

**TO: The Executive Member
MAY 2026**

**ANNUAL REPORT –CHILDREN’S SOCIAL CARE
COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS
APRIL 2025 – MARCH 2026**

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 2025/26. 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 75 complaints received during the period of 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026, this compares to 65 across Childrens Social Care in 2024/25.
- 5.5 Overall cost for individual Stage 2 investigations within Children’s complaints has decreased from an average of £2.9k to £2.2k. Stage 3 review panel hearings have increased from an average of £1.4k to £2.8k.
- 5.6 There were 143 compliments recorded during the year which is slight decrease from 148 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 2025/26 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 2025/26

Contact for further information

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Head of Service



People Directorate

**Compliments &
Complaints**

Childrens Social Care

Annual Report

1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026

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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, in person 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 2025/26

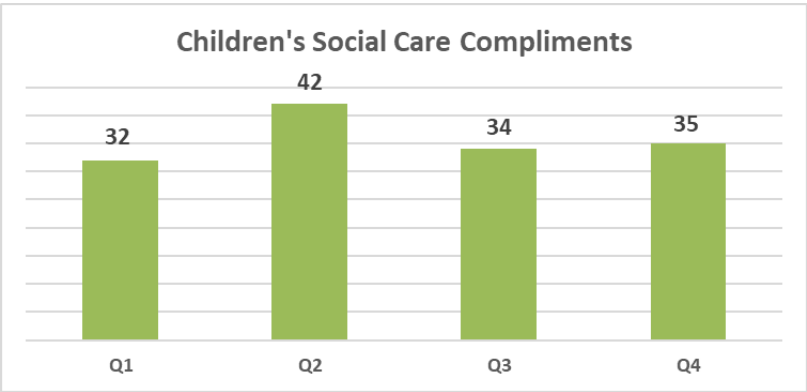
Learning from complaints	Work with head of corporate complaints develop a routine Complaints Handling training offer to the workforce	<i>In Progress</i>
	Present thematic learning to CSLT quarterly	<i>Quarterly before attending DMT</i> <i>Completed</i>
	Ensure a reflective practice discussion is held with involved practitioners to enhance learning and improve practice	<i>For all Stage 2 investigations</i> <i>Completed</i>
	Attend team meetings to discuss compliments and complaints received for individual teams	<i>1 team meeting per annum for 2025/26.</i> <i>Incomplete</i>
	Complaints Manager to meet with Assistant Director to discuss how the learning from complaints will be actioned and disseminated to the service	<i>This is discussed during CSLT throughout the year</i> <i>Completed</i>
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	<i>Target of 95% by year end.</i> <i>Completed</i>

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

4. Children’s Social Care Compliments

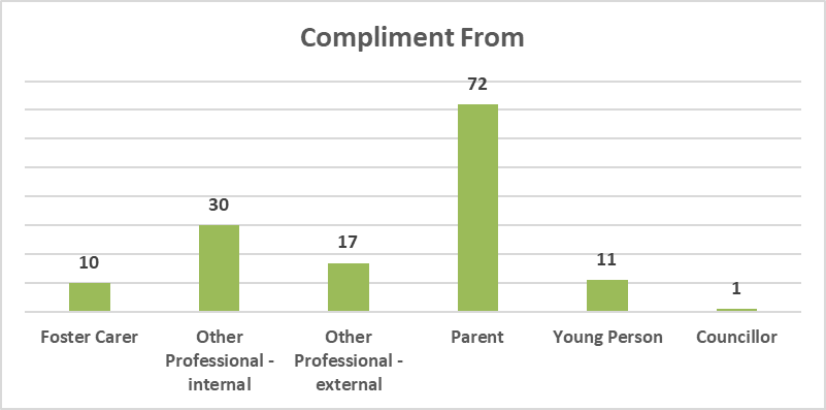
Compliments are received from a wide range of sources across the different services, using surveys, service user feedback forms and direct consultation exercises.

