

<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Children and Families Service - Annual Report on Services Complaints, Compliments and Representations - April 2022 to March 2023</b>
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<b>SERVICE:</b>	Quality Assurance and Commissioning, Integrated Adults and Social Care Services

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## SUMMARY

The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 sets out the procedure that Local Authorities have a responsibility to follow when a complaint is made about Children's Social Services. Regulation 13 (3) of this Act states that all local authorities must publish an Annual Report (1 April to 31 March) to identify the number, detail and outcomes to all complaints received. The information within this Annual Report fulfils Gateshead Council's obligations under this regulation and covers the period between 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023.

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### 1.0 The Statutory Complaints Procedure

- 1.1 This procedure is for all representations received from children and young people, their parents, foster carers, or other qualifying adults about Gateshead Council's Children's Services.
- 1.2 The Statutory Procedure covers complaints about services delivered to children and young people under Part 3 of the 1989 Act and specific functions under Parts 4 and 5 of the Children Act 1989.
- 1.3 There are three stages to the procedure:

#### **Stage 1 - Local Resolution**

Operational managers investigate Stage 1 complaints. Complaints at this level are expected to be concluded within ten working days, with an extension of further ten working days, (with the agreement of the complainant), if necessary. The maximum time for a Stage 1 investigation is twenty working days.

#### **Stage 2 – Investigation**

Investigations at Stage 2 are conducted at arm's length to the operational service complained about, with full and formal reporting to the complainant by an Adjudicating Officer, (usually at Service Director level), within twenty-five working days, with extension up to sixty-five working days, if necessary, which must be negotiated with the complainant.

#### **Stage 3 – Review Panel**

If there is any residual dissatisfaction with the outcome at Stage 2, the complainant can request that the issues are taken to a Review Panel, (Stage 3). A Stage 3 Review Panel must be requested within twenty working days of receipt of the Stage 2 investigation findings. A Stage 3 Review Panel is the final stage of the statutory complaint's procedure.

## **2.0 Publicity and Information**

- 2.1 Information about the complaint's procedure can be made available in key languages and formats. Requests for information in these formats or from customers with sight or hearing impairment are provided via the Council's Communication Team.
- 2.2 There is also a leaflet for children and young people receiving a service. This leaflet was designed with help from the children and young people from One Voice, the Children and the Young People's Forum. The leaflet includes a pre-paid slip that can be completed and posted back free of charge.
- 2.3 When young people are admitted into Local Authority care, part of the 20-day review requirements state that they are to be visited by the Council's Children's Rights Officer. The young person also receives a 'Welcome' pack', which includes information, leaflets and other guidance on how to make a complaint.
- 2.4 The Children's Rights Officer, Independent Visitors and Independent Reviewing Officers are important links between the child and the Complaints Manager and ensure that any issues of dissatisfaction are resolved at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.5 Information about the complaint's procedure can be made available in key languages and formats. Information for customers with sight or hearing impairment can also be provided on request.

## **3.0 The Independent Element**

- 3.1 Under the complaint's procedure, there is a requirement to provide Independent Persons for all Stage 2 complaints. There is currently a reciprocal consortium arrangement with South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council and Sunderland City Council, which provides Independent People for Children Act 1989 complaints. There is also a requirement to ensure that Stage 3 Review Panels consist of three members who are fully independent of the Council. Review Panels are independently organised and administered by Legal and Democratic Services.

## **4.0 Advocacy and Special Needs**

- 4.1 The purpose of advocacy in complaints procedures is to ensure that children and young people are given assistance when making or intending to make a complaint. Advocacy is about empowering children and young people to make sure that their rights are respected and that their views and wishes are fully considered and reflected in decision-making about their own lives. It is a legal requirement that any child or young person wishing to make a complaint must always be offered the services of an advocate.

