

Solihull Council

Annual Complaints Report 2023/24

Children's Services



Annual Complaints & Representations Report

Solihull Children's Services

1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024

1 Introduction

This is the Annual Report of Solihull Council's Children's Services Complaints and Representations, covering the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

1.1 Children's Social Care 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 (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 another relevant person as described in the guidance, 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 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 making contact with the complainant in order to resolve concerns 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 Complaints Team. The timescale for setting up the Panel is 30 working days. The Panel’s remit is to review the Stage 2 investigation; however, the purpose of the Panel is not to 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 Children’s Services which do not fall within the remit of the Statutory complaints process, is the Corporate Complaints Procedure; this is an internally determined procedure. An overview of this procedure can also be found at <https://www.solihull.gov.uk/Tell-us/Complain-about-childrens-services>

3.2 The Corporate Complaints Procedure

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

- Early Help provision
- Child protection S47 enquiries
- Assessments of potential foster carers and adopters
- Foster carer registration
- 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 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 a customer is not satisfied with the response received at stage one, a request can be made to progress their complaint to the second stage of the process.

Reasons to progress to the second stage would be;

- The response did not answer all of the points raised
- and/or the complainant is not happy with the resolution

The review of the complaint at stage 2 should be co-ordinated by the Head of Service and a final response sent to the customer. The Head of Service must ensure that the complaints process has been followed and all of the customers concerns responded to.

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 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 Children's & Adults Complaints Team.

The Complaints Team is part of the Business Intelligence and Improvement Division within the Resources Directorate. The 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 work with the relevant staff to put things 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 Complaints Team and the relevant staff, to resolve these and maintain a high-quality service to service users.

6. Contacting the Children's & Adults 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 2023-24 the Complaints Team was contacted via all of these methods. 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 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 Complaints Team by complainants.

- 7.4 The 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 Solihull Children’s Services also 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 2019/20.

Method	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Email	53%	76%	79%	78%	76%
Telephone	24%	13%	15%	12%	16%
Letter	8%	1%	4%	4%	4%
Leaflet	5%	1%	0%	0%	2%
Web Form	10%	9%	2%	6%	2%

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 2023/24 has accounted for 76% of all initial contacts made to the Complaints Team. Email has, since 2019/20, 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 2019/20 which reflects the transition to using more up to date technology.

The leaflets used for making a complaint about Children’s Services 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, however some contact was made using a leaflet during 2023/24 and this method remains an option, should complainants choose to use this format.

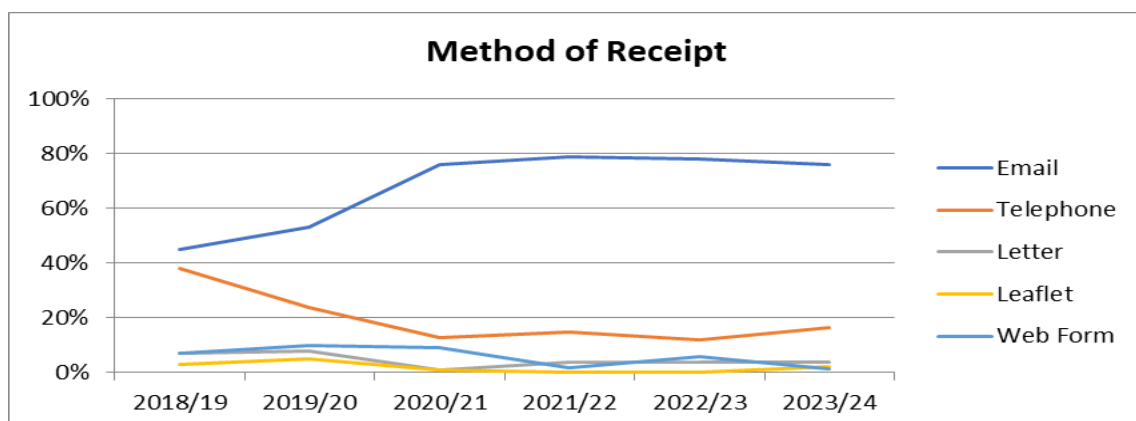


Fig 2

8.3 In 2023/24, the 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 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 six new Statutory complaints received in 2023/24, 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 Complaints Team have, in 2023/24 handled 153 such "duty" cases for Children's Social Care Services.

9. **Solihull Children's Services complaints recorded for the 2023/24 financial year**

During the 2023/24 financial year, Solihull's Children's Services received 129 new complaints compared to 114 new complaints received in 2022/23, an overall increase of 15 (13%).

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

- 85 (compared to 79 in 2022/23) for Children's Social Care Services
- 31 (compared to 32 in 2022/23) for the EHCP Team
- 15 (compared to 6 in 2022/23) for other areas of Children's Services

Note: these figures add to 131 as two complaints spanned more than one service area.

10 **Who made complaints?**

10.1 110 of the 129 new complaints made during 2023/24, across Children's Services were received from adults, making complaints either on behalf of children or in relation to a service impacting them directly (13 of these represented Children Looked After). Of the other 19 complaints, 13 were from a professional advocate acting on behalf of a child (4 of which were Children Looked After) and 6 were made directly by the service user (1 of which was from a Child Looked After).

10.2 74% of new complaints were received from females and 22% from males, with 4% of complaints being made jointly by parents (compared to 74%, 20% and 6% respectively in 2022/23).

10.3 Eighteen looked after young people were supported to make a complaint by either a parent/carer or a professional advocate; or contacted the Complaints Team directly.

- 10.4 In 2023/24, the 19 complaints from Children Looked After constituted 35% of the 55 new Statutory complaints which were raised in relation to services provided by Children’s Social Care (all but one was raised via an advocate of some kind). This is a slight increase in number, but a decrease in the overall percentage, when compared with 11 (44%) of the 25 new Statutory complaints in 2022/23. These statutory complaints from Children Looked After were in relation to six different social work teams.

There was a total of 126 complaint issues within these 19 complaints; 25 (20%) were upheld, 17 (13%) were partially upheld, 21 (17%) were not upheld and 6 (5%) was found to be inconclusive. 49 issues (39%) were still being investigated at the end of 2023/24 and there was no stage 1 outcome on 8 (6%) issues, as they progressed directly to stage 2.

- 10.5 The main focus of complaints raised by or on behalf of Children Looked After related to “Unsatisfactory Communication”.

Unsatisfactory Communication 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 Complaints Team to highlight any specific concerns to managers in Children’s Services.

11. A summary of Children’s Social Care complaints recorded for the 2023/24 financial year

11.1 Live complaints brought forward from 2022/23

- 11.1.1 There were 17 live complaints still under investigation and carried forward from 2022/23. These were at the following stages: 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).
- 11.1.2 Three of the Statutory complaints carried forward at Stage 1 were resolved and one was escalated to Stage 2; the complaint carried forward at stage 2, escalated to stage 3 during 2023/24.
- 11.1.3 Of the 10 Stage 1 corporate complaints brought forward; all were resolved at Stage 1 during 2023/24. The two corporate complaints brought forward at Stage 2 were also resolved during 2023/24.
- 11.1.4 One Corporate complaint, originally closed at Stage 1 in 2022/23, was reopened at Stage 2 during 2023/24 and was resolved.
- 11.1.5 Two Stage 1 Statutory complaints originally closed in 2022/23, were also reopened during 2023/24 at Stage 2. Both were escalated to stage 3 during 2023/24 and were then resolved.