The implemented feedback form within all emails from staff to families has generated positive comments.



During 2025/2026 there were 143 compliments received. This is a decrease of 4% 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
2025/26	143

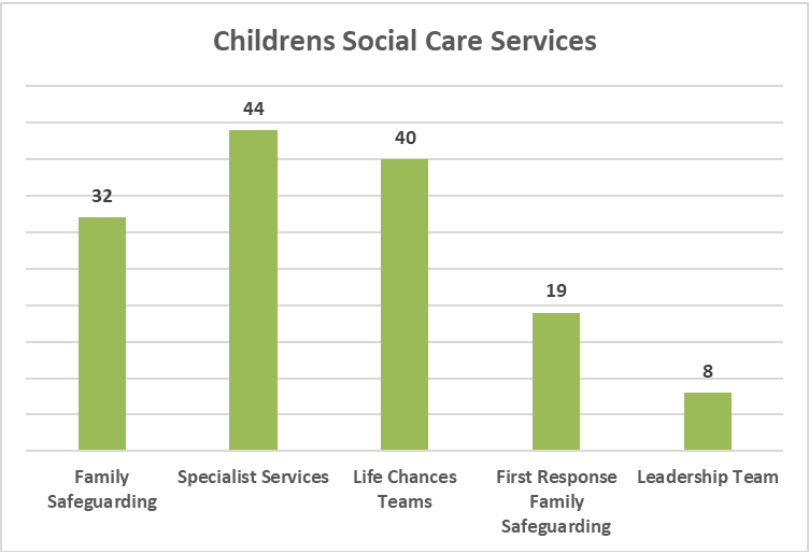
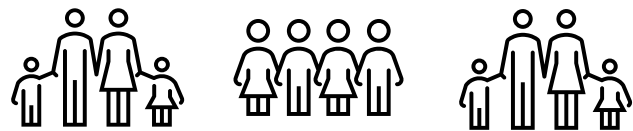


Compliments were received from various avenues, but mostly from parents.

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.

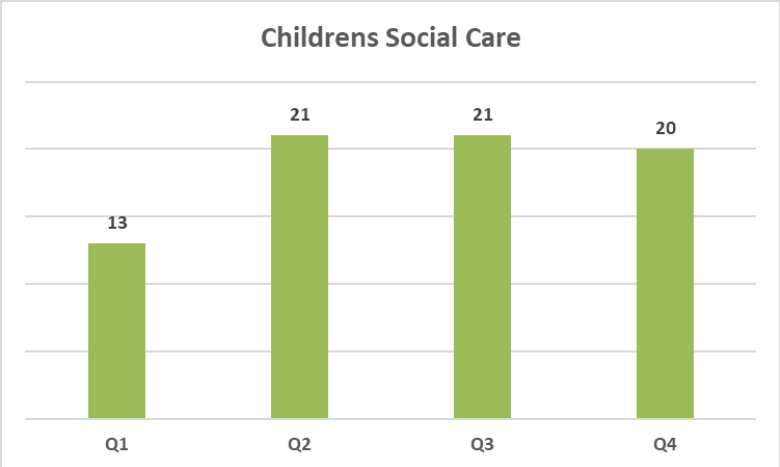


Some examples of the 142 compliments received:

- **Parent** - Parents shared in their CIN review today that they feel very supported and positive with the support that they are receiving from their family worker, they were nervous to ask for help from social care previously as they didn't know what this would look like, but are happy to have someone who makes them feel heard, informative and have consistent support from.
- **Young Person** - I'm writing to share a few thoughts about my PA. Lately, I've been feeling overwhelmed and stressed due to the refusal of my appeal, leading to many sleepless nights and reliance on medication. However, today brought a much-needed change. I had the absolute pleasure of spending the day with her, and it truly lifted my spirits.

