Thomson	Phillip	✓									
Rider	Vera	✓									
Gray	Tim	Apols									
Wells	Billy	✓	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	
Hannaway	Craig	✓	Apols								
Cutler	Graham	n/a									

Substitutes

Key

✓	Attended
RA	Apologies Submitted (replacement attended)
Apols	Apologies Submitted (no replacement)
X	Did Not Attend (no apologies received)
C	Cancelled Meeting
n/a	Not a Member

Reason for Absence (NB Full details may not be provided for reasons of confidentiality)

1	Personal Commitment
2	Work Commitment
3	Illness/Medical
4	Conflicting Council Commitment
5	Other



Briefing Note

2021/22 Annual Complaints and Compliments Report

To: Children & Families Scrutiny and Improvement Committee

Date: 06/07/2022

From: Service Improvement, Children & Families Directorate

Ref:

1.0 Purpose

1.1 To approve the 2021/22 Annual Children & Families Complaints and Compliments Report that is required by the statutory guidance to be published on our website.

2.0 Summary

2.1 The Government publishes statutory guidance in relation to 'Getting the Best from Complaints: Social Care Complaints and Representations for Children, Young People and Others'. The guidance advises the Local Authority on representations and complaints procedures.

2.2 The Children & Families Directorate must abide by this guidance and must have a designated Complaints Officer and a clear process for dealing with complaints and representations.

2.3 The Directorate has a series of reports that it produces to manage the complaints process and to record the outcomes. It also has internal mechanisms to share learning and progress actions from complaints.

2.4 In addition to this, the Directorate is required to produce an annual report that it should share with the relevant committee and then publish. There is no prescribed format for this annual report, however, the guidance given is that it should include the following:

- Representations made to the local authority;
- The number of complaints at each stage and any that were considered by the Local Government Ombudsman;
- Which customer groups made the complaints;
- The types of complaints made;
- The outcome of complaints;
- Details about advocacy services provided under these arrangements;
- Compliance with timescales, and complaints resolved within extended timescale as agreed;
- Learning and service improvement, including changes to services that have been implemented and details of any that have not been implemented;

- A summary of statistical data about the age, gender, disability, sexual orientation and ethnicity of complainants; and
- A review of the effectiveness of the complaints procedure.

3.0 Conclusions/recommendations

- 3.1 In accordance with the statutory guidance, an annual complaints and compliments report has been produced.
- 3.2 It is recommended that this is endorsed by Elected Members for publication on the Council's website.

4.0 Further information sources

- 4.1 None



Children and Families
Directorate

**Complaints,
Compliments and
Comments Annual
Report
2021-2022**

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1. Introduction

This Annual Complaints and Compliments Report for the Children and Families Directorate covers the period April 2021 to March 2022 (2021/22). The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide information on the number and nature of complaints received under the statutory Children and Families Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure, including responsiveness and outcomes;
- Provide information on the number of compliments received;
- Identify the learning and actions resulting from the issues raised; and
- Identify challenges, future plans and actions.

2. Complaint Description and Procedure

A complaint may be generally defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet’ in relation to a child or young person, which requires a response. A complaint may be by written or verbal expression.

It is a legal requirement that Children’s Social Care Services has a distinct complaints procedure. This statutory procedure provides the means for a child or a young person to make a complaint about the actions, decisions or apparent failings of a Local Authority’s Children’s Social Care provision. It also allows an appropriate person to act on behalf of the child or young person concerned, or to make a complaint in their own right. The Local Authority also has a separate Corporate Complaint Procedure, outside of the legal requirement, to investigate complaints which do not fall under the statutory procedure. This report presents details around the statutory complaints element (section 5.1-5.4), and the corporate complaints under section 5.5, for further information.

A prime objective of the Children’s Social Care Complaints Procedure is to ensure the Children & Families Directorate develops a listening and learning culture. Complaints present an opportunity for the service to learn why our services users find them unsatisfactory, and how we can improve the services we provide.

3. Stages of a Complaint

The Children and Families 'Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure' sets out the stages for dealing with complaints, as follows:

Informal Resolution Stage	This stage is an opportunity for the Council to put things right and resolve the complaint within a short period of time without going through the formal complaint process. This aim of this stage is for early resolution.
Stage 1	The complaint is investigated by the person or team providing services locally. The Council will respond within 20 working days.
Stage 2	The complaint is investigated by an Investigating Officer and Independent Person. The investigation should produce a report and an adjudication within 65 working days.
Stage 3	A panel of 3 independent people will consider the complaint and produce recommendations to resolve the complaint.
Local Government Ombudsman	In addition to the above stages, the complainant can refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). A complainant can approach the Ombudsman at any stage; however, the Ombudsman is unlikely to consider the complaint if it has not been through all stages of the complaint procedure. In certain circumstances, early referral after Stage 2 can be considered.