## **5.0 Training and Employee Development**

- 5.1 Training for Investigating Officers is undertaken on an annual basis. All investigating skills training courses are commissioned from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, (LG&SCO). This ensures that investigating officers are trained to the Ombudsman's investigation standard with the focus being on swift resolution, proportionate investigations, and appropriate redress.
- 5.2 An LG&SCO Investigating Skills Training Course was arranged for Spring 2022. All current and new managers across Children's Services operational teams were invited to attend. It is also arranged to undertake additional training and guidance on the internal procedures followed by Gateshead Council with all Children's Services managers. This will reinforce the requirement to carry out robust investigations across all stages of the procedure along with the importance of meeting statutory timescales.

## 6.0 Complaints from Children in Residential Facilities

- 6.1 All children’s residential homes have their own “in-house” complaints process to resolve low level concerns. Residential staff work with the young person and allow them to identify themselves how their issues can be resolved to their satisfaction. Information about low level concerns is retained within the facility and is available in the event of OFSTED inspections.

## 7.0 All Representations Received over the Past Three Years

Representations	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Stage 1 Complaints	17	11	8
Stage 2 Complaints	2	0	4
Stage 3 - Review Panels	1	3	3
Comments	2	3	1
Corporate Complaints	14	19	10
Complaint related queries	27	26	23
Data Issues	1	15	8
Insurance Claims	1	5	1
LGO Referrals	3	6	8
Safeguarding Partnership Complaints	0	0	2
MP / Councillor Referral	2	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Compliments</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>All Representations Received</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>197</b>
<b>Trend</b>		<b>-13.02%</b>	<b>5.35%</b>

## 7.1 Key Points of Interest – Statutory Complaints

- The number of formal contacts received citing dissatisfaction about Children’s Services decreased by 18% (72 from 88) compared with the number of dissatisfaction contacts received during 2021/22, (88).
- **However, during 2022/23, 63% (125) of all Children’s Services contacts were compliments.**
- Children’s Services received eight Stage 1 complaints during 2022/23. This is a 27% decrease on Stage 1 complaints received during 2021/22, (11).
- 62% (5) of complaints related to the quality of services provided.
- No statutory complaints were received regarding professional misconduct of workers.
- One Corporate Complaint was received about actions by a member of staff within the Children’s Engagement Service. The complaint was later withdrawn by the complainant.
- 25% (2) of complaints were regarding the quality or lack of support provided by individual workers or services.
- The number of complaint related queries (low-level issues not requiring a written response) decreased by 11% compared to those received during 2021/22 (23 from 26).
- Safeguarding and Care Planning Teams received 52% (12) of complaint related queries received. However, it was found that a number were relating to court proceedings and subsequently closed.
- All complaint related queries received about Children’s Social Care were dealt with directly by either the team manager of the service complained about or by the Complaints Section after prior discussion with the worker concerned.
- There were four complaints registered at Stage 2 of the complaints procedure during 2022/23. Stage 2 is the progression from a Stage 1 complaint. The issues remain the same but require a more in depth investigation.
- There were also three Stage 3 Review Panels held during this time. All three Review Panels were progressions from Stage 2 investigations carried on in 2022/23.
- Two of the Panels held were from different members of the children’s family and related to the quality of the support provided by the workers concerned. Decisions taken by the

service were also the subject of both complaints. One Review Panel was regarding the quality of a Child in Need Assessment, where it was alleged that key information had not been recorded.

## 7.2 Specific Areas of Statutory Complaints

Service Area	2020 2021		2021 2022		2022 2023	
Assessment & Intervention / CCiN	35.29%	6	27.27%	3	37.50%	3
Cared For Children Team	17.65%	3	27.27%	3	37.50%	3
Children with Disabilities	5.88%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Fostering Team	11.76%	2	9.09%	1	0.00%	0
Safeguarding, Care Planning	23.53%	4	36.36%	4	25.00%	2
Safeguarding Children Unit	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Other	5.88%	1	0.00%	0	37.50%	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>17</b>		<b>11</b>		<b>8</b>

- 25% (2) of all statutory complaints received were in respect of services provided by the Safeguarding and Care Planning Teams. This is a 50% decrease from 2021/22.
- It should be noted that most children receiving a service are allocated a social worker from the Safeguarding and Care Planning Teams.
- 37% (3) of complaints were regarding the services provided by the Assessment and Intervention Team.
- The key theme identified from complaints about the Assessment and Intervention Service were disputes to information within assessments or the assessment process.
- 37% (3) of complaints received were regarding services provided by the Cared For Children Team. This is at the same level as the number of complaints received about the team in 2021/22 (3).
- Two of the complaints about the Cared for Children Team were from current and previous cared for young people and were regarding placement issues.

