



Children and Families
Directorate

**Complaints, Service Requests
& Compliments**

Annual Report
April 2024 to March 2025

Relationships that Connect, Building our Communities



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1.0 Executive Summary

This is the Children's Social Care Annual Complaints, Service Requests and Compliments report for the financial year 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025.

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 service users find them unsatisfactory, and how we can improve the services we provide.

The Statutory Guidance provided by the Ombudsman sets out the parameters of which children's social care functions can be investigated under the procedure. The Ombudsman advises that generally the following can be considered under the Statutory Complaints Procedure:

- Children in need
- Looked after children
- Special Guardianship support
- Post-adoption support

And the following areas of concern would be considered under the two staged corporate complaints procedure.

- Early Help
- Child protection including S47 enquiries and conferences
- Assessments of potential foster carers and adopters
- Foster carer registration
- Section 7 and Section 37 court reports
- SEND
- Education

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 or up to a maximum of 20 working days when a complaint is more complex.
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 writes a final response to the complainant. The timescale for this is 25 working days (or up to a maximum of 65 working days when a complaint is more complex).
Stage 3	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 if required.
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman	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 Council's complaint procedure. In certain circumstances, early referral after Stage 2 can be considered.

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 \(redcar-cleveland.gov.uk\)](http://redcar-cleveland.gov.uk)

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

- Complaints@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.

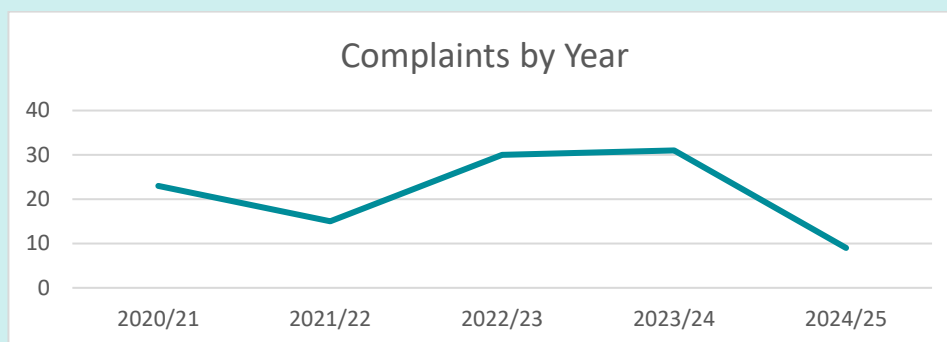
5.0 Key Findings/Summary 2024/25

- **Compliments** – During 2024/25 we received 275 compliments, compared to 168 in the previous year.
- **Service Request** – We received 97 service requests that were resolved through the service request route (informal resolution), this approach ensures a quick resolution for complainants.
- **Stage 1** – The Council investigated 9 Statutory Stage 1 complaints in 2024/25, of which 67% were responded to within statutory timescales. One complaint was joint across Childrens and Adults Social Care Services.
- **Stage 2** – 6 complaints were progressed to a Stage 2 investigation. Of the six Stage 2 complaint investigations, one was responded to within the statutory timescales, four were outside of statutory timescales. One Stage 2 complaint is ongoing, and one was withdrawn due to court proceedings.
- **Stage 3** – During this period there were 4 requests made to move to a Stage 3 panel.
- **Ombudsman enquiries** – During 2024 - 2025 6 complaints were considered by the Ombudsman.
- **Corporate procedure** – The council investigated 25 Childrens complaints at Stage 1 of which 13 complaints were progressed to a stage 2 investigation.

