

**TO: The Executive Member
APRIL 2025**

**ANNUAL REPORT –CHILDREN’S SOCIAL CARE
COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS
APRIL 2024 – MARCH 2025**

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to present the Annual report of the Statutory Complaints function for Children’s Social Care for approval by the Executive Member.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Executive Member, notes the report and endorses any recommendations

3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure Regulations 2006 state that Complaints Services should produce an annual report for consideration.
- 3.2 The Complaints Service performs an important role in assuring the quality of response to children and young people or parents and carers, vulnerable adults and families and Bracknell residents who make complaints. The annual report supports the continuing development and review of the service and learning from complaints.
- 3.3 The Annual Report will be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for Children, Young People and Learning and the Local Safeguarding Board following the approval of the Executive Member

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 None considered

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 The reports provide an overview of the work of the Complaints Manager and identifies some of the key issues arising in terms of complaints during 2024/25. In addition to complaints, the report outlines compliments received.
- 5.2 We have continued to improve the consistency and approach with which we learn from complaints. During this year we held reflective sessions in some parts of the department and have Learning Events in children social care. In the year ahead we will work to improve this further including our ability to understand the impact of learning.
- 5.4 Overall, there were 65 complaints received during the period of 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, this compares to 78 across Childrens Social Care in 2023/24.
- 5.5 Overall cost for individual Stage 2 investigations within Children’s complaints has slightly decreased from an average of £3k to £2.9k. Stage 3 review panel hearings have decreased from an average of £2k to £1.4k.
- 5.6 There were 148 compliments recorded during the year which is an increase from 133 in the previous year.

7 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

7.1 The relevant legal issues are addressed within the body of this report.

The legal framework for children's complaints is governed by the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedures Regulations 2006, Children and Adoption Act 2002 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. The requirement for an annual report is set out in Paragraph 13 of the 2006 Regulations.

Financial Advice

7.2 The Executive Director: Resources is satisfied that no significant financial implications are anticipated from this report on 2024/25 activity.

Equalities Impact Assessment

7.3 The Complaints Procedure is available to all those who meet the specified criteria for making a complaint using the Statutory or the Local Authority Procedure.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

7.4 None identified in connection with the annual report. It should be noted that complex complaints are carefully managed with support from the Borough Solicitor where relevant, to address and minimise risks with individual cases.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

7.5 None identified

Climate Change Implications

7.6 This is in line with the council's impact assessment

Health & Wellbeing Considerations

7.7 None outside the remit of this report

Background Papers

- Children Social Care Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2024/25

Contact for further information

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People Directorate
Compliments &
Complaints
Childrens Social Care

Annual Report

1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025

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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's complaints is governed by the following:

- Children Act 1989 Representations Procedures Regulations 2006
- Adoption and Children 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 The Advocacy People 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 (LGSCO) for consideration. Representations may be made to the 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 but not that of their children or foster children.

3. Update/progress on previous forward plan 2024/25

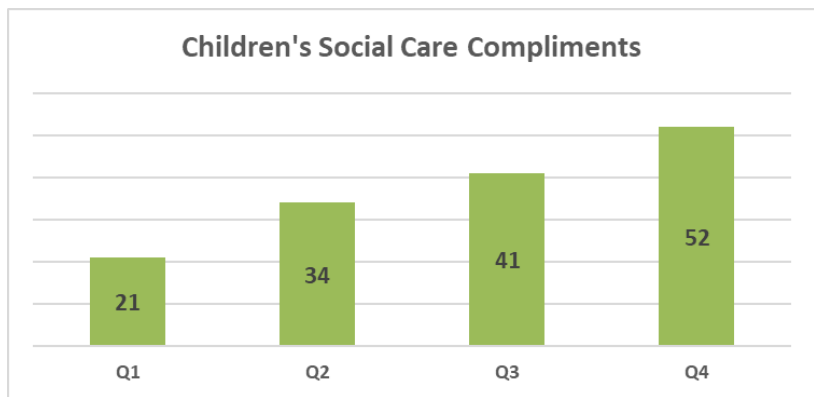
Learning from complaints	Work with head of corporate complaints develop a routine Complaints Handling training offer to the workforce	<i>Not completed, this is due to the new IT Liberty system and updated corporate complaints policy</i>
	Present thematic learning to CSLT quarterly	<i>Completed</i>
	Ensure a reflective practice discussion is held with involved practitioners to enhance learning and improve practice	<i>Completed</i>
	Attend team meetings to discuss compliments and complaints received for individual teams	<i>Completed</i>
	Complaints Manager to meet with Assistant Director to discuss how the learning from complaints will be actioned and disseminated to the service	<i>Completed</i>
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	<i>Completed</i>

