

Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2024/2025



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1. Purpose and Summary of Report

- 1.1. To report to Members and Officers on Leicestershire County Council's (LCC) Children's Social Care complaints activity from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.
- 1.2. To meet the requirements of Regulation 18(2) of Statutory Instrument 2006 No. 1681 Local Authority Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2006 and Regulation 13(3) of Statutory Instrument 2006 No. 1738 The Children Act (1989) Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.
- 1.3. For the current year the following Statutory guidance remains relevant:
 - Getting the best from Complaints 2006
 - the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) [Practitioner Guidance](#) which should be referenced alongside the existing statutory guidance
- 1.4. This annual report provides analysis and commentary for Children and Family Services on all complaints managed under the statutory process. Those complainants who do not qualify to use the statutory process are considered under the County Council's Corporate Complaint procedure and reported in the Corporate Annual Report presented to the Scrutiny Commission.
- 1.5. The Complaints Manager role is responsible for ensuring that complaints are handled appropriately and providing support to the department in resolving complex cases. In addition, the Complaints Manager will highlight key trends that emerge each year and any recommendations that would improve how we work. The Children and Family Services department retain responsibility for actioning any such improvements.

2. Complaints and compliments received 2024-25

2.1. Foreword

This report only considers complaints identified as statutory complaints as defined by the Statutory Guidance outlined within “Getting the Best from complaints”

There are two key tests applied in making the above assessment.

- 1) Is the complainant eligible?
- 2) Is the subject matter within scope of the procedure?

Concerns that fall outside of the scope of the statutory complaints’ procedure are responded to by the Complaints and Information team and are then handled in line with the relevant alternative route which typically includes

- Consideration as a corporate complaint
- Referral to the Leicestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Board (LSCB) appeals procedure
- Explanation that the matter cannot be considered as the subject matter has / will be adjudicated in Court

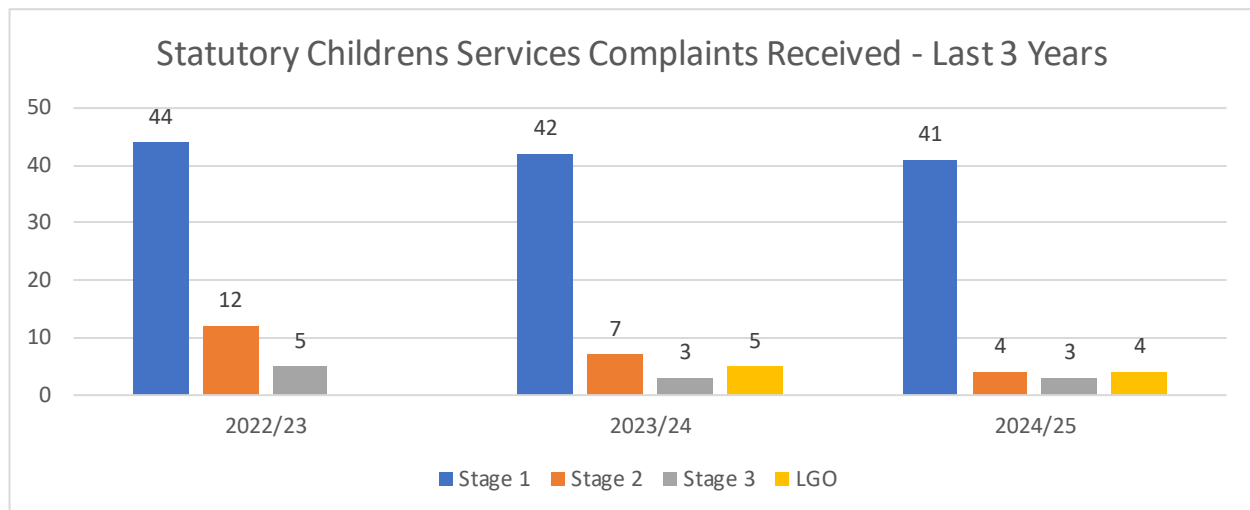
2.2. Complaint Volumes

Volumes of complaints are considered in light of the number of cases which Children’s Social Care dealt with during the year. Table 1 shows the key referral categories and the increased demand on services.

Table 1 – Social Care demand	2023/243	2024/25	% Change
Referrals to Children’s Social Care	6190	6797	+9.8
Single Assessments	4507	6530	+44.8
Children in Care at 31 March	726	694	-4.4
Child Protection Plans at 31 March	430	506	+17.6

The above shows a mixed picture but with a significant increase in the number of referrals. Each of these will trigger action from Childrens Social Care and therefore could form the basis of a complaint.

