

Children's Complaints and Representations

Statutory Annual Report 2023 / 2024

1. Introduction

This report has been written to analyse the complaints made against Children and Young People Directorate. Complaints in this directorate can be processed through both the Corporate Policy and the Children's Representations and Complaints Policy. Guidance for which policy is applied is outlined below.

People who use Herefordshire's Children's Services are encouraged to give feedback on the quality and appropriateness of services they receive. This feedback can be in the form of compliments, comments, suggestions, queries or complaints.

A complaint, for the purpose of this report, and within our Policy, is defined as:

"An expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response."

The Statutory Children's Representations and Complaints Policy covers complaints about:

- Council's services to children in need or in care (looked after children)
- How the council applies to take a child into care
- Complaints about fostering, special guardianship and adoption services
- Complaints about services to children leaving care.

The procedure exists to consider complaints **not just by or on behalf of children, but from their parents, foster carers, special guardians, adopters and others who may have an interest in their wellbeing.**

The Corporate Complaints Policy covers complaints about:

- Complaints about child protection matters (including S47 enquiries and conferences)
- Assessments of potential foster carers and adopters
- Foster carer registration
- How the council assesses families and prepares reports for the court in private proceedings (so-called Section 7 or 37 reports).

Councils should be clear about which procedure they are using, and why. This information will be shared to the complainant by the Complaints Team.

Councils may decide not to accept a complaint that is made late but should not impose this restriction rigidly. It may suspend investigation of a complaint if there is ongoing court action or police investigations. The guidance allows councils to decide not to investigate a complaint if it would prejudice a concurrent investigation, including court proceedings. However, the guidance also allows a complainant to resubmit their complaint to the council once the concurrent investigation has ended (and for up to one year afterwards). Before deciding to end an investigation already in progress, councils should consider if it is possible to investigate some or all of the complaint without prejudicing any other investigation. Detailed records should be kept of any decision to end an investigation. Councils should tell complainants in writing the reason for the decision to end an investigation and the concurrent investigation at risk of being prejudiced. Councils should also tell complainants about their right to resubmit the complaint.

Appendix 1 – Complaints, regarding Childrens Services, processed through the Corporate Complaints Policy

Whilst the Children's Complaints and Representations Annual Report (2023 / 2024) focuses on the statutory reporting under the Childrens Complaints Policy this appendix will identify complaints made under the Corporate Complaints Policy - [Corporate Complaints Policy \(herefordshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/corporate-complaints-policy)

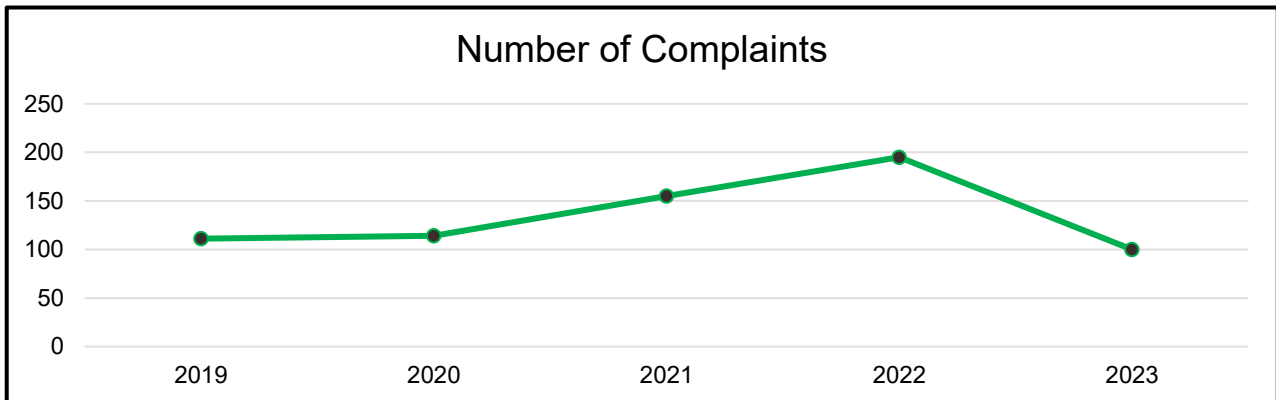
These include complaints from parents, careers and linked professionals regarding their interactions with Childrens Services in Herefordshire.

When handling complaints regarding Childrens Services we review these on an individual case by case basis to establish whether the complaint should be processed through the Childrens Complaints Policy or by the Corporate Complaints Policy. The distinction between the two policies is to determine who is making the complaint and what is the complaint regarding; we often receive complaints from parents careers and linked professionals and these complaints are often around concerns or issues pertaining to themselves and not the child, alternatively they may be regarding the child but they are not representing the voice of the child nor are they indicating any harm to the child. As you will see through the report often the individual is complaining about the lack of communication, a council decision, a services failure or staff attitude in respect of themselves therefore these complaints are handled under the Corporate Complaints Policy.

- 1. Number of Complaints**
- 2. Reason for Complaints**
- 3. Timeliness to respond**
- 4. Learning from Corporate Complaints**

1. Number of complaints and representations regarding Herefordshire Childrens Services

The below information captures those complaints regarding Childrens Services, under the Corporate Complaints Policy, over the past four years to provide a reflective analysis.



The number of complaints, regarding Childrens Services, processed through the Corporate Complaints Policy have steadily increased over the past four years, saying this, this municipal year there is a notable decrease in corporate complaints received, that relate to children's services with a 48.7% decrease. This is a positive step, showing significant improvement from Children's Services when it comes to responding to complaints.

