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### **Cabinet Member for Children and Young People**

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**Time and Date**

10.00 am on Thursday, 9th January, 2025

**Place**

Diamond Room 1 - Council House

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**Public Business**

1. **Apologies**
2. **Declarations of Interests**
3. **Minutes** (Pages 3 - 4)
  - (a) To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2024.
  - (b) Matters Arising
4. **Children's Services Comments, Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2023/24** (Pages 5 - 48)

Report of the Director of Education and Children's Services
5. **Outstanding Issues Report**

There are no outstanding issues
6. **Any Other Business**

To consider any other items of business which the Cabinet Member decides to take as a matter of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.

**Private Business**

Nil

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Julie Newman, Director of Law and Governance, Council House, Coventry

Wednesday, 1 January 2025

Note: The person to contact about the agenda and documents for this meeting is Suzanne Bennett Email: [suzanne.bennett@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:suzanne.bennett@coventry.gov.uk)

Membership: Councillor P Seaman (Cabinet Member)

By invitation: Councillor J Gardiner (Shadow Cabinet Member)

**Public Access**

Any member of the public who would like to attend the meeting in person is encouraged to contact the officer below in advance of the meeting regarding arrangements for public attendance. A guide to attending public meeting can be found here: <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/publicAttendanceMeetings>

**Suzanne Bennett**

**Email: [suzanne.bennett@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:suzanne.bennett@coventry.gov.uk)**

**Coventry City Council**  
**Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member for Children and Young People held at**  
**11.00 am on Tuesday, 23 April 2024**

Present:

Members:                           Councillor P Seaman (Cabinet Member)  
  Councillor J Lepoidevin (Shadow Cabinet Member)  
  Councillor A Jobbar (Deputy Cabinet Member)

Employees (by Service  
Area):

Children's Services	J Jones
Customer Services	K Boyce, K Kanebi, S Patterson
Law and Governance	T Robinson

## **Public Business**

12.    **Apologies**

13.    **Declarations of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

14.    **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2024 were agreed and signed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

15.    **Children's Services Comments, Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2022/23**

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Interim Director of Children's Services which presented the Children's Services Comments, Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2022/23.

There is a statutory duty for the Council to have a system for receiving representations by, or on behalf of, children who use the social care services they provide or commission; and for the Council to produce an annual report about the operation of the complaints procedure.

The report highlighted the themes that arose from them and the learning and service improvements that have resulted from the feedback received.

It was noted that amongst the key highlights raised by officers, of complaints received the vast majority were dealt with at stage 1, within the mandated

timescales, and were down compared to the previous year. Members acknowledged the recognisable plateau of complaints and the effectiveness of intervention to provide a resolution to complaints at the earliest stage in the landscape of sufficiency and financial challenges. Similarly, common themes of complaints were identified – such as poor communication, or differences in the expectation of service – but Members recognised that those types of complaints have always been common.

As an indicator of success, officers drew Members' attention to the fact that the service received more compliments than complaints for yet another year. Predominantly, compliments came from family group conferencing and professional partners – officers endeavoured to improve reporting procedures to fully capture the compliments they receive, especially from families.

Lastly, it was noted that of the 18 complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), only 1 was upheld. The service has used this case as a key point of learning and development for the future with Members sympathetic to families' needs in these cases but also understanding of the Ombudsman's role/jurisdiction.

Members welcomed the report and paid tribute to the excellent work undertaken by everyone involved. Similarly, the Cabinet Member praised the achievements outlined as a good example of building effective working relationships within the council.

**RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member approves publication of the annual report in relation to complaints and representations in children's services in 2022/23.**

16. **Outstanding Issues Report**

There were no outstanding issues.

17. **Any Other Business**

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 11.35 am)



Coventry City Council

**Public report**  
Cabinet Member Report

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Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

9th January 2025

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People – Councillor P Seaman

**Director approving submission of the report:**

Director of Childrens and Education Services – Sukriti Sen

**Ward(s) affected:**

All

**Title:**

Children's Services Comments, Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2023/24

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**Is this a key decision?**

No

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**Executive summary:**

There is a statutory duty for the Council to have a system for receiving representations by, or on behalf of, children who use the social care services they provide or commission; and for the Council to produce an annual report about the operation of the complaints procedure.

This report sets out the details of the comments, compliments and complaints for Children's Services in 2023/24. It highlights the themes that arise from them and the learning and service improvements that have resulted from the feedback received.

**Recommendations:**

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People is recommended to:

- (1) Approve publication of the annual report in relation to complaints and representations in children's services in 2023/24.

**List of appendices included:**

Appendix I – Children's services complaints and representations annual report 2023/24  
Appendix II – Coventry City Council Complaints Handling Guidance

**Background papers:**

None

**Other useful documents**

Young people's guide to making a social care complaint

[https://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/37/childrens\\_social\\_care/625/](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/37/childrens_social_care/625/)

Complaints Managers' Group (May 2016) Good Practice guidance for handling complaints concerning adults and children social care services

<https://www.adass.org.uk/media/5360/good-practice-guidance-final-09062016.pdf>

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Guidance for bodies in our jurisdiction to support good complaint handling [https://www.lgo.org.uk/information-](https://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/advice-and-guidance/guidance-notes)

[centre/reports/advice-and-guidance/guidance-notes](https://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/advice-and-guidance/guidance-notes)

Department for Education (September 2006) statutory guidance for local authority children's services on representations and complaints procedures

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-getting-the-best-from-complaints>

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

No

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

**Report title:****Children's Services Comments, Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2023/24****1 Context (or background)**

- 1.1 There is a statutory duty for the Council to have a system for receiving representations by, or on behalf of, children who use the social care services they provide or commission; and for the Council to produce an annual report about the operation of the complaints procedure.
- 1.2 This report sets out the details of the Comments, Compliments and Complaints for children's services in 2023/24. It highlights the themes that arise from them and the learning and service improvements that have resulted from the feedback received.

**2 Options considered and recommended proposal.**

- 2.1 Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, there were 229 statutory, corporate, and informal complaints received about children's services. That is: 156 statutory complaints, 13 corporate complaints and 60 informal complaints.
- 2.2 The number of statutory complaints has decreased from 167 received in 2022/23, 177 were received in 2021/22, 141 received in 2020/21, and 163 received in 2019/20.
- 2.3 Of the 156 statutory complaints 129 (83%) were resolved at Stage 1; 20 (13%) at Stage 2; and 7 (4%) were escalated to Stage 3 (of which 2 were subsequently withdrawn). This compares with 149 (89%) at Stage 1, 11 (7%) at Stage 2, and 7 (4%) at Stage 3 in 2022/23.
- 2.4 10 (6%) of the 156 complaints were Upheld, with 55 (35%) Partially Upheld. This compares with 8 (5%) Upheld and 57 (34%) Partially Upheld in 2022/23.
- 2.5 188 compliments were received during 2023/24, compared to 344 received in 2022/23 and 502 received in 2021/22.
- 2.6 20 complaints were made by children and young people themselves or from an advocate complaining on behalf of a child; the remainder were from adults. There has been a decrease in the number of children or young people using an advocate to make a complaint, despite being made aware of this provision available to them, with just 8 advocate-supported complaints received during 2023/24 compared to 19 complaints in 2022/23, and 14 in 2021/22.
- 2.7 Two main themes continue to be identified as arising from the complaints handled in 2023/24: issues regarding poor communication with users accounted for 50% of the reasons for complaint, while concerns about the standards of service provided were the next most common (18%).
- 2.8 Themes from compliments were predominantly around the good standard of practice received from individual social workers and the overall standard of service received from teams. It is not currently possible to distinguish between compliments from children and young people themselves, or carers, or staff without manually going through every compliment. A selection of compliments from children and young people and families have been included in the appendix.

2.9 Appendix I sets out the children's services Comments, Compliments and Complaints annual report for 2023/24, highlighting trends and the themes that have arisen from complaints and the learning and service improvements that have resulted from the feedback received.

2.10 Appendix II sets out the Council's guidance for handling complaints.

### **3 Results of consultation undertaken**

None identified or undertaken.

### **4 Timetable for implementing this decision**

4.1 Areas for development and improvement have been included within the divisional and relevant team plans for implementation in 2023/24.

### **5 Comments from the Director of Finance and Resources and Director of Law and Governance**

#### **5.1 Financial implications**

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. Financial remedies resulting from any complaints are paid out of service budgets. All complaints relating to financial issues were investigated and rectified accordingly.

#### **5.2 Legal implications**

This report meets the legal requirement for the Council to monitor arrangements made in accordance with regulations by keeping a record of each representation received and compiling a report every 12 months on the operation of the procedure.

### **6 Other implications**

#### **6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan?**

This annual report sets out the progress made by the service towards the Council Plan vision to be locally committed, by improving the quality of life for Coventry people, by contributing to the priority to protect our most vulnerable people. Children, young people and others acting on their behalf are encouraged to report any concerns about the care and services they are receiving so that these can be addressed quickly.

#### **6.2 How is risk being managed?**

There are reputational as well as financial risks when things go wrong. It is, therefore, important that the Council takes action and learns from the outcome of complaints.

#### **6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

The co-ordination and management of complaints involves considerable officer time. Therefore, where things have gone wrong, it is important for the Council to put things right, learn from the experience and make the necessary improvements. The feedback that is received from complaints and other representations is reported to managers on a regular basis to inform service planning and improvements.



**6.4 Equalities and equality and consultation analyses (ECA)**

ECAs have been built into the delivery of work in children’s services. As part of continuous improvement, the service will continue to review the integration of equality and diversity into operational practice and performance monitoring.

The Service Recovery Team will collect data on complainants by protected characteristics such as ethnicity, sex and disability status from 2023/24 onwards. This will enable the Council to identify if its complaints policy is operating as intended, eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity in line with the public sector equality duty.

**6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment**

None

**6.6 Implications for partner organisations?**

Children’s services may be delivered in-house, or by external agencies for instance partner organisations commissioned by the local authority. The responsibility remains with the Council even when services are delivered by external agencies or partner organisations. Therefore, it is important for the Council and partner organisations to learn from the experience when things go wrong and work together to make the necessary improvements.

**Report author(s):**

**Name and job title:**

Ilius Ahmed  
**Service Recovery Officer**

Steve Paterson  
**Service Recovery Officer**

Kelly Boyce  
**Service Recovery Officer**

Kenneth Kanebi  
**Ombudsman Liaison Officer**

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Enquiries should be directed to the above persons.

