

Solihull Council

Annual Complaints Report 2022/23

Children's Services



Annual Complaints & Representations Report

Solihull Children's Services

1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023

1 Introduction

This is the Annual Report of Solihull Council's Children's Services Complaints and Representations, covering the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

1.1 Children's Social Work Services

Every Local Authority with a responsibility for Social Care Services is required to provide an Annual Report, outlining the workings of both their Adults and Children's complaints and representations procedures.

1.2 The procedure for dealing with children's statutory complaints (those raised by or on behalf of children relating to Solihull Social Care Services) and representations is determined by the following legislation:

- The Children Act 1989, Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.
- The Children & Adoption Act 2002 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the accompanying guidance 'Getting the Best from Complaints' (DfES July 2006)

1.3 The requirement contained in the Children Act 1989; Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006, is that every Local Authority with a responsibility for Children's Social Care Services is obliged to have in post a Complaints Manager, part of whose role is to provide an annual report into the workings of the complaints and representations procedures.

1.4 Legitimate complaints relating to Children's Services, which do not fall within the boundaries of the Statutory Social Care Complaints Process, are processed via the Council's Corporate Complaints Process.

1.5 Information on how to complain, comment or make a compliment about Solihull Council's Children's Services can be found on the Council's webpages at <https://www.solihull.gov.uk/Tell-us/Complain-about-childrens-services>

The Council does have a translation and interpreting service for users of Council services where their first language is not English or if, due to their disability or impairment, they require alternative formats such as British Sign Language, large print etc...

1.6 Information specific to Children in Care can be found on the Internet at the following link <https://www.ovossolihull.co.uk/> Age specific, printable leaflets have also been designed and are available on this site which explain the complaints process, provide contact details for making a complaint and suggest other people who children can talk to about their concerns. This website and the leaflets also provide contact details for the Council's contracted advocacy service for young people, NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service) should this be required.

2 The Statutory Complaints Procedure

2.1 The Statutory Complaints and Representations procedure serves four main purposes:

- a. To provide a way for a child/young person, or a person acting on their behalf, to give their views of the service they have received.
- b. To enable Council services to learn from complaints and compliments and to change, review or maintain its services accordingly.
- c. To ensure that complaints are properly recorded and acted upon and that where necessary, things that have gone wrong are put right promptly.
- d. To ensure that both staff and service users understand their rights and responsibilities within the complaints process.

2.2 The Children's Services and Skills Directorate, in conjunction with the Customer Relations Manager, has the discretion to refuse to consider a complaint which was not raised within twelve months of the incident/event occurring. In these cases, the Customer Relations Manager should write to advise the complainant that their complaint cannot be considered, explaining the reasons why they have adopted this position. Each complaint is considered on its' own merits and will be accepted beyond the twelve-month timescale, where it is considered that a fair and transparent response can still be provided. This approach is outlined on the Council's complaints webpage (see 1.5 above).

2.3 The Statutory Complaints Procedure, used for complaints raised by, or on behalf children receiving a service from Children's Social Care Services, has three stages:

- Stage One - Local resolution.
- Stage Two - An independent complaint investigation.
- Stage Three - An independently chaired Review Panel.

2.4 Stage One – Local Resolution

Stage 1 offers the relevant social work team, the first opportunity to consider the complaint and respond on behalf of the Directorate. In most cases and where possible, this involves the Team Manager/Assistant Team Manager making contact with the complainant in order to resolve complaints as early as possible. This gives us the opportunity to either apologise for any mistakes made and correct any resulting disadvantage (upholding the complaint); or establish that the work undertaken was correct and enables us to explain this to the complainant (not upholding the complaint). It is important that the response is informative, accurate, fair, timely and as helpful as it can be.

There is an initial statutory 10 working day timescale for responding to the complaint, with a possible extension to 20 working days with the agreement of the complainant, where complaints are complex or if time is needed to appoint an advocate.

2.5 Stage Two – Investigation

Where a complainant is unhappy with the outcome of their Stage 1 statutory complaint, they can request consideration of their complaints at Stage 2. All Stage 2 investigations are carried out by an Independent Investigating Officer, alongside an Independent Person, as required by the regulations. The Independent Investigating Officer and Independent Person, compile a report with findings, conclusions and recommendations. A relevant senior member of Children's Social Care Services staff then adjudicates the reports and provides a formal response to the complainant, along with an action plan to implement any recommendations or changes arising from the learning from the complaint.

The timescale for a Stage 2 investigation is 25 working days; however, this can be extended to 65 working days, with the agreement of the complainant, if there is a significant amount of detail or there are complex issues to investigate.

2.6 Stage Three – Review Panel

Where a complainant remains unhappy with the outcome of the Stage 2 investigation, they can request a Stage 3 Review Panel. The Panel is made up of three independent people and is administered by the Council's Democratic Services Team. The timescale for setting up the Panel is 30 working days. The Panel's remit is to review the investigation; however, it should not re-investigate complaint. The Panel provides their findings in writing to the complainant within 5 working days; the Directorate then considers the Panel's findings and produces the Local Authority's response to the Panel's findings, which is sent to the complainant within 15 working days.

3 Complaints about other areas of Children's Services

3.1 The procedure for dealing with complaints concerning other areas of Children's Services or complaints from adults regarding Children's Social Work Services about a service provided directly to them, is the Corporate Complaints Procedure, which is an internally determined procedure.

3.2 The Corporate Complaints Procedure

This procedure is used to process complaints about issues such as:

- a service provided directly to family members (other than the child) involved with Children's Social Work Services
- services provided by the Council to foster carers
- complaints about services provided by the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Service
- complaints concerning any other aspect of Children's Services (unless an alternative appeals process is already in place for this purpose).

3.2.1 The Corporate Complaints Procedure has two stages:

3.2.2 Stage One

This stage is similar to Stage 1 of the Statutory Complaints Procedure and offers the relevant Team Manager, the first opportunity for considering the complaint and responding on behalf of the Directorate. It is good practice, where appropriate, for the Team Manager to make contact with the complainant in order to resolve complaints as early as possible. Complaints at this stage should be responded to within 20 days from the date that the detail of the complaint is agreed with the Performance and Complaints Team. This timeframe can be extended to 30 working days; however, this should only be in exceptional circumstances and with the agreement of the complainant.

3.2.3 Stage Two

If the customer is not satisfied that the investigator's response has answered all of the points raised/they are not happy with the resolution, then they can request to proceed to Stage 2 of the procedure.

A *review* of the Stage 1 complaint response at Stage 2 should be co-ordinated by or on behalf of the Head of Service and a final response sent to the complainant. This should be completed within 20 working days (where the Head of Service is involved in the complaint at Stage 1, another senior member of staff should review the complaint at Stage 2).

4 The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

If a complainant remains unhappy after exhausting all stages of a complaints process, they can take their complaint to the LGSCO. A complainant can access the LGSCO at any point during the complaint process; however, the LGSCO normally allows the Local Authority the opportunity to process a complaint through every stage of the appropriate complaint's procedure, before investigating it themselves. Complaints referred back to a Local Authority by the LGSCO to process are classed as 'premature' complaints.

5 The Performance and Complaints Team

In Solihull during 2022-23, the responsibility for the management and day-to-day administration of complaints for Children's Services, lay with the Performance and Complaints Team.

The Performance and Complaints Team is part of the Business Intelligence and Improvement Division within the Resources Directorate. The Performance and Complaints Team strive to ensure that:

- they achieve respectful dialogue with all complainants and work with investigating professionals to provide the best response in the most efficient timescales
- complaints are acknowledged within 3 working days
- complaints are responded to within the timescales determined by the appropriate complaint's procedure, by working with the service area to achieve this

- complaints and compliments are accurately recorded, which leads to accurate performance data being produced
- when things have gone wrong, they are put right as quickly as possible
- both complainants and staff understand the relevant complaints procedure, how it relates to them and their rights and responsibilities within it
- any learning from complaints is acknowledged and that they work with the appropriate service area to ensure that the necessary changes are made to improve services provided
- internal or professional mediation is instigated, where appropriate
- high quality and timely performance reporting is provided to management teams, to ensure that they are aware of issues arising and can work with the Performance and Complaints Team and their staff, to resolve these and maintain a high-quality service to service users.

6. Contacting the Performance and Complaints Team

- 6.1 The information provided on Solihull Council's Internet pages enables service users to make a complaint in differing ways, by e-mail, letter, telephone, webform and leaflet and in 2022-23 the Performance and Complaints Team was contacted via the first four of these methods. The on-line leaflet was not used during 2022-23. All complainants with an email address receive both acknowledgements and responses for their complaints via the Council's secure e-mail system, unless otherwise requested. This is a very cost effective and efficient way for service users to communicate with the Council and the Council with them and provides an accurate way of tracking communication between the two parties.
- 6.2 The Performance and Complaints Team correspond directly with all complainants / their advocates, whether their complaints are statutory or corporate, in order to properly understand their complaints and hence make it easier for both complainants and investigating managers.

7. Information for children in and on the edge of care

- 7.1 Information for children in and on the edge of care is provided on the Children in Care webpage (see 1.6 above), giving children and young people the information they need to be able to make a complaint. A direct link is also provided to the Complaints Team e-mail box at candacomplaints@solihull.gov.uk
- 7.2 Further information is provided on the Children in Care webpage, so that should they wish, children and young people can contact an advocate directly for help to raise any concerns. This can be found at the following link:
<https://www.ovossolihull.co.uk/>
- 7.3 Complaints leaflets specifically aimed at both younger and older children are available on the Council's Internet page at <https://www.solihull.gov.uk/Tell-us/Complain-about-childrens-services> as well as on the webpage for Looked After Children at <https://www.ovossolihull.co.uk/> and are in addition to the leaflet which is more appropriate for adults making their own complaints about Children's Services, or complaints on behalf of their children. These leaflets can then be printed and completed and sent to the Performance & Complaints Team by complainants.

