

Children's Services Complaints and Representations Annual Report 2021-22



**COMMENTS
COMPLIMENTS
& COMPLAINTS**

**ONE
COVENTRY**

www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/

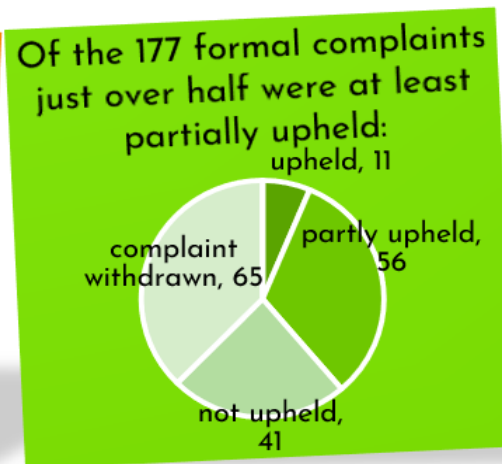
Children's Services 2021/22 Complaints & Representations key facts & figures



Children's services had **3,397** open referrals as of 31 March 2022



In 2020/21, children's services received **235** complaints (177 were statutory, 18 corporate, and 40 informal). **23** complaints were made by young people; **8** supported by an advocate.




Children's services complaints can be complex & timescales can be protracted. In 2021/22:

Complaints	Average time taken
Stage 1	163 7 days
Stage 2	13 34 days
Stage 3	1 35 days




In 2021/22 children's social care also received **502** compliments. Compliments were the standard of practice, partnership about 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 2021/22, the LGSCO received **15** complaints about education & children's services. They investigated **2** social care complaints; which were upheld.

Listening to service users' complaints helps services improve by helping managers identify changes that are required. Key learning points from 2021/22 include: Ensuring effective communication with service users; apologising for mistakes; managing changes in social workers; ensuring that processes are transparent and clear; and striving to resolve issues informally in the first instance

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**.

Table of contents

Infographic.....	2
Welcome.....	3
Background.....	3
Summary	4
Feedback.....	5
Advocacy	6
Complaints.....	6
Statutory complaints	6
Resolution of complaints.....	7
Timescales.....	9
Equality.....	10
Ombudsman	12
Comments	12
Compliments.....	12
Service improvements and learning points.....	15
Further information	24

Welcome

Welcome to the 2021/22 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 2021 to 31 March 2022.

Background

Local Authorities are required by law (Children Act 1989, plus subsequent changes including the Local Authority Social Services Complaints Regulations (1990) as a result of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003) 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; things that have gone wrong are put right; the organisation learns from both positive and negative feedback; and the organisation sustains its focus on service users / customers / citizens.

Particular 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 2021/22 children's services completed 28,103 contacts and received 4,987 referrals. This compares to 25,875 and 5,754 in 2020/21. As of 31 March 2022, there were 3,307 referrals open to children's services, compared to 3,640 a year ago.

The total number of statutory and informal complaints received about children's services in 2021/22 was 235 compared to 157 received in 2020/21. The 235 complaints received consist of 177 statutory complaints, 18 corporate complaints and 40 informal complaints. The number of complaints under the statutory process has increased from 157 received in 2020/21, and we received 212 in 2019/20 and 142 in 2018/19.

22 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 an increase in the number of children or young people using an advocate to make a complaint – 14 complaints received during 2021/22 compared to 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 2021/22: 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. 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 2021/22, 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 of their opportunity to make representations and to find methods they can easily use. There have been 23 complaints from children and young people themselves this year, compared to 17 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 23 children and young people making complaints during the year, 14 used an advocate to support them in making their complaint (this also includes 1 complaint where an advocate was used on behalf of an adult and their child). Since April 2006, the Council has commissioned Barnardo's to provide an advocacy service.

Complaints

The Council received 177 statutory children's services complaints. It also dealt with 18 corporate complaints and 40 informal.

The table below indicates how the complaint was received:

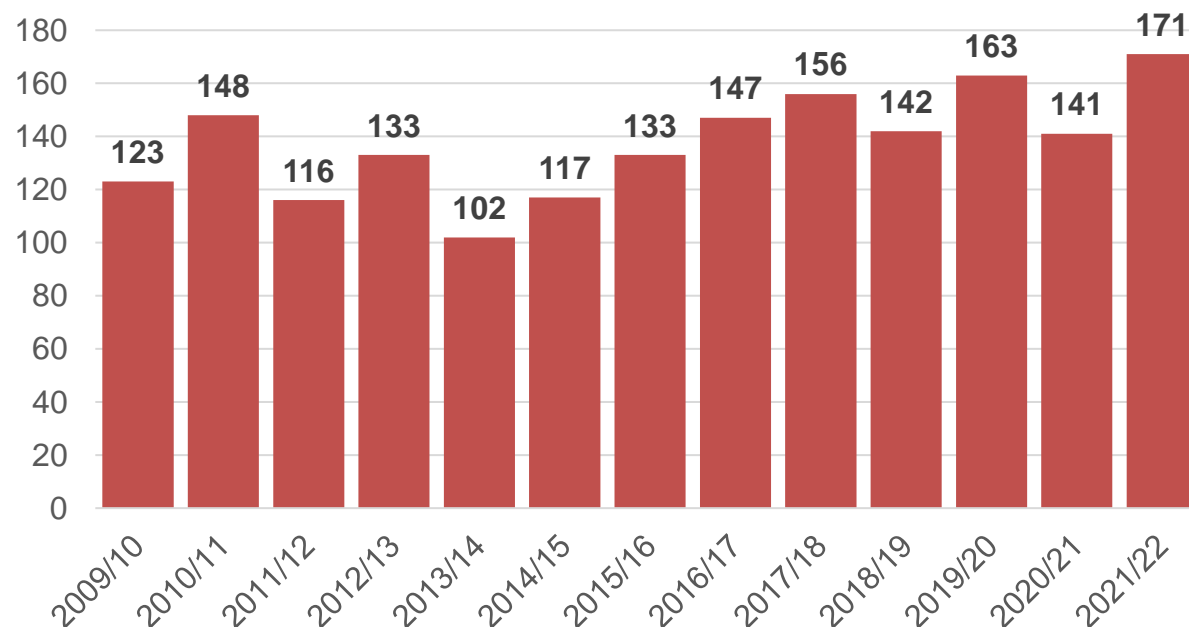
Method	Number of complaints
Email	141
Online form/ Contact Centre	89
Letter	4
Telephone	1

Note: table above includes non-statutory and informal issues. Not knowns excluded.

Statutory complaints

177 statutory complaints were received about children's services in 2021/22. This compares to 141 in 2020/21.

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 2021/22 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	11	6
Partly upheld	56	31
Not upheld	41	23
Complaint withdrawn by complainant	65	38
Still Open	4	2
Total	177	

Statutory complaints by team

The below table shows a breakdown figure of number of complaints received per team in 2021/22.

Team	Complaints
Through Care	29
Team West	30
Children's Disability Team	5
Looked After Children	30
Team South	14
Team East	23
Team Central	20

Team	Complaints
Fostering & adoption	2
MASH	10
Quality & Assurance	5
Social Work Academy	5
Early Help (Team Central)	1
Early Help (Team East)	3
Youth Offending Services	0
Total	177

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 177 statutory complaints, of which 163 were resolved at Stage 1. That is, 92% of complaints were resolved at Stage 1 of the complaints process, compared to 93% during 2020/21. Considering that there was an increase of statutory complaints by 26% compared to 2020/21, this shows an improvement on last year of the number of statutory complaints resolved at Stage 1. More emphasis on local resolution has been introduced this year, with the launch of the Internal Investigation Outcome Form, to gather more learning internally to help to

keep the percentage of complaints resolved at stage one of the process at a high level.

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 2021/22, there were 13 Statutory Stage 2 complaints and 3 Corporate Stage 2 investigations, compared with 9 Statutory Stage 2 complaints and 3 Corporate Stage 2 investigations in 2020/21.

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 complaint were investigated by Senior Managers and not reviewed by commissioned investigating officers.

Review panel (Stage 3)

Within the statutory complaint's 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 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 was 1 Stage 3 independent review during 2021/22. This was the same compared to 2020/21 where 1 Stage 3 complaint was also received. The majority number of complaints are resolved during Stage 1 of the complaints process and the number of Stage 3 complaints received is relatively very low in comparison to how many complaints have been received in 2021/22.

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	10 working days
2	25 working days (can be extended to 65 working	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
1	Within 10 working days	122
	Over 10 working days	41
2	Within 25 – 65 working days	12
	Over 25 - 65 working days	1
3	Within 50 working days	1
	Over 50 working days	0
Total		177

Average timescales by stage in calendar days

Stage	Number of complaints	Average timescales
1	163	7
2	13	34
3	1	35

The average time in days to complete Stage 1 complaints is 7 working days in 2021/22, compared to 9 days in 2020/21. This is a decrease of 2 days. Weekly meetings with senior managers have ensured that complaint timescales were maintained despite an increase in the number of complaints and the lifting of restrictions due the pandemic.