11.2 New complaints received for Children’s Social Care Services during 2023/24

11.2.1 During the 2023/24 financial year, Solihull Council’s Children’s Social Care Services received 85 new complaints. 55 were Statutory complaints and 30 were Corporate complaints which cover issues that fall outside the remit of the statutory complaints process and are outlined at 3.2 above.

The number of new complaints for 2023/24 (85) is an increase of 7.5% compared to the 79 received in 2022/23; however, this needs to be considered alongside an increase in service users of 7.5%, as described at 13.1 below.

11.2.2 Of the 55 new statutory complaints received, 3 were escalated to Stage 2 during 2023/24, and 10 were still under investigation at Stage 1 at the end of the year and therefore carried forward to 2024/25.

11.2.3 All but 18 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 25 of the 30 Corporate complaints received in 2023/24 were closed at Stage 1 (including 1 that was withdrawn). 3 Stage 1 Corporate complaints were still under investigation at year end. Four complaints progressed to Stage 2 during 2023/24, and all were responded to. No stage 2 complaints were carried forward to 2024/25.

11.3 Children’s Social Care complaints carried forward into 2024/25

11.3.1 At the end of the 2023/24 financial year, the number of live complaints carried forward to 2024/25 was 15. This is a decrease on the previous year’s total of 17.

11.3.2 Of the 15 carried forward to 2024/25, 3 were corporate complaints (at Stage 1); and 12 were statutory complaints (10 at Stage 1 and two at Stage 2).

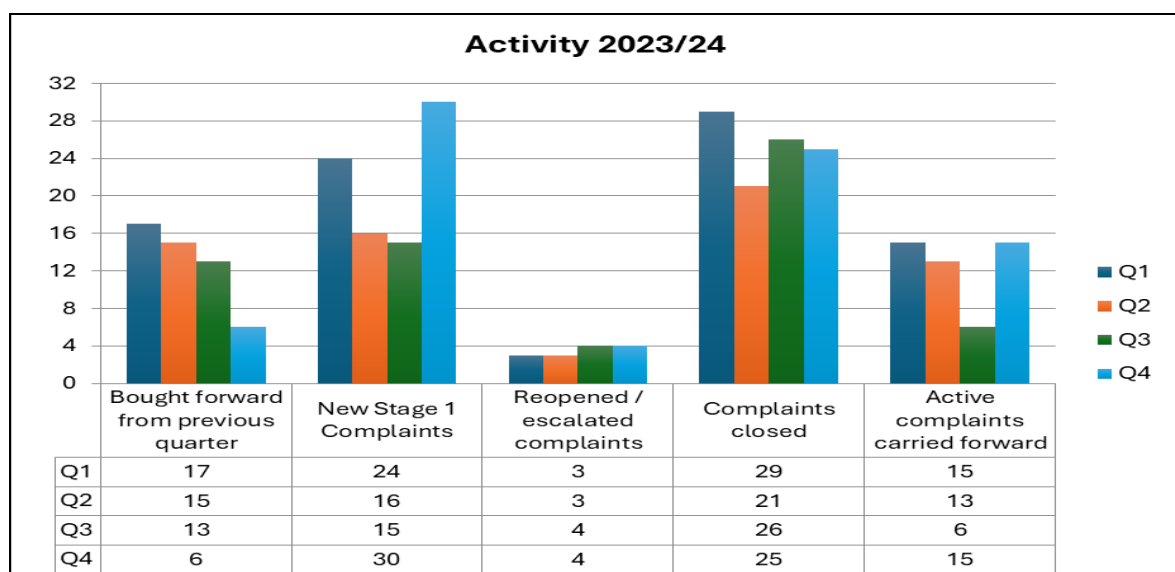


Fig 3

11.3.3 There was a slight decrease in the number of new complaints received for Children’s Social Care Services in Q2 compared to Q1. New complaints remained constant 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 2023/24 the 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.

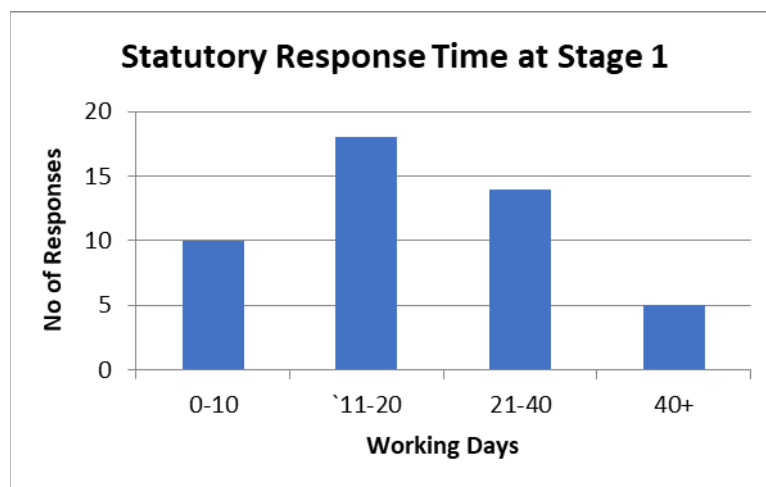


Fig 4

12.1.2 In 2023/24, 48 Statutory complaint investigations were completed and responses provided at stage 1 of the Statutory Children’s Complaints process by Solihull Children’s Social Care Services. Figure 4 above shows the timescale in which these complaints were responded to. 10/48 (21%) of complaints were responded to within 10 days (the initial response timescale), compared to 0% in 2022/23.

12.1.3 18/48 (37.5%) were responded to within 11 – 20 days, giving an overall total of 28 (58%) complaints being responded to within 20 days (the extended timescale). The overall percentage of stage 1 complaints responded to within 20 working days has increased from 44.5% in 2022/23 to 58% in 2023/24.

As outlined at 13.1 below, during 2023/24, there was an increase of 7.5% in service users for Children’s Social Care Services and an equivalent rise in complaints.

- 12.1.4 In 2023/24, 14/48 (29%) of Stage 1 Statutory complaints, were resolved between 21 and 40 days whilst five (10.5%) took longer than 40 days to resolve. One complaint (2.5%) was withdrawn.
- 12.1.5 In 2024/25, the Complaints Team will continue to work with investigating managers in Children's Social Care Services, 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 increased in 2023/24, while 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 19 of the Stage 1 complaint responses being outside of the 20-working day timescale, these 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.

