



**Complaints Annual Report
Children's Social Care Services
2023 / 24**



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1. Introduction

The report covers Children's Social Care Services for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, it details the complaints and compliments that have been formally recorded during this period. This introduction and up to chapter 4 are unchanged from last year's report, there has been no changes to the legislation, policy or procedure when dealing with complaints.

The Children's Act 1989 require all local authorities with Children's Social Care responsibilities in England and Wales to have a complaints procedure. The aim of The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure is for Children and Young People to have their concerns resolved swiftly and wherever possible by the people who provide the service locally. The Department for Education 'Getting the Best from Complaints - Social Care Complaints and Representations for Children, Young People and Others' provides guidance for local authorities on implementing the Children's Act and defines a complaint as being:

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

Statutory complaints relate to the provision of Children's Social Care and are handled in line with the national regulations referred to above, the key stages of which are set out in section 2 of this report: stage 1 - local resolution; stage 2 – investigation; stage 3 - review panel and section 4 - referral to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Complaints about Children's Social Care Services that do not fall under The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure may be responded to under the local Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure which is set out in section 3 of this report. Some complaints may be addressed in accordance to internal HR procedures.

It is a requirement of The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure for the local authority to have a designated officer who is responsible for the management of the procedure and who is independent of social care operational line management and of direct service providers. In order to contribute effectively to service development, the Complaints Management function is managed by the Principal Policy Officer based within the Place Planning, Policy and Provision Service, within the Education, Inclusion and Provision Department.

There are other customer contacts which allow early resolution to prevent complaint escalation and this can include advice and guidance, signposting and problem solving direct with the customer. Another and very positive aspect is the recording and reporting of compliments and positive feedback received by the Children Services Directorate.

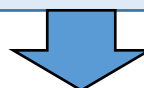
This Annual Report is produced in line with national guidance and is designed to share information more widely with members of the public.

2. The Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints Process

The aim of complaint procedures is to resolve any dissatisfaction promptly, effectively and transparently and to inform service improvements to prevent service users experiencing the same issues in the future. We cannot promise to deliver the outcomes that complainants want, but we do make sure that complaints are dealt with as quickly and as thoroughly as possible.

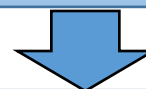
STAGE 1 – the complaint will be allocated to the appropriate team manager who is asked to investigate the complaint. We always aim to resolve the problem as quickly as possible (within 10 working days) however, sometimes the complaint is complex so may take up to 20 working days.

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the response or investigation at Stage 1 and feels that the complaint is not resolved, they or their representative can request to go to Stage 2.



STAGE 2 - An external Independent Person is commissioned by Children's Services to further investigate the complaint. The Investigating Officer and Independent Person will aim to produce a report within 25 working days. However, if the case is complex, they can have a maximum of 65 working days in which to produce their reports. Once the reports have been finalised they are sent to the Adjudication Officer (usually the Head of Service) who will, after careful consideration of the reports, provide the complainant with a written response to their complaint.

If the complainant still remains dissatisfied with the decision/outcome following the independent investigation at Stage 2, they can ask to have their complaint reviewed by the Complaints Review Panel.



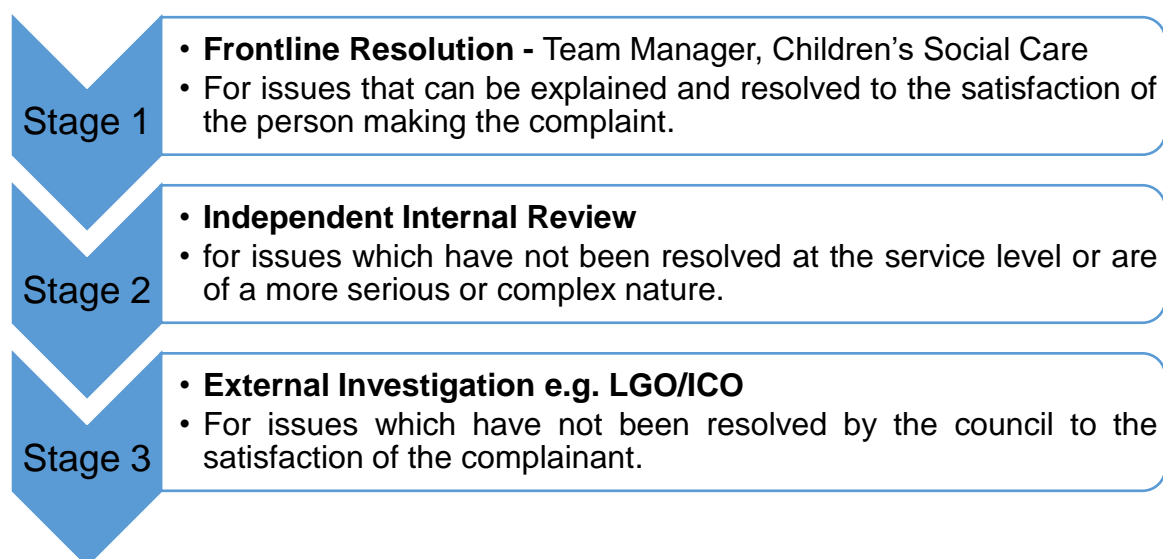
STAGE 3 -. The Complaints Review Panel is made up of three external people who will review the complaint, but they will not reinvestigate or consider new complaints. The complainant can attend the panel meeting if they choose to and can bring a friend or someone they can trust.