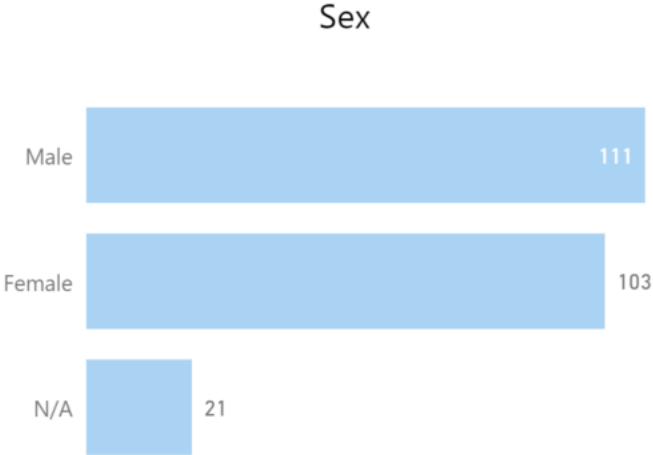
Investigations of Stage 2 complaints under the statutory procedure often need to be extended beyond the 25 working days timescale up to 65 working days due to the complexity of the issues being considered. In these situations, the importance of keeping the complainant informed and securing their agreement to an extension of the timescales, is recognised and addressed. Stage 2 complaints were resolved within an average of 34 working days in 2021/22 compared to an average of 20 working days in 2020/21. 2020/21 has seen an increase in investigation times for Stage 2 complaints from the previous year by 14 days. All Stage 2 complaints were responded to within the maximum 65 working days response timeframe, except for one complaint which was delayed due to exceptional circumstances with the Independent Investigating Officer. This was beyond the control of the Local Authority.

The stage 3 complaint was resolved within 35 working days compared 26 working days in 2020/21. 2021/22 has shown on average, that Children's Services has achieved resolving complaints within the statutory timescale guideline of 10 working days for Stage 1 complaints. The data shows that complaints at Stage 2 were also resolved on average within the statutory timescale guidelines of 20-65 working days. Further data shows that the Stage 3 complaint received was reviewed within the statutory timeline of 50 working days.

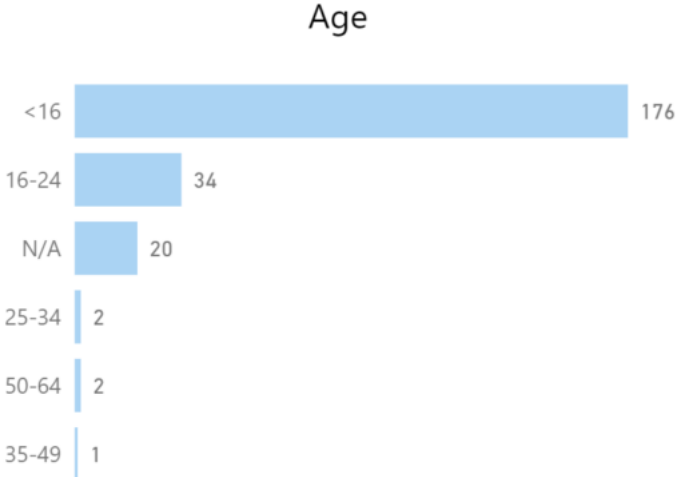
Equality

During 2021-22, 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.

The below graph shows out of 235 complaints received during 2021-22 (excluding SEN), 111 (47%) were from male complainant’s/service users, 103 (44%) were from female complainant’s/service users and 21 (9%) were non- applicable (N/A) as they were made by the public and not service users, therefore those details were not captured.

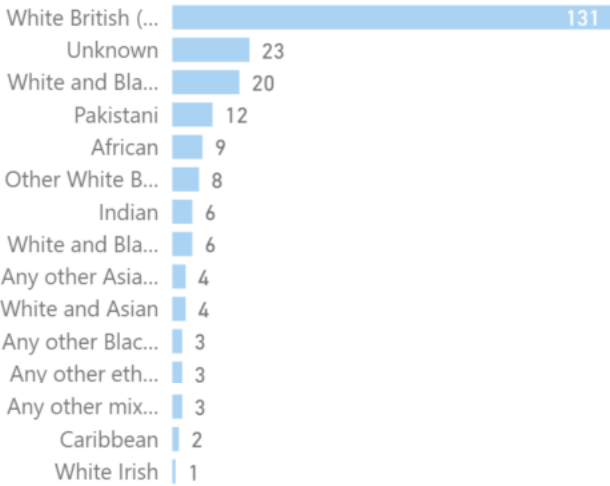


The below graph shows the age range of the complainant or service user. 176 (74%) of the complaints received in 2020-21 (excluding SEN) were from or submitted on behalf of young people under the age of 16, 34 (14%) of complaints received were from or submitted on behalf of young people between the ages of 16-24. Ages 25-34 and 50-64 both received 2 complaints (2%) each and 1 complaint (1%) was received from 35-49. 20 (7%) were non-applicable (N/A).



