

**TO: The Executive Member
APRIL 2024**

**ANNUAL REPORT –CHILDREN’S SOCIAL CARE
COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS
APRIL 2023 – MARCH 2024**

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 Children 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 2023/24. 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 78 complaints received during the period of 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, this compares to 81 across Childrens Social Care in 2022/23.
- 5.5 Overall cost for individual Stage 2 investigations within Children’s complaints has decreased from an average of £4.3k to £3k. Stage 3 review panel hearings have increased from an average of £1.7k to £2k.
- 5.6 There were 133 compliments recorded during the year which is an increase from 113 in the previous year.

7 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

7.1 The legal issues are addressed within the 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 2023/24 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 2023/24

Contact for further information

Kogie Perumall
Head of Service



People Directorate

**Compliments, Complaints
and Concerns**

Childrens Social Care

Annual Report

1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024

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<i>Head of Service</i>	<i>Kogie Perumall</i>
<i>Assistant Director</i>	<i>Thom Wilson (until 15 March 2024) Sonia Johnson (from 15/3/2024 under interim arrangements)</i>

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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.

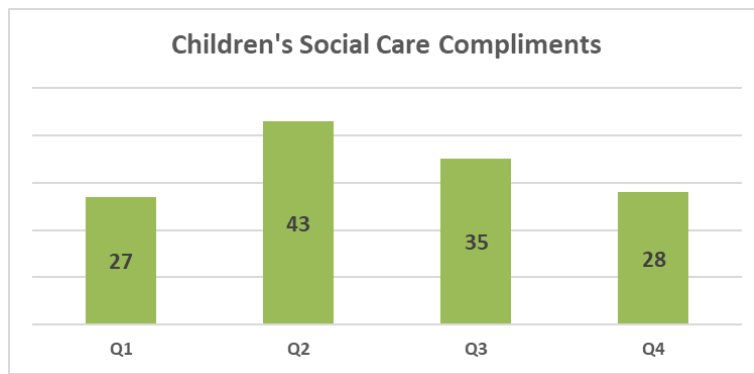
If the complainant is not happy with the outcome of their complaint, they can refer the matter to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) for consideration. Representations may be made to the LGSCO at any stage and any member of the public is able to complain to the Ombudsman if they feel 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. Children’s Social Care Compliments

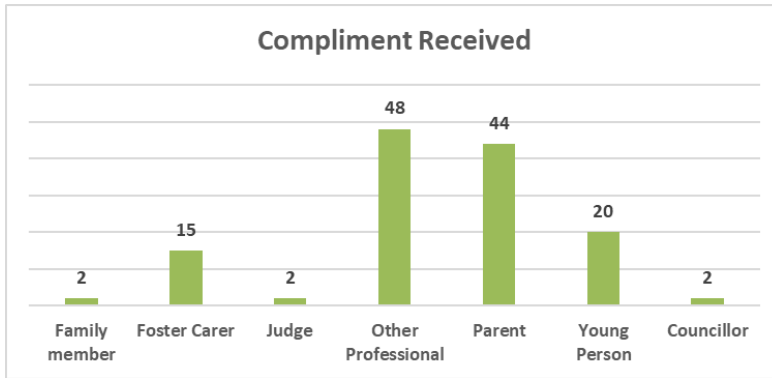
Compliments are received from a wide range of sources across the different services, using surveys, service user feedback forms and direct consultation exercises.

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.



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

During 2023/2024 there were 133 compliments received. This is an increase of 18% compared to the previous year.