STAGE 4 – If a complaint cannot be resolved locally, it can be investigated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). A complainant has the right to self-refer their complaint to the LGSCO at any stage during the complaint process. However, the LGSCO normally allows the Local Authority the opportunity to process a complaint through every stage of the complaints procedure, before investigating it themselves.

3. The Corporate Complaints Process

The Corporate Complaints Procedure consists of a two stage internal process.



The Council try to respond to all Stage 1 complaints within 10 working days of receipt.

Where a Stage 2 review is undertaken the Independent Investigating Officer will aim to respond within 28 working days of receipt of the request.

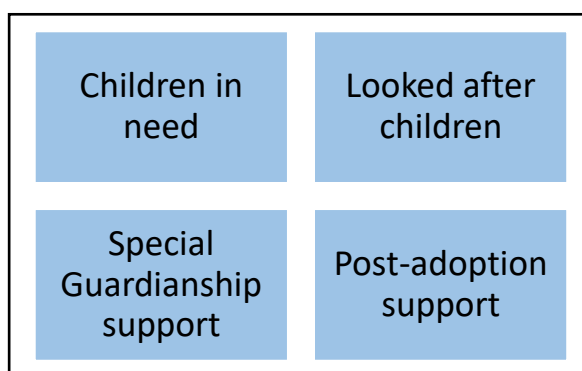
The following types of complaints cannot progress beyond Stage 1 of the Procedure.

- Complaints about a Council policy or decision rather than the way that the policy or decision has been carried out.
- Complaints against the conduct of individual employees. Should such matters need to be progressed, after a Stage 1 response has been provided to the complainant, this will be done through the Council's internal management procedures.
- A decision where regulatory powers are being exercised (such as licencing and planning) unless the complaint relates to the way the matter has been administrated.
- Matters for which there is a right of appeal, a legal remedy, or where legal proceedings are ongoing.
- Matters that are of a general nature and do not relate to the provision, or lack of provision, of a service at an individual level.

4. Which Complaint Procedure should be used?

The statutory guidance, Getting the Best from Complaints, sets out which of a council's children's social care functions can be considered under the procedure. The guidance should always be read alongside the Children Act 1989, the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the associated regulations referred to in the guidance itself.

The procedure covers complaints about councils' actions under Part 3 and some of Parts 4 and 5 of the Children Act 1989, as well as some adoption and special guardianship services. Generally, assessments and services in the following areas should be considered under the Statutory Procedure:



Complaints about the following tend to be exempt:

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

While these may be excluded from the Statutory Procedure, this does not prevent councils investigating them, it is expected that councils assess each complaint on its own merits and apply other procedures, such as the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

As a Council we do receive complaints where there is an overlap between those areas which are inside and outside the scope of the procedure, for example a case may have been at Section 47 Child Protection Conference and stepped down to Child in Need or, a Section 47 investigation concluded finding no concerns of a safeguarding nature and was instead referred to Early Help services for support.

The guidance allows councils to use their discretion to consider all parts of a complaint in a single investigation and response. Complainants should not be disadvantaged by any overlap between complaint procedures. Councils should consider which procedure is likely to produce the best result for the complainant and the child or young person.

5. Children's Social Care Service

An Ofsted focused visit on the local authority's arrangements for children in need, including those who are subject to a child protection plan took place in October 2021. Following this outcome the Local Authority was required to have an Improvement Plan to address the issues with the progress scrutinised by the Children and Families Improvement Board.

In November 2022 Ofsted further undertook a focused visit on the local authority's arrangements for the 'front door'. Ofsted found that there was *'effective management oversight of information provides clear direction for social worker practice. Workers undertake detailed information-gathering activity which informs the next steps. As a result, children and families benefit from timely interventions and support which are proportionate to the presenting issues. Effective emergency duty social workers provide children with support and safety when risks escalate on an evening or weekend'*.