Governance	Data report to assistant directors, heads of services, team managers and assistant team managers	<i>Completed</i>
	Quarterly summary reports to assistant directors, heads of services, team managers and assistant team managers	<i>Completed</i>
Process	New complaints system is being developed called Liberty Create Complaints System. This will be a council wide system and is currently being tested in conjunction with IT developers, the complaints manager, and head of corporate complaints.	<i>Completed – March 2025</i>
	Ensure that the new two stage corporate complaints process is followed within the new corporate complaints policy	<i>Completed</i>

4. Children’s Social Care Compliments

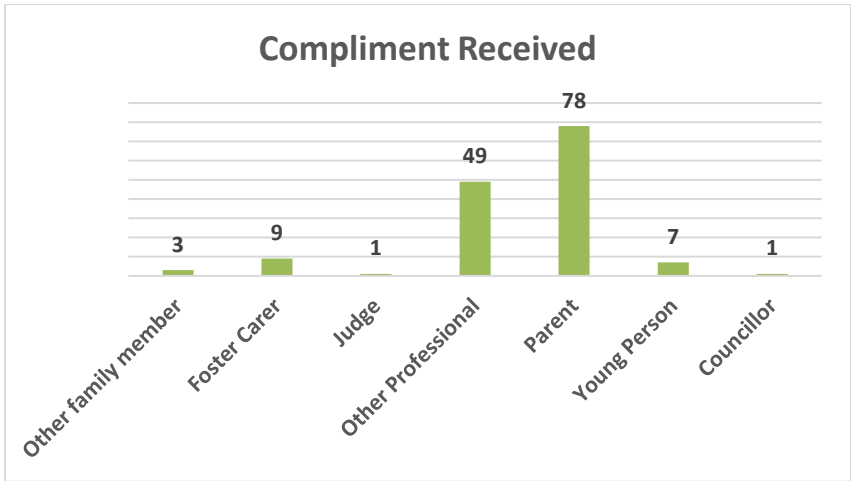
Compliments are received from a wide range of sources across the different services, using surveys, service user feedback forms and direct consultation exercises.

We have now implemented a feedback form within all emails from staff to families which has generated positive comments.



During 2024/2025 there were 148 compliments received. This is an increase of 11% compared to the previous year.

	Number of compliments
2018/19	83
2019/20	173
2020/21	185
2021/22	164
2022/23	113
2023/24	133
2024/25	148



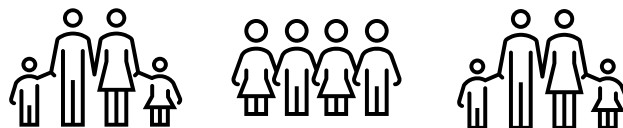
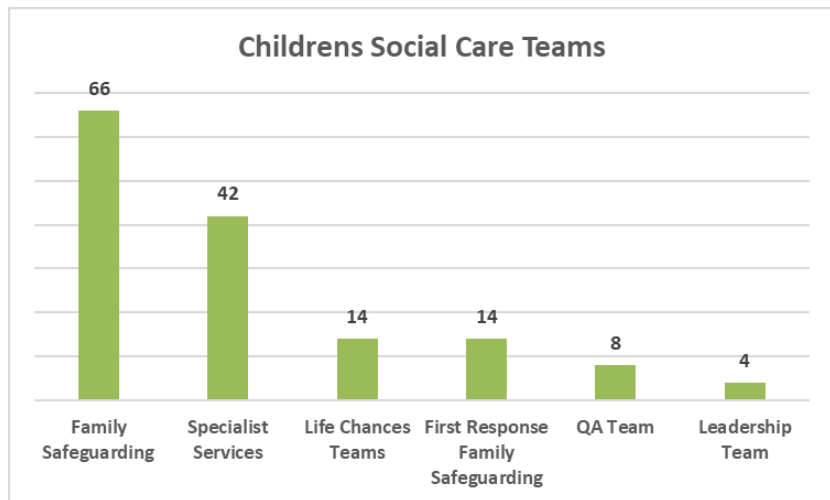
Compliments received

