



Children and Families
Directorate

Complaints, Service Requests & Compliments

Annual Report

April 2023 to March 2024



Thriving children, fulfilling their dreams.



Table of Contents

1.0 Executive Summary	3
2.0 Overview of the Statutory Childrens Complaints Procedure	4-5
3.0 Accessing the Childrens Social Care Complaints Procedure	5
4.0 Role of the Complaints Officer	6
5.0 Key Findings/ Summary 2023/24	6
5.1 Number of Complaints	7
5.2 Complaint Outcomes	8
5.3 Breakdown by Service Area	9
5.4 Complaint Findings	10-11
6.0 Complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman	12
7.0 Lessons Learnt	12
8.0 Compliments	13
8.1 What is a Compliment	13
8.2 Number of Compliments	13-14
8.3 Examples of Compliments	15
9.0 Conclusion	16
10.0 Future Developments 2024/25	16-17

1.0 Executive Summary

This is the Children's Social Care Annual Complaints, Service Requests and Compliments report for the financial year 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

Complaints, service requests and compliments form a vital part of our overall engagement activity. By listening to the families we support, along with their carers we can gain valuable insight into the unique experiences of those who use our services.

Whilst our service works closely with children and their families to ensure they understand what is happening or will happen when they receive care and support from us, there may be times where things go wrong. Our aim is to resolve and learn from complaints raised, identify when we are not getting things right and what we need to do to improve our services to ensure it does not happen again.

This report provides an overview and analysis of all complaints received and handled through the Council's statutory complaints procedure, in addition to the handling of feedback received in the form of service requests and compliments about Children's Social Care services.

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 for the Children & Families Service.
- Identify the learning and actions resulting from the outcome of investigations into complaints.
- Identify future plans and actions.

On occasion there are safeguarding concerns raised within a complaint. Those concerns are referred directly to our MACH Assessment Team to be considered as part of our statutory requirement to carry out enquiries to decide whether any further action should be taken.

2.0 Overview of the Statutory Childrens Complaints Procedure

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.

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

Service Request Stage (Informal, Early Resolution)	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 – Local Resolution	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).
Stage 2 - Investigation	The complaint has a full and formal investigation undertaken by an Investigating Officer. An 'Independent Person' must be appointed to oversee the investigation and report independently. Both the Investigating Officer and Independent Person produce reports, which are submitted to an Adjudicating Officer who write a final response to the complainant. The timescale for this is 25 working days (up to a maximum of 65 working days).

Stage 3	<p>A review panel is convened and will consist of a chairperson and two individuals who are independent from the council. The panel will consider the complaint and produce recommendations to resolve the complaint.</p>
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman	<p>In addition to the above stages, the complainant can refer their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (Ombudsman). 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>

3.0 Accessing the Childrens Social Care Complaints Procedure

Childrens Social Care encourages service users and their carers who use our services to provide their feedback to us about the care and support they have received.

Information on how to make a compliment, a service request or complaint is readily available on our dedicated Childrens Social Care webpage on the Council website.

[Children's social care complaints and feedback | Redcar and Cleveland \(redcar-cleveland.gov.uk\)](https://www.redcar-cleveland.gov.uk/childrens-social-care-complaints-and-feedback)

A complaint can be made to any member of council staff, however, to assist, contact can also be made by the following methods.

- ChildrenServicesComplaints@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk
- Write to: Complaints Officer, Children and Families Service, Seafield House, Kirkleatham Street, Redcar, TS10 1SP.
- Call: 01642 771528



4.0 Role of the Complaints Officer

The Children's Social Care Complaints Officer facilitates the complaints process and referrals to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

