

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr
Bridgend County Borough Council



SOCIAL SERVICES REPRESENTATIONS AND COMPLAINTS



ANNUAL REPORT 2023 / 2024

November 2024

**SOCIAL SERVICES
REPRESENTATIONS AND COMPLAINTS 2023/24**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report covers the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 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.

Local Authority Social Services 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 ninth 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: An emphasis is placed upon swift resolution of the majority of complaints. An offer to discuss the complaint with the complainant must 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 for complaints relating to Children's services an Independent Person must also be appointed to oversee the investigation process. 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 2023/2024, 16 complaints were received by the Public Services Ombudsman's Office, 14 of which related to Children's Social Care, 2 in respect of Adult Social Care. None were 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 2023/2024, Member referrals were received as follows:-

Table 1

2023/2024	Number of Referrals
Adult Social Care	94
Children's Social Care	41
Total	135

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 2023/2024 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 2023 and 31st March 2024, **778** surveys were distributed, of which, **267** responses were received. This is a **34%** response rate, which is a slight decrease from the response rate of 36% in the previous year.

General comments provided include:

I really appreciate all your help in a kind and friendly manner.
Installer was knowledgeable and easy for my Mum to understand.
The Care & Repair workman was excellent and explained it very well.
The engineer was neat with his work, and he took his time to explain everything about the device to me. It would help if people knew more about Care & Repair. I only knew through friends, the help you provide.
The installer provided exemplary service; punctual and quick, yet thorough and accurate (and patient).

Bridgend Resource Centre provides care and support services to individuals with learning disabilities, complex health/behavioural needs and adults living with advanced dementia. The aims of the service are:

- the development and maintenance of skills for the person;
- to support the social aspect of friendships and relationships; and
- to provide a respite service for families and carers.

These core aims are also the ethos for our community hubs where an emphasis is placed on an active citizenship within the local community.

Bridgend Resource Centre has a therapeutic and sensory approach. The activities individuals are involved in are person centred and aim to promote the potential of each person. This will take into consideration their cognitive and physical wellbeing promoting, as high a level of independence as possible, for as long as possible. The centre has a sensory room, hydrotherapy pool, Touch Trust room, sensory garden and base/activity rooms designed to enhance the care experiences of those who attend.

There is a specialist team working as one for High Support and Self-Directed Support (SDS). SDS has a dedicated on-site Health Team in respect of an Occupational Therapy, Community Psychiatric Nurses and Dietician/Speech and Language Therapist. The collaborative approach works extremely well in the SDS, and as outreach workers to the community hubs and homes for assessments if required.

Comments include:

Having the support from day service has made the difference between living and existing.
A new week and another day in day centre. He's absolutely loving it and looks forward to going each time. He went to Tesco's shopping last week pushing his own basket and loves music sessions.
I just wanted to compliment you as the pathway is looking great and I appreciate the way you have maintained it. Your grounds also are well kept.
Knowing that my husband is safe and cared for at the day centre means everything to me. These few hours when he is there gives me the strength to cope and continue caring for him at home. The staff are wonderful, they sing from the same hymn books as myself when it comes to my husband's wellbeing and [it's] a huge benefit to myself knowing how well he is looked after.

The **Hospital Social Work Team** have a crucial role in providing support and assistance to adults and their families following admission to hospital. The team work collaboratively with health professionals to undertake assessments to facilitate smooth, safe and timely transitions from hospital to home or alternative care settings. They support people on their hospital journey during times of crisis to successfully navigate the complexities of healthcare processes, and connect them with essential community resources. The team play a pivotal role in enhancing the overall wellbeing of individuals by promoting a person centred, strengths-based approach.

Comments provided include:

Can I please extend my thanks to you and your team for the professional way that you have treated this case.
I would like to express my thoughts on the team and my time at the POW (Princess of Wales Hospital). The team have been greatly supportive and one of the best supportive teams I have worked with. I have been treated with fairness and feel my experience and professionalism has been always respected with no prejudice. It has been a positive experience with no regrets in working under BCBC [Bridgend County Borough Council]. I have been given plenty of opportunities to express myself, support others in the team and able to complete training that has been required.
The social worker who assisted our transition from hospital to home was excellent. She explained the process, took care of all our worries + concerns and was very understanding of our needs. She updated us regularly with any progress as we awaited a full package of care.

Children's Social Care

The **East Locality Safeguarding 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 families. The team analyse and manage risk to ensure children remain at home where it is safe for them to do so.

Comments include:

Thank you all.....you have protected and saved my daughters! I will be eternally grateful.
I just want to say thank you ever so much for your support and kindness. I really appreciate you. Me and B have been so lucky to have you in our lives guiding us through how to live correctly. I will never forget you. Take care x
C has been amazing and her support has been 'phenomenal'. They did not feel that they would be in such a good position – on the brink of reunification - without her support and help and they wanted to express their gratitude and thanks to her.
I wanted to take this opportunity to express that despite how difficult this case has been, you have managed it very well, with sensitivity and understanding. The needs of the children has always been your priority and this on times has meant some difficult discussions with the family. However, you have always advocated for the children with a compassionate, respectful and professional approach whilst being mindful and sensitive to mum's health needs. You have always ensured that necessary information has been communicated to me in a timely manner and that any changes to the plan has always been discussed in a professional forum. This has meant no need for chasing from my end, which I am very grateful for! Occasionally there are differing opinions between Social Services and other agencies - although this is not always a bad thing, it has been apparent that as the statutory/lead agency you value and respect the views of the other professionals involved, and ensure that their knowledge of the family informs any decisions made. This understanding of professional roles will only ever increase positive working relationships. Thank You's are not said enough particularly in professions like ours, so, 'Thank you' for your hard work and commitment and professionalism with this case. I for one have certainly appreciated it!