4 Overview of Representations made to the Local Authority

- **Compliments** – During 2021/22 less compliments were received at 203, compared to 257 in the previous year.
- **Complaints** – During 2021/22 less complaints at 35 were received and dealt with under the statutory procedure, as compared to 48 in the previous year. This constitutes a 27% decrease.
- **Informal Resolution** – Throughout the year, 14 of the 35 complaints were resolved through informal resolution, 5 we were unable to investigate and 1 was withdrawn before proceeding to a Stage 1 investigation.
- **Statutory Stage 1** – The Council investigated 15 Stage 1 complaints received in 2021/22 and 2 complaints received in 2020/21 that were carried over. 87% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to within statutory timescales.
- **Statutory Stage 2** – The Council investigated 8 complaints that proceeded to a Stage 2 investigation and 4 complaints received in 2020/21 that were carried over. 59% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to within statutory timescales.
- **Statutory Stage 3** – In this year, there were 3 requests for a Stage 3 panel, and 2 remained ongoing as of the end of this year.
- **LGO enquiries** – In this year, 5 complaints were considered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

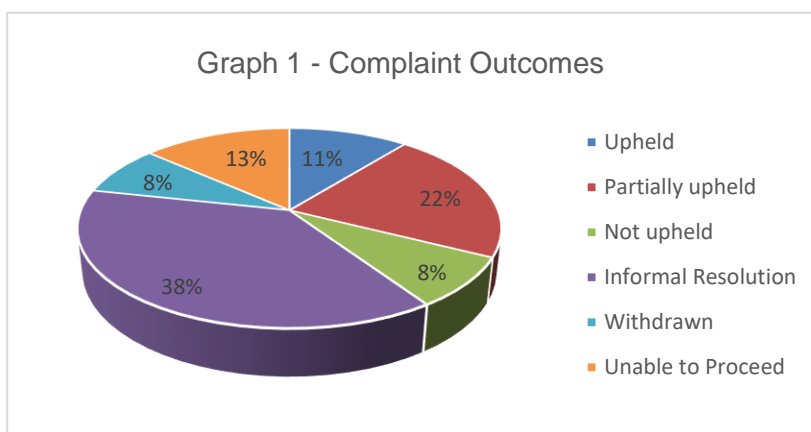
5 Analysis of Complaints

5.1 Stage 1 Statutory Complaints

Thirty-five Stage 1 statutory complaints were received in 2021/22. In addition, 2 complaints received in 2020/21 were responded to in 2021/22. There has been an increase in complaints being resolved or withdrawn before reaching Stage 1 due to our staff engaging families in early informal resolution.

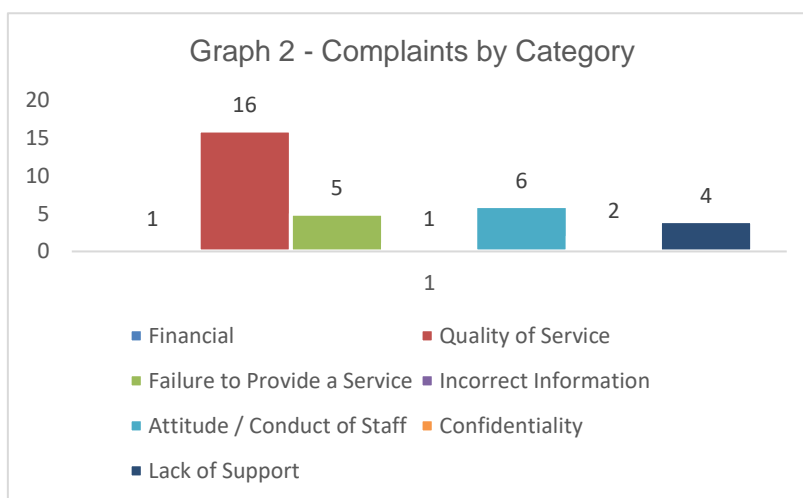
Of the 37 complaints concluded this year:

- 4 (11%) were upheld
- 8 (22%) were partially upheld
- 3 (8%) were not upheld
- 14 (38%) were resolved through informal resolution before proceeding to a Stage 1 investigation.