Compliments were received from various avenues, but mostly from parents.

These do not include feedback from children & young people using Mind of My Own (MOMO) measure what matters most, audits, and Family Group Conferences

Compliments by Team

This table shows the numbers of compliments for individual teams within Childrens Social Care that came through to the complaints manager. Every team within the service has received at least one compliment.



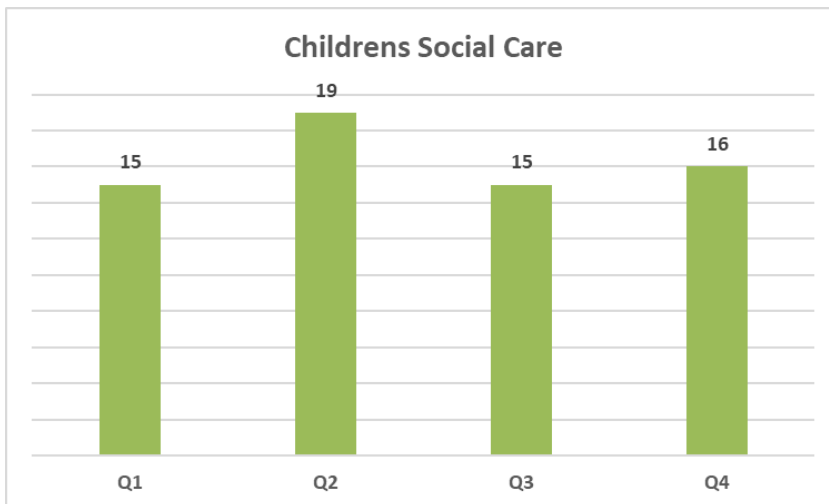
Some examples of the 148 compliments received:

- **Parent** - Wow that's amazing thank you so much. I would like to offer my thanks to you for all the help and support you have given us and made this a positive experience instead of negative. You have also shown me that not all social services involvement is not a bad or scary thing and have changed my views from the bad experience I have been through.
- **Young person** - Thank you so much I had my best time of my life and feel like an adult now and I am so sorry that you have to go you was such a great social worker to work with so thank you so much with everything u have done definitely made me a lot happier and better will 100% miss you :((sad face)
- **Parent** – We are still in the process of the assessment as we have been referred to the Disability Service, but knowing we will be getting some help has been a relief. Social worker

has been really supportive throughout the process, explaining everything step by step, and answered all our questions professionally and effectively

- **Foster Carer** – Our supervising social worker has been unbelievably supportive in our kinship fostering journey. She has been instrumental in ensuring we obtained all necessary training and guided us through all of the bureaucracy and pitfalls along the way. She has always fought for us and our YP and has tenaciously advocated for us over the years. We could not have done this without her!
- **Parent** – I just wanted to say a big thank you for helping me out on Friday if I didn't say it on the day I'm extremely grateful to you and your staff for allowing my son to be at Larchwood for the extra hours on Friday. Please can you thank all the staff on Friday as well. I'm not sure where families would be without Larchwood and your staff.
- **Young person** - She is caring dedicated social worker and especially she understands everything and very aspect. Emotionally I find her hilarious. Sometimes I had a few bad moment or bad day, but when I meet her all the sadness goes away