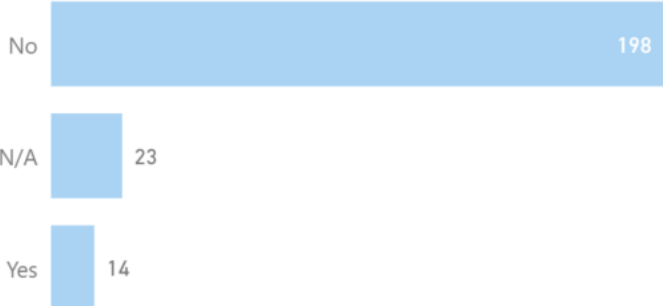
Out of the 235 complaints received in 2021-22, 131 (55%) of the complainant's/service users were White British, followed by White and Black Caribbean with 20 (8.5%). 12 complaints were received from a Pakistani background (5%). 9 complaints were from an African background (4%). Indian, and White and Black African both received 6 complaints (2.5%) each. Any Other Asian Background and White and Asian background both received 4 complaints (2%) each. Any Other Black/African/Caribbean Background, Any other ethnic group and Any Other Mixed Background received 3 complaints (1.5%) each. Caribbean received 2 complaints (1%) and White Irish received 1 (0.5%). 23 complaints (9%) were unable to be captured.

Ethnicity



The data captured during 2021-22 showed that 14 (6%) of complainants had a disability and that 198 (84%) did not, with 23 (10%) as non-applicable (N/A) due to this information not being able to be captured.

Disability



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 2021/22, the LGSCO received 15 complaints or enquiries relating to the category of education and children's services for Coventry City Council. The LGSCO does not separate Education and Children's Services and do not necessarily inform the Local Authority of every complaint or enquiry received, so it is unclear how many of these related specifically to children's services.

Please note that this figure is an estimate, as on occasion when the annual letter is received in July, the LGSCO include some other decisions as full investigations- currently, only decisions that were either held or not upheld have been included.

The LGSCO undertook full investigations for 2 Children's Services, 2 Children's services cases were Upheld.

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 2021/22.

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.

502 compliments were received during 2021-22, compared to 445 received in 2020/21.

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 and categorised 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.

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.

Below is a selection of compliments from children/young people and parents/carers:

I just wanted to give you some feedback of one of your workers. We shared practiced and I joined her with a very hard to reach young person. She can identify the young person if you speak with her. The work delivered was excellent and I had to feedback the extraordinary engagement skills she has. It was a breath of fresh air and a delight to see.

The service user was extremely complimentary about you and the Skills to Foster course. She said she learned a lot from it in terms of children's likely needs and behavior, expectations of recording and TSDS as well as the financial side. She said it was lovely to be with other people "in the same boat" and helped her feel better about her situation. She also said you were lovely and kind.

I wanted to pass on that the District Judge shared today in the briefing how impressed she has been with you. She said she is heavily involved with the law elements of the Open University training for social workers, so has worked with a lot of social work students. She said you were one the best she has come across, stating you were organised, professional and generally very good.

I want to say thank you so much for your help, you made me feel so comfortable and free to speak, I was so confident with the services you offered, you showed me the direct part on the things I was struggling to access, like the family service and so on, thank you for taking time to check on me and the children and always tell me to be proud of myself. Thank you for all the assistance you gave me and my kids. I wish to always have someone like you

During my discussion with the Young Person, they spoke very positively about their relationship with the SW and stated that they have done many fun things with her such as playing various games and they have taken them out and not just sat talking to them. The SW said how happy she was to work with her and that she is like a big sister to her.

Words will never be enough to be able to thank you. You have helped me and the children in more ways than one but most importantly you helped me get my life back which I never thought was possible. My children have their mum back and for that we are eternally grateful. You are an amazing person and are fabulous at your job. Our children are forever safe with people like you around. I wish you all the luck and success in your life and career. Me and the children will always remember you. Thank you for saving my family and sharing our journey!

I just wanted to email to let you know how amazing the Senior Practitioner was last week. She saw that we were struggling so stepped in and went downstairs to wait with the mother and children whilst we got on and sorted out placements etc. for the children. I couldn't have done it all without her help!