The improvement journey continues through the Improvement Board and also a programme of significant transformation that encompassed the Council as a whole 'Reimagine Halton' led by the Transformation Delivery Unit. Budget pressures also remain a feature.

During this reporting period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 there has been some instability in the service due to vacancies of some significant key senior management posts during this reporting period 2023-24. In October 2023 Zoe Fearon returned to Halton as the new Executive Director for Children's Services, followed by Katherine Appleton, Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help and Andrew Jones, Head of Service Child in Need and Child Protection. A new Head of Service for Children in Care and Care Leavers Jamie Pope was appointed, and a new Head of Service post created for EDT (Emergency Duty Team, iCART (integrated Contact and Referral Team) and (DAAT) Duty and Assessment which Sarah Ellison was successful in stepping up to. These appointments to key posts will offer stability to the department and the workforce, with new views, ideas and energy to drive forward a reinvigorated Improvement Plan.

In addition to the above, the Children in Care and Care Leavers service was reconfigured with a new post of Principal Manager for Care Leavers created as well as a number of new Personal Assistant posts. The Children in Care Council is being reinvigorated following the successful appointment of the Participation Officer and there was the launch of the enhanced Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) Academy. There was also the launch of the family hubs in Halton, the co-location of health colleagues and bringing services together in one place for children and families supporting in the 1001 days early life agenda.

The number of Children in Need has fluctuated with 577 in March 2023 compared to 584 in March 2024, our highest peak was in June 2023 with 678 and our lowest in November 2023 at 463. Child Protection numbers fluctuated with March 2023 at 199 and March 2024 being the lowest month at 150, there was a peak in July 23 at 215. Children in Care numbers in March 2023 were 389 and have remained consistent with March 2024 at 383. The Number of Open Care Leavers who continue to be engaged with the Local Authority has increased again from 139 in March 2023 to 147 in March 2024, this accounts for 46% of the total 317 Care Leavers in Halton.

6. Key Messages up to here

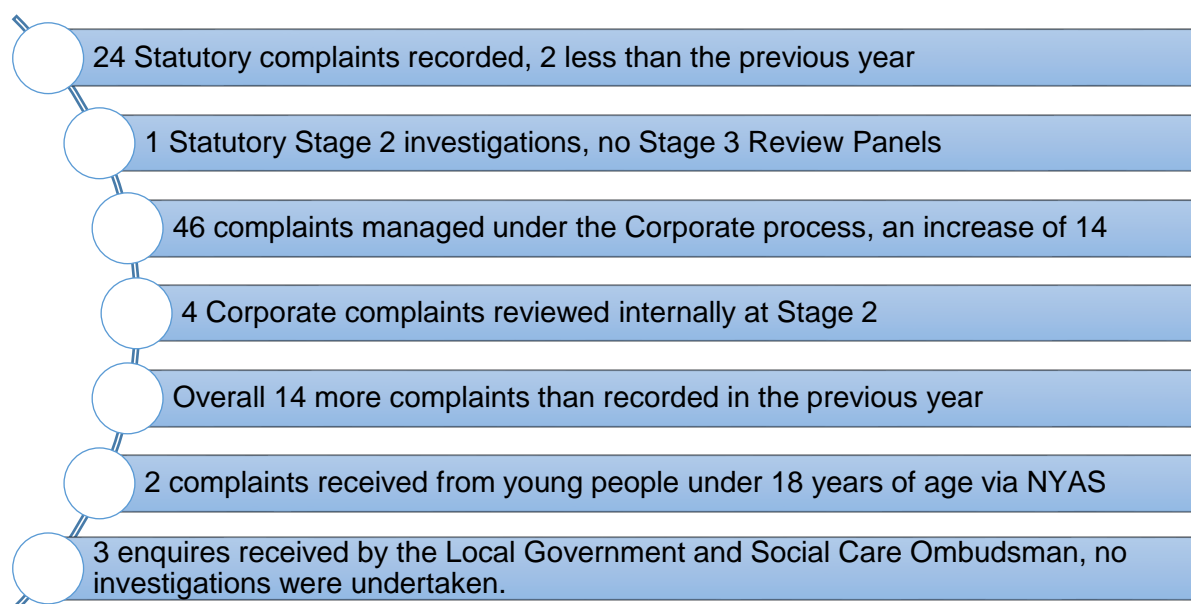
Overall the number of complaints received is a small proportion in comparison to the number of children, young people and families accessing services.

Complaints and compliments are feedback received from our service users. Effective feedback, both positive and negative is very helpful, it highlights areas for development as well as strengths that can be used to improve services. They provide a chance to identify errors and to make sure the same mistakes are not repeated in the future

Often Children Social Care involvement with families is unwanted and so conflict can arise at the onset, it is recognised that Children's Social Care involvement is an emotive and worrying time for families and so managing their expectations and demands can be a challenge.