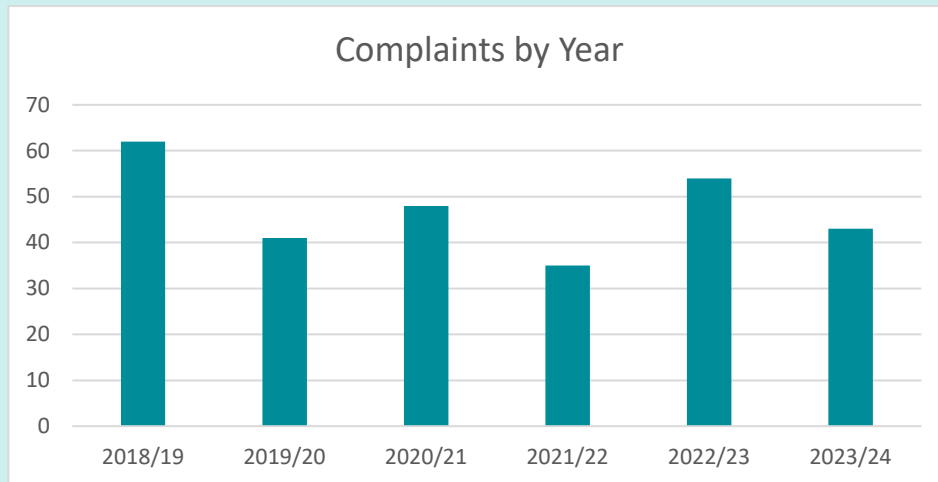
5.0 Key Findings/Summary 2023/24

- **Compliments** – During 2023/24 we received 168 compliments, compared to 250 in the previous year.
- **Complaints** – During 2023/24 we received 43 statutory complaints, compared to 54 in the previous year.
- **Service Request** – Of the Forty-three complaints, nine were resolved through the service request route (informal resolution), four were withdrawn by the complainant, and an additional four complaints the Council were unable to investigate due to them being considered by other methods – for example court proceedings.
- **Stage 1** – The Council investigated Thirty Statutory Stage 1 complaints in 2023/24, of which 47% were responded to within statutory timescales.
- **Stage 2** – Twelve complaints were progressed to a Stage 2 investigation. Of the Twelve Stage 2 complaint investigations, three were responded to within the statutory timescales, eight were outside of statutory timescales and one Stage 2 complaint is ongoing.
- **Stage 3** – During this period there were six requests made to move to a Stage 3 panel.
- **Ombudsman enquiries** – During the 2023/24 one complaint was considered by the Ombudsman.

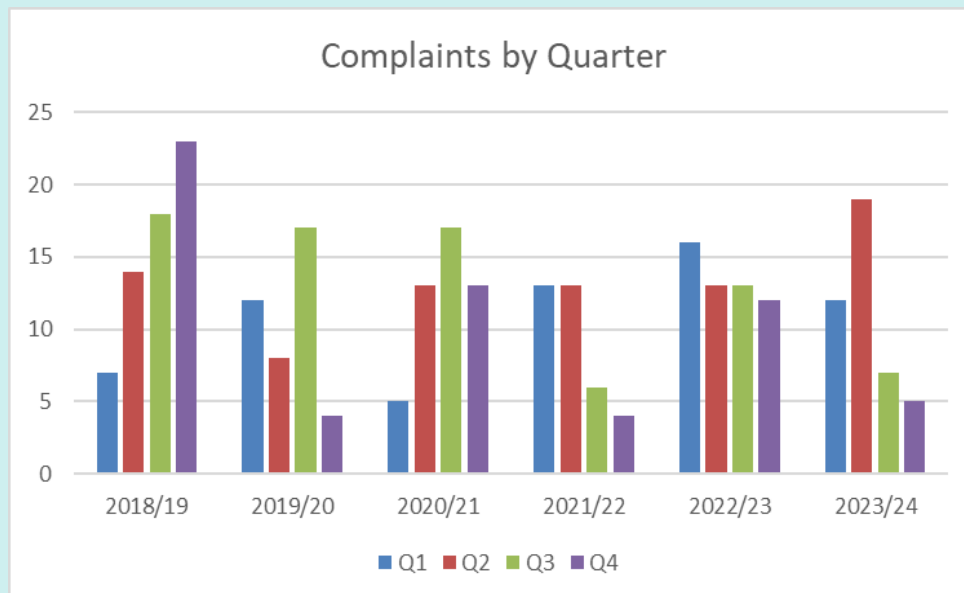
5.1 Number of Complaints

During 2023/24 the Local Authority received 43 statutory complaints this is compared to 54 in the previous year.

