



Children and Families  
Directorate

**Complaints,  
Compliments and  
Comments Annual  
Report  
2022/23**

# Contents

1. Introduction .....	3
2. Complaint Description and Procedure .....	3
3. Stages of a Complaint.....	4
4 Overview of Representations made to the Local Authority .....	5
5 Analysis of Complaints.....	6
5.1 Stage 1 Statutory Complaints.....	6
5.2 Stage 2 Statutory Complaints.....	8
5.3 Stage 3 Statutory Complaints.....	9
5.4 Complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).....	9
5.5 Corporate Complaints.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
6 Organisational Learning.....	10
7 Voice of the Child .....	11
8 Repeat and Vexatious Complaints .....	11
9 Compliments .....	12
10 Equal Opportunities Monitoring .....	13
11 Conclusions .....	14

## 1. Introduction

This Annual Complaints and Compliments Report for the Children and Families Directorate covers the period April 2022 to March 2023 (2022/23). 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 by the Children & Families Service,
- Identify the learning and actions resulting from the outcome of investigations into complaints, and
- Identify 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 all Local Authority children’s social care services have arrangements in place for considering children’s social care representations, including complaints, under the Children Act 1989. It is a requirement of the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 that the Local Authority publishes an annual report. In addition to the Regulations, the Department for Education and Skills produced guidance for local authorities on managing complaints called ‘*Getting the Best from Complaints: Social Care Complaints and Representations for Children, Young People and Others*’.

The legislation 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.

A prime objective of the Children’s Social Care Complaints Procedure is to ensure the Children & Families Directorate further develops its 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:

<p><b>Informal Resolution</b></p>	<p>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 to bring a swift resolution to the satisfaction of the complainant.</p>
<p><b>Stage 1</b></p>	<p>The complaint is investigated by the person or team providing services locally. The Council will respond within 10 working days (up to a maximum of 20 working days).</p>
<p><b>Stage 2</b></p>	<p>The complaint has a full and formal investigation undertaken by an Investigating Officer who must not be connected to the service which is the subject of the complaint. An ‘Independent Person’ (not employed by the Council) must be appointment to oversee the investigation. The timescale for this is 25 working days (up to a maximum of 65 working days).</p>
<p><b>Stage 3</b></p>	<p>A ‘Review Panel’ is convened and will consist of a chairperson and two individuals who are independent from the Council. The Review Panel will consider the complaint (but will not re-investigate) and produce recommendations to resolve the complaint. Stage 3 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.</p>
<p><b>Local Government Ombudsman</b></p>	<p>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.</p>

#### 4 Overview of Representations made to the Local Authority

- **Compliments** – During 2022/23 more compliments were received at 250, compared to 203 in the previous year.
- **Complaints** – During 2022/23 more complaints at 54 were received and dealt with under the statutory procedure, as compared to 35 in the previous year. This constitutes a 54% increase.
- **Informal Resolution** – Throughout the year, 13 of the 54 complaints were resolved through informal resolution, 4 we were unable to investigate and 7 were withdrawn.
- **Stage 1** – The Council investigated 30 complaints received in 2022/23 at Stage 1; of which 85% were responded to within statutory timescales.
- **Stage 2** – The Council investigated 3 complaints at Stage 2. One Stage 2 complaint was responded to outside of statutory timescales and two complaint investigations remain ongoing.
- **Stage 3** – There were no requests for a Stage 3 panel.
- **Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) enquiries** – 5 complaints were considered by the Local Government Ombudsman.

