

Children's Services Complaints and Representations Annual Report

2024-25



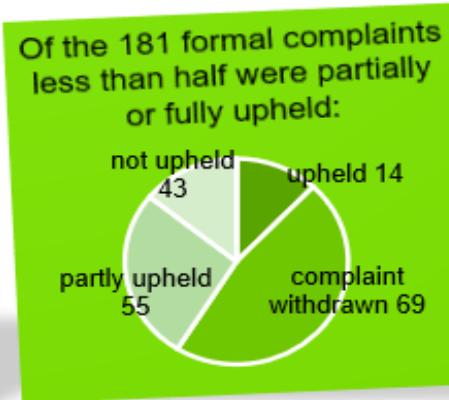
Coventry City Council

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Children's Services 2024/25 Complaints & Representations key facts & figures

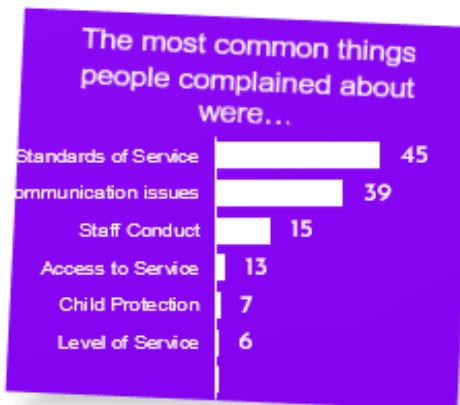


In 2024/25, children's services received **257** complaints (181 were statutory, 6 corporate, and 39 informal). **10** complaints were made by young people; **10** were supported by an advocate.



Children's services complaints can be complex & timescales can be protracted. In 2024/25:

Complaints	Average time taken
Stage 1 152	13 days
Stage 2 21	57 days
Stage 3 8	36 days



In 2024/25 children's social care also received **154** 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 2024/25, the LGSCO received **31** complaints about education & children's services, of which they investigated and upheld **5**

Listening to service users' complaints helps services improve by helping managers identify changes that are required. Key learning points from 2024/25 include: improving case recording and clarity of assessment evidence sources, improved frequency of communication, and providing clearer guidance for financial support for kinship carers

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Introduction

Welcome to the 2024-25 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 Social Care services provided by or commissioned by Coventry City Council for the year 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

Children's Social Care services support vulnerable children, young people and families by providing extra help and protection from harm, including residential care, fostering, adoption and support to families, children with disabilities and young people in trouble with the police.

Local Authorities are required by statute to have a system for receiving representations made by or on behalf of children who use the Children's Social Services they provide or commission (*Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006*). This is also underpinned by the statutory guidance on representations contained in *Childrens Social Care - Getting the Best from Complaints*. Representations are defined as comments, compliments and complaints.

The purpose of the comments, compliments and complaints system is to ensure that:

- The views and experiences of people who use our services are heard
- Things that have gone wrong are put right quickly and effectively
- The Council learns from feedback (both positive and negative) so we can develop and improve our services
- We ensure that customers / service users remain at the heart of all we do

Some complaints received do not meet the criteria to be dealt with under the statutory procedure. Where this is the case, these are registered and actioned 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. Full details are available on our website www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints .

Summary

In 2024-25 Children's Social Care services received 257 complaints, up from 252 in 2023-24. 181 of these were **statutory complaints**, compared to 143 in 2023-24. 69 (38%) of these complaints were fully or partially upheld, which was 6 more than in 2023-24, although 6% lower in overall percentage terms.

The main themes of complaints received over this period were as follows:

- Standard of service / work
- Quality of communication / Delays in or no communication

- Delays in receiving services
- Attitude / Rudeness

Number of complaints received

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Stage 1	148	120	152
Stage 2	11	16	21
Stage 3	7	7	8
(Total Stat)	(166)	(143)	(181)
Corporate	16	15	6
Informal	49	70	39
Ombudsman	18	24	31
Total	249	252	257

Children's Services complaints were up by just 5 cases (+2%) on prior year, although the number of statutory complaints increased by 38 cases (+27%) overall, with 32 additional Stage 1 complaints, 5 additional Stage 2's and 1 additional Stage 3 review over the year. There were also 7 more cases (+29%) that were escalated to the Local Government Ombudsman in 2024-25 than in the previous year.