2019 - 2020

111 Corporate Children's Complaints

2020 - 2021

114 Corporate Children's Complaints

2021 - 2022

155 Corporate Children's Complaints

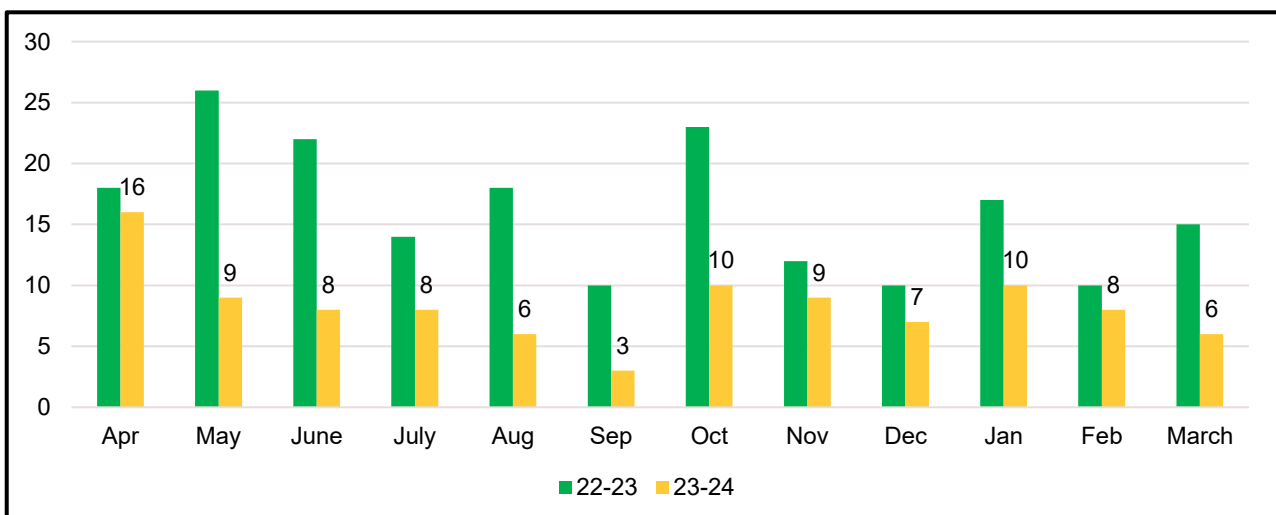
2022 - 2023

195 Corporate Children's Complaints

2023 - 2024

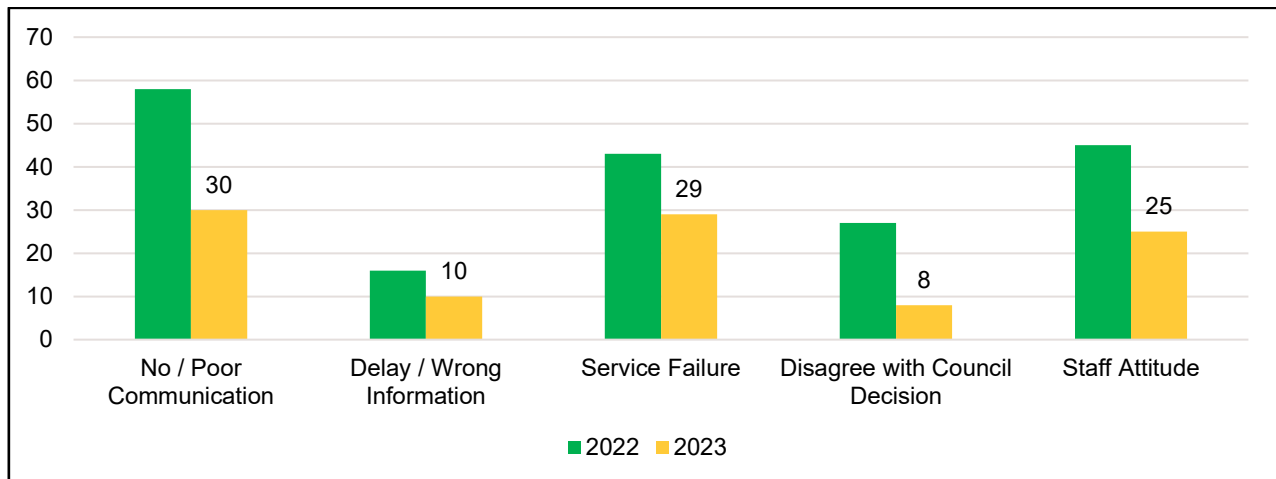
100 Corporate Children's Complaints

The below chart highlights the corporate complaints that came in by month, in comparison to last year;



The reason for the decrease in the number of corporate complaints could be suggested as; consistency in management within children's services and a general understanding of how Children's Complaints should be differentiated being implemented into standard practice.

2. Reason for Complaints regarding Herefordshire Childrens Services:



The fundamental *reasons* for complaints over the past five years have remained consistent; poor communication, service failure and staff attitude.

There could be a number of reasons for this that are, unfortunately, repeating themes and patterns:

- Staffing has been complex this past 2/3 years and there has been a number of staff changes in terms of front line delivery, however there has been consistency and structure within senior management within children's services. Within the high turnover of front line staff, consistent, effective and high quality communication becomes harder; it has been noted that complainants report that they are not always introduced to new Social Workers or Team Managers as they take over the case, they often can't get a hold of a Social Worker and/or they are having to wait a significant period of time for replies, unfortunately, in addition, handover of cases has not always taken place leaving the young person feeling they have to re-explain their history and their case and therefore feeling let down.
- In relating to service failure this is also around the perceived lack of support / or services being provided that had been offered. This is open to interpretation of whether an individual may feel that they have been offered something without explanation as to what that service is or what it entails. However, this could be linked to effective communication in a sense of does the individual understand what is expected from them in line with any plans and actions within these, and do they understand what they can expect from support services available.

It has been a complex and challenging time for Herefordshire Childrens Services but we need to continue to learn from the feedback and insights our customers and clients provide and embrace complaints to continue to make positive change and improvements. It has been noted by our families this year that the complaints procedure gives them an opportunity to be heard, and they do feel listed to.

3. Complaints and the time taken to respond:

The timescale for response, under the Corporate Complaints Policy, is 15 working days.

2019

Out of 111 complaints 15 responses were extended to take longer than 15 working days

2020

Out of 114 complaints 16 responses were extended to take longer than 15 working days

2021

Out of 155 complaints 23 responses were extended to take longer than 15 working days

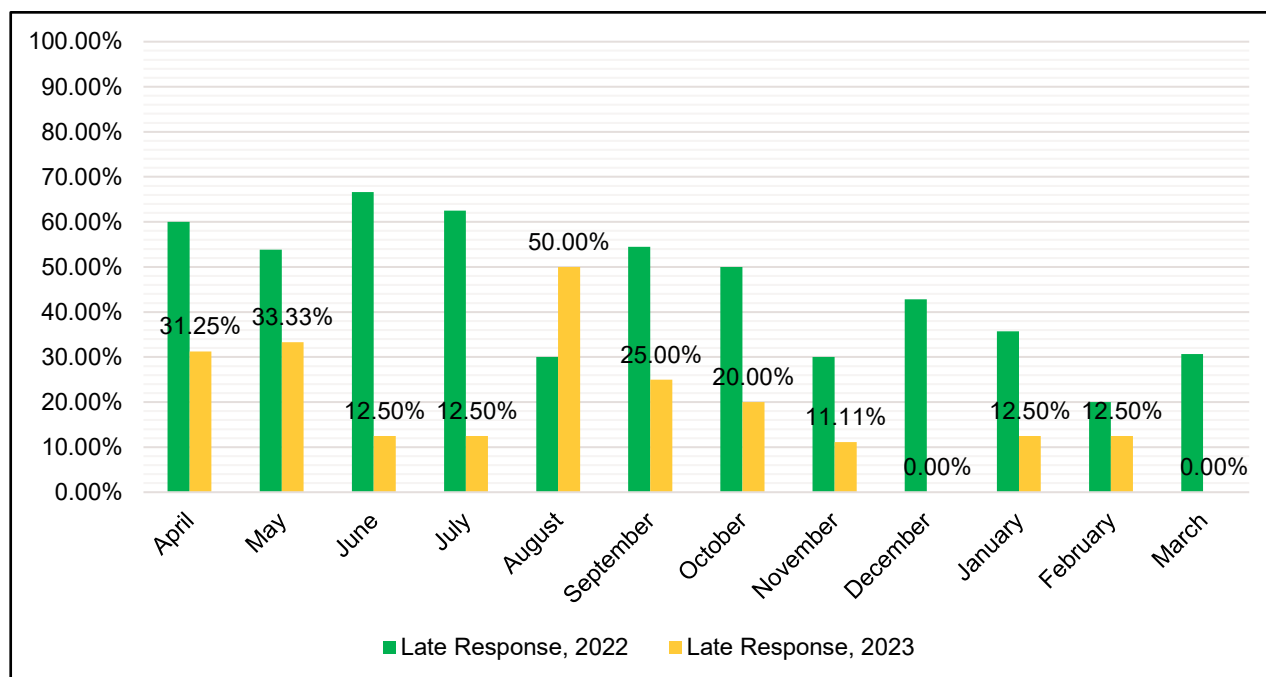
2022

Out of 195 complaints 87 responses were extended to take longer than 15 working days

2023

Out of 100 complaints 20 responses were extended to take longer than 15 working days

This financial year, 20% of complaints received were responded too later than the allocated 15 working days which is a significant decrease from the 45% that were responded too late, in the previous financial year. The below chart compares, by month, the percentage of complaints that were responded too out of the 15 working day timescale in correlation to the data from 2022-2023. The below chart indicates, by percentage, the number of complaints that were responded too out of timescale, by month.



Historically, there has been an increase in the number of complaints we are responding too as late – that being beyond the 15 working days response time, the last 12 months senior management have consistently reiterated the importance of responding to complainants quickly and effectively to resolve complaints locally. The reasons for this can include:

- In the past year we have seen on a number of occasions the Investigating Officer (IO) has changed and the Complaints Team has not been informed about this to then re-allocate appropriately. This causes delays, combined with no communication to the team we are not able to keep the complainant up to date with what is happening. This concern has been raised previously but unfortunately continues to be an issue.

