

**BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

**SOCIAL SERVICES
REPRESENTATIONS AND
COMPLAINTS**

**ANNUAL REPORT
2022 / 2023**

November 2023

**SOCIAL SERVICES
REPRESENTATIONS AND COMPLAINTS 2022/23**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report covers the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 and relates to representations and complaints received by the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate regarding services and support provided by Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care.

Social Services Authorities are required to maintain a procedure for considering complaints and representations (comments and compliments). Any member of the public, including a child who has received or was entitled to receive a service from Social Services may make a complaint. The purpose of this report is to provide a review and statistical analysis of the complaints, comments and compliments received by Social Services during the reporting period.

This is the eighth Annual Report relating to representations and complaints received by the Directorate which have been handled in accordance with the Welsh Government Complaint Guidelines "A Guide to Handling Complaints and Representations by Local Authority Social Services" which came into effect on 1st August 2014. The guidance supports the implementation of the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014. The Regulations introduced a two-stage process which replaced the previous three stages and also brings the process for Social Services into line with the NHS Complaints Procedure.

2. SUMMARY OF THE STATUTORY COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

"A guide to handling complaints and representations by Local Authority Social Services" (Welsh Government).

Stage 1 – Local Resolution: As with the previous guidelines, particular emphasis is placed upon swift resolution of the majority of complaints. An offer to discuss the complaint with the complainant must therefore be made to attempt to resolve matters. This discussion must take place within 10 working days of the date of acknowledgement of the complaint. Where this approach leads to mutually acceptable resolution, the Local Authority must write to the complainant with details of the terms of the resolution within 5 working days of the date on which the complaint or representation was resolved.

Stage 2 – Formal Investigation: Appointment of an Independent Investigator is made and, as with the previous guidelines an Independent Person must also be appointed to oversee the investigation process (complaints relating to Children's services). Collaborative arrangements have been established (on a reciprocal basis) with neighbouring Local Authorities to share details of Independent Investigating Officers and Independent Persons able to undertake investigations.

The investigation must be completed, and a full written response issued to the complainant within 25 working days. Where this is not possible, the Authority must write to the complainant to explain the reason for the delay and ensure the response is issued as soon as possible and no later than 6 months from the date of receipt of the complaint.

3. THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES

Where complainants have exhausted the complaints procedure, the complainant has the right to refer their concern for consideration by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales provides an external independent service for the purpose of considering complaints made by members of the public in relation to all Local Authority services, including Social Services. The Public Services Ombudsman also has jurisdiction to examine and determine complaints of injustice as a result of maladministration on the part of the Local Authority.

The Ombudsman will normally require complainants to have sought redress, in the first instance, via the Local Authority's complaints procedure prior to accepting and investigating a complaint of maladministration on the part of the Local Authority.

During 2022/2023, 10 complaints were received by the Public Services Ombudsman's Office, 9 of which related to Children's Social Care, 1 in respect of Adult Social Care. None of these progressed to investigation.

4. MEMBER REFERRALS

The Representations and Complaints Procedure does not preclude the right of an individual to approach their Local Councillor, Assembly Member or Member of Parliament. They undertake an important role in handling concerns and queries that individual constituents may have. Collectively, these are called Member Referrals and can range from comments and queries to complaints.

If an Elected Member considers it to be inappropriate to deal with a concern, the matter can be referred for consideration under the Complaints Procedure. With effect from 2017, only those referrals received from Elected Members have been recorded by Democratic Services. Cabinet Members may liaise with Assembly Members and Members of Parliament to complete referrals but this data is no longer recorded.

During 2022/23, Member referrals were received as follows:-

Table 1

2022/2023	Number of Referrals
Adult Social Care	139
Children's Social Care	72
Total	211

5. ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK

In addition to receiving comments and compliments from service users and their relatives/carers, the Directorate also issues a range of feedback questionnaires from across service areas. A cross-section of the feedback during 2022/2023 is set out below:

Adult Social Care

The Telecare survey is forwarded to all people who have accessed a Local Authority Domiciliary Care Service and have an active Care and Support Plan.

Between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023, **614** surveys were distributed, **222** were returned completed. This is a **36.14%** response rate, which is a slight rise from the response rate of 34.7% in the previous year.

General comments provided include:

Really grateful for your help to improve my Uncle's safety at home. My Uncle said the engineer was great and very friendly - Thank you.
All visitors to my home were very helpful.
As a newcomer I am very impressed with the service that I have received.
I know if these services hadn't been available life would be awful, but it's improved my life and my husband's.
The gentleman who installed was lovely and explained everything fully. Brilliant service can't fault it.

The Transformation and Review Team's overarching aim is to support individuals in long term managed care who have been assessed as requiring longer term support to meet their identified outcomes (individuals receiving support living in their own homes and in nursing/residential settings). Staff utilise a strengths-based approach when undertaking reviews with an analysis of current strengths and capabilities and the level of commissioned support. The team currently have over 900 cases and also operate a duty desk function. The duty desk is a point of contact to discuss individuals receiving support without an allocated social worker where changes or concerns have been identified which require timely intervention to

resolve. The duty desk function as with the day-to-day intervention of the team has a strong customer focussed approach which links in closely with BCBC's identified ambitions such as in ensuring better use of resources, one council working well together with our partners and in supporting and empowering individuals.