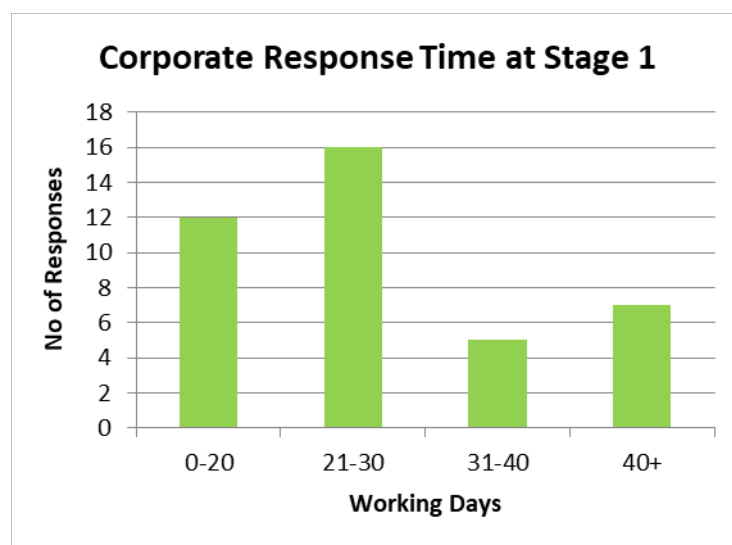


Fig 5

- 12.2.1 In 2023/24, 40 Corporate complaints were investigated and responded to at stage 1 by Solihull Children's Social Care Services. Figure 5 above, shows that 12 (30%) Stage 1 complaints were responded to within 20 days, compared to 22 (45%) in

2022/23, whilst a further 16 (40%) took 21 – 30 days, meaning that 28/41 (68%) complaints were responded to at stage 1 within the extended 30 working day timescale, compared to 73% in 2022/23, which shows that there has been a very slight decrease in the percentage of Stage 1 corporate complaints resolved within timeframe in 2023/24.

12.2.2 Twelve (30%) Stage 1 Corporate complaints took longer than the 30-working day timescale to respond to, including seven 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 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 8/40 (20%) of Corporate complaints investigated at Stage 1 during 2023/24 by Children's Social Care Services, progressed to Stage 2, compared to 9 (18%) in 2022/23.

Seven of these Stage 2 investigations were completed in 2023/24; 4 (57%) were responded to within the maximum 20 working days timescale at Stage 2, (compared to 71% in 2022/23) and the remaining 3 complaints took longer than 40 days to respond to, thus exceeding the maximum response timeframe. One Stage 2 corporate investigation was carried forward to 2024/25.

In 2023/24, there has therefore been a 14% decrease in the number of corporate complaints responded to within the maximum 20 working day timeframe at Stage 2.

12.2.4 Eight enquires were received from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) in relation to Children's Social Care Services in 2023/24. The LGSCO declined to investigate two of these; three were closed as premature and one was investigated by the LGSCO where fault was found. Two complaints remain open to investigation at the end of 2023/24. More information can be found at point 20 below.

12.2.5 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 the low numbers of complaints which progress to the Ombudsman. 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 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 85 new complaints received for Children's Social Care Services in 2022/23, represent a 7.5% increase when compared to the 79 new complaints received in 2022/23.

During 2023/24 however, Children's Social Care Services provided a service to 5212 service users compared to 4850 in 2022/23 (an increase of 7.5%). This may

suggest that the increase in complaints in Solihull Social Care Services in 2023/24 has been due to the proportionate increase in service users.

Complaints were received from only 1.6% of service users/their families in 2023/24 which is the same percentage as in 2022/23.

13.2 Detailed in the chart below (*Figure 6*) is a comparison of the number of complaints received each quarter between 2019/20 and 2023/24.

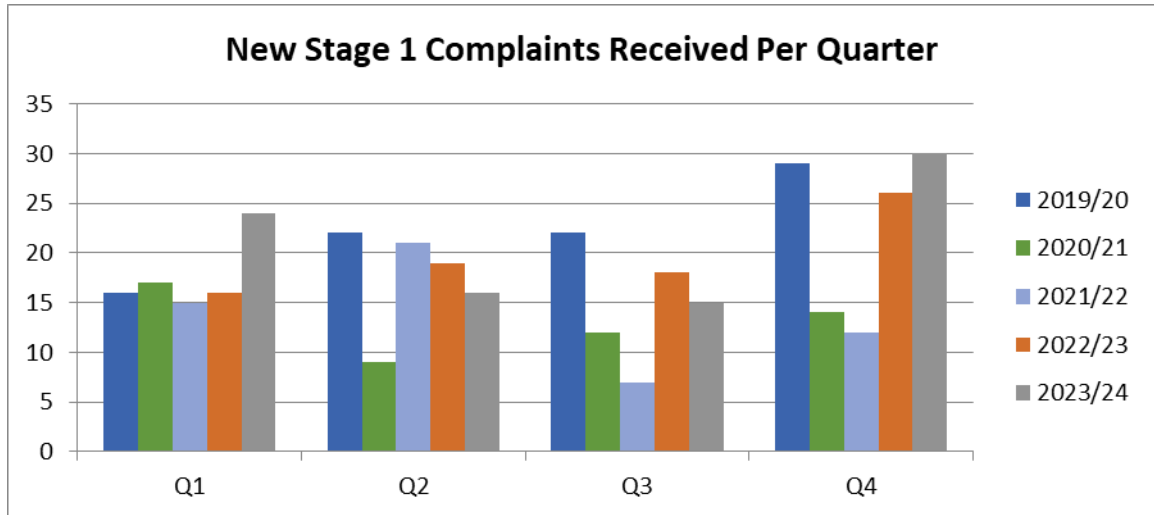


Fig 6

13.3 Figure 6 above, shows that in 2023/24 complaints decreased slightly in Q2, remained constant 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. In 3 out of the 5 years shown however, the highest number of complaints were received in Q4. The relatively low number of complaints received 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 The accurate definition of complaints by the Complaints Team means that several issues are often identified within each complaint. Figure 7 below, shows a breakdown of the numbers of new complaints (both Statutory and Corporate) received during 2023/24, 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	13	4	1
Care Experienced & UASC Team	15	3	
Child in Need Team	28	4	1
Safeguarding & Family Support Team 1	11	3	
Child Protection & Court Team	21	1	5
Safeguarding & Family Support Team 2	30	6	1
Child Protection Unit	15	5	
Children's Assessment Team	210	13	9
Children's Disability Team	70	10	4
Children's Social Care Admin	3		2
Children's Social Care Commissioning	6		1
Early Help	10	1	
Equinox	10		2
Fostering Team	6	1	1
Child Looked After	99	10	5
MASH Team	15	2	4
Youth Offending Service			
Grand Total	562	63	36

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 number of new complaints received.

During the reporting period, the Child in Need Team changed its' name to the Safeguarding & Family Support Team 1, the Child Protection & Court Team became the Safeguarding & Family Support Team 2 and the Child Asylum and 16+ Team became the Care Experienced and USAC Team.

- 14.2 In 2023/24, the highest number of complaints were received in relation to the Children's Assessment Team and totalled 22. Numbers of new complaints for this team have been fairly steady across the year (see fig 8 below), but with an increase in Quarters 3 & 4 which is in line with the overall increase in complaints in quarters 3 and 4, (as shown at 13.2 (figure 6) above).