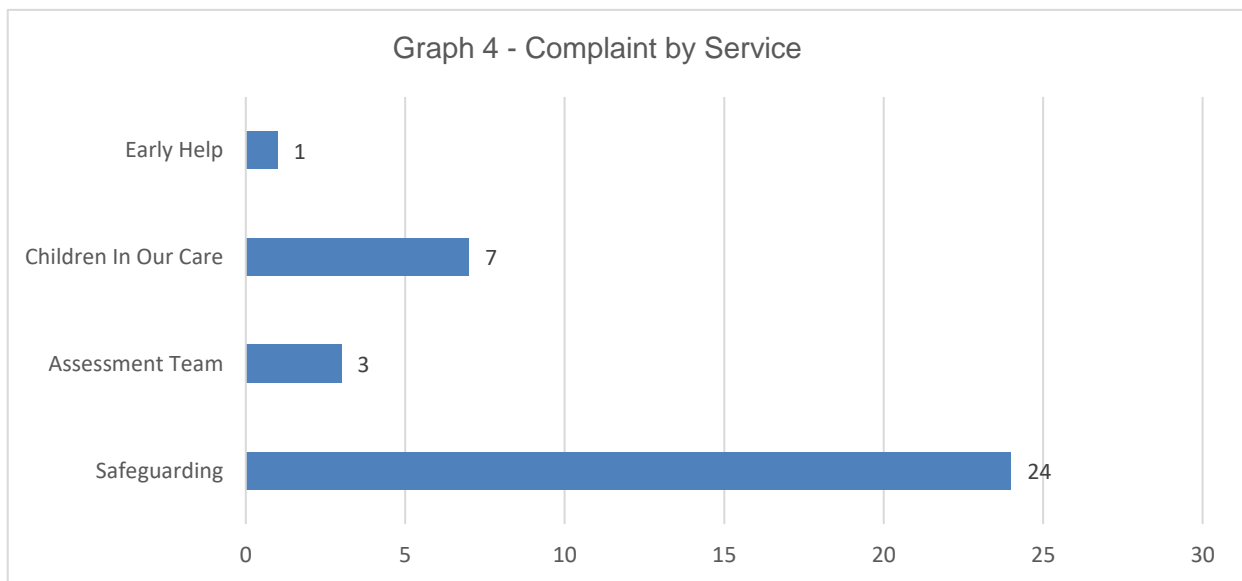
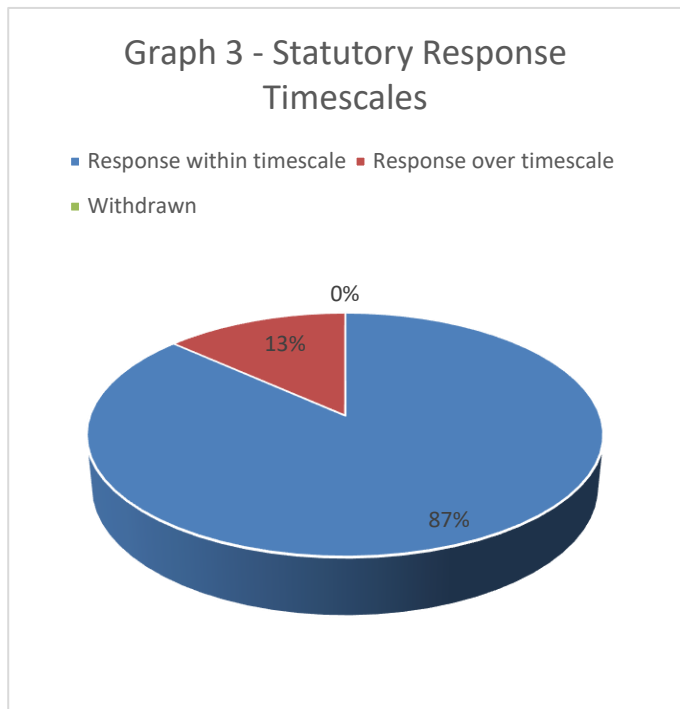


- 1 was withdrawn before proceeding to a Stage 1 investigation
- 2 were withdrawn during the Stage 1 investigation
- 5 (13%) received were deemed outside of the complaint remit, as issues had already been investigated, were historic, or were being dealt with within the Court arena.