Comments include:

Over the last 4 years A has been supported by a wonderful team of professionals from your team. We would like to share our gratitude with you for their unfaltering, dependable support, not only to B but to us as a family. Thank you so much to each and every one of you.

Thank you for visiting Mum and Dad today! Please also thank C for being able to arrange fast delivery of the equipment - amazing! I understand she is visiting again tomorrow with the GP. Really appreciate all this support . . . Thank you! Best wishes

Thank you for everything you did for us xxx

I received a phone call from the daughter of D, who has paid you a compliment, as you were very supportive to her and her father, she wished to thank you for all your support.

Ty Cwm Ogwr is a purpose-built residential home for Older People. Ty Cwm Ogwr provides care and support for up to 28 people who are physically frail or living with dementia. The home offers permanent and short-term respite placements. Ty Cwm Ogwr Residential Home is committed to supporting its residents in leading a fulfilled life as possible, in an environment which:

- Places value on individual beliefs, choices, and aspirations
- Promotes and maximise individual independence and community integration
- Provides a safe, nurturing, and homely environment

The home hosts a range of activities, which are based on individual choice and are according to residents' interests. Weekly activities are planned and staff encourage all to participate as much as possible. Activities include arts and crafts, knitting, quizzes, bingo, reminiscence sessions, puzzles, external entertainment, bus trips, religious groups, local choirs, brass bands etc. Residents receive staff support to undertake activities as their needs dictate. Staff will also spend time with individual residents if preferred.

Comments provided include:

Thank you so much for making my 96th birthday full of fun and the buffet was marvellous.

Mrs E's niece come to take her aunty home today, she bought a tin of sweets for the staff and could not thank the staff enough for the care given to her aunty.

I can't thank you enough for the way you look after F.

With a heartfelt thanks for all your support this year. Thank you for everything you all do for me.

The East Integrated Cluster Network is an integrated team of social workers, district nurses, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, community psychiatric nurses, speech and language therapists, dieticians, experienced technicians and support workers. The team works with adults from the age of 18, into older age, affected by frailty and/or complex long term health conditions and/or disabilities; often compounded by their mental health or emotional well-being needs.

The social workers work closely with all the multi-professionals as well as GPs and primary care and cluster staff, and the third sector, to support individuals to have good quality emotional and physical well-being and where appropriate provide seamless care in their own homes.

The social workers provide a therapeutic and innovative social work approach to assessment and support, focusing on the person's 'voice' and 'strengths' and the needs of their families, carers; or those important to them. Partnership working, care coordinating, community working and building, and contingency planning are essential within this team.

Thank you so much for believing in me. I appreciate all the help and support you have given me and will continue to do :)

I am writing to you with regards a recent experience with the East Network Team of adult social services, Bridgend county borough council.

Unfortunately, my nan recently returned to the UK after deteriorating due to dementia. My mother attempted to care for her at home but unfortunately struggled due to the 24/7 specialist care that she required.

We, as a family, would like to pass on our thanks to the East Network Team for their professionalism, understanding and support through what was a very difficult and emotional time.

My mother spoke to G on several occasions, who was extremely helpful, offered reassuring support and was able to organise a social worker for my nana quickly, when we were struggling to meet my nana's care needs at home.

Social Worker H was assigned to review/assess my nana's mental health and worked closely with I (CPN). They were both very professional and were able to assess my nana with minimal stress and/or confusion to her.

We were extremely impressed by the professionalism of the team and the rate that they were able to arrange assessments and assistance once we had found a suitable care home where her needs could be met.

My Nana has now settled into her care home and is receiving the care that she requires. We cannot thank the East Network Team enough for all they have done to achieve this.

We would appreciate if you could pass on our greatest thanks to the team and hope that you are able to keep this level of service in the future to help other families going through such a difficult time.

Thank You.

Really appreciate the time you took with us on Friday. We both said how helpful it was to talk through our concerns - and to feel listened to.

Children's Social Care:

The Just Ask 16+ service provides a crucial role to young people aged 16-25 in providing essential support to care experienced young people. Their primary objective is to ensure a smooth transition into independent adulthood for these vulnerable individuals. This involves offering guidance on practical life skills such as budgeting, housing and employment, as well as emotional support to help them navigate the challenges of leaving care.

Comments include:

J has been absolutely brilliant, she has gone above and beyond in her work', J communicates well and always deals with matters in a timely manner. K is hoping that J will soon be the social worker for L, as she has instilled her confidence again in working with Children's Services.

I had the pleasure of spending 8 weeks during September and October as an Agency Social Worker in your 16+ Team. I absolutely enjoyed every second of it. I know there has been a spotlight on you and I know you are undertaking a learning and reflective journey and so wanted to share my experiences as a practitioner of working within your Children's Services. You have appointed M as the new 16+ Team Manager and know he is really settling in well, liked by the staff and making such a positive impact for young people.

Just want to say a massive thank you for giving me N as my PA, just had my PIP back, my sofa is here, my universal is getting sorted and my repairs honestly thank you she's been a massive help.

Can I just add that I additionally wanted to pass on my compliments in respect of O who has also gone above and beyond in respect of the level of support, effort and commitment that she has sustained throughout this case. O has always been available, easy to contact and thoroughly hands on in respect of supporting both P and the carers, alongside this she has demonstrated a calm focused attitude throughout, her commitment to P should be applauded, it has been an absolute pleasure to work with her.

Kinship Care & Permanence team provide family foster case placements for children and young people who are looked after by Bridgend County Borough council. This includes long and short-term kinship care arrangements. They also provide assessments and support Special Guardians.

