



Children and Families
Directorate

**Complaints, Service Requests
& Compliments**

Annual Report
April 2025 to March 2026

Relationships that Connect, Building our Communities



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	6
4.0 Role of the Complaints Officer	7
5.0 Key Findings/Summary 2025/26	7
5.1 Number of Statutory Complaints	8
5.2 Complaint Outcomes	9
5.3 Breakdown by Service Area	10
5.4 Complaint Findings	11
6.0 Complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman	12-13
6.1 Vexatious Complainants	14
7.0 Lessons Learnt	14-15
8.0 Compliments	16
8.1 What is a Compliment	16
8.2 Number of Compliments	16-17
8.3 Examples of Compliments	18
9.0 Conclusion	19
10.0 Future Developments 2026/27	20

1.0 Executive Summary

This is the Children's Social Care Annual Complaints, Service Requests and Compliments report for the financial year 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026.

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.

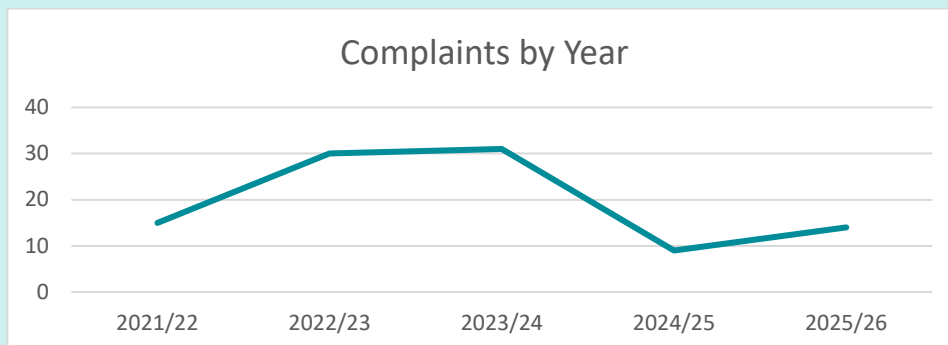
5.0 Key Findings/Summary 2025/26

- **Compliments** – During 2025/26 we received 511 compliments, compared to 275 in the previous year.
- **Service Request** – We received 88 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 14 Statutory Stage 1 complaints in 2025/26, of which 50% were responded to within statutory timescales.
- **Stage 2** – Four complaints were progressed to a Stage 2 investigation. Of the four Stage 2 complaint investigations, none were responded to within the statutory timescales, two were outside of statutory timescales. One Stage 2 complaint is ongoing, and one was withdrawn and investigated under the Information Governance complaints procedure.
- **Stage 3** – During this period there were 0 requests made to move to a Stage 3 panel.
- **Ombudsman enquiries** – During 2025/26 **eight** complaints were considered by the Ombudsman.
- **Corporate procedure** – During 2025/26 The council investigated **36** Childrens complaints at Stage 1. **10** complaints were progressed to a stage 2 investigation. This is compared **to 25 Stage 1's and 13 Stage 2's in 2024/25.**