20/12/2024 11:44:51

<b>Contributor/ approver name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Service</b>	<b>Date doc sent out</b>	<b>Date response received or approved</b>
<b>Contributors:</b>				
Neil Macdonald	Strategic Lead – Quality Assurance	Children’s Services - Quality Assurance	11/11/2024	22/11/2024
Jaspal Mann	Equality and Diversity Officer	Public Health	11/11/2024	22/11/2024
Chris Heeley	Strategic Lead – Early Help and Protection	Children’s Services - Help & Protection	11/11/2024	22/11/2024
Angela Whitrick/Matt Clayton	Strategic Lead – Looked After Children	Children’s Services - Looked After Children	11/11/2024	22/11/2024
Suzanne Bennett	Governance Services Officer	Law and Governance	11/11/2024	13/11/24
Mandeep Chouhan	Resident Experience Lead	Customer Services	11/11/2024	22/11/2024
<b>Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)</b>				
Sarah Kinsell	Finance Manager	Finance	11/11/2024	22/11/2024
Nancy Perkins	Case Management (Childrens) Team Leader	Law and Governance	11/11/2024	22/11/2024
Sukriti Sen	Director of Childrens and Education	Childrens and Education	11/11/2024	22/11/2024
Members: Councillor Seaman	Cabinet Member (Children and Young People)		11/11/2024	06/12/2024

This report is published on the Council’s website: [www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings/](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings/)

# Children's Services Complaints and Representations Annual Report 2023 - 24



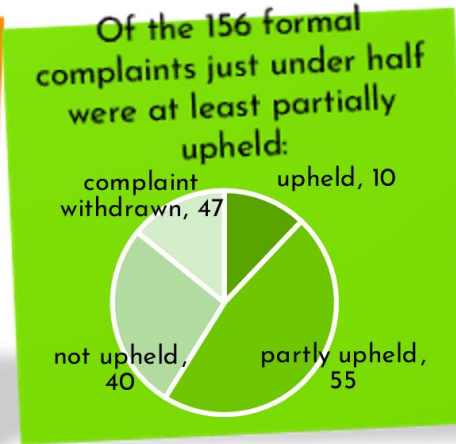
**COMMENTS  
COMPLIMENTS  
& COMPLAINTS**


**ONE  
COVENTRY**

# Children's Services 2023/24 Complaints & Representations key facts & figures

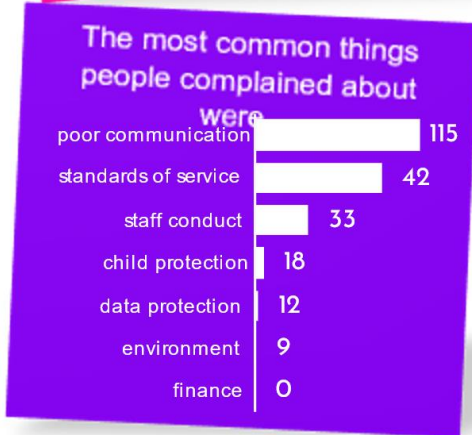
 Children's services had 4505 open referrals as of 31 March 2024.

 In 2023/24, children's services received **229** complaints (156 were statutory, 13 corporate, and 60 informal). **20** complaints were made by young people; **8** supported by an advocate.



 Children's services complaints can be complex & timescales can be protracted. In 2023/24:

Complaints Stage	Average time taken
Stage 1	129 12 days
Stage 2	20 59 days
Stage 3	7 36 days



 In 2023/24 children's social care also received **188** compliments. Compliments were about the standard of practice, partnership working, taking a child-centred approach, and communication.

If a complainant remains unhappy after completing our complaints process, they may take their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). In 2023/24, the LGSCO received **11** complaints about education & children's services. They investigated **1** social care complaint; which was upheld.

Listening to service users' complaints helps services improve by helping managers identify changes that are required. Key learning points from 2023/24 include: extension of the mentoring scheme, improving frequency of communication, and providing more support to foster carers at the end of a long-term placement

### Having your say about Children's Services

If you have a problem with children's services or if you are unhappy about something that is happening to you, this can usually be sorted out by speaking to someone you trust like your social worker, keyworker or foster carer. But if they can't put things right for you, then you can make a complaint. You can do so by asking to speak to your **Children's Rights Officer**. The children's rights officer makes regular visits to children's homes in Coventry or you can ring them on **0800 0272 118**.

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## Welcome

Welcome to the 2023/24 complaints and representations annual report. As part of the Council's commitment to openness, quality assurance, service development and listening and learning from service users, this report provides summary information from comments, compliments and complaints received under the statutory procedures in relation to children's services provided by or commissioned by Coventry City Council for the year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

## Background

Local Authorities are required by law to have a system for receiving representations made by or on behalf of children who use the Children's Services they provide or commission. These include social work services, residential care, fostering, adoption and the provision of support to families, children with disabilities and young people in trouble with the law. Representations are defined as comments, compliments and complaints. Local Authorities are required by law to appoint a complaints officer to oversee all aspects of the procedure.

Some complaints received do not meet the criteria to be dealt with under the statutory procedure. When this is the case, these are registered under the Council's corporate complaints procedure. The arrangements for handling these complaints are different from the statutory process in terms of

timescales and the independence of the people who investigate and review the complaints. Children Services has a nominated officer assigned to the management of representations from children and others who present feedback on children's services.

The purpose of the comments, compliments and complaints system is to ensure that: the views and experiences of people who use services are heard; positive feedback is used to develop services and acknowledge good practice; that when things have gone wrong opportunities are taken to rectify; the organisation learns from both positive and negative feedback; and the organisation sustains its focus on service users / customers / citizens. Reference is made to the range of representations received and responses to them, and specific trends and issues that emerged in the reporting period.

## Summary

In 2023/24 children's services completed 25,242 contacts and received 4,505 referrals. This compares to 26,677 and 4,912 in 2022/23. As of 31 March 2024, there were 3,429 referrals open to children's services, compared to 3,702 a year ago.

The total number of statutory and informal complaints received about children's services in 2023/24 was 229, the same as were received in 2022/23. The 229 complaints received consist of 156 statutory complaints, 13 corporate complaints and 60 informal complaints.

The number of complaints under the statutory process has decreased to 156 received in 2023/24, compared to 167 in 2022/23, 177 received in 2021/22 and 141 received in 2020/21.

20 complaints were made by children and young people themselves or from an advocate complaining on behalf of a child; the remainder were from adults. There has been a slight decrease in the number of children or young people using an advocate to make a complaint, despite being made aware of this provision, – 21 complaints received during 2022/23 compared to 14 complaints in 2021/22, 8 in 2020/21, 13 in 2019/20 and 11 in 2018/19

Two main themes could be identified as arising from the complaints by and on behalf of users in 2023/24: issues regarding poor communication with users; and concerns about the standards of service provided. Themes from compliments were predominantly around the good standard of practice received from individual social workers and the overall standard of service received from teams.

### Description of Complaint Types

Coventry City Council's complaints policy sets out how individual members of the public can complain to the Council, as well as how the Council handle compliments, comments and complaints.

#### Informal

Where possible, complaints should be resolved informally. The complaint is usually sent to a Team Manager to make contact with the individual to discuss their concerns to ensure a resolve can be actioned as soon as possible. If this is not possible, complainants can formally complain to the Council. Informal matters can also be related to concerns that require resolution or follow up investigation outside of the formal process.

#### Statutory

Complaints about Children's Services follow the statutory process if they are not able to be resolved informally. Complaints that fall under the Statutory complaints process are complaints made by children, young people, parents and carers.

All other complaints relating to Council services are dealt with by the corporate complaints policy.

### Corporate

A Corporate complaint example would be as follows: When a member of the public who is not a service user or a holder of parental responsibility for a young person request that their concerns are investigated formally.

# Feedback

## Promoting feedback

Comments, compliments and complaints can tell the Council a great deal about the service users' experiences of service delivery, professional practice and the outcome of management decisions. Children's services welcome this feedback and encourages children, their advocates and anyone who uses the service or who is affected by it, to make their views known.

Where possible, issues/complaints should be handled at the point of delivery. It is when a person feels that they are still not satisfied, then it is recorded as a formal complaint and investigated as such. The length of time to investigate and resolve complaints depends on their complexity. Where there are particular complexities that will require an elongated period of investigation, a timescale is agreed with the complainant.

## Providing feedback

People can provide feedback directly to the service or team; to customer services; or to the Complaints Officer. Further information about how to make a complaint, access advocacy or support, and the complaints process is available on the Council's website at [www.coventry.gov.uk/comments](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/comments). It is vitally important that the comments, complaints and compliments system is easily accessible. This maximises the opportunities for individuals to make their views known. Complaints can be accepted through the contact centre via a visit to the centre, by letter, by an online form or by telephone. Complaints may also be made directly to the team that is providing them with a service. Sometimes, complaints are also made via elected members (Councillors), the Chief Executive, or directly to senior managers. Complaints can also be referred to the Council from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). Complainants who contact the complaints team directly are encouraged to use the contact centre to ensure that their complaint can be processed efficiently.

In 2023/24, the majority of complainants chose to make a complaint via email or through the contact centre.

# Advocacy

Of particular importance is the need to inform children and young people of their opportunity to make representations and to find methods they can easily use. There have been 20 complaints from children and young people themselves this year, compared to 21 last year. Work has taken place with Barnardo's advocacy service to ensure that more feedback is received from children and young people.

Since 1st April 2004, the Advocacy Services and Representations Regulations 2004, have required councils to make arrangements for the provision of advocacy to children and young people making representations under the Children Act 1989. Of the 21 children and young people making complaints during the year, 18 used an advocate to support them in making their complaint. Since April 2006, the Council has commissioned Barnardo's to provide an advocacy service. All children and young people are made aware of the provision that the Local Authority has to make available to them to access an Advocate but many have refused this offer.

# Complaints

The Council received 156 statutory children’s services complaints. It also dealt with 13 corporate complaints and 60 informal.

The table below indicates how the complaint was received:

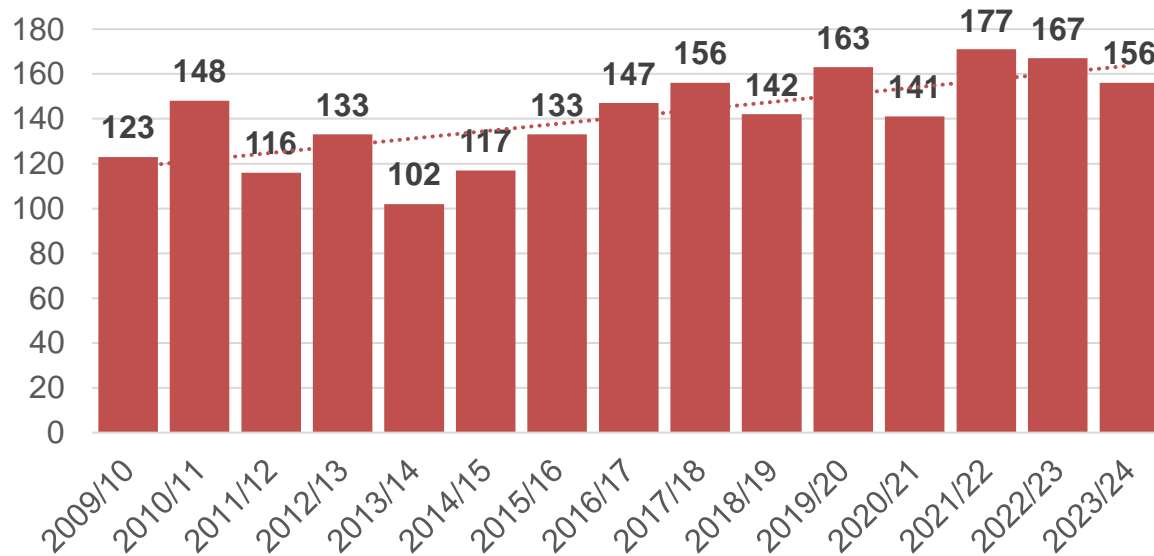
Method	Number of Complaints
Email	110
Contact Centre/Form	42
Letter	2
Telephone	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>

Note: table above excludes non-statutory and informal issues.

## Statutory complaints

156 statutory complaints were received about children’s services in 2023/24. This compares to 167 in 2022/23.

### Statutory complaints overtime



Listening to service users' complaints helps services improve by helping managers identify changes that are required. When complaints are received, they are reviewed to see if the concerns can be resolved informally in the first instance. The statutory procedures offer a three-stage process, and the corporate procedures offer a two-stage process, both of which aim to provide a satisfactory resolution to any complaint, preferably as quickly as possible.