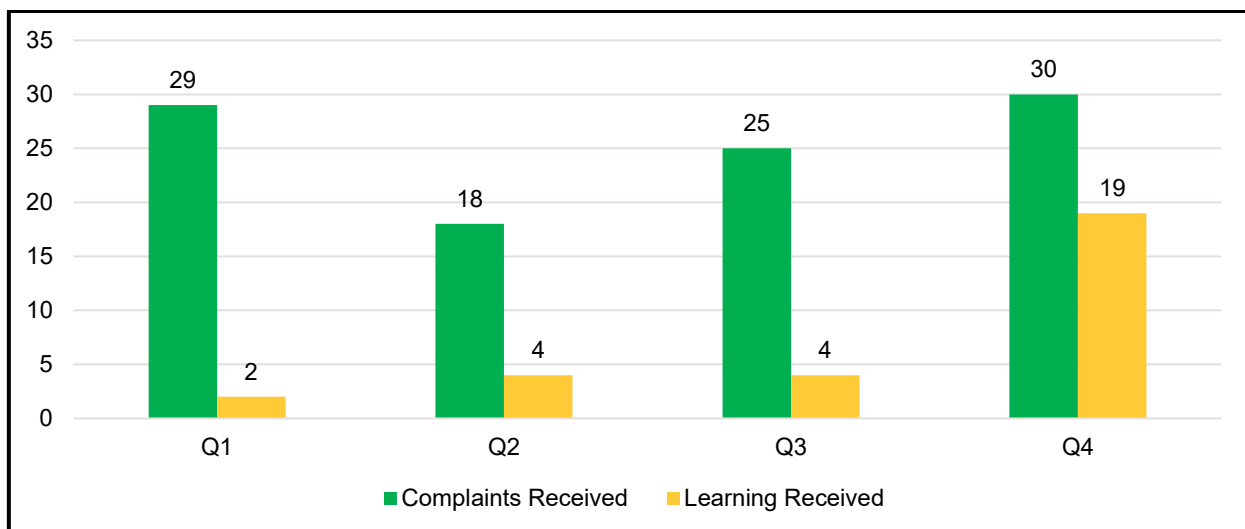
- We are aware that workload is likely a contributory factor in being able to prioritise and ensure that timescales are met in relation to complaints handling. The Complaints team aim to work with the IO to ensure that the complainant is kept up-to-date with a realistic date of response to ensure no further conflict is caused.

This being said, it should be noted that consistently over the past 7 months we have seen a significant increase in complaints responded too within timescales and this is an improvement that should be commended.

4. Learning from Corporate Children's Complaints: what difference have complaints made?

Learning from complaints helps social care practitioners in their practice development and wider service improvement, which benefits other children and young people receiving services. When complaints are seen as, constructive, feedback and tools for improvement they can shape the way to making things better for all.

The below chart highlights the number of learning templates completed and returned this year, in comparison to the number of complaints received:



Appendix 2 – Complaints, regarding Childrens Services, processed through the Children's Statutory Representations and Complaints Policy

This report seeks to recognise the determination of children and young people to see that Social Care processes improve and develop and outline not just what complaints were made, but what difference they have made in the work of Herefordshire Children's Services.

This is the fifth year that the children's complaints process was administered by the Council's Complaints Team, taking over its management from Childrens Services in 2019. The team continue to review the policies and procedures for administering Children's complaints, reporting on complaints to the children's services senior management team, and arranged training for complaint investigation officers which was delivered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

- 5. Representations**
- 6. Volume of Complaints and Representations**
- 7. Complainants**
- 8. Reason for Complaints**
- 9. Outcomes from Complaints**
- 10. Support for Children and Young People complaining**
- 11. Response Time**
- 12. Complaints taken to the LGSCO**
- 13. Learning**
- 14. Effectiveness of the Complaints Procedure**
- 15. Financial implications**
- 16. Considerations and Recommendations**
- 17. What are the Complaints Team doing to support improvement**

5. Representations

Children and young people have a variety of methods in which they can feedback, make comments and send complaints. They can submit these through our online form, through their physical or virtual meetings with their Social Worker and/or Family Support Worker or they can request an advocate who can support them through the process. Other ways in which representations can be made are via third parties by way of their School, a family member or a foster carer for example. In 2021, there have been:

- 1 complaint directly from young people
- 13 complaints directly from young people with the support of an advocate
- 80 complaints from family members, including parents and guardians on behalf of the child or young person;
- 8 complaint from professionals, including through the Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer

6. Volumes of complaints and representations

There were 102 complaints made under the Children's Complaints and Representations Policy in 2023 / 2024, an 85% increase from the previous year.

2018 – 2019

36 Children's Complaints and Representations

2019 - 2020

30 Children's Complaints and Representations

2020 - 2021

14 Children's Complaints and Representations

2021 - 2022

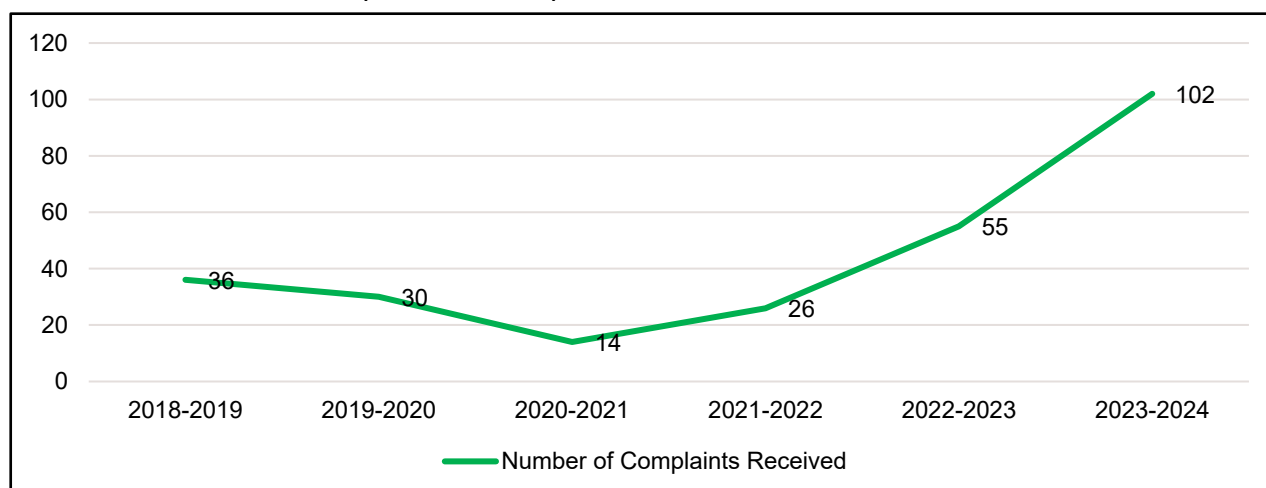
26 Children's Complaints and Representations