To provide further context to complaint volumes, the number of referrals to Children’s Social Care in Table 1 has been used and this shows that 0.7% go on to make a formal statutory complaint. This has remained unchanged for the last 2 reporting years.



As illustrated above (Table 2), 48 complaints were accepted under the statutory procedure. This represented a decrease on the previous year (52)

Of those 48, 4 requested escalation to Stage 2 and required an Independent Investigation be carried out (8%)

There are also a number of complaints regarding Childrens Social Care matters that are responded to under the Corporate Complaints procedure so to give the full picture of complaints, table 3 sets out all social care complaints for the last 2 years.

This shows that, overall, there has been an increase of 3% in the total number of complaints about Childrens Social Care.

The Council follows guidance issued by the LGSCO in assessing eligibility to the statutory procedure and this sees most complaints that are **not** focused on the impact on a child handled under our corporate procedure. This helps control costs incurred should complaints escalate.

Table 3: All Complaints about Childrens Social Care

Financial Year	Statutory Complaints	Corporate Complaints	Total
2023-24	52	129	181
2024-25	48	168	216

2.3. Complaints accepted at stages 2 & 3

The number of requests considered at Stage 2 of the process reduced by 4 compared with the previous year. As a percentage of Stage 1 complaints this represents 8%, very slightly reduced from 2023/24 (10%).

Three Stage 3 panels were convened during the year. Stage 3 Panels cannot re-investigate complaints and as such can only look at the quality and comprehensiveness of the Independent report at Stage 2.

The LGSCO take a rigid approach on consideration of early referrals. The implications are that it is more important than ever to be clear at the outset which complaints procedure should be used. Once the statutory procedure has been initiated, the LGSCO expects all stages to be completed.

This has implications for the department and highlights the need to ensure every effort is made to resolve complaints at Stage 1 of the process.

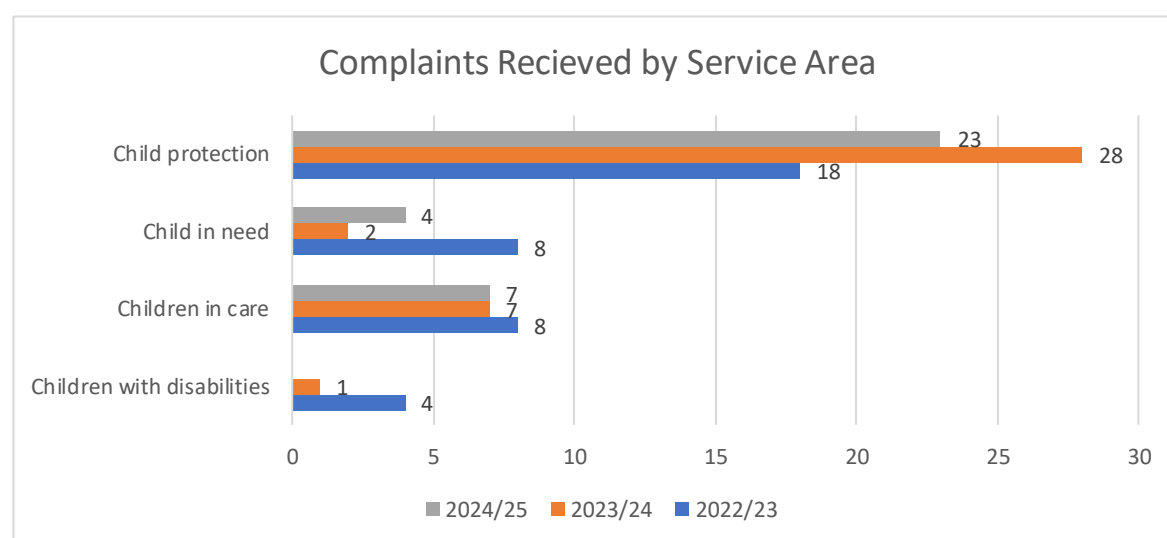
The Ombudsman considered 3 complaints during the year which had exhausted all stages of the statutory complaints procedure, and 1 complaint which was referred following stage 2 for early referral.

2.4. Statutory complaints by Service area

The Complaints Manager records all statutory complaints at a service level and table 4 below shows the results for 2024-25 overlaid against the previous year.

The biggest change that presents is a decrease of complaints regarding Child Protection. Themes are explored later in this report.

Table 4: Complaints received by Service Area



2.5 Compliments received

During 2024-25 there were 6 compliments recorded regarding Children's Social Care officers. This is a decrease on last year (18). The Complaints Team can only record compliments which are received directly via our online compliments form, or shared when received directly into the service. As many compliments are received directly by the service, the above data may not be truly reflective of the overall amount received.