## 7.3 Issues linked to the complaint

Main Complaint Issues	2020 2021		2021 2022		2022 2023	
Delay	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	12.50%	1
Lack of Service	11.76%	2	18.18%	2	25.00%	2
Quality of Service	64.71%	11	54.55%	6	62.50%	5
Refusal of Service	17.65%	3	18.18%	2	0.00%	0
Staff Issues	5.88%	1	9.09%	1	0.00%	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>17</b>		<b>11</b>		<b>8</b>

- There were no complaints at Stage 1 regarding allegations of inappropriate staff conduct.
- In all cases, should complaints be received where there is evidence that workers have acted inappropriately or failed to follow processes or procedures, the matter is always shared with senior managers and addressed directly with the member of staff concerned. Appropriate and proportionate measures are then taken to reduce the risk of any similar situations occurring.
- Quality of Service remained the key theme of all complaints received. Almost 63% (5) of complaints received were regarding the quality of the services provided.
- Quality of service includes:
  - Missed or late contact visits.
  - Contact visits that are cancelled at very short notice.
  - Conflicting or incorrect information by workers.
  - Allegations of poor support from the services involved in individual cases.
  - Poor communication between the workers and family members.

- After investigation, only one complaint about quality of service was fully justified. One was found to be partially justified and 50% (2) were found to be fully unjustified. One complaint about quality of service remains outstanding.

## 7.4 Themes of Statutory Complaints Received

After full consideration of all Stage 1 complaints received during 2022/23, only one key theme of dissatisfaction was identified.

### 7.4.1 Quality of Service

Quality of services provided continues to attract the largest number of complaints with five complaints being received during 2022/23.

Complaints about quality cover several areas and can range from low level disputes to significant concerns about the actions or decisions of the services involved.

During 2022/23, two of the complaints received about quality were regarding disputes to decisions made by the workers or service. One was regarding the quality of the Children in Need Assessment and the decision of the worker not to include relevant information within the assessment document. This complaint was partially upheld. However, the complaint did subsequently progress to Stage 2 and to a S3 Review Panel.

One complaint about decisions was regarding the service decision not to allow children in care to move back into the family home following improvements made by the family. This complaint is still under investigation.

Two complaints about quality were regarding the quality of communication by individual workers. One complaint about the quality of communication was regarding the adoption process and the lack of updates by the worker. It was found that although there were reasons for the lack of updates, that these were not shared with the potential adopters which had left them in limbo when organising a family holiday. The Council apologised to the complainants and highlighted recommendations in relation to the individual worker. This was dealt with via individual supervision sessions to monitor any reoccurrence.

All other complaints about quality were regarding different areas.

One complaint was regarding a lack of progress to change a cared for child's placement. This complaint was upheld. However, the main issues regarding the placement had already been addressed whilst the complaint investigation was ongoing.

One complaint from a previously cared for child was in respect of historic foster carer conduct. This area of complaint was not upheld after investigation. However, one area regarding the loss of a document was upheld and an apology and a time and trouble payment offered. The document concerned was mislaid and unable to be located by the team at the time. The recommendation from this complaint was shared across the team to ensure that any documents received by the service are securely copied with the original returned to the owner once they are no longer needed.

## 7.5 Statutory Complaints Outcomes

Outcomes of complaints	2020 2021		2021 2022		2022 2023	
Outstanding						2
Not upheld	35%	6	45%	5	50.00%	3
Partially upheld	35%	6	27%	3	16.67%	1
Upheld	6%	1	0%	0	33.33%	2
Closed or withdrawn	24%	4	27%	3	0.00%	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>17</b>		<b>11</b>		<b>8</b>

- In 2022/23, 50% (3) of complaints were not upheld after investigation.