- 7.4 The Performance and Complaints Team will also, where requested, assist children and young people to acquire an advocate who will assist with their complaint, by contacting the advocacy service commissioned by Solihull (NYAS) directly, requesting them to make contact with the complainant.
- 7.5 During 2022-23 Solihull Children’s Services also launched the use of the Mind of My Own app to provide children with an easily accessible route to make their concerns/opinions known.

8. How we received complaints for Solihull Children’s Services

8.1 Figure 1 (below) shows the ways that Solihull Children’s Services have received initial contacts about complaints since 2018/19.

Method	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Email	45%	53%	76%	79%	78%
Telephone	38%	24%	13%	15%	12%
Letter	7%	8%	1%	4%	4%
Leaflet	3%	5%	1%	0%	0%
Web Form	7%	10%	9%	2%	6%

Fig 1

8.2 Predictably, in a world of increasing technology, email continues to be an extremely popular, convenient and efficient way for people to raise complaints and in 2022/23 has accounted for 78% of all initial contacts made to the Performance and Complaints Team. Email has, since 2018/19, been the most popular form of initial contact used by complainants.

Telephone contact is, after email, still the second most popular method used by people to make their first contact regarding their concerns. Initial contacts by letter have been very few since 2018/19 which reflects the transition to using more up to date technology.

The leaflets used for making a Children’s Social Work complaint are readily available in an on-line format (see 6 and 7 above). The leaflets guide the complainant through the type of essential information which is required when raising their concerns. The percentage of contacts using a leaflet has however continued to remain low and there was no contact via leaflet during 2021/22 or 2022/23. This however currently remains an option, should complainants choose this method of contact.

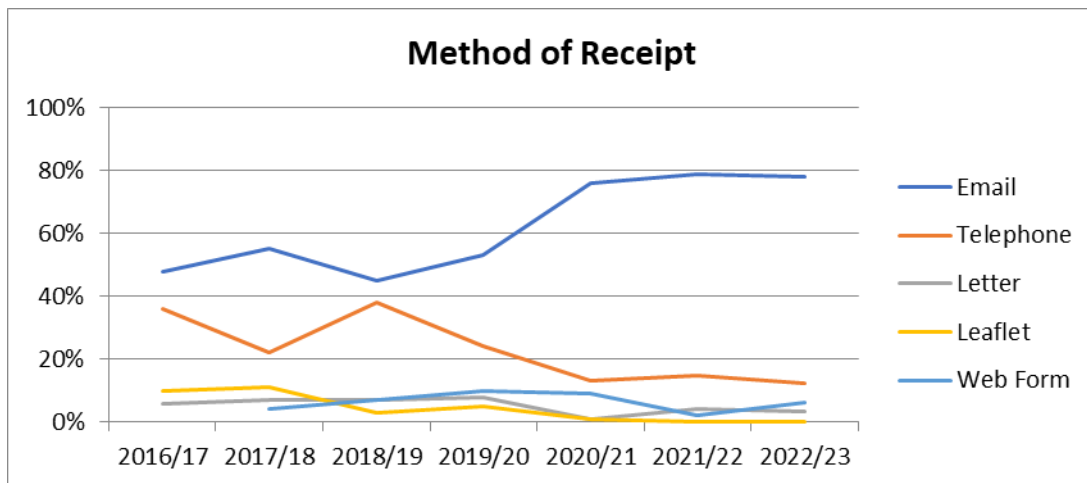


Fig 2

8.3 In 2022/23, the Performance and Complaints Team continued to invest time speaking directly to prospective complainants, regardless of how the initial contact was made. This is always an important opportunity to build a trusting relationship with the complainant/service user, giving them a point of contact throughout the duration of their complaint. This is particularly important when dealing with more in-depth complaints, as it enables the Performance and Complaints Team to fully understand the concerns being raised and then to define them appropriately, which in turn helps investigating managers to provide clearer, more detailed responses to complainants, assisting their understanding of the outcomes reached.

The benefit of such responses is further endorsed by the fact that all but two new Statutory complaints received in 2022/23, have been resolved at Stage 1, without the need to progress to an independent investigation.

8.4 Talking to complainants also ensures that where it is appropriate and possible, that concerns are resolved, without the need to progress to the formal complaints process. This can prove to be a quicker and more beneficial means of resolution for all concerned. The Performance and Complaints Team have, in 2022/23 handled 156 such "duty" cases for Children's Services compared to 112 in 2021/22.

9. Solihull Children's Services complaints recorded for the 2021/22 financial year

During the 2022/23 financial year, Solihull's Children's Services received 114 new complaints compared to 102 new complaints received in 2021/22, an overall increase of 12 (11%).

The new complaints can be broken down into the following areas:

- 79 (compared to 54 in 2021/22) for Children's Social Care Services
- 32 (compared to 43 in 2021/22) for the EHCP Team
- 6 (compared to 5 in 2021/22) for other areas of Children's Services

Note: these figures add to 117 as three complaints spanned more than one service area

10 Who made complaints?

- 10.1 106 of the 114 new complaints made during 2022/23, across Children's Services were received from adults, making complaints either on behalf of children or in relation to a service impacting them directly. Of the other 8 complaints, 4 were from a professional advocate acting on behalf of a child (2 of which were Children Looked After) and 4 were made directly by the service user (2 of which were from a Child Looked After).
- 10.2 74% of new complaints were received from females and 20% from males, with 6% of complaints being made jointly by parents (compared to 70%, 24% and 6% respectively in 2021/22).
- 10.3 Eleven looked after young people were supported to make a complaint by either a parent/carer or a professional advocate; or contacted the Performance and Complaints Team directly.
- 10.4 In 2022/23, the 11 complaints from Children Looked After constituted 44% of the 25 new Statutory complaints which were raised in relation to services provided by Children's Social Care (all but two were raised via an advocate of some kind). This is a slight increase when compared with 9 (39%) of the 23 new Statutory complaints in 2021/22. These statutory complaints from Children Looked After were in relation to five different social work teams.

There was a total of 58 complaint issues within these complaints; 27 (46.5%) were upheld, 14 (24%) were partially upheld, 13 (22%) were not upheld and one (2.5%) was found to be inconclusive. Three issues (5%) were still being investigated at the end of 2022/23.

- 10.5 The main focus of complaints raised by or on behalf of Children Looked After related to "Delivery / Non-delivery of Service."

Delivery / Non-delivery of Service is one of the main issues arising from complaints across Children's Services (further detail is provided within section 15 below). Within the reporting process to senior management, these issues are broken down under further headings, enabling the Performance and Complaints Team to highlight any specific concerns to managers in Children's Social Care Services.

11. A summary of Children's Social Care complaints recorded for the 2022/23 financial year

11.1 Live complaints brought forward from 2021/22

- 11.1.1 There were 12 live complaints still under investigation and carried forward from 2021/22. These were at the following stages: four at Stage 2 of the statutory process; and one at Stage 2 and 7 at stage 1 of the corporate complaints process.
- 11.1.2 Of the Statutory complaints carried forward at Stage 2, all were resolved at stage 2. No complaints escalated to the final stage (Stage 3) during 2022/23.

Of the 7 Stage 1 corporate complaints brought forward; all were resolved at Stage 1 during 2022/23. The corporate complaint brought forward at Stage 2 was also resolved during 2022/23.

- 11.1.3 Two Corporate complaints, originally closed at Stage 1 in 2021/22, were reopened at Stage 2 during 2022/23 and both were resolved.
- 11.1.4 Two Stage 1 Statutory complaints originally closed in 2021/22, were reopened during 2022/23 at Stage 2. One was resolved during 2022/23 and the other was still being investigated at year end.

11.2 New complaints received for Children's Social Care Services during 2022/23

- 11.2.1 During the 2022/23 financial year, Solihull Council's Children's Social Care Services received 79 new complaints. 25 were Statutory complaints (those from children and young people or their representatives) and 54 were Corporate complaints which are usually complaints made by adults in relation to the impact that a service provided by Children's Social Care Services has had upon them directly, rather than their child.

The number of new complaints for 2022/23 (79) is an increase of 46% compared to the 54 received in 2021/22; however, this needs to be considered alongside an increase in service users of 41%, as described at 13.1 below.

- 11.2.2 All but four of the new Statutory complaints received in 2022/23 have been resolved at Stage 1, with those four complaints still being under investigation at the end of the year and therefore carried forward to 2023/24.
- 11.2.3 All but 15 of the new Statutory complaints received since 1st October 2013 have been resolved either via investigation at Stage 1 of the complaints process, through mediation, or through a combination of both. Most complainants making Statutory complaints therefore appear to have been satisfied with the responses that they have received at Stage 1, choosing not to request progression of their complaint to the next stage.
- 11.2.4 38 of the 54 Corporate complaints received in 2022/23 were closed at Stage 1 (including 2 that were withdrawn). 10 Stage 1 Corporate complaints were still under investigation at year end. Six complaints progressed to Stage 2 during 2022/23, with two being responded to and closed in the year and two still under investigation and therefore carried forward to 2023/24.