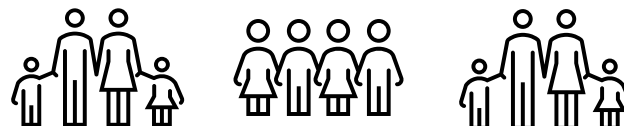
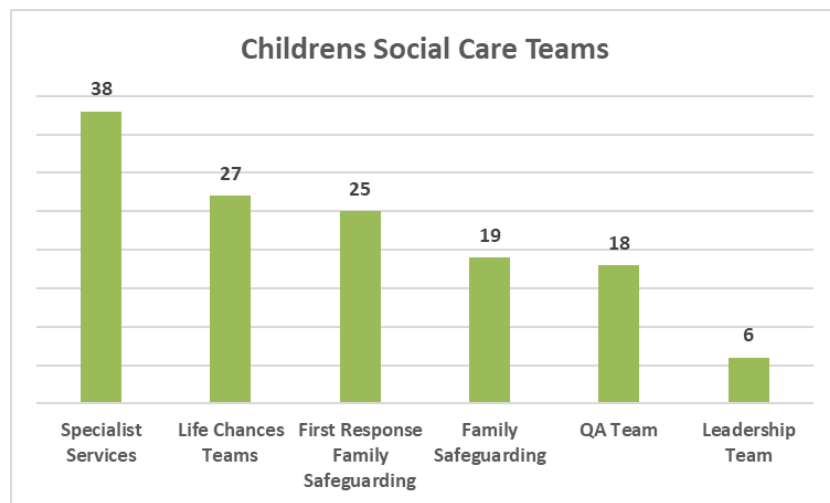


Compliments received

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

Compliments by Team

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

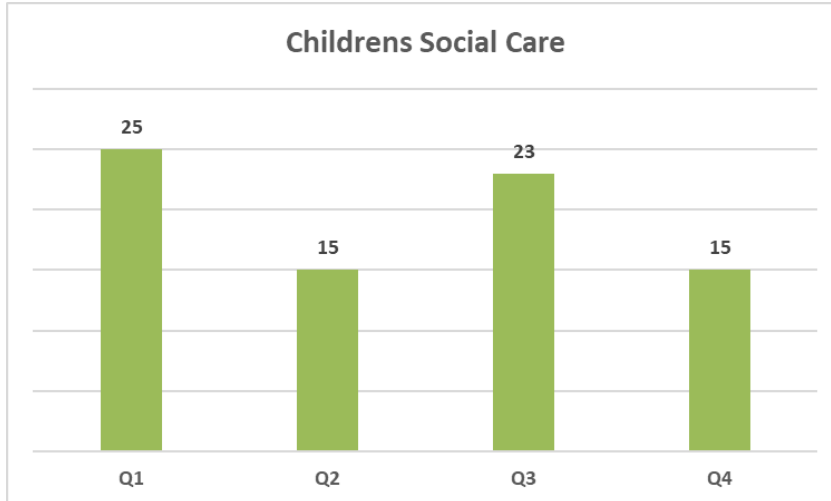


Some examples of the 133 compliments received:

- SW was very professional showed her ID before entering our home. She was very respectful and showed empathy. The girls were worried about meeting her but after she left, they were happy, she was very nice.
- Thank you for all the support with this, it’s an absolute credit to you both that there is so much care around him. We appreciate you!!
- Young Person spoke in her review about a recent meeting with senior managers and how positive she found the experience, she commented about managers being approachable and “normal”, she felt listened to and felt positive about attending future meetings
- I’ve been very happy with social worker, he is a breath of fresh air for Bracknell council, and you should be lucky you have someone like him who works for you. He is able to connect and truly understand different and difficult situations on another level, which I have never encountered with past family/behavioural workers

- Thank you for listening to both of our needs and understanding this situation the way you have. I can't praise you enough for how great you have been and the promptness in which you carried out the required checks. Most of all, thank you for caring about my child. I can now look forward to a future with my child.
- Thank you so much for your time and dedication to me and my family. I can never thank you enough for the kindness you have shown us. I really want to move forward, and I pray for a happy outcome to this situation. Thank you so much for everything.
- Thank you very much. I also wanted to thank you for all the support the team at Bracknell Forest has given me over the course of my time at university so far. Both the emotional and material support have really helped drive me forwards, and I'm absolutely sure that without it my situation would be a lot more difficult. I really do appreciate everything that has been done, and I'm looking forward to the rest of my studies here.
- Bracknell have always been by far the best LA I've ever worked with in over 15 years. Thanks for your support as a LA"
- Thank you for placing me with these carers and I want to thank my carers for making me who I am today. If I was somewhere else, I would still be rude, not rude rude, but my rude.
- Thank you for our foster child's life story book - she loves looking through it. Thank you for all the time you spent creating this.