Feedback provided include:

I just wanted to let you know I had supervision with Q and R today and they were very complimentary about you. Q said you have been brilliant, have a wealth of knowledge and experience and they have found all your strategies and tips very helpful. R said she thinks out of all the help they have received they think you will be the most useful. It was really nice to hear such positivity so thought you would like to hear it too. Well done S 😊.

Just letting you know that T had some very positive feedback from Panel today regarding the quality of her Annual Review for U. Panel said it was comprehensive, reflective of the hard work undertaken by the carers over the past year and gave them all the information needed. They were very impressed and suggested this be used as the standard for Annual Reviews. They were also extremely complimentary of the carers in their care of the children in placement. They found their efforts to be of an extremely high standard and evidenced their ability and commitment to fostering. They suggested that if there were awards for foster carers, the couple should be considered.

The level of support was excellent. V consistently checked in with W and X, provided appropriate advice and always ensured W and X were happy and content following their conversation.

W and X always spoke highly of V and the support she offered and provided. V always updated myself as the child's social worker, as well as the supervising social worker. She queried anything she was unsure of and provided feedback to W and X in a timely manner. Thank you so much for all of your help V. You really have made a difference.

I am writing to you to pay a huge compliment to Y for the work and dedication she has put in to supporting Z and A who are caring for B. Having chaired the LAC review today for B, both carers have had an increasingly difficult time and without the support Y has provided which has been above and beyond what I have seen from other workers throughout my career. I have no doubt that B's placement has continued because of the large amount of time Y has spent in visiting the placement and providing telephone support. Z commented that she has been very grateful for the support that has been provided by Y. I honestly do not have the words to express my appreciation of the work Y has undertaken with this placement.

The **North Locality Hub** work with children from pre-birth to 18 years of age. The team manage Care and Support, Child Protection, Public Law Outline and Court cases. The team work closely with children and families and partner agencies to

facilitate plans in an attempt to facilitate positive change for those families. The team analyse and manage risk to ensure children remain at home where it is safe for them to do so.

Comments include:

C wanted to advise how she feels D has gone above and beyond for them as a family. She has been a rock of support and guided them through the court process. She can't praise her enough. Professionally she has been wonderful, and stated that D is an asset to my team. She advised her son (E's Dad) also felt the same and wanted her to pass on the same message.

I would like to compliment both F and G on their reports and presentation within conference today. I received reports in better than good time, F contacted me and booked in a discussion time before the conference. G's feedback and level of professional knowledge was impressive. I found them well organised which made the conference run smoothly, they were supportive of Mum, and organised an advocate for her, which was amazing. I feel it's important to point out, this was such good practice and thank you for making my job that much easier and the family feeling supported.

H's clear and professional input into the meeting under difficult circumstances and the commitment she shows to the young people she works with, especially this young person who I know she has been trying to work with for a number of weeks.

This case concluded Monday at IRH and I just wanted to say well done to J for all of her hard work. Her paperwork has been excellent and on time, even filed early on some occasions and it is clear that she has worked really hard to achieve the best outcome for these children. It is thanks to her hard work that this case managed to conclude early on Monday. I know the judge was complementary of her and the other parties have also commended her to me for her hard work with this family, which is so good to hear as I do think that on many occasions such hard work and dedication goes unnoticed outside of the LA.

The **Information, Advice and Assistance Service**, or **IAA**, works in partnership with police, health, adult services and MASH. The IAA team is the first point of contact for professionals and members of the public. The team respond to all initial enquiries in relation to children and families. The team offer information, advice and assistance; and these enquiries range from requests for information and services through to concerns about the welfare or safety of a child or young person. The team has a duty to assess whether a child is in need of care and support. When it is felt that the child meets eligibility criteria, a care and support assessment will be undertaken in order to identify services. If it is felt that a child is at risk of harm the IAA team will liaise with partnership agencies and undertake a child protection investigation. The young carers coordinator also sits within the IAA team and their role is purely to assess what caring duties a child has. The co-ordinator will then consider if there is any support that can be put into place for the

family as a whole. The co-ordinator liaises with social services, early help, education and outside organisations.

Comments include:

I would just like to thank you for assistance in the meeting yesterday. As you knew, I was extremely upset and panicking about the report and the outcome of the meeting. I felt listened to and understood in my concerns. Thank you for the professional way in which the meeting was conducted, it really made a difference to mine and K's worries. I hope you have a wonderful Christmas and New Year. L, M and I can now try to do the same ourselves! Best wishes

Since N has been in contact, I can not sing her praises enough, she has answered every question I have had, she has been empathetic with our situation and has followed through with all plans she has made. She has been quick to make arrangements and has kept me in the loop with everything.

O has been observed to be enthusiastic in her attendance with a clear understanding of her role/your agencies role in protecting the children of high risk DV couples, she is clearly researching in advance and presenting relevant information and is actively contributing with ideas and volunteering actions. She is like a breath of fresh air and her attendance for the full meeting is having a positive impact on the process.

I overheard a lovely conversation between P and a parent of a child she is due to visit tomorrow. As a way of putting the child at ease P has created the attached document that she willingly shares with children and families. I observed a wonderful piece of direct intervention followed up by the use of a great working tool. P has agreed that I can share the document she created and I would encourage all workers to create one . I certainly will ! We already have some takers in the team who want to follow this great example .