The Placements and General Fostering team provide foster care placements for children and young people who are looked after by Bridgend County Borough Council. The team provides emergency, short term and long-term foster care placements, as well as operating specialist schemes such as transitional Foster Carers, parent and child and short breaks.

Comments include:

Just to let you know how proud we all are for the amazing job D and E do for our looked after children. In their care F who was rescued from his mother some 5 years ago has made such amazing progress from almost being classed as disabled to now excellent in his growth and development and he is 3 years over and above his chronological age for reading and comprehension from the amazing help and support provided by D and E

despite the challenges mother has posed over the years and continue to do so. He has achieved 400 mts swimming badge and purple belt in Karate
Just wanted to let you know that the feedback from the G's on you as their social worker was fab! They said that you were really supportive and always asked how they were and what they needed to support them! They said they couldn't fault you!!
I could not stop her from telling me how wonderful, helpful, and supportive H is. This now is the second Supervising Social Worker I will have worked with and what ever you as a manager are doing is having great benefits for our / Social workers/carers who in turn give a great service to our children. Please pass this to your manager too as I have no idea who they are. Thank you to you and your team for all their hard work.
The feedback from the foster carers was that J is an outstanding Fostering Social Worker, she is supportive but challenging and not afraid to have the difficult conversation, her practice is outstanding. What insightful and caring foster carers. J has supported them to create a wonderful home for K and I saw the outcomes today of their care. As an IRO it was a pleasure to conduct this review.

The **Care Experienced Childrens Team** undertake direct work to achieve positive outcomes for children/young people who are looked after by the Local Authority. The team create and review outcome-based care plans that address the needs identified in assessments. Social workers within the team work with individuals, families, carer groups and communities to help them make informed decisions, enabling them to clarify and express their needs and contribute to service planning. The team work alongside agencies and professionals to address the needs of children and their families, including preparing and participating in decision making forums.

Comments include:

The judge thanked her for her thorough and detailed report. The child was subject to private proceedings the judge stated that he didn't think things would have come to the same positive conclusion if it wasn't for the hard work and dedication of the social worker as well as her working style.
Just wanted to make everyone aware of the quality of work that reunification had recently completed with a child L is working with who's at home with parents under PWP. Since the work has been completed L feels there's been a noticeable change in M's presentation; he's more chatty and more engaging and open in speaking to social workers. L feels reunification have supported him to understand that it's safe to speak to professionals and they're there to support. M has spoken extremely positively of the relationships he's built up with the reunification workers.
Just wanted to thank-you again for all your hard work on this case, I know you've provided huge support to N and have gone 'over and above'.
P so kind and generous, Illuminated with a bright source of light and imagination. Cautious of the people around her magical mind, Obtaining the trust and respectability of the ones around her. Loud enough with her enjoyment of singing the sound of Christmas songs, Affectionate and authentic through the whole of time.

Providers

Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) commissions a 'Hub & Spoke' service model for advocacy which includes:

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

Performance Data

The BVC Advocacy Hub received an average of 50 connected contacts per quarter, which was down from an average of 60 per quarter in the previous year. 50% of contacts came from the general public, and there was a proportionate reduction in contacts from professionals and practitioners.

Referrals and contacts to the BVC Hub were triaged and referred to the most appropriate support service. This approach ensures that only those eligible for statutory Independent Professional Advocacy (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.

Of the 207 contacts received by the Hub, 42 were referred to statutory IPA services during the year.

Where IPA was not applicable, and/or other forms of advocacy (support) or other advice/intervention were required, service users were signposted to the following services:

- Older People's Commissioner for Wales
- Early Intervention and Prevention Hub formerly known as Bridgend Common Access Point
- Pobl Floating Support
- Social Services
- Disability Advice Project
- Housing Options (Generic)
- Assia Domestic Abuse Service
- LawWorks Cymru, Napac
- Citizens Advice
- Qualia Law CIC
- Family Lives
- Y Bont, National Autistic society
- The Autism Directory
- Tros Gynnal Plant

As the statutory IPA providers also receive direct referrals in addition to those triaged via the Hub, there was a total of 125 new referrals for statutory IPA made during the year, with the two providers collectively supporting 279 individuals across the four quarters.

Parental Rights and Child Protection issues were again some of the largest reasons for contacts, alongside mental health and family relationship issues. This reflects the largest proportion of IPA case work held by Mental Health Matters Wales in their statutory IPA service data. The levels and complexity of a large proportion of the case work has increased to support Child Protection cases, where often both parents need an advocate. The providers 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 Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.

Active Offers & Issue-based Advocacy (IBA)

During the year, 145 young people accessed the Issue Based Advocacy (IBA) service, presenting with 172 issues. The figures identify a notable decrease in young people accessing IBA when compared to the previous year where 224 presented with 275 issues. 76 young people accessed the service for the first time, compared to 123 in the previous year. The decrease is likely to be due to the reduction in child protection conferences and the improvements in social services that has resulted in less young people dependent on advocacy for support. However, we recognise that the uptake of the active offer and IBA needs to improve; therefore, TGP have recently delivered a number of presentations in regard to the active offer to ensure the teams have a good understanding of our responsibilities in promoting this. Team managers are encouraged to actively promote advocacy within their teams, and Independent Reviewing Officers are reminded to reinforce the offer made by social workers at each review.

6. STATISTICAL INFORMATION 2023/2024

Number of Representations Received and Timescales

Table 2

Total Number of Complaints and Representations Received
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Statutory Complaints Procedure – 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024		
Complaints	Adult Social Care	Children’s Social Care
Informal (resolved outside of the formal complaints procedure)	34	107
Stage 1	10	23
Stage 2	3	5
Total Complaints	<u>182</u>	
Compliments	Adult Social Care	Children’s Social Care
	223	139
Total Compliments	<u>362</u>	

A total of 191 complaints were received in the previous period 2022/23. The table above shows a slight **decrease in complaints** received during this reporting period – a decrease of **4.7%** compared to the previous year.

