



People Directorate

**Compliments and
Complaints**

Childrens Social Care

Annual Report

1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022

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1. Background and Context

This report sets out information regarding compliments and complaints made by, or on behalf of children, young people and parents/carers who receive support or services from the Local Authority.

It is a statutory requirement to produce an annual report which will be published on the Council's website. The legal framework for children services complaints is governed by:

- Children Act 1989 Representations Procedures Regulations 2006
- Children and Adoption Act 2002
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

The requirement of annual report is set out in Paragraph 13 of the 2006 Regulations.

The current legislation requires local authorities to appoint a 'responsible person' with responsibility for ensuring compliance with the following arrangements:

- Managing, developing and administering the complaints procedure
- Providing assistance and advice to those who wish to complain
- Liaising with services regarding the investigation of complaints where appropriate
- Supporting and training existing and new members of staff
- Monitoring and reporting on complaints activity

Staff will always try to resolve problems or concerns before they escalate into complaints, and this ensures that investigations are kept to a minimum.

Bracknell Forest Council has set procedures for resolving complaints to ensure that: -

- The views and experiences of people who use the services are heard
- Positive feedback is used to develop services and highlight good practice
- We continually learn as an organisation and resolve things
- We can sustain a quality focus on our customers

Our aims are to:

- Resolve complaints quickly and where possible using informal measures
- Offer early resolution of complaints
- Reduce escalations, and in turn addressing cost implications
- Learn lessons from complaints

2. Bracknell Forest Children's Statutory Complaints Procedure

The complaints process aims to be as accessible as possible. Complaints may be made by telephone, in writing, by email or using our online complaints form on the Bracknell Forest Council public website.

Children's Statutory Complaints:

Bracknell Forest adopts a three-stage process for dealing with complaints which is in line with statutory guidance, *Getting the Best from Complaints (2006)*. This sets out the following stages:



- Stage 1 – Informal/Local Resolution
- Stage 2 – Formal Independent Investigation
- Stage 3 – Independent Review Panel Hearing

An independent advocate for children and young people is commissioned via Action for Children where required, to ensure effective representation to support early and prompt resolution of complaints.

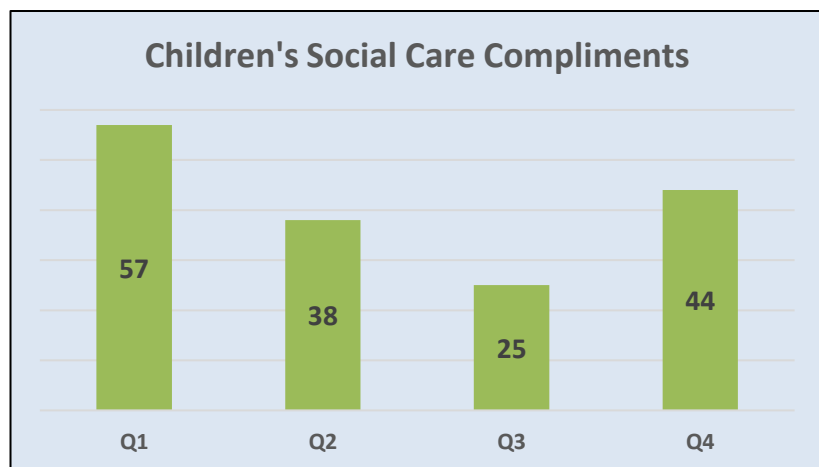
If the complainant is not happy with the outcome of their complaint, they can refer the matter to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for consideration. Representations may be made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) at any stage and any member of the public is able to complain to the Ombudsman if they feel there has been maladministration or injustice. The LGSCO will not normally accept the complaint until the Council has had a chance to complete all stages of the complaint procedure.

Complaints not covered by this process will be dealt with under the Local Authority's Corporate Complaints Procedure. These can include complaints made by parents/carers about their own experiences and not that of their children or foster children.