There was a wide range of issues raised in the statutory complaints procedure. The highest volume of complaints received were in relation to Quality of Service with 16, followed by 6 complaints relating to Attitude/Conduct of Staff and 5 complaints relating to Failure to Provide a Service.

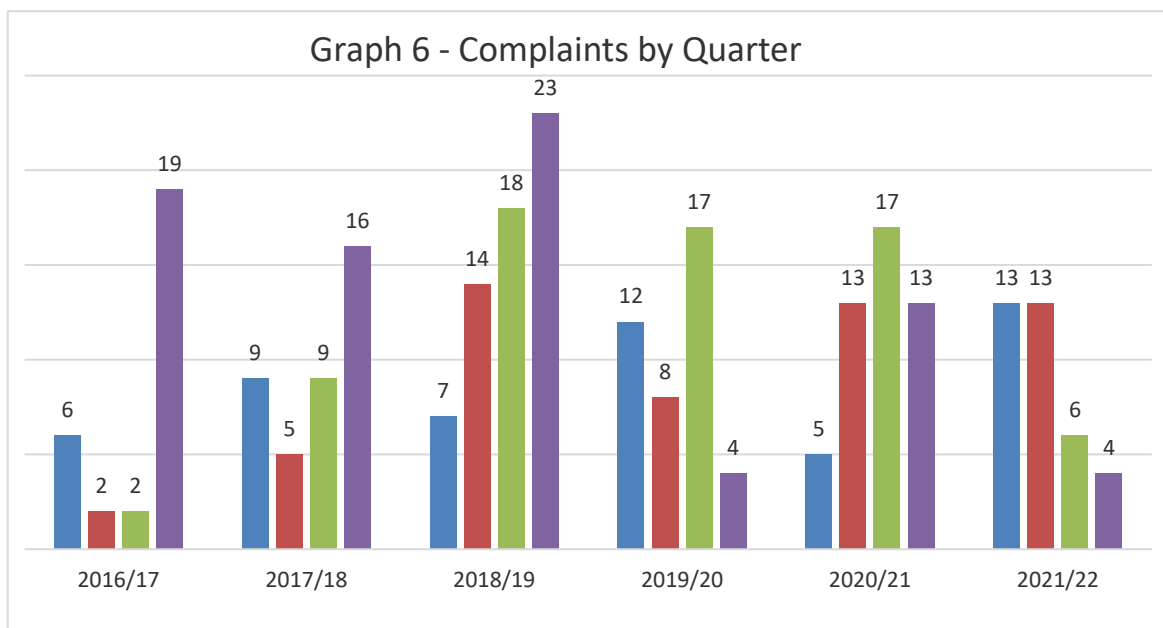
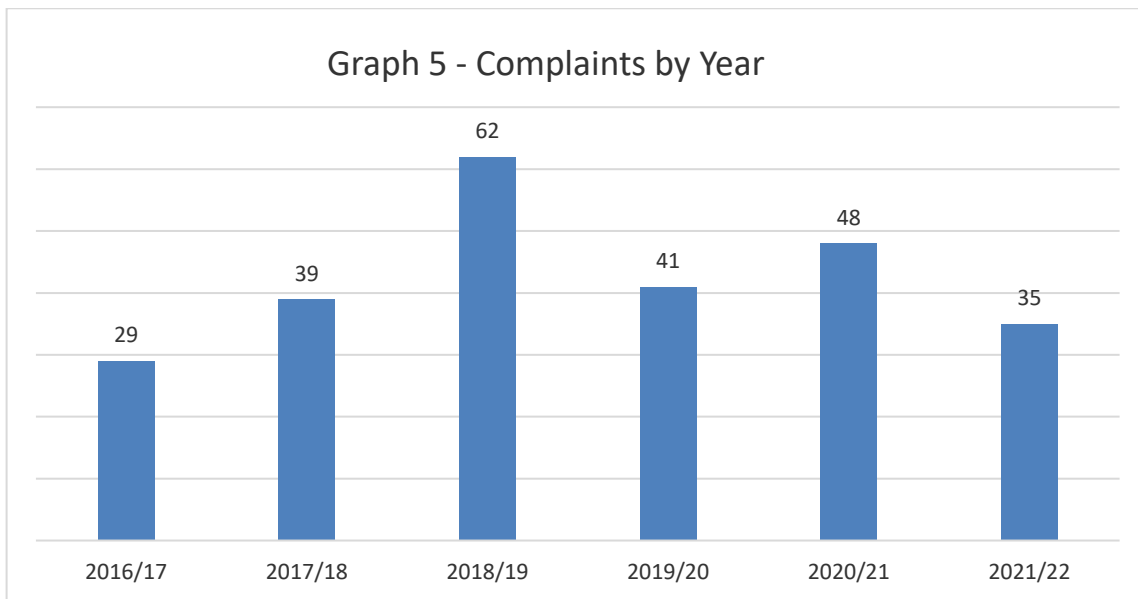