The table below sets out the number of complaints in 2023/24 by resolution. The majority of complaints were either Partially Upheld or Withdrawn by the complainant or include concerns relating to ongoing court cases.



## Statutory complaints by upheld status

Status	Number of complaints	%
Upheld	10	6%
Partly upheld	55	35%
Not upheld	40	26%
Complaints withdrawn	47	30%
Still Open	4	3%
Total	156	100%

## Statutory complaints by team

The below table shows a breakdown figure of number of complaints received per team in 2023/24.

Team	Complaints
Through Care	20
Team West	37
Children's Disability Team	9
Children in Care	26
Team South	16
Team East	20
Team Central	16

Team	Complaints
Fostering & adoption	4
MASH	3
Quality & Assurance	0
Social Work Academy	3
Early Help (Team West)	0
Early Help (Team East)	1
Placements	0
Safeguarding	1
Total	<b>156</b>

# Resolution of complaints

## Local resolution (Stage 1)

The service aims to resolve concerns, whenever possible informally or at Stage 1. At this stage, the allocated manager (usually the manager responsible for the service being complained about) will identify what is needed so that the complainant feels able to continue to work with the service. Examples of the types of resolutions offered can be found later in this report.

There were 156 statutory complaints, of which 129 were resolved at Stage 1. 87% of complaints were resolved at Stage 1 of the complaints process, compared to 89% during 2022/23. Considering that there were the same number of statutory complaints in 2023/24 compared to 2021/22, this shows a slight decrease on last year of the number of statutory complaints resolved at Stage 1. The new Service Recovery Team is now in place (as detailed below) with a Service Recovery Manager and work will continue to ensure that team managers are supported when necessary with complaints guidance and regular reminders to improve the volume of complaints resolved at Stage 1 and within timeframe.

## Formal investigation (Stage 2)

In certain circumstances a formal investigation of the circumstances leading to a complaint is a more appropriate response, although this tends to be a lengthier process. This may be required when complainants remain dissatisfied with the conclusion reached at Stage 1 or when the complaint is particularly complex or involves a number of service areas. These investigations are always conducted by someone outside the direct line management of the service and the person about whom the complaint is being made.

In 2023/24, there were 20 Statutory Stage 2 complaints and 4 Corporate Stage 2 investigations, compared with 11 Statutory Stage 2 complaints and 2 Corporate Stage 2 investigations in 2022/23.

The investigations for the Statutory Stage 2 complaints were undertaken by external commissioned investigators. At the conclusion of these Stage 2 investigations the investigating officers/persons' reports are read by senior manager who acts as an Adjudicating Officer for them to consider and act upon before a response is sent to the complainant. The Corporate Stage 2 complaints were investigated by Senior Managers and not reviewed by commissioned investigating officers.

## Review panel (Stage 3)

Within the statutory complaints procedure, where complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of a formal investigation at Stage 2, they can request that a review panel of three independent people be convened to examine the investigation. Review panels can make recommendations to the Director of Children's and Education Services if they conclude that the complaint is justified, or that more could be done to resolve the matter, or if they feel the Council should take action to prevent similar situations arising in the future.

There were 7 Stage 3 complaints received and 5 of these were reviewed by an independent panel during 2023/24. The other 2 stage 3 complaints were withdrawn. The number of Stage 3 complaints was the same in 2023/24 as in 2022/23 but in comparison to the number of Statutory complaints which was 156, this number remains very low which recognises the work which is put into Stage 1 complaints by Team managers.

# Timescales

The statutory legislation and corporate procedures set out timescales for dealing with complaints at each stage of the process. The timescales are as follows:

Stage	Statutory complaints	Corporate complaints
1	10 working days (can be extended to 20 working days)	10 working days
2	25 working days (can be extended to 65 working days)	20 working days
3	Within 50 working days of complainant's request	Not applicable

The complexity of Children's Services issues means that complaint resolution can sometimes be protracted, and achievement of the timescales can suffer as a result. Not all potential delays are due to delays within the Council, they are also due to the complainant submitting additional complaints or the complainant providing further information. The complaints officer/team undertakes rigorous monitoring of progress in relation to responding to complaints via a weekly RAG report which is shared with senior management.

## Statutory complaints by stage and timescales

Stage	Timescales	Number of Complaints
1	Within 10 working days	61
	Over 10 working days	68
2	Within 25 – 65 working days	11
	Over 25 - 65 working days	9
3	Within 50 working days	5
	Withdrawn	2
Total		156

## Average timescales investigated by stage in working days

Stage	Number of complaints	Average timescales
1	129	12
2	20	59
3	7	36

Average timescales do not include 2 stage 3 complaints that were withdrawn.

The average time in days to complete Stage 1 complaints is 12 working days in 2023/24, compared to 9 days in 2022/23. This is an increase of 3 days and is over the Statutory timescales. Further guidance and training is being developed for team managers to ensure they complete Stage 1 complaint investigations in a timely fashion and that responses are provided with the 10-day timeframe.

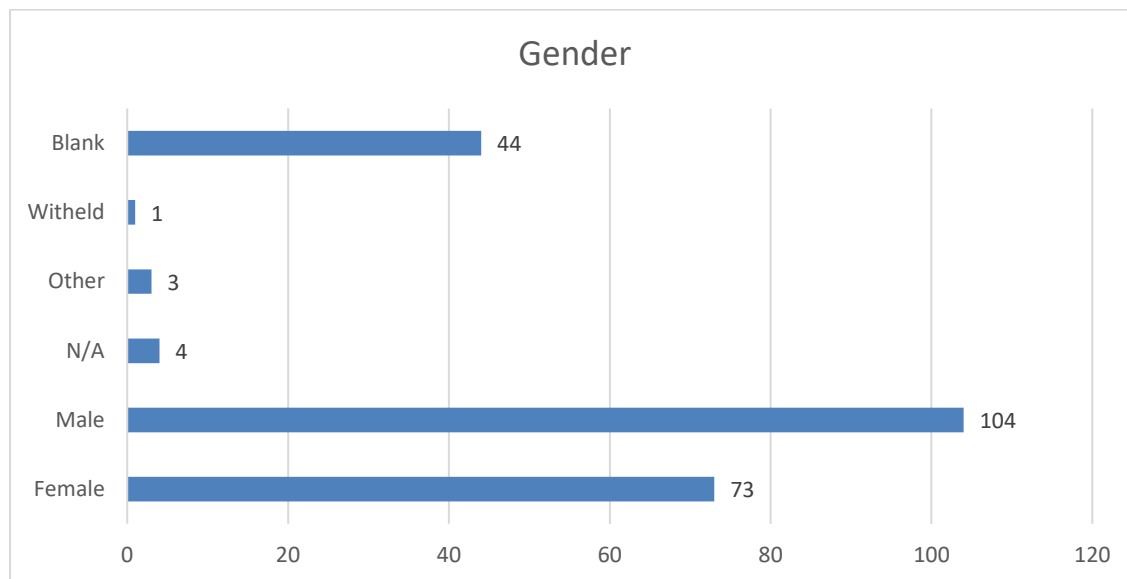
Investigations of Stage 2 complaints under the statutory procedure often need to be extended beyond the 25 working days timescale up to 65 working days due to the complexity of the issues being considered. In these situations, the importance of keeping the complainant informed and securing their agreement to an extension of the timescales, is recognised and addressed. Stage 2 complaints were resolved within an average of 59 working-days in 2023/24 compared to an average of 48 working days in 2022/23. 2023/24 has seen an increase in investigation times for Stage 2 complaints from the previous year by 11 days. There has been a significant delay in 9 Stage 2 complaint investigations due to exceptional circumstances with the Independent Investigating Officer. This was beyond the control of the Local Authority.

The two Stage 3 complaints were resolved within 36 working days compared to 26 working days in 2022/23. 2023/24 has shown an increase in the average timeframe for resolution of complaints at all stages. Children's Services continues to aim for all complaints to be resolved within the statutory timescale guideline of 10 working days for Stage 1 complaints, 25-65 working days for Stage 2 and 50 working days for Stage 3. This can be impacted by complexity, availability of staff members for discussion and the availability of Independent investigators and panel members.

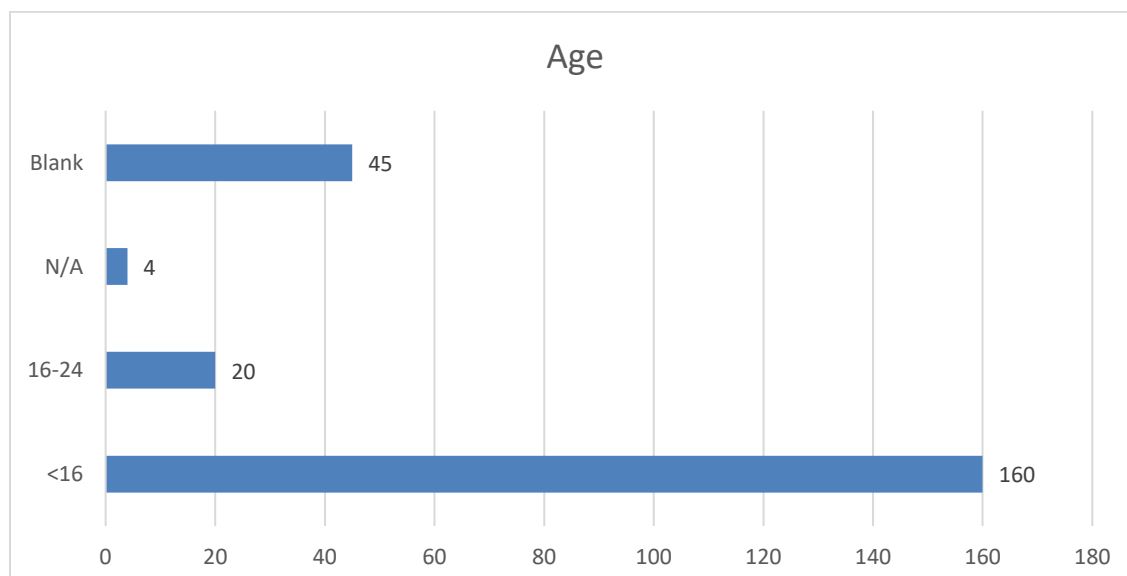
# Equality

During 2023-24, we captured Equality Data to obtain further information and a characteristic insight on the complainants and service users who made complaints within Children's Services. The below graphs illustrate the data captured but this does not include complaints submitted for the SEN service area as we were unable to obtain those details, due to equality data not being required when SEN complaints are registered.

