
**Bath & North East
Somerset Council**

Improving People's Lives

**Children's Services
Complaints and Representations Procedure**

Annual Report 2022 - 2023

**Author: Sarah Watts
Complaints and Data Protection Team Manager**

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1. Summary

- 1.1 There is a duty on all local authorities to operate and maintain a complaints and representations procedure for children's social care services in accordance with Sections 24(D) and 26 of the Children Act 1989; the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006; and, the accompanying statutory guidance, Getting the Best from Complaints.
- 1.2 The following report has been prepared in accordance with the above Regulations and statutory guidance and provides an analysis of compliments, complaints and representations received by Children's Services between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023. The report also considers emerging trends in complaints, the outcomes of the complaints and the learning derived by the services from the complaints, compliments and representations.
- 1.3 In addition to complaints about Children's Social Care, commonly referred to as 'statutory complaints' this report also considers complaints about the Young People's Prevention Service, the Children and Families Prevention Service and the Education, Inclusion and Children's Safeguarding Service which are dealt with under the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure.
- 1.4 Complaints about schools are governed by separate legislation. All schools are required to have their own complaints procedures and this report does not therefore include information about school complaints.
- 1.5 Colleagues across Children's Services welcome all types of feedback and are committed to using it to improve practice and service delivery. During the year **67** complaints were processed under the Children's Social Care statutory complaints procedure, **67** were processed under the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure and **2** new referrals were made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. In addition, **15** compliments were recorded.
- 1.6 The Complaints and Data Protection Team is also responsible for logging and monitoring enquiries from MPs and Councillors. During 2022 – 23, **37** enquiries for recorded. Three concerned Children's Social Care and the remainder were related to education and in particular the SEND Team and transport issues. Frequently the service will also be dealing with the same issue under the Complaints Procedure.

2. The Statutory and Corporate Complaints Procedures

- 2.1 The statutory complaints procedure is a three-stage process which is described in Appendix 1. In addition to complaints, the local authority is also required to record and report on representations and compliments.

- **Complaint** – a complaint is defined as *an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response.*
 - **Representation** – a representation is *an enquiry or comment about the availability, delivery or nature of a service which is not a criticism*, for example, a child or young person can put forward ideas or proposals about the service they receive without having this framed as a complaint.
 - **Compliment** – a compliment is *positive feedback about a service or individual member of staff from a child or young person and their family or other agencies.*
- 2.2 The scope of the statutory complaints procedure is relatively limited and only covers certain aspects of the Childrens Social Care service, for example, it does not cover child protection matters including section 47 enquiries and conferences, Early Help, Section 7 and Section 37 court reports and assessment of foster carers.
- 2.3 Complaints about these areas of work are handled under the Council’s Corporate Complaints Procedure along with complaints about the Education and Inclusion Services such as the statutory SEND service, educational psychology, early years funding. The Corporate Complaints Procedure is a two stage procedure and more information can be found at: <https://beta.bathnes.gov.uk/make-complaint-about-other-council-services>
- 2.4 All complaints and representations are triaged by the Complaints and Data Protection Team and allocated to the appropriate procedure. Once this has happened, the complaint will be handled through that procedure until it has exhausted all stages or the complainant is satisfied their complaint has been resolved, the complaint cannot be transferred to a different procedure.

