

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

SOCIAL SERVICES REPRESENTATIONS AND COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT 2025 / 2026



**SOCIAL SERVICES
REPRESENTATIONS AND COMPLAINTS 2025/26**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report covers the period 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026 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 and Family Services.

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 eleventh 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 and Family 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, they have the right to refer their concern for consideration by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW).

The PSOW 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 PSOW 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 2025/2026, **20** complaints were received by the PSOW's Office, **12** of which related to Children and Family Services, **8** in respect of Adult Social Care. None were progressed to investigation.

The PSOW publishes annual letters for Welsh local authorities which include comparative complaints data, enabling organisations to benchmark their performance against other local authorities across Wales. These letters provide valuable insight into complaint volumes and outcomes, helping to inform service improvement and governance arrangements. At the time this report was written, the PSOW had not yet published its annual letter for 2025/26. As a result, the most recent comparative data was unavailable for inclusion or analysis in this report, however, you can access the letters directly from the PSOW's website by clicking [here](#).

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 2025/2026, Member referrals were received as follows:-

Table 1

2025/2026	Number of Referrals
Adult Social Care	86
Children and Family Services	26
Total	112

5. COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED FROM THE CITIZEN VOICE BODY “LLAIS”

The Citizen Voice Body (CVB) promotes public engagement in the planning, designing and delivery of services and plays a key role in ensuring health and social care services in Wales are of a high quality and are responsive to the needs of citizens. The CVB operates under the name “Llais” and became operational from 1st April 2023. Llais is an independent body which provides a free Advocacy service to support members of the public who may wish to raise a concern. Llais also provide advice and information on the most appropriate course of action. During the reporting period, we received **1** complaint from a Llais advocate; the complaint related to Adult Social Care.

6. 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 2025/2026 is set out below:

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 2025 and 31st March 2026, **897** surveys were distributed, of which, **164** responses were received. This is a 18% response rate, which is a decrease from the response rate of 21% in the previous year. Although the percentage response rate was lower than last year, a higher number of surveys were distributed. The actual number of responses received remained broadly consistent with the previous year. Overall, the level of satisfaction from this survey was very high; 99% said they would recommend Care and Repair to others, 99% said they would recommend Bridgelink Telecare to others, 82% said Telecare had improved their quality of life, while 18% did not answer or were unsure.

General comments provided include:

Since Care & Repair have been involved with us, we've found everyone very, very, helpful, polite, and patient so far. Keep up the excellent work!

Your people really care. Full marks!!

A was quick, clean and very pleasant manner- excellent service.

B was quite amazing. He left and we knew everything we needed to, explained very, very well.

The engineer was very good at explaining the telecare service to [my] elderly parent.

C who came and installed the Bridgelink explained in an easy way of how it works and was friendly and polite at all times. Extremely happy with him and the service he supplied in my home. Well done.

The **Support at Home** survey is provided to all people in receipt of the service. It is provided within their file, and staff encourage those leaving the service to provide their feedback. Of the 704 surveys that were distributed, 63 people responded (response rate of 9%) Although the response rate is low, the overall level of satisfaction from those who completed the survey was very high.

General comments provided include:

More than and gave me more confidence back.

Could not fault any of the home staff.

Service expectations first class. On time always. Always pleasant, understanding, very friendly. 200 out of 10!

Brilliant service by carers.

Encouraged and prompted to help build my confidence and feel optimistic about what I can still do.

Bryn Y Cae is a purpose-built residential home providing residential, respite, dementia and short-term reablement care for older people. The home has 37 bedrooms across dementia, frail elderly and reablement units and offers a safe, homely environment that promotes independence, wellbeing and personal choice. Respite care is also available to support families and carers.

Comments provided include:

To all the staff, Thank you so much for all the care you give my sister while she was with you and for the end of life care you give her and how kind you were to the family. Thank you so much.

To all staff, thank you for all your hard work over the Christmas period , doing everything you could to make it enjoyable & special for the residents. For their meal out, staff went 'all out' to make them feel special – nails, hair, clothes... and atmosphere. We as a family appreciate these touches. Of course, you work hard throughout the year and that is also appreciated. Best wishes for 2026.

Just like to say a big thank you to everyone at Bryn y Cae. I know it's a hard but rewarding job. Without people like you who are so caring, you make such a difference to homes this week.

I thank God every day for mum being in Bryn y Cae, she has the best care possible and I am so grateful to D and her wonderful staff for caring for her in such a caring and loving way, night and day.

E explained that she thought her current support at Bryn Y Cae was “wonderful”. She was very happy with the care from “all the boys and girls” (care/support staff), everyone was very kind, she felt safe knowing that she had their help available whenever she needed it “I only have to press my buzzer and they come”. She spoke very positively about the night time support she has from care staff so she is able to maintain her continence, she described how staff respond several times a night in a very timely way when she calls using her buzzer, support her to transfer from bed to use the commode and help her to feel clean and comfortable and back into bed so she can sleep.

The West Integrated Cluster Network is a multidisciplinary team supporting adults with frailty, long-term health conditions, disabilities and mental health needs. Social workers work alongside health professionals, primary care services, and community organisations to provide coordinated, person-centred support that promotes wellbeing, independence, and quality of life.