Adult Social Care - Statutory Independent Professional Advocacy (IPA)

Providers

BCBC commissions a 'Hub & Spoke' service model for advocacy which includes:

- Advocacy Contact Hub: PromoCymru
- Specialist Learning Disability Provider (statutory and non-statutory): People First Bridgend
- Specialist Communications/Accessible Support Provider: Mental Health Matters Wales

Performance Data

The Advocacy Hub continued to receive circa 60 connected contacts per quarter, which were triaged and referred to the most appropriate support service. This approach ensures that only those eligible for statutory IPA are then referred through to that service, and non-statutory or other services which may be more appropriate are contacted to ensure the best service is accessed.

181 individuals were referred for statutory IPA support across the services. This was a decrease from the 236 individuals supported in the previous year. Advocacy services have successfully resumed face-to-face operations post-pandemic, aiming to provide the vital in-person support that many clients require. However, a notable challenge emerged in the form of a surge in complex cases, which has placed staff at full capacity. The levels and nature of the case work has increased, including significant resource being required to support Child Protection cases, where often both parents need an advocate. So, overall work and capacity within the service has not reduced due to the shift towards more complex cases. The providers now operate a waiting list to access adult IPA support.

Children’s Social Care – Statutory Independent Professional Advocacy (IPA)

Provider

Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) is an established and long-standing advocacy provider in the Bridgend area, under a regional contract for Cwm Taf Morgannwg, contract led by RCTCBC.

Active Offers & Issue-based Advocacy (IBA)

During the year, 224 young people accessed the Issue Based Advocacy (IBA) service, presenting with 275 issues. This represents a notable increase in young people accessing IBA when compared to the previous year. 123 young people accessed the service for the first time, compared to 67 in the previous year. In the previous year, the drop in the Active Offer (AO) was identified as an area of improvement due to the number of eligible young person’s entering the system. Children’s Services have worked closely with TGP in respect of ensuring active offers and issue-based advocacy uptake is increased. In this reporting period, the AO referrals increased significantly, more than doubling from 37 in the previous year, to 101 this year.

6. STATISTICAL INFORMATION 2022/2023

Number of Representations Received and Timescales

Table 2

Total Number of Representations Received Statutory Complaints Procedure – April 2022 to March 2023		
Complaints	Adult Social Care	Children’s Social Care
Informal (resolved prior to invoking the formal complaints procedure)	12	130
Stage 1	13	28

Stage 2	5	3
Public Services Ombudsman for Wales	0	0
Total Complaints	<u>191</u>	
Compliments	Adult Social Care	Children's Social Care
	166	91
Total Compliments	<u>257</u>	

A total of 74 complaints were received in the previous period 2021/22. The table above shows a substantial increase in complaints received during this reporting period – a rise of **158%**.

47% of Stage 1 complaints were responded within the timescale of 15 working days of receipt during this reporting period. This was a drop from the 60% response rate recorded in the period 2021/22.

The substantial increase in complaints has significantly impacted the timeliness of responding to concerns. The surge in complaints coupled with the increase of referrals into social services has become increasingly challenging for the department to address each issue within the prescribed timescales. There has also notably been an increase in the complexity of issues raised. This has affected the councils' limited resources, which has regrettably led to increasing delays in response times.

We acknowledge the need for timeliness improvement. In January 2023 an additional member of staff joined the complaints department to support the adherence to the timescales and provide departmental cover during the designated Complaints Officer's leave.

Overall Analysis

Early Resolution of Complaints

Inline with the Welsh Government Guidance "A guide to handling complaints and representations by Local Authority social services" Bridgend County Borough Complaints Department, wherever possible, focuses on early resolution of complaints. **74%** of complaints were resolved informally during this reporting period (pre the complaints procedure). This is consistent with the 74% of complaints resolved informally in 2021/22 and the high percentage overall continues to reflect the Directorate's commitment to achieving the early resolution for complainants.

Some of the feedback comments received in relation to complaint staff members involvement with complainants in terms of discussion to understand the nature of complaints and support early resolution is as follows:

"I so appreciate this. You have sorted this out so quickly and it is really helpful."

<p>“Firstly, thank you for your professional and prompt actions on my behalf the occupational therapist was excellent as well I am more than happy with your actions so once again thanks.”</p>
<p>“Thank you for your reply, we really appreciate your help and support. The passport is obviously the priority but more so getting an identity for J as he hasn’t got a nationality at the moment even though he was born in Bridgend. K was amazing fair play and he’s reassured us that he will go down every avenue to help J and try his best to get us reimbursed. Once again thank you.”</p>
<p>“I am delighted to inform you, social services made contact on Monday afternoon and visited yesterday to conduct my parents’ assessments.</p> <p>Many thanks for your support with this matter.”</p>

Complaint Outcomes (Statutory)

In-line with Welsh Government guidance on “A guide to handling complaints and representations by local authority social services” complaints resolved at Stage 1 are only closed by mutual consent, with all parties confirming that a resolution has been agreed. The three most common themes during this reporting period were:

- Lack of support
- Staff conduct
- Quality of service

Stage 2 complaints are investigated by an Investigating Officer (IO) independent from the council. Complaints relating to children’s services must also be overseen by an Independent Person (IP).