2022 - 2023

55 Children's Complaints and Representations

2023 – 2024

102 Children's Complaints and Representations



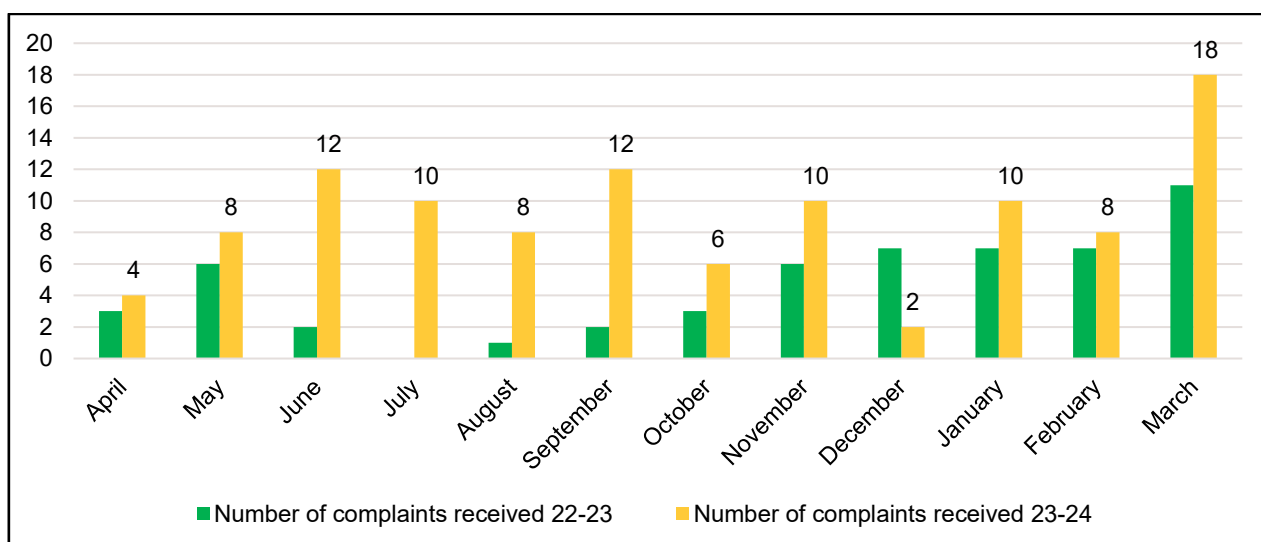
The above chart indicates the increase in complaints that have been received and processed through the Children's Complaints and Representations policy since 2018/2019. It should be noted that, as with the previous year, in line with LGSCO guidance more complaints have been process through this policy as is the right of the Children and Young People and those acting on their behalf. Below indicates who can complain on behalf of the children and young people;

Section 26(3) and Section 24D of the Children Act 1989 and Section 3(1) of the Adoption & Children Act 2002 require the responsible authority to consider representations, including complaints, made to it by:

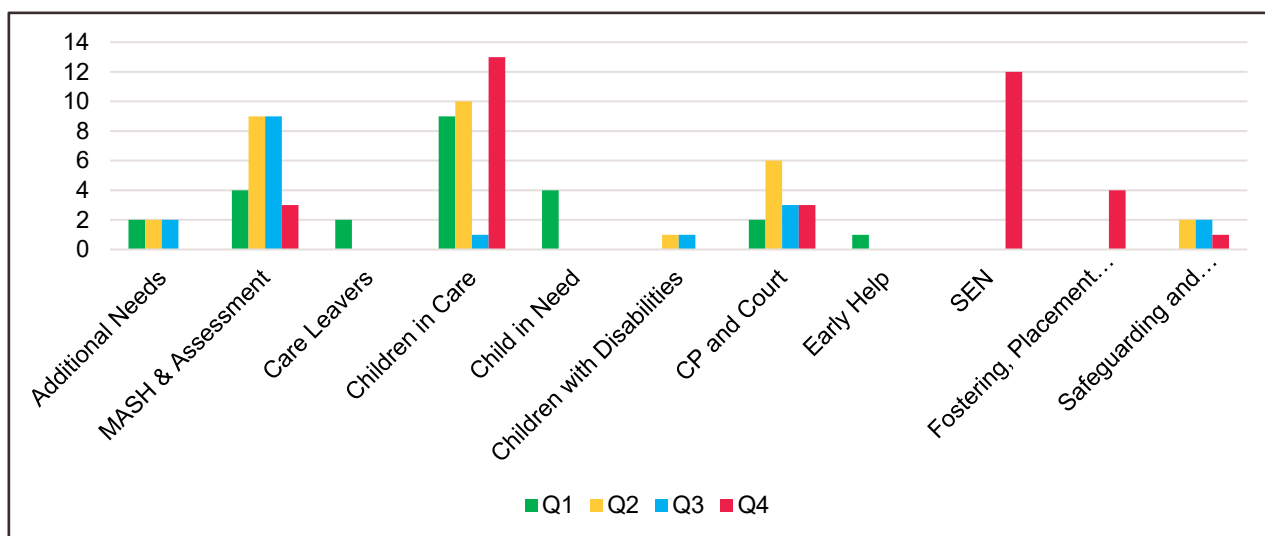
- *Any child or young person (or a parent of theirs or someone who has parental responsibility for them) who is being looked after by the local authority or is not looked after by them but is in need;*
- *Any local authority foster carer (including those caring for children placed through independent fostering agencies);*
- *Children leaving care;*
- *Special Guardians;*
- *A child or young person (or their parent) to whom a Special Guardian Order is in force;*
- *Any person who has applied for an assessment under Section 14F(3) or (4);*
- *Any child or young person who may be adopted, their parents and guardians;*
- *Persons wishing to adopt a child;*
- *Any other person whom arrangements for the provision of adoption services extend;*
- *Adopted persons, their parents, natural parents and former guardians; and*
- *Such other person as the local authority consider has sufficient interest in the child or young person's welfare to warrant their representations being made by them*

Although the number of complaints is significantly higher it could be suggested that since the necessary changes to the complaints procedure and its accessibility have been implements it has made submitting a complaint less daunting and it has offered families, children and young people reassurance that Children's Services will listen to their concerns, learn from them and take them seriously.

The below chart highlights the complaints received from April 2023 – March 2024, in comparison to the previous year. The increase indicated is due to the change in policy that complaints are processed under. This change came into place in September 2022 following a discussion with the Complaints Manager and Corporate Director, Children and Young People and continues to be the practice followed.



The below chart shows the number of complaints received by service area.



Of the 102 complaints received in 2023 / 2024;

- 79 were resolved at stage 1
- 19 were progressed to stage 2 (see point 8 for reasons)
- 4 were progressed to a stage 3

77.45% of complaints were resolved at the local resolution stage, stage 1, this is significant improvement from previous years and another notable improvement from the previous year where 52% were resolved with local resolution. This increase would indicate the Children's Services are working with families to resolve their concerns and this is being supported by the complaint procedure where we attempt to exhaust all internal avenues of resolution before escalating the complaint to stage 2. This being said, should the complainant not wish to engage with any internal attempts to resolve their complaint it is their right to escalate their complaint to the second stage, and where there is a lack of response or attempt at resolution by the Local Authority at stage 1, complainants have the right to escalate to stage 2.

7. Who has made complaints?

The majority of complaints were made by family members of children both currently and previously in the care of the local authority, with the rest of complaints coming from children and young people either directly or with support of an advocate.

8. Reasons for complaints

There can be multiple reasons for a complaint, which is why the total number of complaints and total number of reasons for complaint will differ. The complaints raised relate to:

- Service failure - This has included quality of service, errors made in assessments or lack of support/services being provided that had been offered;
- Communication – This included not being kept informed or involved through the process, information not being explained, relevant staff not being available at time of contact, the complainant feeling that they are not being listened too;
- Staff attitude – This included complainants feeling that the Social Worker does not involve them in the decision making process;

- Placement – The complainant felt that the process was not effective and they were not supported to seek appropriate placement;
- Wrong Information – The complainant believes that their information had been shared inappropriately (also shared with Information Governance as a data breach).