11.3 Children's Social Care complaints carried forward into 2022/23

- 11.3.1 At the end of the 2022/23 financial year, the number of live complaints carried forward to 2022/24 was 17. This is an increase on the previous year's total of 12.
- 11.3.2 Of the 17 carried forward to 2023/24, 12 were corporate complaints (10 were at Stage 1 and 2 were at Stage 2); and 5 were statutory complaints (4 at Stage 1 and one at Stage 2).

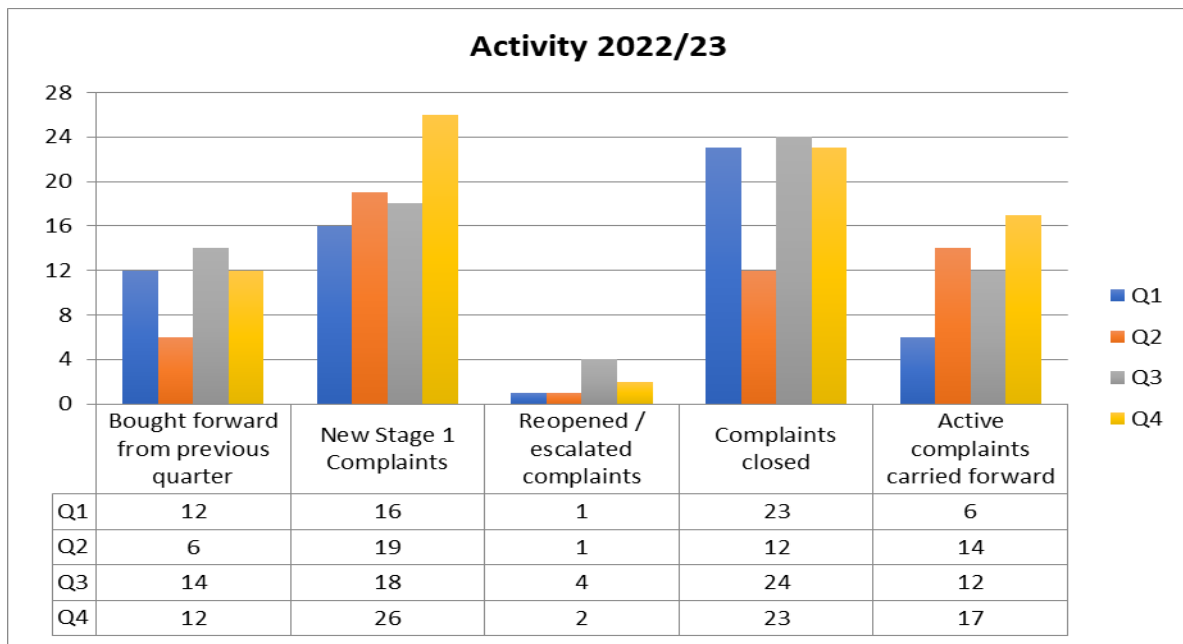


Fig 3

11.3.3 There was a slight increase in the number of new complaints received for Children’s Social Care Services in Q2 compared to Q1. New complaints decreased again very slightly in Q3 and then increased significantly in Q4. The number of complaints carried forward at the end of each quarter fluctuates, depending on response timescales and the date on when the investigation commenced in the previous quarter.

12. Timescales for responding to complaints in Children’s Social Care Services

In 2022/23 the Performance and Complaints Team have continued to provide accurate data to senior management concerning response timescales for complaints processed under both the Statutory and Corporate complaints processes. Timescales for each process are described below.

12.1 Statutory Complaint timescales

12.1.1 The initial timescale for processing Stage 1 complaints within the Children’s Statutory Complaints Process is 10 working days, (extended to 20 working days for complex cases and as agreed with the complainant).

Children’s Social Care Services aim to respond to as many Stage 1 Statutory complaints within the initial 10-day timescale, as possible; whilst at the same time ensuring an appropriate level of detail and accuracy, so that the complaint can be resolved as quickly as possible; this being positive for all concerned.

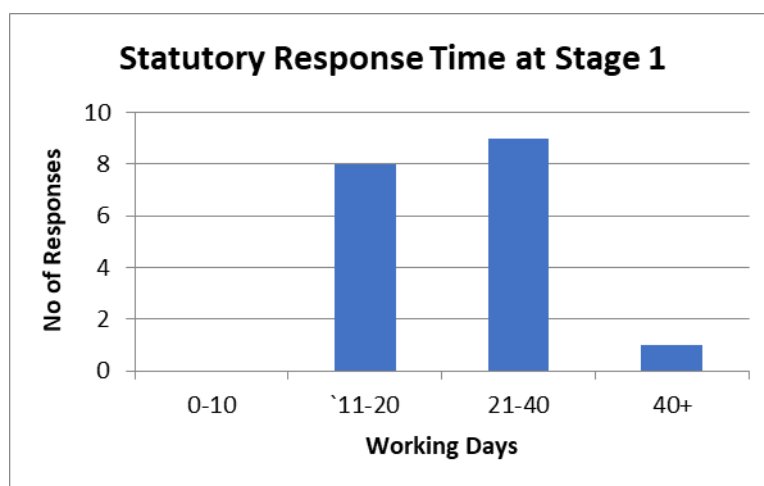


Fig 4

12.1.2 In 2022/23, 18 Statutory complaints were investigated and responded to at stage 1 of the Statutory Children’s Complaints process by Solihull Children’s Social Work Services. Figure 4 above shows the timescale in which complaints were responded to at Stage 1 in 2022/23. 0/20 (0%) of complaints were responded to within 10 days (the initial response timescale), compared to 11% (2/19) in 2021/22.

12.1.3 8/18 (44.5%) were responded to within 11 – 20 days, giving an overall total of 8 (44.5%) complaints being responded to within 20 days (the extended timescale). The overall percentage of stage 1 complaints responded to within 20 working days has decreased from 53% in 2021/22 to 44.5% in 2022/23.

As outlined at 13.1 below, during 2022/23, there was an increase of 41% in service users for Children’s Social Care Services and an equivalent rise in complaints. This increased workload has impacted the capacity of Children’s Social Care staff to respond within timeframe.

12.1.4 In 2022/23, 9/18 (50%) of Stage 1 Statutory complaints, were resolved between 21 and 40 days whilst one (5.5%) took longer than 40 days to resolve.

12.1.5 The Performance and Complaints Team will continue in 2023/24, to work with investigating managers in Children’s Social Care Services, to continue to try and reduce the numbers of Stage 1 Statutory complaints that take more than 20 days to respond to, with an additional aim to respond to more complaints within the initial 10 working day timescale.

12.1.6 The percentage of Stage 1 Statutory complaints responded to within 20 working days has slightly decreased in 2022/23, however the level of detail included in Stage 1 responses has been maintained, despite the unprecedented circumstances that Solihull Children’s Services have faced. This appears to reassure complainants that their complaints have been thoroughly investigated.

12.1.7 Despite 10 of the Stage 1 complaint responses being outside of the 20-working day timescale, the responses still appear to be resolving the majority of complaints at a local level, without complainants feeling the need to progress their complaint to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (see 12.2.4 below). This can only be positive for both the complainant and the Local Authority.

12.2 Corporate complaint timescales

The timescale for processing complaints at Stage 1 within Solihull Council's Corporate Complaint Process is 20 working days (extended to 30 working days for complex cases) and 20 working days at Stage 2; where an appropriate senior officer, usually the Head of Service, responds to the escalation of the complaint.

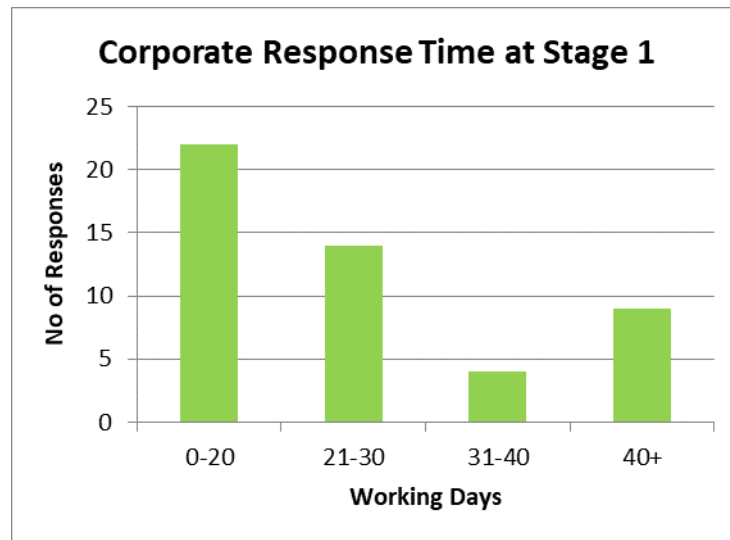


Fig 5

- 12.2.1 In 2022/23, 49 Corporate complaints were investigated and responded to at stage 1 by Solihull Children's Social Care Services. Figure 5 above, shows that 22 (45%) Stage 1 complaints were responded to within 20 days, compared to 11 (38%) in 2021/22, whilst a further 14 (29%) took 21 – 30 days, meaning that 36/49 (73%) complaints were resolved at stage 1 within the extended 30 working day timescale, compared to 79% in 2021/22, which shows that there has been a very slight decrease in the percentage of complaints resolved within timeframe in 2022/23.
- 12.2.2 Thirteen (27%) Stage 1 Corporate complaints took longer than the 30-working day timescale to respond to, including nine which took longer than 40 working days to respond to. As mentioned earlier in this report, these delays can be attributed to several issues, including an increased workload, the unprecedented circumstances that Solihull Children's Services have faced in 2022/23 and an associated increase in complaints. Some delays can also occur due to the detail of a complaint and the need to ensure that the response is as thorough as possible. The Complaints Team liaise with complainants where delays occur to keep them fully informed.
- 12.2.3 Only 9/49 (18%) of Corporate complaints investigated at Stage 1 during 2022/23 by Children's Social Care Services, progressed to Stage 2, compared to 10 (34%) in 2021/22. Of the 7 Stage 2 investigations completed in 2022/23, 5 (71%) were responded to within the maximum 20 working days timescale at Stage 2 (compared to 7 (70%) in 2021/22) and 2 complaints took longer than 40 days to respond to at Stage 2, thus exceeding the response timeframe. Two Stage 2 corporate investigations were carried forward to 2023/24.