The outcome of Stage 2 complaints resolved within the reporting year are as follows:

Table 3

Complaint Outcomes (St. 2 – Statutory Complaints Procedure)			
Outcome	Adult Social Care	Children’s Social Care	Total
Not Upheld			
Partially Upheld	2	3	5
Upheld			
Investigation Suspended	3		3
Total	5	3	8

The following issues were upheld following independent investigation:

1. There was a failure to explain the situation where Police were involved in a Safeguarding investigation on the complainant's arrival at the Day Centre.

Police were contacted on the advice of the Safeguarding Team in accordance with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures and Section 126 of the Social Services & Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. Staff had a duty to report an adult at risk and the investigator confirmed that they took the correct action. The investigator concluded that the decision not to notify complainant to avoid compromising the safeguarding process was also appropriate in the circumstances. The investigation established that the length of the delay in the ability of Bridgend Resource Centre Managers being able to contact the Complainant was unfortunate, but had clearly been due to a culmination of factors and were outside of the control of Day Centre staff. The Local Authority accepted that that the situation upon Complainant's arrival could have been managed differently and for this, a formal apology was given to the complainant for the upset caused from the way the situation was handled.

2. A social worker failed to attend an arranged meeting with complainants' family and the hospital.

This matter was investigated at Stage 1 and an apology issued, however complainant remained dissatisfied. The independent investigation further explored the issue relating to the meeting that the social worker missed, and this element of the complaint was upheld. The Local Authority apologised again for the inconvenience and frustration that the missed meeting caused complainant and his family.

3. There was a delay in receiving meeting notes. It took 9 months to get a copy of the statement from the original referral. At the time the complaint was made, complainant was still waiting for a copy of the Section 47 from January 2021.

The Investigating Officer concluded that the complainant was invited to all meetings relating to his children, however there was an inconsistency in whether plans/minutes were distributed in all meetings, and no rationale was given when they were not. The Local Authority accepted these findings and issued an apology for the frustration caused to the complainant from having to wait several months for paperwork. Business support workforce has since been increased and systems and processes have been reviewed to ensure there is greater capacity and oversight in this area.

4. It took 9 months for the complainant to receive contact from the previous Team Manager for IAA. It took 18 months for complainant to meet with the previous Team Manger from the East Locality Team. When the meeting occurred, the Team Manager told the complainant that she would try and look into the issues, but she was leaving her position the following Friday. Complainant was unhappy that his

request to speak with a senior manager to discuss concerns kept being ignored, especially in light of the frequent changes in social workers and contact workers.

The Investigating Officer found evidence of regular phone calls from the complainant to the department raising concerns the children were at risk. The Investigating Officer felt this information was taken seriously by the social worker, but did not achieve the outcome the complainant desired. The investigator concluded that the complainant was desperately trying to speak with managers to discuss his concerns and get some clarity. This was not done until very late in the day and left the complainant feeling extremely dissatisfied. The Local Authority recognised that the complainant should have been given the opportunity to speak with a Team Manager at the time the issues occurred. A formal apology was issued for the lack of response, and for having to pursue this matter through the formal complaints process in order to gain clarity on this issue. To learn from this, additional training will be provided for all new and current managers to ensure they understand the importance of effective and timely communication to resolve issues at the earliest opportunity. Also, the development of a Parents Charter will set out clear standards to be met for communicating clearly and checking understanding of communications.

5. “The social worker failed to respond to requests for policies over a lengthy period of time.”

The complainant had to pursue an FOI request to establish that BCBC do not have a ‘Reunification and Permanence’ policy and they also pursued this matter through the councils’ formal complaints process. Complainant was concerned that the social worker should have known that that the policy did not exist in order to give them a direct answer. The Local Authority issued a formal apology for the workers failure to respond to the request for a policy over a lengthy period of time, and for the matter having to be pursued through the councils’ formal complaints process.

Corporate Complaints Procedure

There are instances whereby aspects of a complaint do not fall within the remit of the Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure and in these instances, the Authority’s Corporate Complaints Procedure is utilised; **5** complaints were received which were deemed appropriate to be addressed in accordance with the Corporate Complaints Procedure during 2022/23; **2** of which related the Adults Social Care and **3** of which related to Children’s Social Care (all of which were addressed at Stage 1). The Council Annual Complaints Report will report further on these complaints, alongside others received in accordance with the Corporate Complaints Policy.

NATURE OF COMPLAINTS

The nature of all complaints received to the directorate varied, and included:

Table 4

Themes of complaints received 2022/23	Percentage %
Staff conduct	32.6
Lack of support	26
Lack of communication	16.3
Issue with assessment	14
Delays	3.5
Court outcome	1.9
Quality of service	2.7
Data Breach	1.2
Historical concerns	0.8
Safeguarding concerns	0.8
Data inaccuracies	0.4

Complaints regarding staff conduct

Any complaints pertaining to the conduct of staff members are handled in accordance with our internal HR policies. In compliance with legal confidentiality obligations inherent in each employee's contract of employment and the Data Protection Act 2018, the Authority cannot disclose the results of any investigations involving staff members to a complainant. Bridgend County Borough Council have separate policies and procedures for addressing staff conduct issues. These policies are designed to ensure that appropriate action is taken when necessary, via our HR processes. The Authority takes these concerns very seriously and thoroughly evaluates every concern raised relating to the conduct of individual staff members. The complaints department also hold a record to support the identification of any reoccurring concerns.

Complainants may also be advised that they are entitled to raise a concern directly with the regulatory body, Social Care Wales or Social Care England, and are given details of how to also raise a concern with them, should they wish to do so.