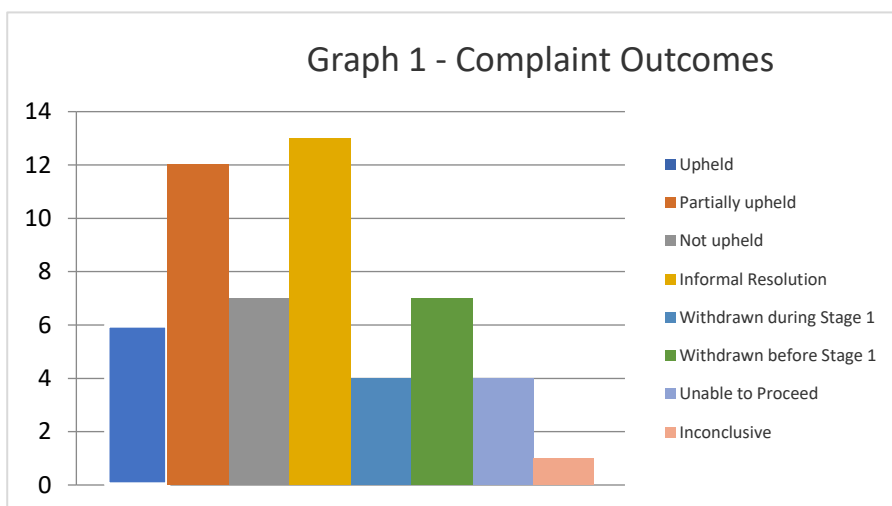
## 5 Analysis of Complaints

### 5.1 Stage 1 Complaints

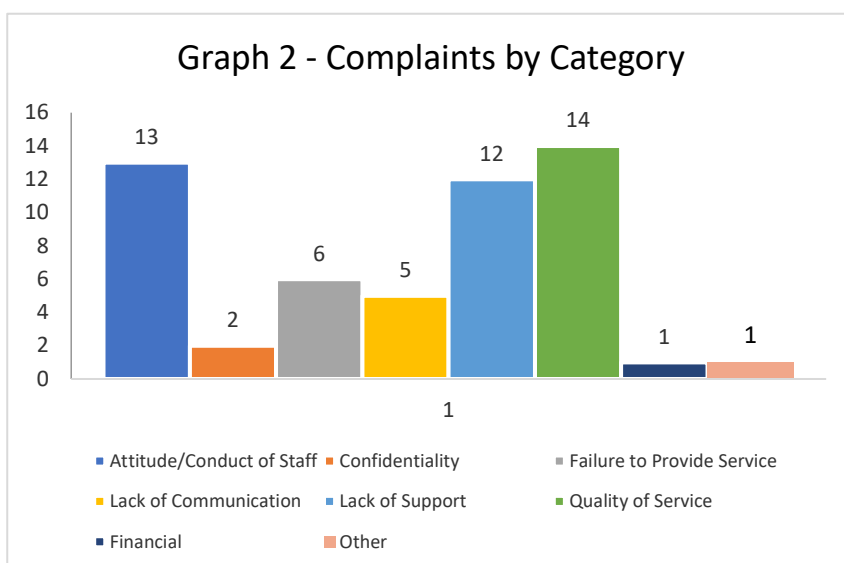
Fifty-four complaints were received in 2022/23. There has been an increase in complaints being resolved or withdrawn before reaching Stage 1 due to our staff engaging families in early informal resolution.

Of the 54 complaints received this year:

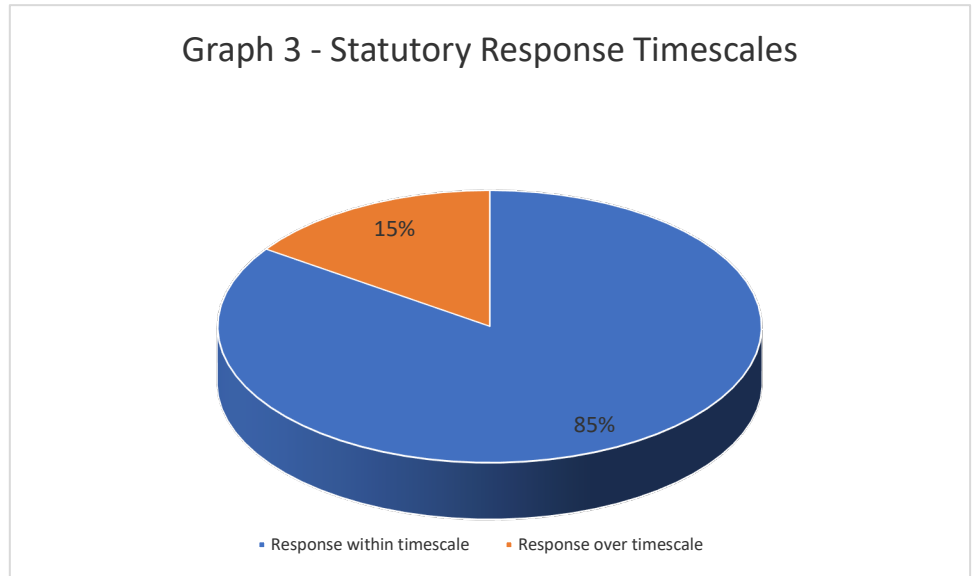
- 6 (11%) were upheld
- 12 (22%) were partially upheld
- 7 (13%) were not upheld
- 1 (2%) was inconclusive
- 13 (24%) were resolved through informal resolution before proceeding to a Stage 1 investigation.
- 7 (13%) were withdrawn before proceeding to a Stage 1 investigation
- 4 (7.5%) were withdrawn during the Stage 1 investigation
- 4 (7.5%) received were deemed outside of the complaint remit, as issues were historic or were being dealt with within the Court arena.