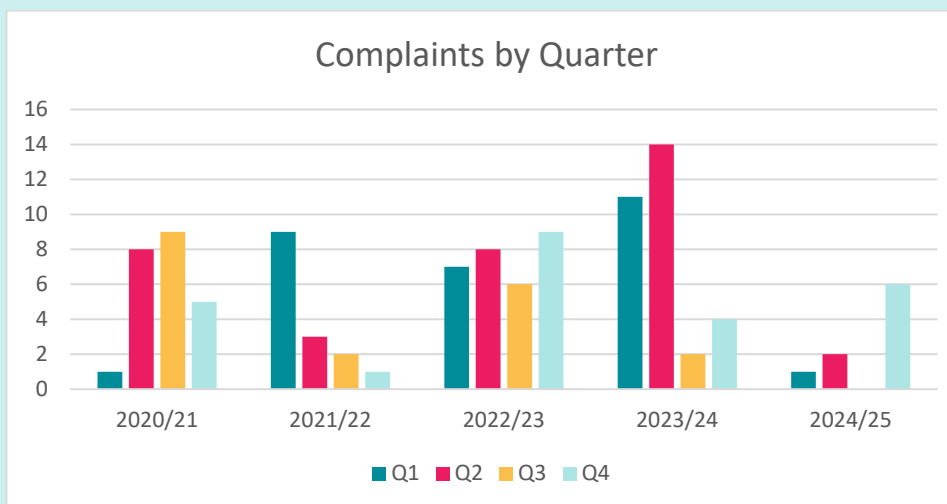
5.1 Number of Statutory Complaints

During 2024/25 the Local Authority received 9 Statutory Stage 1 complaints this is compared to 31 in the previous year. This is a significant reduction due to increased vigilance at resolving issues at the earliest opportunity within the service request procedure. As documented in last year's annual report we have closely reviewed each complaint received and by looking at the complaint criteria we have determined the most appropriate complaints procedure to use.

The graph below shows the number of Statutory Stage 1 complaints received between 2020/21 and 2024/25.



The chart below shows quarterly comparative data for Stage 1 Statutory complaints for the last 5 years.