Complaints regarding a lack of support

Complaints regarding a lack of support are often coupled with a narrative regarding frequent changes in social worker. This can often have an impeding effect on the progress made in cases. These continuous shifts in personnel have an affect on the delivery of vital services and support. The high turnover among social workers may be attributed to the challenging climate and fragility of the workforce, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Negative media attention has also further exacerbated this issue, deterring potential social workers from entering the profession and intensifying the strain on those already in the field. This has unfortunately led to an increase in concerns from individuals feeling unsupported.

Complaints regarding safeguarding concerns

During this reporting period, **2** complaints highlighted safeguarding concerns. One complaint was resolved at Stage 1 of the complaints process, the other was referred to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for investigation.

The first complaint was from the family of a gentleman in supported living accommodation. The family complained that their concerns were not acted upon appropriately. The Team Manager met with the complainant to explain the process that had been followed. They were able to confirm that they had been made aware of the incidents and the appropriate referrals to the safeguarding team had been made, and that the appropriate procedures were followed. They were also able to detail the measures that have been put in place to safeguard the gentleman, which included additional staff being commissioned from the care provider. This was felt to be an appropriate response to mitigate any further risk. Risk management plans were also reviewed in this case.

The second complaint was suspended in accordance with section 21 and 22 of the guidance that governs our complaints process. The Local Authority was prohibited from investigating the concern via our Statutory Social Services Complaints Process simultaneously, as the consideration would prejudice the conduct of the adult safeguarding investigation. Complainant was advised that if they wish, they are entitled to re-submit the complaint up to 6 months after the conclusion of the safeguarding investigation.

7. HOW COMPLAINTS WERE RESOLVED and LESSONS LEARNED

A variety of methods were used to resolve complaints, including:

- Liaison by the complaints officers with senior managers to identify/agree immediate/informal resolution.
- Meetings by senior officers with complainants to discuss/resolve their concerns.
- Liaison with other Local Authorities ensuring coordinated and cohesive responses.
- Provision of explanation of reasons for decisions (verbal and/or written).
- Provision of an apology (written), where appropriate.
- Corrective actions, e.g. change of decisions, review of procedures;
- Reassessment (independent).
- Advocacy services/support.
- Independent investigation.
- Strengthening the links with Learning and Development to incorporate the lessons learned into the further development of staff training.

Key lessons learned during 2022/23 were as follows:

Table 5

Service Area	Lessons Learned/Actions Implemented
<p>Adult Social Care</p> <p>Record Keeping</p>	<p>An Independent Investigating Officer recommended that where statements are produced by multiple staff, all parties' names should be recorded on the document. They also recommended that staff be reminded to ensure they make a record of the reason for sharing information, with whom the information was shared and for what purpose and the reason for their decision. The Local Authority agreed with this investigation and staff were reminded of the importance of detailed record keeping.</p>
<p>Adult Social Care</p> <p>Communication</p>	<p>An Independent Investigating Officer recommended the manager should be open and consistent when communicating and sharing information in instances where there are safeguarding concerns against a family member. Good communication will prevent any misunderstanding which, in this complaint, led to the perception that information may have changed or been 'played down'. The investigator noted that good communication may still be achieved whilst taking individuals' feelings into account. The manager has since reflected on the learning from the circumstances in this complaint and accepts that if a similar situation should arise again, they will have open and consistent communication.</p>
<p>Adult Social Care</p> <p>Clear information</p>	<p>An Investigating Officer suggested that clearer communication about how decisions are made, what actions are taken and what is within the remit of social services could have ameliorated concerns in the case investigated. The Investigating Officer also suggested the Local Authority should consider providing clear information to families and those in receipt of care that sets out what the roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities of social services are, so misunderstandings can be avoided, and expectations can be realistic. In this particular complaint, it would have enabled the family to understand the care and support they were receiving and what the</p>

	<p>family could expect. We have since developed information for the public to meet this recommendation. This information sets out the roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities of social services along with information on how to make a complaint.</p>
<p>Children's Social Care</p> <p>Documentation sharing</p>	<p>In Independent Investigator recommended that BCBC ensures it has robust processes in place to ensure relevant parties get all of the documentation they are entitled to receive and an evidence trail that notes when documents have been sent. We reflected on the robustness of our procedures and increased business support capacity. We reviewed systems and processes to ensure we monitor performance in this area better and take action when issues arise in a timely way. Work continues with the business support department to see if the current system can provide an automatic distribution list. A practice guidance note was also issued to all staff.</p>
<p>Children's Social Care</p> <p>Information recording</p>	<p>A Independent Investigating Officer recommended that BCBC review its recording practice and procedures to ensure that contemporaneous case notes and supervision notes are inputted on to WCCIS. This is particularly pertinent when considering the level of staff turnover that has occurred and the need for new staff to understand and appreciate the context of cases. The Local Authority have since developed a new Recording Policy and training on this is incorporated into our suite of practitioner training days. A new Supervision Policy has also been approved and extensive staff training delivered on the new policy, including the requirements around recording supervision discussions.</p>
<p>Children's Social Care</p> <p>Managing challenging contacts</p>	<p>An independent investigator recommended that BCBC reflect on the concerns highlighted in the case investigated, and work to develop and adopt strategies for dealing with members of the public who</p>