3. Children's Social Care Compliments

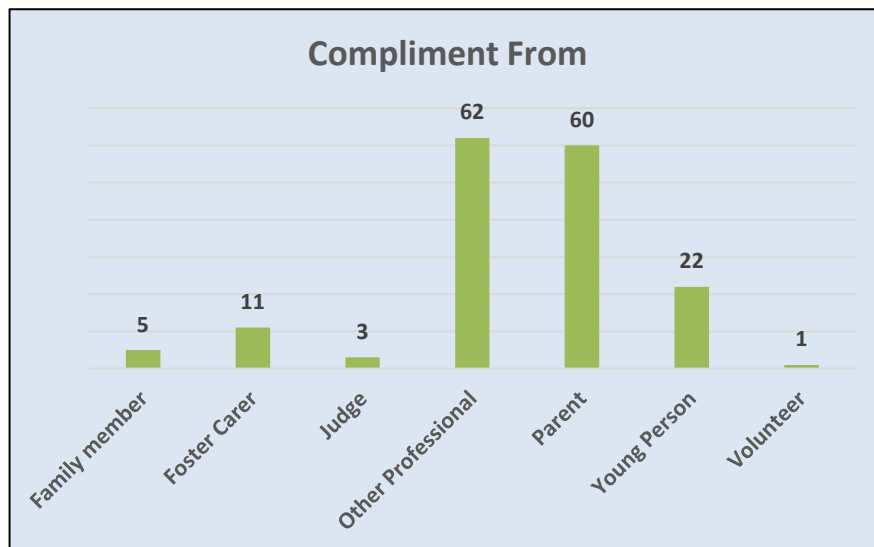
Compliments are received from a wide range of sources across the different services, using surveys, service user feedback forms and direct consultation exercises.

All compliments received from external sources and internal professionals/agencies are sent to the individual's line manager to support the appraisal process and personal development of employees.



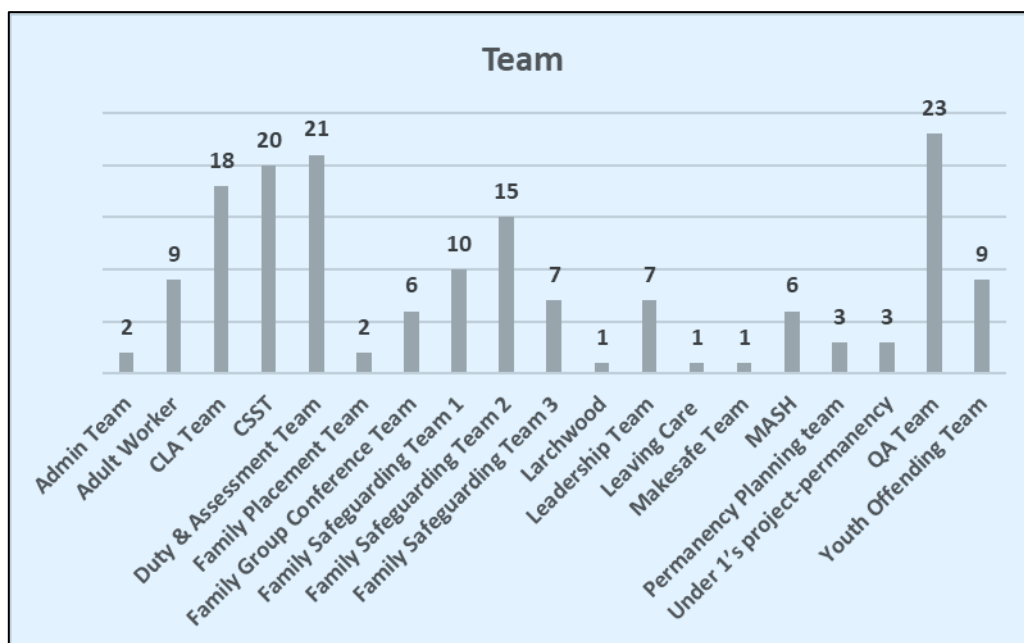
	Number of compliments
2018/19	83
2019/20	173
2020/21	185
2021/22	164

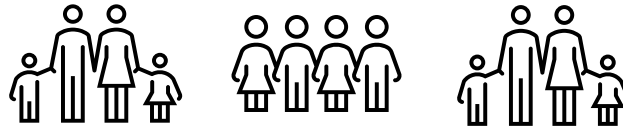
During 2021/2022 there were 164 compliments received. This is a decrease of 11% compared to the previous year. This decrease may be due to changing views and expectations as services returned to normal operations following the pandemic.



Compliments by Team

The table below shows the numbers of compliments for individual teams within Childrens Social Care. Every team within the service has received at least one compliment.





