

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



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Purpose of Report

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

Introduction

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

Complaints Volumes (Cases Received 2024-2025)

Statutory Children's Social Care Complaint and LGO Cases

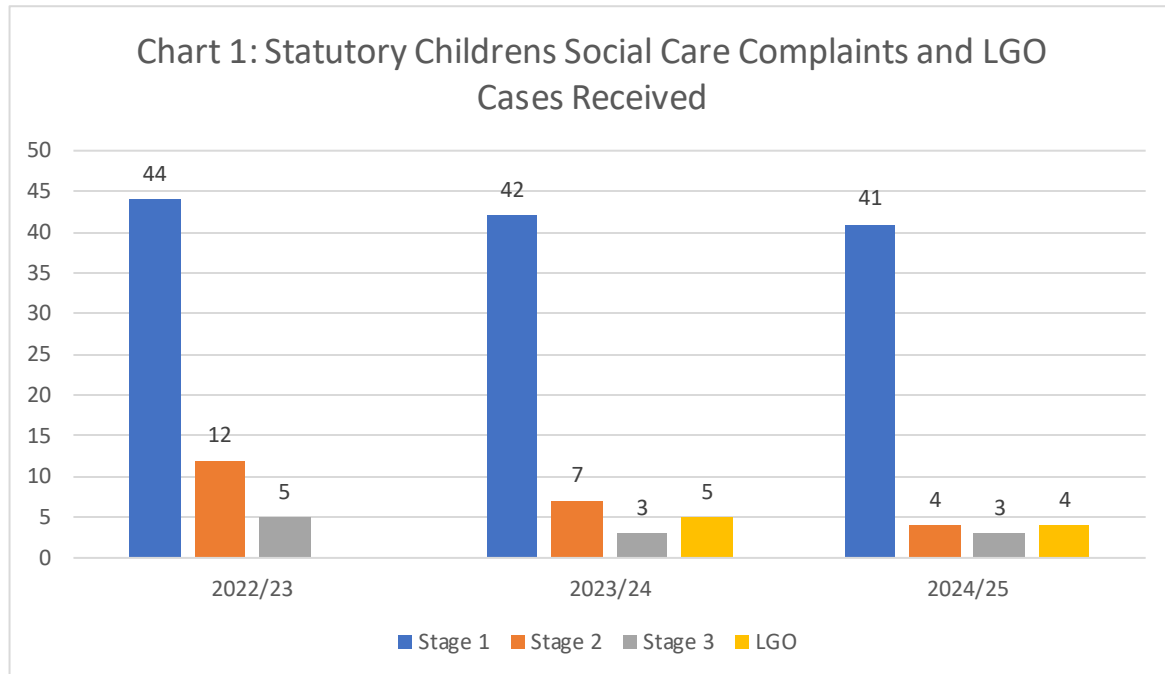


Chart 1 shows a total of 48 cases (the total of stage 1, 2 and 3 cases) were accepted under the statutory procedure in 24/25. This is a decrease of 4 from the previous year (52).

Stage 1

41 cases were accepted under Stage 1 of the local policy – Local Resolution. This is a decrease of 1 from the previous year (42).

Stage 2

4 cases escalated to Stage 2 of the local policy - Independent Investigation. This is a decrease of 3 from the previous year (7) and represents 10% (rounded) of the Stage 1 cases, a slight reduction from 23/24 (17%).

Stage 3

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.

3 Stage 3 Review Panels were convened in 24/25; this figure remains the same from the previous year.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

The LGSCO takes 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 Council received 4 ombudsman cases in 24/25, 3 of which had exhausted all 3 stages of the Council's local procedure and 1 which was an early referral following Stage 2. This compares to 5 in the previous year.

Corporate Complaint Cases

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 Complaints Procedure. This helps control costs incurred should complaints escalate.

To give the full picture of complaints, Table 1 sets out all social care related complaints for the last 2 reporting periods.

