



Children's Social Care Services and Education Service

Customer Feedback – Complaints, Comments & Compliments

Annual Report 2023 – 24

Foreword

Complaints, Comments and Compliments are an important way in which we receive feedback from those who use our services. This is the second Annual Report I have had the opportunity to introduce since becoming Gloucestershire County Council's Executive Director for Children and Young People's Services. It is fantastic to hear when we've helped a family to achieve their goals and feedback in such circumstances reinforces and affirms good practice and I am grateful to those children, young people and their families for taking time to tell us when we get it right. It is also true that we learn as much from our failures as we do from our successes and that is why I believe it essential that we understand what has happened and what action we can take when the children, young people and their families are dissatisfied with our services. We take feedback seriously and are committed to continuous improvement, listening, learning, and doing better in future.

To respond to feedback, we have targeted additional investment to increase capacity where it is needed and focused on developing technical and relational capability across all aspects of our service. This is helping us respond to the demand pressures we have been experiencing. Those demand pressures are not unique to Gloucestershire and reflect the enduring impact of the Covid pandemic and cost of living crisis, particularly on our most vulnerable families. The situation is further compounded by supply side issues as some key sectors struggle to meet the rise in demand. These challenging operating conditions are unlikely to ease in the short term.

Our most recent Ofsted inspections, in February 2022 and June 2023, found that our improvement journey continues, with good progress being made against most performance and quality indicators and sustained improvement in several areas. We will continue to strive for excellence, with the aim of ensuring that all children, young people and families receive consistently good services, providing the right help and support at the right time. Our Ambitions Plan 2023/24 set out how we will achieve this and is built around 3 core obsessions and 8 priority areas. It provides the framework for our continuous improvement activity, with progress overseen by a multi-agency Ambitions Board to ensure we continuously learn and are held to account for its delivery.

This annual report evidences our continued improvement alongside outlining aspects of a service with more to do. Social care complaints have fallen while those for education, most significantly for special educational needs, have increased. Positively we are able to resolve most complaints without the need for escalation. A further positive aspect is the increase in compliments for our work which enables us to celebrate and highlight those practitioners who are making a positive contribution to the lives of children and families.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report and your continued support in our work to give every child the best possible chance of a great life, especially those children who face disadvantage and experience vulnerability as a result.

Ann James

Executive Director of Children and Young Peoples Services

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1) Executive Summary

This executive summary highlights key points from the analysis of Children's Social Care and Education feedback received between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.

During this period, the Council managed:

- 310 comments (i.e., contacts received and resolved without them becoming formal complaints)
- 288 formal Stage 1 complaints
- 33 Stage 2 complaints
- 5 Stage 3 panels
- 404 compliments
- 46 formal referrals from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO)

310 contacts were managed and resolved outside of the formal complaints process: 178 for Social Care and 132 for Education services.

Of the 288 Stage 1 complaints received, 137 were in relation to Social Care and 151 were in relation to Education.

The number of formal Social Care complaints received for the year decreased by 31.5% (137, compared to 200 in 2022/23). The number of formal Education-related complaints received increased by 12.6% (151 compared to 132 in 2022/23). This increase can be attributed to numerous factors which are explored on pages 6-7 of this report.

Where resolution at Stage 1 could not be achieved with Social Care complaints, 8 independent investigations by an Independent Investigator, external to the Council, were arranged at Stage 2 of the Representations Procedure (Children) Regulations 2006, (2 of these being cases where the Stage 1 complaint was received in 2022/3). A further 7 were investigated internally at Stage 2 in line with corporate complaint procedures. In Education-related services, 16 complaints were investigated internally at Stage 2, and 2 were investigated externally.

The Council received 46 referrals from the LG&SCO (43 in 2022/23), with 12 of these being related to Social Care. 2 of the 12 referrals resulted in the LG&SCO undertaking a formal investigation. Of these investigations, there was 1 outcome of fault / injustice found, with the other 1 found to have no fault. The remaining 34 referrals were for Education-related services. Of these, 12 resulted in a formal investigation where the Ombudsman found fault in 10 cases, and 2 cases were not upheld.

In the 11 cases where fault was found (1 Social Care and 10 Education-related), the Ombudsman asked the Council to either compensate the complainant or reimburse monies as a result of the fault found. This totaled £19,880, which comes directly from the relevant service's operational budget.

Between the various stages of the complaints process, the rate of escalation for complaints is low. This reflects the successful efforts made by officers to understand and address concerns when they arise.

The decrease in formal complaints this year suggests that quality of practice / the outcomes achieved for children and young people is improving.

Overall, the percentage of complaints found to be justified (either partly or fully upheld) decreased in the year to 70.5% (71.4% in 2022-23), though remains high. This can be attributed to the sustained demand upon services, as discussed on page 7. The percentage of complaints responded to within agreed timescales increased to 71.5% (65.6% in 2022/23), and work continues between the Complaints Team and service to improve these measures.