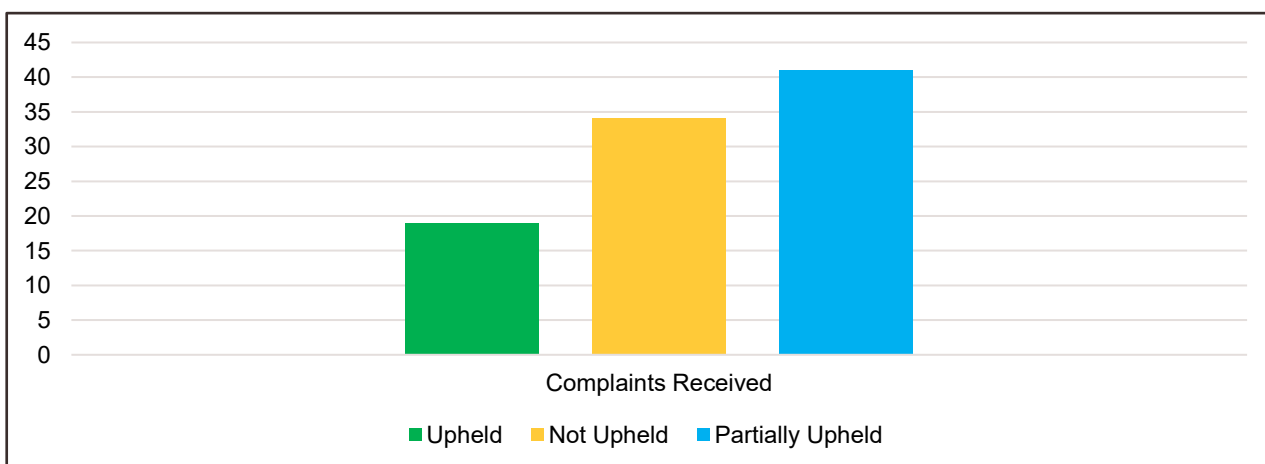
Following the stage 1 internal investigation if a complainant remains dissatisfied they have the right to progress their complaint to stage 2. Reasons for escalating to stage 2 have been;

- Late response at stage 1
- Lack of response at stage 1
- No actions completed following stage 1
- Dispute/disagree with the councils view/decision

9. Outcomes from complaints

Of the 102 complaints received in 2023 / 2024, outcomes from Investigation Officers include:

- 19 were upheld;
- 41 were partially upheld;
- 34 were not upheld;
- 8 complaints did not receive a response



It is the view of the Ombudsman that complaints should be 'upheld' or 'not upheld' and as such, this is the expectation of the Local Authority.

10. How are children and young people supported to raise concerns?

All children and young people making complaints are offered support from a professional advocacy service; [Hear Me](#), a service provided for children and young people in care, care leavers aged under 25 years, young people aged over 5 years who are subject to Child Protection, Children with Disabilities (in an instructed capacity), Homeless Children aged 16-17 and Children in Need. The service has supported a large number of young people in making their complaints this year and it is predicted this will continue to be a developing area into 2024/2025.

Of the 102 complaints received in 2023 / 2024, 12 of these were made by the child or young person, supported by an Advocate.

11. How quickly have we responded to complaints?

The statutory timescale for response at the first stage of investigation of a children's complaint is 10 working days, though this can be extended to 20 working days if the complaint is complex or a large investigation would need to be carried out.

- 48 of the 102 complaints were extended to take longer than 10 working days, 6 of these 48 were responded to within 20 working days. This has been identified as a significant area for improvement. If we can respond to complainants and resolve the concerns within 10 working days we are less likely to receive more complaints due to a lack of response. The extension of a further 10 working days should only be used for large / complex / collaborative responses.
- 42 of the 102 complaints were responded to late at the first stage, over the 20 working days. Meaning over 40% of complaints were responded too out of statutory timescale, although this is a decrease from the 62% last year, there continues to be a significant area for development. Reasoning for lateness have included; capacity, IO leaving, IO not responding and suggesting stage 2, IO not knowing the case. Unfortunately, in the view of the LGSCO these are not valid reasons for responses being late.
- 60 of the 102 complaints were responded to within statutory timescales

Stage 2 investigations should take 25 working days, and can be extended to 65 working days for more complex investigations. As I write this report, 10 complaints are being processed at stage 2.

12. Complaint responses taken to the LGSCO:

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) looks at complaints about councils and some other authorities and organisations, including education admissions appeal panels and adult social care providers (such as care homes and home care providers). The service is free, independent and impartial.

2019-2020

9 complainants took their complaints to the LGSCO for review:

- 3 were not upheld
- 3 were closed after initial enquiries
- 1 was deemed as premature
- 2 were upheld and the complainant(s) was awarded £2500 and £300

2020-2021

6 complainants took their complaints to the LGSCO for review:

- 1 was not upheld
- 2 were closed after initial enquiries
- 3 were upheld and the complainant(s) was awarded £1000 and £300 and upheld but no injustice

2021-2022

13 complainants took their complaints to the LGSCO for review:

- 2 were not upheld
- 7 were closed after initial enquiries
- 1 was deemed as premature
- 2 were upheld and one complainant was awarded £600

- 1 concluded complaint in 2020 was reviewed by the LGSCO in 2021, with an outcome of: Upheld - Maladministration & Injustice, awarding £4,270.00 and £600.00

2022-2023

9 complainants took their complaints to the LGSCO for review:

- 1 was not upheld
- 4 were closed after initial enquiries
- 2 were deemed as premature
- 1 was upheld and the complainant was awarded £100
- 1 was upheld with no further action

2023-2024

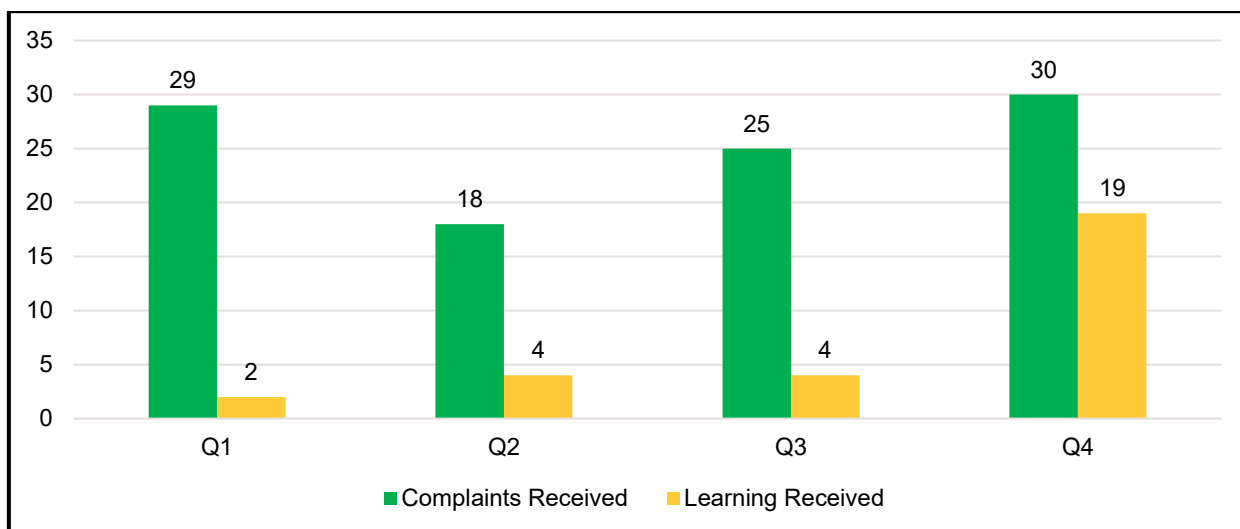
12 complainants took their complaints to the LGSCO for review:

- 5 were deemed as premature
- 3 Upheld: Fault and Injustice
- 1 Not upheld: no injustice
- 1 Upheld: Fault and Injustice, financial redress of £250 plus cost of doorbell
- 1 Upheld: no further action, organisation already remedied.
- 1 Not upheld, no further action

13. Learning: what difference have complaints made?

Learning from complaints helps social care practitioners in their practice development and wider service improvement, which benefits other children and young people receiving services. When complaints are seen as, constructive, feedback and tools for improvement they can shape the way to making things better for all.