- 17% (1) was found to be partially justified. Partially justified highlights that the main issue of complaint was found to be unjustified, but there were areas where the service could have performed better, for example communication, delays in returning calls or late/missed visits.
- In each case where it is found that there had been some fault by the service, the complainant will always receive a written apology within their response letter. The Investigating Officer will also be expected to identify ways in which the service can improve and ensure that these recommendations are progressed by the service.
- After investigation, 33% (2) complaints were found to be fully justified. One complaint acknowledged that there had been delays in respect of an alternative placement and one complaint was regarding a lack of action by the service in response to requests for documentation via the adoption process.

## 7.6 Timescales for Responding to Statutory Complaints

Complaints Completed within 20 Working Days	2020 2021	2021 2022	2022 2023
Resolved	5	4	1
Not Resolved	11	2	5

- The statutory timescale for Stage 1 resolution is ten working days. This can be extended to twenty working days with the complainant's agreement.
- From the six complaints responded to, only one was completed within twenty working days.
- This evidences that only 17% of complaints met the extended timescale of twenty working days.
- As a number of complaints now include additional areas, it is difficult to meet such tight timescales for response, whilst also ensuring a thorough and robust response. However, the Investigating Officers is expected to maintain contact with the complainant to keep them updated on the progress of investigation.
- Prompts for investigation updates are sent on a weekly basis by the Complaints Team to all investigating officers, (and their line managers) undertaking investigations to request updates on the progress of investigation. If the complaint is overdue, the Practice Lead is then informed and will be requested to make arrangements for the complaint to be finalised and completed.

## 8.0 Stage 2 and 3 Complaints

Stage 2 Complaints	2020 2021	2021 2022	2022 2023
	2	0	4
Stage 3 Review Panels Held	1	3	3

- There were four Stage 2 requests during 2022/23. Two related to the same children and to the practice of workers through the Special Guardianship Process. One was about a disputed Child in Need Assessment. One Stage 2 progression was delayed allowing Court Proceedings to conclude as it was agreed that any concurrent investigation could have caused conflict as the issues raised were the same.

### Stage 3 Review Panels Held

- Three Stage 3 Review Panel were held during 2022/23.  
Two of the Stage 3 Review Panels were regarding children from the same family. One panel was from grandparents and one complaint was from the children's aunt and uncle.  
Both complaints were considered separately by the Review Panel.

As a number of recommendations had already been made by the Stage 2 Investigating Officer, the Review Panel only identified a small number of recommendations.

The learning from both complaints have been taken forward by the service to ensure implementation.

- One Review Panel was from a father of a young person and was in respect of the quality of a Child in Need Assessment. The complaint had already been considered at Stage 2 and recommendations identified for the Service.
- The Review Panel identified recommendations for the complainant and for the Stage 2 complaints documentation. The service learning from all three Review Panels will be shared within this report.
- As Stage 3 is the normal progression for complaints. Unless the complaint is fully upheld at Stage 2, all complainants subsequently request a Stage 3 Independent Review Panel.

## 9.0 How Statutory Complaints Were Received

Method of Complaint	2020 2021		2021 2022		2022 2023	
Complaint Form – Online	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
E - mail	58.82%	10	54.55%	6	100.00%	8
Children’s Leaflet	5.88%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
In Person	0.00%	0	9.09%	1	0.00%	0
Letter	23.53%	4	9.09%	1	0.00%	0
Telephone	11.76%	2	27.27%	3	0.00%	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>17</b>		<b>11</b>		<b>8</b>

- Email continues to be the main method of complaint referral accounting for all eight of the statutory complaints received.
- Emails and letters tend to raise multiple areas of complaint. Therefore, it is important that an Investigating Officer speaks with the complainant at the earliest opportunity to identify the key issues of concern and to highlight areas that are not able to be responded to or are outside of the remit of the complaints procedure.
- Complaints brought by relatives with parental responsibility accounted for 75% (6) of all complaint referrals.
- One complaint was raised directly by a previously cared for young person. This complaint was regarding the historic actions of a foster carer along with the loss of a personal document by Social Work staff. The issue about foster carer conduct was not upheld after investigation. However, it was accepted that a personal document had been mislaid and an apology along with the offer of a time and trouble payment given.
- One complaint was from a cared for young person via their advocate. This was regarding a change of placement. The service had already taken action before the complaint was received and so had the opportunity to build on this within the response. The young person was happy with the services actions and response to their complaint.
- Children and young people receiving a service have recourse to the Council’s Children’s Rights Officer. The Children’s Rights Officer works closely with those who raise concerns and, in most cases, can resolve these successfully.