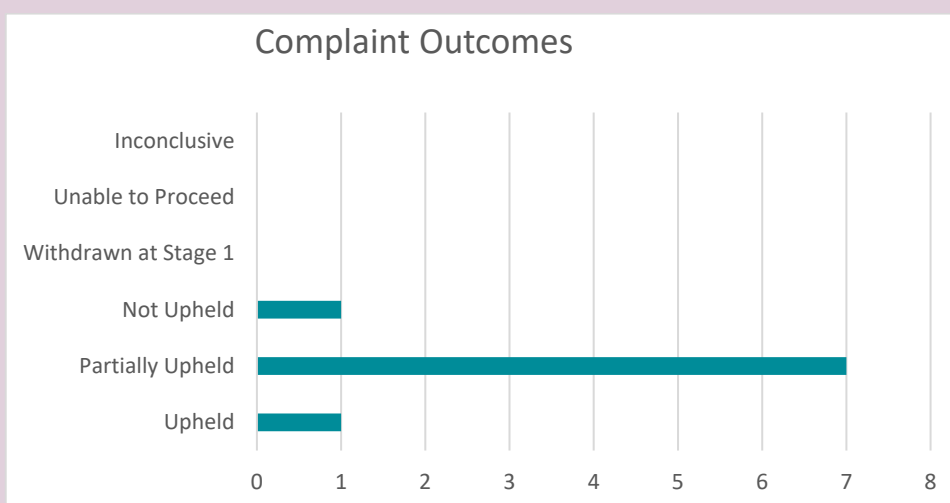


5.2 Complaint Outcomes

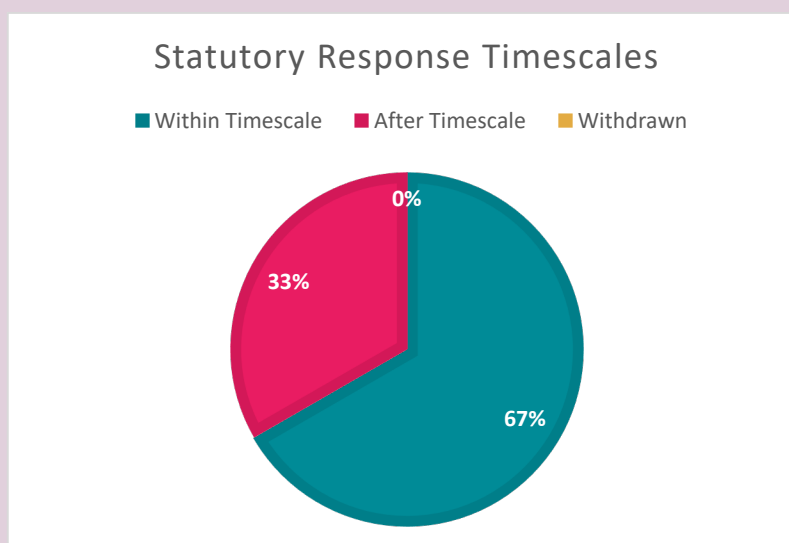
Of the 9 Statutory complaints received during 2024/25:

- 1(11%) were upheld
- 7(78%) were partially upheld
- 1(11%) were not upheld

The graph below shows the outcomes for the nine Statutory Stage 1 complaints received this year.

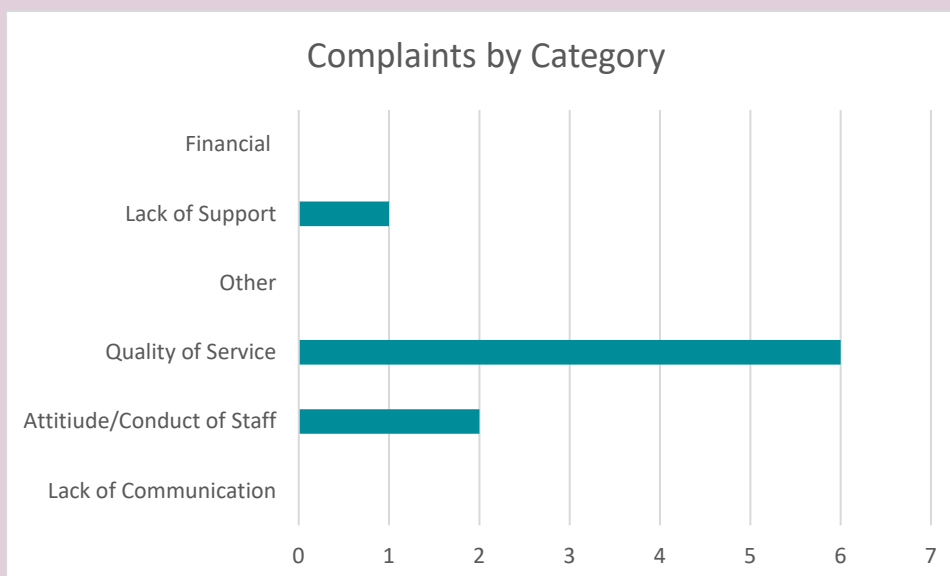
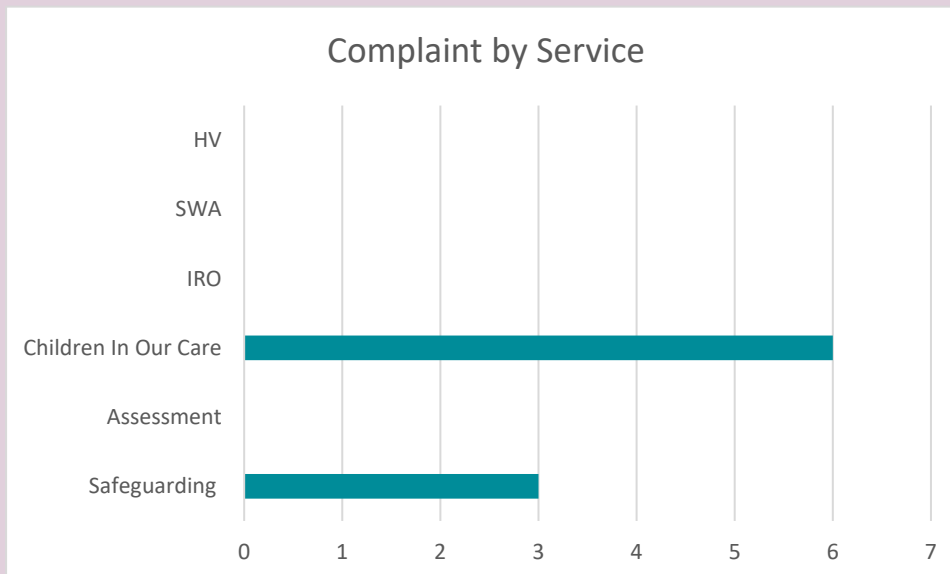