Table 1: table showing counts of social care complaints received and managed under the Children's Social Care Complaints Policy or Corporate Complaints Procedure.

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

Table 1 shows, there has been a 19% increase in the total number of complaints about Children's Social Care.

When examining these complaint volumes, it is important to consider the broader operational context—specifically, the total demand handled by Children's Social Care throughout the year. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the primary case categories, illustrating not only the type but also the escalating volume of demand placed on the service in 3 of the 4 areas listed.

Table 2: cases dealt with by Children's Social Care in each reporting period.

Social Care Demand	2023/24	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

Analysing complaints alongside these figures helps to contextualise the proportionality of concerns raised: while the total number of complaints has grown, so too has the overall caseload, suggesting that the rise in complaints may partly mirror the service's expanding remit and the complexities of the cases managed. To provide further context to complaint volumes, the number of 24/25 referrals to Children's Social Care in Table 2 has been used and this shows that 0.7% go on to make a formal statutory complaint.

Statutory Complaints Received by Service Areas

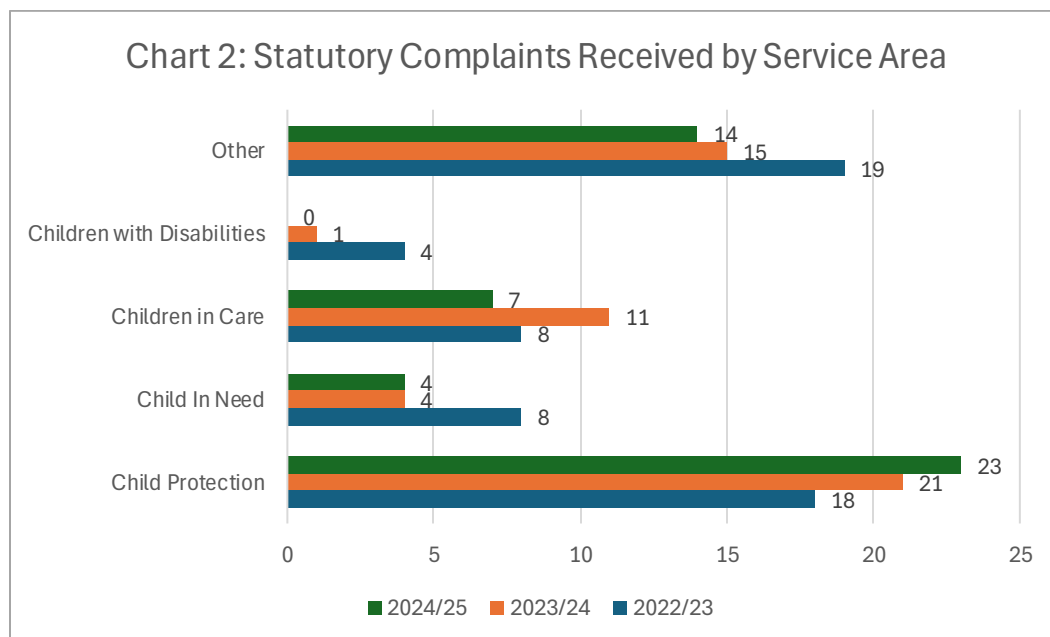


Chart 2 shows the top four services with the highest counts for 24/25 and the comparisons for those services for 23/24 and 22/23. For ease of visualisation, the remaining services have been grouped under other. Child Protection consistently presents with the most cases across the reporting years shown and both Children in Care and Children with Disabilities has seen a decrease.

Compliments Received 2024-2025

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.

Complaints Performance

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*.