97.6% of complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days in 2023/24, improving on the previous year, when 95% was achieved.

The total number of compliments received decreased from the previous year by 27.1% (404 compared to 554 in 2022/23).

2) Children's Social Care Comments - an overview

Where possible, the Complaints Team and relevant service area have continued to try to find ways to resolve concerns quickly, outside of the formal complaints process. In total, 178 Social Care contacts were managed as comments in 2023/24, which represents a decrease from the 244 managed that way in 2022/23.

It is an approach that requires active support and input from managers, with prompt responses being provided to the queries and concerns raised. It may be the case that they:

- offer an apology if it is recognised that there has been fault on their service's part
- arrange a meeting with the complainant(s), so their views can be heard, and their concerns discussed
- simply provide an explanation for what has happened, and outline the actions which will be taken as a result / the timescale in which these actions will happen

Where it is not possible to achieve resolution in this way, the Council can still take concerns forward under the statutory complaints process / its own complaints process (also known as the Corporate Complaints Policy), as appropriate.

In the last year, the Complaints Team and the service areas have continued to work closely to proactively resolve issues at the earliest point possible. The data reflects a decrease in the number of formal Social Care complaints, which evidences this approach has been taken onboard and is being effectively implemented. This remains a priority moving forward and should lead every year to a high proportion of contacts resolved outside of the formal complaints processes, which is of benefit to both customers and the service involved.

3) Children's Services Complaints - an overview

Social Care

When complaints have been made by or on behalf of children and young people with whom Children's Social Care are involved, and they are about Social Care functions, they will likely be considered under the statutory complaints process. Where concerns are about how the Council has treated an individual as an adult, or relate to Non-Social Care functions, they will likely be managed under the Council's Corporate Complaints Policy.

The table below details the number of complaints dealt with at various stages of the complaints processes.

Number of Children's Social Care complaints managed at :	During 2019/20	During 2020/21	During 2021/22	During 2022/23	During 2023/24
Stage 1	199	239	229	200	137
Stage 2	11	21	22	8	15
Stage 3	2	1	1	1	5
LG&SCO	21	12	25	21	12

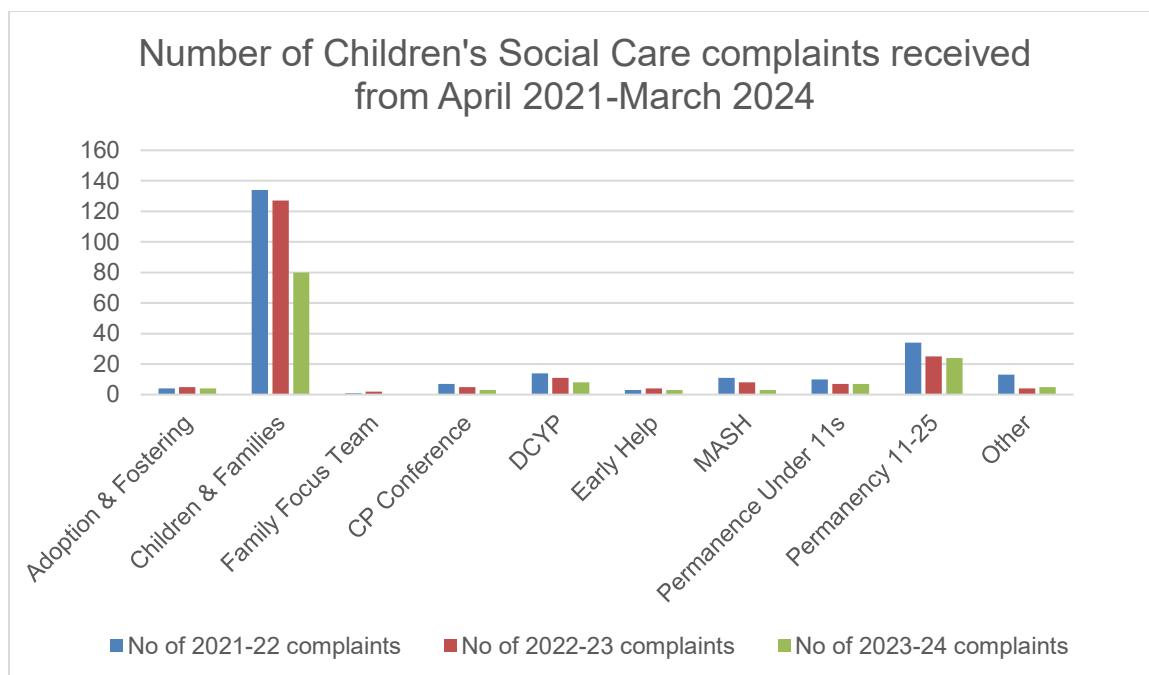
The volume of complaints dealt with should be viewed in the context of all the work undertaken by Gloucestershire Children's Social Care, as set out in the table below.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Total number of contacts received by Children's Services	34,595	34,465	33,961
Total number of children in care	841	865	842
Total number of children subject to Child Protection Plans	855	545	603
Total number of children assessed as Children in Need	2,257 (monthly average 21/22)	2,417 (monthly average 22/23)	2,148 (monthly average 23/24)
Total number of Single Assessments completed	9,221	9,300	5,857
Total number of Single Assessments completed in up to 45 working days	7,395	7,213	4,471