The increase in statutory Stage 1's complaints almost wholly matches the reduction in the number of those that were resolved informally / through local resolution compared with 2023-24, which is indicative of the more resolute approach of complainants who are increasingly requiring formal redress.

Overall Outcomes

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Upheld	8 (5%)	10 (7%)	14 (8%)
Partially Upheld	56 (34%)	53 (37%)	55 (30%)
Not Upheld	43 (26%)	39 (27%)	43 (24%)
Withdrawn	59 (35%)	41 (29%)	69 (38%)
Total	166	143	181

Overall the number of Upheld complaints (14) was 4 more than in 2023-24, but as a percentage of all complaints these were only 1% higher, while the number of Partially Upheld complaints was 2 more than prior year but as a percentage was 7% lower.

Overall the numbers Upheld or Partially Upheld were up by 6 (to 69), but as a percentage of all complaints, outcomes where there was an element of 'fault' were 6% lower (38%) in 2024-25 than in the prior year (44%).

Stage 1:

• Response times

The target to respond at Stage 1 is 10 working days, although the regulations do permit a further 10-day extension in cases where a detailed investigation and response is required.

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Average days open	9	12	13
Response <10 days	99 (67%)	57 (48%)	87 (57%)
Response >10 days	49 (33%)	63 (52%)	65 (43%)

The number and percentage of complaints responded to in time / without an extension was much improved in 2024-25, with an additional 30 complaints (+9%) being responded to in time compared with prior year. However, some particularly challenging and drawn-out Stage 1 investigations meant that the overall average response time was still 1 day higher than in 2023-24, and 3 days over the 10-day target.

• Outcomes

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Upheld	8 (5%)	8 (7%)	12 (8%)
Partially Upheld	46 (31%)	37 (31%)	39 (26%)
Not Upheld	43 (29%)	37 (31%)	36 (23%)
Withdrawn	51 (35%)	38 (31%)	65 (43%)
Total	148	120	152

The number of Upheld Stage 1 complaints (12) was 4 more than in 2023-24, but as a percentage of all complaints these were only 1% higher, while the number of Partially Upheld Stage 1 complaints was 2 more than prior year but as a percentage was 5% lower.

Overall the numbers Upheld or Partially Upheld were up by 6 (to 51), but as a percentage of all Stage 1's, outcomes where there was an element of 'fault' were 4% lower (34%) in 2024-25 than in the prior year (38%).

Stage 2: (Independent officer investigation)

• Response times

The local target to respond to an escalated Stage 2 complaint is 25 working days, although the regulations do permit up to 65 working days in more complex or detailed investigations.

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Average days open	48	75	57
Response <25 days	0	0	3 (14%)
Response 25 – 65 days	6 (55%)	6 (38%)	8 (38%)
Response >65+ days	5 (45%)	10 (62%)	10 (48%)

At 57 days the average response time was much improved on that of 2023-24, with 52% of Stage 2's (11 out of 21) being responded to in target. This is a 14% improvement on prior year and only 3% below that of 2022-23. Of the 10 Stage 2's that were out of time, these mostly related to some particularly challenging and complex investigations which required a high volume of documentation and records providing to (and analysing by) the independent investigating officer ahead of their making their report.

• Outcomes

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Upheld	0	1 (6%)	2 (10%)
Partially Upheld	8 (73%)	13 (81%)	11 (52%)
Not Upheld	0	0	4 (19%)
Withdrawn	3 (27%)	2 (13%)	4 (19%)
Total	11	16	21

Two Stage 2 complaints were Upheld and a further 11 Partially Upheld in 2024-25, being one less than in 2023-24. As a percentage of all Stage 2's received, outcomes where there was an element of 'fault' were 25% lower (62%) in 2024-25 than in the prior year (87%).