The work undertaken by the Children's Assessment Team means that they deal with a proportionally higher number of service users (3622 children) in this reporting period and therefore potentially, this would explain why they receive a proportionally higher number of complaints.

NEW COMPLAINTS RECEIVED	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Children's Assessment Team	5	4	7	6	22
Children's Disability Team	3	4	3	4	14
Child Looked After Team	5	3	1	6	15

Fig 8

- 14.3 After the Children's Assessment Team, the teams receiving the highest number of new complaints were the Children Looked After Team, with 15 complaints, followed by the Children's Disability Team who received 14 new complaints.

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 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 Directorate Leadership Team and quarterly reporting to both Senior Leadership and Directorate Leadership teams; in order to ensure that any areas of concern are highlighted and dealt with efficiently.
- 15.2 The 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 breakdown of complaints into issues by the Complaints Team 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	5	4	13
Decision Making	10	12	4	6	32
Quality / Accuracy of Social Work reports	8	2	5	48	63
Safety issues (non safeguarding)			3	1	4
No policy / process in place			1		1
Impact of LA policy on service user				1	1
Recording of information	3	6	5	3	17
Attitude or Behaviour of Staff	33	22	52	56	163
Failure to complete agreed outcome	3	2	3	8	
Failure to meet with parents/carers			1		
Inappropriate comments/actions	25	13	44	36	
Consent not requested				1	
Lack of knowledge of case	2		1	2	
Rudeness	2	2		6	
Poor interaction with child	1	1		3	
Accusation of bias		4	3		
Delivery / Non Delivery of Service	25	19	16	19	79
Inappropriate type of worker allocated				3	
Delay in undertaking assessment					
Support not provided by SW/ Children Services	8	12	6	10	
Delay in providing support				1	
Unsuitable placement	2			1	
Correct process/ procedure not followed	14	7	6	1	
Frequent change of Social Worker	1		4	3	
Contact Issues	3	1	4	0	8
Full contact not provided	1		1		
Contact not increased			2		
Contract stopped	2				
Contact not arranged		1	1		
Finance Issues	2	9	1	1	13
Dissatisfaction with direct payment / process					
Special Guardianship Allowance					
Travel expenses		1			
Funding not provided	2	8	1	1	
Unsatisfactory Communication	56	29	27	56	168
Incorrect / Contradictory information given	18	3	4	5	
Documentation / Information not provided	6	9	7	15	
Documentation / Information delayed	2	1	1	4	
Not being listened to	8	8	8	8	
Calls / Email not returned	10	3	1	10	
Not informed / invited to meetings	3	4		3	
Inappropriate information given to child			1	1	
Contact not made when requested	3		2	8	
Not contacted on a regular basis	2	1		2	
Meeting cancelled at short notice	4		2		
Meetings not held on time			1		
Grand Total	140	104	123	195	562

Fig 9

15.4 Within the 85 new complaints received during 2023/24, there was a very slight increase (2%) in the number of issues raised, from 551 in 2022/23 to 562 and these are detailed in fig 9 above.

The average number of issues per complaint has decreased very slightly from 7 to 6.6, therefore, the evidence suggests that complaints in 2023/24 remain as complex as 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 further by the 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, deliver/non deliver of service and unsatisfactory communication were the top areas of complaint (see fig 9 above). These are issues which are a common cause for complaint in any complaint arena; however, it should be recognised that figure 9 shows the number of issues *raised* under each heading. Following investigation, not all of these issues are upheld. The outcome of complaints is discussed in section 16 below.

15.7 The total number of new issues received in relation to unsatisfactory communication and delivery/non delivery of service have decreased during 2023/24 when compared with 2022/23 (as shown in fig 10 below); however, the number of new issues in relation to attitude/behaviour of staff has increased in line with the rise in new complaints. The decrease of issues in some areas despite the rise in complaints, shows that learning from other similar complaints has started to have an impact.

Issue	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	No of issues 2023/24
Attitude/behaviour of staff	84	124	58	164	144	163
Unsatisfactory communication	75	120	73	90	180	168
Delivery/non-delivery of service	39	60	55	49	130	79

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 2019/20 and 2023/24.

	% upheld & partially upheld				
Type of issue	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Unsatisfactory communication	52%	40%	38%	31%	50%
Delivery / non delivery of service	29%	36%	17%	38%	49%
Attitude or behaviour of Staff	21%	24%	32%	32%	18%

Fig 11

16.2 The percentage of complaint issues upheld/partially upheld has increased in 2023/24 for unsatisfactory communication and delivery/non-delivery of service, but has decreased significantly for attitude/behaviour of staff.

18% 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 the nature of these complaints (e.g. issues raised regarding the tone of conversations with workers) and therefore a lack of evidence from both the complainant/the Council; however, these complaints are monitored, and appropriate action is taken by managers in Children’s Services when required.

16.3 Following the completion of the investigations for these complaints, the investigating managers have looked 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 85 complaints (418 issues) were responded to during 2023/24 at stage 1 and the outcome of each issue within these complaints is recorded and reported to senior managers by the Complaints Team (see fig 12 below).

16.5 The outcomes for all complaint issues closed at Stage 1 in 2023/24 were as follows: 78 (19%) were upheld, 83 (20%) were partially upheld, 192 (46%) were not upheld and 53 (12%) were found to be inconclusive. In addition, 12 (3%) 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). 126 issues were still being investigated at the end of the year.

These outcomes are shown in Figure 12 below.

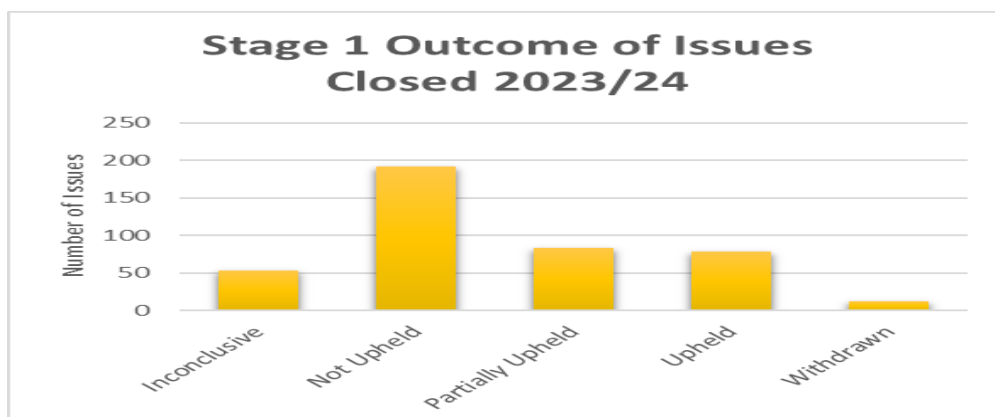


Fig 12

- 16.6 Upheld or partially upheld issues constituted 39% of all issues responded to in 2023/24, compared to 34% and 30% 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 particular 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 2023/24 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 2023/24, 31 new formal complaints relating to the Council's EHCP Team were received, compared to 32 in 2022/23, which is a decrease of 3% 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, 45 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 an increase compared to the 22 handled during 2022/23.