A total of 257 compliments were received in the previous period 2022/23. The table above shows a significant **increase in compliments** received during this reporting period – an increase of **41%** compared to the previous year.

Timescales

92% of Stage 1 complaints were acknowledged by the complaints department within 2 working days during this reporting period.

At Stage 1, the complainant should be contacted within 10 working days of the date of acknowledgement by the person looking into the complaint. This is usually the relevant manager responsible for the service area the complaint is regarding. When the complaint has been resolved, a written response is provided on behalf of the Local Authority within the following 5 working days of the discussion or meeting. **47%** of Stage 1 complaints were resolved and response provided within 15 working days of the start date.

At Stage 2, the guidelines state that an investigation must be completed and a full written response issued to the complainant within 25 working days of the start date. Disappointingly, **no** Stage 2 complaints investigations were completed and the report issued within 25 working days of start date.

A factor contributing to the delay in completing complaint investigations within the prescribed timescale is due to the marked increase in the complexity of the complaints. There has been a marked increase in highly detailed complaints, with one particular complaint exceeding 100 pages, and many others also encompassed complex issues. 46% of complaints covered multiple issues compared to 27% in the previous year. While we strive to adhere to the timescales set out in our complaints policy, the complexity of each situation often necessitates a more thorough approach to ensure meaningful and positive outcomes for complainants.

This increase in complexity requires extensive time to thoroughly review and address each concern. Additionally, 9.5% of complaints involved multiple teams within the Local Authority (compared to 6.5% the previous year), necessitating coordination among various service managers, which further complicated and prolonged the investigation process.

The sharp rise in the number of complaints received in the 2022/23 reporting period (an increase of 158% from the previous year) continues to place a strain on the Council's limited resources. Although there has been a slight decrease of 5% in complaints this reporting period, the overall volume remains high compared to previous years.

At Stage 2, the complexity and seriousness of the complaints has resulted in investigations exceeding the 25-working day timeframe. The severity and intricacy of the issues demand thorough and detailed investigations, which has necessitated the need to extend the duration of the process to ensure all aspects are thoroughly considered. Compounding the issue is the ongoing national shortage in Independent Investigating Officers (IIO) and Independent Persons (IP). As the pool of IIO and IP resources is accessed by other Local Authorities in Wales, investigators are often working on multiple complaints across the nation, leading to extended timelines for completing each investigation.

Improvements are required in timeliness and the service is committed to implementing measures to address this. One approach to expedite internal processes is to review and streamline the sign-off process, especially where complaints involve multiple teams, which has been identified as a cause for delays. This will ensure more efficient communication and resolution.

The directorate has stabilised the social work workforce, significantly reducing reliance on agency staff, which will enhance continuity and efficiency in handling complaints. To further mitigate delays, the Compliments, Complaints and Resolution Manager is actively liaising with counterparts in neighbouring authorities to share details of new Independent Investigators, on a reciprocal basis. We are also considering ways to recruit the services of Independent Complaints Investigators to expand the available pool, thus reducing the burden on existing investigators. The Compliments, Complaints and Resolution Manager is currently in discussions with neighbouring Local Authorities to consider a joint approach to attract interest in the IIO and IP roles.

Overall Analysis

Early Resolution of Complaints

In line with the Welsh Government Guidance "A guide to handling complaints and representations by Local Authority social services" Bridgend County Borough Council, wherever possible, focuses on early resolution of complaints, with **77%** of complaints resolved informally during this reporting period (pre the complaints procedure). This is an

increase from the 74% of complaints resolved informally in 2022/23. The high percentage overall continues to reflect the Directorate’s commitment to achieving early resolution for complainants.

Some of the feedback comments received in relation to staff working within the Social Services Complaints Department are as follows:

Thank you R. I was very frustrated this morning. You are a good listener and for the first time today I didn't feel dismissed.
Thank you for the explanation offered which is very helpful and clear.
S is really nice and understanding.
Hi, thank you T that clarifies things for me. I appreciate your time in responding to my email and concerns.

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:

- Staff conduct (**22%**)
- Lack of support (**20%**)
- Lack of communication (**16%**)

Further information on themes can be found on Page 18 and 19 of this report.

Stage 2 complaints are investigated by an Independent Investigating Officer (IIO) independent from the Council. Complaints relating to Children’s Social Care 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	2	1	3
Partially Upheld	1	1	2
Upheld	0	3	3
Total	3	5	8

The following complaints were upheld following independent investigation:

Childrens Social Care

- 1. Complaint regarding a failure to communicate effectively internally and with complainants regarding a Professional Concerns referral under Part 5 of the Wales Safeguarding Procedures.**
- 2. Complaint regarding a failure to conduct the appropriate assessment of a mother's capacity to care for complainant's grandchild prior, or since, child's return to her mother in January 2022. There was also a failure to conduct the necessary drug and alcohol tests prior to placement with Mother, as instructed within the Care Order. Paternal Grandfather also complained that the contact arrangements set out in the Court approved care plan were not adhered to in relation to contact with maternal grandparents.**
- 3. Complaint regarding a child who was not appropriately supported in terms of their physical and emotional health, including their specific needs related to their ASD diagnosis.**
- 4. Complaint regarding a delay and breach in the assessment timescales within core groups, visits, and delays receiving documentation such as the child protection minutes and the child protection plan.**
- 5. Complaint that although the Local Authority requested the relevant forms to change child's name, the forms were sent directly to child's mother.**

Adult Social Care

- 6. Complaint regarding an elderly lady being placed in a care home at a time when she lacked capacity and no-one else had authority to make arrangements on her behalf. Notwithstanding this, the Council deducted £500 as a fee for making the arrangement, which is only permitted when a person whose means exceed the financial limits requests.**

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. 1 complaint was received by the Local Authorities' Corporate Complaints team and was deemed appropriate to be addressed in accordance with the Corporate Complaints Procedure during 2023/24. This complaint was relating to a data breach in Childrens Social Services and was 'Upheld'. The Council Annual Complaints

Report reports on this complaint, alongside others received in accordance with the Corporate Complaints Policy.