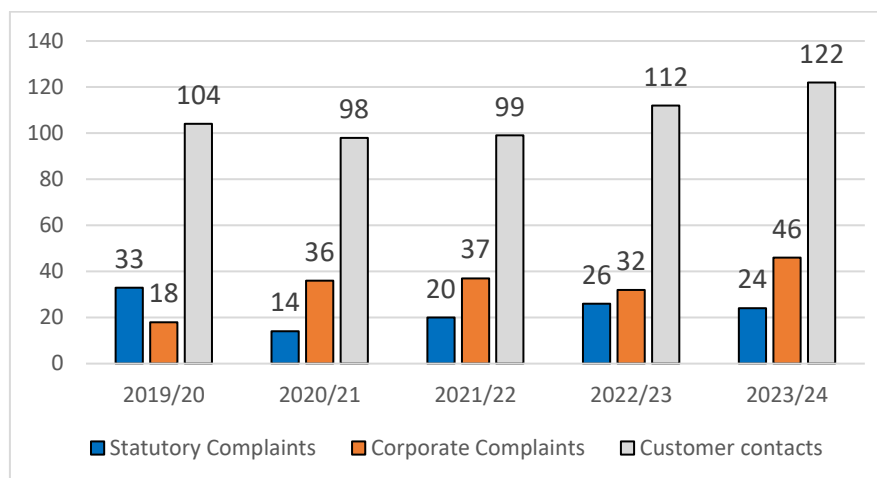
For most of us in our day to day work there is that opportunity to pick up on those small signs of frustration, receive that feedback and address it there and then but sometimes regardless of best efforts or intentions they will escalate to a complaint.

Detailed below is a highlight summary of complaints received during the 2023-24 period:



7. Customer feedback data

7.1 Number of complaints Children and Families Service



| | 2019/20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 | 2022-23 | 2023-24 |
|------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total Complaints | 51 | 50 | 57 | 58 | 70 |

As detailed above 2023/24 saw an increase in corporate complaints and customer contacts from the previous year, but a slight reduction in the number of statutory complaints.

The volume of complaints does not, in itself, indicate the quality of a council's performance. Low complaint volumes can be an indicator that all is well but can also be a worrying sign that an organisation is not alive to user feedback. It is also not always a negative thing to have complaints increase, it can evidence that clients know how to complain, that they have confidence in the process and are willing to engage in order to achieve a fair explanation of the facts. The important information however is the outcome, not necessarily the number received.

It continues to be the case that complainants will, thanks to technology, email lengthy and numerous correspondence, and unpicking these, examining the files, and composing responses, are, on occasions, comparable to a report rather than a letter thus taking a considerable amount of time to investigate and respond. As an example, a complaint may be categorised as 'service provision', the complainant states that the Social Worker is 'always' cancelling meetings and so records can be examined over a 12 month period with responses detailing meetings over that time frame.

Responses are done with the view that the complainant may refer the matter to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and so the Principal Policy Officer offers a high degree of support, scrutiny and challenge to ensure that all issues raised are addressed.

7.2 The teams the complaints are made about

| | Statutory | Corporate | Historically it has always been the case that the greatest number of complaints is in the Children in Need and Child Protection (CIN & CP) Division. |
|---|-----------|-----------|--|
| Child in Need & Child Protection (CIN & CP) | 15 | 32 | |
| Children in Care & Care Leavers (CICCL) | 1 | 7 | |
| EDT, iCART & DAAT | 6 | 6 | |
| Disabled Children Service | 1 | 0 | |
| Fostering | 1 | 1 | |
| Total | 24 | 46 | |

The total number of complaints increased from 58 to 70, this increase has been seen in the number of corporate complaints for the CIN & CP service going from 21 last year to 32 this year. There was also an increase from 7 to 12 in the EDT, iCART & DAAT division and a drop from 12 to 8 with the CICCL service.

7.3 Who is contacting us and how

The statutory complaints procedure details who is allowed to access this procedure, 21 were parents, and 1 was a foster carer. National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) is the agency commissioned to support Children in Care and Care Leavers. All young people in contact with the team are offered access to an advocate so that their voices can be heard, this is often at the point of service delivery where the matter can be resolved rather than progressing to a complaint. NYAS supported 2 young people to make their complaint, this is the same number as last year.

Children's Services by the nature of work undertaken do interact with other family members. 6 Complaints in relation to their experience with the department were treated as Corporate Complaints.

As stated in chapter 3 & 4 of this report, complaints against the conduct of individual employees or about child protection including S47 enquiries and conferences as well as Section 7 and Section 37 court reports are not responded to under the statutory process, 38 complaints were made by parents and recorded as Corporate complaints.