4. Children's Social Care Complaints

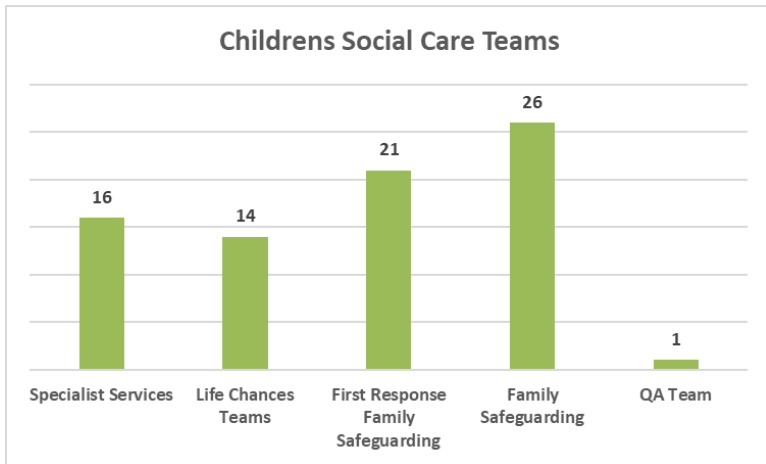
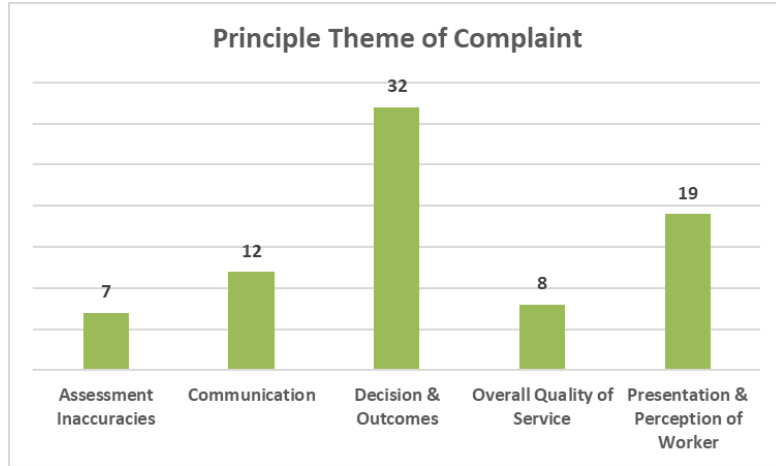


During 2023/24 there were 78 complaints received from 63 complainants compared to 81 received in 2022/23. This is a decrease of 3%.

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

In this reporting year 2023/24 the theme most complained about is decision and outcomes and the presentation & perception of the worker. The was the same during 2022/23.