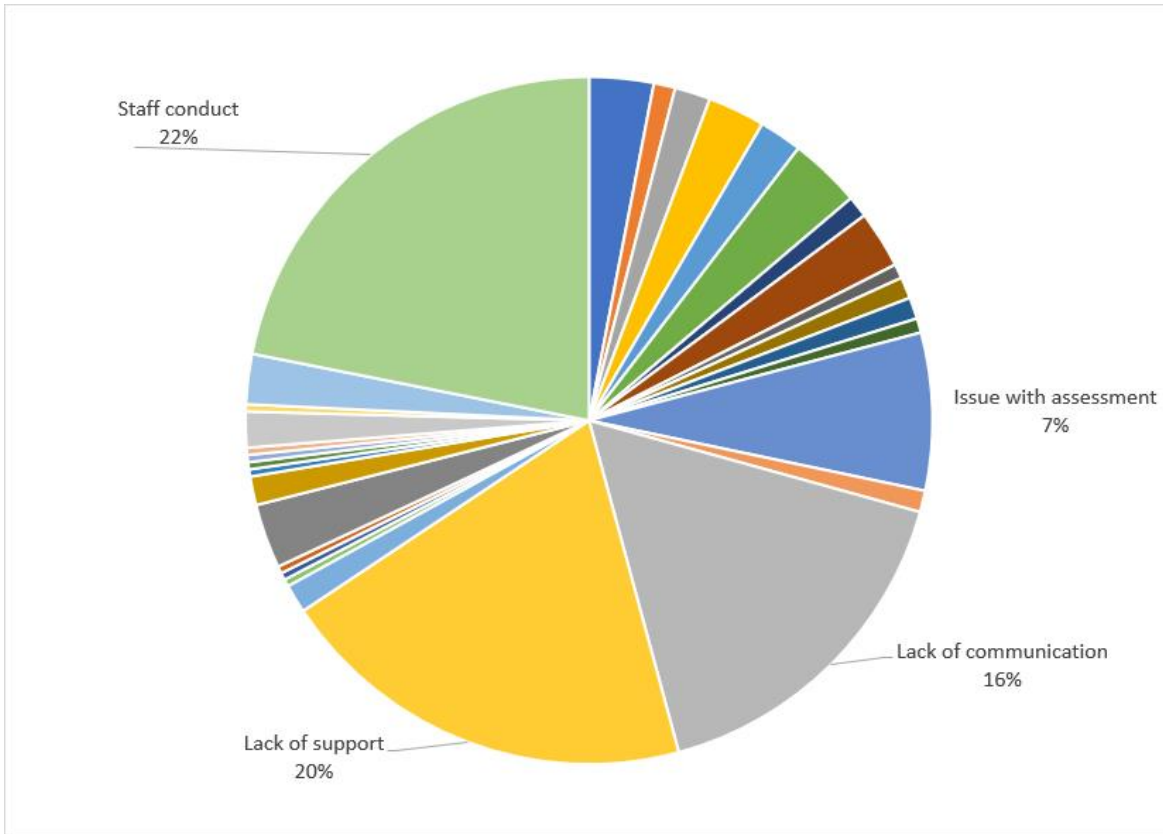
Complaint Themes

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

Table 4.

Themes of complaints received 2023/24	Percentage %
Staff conduct	22
Lack of support	20
Lack of communication	16
Issue with assessment	7
Delays	3
Data inaccuracies	3
Child/Adult Protection Process/Outcome	3
Contact arrangements	3
Policies / Procedures not followed	3
Safeguarding concerns	2
Case management decisions	2
Court outcome	2
Request for a change of social worker	2
Quality of service	1
Data Breach	1
Historic concerns	1
Call times	1
Frequent changes of social worker	1
Court Order not followed	1
Failure to act in a way the complainant believes Council should have	1
Issue with financial assessment	1
Meeting minutes not provided	1

Figure 1.



Complaints regarding staff conduct

As you will see from table 4, the largest proportion of complaints received this period related to issues with the conduct of staff members (**22%**). Complaints pertaining to the conduct of staff members are handled by the appropriate line manager in accordance with the Council’s internal HR policies. These policies are designed to ensure that appropriate action is taken, when necessary. The relevant line manager who handles the complaint must take the concerns seriously, and thoroughly evaluate every concern raised relating to the conduct of their staff. The complaints department hold a record of staff names to support the identification of any reoccurring concerns and are able to highlight this to the appropriate managers. In compliance with legal confidentiality obligations inherent in each employee’s contract of employment and the Data Protection Act (2018), the Council must not disclose the results of any investigations to a complainant.

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

Complaints regarding a lack of support

During this reporting period, **20%** of all Social Services complaints centred around a perceived lack of support in various areas critical to our responsibilities under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. In Children’s Social Care, this broad theme included advice and assistance with managing relationships and contact arrangements, financial support, support with obtaining personal documents, support to Foster Carers in maintaining their roles and referrals to partner agencies that provide specialist support. In

Adult Social Care, complaints relating to a lack of support have included issues such as inadequate support identified through assessments or reassessments, vital support required for carers / need for a carers assessment, respite support issues and occupational therapy assessments required to inform referrals to Housing.

Complaints relating to a lack of support have highlighted to services the urgent need for families who may be experiencing a crisis. These complaints emphasised the need for a responsive and coordinated approach to ensure vulnerable individuals and families receive the support they require. The complaints procedure and focus on the early resolution on complaints (wherever possible), has supported the Council's responsiveness in these situations.