There has been a very slight increase (1%) in response timeframes in 2022/23 for Stage 2 Corporate complaints.

- 12.2.4 Ten enquires were received from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) in relation to Children’s Social Care Services in 2022/23. The LGSCO declined to investigate five of these; four were closed as premature and one was investigated by the LGSCO and no fault was found.

As outlined at 12.1.7 above, the level of detail which continues to be included in complaint responses from investigating managers appears to be a significant contributor to this. This can sometimes have a slight impact on response times; however, it does appear to reassure the complainant that their complaints have been thoroughly investigated and responded to and resolves their complaint without them considering a need to refer to the LGSCO. The Performance & Complaints Team keep lines of communication open with all complainants regarding the response times for their complaint.

13 Trend Data for Children’s Social Care complaints

- 13.1 As outlined above at 11.2.1, the 79 new complaints received for Children’s Social Care Services in 2022/23, represent a 41% increase when compared to the 54 new complaints received in 2021/22.

During 2022/23 however, Children’s Social Care Services provided a service to 4850 service users compared to 3433 in 2021/22 (an increase of 41%). Despite this increase, complaints were received from only 1.6% of service users/their families in 2022/23. This is the same percentage as in 2021/22. This may suggest that the increase in complaints in Solihull Social Care Services has been due to the proportionate increase in service users.

- 13.2 Detailed in the chart below (*Figure 6*) is a comparison of the number of complaints received each quarter between 2018/19 and 2021/22.

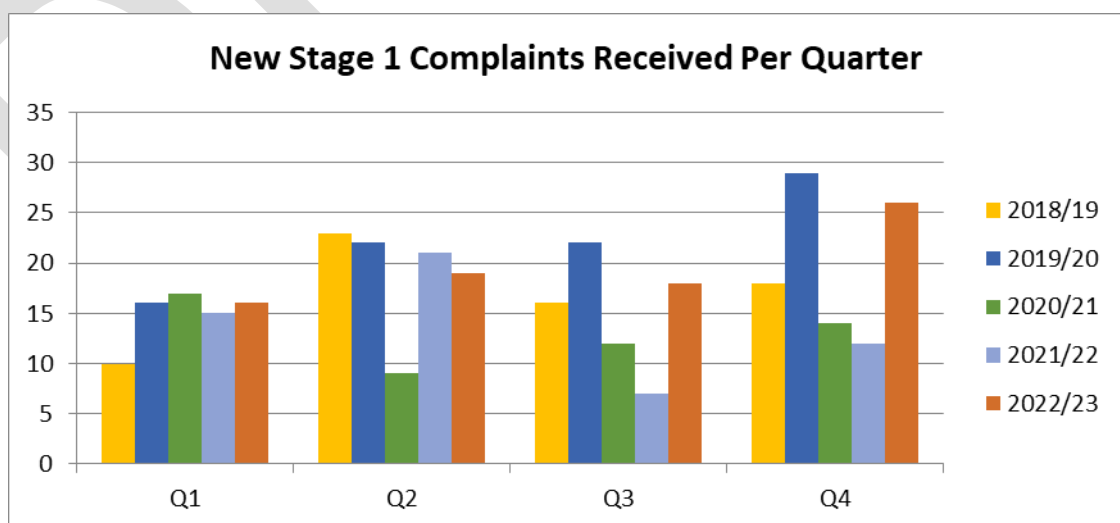


Fig 6

- 13.3 Figure 6 above, shows that in 2022/23 complaints increased slightly in Q2, decreased very slightly in Q3 and increased significantly in Q4.

13.4 Having mapped the quarterly trends for receiving new complaints over a number of years, there is a difficulty in pre-empting the number of new complaints that will be received and hence planning this workload in both Children’s Services and the Complaints Team. Generally speaking however, there is an increase in Q2 from Q1 with a decrease in Q3 and an increase again in Q4. The drop in the latter half of 2020/21 may have been caused by the onset of the COVID19 pandemic.

14. An Overview of Complaints and Issues for Children’s Social Care Services by Team

14.1 Figure 7 below, shows a breakdown of the numbers of new complaints (both Statutory and Corporate) received during 2022/23, along with the number of corresponding issues for each of Solihull’s Children’s Social Care teams.

New Stage 1 Complaints & Issues Per Team	Total Issues	Total Statutory Complaints	Total Corporate Complaints
Child Asylum & 16+ Team	9	2	0
Child in Need Team	14	0	2
Child Protection & Court Team	132	4	13
Child Protection Unit	17	2	4
Children's Assessment Team	78	2	13
Children with Disabilities Team	125	8	7
Children's Finance	1	0	1
Family Support East/West	32	1	3
Family Support North	24	2	4
Fostering Team	37	0	2
LADO (POT Process)	12	0	2
Looked After Children	53	5	6
MASH Team	11	0	4
Youth Justice Service	0	0	0
Exploitation & Missing Team	0	0	0
Innovate	6	1	0
Grand Total	551	27	61

Fig 7

****Note – some complaints will span both the Statutory and Corporate complaints procedures or are responded to by more than one team and therefore do not equate to the total no of new complaints received.***

14.2 In 2022/23, the highest number of complaints were received in relation to the Child Protection & Court Team and totalled 17. Numbers of new complaints for this team have been fairly steady across the year (see fig 8 below), but with a peak in Quarter 4 which is in line with the overall increase in complaints at quarter 4, as shown at 13.2 (figure 6) above.

	NEW COMPLAINTS RECEIVED PER QUARTER				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Child Protection & Court Team	1	5	3	8	17
Children's Assessment Team		3	3	9	15
Children with Disabilities Team	2	5	4	4	15
Looked After Children	2	4	1	4	11

Fig 8

14.3 After the Child Protection & Court Team, the teams receiving the highest number of new complaints were the Children's Assessment Team and the Children with Disabilities Team; both teams received 15 new complaints. This was followed by the Looked After Children Team who received 11 new complaints.

14.4 The Family Support teams were disbanded part way through 2022/23 and the Children's Assessment and Child in Need teams were formed.

14.5 Any learning which was identified from each complaint investigation was implemented following the closure of each investigation and this should assist with reducing these types of complaints moving forwards.

15 Categories of Issues Raised within Complaints

15.1 Defining complaint issues, the detail within these and what this tells us, is something that is regularly reviewed by the Performance and Complaints Team, in liaison with senior managers in Children's Services. This enables a depth and accuracy of performance reporting, both via monthly live complaints reports to heads of service and the assistant directors and quarterly reporting to the Senior Management Team and Directorate Leadership Team; in order to ensure that any areas of concern are highlighted and dealt with efficiently.

15.2 The Performance and Complaints Team supply within reporting to senior managers, a further breakdown under the categories of issues which show the higher number of complaint issues, so that they are more easily able to define any potential areas of concern and use this along with the learning highlighted from complaints to improve practice/review procedures.

15.3 The accurate definition of complaints by the Performance and Complaints Team means that several issues are often identified within each complaint. This assists investigating managers to respond efficiently and accurately to each part of the complaint.

New Issues per Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Breach of confidentiality	4	10	1	3	18
Decision Making	2	10	3	5	20
Dissatisfaction with fostering process				1	1
Lack of involvement of family member with POA / PR	2				2
Quality / Accuracy of Social Work reports	4	1	12	4	21
Impact of LA policy on service user			4		4
Recording of information		5	4	8	17
Attitude or Behaviour of Staff	24	34	37	49	144
Failure to complete agreed outcome	4	1			
Inappropriate comments/actions	19	29	30	43	
Consent not requested			1		
Lack of knowledge of case		1	1	3	
Rudeness		1	2	1	
Poor interaction with child		1	1	1	
Accusation of bias	1	1	2	1	
Delivery / Non Delivery of Service	18	47	32	33	130
Inappropriate type of worker allocated			1		
Delay in undertaking assessment		6		2	
Support not provided by SW/ Children Services	8	8	10	13	
Delay in providing support	2	8	4	2	
Correct process/ procedure not followed	8	25	17	10	
Frequent change of Social Worker				6	
Contact Issues	0	1	1	3	5
Full contact not provided				2	
Contract stopped				1	
Contact not arranged		1	1		
Finance Issues	2	5	0	2	9
Foster Carer Payments		1			
Dissatisfaction with direct payment / process		2			
Special Guardianship Allowance	2				
Travel expenses		1			
Funding not provided		1		2	
Unsatisfactory Communication	21	66	49	44	180
Incorrect / Contradictory information given	7	8	8	6	
Documentation / Information not provided	7	20	12	13	
Documentation / Information delayed		3	2	1	
Not being listened to	2	10	11	5	
Calls / Email not returned	4	11	5	5	
Not informed / invited to meetings		6	5		
Inappropriate information given to child				1	
Contact not made when requested		2	3	10	
Not contacted on a regular basis		2	1	3	
Meeting cancelled at short notice		3	1		
Meetings not held on time	1	1	1		
Grand Total	77	179	143	152	551

Fig 9

- 15.4 Within the 79 new complaints received during 2022/23, there was an increase (111%) in the number of issues raised, from 261 in 2021/22 to 551 and these are detailed in fig 9 above.

