

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



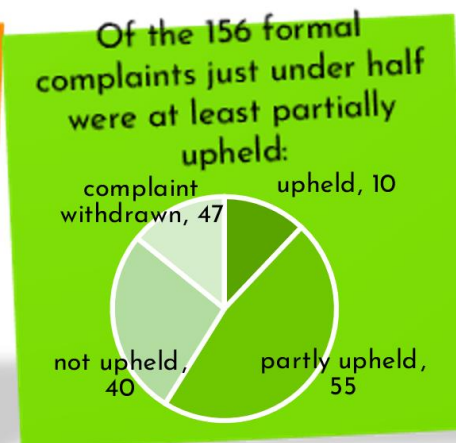
**COMMENTS
COMPLIMENTS
& COMPLAINTS**


**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**.

Table of contents

Infographic	2
Welcome	3
Background	3
Summary	4
Feedback.....	5
Advocacy.....	5
Complaints	6
Statutory complaints	6
Resolution of complaints	7
Timescales	8
Equality	10
Ombudsman.....	12
Comments.....	12
Compliments	12
Service improvements and learning points.....	16
Further information	24

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. 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:

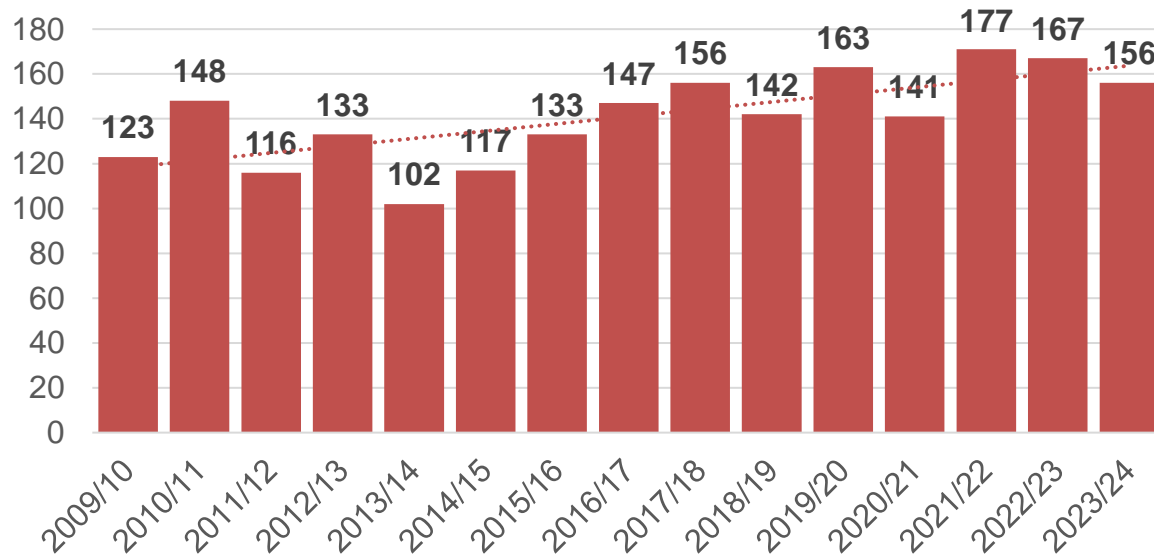
Method	Number of Complaints
Email	110
Contact Centre/Form	42
Letter	2
Telephone	2
Total	156

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	156

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.