Stage 1

There were 137 complaints dealt with at Stage 1, which represents a notable decrease of 31.5% from 2022/23, when 200 were recorded.

87.6% of complaints received during 2023/24 were resolved following an investigation and response at Stage 1 of the complaints procedure, or with further informal intervention.



Regarding the table above :

- In 2023-24, 'Other' encompasses Commissioning, the Independent Reviewing Team and the Allegations Management Service.
- in 2022-23, 'Other' encompassed Commissioning, the Family Group Conference Team and the Complaints Team.
- in 2021/22, 'Other' encompassed the Allegations Management Service, Commissioning, the Independent Reviewing Team, the Turn Around for Children Service, and a complaint relating to Children's Social Care but not a specific department.

Stage 2

15 complaints were investigated at Stage 2 in 2023/24, though with 2 of these, the Stage 1 complaints were received in 2022/23. Of the 15 investigations, 8 were undertaken by an independent investigator, external to the Council in line with Representations Procedure (Children) Regulations 2006, and the other 7 were responded to by the relevant Service Manager or Head of Service.

Stage 3

5 complaints progressed to a Stage 3 review panel in 2023/24.

The first was not upheld, though the Council agreed to :

- provide a written apology for the length of time it had taken to respond in writing to safeguarding concerns and review procedures.
- assure itself of the safeguarding process, staff training and quality assurance measures to ensure processes were happening in a timely manner.
- commit to providing clear and timely communication via text and e-mail.

The second was partially upheld, and the Council agreed to :

- provide a letter of apology.
- provide Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism to relevant staff who had not yet received it
- ensure relevant staff were aware of the family's communication requirements.
- ensure parents / carers of young people undertaking EOTAS are aware of and can easily access free school meal vouchers.
- ensure training is available to commissioned advocacy services around providing neuro-affirming practice.
- provide a tablet so the young person could properly engage with EOTAS.
- make a goodwill payment in recognition of the learning gathered from the complaint.
- offer payment for the distress and uncertainty experienced around any upheld complaints.

The third was partially upheld, and the Council agreed to :

- complete the process already started in relation to improving services.
- progress remedy payments in regard to the complaint.
- reiterate to practitioners the complexities involved in considering private assessments and diagnosis as part of the evidence underpinning an EHCNA and EHCP.

The fourth was partially upheld, and the Council agreed to :

- apologise in regard to the points of complaint upheld at Stages 2 and 3.
- offer a meeting with an appropriate senior manager, to ensure a clear and consistent response to the complaint process' findings / complainant's views on the process.
- offer a meeting with an appropriate social work manager, so the parent could see and comment on relevant details in the case files.
- review the way in which it shares information about the Child Protection / care process with families.

The fifth was partially upheld, and the Council agreed to :

- continue with improvement work around the timeliness of EHCP reviews.
- check that annual reviews had been held within timescales for children in care, particularly those with the highest needs, and rectify this where that hadn't taken place.
- ensure the young person's education was, in line with his abilities and age, sufficiently challenging.
- provide an apology for the length of time it had taken to provide an appropriate service and for the points of complaint upheld at Stage 3
- offer payment for the distress and uncertainty experienced around any upheld complaints.
- provide a realistic target date for the young person's move to a new home.
- commit to providing clear and timely communication with the young person's advocate and parent, and invite them to meetings as appropriate.

Learning from all 3 stages is reported in section 6 below.

Education

Complaints made directly about schools are managed by the Governors or Headteacher of the school affected rather than the Council, and instances where people have been signposted to a school's complaints process are not included in this section. Where the Council has dealt with Education-related complaints, however (for example, when they relate to the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process or home to school transport), the complaints have been managed in line with the Council's Corporate Complaints Policy.

In 2023/24, 132 comments were managed outside of the Corporate Complaints process informally. A further 151 complaints were received and responded to at Stage 1.

27 of the 151 complaints were not upheld, 60 were partially upheld, 61 were fully upheld, 1 did not progress and 2 were withdrawn.

There were 28 cases where escalation to Stage 2 of the corporate procedure was requested and, of these, it was agreed to provide further investigation at Stage 2 in 18 cases.