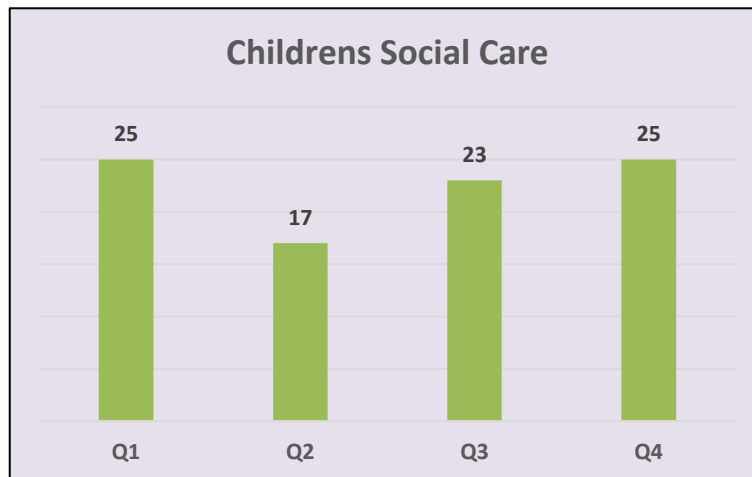
What are compliments saying?

- **Young Person** – Just wanted to pass on a compliment given to social worker in young person’s recent pathway plan review. He told us he thinks the worker is THE best Social Worker and he particularly appreciates the fact that she has kept him on even after she became ATM, keeping the promise that he would not have more changes to deal with. I would add that it is really good to see the trust and relationship and open communication they have.
- **Family Member** - I just wanted to say thank you so much with the whole of my heart for everything you have done to help this happen and for doing all you can to protect my grandchildren. They have a real chance for a better, happier life now. Thank you so much. Kind regards always Granny x
- **Parent** - I want to thank each of you for your help, support, and patience. None of this could have happened without you. I am eternally grateful. I have two last favours to ask of you. 1. Show this email to your respective bosses. 2. Keep a copy for yourselves to look at, if you're ever having a crappy day at work, to remind you of some of the good that you have accomplished. With love, thanks and warmest wishes
- **Foster Carer** - “I thought it was professional, everyone had their say, Supervising Social Worker, child and child’s social worker and the Independent Reviewing Officer ran it well and asked the right questions.”
- **Other Professional** – Feedback on Family Group Conference Co-ordinator - He is superb! He is quick, effective, and just lovely! He has worked with a difficult family on mine and worked wonders and came up with a brilliant plan.
- **Parent** - Thanks for your report, I have read it through, and I am very pleased. You do understand the situation very well and you are one of the best professionals.
- **Parent** – Feedback on Larchwood - To all the wonderful staff. We literally cannot thank you enough for looking after our daughter over the last few years that she has been coming to the unit. You’re all amazing and I know my daughter will miss you all.
- **Judge** – The Judge complimented SW during his summing of the court hearing earlier this month. “The social workers engagement with the family and the following assessments were really positive”
- **Young Person** - If it wasn’t for Youth Offending Team I wouldn’t have applied to college. My caseworker encouraged me to apply. I’m a more confident person. I have a better relationship with family members particularly my dad. I have a more open relationship. That is really important to me
- **Other Professional** - This is not a surprise and fantastic. It is a testament to your qualities as a leader and there is a huge amount to be proud of. Thank you for all that you and your team do day in day out, come rain or shine. It is a privilege working with you. Congratulations all round

4. Children's Social Care Complaints

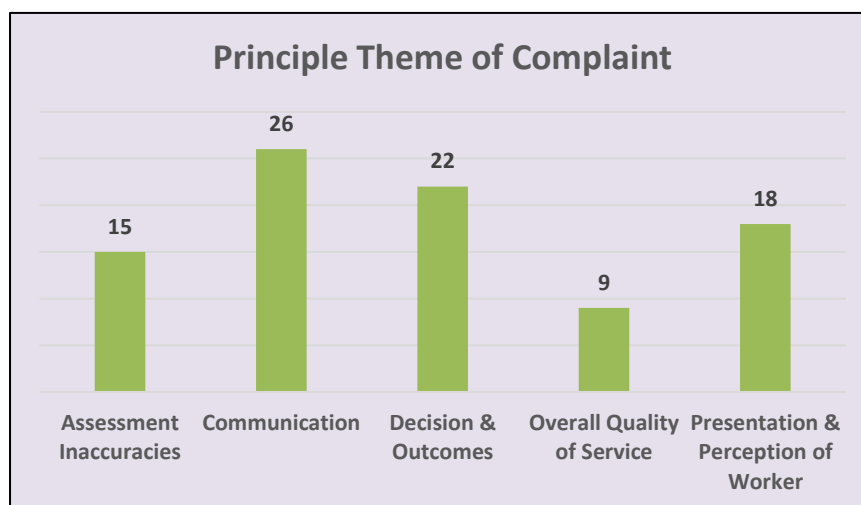
During 2021/22 there were 90 complaints received compared to 73 received in 2020/21. This is an increase of 23.2%.