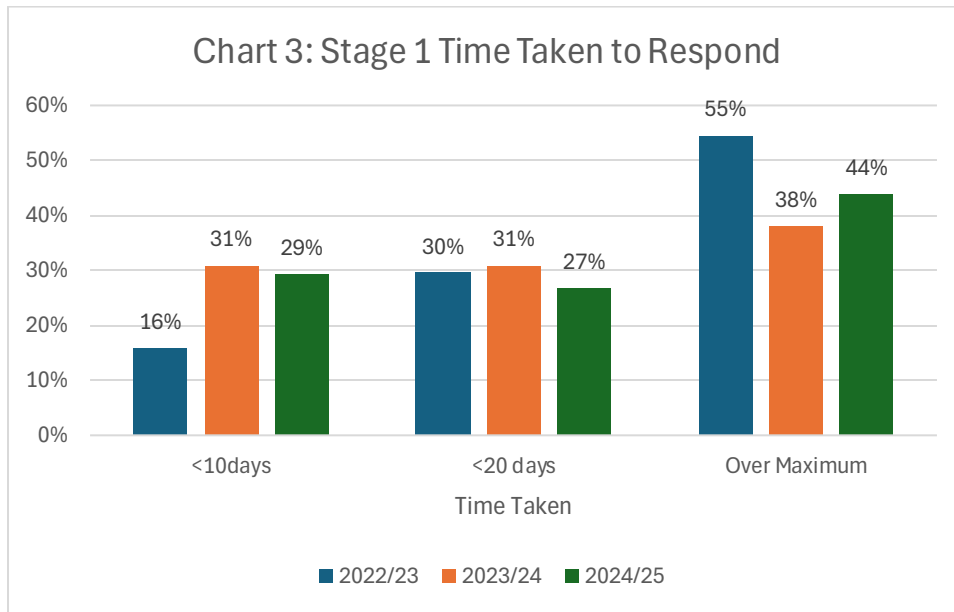
Responsiveness to Statutory Complaints

Stage 1

In respect of 'Stage 1 Local Resolution', the Council aims to provide a response to the complainant within 10 working days in accordance with Regulation 14 'the local authority must consider and try to resolve the representations as soon as is reasonably practicable and in any event within 10 working days of the start date as defined in paragraphs (3) and (4).' Complex cases may take longer to consider and 'The local authority may extend the period for considering representations under this regulation by a maximum of 10 working days where they consider the representations to be complex.', giving a maximum of 20 working days.

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 Complaint and Information Services Manager is duty bound to offer a Stage 2 investigation.

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



Analysis of the Stage 1 response times shows the percentages of cases per time category has remained fairly consistent with the majority of cases being responded to within the maximum limit of 20 working days, reflecting positively on the department's commitment to statutory deadlines and customer service. Typically, cases towards the upper limit are complex or there is the need for more information.

Cases over the maximum period highlights the importance of ongoing monitoring of case complexity and resource allocation to ensure that timely resolutions remain the norm, and to prevent delays that might negatively impact complainant satisfaction and overall trust in the process

Stage 2

Regulation 17 states the 'local authority should send notice of their response to the complainant and, where one has been appointed, to his advocate within 25 working days of the start dates as defined in paragraphs (4) and (5).' Where it is not possible to respond within 25 working days, cases may be extended 'no later than 65 working days from the start date, by which they will have concluded their consideration and sent notice of their response.'

Table 3: table showing the count of Stage 2 cases which met the response time categories

Time to Respond	23/24	24/25
Within 25 working days	1	1
Within 65 working days	0	2
Over maximum	6	1

The proportion of cases responded to within the maximum statutory guideline of 65 working days has improved from the previous year, with 3 of the 4 investigations achieving this.

The ombudsman has indicated that providing a 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.

Stage 3

Regulation 18 states 'Where a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigations of his representations under regulation 17 the complainant or, where one has been appointed, his advocate may request that the representations be further considered by a panel in accordance with regulation 19.'. The complainant should make their request within 20 working dates of the date on which the complainant received the notice of the local authority's response. The local authority has up to 50 working days in which to issue its response.

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, 2 of these were managed within the statutory timescales. 1 exceeded the statutory timescales due to delays due to the complainant's availability to attend the panel.

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.