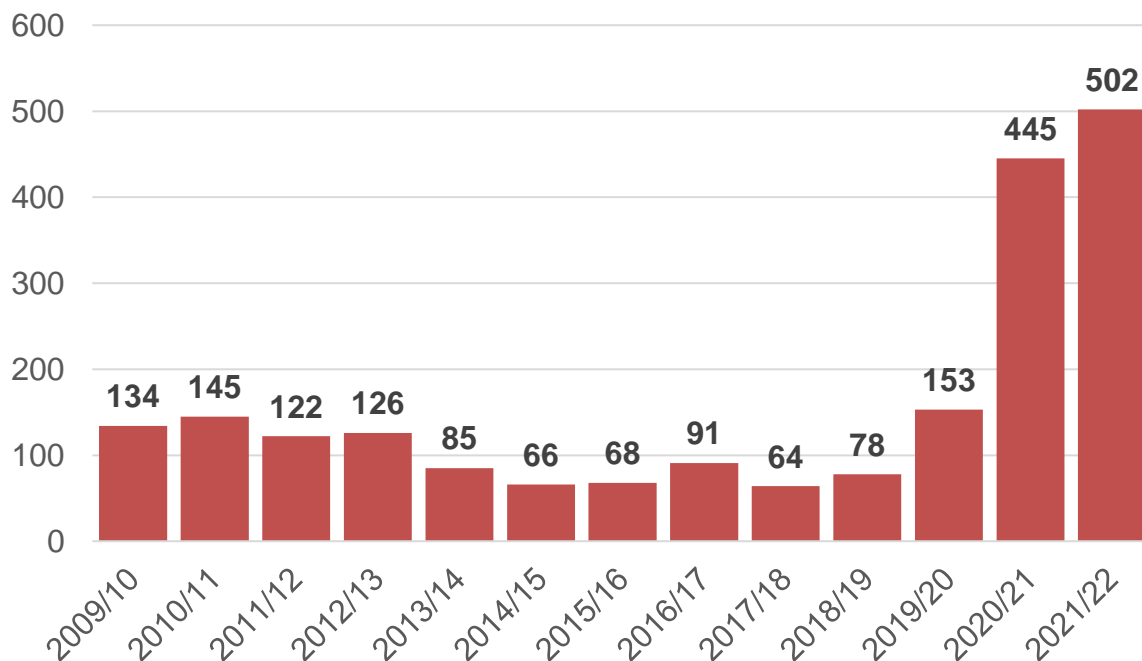
I am emailing to express our delight and deepest gratitude for the level of support to one of our families by the SW. She has been so professional when dealing with the appropriate agencies during 'Teams Meetings' and so effective in providing the care and support that the family needs to thrive together. She is approachable as well as being honest and straight-talking when controversial elements raise their heads. She assists the mother to understand what is happening to her and her girls in a positive way that moves the situation forward. It is a real pleasure to work with such a true professional and thank you for providing our school with her support.

I just wanted to say that it was good to have you on panel yesterday. You always have really good questions that you ask in a very appropriate way and I know I can count on you during panel to ask any difficult questions sensitively and respectfully.

I know it is a big commitment to do panel alongside your job, but you are of great value to panel and a fab panel member, and I appreciate you being on panel.

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 13 years.



Compliments by category in 2021/22

The below table shows the compliment themes

Category	Compliments received
Standard of Service	284
Good communication	128
Standard of practice (social work)	113
Good child focus	98
Good partnership working	85

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

Compliments by category received in 2021/22

The below table shows the breakdown of compliment received from.

Compliment from	Compliments received
Professionals	191
Parent/Carers	179
Young Person/Child	43
Police/Judge/Legal	42
School/Education	25
Foster Carers	18
Adopters	3
Other	1

Compliments by team

The below table shows a breakdown figure of number of compliments received per team in 2021/22.

Team	Compliments
Team Central	92
Team East	44
Team South	37
Team West	40
Responsive Services	8
Social Work Academy	4
Youth Offending	64
Total	289

Team	Compliments
Through Care	84
Edge of Care	3
LAC & Permanency	73
Fostering and Adoption	22
Placements	3
Children's Disability Team	23
Total	208

Team	Compliments
Safeguarding	0
Quality Assurance	2
Children's Champion	3
Total	5

Service improvements and learning points

Children's Services are committed to learning from customer feedback. When complaints highlight where things have gone wrong, managers must identify 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 177 formal complaints received, the table below highlights the different types of concerns raised within the complaints received in 2021/22 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	190
Standards of service	139
Alleged Staff conduct	48
Child protection issues	19
Breach of Confidentiality	2
Standard of environment	2
Finance	0

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. In 2021/22 the following remedy payments had been made, Corporate Stage 2 remedy payment of £300.00 and a Statutory Complaint which progressed to the Ombudsman and a remedy payment of £200.00 had been provided.

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 any reports or assessments are concise and accurate with all information detailed in the appropriate depth and these are completed within allocated deadlines.
- Making certain complaint responses cover all points that have been raised and these are addressed in a clear and precise way so complainants can see all points have been considered.
- Ensure all information sharing adheres to the Data Protection Act and all training around Data Protection is continued to be completed and up to date.

Progression Actions

A number of actions were identified in the 2021/22 report. Progress on these actions is as follows.

Complaint Leaflets/External Webpages

In 2022/23 The complaints information webpages were updated which includes an online and downloadable Children's Complaints Leaflet which outlines the complaints process and stages. In 2023 the Complaints Team will relaunch a new complaints leaflet which will be available online in due course.