The highest volume of complaints received were in relation to Quality of Service with 14, followed by 13 complaints relating to Attitude/Conduct of Staff and 12 complaints relating to Lack of Support.

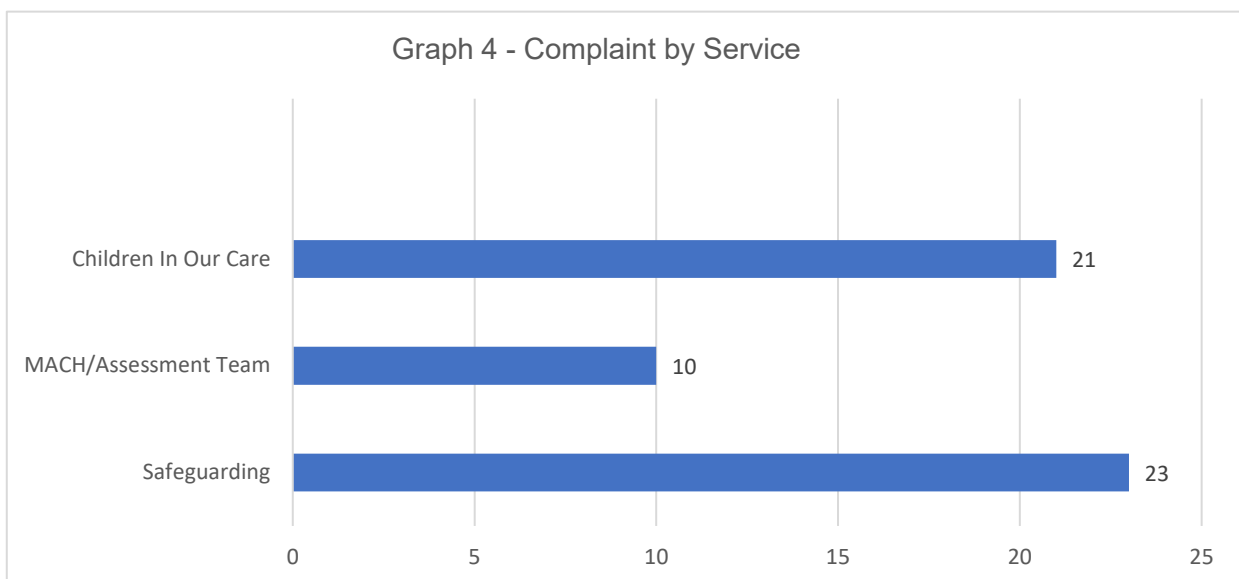


We have a duty to respond to complaints within a specified time frame. For Stage 1 complaints this is within 10 working days (up to a maximum of 20 working days). Of the 26 Stage 1 complaints responded to this year, 6 responses were