Stage 3: (Panel review)

• Response times

A Stage 3 review panel should be convened within 30 working days of the escalation request being accepted and acknowledged. This requires coordination of the availability of the complainant, three independent officers for the panel (one of whom will Chair), the

Investigating Officer and Independent Person who undertook the Stage 2 investigation, the Strategic Lead who was the adjudicating officer for the Stage 2 investigation, the Operational Lead for the service, and any other persons relevant to the review, when settling on a mutually agreeable date.

Following the review, the panel have up to 5 working days to report their findings. The Council then has up to 15 working days to consider these and issue a response, giving a total of 50 working days to complete a Stage 3 review.

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Response issued < 50 days	2	3	4
Response issued > 50 days	0	3	4
Withdrawn	5	1	0

Of the 8 Stage 3 panels held in 2024-25, 50% (4) were completed within time. This is the same percentage and one physical case more than in 2023-24.

• Outcomes

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Upheld	0	1 (14%)	0
Partially Upheld	2 (29%)	3 (43%)	5 (63%)
Not Upheld	0	2 (29%)	3 (37%)
Withdrawn	5 (71%)	1 (14%)	0
Total	7	7	8

Overall the numbers Upheld or Partially Upheld Stage 3's were up by 3 cases (8), which as a percentage of outcomes where there was an element of 'fault' was 7% higher (63%) in 2024-25 than in the prior year (57%).

Reasons for Upheld / Partially Upheld complaints - by team

Where complaints are Upheld or Partially upheld the number of issues / concerns raised will usually total more than the number of complaints themselves, as each complaint may raise several issues or span multiple service areas.

	CEN	CIC	EAS	FOS	SOU	THR	WES	OTH	TOTAL
Stat complaints received	13	37	15	11	21	17	46	21	181
Number Upheld	1	6	1	0	0	1	3	2	14
Number Partially Upheld	2	12	2	5	8	5	16	5	55
Issues / concerns raised									
Standard of service	2	10	2	4	4	4	14	5	45
Quality of communication	2	6	0	3	4	2	5	2	24
Delays in / no communication	0	5	0	1	1	3	3	2	15
Delay in receiving service	0	6	0	0	3	2	3	1	15
Standard of work	1	1	0	1	3	1	5	3	15
Attitude / Rudeness	2	5	1	1	2	0	4	0	15
Access to service	0	5	0	0	1	2	3	2	13
Incorrect information given	1	6	0	1	0	0	1	1	10
Child Protection procedures	1	4	0	0	1	1	0	0	7
Poor quality / level of service	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	6
Abuse from service user / child	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	4
Other matters	3	7	3	5	3	5	13	5	44
Total Issues Upheld or Partially	14	56	6	17	23	21	54	22	213

CEN = Team Central

CIC = Children In Care (previously *Looked After Children*)

EAS = Team East

FOS = Fostering and Adoption

SOU = Team South

THR = Through Care

WES = Team West

OTH = All others

Please see Appendix 1 for a high-level summary of key remedial actions taken or lessons learnt from the Upheld and Partially Upheld complaints above.

Ombudsman investigations

If, after having completed the statutory complaints process, the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may ask the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman) to review their complaint. The Ombudsman looks at individual complaints about councils, all adult social care providers (including care homes and home care agencies) and some other organisations providing local public services. It investigates matters fairly and impartially and is free to use.