15 were partly or fully upheld.

1 case was also escalated to Stage 2 of the statutory complaints procedure, given its length and complicated nature, and the investigation is still ongoing at the time of writing.

It is noted that there was a 12.9 % increase in complaints relating to Education in 23-24, when compared to 22-23. This increase can be attributed to various factors including, but not limited to;

- a 12.8% increase in requests for new EHC Needs Assessments (1539, compared with 1364 in 22-23)
- An 8.9% increase in children / young people with an EHC plan (5289 on 1 April 2023, compared with 4854 on 1 April 2022)
- A 38.9% increase in the number of appeals logged (282, compared with 203 in 22-23)
- The wait time for tribunals has increased, and it is thought that this has caused parents to explore other routes, such as the complaints process.

As a result of the increase in demand on their service, the EHCP team have reshaped their structure to close the gap in demand. The Complaints Team also continued to work closely with the service to support complaint management.

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

Children's Social Care

In 2023/24, the Council received 12 referrals regarding Children's Social Care from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman. In the previous year, it received 21. Of the 12 referrals received, 2 led to full investigations. The table below sets out the decisions made in each case.

LG&SCO Decision received in year ending 31 March 2024				
Closed after initial inquiry / out of jurisdiction	Premature	No fault	Fault/Injustice	No final decision made
8	2	1	1	0

In the 1 case where fault was found, it resulted in the council apologising for failing to approach Health services sooner, was asked to make a payment of £150 to the complainant for the distress the fault caused, review procedures to ensure systems are in place for identifying overdue enquiries and actions by Health bodies and to remind officers of the need to pursue health officials about referrals and health related inquiries so there are no delays on child protection investigations.

Education Services

A further 34 complaints were recorded by the Ombudsman for Education Services, compared with 22 referrals the previous year. Of the 34 complaints referrals received, 12 progressed to full investigations. The final decisions are set out below, including the learning for the Council.

LG&SCO Decision received in year ending 31 March 2024				
Closed after initial inquiry / out of jurisdiction	Premature	No fault	Fault/Injustice	Remedy already complete
13	7	2	10	2

In the first case where fault was found, the Council was asked to provide a written apology to the complainant acknowledging the faults identified in the ombudsman's report; pay the complainant £500 for the avoidable distress and frustration caused; pay the complainant £500 for the time and trouble taken trying to resolve the issue with the Council; to remind relevant to adhere to SEN timescales and respond promptly to parent and carers communication.

In the second case where fault was found, the Council was asked to apologise for not holding an annual review meeting within legislative timescales; pay £300 for the uncertainty caused; issue guidance to staff to ensure EHCP's are reviewed every 12 months; issue guidance to relevant staff of the need to issue revised EHCP's within the timescales set out in legislation.

In the third case where fault was found, the Council was asked to provide an apology for the inconvenience, distress and frustration caused through delays in completing the EHC Plan review process; pay £4,000 for the Council's failure to provide suitable Alternative Provision; pay £500 for the failure to provide educational provision detailed in the EHC Plan.

In the fourth case where fault was found, the Council agreed to apologise for the failings; make a symbolic payment of £8,000; commit to making a further payment to cover tuition costs; remind all relevant staff to accurately record and action complaints.

In the fifth case where fault was found, the Council agreed to apologise for the failings; Pay £200 to recognise the distress caused; review its processes to ensure effective systems are in place to ensure decision letters are sent out within 4 weeks of an annual review.

In the sixth case where fault was found, the Council was asked to apologise for the failings identified; pay £300 for the distress caused.

In the seventh case where fault was found, the Council was asked to pay £2,500 to acknowledge a loss of education; pay the complainant £300 for their time and trouble in trying to resolve the issue with the Council; review its commissioning arrangements for tutors of children.

In the eighth case where fault was found, the Council was asked to apologise for the fault; pay £1,200 to remedy the impact on the loss of provision; pay £300 for the distress caused by the fault.

In the ninth case where fault was found, the Council was asked to pay £200 to acknowledge the complainant's distress and time and trouble taken to resolve the issues; pay £330 in recognition of the delay of the likely provision missed as a result in the delay in responding to the complaint.

In the tenth and final case where fault was found, the Council was asked to provide a written apology to the complainant acknowledging the faults identified in the ombudsman's report; pay the complainant £700 to recognise the distress and uncertainty caused by the delay in issuing the EHC Plan.

4) Reasons and outcome of complaint by service

This section of the annual report analyses the reasons for complaints by service and identifies key themes, trends, and outcomes.

Adoption & Fostering

Of the 4 complaints received in 2023/24, the most commonly raised reasons for complaint were **Non delivery** and **Eligibility**.

3 of the 4 complaints were not upheld and 1 was partially upheld.