- **Young Person** – Young person said: "She comes to school and home, and we do fun things together I would like her to stay over at my home more often so I can show her around and more things, but I know that she is busy. I would score her 100/10!"
- **Young Person** - ‘Amazing day out. Really enjoyed it. Glad I came out and joined in.’ ‘It was the best!’ ‘I’m glad I came I had fun today.’ ‘I loved it and good amount and variety of people.’
- **Parent** - Thank you so much for all your support and everything you have done for us as a family. You are an amazing social worker, and you have given me so much reassurance, support, advice and just listening during some very difficult times
- **Foster Carer** – Throughout our time working together, SW has been consistently kind, approachable, and incredibly supportive not only towards young person, but also towards me. She demonstrates genuine care and compassion in the way she engages with the child, always taking the time to listen, understand, and respond thoughtfully. Her calm and reassuring manner makes a significant difference, particularly during challenging situations.

5. Children’s Social Care Complaints



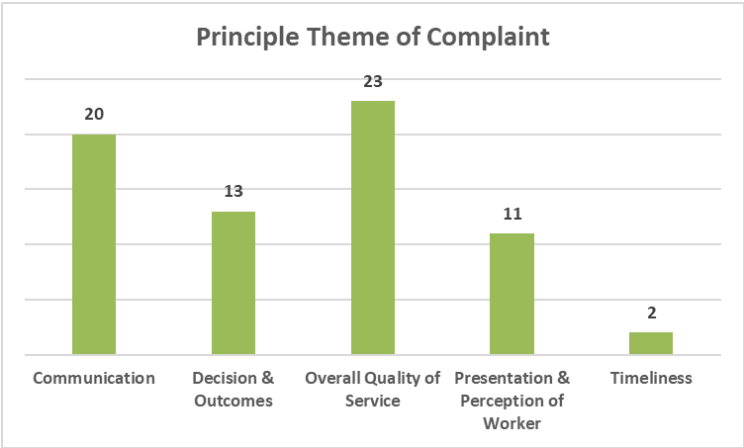
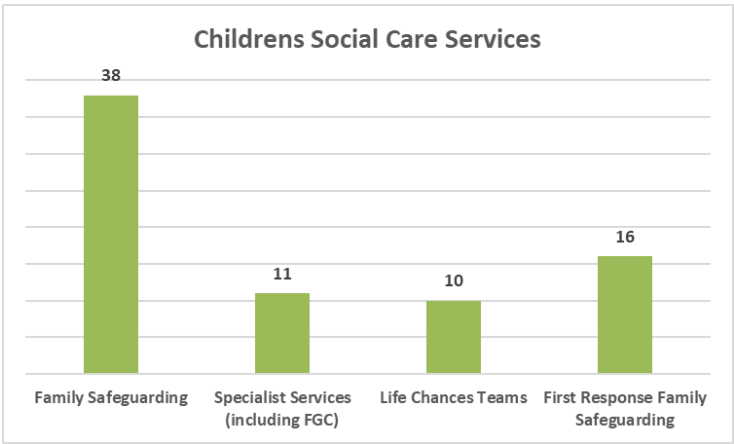
During 2025/26, the service received a total of 75 complaints from 58 complainants. There were, 21 complaints (28%) submitted by six repeat complainants, indicating a small number of individuals accounted for a disproportionate share of contacts. This is compared to 65 complaints from 59 complainants received in 2024/25. This is an increase of 15% in complaints.

The table below shows the numbers of complaints since 2018/19 and reflects a reduction since then.

Year	Number of complaints	Number of complainants
2018/19	107	
2019/20	77	
2020/21	73	
2021/22	90	
2022/23	81	
2023/24	78	60 complainants
2024/25	65	59 complainants
2025/26	75	58 complainants

In this reporting year 2025/26 the themes most complained about are ‘overall quality of service’ and ‘communication’.