Most complaints continue to be made by parents or family members (where they have sufficient interest in the child or young person's welfare¹).

¹ Guidance set out in section 2.6 of Getting the Best from Complaints.

Complaint Outcomes

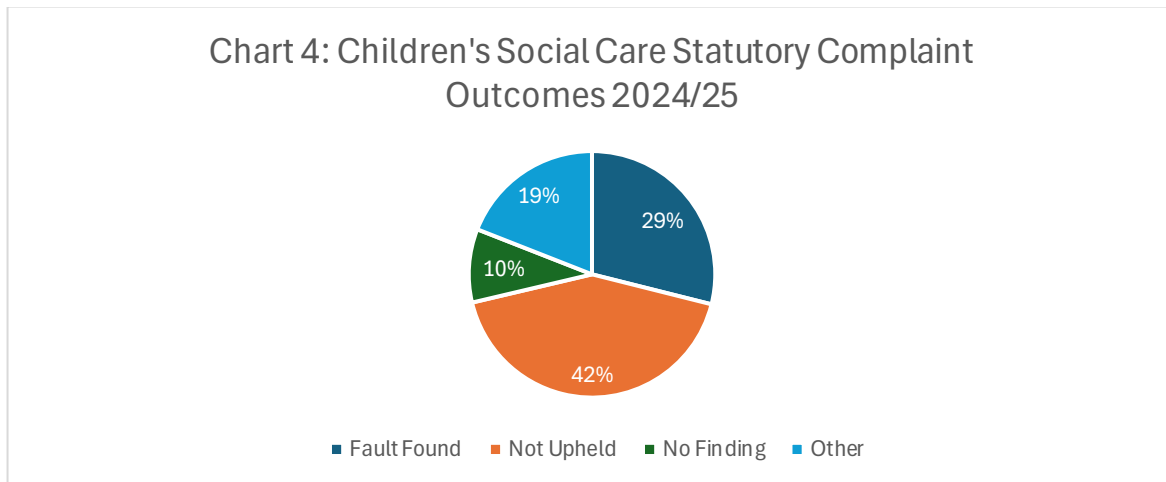


Chart 4 above shows that fault was found in 29% of the statutory complaints considered during the year. For context other includes withdrawn, referred to another organisation, and alternative route of redress.

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 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.

Who Complains?

In 2024/25, two complaints were made by children or young people². This is 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.

Financial Implications

Children's Service Complaints expenditure

Both Stages 2 and 3 of the Children's Social Care Complaint Policy 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 process. 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 4 below shows the total costs incurred during the last 3 financial years. All costs are re-charged directly to the department.

Table 4: table showing costs incurred through the complaints process³

Spend Category	2022/23	2023/24	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

³ Figures are rounded up to nearest £10.

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 a pool of Independent Persons rather than use of agencies.

Costs continue to be controlled through several ways including:

- 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.

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 Council 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.

Corrective Action

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

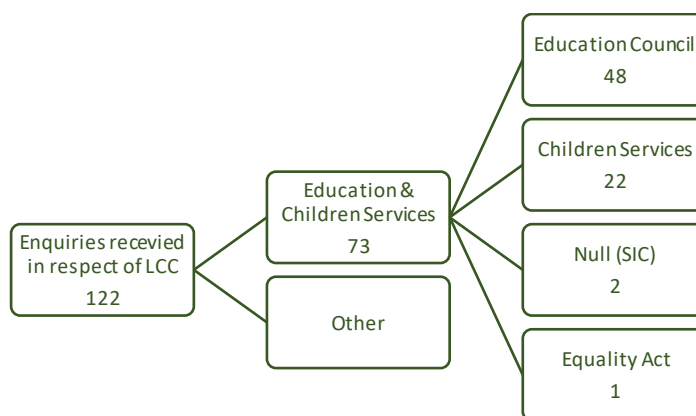
- reminder on need to cross-check information provided in referrals from partner agencies
- reminder to escalate cases where there are concerns with a lack of action from other agencies involved
- Commitment to develop training on trauma informed approach

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Performance

Each year, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) publishes a set of data that reflects its complaint-handling activity across England. This includes both national and local authority-level insights. The information contained in this section has been extracted from the LGSCO's data set.