Children & Families

Within the 80 complaints received in 2023/24, the most commonly raised reason for complaint was **Quality of Service**.

25 of the 80 complaints were not upheld, 42 were partially upheld, 3 were fully upheld, 3 were withdrawn and 7 are not progressing.

CP Conference

Of the 3 complaints received in 2023/24, the most commonly raised reason for complaint was **Quality of Service**.

2 of the 3 complaints were not upheld and 1 is not progressing.

Disabled Children & Young People (DCYP)

Within the 8 complaints received in 2023/24, the most commonly raised reason for complaint was **Quality of Service**.

6 of the 8 complaints were partially upheld, and 2 were fully upheld.

Early Help

Within the 3 complaints raised in 2023/24, the most commonly raised reasons for complaint were **Communication** and **Quality of Service**.

2 of the complaints were partially upheld, and 1 was withdrawn.

Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

Within the 3 complaints received in 2023/24, the most commonly raised reason for complaint was **Staff attitude**.

All 3 complaints were partially upheld.

Permanence Under 11s

Within the 7 complaints received in 2023/24, the most commonly raised reason for complaint was **Communication**.

2 of the 7 complaints were not upheld, 4 were partially upheld, and 1 was fully upheld.

Permanency 11-25

Within the 24 complaints received in 2023/24, the most commonly raised reason for complaint was **Communication**.

6 of the 24 complaints were not upheld, 10 were partially upheld, 2 were fully upheld, 2 were withdrawn, and 4 were marked as not progressing.

THE REASONS GIVEN BY COMPLAINANTS FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMPLAINTS IN 2023/24

The table below provides the aggregated data of broad themes captured within complaints, and the number of different times the Council were told about these in 2023/24.

Communication	Data breach / mishandling of information	140
	Delay in provision of information / response / returned contact	
	Feel they are not being kept informed / involved, or are not being listened to	
	Information, policy, plan, or rule has not been properly explained	
	No / little communication being given of absence / cancellation / lateness	
	Relevant staff not being available at time of contact	
	Inappropriate charge for service	
	Not receiving level of payments that are due or feel compensation is warranted for faults in service	

Cost	Tax payers' money wasted	17
	Unhappy with changes to financial support	
Delay in decision or provision of service	Decision not provided within given timescales	115
	Doesn't feel sufficient progress is being made	
	Service not provided within given timescales	
Discrimination	Discriminated against due to age	17
	Discriminated against due to class	
	Discriminated against due to gender / sex	
	Discriminated against due to mental / physical health or disabilities	
	Discriminated against due to race or nationality	
	Discriminated against due to religion	
	Discriminated against on a personal level	
Eligibility	No / restricted access to payment or service (general)	50
	No / restricted access to payment or service (personal)	
Non delivery	Frequency of visits / meetings not at appropriate level	72
	Support not provided (e.g., help not given with achieving agreed outcomes, or requested therapy sessions not arranged)	
Quality of service	Errors or omissions in assessment / letter / minutes / statement	195
	Insensitive application of service by authority / team	
	Not being sent documents / invited to meetings	
	Policy / guidelines not being adhered to	
	Sees no benefit from authority's involvement	
	Teams not communicating with each other / working together	
	Too many changes of social worker / carer	
	Website navigability / quality	
Staff attitude	Staff member displaying a lack of empathy / being unhelpful	50
	Staff member displaying a lack of knowledge / competence	
	Staff member displaying rude / aggressive behaviour	

	Unhappy with a decision they feel puts the child(ren) involved / them at risk	
Unwelcome or disputed decision	Unhappy with case being closed	67
	Unhappy with escalation of concerns	
	Unhappy with other decision made by social worker / authority	
	Unhappy with the frequency / length / nature of contact	
	Unhappy with the outcome of an assessment	

Of the 288 total Stage 1 Children's Services complaints received in 2023/24 (that being, Social Care and Education-related services), 70.5% of them were found to have some justification and were recorded as being fully or partially upheld. This represents a decrease from the 71.4% which were fully or partially upheld in 2022/23, and an increase from the 64.8% which were fully or partially upheld in 2021/22. The percentage remaining relatively high can almost certainly be attributed to the increase overall of complaints in Education and the capacity issues they have faced.

Where the Complaints Team has not received information on the outcome of concerns raised, these have been recorded as 'not progressing'.

Education

Of the 151 complaints received and responded to at Stage 1, the most commonly raised reason for complaint was **Delay in decision or provision of service** (55 relating to 'Service not provided within given timescales', 19 relating to 'Doesn't feel sufficient progress is being made', and 26 relating to 'Decision not provided within given timescales').

27 of the 151 complaints received were not upheld, 60 were partially upheld, 61 were fully upheld, 2 were withdrawn, and 1 was marked as not progressing.