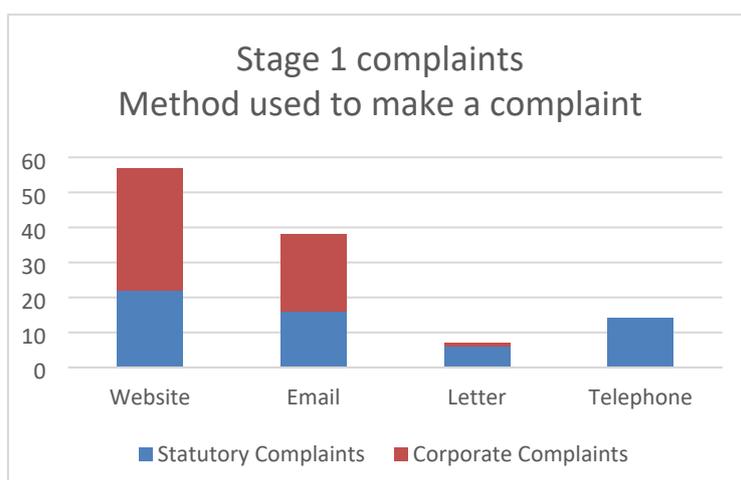
3. Accessing the procedure

- 3.1 Children’s Services welcomes feedback, including complaints and representations about its services and is committed to the following key principles of complaint handling:
- People who use services can tell the Council about their good and bad experiences of the service.
 - People who complain have their concerns resolved swiftly and, wherever possible, by the people who provide the service locally.
 - The procedure is a positive aid to inform and influence service improvements, not a negative process to apportion blame.
 - The Service has a ‘listening and learning culture’ wherever possible learning is fed back to people who use services – and fed into internal systems to drive improvement.

3.2 With this in mind, there are many ways available for young people, their families and carers to make a complaint or representation:

- Information is available on the Council's website and a complaint can be made using a simple on-line form.
- A link to information about the complaints procedure is included on the feedback form which is used by Children's Social Care and is promoted through a QR code on staff email addresses.
- Information about the complaints procedure is incorporated into the Single Assessment report form.
- A complaint can be made to an allocated worker and staff have an information sheet to share which explains the procedure.
- All looked after children have an opportunity to raise concerns with the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) at their regular review.

3.2 The move towards using the Council's website to make a complaint continues, particularly with Corporate Complaints. This helps the Complaints Team to triage the complaint quickly and accurately.



3.3 The majority of the complaints (71%) are made by a parent on behalf of, or in relation to, their child. Complaints were also received from foster carers and people in a formal caring role (6 complaints), grandparents (5 complaints) and other relatives such as aunts and uncles (6 complaints).

3.4 Of the 57 Stage 1 complaints made under the statutory procedure, 7 were made by a young person, 5 of these were made by a young person who is either in care or is care experienced. Two were made by young people who were not in receipt of a service from Children's Social Care.

3.5 Section 26A of the Children Act, 1989 requires the local authority to 'make arrangements for the provision of advocacy services to children or young people making or intending to make complaints under the Act'. 'Shout Out!' at Off the Record is commissioned to provide this service and the Complaints and Data Protection Team ensures information about advocacy is available to

all young people who contact about making a complaint if they are not already aware of it.

3.6 Three of the young people who were eligible for advocacy support made their complaint with the support of an advocate from Shout Out.

3.7 Advocacy is not available to parents and carers in the same way although there are organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau which can offer some support.

3.8 The Council has set out its commitment to responding to the concerns of young people in care or who are care experienced in the Pledge which has been endorsed by the Council's Corporate Parenting Group and the In Care Council helps to monitor it. It says:

- ✓ We will work hard to sort out any problems or worries that you have
- ✓ If we can't do what you ask, we will explain the reasons why
- ✓ We will make sure you know how to get an independent advocate – that's someone who will listen to you and work with you to get things changed
- ✓ We will make sure you have all the information you need to make a complaint and we promise to always take your complaints seriously
- ✓ You can contact your IRO if you are worried or don't feel listened to, they will try to help and can support you should you wish to make a complaint

3.9 Information available indicates that for statutory complaints:

- Gender Identity - 71% of complainants were female and 29% were male. This is in line with previous years.
- Ethnicity - Two people identified themselves as Caribbean, one person as African and one person as 'Any other'. Where the information is known all other complainants were recorded as White British.
- One person recorded that they have a disability.
- 70% of complainants fell in the age bracket of 25 to 44 years. 10% of complaints were made by someone under the age of 25 and 20% by someone 45 years or older.