The positive comments received appears in Appendix A and provide an important balance when reviewing the performance of the department.

3. Service Performance 2024-25

The key performance indicators for speed of response, outcomes, causes and identified learning are linked to complaints that have been *resolved* within any given reporting period rather than received.

This is important as it ensures that full data sets can be presented, both to departments on a quarterly basis, and at year end. It also avoids the scenario whereby Ombudsman findings of maladministration might not appear in annual reports.

It follows from the above that the figures presented below will not match the data presented in section two of this report which focused on complaints *received*.

3.1. Responsiveness to complaints

Table 5: Children's Services Performance at stage 1

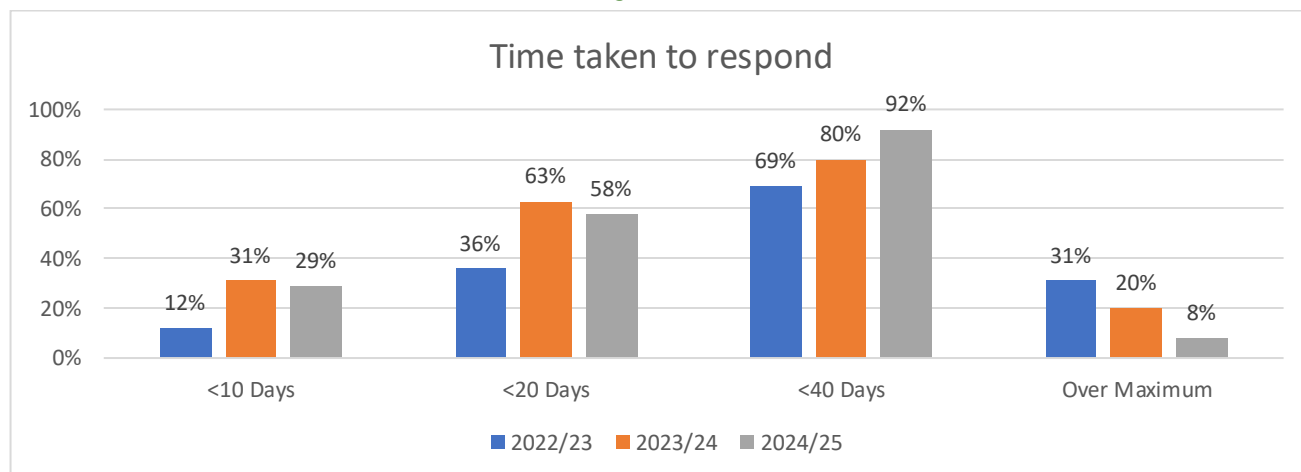


Table 5 above details the time taken to respond to complaints at Stage 1 and provides a comparison between last year and the current reporting year.

58% of complaints at Stage 1 were resolved within 20 working days, a slight decrease from 2023/24 (63%).

Statutory guidance sets out an expectation that “the majority” of complaints should be resolved within 10 working days with 20 working days considered reasonable for “complex cases”. Whilst

improvements are being made this will need to be a continued focus to ensure more complaints are resolved within these statutory timescales.

It is important to note that, where complainants have not agreed an extension and there is no good reason for a complaint to exceed 20 working days, the Complaints Manager is duty bound to offer a Stage 2 investigation.

The Complaints Manager has not had to exercise this duty during the year.

Response timescales at Stage 2

Completion of Stage 2 investigations within the statutory guidelines (65 working days) has improved throughout the year with 3 of the 4 completed investigations achieving this.

Regional and national benchmarking shows that the Council is very much in line with other authorities and the Ombudsman has indicated that providing the Local Authority is managing the expectations of a complainant and not unduly delaying resolution, there is unlikely to be severe criticism of not meeting this timescale.

Response timescales at Stage 3

There were 3 requests to escalate to Stage 3 during the year with 3 of them proceeding to panel hearings.

Of the 3 complaints heard by panel, 3 of these were managed within the statutory timescales.

There are no concerns with the timeliness of this stage of the process

3.2. Complaint Causes

To try to understand the main causes leading to complaints, the complaints team assess the underlying causes for each complaint determined.

Very often there are multiple factors being complained about and to reflect this the Complaints team now record against multiple categories.

The biggest single cause during 2024-25 was around staff conduct / customer care. Inevitably these were often interlinked with poor communication.

3.3. Who complains?

In 2024/25, two complaints were made by children or young people¹. This is very lower than 2023/24 (9%) and represents 4% of the overall volume. The remaining complaints were made by parents or others who were deemed to have sufficient interest in the child's well-being.