5) How quickly are we responding to Stage 1 complaints?

This section looks at our performance in relation to the standards expected for responding to complaints.

The aim is to acknowledge all complaints within 2 working days and respond to them within the given timescales. The statutory timescale for a response is 10 working days, though this can be extended to 20 working days if the complaint is complex / staff important to the investigation are absent. The timescale for a response under the Corporate Complaints Policy is 20 working days.

97.6% of Children's Services complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days in 2023/24, compared to 95% in 2022/23. The reasons for delays in acknowledging complaints included:

- Complaints not being sent directly to the Complaints Team

- Complaints incorporating multiple issues, where it has taken time to establish the team or teams who will be responding
- Awaiting responses from team managers, when review of the contact indicates the concern could be resolved informally

The table below shows our performance for responding to complaints at Stage 1 of the process.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
% of Children's Services complaints responded to within agreed timescale	60.6%	65.6%	71.5%

Reasons for late responses include:

- The person investigating the complaint / involved staff members having other work commitments, delaying the investigation
- The detail and complexity of the complaint
- Annual leave and sick leave of key members of staff

The Complaints Team continue to work with Children's Services to improve the timeliness of responses, work which includes producing monthly and quarterly reports on the status of complaints for Heads of Service, sending reminder e-mails as to when responses are due, and assisting with the drafting and checking of responses. This work is ongoing, and we continue to consider ways in which the process might be improved, including complaints meetings with Heads of Service to discuss this work and approach.

6) Learning from complaints

Learning from complaints contributes to practice development and service improvement and is an important element within Children's Services quality assurance arrangements, with senior leaders having regular oversight.

The following table details some examples of actions which have been taken by Children's Services and the Complaints Team as a result of concerns being raised, these are in addition to the actions already identified in the report following Ombudsman recommendations.

Issue	Action
That Children's Social Care satisfy itself that robust systems are in place for the escalation process for IRO's to challenge poor practice.	Senior Leaders committed to review this process.
That Children's Social Care develop a proforma which can be used with young people who are in care and are 16 years old to clarify/confirm their wishes in regard to sharing information with their parents/carers.	Document developed.
That social work managers are reminded that when there are communication challenges	Discussed at Senior Leadership meeting and disseminated to all staff and management.

between officers and service users, there is an agreed Communication Strategy/Agreement to manage expectations.

That Children's Social Care reminds its staff of the value of accurate record keeping and minute taking.

Discussed at Senior Leadership meeting and disseminated to all staff.

That Children's Social Care ensures that step up or step-down processes between service provision (Early Help/social work) is robust and effective.

Included as part of the remodeling of the service

That Children's Services put in place a strategy to ensure that all parents/carers of children/young people undertaking EOTAS are aware of and can easily access their FSM/vouchers on a regular basis.

Senior leaders committed to have the policy reviewed and provide advice and guidance to parents following receipt of the government's revised guidance.

That Children's Social Care consider ensuring that their commissioned advocacy services are trained in and able to provide neuro-affirming practice.

Senior leaders committed to finding out what training was in place and to plan for neuro diversity and neuro-affirming training to be available to advocacy services.

7) Who is using the complaints procedure?

This section looks at who is raising issues, complaints, or concerns in regard to Children's Services, and offers some analysis of the equalities and diversity data which has been returned to us.

The following key points can be identified in regard to the people using our complaints processes, and who answered our equalities monitoring questions:

- There were 10 complaints received from children and young people under the age of 18 directly or via an advocate. This made up 3.5% of the total received.
- 246 complaints were raised by parents, either directly, or via an advocate or legal representative. This amounted to 85.4% of the total.
- There were 10 complaints received from relatives / partners with no parental responsibility. This made up 3.5% of the total received.
- Foster carers and Special Guardians (both former, current and prospective) put in 10 complaints, representing 3.5% of complaints made.
- There were 6 complaints received from young people between 18 and 25 directly or via an advocate. This made up 2.1% of the total received.
- 1 complaint was received from an adult who had received services as a child. This amounted to 0.3% of the total.
- There were 2 complaints logged as having been received from 'other' or 'unknown'. This made up 0.7% of the total received.
- Professionals put in 3 complaints, representing 1% of complaints made.
- Where it was stated, 82% of complainants identified as British.

- Where it was stated, 15% of complainants identified as male, 83% as female, with 2% choosing not to say
- Where it was stated, 17% of complainants identified as having a disability

8) How are children and young people being supported to raise concerns?

Reconstruct have now taken over from Barnardo's in providing an advocacy service, which supports young people in complaining about the actions of Children's Services. Their advocates are familiar with the Council's complaints processes, and information about the service is included on the Children's Services complaints page of the Council's website.