3.10 Providing improved monitoring information is an area for development.

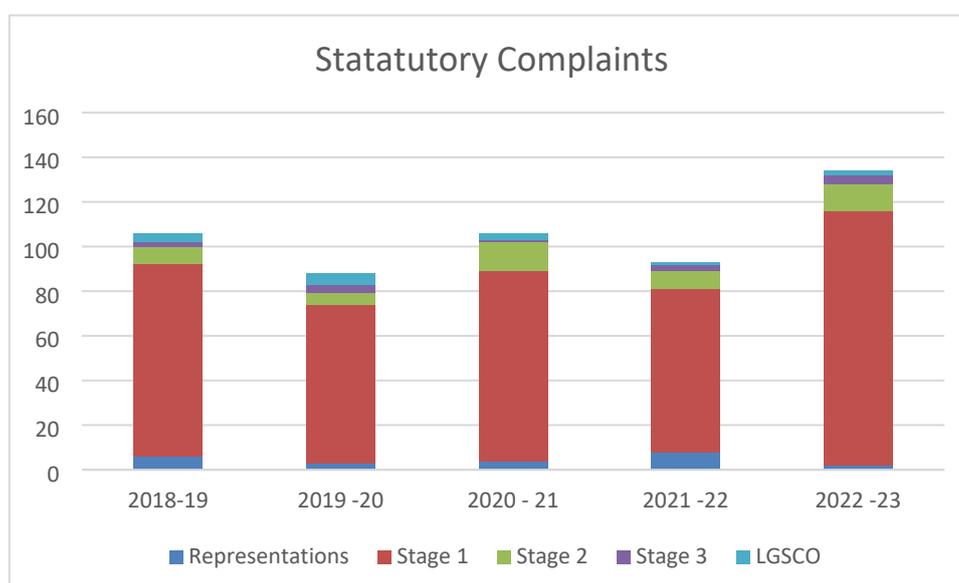
4. Complaints – analysis of the data

4.1 To provide some context to the number of complaints received in 2022/2023, Children's Social Care received 885 referrals per 10,000 children and young people in 2021/22. There were 102 children subject to a Child Protection Plan on 31 March 2022 and 196 were children looked after on this date. 1,967 children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan) in January 2023.

4.2 The table below provides the number of complaints received and closed during 2022 – 23.

	Carried over 2021 - 22	Received 2022 - 23	Resolved	Outside Scope	Not pursued	Carried forward 2023 - 24
Representation	0	2	1	0	1	0
Stage 1 (Statutory Procedure)	5	57	34	14	6	8
Stage 1 (Corporate Procedure)	0	57	42	8	0	7
Stage 2 (Statutory Procedure)	2	10	9	0	0	3
Stage 2 (Corporate Procedure)	0	2	2	0	0	0
Stage 3 (Statutory Procedure only)	1	4	3	0	0	2
Referral to Ombudsman	3	2	5	0	0	0
Total	11	134	96	22	7	20

4.3 Comparison with previous years



4.4 The total number of complaints received is showing a significant increase from previous years. The number of Stage 1 complaints about Children's Social Care have not increased significantly year on year; however, there has been an increase in the number of complaints about the SEND Service from 17 in the 2 previous years to 33 Stage 1 complaints in 2022/23.

4.5 Escalation of complaints from Stage 1 to Stage 2 has remained at a similar level for the past 3 years. Further information about Stage 2 complaints can be found in Section 5.

4.6 The table below provides a breakdown of the number of complaints received by each Team. A full list of the Teams is given at Appendix 2.