## 10.0 Equalities Monitoring

- Gateshead Council recognises that equality monitoring of service delivery is crucial for effective planning and scrutiny of the services that it provides. This monitoring can identify which groups are using services and gauge their level of satisfaction. The information can then be used to highlight possible inequalities, investigate their underlying causes, and address any unfairness or disadvantage. However, as complainants tend to be from relatives, it is not possible to collect this information with any accuracy as diversity forms sent out were not routinely returned despite the forms being made simpler to complete in 2022/23.
- During 2022/23, there was one complaint and two low level issues where the complainant was a member of the BAME community. Two compliments were also received.
- Information about the complaints process can be made available in key languages and formats. Information for customers with sight, hearing or learning difficulties can also be provided.

## 11.0 Corporate Complaints Received

Between 2022/2023, Children's Services received ten Corporate Complaints. Corporate Complaints are from those who do not have parental responsibility, or issues relating to Child Protection matters, LADO issues and Early Help Services. Corporate Complaints are outside of the statutory procedure and follow the Council's Corporate Complaint Procedure.

[About the corporate complaints process - Gateshead Council](#)

Currently Corporate Complaints about Children's Social Care are recorded on the Social Care Complaints System. Moving forward, the complaints will need to be recorded and responded to via the Council's Corporate Complaint Portal and will be reported on by Legal and Democratic Services rather than within the Statutory Complaint Report. Training on this system is arranged by Legal and Democratic Services.

Corporate Complaint - Service Area	2021 – 2022	2022 – 2023
Access & Intervention	6	2
Cared For Children Services	3	1
CWD	0	0
Early Help	3	2
Safeguarding & Care Planning	1	3
Safeguarding Children Unit	6	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>10</b>

Corporate Complaint - Main Element	2021 – 2022	2022 – 2023
Delay	0	0
Lack of Service	1	3
Quality of Service	11	4
Refusal	5	0
Staff Conduct / Actions	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>10</b>

Corporate Complaints – Outcome	2021 – 2022	2022 – 2023
Not Upheld	17	8
Partially Upheld	1	0
Fully Upheld	1	1
Withdrawn / Closed	0	1
<b>Total Completed</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>10</b>

Issues complained about via the Corporate Complaint Procedure included three allegations of inappropriate staff comments. Following receipt, one complaint about staff comments was withdrawn. One complaint from an extended family member was not upheld.

One corporate complaint was upheld, and an apology given. The matter was discussed with the worker and advice given regarding the need to be sensitive when commenting on contact arrangements.

One corporate complaint was about the lack of communication with a commissioned provider. This had resulted in alleged financial injustice to the provider. As an outcome to this complaint, the Cared for Children Service has ensured that all commissioned services care package requests will now link to the new Electronic Case System, Mosaic, and require senior management validation. It is anticipated that this will prevent similar issues reoccurring.

Following Investigation 80% (8) of corporate complaints received were not upheld. One complaint was withdrawn and only one complaint was found to be fully justified.



## 12.0 Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Referrals

During 2022/23, Children's Services received eight Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO) referrals.