We have a statutory duty to respond to complaints within a specified time frame. For Stage 1 complaints this is within 10 working days (up to a maximum of 20 working days). Of the 17 Stage 1 statutory complaints responded to this year, 5 responses were within the initial 10 working day timescale, and 8 were responded to within the extended 20 working day timescale. This constitutes 87% responded to within timescale. Two Stage 1 statutory complaints were outside of the prescribed timescale which equates to 13%. Two complaints were withdrawn at Stage 1 before receiving a response.



The majority of complaints received within the service were received in relation to the Safeguarding Teams 24, followed by Children in Our Care with 7. Three complaints were received for the Assessment Team and 1 complaint was received for Early Help.

The following graphs compares the number of complaints received by year and quarter since 2016/17.



5.2 Stage 2 Statutory Complaints

The Council investigated 8 Stage 2 complaints received in 2021/22, and 4 Stage 2 complaints that were received in 2020/21. We have a statutory duty to respond to complaints within a specified time frame. For Stage 2 complaints this is within 25 working days (up to a maximum of 65 working days).

Out of the 12 Stage 2 investigations which were concluded in 2021/22, 5 were extended from

the initial 25 working day timescale to a 65 working day timescale. Five complaints were responded to outside of the prescribed timescale. One complaint was withdrawn before the Stage 2 investigation concluded and 1 complaint from 2020/21 was withdrawn due to the complainant being non-responsive.

The statutory guidance allows Councils to extend timescales for responding to complaints due to the complaint being particularly complex, or other factors which prevent a full investigation to be undertaken, such as key members of staff being on leave. The Council always endeavours to provide a response to complainants as soon as possible to address their concerns and provide an appropriate remedy.

Stage 2 complaints often have a number of outcomes to each element of the complaint. Out of the 12 Stage 2 investigations that concluded this year, they contained the following outcomes:

- 1 was fully upheld
- 2 were not upheld
- 4 were upheld and partially upheld
- 1 was upheld, partially upheld and not upheld
- 1 was upheld and unsubstantiated
- 1 was upheld, not upheld and unsubstantiated
- 1 was withdrawn
- 1 did not qualify as the complainant was non-responsive.

5.3 Stage 3 Statutory Complaints

In 2021/22 the Council received 3 requests for a Stage 3 statutory panel. One request for panel was undertaken this year, with 2 still open and therefore ongoing as of the end of this year. The Council also arranged 1 panel which was requested in 2020/21 and carried forward into this year.

We have a statutory duty to respond to complaints within a specified time frame. Stage 3 statutory panels should take place within 30 working days of the request, with a response from the Director within 15 working days of receiving the panel outcome.

One panel, which was requested this year, was outside of the 30-working day timescale due to availability of all members to attend, however, the Director response was sent within the 15 working day timescale. One panel which was requested in 2020/21 was outside of the 30-

working day timescale due to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and complainant availability. Again, the Director response was sent within the 15-working day timeframe. Two Stage 3 panel requests are ongoing.

Stage 3 review panels do not reinvestigate the complaint. They try to find the best way to settle any outstanding issues within the complaint process for all parties.

5.4 Complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

As discussed in Section 3 above, a complainant may choose to refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) at any time during the process if they feel dissatisfied with the response. However, the LGO is unlikely to consider the complaint if it has not gone through the Council's own complaint procedure first. In some cases, complaints can be referred to the LGO at the conclusion of Stage 2 if certain criteria are met.

During 2021/22, five complainants referred their concerns to the LGO.

One complaint had not progressed through the Council's complaint procedure, therefore the LGO asked the Council to investigate the complaint at Stage 2 in the first instance. This complaint was investigated at Stage 2 of the statutory complaints procedure, and then progressed to Stage 3 of the statutory complaints procedure.

One complaint, which had also not been through the statutory complaint procedure, was not investigated by the LGO as the LGO are unable to investigate matters that have been subject to court proceedings, and furthermore the complaint was made late, as it related to court proceedings from 2018.