The below chart highlights the number of learning templates completed and returned this year, in comparison to the number of complaints received:



Numbers of lessons learnt forms being completed, remains low. It is the expectation of all officers at Herefordshire Council that a lessons learnt form is completed as part of the complaint investigation.

Some examples of improvements and changes that have been made as a result of the complaints made in 2023-2024 are as follows:

- Communication has been an ongoing issue for Children's Services and is a key area of learning and improvement; this is a part of wider learning across Children's Services currently, embedded into the Quality Improvement Plan.
- There is an increase in the recognition and use of the interpreter services and ensuring this is in place consistently for those where English is not the individuals first language.
- There is wider recognition that information needs to be passed to families in a timelier manner to ensure that they are able to review and process this prior to meetings; in addition communicating information in an effective way that makes sense to the family involved.
- For all staff to utilise the information recording systems held to ensure that all information is logged appropriately and is correct. When Investigating Officers have investigated complaints, it is advised that the complaint reference number is added to the case file of the complainant so that, should it be needed, professionals can request complaint information from the Complaints Team.

Learning from Children and Young People Directorate

| Complaint | Lesson |
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| ██████ complained regarding his involvement with Children's Services. ██████ complained about the below. Inaccurate information in the referral. Education processes and support. Not taking his disability into account when working with his family. Children's services holding defamatory information supplied by a school nurse in a meeting. | I have had a discussion with the MASH managers (22/9/23) and we are going to carry out some training with staff around the differences between health anxieties, perplexing presentations and fabricated and induced illness as the terminology is complex and not easily understood. This will give staff more confidence when discussing referrals of this type. I have further asked the managers not to use the heading in the 'right help right time' document unless we have been provided with clear evidence that fabricated or induced illness is likely. |
| Health provision not provided by NHS, mandated by SENIST Tribunal based on private assessment requiring private therapy provision - national shortage of therapists, no option of a counter assessment by NHS therapist. No joint commissioning framework with LA and health. | In the absence of NHS therapy service, unless there is an updated assessment reconfiguring his needs at a lower level, or a proper joint commissioning plan with health there is a continued risk of happening again. This is not a local issue, it is national and is a situation being repeated across the UK due to the conflict around health provision ruling and non-provision through the health service. |
| Allowance being stopped | Reminder to all team to warn parents when allowances are to be stopped |
| Parents did not agree that an assessment was required. The complainant believed MASH to have falsified information and believes that herself and her partner were coerced into agreeing to an assessment. | From reviewing the information I could not find any concerns raised in respect of how the social worker conducted the MASH screening. This was thorough, fact based and the social worker went to every length to ensure parents were contacted and made fully aware of the concerns. This was a really good piece of work by the MASH team and I |

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| | agree that an assessment is necessary in this case. |
| Staff capacity - There is a dedicated finance co-ordinator within Children's Business Support for safeguarding. There are 1393 children open to social care for whom the dedicated business support deals with invoices and payments. There are a large number (20+) other business support officers who complete all the other administration tasks relating to social care. There are 1467 children and young people with an EHCP and no dedicated business support to deal with invoices and payments. There are 2.3 EHCP Assistants (only 1.3 in post at present) who complete all the other administrative tasks relating to SEN processes. If they had capacity, they would be doing it. | We have requested support from business support to process payments - this has not yet been agreed |
| Transport team thought taxi company were going to contact the parent. Taxi company thought parent already knew the pick up time. | Clearer expectations between transport team and transport provider regarding who will contact parents |
| Poor communication the process for secondary school admission for children with EHCPs. All parents should have received a letter about secondary school admissions. The letter directs parents to the council's school admissions information web page | A separate letter detailing the process can be sent to parents of Y6 children with an EHCP rather than a link to the process. |
| Service Manager understood that there was a "blanket" rule from the Service Director that ICPCs could never be cancelled if the SW report was late or unavailable. Mother wanted CP conference to find that the risk to her 2 children was parental alienation caused by father's actions. CP chairs and other conference participants felt both parents continuation of discord and arguing about their care arrangements is emotional harmful to the children. CP chair did make a comment that at best is ambiguous and at worst openly judgemental. "we all know what is happening here" | There needs to be some flexibility in terms of occasionally considering cancelling meetings if parents or children request this for a legitimate reason. It is well intentioned and understandable that the current position is that we never cancel ICPCs. This was in response to many being cancelled and falling out of timescale. In this instance the agreed procedure is that the parent should have had the SW report 5 days prior to the meeting. Ms T didn't receive it until later in the evening the day before the meeting. Many parents tolerate similarly late receipt of SW reports but Ms T does like to read them and comment in detail. There is currently restorative training and service development being conducted with CP chairs. Making sarcastic or judgemental unclear comments should not be a feature of chairing conferences. |
| Court decision to agree permanency plans for children away from parents care | evidence of email response. Children not able to return safely |
| The complaint relates to a review child protection conference being reconvened due to professional's non-attendance in | Unfortunately this complaint is not unusual and the Head of Service has been notified so that the |

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| spite of invites being sent out in a timely manner. The complainant is requesting financial recompense for travel. | concerns around professional non-attendance at core meetings can be escalated. |
| Not clear as social worker had tried to communicate with the service user. | Delayed in an attempt to discuss the complaint with complainant. |
| 1. Negative attitude during visits, checking every room. 2. Being told to de-clutter house and check cupboards. 3. Not being informed of all reasons for the MARF. | Family Support Worker has been involved in the complaint investigation and the concerns have been discussed with her. Informal support plan to be implemented to support develop her practice and ensure practice is respectful, and recordings accurate and evidence relationship based practice and consent being gained. This will include observations and time to reflect on her practice as well as recordings within supervision and dedicated support sessions. Management oversight of MARFS – change to our process will be implemented whereby MARFs are prepared by FSW, approved by TMs and then FSW will speak to parents about the concerns that have led to the MARF being submitted. This will avoid information sharing being missed and more transparency for families. |
| Lack of staff capacity / volume of work | Several business cases asking to increase capacity in the team have been submitted, however this will continue to happen despite the best efforts of the team due to the volume of work. |

In addition to the above, stage 2 Investigating Officers have made the below recommendations to encourage learning throughout the service and to support the continued improvements being made;

- Children's Services to review its contractual arrangements with providers as a matter of urgency.
- That formal written responses should be provided to Complainants at Stage 1 of the Complaints Procedure.
- Children's Services staff are reminded that any complaint received by them should be forwarded to the Complaints Team in order for it to be formally logged and monitored.
- The IO recommends that following on from the review into the matter of children and young people being the subject of S20 Voluntary Care Orders for extended periods of time (2018), the Local Authority reassure itself that all current cases are consistently examined and assessed for appropriateness.
- The IO recommends that the Local Authority reassures itself that oversights of this nature, YP's not participating in a Pathway Plan Review, cannot reoccur.
- The IO recommends that Stage 1 complaint responders are reminded of the benefits of meeting with complainants prior to the production of a Stage 1 response letter. Providing complainants with an early opportunity to discuss their concerns, might assist in the context and understanding of a complaint, which in turn, might allow for a response to thoroughly addresses all aspects.
- In both complaints that have no findings this decision is made due to a lack of evidence. In this case specifically, the IO recommends that case file recording include copies of recording from externally commissioned agencies such as supported housing providers. Ensuring all relevant information pertaining to individual young people is accessible, should simplify data collection.

14. The effectiveness of the complaints procedure

It is difficult to draw conclusions from much of the data this year as we have seen a relatively low number of lessons learnt being completed making it challenging to draw on what improvement and changes have been made and how we can ensure that in fact the right improvements are made and processes are developed to support such improvements.

We do need to consider that Childrens Services are still going through a period of considerable and significant change; the Complaints Team and the Childrens Directorate will continue to review the process of Complaints to ensure that it is fit for purpose, that children, young people and their families can make comments and complaints about the services they receive and that we learn from these in an effective and timely manner.