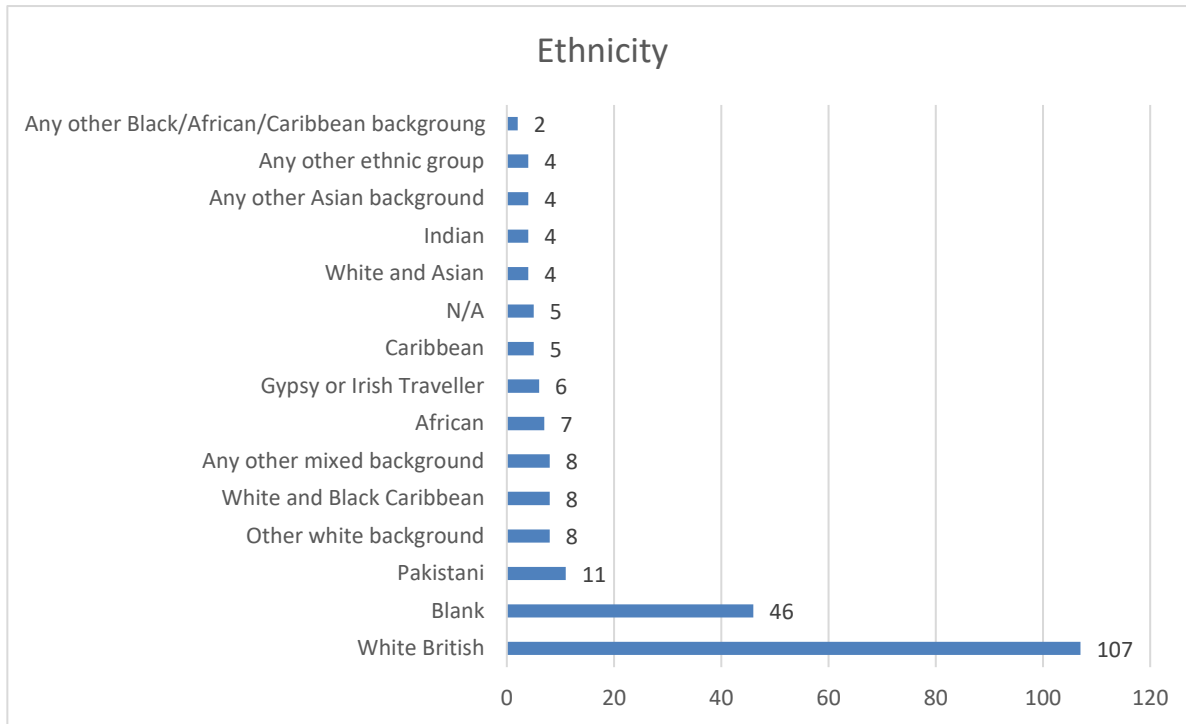
The below graph shows out of 229 complaints received during 2023-24 (excluding SEN), 104 were from male complainant's/service users and 73 were from female complainant's/service users.



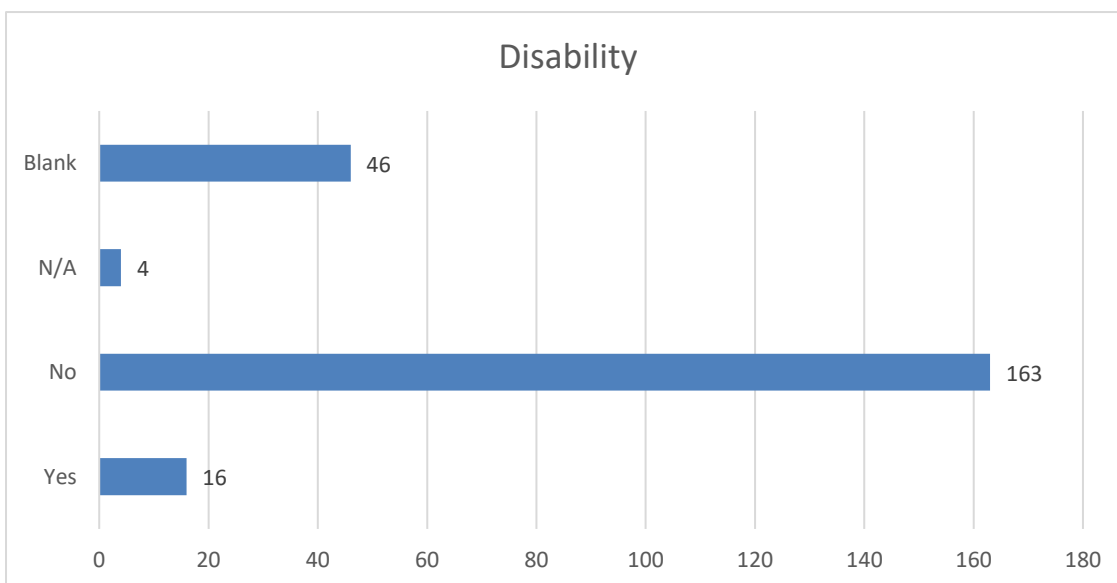
The below graph shows the age range of the complainant or service user. 156 of the complaints received in 2023-24 (excluding SEN) were from or submitted on behalf of young people under the age of 16, 20 of complaints received were from or submitted on behalf of young people between the ages of 16-24. 4 were marked "not applicable" and 45 were left blank.



Of the 229 Complaints received in 2023/24 (not including SEN/Education complaints), 107 complainants identified as White British, 46 were left blank, 11 identified as Pakistani, 8 as other White background, 8 as White & Caribbean, 8 as any other mixed background, 7 identified as African, 6 as Gypsy or Irish Traveller, 5 as Caribbean, 5 returned a “not applicable” answer, 4 identified as White & Asian, 4 as Indian, 4 as Any other Asian Background, 4 as Any other ethnic group and 2 as any other Black/African/Caribbean background.



The data captured during 2023-24 showed that 16 (7%) of complainants had a disability and that 163 (71%) did not, with 4 as non-applicable (N/A) due to this information not being able to be captured.



# Ombudsman

If the complainant remains unhappy following the outcome of the Council's complaints process, they have the option of taking their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

In 2023/24, the LGSCO received 24 complaints or enquiries relating to the Education and Children's Services for Coventry City Council. The LGSCO does not provide a breakdown of the individual numbers for each service and does not necessarily inform the Local Authority of every complaint or enquiry received, so it is not possible for us to ascertain how many of the 24 cases related specifically to Children's Services.

The LGSCO did not undertake any investigations in respect of these cases this year.

# Comments

People may also express disappointment, disagreement or observations about services without necessarily wanting to complain. Feedback of this nature will be recorded as a comment on the Council's central customer relationship management and forwarded to the relevant service area for consideration and action.

No comments were recorded in 2023/24.

# Compliments

Compliments tell the Council what people appreciate about services and the way they are provided. Positive feedback also encourages and motivates staff and enables them to celebrate their good performance. Every compliment received is shared with the individual or team to whom it refers and copied to the relevant managers.

**188** compliments were received in 2023/24, compared to 363 in 2022/23 and 502 received in 2021/22.

The majority of compliments reflected satisfaction about the standard of practice in social work; and the standard of service provided by a social worker and/or child and family worker. Other compliments received were about good partnership working, child-centred practice, and the quality of communication.

Compliments recorded include those from other professionals and partner organisations, for instance, advocates, police officers, judges, schools; as well as compliments from foster carers and service users, for instance, parents/carers, children and young people, and other family members.

**Below is a selection of compliments from children/young people and parents/carers to Children Services Teams.**

Dear [Name], I hope this message finds you well. I want to thank you for the great support you gave us so far, without your help and support it wasn't possible to get our voice heard. I applied for Stage Two Complaint last week and today I met the School Director. The outcome is that the other boy is still attending the school, and my son continues to be anxious and distressed to be in the school. I requested the school transfer form today and I am in the process of filling it. Would you Please call me on [Number] if it is possible, as I need to consult you about a few things. Many thanks. Kind regards, [Name]

*I am writing to give my review of [Name] one to one session work with myself. She is very professional yet easy to talk to and very understanding. I found the course very informative and has helped me in my daily life. She has given me coping mechanisms and a lot of knowledge that I didn't have before. She also went above and beyond for my family with getting us some well needed clothes and general items from a charity. I would like to thank her for all that she has done for us.*

I would like to say thank you for making me feel very comfortable at the above CP, this was my first time attending a CP and you made me feel very confident and I also felt that my voice was listened to. I will not be so nervous if I have to attend another CP.

*We have been working with [Name] who has supported us with one of our foster children, her ability to explain and expand on ways we can support him and some of the tasks she has done with him have really helped us as a family. I was always worried how we would cope with his behaviour when he is bigger but [Name] has given us confidence to understand what we know and can put into practice*

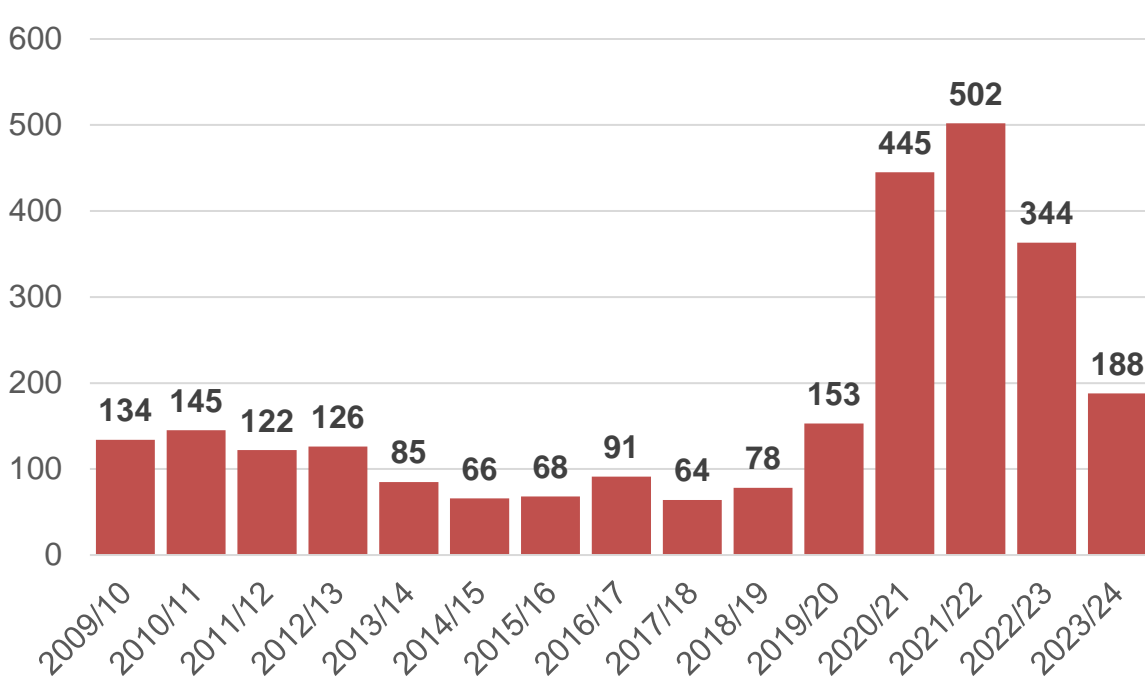
Just wanted to share that [Name] mother of [Name] shared some really positive feedback about her experiences of working with Horizon and Edge of Care. [Name] shared that in the past she has felt as though professionals have been looking to identify problems and have blamed her parenting for some of the challenges her children have faced. However, during the MACE meeting she shared that her most recent experience of accessing services has been totally opposite, she shared she has felt listened to, not blamed and she shared that she has been really reassured to know that she is not the only parent to be in a position where her child is potentially being exploited. [Name] shared she really values the support that has been offered to her about being reflective and recognising the impact her parenting can have, she knows feels able to "take a step back" to prevent challenges in her relationship with her daughter and she recognises now how the wider family environment has been impacted in a positive way.

I wanted to say thanks to the social worker [Name], [Name] and [Name] for supporting my family and I through this difficult time. Also, extra thanks to [Name] as from my previous experience I did not like working with social worker but talking to [Name] made me feel more comfortable, i felt less pressured and more willing to work with everyone on this case.

*The support and assistance that we have received from [Name] our supervising social worker we cannot put into words, he has supported and guided us through the process, and we knew we could contact him if we had any problems, he has been a godsend to us and a credit to the care system.*

## Compliments recorded by year

The below graph shows the year-by-year compliments figures received and 2021/22 shows the highest number of compliments received in 14 years.