The graph below shows the number of Stage 1 complaints responded to within the 20-working day timescale.



5.3 Breakdown by Service Area

3 complaints were received in relation to Safeguarding issues, Children in Our Care received 6 complaints.



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 9 Stage 1 responses the following was noted:

- 2 responses were within the initial 10 working day timescale.
- 4 were responded to within the extended 20 working day timescale.
- 3 went over the 20-working day timescale.

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

Of the 6 Stage 2 responses the following was noted:

- 1 was responded to within the timescales.
- 3 went over the 65 working day timescale.
- 1 was withdrawn due to court proceedings.
- 1 complaint is still ongoing.

At Stage 2 there were:

- 3 complaints that were partially Upheld, 1 was Not Upheld, 1 was withdrawn due to court proceedings and 1 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 4 Stage 3 Panels the following was noted:

- 3 were responded to within the 15 working days of receiving the panel report.
- 1 went over timescale.

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 2024/25, 6 complainants referred their complaints to the Ombudsman. The details of the complaints are as follows:

- *Mr X complains about the Council's conduct during the Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment process and delay issuing the final EHC Plan.*

The Ombudsman did not investigate as the matters have already been considered by a Tribunal, and we could not achieve anything more.

- *Ms Y, complains that the Council has been at fault in the course of child protection action relating to her family and in failing to properly consider her complaint.*

The Ombudsman did not investigate this complaint that the Council was at fault in the course of child protection action, Investigation would not lead to a different outcome.

- *Miss X complains that the Council has failed to properly investigate her complaint that a malicious referral made to children's services in the area she resides came from a member of its staff.*

The Ombudsman did not investigate this complaint, this is because there is no evidence of fault on the Council's part, and they could not achieve the outcome the complainant wanted.

- *Mrs Y complained about the Council's actions in 1987 to 1988. She said the Council took her child into care, and she felt the Council and the foster parents colluded together. She said the matter has caused her significant distress and post-traumatic stress disorder. She wanted the Council to pay her compensation.*

The Ombudsman decided not to investigate this late complaint about the Council's children's services. They considered there was not a good reason for the delay and could not come to a sound conclusion regarding historical events.

- *Mr Y complained on a range of actions by the Council in its involvement with his family. These related to him, his former partner, and their children.*

The Ombudsman did not investigate this complaint as the matters complained of are either complaints about what happened in family court proceedings, or could reasonably have been raised there, so it would be correct for Mr Y to go to court if he is seeking to pursue that matter.

- *Mr & Mrs C complaint concerned the care of their son Z who is in care. They claimed the Council plans to rehome Z into a property that is unsuitable and may place them at risk. They also complained that the Council had failed to arrange suitable education provision for Z since July 2022.*

The Ombudsman will not investigate Mr & Mrs C's complaint this is because the matter forms part of court proceedings.

6.1 Vexatious Complainants

The Council will handle complaints impartially, objectively, and professionally, treating complainants with respect. Complainants and their families will not face adverse treatment for making a complaint.

However, if a complainant's behaviour is abusive, offensive, or threatening, the Council may restrict contact to protect staff. Legitimate queries or criticisms are acceptable if raised appropriately. If a complainant is unhappy with an outcome and simply seeks to challenge it, this will not result in them being considered as vexatious or unreasonable.