The table below shows numbers of complaints since 2018/19 and shows a reduction since then, suggesting better working with children and families in Bracknell.



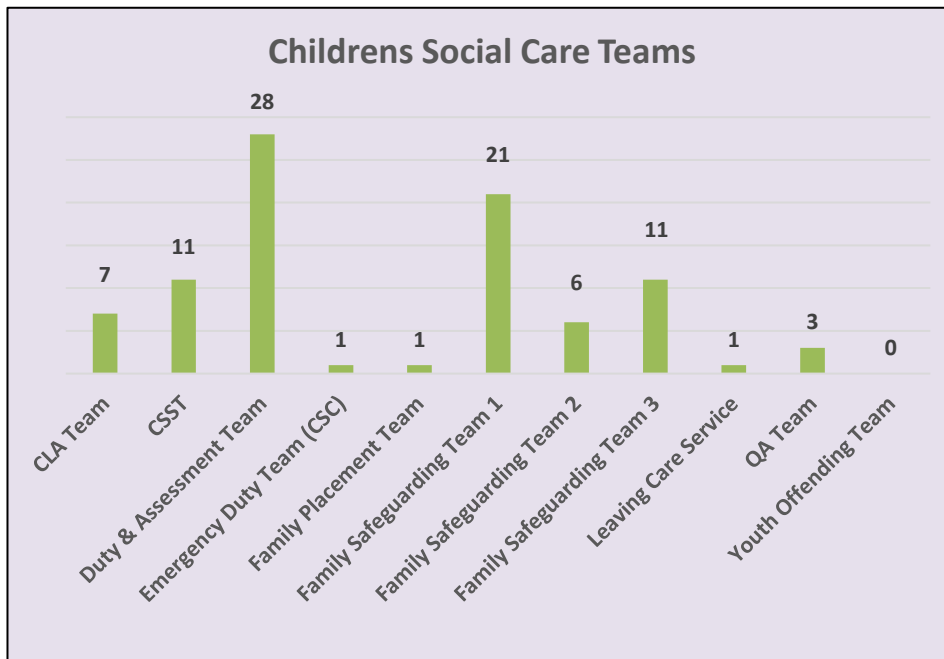
Year	Number of complaints
2018/19	107
2019/20	77
2020/21	73
2021/22	90

In this reporting year 2021/22 the theme most complained about is communication. This replaced Decision and Outcomes which was the most common complaint in the previous two years.



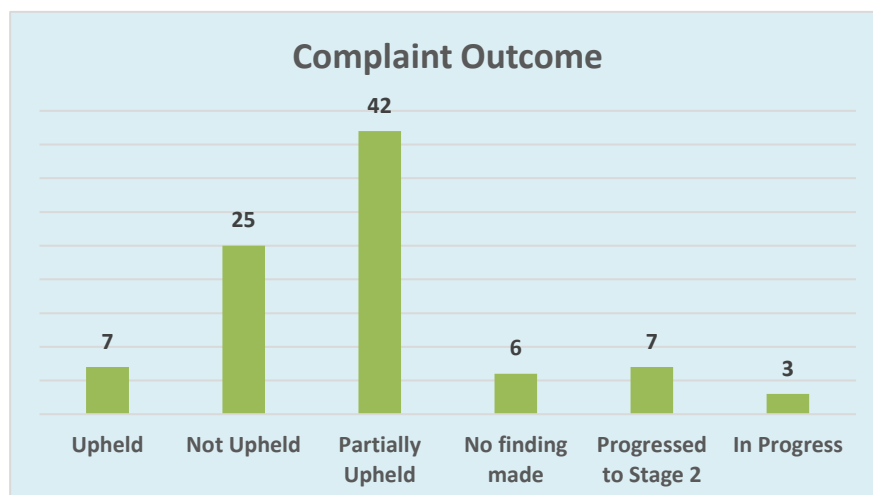
The pandemic during the past two years, and the range of changes at different times, has impacted significantly on the way that children’s social care works. This included the need to change the way that services operated at short notice, and meant that teams and services were operating beyond their normal capacity. Staff turnover was high during this period. The shortage of Social Workers is a nationwide problem, but the Children’s Social Care Leadership Team is working to recruit permanent staff as a matter of priority.