Complaints regarding safeguarding concerns

During this reporting period, **7** complaints highlighted safeguarding concerns for consideration under Wales Safeguarding Procedures; **2** of which related to Children's Social Care and **5** of which related to Adult Social Care.

In Children's Social Care, one complaint led to a Section 47 investigation. The second complaint in Children's Social Care resulted in Social Services arranging for the father to appropriately safeguard the child from their mother due to the concerns raised in the form of a complaint.

In Adult Social Care four out of the five complaints were in relation to services commissioned by the Council. All four complaints were referred to the service provider for resolution under their own complaint's procedure. All five complaints were referred to the Council's Safeguarding Team for consideration under Wales Safeguarding Procedures. One case was already subject to a police investigation, while the others did not meet the threshold for significant harm following the necessary enquiries.

All four complaints relating to commissioned services were reviewed by the Social Services Compliments, Complaints and Resolution Manager, the Safeguarding Manager and the Contract Monitoring Manager, in which any necessary next steps were considered, such as placing the provider on the 'Risk Register' for closer monitoring.

7. HOW COMPLAINTS WERE RESOLVED and LESSONS LEARNED

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

- Liaison by the complaints officers with the appropriate managers to identify and agree a swift and informal resolution.
- Meetings between the appropriate managers and complainants to support honest and open communication, as well as being able to gain a better understanding of complainants concerns and their desired outcomes.
- Positive working relationships with Social Services Complaints Departments in other Local Authorities across Wales, to share best practices and ensure consistency in the handling of complaints. This also ensures complainants receive fair and equitable

treatment. On occasion and for particularly complex cases, we can collaboratively problem-solve on a reciprocal basis (whilst always maintaining confidentiality).

- Providing complainants with clear explanation of the reason(s) for decisions (verbal and/or written), where appropriate.
- Being open and honest by providing apologies to complainants, where appropriate.
- Identifying where services should be changed and improved, and recording following up on corrective actions.
- Offering a reassessment, where appropriate.
- Signposting complainants to advocacy services such as Llais, TGP Cymru and Bridgend Voice and Choice.
- Referring complaints to Stage 2 of the Social Services Complaints Procedure to provide an independent consideration of the complaint.
- Liaison with the Councils Quality Assurance Officer to discuss any recurring issues and trends in complaints, allowing a greater focus on areas where service quality can be improved. The Quality Assurance Officer will also consider where identified learning outcomes align with broader service improvement plans.

A summary of key lessons learned during 2023/24 were as follows:

Table 5

Team	Lessons Learned/Actions Implemented
Business Support	<p>Minute Taking</p> <p>Business support capacity was increased, improving processes like minute-taking. Improved processes ensure timely distribution of ICPC/RCPC minutes to all parties, supported by expanded business support.</p>
	<p>Filing Family Court judgements</p> <p>The Group Manager of Business Support distributed a practice note to all relevant staff to confirm where all documents should be saved, to ensure continuity.</p>
CDT	<p>Children's Disability Team</p> <p>Improved communication between teams will ensure appropriate case assignment for children with specialised needs, such as ASD.</p>
	<p>Panel Assessments</p> <p>Collaborative assessments between the safeguarding and disability teams were introduced to ensure decisions include all relevant expertise.</p>
CECT	<p>Court Order Name Changes</p> <p>Social workers were advised to promptly notify the General Register Office (GRO) of court-ordered name changes and complete forms within 6 weeks. Staff are now aware of GRO procedures for future cases.</p>
	<p>PWP Assessments</p> <p>The missing PWP assessment was rectified with a new assessment. A tracker system was introduced for monitoring PWP cases.</p>
	<p>Review of contact arrangements</p> <p>Following a recommendation in one particular case, a review of current contact arrangements was undertaken with maternal grandparents to ensure that the Local Authority is satisfied that it is a safe and nurturing environment for the child.</p>