Furthermore, we appreciate that complainants may often be frustrated and aggrieved, and it is, therefore, important to consider the merits of their case rather than their attitude. However, if a complainant becomes unreasonable in an unnecessarily persistent or aggressive manner, action under the Vexatious Complaints Procedure may be considered.

In 2024/25 one individual receiving support from Childrens Social Care were made vexatious:

Miss X's conduct had become unreasonable in the unnecessarily persistent email communications with several senior officers regarding the same issues, and not accepting the advice given regarding the appropriate processes she must follow with regards to her queries.

Formal restrictions were invoked for a period of 12 months, outlining the local authority would only accept communications via email to a single point of contact email address and Council officers will not engage in telephone conversations without prior agreement.

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 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 was held on May 14th, 2024, and June 27th, 2024.

- From the complaints investigated under the Statutory children's procedure and the corporate complaints procedure, 20 investigations identified learning actions, such as training for staff, improvements to our processes and communication, changes to working practices and revision of our documentation to be implemented.

Examples of learning from complaints for this reporting year are detailed below:

Theme	Recommendation for improvement
Improved Processes	<p>We are updating our Practice Standards to include a chapter about "Recording." This includes the following guidance in regard to recording on a child or young person's record:</p> <p>Is accurate and shows clear decision-making, distinguishing between facts, first-hand information and information obtained from third parties, opinions, assessments, and decisions.</p> <p>Includes and explains the views and opinions of children, their families and other people in their network, including when they disagree with decisions made.</p> <p>The new recording chapter will be shared with all staff through the Practice Bulletin in February 2025. The Practice Bulletin is routinely reviewed within Team Meetings, and in bi-monthly meetings of the Learning and Review Group which all Team Managers, Deputy Team Managers and Advanced / Senior Practitioners, Independent Reviewing Officers and Service Managers are invited to attend.</p>
Changes to Social Work Practice	<p>September 2024 Practice Bulletin focused on the importance of Management and Oversight of Practice. The following learning was clearly communicated to all practitioners and Managers in response to the complaint:</p> <p>It is important that we protect the anonymity of those who make referrals to us when they have requested to remain anonymous. In doing so, they will feel able to share further information and intelligence which could be vital for safeguarding children and young people. In all documents which are shared with the family including Children & Family or Early Help Assessments, Initial Conference Reports or entries into chronologies – these should be referred to as "anonymous referrals."</p> <p>The Practice Bulletin is routinely reviewed within Team Meetings, and in bi-monthly meetings of the Learning and Review Group which all Team Managers, Deputy Team Managers and Advanced / Senior Practitioners, Independent Reviewing Officers and Service Managers are invited to attend.</p>
Improved Communication	<p>October 2024 Practice Week has focused on the theme of 'relationships', providing sessions for practitioners on how to develop and maintain positive relationships with the children and families that we support. December 2024 Practice Bulletin also discussed professionalism and learning from this complaint. The guidance was to be mindful about the language that we use at all times, and to give consideration to how this will be received and perceived by those we direct it to.</p>