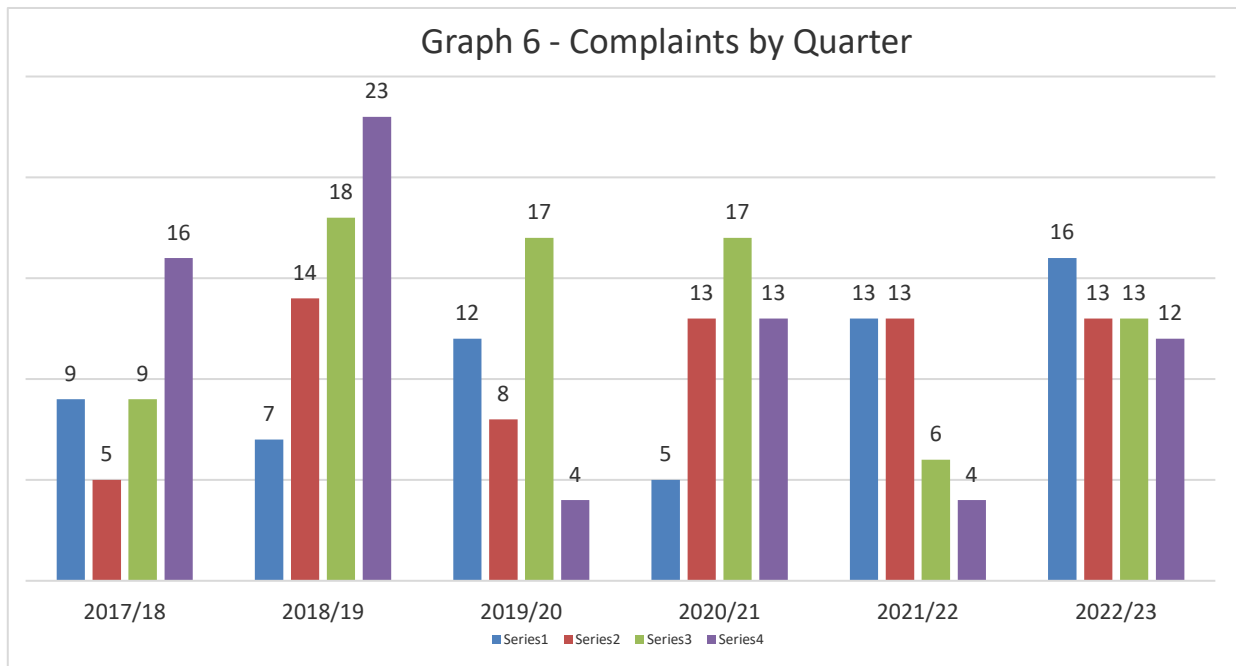
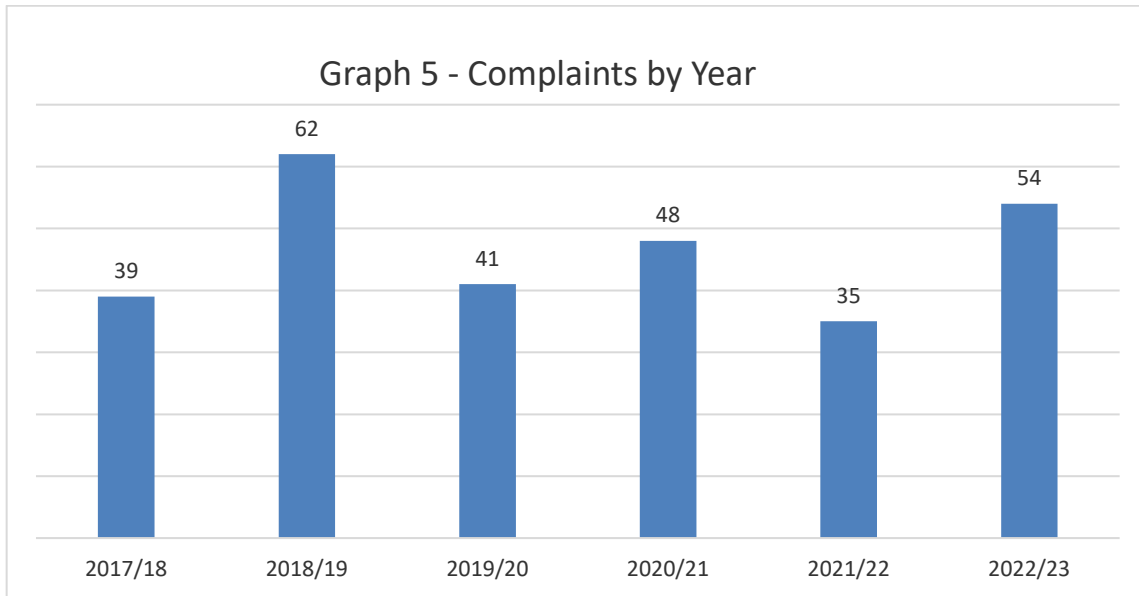


within the initial 10 working day timescale, and 16 were responded to within the extended 20 working day timescale. This constitutes 85% responded to within timescale. Four Stage 1 statutory complaints were outside of the prescribed timescale which equates to 15%. Four complaints were withdrawn at Stage 1 before receiving a response.

The majority of complaints received were in relation to the Safeguarding Teams with 23, followed by Children in Our Care with 21 and 10 for the MACH/Assessment Team.



The following graphs compare the number of complaints received by year and by quarter since 2017/18.