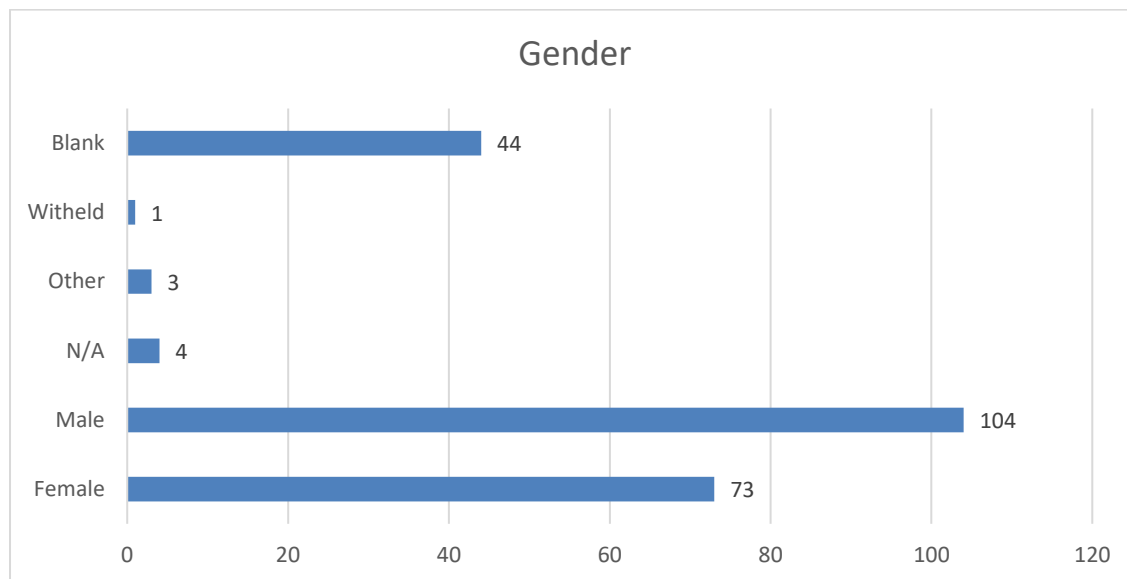
Investigations of Stage 2 complaints under the statutory procedure often need to be extended beyond the 25 working days timescale up to 65 working days due to the complexity of the issues being considered. In these situations, the importance of keeping the complainant informed and securing their agreement 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.

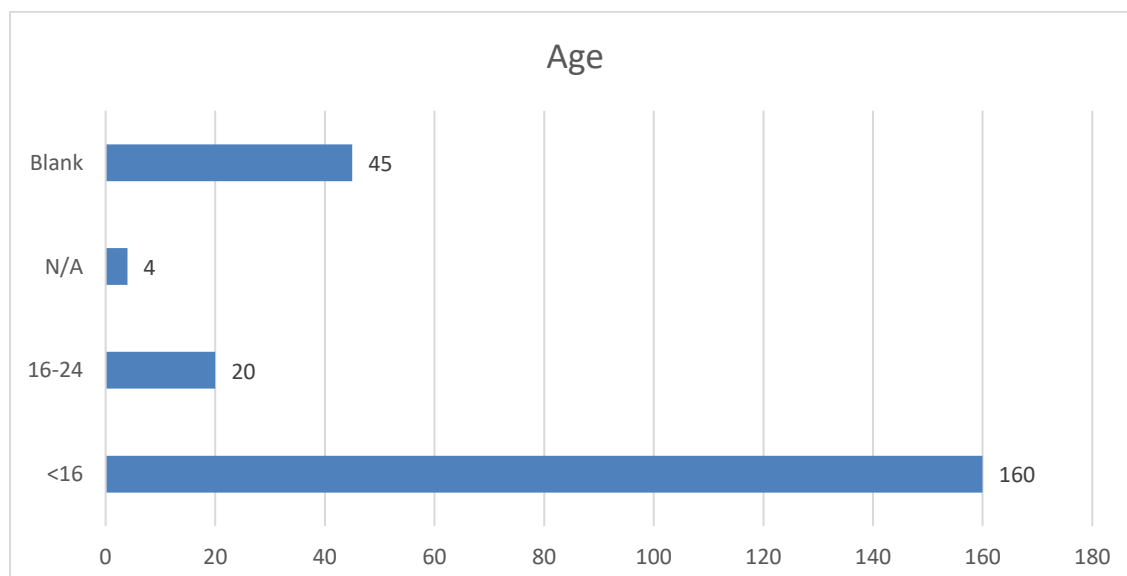
Equality

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.