The graph below shows the number of complaints received between 2018/19 and 2023/24.



The chart below shows quarterly comparative data for complaints for the last 6 years.

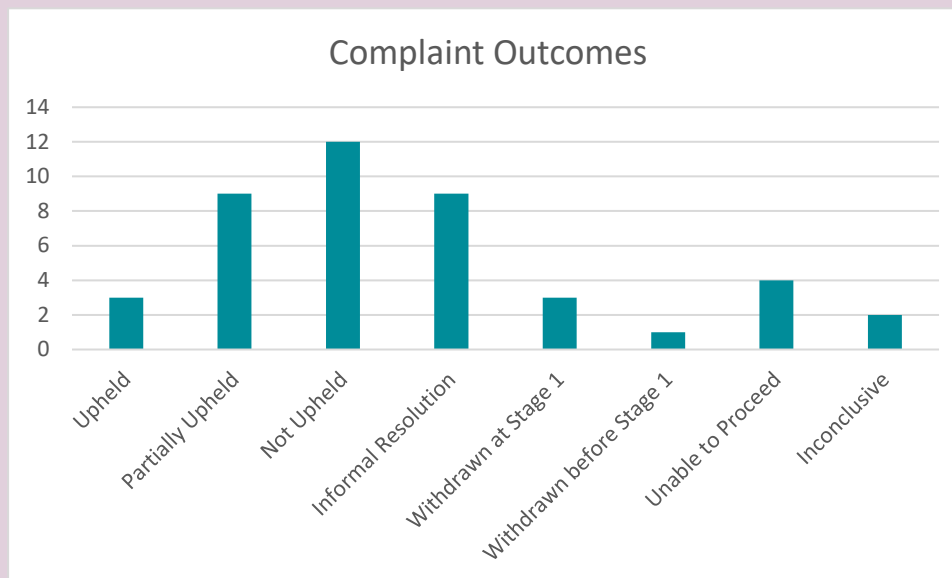


5.2 Complaint Outcomes

Of the 43 complaints received during 2023/24:

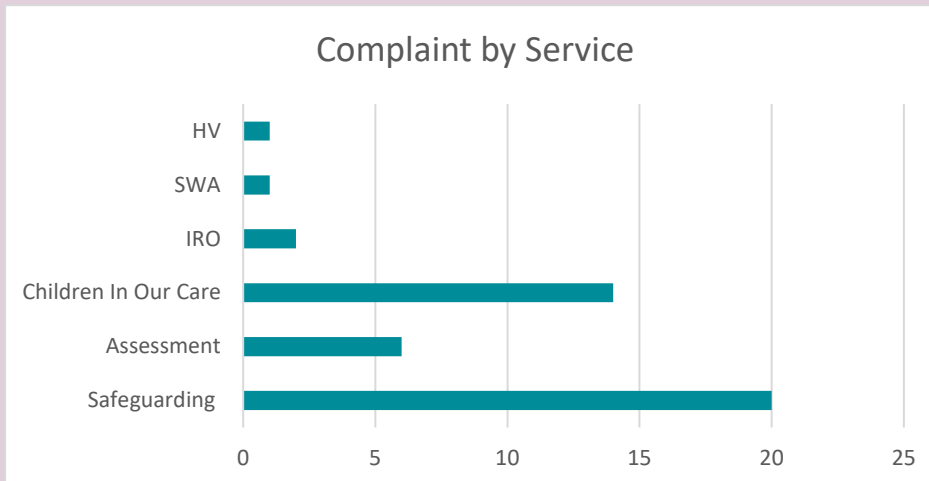
- 3 (7%) were upheld
- 9 (21%) were partially upheld
- 12 (28%) were not upheld
- 2 (5%) were inconclusive
- 9 (21%) were resolved through informal resolution before proceeding to a Stage 1 investigation.
- 1 (2%) was withdrawn before proceeding to a Stage 1 investigation
- 3 (7%) were withdrawn during the Stage 1 investigation
- 4 (9%) were unable to proceed. 2 were unable to proceed due to court proceedings, 1 was a safeguarding concern rather than a complaint and was passed on to the MACH and one was an anonymous complaint, so we were unable to respond.