Team	Rep	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	LGSCO
Admissions & Transport		2			
Attendance & Welfare		2			1
Connecting Families		2			
Safeguarding & QA		7			
SEND		33	2		1
SEND Transport		3			
Children in Care	1	18	1		
DCT		9	4	3	
FPT		1			
FST (1, 2 & 3)		26	2	1	
Triage		7			
YOS		1			
Other	1	3	1		

4.7 As mentioned above the number of complaints to the statutory SEND Service has increased significantly during the year. The issues raised include concern about the delay in issuing an assessment decision, disagreement with the decision following an EHC Needs Assessment, delay in issuing an EHC Plan, disagreement about provision named in the Plan, lack of suitable provision and the quality of provision.

4.8 Where a parent is dissatisfied with the initial Stage 1 response to their complaint, under the Corporate Complaints Procedure they can request clarification from the service and a second response is provided. This process has been used to successfully resolve the majority of complaints and only 2 were escalated to Stage 2 of the procedure.

4.9 Within Children's Social Care the largest increase in complaints is against the Children in Care Team although this has been gradual over recent years; there were 12 complaints in 2021 – 22 compared with 18 in the current year. There are no new themes emerging from these complaints and the increase in numbers is likely to be partly due to the number of young people who have made a complaint in the last couple of years. It is seen as a positive that they have felt able to raise their concerns in this way.

4.10 Attempts have been made to compare the number of complaints received by Bath and North East Somerset with its comparator authorities. Unfortunately, the figures for these authorities are not available.

4.11 The statutory guidance requires the local authority to monitor complaints against standard categories to identify the reason for the complaint. The table below shows how many complaints were upheld against each of these categories (Statutory complaints in Children’s Social Care only).

Category	Number of Stage 1 complaints	% of Stage 1 complaints	Upheld (UH) or Partially Upheld (PUH)	% of complaints Received UH or PUH by category
Assessment, care management or review <i>includes delays in completing an assessment, errors and perceived bias in an assessment</i>	1	2%	1	100%
Attitude or behaviour of staff <i>includes issues with poor communication</i>	10	16%	5	50%
Concern about appropriateness of service <i>includes dispute about whether the service should be involved with the family</i>	7	11%	0	0%
Concern about quality of the service <i>Where the service did not meet service user expectations</i>	29	46%	5	17%
Delay in decision making or provision of a service	1	2%	1	100%
Unwelcome or disputed decision	14	23%	2	2%
Total	62	100%	14	23%

4.12 The percentage of complaints in each category is consistent with previous years. 46% of complaints were recorded under the category of ‘Concern about the quality of service’. These complaints tend to be more complex, cover several issues and can be harder to resolve. Only 17% were upheld or partially upheld. 20% of these complaints were escalated to Stage 2.

4.13 23% of all complaints were either upheld or partially upheld. This figure is lower than previous years. Examples of complaints in the three categories with the highest number of complaints are given below.

Complaint recorded under the category of Unwelcome or disputed decision – a parent complained about the decision to hold a strategy discussion in respect of their child and then not inform them until after it had taken place. The parent believes this is against the agreed procedure.

Response – the complaint was partially upheld. It was accepted that there was no clear record or rationale for the decision not to inform the parent. The reasons for the decisions should have been explained to the parent at a later date.

Complaint recorded under Concern about Quality of Service – a grandparent complained about confusion caused by changes to contact arrangements with their granddaughter, the lack of interest from Children’s Social Care to support her relationship with their granddaughter and proposals for a possible move to a new placement.

Response – the complaint was not upheld and the manager reiterated how

Complaint recorded under Attitude and Behaviour of Staff – a parent complained that a social worker had been rude to their family at a meeting held in front of school staff and no minutes of the meeting were shared afterwards.

Response – the parent received an apology for social worker’s manner at the meeting. The manager confirmed that the incident was being taken seriously and a new social worker would be allocated.

5. Learning from complaints

- 5.1 The main purpose of the complaints procedure is to give the service an opportunity to put things right for the individual complainant wherever possible. The statutory guidance also states that all local authorities should provide a system for:
- The dissemination of learning from complaints to line managers;
 - The use of the complaints procedure as a measure of performance and means of quality control; and
 - Information derived from complaints to contribute to practice development, commissioning and service planning.