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

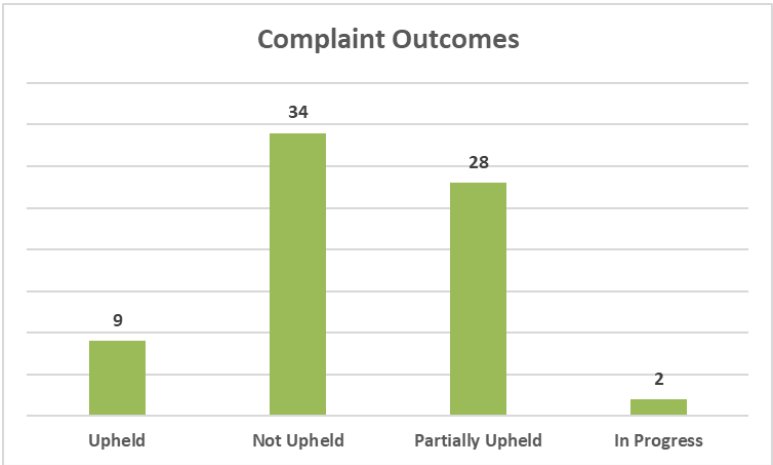
Childrens Social care supported approximately **2300** children within Bracknell Forest between April 25 – March 26, this includes children looked after, children on child protection/child in need plans, and at assessment stage. The 75 complaints (58 complainants) received equates to **3.3%** of the children we support.

6. Analysis of Complaints

In total 9 complaints were upheld compared to 2 in 2024/25.

A further 34 complaints were not upheld compared to 31 in 2024/25.

There were 28 complaints partially upheld compared to 27 during 2024/25.



Overall, this shows 51% of all complaints made are either upheld or partially upheld compared to 44% during 2024/25, with 46% of complaints not upheld compared to 48% during 2024/25. A total 3% of complaints were still in progress at the year end. Overall there has been an increase in complaints during this year.

Stage 2 complaints/investigations

There were 7 complaints escalated to Stage 2 of the Childrens Statutory Complaints procedure. There were 13 complaints escalated to Stage 2 through the Council’s Corporate Complaints process.

Stage 3 complaints/panel hearings

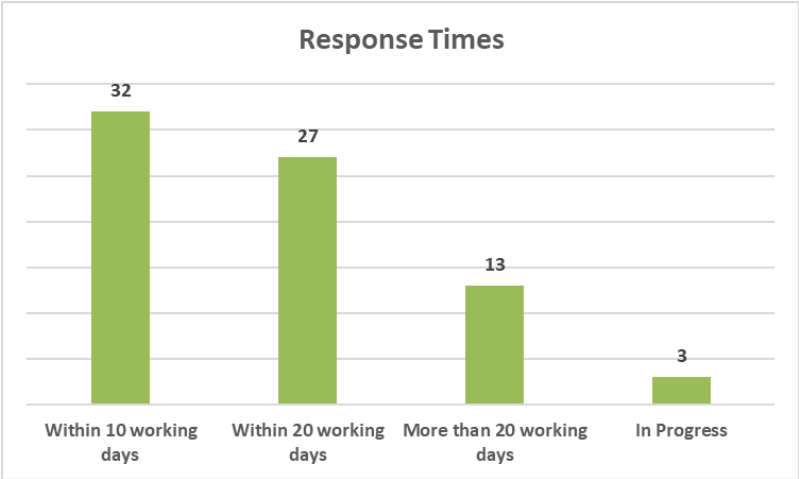
There was 1 complaint escalated to Stage 3 children’s statutory panel hearing meeting. The corporate complaints process no longer has Stage 3.

LGSCO complaints

There were 6 complaints submitted to the LGSCO during 2025/26.