- 18.3 Of the 31 formal complaints received during 2023/24, 10 (32%) progressed to Stage 2 of the Corporate process. This is an increase of 5% when compared to 2022/23.
- 18.4 46 complaint investigations were completed and responded to in 2023/24 (which included any open complaint investigations brought forward from 2022/23); 34 at Stage 1 and 12 at Stage 2.
- 18.5 4 complaints for the EHCP Team were carried forward to 2023/24, one at stage 1 and 3 at stage 2.
- 18.6 Figure 13 below shows the 31 new complaints as they were received across each quarter. Complaints were highest in quarters 2 and 3, with a corresponding higher number of issues identified, when compared to quarters 1 and 4.

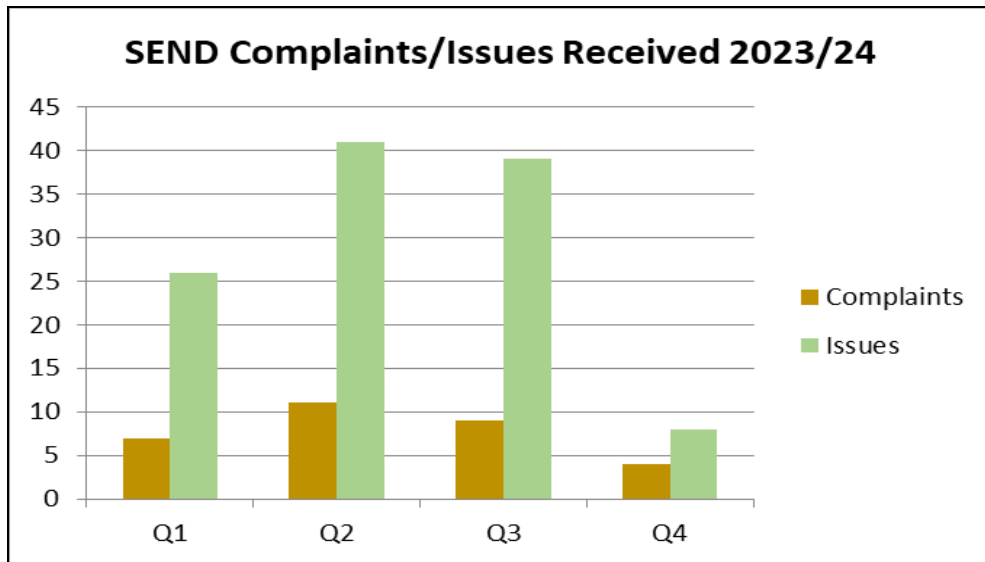


Fig 13

18.7 An overview of complaint issues for the EHCP Team

In 2023/24, a total of 114 issues were received within the 31 new complaints outlined above. The 2 main issues about which concerns were raised, revolved around the EHCP process not being followed (14 issues) and calls/emails not being returned (16 issues); (see fig 14 below). The number of individual issues raised against each main category have increased in quarters 3 and 4, which is in line with the number of new complaints in these quarters.

New SEND Issues Per Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Impact of LA policy on service user		1			1
Decision making		4	1		5
Attitude / Behaviour of Staff	0	5	7	0	12
Rudeness	3				
Inappropriate comments/actions		5	7		
Issues with EHCP	21	14	16	6	57
Quality of EP / OT Report	3				
Change of EHCP Officer			1		
Council not fulfilled duty to provide education	2	2	1	1	
Delay in finding school / suitable placement		1			
Delay in providing support			1		
EHCP not being followed	4	1	7	2	
EHCP not completed within timescales	3		1		
EHCP not reviewed	3	4		1	
EHCP process not followed	6		4	2	
Funding not provided		2			
Provision not named on EHCP		2			
Unsuitable placement		1			
Correct process not followed		1	1		
Unsatisfactory Communication	5	17	15	2	39
Calls / Email not returned	3	7	4	2	
Contact not made when requested	1		1		
Documentation / Information not provided		4	1		
Documentation / Information delayed	1		2		
Incorrect / contradictory information provided		5	2		
Meetings not held on time			1		
Not informed / invited to meetings			1		
Not being listened to		1	3		
Grand Total	26	41	39	8	114

Fig 14

18.8 Timescales for responding to complaints in the EHCP Team

Thirty-four complaint investigations were completed and responded to by the EHCP Team at Stage 1; 20 (59%) were responded to within the 20-working day timeframe and a further 12 (35%) received a Stage 1 response within the extended 30 working day timeframe. This means that a total of 94% of the complaints responded to at Stage 1, were completed within 30 working days, compared to 97% in 2022/23. Only two complaint responses exceeded the 30 working-day timeframe allowed at Stage 1.

No complaints were withdrawn at stage 1 and one Stage 1 complaint was still being investigated at the end of 2023/24 and carried forward to 2024/25 (see 18.5 above).

- 18.9 Of the 12 complaint investigations completed at Stage 2 during 2023/24, 12 (100%) received a response within the 20-working day timeframe at Stage 2 compared to 90% in 2022/23 and no complaints exceeded the 20-working day timeframe at Stage 2. No complaints were withdrawn at stage 2 and three active Stage 2 complaints were carried forward to 2024/25.

In 2024/25 the Complaints Team will work with the EHCP Team to try to ensure that all Stage 1 complaints are responded to within the initial 20 working day timescale and that all Stage 2 complaints continue to be responded to within the 20-working day timescale.

18.10 Outcomes of resolved complaints by issue for the EHCP Team

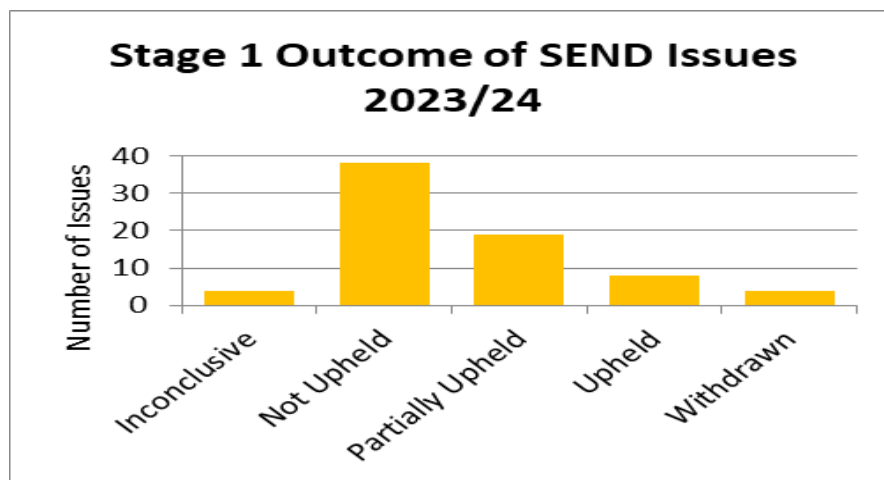


Fig 15

Of the 73 issues which were responded to at Stage 1 by the EHCP Team, 8 (11%) were upheld, 19 (26%) were partially upheld, 38 (52%) were not upheld, 4 (5.5%) were inconclusive. Four issues (5.5%) were withdrawn (as shown at fig 15 above).