To achieve this there are processes in place to collate the learning at the conclusion of each stage of the procedure and disseminate this through regular meetings such as the Service Improvement Board. Learning does not always come from complaints which have been upheld; improvements can also be identified where the basis of the complaint is not upheld.

Stage 1 complaints

- 5.2 Examples of improvements identified include:
- A training session to be held for the Team to consider plans to manage contact sessions where adoption is the care plan and the sessions are particularly emotionally difficult.
 - The guidelines for social workers when placing a child into foster care to be reviewed in the light of a complaint from a young person who shared the impact this situation had on him when he was younger.

Stage 2 complaint investigations

- 5.3 During 2022 - 23, 10 requests for a Stage 2 complaint investigation under the statutory procedure were received. This is higher than the service used to receive but is in line with the previous 2 years. Two investigations were continuing from the previous year. Nine investigations were concluded.
- 5.4 Stage 2 investigations can generate a number of actions for the service and detailed action plans are developed to monitor progress. Many of the actions relate specifically to the child or young person or their family; however, examples of actions which provide wider learning for the service include:
- Managers and staff will continue to explore the issue of 'unconscious bias'
 - The Service will ensure that staff are fully aware of the procedures for the distribution of Child Protection Care Conference minutes.
 - The Service will ensure that additional training is available to staff on confidentiality, the law and BANES policy on data protection and that staff understand the process to follow in the event of a data breach.
- 5.5 In the same period, two requests for a Stage 2 Review under the Corporate Complaints Procedure were made. One complaint was not upheld and one was partially upheld. Both complainants were given information about making a complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Stage 3 Review Panel

- 5.6 Three Stage 3 Review Panels were held during the year. Two further Review Panels were requested and arranged for 2023 -24.
- 5.7 The Review Panel can only consider complaints which were not upheld at Stage 2. The Panel does not re-investigate the complaint but makes recommendations to assist with the resolution of the complaint and learning for the Service.
- 5.8 Examples of recommendations made by the Review Panels include:
- Training to be made available to social workers to ensure they have an effective understanding of Pathway Planning.
 - Social workers to be aware that all children and young people in care have a right to advocacy support. This does not depend on where they live.
 - Advocates should be informed of meetings in a timely way.
 - The Commissioning Team to ensure they record all complaints about external agencies.
 - All children and young people in care to have access to the Emergency Duty Team.
 - Training to be made available to social workers on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. This was a recommendation made by two of the Review Panels.

6. Complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGSCO)

6.1 Three complaints to the Ombudsman which were outstanding from the previous year were concluded during the year. Two further referrals were made during 2022 – 23. One was concluded and the other carried forward to 2023 – 24. The table below records the findings of the Ombudsman.

Summary of Complaint	Final Ombudsman decision
Miss D and Mr E complained about the Council's statutory complaint investigation. They said the Council did not take their complaint seriously or deal with it professionally. Miss D and Mr E said this left them distressed and without a financial remedy	The Council was at fault for a short delay in stage two of its complaint investigation. We do not consider this caused Miss D and Mr E significant injustice. Fault with no injustice
Mr X complained about the outcome of his home to school transport appeal for his daughter. He said the panel did not properly consider all the information he provided when it denied his request for a taxi as school transport for his daughter. Mr X further complained the Council ignored his communication about the same matter.	There was fault in the Council's record keeping but this did not cause Mr X an injustice as it did not affect the outcome of the appeal. Fault with no injustice
The complaint is about the Council's decision to carry out a child protection investigation, after contact from the complainant's employer. Ms X says the investigation was flawed and the report contained opinion and unevidenced statements.	The Ombudsman upholds the complaint, because of several administrative faults. We have asked the Council to apologise. But the faults did not affect the conclusions of the social worker's report, or the decision to start a child protection plan. Upheld
The complainant complained the Council had failed to ensure her daughter (Y) received the Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) contained in her Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)	There was no fault in how the Council assessed Ms X's daughter for autism and speech and language provisions for her Education, Health and Care Plan. Nor was there any fault in how it ensured these provisions were being delivered by the education provider. No fault