Complaints, Comments and Compliments Information Hub

An information hub had been launched in 2019 to provide complaint information and processes to members of management and staff within social services to support the investigation and complaints process. The information hub will further develop going forward to provide all information to support Children Services with the complaints process.

Ongoing revision of the Stage 1 process

All Stage 1 complaints are monitored and managed more effectively. For the quarters of 2021/2022 the average time in days to complete Stage 1 complaints was 8 in Q1, 7 in Q2, 6 in Q3 and 6 working days in Q4. Further work has continued in 2022/23 to streamline the process and a more informal approach to investigate complaints has been undertaken to ensure that, where possible, complaints are not escalated within the complaints process, and are resolved, if possible, informally in the first instance. A complaints report is provided to the senior management teams on a quarterly basis outlining the themes and average days taken to investigate Stage 1 complaints.

Internal Complaints Investigation Form

An Internal Investigation Form was launched in 2020/21 to capture additional learning and understanding of complaint concerns to ensure service areas and teams consistently improve their services and implement any learning necessary.

Complaints Monitoring Dashboard

A Complaints monitoring dashboard- was launched in 2021/22 for senior management within Children's Services, to be able to monitor complaints on a daily basis This will ensure timeframes are met and any further learning captured.

Further revision of the Stage 2 process

There was a slight increase in completing Stage 2 complaints in 2021/22 with the average time in days to completion being 34 working days, compared to 20 working days in 2020/21. The Complaints Officer meets with managers on a regular basis to monitor and manage the Stage 2 complaints to ensure they are completed in a timely manner. The quarterly reports include stage 2 complaints, the timeframe and the themes.

Investigating Officers External Web Pages

A step-by-step guide for investigating officers has been launched in 2022 on our external website. The guide is to provide support and guidance for investigating officers on statutory, corporate, and informal complaints and this will be updated and refreshed on a yearly basis.

Complaints RAG Report

A RAG report was introduced in 2016/2017 to ensure managers were able to have an overview of complaints in their area. It enabled current complaints to be monitored weekly and discussed at Management Team Meetings on a regular basis, allowing joint working and responses. This process has continued into 2022/23 as it has been effective in monitoring complaints and any issues arising.

Training for Children's Services and Managers on Complaint Process

The Complaints Team continues to provide training sessions on all aspects of complaint processes in 2020/21 to all existing and new staff within Children's Services. Feedback sessions will also be provided on positive and negative areas of categories of complaints. In 2022/23 the Complaints team will provide a training module for all officers in Children's Services on the complaints process and investigation.

Specific service area improvements/learning which have been identified

Children's Disability Team

There have been two main themes arising from complaints received over the past year in CDT.

The first theme the complaints have highlighted, is the importance of consistent communication. Specifically, regarding social workers returning calls in a timely manner and consistently keeping families updated with the outcome of assessments and the rationale behind decision-making at short-breaks panel.

This also relates to the importance of ensuring that there is information available and easily accessible to families about the amount of short break hours that they may be entitled to, and that this information is shared with families at the outset of involvement.

The second theme relates to the quality of service delivered by short-breaks agencies and packages of support being provided in a timely manner. This highlights and the importance of families receiving timely support that is of good quality.

In terms of actions to be taken forwards, the above learning around communication will be shared with all team members, as we strive to achieve a consistently good service for all children and families.

Work will be taken forward to improve the information available to families about short breaks and to improve the communication around the outcome of short-breaks panel and the rationale behind decision-making.

Action is also being taken forward with the Commissioning team around quality assurance of the service delivered by short breaks providers.

Fostering

During the year, 2 complaints were made in relation to the work of the fostering service. One was dealt with through the court process and the other related to the training offer made to foster carers. As a result, of the complaint in relation to foster carer training, the service has undertaken a review of the way in which fostering applicants and foster carers are supported to complete their training, support and development induction standards. Group support is now on offer for those carers who would like this and carers now have the option of completing their workbook either online or hard copy. A consultation with foster carers has taken place which include views on the training offer. The service is exploring if there are any avenues through which foster carers could access a recognised qualification.

Looked After Children (LAC) and Permanency

Communication between social workers and families is a clear overarching theme arising from complaints received during 2021-2022. It is apparent that changes in social worker have contributed to information not always being communicated effectively. A range of measures have been taken during the year increase staffing stability and more children and families are now benefiting from improved communication with permanent social workers.

The learning from the complaints received will be shared with the service to ensure that this is taken forward.

Multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and responsive services

Responsive Services are committed to learning from complaints. From the seven complaints received between 2021 and 2022, there were no identifiable themes. The findings of these complaints have been considered to support in the continuous improvement of services for children, families and professionals. It is anticipated that this approach will support in a reduction of the complaints we receive year on year.

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

Responsive Services are seeking to understand the experiences of families and to encourage greater engagement with parents and children making sure they feel involved, are listened to and views are clearly recorded in all contacts and referrals.