## Compliments by theme in 2023/24

The below table shows the compliment themes. A compliment can have more than one theme.

Category	Compliments received
Standard of Service	64
Good communication	53
Standard of practice (social work)	33
Good child focus	19
Good partnership working	19

Note: totals may not add up because numbers may fall under more than one category.



## Compliments by category received in 2023/24

The below table shows the breakdown of compliments received from:

Compliment from	Compliments received
Professionals	45
Parent/Carers	31
Young Person/Child	22
Police/Judge/Legal	18
School/Education	5
Foster Carers	5
Adopters	6
Other	56

## Compliments by team

The below table shows a breakdown figure of number of compliments received per team in 2023/24.

Team	Compliments
Team Central	23
Team East	5
Team South	11
Team West	16
Responsive Services	23
Social Work Academy	0
Youth Offending	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>107</b>

Team	Compliments
Through Care	53
Edge of Care	13
LAC & Permanency	6
Fostering and Adoption	5
Placements	0
Children's Disability Team	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>

Team	Compliments
Safeguarding	0
Quality Assurance	1
Children's Champion	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>

# Service improvements and learning points

Children’s Services are committed to learning from customer feedback. When complaints highlight where things have gone wrong, managers will work on identifying any remedial and developmental action required to improve service delivery.

When complaints are received, they are recorded on a database and each concern raised within the complaint is logged under a ‘reason of complaint code’. These codes include main categories and subcategory subjects. An example of this would be Standard of Service which has the subcategory reason codes service level/care plan dispute, lack of/access to/eligibility for service and delay in receiving service. It is not unusual for a complainant to raise more than one concern in the same complaint. For example, a complainant may submit a complaint about communication and finance issues experienced during the same incident, and both concerns along with any additional subcategories within the complaint codes would be recorded accordingly under that complaint.

From the 156 formal complaints received, the table below highlights the different types of concerns raised within the complaints received in 2023/24 under the main category. This does not show the actual number of complaints received but only the main reasons of complaints data. Currently our system does not capture an individual complaint code breakdown of the outcome of each concern – so the figures below reflect the alleged complaint, rather than whether a complaint was upheld or not within those specific categories.

## Complaint issue/category

Category of concern raised	Number of times raised
Communication	115
Standards of service	42
Alleged Staff conduct	33
Child protection issues	18
Breach of Confidentiality	12
Standard of environment	9

## Resolutions

All staff dealing with complaints are encouraged to make any reasonable effort to ensure that the complaint is resolved. Common resolutions this year mirror the previous years. These are: a full explanation of why decisions were made; apologies for mistakes made and any distress caused; a change in practitioner, where this could be managed in the best interests of the child; the opportunity for complainants to ensure their views recorded on the social care file; additional monitoring of the case through the usual supervision route; provision of advocacy to ensure child’s voice could be heard; and to aim to deal with complaints informally in the first instance – this often achieves a positive resolution in many cases, which in turn decreases complaint escalation.

## Compensation/Remedy

The key principle for any financial remedies paid is that a remedy should, as far as possible, put the complainant back in the position they would have been in but for the fault identified. Typically, compensation will be considered if a service user has had to use their own finances due to the delay in offering a service or if their belongings have been damaged or lost through no fault of their own. Some complaints at Stage 2 and 3 of the process resulted in payments.

## Service Improvements

Upon completion of the complaint investigation, officers are asked to identify specific service improvements as a result of the complaint. On the completion of Stage 2 upheld complaints these are regularly monitored by the Complaints Officer and Operational/Strategic Leads of the service areas and discussed within the senior leadership meetings for regular review and improvements.

Examples of some of these improvements include:

- To ensure that information is communicated in a timely way and in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of families who are experiencing difficulties.
- Extension of the mentoring scheme to allow for mentoring support to be offered to carers during the standards of care process.
- Foster carers to be supported to work with the service regarding the ending of long term fostering to ensure that where moves needed they take place in the best way for children and young people.
- Improve frequency and levels of communication with families, especially where children are not in their birth families care.
- Ensure that parents and carers receive reports/minutes in a timely manner following meetings and that sharing of information is robust.

## Progression Actions / Work in progress

A number of actions were identified in previous reports, which are progressing as follows:

- **Complaint Leaflets / External Webpages**

Updated easy-to-read complaints leaflets are planned for 2024/25 and complaints information webpages will be revisited and refreshed in conjunction with the changes arising from the new Compliments, Comments and Complaints policy being introduced this year.

- **Service Recovery Team**

The former complaints team has been redesigned to create the Service Recovery team and expanded to include a Service Recovery Manager, two additional Service Recovery Officers and additional Administration support. This will help ensure more timely responses to internal and external queries and provide a more robust case management support to services.

- **Ongoing revision of the Stage 1 process**

The average time to complete Stage 1 complaints has increased to 12 working days in 2023/24, compared to 9 days in 2022/23, and which is in excess of the Statutory 10-day timescales. Further guidance and training is being developed for team managers to ensure they can complete Stage 1 complaint investigations in a timely fashion and that responses are provided within the 10-day timeframe.

- **Further revision of the Stage 2 process**

Stage 2 complaints were resolved within an average of 59 working-days in 2023/24 compared to an average of 48 working days in 2022/23. While over the initial 25 working days timescale this is still

within the permitted extension of up to 65 working days. The increase has been both due to the complexity of the issues being considered, but also due to high demand on Independent Investigating Officers, and we are working to increase the pool of these to address the impact of delays due to availability or caseload.

- **Internal Complaints Investigation Form**

This form is for investigating officers to capture additional learning and understanding of complaint concerns to ensure service areas and teams consistently improve their services and implement any learning necessary. These are not being uniformly or consistently completed across all elements of Children's Services, and steps will be taken in 2024/25 to increase officer awareness of these and additional training offered on the importance of (and benefits from) completion as standard.

- **Investigating Officers Complaints Handling Guidance**

The guide is to provide support and guidance for investigating officers on statutory, corporate, and informal complaints. It will be updated and refreshed in 2024/25 to reflect the changes arising from the new Compliments, Comments and Complaints policy being introduced this year, and will be published on Council's website for reference to and use by external Independent Investigating Officers as well as internal staff. This will then be revisited and refreshed on a yearly basis.

- **Training for Children's Services and Managers on Complaint Process**

Further training will be provided to all Managers / Investigating Officers during 2024/25 to ensure continuation of effective complaint handling and to maximise early resolutions wherever possible.

## Specific service area improvements/learning which have been identified

### Children's Disability Team

During the year 2023-2024 there were seven complaints made in respect of the Children with Disabilities Teams. Out of these seven complaints, three were upheld and two were partially upheld. There was one common theme in these complaints which was about the need for practitioners to ensure that they communicate information in a timely way and in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of families who are experiencing difficulties.

The Children's Disability Teams take complaints seriously and learning was taken forward with practitioners at the time of the complaints. The learning from the complaints will also be shared with practitioners during team and service meetings.

### Fostering

There was 1 complaint against the fostering service in 2023-24 which was considered at stage 1 and stage 2. This complaint by a foster carer covered areas of practice both in the Fostering service and in Throughcare. The aspects related to the Fostering service relate to delay in receipt of information for a standards of care meeting and delay in receipt of minutes for this. They also relate to actions of the service related to the disruption of a long-term matched arrangement for a young person. In response to this complaint the service has reviewed and updated the process notes for standards of care meetings and reinforced to those arranging these what the expectations are prior to and after these to ensure that information is shared in a timely way.

The mentoring scheme has been extended to allow for mentoring support to be offered to carers during the standards of care process. In addition, the service has reviewed expectations around the ending of long term fostering arrangements making clear that foster carers are asked to work with support offered

to prevent this and to work with the service to ensure that moves where needed take place in the best way for children and young people.

## Children in Care

During 2023-2024, complaints that were upheld or partially upheld were about a range of different issues. The themes which were reoccurring within a small number of the complaints were:

1. Majority of complaints related to poor communication or communication not being received in a timely way.
2. Not receiving reports or minutes following meetings and lacking in sharing of information.

Overall, the complaints reached solutions that families were satisfied with. The learning has identified that communication could be better with families, especially where children are not in their birth families care. Every effort and consideration will be given to ensure that families are responded to in a timely way, and they are kept aware of what is going on in their children's lives. It is vital that parents and carers receive reports/minutes following meetings and that sharing of information is robust. It remains important that we take learning and understand the impact of the way we communicate with families. Lack of information sharing and poor communication impacts families and can weaken relationships. Working with families in a restorative way will improve their experiences which continues to be embedded.

The Children in Care service holds monthly service meetings, with a focus on best practice. The learning themes identified from the 2023 -2024 complaints will be shared at a service meeting during the next quarter.

## Multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and responsive services.

Responsive Services are committed to continuous learning from complaints, and this is a standard agenda item on all service meetings. From the three complaints received between 2023 and 2024, there were no identifiable themes and learning was shared with individual practitioners and across the whole service. The findings of these complaints have been considered to support in the continuous improvement of delivery of services for children, families and professionals by Responsive Services.

The service continues to work restoratively and welcomes challenge, to inform practice changes to better support the children and families we work with. It is important to understand the impact of the way in which we work with families and if there are points of learning we will take these on board to seek to improve families' experiences.

Responsive Services are proud of the level of engagement that they have with parents and children, making sure that they feel involved, are listened to and views are clearly recorded in all contacts, referrals and assessments.

## Quality Assurance Service (Child Protection Conference Chair Service, Independent Reviewing Officer Service, and LADO Service)

### **The Child Protection Conference Service**

The Child Protection Conference Chairing Service take their relationship with Partner Agencies very seriously. There was one complaint received during the 2023/24 period regarding an alleged breach of confidentiality. This was investigated swiftly and a conclusion reached without any delay. The complaint was not upheld. The complaint did however remind those within the service of the importance of data protection and their responsibilities in relation to information sharing.

### **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service**

There was one complaint received in respect of this service area over 23/24 period and this was

investigated under stage 1 of the council's complaints procedure, by the IRO Service Manager. This related to concern about the manner of an Independent Reviewing Officer during a child in care review meeting.

The complaint was broken down into 6 separate sections and each were responded to individually. After a thorough investigation, the IRO Service Manager found the one element of the complaint to be partially upheld and therefore the concluded the overall complaint to be partially upheld. The complainant's experience was acknowledged and the IRO and other participants in the review acknowledged the language used by the IRO was less sensitive than would be ideal and had caused hurt to the complainant, causing them to feel the need to leave the review meeting.

The IRO has apologised for the poor choice of language used and has engaged in a reflective discussion with the IRO Service Manager, about the impact of language, and the need for this to be consistently respectful, restorative, and relational. It was further suggested that the complainant is supported in all review meetings by an advocate and that the IRO has updating discussions about assessments in advance of reviews, to ensure that conversations around care planning and sensitively approached and well managed.

This outcome was shared with the complainant, who was satisfied with the investigation and action taken.

### **Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Service**

There was one complaint in relation to this service area raised over 2023/24, which was resolved at stage one. The complaint related to an individual in a Position of Trust, subject to an allegation. The individual was dissatisfied with the outcome of 'substantiated' that had been reached at the conclusion of the LADO process and felt that this was not justified. The complainant was also unhappy that they were not included in the Position of Trust meeting, held between members of the professional network.