5. Children's Social Care Complaints



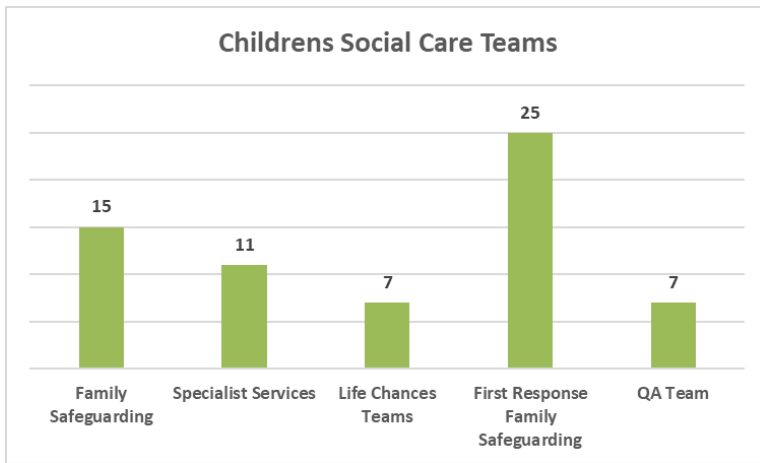
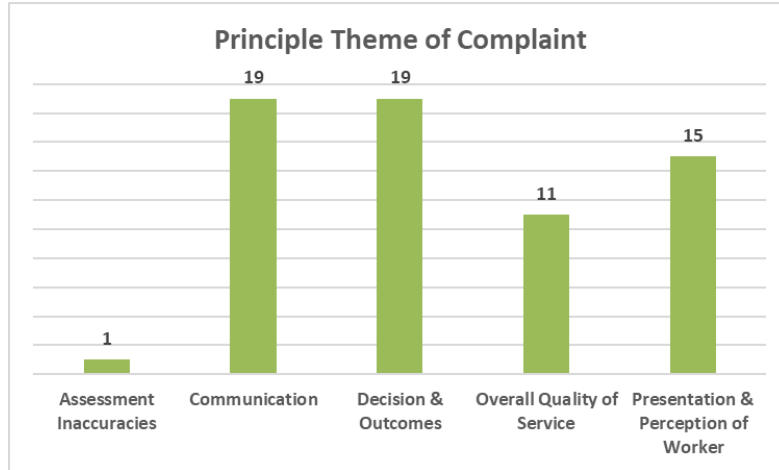
During 2024/25 there were 65 complaints received from 59 complainants compared to 78 received in 2023/24. This is a decrease of 17% in complaints.

The table below shows the numbers of complaints since 2018/19 and reflects 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
2022/23	81
2023/24	78
2024/25	65

In this reporting year 2024/25 the themes most complained about are 'communication' and 'decision and outcomes.

Feedback on presentation and perception of worker is discussed with individual workers when complaints arise and in their supervision.



This table shows a breakdown of the teams that have received complaints. The number of complaints is relative with the number of children open to the teams.

- First Response – 38%
- Family Safeguarding – 23%
- Specialist Services – 17%
- Life Chances – 11%
- QA Team – 11%

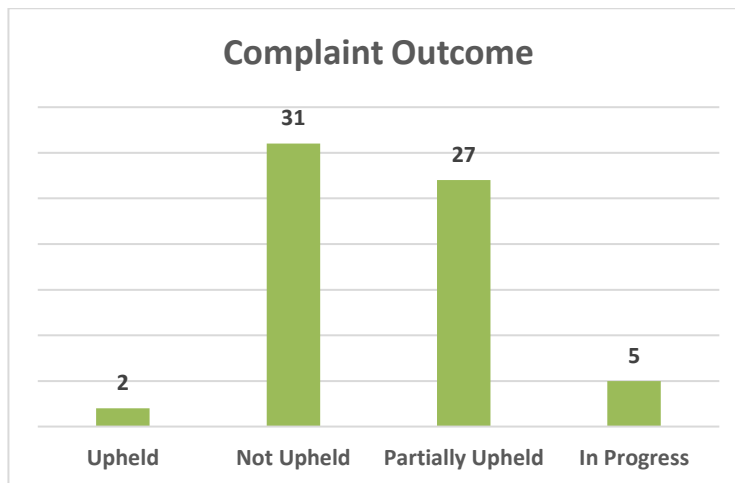
Childrens Social care supported approximately 1800 children within Bracknell Forest between April 24 – March 25, this includes children looked after, children on child protection/child in need plans, and at assessment stage. The 65 complaints (59 complainants) received equates to 3.6% of the children we support.