One complaint which had been through Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the corporate complaint procedure was referred to the LGO. The complainant requested a Stage 3 Panel, however this was declined by the Monitoring Officer as Panel consideration would be unlikely to change the outcome. The LGO declined to investigate this complaint as the complainant had appealed to a tribunal which placed the matter outside of their jurisdiction.

One complaint which had been through Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the corporate complaint procedure was referred to the LGO. The complainant requested a Stage 3 Panel; however, this was declined by the Monitoring Officers as the complaint had already been partially upheld at Stage 1 and Stage 2, and therefore the Panel process was not likely to add any significant

value to the complaint outcome. The LGO declined to investigate on the basis that they were unlikely to find evidence of fault in the Council's actions.

One complaint in relation to school transport and appeals, which had not been through the complaint procedure, was not investigated by the LGO as they found no evidence of fault on the Council's part.

5.5 Corporate Complaints

As discussed in the introduction, the service has no statutory duty to report on any complaint received that falls into the Corporate Complaints procedure. The statutory Children and Families procedure covers complaints about Council's actions under Part 3 and some of Parts 4 and 5 of the Children Act 1989, as well as some adoption and special guardianship services. As stipulated by the LGO, generally, assessments and services for children in need, looked after children, special guardianship support and post-adoption support should be investigated under the statutory procedure. The LGO also identify that complaints received regarding early help, child protection (including s47 enquiries and conferences), assessments for potential foster carers and adopters, foster carer registration and Section 7 and Section 37 court reports tend to be exempt from the statutory procedure, however this should not prevent the Council from investigating them under other procedures, and therefore these cases are considered under the Council's Corporate Complaint procedure. The service takes invaluable learning from all complaints, regardless of where it sits within the statutory framework, therefore this section will provide some information on those complaints dealt with corporately but pertinent to the quality of the services delivered by the Children and Families Directorate.

The Corporate complaint procedure involves a similar three stage process, with the right to take the complaint to the LGO at any time during the complaint procedure.

In 2021/22, the Children and Families Service received 56 complaints under the corporate procedure. In addition to this, the service responded to 1 complaint initiated in 2020/21 that was carried forward into this reporting period. Out of the 57 complaints responded to this year, 21 were resolved informally through early resolution, 29 received a Stage 1 corporate investigation, 2 were withdrawn, 4 were deemed outside of the complaint remit as issues were historic or were being dealt with through appeal processes; and 1 complaint is ongoing.

In 2021/22, 11 requests were made for Stage 2 corporate complaint investigations with 10 investigations being completed and 1 ongoing into 2022/23. One Stage 2 complaint from the

previous year was also concluded in 2021/22.

In 2021/22, 4 requests were made for a Stage 3 corporate review panel. Within the Corporate Complaints Procedure, a Stage 3 review panel is a discretionary stage, and the Council reserves the right to refuse the request. An assessment of proportionality will be undertaken by the Council's Monitoring Officer who will consider the seriousness of the complaint, the outcome of the complaint at stages 1 and 2, the value that may be added by pursuing the matter further, whether the outcomes sought by the complainant are achievable; and whether there is any legal, practical or logistical reason why it might not be appropriate to progress to Stage 3. If a request to move to Stage 3 is refused by the Monitoring Officer, the complainant may refer their complaint to the LGO.

Of the 4 requests made for a Stage 3 corporate review panel, 3 requests were refused by the Council and one request was accepted and received a Stage 3 panel.

6 Organisational Learning

We are constantly improving our approach to learning from complaints. All complaint outcomes are considered at senior management level to identify any wider learning to be shared with wider staff teams, which will help us to improve our services.

One area for improvement has been identified as staff needing further support and training to undertake Stage 1 and Stage 2 investigations to ensure that our responses to the complainant are specific and transparent, and our complaint findings clear. As a result, we have created guidance for all staff on how to identify and respond to complaints. We also implemented a new training programme in Summer 2021 in which 43 Stage 1 and Stage 2 investigators attended. The training focused on complaint investigations and how to achieve better quality investigations, and a consistent approach across the Directorate.

In order to demonstrate learning from complaints and the Directorate's commitment to use the learning from complaints to improve standards and services, all recommendations arising from complaints are now discussed with the service to ensure all recommendations are acted upon and to identify any wider learning. Wider learning is then shared throughout the Directorate in a regular 'Spotlight on Services' newsletter.