The graph below shows the outcomes for the forty-three complaints received this year.



5.3 Breakdown by Service Area

20 complaints were received in relation to Safeguarding issues, Children in Our Care received 14 complaints and 6 complaints were received in relation to MACH/ Assessment issues. Health Visiting and School Nurses received 1 complaint. Social Work Academy received 1 complaint and Independent Review received 2. One complaint received was across two service areas which required a joint response.



5.4 Complaint Findings

We have a duty to respond to complaints within a specified time frame.

Stage 1 complaints should be responded to within 10 working days (up to a maximum of 20 working days).

Of the 30 Stage 1 responses the following was noted:

- 14 responses were within the initial 10 working day timescale.
- 13 were responded to within the extended 20 working day timescale.
- 3 complaints were withdrawn at Stage 1 before receiving a response.

Stage 2 complaints should be responded to within 25 working days (up to a maximum of 65 working days).

Of the 12 Stage 2 responses the following was noted:

- 3 were responded to within the timescales.
- 8 went over the 65 working day timescale.
- 1 complaint is still ongoing.

At Stage 2 there were 6 complaints Partially Upheld, 3 were Not Upheld. 2 were Unable to Prove or Disprove and 1 complaint investigation is still ongoing.

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.

Of the 6 Stage 3 Panels the following was noted:

- 4 were responded to within the timescales.
- 1 complaint went over the 65 working day timescale.
- 1 complaint is still ongoing.

Of the stage 3 panels 1 complaint was Not Upheld, 1 complaint was Unable to Prove or Disprove, 2 complaints were Partially Upheld, 1 complaint was withdrawn and 1 complaint is still ongoing.

For Stage 2 investigations it is a requirement that the complaint must be investigated independently, we have noted delay in allocating Investigating Officers due to the nature of the NEPO framework which unfortunately has not been as effective as in previous years. To combat this, we have utilised private external suppliers.

We have met with this agency and created a new more succinct way of working to help prevent any future delays. These include Investigating Officers communicating any changes to the statement of complaint, which may affect timescales. Streamlining of the reports which had become long and cumbersome. Additionally, Investigators offering feedback meetings to help prevent the need for a Stage 3 panel.

The Complaints and Information Governance Officer is now responsible for organising and attending all Stage 3 panels to help reduce response times.

6.0 Complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman

A complainant may choose to refer their complaint to the Ombudsman at any time during the process if they feel dissatisfied with the response. However, the Ombudsman is unlikely to consider the complaint if it has not progressed through the Council's internal complaint procedure first. In some cases, the Council can refer complainants to the Ombudsman at the conclusion of Stage 2 if certain criteria are met. During this period the Council made no referrals to the Ombudsman.

During 2023/24, one complainant referred their complaint to the Ombudsman. The details of the complaint are as follows:

- *Miss X complained about the way a child protection conference was run and the impact this had on her and her family.*

The Ombudsman decided not to investigate Miss X's complaint as they concluded that an investigation would not lead to a worthwhile outcome.

7.0 Lessons Learnt

We are constantly improving our approach to learning from complaints. All complaint outcomes are considered at senior management level to identify any learning to be shared with wider staff teams.

All recommendations arising from complaints are discussed with the service to provide assurance that all recommendations are acted upon. This is then shared throughout the Directorate in a range of methods such as 'Spotlight on Services' newsletters, team briefings, training courses and changes to policies and procedures.

It was established through the learning outcomes there was a need for training regarding how to manage and respond to complaints. To combat this training was arranged with the Ombudsman and will be held on May 14th 2024 and June 27th 2024. All key staff were invited to the training. Further lessons have been incorporated in the Future Development section, illustrated in section 10.0