8.0 Compliments

8.1 What is a compliment?

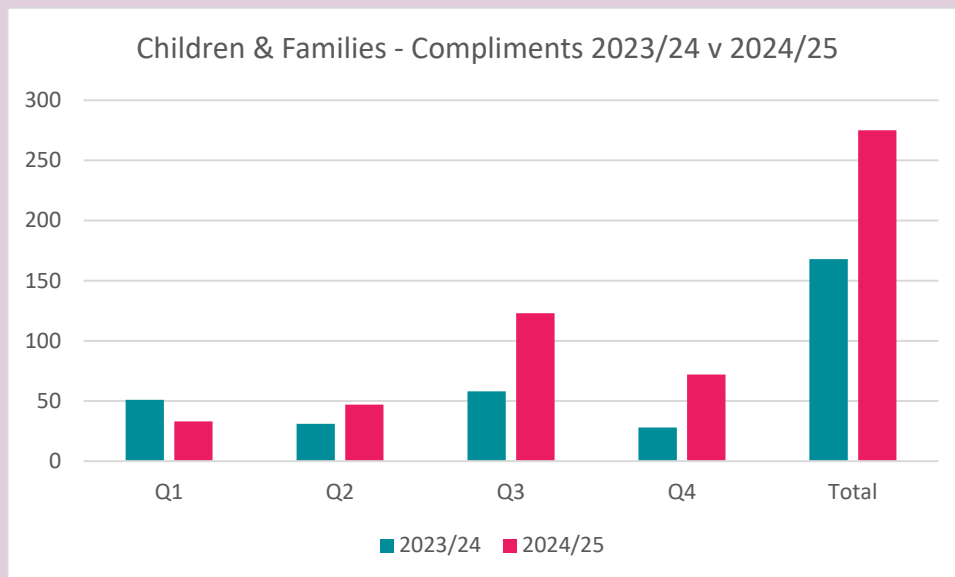
A compliment is defined by

"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.

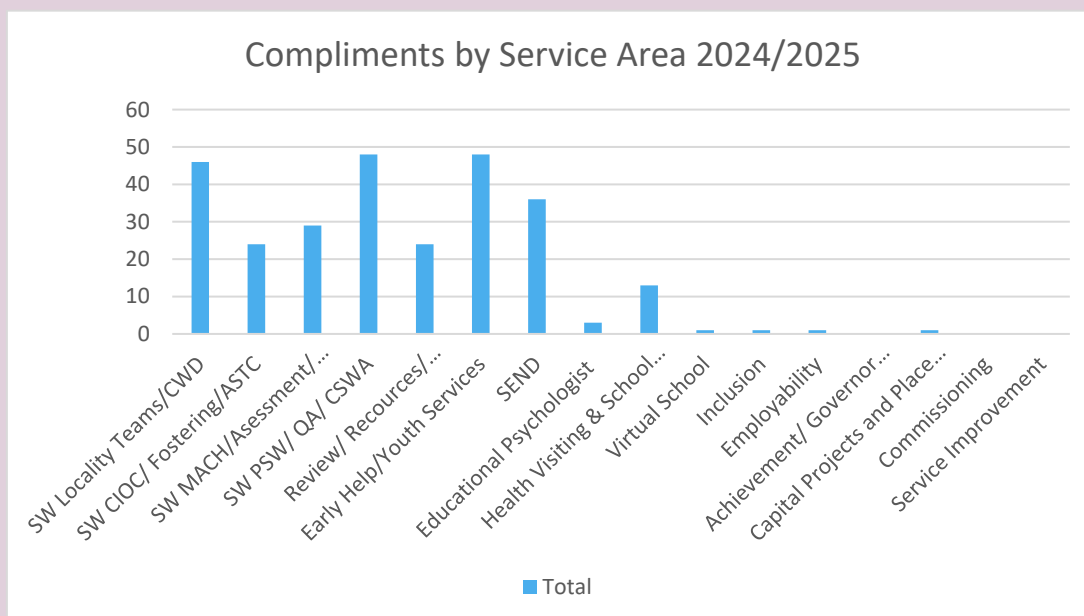
8.2 Number of compliments?

In 2024/25 the Children and Families Directorate received 275 compliments. The graph below shows the number of compliments received each quarter compared to 2023/24.



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 275 compliments received.



8.3 Examples of Compliments

Thank you so much for your session today. It was brilliant! The passion for your work shines so strongly and your knowledge is exceptional.

It was a perfectly balanced session that informed our colleagues regionally and nationally about your work and helped them to gain perspectives on supporting UAS young people. It had such an impact, colleagues after the session have been feeding back and wanted us to pass on their thanks also, some said they felt "emotional" and found you both "inspirational".

Thank you for developing a very informative presentation. The case study of the young person brought your work to life brilliantly and you both answered the many questions thrown at you very well.

You girls are so so so so so amazing and I can't thank you enough for that information, it's made me quite tearful, and you've helped me the most with this situation.