6. Analysis of Complaints

In total 2 complaints were upheld compared to 3 in 2023/24.

A further 31 complaints were not upheld compared to 35 in 2023/24.

27 complaints were partially upheld compared to 33 during 2023/24.



Overall, this shows 44% of all complaints made are either upheld or partially upheld compared to 46% during 2023/24. 48% of complaints were not upheld compared to 50% during 2023/24. 8% of complaints were still in progress at the year end. Overall there has been a decrease in complaints year on year.

Stage 2 complaints/investigations

There were 2 complaints escalated to Stage 2 of the Childrens Statutory Complaints procedure. There were 7 complaints escalated to Stage 2 through the Council’s Corporate Complaints process.

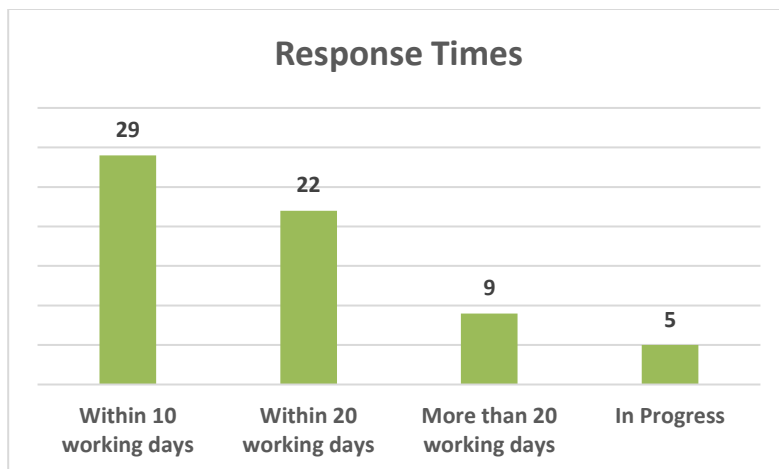
Stage 3 complaints/panel hearings

There were 2 complaints escalated to Stage 3 children’s statutory panel hearing meetings, one of which was from the previous year 23/24. 4 were escalated to Stage 3 of our corporate complaints process. The corporate complaints process no longer has Stage 3.

LGSCO outcomes

There were 4 complaints submitted to the LGSCO during 2024/25. The outcome for 2 of them were that the LGSCO agreed with the Local Authorities action as already remedied and this was upheld at stage 2 & 3. The other outcomes were closed after initial enquiries with no further action and premature complaint.