<b>LG&amp;SCO Referrals - Service Area</b>	<b>Total 2021 - 2022</b>	<b>Total 2022 - 2023</b>
Access & Intervention	0	0
Cared For Children Services	2	2
Children with Disabilities	1	1
Safeguarding & Care Planning	3	4
Safeguarding Children Unit	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>

<b>LG&amp;SCO Outcomes</b>	<b>Total 2021 - 2022</b>	<b>Total 2022 - 2023</b>
Closed - No Further Action	3	3
Closed - LA Remedy Appropriate	1	2
Outside LG&SCO Jurisdiction	1	1
Closed – Out of Time (12 months)	0	1
Fault Causing Injustice	1	1
	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>

In all cases, information was provided by the Council to allow the Ombudsman to consider the issues raised. Following this, three referrals were subsequently closed by the Ombudsman after initial enquiries.

Two referrals were considered by the Ombudsman, but the Ombudsman was satisfied that the remedies proposed by the Council was appropriate to the level of injustice caused and subsequently closed the complaint.

One referral was outside of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction as the issues were subject to Court Proceedings.

The Ombudsman did find that one referral had caused injustice to the family of the child concerned. The Council were asked to provide a payment to the complainants in respect of the injustice caused and to share information that the recommendations at Stage 2 had been progressed. This was provided with evidence that the recommendations had all been implemented. The Ombudsman was satisfied that the Council had acted accordingly.

## 13.0 Learning from Complaints

- 13.1 At the end of every investigation, the investigating officer is responsible for identifying any improvements or recommendations resulting from the complaint. Changes can include policy, procedure, or staff development.
- 13.2 Complaints about individual practice or failure to follow procedures are dealt with by reinforcement of processes and reiterating customer care standards through service / team meetings or individual supervision sessions. In addition to this, if it is felt that additional or refresher training is required for either workers or teams, this will be progressed by the relevant team manager.
- 13.3 In respect of complaints about staff attitude or conduct, if it is found that an employee has deliberately acted inappropriately, the issue will be dealt with in line with internal employment procedures.
- 13.4 Children's Services have recently developed a Quality Assurance process via the Quality Assurance Strategic Group which allows the Services to consider recommendations and

improvements identified from all complaints that have been responded to. The process will now monitor the agreed recommendations to ensure that they are implemented within a timely manner, and to ensure that learning from complaints is shared across all Children's Services Teams.

### **13.5 Improvements to service identified following a complaint:**

#### **13.5.1 Assessment and Intervention Team**

**Action:** A complaint was received about the quality of the Child in Need Assessment Process, where it was found that key information had not been included within the final document. This had impacted on the decision making by the young person's family in relation to contact. The complaint was investigated at Stage 2 of the procedure and subsequently at a Stage 3 Review Panel.

The Stage 2 findings recommended that information about the Child in Need Assessment Process along with the requirement to include any significant information relevant to the assessment within the final assessment document.

**Improvement:** This requirement has since been shared across the service with an instruction to disseminate this requirement to all workers who are responsible for undertaking Assessments. This has since been fully completed.

#### **13.5.2 Safeguarding and Care Planning Teams**

**Action:** After a complaint where the quality of social worker support and conduct was raised by two members of the same family, two separate investigations were undertaken.

**Improvements:** The investigating officer implemented several recommendations from their investigation.

- The importance of children been seen by their Independent Reviewing Officer before every review should be seen as a priority across the service to reinforce standards of good practice. This includes ensuring the children's wishes and feelings are represented in their Review meeting. To ensure implementation of this requirement, the training has since been reviewed to ensure that this requirement is embedded into practice.
- In addition to this, the Court Report Writing course has also been reviewed to ensure that it is effective across the service and that Court Reports are based on factual evidence.
- That a review of the individual worker's practice has been carried out to ensure that all professional Social Work standards are always adhered to.
- A process for quality assuring adjudication letters at Stage 2 of the complaints procedure has been developed and implemented. The Complaints Manager now checks all adjudication letters to ensure that they align with the details / outcomes within the Stage 2 Investigation Report.

**Action:** As an outcome to a corporate complaint about inappropriate remarks made by a worker, it was agreed that although the worker did share the correct information, that this could have been done in a more sensitive manner. The worker offered to contact the complainant to provide a personal apology for any upset caused. This was carried out and the complainant was satisfied with the remedy to the complaint.

**Improvement:** The Team Manager also ensured that this matter was addressed and monitored within the worker's supervision sessions and no further issues were identified.