Seriously thank you so so much, I'm braving court on the 7th of November and my heart feels so much calmer knowing you from Redcar have given me all that information I need. There are no words to explain how grateful I am for those documents. That has absolutely restored my faith in humanity and seriously wish and pray all the best and luck, peace and gratitude in the whole wide world. I'd like to send some Christmas flowers to your office if this is possible, please reply to the address. This year has given me the time to reflect and change some of my ways and fill my heart back up with the love.

In the meeting, which was lengthy, and following the scaling and decisions, the grandparents wanted it on record the work the social worker, Emily, has done in their life saying 'we couldn't have survived without you', the mother said even though there have been issues which Emily has rightly raised and challenged, that they never felt judged, that she is easy to talk to and communicates well and is a massive support. They all said that the child tells her everything. They wanted it on record to say a massive thank you.

I would just like to pass on how much the family Hub team contribute to the families in our community

I often work with Tina who provides invaluable support for families which is further enhanced by the domestic abuse experience from previously facilitating Freedom.

The Little Explorers session is so well attended and that is testament to the girls running it, the families love attending and its clear from the numbers of buggies/ happy smiling faces following the session how much the families feel the benefit

Baby massage sessions are so helpful for mums lacking confidence, struggling with mental health issues

The whole team is so friendly, welcoming and approachable and provide such an amazing service to our families.

I just wanted to say a heartfelt thank you for yesterday, we both left the meeting feeling so positive and heard and you have such a gift of being so intuitive of our situation. I love how thorough you are in your approach to ensure EVERY bit of detail is covered 😊 In fact, you make it look easy as you move around everyone in the room! I know it will be far from easy listening, hearing and then being able to pick out the pertinent detail so quickly to advise. We honestly are beyond blessed having you coordinate all of this with us -so thank you so very much indeed!

9.0 Conclusion

This year has shown a reduction in Statutory Childrens complaints. This is a result of teams working effectively to discuss concerns raised at the outset, working to offer a quick resolution to benefit the children and their families with an appropriate outcome. Teams are offering an informal resolution as a Service Request which is reducing the need for escalation to the complaints team which ultimately ensures children and families feel listened too and supported.

The complaints team has effectively used the Ombudsman guidance on what makes a statutory complaint, this has resulted in more complaints being investigated under the corporate complaints procedure when is it appropriate.

The number of complaints received through the Children and Families Complaints Procedure decreased in 2024/25. 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.

The increase in compliments received from service users and their families, along with the praise from our peers, is a testament to the high quality of service we are providing to our children and families. This positive feedback highlights our commitment to excellence and the significant impact of our efforts in delivering exceptional care and support.

The Childrens Social Care Complaints Officer now sits within the central corporate team. This strategic move has ensured a consistent approach across the entire local authority, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of our complaint handling processes. It has provided a robust resource, enabling us to address concerns more comprehensively. This centralisation has significantly improved our overall awareness of issues raised across all directorates, fostering a more cohesive and responsive service.

In addition, having a single complaints team for service users to contact makes the process of raising complaints easier and more accessible. Complainants can now raise their concerns with greater ease, ensuring their issues are addressed promptly and effectively.

10.0 Future Developments 2025/26

- Continue to work with all staff across Children's Social Care to enhance information shared about the complaints process, improving complaint investigations and responses.
- To apply effective and meaningful lessons learned.
- Work collaboratively within the Corporate Complaints Team to develop effective training about complaint resolutions and the handling of service requests, providing a consistent approach across the entire Council.
- The complaints team has devised a uniformed approach to the record-keeping of complaints for the whole local authority. The corporate complaints team will continue to utilise this system, enabling better performance monitoring of complaints and the production of effective data against statutory response times. This improvement aims to enhance our ability to track and address complaints more efficiently, ensuring a higher standard of service.
- Resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity in a manner appropriate to resolve it speedily and efficiently. Utilising service requests where possible to provide complainants with an appropriate, timely outcome without the need for a detailed investigation.
- We will review our current Childrens Social Care complaint materials and handling procedures to ensure they align with the guidance provided by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)