It is not unusual for numbers of complaints made by young persons to be proportionally low and this mirrors the situation reported by regional colleagues.

It remains a key priority of the Complaints Manager to ensure that everything is being done to improve accessibility of the complaints process to our children and young people and there continue to be good links between the Children's Rights Officers and Complaints. Regular discussions are held to ensure and check that appropriate processes are followed to resolve issues.

Most complaints continue to be made by parents or family members (where they have sufficient interest in the child or young person's welfare.²)

3.4. Complaint Outcomes

Table 6: Children's Services complaints recorded by outcome

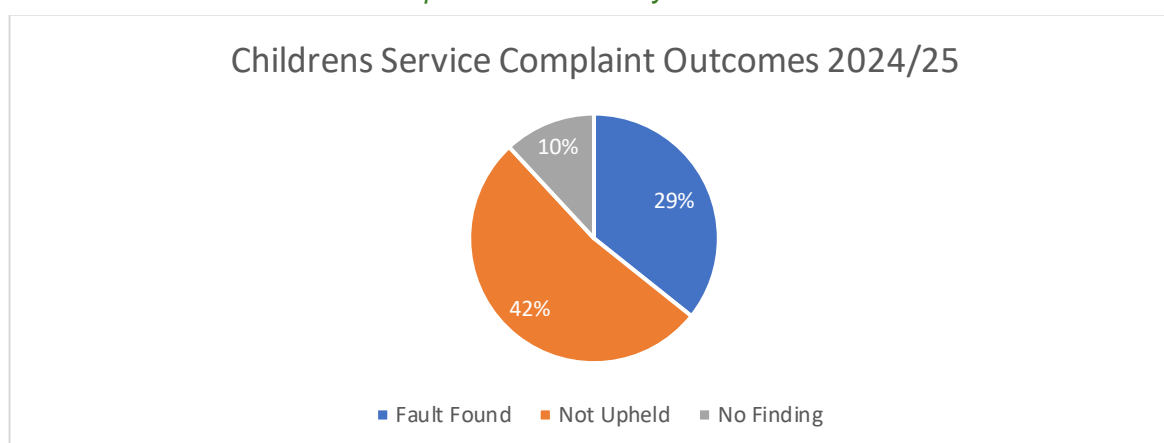


Table 6 above shows that fault was found in 29% of the statutory complaints considered during the year.

It is important to note that a finding of fault is not necessarily a bad thing as it can also be a sign of greater maturity within complaints handling. It is always important to listen to what we are being told about our service to put matters right at the earliest opportunity, and to learn and improve. Managers are also encouraged not to handle complaints defensively and this is evidenced in a number of cases whereby we have accepted that there are opportunities to improve.

In some cases, complaints are not able to be determined as there are irreconcilable versions of events. In these situations, rather than record the complaint as "Not Upheld", the complaints

² Guidance set out in section 2.6 of Getting the Best from Complaints.

team will instead record them as “No Finding” which more accurately reflects the outcome. This will also include some complaints whereby the Court process is the appropriate forum to make a finding.

Financial Implications

Children’s Service Complaints expenditure

Both Stages 2 and 3 of the statutory complaints’ procedure require independent investigation to take place.

At Stage 2, the authority is required to appoint an Investigative Officer who must not work in the same area as the complaint being investigated and be suitably trained to carry out investigative work.

In addition to the Investigative Officer, the Regulations also require an Independent Person to be appointed to ensure the investigation is carried out fairly. This is a mandatory requirement, and this person cannot work for the Council.

At Stage 3, the procedure is for a panel hearing to be held to review the Stage 2 investigation. This involves the appointment of 3 external panel members.

Leicestershire County Council can also explore independent mediation as an alternative form of redress through Stages 2 or 3. Mediation has not been used this year for any cases.

Finally, on some occasions, financial redress is offered as part of the Complaints procedure. Usually this is by way of a Local Settlement with the Ombudsman but can also be recommended at either Stage 2 or 3 of the procedure.

Table 8 below details the total costs incurred during the last 3 financial years. All costs are re-charged directly to the department.

Table 8 Costs incurred through complaints procedure³

Spend	Total 2022/23	Total 2023/24	Total 2024/25
Commissioned Investigations	£41,650	£7,050	£4,100
Mediation	£0	£0	£0
Financial Redress	£2,500	£5,700	£5,200
Total	£44,150	£12,750	£9,300

Costs incurred for 2024/25 through commissioned investigators represent a significant decrease on previous year. This reflects the in house investigations and reduced spend following recruitment of an Independent Pool rather than use of agencies to supply these people.

