



Children and Families  
Directorate

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

# 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
<b>5.1 Stage 1 Statutory Complaints</b> .....	6
<b>5.2 Stage 2 Statutory Complaints</b> .....	8
<b>5.3 Stage 3 Statutory Complaints</b> .....	9
<b>5.4 Complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)</b> .....	10
<b>5.5 Corporate Complaints</b> .....	11
6 Organisational Learning .....	12
7 Voice of the Child .....	13
8 Equal Opportunities Monitoring.....	14
9 Repeat and Vexatious Complaints .....	14
10 Compliments .....	15
11 Conclusions .....	16

# 1. Introduction

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

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

# 2. Complaint Description and Procedure

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

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

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

### 3. Stages of a Complaint

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

<b>Informal Resolution Stage</b>	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.
<b>Stage 1</b>	The complaint is investigated by the person or team providing services locally. The Council will respond within 20 working days.
<b>Stage 2</b>	The complaint is investigated by an Investigating Officer and Independent Person. The investigation should produce a report and an adjudication within 65 working days.
<b>Stage 3</b>	A panel of 3 independent people will consider the complaint and produce recommendations to resolve the complaint.
<b>Local Government Ombudsman</b>	In addition to the above stages, the complainant can refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). A complainant can approach the Ombudsman at any stage; however, the Ombudsman is unlikely to consider the complaint if it has not been through all stages of the complaint procedure. In certain circumstances, early referral after Stage 2 can be considered.

## 4 Overview of Representations made to the Local Authority

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

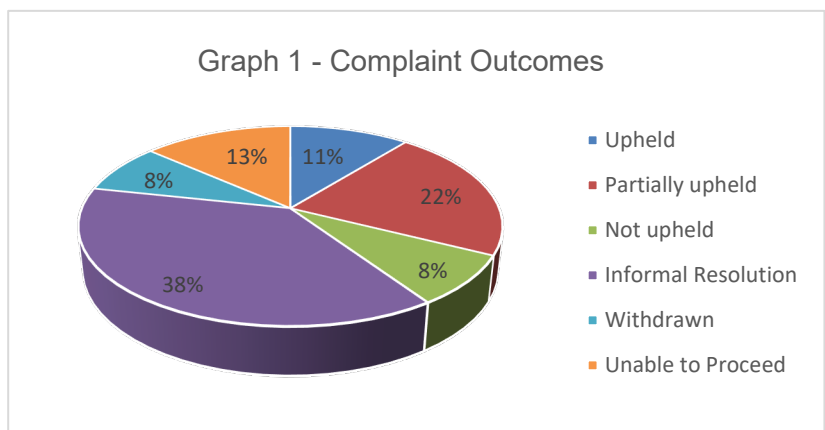
## 5 Analysis of Complaints

### 5.1 Stage 1 Statutory Complaints

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

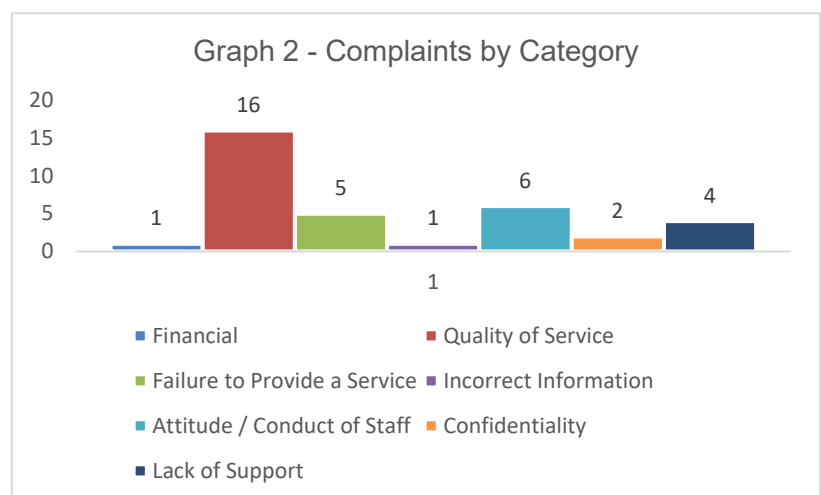
Of the 37 complaints concluded this year:

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

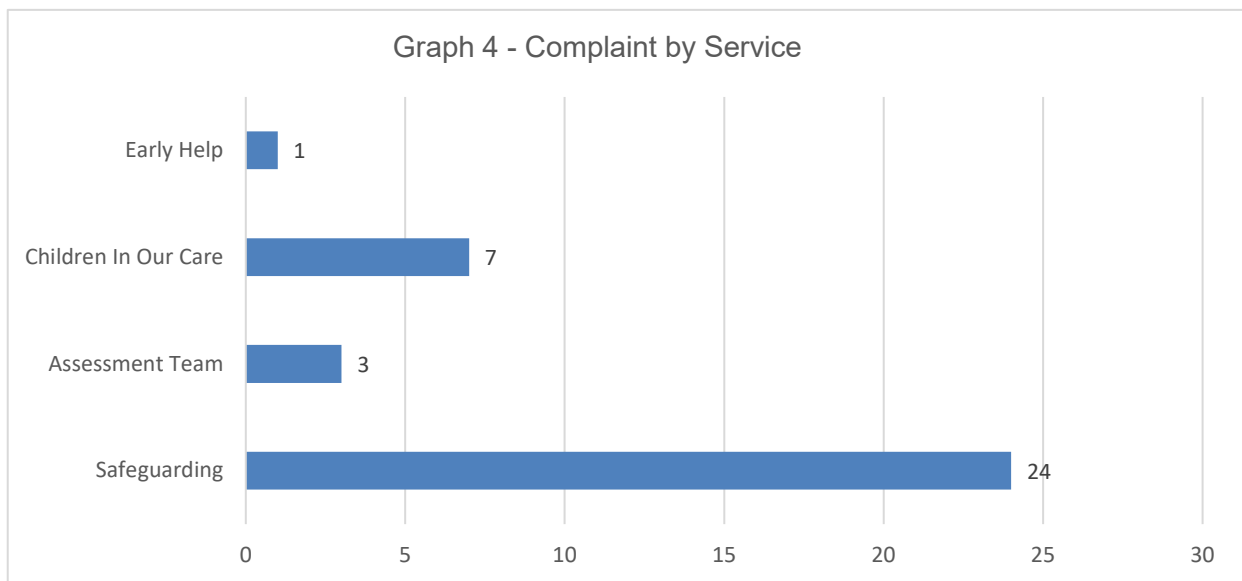
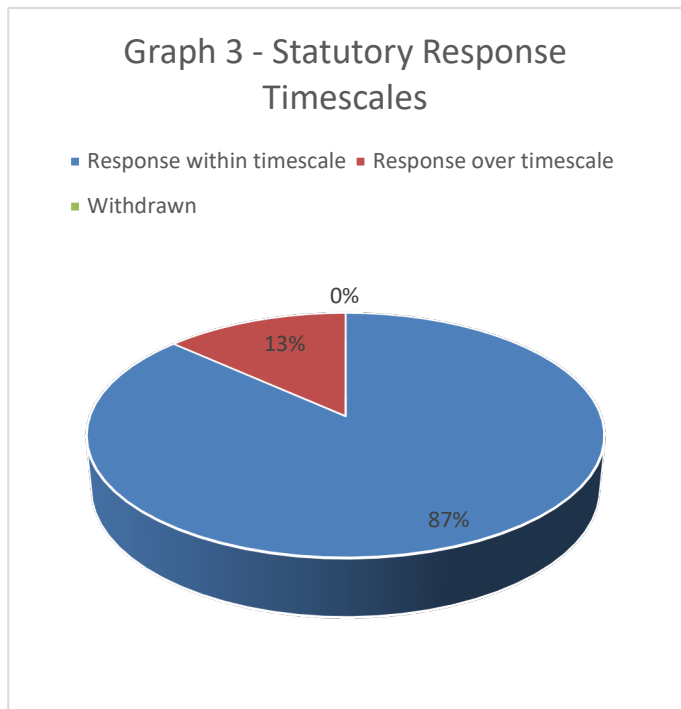


- 1 was withdrawn before proceeding to a Stage 1 investigation
- 2 were withdrawn during the Stage 1 investigation
- 5 (13%) received were deemed outside of the complaint remit, as issues had already been investigated, were historic, or were being dealt with within the Court arena.