## 5.2 Stage 2 Complaints

The Council investigated 3 complaints in 2022/23 at Stage 2 of the Statutory Complaints Procedure. We have a statutory duty to respond to a Stage 2 complaint within 25 working days (up to a maximum of 65 working days).



One Stage 2 investigation was concluded in 2022/23. This complaint was extended from the initial 25 working day timescale to a 65 working day timescale; however, the investigation went beyond the 65 working day timescale. Two Stage 2 complaint investigations are still being investigated (as at 31.3.23).

The statutory guidance allows Councils to extend timescales for responding to complaints if the complaint is particularly complex, or for 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. The Stage 2 investigation that concluded in 2022/23 contained the following outcome:

- 1 element was upheld, 2 elements were partially upheld, and 2 elements were not upheld.

### **5.3 Stage 3 Statutory Complaints**

There were no requests for a Stage 3 panel in 2022/23.

### **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 hasn't progressed through the Council's own complaint procedure first. In some cases, the Council can refer complainants to the LGO at the conclusion of Stage 2 if certain criteria are met.

During 2022/23, 2 complainants referred their concerns to the LGO. One complaint received in 2021/22 was also responded to in 2022/23. The details of the 3 LGO complaints are as follows:

- One complaint, which had been through Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3 of the

Statutory complaint procedure in 2021/22, was referred to the LGO. The LGO investigated and found the Council to be at fault. The Council agreed to apologise to the complainant and make a payment to recognise the injustice caused.

- One complaint, which had not been investigated by the Council's complaint procedure due to the historical nature, was not investigated by the LGO because it had been considered in court proceedings and was made late but the LGO recommended that the Information Commissioner was better placed to consider complaints about the data protection element of the complaint.
- One complaint is currently being investigated by the LGO (as at 31.3.23).

## **6 Organisational Learning**

We constantly improving our approach to learning from complaints. All recommendations arising from complaints are discussed with the service to provide assurance that they are acted upon and to identify any wider learning. Wider learning is then shared throughout the Directorate in a range of ways to include regular 'Spotlight on Services' newsletters, team briefings, training courses and changes to policies and procedures. The changes to policies, procedures and processes and the training identified include:

- A new process for making referrals to a partner agency, including who should make the referral and how to keep families up to date.
- A review of the information provided to families where there is an initial child protection conference to ensure information explains the processes involved and why we may need to transfer families to another social work team.
- Further training in relation to confidentiality and GDPR regulations.
- A training session undertaken with Social Workers in relation to best practice when undertaking assessments.
- A training session undertaken with Social Workers on private law matters and Section 7 welfare reports.
- Guidance for staff to ensure appropriate handling of sensitive documentation to ensure confidentiality is maintained.

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.

In addition to the advocacy process, a complaint can be progressed through our Independent Reviewing Officers for Children In Our Care and Personal Advisors.

In 2022/23 we received 3 complaints via NYAS on behalf of a child and 2 complaints directly from a child.

We have created a children's leaflet to help children and young people understand 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 Repeat and Vexatious Complaints**