Quality and Assurance (Child Protection Conference Chair Service and Participation Service) / Child Protection Conference Chair Service

Child Protection (CP) Conference Chair Service

There was one complaint received in respect of this service area over the 21/22 period and this related to a young person's experience of pre-child protection conference meeting with the child protection conference chair.

The key concerns raised were in relation to the interaction/behaviour by the chair, with the young person feeling they were not able to discuss the issues they wanted to raise or share their views; they did not feel listened to, responded to, or valued and did not feel there was the opportunity to be seen alone with the chair which is what was wanted.

The Service Manager for the CP Chair Service was able to meet with the young person to better understand their experience and apologise for how this had made them feel. Whereas there were some differences in perception and interpretation of what had happened, there were some clear areas for learning that were followed up individually and with the team. Agreement was reached about what needed to happen for them and others to ensure a more positive experience moving forward.

This included:

- CP Chairs ensuring that young people have opportunity to meet with them alone should they want this.
- CP Chairs taking a relational approach with children and young people, creating an environment that allows young people to be listened to, share their views and be heard.
- CP Chairs demonstrate they value young people's views, and these views are responded to; when the response/outcome is not in keeping with their wishes, the reasons and rationale are explained fully and clearly.

The CP Chair Service is committed to providing consistency and quality of approach for children and families in Coventry and have devised Practice Standards to support best impact and outcomes. The areas for learning identified above, are incorporated into these standards and the service is held accountable for meeting them.

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Service

There were four complaints in total for this service area over 2021/2022 with one partially upheld and three not upheld; learning was identified from three of the four, with the aim of supporting best practice, improvement, and development in the service.

The main theme was around lack of understanding of LADO/Position of Trust and related processes, procedures, and referrals to regulatory bodies from those who were subject to these. In addition, there were issues identified relating to timeliness of response to complaints, awareness of referral to LADO by those who were subject to this including support available when additional needs are a factor.

The LADO Service takes all complaints seriously and learning is carefully considered by the responsible managers and translated into actions for improvement. This has included feedback for individuals as well as identifying areas to be incorporated into the LADO annual work plan for 22/23 as follows:

- Tight management grip and oversight of LADO related complaints and close communication with Complaints Service to ensure timely response and action.
- Ensuring that if the complaint involves or potentially involves more than one department/area within Children's Services there is timely and effective communication across these, to agree roles, responsibilities, and timeframes for response; Customer Services include this information in their complaint acknowledgement.
- LADO follow up, tracking and monitoring systems have been strengthened to ensure actions for employers from Position of Trust meetings have been completed and outcomes clearly recorded – this includes ensuring subjects are aware and supported as needed.
- Review LADO referral form and POT agenda to ensure consideration to any additional needs is included and relevant actions progressed accordingly (learning/communication/disability factors).
- Devise for those subject to LADO/POT procedure and process an information guide – to include roles and responsibilities of employers/self-employed individuals and referrals to regulatory bodies/DBS.

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service

One complaint relating to the IRO Service was received over the reporting period and this related to a parent being dissatisfied with the service provided by their daughter's Independent Reviewing Officer; the parent was seeking a change of IRO for their child.

Although the complaint was not upheld it was still reviewed to consider any areas of learning. None were identified on this occasion, but some good practice was noted that supported best outcomes and impact for the young person concerned.

This entailed a decision to retain the same IRO as this supported consistency and continuity for the young person concerned, considered their wishes and feelings and preserved the longstanding relationship they had with their IRO.

Placements

One complaint was received by a member of public that observed interactions between a staff member and a child in the community. The complaint was fully investigated and included a one-to-one discussion with the child. The antecedents to the observed incident were unable to be shared, but it was acknowledged that it could be perceived that the staff member was angry and stern in her approach to the child. Reflective discussions with the member of staff and child identified that a number of different strategies had been tried during the evening and been unsuccessful, as the 9-year-old was refusing to return home, but the staff member used her relationship with the child to support them to return home.

Work continues to be undertaken in relation to embedding restorative practice and relationship-based practice.

Social Work Academy

The operational teams in the social work academy support new cohorts of Newly Qualified Social Workers into the service. The Academy supports their learning as new social workers step into professional practice, this means there is always new staff being brought into the service. The learning from the complaints for the Academy relates to relational practice and the journey coming out of the pandemic. The learning and development offer within the service is being developed alongside the roll out of Coventry Family Valued, relational and restorative practice models. Also, as the service moves out of the pandemic and returns to business as usual, there has been an increased focus to support Newly Qualified Social Workers to undertake face to face visits, the pandemic has impacted upon student placement opportunities and the learning relates to developing this practice.

There has also been learning and discussions around the use of social media in the context of professional standards.

Team Central

Team Central Between 2021 and 2022 complaints have continued to reduce as improved practice is embedded.