	<p>have difficulties understanding the process and procedures. We agreed to reflect on this recommendation. Since then, we have developed a Parents Charter which includes standards of communication. We also regularly refer to agencies who provide advocacy service to adults to support in their understanding of children's social care processes and procedures.</p>
<p>Children's Social Care</p> <p>Resolving issues at the earliest opportunity</p>	<p>In cases where it becomes apparent that communication is an issue, it was recommended that managers proactively contact clients and work out strategies of dealing with these situations before they escalate into complaints. We agreed with this recommendation and advised that managers will receive training in effective resolution of issues prior to them escalating to complaints. The Parents Charter will set out clear standards for communicating clearly and checking understanding of communications.</p>
<p>Children's Social Care</p> <p>Resolving issues at the earliest opportunity</p>	<p>In another Stage 2 complaint, the Independent Investigating Officer recommend that concerns are not dealt with by means of a written Stage 1 response but are initially responded to as a face-to-face meeting or a telephone discussion. In this case, we recognised the time and inconvenience caused to complainants in having to pursue matters via our formal complaints process. To show our commitment to building a positive working relationship with the complainants, the service offered a monthly meeting with the Team Manager (or another senior member of staff) for any issues to be addressed in an efficient and constructive manner moving forward.</p>

There have been no complaints received during this reporting period that have been communicated via the medium of Welsh.

To ensure compliance with the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards all complaints publicity material, including leaflets and the complaints website have been translated and are readily available in Welsh and English.

Compliments

Compliments are regarded as important information which can be used to identify and learn from good practice. All compliments are therefore recorded centrally, and details provided in management reports. As shown in Table 2 (page 13), **257** compliments were received during 2022/23 compared to 117 the previous year, a welcome increase of **120%**. Please find a selection of the compliments received for 2022/23 below:

Table 6

Compliments - Adult Social Care:
“...My brother and I would like to thank you for your help and concerns regarding Mum this past month. Your assistance and advice, has been valuable and warmly received...”
“...I had a craniotomy on 23rd August 2022. After leaving the hospital I had a Speech Therapist and an Occupational Therapist. The Speech Therapist helped me understand what I needed to do to make communication easier for me, she helped and searched for groups for me that I haven't gone to yet but I will check them out. The Occupational Therapist was very compassionate to me, she helped and guided me towards checking out HRT and the menopause, from the Occupational Therapists help I got in touch with the doctor and the neurosurgeon and got checked out, without my knowledge they saw there was a problem and I had an emergency hysterectomy. I am very grateful for the Occupational Therapists and Speech Therapists help and guidance...”
“...Thank you for coming to assess Mum in January. I know she was private and was frightened to accept care. She was a private lady. We were all very grateful of the help. Please thank J for her knowledge, kind and professional manner. The equipment came in extremely helpful...”
“...Brilliant staff. K, L fantastic carers. Fantastic. I had all the help needed. All changes discussed accurately and understood. This was fantastic by everyone that came to me, friendly, helpful, and caring. Really has helped me, in always. This is a fantastic service. From carer's who a brilliant at what they do. Can't fault them. The manager is excellent. Everybody I am so grateful and can't thank enough. Feel I have got my life back as much as I can...”
“...As you would remember, I stayed at Bryn y Cae for two nights in February – March 2023. I was very impressed with the efficient Management of the Home and a professional approach to various problems by the carers, especially, the night team who rose to challenging situations, often exacerbated by inadequate number of carers. I look forward to visiting Bryn y Cae again (subject to

management approval as a Respite Resident). Please forward my heartfelt thanks to all staff for making my stay a pleasant one!..."

"...I'd like to say a big thank you to you and M. Every time I've contacted your department, by phone or email, you have both been most helpful, which has been very much appreciated..."

"...N, I don't even know where to begin, except thank you. Thank you for everything you have done for me over the past year. Thanks for putting up with all my tear and breakdowns, and all my random hyper times. Thank you for supporting me through everything and helping me remember to be POSITIVE, even though I hated you saying it :) Thank you for always finding time for me, even when I was moody. I'm going to miss you alot, alot, alot! and I'll always remember you, always! I'm going to miss sitting in the office and annoying you with my random questions. I'm going to miss seeing you basically every day and pulling different faces at you. I'm going to miss you making me laugh all the time. I'm going to miss you so much!..."

"...O thank you for doing all you could possibly do for him and for us. Not only that, but you did it all with such kindness and thoughtfulness and sensitivity. You are a professional with a remarkably personal touch. I don't know who your managers are but please could I respectfully ask you copy and paste this message to them as I want them to know how thoroughly appreciative my family and I are of you Thank you O..."

"...P gave me some really lovely feedback at the end of the visit saying she was really anxious initially, but I put her at ease. She said she 'really enjoyed our conversation and found it helpful' and also that I must be really 'really good at my job, as I'm so easy to talk, and it wasn't like other people she'd spoke to'. She also said that she felt really comfortable talking to me and that she could tell me anything..."

Compliments – Children Social Care:

"...I would like to say Q has been very helpful in telling me to make a complaint go on line as I stated I wasn't happy about smoke around R. If there were more social workers like her then talking to social workers would be so much easier and calmer. She's honest, tells you how it is and has my total respect for that..."

"...Thanks for the care and support shown towards S. T really enjoyed your visit and playing the games. We will use those going forward. Such a simple but great way of expression while making it fun..."

"...I just want to give feedback on U. What a fantastic social worker (best social worker I have ever worked with). It so lovely to see the children are at the centre of everything she does. U is a credit to BCBC children services..."