Enquiries

Chart 5: chart showing the breakdown of enquiries received by the LGSCO in 24/25



Enquiries relating to Education Council include all SEN categories (34), transport, alternative provision, school admissions and other.

Enquiries relating to Children's Services include child protection (12), child in need, fostering, leaving care, disabled child, other.

Decisions

In respect of decisions made against cases categorised as Education & Children Services, the LGSCO made the following decisions:

- 26 Referred back for local resolution

- 19 Upheld
- 18 Closed after initial enquiries
- 5 Incomplete/Invalid
- 1 Advice Given
- 1 Not upheld

Upheld Cases

Of the 19 Upheld cases, 12 were recorded as 'fault and injustice' and a summary of the cases is provided below.

Case 1 related to the Council not providing suitable education and taking too long to arrange alternative education. There was fault found for the length of time taken to arrange alternative education.

The Council apologised, paid £250 and reviewed how it monitors and records information.

Case 2 related to the Council's failure to update a EHCP following its annual review leading to inadequate support provided. The Council was found at fault for not updating the EHCP and providing the outcome to the Service User.

The Council apologised, paid £500 and produced an action plan for dealing with delays.

Case 3 related to the delay in completing a EHCP leading to specialist assistance not being provided. The Council was found at fault for providing the EHCP 40 weeks late.

The Council apologised and paid £900.

Case 4 related to the Council not following the correct procedure for transferring the EHCP when someone moved to the area, did not provide appropriate education and provided lack of responses. The Council was found at fault for not starting the EHCP provision when transferred to them and not provided satisfactory communication with the complainant.

The Council apologised and paid £3,012.50.

Case 5 related to the Council failing to complete recommendations agreed during the statutory children's social care procedure. The Council was found at fault for wrongly referring the complainant to a team who could not complete an assessment.

The Council apologised, paid £150, ensured all social workers and family support workers are aware of the relevant law and guidance concerning disabled children and parent carers.

Case 6 related to the Council disclosing Mrs Y's name without her consent leading to their relationships being negatively impacted. The Council was found at fault for not maintaining Mrs Y's anonymity during the process.

The Council apologised, paid £1,000 and made staff aware that anonymous information can come from telephone referrals.

Case 7 related to how the Council decided and delivered special education needs support. The Council was found at fault for the delays in providing the ECHP and support.

The Council apologised and paid £1,500.

Case 8 related to the Council not including Mr X in the child protection enquiries and causing significant distress and frustration. The Council was found at fault for not putting an adequate safety plan in place.

The Council apologised at senior level and paid £1,000.

Case 9 related to the Council not correctly managing the transition from education other than a school setting to a school setting with the Council, not consulting with the school and not providing a personal budget. The Council was found at fault for a delay in providing the personal budget.

The Council apologised, paid £250 and provided training to relevant staff to remind them the importance of arranging personal budgets in a timely manner.

Case 10 related to the Councils handling of a position of trust meeting. The Council was found at fault for not adhering to its complaints procedure by providing a response over the agreed timescales.

The Council apologised and paid £100.

Case 11 related to the Council delaying assessment for a EHCP, issuing of that EHCP and length of time taken to respond to their complaint. The Council was found at fault for a delay in providing the EHCP and delay in responding to their complaint.

The Council apologised and paid £1,750.

Case 12 related to the delay of providing a EHCP leaving 2 children without suitable education leading to the parent reducing their work hours. The Council was found at fault for not providing the ECHP in a timely manner.

The Council apologised, paid £3,500 and agreed to appoint one officer as a key point of contact and provide updates until suitable college placements were found.

Monitoring the Process

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