Young people are also supported by Reconstruct in raising concerns, informally, with the social worker or team with whom they are working. This is in line with best practice, and the Complaints Team is not typically made aware when such interventions have been successful in resolving a young person's issues. Moving forward the complaints team have established links with the children's commissioners and will meet quarterly to ensure the work of the advocacy service in resolving concerns informally is reflected in future reports, and to generally discuss the service experience from the Complaints Team's perspective.

Of the 12 young people who raised comments and complaints this year, 6 were supported by advocates in making their complaints. The main reasons for their complaints were a feeling that the service had been applied insensitively, and that they were not being kept involved / informed.

The Children's Services' Participation Team supports and co-ordinates use of the Mind of My Own app, though 0 young people used it to raise comments or complaints this year.

There is no statutory requirement to offer advocacy for adults raising complaints relating to their children.

9) Children's Services Compliments - an overview

This section looks at compliments received. The table below compares the number of compliments received in 2023/24 with the number received in previous years.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Children's Services compliments received by year	212	554	404

16 of the compliments we have logged were made by young people under the age of 18, 2 were received from a young person between 18 and 25, there were 91 internal compliments, 137 external professionals took the time to put their praise of staff on record, 154 examples of positive feedback were received from carers, prospective carers, parents, or other family members, 1 compliment was logged by a councilor, and 3 compliments were received from anonymous, unknown or other parties. We continue to log compliments from professionals and colleagues that recognise the positive work done by teams and the individuals within those teams.

What positive things are people saying?

Some examples of the positive comments made by service users are:

- One young person said : *'I really enjoyed working with you as my time as a care leaver you really helped me to become the person I am today and get through everything that was chucked at me! I was very lucky to have you and who ever had you next is lucky thank you for helping me and my girls with anything and everything!'*
- One parent said : *'No words can describe the gratitude we feel for all the support you have given [us]. Your patience (lots of it!), trust, compassion, wisdom and candour/openness have helped us so much and got us to the point where we are now ... you made a massive impact on us'.*
- One professional said : *'I just wanted to 'champion' XX and what a great job she does. Her communication with professionals is 'gold star'. Often as a school, we see the children the most and having social workers such as XX who are working so closely really helps us and without doubt gets more positive outcomes for our families. Her passion and care for getting the job done is so commendable'.*
- One young person said : *'Thank you for all ur help and support. It has meant the world to me ❤️❤️❤️I have no doubt that without ur help, I wouldn't be where I am. Really I mean it, you have been a role model and helped me reach full independence. You have always been so encouraging of me and I don't know, you've been different to other social workers (in a good way), I know you really believed in me and you really cared about me doing well. You have played a massive part in me finishing uni so I just want to say thank you XX'.*
- One parent said : *'I would like to say big thanks to XX, Her deep understanding of XX's needs has been remarkable, and she has consistently demonstrated her ability to provide XX and the hole family with the support required to help XX. And since not being XX's social worker any longer, due to XX reaching 18, XX has not given up she has chased all the right relevant departments to make sure XX gets the right help, and adult social worker if XX reaches the needs to get one. which I'm very grateful for her hard work I think she should be awarded and the valued for her hard work. XX has gone out of her way on so many occasions to help XX, and put in the right support networks support XX, her ability to listen and understand is remarkable. Moreover, she has diligently followed through on every commitment she made, instilling a sense of trust and reassurance with social services which is certainly needed to support children and families in their need and shows a strong commitment to work with families. I would certainly recommend to any family that needs input and the relevant help'.*
- One foster carer said : *'We have thoroughly enjoyed our time as foster carers and are looking forward to this next phase of life as adoptive parents to our foster daughter! We are hoping this is not the end of our journey with fostering as we have found it to be one of the most fulfilling and rewarding experiences we have ever had. We will intentionally look for opportunities to promote fostering and its vital role in many children's lives. We would also like to take the opportunity to formally thank the incredible team at GCC who made our whole families journey into this such a joy. We know that often the job is long hours and a lot of stress! We would especially like to thank the XX who supported our children, XX for supporting our family from the idea of being a foster family, through training and there after, XX and XX for being creative and helping navigate our very complex placement situation. For championing XX*

and her needs even when the form's didn't fit, you always found a way! XX for being the CSW who finally got us to panel and across the line! Most of all we would really like to thank XX if it hadn't been for her steadfast hand on this situation, her encouragement, support, wisdom and determination that went far above and beyond her expected professional role, we would not have been able to keep going. Without her help our family would always have been missing one very special person. You are an absolute Hero in our house XX'.