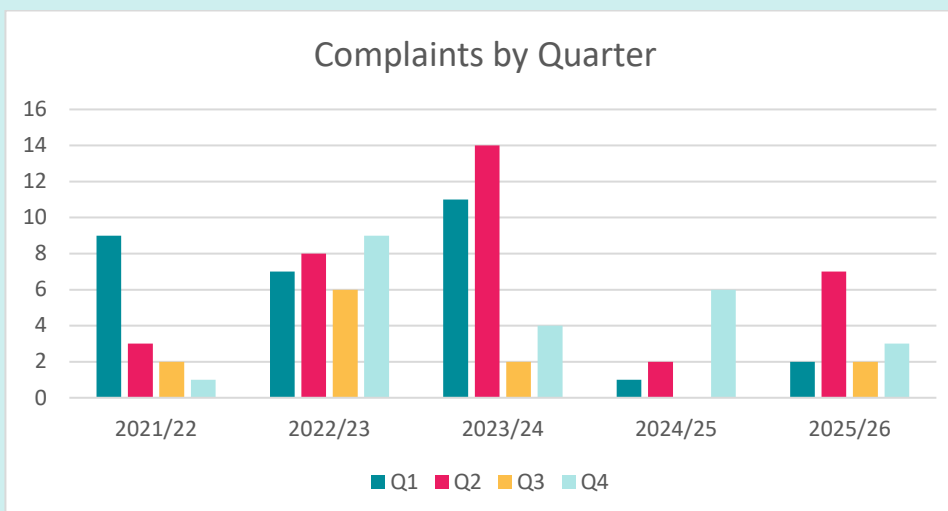
5.1 Number of Statutory Complaints

During 2025/26 the Local Authority received 14 Statutory Stage 1 complaints this is compared to 9 in the previous year. This has been an increase in Stage 1 complaints. 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 2021/22 and 2025/26.



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

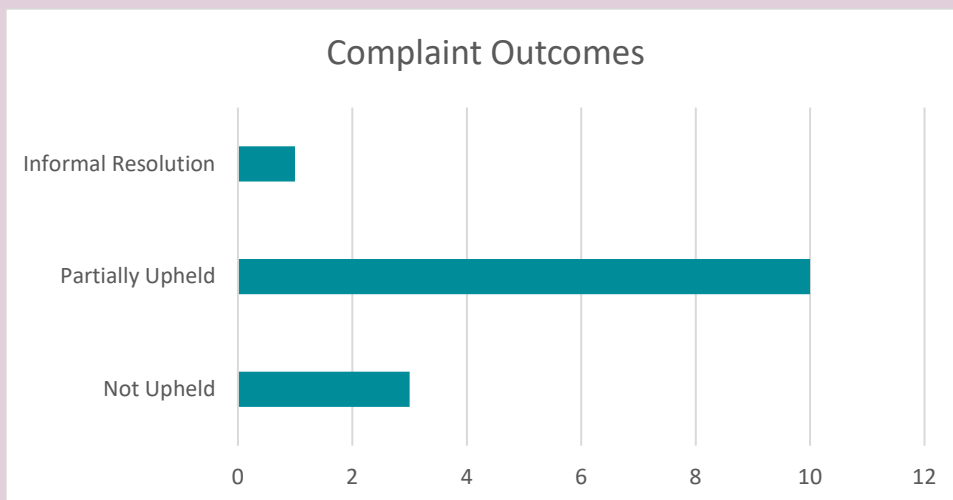


5.2 Complaint Outcomes

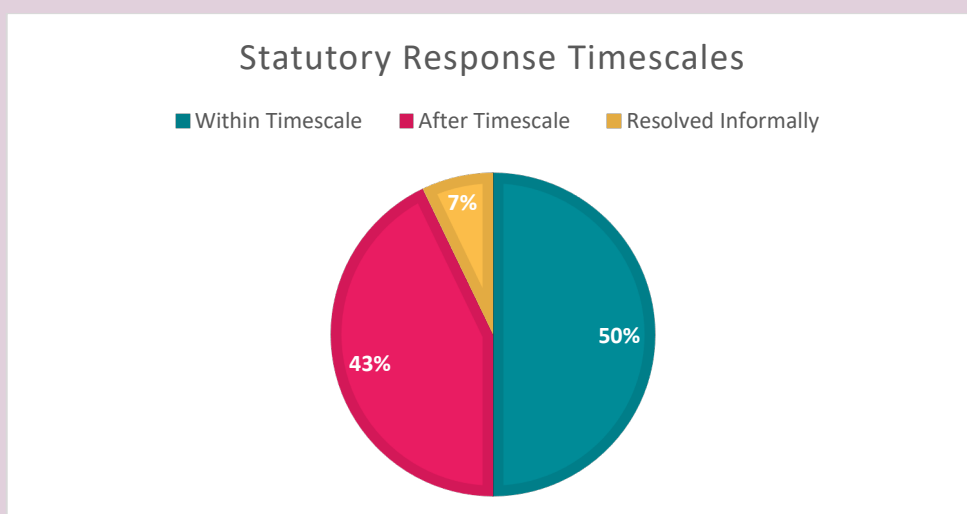
Of the 14 Statutory complaints received during 2025/26:

- 1 was Informal Resolution
- 10 were partially upheld
- 3 were not upheld

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

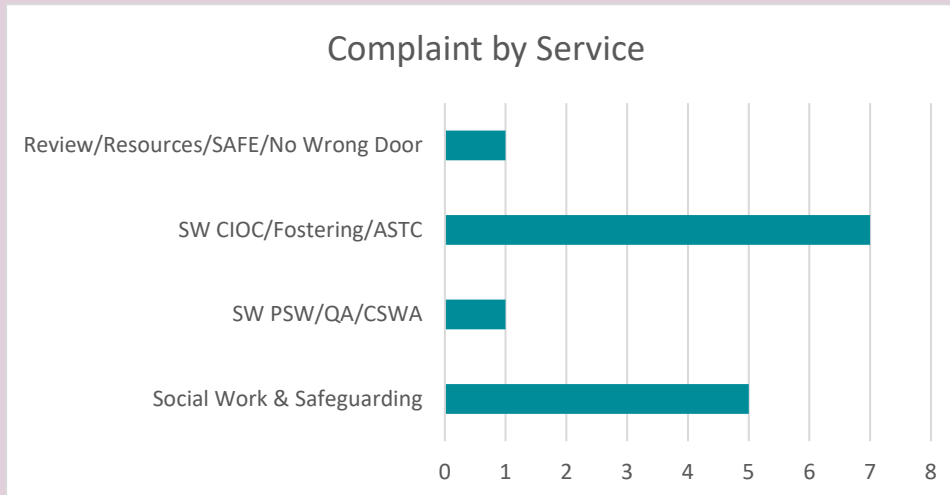


The graph below shows the number of Stage 1 complaints responded to within the 20-working day timescale. Of the 6 complaints that went over timescale, 1 went 30 working days over deadline.

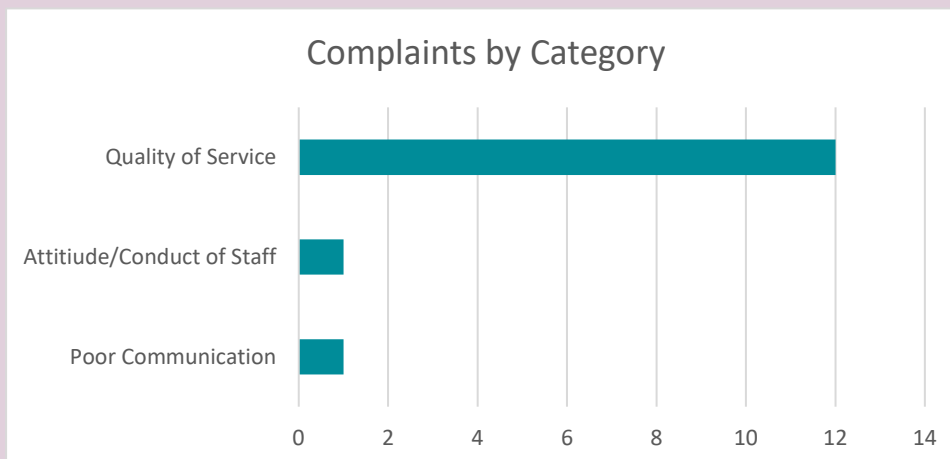


5.3 Breakdown by Service Area

5 complaints were received in relation to Safeguarding issues, Children in Our Care received 7 complaints.



12 of the complaints received were due to quality of service.