The remaining 2 under the corporate process were from a foster carer and a care leaver.

1 Complaints received in relation to specific services for children with a disability.

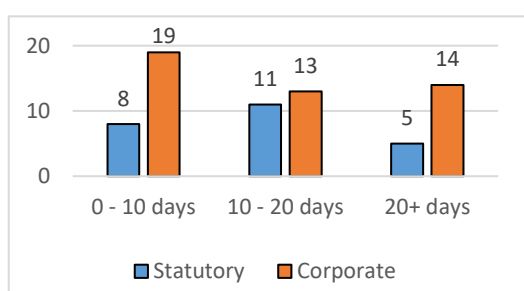
Halton continues to have a low ethnic minority, 1 complainant was recorded as any other mixed background, 3 as any other black background however this 3 is the same complainant making a number of complaints during differing times in this reporting period. The remainder were recorded as white British.

Due to the ease of access on mobile devices and the desire to have their own written record, e-mailing continues to be the preferred method to make a complaint (83%). Emails do give quick delivery however it raises expectations for immediate responses, they can also often be of significant length and contain numerous issues.

7.4 How quickly do we respond to complaints

In regards to statutory complaint timescales, there was an improvement from the previous year. In 2022-23 only 54% were responded to within 20 working days, in 2023-24 year it is 79%.

| Statutory | % within 10 days | | % within 20 days | % over 20 days | |
|-----------|------------------|--|------------------|----------------|------|
| 2023-24 | 33% | | 79% | 21% | 100% |
| 2022-23 | 23% | | 54% | 46% | 100% |
| 2021-22 | 35% | | 80% | 20% | 100% |
| 2020-21 | 50% | | 85% | 15% | 100% |
| 2019-20 | 30% | | 67% | 33% | 100% |



In terms of corporate complaint timescales it is the same picture, there was an improvement. 41% were completed within 10 working days up from 19% with an increase from, 56% to 70% for responses done within 20 working days.

There are a number of factors to consider in terms of why responses take over 10 working days, for example, staff may be in court or absent, there may be multiple issues requiring extensive examination of case files or there may be some mediation or negotiation to resolve the issue before responding. Even so the timescales are statutory requirement and these have not been met however, if a response does take longer the complainant is usually contacted to advise of the reason for the delay and the complainant can agree to this. It is the preference to complete a thorough investigation and response rather than rush to meet a timescale.

Responding to complaints quickly can demonstrate to the complainant that we are taking their concerns seriously, if it takes too long to investigate a complaint about delays in service provision or they are not being kept informed, then a delay in responding will only reinforce their view. To act quickly allows for a speedy correction where things may have gone wrong, to not do so can make us culpable in allowing the fault to continue.

7.5 Stage 2 investigations

Only one Stage 2 investigation was undertaken, and this followed discussions with senior managers, where a decision was made to offer the complainant a Stage 2 under the statutory complaints procedure. No stage 1 investigation was completed. A lot of focus is put on getting the Stage 1 investigation right, this ultimately benefits the complainant as they get a thorough, considered investigation and explanation to the issues raised without having the stress or inconvenience of moving through the stages however, in this case, the independence that an externally commissioned investigator and independent person brings was felt necessary. There were 4 elements to the complaint, 1 was partly upheld.

There were 4 internal investigations completed under the corporate complaints procedure. 2 were partly upheld and 2 were not upheld, only one finding differed from the stage 1 where it changed from not upheld to partially upheld.

7.6 Stage 3 Review Panels

No Stage 3 Review Panels took place under the statutory complaints procedure.

7.7 Complaint outcomes and themes

We record complaints under 3 main categories, 'service provision' is about how we have done things, and it's about how we have delivered it and the quality. 'Assessment and review' is about challenges to the content of the assessment and the outcome of it. In both of these we should ask the question 'did we do what we should have done in accordance to regulations, policy or procedure', by doing this we can identify if changes need to be made to ensure it does not happen again.

The third main category is misconduct of staff but the Complaints Procedures are not designed to deal with allegations of misconduct of staff, but they will be interwoven into the complaint as they are often linked to the decisions they have made or the service they have provided, so for recording purposes we look at the context of the complaint. Complaints received about staff conduct do not necessarily mean that they are making poor decisions, rather, it can be an indicator that complainants do not agree with the rationale or policy on which the decision is based. Complainants will disagree with the social workers analysis of the information and the judgement made, this then leads to complaints about their conduct. Complaints of this nature would be responded to under Stage 1 of the Corporate Procedures only. Should any further action be required this would be dealt with in accordance to the organisations disciplinary procedures.