The average number of issues per complaint has increased from 4.7 to 7, therefore, the evidence suggests that complaints in 2022/23 have become more complex than they previously were.

- 15.5 The issues relating to unsatisfactory communication, attitude / behaviour of staff, delivery/non delivery of service, contact issues and finance issues are broken down by the Performance and Complaints Team into sub-categories, in order to provide a better understanding to managers regarding the specific reasons for complaint (see fig 9 above). This enables managers to focus, where required, on any area that receives repeat or higher levels of complaints, looking at possible reasons for this, so that learning can be focussed in these areas and implemented in order to improve practice.
- 15.6 As in previous years, attitude/behaviour of staff and unsatisfactory communication were the top two areas of complaint (see fig 9 above). These are issues which are a common cause for complaint in any complaint arena. The number of new issues received in relation to delivery/non-delivery of service and unsatisfactory communication have both increased significantly during 2022/23 when compared with 2021/22 (as shown in fig 10 below). This is due both to an overall increase in complaints and the complexity of those complaints.
- 15.7 The number of new issues relating to attitude/behaviour of staff have decreased however, even with the rise in the total number of new complaints. This indicates that learning from other similar complaints has started to have an impact.

Issue	No of issues 2017/18	No of issues 2018/19	No of issues 2019/20	No of issues 2020/21	No of issues 2021/22	No of issues 2022/23
Attitude/behaviour of staff	87	84	124	58	164	144
Unsatisfactory communication	65	75	120	73	90	180
Delivery/non-delivery of service	67	39	60	55	49	130

Fig 10

- 15.8 As outlined above at 15.5 above, these issues are reported to senior management in detail within quarterly reports, in order to identify any possible areas of concern, so that managers can focus, where required, on any area that needs their attention, so that learning can be focussed in these areas in order to improve practice.

16 Outcomes of resolved complaints by issue for Children's Social Care Services

- 16.1 The table below shows the percentage of issues that have been upheld/partially upheld for the top 3 areas of complaint between 2018/19 and 2022/23.

	% upheld & partially upheld				
Type of issue	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Unsatisfactory communication	78%	52%	40%	38%	31%
Delivery / non delivery of service	50%	29%	36%	17%	38%
Attitude or behaviour of Staff	28%	21%	24%	32%	32%

Fig 11

16.2 The percentage of complaint issues upheld/partially upheld has decreased in 2022/23 for Unsatisfactory Communication, it has increased for Delivery/Non-Delivery of Service and has remained the same for Attitude or Behaviour of Staff.

32% of issues raised in relation to attitude or behaviour of staff were upheld/partially upheld and a number of issues are found to be inconclusive. This is sometimes due to a lack of evidence from both the complainant/the Council; however, these complaints are monitored and appropriate action is taken by the Council when required.

16.3 Following the completion of the investigations for these complaints, the investigating managers have looked in detail at the learning issues that have been highlighted and learning actions have been outlined and put into place, to try to ensure that the same issues do not reoccur, (see learning from complaints in Section 21 below).

16.4 A total of 74 complaints (455 issues) were responded to during 2022/23 and the outcome of each issue within these complaints is recorded and reported to senior managers by the Performance and Complaints Team (see fig 12 below).

16.5 The outcomes for all complaint issues closed at Stage 1 in 2022/23 were as follows: 67 (15%) were upheld, 68 (15%) were partially upheld, 181 (40%) were not upheld and 47 (10%) were found to be inconclusive. In addition, 92 (20%) issues were withdrawn, (either by the complainant, or where evidence came to light and they were unable to be investigated within the confines of the complaints process). 83 issues were still being investigated at the end of the year.

These outcomes are shown in Figure 12 below.

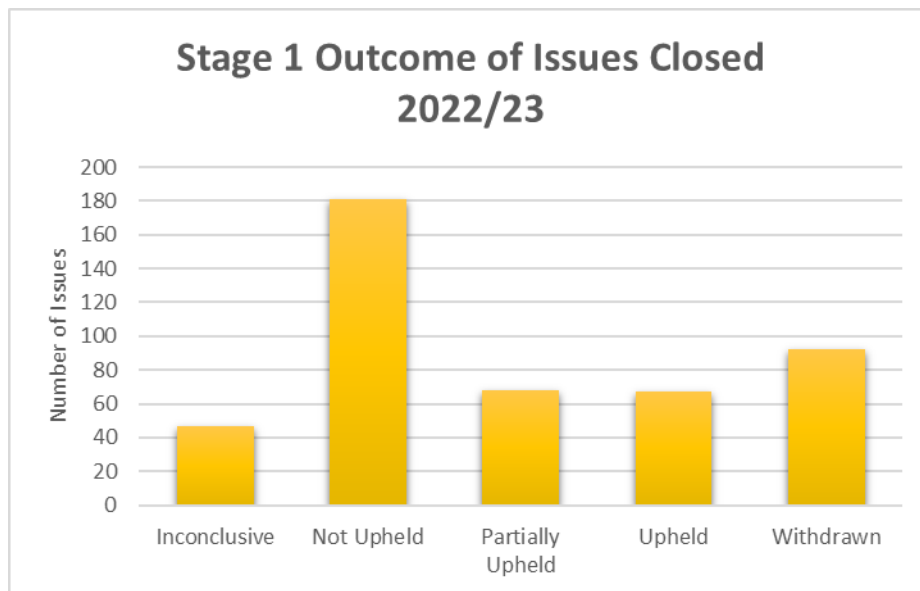


Fig 12

- 16.6 Upheld or partially upheld issues constituted 30% of all issues responded to in 2022/23, compared to 33% and 34% respectively in the previous two years. This demonstrates a consistency of approach by investigating managers and accompanied by the fact that the numbers of complaints progressing to Stage 2 are relatively low and very few complaints progress to the Ombudsman, this would not raise any concern about the outcomes being found by investigating managers.
- 16.7 Learning from complaint issues was identified and progressed as described in Section 20 below.
- 17. Complaints for other areas of Children, Young People & Families Services**
- 17.1 During 2022/23 there were no formal complaints received for Solihull Council's Youth Justice Service or the Exploitation & Missing Team.
- 18. Complaints relating to services provided by Solihull EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan) Team**
- 18.1 Complaints made in relation to services provided by Solihull Council's EHCP Team are processed via the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure.
- 18.2 During 2022/23, 32 new formal complaints relating to the Council's EHCP Team were received, compared to 43 in 2021/22, which is a decrease of 25% in new complaints being received. To support the continued SEND improvement journey staff are actively encouraging of parents submitting formal complaints, so that issues can be clearly understood, looked at and addressed; and learning monitored at senior levels.

In addition to formal complaints, 22 Duty cases (those cases where concerns are raised and resolved, with the agreement of the complainant, without progressing to a formal complaint) were also received and handled by the Complaints Team. This is also a slight decrease compared to the 32 handled during 2021/22.

- 18.3 Of the 32 formal complaints received during 2021/22, only 6 (19%) progressed to Stage 2 of the Corporate process. This is a decrease of 4% when compared to 2021/22. Reasons for this can be attributed to the continued level of detail included in Stage 1 responses, which appears to reassure complainants that their complaints have been properly looked into and addressed.
- 18.4 40 complaint investigations were completed in 2022/23 (which included any open complaint investigations brought forward from 2021/22 and which were responded to during 2022/23); 30 at Stage 1 and 10 at Stage 2.
- 18.5 4 complaints for the EHCP Team were carried forward to 2023/24, all at stage 1.
- 18.6 Figure 13 below shows the 32 new complaints as they were received across each quarter. Complaints were highest in quarters 3 and 4, with a corresponding higher number of issues identified, when compared to quarters 1 and 2.

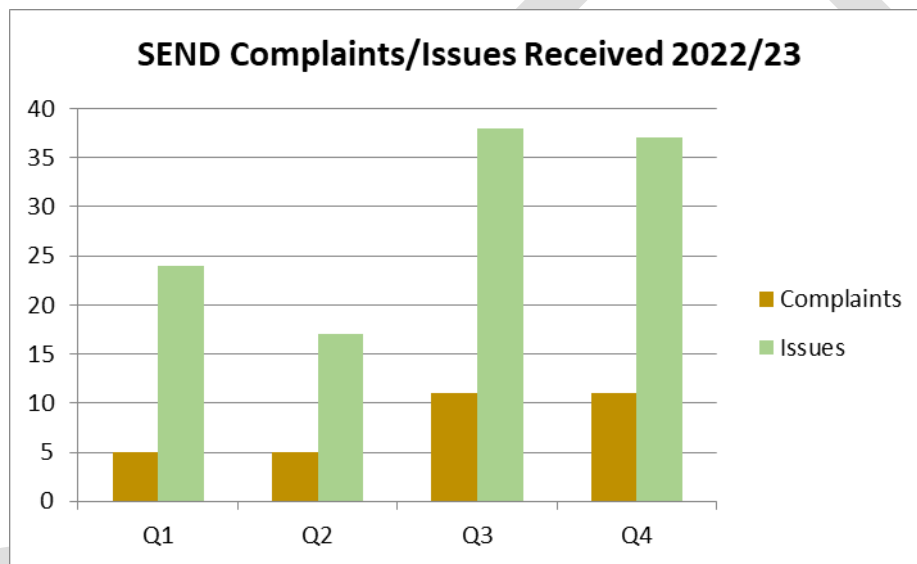


Fig 13

18.7 An overview of complaint issues for the EHCP Team

In 2022/23, a total of 116 issues were received within the 32 new complaints outlined above. The 2 main issues raised revolved around the EHCP process not being followed and unsatisfactory communication, with calls/emails not being returned being the main issue (see fig 14 below). The number of individual issues raised against each main category have increased in quarters 3 and 4, in line with an increase in complaints.