Learning from complaints has identified some training needs and has led to a number of service improvements and changes to processes, some of which are listed below:

- A new SEND portal for monitoring assessment requests is being developed which will allow parents to monitor their applications and identify any delays.
- Individual learning and development around communication skills when speaking to service users, and keeping parents involved as appropriate.
- Guidance for staff to ensure appropriate handling of sensitive documentation to ensure confidentiality is maintained.
- Regular reviews to take place to ensure basic contact information is kept up to date on open service user records.
- A new procedure has been put in place between Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council and the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) to improve information sharing in out of hours situations.
- A new procedure and referral pathway flowchart has been implemented for Social Workers in relation to hospital medical examination requests.
- Review of the process between EDT and Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council to ensure all information is available to Redcar Council at the point of handover.
- New flowchart developed to demonstrate the process for reporting a data breach, to ensure all actions are taken within timescale.
- Individual learning and development around confidentiality and GDPR regulations.

Next steps in respect of our learning from complaints includes:

- To continue to emphasise to staff the importance of making service users aware of the complaints and compliments process, as this provides valuable feedback to ensure the Directorate focuses on the quality of service we deliver.
- To continue to review the way in which we engage with service users and use their comments and concerns to feed into how we design and review the services we deliver.
- To promote advocacy services for the young people we care for and support.

7 Voice of the Child

Every child or young person is offered an advocate when they make, or say they wish to make, a complaint. We commission the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) to support and assist children and young people to make complaints and support them through the complaints process.

Aside from the advocacy process, a complaint can be progressed through our Independent Reviewing Officers for Children In Our Care and we make available complaint forms via our website and Personal Advisors as ways of young people making complaints or giving feedback to the service should they wish to do so.

In 2021/22 we received 1 complaint via NYAS on behalf of a child. We did not receive any other complaints directly from a child. We have created a children's leaflet to tell children and young people how they can make a complaint or give a compliment and how they can get support from an advocate.

NYAS have guidance on how to complete a referral for advocacy and this has been circulated to staff teams.

8 Equal Opportunities Monitoring

Whilst efforts have been made to monitor the ethnic origin, gender, disability and age of the Council's complainants, this is not always possible. This can be attributed to complainants using a variety of methods to submit their complaint, including over the telephone, in person, writing a letter or via email. Some complainants have completed a designated complaints form but have elected to not complete the diversity questionnaire.

Due to the limited data returned, a true and accurate reflection of the diversity of the complainants cannot be reported.

9 Repeat and Vexatious Complaints

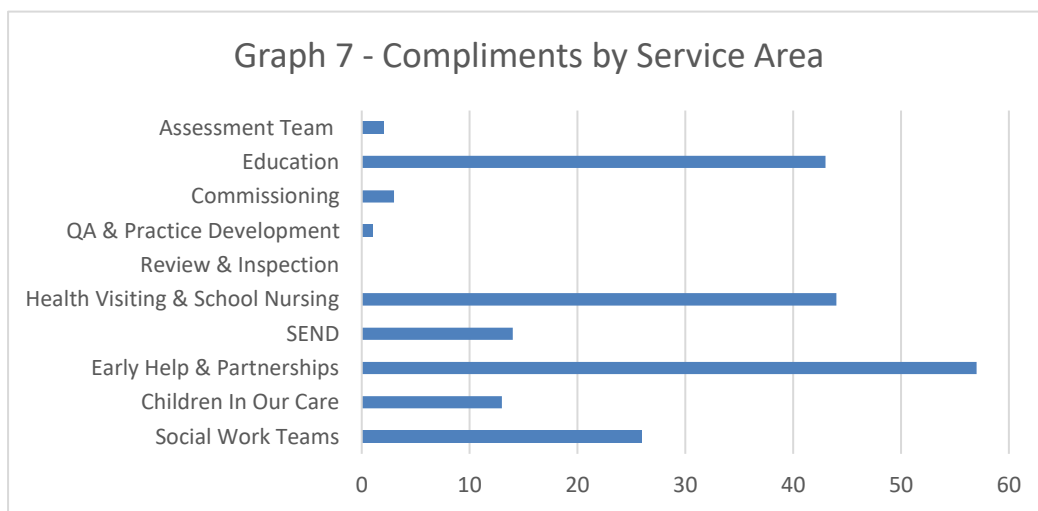
Vexatious or repeated complaints impact greatly on the time of both the investigating officer and Directorate staff and hinders the completion of complaints. In 2021/22, we did not identify any complainants as being vexatious.