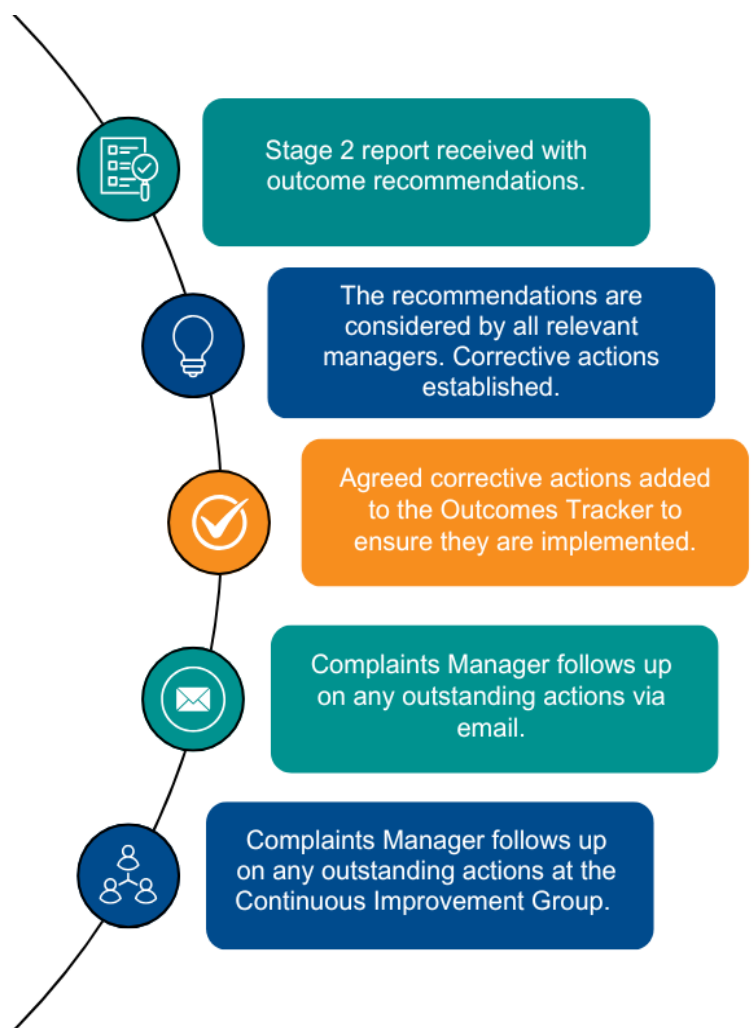
	<p>Internal Communication Communication protocols were reviewed during a comprehensive learning event, and strategies were introduced to prevent future failings in inter-team communication.</p>
Childrens Services	<p>Learning from Complaints An IIO recommended the Local Authority organise a learning event for all staff as a way of coming together and improving practice, so that workers can be supported to make improvements and reflect over the errors that were made during this particular investigation. Although we did not agree to hold an event, monthly complaint reviews and various training initiatives were implemented to share lessons across the service.</p>
	<p>Case Allocation Enhanced management oversight ensures proper matching of case complexity with social worker experience. Peer supervision and mentoring programs for managers were introduced.</p>
	<p>Record Keeping Training was enhanced to emphasise clear and readable record-keeping. The Council's Recording Policy has been reinforced with all safeguarding staff.</p>
	<p>ASD Training Comprehensive ASD training, addressing both male and female presentations, was implemented. Projects involving clinical psychology now provide additional support to staff.</p>
	<p>Adoption & Trauma Training Trauma-informed training covering adoption and early years trauma is now mandatory for all social work staff.</p>
	<p>Child Protection Thresholds Efforts are underway to ensure proper understanding of child protection thresholds, focusing on cases of significant harm.</p>
	<p>Updated Practice Guidance New workers must schedule protected time to read all key documents within the child's file. This has been written into our practice guidance as the standard we expect from our staff.</p>
	<p>Record-Keeping Standards A mandatory induction framework for new staff highlights the importance of clear record-keeping. An IIO recommended that record-keeping training be provided to staff. In response, we've implemented a Recording Policy and provide regular training on record-keeping standards. This is also extended to Foster Carers, as they play a key role in safeguarding.</p>
Directorate	<p>Agency Staff Standards for agency staff were reviewed, ensuring equal accountability with permanent staff.</p>
East Locality Hub	<p>Timescale Monitoring We reviewed performance monitoring of child protection timelines and improved compliance. Apologies were given for delays in the case in question.</p>
	<p>Child Protection Training Refresher training and reflective practice workshops were introduced to improve</p>

	<p>staff's knowledge and work environment. The "Signs of Safety" framework was implemented to aid consistency in child protection.</p> <p>Domestic Violence Training Mandatory training on domestic violence, including parental alienation and coercive control, was reinforced. Training needs are addressed in supervision and appraisals.</p>
Financial Assessments Team	<p>Reimbursement of Charges We reimbursed a £500 charge made in error and issued an apology to complainants.</p> <p>Clarifying Information for Self-Funders We reviewed the information provided to self-funders to ensure clear communication of the Individual Care Contract rationale. This will ensure transparency from the outset of the process.</p> <p>Payment Clarity for Self-Funders We reviewed the payment process information provided to self-funders to ensure clarity regarding payments to the Care Home.</p>
IAA	<p>Timescale Monitoring We reviewed performance monitoring of child protection timelines and improved compliance. Apologies were given for delays in the case in question.</p> <p>Domestic Violence Training Mandatory training on domestic violence, including parental alienation and coercive control, was reinforced. Training needs are addressed in supervision and appraisals.</p>
Integrated Cluster Network Team - East	<p>Referral to Mental Health Services Although the complaint in question was not upheld, the IIO suggested a re-referral to Mental Health Services may better meet the complainant's needs. A reassessment was completed to determine the appropriate level of post-operative support and whether alternative services, like Mental Health, were necessary.</p>
IRO	<p>Attendees to Child Protection Conferences Expectations around family attendance and social worker roles at conferences were clarified. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) received a reminder to assess family participation carefully.</p> <p>Document Accessibility We implemented measures to ensure IROs and social workers have access to all relevant documents, including court judgements, at case reviews. If the documents haven't been received by the first LAC review, the IRO will follow up with our legal team. Senior managers now have a monthly interface with legal, giving opportunity to follow up on any relevant legal documents in a timely manner.</p> <p>Update to LAC QA IRO Monitoring Report We updated the LAC QA IRO Monitoring Report to ask the question: "<i>Have Foster Carers been provided with all the necessary paperwork?</i>" in line with regulations.</p>
LADO	<p>Reflective Practice: Safeguards We implemented measures to ensure that the safeguards implemented in a Professional Concerns meeting are relevant and in line with the risk assessment</p>