The complaint was investigated by the Risk Management Coordinator, responsible for the LADO Service, and was found to not be upheld. Despite this, the following learning for the LADO Service was identified:

- There needs to be consistently timely communications and recording around Position of Trust meetings and investigation within the Children's Services electronic recording system (LCS). Specifically, Position of Trust meeting minutes need to be written up and promptly uploaded to the appropriate file, as well as the recording of case notes detailing communications between the professional network.

The LADO Service takes all complaints seriously. Learning is carefully considered by the responsible managers and translated into action plans to support continuous improvement. The LADO Service is currently recruiting to a newly created position of LADO Coordinator. This will increase efficiency within the service going forward, ensuring that records are accurate and promptly uploaded to the Children's Services electronic recording system.

### **Social Work Academy**

The operational teams in the social work academy support cohorts of Newly Qualified Social Workers into the service (NQSWs). The Academy develops NQSWs through their continuous professional development and their journey as newly qualified social workers, stepping into professional and accountable practice. Effectively, new staff consistently join and pass through the service. The learning relates to this stage in the Social Worker career. The learning feeds into the Coventry Family Valued program, and the development of relational, restorative practices and value base when working with families. The evolved practice methodology Family Valued will significantly update the Academy offer and connect the underpinning theories and principles to practice delivery and will shape the future career of NQSWs as they grow and develop further in Coventry. Relational and restorative practice connect this to "a way of being" and will build the foundations as learning is taken forward. The team managers will connect and align closely to this work to enable this transition.

## Team Central

Team Central Between 2023 and 2024 complaints have continued to reduce as restorative practice is embedded. From the complaints either upheld or partially upheld there are 3 common themes:

1. Communication
2. Conduct of the Social Worker
3. Sharing of information in a timely manner with professionals and families.

Social Workers are encouraged to respond to families and professionals in a timely way. Social workers have been trained in Family Valued Relational Practice which should ensure that families feel included valued and respected throughout the process of our interventions. Guidance around expectations of Social Workers is now embedded. The team are clear on what constitutes best practice. Any complaints are personally addressed with individuals at the time by the Team Manager. Furthermore, learning from complaints remain on the agenda of supervision sessions, team meetings and whole team meetings. Central have embedded a system where they routinely seek service user feedback every month and discuss the feedback in the team and the learning themes.

## Team East

A review of the complaints received by East Help and Protection has shown that the main themes of complaints are as follows:

1. Communication
2. Conduct of the Social Worker
3. Parents feeling unclear of process and challenge of processes undertaken

Unfortunately, a higher number of stage 1 complaints progressing to stage 2 complaints is evidenced for year 2023/24 compared to that of 2022/23. To prevent this from continuing the social work team will begin to review outcomes of complaints as whole service group and ensure there is a feedback loop to the actions set and learning from the complaints. To support positive practice the East area has challenged poor practice where it has been identified through individual supervision or team meetings with bespoke short sessions run by the Team Managers. All new and agency staff are trained in line with the Coventry Family Valued approach and guidance around expectations of staff is embedded in the form of practice standards and recording guidance, so all are clear what constitutes best practice. The Team Managers continue to lead by example and complaints are addressed promptly with attempts made by the Team Managers to locally resolve in the first instance.

## Team South

There have been 27 complaints in Team South. The main themes from complaints are:-

- 1) Lack of clarity about expectations of the father and the plan for children.
- 2) Social worker communication with families in a timely way.
- 3) Paperwork not being shared in a timely manner.
- 4) Process not being followed – Conference was rearranged. Communication and timescales.

The South area is focusing on ensuring more timely support to families, with records being provided in a timely manner. South are utilising support from Restorative Practice Leads to ensure that families are supported in a restorative way.

## Team West

During this year, there have been a number of complaints from Parents in relation to:

- 1) Communication.
- 2) Level and timeliness of support and safeguarding assessment and checks.
- 3) Records not being accurate or shared or shared in a timely way.

Social Workers in Team West have all received Restorative Practice training within service meetings to consider how best to work with families. In addition, they are in the process of embedding the new Re-Think Formulation approach to try and focus more on working with families where they are stuck. West have recognised the need to communicate better with fathers, especially those not living in the same household as their children.

The West has the highest volume of referrals in the city so caseloads of Social Workers are higher, this does sometimes impact on the ability of managers and Social Workers to respond in a timely way. The Operational Lead and Team Managers are aware of this and therefore are mindful to try and resolve complaints quickly and informally.

All learning from complaints is shared and discussed with practitioners to ensure continuous improvement in service deliver to children and families.

## Through Care

A review of the complaints received by the Through Care service has identified that communication is the main theme and reason why complaints are partially upheld. The communication issue is what leads to matters ending in complaints and could be resolved much earlier. As a result of the review a targeted whole service session in respect of communication and impact of good communication will be held. Communication that is timely has been a priority within the service and learning is disseminated within manager meetings and developmental sessions.

The feedback from complaints or compliments continues to be an agenda item on a weekly basis within the management team and key themes are shared within team meetings to ensure we have a continued focus on any areas for improvement.



# Children Services



## Success Summary

Our Teams take complaints very seriously and we continue to use these to inform our practice throughout Children Services. We have monthly Practice Improvement Forums, where all Children Services Practitioners come together to consider learning and development and this includes feedback and learning from complaints and audits, this enables us to continuously reflect on the service we provide and improve, to ensure the same learning is applied.

We continue to develop these forums and continue to learn from all feedback from children, young people, parents, carers, families and professionals to ensure the service we deliver continues to be improved

Out of a total of **229 complaints received**, the number of complaints resolved informally has **increased from 48** in 22/23 **to 60** in 23/24

The average timeframe to **investigate Stage 2 complaints** has continued to be investigated within the formal timeframe expectations

The **two main themes for complaints** received in 2023/24 is **standard of service** and **communication** however these concerns **have reduced** compared with the **complaints received**

Statutory **Stage 3 complaints** continue to remain **extremely low** showing that the majority of complaints are **resolved at Stage 1** or informally

The Service Recovery Officers provide Children Services with **quarterly complaint and compliment reports** so any learning and success can be be addressed

The **Internal Investigation Form** continues to provide service areas with more insight into service improvement and delivery

# Further information

Further information about complaints and representations and a copy of the Council's complaints policy and [complaints handling guidance](#) is available at [www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/).

Ilius Ahmed  
Service Recovery Officer  
**Customer Services – Improvement & Development**  
November 2024

Kelly Boyce  
Service Recovery Officer  
**Customer Services – Improvement & Development**  
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Steve Paterson  
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Service Recovery Officer  
**Customer Services – Improvement & Development**  
November 2024

# Complaints Handling Guidance

Guidance for managers and officers dealing with comments, compliments, and complaints



**COMMENTS  
& COMPLIMENTS  
& COMPLAINTS**

**ONE  
COVENTRY**

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# Introduction

## About this guide

This document is an internal document that provides guidance for managers and officers dealing with comments, compliments and complaints. It is to be read in conjunction with the complaints policy at [www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/). In line with the Council's values to be open, honest and transparent, this guide is made available to members of the public too.

## Making things right

Coventry City Council is committed to putting local people and their needs at the heart of what it does. As employees of the Council, we work to ensure that people have a positive and trouble-free experience with us in all transactions and interactions. However, sometimes things go wrong. When things go wrong, we encourage people to speak up, so that we can make things right.

Effective management and resolution of complaints, as well as learning from complaints, help ensure that Council services meet the needs of local residents and communities, and helps build a foundation of trust in order for the Council to have new conversations with residents, communities and partners to enable people to do more for themselves as active and empowered citizens. A key principle of this is continuous improvement, and this includes reviewing the Council's complaints processes and systems to ensure consistency and improve the way the Council serve the people of Coventry.

## The complaints policy

Coventry City Council's complaints policy sets out how individual members of the public can complain to the Council, as well as how the Council handle compliments, comments and complaints. Where possible, complaints should be resolved informally. If this is not possible, they can formally complain to the Council.

The complaints policy can be found at: [www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/). The policy defines complaints as *"any expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the Council or its employees, which the customer feels should have been provided"*.

Depending on the subject and nature of the complaint, a different pathway is followed:

- complaints about **Children's Services** including care homes and other providers commissioned by the Council follow the statutory process for representations made by or on behalf of children using social care services provided by / commissioned by the Council arising from the Children Act 1989;
- complaints about **Adult Services** including care homes and other providers commissioned by the Council follow the statutory process for representations made by or on behalf of an adult using social care services provided by / commissioned by the Council arising from the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Services Complaints Regulations 2009;
- **all other complaints** relating to Council services are dealt with by the corporate complaints policy.

Note that complaints about non-Council services, for instance, schools, hospitals; complaints by employees; or complaints about elected members (councillors) are outside the scope of the complaints policy.

The Council strives to act in accordance with best practice. This includes:

- the National Complaints Managers' Group (May 2016) [Good Practice guidance for handling complaints concerning adults and children social care services](#);
- guidance from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO):
  - [guidance on good complaint handling](#) (for instance, running a complaints system; managing unreasonable complaint behaviours and remedies); and
  - [single complaints statement](#) guidance for councils and care providers on best practice in receiving and dealing with comments, complaints and feedback about their services.

## The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The LGSCO is the final stage for complaints about councils, all adult social care providers (including care homes and home care agencies) and some other organisations providing local public services. It is a free service that investigate complaints in a fair and independent way; and provides a means of redress to individuals for injustice caused by unfair treatment or service failure.

If a complainant has exhausted all of the Council's own complaints process, and remain dissatisfied with the Council's decision and/or its handling of the complaint, they have the right to take the complaint to the LGSCO. When a complaint has exhausted the Council's complaints procedure, they are informed of this right – and provided detail with how to contact the LGSCO.

# Roles and responsibilities

## Customer services

Complaints by members of the public should typically be made through customer services:

Web: [https://www.coventry.gov.uk/form\\_speakup](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/form_speakup)  
 Email: [customer.services@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:customer.services@coventry.gov.uk)  
 Telephone: 08085 834 333

Members of the public may also choose to seek help and advice from elected members (councillors) or from agencies (such as Citizens Advice, or the Ombudsman) for help and support in making their complaint. These complaints should also be passed to customer services to ensure it is recorded and tracked on Dash.

## Resident experience team

When a resident asks to make a complaint, the advisor will select 'Resident experience team' as the function area. This team will then triage all complaints, before sending them to the relevant areas of the organisation. This team have been put in place to actively welcome and encourage resident feedback, and they will aim to resolve complaints informally. Depending on the nature of the complaint, the Resident experience team may just hand it straight off to the service recovery team who will handle it as a formal complaint.

## Investigating officers

Complaints should be dealt with by the individual service area in line with the complaints policy. The officer leading the complaint response is known as the investigating officer.