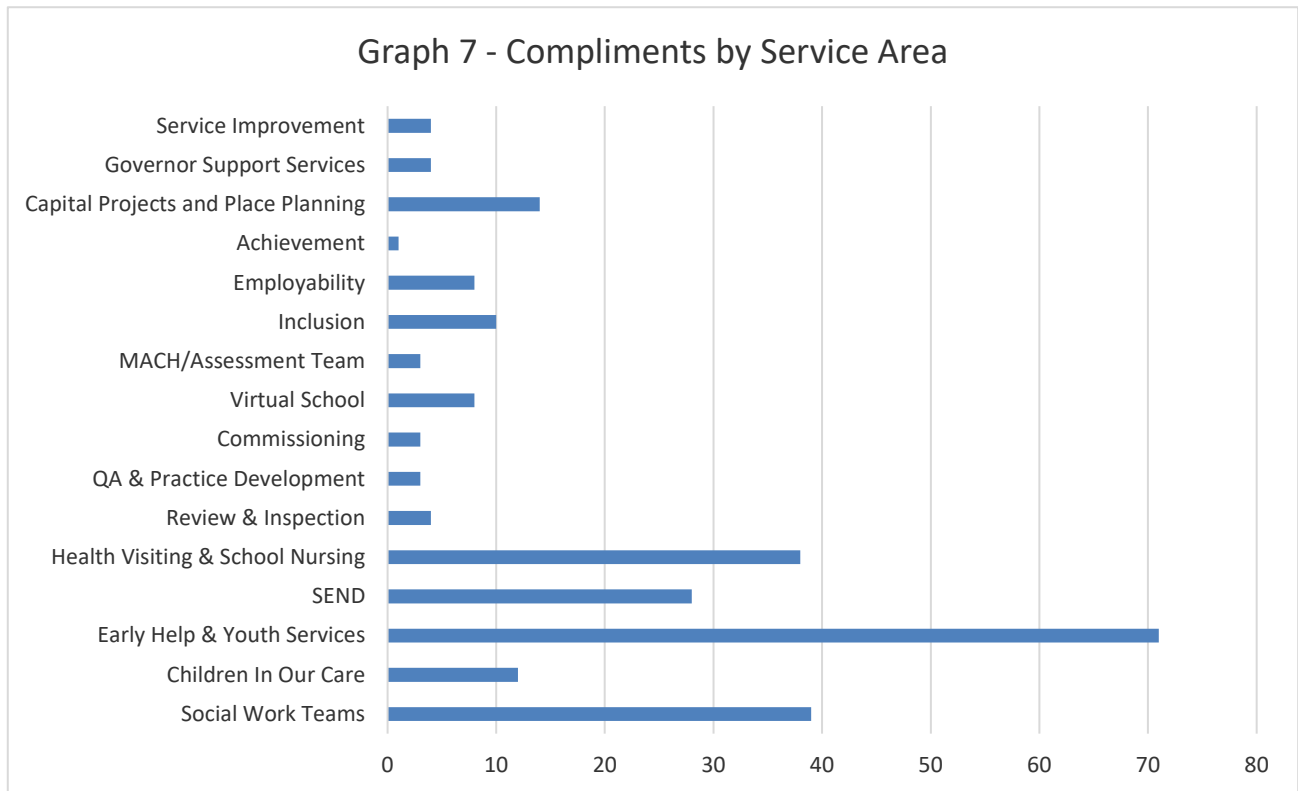
Vexatious or repeated complaints impact greatly on the time of both the investigating officer and staff and can hinder the completion of complaints. In 2022/23, we identified 1 complainant as being vexatious.

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

## 9 Compliments

In 2022/23 the Children and Families Directorate received 250 compliments, compared to 203 in the previous year.

Graph 7 identifies compliments received by service area.



The service areas receiving the highest volume of compliments were Early Help and Youth Services (71), Social Work Teams (39), followed by Health Visiting & School Nursing (38). The highest performing areas have the highest ratios of frontline staff.

Examples of compliments received include:

Children in Our Care Team – Thank you for all your help and support you have given me in the past year. If it wasn't for you I wouldn't have come this far. I can't believe how much I have changed this year, it is all because of you. I would like to thank you again for everything you have done for us all.

Health Visiting & School Nursing – X has gone above and beyond for us, in so many ways, more than I ever thought was possible. She has been my saviour in such awful times and I

couldn't possibly have got through it without her, she is an absolute privilege and treasure to your service, and truly one of the best!

Early Help & Youth Services – I have had amazing support to help me move on positively with my son. Myself and my son have become much more confident. I do not feel we as a family would be in such a position if it was not for all this help and support. I am now able to manage and cope with X. We have a much better relationship now. X has gone from out of control and sad to being able to manage his emotions better and being much happier and less anxious. I would highly recommend this support to anyone.

Social Work Teams – The Social Worker we had dealt with any problems we had. We needed a bed and clothing and this was dealt with right away. The Social Worker did everything within her power, went above and beyond and was always professional and helpful. I would not change anything and would deal with her anytime.

SEND – When we started Portage the way forward seemed bleak, we weren't getting any help for X. Since starting the service, the help and support we have received has been invaluable. Y has been everything we've needed and more. Whenever there are issues, Y has always helped to provide answers, incorporating X's changing needs at all times. We really can't thank Y and the team enough for all the help and support we have received.

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.

## **10 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.

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

## **11 Conclusions**

The number of compliments has increased in 2022/23 and we are pleased that our staff are recognised for their hard work and dedication.

The number of complaints received through the Children and Families Complaints Procedure increased in 2022/23. The service aims to conduct timely and thorough investigations so that complaints are responded to effectively and within the statutory timescales. Whilst timescales cannot always be met the complainant is kept informed throughout the investigation process.

Learning from complaints can provide 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 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 feedback and compliments regarding service delivery, where appropriate.