	<p>pertaining to the specific professional concern raised. The LADO will ensure that safeguards are articulated and recorded during strategy meetings.</p> <p>Internal Communication Communication protocols were reviewed during a comprehensive learning event, and strategies were introduced to prevent future failings in inter-team communication.</p>
Childrens Locality Hubs	<p>Record Keeping Training was enhanced to emphasise clear and readable record-keeping. The Council's Recording Policy has been reinforced with all safeguarding staff.</p>
Fostering	<p>Professional Concerns Documentation We implemented measures to ensure that appropriate action is taken and relevant paperwork is provided to Foster Carers in accordance with the timescales set out in regulations. We have ensured that practitioners are aware of the documentation expected.</p> <p>Guidance for Foster Carers The fostering service have reviewed paperwork and are developing and implementing guidance on drug and alcohol misuse in young people. Mandatory first aid training provides opportunity for foster carers to improve their understanding this area in more detail.</p> <p>Foster Carer Training Foster carers now receive mandatory training on drug and alcohol misuse, and a handbook with guidance is being updated. We follow up during reviews if Foster Carers do not engage with training sessions as needed.</p> <p>Complaint Communication Workshops are considered to improve communication between teams and foster carers where necessary. Safeguards in Professional Concerns meetings are now clearly recorded in foster carer supervision notes.</p> <p>Foster Carer Supervision records Any safeguards recommended to be implemented are clearly recorded in Foster Carer Supervision records, to include dates when safeguards implemented and when lifted. These are also reflected within Foster Carer Supervision notes.</p> <p>Internal Communication Communication protocols were reviewed during a comprehensive learning event, and strategies were introduced to prevent future failings in inter-team communication.</p> <p>Supporting Foster Carers An IIO suggested reviewing policies to better support Foster Carers through challenging processes like Professional Concerns procedures. Our safeguarding protocol outlines available support, and the Fostering team provide assistance during these difficult situations.</p> <p>Mandatory Training for Foster Carers The IIO recommended mandatory training on Professional Concerns processes and support. We provide regular training and offer Foster Carers access to resources, including support during allegations through Fostering Network membership. We hold consultation events to update Foster Carers, and the complainants who missed this event were individually briefed by their Supervising Social Worker.</p>

Senior Management Childrens Services.	Record of actions Key meetings are documented to ensure clarity and accountability in decision-making. Although Senior Managers do not routinely input into case records, we will implement measures to document key meetings to ensure transparency and accountability.
Social Services Complaints	Minute Taking An IIO recommended that the complaints team consider minuting or recording all meetings with complainants. We recognised the need to respect individual preferences and circumstance as not all complainants benefit from formal minuted meetings. Minute-taking services are offered on a case-by-case basis.

In order to ensure that the directorate learns from complaints, and improvements are embedded effectively, the complaints department record, analyse and report on the learning from complaints. Improvements are monitored using an 'Outcomes Tracker' spreadsheet, which is reviewed periodically by the Complaints Manager to ensure that all outcomes and agreed actions have been completed. While some actions are straightforward and can be implemented quickly, others may require a period of work, time and commitment from the service to embed. The Complaints Manager also follows up on any outstanding actions during the 'Continuous Improvement Group' meetings in both adult and children's services. This group, attend by team managers and senior managers within the service, ensures that all areas of improvements are being addressed. The flowchart to the right demonstrates the process we follow from the recommendations being made, to ensuring they are completed.



Welsh Language Standards

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), **362** compliments were received during 2023/24 compared to 257 the previous year, a welcome **increase of 41%**. Please see a cross selection of the compliments received for 2023/24 in the table below:

Table 6.

Compliments - Adult Social Care:
We are all thrilled that you've taken over Mums case, especially Mum. You've already added so much value to mums everyday, From the bottom of our hearts, thanks you so much You really are worth your weight in gold V, and we appreciate all of your help.
I am writing on behalf of my Uncle, my Aunt, and wider family members to let you know how much we have valued W's involvement while my Uncle was in hospital. She provided helpful information and advice and additionally, perhaps most importantly, ensured that the views and wishes of my Uncle and Aunt were fully understood and incorporated within the care planning process. I would be grateful if you could pass on our thanks and best wishes to W.
I would like to say thank you for going out of your way and carrying out an assessment with Mum. The information you have passed to the social worker has finally ensured that Mum has received the nursing assessment that was required, we can now look at respite for Mum in suitable places, thank you again.
Dear X, I write to express my gratitude for the support you have shown Y and the staff supporting her through her operation, Z has fed back to me that your advice, support, and visual contact have been very much appreciated, I know Z and her team have found your input invaluable. I have copied A in to pass our thanks on, and compliment her staff for fantastic work.
B has been absolutely amazing, I do not know where I would be without her support. She is the only person who has gotten through to me to help myself, I have a far better quality of life with B's support, I have finally accessed health appointments, tackled my financial issues and I actually feel very much supported. I know B is always there to support and I am able to approach her with queries. B has been a life line to me.
FYI, I have just left C, he gave great feedback and would like the opportunity to attend another day at the centre if it came up! He finds it 'brilliant fun' with lots of good humour and good quiz's. He enjoys the food and being picked up and dropped off. Also stated 'it's the best thing since sliced bread!' Spoke to X who feels like C a different person and more confident in himself.

Mr D was very complimentary of you and said you have been a great support to E and her family. Very well done in difficult circumstances.

I hope you can get a message to F at Bridgeway ASAP. Would you also pass on our thanks to her and all the girls in her team. They have all done a fantastic job keeping Mum safe in her own home for as long as was possible. Also, a big thanks to you and your team (especially G who worked extra hard to make sure the blister packs worked). Best wishes to H and her new baby (when he/she arrives) and a thank you to I who offered good advice to help Mum with her diet. Mum was very positive with the girls from Foxtroy during her assessment and it was clear from her responses that she is looking forward to the move.

I would like to drop a line just as a thank you to your department for your help with a recent placement for my Mum. I would like to give credit to Social Worker J, she has shown nothing but understanding and empathy with my Mum and my own struggles as it has not been an easy decision to give up a home but hopefully the right decision has been made. J has been supportive and always communicated with me through the process, I don't think Mum would have been admitted to hospital when we were so desperate if she had not challenged the GP this should probably have happened months ago. J has taken all of the family into her assessment for a very positive outcome for my Mum. I think it's so important to ensure that good work is appreciated as there is always so much negativity in services at the moment.

Compliments - Childrens Social Care:

K being newly allocated has managed to gain quick oversight of all relevant information, develop a chronology, and present an excellent report for the conference today. In addition, there were challenging discussion that took place today, I felt this was managed by K professionally with good direction for resolution.