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

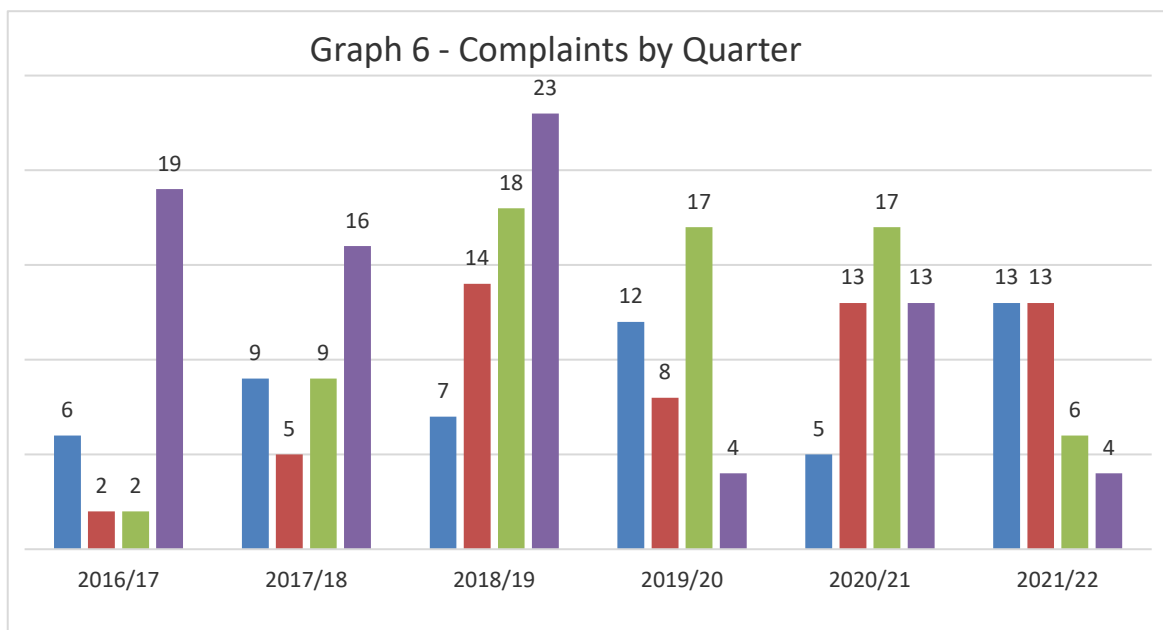
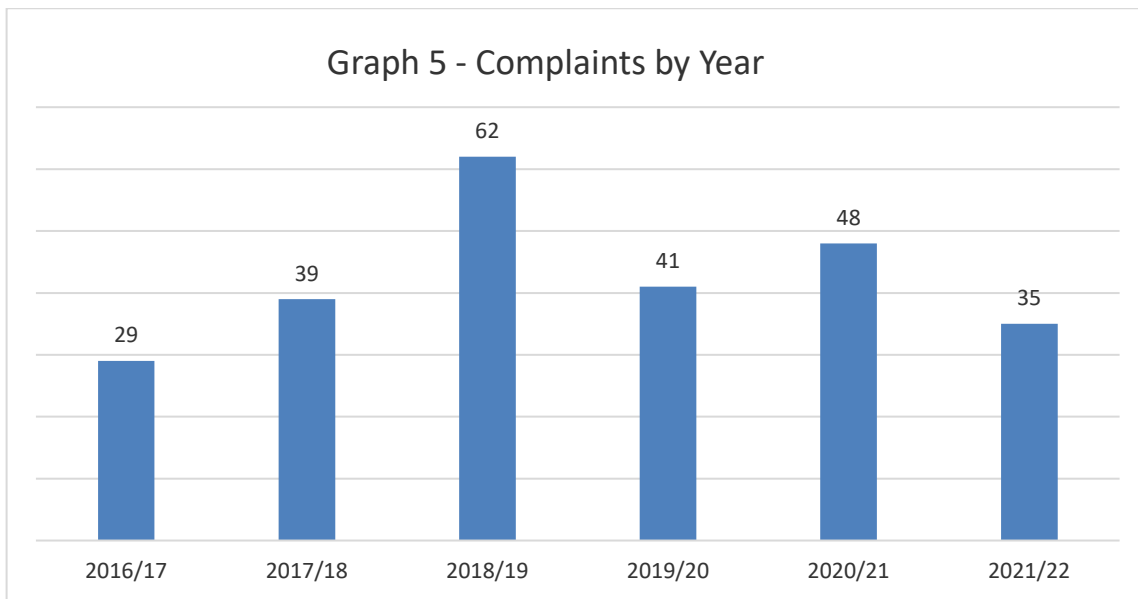