New SEND Issues Per Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Recording of information	1				1
Decision making			1	1	2
Attitude / Behaviour of Staff	1	0	1	1	3
Inappropriate comments/actions	1			1	
Poor interaction with child			1		
Issues with EHCP	14	13	27	20	74
Change of EHCP Officer		1			
Council not fulfilled duty to provide education		1	3	3	
Delay in providing EP report			2		
Delay in finding school / suitable placement	7	3	1	1	
Required information / advice not sought				1	
Delay in providing home schooling	1		1		
Delay in finalising EHC Assessment	2			1	
EHCP not being followed	1		2	4	
EHCP not completed within timescales	1		4	1	
EHCP not reviewed	1	1	2	1	
EHCP process not followed	1	5	11	4	
Funding not provided		1		1	
Delay in providing support		1			
Correct process not followed			1	3	
Unsatisfactory Communication	8	4	9	15	36
Calls / Email not returned	2	1	4	6	
Contact not made when requested			1	2	
Documentation / Information not provided	3	2		3	
Documentation / Information delayed				1	
Incorrect / contradictory information provided		1	3	1	
Meetings not held on time				1	
Not contacted on a regular basis	3			1	
Not being listened to			1		
Grand Total	24	17	38	37	116

Fig 14

18.8 Timescales for responding to complaints in the EHCP Team

Thirty complaint investigations were completed and responded to by the EHCP Team at Stage 1; 20 (67%) were responded to within the 20-working day timeframe and a further 9 (30%) received a Stage 1 response within the extended 30 working day timeframe. This means that a total of 97% of the complaints responded to at Stage 1, were completed within 30 working days, compared to 75% in 2021/22. Only one complaint response exceeded the 30 working-day timeframe allowed at Stage 1.

No complaints were withdrawn at stage 1 and four Stage 1 complaints were still being investigated at the end of 2022/23 and carried forward to 2023/24 (see 18.5 above).

- 18.9 Of the 10 complaint investigations completed at Stage 2 during 2022/23, 9 (90%) received a response within the 20-working day timeframe at Stage 2 compared to 64% in 2021/22 and one complaint exceeded the 20-working day timeframe at Stage 2 (taking 22 days). No complaints were withdrawn at stage 2 and no active Stage 2 complaints were carried forward to 2023/24.

In 2023/24 the Performance and Complaints Team will work with the EHCP Team to try and increase the numbers of Stage 1 complaints responded to within the initial 20 working day timescale and to try to ensure that all Stage 2 complaints are responded to within the 20-working day timescale.

18.10 Outcomes of resolved complaints by issue for the EHCP Team

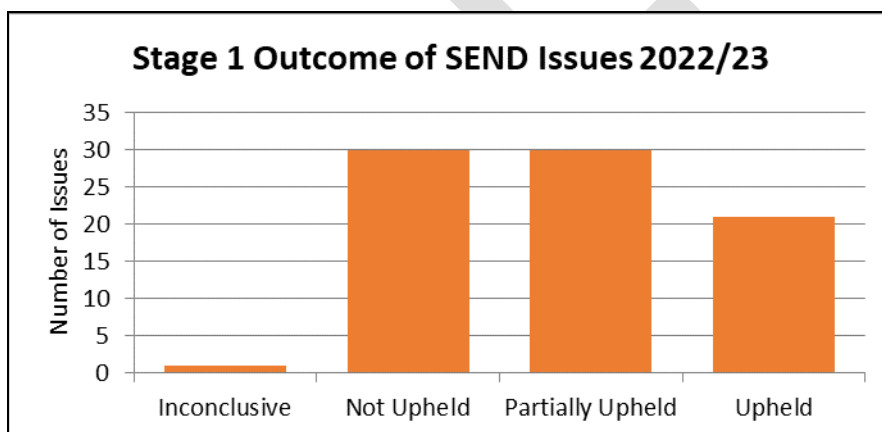


Fig 15

Of the 82 issues which were responded to at Stage 1 by the EHCP Team, 21 (26%) were upheld, 30 (36%) were partially upheld, 30 (37%) were not upheld, 1 (1%) were inconclusive. No issues were withdrawn (as shown at fig 15 above).

The 6 Stage 2 complaints that were responded to during 2022/23 had 37 issues within them, 7 (19%) of which were upheld, 10 (27%) were partially upheld, 20 (54%) which were not upheld, and no complaints/issues were withdrawn at stage 2.

- 18.11 3 EHCP (education related) complaints progressed to the LGSCO in 2022/23 (see section 20 below).

19. Complaints for other areas of Children’s Learning and Achievement

The Performance and Complaints Team also received:

- 19.1.1 One new complaint in relation to CLA Education which was partially upheld.
- 19.1.2 One new complaint in relation to School Admissions which was not upheld.

- 19.1.3 Two complaints were received in relation to the Family Information Service, with one being upheld and the other still being investigated at the end of 2022/23.
- 19.1.4 Two complaints were received for the EHE Inclusion Team with one being upheld and the other, which formed part of a wider complaint involving the EHCP Team, still being investigated at the end of 2022/23.

20. Complaints considered by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

20.1 During 2022/23 there were 13 new complaints referred to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) for Solihull Children's Services (a decrease of 2 compared to 2021/22). In addition, 2 complaints received during 2021/22 which were still being investigated by the LGSCO at the end of 2021/22, were brought forward into 2022/23.

Of these 15 complaints, the LGSCO declined to investigate 6 of these and 5 were classed as a premature complaint (a complaint which has not already been investigated by the Council).

20.2 Fig 16 below shows the 15 outcomes found by the LGSCO for Solihull Children's Services in 2022/23.

Outcome	Children's Services Team
Declined to investigate	Child Protection & Court Team; (4) Children's Disability Team (1); School Admissions (1)
Premature complaint	EHCP Team (1); Child Protection & Court Team (1); SEND Social Care/Children's Disability Team (2); Fostering Team (1)
Investigated (brought forward from 2021/2022) – No Fault found	Children with Disabilities Team (1)
Investigated (brought forward from 2021/2022) – Fault found	School Transport – appeal meeting reconvened
Investigated – Fault found	EHCP Team - fault found but local remedy of £4,000 for loss education, £300 time & trouble and apology considered sufficient
Investigated – Fault found	EHCP Team – apology, £150 time & trouble plus £2000 for lack of OT provision
Carried forward to 2023/24	None

Fig 16

20.3 The level of detail provided in the responses from Children's Services still appears to be having a direct link to the numbers of complaints referred to and then investigated by the LGSCO.

The Council was found at fault for one case brought forward from 2021/22.

Fault has been found in only 2 of the new 13 cases referred to the LGO in 2022/23 and there are no outstanding LGSCO complaints carried forward to 2023/24. This demonstrates a significant improvement in the percentage of Children's Services complaints referred to the LGSCO for which fault is being found.

21 Areas for Learning and Improvement highlighted by team managers and heads of service for Children’s Services

21.1 Learning for Children’s Social Care Services

21.1.1 During 2022/23, the Performance and Complaints Team has continued to send learning forms to investigating managers for each complaint responded to and to liaise with those managers through to the implementation of the learning highlighted.

21.1.2 79% (50 out of 63) of the learning forms sent to managers had been completed and returned by year end. Learning outcomes for the forms returned by year end have been categorised, which are shown in figure 17 below. Some of the forms will have been issued for investigations completed close to year end with managers not having had chance to return them by 31st March 2023.

The Performance & Complaints Team will continue to follow up the outstanding forms until all of them have been returned and any learning is highlighted and implemented.



Fig 17

21.1.3 As shown above in figure 17, the main area highlighted for improvement has been to improve communication. Other areas highlighted for improvement are to follow the correct process and to improve record keeping.

21.1.4 All learning issues highlighted either already have or will be addressed efficiently and mapped by the Performance and Complaints Team, through to implementation.

21.1.5 Some examples of the types of learning that have been identified and put into place and hence used to inform service improvements are demonstrated below:

- *Following a complaint about a Social Worker's interaction with a family, learning issues highlighted were:*
 - Ensuring parents views are heard and listened to during assessments
 - Highlight the importance of families being referred to advocacy services at the earliest opportunity
 - Visits are booked in a timely way and support this with pre-planning and ensure that when there are concerns about delay, the allocated social worker raises issues with the supervising manager, so action can be taken to support and progress the plan.
 - Importance of reports being made available to parents at a minimum of 3 working days prior to a conference

- *Following complaints about the lack of communication from social work teams, learning issues highlighted were:*
 - If concerns have been raised and are being dealt with, provide reassurance and updates to the family about this so they feel listened to and know concerns are being addressed.
 - Messages and their urgency/expectation need to be clearly conveyed to all recipients to ensure an appropriate and timely response.
 - Families to be updated if allocated workers are on extended leave and provided with alternative contact details if necessary
 - It is important for all parents with a difficulty or need regarding communicating in English to be offered the consistency of a translator at key meetings and to interpret key reports.