In the majority of cases, complaints have multiple issues that need responding to and that will cross over all three categories and so the Principal Policy Officer taking into consideration the main crux of the complaint, the desired outcome, and the complaint findings will determine the category.

Of the statutory complaints received in 2023-24;

- 24% were categorised as Assessment / Review process, this is comparable to the previous year when it was 27%
- 66% were categorised as service provision this has decreased from 73% in the previous year.
- 10% were categorised as being in relation to staff

Once a complaint has been concluded it will be recorded as being

- Upheld - this means that the service made mistakes or provided a poor service that amounted to maladministration or service failure.
- Not upheld – the service acted correctly.
- Partly upheld - where there are complaints with multiple issues there may be a mix of complaints that were up held and not upheld and so overall for recording purposes they will be recorded as partly upheld but, it can also be recorded as this if it is a single element where it was not wholly the fault of the service.

| Statutory and Corporate | Upheld | Not upheld | Partly upheld | Total |
|--------------------------------|--------|------------|---------------|-------|
| Assessment / Review Process | 0 | 12 | 5 | 17 |
| Service Provision | 7 | 30 | 9 | 46 |
| Staff | 1 | 5 | 1 | 7 |
| Total | 8 | 47 | 15 | 70 |

Previous Year Comparison

| | | | | |
|-----------|---|----|----|----|
| 2022-2023 | 9 | 37 | 12 | 58 |
| 2021-2022 | 4 | 42 | 11 | 57 |
| 2020-2021 | 5 | 33 | 12 | 50 |

There were 21 complaints (30%) linked to cases in the Court arena this is 8 more than the previous year. 4 cases were partially upheld

- 2 related to poor communication with the family
- 1 case was subject to a non-compliance meeting due to delays in the process
- The fourth case had multiple issues, the element upheld was due to DAAT team arranging a meeting however, the case was transferred and the new Social Worker who could not accommodate this meeting due to prior diary commitments so it was cancelled, in addition to this a further meeting was also cancelled. This complainant was advised to go to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman who refused to investigate.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) can decide not to investigate when matters are in the Court area, there is no such limit placed on Councils. The guidance allows councils to decide not to investigate a complaint if it would prejudice a concurrent investigation, including those in court proceedings. We do not refuse to accept a complaint because it is in the Court arena, we provide a response to aid clarification for families who are going through an already worrying time. These matters are recorded under corporate complaints and at Stage 1 as there is no recourse to Stage 2 due to the legal proceedings.

Examining these complaints allows the reports submitted to court to be checked and accuracy confirmed, ultimately it forms part of the councils evidence and will include professional opinions of the Social Worker which is what the Court has requested. These professional opinions are usually where the disagreement arises resulting in the complaint not being upheld. In these instances they are advised to direct their concerns to their legal representative to be addressed in court.

At the time of making a complaint, 13 were related to children on a Child Protection Plan. 1 was upheld and 3 Partly upheld.

- 3 partly upheld involved multiple issues being raised with an element upheld. 2 of these related to families not being given copies of core group minutes and one in relation to core group meeting cancellation.
- Upheld – Due to the previous Social Workers leaving, a core group meeting had not occurred and so this needed to take place prior to the Child Protection Conference and so it was rearranged. Whilst the report was completed for the meeting to be held, the expectation for the Child Protection documentation was not made clear to the new Social Worker (i.e. 12.30pm on the third working day

before the conference). Because the report was not received by the Safeguarding Unit within the required timescale time this led to the meeting being rearranged again and the complainant being contacted at short notice, in consideration of statutory timescales and as it had been postponed once already it had to take place as soon as possible.

The following table, provides a summary/examples of those elements upheld or partly upheld.

| Issue complained about | | Remedy, comment |
|---|---------------|--|
| Core group meeting arranged by DAAT prior to SW allocation in CIN. SW could not accommodate meeting due to short notice, prior commitments, meeting cancelled/ rearranged. Further meeting also cancelled/ rearranged due to technical/connection difficulties. | Partly upheld | Whilst complaint received in this period the issue upheld related to Christmas and the beginning of January 2023. Apologies were offered. |
| Unhappy with comment recorded in the assessment by the SW that they were ' <i>very young parents</i> ' they were mid 20's. | Partly upheld | Apologies offered, copy of response on file. SW had left LA. Multiple other issues not upheld |
| Father was not informed of the change of Social Worker, or the case in general and was closed without his knowledge | Upheld | Apologies offered |
| Informed case to close but audit identified gaps in protector assessment so kept open, more work to be do. | Partly upheld | Met complainant, impacted on supervision of contact, new plan devised. Meeting cancelled Police investigation ongoing, they were not aware. |
| Content of assessment, delegated authority | Partly upheld | Independent assessor was asked to remove content at the time, apologies offered, learnings shared with team |
| Father was not informed of the change of Social Worker or kept updated | Upheld | Apologies offered |
| Child Protection Review meeting rearranged without any contact with parent no official notification/formal invite in writing | Upheld | Apologies, expected reports shared by 12.30pm on the third working day before the conference. Not shared within timescale, review meeting stepped down. Report was completed, new Social Worker not aware of this expectation. If dialogue had occurred need not have stepped down |
| Not informed SW change, then SW changed again, meeting cancelled so new SW could familiarise. | Upheld | Apologies |
| Not received copies of CIN Meetings. SW left at short notice without completing case recordings and minutes. | Upheld | Apologies |
| SW did not turn up for home visit previous visit overran, unrealistic arrangement for home visit at 6.30pm | Upheld | Apologies |
| Missed opportunities to communicate around the time of the transition plan. Communicating contact sessions. | Partly upheld | Apologies, court aware and directed the LA to attend a noncompliance hearing to provide further explanation for where directions had not been complied with. |