6.2 The Ombudsman did not request any remedial action by Children's Services on any of the complaints.

6.3 The Ombudsman has launched an interactive map on its website with data about the annual performance of each council <https://www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance/bath-and-north-east-somerset-council/statistics>

7. Compliments

7.1 Compliments are a very important way of reflecting good practice and provide valuable information which is used alongside complaints data to identify where the strengths and weaknesses of the service are. A total of 15 compliments were recorded during the year from children, young people and their families and colleagues working in partner agencies. This is far lower than in previous years and Teams are encouraged to continue to send through their compliments.

7.2 The Teams receiving the compliments were:

The Administration Team – 2 compliments
 Care Experienced Team - 4 compliments
 Child in Care Team – 1 compliment
 Connecting Families – 2 compliments
 Disabled Children’s Team – 6 compliments

7.3 The table below captures examples of the compliments received. These compliments have been selected to show the range of feedback received. There are many more that could have been included.

<p>From the parent to her son’s social worker in DCT.</p>	<p>S has been a rock to me, allowing me to not feel I am failing as a mum. I have, with my family, tried our very best to care for C without any outside agencies. Now that C is older, stronger, with some behavioural challenges, S has been amazing in her support, advice and guidance on how best support C and our family. She keeps me updated on processes and checks in regularly with me and how C is, whether positive or negative. She is always at the end of the phone should there be a problem and will inform me when she is available should I need to contact her. What is great about Stacey is that she listens and I feel I am listened to and taken seriously without any judgement.</p>
<p>From the Chair of the Channel Panel to the minute taker</p>	<p>These minutes are extremely prompt. They are also very good. I understand it is largely a difficult and thankless task. What you’re doing is the standard that other Channel minutes should be achieving.</p>
<p>From a parent to her children’s social worker in the Children in Care Team</p>	<p><i>K shared that she feels she has a strong and positive relationship with S and feels she can trust her to keep her up to date about the needs and experiences of her children. She feels that communication is clear and timely and that as a result she feels confident about the service and communication and advocacy her children will also be getting which feels really positive to her’.</i></p>

<p>From young people in the Care Experience Council to a worker in the Care Experienced Team.</p>	<p>I just wanted to give a shout out to you from some of our young adults in the CEC. Your name is often mentioned in sessions, with the group referencing your dedicated and determined approach! They really value your style of working and say that it makes all the difference 'because you actually get stuff done'.</p>
<p>From a parent to the Team Manager of the Children in Care Team</p>	<p>I'm not sure if this is the best place to write to about this as it's where I'd normally log a complaint but I wanted to share a really positive experience I've had with the LA today and hopefully it will get to the right person.</p> <p>An unexpected issue was raised around lunch time today that could have impacted my face to face contact with one of my children next week. I was unable to reach my sw or her manager but managed to speak with the Team Manager.</p> <p>J helped me to get the issue sorted and even went out of her way to bring me lateral flow tests to ensure my parents and I each had enough to take one each day before the visit as requested by the placement</p> <p>I feel that this was above and beyond what would be expected and am extremely thankful that J took the time to do this.</p> <p>I am thankful that I can head into Christmas without the worry that I may not be able to see my daughter.</p>

8. Complaint handling and monitoring

Response to Stage 1 complaints

- 8.1 Compliance with timescales is carefully monitored in recognition of the need to deal with complaints as swiftly as possible.
- 8.2 **Statutory complaints** – the timescale for a response is 10 working days. This can be extended to 20 working days when an advocate is needed, or the complaint is complex. Due to the increased complexity of many complaints and the difficulty managers have in addressing the issues satisfactorily in 10 working days, the timescale is now extended to 20 working days from the outset for many complaints.