- *Following complaints about the completion of assessments, the learning issues highlighted were:*
 - Consider the impact on adults who are sharing past experiences of trauma when contributing to assessments. Communication via phone or Teams may not be ideal and where possible, meetings in person may be preferable as well as an initial phone call to make introductions and build some rapport
 - Being clear about levels of intervention and what that means
 - Ensure all young people have timely completion of assessments when it comes to supported lodgings placements.
 - Ensure that there is tracking of agreed assessments and that they are written up by the allocated worker and this is recorded on LCS.

21.1.6 Learning from complaints is discussed by investigating managers with both individuals (where appropriate) and their teams and is also shared with the relevant service area by heads of service through wider management meetings, so that all areas of Children's Services can learn from the issues arising.

Where applicable, these issues are also shared with the Workforce Development Team in order that, where necessary, they can be mapped and addressed through staff training and supervision.

21.1.7 In 2023/24, the Performance and Complaints Team will produce a separate learning report for implemented learning which will be circulated to the assistant directors, heads of service and managers listing the learning under each team. This will provide an overview of all learning for Children's Social Care Services for which, after a period of implementation, team managers will be required to highlight the difference the learning has made in practice.

21.2 Learning from complaints for Learning & Achievement

21.2.1 During 2022/23 the Performance and Complaints Team has also sent learning forms to the investigating managers in Learning & Achievement for each complaint responded to.

96% (50 out of 52) of the learning forms sent to managers had been completed and returned by year end. The learning outcomes for the forms returned by year end have been categorised, which are shown in figure 18 below. The Performance & Complaints Team will continue to follow up the 2 outstanding forms until they have been returned and any learning is highlighted and implemented.

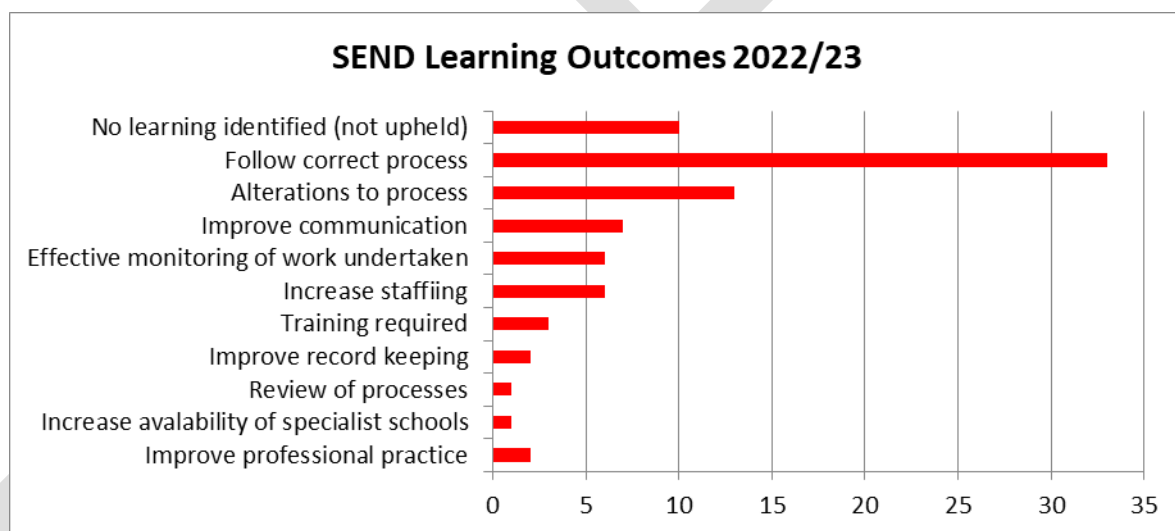


Fig 18

21.2.2 As shown above, the main areas highlighted for improvement were to follow the correct process and for alterations to process, which unsurprisingly relate to the number of complaint issues raised concerning the EHCP process, (see section 18.7 above). All learning issues highlighted by investigating managers are tracked by the Complaints Team until implementation is confirmed.

21.2.3 Some examples of the types of learning that have been identified and put into place and hence used to inform service improvements are demonstrated below:

- *Following a complaint about the provision in an EHCP, the learning highlighted was:*
 - Clear process and guidance required from social workers to feed into the EHCP process
 - Process agreed with health DCO regarding monitoring of their advice within timescales

- Remind all EHCP Officers of the legal duty to consult with parental preference, regardless of whether it aligns with the Panel decision for setting type.
 - For officers to check for other stated provision when they send consults to try to find an educational setting
- *Following a complaint about the delay in completing an EHCP, the learning highlighted was:*
 - Importance to be stressed to the team of complying with legal deadlines
 - Matter to be addressed specifically in team meeting
 - New staffing and working system to be put into place to avoid these issues when caseworkers are off sick/on leave
 - For case officers and EHCP officers to check the timeframes for each plan under review.
 - Case officers to maintain spreadsheets, enabling them to send reminders of upcoming deadlines and EHCP officers to also have access to these spreadsheets.

22. Compliments for Children's Services

22.1 56 compliments were received for Children's Services during 2022/23. These included 26 professional and 30 service user compliments as shown in figure 19 below:

Social Work Team	Professional	Service User	Grand Total
Child Asylum and 16+ Team	1		1
Child in Need		1	1
Child Protection and Court Team	4	3	7
Children's Assessment Team	1	1	2
Children with Disabilities Team	1	3	4
Exploitation and Missing Team	11	2	13
Family Support Team East/West		1	1
Fostering Team	1	1	2
Looked After Children		1	1
MASH Team		2	2
Youth Justice Service	1	5	6
Grand Total	20	20	40

Learning & Achievement Service	Professional	Service User	Grand Total
EHCP Team	1	6	7
EHE Inclusion Team	1		1
Learning, Skills & Progression	1		1
Planning, Performance & Commissioning	2		2
School Admissions		1	1
SISS Team	1	3	4
Grand Total	6	10	16

Fig 19

22.2 Below are some examples of compliments received in the year:

22.2.1 Service User compliments

Children In Need Team

I am so lucky, because I have you XX (EMT Coordinator) and YY (allocated Social Worker), who have stuck with me on my journey, and I trust you both. There are other girls placed here who have had lots of different workers and they don't feel they can talk to anyone as they get close and then someone new turns up. I am grateful for you and YY and how you have both stayed with me.

Exploitation & Missing Team

BB has always been very helpful, polite, professional and informative – it helps that she is quite young as my daughter clicked with her straight away. In that situation with what my daughter was going through, she is more on a level, she can relate – she had a laugh with my daughter, especially when she was trying to put my daughter at ease, finding common interests like anime. I don't think my daughter would have related in the same way to someone else. ... She is kind and caring, she got my daughter a card and some slime, and she didn't have to do that. She doesn't let her job get to her head, even though she is all about the job, she enjoys what she is doing. If she was running late, she would let us know, most of the time she would be on time. 9 times out of 10 she was on time. Very organized. She has a nice, calm demeanour about her, very friendly, approachable. She was amazing. Always followed it up, always done what she said, stuck to her word.'

Family Support Team East/West

I would like to provide feedback with regards to my experience with Solihull Children's Services. Our support worker CC has been absolutely remarkable. She has been my rock throughout the time she has been with us, kept me going at times when I was about to give up. Without her I would not be where I am right now, she pushed to have us rehomed, she never gave up hope even when I had. Any family who is lucky enough to have CC in their corner will definitely see results. She has always been very professional, a very honest lady who I know will always welcome me for a chat if I ever need her. I feel like I have gained a friend and am so thankful for all of her help.

MASH Team

I wanted to say a big thank you to the Children's Social Care and MASH teams, particularly Social Workers FF and RR. They have been excellent at working with us whilst we have been experiencing difficult family circumstances and I have really appreciated their honesty, insight and kindness. The work that they have done with us have helped us to be better informed and to feel more safe and we are very grateful.

Youth Justice Service

*"Just want to say a massive thank DD for everything you have done for *** and us as a family. I never thought he would bond with anyone at the start, but he did with you. You have made him come out of his shell which is amazing! You walked into our lives just as his YOS officer and your leaving now as our friend. We will miss you loads and I know I'll miss our little weekly chats too. We all wish you all the good luck in the world in your new adventure. I know whatever you do you will smash it!"*

EHCP Team

Thank you so much for all of your help! Your assistance has been invaluable and greatly appreciated! We are really happy that XX has been able to secure the YY ARP and ZZ ARP placements, which you have helped facilitate. It has been great to work with you during this entire process, and have you taken the time to listen and understand our concerns, whilst providing your advice. All the best and thank you once again!

SISS Team

I would like to take this opportunity to let you know my feelings of RR. RR has been supporting my son XX at YY school for last few years now . Well where do I start. Your services are very lucky to have such a great employee, he is amazing at his job, caring, understanding and has given my son XX 100% after my son tried to take his own life and with my son caring for myself at home as I have seizures . Many more issues. XX built trust and bond with RR in which he could open up and I'm forever grateful for that.

22.2.2 Professional compliments

Child Protection & Court Team

The matter of XX was in court this morning and the judge was really pleased with the work that the Local Authority had done in particular the social worker. The judge wanted me to convey the courts pleasure at the way that the matter has been dealt with by YY and said that her manager should commend her for her hard work in the matter.

Children's Assessment Team

I have been liaising with SS regarding concerns for a YP prior to their initial MACE meeting, SS has built a strong working-relationship with this YP which has contributed to reducing the risks regarding exploitation for her. SS has supported the YP understanding exploitation risks with direct work which has led the YP to feel comfortable sharing their own experiences. SS has taken additional measures to safeguard this YP by completing an NRM application, making additional referrals for other YP that may be at risk and making reports to the Police when safeguarding issues have been identified. SS has been helpful sharing information regarding other YP that have been identified which has supported with mapping any links of concern. SS has ensured the YP and her parents attended their MACE meeting and their views were obtained which supported professionals with understanding the risks.