## Complaints co-ordination

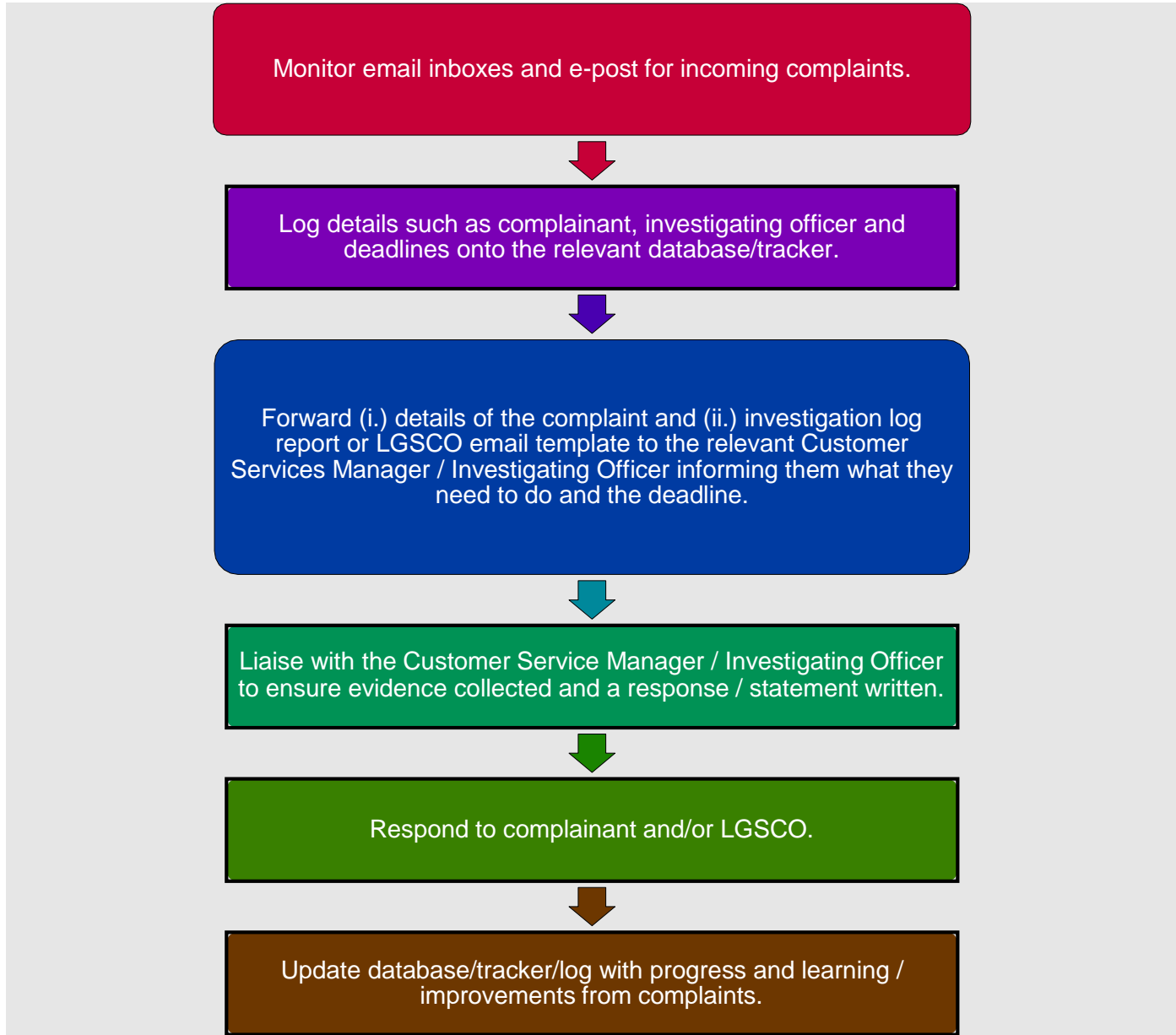
The Complaints Team provides a co-ordination function for social care, corporate and complaints escalated to Ombudsman. The complaints co-ordination function also:

- manages the 3Cs Info Hub, a one-stop shop on the intranet;
- holds regular meetings with managers and advocacy services to provide progress updates and discuss cases;
- appoints independent investigators and facilitate service investigations and reviews, in conjunction with children's services and commissioning;
- provides regular reports and statistics on complaint numbers, timescales and key messages to senior management; and
- produce annual reports.

# Complaint's co-ordination role

## Process flowchart

The following flowchart sets out how the complaints co-ordination process handles complaints and representations from members of the public:



## Getting help

### The complaints information hub

Further guidance, reports and information available for Council staff on the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Information Hub (**3Cs Info Hub**) at <https://coventrycc.sharepoint.com/sites/3CsInfoHub/>.

### Getting help

If an investigating officer needs help in responding to a complaint, please speak to your line manager at first instance. If you need further help, please contact:

### Statutory social care complaints

- Adult social care complaints: [AdultSocialCareCustomerRelations@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:AdultSocialCareCustomerRelations@coventry.gov.uk)
- Children's social care complaints: [CLYPCustomerRelations@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:CLYPCustomerRelations@coventry.gov.uk)

### Corporate complaints

- Corporate complaints: [Customer.Services@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:Customer.Services@coventry.gov.uk)

### Ombudsman Link Officer

- Coventry City Council's Ombudsman Link Officer: [Ombudsman@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:Ombudsman@coventry.gov.uk)

# Complaint processes, stages and escalation

The key stages of the Council's complaints processes are as follows:

Type	Corporate	Adult social care	Children's social care	LGSCO
<b>Stages</b>	Resident experience team will work towards Informal resolution. Stage 1: service investigation Stage 2: service investigation review	Informal resolution  Stage 1: local resolution	Informal resolution  Stage 1: local resolution Stage 2: investigation Stage 3: review panel	Enquiry and assessment  Investigation Decision and remedy
<b>Timescales</b> (in working days)	Acknowledgement: 3 days Stage 1: 10 days Stage 2: 20 days  Please note that between Stage 1-2 escalation, we will always try to resolve issues informally before progressing to the next stage.	Acknowledgement: 3 days Stage 1: 20 days	Acknowledgement: 3 days Stage 1: 10 (to 20 <sup>1</sup> ) days Stage 2: 25 (to 65 <sup>1</sup> ) days Stage 3: 30 days  Please note that between Stage 1-3 escalation, we will always try to resolve issues informally before progressing to the next stage.	Enquiry: 1-3 days Investigation: 20 days Draft decision: 5-10 days Remedy: as set out in the final decision statement
<b>Services</b>	All other services <sup>2</sup>	Adult social care	Children's social care	All
<b>Recording</b>	On the corporate customer relationship management system, <a href="#">Dash</a> .	On the corporate system, <a href="#">Dash</a> plus the <a href="#">social care complaints database</a> .	On the corporate system, <a href="#">Dash</a> plus the <a href="#">social care complaints database</a> .	On the <a href="#">Tracker</a> on the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman management portal.
<b>Reporting</b>	Quarterly summary trends and indicators on the <a href="#">3Cs Info Hub</a> <sup>3</sup> .	Weekly progress reports provided on the <a href="#">3Cs Info Hub</a> and regular progress meetings held with relevant managers. Quarterly trend and context provided to relevant management team and via dashboards. Annual report to the relevant Cabinet Member.		Upheld complaints referred to the Monitoring Officer for follow-up action. Quarterly trends and context on the <a href="#">3Cs Info Hub</a> . Annual report to relevant committees and relevant Cabinet Member.

### Escalation of complaints

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, and they consider that one or more of the following apply: relevant information was not taken into account in investigating the complaint; procedures have not been properly applied in handling the complaint; there has been an incorrect interpretation of Council policy, they can ask for the complaint to be reviewed via a service investigation review. The review will either be conducted by a senior manager of the service or, a senior officer or manager outside the line management of the service depending on the circumstances.

<sup>1</sup> This is the maximum extension for complex cases as defined by the statutory guidance.

<sup>2</sup> All other services, e.g.: adult education; benefits and tax; children's transport; corporate, finance and legal; education and libraries (except schools or education admissions appeals); environmental services (including household waste collections, noise complaints); housing services; planning; parking, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Indicators currently provided on the corporate dashboard accessible via the 3Cs Info Hub and the Performance Hub.



The complainant will be expected to explain, in writing or verbally, the grounds for seeking a review. With children's social care complaints, in line with the Department for Education statutory guidance for local authority children's services on representations and complaints procedures, a complaint may be escalated to a Stage 2 investigation or Stage 3 review panel if a complainant wishes for it to do so. When this happens, a senior officer will always work with the complainant to see if the complaint can be resolved without escalation first.

### Escalation to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

If a complainant is unhappy about the way the Council has dealt with their complaint, they can contact the LGSCO. The LGSCO would normally expect a complaint to be made within twelve months of when the complainant first knew of the problem that they are complaining about, and normally require all complainants to go through all stages of the Council's own procedure before considering the complaint. However, in certain circumstances the LGSCO has the discretion to waive this requirement. Note that a complainant can approach the LGSCO at any stage of the complaints process.

### Remedies, compensation and financial redress

The key principle for any financial remedies paid is that a remedy should, as far as possible, put the complainant back in the position they would have been in but for the fault identified. Any financial redress should be agreed with the relevant director, in line with LGSCO guidance set out at <https://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/guidance-notes>. Where a complaint has gone to the LGSCO, the local authority has the option of suggesting a remedy to resolve the complaint – or to accept the LGSCO's recommendation.

### Learning from complaints: the complaints investigation log report

It is important for services to treat complaints as an opportunity to learn lessons from previous experiences. By learning from complaints, services can become more responsive to the needs of residents. Upon completion of a complaint investigation, investigating officers are asked to complete a complaints investigation log report. This will provide additional learning from the complaints received, for example, improvements to training or to inform changes to procedures. The Council regularly publishes reports on complaints, including lessons learned, to ensure that complaints are properly communicated to elected members.

### Equality monitoring

It is important to ensure any equality dimensions identified through complaints are addressed and rectified. Operationally, it is important that equality data such as the protected characteristics such as ethnicity, sex and disability status is collected as part of handling complaints; and issues are raised to the strategic equality, diversity and inclusion project board. This will enable the Council to identify if its complaints policy is operating as intended, eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity in line with the public sector equality duty.

## Privacy and information governance

**Please remember that complaints, investigations and information about it are private and confidential and must not be disclosed to third parties.**