### 13.5.3 Cared for Children

**Action:** A complaint was raised about the involvement of the Cared For Children's Team in relation to financial support for adopters / Special Guardianship holders. The complaint also included concerns about the care provided by a foster carer.

**Improvements:** Following the conclusion of the complaint investigation, the following recommendations were agreed and implemented.

- A letter has been developed which details the outcomes from financial assessments carried out along with the rationale on how the final decision had been made. The letter must also include details of the statutory complaints procedure should the outcome of the financial assessment be disputed.

The letter was subsequently developed and implemented and is now in use by the Cared For Children Teams.

- That all Fostering Annual Reviews should reflect whether a Foster Carer has been subject of a complaint during their review period, how these concerns have been raised with the carers and how they are to be addressed by the service. Documentation regarding Fostering Annual Reviews has been updated to include these requirements and is now in use.
- The guidance for Stage 2 investigations has been revised to reiterate that the key points of complaint at Stage 1 should form the basis of the Stage 2 Statement of Complaint which will then be quality assured by the Complaints Manager. The Stage 2 investigation guidance has been updated to reinforce this requirement.

**Action:** A complaint was received from a previously looked after young person who alleged that the Social Work team had lost an important personal document that had been shared with them. This matter was upheld and as an outcome to this it was agreed that when link workers receive original copies of documentation, that they are kept in a secure place and then returned to their owner as soon as they are no longer required.

**Improvement:** This requirement was shared across the Cared for Children's Service who have since implemented this recommendation and all documents are kept in a secure place until they can be returned to their owner.

### 13.5.4 General Recommendations from a Review Panel

**Action:** That during complaints investigations, social workers should be reminded of preparing for interviews ahead of attending them. This will ensure that they are able to respond to any questions raised.

**Improvement:** This requirement is already within the letter sent to social workers when inviting them to interview.

**Action:** That Investigating Officers and Independent Persons should ensure that the investigation report always follows the signed statement of complaint and that all elements are answered fully and in order.

**Improvement:** This is already a requirement within the information shared with Stage 2 Investigating Officers / Independent Persons. However, it will now be robustly monitored during the quality assurance process for Stage 2 Reports.

## 14.0 Compliments

- 14.1 Between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2023, Children's Services received 125 compliments about either individual workers or teams. This means that compared with the number of statutory and corporate complaints received during 2022/23, (18), 87% (125) were compliments about Children's Services.

16% (20) of compliments were regarding Access and Intervention Teams.  
4% (5) were regarding Children's Business Support Officers.  
3% (4) were about the Cared for Children Teams.  
33% (41) were about the Children with Disabilities Service, including Grove House Respite.  
33% (41) were regarding teams within Early Help.  
6% (8) were about the Safeguarding and Care Planning Teams.  
5% (6) were regarding the Safeguarding Unit, including FDAC and Children's Engagement.

## **14.2 Examples of compliments received**

### **Assessment & Intervention Team**

*'Dear W..., I would just like you to know how impressed I am with the work W..., has completed with one of our parents. It is absolutely clear that W... cares passionately for the wellbeing and care of this vulnerable family. His support will undoubtedly make a big difference to their future. It was truly a pleasure to work with him. Kind regards, NI'*

*'Hi S... I just wanted to say thanks again for everything, you have been so supportive and made a difference. I had very little faith in the system but now my views have changed so thank you from the whole family. Take care S...'*

### **Cared for Children Team**

*'Hi A..., I've just finished reading your assessment. You've put so much work into it, give yourself a massive pat on the back! I can see the hours it must have taken you. I've really enjoyed reading it. Its lovely, brought tears to my eyes! You've done a really great job. It's all spot-on.... Thank you for all the lovely things you've said about us. You've made the assessment all so easy and I can't thank you enough. You do a brilliant job. Well done! Thanks A...'*

### **Children's Business Support Team**

*'KR informed me that she would like to thank you (AMP) for your help yesterday and last week for dealing with her issues quickly. She reported that you are very good at your job and if she has further queries, she plans on contacting you to address these.'*