This, in addition to adjustments in face to face working is possibly a contributing factor in the theme of ‘communication’ within complaints.



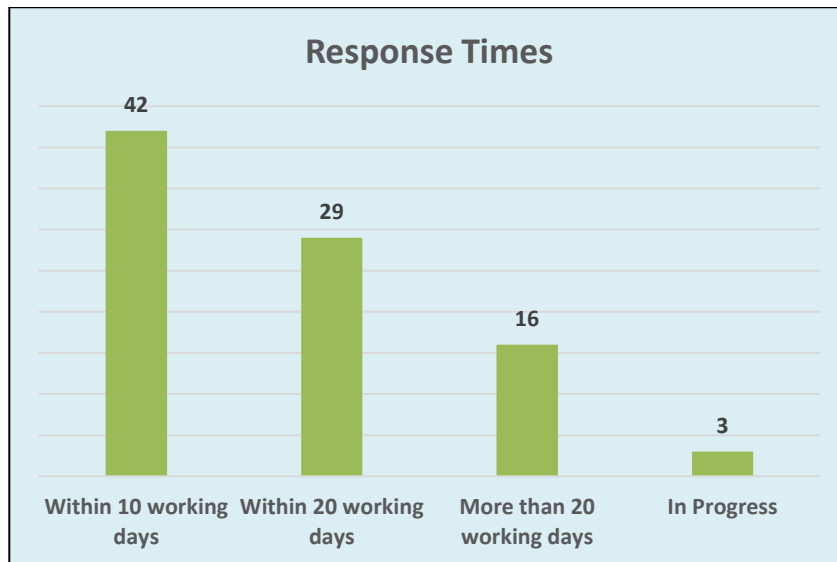
5. Analysis of Complaints

During 2021/22 8% (7) of complaints were upheld compared to 6% (4) during 2020/21. However, a further 47% (42) of complaints were partially upheld compared to 40% (31) during 2020/21. Of complaints received 28% (25) were not upheld- this is the same as for 2020/21, 28% (20).



There were 8% (7) complaints escalated to the next stage of the Childrens Statutory Complaints procedure compared to 5% (4) in 2020/21. Overall, this shows 54% of all complaints made are either upheld or partially upheld (meaning that some rather than all aspects of the complaint were upheld). 34% of complaints were either not upheld or had no finding made.

Timeliness of Complaints



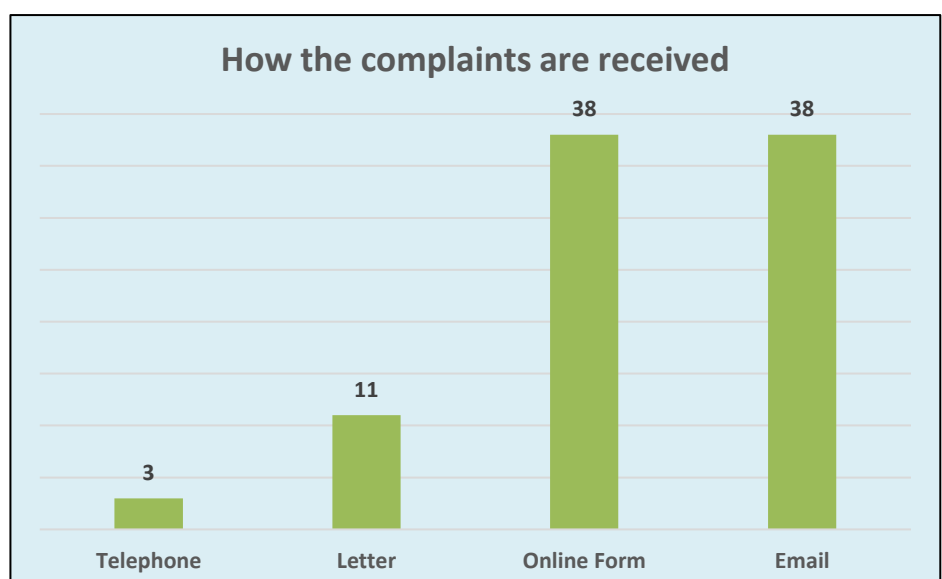
Whilst it is the aim to respond to complaints within 10 working days, 20 working days is allowed for more complex complaints. A response may exceed 20 working days if this involves meeting with complainants or further investigations are required.