8.0 Compliments

8.1 What is a compliment?

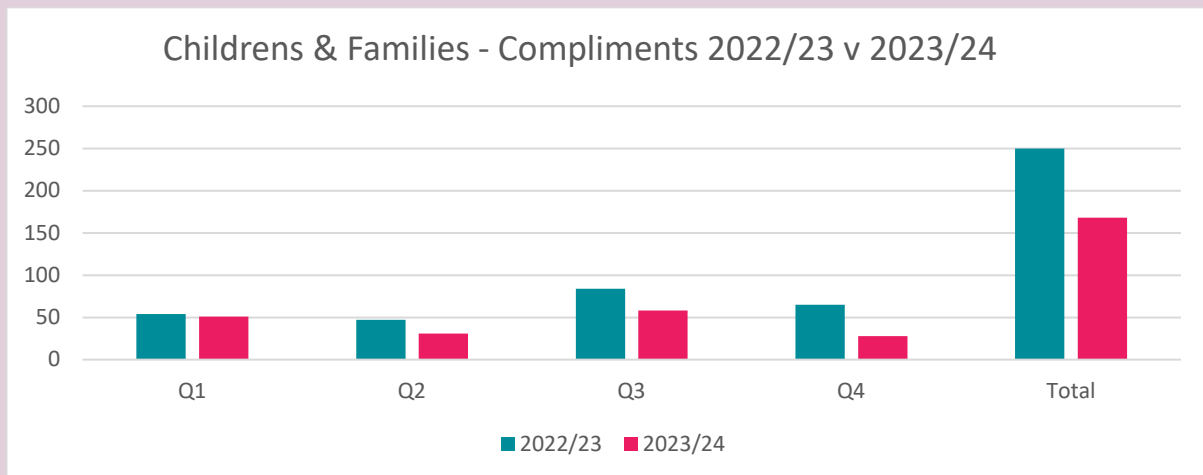
A compliment is defined by

“An unsolicited statement of satisfaction or praise received from an outside source regarding an aspect of the service or an individual member of staff.”

Childrens Social Care can receive compliments from young people, parents and other family members, foster carers, external professionals and other colleagues from across the Directorate.

8.2 Number of compliments?

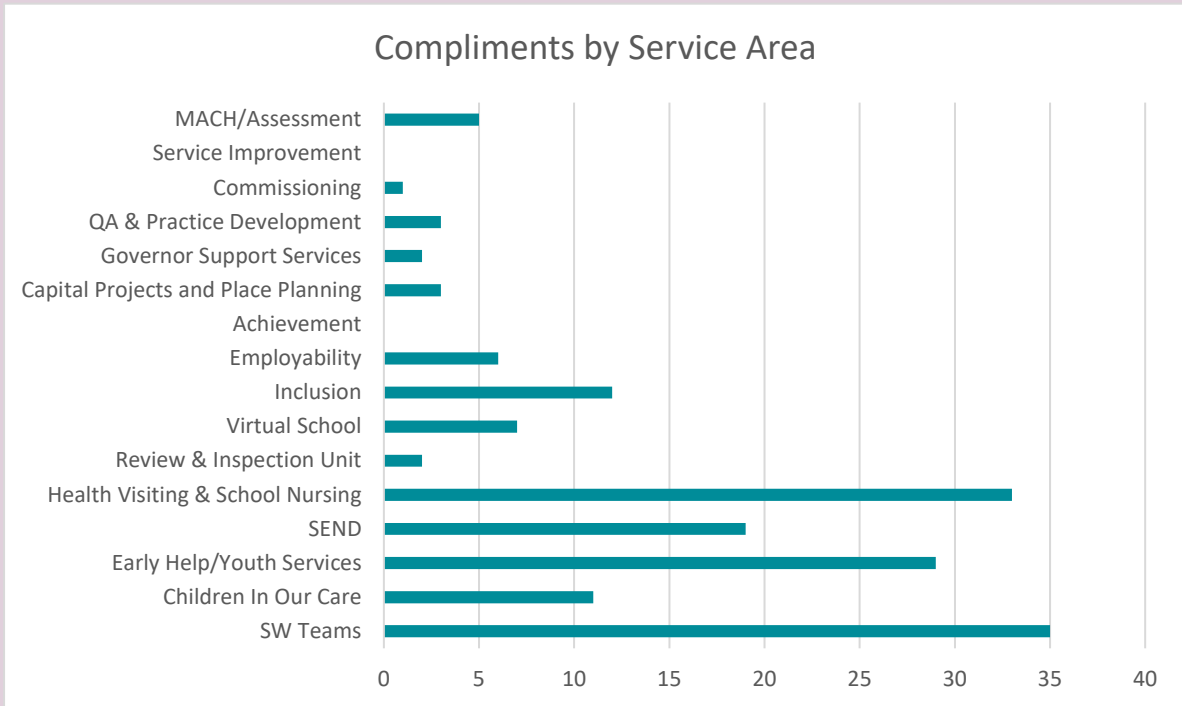
In 2023/24 the Children and Families Directorate received 168 compliments. The graph below shows the number of compliments received each quarter compared to 2022/23.