| | | |
|---|---------------|----------------------------------|
| Meeting cancelled, delay in CSW allocation, communication around visits, new SW allocated was on AL | Partly upheld | Apologies |
| Minutes of core groups not delivered, Admin identified sent to SW but SW not delivered | Partly upheld | Apologies, minutes provided |
| Delay in risk assessment completion, not challenged | Upheld | Apologies offered |
| Delay in father receiving a copy of the assessment | Partly upheld | Apologies offered, copy provided |
| SW shared info with child re relative without confirming accuracy | Upheld | Apologies offered |
| SW late for home visit, previous overran | Partly upheld | Apologies offered |
| Numerous comments re content of assessment, one partly upheld | Partly upheld | Apologies offered |
| SW did not respond to text messages left by YP | Partly upheld | Apologies offered |
| SW not responded to emails and texts | Upheld | Apologies offered |

The following table provides some themes of complaints made that were not upheld.

| |
|---|
| Biased / discriminated in the other parties favour. |
| Disagreed with outcome of parenting assessment |
| Contact – cancelled/ children don't wish for contact |
| Social Worker visits nit taken place, they had |
| Disagreed with decision to enter proceedings |
| Social Worker is a liar |
| CPC was organised by other LA |
| Matters were previously addressed in court, decisions made by court. |
| Communication, responses to texts, call or emails, client expectations vs statutory duties. |

The world of Children's Social Care complaints is unique, families are often resistant to Children Social care involvement however, the statutory duty to safeguard requires them to be involved and so conflict can be there at the onset.

Complaints received disputing the need for Children's Social Care to be involved in carrying out assessments are rarely upheld due to the statutory duty placed on the Local Authority to investigate children safeguarding concerns, the service recognises this to be a stressful and worrying time for families.

There are always complaints from customers in relation to not being able to get in touch with their allocated social worker immediately or directly and it is difficult to know how to prevent these long term, social workers cannot provide immediate responses to messages left.

Complaints about bias are often as a result of a parent disputing the Social Workers professional opinion and this usually occurs when the outcome does not lean in their favour. It is clarified that the Social Workers role is to represent the best wishes of the child, not either parent.

There is a difference between factual accuracy and the opinion or analysis made by the worker involved. We do also have to consider the arena for reports to be presented, reports requested by courts should be challenged in the court arena.

7.8 The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

3 enquiries were received during this reporting period, the LGSCO refused to investigate i.e. matters are in the Court arena and dissatisfaction should be raised in that forum.



7.9 Actions taken and learnings

Complaints are used by the Council as an opportunity to learn and improve, we do try to ensure that the same issues do not reoccur however everyone is capable of making a mistake no matter how well trained and motivated they are however, in the workplace the consequences of human error, an 'action or decision which was not intended' can impact on others, staff generally do not set out to get it wrong. No complaints were as a result of a deliberate deviation from a rule or procedure.

Learning from complaints is discussed by investigating managers with individual staff members and where appropriate their teams to inform practice, they are also shared with the relevant heads of service.

Local Government Ombudsman publish findings from cases they have investigated elsewhere in the country; they provide an opportunity to reflect on the consequences of processes not being applied, learn from them and develop our own practice. A selection of these reports are regularly shared by the Principal Policy Officer / Policy Team with the Directorate's Senior management team to cascade to appropriate staff'.

7.10 Complaints Training and Procedures

There has been no changes to complaint regulations, therefore no procedural changes. The Principal Policy Officer continues to work proactively alongside the workforce, this in turn enables the workforce to further develop their own complaint handling skills. Providing training has been challenging due to competing priorities within the Children's Social Care Service.