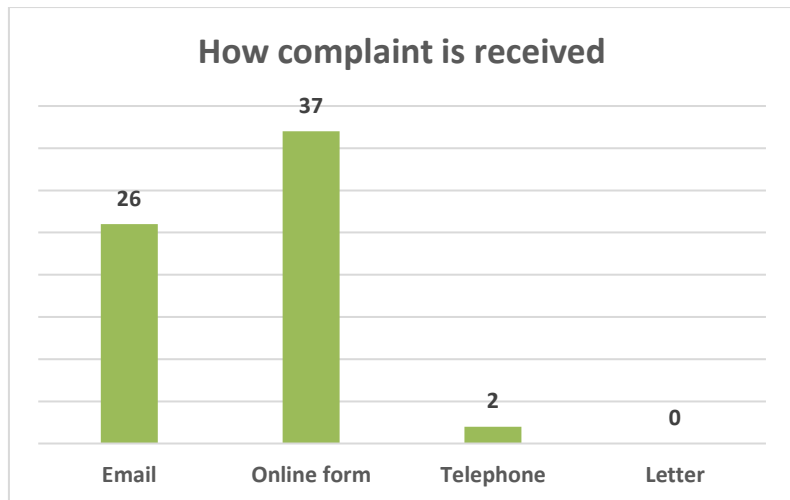
Timeliness of Complaints



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 44% of complaints were responded to within 10 working days. 34% of complaints were responded to within 20 working days and 14% were responded to over 20 working days. 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 although this does cause responses being out of the expected timescales. Whilst we continue to focus on the 20 working days timescale this is not always achievable given the reasons above, but it is more important for the complainants to resolve their complaints which can sometimes delay the responses to be within the expected timescales.

Most complaints are received using the online form. On 5 March 2025 we launched our new Liberty complaints handling system which allows complainants to complain directly using the online form and communicating with us through their own online portal. This has been received well and since the launch we have received 5 complaints using this process. Complainants can still complain by telephone, in person or by writing to us.



7. Cost of Complaints Service & Investigations

During 2024/25 we concluded two children's statutory complaint external stage 2 investigations which were started during 2023/24. The total cost of these were £8,256.25. One of these escalated to a stage 3 review panel hearing costing £1,966.15.

During 2024/25 we had two new external stage 2 investigations. The total cost of these were £5,215.00. One of these escalated to a stage 3 review panel hearing costing £870.25.

The total cost of external investigations and panel hearing was £16,307.65; this is a decrease on spending from 2023/24 being £25,750.05.

8. Learning from Complaints

Learning from complaints continues to be a focus for Childrens Social Care.

For all complaints that progress to Stage 2, reflective discussions are held so that staff can discuss, reflect, and learn from the complaints received. We also create an action plan following stage 2 & stage 3 complaints to ensure any actions are adhered to.

During 2024/25 the Resource Allocation System (RAS) process has been updated and the process improved, to now incorporate an appeal process for families if they do not agree with the outcome, instead of lodging a complaint if dissatisfied with the outcome.

A parent delivered training to all members of Childrens Social Care about living with autism and caring for her child who also has autism, this gave staff a better insight into their lives and the challenges.

In children's social care, new meetings have been established to ensure referrals are not missed. This was a one-off referral, and assurances are now in place.

Unannounced visits are essential to safeguarding. Strengthen practice direction on visits and information for families regarding unannounced visits. Learning-focused session on quality of assessments and a reminder to ensure we check assessments before sending. Discussed all the learning in team meetings and learning events to ensure better practice.

Operationally, practice reflection has taken place. System - review edge of care responses at the front door.

The complaints manager works with our quality assurance team to ensure that learning contributes to the ongoing development of our social care workforce.

The complaints manager is always on hand to offer procedural 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 plan will continue to be progressed between the complaints manager and the head of corporate complaints to provide complaint handling training across CSC for all senior managers involved in complaints responses.

9. Forward plan for 2025/26

Learning from complaints	Work with head of corporate complaints develop a routine Complaints Handling training offer to the workforce	By August 2025
	Present thematic learning to CSLT quarterly	Quarterly before attending DMT
	Ensure a reflective practice discussion is held with involved practitioners to enhance learning and improve practice	For all Stage 2 investigations
	Attend team meetings to discuss compliments and complaints received for individual teams	1 team meeting per annum for 2025/26
	Complaints Manager to meet with Assistant Director to discuss how the learning from complaints will be actioned and disseminated to the service	Arranged for April 2025
Timeliness	Work with colleagues to achieve a stage 1 complaint response within 20 working days on all complaints. Unless purposeful delay is agreed with the complainant. 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	Quarterly

	Quarterly summary reports to assistant directors, heads of services, team managers and assistant team managers	For each quarter
Process	Ensure complaint owners use the new Liberty IT complaints handling system to support a robust complaints management system	Throughout the year

End