The Complaints procedure will continue to be reviewed, training has been provided for investigating officers and further training will be provided as the teams stabilise, senior management are regularly updated on complaints received and the reporting process will be reviewed in line with changes to the Senior management team to ensure this continues to capture what they require to make informed changes and improvements.

In addition, further work will be carried out in 2024/2025 to provide more awareness of the Complaints procedures, ensuring that the processes continue to be person centred and accessible to all children and young people, and that that the process both empowers and shapes the wider Quality Improvement Strategy of Herefordshire's Childrens Services Directorate.

As part of the improvement plan the Complaints Team are working with Leeds to continue to embed a restorative resolution culture across the Local Authority.

This is the fourth year that the children's complaints process was administered by the Council's Complaints Team, taking over its management from Childrens Services in 2019. The team continue to review the policies and procedures for administering Children's complaints, reporting on complaints to the children's services senior management team, and arranged training for complaint investigation officers which was delivered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

15. Financial Implication of Complaints

In the previous financial year, concluded stage 2 and stage 3 complaints cost a total of; **£19,830.20**

This financial year the projected spend was **£48,863.60**. However, by the end of quarter three, this has been spent.

Quarter 1 - **£12,215.90**

Quarter 2 - **£10,214.05** (£22,429.95)

Quarter 3 - **£25,829** (£48,258.95)

Quarter 4 - **£23,848.70**

Total current spend: £72,107.65

This does not include the current complaints that are being investigated at stage 2 and pending stage 3 review panel

16. Considerations and Recommendations

Unfortunately the Court Judgement in April 2021 has continued to have a negative impact on Children's Services, there is no denying that; through published Court documents and media coverage that was in the public domain and had a negative impact on how Children's Services has been viewed, by both families we work with but also the wider community. The Ofsted report that was issued in September 2022 confirmed to those members of the public doubting the abilities of Children's Services to provide the right care for the Children and Young People of Herefordshire. However, the release of the Improvement Plan and the Commissioners Report earlier this year indicated that there has, and continued to be, significant improvements main within Children's Services, including the appointment of several permanent members of senior staff. The increase in complaints in this directorate should not, in its entirety, be considered a negative. It is evident that was the introduction of new services, improved communication that the public feel confident to raise concerns with the hope they will be resolved. One family gave recent feedback stating she had complained because she wanted to make sure decisions that had been made about her family didn't happen to anyone else, so learning could be taken by the service, and she wanted to be part of the change in how the public view children's services.

There has been a significant change to both the Senior Management and Leadership structure in the past year. We are now fortunate to have a highly experienced permanent Director and Service Director in place; and the new senior management and leadership structure is being formed following a period of review, including permanent Heads of Services, Service Managers and Team Managers, with the additional of a Service Director who is leading on Improvement and Assistance Chief Executive, Children's Improvement. Commissioning work continues with the support to improvement from Eleanor Brazil and well as regular Monitoring Visit from Ofsted which are providing valuable feedback to the service. All this considered it gives us hope and indication that we are on the right path towards improvement across all services.

There has been a significant change in terms of front line staff, including the introduction of additional teams in services areas, a developing recruitment campaign to source permanent Social Workers through the Social Work Academy and a Quality Improvement Plan in place for the coming years to focus on quality improvement, including within frontline staff.

A key recommendation would be the consideration of an independent complaint investigator being sourced to action investigations within the Children's Directorate; this would be a person/team of people who are separate of any specific team within the Directorate and could fall within the wider Quality Improvement Team. This is something that could be embedded but further review would be needed to make a valued assessment of how effective this would be.

A further recommendation would be that following the investigation into a complaint that the reference number is added to the case file of the complainant so that, should it be needed, professionals can request complaint information from the Complaints Team. This also indicates whether issues being raised may have already been addressed via the complaint procedure.

17. What are the Complaints Team doing to support improvement?

Growth to the Hear Me Advocacy services, pending a successful bid of funds to develop the service:

- Increase in advocacy staff (additional 82 hours to provide additional services and grow our offer)
- Introduction of a administrative post to support the team and manage all administrative functions that are currently managed by the Manager

- Increase in capacity to support children and young people to make complaints and ensure their voice is heard in all aspects of their journey

Growth of the Complaints Team to act as dedicated support for Children's complaints:

- Supporting the organisation to remain compliant and meeting our statutory responsibilities
- Protecting the organisation from reputational and financial damage
- Facilitate LGSCO complaints handling training for Children's Services managers

A review of the website is underway to ensure that it is accessible to all those who have a right to complaint, this includes translated complaints forms, easy read versions of information and up to date contact details.

The Complaints Team will continue to work with Social Care teams to ensure that awareness is raised amongst children and young people regarding making complaints if they feel the need to.

Appendix 3 – Compliments, regarding Childrens Services.

This report seeks to recognise the determination of children and young people to see that Social Care processes improve and develop and outline not just what complaints were made, but what difference they have made in the work of Herefordshire Children's Services and the recognition of individual officers.

18. Compliments Received

| Children & Young People | |
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| Robson Kapururira | I just wanted to email and say thank you for sorting everything out with my laptop and making sure I'm getting the money back it's very appreciated. Also thanking for listening to all of my thoughts and working towards the changes in the system it's nice to know someone cares. |
| Tracy Clarke | Tracy's communication was excellent throughout, and she arrived promptly for our appointment. She was able to advise of the preparation beforehand signing up to the mosaic system (which was a very simple process too!), and sent through some notes to consider for the EHA from speaking to the family prior to the meeting. Tracy was very helpful and supportive throughout the meeting with our family, and explained everything to us clearly. |
| Nazira Tourmoche | Dear Nazira, I wanted to send you this email to complement and congratulate you on your work in the children with disabilities team and in particular with AH and LL two children you discussed with us in your Ofsted feedback. |
| Cassie Bradley | Dear Cassie, I am writing to you to complement you and congratulate you on the excellent work you have carried out with the two children you provided post Ofsted feedback on. |
| Darcy Webb | Lovely to see you earlier – just wanted to say what a great job it sounds as though you are doing. I really believed when we met that R would benefit from the connection and it is lovely to hear about hair colouring and Friends watching 😊 |
| Bright Mawoko | On behalf of myself and my daughter, I would like to extend my appreciation for the fantastic work completed by my daughters' social worker, Bright Mawoko. The endless support and advice that he has offered during this time of distress has been impeccable and this has really helped me move forward with setting up a more positive future for my daughter and for this I will be |

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| | <p>eternally grateful.</p> <p>I have previously had a negative experience with social services that had left me with a lack of trust, but after working with Bright, my trust and opinion for social services has been restored.</p> <p>Moving forward, though we are not out of the woods yet, I am confident that with the continued support from Bright that we will reach a positive outcome which will be in the best interest of my daughter.</p> <p>I really cannot thank you enough Bright!</p> |
| Nana Pieterse | <p>I want to share some feedback with you that I received today at the Child Looked After review meeting for [REDACTED]. It was quite a difficult meeting, however there was lots of positive praise about the progression of the plan since Nana has become the social worker. This came from the School team, Foster Carer and Parent.</p> <p>Mum shared how pleased she was that Nana was the social worker for all three of her children. She said that all the children like him and feel able to talk to him. Mum said that she has a good working relationship with him which has helped the situation.</p> <p>[REDACTED] shared that Nana was the best social worker that she had ever had!</p> <p>Overall a very positive experience of Nana's practice, which I wanted to be celebrated.</p> |
| Laura Williams | <p>I just wanted to put a few words down and say how grateful I am to Laura for all the help and support she has given to me personally.</p> <p>Everything has been beyond crazy the last few months and my head has been a complete whirlwind. Laura has always been there to listen and help. She's an absolute credit to social services and fully deserves her promotion. Although from a selfish point of view I feel I'm losing someone who is on my side.</p> <p>Sorry for the waffle but I just wanted it known how good a job she does and more importantly how much she cares.</p> |
| James Hewett | <p>My CIN case is being closed on the 27th of October so that means I will not have a social worker anymore But we are quit sad that James is going as he has been the best social worker I could ever have</p> |
| Nana Pieterse | <p>I have had confirmation this morning from [REDACTED] that she is withdrawing her stage 2 complaint.</p> <p>The reason for this being the positive work Nana has been doing with her and this children and she does not want to jeopardise this positive relationship by purposing this complaint. Credit where it's due.. well done Nana, [REDACTED] speaks highly of you</p> |
| Paula Anderson | <p>I just wanted to let you know how delighted I am to be working with Paula Anderson from the Early Help Team. The recent changes have been most welcome and having the opportunity to work with Paula has been an absolute pleasure. She is clearly a passionate, dedicated and committed professional. The frustrating experience of recent EHA portal issues have been rectified swiftly by Paula's timely intervention. It is refreshing to know, with confidence, that through each step of the process you have a colleague who will do what they say and offer ongoing support and guidance. I am excited to work</p> |