8. Compliments

Representations may not always be complaints; they might also be positive remarks or ideas that require a response from the local authority. Enquiries or comments about the availability, delivery or nature of a service which are not criticisms are likely to constitute representations. A separate report is compiled that records all the positive comments received and so this is a snapshot.

| Year | Total |
|-------|-------|
| 20-21 | 92 |
| 21-22 | 73 |
| 22-23 | 65 |
| 23-24 | 75 |

An increase in the amount of compliments and positive feedback recorded in this year.

A little appreciation is medicine for the soul, and can be contagious. Staff benefit from receiving compliments, knowing that they are noticed and that they are valued is powerful in motivating continued efforts enhancing their performance and contributing to their improved skills.

It is important to remember that all the Divisions, Team around the Family, Children in Need, Children in Care and the Safeguarding Unit work together to support families. As an example, a child on a Child Protection Plan could be open to the Child in Need Division and the Safeguarding Unit.

| | 20-21 | 21-22 | 22-23 | 23-24 |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| CIN | 44% | 26% | 12% | 16% |
| EID | - | - | - | 8% |
| CIC | 14% | 19% | 12% | 32% |
| TAF | 42% | 53% | 71% | 41% |
| SG | | 2% | 5% | 3% |

Historically EDT, iCART and DAAT (EID) were recorded under the division of CIN however, in the latter part of year it became a separate division.

Card - Thank you for helping me on my journey in life up to now, and all that you have done. You've comforted me when I cried, and laughed with me when we have had fun. You've made it extra special by making sure I'm safe, when we've been to contact you stayed with me in every place. I have loving Nanny, and she will always remind me of what you've done for me. In case that I may forget. Because of your empathy and caring nature and you fighting my cause, I could have ended up with those that might not give me a loving childhood. So thank you again for the protection, ensuring that I was safe. I'm now living with 'M' who will carry on loving me and give me an amazing life. Loving wishes and many hugs and kisses. (Child)



Email - Just want to say thank you so much for the time you've spent being my families social worker, I've never ever had a good experience with social services so it was very refreshing to meet someone like you who's involved in social, I just want to say I appreciate what you've done for us and I can't thank you enough for being a good social worker who genuinely listened to mine and my children's cares and needs, so thank you and we will miss you but I'm very happy to see the back of you hahahah, I wish you all the best and I hope the new job goes well for you, thank you x (Client)

Text - I'll never forget how above and beyond you've gone for my babies. Not just saying this because of the outcome but you're really one of the good ones, you take the time to listen, you actually care about my kids and their welfare and not just because it's your job to, I appreciate everything, even when I've been challenging at time, always make me find strength at the hardest of days, can't wait for the following months ahead to continue to working together to get the best from the Kids, thanks soooo much!Xxx (Client)

Email - I've just had a conversation with the Guardian for the children. She was very complimentary of the Social Workers Initial Evidence. Mentioned that it was very thorough, and gave a clear picture of what life is like for the children. (Professional)

Email - Thank you for sending the assessment over. I just want to take this opportunity to say thank you. Thank you for being understanding and being the reassuring voice I needed during the assessment process. You're a credit to the social services team and I'll always be grateful for how you dealt with our families difficulties. (Client)

Email - I strongly feel that I need to express my feelings and appreciation to you regarding the Social Worker. From the bottom of my broken heart, I cannot thank her enough. She is so compassionate, caring, thorough, understanding, professional, and approachable. She explains every detail/step in depth to enable us to understand and comprehend. This has been and continues to be the most difficult time of my life, and probably my son's. I am honoured to have her support and guidance on the journey. She always has my son's best interest at all times, and also mine. She is such an asset to Social Services. (Client)

Email - I am just writing to thank you service. I referred myself via your service found on Halton Local Offer. I was contacted two days later by 'J' who was fantastic. I found her to be attentive, compassionate, knowledgeable and reliable. She contacted all the people she said she would, all relevant information she needed she sought by phone or on HBC computer. I was given information about who she had contacted, why and what should be happening next. I felt noticed and heard which is so important to me. Please pass on my thanks and appreciation. (Client)



Email - Hiya mate its' P' just want to say a big thank you for everything you have done for my girl and are still doing I'm so proud of how she has turned her life around thanks again mate x (Client)



Text - I don't feel I could have got through this past few months without you. My sons adore you and your always there to support them too. I don't feel I would change anything about you or how you work with us as a family. The biggest different in general is YOU. You have a big positive impact on me, my boys and us as a family x' (Client)

Email - I want to put into words the enormous gratitude I feel towards you and the support you gave to my daughter and her two boys. When we needed a professional, caring and compassionate person you came into our lives. When we needed you, you were there. If you perform this miracle only once in your professional life then your life has been worthwhile. Thank you. (Client)