- 8.3 34 complaint responses were issued during the year:
- Within 10 working days: 5 complaints (100% within agreed timescale)
 - Within 20 working days: 14 complaints (100% within agreed timescale)
 - In excess of 20 working days: 15 complaints (not within agreed timescale)

8.4 The Complaints and Data Protection Team work closely with managers to avoid unnecessary delay and keeps the complainant informed of timescales. Three complaints responses which fell outside the timescale were delayed while the manager arranged to meet with the complainant.

8.5 **Corporate Complaints** - a response should be provided in 15 working days.

42 responses were issued during the year

Within 15 working days: 22 complaints (52% of responses)

In excess of 15 working days: 20 complaints (48% of responses)

Response to Stage 2 complaints

8.6 **Statutory complaints** - The response to a Stage 2 complaint should be provided within 25 working days from the date the complaint is agreed with the complainant. This timescale is very challenging as the complaints are complex and the time needed for file reading and interviewing staff is considerable. The timescale can be extended up to a maximum of 65 working days with the agreement of the complainant and this is required with most investigations.

8.7 Of the 9 investigations completed, two investigations met the 65 working day timescale. It took an average of 89 working days to complete all the investigations. The Complaints Manager continues to work with the Investigating Officer and Independent Person to manage their time effectively during the investigation but there are many factors which contribute to the delays which are outside the control of the Investigating Team. Complainants are also returning to ask to meet in person rather than online which is a more efficient use of time.

8.8 Corporate Complaints – the Stage 2 process is managed by the Corporate Complaints Team and is reported on separately.

Response to Stage 3 complaints

8.9 **Statutory Complaints only** - A Stage 3 Review Panel should be held within 30 working days of the request being received. Two Panels were held within this timescale. The third Panel was arranged to accommodate the complainant's commitments.

9. An overview of the work of the Complaints and Data Protection Team

- 9.1 **The Complaints and Data Protection Team Manager** manages the complaints and data protection service for Children’s Services, Adult Social Care and Public Health and has two Information Governance Officers in the Team. One supporting the Data Protection service and the other the Complaints Service.
- 9.2 **The data protection service** includes processing Subject Access Requests under the Data Protection Act 2018, responding to requests from the police under a joint information sharing protocol and requests from other local authorities and agencies for disclosure of records. The Team also works Data Protection Team on information security issues (data breaches).
- 9.3 **Membership of external groups:** The Complaints and Data Protection Team Manager is the Vice Chair of the South West Region Complaints Managers Group. She is also currently co-managing the Register of Independent Investigators and Stage 3 Panel Members (South West) with South Gloucestershire Council. This Register was set up to ensure that the Council has access to appropriately appointed and trained independent investigators and Stage 3 Panel Members. The Group holds annual Network Meetings to support the development of Register Members in the independent roles.
- 9.4 **Development of the Service; the objectives for the coming year**

- **Continue to work with managers to improve the response times for complaints at Stage 1 whilst maintaining the quality of the response.**

A delayed or poorly written response will increase the possibility of escalation to Stage 2.

Emphasis is now placed on the manager speaking with the complainant as soon as they receive the complaint to ensure they understand the complaint and the outcomes being sought. Writing directly to the complainant without a speaking to them first is discouraged particularly if the complainant is a young person.

- **Continue to support managers with the handling of complaints through individual support sessions and attendance at meetings to share good practice and provide feedback.**

Delivering training sessions to managers and staff is currently being explored. This could be face to face or through an e-learning package.

- Continue to develop the mechanism for capturing and disseminating the learning from complaints through the use of action plans.

This work is support by the Service Improvement Board and will continue through the year. The intention is to routinely share the action plan and outcomes with the complainant following a Stage 2 investigation or Stage 3 Review Panel.