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 14 Stage 1 responses the following was noted:

- 1 was withdrawn and handled informally.
- 1 response was within the initial 10 working day timescale.
- 6 were responded to within the extended 20 working day timescale.
- 6 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 4 Stage 2 responses the following was noted:

- 2 went over the 65 working day timescale.
- 1 was withdrawn and investigated under the Information Governance Complaints Procedure.
- 1 complaint is still ongoing.

At Stage 2 the outcomes were:

- 1 complaint was partially upheld, 1 was upheld, 1 was withdrawn due to be investigated under another procedure 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.

- In 25/26 no complaints went to Stage 3 panel.

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 2025/26, 8 complainants referred their complaints to the Ombudsman. The details of the complaints are as follows:

- 1. *Miss X complains about the way the Council dealt with a referral for help when her husband was given a terminal prognosis. Her late husband wanted his daughter to remain in Miss X's care when he passed away. Miss X says the Council prevented this and caused significant distress. She also believes the Council has failed to manage, share or correct data and recorded contrary to the General Data Protection Regulations.*

The Ombudsman decided not to investigate Miss X's complaint because it is not likely they would add anything significant to the responses she has received from the Council. The Council's investigation appears to have been proportionate and the outcomes defensible.

- 2. *Ms X complained about the conduct of the Social Worker supporting her family. She said this impacted her children's well-being and education. Ms X had a number of complaints upheld by the Council. She complained the Council has not made itself sufficiently accountable for these complaints or formally apologised.*

The Ombudsman decided not to investigate Ms X's complaint about the actions of a social worker and the response of Children's Social Care. This is because it is unlikely investigation by us would lead to a different outcome.

- 3. Mr X complains the Council has prevented contact with his son and did not provide reasonable adjustments to help him to make a complaint.

The Ombudsman decided not to investigate Mr X's complaint about the Council preventing contact with his son. This is because there is not enough evidence of fault to justify an investigation.

- 4. Ms M complained the Council had not arranged occupational therapy (OT) for her son. She wanted compensation so she could arrange the therapy herself.

We will not investigate Ms M's complaint that her son has not received the occupational therapy (OT) in his education, health and care (EHC) plan because he has now had the therapy and has been discharged by the OT service. There is no worthwhile outcome achievable.

- 5. Miss X complained the Council: failed to record a visit by a social worker she said happened in May 2017; recorded a case note in April 2018, the content of which she disagrees with and; stored her personal data on the file of another person. Miss X said these matters caused her distress.

The Ombudsman decided they would not investigate Miss X's complaint about how the Council handled her personal data. The complaint is late, and there are no good reasons for us to investigate now. In any case, the Information Commissioner's Office is better placed to consider it.

- 6. Mrs Y complains regarding how the council handled her grandchild's case in 2018 to 2019.

The Ombudsman decided not to investigate as they deemed the complaint late and that there were other bodies better placed to consider the issues raised.

- 7. Mr X complains about how the council supported them whilst they were foster carers.

The Ombudsman have chosen to investigate and this is ongoing.

- 8. Miss X complains that she feels the council have continuously mishandled her daughter's case.

The Ombudsman decided the complaint is premature. They advised us to contact the complainant and ensure that the complaints procedure is completed. This complaint is currently being handled under a Stage 2.

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 2025/26 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 for Childrens Services with the Complaints Manager and Complaints Officer on 20th January 2025.

- From the complaints investigated under the Statutory children's procedure and the corporate complaints procedure, 15 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 recommendations for learning from complaints for this reporting year are detailed below:

Theme	Recommendation for improvement
Improved Processes	The Local Authority should review the arrangement for the receipt and onwards transmission of referrals/notifications from the EDT, so that the relevant personnel are informed in a timescale that ensures that they can respond to enquiries from parents and other professionals regarding that individual child immediately after office hours start.
Changes to Social Work Practice	Local authority and Children's Services staff to be reminded to gather information from all agencies and partners that will permit a holistic assessment of the family/young person and permit an appropriate analysis and conclusions about their needs.
Improved Communication	We have introduced feedback meetings as part of our complaints process following Stage 2 investigations. Following recommendations from Stage 3 panels that such meetings would be beneficial, this has now been adopted as standard practice.