The 12 Stage 2 complaints that were responded to during 2023/24 had 33 issues within them, 3 (9%) of which were upheld, 8 (24%) were partially upheld, 22 (67%) which were not upheld. No complaints/issues were withdrawn at stage 2.

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

The Complaints Team also received:

- 19.1.1 Two new complaints in relation to Educational Psychology, one of which was not upheld and the other remained open to investigation at the end of 2023/24.
- 19.1.2 Four new complaints in relation to EHE Inclusion Team, three of which were not upheld and one was upheld.
- 19.1.3 Five complaints were received in relation to School Admissions, with three being not upheld, one being partially upheld and the other still being investigated at the end of 2023/24.

- 19.1.4 One complaint was received in relation to School Appeals and was not upheld.
- 19.1.5 Three complaints were received for School Transport, with two being not upheld and the other being inconclusive.

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

- 20.1 During 2023/24 there were 17 new complaints referred to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) for Solihull Children’s Services (an increase of 4 compared to 2022/23).
- 20.2 Of these 17 complaints, the LGSCO declined to investigate 8 of these and 3 were classed as a premature complaint (a complaint which has not already been investigated by the Council). The remaining 6 complaints were investigated and the outcomes are shown in Fig 16 below.

Outcome	Children’s Services Team
Declined to investigate	EHCP Team (5); School Admissions (1); Children with Disabilities Team (1); Child Protection & Court Team (1)
Premature complaint	Children’s Assessment Team (1); Children’s Disability Team (1); Children’s Assessment Team / School Admissions (1)
Investigated - Fault found	EHCP Team - apology, ensure provision, training, £2,800
Investigated – Fault found	EHCP Team - apology, £600, service improvements, consideration by Scrutiny
Carried forward to 2023/24	EHCP Team (2); Fostering Team (1); Safeguarding & Family Support Team 1 (1)

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.

At this point, fault has been found in only 2 of the new 18 cases referred to the LGO in 2023/24; however there are four outstanding LGSCO complaints carried forward to 2024/25. 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 2023/24, the 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 There were 15 learning forms outstanding at the end of 2022/23 which were all returned during 2023/24. 84 new learning forms were sent to managers in 2023/24

and by the end of this reporting period 73 (87%) had been completed and returned. Most of the outstanding 11 forms were issued for investigations completed close to year end with managers not having had chance to complete and return them by 31st March 2024.

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

Learning outcomes from the forms completed and returned by year end have been categorised and are shown in figure 17 below.

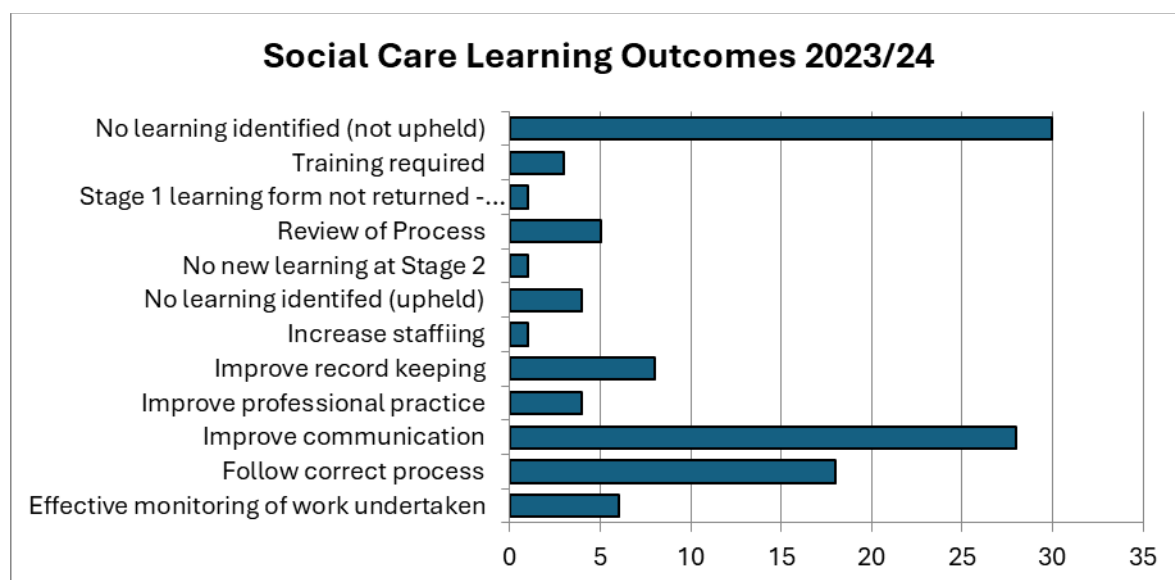


Fig 17

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 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:*
 - SW and partner agencies make very difficult and complex decisions every day and parents need to be part of the decision-making process.
 - Ensure that workers are transparent about the need to seek and share information,
 - Look at the processes in place following successful mediations, to ensure parents/carers receive all required information,
- *Following complaints about the lack of communication from social work teams, learning issues highlighted were:*

- Social workers and managers to be reminded of the need to speak to parents rather than messaging them.
 - Continue developing more robust procedures regarding collecting the views of children and young people.
 - Reminder to the team to respond to all parental/carer enquiries within the corporate, response, timeframe guideline of five working days
- *Following complaints about the completion of assessments, the learning issues highlighted were:*
 - The need for improved tracking of permanence plans and the steps needed to get to the final outcome – i.e. LPMs, and tracking of assessments
 - Discussion with HOS around provision of Life Story Workers being employed within the Council as part of wider council Improvement plan.
 - Managers to challenge SW during 1:1 supervision to ensure that all parents are part of the plan

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 2024/25, the 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 2023/24 the Complaints Team has also sent learning forms to the investigating managers in Learning & Achievement for each complaint responded to.

There were 2 learning forms outstanding at the end of 2022/23 which were both returned during 2023/24. 57 new learning forms were sent to managers in 2023/24 and by the end of this reporting period 54 (95%) had been completed and returned. The 3 outstanding forms were issued for investigations completed close to year end with managers not having had chance to complete and return them by 31st March 2024.