L has been absolutely amazing in not just going off what is written on paper. She has gotten to know us as a family beforehand and gotten everyone into actually helping us rather than being ignored. During our core groups L always gives me time to speak and makes sure nobody interrupts or stops me from my views and even encourages when I stand up for myself and what I think in core group about my children. L has always laid out clearly what help she can push for and even had her manager explain if we are unable to get something for one of my children. L has always been very easy to get hold of and nothing is ever too much or out of her way even when busy L will make time to talk to me or get back to me on something as right now my family is dealing with a lot. L is always a listening ear and always levels with us. She is never making us feel like we aren't listened to or lying. Other professionals around us haven't done this! L has never once made us feel like we are less than or a problem family just because of what is written down. Being a social worker it's important to be professional but also still act like a human. We have had social workers who look down on us and never give us the chance of proving we're not what is written. L has never come to our home telling us what to do it's only ever been suggestions and actual help. Very open and honest, if L has an issue or concern, she will directly come to us and talk about it.

I just remembered that I was going to email you about M. I just wanted to say how amazing I thought she was when we went to carry out a joint assessment together. The work she did with the young person was so good, they really opened up to her and she gathered really important information that without her input she might not have gained otherwise.

<p>She was also excellent with the parents, really empathic, able to challenge appropriately and really knowledgeable. I really think M is a star social worker, someone to aspire to be like in practice and someone I would want to come to my door if I ever needed a social worker in future. She is brilliant.</p>
<p>I would just like to write to you to praise up your lovely worker N who has worked with me and O covering P! I'm very sad that she's leaving me and even asked if I could stay with her. She has been an absolute diamond and helped me with so much! The understanding she has shown to my situation has meant so much as rarely do people understand to that level without actually having a child with a disability. People are so quick to complain that I just wanted to email to praise N and let you know what a valuable member you have on your team. I honestly cannot praise her enough she is honestly one of the best disability workers I have ever worked with and it was an absolute pleasure to work with her and I hope she receives the recognition she deserves I will very much miss working with her! Thank you.</p>
<p>Just wanted to let you know that the feedback from the Q on you as their social worker was fab! They said that you were really supportive and always asked how they were and what they needed to support them! They said they couldn't fault you!!</p>
<p>I just wanted to pass on some positive comments in relation to R, that were shared in conference this morning. Conference was in relation to S. Mother, T stated that she feels that R has been a breath of fresh air, they have an open relationship, where T feels that she can be honest about her situation, without being judged. She feels that R is also very open with her about concerns. T also stated that she has found R to be really supportive.</p>
<p>I just wanted to message to say thank you, thank you for supporting and believing in us. Thank you for not judging us and learning about us. Thank you for being that social worker who makes a difference, you'll be one of the ones we remember for ever. There are not many social workers like you around, you do not go unnoticed and you are so appreciated.</p>
<p>I want to see U every week - I listen to her and I am safe. She won't take any messing and she tells me all the rules to keep myself safe. I know then what I can do and I can be safe.</p>

8. ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2023/2024

- In July 2023, we reviewed our data collection system to ensure we address identified learning outcomes, and track where services have been changed and improved as result of complaints. This system has allowed the Complaints Manager to actively track outcomes. The Complaints Manager also actively participates in Continuous Improvement Groups in Adult and Childrens services.
- From August 2023 onwards, all complainants have been offered advocacy support from "Llais Cwm Taf Morgannwg", in line with the Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement) (Wales) Act 2020. We have also updated the information on our website to ensure complainants are aware of the support available. We have actively engaged with Llais managers and advocates, which has enabled us to strengthen our working relationships and collaboratively support complainants.

- From October 2023 onwards, the Complaints Manager has fostered a strong working relationship with the newly appointed Quality Assurance Officer. This has supported the learning from complaints. This open communication has allowed the Quality Assurance Officer to consider if any issues in services can align with broader service improvement plans, and the Complaints Manager has gained insight on improvements which can in turn led to more effective resolutions for complainants. This collaborative approach has increased accountability, ensuring the relevant departments address any identified recurring issues.
- Between November 2023 – February 2024 the Social Services Complaints Department underwent a Regional Internal Audit. It was pleasing to note that the audit gave a **Reasonable Assurance audit opinion**, which established a sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. There was only one ‘Medium Priority’ improvement identified, and four at ‘Low Priority’. All identified improvements have since been addressed to the satisfaction of the auditor.
- In March and April 2024 we reviewed and improved the system used to log and track complaints; which now provides more detailed information on complaint timescales, which will allow for greater oversight and will help report on timeliness in further detail.
- Throughout the reporting period there has been a continued focus on achieving positive outcomes for complainants in a year with a high overall number of complaints received. Managers have continued to work hard to resolve as many complaints as possible either informally or at Stage 1 of the complaints process; supporting the directorate’s commitment to achieving the early resolution for complainants. This resulted in only a small percentage of all complaints received progressing to Stage 2 of the Statutory Social Service Complaints process – **4.4%**.

10. OBJECTIVES FOR 2024/25

- As timeliness is a clear area of improvement, an objective for the year ahead is to enhance resolution efficiency by streamlining the signing-off process for formal complaints. This is especially pertinent for complaints involving multiple issues and/or teams, as these have been identified as a causes for delays. By streamlining internal processing we will ensure timely follow-up with complainants.
- In order to increase accessibility and inclusivity, an objective for the year ahead is to develop our complaints information in formats accessible for young people, individuals with learning difficulties, and for those with hearing or visual impairments.
- Roll out training on the Social Services Complaints Procedure on a wider level to management across the Directorate. The recently updated training materials will provide managers with the necessary skills and knowledge to handle issues effectively and efficiently, improving timeliness, reducing the number of complaints that progress to Stage 2 unnecessarily and improve the complainants experience and the quality of

service delivery. The training will also be available as a 'refresher' for those already familiar with the complaints process.

- Local Authorities across South Wales 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. We are also considering a joint advertising approach to attract interest in the IIO and IP roles.

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**