8.0 Compliments

8.1 What is a compliment?

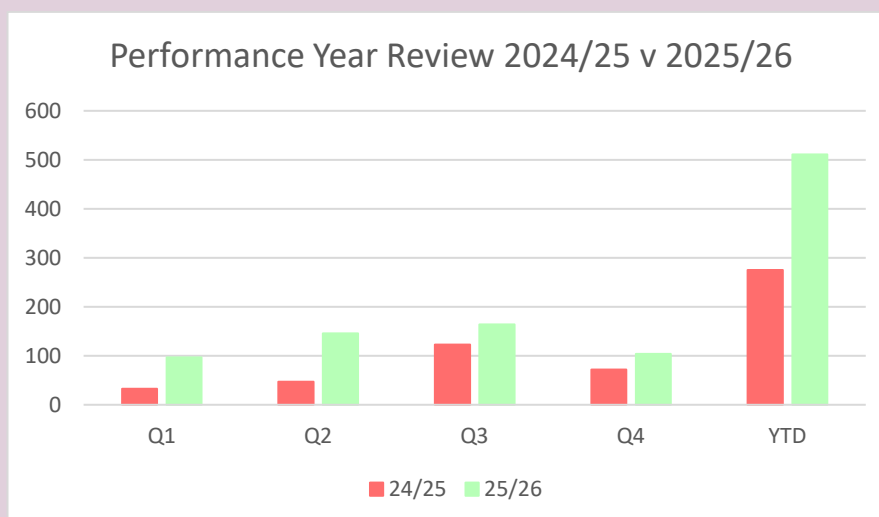
A compliment is defined by

"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.

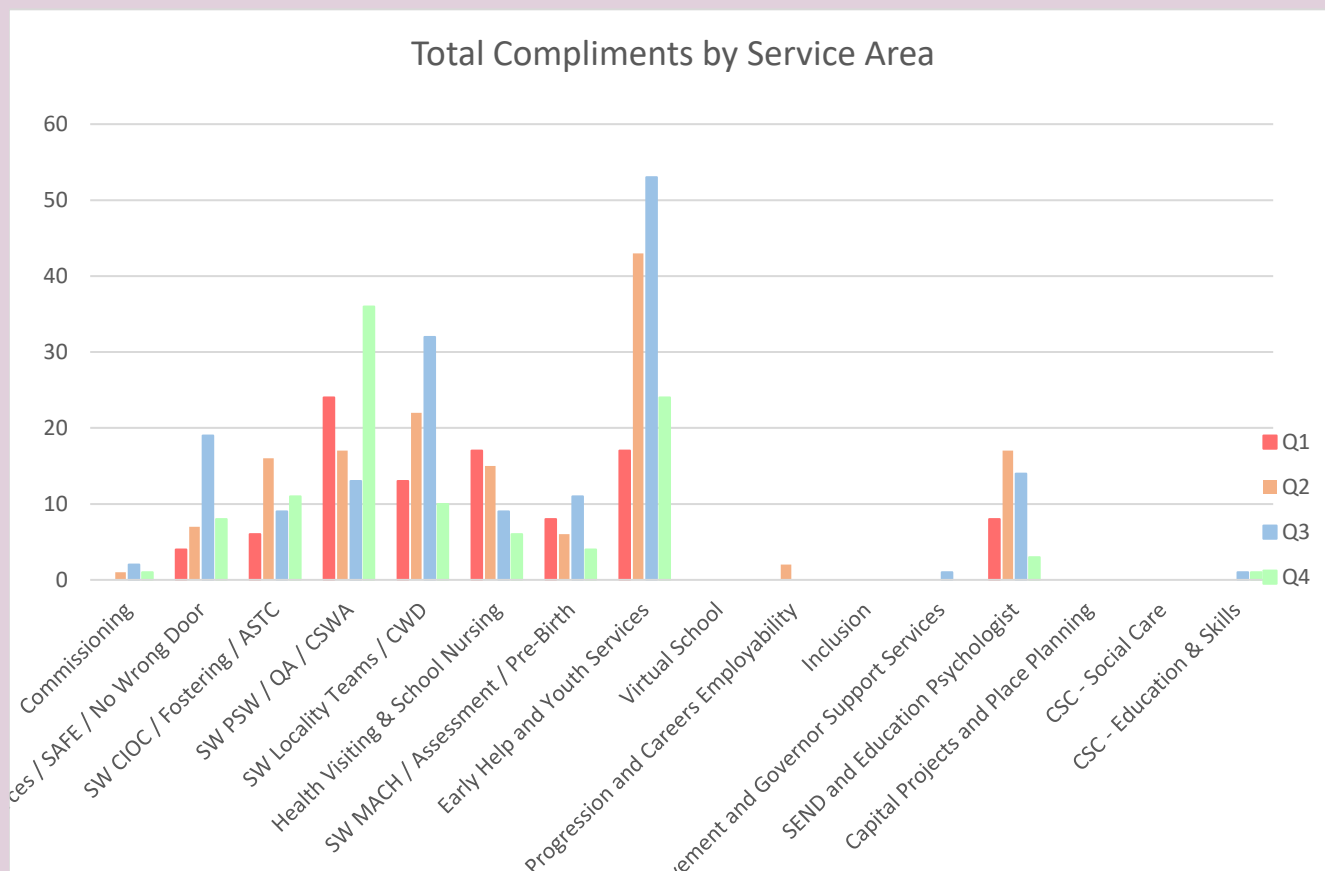
8.2 Number of compliments?