- *One parent said : 'I'm not good at goodbyes. If I would have said goodbye I would have cried. Thank you, for all you have done for our family, really don't know what I'm going to do without you. I alone have had some very dark moments and knowing you were there helped me through. W.W.XX.D I will all think what would XX do. Forever. Thank you for getting my boy to open up and talk to someone, you were so approachable and open that he knew he could be himself around you. And for being there whenever XX got violent your advise worked amazing. As a family we have grown and progressed so much. Thanks to you. I've had 2 family support workers but you were the best by far. It is our loss now you have gone, but another family's great gain. Have a wonderful Christmas and a fan-dab-a-tastic new year'.*
- *One professional said : 'I just wanted to take a moment to say goodbye and thank you for everything you've done, especially for XX. It's been amazing to see how much of a positive impact you've had on her. XX has mentioned a time and time again how much she's going to miss you. Your kindness, patience, and dedication have meant so much to her, and to all of us. It's been a pleasure to work alongside someone who genuinely cares. I'm really hopeful we'll get the chance to work together again in the future. You're leaving big shoes to fill, and I want you to know your efforts and the difference you've made won't be forgotten'.*
- *One parent said : 'I would like to thank all of you from the bottom of my heart for everything you've done for myself, XX and XX. It has been a rollercoaster of a journey for everyone. All of you are tremendous at your jobs and have the patience of a saint where XX is concerned, I'm truly sorry for any bad manners and bad attitude he may have shown towards you. There's day's I wish to god he would change his ways and be my loving caring son again instead of this hard man exterior he portrays, I suppose I can live in hope but never give up on him. The dedication, time, correspondence, visits and support you've shown me and my family is truly above and beyond. So I'd just like to say thank you again'.*
- *One professional said : 'I am sure that like most of us, you mostly get feedback that is not massively positive, so I just wanted to say thank you very much for sorting this case out for XX. I know that there were several things out of your control and that you are swamped but appreciate that you have managed to resolve all the issues and get a decision'.*

10) The complaints process explained

This report provides information about complaints which were made between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 and handled under the complaints and representations procedures established through the Representations Procedure (Children) Regulations 2006 and the council's Corporate Complaints Policy.

All timescales contained within this report are in working days. Text within inverted commas indicates direct citations from the 2006 Regulations or Guidance, unless otherwise specified.

What is a complaint?

'An expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response'.

Who can make a complaint?

The child or young person receiving or eligible to receive services from the council or their representative (e.g., a parent, relative, advocate, special guardian, or foster carer).

'The Council has the discretion to decide whether or not the representative is suitable to act in this capacity or has sufficient interest in the child's welfare.'

Stages of the complaints procedure

The statutory complaints procedure has three stages:

Stage 1: This is the most important stage of the complaints procedure, and the one in which service areas / external contractors providing services on our behalf are expected to resolve as many complaints as possible.

The Corporate Complaints Policy requires a response at Stage 1 within 20 working days. The statutory complaints procedure requires response to complaints at Stage 1 within 10 working days (though the response time may be extended to 20 working days, where necessary).

Stage 2: This stage is implemented when the complainant is dissatisfied with the findings from Stage 1. Stage 2 of the statutory complaints procedure involves an investigation being conducted by an Investigating Officer, with oversight being provided by an Independent Person. Both of these people are external and independent, and an internal senior manager adjudicates their findings and recommendations. Under the Regulations, the aim is to provide the Stage 2 response within 25 days of the complaint being agreed, though this can be extended to 65 days, where necessary.

Under the Corporate Complaints Policy, an internal senior manager reinvestigates the complaint, considering the response already provided. Arrangements might be made for an independent person to review and investigate the complaint instead if this is considered necessary. The aim is to provide the Stage 2 response within 25 days of the request for a Stage 2 investigation being accepted. There is no statutory duty, with the Corporate Complaints Policy, to progress complaints to Stage 2.

Stage 3: There is no Stage 3 under the Corporate Complaints Policy. The third stage of the statutory complaints procedure, however, is considered by a Review Panel made up of three independent people. It is not within the Panel's remit to reinvestigate complaints.

Where complainants wish to proceed with complaints about statutory Children's Social Care functions, the council is required to establish a Complaint Review Panel. The Panel makes recommendations to the Director of Children's Services, who then sets out what action will be taken in response.

Timescales in regard to Stage 3 complaints include:

- setting up the Panel within 30 working days;
- producing the Panel's report within a further 5 working days; and
- producing the council's response within 15 working days

For more details, please click on,

<https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/complaints-and-feedback/>

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman is an independent government body, empowered to investigate complaints about councils when the council's own investigations have not provided resolution. They offer a free service and can both offer advice and *'investigate complaints in a fair and independent way'* (Source - <https://www.lgo.org.uk>).

Complainants retain the right to approach the Ombudsman at any time, though the Ombudsman will typically expect complainants to have completed the council's complaints process before they investigate matters themselves. For more details, please click on <https://www.lgo.org.uk/>

Michael Ellis (Customer Feedback and Complaints Officer)
Colin Davies (Customer Feedback and Complaints Manager)

November 2024