In 2024-25, 31 Childrens Social Care complaints were escalated to the Ombudsman, which was 7 more than in 2023-24 (24) and 13 more than in 2022-23 (18). Of these, 5 were investigated and Upheld, up from 2 investigated and Not Upheld in 2023-24. Symbolic remedies totalling £1850 were made in respect of the Ombudsman's findings, as summarised below:

- Failure to advise X of physical attack on her son in a timely manner, and the distress and frustration caused
- Failure to consider complaint in accordance with statutory escalation requirements (x2)
- Delays in child-in-need process and in implementation of child protection plan
- Delays in completing Stage 2 investigation within statutory timescales (x2)

Remedies provided

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Upheld	8	10	14
Partially Upheld	56	53	55
Apology made	n/a	n/a	65
Service provided	n/a	n/a	26
Practice changed	n/a	n/a	25
Financial Remedies	7	10	8

Of the financial remedies made, these were determined as follows:

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Number	8	10	12
Council determined	£7467 (7)	£12600 (10)	£5475 (8)
Ombudsman	£500 (1)	£0	£1850 (4)
TOTAL £	£7967	£12600	£7325

Compliments received

A compliment is an unsolicited expression of praise or recognition for a member of staff (or service area) where they have provided excellent customer service or gone above and beyond the expected standard.

Compliments can be received from service users, their family members and from carers, thanking individual members of staff and teams for the ongoing support and quality of care provided. Positive feedback also helps us to recognise good practice and further develop our services to add value to the outcomes for our users.

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Compliments	363	188	154
Stage 1 Complaints	148	120	152
Ratio of compliments to complaints	2.5 : 1	1.6 : 1	1 : 1

Compliments - by team

	2023-24	2024-25
Team Central	23	16
Team East	5	10
Team South	11	5
Team West	16	13
Responsive Services / MASH	23	8
Youth Offending	29	52
Through Care	53	30
Edge of Care	13	1
Children In Care / LAC	6	6
Fostering and Adoption	5	5
Children's Disability Team	3	1
Quality Assurance	1	0
Early Learning	0	2
Help & Protection Family Hub	0	3
Other	0	2
TOTAL	188	154

Examples of some of the compliments received during 2024-25 include:

The social worker was absolutely amazing. Not once did I feel judged or that a preconception was made about me. She made me and my children feel very comfortable and followed through with every single thing she said she would do. She is a breath of fresh air and I felt she saw me for the parent I am not the illness I have. I have found dealing with professionals extremely hard but she has shown me that there are people who genuinely care. My children spoke very highly of her after every interaction.

I am so pleased to see that there has been the opportunity given to parents to contribute, this is often not seen. The CPR is also written with sensitivity, understanding of parental history and lived experience which again is nice to see.

I wanted to take a moment to share my appreciation for (Name) and the unwavering professionalism and dedication she consistently shows towards one of our shared clients (Name). Having worked with social workers for many years, I can honestly say that I have never met a social worker as committed to ensuring that service users received person centred care.

I just want to thank you and highlight the good work you are doing to support XXX

You have taken your time to build up a trusting and valued relationship with her over the past few years.

From talking to XXX recently it was clear that she values the emotional support you are providing to her

Finally, whilst it is the PDYM staff's job to offer visitors an all-round exciting and challenging trip... you always go above and beyond.

Your care, understanding, and love for what you do and give, is amazing.

She shared that she has never worked with Coventry Children Services before and has been really impressed with how available and supportive she has found all professionals to be. She wanted to send her thanks.

Appendix 1: Summary of Lessons learnt and / or remedial actions taken

Case Recording and Clarity

- Remind staff of the importance of following case recording procedures and ensuring that information (including emails) are uploaded and properly recorded on to the electronic systems. This should include clear reasons to support decisions and /or actions
- Social workers should evidence their advice and actions, such as sending meeting minutes, in the case records to avoid any confusion or disputes
- Phone calls to the Emergency Duty Team should be recorded on the child's case files and the allocated social worker emailed to acknowledge and / or call them back