### **CCiN & RR Team**

*'We had the first court hearing for J... today. I just wanted to share with you that both the Judge and children's guardian were very complimentary of the work that has gone into supporting J..., advocating for him and ensuring that the foster care placement he is in is going as well as it is doing. The Judge was very impressed with the work that you did F... with J... when you gathered his views for the initial SWET. The Judge actually said that he copied that entire section into his notes for the case and will use this when the judge meets with J...'*

### **Children with Disabilities - Grove House Respite**

*'V was full of praise for Grove House and said after speaking to L last night, L said she absolutely loved her tea visit at Grove House and was looking forward to her next visit.'*

*'M gave S an update after J's overnight stay. S was delighted with the positive update and complimentary of staff engaging children in activities to support Autism Acceptance 60 challenge. S advised that J is always very excited to go to Grove House'*

*'Thank You A..., His last visit will be very emotional for us, he loves coming to Grove House, I don't think we will be sending him anywhere else, wish there was something like Grove House for 18 - 25 year olds. Thank you to all of you for everything you have done for our A.'*

### **Children with Disabilities Team**

*'Dear H..., We're so grateful for all your hard work in supporting us to get the continuing care funding. There's no way we could have done it without you. Please know you've made a massive difference. Thanks again. x'*

## **Children's Engagement / Rights**

*'To V..., A... and everyone who is part of the big red bus Gateshead team this week. We'd like to say a HUGE thanks you for all the planning, energy and patience that has gone into making the time on the bus brilliant this week. It has had a big impact on Jamie seeing young people, older than himself, volunteering as part of the team and he said today he'd like to do this one day - this is just wonderful! Thanks so much to you all. J..., H..., P... and T...'*

## **Children's Travel Care Team**

*'Hi please be advised that my son J will no longer need to access the Home to School travel scheme from September 2022 as he leaves Hill Top School end of July 2022. Can I take this opportunity to thank you for providing this service during J's school career, it has been invaluable to us as a family and very much appreciated, please pass on my regards to all concerned. Thanks again C.'*

## **Early Help Service – DAT**

*'H... is a wonderful person, She made me feel so much better about everything i was going through. She helped me through the dark times and give me the strength to carry on. She is amazing at her job! Even though it is her job she is caring, kind and listens. Thank you H..., honestly because of you I have found the inner strength to motivate myself to better myself and my children's future and make them proud! I will tell my children about you when they are older and tell them about the woman who I never met but felt she was with me through the dark times. Thank you H... Take care and thank you!'*

*'Both EG and AM have been absolutely amazing and have given me the best support I could have asked for throughout. They have helped me so much and i appreciate all their advice and support. They are truly amazing and i want to say thank you very much.'*

## **Early Help Service – Specialist Support Team**

*'Hiya G., Hope you're well!!! Just wanted to send an email to say a massive thank you for all your help and support over the last year, if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't have realised how violent and abusive my ex really was. The freedom programme is what I think literally changed my life, and my view of everything! It's mad looking at the place I'm in now, compared to when I first got in touch with you. Apologies this has turned into such a lengthy message!! Haha but yeah just wanted to really say your support has meant the world, and I'm finally at a place in my life for the first time ever where I'm truly happy and at peace!! Thanks so much again, the work you do to help people is amazing, I'll never forget it. Thanks, A M.'*

## **Fostering Team**

*J... made some really significant comments about the Fostering service after being a Carer for a number of years, she loved her former supervising Social Worker but R... she commented specifically about the support you provided her during her personal time this year. She commented about your availability and also reassurance and is grateful for your support.'*

## **Safeguarding & Care Planning Teams**

*'I honestly want to thank you all from the bottom of my heart for everything you all have done for me and my children we will be forever grateful xxx.'*

*'The Children's solicitor complimented E... on behalf of the Children's Guardian for her excellent work with S.... The Judge also wanted to commend "the huge efforts made by the allocated Social Worker alongside dad and step mum to bring about a remarkable transformation in S...'s presentation.'*

**Contact Officer:** Alison Routledge, X2408