During the past year there were 16 complaints that took longer than 20 days.

This compares to 17 complaints in the previous year sent out of timescales. More managers are meeting with complainants before writing their responses to ensure that actions discussed during the meeting are reflected in the written responses. This is proving a better way to respond to complainants as they report feeling more listened to.

We continue to work to improve response timeliness within 20 working days through management meetings and regular reminders to team managers of the standards we are working to.

Complex complaints refer to those instances where there are several issues within the



complaint and would require more time to consider each in order to respond with due regard.

6. Cost of Complaints Service & Investigations

Children's Social Care has had seven Stage 2 investigations this year, two of which have not been completed within this reporting year. One of the seven Stage 2 investigations was processed through our Corporate Complaints procedure. This complaint escalated to Stage 3 of the Corporate Complaints procedure and then to the LGSCO.

The LA was supported by the LGSCO who stated "*although this complaint did not qualify to be addressed under the children's statutory complaints procedure, the Council chose to deal with it in a similar way, by bringing in an independent IO to conduct the stage 2 investigation. This was not a legal requirement and so it is positive to see. I consider this demonstrates the seriousness with which the Council took this complaint*".

The cost of the five investigations completed during 2021/22 was £25,417.75 (average cost per complaint being £5k) compared to the cost of £21,943.72 (average cost per complaint £3.1k) during 2020/21. One complaint was highly complex and increased the working hours of the investigators from the average of 106 hours to 290 hours, which doubled the usual cost of an investigation.

Also included in the cost during 2021/22 were three Stage 3 panel hearings from investigations from 2020/21 costing £4,099.25 and one Stage 2 from the same year costing £2,667.00.

All investigations including interviews with complainants and staff involved have been held via Microsoft teams, this has been a saving to the Council as no travelling and mileage costs have been charged by the Investigating Officer and Independent Person. We are reviewing the way we conduct complaints investigations after Stage 1 for a more efficient way of working in the longer term based on our experiences during the pandemic. Interviews with complainants and staff could continue to be held via MS Teams for Stage 2 investigations. The more structured Stage 3 Panel Hearing Reviews involving Panel Chair, Panel Members and investigators as well as the Complainant and Adjudicating Officer, would benefit from continued face to face meetings.

7. Learning from Complaints

For all complaints that progress to Stage 2 or Stage 3, reflective discussions are held so that staff can reflect and learn from the complaints received. On a more strategic level, learning from complaints is a learning brief presented twice a year at the Children's Social Care Learning Event. The Complaints Manager works with our Principal Social Worker to ensure that learning contributes to the ongoing development of our social care workforce.

The Complaints Manager is always on hand to offer advice and explain the policy and procedures to all members of staff and will seek expert advice and guidance where necessary to ensure a complaint is managed in the most considerate and considered manner.

The Complaints Manager and other members of the Quality Assurance Team hold quarterly induction training for all new staff. The Complaints Manager will again be arranging Complaint Handling training across CSC for all Team Managers and Assistant Team Managers in the new reporting year.

8. Forward plan for 2022/23

Learning from complaints	Work with HR/OD to develop a routine Complaints Handling training offer to the workforce	By December 2022
	Present thematic learning to the CSC learning event	2 x pa
	Ensure a reflective practice discussion is held with involved practitioners to enhance learning and improve practice	For each complaint upheld following a stage 2 or 3 complaint
Timeliness	Work with colleagues to achieve a stage 1 complaint response within 20 working days on all complaints. Where this is not possible a clear rationale will be evidenced	Target of 95% by year end
Governance	Data report to assistant directors, heads of services, team managers and assistant team managers	Monthly
	Quarterly summary reports to assistant directors, heads of services, team managers and assistant team managers	For each quarter
Process	Investigate and implement a streamlined and efficient operational arrangement for virtual complaints meetings where the situation allows	By August 2022