"...V was told last night and to say he was overjoyed is an understatement. He has packed all his stuff up already which wasn't quite the plan but wouldn't listen so left him to carry on. Thank you W for all your help sorting out this matter as we honestly think we would still be going around in circles if it wasn't for you! W thank you for stepping in and supporting us..."

"...Mother stated that X has been absolutely amazing and has been easy to talk to and discuss difficulties with. Father stated that X has been brilliant and has help a lot, he stated that he appreciated all the help that she provided with

obtaining funding for new furniture for Y's bedroom, which made a huge difference..."
"...We recently held a judging session for our annual Life Journey Awards. One of your colleagues nominated some of your work and I am pleased to announce that it was 'Highly Commended' by the judges! The piece in particular is the book that was made for Z, with the child focus and visual simplicity really striking a chord with the judges. Congratulations!..."
"...I just want to pass on a compliment that was shared with me today from A in the Youth Justice Service. She told me how much of a good social worker you are and how much she is enjoying working alongside you on a very complex case. Well done, amazing work and good collaborative working..."
"...Thank you for walking the most challenging and rewarding journey with us. We can hand on heart say we couldn't have done it without you. Although our time has come to an end for now, we want you to know you were appreciated. Thank you for your kindness, patience and most of all for making us feel like you genuinely cared..."

8. CUSTOMER FEEDBACK – THEIR EXPERIENCE OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The rate of return by complainants of completed questionnaires has been very poor historically, the service only received one response 2016/17 and two responses in 2015/16. Therefore, the focus since 2018/19 has been on the outcome of the complaint, as opposed to the experience of using the complaints procedure.

Questionnaires will be reintroduced in 2023/24 to try to gain customer feedback on the experience of the complainant's experience of the complaint's procedure.

9. ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2022/2023

- The continued focus on achieving positive outcomes for complainants in a year with a significant increase in complaints. Adherence to timescales has been an area for improvement, however within the parameters of what is appropriate and possible, the service and complaints department have continued to work together to resolve as many complaints as possible either informally or at Stage 1 of the complaints process. A focus to "Investigate Once, Investigate Well" and meet outcomes for complainants wherever appropriate and possible. This resulted in only a small percentage of complaints progressing to Stage 2 of the Statutory Social Service Complaints process - **4%**
- A review was completed in April 2023 to evaluate our Social Services Complaints Policy. This work was undertaken to determine if the policy adequately addresses concerns raised in complaints and to identify potential gaps or shortcomings to prevent similar issues from arising in the future.

- Work has also been undertaken to develop a Social Services Complaints Factsheet. This factsheet has been available from May 2023, and we will also be looking to publish a downloadable version on our website in the near future. The factsheet provides a clear, concise, and easy to read summary of the Social Services process. The Factsheet is set out in a 'questions and answer' format, to support members of the public who would like to make a complaint and for those who would like further information on the process.
- There has been a notable increase in compliments received compared to complaints, indicating an improvement in overall service satisfaction. **57%** of contacts received to the complaints department were compliments compared to **43%** of which were complaints.

10. OBJECTIVES FOR 2023/24

- The role of the Citizen Voice Body ('CVB') is to strengthen the voice of citizens and to ensure Local Authority services are open and honest when something has gone wrong. They are an independent body who provide advice and assistance to citizens when making a complaint. The CVB operates under the name "Llais" and became operational from 1st April 2023. An objective for 2023/24 is for the Local Authority to foster positive working relationships with Llais advocates. Through collaboration and open communication, social services will be able to better understand the unique challenges and needs of individuals, leading to more effective support and improved outcomes for citizens.
- The Social Services complaints department plays a crucial role in addressing grievances and improving the quality of services provided to individuals and communities. Complaints can be used as learning opportunities to drive improvement within services, therefore the complaints department will review the system to ensure there is a structured process for learning and for services to be able to demonstrate the improvements undertaken.
- Staff turnover has resulted in a number of new managers in the Authority. To ensure they are equipped to address concerns proactively and prevent escalation to formal complaints, an objective for this year is for the department to seek external training resources. This training will provide managers with the necessary skills and knowledge to handle issues effectively and efficiently, reducing the number of formal complaints and ultimately improving the quality of care and service delivery. The training will also be available as a 'refresher' for current managers in the directorate.
- The Council continue to experience difficulties in appointing suitably experienced Independent Investigating Officers in a timely way. Due to the rise in the number of complaints being considered at Stage 2 of the Social Services Complaints Process across Wales, Independent Investigating Officers are often at capacity

and availability is limited. This year the complaints department will continue to further develop our pool of investigators. As we have good working relationships with our counterparts in neighbouring Local Authorities, we are able to share information on good quality Investigating Officers on a reciprocal basis.

- An objective for the complaints department for this year is to conduct a review of the current system for logging and tracking complaints. This review aims to identify areas for improvement in order to enhance the system's efficiency and effectiveness. By refining the complaint management processes, the department intends to facilitate better support for performance management reporting, ultimately ensuring a more streamlined and responsive approach to addressing concerns.

11. EQUALITIES

A screening for equality impact has been carried out in relation to the representation and complaints procedure. There is no negative impact on the protected equality characteristics.

There have been no complaints in relation to equality impacts received during the reporting period in relation to the Social Services Representations and Complaints Procedure.

**Report prepared for Claire Marchant
Statutory Director of Social Services
By the Compliments and Complaints Resolution Manager**