- Review the collection of equalities monitoring data.

This work will continue during 2023 – 24.

- Continue to develop the work started recently to offer a Complaint Investigation Service for Schools and Multi-Academy Trusts. This work is being done in collaboration with One West Professional Services.

The work is in its infancy but offers a professional complaint investigation service using members of the South West Register of Independent People.

- Participate in the introduction of the Joint Complaint Handling Code which has been issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Services Ombudsman.

The new Code is due to be implemented in April 2024 and will require changes to the procedure for handling Corporate Complaints. It will not effect the statutory complaints procedure.

Sarah Watts
Complaints and Data Protection Team Manager
November 2023

Appendix 1 - Summary of the statutory Complaints Procedure

The statutory complaints procedure is aimed primarily at providing a child or young person who is looked after, a care leaver or a child in need the opportunity to make a complaint to Children's Social Care. In addition, a parent with parental responsibility, a foster carer, a special guardian and prospective adopters can use the procedure.

An adult can make a complaint on behalf of, or in relation to, a child or young person but the local authority must be satisfied they are suitable to act on behalf of the child or young person and have sufficient interest in the child's welfare.

Stage One – Local Resolution

Stage 1 complaints are investigated and responded to by the manager of the team complained about. The manager responding to the complaint is encouraged to speak with the complainant to hear their concerns first hand and identify ways of resolving the complaint as swiftly as possible.

This is followed by a written response from the manager within 10 working days. The timescale can be extended to 20 working days where the complaint is complex, or input is needed from an advocate or other agency.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response, they have 20 working days in which to request a Stage 2 investigation.

There are a small number of complaints where the informal approach at Stage 1 is not appropriate, for example, where a young person makes a detailed complaint about their care experience. In these circumstances the complaint is escalated straight to Stage 2.

Stage Two – Independent Investigation

The Complaints Manager will arrange a full investigation of the complaint. The investigator will be independent of the service and the person complained about.

The investigation is overseen by an Independent Person, and they will be involved in all aspects of the investigation to ensure it is fair, thorough and transparent and the child or young person is the focus of the investigation.

The complainant should receive a response to their complaint in the form of a report from the investigating officer and a report from the independent person and adjudication letter from a senior manager within 25 days of making the complaint. This can be extended up to a maximum of 65 working days where the complaint is particularly complex or a key witness is unavailable for part of the time.

The Adjudicating Officer should ensure that recommendations contained in the response are implemented. This is monitored by the Complaints Manager.

Stage Three - Review Panel

At the end of the Stage 2 process if the complainant remains dissatisfied, they can request a Review Panel meeting. They have 20 working days to make the request and the Panel must be held within 30 working days of the request. The Panel is made up of three people who are independent of the local authority.

The complainant has an opportunity to present their case to the Panel and the Panel will then consider whether the complaint has been adequately dealt with at Stage 2.

The Panel should focus on achieving resolution for the complainant and making recommendations to provide practical remedies and solutions.

The Stage 3 Review Panel is the final stage of the local authority procedure. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, s/he will be advised how to refer their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Appendix 2 – Abbreviations used for Children’s Service Teams

A&T – Schools Admissions and Transport

A&W - Attendance and Welfare Support Service

ACE – Adolescent and Child Exploitation Team

Children’s Centres – Bright Start Children Centre Services

CIC – Child in Care Team

Commissioning – Complex and Targeted Support

CF - Connecting Families

DCT – Disabled Children’s Team

Early Years Funding - EYF

FPT – Family Placement Team

FST – Family Support Teams (1, 2 & 3)

IRO – Independent Reviewing Officer

LADO – Local Authority Designated Officer (Managing Allegations)

SSEN - Statutory Special Educational Needs Team

S&QA – Safeguarding and Quality Assurance (including CP Chairs, LADO and IRO)

Triage