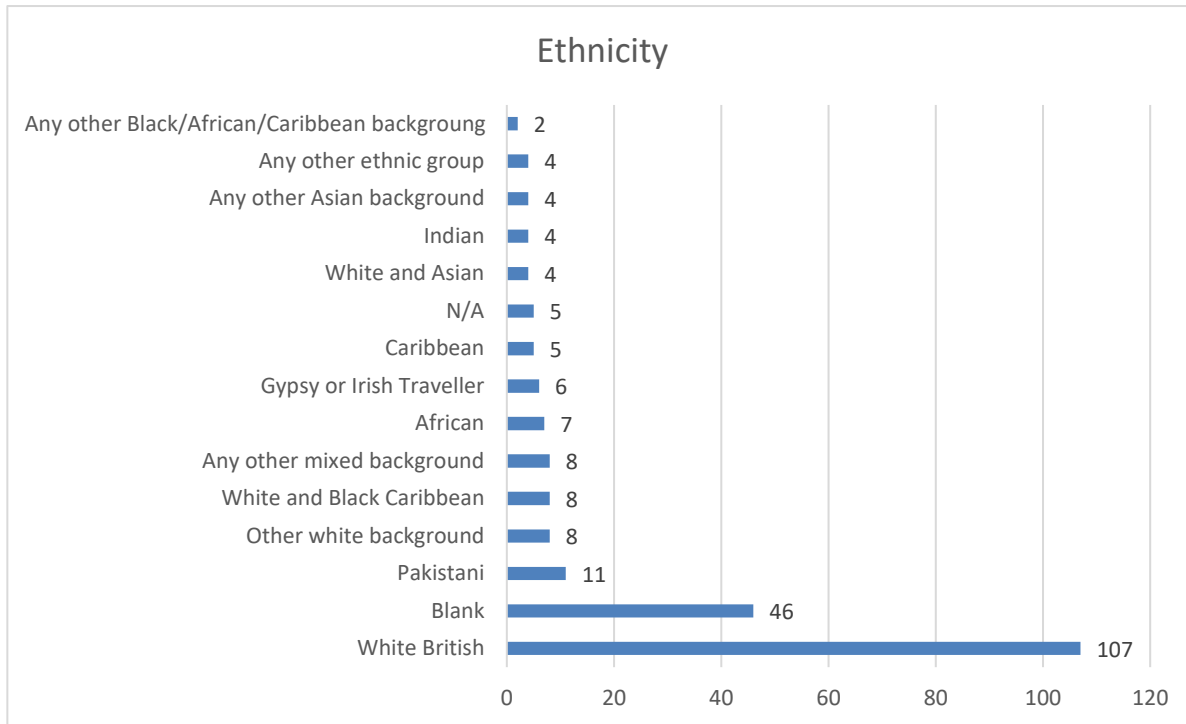
The below graph shows out of 229 complaints received during 2023-24 (excluding SEN), 104 were from male complainant's/service users and 73 were from female complainant's/service users.



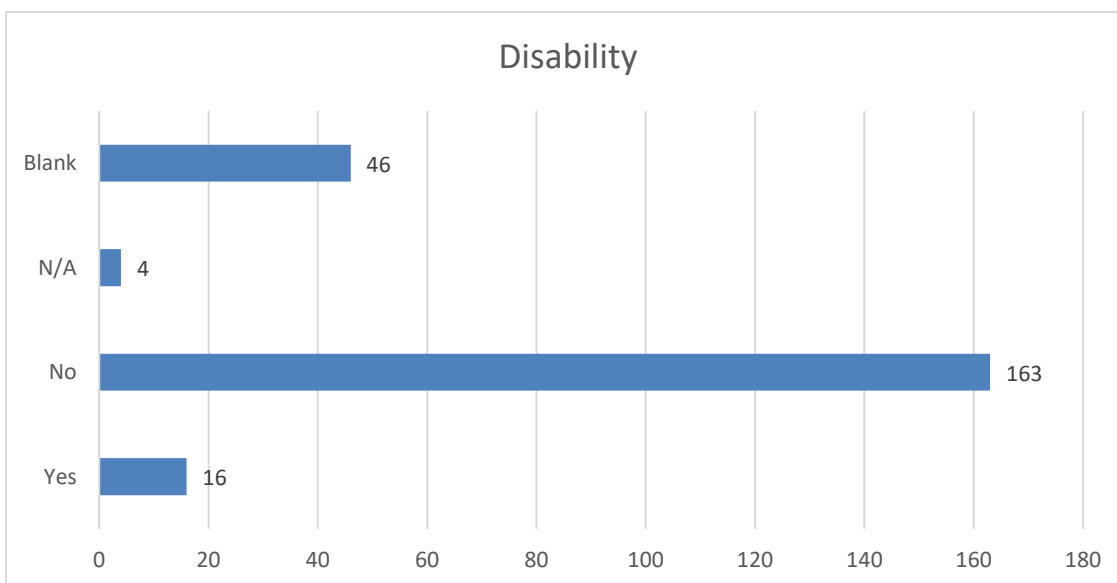
The below graph shows the age range of the complainant or service user. 156 of the complaints received in 2023-24 (excluding SEN) were from or submitted on behalf of young people under the age of 16, 20 of complaints received were from or submitted on behalf of young people between the ages of 16-24. 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.