From the complaints either upheld or partially upheld there are 4 common themes:

- 1) Communication
- 2) Conduct of the Social Worker
- 3) Concerns around the timeliness of the assessment process.
- 4) Engaging with fathers and keeping them up to date with information.

Social Workers are encouraged to respond to families and professionals in a timely way and share information about the Children and Families Assessment Process at the onset of their intervention. An introduction pack is now routinely used by social workers when they visit a family for the first time to provide families with the necessary knowledge to improve their understanding of the work, we undertake which should ensure that they feel included valued and respected throughout the process. Guidance around expectations of Social Workers is now embedded in the form of Practice Standards and recording guidance so they are clear on what constitutes best practice. Training has been provided to assist with engaging fathers to ensure they are included. This is provided as part of a social Workers induction and routinely monitored by managers. 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.

Team East

During this year, there have been (x) number of complaints from children and families who we work with. The themes which are present in the complaints from children and families, includes the following:

The language which we use in our reports and the way in which children and families struggle to connect with what we are reporting on in respect of their family's circumstances. Some of the language we have used has been social work centric and unhelpful and at times perceived to be rude. Families have also identified factual inaccuracies or misrepresentation in our reports.

The other theme was about the legal basis for a care plan as well as different views on harm within a family system. Some children and families have disagreed with decisions about whether they should be supported via a CIN or CP plan or an Child Arrangements Order or SGO.

Other themes have included a perceived lack of support with housing, missing home visits and attendance at core group meetings.

In terms of our learning and response to our complaints, we have done the following:

- Staff are being trained in line with Family Valued with a specific focus on how we use language. East Service have run bespoke workshops on language and our approach to working with children and families in a relational and restorative way. Our relational practice lead is delivering a plan which is strengthening practice across the service.
- We are working more relationally and restoratively so that families understand the plans which are in place to support children on children in need and child protection plans and that families understand the legal basis of their care plans.
- We have strengthened our approach to housing, especially families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. We are also auditing children on child protection plans and as part of this, we are looking at attendance and participation in core groups.

Team South

The South Area is committed to improving our service and engagement with children and families, making sure, they feel involved, are listened to, are respected using a relationship-based approach. We have embedded a system where we routinely seek service user feedback every month and, we discuss the feedback in the team and the learning themes. It is important to us that all children and families receive a good service overall, receive the support they need and that we continue to listen to families as partners in safety planning to help improve our help and protection offer. As part of the Coventry Family Valued programme we are also working to improve our recording so that records are presented more professionally, using restorative language.

Team West

A review of the complaints received in the West Area over this period, has identified the main themes of those upheld or partially upheld. These include unprofessional communication, data protection, not involving or listening to families and not responding to families in a restorative manner. Where complaints have been upheld/particularly upheld, the learning has been shared with relevant members of the service and discussed within supervision to ensure that learning is embedded into practice. In addition, the Restorative Practice lead has completed a session with a practitioner to reflect on the family's experiences and also met with a family with the practitioner. The West area is committed to improving our service delivery and engagement with families, ensuring that they are listened to, respected and responded to in a restorative manner. It is important to us that children and families feel valued when working with us and over the next year we will be ensuring that responses to complaints are more restorative as we seek to improve on the service we deliver.

Through Care

The two main key themes from a review of the complaints relate to communication and access to entitlements. As a result of the review of the complaints a welcome pack has been designed with full details of entitlements. This pack is provided to all children and young people within the service and positive feedback has been shared by children and young people that have received the packs. In terms of communication with parents and children and young people. This has been a priority within the service and learning has been shared as a result of the complaints received. A group supervision session has been created specifically with a focus on this area of communication. The feedback from complaints is reviewed 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's 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. We have the same forums each month for managers, to ensure the same learning is applied.



We will 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.

Compliments received in 2021/22 are the highest number received in **13 years**

Out of the total of **235 complaints** received overall, **40 complaints** had been resolved informally

Even though the number of complaints has increased in 2021/22, out of a total of 177 Statutory complaints, **163 were resolved at Stage 1**

The number of complaints investigated at **Statutory Stage 2 remained comparatively low** even though there has been an increase of complaints received in 2021/22

Statutory Stage 3 complaints continue to remain extremely low showing majority of complaints are resolved at Stage 1

The average timeframe to investigate statutory complaints continues to be under the guidance timeframes

Communication and Standard of Service remain to be the two main complaint concerns however with the increase of complaints in 2021/22 these concerns on average have shown to reduce compared to 2020/21

The internal investigation form has provided service areas 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](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/) is available at www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/.

Ilius Ahmed
Complaints Officer
Customer Services- Improvement & Development
Coventry City Council
March 2023

John Stewart
Complaints Administrator
Customer Services- Improvement & Development
Coventry City Council
March 2023