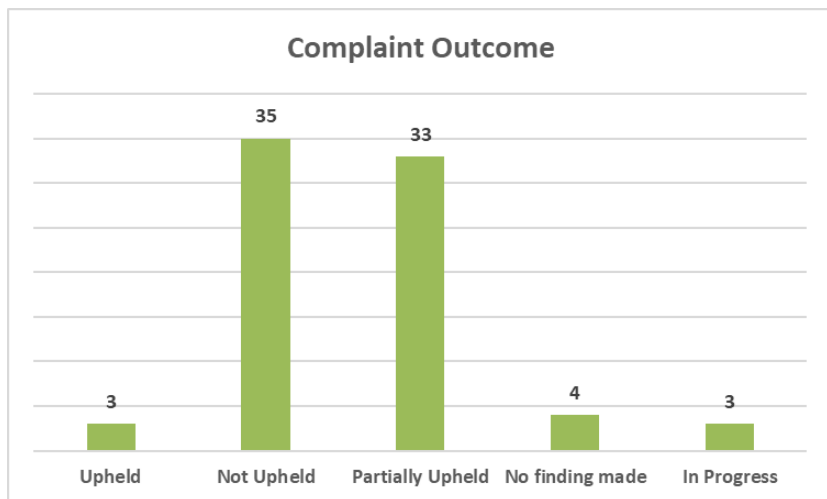


This table shows a breakdown of the teams that have received complaints. The number of complaints is relative with the number of children open to the teams.

- Specialist Services – 8.4%
- Life Chances – 7.3%
- First Response – 12%
- Family Safeguarding – 8.2%

5. Analysis of Complaints

During 2023/24 4% (3) of complaints were upheld compared to 1% (1) during 2022/23. However, a further 42% (33) of complaints were partially upheld compared to 49% (39) during 2022/23. Of complaints received 45% (35) were not upheld compared to 31% (25) during 2022/23.



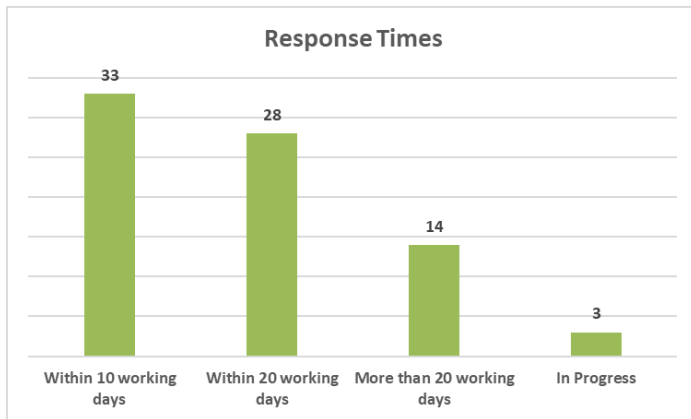
Overall, this shows 46% of all complaints made are either upheld or partially upheld compared to 50% during 2022/23. 50% of complaints were either not upheld or had no

finding made compared to 35% during 2022/23. 4% of complaints were still in progress at the year end.

There were 10% of complaints escalated to the next stage of the Childrens Statutory Complaints procedure. There were 10% complaints escalated to the next stage through the Council’s Corporate Complaints process.

There were six complaints escalated to Stage 3. Two of these were children’s statutory panel hearing meetings and four were our corporate complaints process.

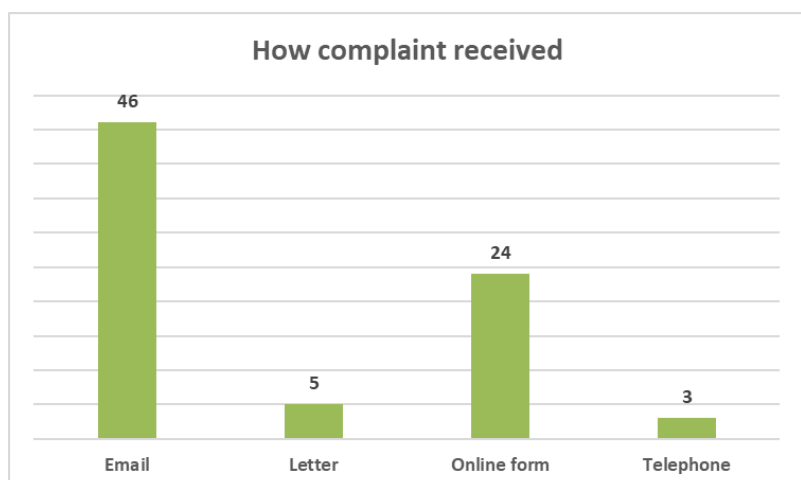
Timeliness of Complaints



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 42% of complaints were responded to within 10 working days. 36% of complaints were responded to within 20 working days and 18% 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. 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.