- Of these 5 were closed after initial enquiries with no further action/out of jurisdiction or premature complaint
- There was 1 complaint upheld. Apology, financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble, procedure or policy change/review, provide training and/or guidance

Timeliness of Complaints



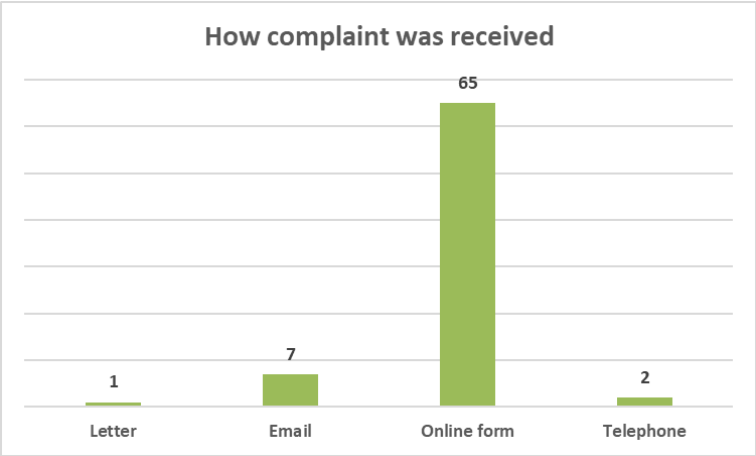
Whilst it is the aim to respond to complaints within 10 working days, 20 working days is allowed for more complex complaints. A response may exceed 20 working days if this involves meeting with complainants or further investigations are required.

During the past year 43% of complaints were responded to within 10 working days, with 36% of complaints responded to within 20 working days and 17% responded to over 20 working days.

We encourage managers to meet 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, it is important for the complaints to be resolved which can sometimes delay the responses within the expected timescales.

Since the introduction of the Liberty complaints handling system, most complainants have chosen to submit their complaints through the online platform. While Liberty is now the primary route for complaint submission, we continue to offer alternative methods to ensure the process remains fully accessible. Complaints can still be raised by telephone, in person, or in writing.



Due to reasonable adjustments, a small number of complainants continue to prefer submitting their concerns via email. These complaints are accepted in full and are entered into the Liberty system by the Complaints Manager to ensure they are logged, monitored, and managed in line with standard procedures.

This approach ensures that all individuals, regardless of communication needs or accessibility requirements can engage with the complaints process in a way that best supports them.

7. Cost of Complaints Service & Investigations

During 2025/26 we concluded 5 children’s statutory complaint stage 2 investigations. Of these 2 investigators were from the LA which was a saving on costs. The total cost of these 5 investigations was £11,314.89. One of these escalated to a stage 3 review panel hearing costing £2,872.45. We had 2 investigations in progress at the end of this reporting year.

The total cost of investigations and panel hearing was £14,187.34; this is a decrease on spending from 2024/25 being £16,307.65.

8. Learning from Complaints

Across the year, complaints highlighted several recurring themes relating to assessment quality, communication, information handling, case coordination, and support for practitioners. The service has taken a range of actions to address these issues and strengthen practice.

Across all complaints, the following themes were most prominent:

- Timeliness and accuracy of assessments
- Clear, sensitive, and consistent communication

- Strong case coordination and reliable handover processes
- Transparency and adherence to consent-based practice
- Better information handling and record-keeping
- Strengthening practitioner skills through training and reflection

Actions from complaints: Strengthened consent-based and transparent practice, including development of a clear process map, introduction of a standardised consent form, and guidance on information redaction.

Reinforced communication standards and parental engagement, including timely sharing of plans, appropriate handling of sensitive conversations, and clear expectation-setting with families.

Expanded training and workforce development, including reflective practice, neurodiversity, safeguarding (risk and safety planning), domestic abuse, and managing referrals and sensitive communication.

Enhanced management oversight and accountability, including strengthened supervision, clearer practice expectations, and improved oversight of agency staff.

The actions taken reflect the service's commitment to improving consistency, enhancing engagement with families, and ensuring that children's needs are met through timely and effective practice.

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 2026/27

Learning from complaints	Work with head of corporate complaints develop a routine Complaints Handling training offer to the workforce	By March 2027
	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 2026/27
	Complaints Manager to meet with Assistant Director to discuss how the learning from complaints will be actioned and disseminated to the service	Discussions to be held throughout this reporting year.
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

End