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

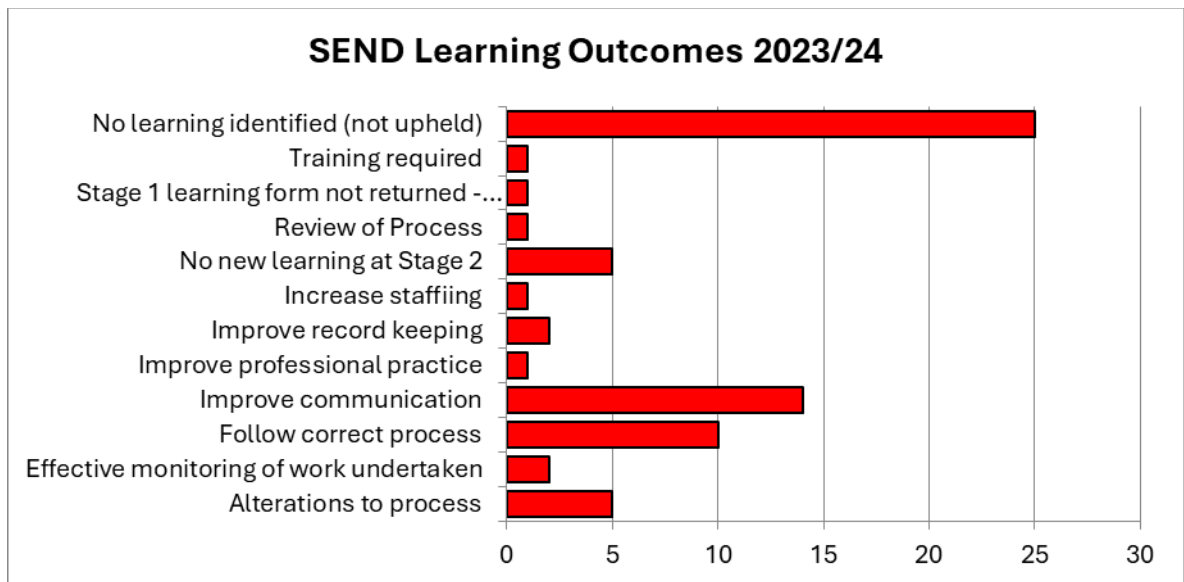


Fig 18

21.2.2 As shown above, the main areas highlighted for improvement were to improve communication and follow the correct process. 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:*
 - Ensure all EHCP officers are clear about which documents are required in Panel folders.
 - Continue to reflect on tribunal cases and make necessary adjustments, as is our normal practise.
 - Continue developing more robust procedures regarding collecting the views of children and young people for the tribunal process.
- *Following a complaint about the delay in completing an EHCP, the learning highlighted was:*
 - Put new processes in place to better improve and monitor the review process.
 - Continue to train SENCOs and other staff at educational settings, enabling them to follow the statutory review process accurately and confidently.
 - Remind the whole team that all statutory timescales need to be met.

22. Compliments for Children’s Services

22.1 87 compliments were received for Children’s Services during 2023/24. This is an increase of 55% compared with the 56 received in 2022/23. These included 43 professional and 44 service user compliments as shown in figure 19 below:

Social Work Team	Professional	Service User	Grand Total
Care Experienced & UASC Team	3	1	4
Child Asylum and 16+ Team	1	1	2
Child in Need		1	1
Safeguarding & Family Support Team 1	2	2	4
Child Protection and Court Team	1	1	2
Safeguarding & Family Support Team 2	5	2	7
Child Protection and Review Unit		1	1
Children's Assessment Team	3	6	9
Children's Disability Team	5	2	7
Early Help		4	4
Exploitation and Missing Team	4	2	6
Family Support Service	1	1	2
Family Support Team East/West	1		1
Head of Service / Assistant Director	1		1
Looked After Children	2	2	4
MASH Team	3		3
Youth Offending Team	2		2
Grand Total	34	26	60

Learning & Achievement Service	Professional	Service User	Grand Total
EHCP Team	4	11	15
ESCOS		1	1
Learning, Skills & Progression	1		1
Planning, Performance & Commissioning	2		2
School Admissions		1	1
SISS Team	2	5	7
Grand Total	9	18	27

Fig 19

22.2 In addition to the above there were also a further 11 compliments about Children's Services staff sent to the Director of Children's Services as part of her "Talkto" sessions.

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

22.2.1 Service User compliments

Child Asylum & 16+ Team / Care Experienced & UASC Team

I've been meaning to write this to you for quite a while but have been searching for the right words to accurately convey how I felt and my gratitude to you. Knowing somewhat now how the professional world works, we often get caught up in titles and roles, but you've consistently demonstrated that being my worker is more than just a job title. You've shown me that it involves empathy, dedication, and an unwavering commitment to helping others, values that you exemplify. To me, you've become more than my worker; you've become a friend, and a mother figure. During the times when I felt down, you offered me a kind word and a listening ear.

You've provided the support that I needed to navigate through life's challenges, always there, consistently, without fail.

It's the little things that truly stand out, like a comforting chat when things seemed bleak, your unwavering faith in my abilities, the genuine care in your words, and the consistent support through the ups and downs. These are the things that make the difference, the things that have helped me stand back up whenever I stumbled.

Children in Need / Safeguarding & Family Support Team 1

I wish to feedback you that you are wonderful and a breath of fresh air. You are amazing at your job and any stigma of social workers in a shallow mind couldn't be further from the truth with you. You have been a pleasure to work with and an asset to Solihull Children's Services.

Child Protection & Court Team / Safeguarding & Family Support Team 2

Just wanted to share that XX (Mother) was really complimentary of AA in the conference this afternoon. She said that as soon as she picked up the case, she has progressed things and worked in a really positive way with the family. Reports were shared in advance, and it was clear that discussions had taken place about the plan which included the ongoing concerns as well as everything which is working well. XX spoke about how well AA communicates and that she will get back to her.

Children's Assessment Team

Since first meeting you, you have made both myself & KK feel at ease. Throughout our visits you have kept us updated & informed. As it has been a rollercoaster of emotions during our journey, we can finally see things looking up. I know we still have a long journey ahead of us before the outcome we would love. It is with your support and reassurance this has been made possible. Your chats, messages have helped KK through some of the most difficult days. He is really trying & like us he just wants the best for CC. Thank you for always being there for us as a family & like us always having CC;s best interests at heart.

Children's Disability Team

I was so happy to find out last week that FF is now our Social Worker...I cried! She is so very knowledgeable and nothing at all is out of her reach or inconvenient. If she doesn't know the answer, she will for sure find out. Just her enthusiasm and love of her job is outstanding. Also help....she loves our little bonkers staffie and just sits there giving her fuss and attention too. No locking away and upsetting the dog during visits. FF has just come in to our family and become part of it already!

EHCP Team

GG has been overseeing our son's EHCP annual review, and I can genuinely express that this has been the most exceptional service we've ever encountered. GG was incredibly compassionate, guiding us through the entire procedure. The meeting was a pleasure, and we are absolutely delighted with her exemplary service and unwavering dedication.

Children Looked After Team

.... You then thought about your current social worker JJ – in your words “number one social worker, the main man”. In previous work we had done you had identified him as being someone you can rely on and is someone who genuinely cares for you and wants the best for you. When thinking about JJ, you thought about how he had

been your social worker for over 5.5 years and this has given you stability, you haven't had to get to know a new social worker again and he knows your story, for you this felt like you were safe and belonged. You are happy that he will be your social worker until you are 18 years old.

SISS Team

Thank you so much for all the help and support you have given XX and myself, you have certainly made a huge difference to XX's path in life and to my sanity! I will be forever grateful to you. Without you standing up for her I fear she would still be being told to 'try harder'. I now know there are people who don't believe that is the right way for all children, it gives me confidence in my own decision making for XX moving forward. If you took on your role to make a difference in people's lives, I can tell you first hand, you make a huge difference! If the experience I've had in the system so far is anything to go by, I can see how challenging and disheartening your job can be. Just know, you are amazing at what you do, and you really do make a huge difference.