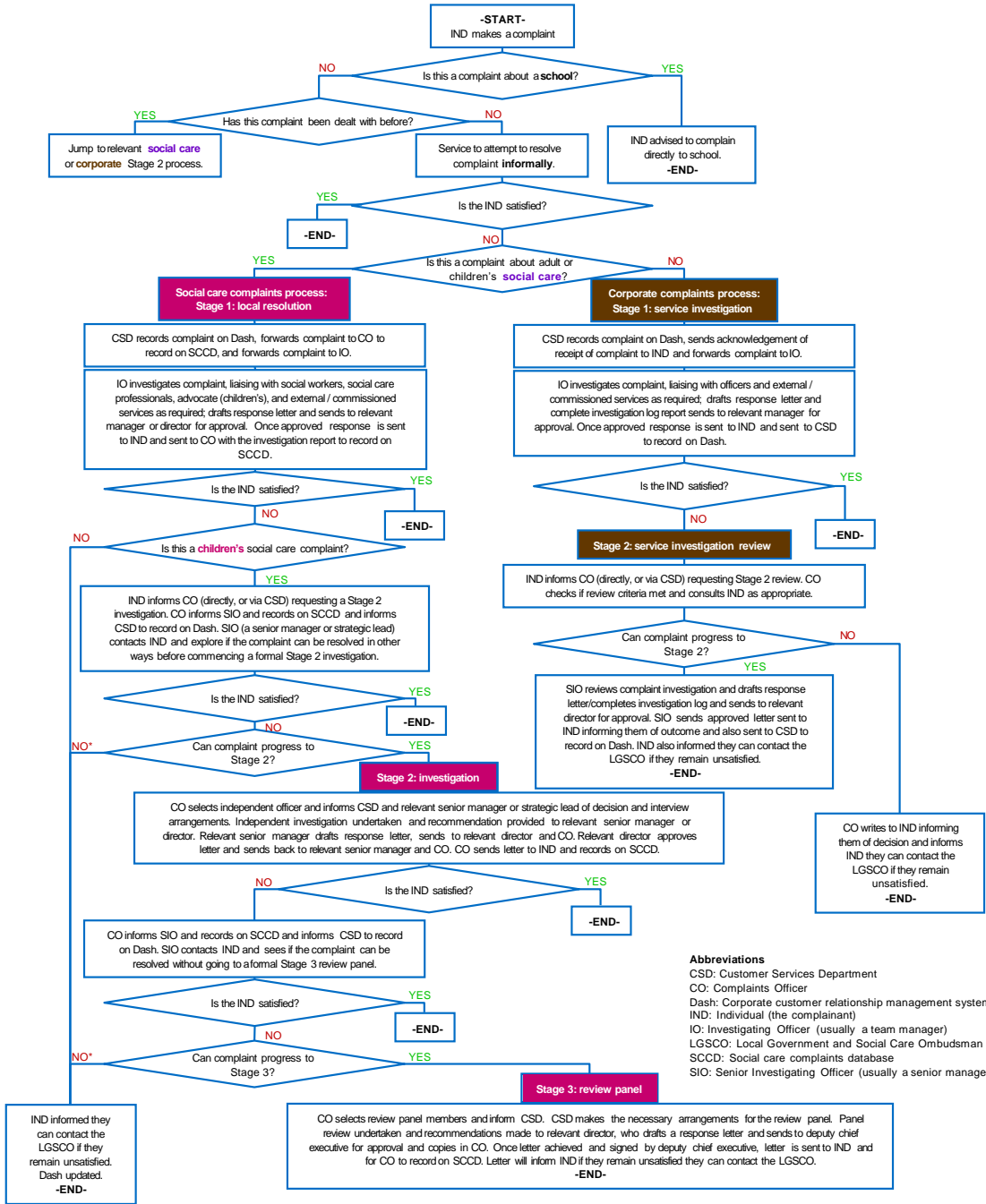
Our summary privacy notice states:

We will use the information you provide to handle your complaint in line with the Council's complaints policy available at [www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/). We may share this information with other organisations which may include independent external investigators, children's advocacy services and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. We will only share your information if this is part of solving your complaint. More information on how we handle personal information and your rights under the data protection legislation can be found in the full Privacy Notice: [www.coventry.gov.uk/privacynotice/](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/privacynotice/).

You can help ensure that we protect people's information by ensuring that you follow the Council's information governance and data protection policies. In particular, please:

- **ensure that any correspondence containing personal or confidential data is sent in a password protected zip archive** with the **password provided in a separate email**; and
- **double-check** people's names, contact details, email addresses, mailing addresses and telephone numbers!

# Social care and corporate complaints process flowchart



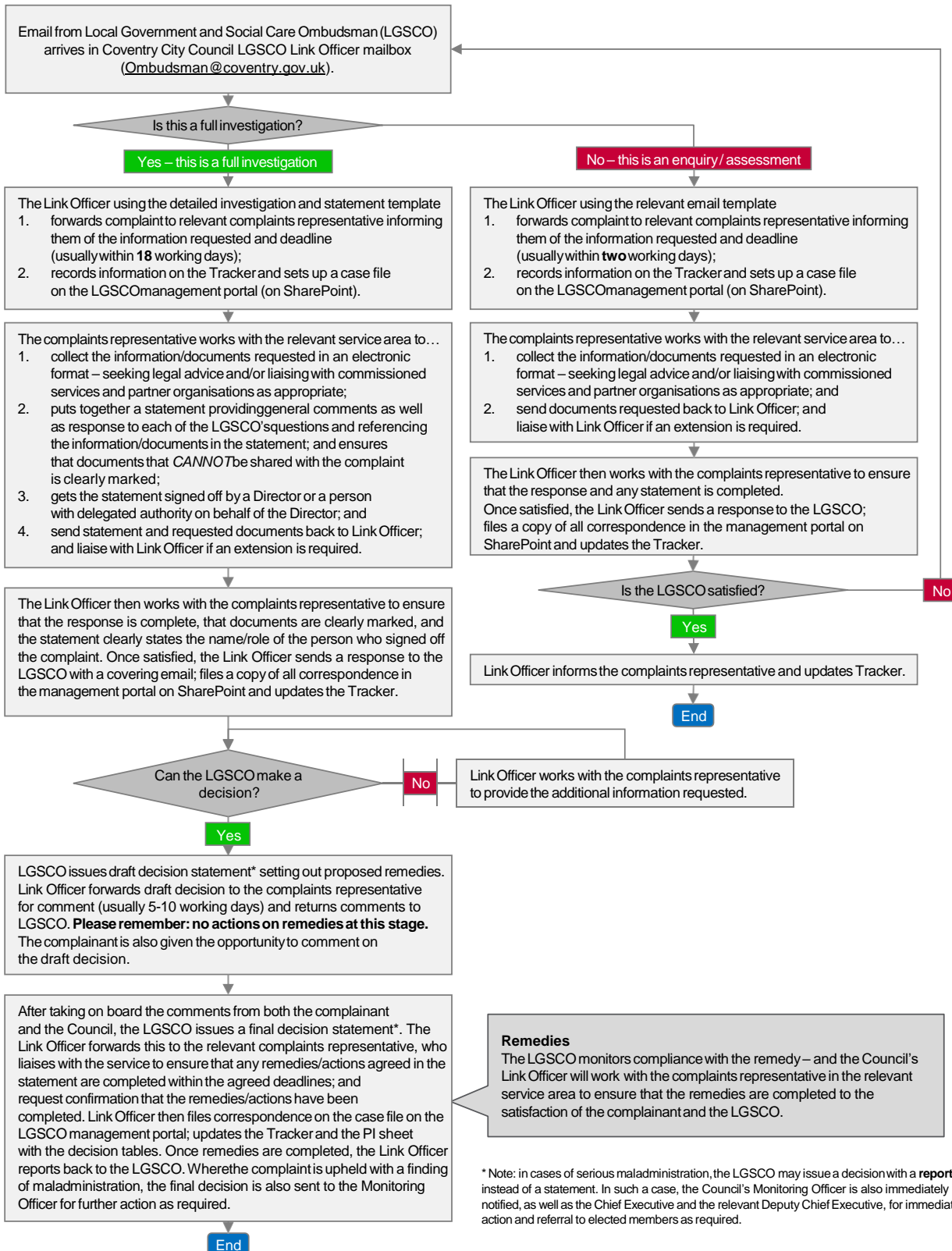
**Abbreviations**  
 CSD: Customer Services Department  
 CO: Complaints Officer  
 Dash: Corporate customer relationship management system  
 IND: Individual (the complainant)  
 IO: Investigating Officer (usually a team manager)  
 LGSCO: Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman  
 SCCD: Social care complaints database  
 SIO: Senior Investigating Officer (usually a senior manager)

\* on rare occasions a complaint may not progress to the next stage, (e.g. out of timescale)

# Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman process complaints guidance

Stage	Notes
<b>Enquiry / assessment</b>	The request will have a short deadline of between <b>1 to 3 working days</b> . At this stage, the LGSCO will ask the Council for a copy of its formal complaint responses; and confirmation that the complaint has fully completed the Council's complaints process. The request will not include any new actions and should be returned to the Link Officer by the date specified.
<b>Premature</b>	If a complaint has not completed the Council's own complaints process, the LGSCO Intake team will ask the complainant to contact the Council. Alternatively the LGSCO will return the complaint as a "premature" complaint for consideration under the Council's complaint process. The Link Officer will send the relevant department the information using the premature email template. It is important to remind complainant of their right to complain again to the LGSCO when they exhaust the Council's complaints process. Following completion of the complaints process (whether it is resolved or not), a copy of the final response should be sent to the Link Officer.
<b>Investigation</b>	The Link Officer will send a covering email using the Ombudsman detailed investigation template which includes the statement document requesting a written response to the LGSCO's questions. This needs to be returned by a set deadline, usually within <b>18 working days</b> , so that the deadline (within 20 working days) can be met. The response must be provided as a <b>statement</b> , providing general comments as well as responses to each of the questions. It must also include the name and role of the author, and be <b>signed off by the Director</b> or a nominated person. Any supporting evidence must be provided as electronic attachments and referenced in the statement. Any information that cannot be shared with the complainant should be clearly marked and packaged separately. It may be necessary to seek legal advice and/or liaise with commissioned services and partner organisations as appropriate. The Link Officer needs confirmation that this has been done (in the form of an email trail). If the LGSCO investigator has asked us to consider whether we are prepared to remedy any injustice that may have been caused – we should comment on this as this is an opportunity for us to resolve the issue.
<b>Draft decision</b>	Following the investigation, the LGSCO will typically issue a draft decision <b>statement</b> . This will state whether the complaint was <b>upheld</b> or not, and detail the investigator's findings and explains the decision made. At this stage, the Council is asked whether it agrees with the decision and remedy. This is an opportunity to comment on the decision, and suggest any changes or corrections. At this stage, remedial actions must <b>not</b> be taken yet – remedies should only be completed after the final decision. We are usually requested to respond within <b>5-10 working days</b> . <i>Note: the investigator may choose to issue a decision as a <b>report</b> (under Section 30(1) of the Local Government Act 1974) in which case the Council's Monitoring Officer is notified.</i>
<b>Final decision</b>	The final decision letter and statement should be circulated, as appropriate, to everyone who was involved in the investigation and everyone who needs to know of the investigation outcomes. Action on remedies should now be completed. In cases where the LGSCO makes a finding of <b>maladministration</b> , the final decision letter and statement is also forwarded by the Link Officer to the Monitoring Officer. The Monitoring Officer will decide if any further action is required.
<b>Remedy</b>	The LGSCO aims to remedy personal injustice when its investigations reveal there has been fault. Remedies are not intended to be punitive and are not just about money: the remedies also look into the root causes and recommend improvements to systems when they haven't worked properly, so that others do not suffer the same problems in future. The LGSCO monitors compliance with the remedy – and the Link Officer will work with the complaints representative in the relevant service area to ensure that the remedies are completed to the satisfaction of the complainant and the LGSCO. Confirmation and evidence that all actions required, as per the final decision letter and statement. This can be as soon as within <b>5-10 working days</b> ; or longer for more complex issues.

# Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman process flowchart



# Version control

## Document Location

Published location: <https://smarturl.it/cov-complaints-guide>

SharePoint: [https://coventrycc.sharepoint.com/teams/ChiefExec/PublicHealth/Insight/Documents/Complaints handling guidance 2020.docx](https://coventrycc.sharepoint.com/teams/ChiefExec/PublicHealth/Insight/Documents/Complaints%20handling%20guidance%202020.docx)

## Reviewing arrangements

This guidance is reviewed annually with the annual complaints report.

## Revision History

Revision date	Summary of Changes
13/09/2018	3.1 Integrated guidance, combining previously separate complaints handling guidance for the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and People Directorate and social care into one document.
04/09/2019	4.0 Updated with new section on roles and responsibilities, updated with the new complaint's investigation log and statement template.
20/09/2019	4.1 Added section on equality monitoring.
14/09/2020	5.0 Updated to clarify changes in Ombudsman handling procedure regarding premature complaints and reflect organisational changes.
19/09/2021	6.2 Updated Complaint, Process, Stages and Escalation table to reflect an informal review between each stage of the complaint's procedure before escalation to the next stage.
09/06/2022	Complaints Policy page 3 Social care changed to services
23/02/2024	Information relating to 'Resident experience team' has been added.



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