Costs continue to be controlled through several ways including:

³ Figures are rounded up to nearest £10.

- Complaints Team proactively looking for opportunities to resolve via meetings if any prospect of success.
- Ensuring that complainants are eligible to use the statutory complaints procedure .
- Imposition of restrictions to the scope of some independent investigations. Typically, around matters that have been determined in the Court arena.
- Recruitment of a casual pool of Independent Investigators. This both saves money but is helping ensure consistency of work.

4. Learning from Complaints

Complaints are a valuable source of information which can help to identify recurring or underlying problems and potential improvements. We know that numbers alone do not tell everything about the attitude towards complaints and how they are responded to locally. Arguably of more importance is to understand the impact those complaints have on people and to learn the lessons from complaints to improve the experience for others.

Lessons can usually be learned from complaints that were upheld and, in some instances, where no fault was found and where the Authority identifies that improvements to services can be made.

Occasionally during an investigation issues will be identified that need to be addressed over and above the original complaint. The Complaints Team will always try to look at the “bigger picture” to ensure that residents receive the best possible service from the Council.

5.1 Corrective action taken

All the 15 complaints where fault has been found have been reviewed by the Complaints Team to ascertain what action the relevant department has taken, both in remedying the fault, and any wider learning to avoid such issues occurring in the future.

Remedial action typically consists of both individual redress (e.g., apology, carrying out overdue work) and wider actions that may affect many.

The most common action taken was staff training. There are lots of good examples of this taking place both at individual and team level. These included:

- reminding teams of the need to record rationale for decisions made
- reminder on need to cross-check information provided in referrals from partner agencies
- reminder to escalate cases where there are concerns with a lack of action from other agencies involved
- Commitment to develop training on trauma informed approach

6. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Ombudsman made decisions on thirty one complaints which related to children's social care⁴ during the year.

A summary of the complaints considered, and their respective outcomes appears below.

- 3 Outside of Jurisdiction or where at an assessment stage the Ombudsman felt unlikely it would achieve anything through further investigation.
- 7 Premature for the Ombudsman as the complaint had not fully exhausted the Council's complaints procedure.
- 11 findings of Fault with Injustice.
- 10 No fault found with the Council's actions

It should be noted that where the Ombudsman was satisfied that the Council had already recognised fault and acted appropriately to remedy this, it will still be recorded as Fault with Injustice.

7. Monitoring the Process

The Complaints team continues to support Children's Services to manage and learn from complaints. The key services offered to CFS are -

1. Complaints advice and support
2. Commissioning and administrative support for all Independent Investigations
3. Production of Performance Reports
4. Liaison with Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
5. Quality Assurance of complaint responses
6. Complaint handling training for Operational Managers

Assistance continues to be routinely provided to Heads of Service in drafting adjudication responses to Stage 2 investigations. This helps ensure a consistency of response and that clear action plans are created.

Work has also started to help improve oversight and tracking of actions agreed within Stage 1 responses which was identified as a weakness during the year.

APPENDIX A – compliments received

- Thank you R for all the support you have given us, the service needs more people like you.
- Thank you J for all your help and support in regard to my son. Chairing meetings for us with the school has been invaluable.
- Thank you N for everything you have done for us. Your incredible dedication, empathy and unwavering support have meant the world to us.
- Thank you V for everything you have done for us. You really have made a positive impact!
- Thank you to R and team for all your hard work and effort to try and help my daughter as best as you could.
- Thank you so much to N for all his support to my son and me. Also, thank you to T for being an amazing support in what was a very difficult time and for always being a listening ear.

Additional compliments which were not recorded but have since been shared with the Complaints & Information Team

- Amazing!! Thanks you so much C! We can't tell you enough how much we appreciate you sorting our adoption allowances out for us. (Shenton family).
- I just wanted to say a big 'Thank You' for your contribution to K's memory book which we received a couple of weeks ago. Thank you again for everything you did for K, S and I are extremely grateful
- Its an absolute pleasure to have been working with K over the years as a fellow co-chair of channel – her professionalism, attention to detail and superb chairing is second to none. I continue to learn so much from her approach and the application she takes when considering channel referrals. She is always organised having planned the chairing in advance and her communication style is excellent. She is an asset to the channel approach and invaluable.
- We put a CAMHS plan in for daily visits over the weekend and have had a multi agency meeting today, which G was present at. G was fab – she clearly has a good understanding of the family despite only having been allocated a few weeks ago, she had a plan in place for next steps and was really clear about what the social care offer will be which has really supported multi agency planning to support this young person to stay in the family home and parents to feel supported.

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