Complainants continue to email directly to Childrens.Complaint@bracknell-forest.gov.uk and using the online complaints form.



6. Concerns

We have received 43 complaints from individuals which were not children's statutory or corporate complaints. Some concerns were to do with data breaches which were passed on to the relevant department. Other concerns were daily operational issues which were dealt with by the relevant team manager. Some were by family members who would not have Parental Responsibility (PR) for the children concerned so we would not be able to discuss with them as this would breach General Data Protection Regulations. Some complainants complain during court proceedings which the complaints process cannot deal with during this time, but they can come back when the proceedings have concluded.

7. Cost of Complaints Service & Investigations

Children's Social Care has had eight external Stage 2 investigations this year, one of which was from 2022/23.

The cost of the Stage 2 investigations during this financial year has been £18,521.00 this was for six investigations as two have yet to conclude and will be costed within the next financial year. This equates to an average cost for each investigation of £3,087.00.

The cost of the Stage 3 panel hearings during this financial year has been £6,289.00 this included one complaint from 22/23. The three hearings held equals to an average cost of £2,096.00.

8. Learning from Complaints

For all complaints that progress to Stage 2 or Stage 3, reflective discussions are held so that staff can discuss, reflect, and learn from the complaints received. The complaints manager works with our quality assurance team and 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 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 complaints manager and the head of corporate complaints will be arranging complaint handling training across CSC for all team managers and assistant team managers in the new reporting year.

Since October 2023 we have been capturing the learning from Stage 1 complaints within a new form.

The themes from the learning have been:

- *Assessments issues*
- *Information sharing*
- *GDPR/Data protection issues*

- *Parental consent not obtained to visit child*
- *All relevant professionals to be invited to children's meetings*
- *Policy changes for savings for CLA's living at home with parents*
- *Ensuring non-resident parents are involved in the S47 enquiry*
- *Better communication and keeping parents informed*

Complaints regarding 'decisions & outcomes' do not always provoke learning as these are with regards to unique situations for families and children including adoption support & issues with children who are looked after which are decisions made within panels and by panel members.

9. Update/progress on previous forward plan 2023/24

Learning from complaints	Work with HR/OD to develop a routine Complaints Handling training offer to the workforce	By August 2023	<i>In progress.</i>
	Present thematic learning to the CSC learning event	2 x pa	<i>Presented to CSLT and back on agenda for 2024/25 Learning Events</i>
	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	<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	Target of 95% by year end	<i>Not completed</i>
Governance	Data report to assistant directors, heads of services, team managers and assistant team managers	Monthly	<i>Completed</i>
	Quarterly summary reports to assistant directors, heads of services, team managers and assistant team managers	For each quarter	<i>Completed</i>
Process	Investigate and implement a streamlined and efficient operational arrangement for virtual complaints meetings where the situation allows	By August 2023	<i>In progress</i>
	New complaints system is being developed called Liberty Create Complaints System. This will be a council	December 2023	<i>In progress</i>

	wide system and is currently being tested in conjunction with IT developers, the Complaints Manager, and Head of Corporate Complaints.		
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10. Forward plan for 2024/25

Learning from complaints	Work with head of corporate complaints develop a routine Complaints Handling training offer to the workforce	By August 2024
	Present thematic learning to CSLT quarterly	Quarterly
	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 2024/25
	Complaints Manager to meet with Assistant Director to discuss how the learning from complaints will be actioned and disseminated to the service	Meeting to be arranged by October 2024
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	Quarterly
	Quarterly summary reports to assistant directors, heads of services, team managers and assistant team managers	For each quarter
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.	September 2024
	Ensure that the new two stage corporate complaints process is followed within the new corporate complaints policy	June 2024

End