22.2.2 Professional compliments

Care Experienced & UASC Team

I just wanted to say that I have found working with you, with XX, not only helpful, but crucial, in terms of the joined-up work we have been doing together; this has made my role much clearer and more productive. Thank you. Although XX can take some of her frustrations out on you, I do believe that is because they trust you and know that you will be able to withstand their sometimes primitive and overwhelming anxieties (emotions that weren't possible or safe to express when they were younger). I know that isn't always easy to be on the receiving end of XX's fury (having had firsthand experience of this myself too), but feeling safe enough to do this with you and I, is hopefully enabling XX to realise that their feelings (and the feelings of the majority of others) aren't necessarily dangerous or damaging. I truly believe that the work I have been doing with XX would not have got to the stage they are currently at without your support and involvement. I know they still have a lot of work to do, but without the joined-up approach between you and I, in my view I think their progress would have been much slower and much more worrying. I have always been impressed with your ability to balance a kind, nurturing and thoughtful approach with XX whilst also ensuring equally kind but clear boundaries with them.

Safeguarding & Family Support Team 2

Just to add to the praise, HHJ praised BB repeatedly throughout today's hearing. Both in relation to the lengths he has gone to build up XX's trust, the hours spent with the family and his approach in trying to keep things from boiling over. She was particularly impressed with the quality of his statement – it's a very good example of how to write an updating statement and one which I would recommend is used as an example of good practice.

Children's Assessment Team

I would like to share how pleased we have been with the communication and quality of support and leadership of BB as a Social Worker to one of our most vulnerable children. It is so important to us that we are able to work effectively together in partnership in this area and we have been able to witness this strength of partnership between school and BB in recent times which have been both turbulent and traumatic on occasion for one particular child.

Children with Disabilities Team

Just wanted to share that I have raised a purple RAG following the review for XX today. There is a huge amount of work which has gone into progressing a highly complex multi-agency plan for XX. It was so positive to hear today how this is coming together and in time to hopefully have a really positive and planned transition for XX into her adult placement.

EHCP Team

A short message to thank you all for your guidance and expertise this year and particularly in answering my questions about EHCPs - some of which I know are very specific! Whilst I am a very experienced teacher, coming towards the end of my 30th year and an experienced senior leader of 10 years, I am still a relatively novice, learn as I go, inexperienced SENCO. I have realised how much I didn't know and how weak the training for NASENCo is in terms of EHCPs. I very much appreciate how quickly you get back to me as I realise, I'm not the only SENCO you must deal with.

Exploitation & Missing Team

XX has an excellent team around her, through her social worker, exploitation worker and PA. The professional support and intervention provided to XX has been successful in making positive connections with XX, helping her trust in adults and helping her to address areas of concern and risk. At this review, XX is currently safer, making safer and wiser choices for herself, and is engaged with her support network. She has a positive focus for her future and can see herself working towards her aims. XX's voice is heard and is acted upon. I would add that particular thanks should be extended to PP. She is an exceptional worker who has gone over and above for XX in forging a strong working relationship, understanding XX's experiences and starting where XX is. The ability of the service to work more intensely has been key. PP's commitment to supporting XX has been exactly what XX needed and has been the right high-support, high challenge intervention at the right time. Their work continues and there is still progress to be made, but PP has given XX the tools and the opportunity she needed at the right time.

Children Looked After Team

XX it was a pleasure to chair your review and to hear about the progress you have made over the review period. Whilst you should take the credit for this there has been some really good planning in the background making sure that things are in place for when you turn 18 ... I was also really pleased to hear that your PA has done a lot of work with you around attending University and making sure you have the right bursaries and support in place. There are dates already booked in the diary for any remaining actions and you were really confident today that everything was in place for you to start university ... There has been some excellent planning and multi-agency working to support you and this has really put in place the groundwork for what should be a smooth transition to leaving care at 18. Due to the way the care plan has been progressed and the positive outcomes achieved I am raising a purple RAG as there has been some excellent support provided to you.

MASH Team

I was talking to XX Lead DSL at A SCHOOL. She said that she had been in contact with Solihull a few times recently and it had been a very positive experience. There were prompt responses and good engagement. Social workers responded quickly

to concerns and we had contacted to gather and share information. She wanted it to be that she appreciated the hard work and dedication of the team. She said they don't get that in [Another LA].

Youth Offending Team

I was reflecting yesterday and I was thinking about how refreshing it was to see XX's energy to challenge my proposal and the way he advocated so passionately for the victim and their family in triage, it was really nice to see and highlighted to me how much of a gap it was in our service and how I must reflect the victims views in our assessments and intervention as well as the voice and journey of the young person.

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 2023/24, the Complaints Team have continued to work hard to maintain 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 Complaints Team have managed 198 such cases for Children's Services in 2023/24 (compared to 153 in 2022/23), helping to ensure that concerns are resolved as quickly as possible; whilst all but 21 of the 135 complaints investigated during 2023/24 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 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 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 Complaints Team to record complaint details ensures that any member of the 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.
- 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 2023/24 there were no equality issues identified.

- 23.9 During 2023/24 the Complaints Team received the following feedback:

23.9.1 Feedback from Complainants

- *Mrs T praised the notes made of our telephone conversations and said they were the most comprehensive and correct notes she had received since being involved with Children's Services. She also complimented me on taking the time to listen to her and to try to resolve the issues she had. She said she knows that she talks a lot but at no point did she feel rushed or dismissed.*
- *Thank you for taking the time to listen to me and allow me to discuss my concerns. As I'm dyslexic, I find it difficult to put things in writing and being able to talk to someone has helped me feel that I'm not being dismissed and am being taken seriously.*
- *Thank you so much for all your help with this, this is an early Christmas present and mum will be relieved. Thank you so much I really appreciate it.*

23.9.2 Feedback from professionals

- *... As with the previous set of minutes, your minutes are by far the best we have seen from any of the LA's and Trusts I have done Stage 3's with. Thank you so much, it makes our job easier and having the confidence that you will capture the conversations accurately means I can concentrate on chairing the meetings.*
- *...thank you all for your service, you all do an amazing job...couldn't do it without you. I'll second that, 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.*

- *I would also like to thank you for all your efforts to turn around children services.*

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 which assists senior staff to easily identify whether 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 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 Complaints Team in 2023/24.
- 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 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 quarterly basis and any new complaints referred from the LGSCO are reported immediately to the Director / appropriate Assistant Director. Any adverse outcomes are notified to the Chief Executive as they are received.

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 2024/25

- 25.1 In 2024/25, training sessions will be organised for appropriate staff who are required to respond to complaints and who are new to Solihull. In addition, one-to-one training is always available to investigating managers and the Complaints Team are always happy to assist and provide advice and guidance to managers on an on-going basis.
- 25.2 During 2024/25, the 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 2023/24, the 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 stage 1 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 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 2023/24 has remained high. Learning data from 2023/24 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 Complaints Team, and this is available to inform service improvement.
- 26.5 During 2024/25, as in previous years, the 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 2024