We have a statutory duty to respond to complaints within a specified time frame. For Stage 1 complaints this is within 10 working days (up to a maximum of 20 working days). Of the 17 Stage 1 statutory complaints responded to this year, 5 responses were within the initial 10 working day timescale, and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



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

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



## 5.2 Stage 2 Statutory Complaints

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **5.4 Complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **5.5 Corporate Complaints**

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

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

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

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

previous year was also concluded in 2021/22.

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

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

## **6 Organisational Learning**

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

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

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

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

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

Next steps in respect of our learning from complaints includes:

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

## **7 Voice of the Child**

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

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

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

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

## **8 Equal Opportunities Monitoring**

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

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

## **9 Repeat and Vexatious Complaints**

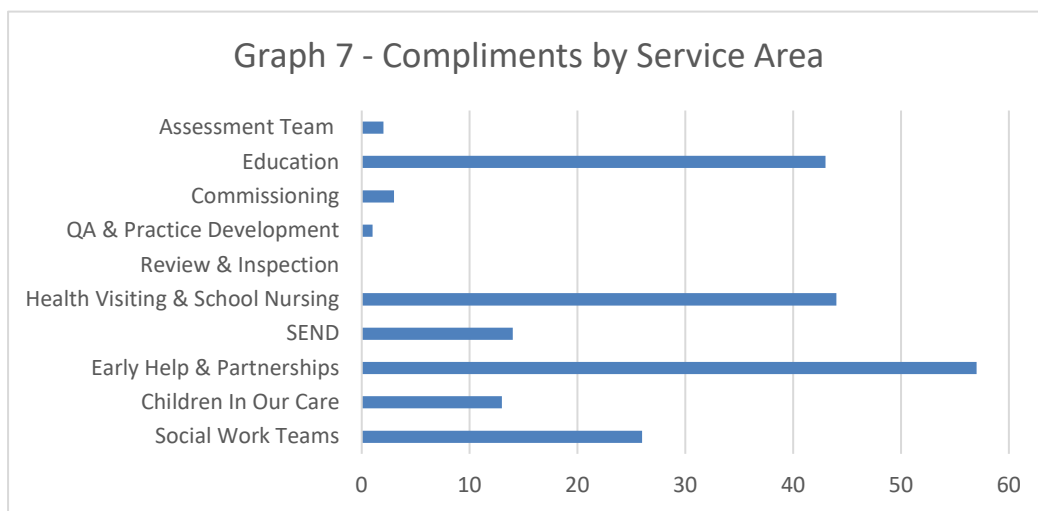
Vexatious or repeated complaints impact greatly on the time of both the investigating officer and Directorate staff and hinders the completion of complaints. In 2021/22, we did not identify any complainants as being vexatious.

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

## 10 Compliments

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

Graph 7 identifies compliments received by service area.



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

Examples of compliments received include:

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

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

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

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

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

## 11 Conclusions

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

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

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



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

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