Assessments and Reports

- Assessments would benefit from a fuller and more holistic exploration of family dynamics, circumstances and background
- Child and Family assessments should contain details of partner agencies' contributions to them
- Social workers should clearly identify their professional opinions in reports / assessments and ensure these are supported by evidence
- Subjective views, where there is no firm evidence to support them, should be clearly identified as such, rather than presented as factual statements
- Social workers should include parent(s) in the Child & Family assessment
- Child and Family assessments should be redacted for parent(s) and for the court
- Parent(s) should be provided with a copy of the Child and Family assessment before it is shared with professionals and the court

Communication and Timeliness

- Appropriate measures should be taken to ensure that communication with families is clear, timely, and well-documented
- Ensure all assessments and meeting minutes / reports are shared with families in a prompt manner and families kept up to date
- Ensure there is a clear understanding of the expectations of the safety plan provided from the outset.
- Risk assessment timeline to be agreed with both parents. If one party is not working with the deadlines, then this needs to be communicated with the other parent.
- Promote regular contact with parent(s). Emails and messages should be responded to in a timely manner. Increased communication between visits, including updates / improved information sharing, would be beneficial

- Parent(s) should be updated on any significant events in relation to their children in a timely manner
- Managers to review cases where social workers are absent from work unexpectedly or for any length of time. There is a need to improve communication with families when social workers are absent from work.
- Ensure any changes in social worker are promptly communicated to all parties
- Ensure parent(s) receive a copy of the Child and Family assessment at the time of case closure, and closure letters sent out in a timely manner

Consistency

- Continue to stabilise the social work workforce to ensure children and families have consistency in who is working with them, and can build relationships with them
- Ensure any changes in social worker are promptly communicated to all parties

Financial Considerations

- Undertake a full review of support to Kinship Carers, including Special Guardians, following the publication of new practice guidance
- New guidance for special guardians to clarify how they can request additional financial and therapeutic support, including clear eligibility criteria.
- Implementation of an automatic biannual review system to reassess special guardian's financial assistance and additional needs support as children's needs evolve
- Ensure Special Guardians are provided with clear, specific reasons when deductions are made from their allowances. This will help ensure that they are aware that deductions, such as child benefit, are not applied in a blanket manner but are tailored to their individual needs and resources.
- Written guidance to be developed and shared regarding the adoption process, specifically clarifying the implications for finances and fostering payments, to ensure clarity for all parties.

Best Practice

- Reinforce the important roles of parents for children in care, and the duty of ensuring that they are included in decision making
- Consider development of a practice standards document or similar that sets out expectations for social workers for matters such as communication and responding to emails. (Various good examples are available from other local authorities)
- Where the child's (or parent's) first language is not English, consider offering advocacy or an interpreter earlier

- When booking an interpreter, ensure there will be enough time for all matters to be covered, so the parent has sufficient opportunity to contribute to the meetings / visits and their voice is heard
- The frequency of social worker updates should be agreed to help manage parent expectations, along with what will be included (i.e. photos of the children)
- Social workers should consider parent(s) availability when booking Child in Need meetings to ensure that they have an opportunity to attend
- Social workers to ensure they invite both parents and other professionals to Child In Need meetings so that they are kept fully updated or aware (especially when case closing)
- Both parents should be given equal time to present their perspectives in child protection conferences
- When plans for family time are made, dates should be arranged in advance so everyone knows when this is due to take place. The plan should be shared with all relevant parties, including the children

Complaints process monitoring

- Service areas to ensure they have appropriate monitoring processes in place to ensure all actions and recommendations captured at Stage 1 or Stage 2 of the statutory complaints process are followed through
- Guidance to be developed to support Investigating Officers to contact / interview key professionals who have left the Local Authority, but also to help manage complainant expectations where staff members are no longer working within the Local Authority

Appendix 2: Equalities and protected data

Collating information regarding complainants' protected characteristics helps us better understand our customer base and ensure our services are equally accessible to all.

This information is indicative and aggregated for reporting purposes only, being sourced from data already held on the Council's systems (including those for Corporate, informal and statutory Stage 1 complaints) rather than being specifically collected as part of the statutory complaints process. Where an individual's data is not held, these are recorded as Not Specified (N/S).