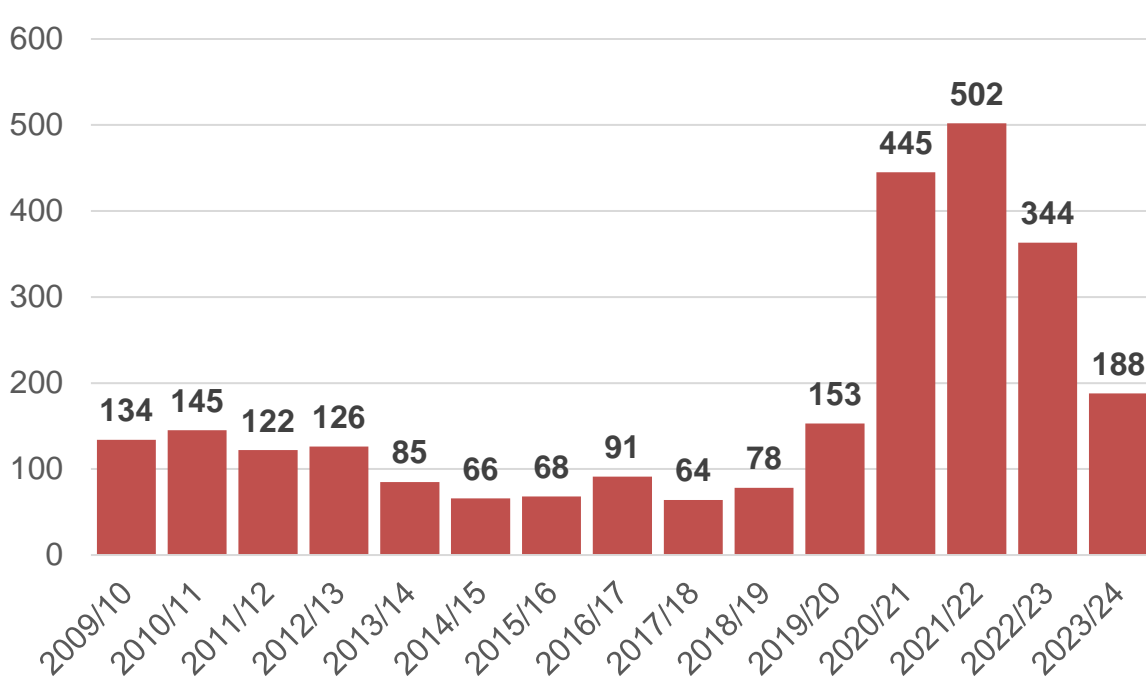
[Name] shared she really values the support that has been offered to her about being reflective and recognising the impact her parenting can have, she knows feels able to "take a step back" to prevent challenges in her relationship with her daughter and she recognises now how the wider family environment 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
Total	107

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

Team	Compliments
Safeguarding	0
Quality Assurance	1
Children's Champion	0
Total	1

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 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](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/) is available at 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
November 2024

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

Kenneth Kanebi
Ombudsman Liaison Officer
Service Recovery Officer
Customer Services – Improvement & Development
November 2024