Compliments can be received by letter, email, thank you cards. They are recorded and the members of staff involved are congratulated by the senior management team on their good practice. We use feedback received from compliments to affirm when services are working well and have made a positive impact on the people who are using our service.



The graph below shows a Service Area breakdown of the 168 compliments received.



8.3 Examples of Compliments

Children in Our Care Team – “Paula your commitment went above and beyond, and I know X appreciated that fact that you were always there fighting her corner! which I know was extremely frustrating having to take on the multiple services to ensure X’s needs were met; but you and Ali somehow managed to negotiate and were able to get the support she required so thank you again on behalf of X.”

Early Help & Youth Services – “Good morning. I thought I would drop you a line to say how happy was that I was able to attend your session at Greengate’s yesterday. Having done my kind of role for 10n years or more in different local authorities it was lovely to see and hear someone explain in such an understandable way to others how it is used. I also suspect you changed the working lives of the ladies in the room, which can’t really be quantified. If I can help your endeavours in any way, please don’t hesitate to ask. Thanks again.”

Health Visiting & School Nursing – “All the staff at the west locality were amazing to work with. So helpful and always supportive, felt like I got the most out of my experience.”

Social Work Teams – “The work of both Ellie and Beth has been phenomenal over the last 3 days, despite an unprecedented, unexpected, and significant situation occurring. They have gone above and beyond, and I am extremely grateful for their work, support, assistance, and dedication on this case. They were praised by the Judge today, and the solicitor for the children. Beth was further praised by the solicitor for the mother, for making significant attempts today in assisting the mother to find a place to stay. It has been incredibly difficult circumstances this week, and Ellie and Beth have handled it all so incredibly well. The positive feedback today was very well deserved.”

SEND – “Christine has provided vital work to families which can often be hard to reach, her approach has been extremely beneficial. It is great to have her support within the team and be able to use her expertise to support some of our most vulnerable pupils and ensure they have the correct support in place. Christine has very much brought everyone together to have a shared understanding of support for the child.”

9.0 Conclusion

The number of complaints received through the Children and Families Complaints Procedure decreased in 2023/24. 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.

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.

10.0 Future Developments 2024/25

- Continue to work with all staff to improve information shared about the complaints process, improve complaints investigations, and responses to implement effective and meaningful lessons learned.
- Work collaboratively with the Corporate Complaints Manager and Adults Complaints Officer to develop effective training about complaints resolution and the handling of service requests, providing a consistent approach across the entire Council.
- Continuous performance monitoring against statutory response times.
- More effective record keeping of complaints. Complaint responses to be recorded on Protocol to aide transparency and effective complaint handling across Childrens Social Care.
- Handle service requests and resolve complaints on a more informal basis where possible to provide a response with an appropriate, timely outcome.
- Corporate Complaints – review complaints received to ascertain are they purely social care complaints or are they a corporate complaint.

- In depth audit review by Corporate Complaints Manager and Childrens and Families Complaints Officer to review complaints procedure and the management of complaints within the service.
- Offering more Ombudsman training for all relevant staff to attend.
- Going forward we are highlighting a new effective way of working and streamlining the complaints process. Individual training with departments on complaints to discuss the new process for corporate complaints and to refresh on statutory procedure guidelines.
- A new way of recording lessons learnt has been discussed and meetings with the Complaint's and Information Governance Officer and Practice & Quality Assurance Manager have been set up every six weeks to discuss lessons learnt.
- 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.