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| | alongside Paula moving forward and wanted to make you aware of the excellent service she is providing. |
| Precious Mavura | Thank you for your concern and your kind words. You, above anyone else helped my brother Tim retain his independence by making sure he got the help he needed. He was sometimes stubborn and difficult to help but you saw past his quirks and went out of your way to make sure he got the help he needed. You were always professional but super kind and took time to listen to him. Our family will be forever grateful that you came into his life and made a difference. Please pass me the details of your supervisor so I can contact them and leave some feedback on your wonderful service. Take care, you are an angel! |
| Jules Knowles | Please can you give Jules more recognition for what she does she is amazing person. |
| Valerie Williams | Good morning Valerie, Hope you're well. Just wanted to send a quick email to say thank you for meeting with us yesterday and doing your best to solve the reference and LA check issue. It's very much appreciated. Looking forward to hearing from you or [REDACTED] later. |
| Sue Fair Nick Shire Bethan Venetia Bradbury Hannah Thyer Ed Lindsey Chase Dowling Naomi Alleyne Duty team Anthony Locke | You all gave me a family, parent figures & friends. I recognise now I wasn't always the best person to get along with as I was a rebellious teenager but despite that you never gave up on me. I have since gone on to changing my life completely around when I fell pregnant with my eldest daughter & now have 3 children in total. There was an issue that surfaced when I first signed myself into section 20 that a train pass would be funded for me to return to my school in Hereford from my foster placement in Church Stretton to finish studying for my GCSE'S and sit my exams, unfortunately this did not happen and I have missed out significantly on having them. However I made formal complaint with Herefordshire council and Naomi manager of 16+has agreed to amend this complaint. I am very pleased to have found my feet with the help of you all and cannot thank you enough for putting a roof over my head and trying your absolute best with me. I am now 25 years old and this will probably be my last email regarding my time spent with you so I wanted to personally thank all of you...Firstly Sue Fair, agnus brown as I used to call her! My first social worker and what an amazing one she was! Nick Shire, an amazing man who helped me significantly, Bethan, one of my support workers who was the loveliest woman, Venetia Bradbury, who is amazing and goes above and beyond for young people! She helped me through a really difficult situation and showed me nothing but love and support. Thank you vee! Hannah Thyer, for always being a chatty friend. Ed Lindsey, for putting up with my emails even though we have never met. Chase, for the correspondence to my complaint, and always there to offer a helping hand Naomi A, for agreeing to solve my complaint. Thank you Duty team who always help when needed that day. But most of all Anthony Locke, my support worker & PA.. Anthony did a lot for me during my time with 16+ and beyond that time and I have known I was always able to count on good old tony for anything. From advice to a bit of banter. Tony thank you for putting up with me for all these years and always being my friend. Even when I used not the best option of words. I will forever be grateful. I would not have made to where i am today without you all! |
| Danny Ivan | Both the young person ([REDACTED]) and carer were very positive of how Danny "makes things happen" for [REDACTED]. Think it's good to highlight areas of good practice. |
| Lema Daley | I would just like to provide some feedback on behalf of Lema Daley, chair for the above conference on 31.08.23. This was a difficult conference as parents |

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| | were unable to attend together due to domestic abuse and a non-molestation order in place. Father was very resistant to engage to start and at one point made it almost too challenging for the meeting to continue, however Lema used effective communication skills and was able to calm the situation. This took some time and careful management but resulted in the father engaging positively and behaving respectfully to all members of the conference. |
| Danny Ivan Toni Bepswa | Toni said she has seen [REDACTED] grow since being in [REDACTED] care as she has worked with them since the beginning. [REDACTED] was shy to start with and now does fist bumps to acknowledge people (which Danny (CSW) taught her) and is growing in confidence. The family do lots together and all is positive. [REDACTED] said support has been good from those around them, and has not felt intrusive. It has been difficult previously with frequent changes of social worker for Summer. But they are hopeful that the social workers Danny (Children's Social Worker) and Toni (Fostering Social Worker) continue working with them, as they are great. They said Danny is very good with [REDACTED] and she likes him. [REDACTED] feel that they have learned more about processes and how things work from Danny and Toni than they have from anyone else. They said Danny and Toni always let them know what is going on. |
| Dorine Rai | Thank you for being the best chair of conferences, you are so honest and transparent with parents and that is what they need |
| Louise Wright | as and when the time is right, my compliments to Social Worker Louise Wright who did the C&F assessment in October, it is excellent and I am saying so in my report 😊 😊 |
| Claire Hargest | Huge thanks for all that you have done to support the Knight family and school – it has been a pleasure working with you! May I take this opportunity to wish you continued success and happiness in your future career in social work. Herefordshire are so fortunate to have such a dedicated and passionate Social Worker to join their team – you will be an asset Claire, of that, I have no doubt! |
| Thelma Barns | Thelma Barnes! We can't express how amazing this lady is! She will always hold a place in our daughter's story. What an amazing human! Any future families that get to experience her support will be so lucky. |
| Laura Beare Beth Jones | We just want to impress upon you our heart felt gratitude and admiration for the speedy and professional response we received yesterday regarding CM. In the 1 years we have been fostering we have never had so much support so quickly so professionally for all concerned. The situation remains ongoing but we know a resolution is just around the corner and help has been sought for CM which is fantastic. Please could you pass this on to them. Even in the course of their many other duties they have both managed to drop us texts to check in and advise accordingly. Again we are very grateful to the service. |
| Hilary Jones Saffron Murray | Thank you both for facilitating and chairing the meeting this afternoon. It was a really productive meeting and we both felt enormously well supported as a result. |
| Hilary Jones | 'I can't thank you enough for being so kind. I've not seen H this happy for a long time' |
| Tanya Coad | <i>Thank you for letting me speak about my concerns and questions ensuring these were answered during the Conference. I had been very nervous about this conference due to past experiences at Conferences where I had not been listened to. Thank you for putting me at ease and ensuring I was heard.</i> |
| Jules Knowles | We had a good relationship with Jules and she has made a positive impact to our family. I felt that Jules listened to us. There is nothing that Jules did that I was unhappy with, she has done everything I asked for. Having Jules was |

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| | beneficial to our family, we have changed for the better. XXX's behaviour has improved and I think decorating the boy's room and giving them their own space has helped too |
| Tracey Duffy | <p>Thank you so much for the most amazing email that a mum could receive! And for all of your help and hard work. I just had the biggest happy cry and O is absolutely over the moon and so excited to go to college and make friends!! Honestly you guys have changed O's life for the better.</p> <p>It has been the hardest year watching O hit absolute rock bottom in mainstream school and not knowing what the future held for her. To now knowing she will absolutely thrive in life in an amazing setting with the skills to help her (needs description redacted)</p> <p>From an overwhelmingly happy mummy, thank you from the bottom of my heart.</p> |