The Local Government Ombudsman remains a source of advice in these situations.

10 Compliments

In 2021/22 the Children and Families Directorate received 203 compliments, compared to 257 in the previous year. They are divided into compliments from young people, parents and other family members, foster carers, external professionals and other colleagues from across the Directorate.

Graph 7 identifies compliments received by service area.



The areas receiving the highest volume were Early Help and Youth Services (57), Health Visiting & School Nursing (44), followed by Education & Skills (43). The highest performing areas have the highest ratios of frontline staff; therefore it can be anticipated that they would receive the highest number of compliments.

Examples of compliments received include:

Social Work Assessment Team – I would like to express my sincere thanks for the support given by a member of your assessment team, XX. We found her to be thoroughly professional throughout the assessment process showing objectivity, skilled analysis and empathetic understanding in reaching her conclusions. She was honest and transparent throughout, asking the tough challenging questions when appropriate as well as the more supportive ones. This gave us confidence that her evidence-based approach would be based on reality when dealing with all parties.

Health Visiting and School Nursing – XX has been a saviour to me when I have been at my lowest. She has given me so much support and gone above and beyond to ensure I felt supported. She has encouraged me and supported me to be the best parent I can for my three children. I am thankful to the whole health visiting team but especially XX, during the worst of the pandemic I was able to get support from her and this has undoubtedly had a great effect on my children and the care they receive due to XX's guidance. Please let it be noted how fantastic she is as a health visitor and how her caring nature has helped me through my struggles.

Education – XX is kind, knowledgeable but most of all she listened to me, she cared. I never waited weeks for her to reply, I never have to prompt her to reply, this lady is worth her weight in gold and in my opinion is a credit to your establishment. Her role within Education is so important. I would just like to say a huge thank you to XX, a lady I will truly never forget for the right reasons.

Early Help – XX has been the only person who has actually helped not only us as parents but our son too. She has gone above and beyond to offer support and seek advice from the necessary professionals to get us all on the right track, even joining us in meetings... We can honestly say, without XX, we wouldn't be anywhere close to where we are today... She really has gone above and beyond with us as a family, her continued determination and commitment to the whole situation has been beyond gratitude. We'll never be able to thank her enough for the kindness and support given to us as a family.

The promotion and communication of compliments takes place within team meetings and the Directorate's newsletter to encourage staff to record and celebrate the compliments received.

11 Conclusions

The number of complaints received through the Children and Families Complaints Procedure decreased in 2021/22. Strict monitoring and follow up of complaint investigations continues to be a priority to ensure complaints are responded to effectively and within the statutory timescales.

Although the number of compliments has decreased this year, this still remains high and is a positive reflection on service improvement in recent years.

Learning from complaints can provide a valuable insight into areas for practice development

which in turn can result in better outcomes for children and families. There has been good progress made during the last year to maximise the opportunity for us to learn and develop our services as an outcome of complaints.

Children, young people and their families continue to be routinely informed about the complaints procedure and encouraged to exercise their right to complain should they be dissatisfied with the service received. Equally they are encouraged to submit any comments and compliments regarding service delivery, where appropriate.

Actions from 5 May 2022		
Action:	Responsible Officer:	Comment:
Equalities Objectives.	KB	Redcar & Cleveland’s equalities data to be shared with Members.
The Corporate Director for Children and Families to share with Members of the committee the number of qualified SENCo’s	CM	Data will be shared at the July children & families Scrutiny and Improvement Committee.

Actions from 14 June 2022		
Action:	Responsible Officer:	Comment:
Cabinet Reports - Delegated Decisions A Member requested that the Blue Cabin Pilot be brought back to the next meeting for discussion.	KB	A session was delivered by Blue Cabin 28 th June 2022, an invitation to attend to discuss the work was extended to all Members.
Quarter 4 Performance Report A Member referred to the reduction in the number of children travelling out of the area and asked what the percentage of SEN special school places was compared to the rest of the country and in particular in an Authority with similar demographics to ours.	CM	There is currently no published data to be able to compare ourselves to other local authorities

Children & Families Scrutiny and Improvement Committee – Action List

<p>The Corporate Director for Children and Families advised that Redcar College had recently had an Ofsted inspection the details of which would be supplied to Members.</p>	<p>KB</p>	
<p>The Corporate Director for Children and Families invited Members to visit the offices and witness the work of an officer first hand and have the opportunity to use the virtual reality headsets.</p>	<p>KB</p>	