Children with Disabilities Team

Just a quick compliment for HH, in regards her response to the complexities/risks associated with XX. I know she picked this up on duty last week and ran with it. Her quick and thorough response has been very much appreciated. We often forget to praise good practice, so thought I'd make the effort. The strat meeting on Friday for XX was not an easy one. Yet HH did an amazing job, she was open, transparent and offered appropriate challenge to partners around that table, ensuring what was best for that young person was at the centre of discussions/ actions.

Exploitation & Missing Team

I just want to take this opportunity to say that I think you have done a fantastic job with XX, he has come a long way in the last few months in regards to engagement with professionals thanks to you. Thank you for staying involved despite an expectation to transfer him, I really do think had you transferred sooner this would have been a potentially risky time. This has been evidenced as since staying involved he has disclosed very pertinent, sensitive information to you that otherwise may have increased his risk if not shared. It has been a pleasure to work with you and I look forward to working with you again in the future. You have been a consistent advocate for XX and prioritised his welfare and needs at all times.

EHCP Team

I just wanted to say how much we appreciated PP's attendance at a review meeting held yesterday. PP was excellent in the meeting and I know myself and the other professionals in attendance really valued her insights and input. She was reassuring and knowledgeable in her approach to the parents of the child too.

SISS Team

We just wanted to take a moment to thank and commend KK for the invaluable support she has offered us so far this year. She has built up positive relationships with school staff alongside the child she is working with and is a welcome sight on a Tuesday and Thursday morning! She has helped us to develop our own practice and given us some really helpful advice. She is warm and empathetic and has made a huge difference to our classroom this year.

22.3 Learning from compliments, as well as complaints is something that staff in Children's Services can use in order to share good practice and highlight what has worked well for those staff involved. This can then be considered and used appropriately by other Children's Services staff to enhance service provision.

23. Maintaining high standards in Children's complaints processing

23.1 During 2022/23, the Performance and Complaints Team have continued to work hard to ensure that any improvements made to the administration of complaints in previous years are maintained and where appropriate, improved upon and have continued to do all that they can to ensure that the processing of Children's Services complaints is of the highest standard.

23.2 Detailed conversations with prospective complainants both by telephone and e-mail and which continue, where required, throughout the complaint, ensure that customers feel listened to and reassured that their concerns will be dealt with. This approach is consistent with the report from the LGSCO entitled "*Running a complaints system*," which highlights that "*Features of an effective complaints procedure includes early direct contact with the person making the complaint and continued contact through the complaints process.*"

23.3 A number of concerns have been resolved outside of the formal complaints process with the agreement of the complainant. The Performance and Complaints Team have managed 156 such cases for Children's Services in 2022/23 (compared to 112 in 2021/22), helping to ensure that concerns are resolved as quickly as possible; whilst all but 12 of the 114 formal complaints received during 2021/22 have been resolved at Stage 1 of either the Statutory or Corporate process. This is an indication that high standards and continued customer liaison have a positive

impact on the quality of responses provided to complainants, aided significantly by the quality checking process provided by the Performance and Complaints Team. This has also had a positive impact on the number of requests by complainants to progress to the next stage in the complaints process.

- 23.4 When it is apparent to complainants that their complaint has been taken seriously and thoroughly investigated, with apologies made where appropriate and where the response is sufficiently thorough for them to understand how the outcome has been reached and that Children's Services has taken any appropriate learning from the complaint; then it is much more likely that complainants will be satisfied with the response they have received and less likely to request an escalation of their complaint.
- 23.5 Throughout complaint investigations, the Performance and Complaints Team have maintained positive relationships with existing Children's Services staff and also always aim to build new and positive relationships with staff taking up new positions in the Children's Services & Skills Directorate.
- 23.6 The efficient records management system used by the Performance and Complaints Team to record complaint details ensures swift responses to complainants, Children's Services staff and the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman. It also ensures that any member of the Performance and Complaints Team can, at any time, establish the current status of a complaint along with the detail of any correspondence that has taken place in relation to that complaint. This ensures an excellent level of customer service.
- 23.8 Customer feedback is sought following each complaint via an on-line questionnaire (also available on request in printed format) which has been developed and published on the Smart Survey website. Complainants/their representatives are invited to feedback their comments concerning their experience of the Complaints Procedure. This in turn, will feed into the learning and improvement process.

As part of this process the Council seeks to gather equality information from service users to help them check that we are treating people fairly and to identify any issues we might need to address. For the period of 2022/23 there were no equality issues identified.

- 23.9 During 2022/23 the Complaints Team received the following feedback:

23.9.1 Feedback from Complainants

- *... everything has been explained clearly to me in the letter and they sent it in time.*
- *Thank you for dealing with angry parents and speaking with them. I feel sorry for you being on the receiving end and thank you for your time and patience. You don't have an easy job and I don't envy you but I give praise where it's due, especially when people go over and beyond what is expected.*
- *Thank you for pursuing this complaint and keeping me informed. I accept the apology and hope this makes the team more aware of how their poor service impacts ordinary people. Thank you for ensuring that I and XX are being financed appropriately and in a timely manner.*

23.9.2 Feedback from Internal Staff

- *... thank you for pulling this together, you and your team are always so helpful and supportive*
- *thank you all for your service, you all do an amazing job...couldn't do it without you*
- *you have been so supportive and patient explaining things in detail to help me understand the complaints process. Both you and XX have been truly supportive.*

24. Reporting on Complaints

- 24.1 The reporting process to senior management is an important part of the complaints process in Solihull. This is essential if the issues raised in complaints and the learning from them, is to have a positive impact on practice. Any improvements which are identified, however minor, are built into the process and an example of this is the further breakdown of complaints issues as outlined at 15.3 and 18.7 above. This assists senior staff to easily identify if there is a common issue being raised by complainants, so that it can be reviewed and dealt with appropriately, in order to improve the service where required and prevent further complaints.
- 24.2 The Respond database used for recording complaints is an essential tool when providing accurate performance reporting and has allowed the Performance and Complaints Team to continue to provide in-depth reporting to management at all levels, including numbers of complaints received under each process (at which stage and for which teams), issue type and numbers and investigation timescales, along with outcomes and the number of learning forms that have been distributed, completed and returned and whether the learning has been implemented. The benefits of this have been outlined throughout this report.
- 24.3 Detailed reports for heads of service, the Senior Leadership teams and the Directorate Leadership Team are produced on time and at regular intervals (both monthly and quarterly). These highlight areas needing attention and have been an integral part of the complaints service provided by the Performance and Complaints Team. Accurate recording on the Respond database also enables one-off reports to be produced efficiently and as requested by managers, where complaint processing and monitoring suggests that there are issues that need attention in specific areas of Children's Services.
- 24.4 Heads of service and the assistant directors receive monthly reports of live complaints, enabling them to track performance against timescales and intervene if there is a risk that a complaint will not be dealt with within the desired time limit.
- 24.5 Quarterly complaints reports, detailing activity and performance, categories of complaint and learning and outcomes by service area and team, highlight any emerging trends. This ensures that managers can identify trends and again intervene early if a problem is highlighted.
- 24.6 Ombudsman activity / responses are also reported to CLT (Corporate Leadership Team) on a monthly basis and any new complaints referred from the LGSCO are reported immediately to the Director / appropriate Assistant Director. The Link

Officer role is situated within the Children's & Adults Complaints Team and hence the team have a role in the collation of information and oversight of Council wide Ombudsman responses to ensure that responses to the Ombudsman are within the timescale requested by the Ombudsman.

25 Looking ahead to 2023/24

- 25.1 In 2023/24, as in other years, training sessions will be organised for staff new to Solihull or to a management role, who respond to complaints. In addition, one-to-one training is always available to investigating managers and the Performance and Complaints Team are always happy to assist and provide advice and guidance to managers on an on-going basis.
- 25.2 During 2023/24, the Performance and Complaints Team will conduct a review of the Council's procedure for dealing with Statutory Complaints (those relating to Children's Social Work Services), in order to ensure that current senior members of staff have the opportunity to feed into and shape this.

26 Conclusion

- 26.1 During 2022/23, the Performance and Complaints Team have continued to work closely with Children's Services staff to ensure that as many responses as possible meet the appropriate timescales and that complaint responses are of a high quality. The quality of responses at Stage 1 has remained high, as evidenced by the fact that requests for Stage 2 investigations remained low.
- 26.2 The quality of complaint responses has continued to have a positive impact on the requests for escalation and hence the numbers of complaints progressing to investigation by the LGSCO.
- 26.3 Detailed and quality reporting to senior management has continued with the Performance and Complaints Team providing a detailed breakdown of the issues complained about, so that learning and subsequent actions taken; can be even more focussed and hence have a bigger impact on service improvement.
- 26.4 The numbers of learning forms being returned in 2022/23 has remained high. Learning data from 2022/23 will be formatted into spreadsheets and distributed to senior staff and the appropriate team managers, highlighting learning and implementation dates, both on a service wide and team-by-team basis, so that managers can comment on the differences that learning has made to practice. The evidence is then collated by the Performance and Complaints Team and this is available to inform service improvement.
- 26.5 During 2023/24, as in previous years, the Performance and Complaints Team will constantly review its practice in accordance with feedback from both complainants and Children's Services and will then work with managers and staff to make any changes that are essential, to enhance overall performance.

June 2023