In 2025/26 the Children and Families Directorate received 511 compliments. The graph below shows the number of compliments received each quarter compared to 2024/25.



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 511 compliments received.



8.3 Examples of Compliments

I also want to thank you and the SEND team for making my education journey so smooth! It's been a rough couple of years, and your team is amazing. You have given me my independence and my life back!

I asked X who was the most important person in his life, and he said 'Andrea, my social worker'. I asked why Andrea was important to him and he said, 'because she keeps me safe and that is what is important to me'.

"I wanted to thank you for helping me and my family when I was struggling and I'm always grateful for you and all help and support that you give me and my family Since I come to this country you been there for me always, I pray for you always because without you I don't know where I would be and how my future would look like".

Thank you for being with me every step of the way il never forget it, you've been truly amazing ❤️ (When talking about the upcoming birth of her child the young person replied)'and il sure tell them when their old enough how amazing you've been and how you've made me a better person ❤️"

From start to finish you have been a God send to us. I didn't have a great experience with social services as a child but you have absolutely restored my faith in the system.

Not only that, you have always made XXXX feel comfortable and she has always looked forward to seeing you. You really have gone above and beyond, and you will always be an important part of our story.

9.0 Conclusion

This year has shown a slight increase in Statutory Childrens complaints. We are still 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 has increased in 2025/26. 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.

We have received a significant 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 continues to sit within the central corporate team. This 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.

10.0 Future Developments 2026/27

- Continue to work with all staff across Children's Social Care to enhance information shared about the complaints process, improving complaint investigations and responses.
- 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.
- Continue to adopt 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 offer Feedback meetings following Stage 2 complaints as standard practice.
- 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) new versions will be published.
- Childrens Complaints Handling training has been scheduled for July 2026 to improve staff confidence, enhance consistency in approach, and strengthen overall complaint management practices.
- Developing and implementing a new, structured process for capturing, recording, and analysing learning from complaints. This will enable a more comprehensive and in-depth review of themes, root causes, and recurring issues, ensuring that insights are not only documented but translated into meaningful service improvements. The process will support consistent recording, clearer accountability, and more effective dissemination of learning across teams, ultimately driving continuous improvement in service quality and user experience.