Comments include:

Many thanks for the update which all sounds very positive and thank you all so much for getting things to this stage so incredibly quickly. Huge thanks once again.

Thank you so much for this update I cannot begin to tell you how much I appreciate your input and communication; it's provided a great weight off my mind for my father's ongoing care.

I am emailing to pass on positive feedback for Social Work Assistant, E, who is currently providing support to my Grandmother, F and to my uncle, G who is my grandmother's carer. I wanted to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude for the incredible support and care provided by E, who has gone above and beyond in providing compassionate care. E has been on hand for any worries/ concerns/ changes regarding my grandmother, and has attended multiple home visits to discuss support options, and has facilitated these as soon as possible (many at short notice when additional support is needed). The provision of information has been exceptional and she has kept me in constant communication regarding referrals, panel timeframes and outcomes. This has made such a difference to us. E has demonstrated consistent empathy, supporting my uncle who is overwhelmed with his caring responsibilities, and is also neurodivergent. She has suggested many improvements and options for reducing the load for him, something I would never have been in the position to do. E has listened, been an advocate, and found solutions whilst bringing comfort to the family during challenging times. It is clear in the care E provides that she is extremely passionate about her role, and she has made an incredible impact on not only myself, but my uncle and grandmother. I genuinely can't put into words how appreciative we are, and the positive impact this has had during a really difficult time. I wanted to ensure that E's work and commitment to providing exceptional care did not go unnoticed.

I wanted to thank you again for your support and speedy decisions from you and your manager too. This has no doubt enabled my dad to be with mam throughout her progressive illnesses which was especially important for dad over the past week.

Not sure what dad will do about continuing to live here but am sure this discussion will come up over the coming days.

We are all heartbroken that mam has gone but so grateful to the fabulous carers and management care team at Llys Ton. My dad and sis also told me the District Nursing Team have been amazing in their monitoring and responding to mam's pain relief and agitation too which meant mam could stay at home with dad.

Thanks again for compassionate support, timely communication updates and continued help it's meant so much to dad and the family.

Hi, I would just like to say how helpful the lady on duty fri 5th Dec was.

I only caught her first name H.

Her help and compassion on the phone was amazing and helped practically as well as supportively. I feel a little silly but wanted to reach out and say thank you.

The **Supported Living** team is designed to help people to live independently within their own homes. The supported living service offers tailored care and support that helps people deal with day-to-day living, housing management and community integration.

Staff provide support for people with a learning disability within their own home and in the community. Staff are committed to enabling people to maintain and develop skills, providing support that is personalised to meet individual needs.

Comments provided include:

I know its not been easy and continues to be the case but I just wanted to say a really really big thank you to you both and to your supported living team for all your help and support. You have all been amazing with I and gone over and above. I know that (for now, until things change) she is totally in the right place. I haven't been directly involved with Learning Disability Support for a number of years now and its been a lovely reminder of how very skilled, caring and passionate you all are about supporting people with more complex needs. I'm grateful for the support you've provided me in helping with the transition and I is really lucky to have your support.

J invited myself and K to the 'have your say' group on Friday last week. Thank you for the invite J it really was a lovely end to a busy week and made both myself and K smile from start to finish. It was wonderful. I just wanted to say J's manor and engagement with the service users was just so lovely to see. Her passion shone through. She was so respectful, gave everyone time to speak and feel included, and the opportunity for them all to feel special. Me and K left and immediately spoke about what a lovely time this was. I just wanted to give some well deserved acknowledgement of a lovely experience.

Thank you so much to your staff for the past few days they have been absolutely amazing. L has been a godsend with M, and their relationship has been lovely to watch.

Thank you for arranging for N to accompany O and I to the CAREFEST event last Tuesday, it was a pleasure to work with her on the day.

N demonstrated sound knowledge of her area of work and shared excellent enthusiasm and her joy in working in supported living, she gave the learners a positive and enjoyable overview of the service and the benefits of working in Social Care.

I hope to and look forward to working with her in the future to promote social care.

The **North 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:

We have today completed care proceedings for P&Q and I just wanted to highlight what a pleasure it was to work with R. R kept me updated throughout which I greatly appreciated. R has a very child focused approach and despite having to manage very challenging situations maintained positive trusting relationships with the children. When actions were needed to be completed now or in the next steps for these children, I know it will be undertaken thoroughly and with the child's experience in mind, in addition to R's assessments being thorough and well balanced. I have been very impressed by R's efficiency and style of working and cannot wait to have the pleasure of working with her again.

I would like to provide some positive feedback regarding S. S has consistently ensured that all information, paperwork, and updates have been completed in a timely and thorough manner. S's organisation and proactive approach have helped keep the placement running smoothly.

S communicates clearly, keep everyone well informed, and has shown a strong commitment to supporting T and prospective adopter throughout the process. S was happy to answer any questions from the adopter in the review today.

U (mum) said that V has been excellent working with her and she felt at ease from their first conversation. U said that without V's help and support she wouldn't be feeling confident today and it has totally changed her opinion on the process. U said that she found V easy to talk to and she has been 'amazing'. W (dad) also agreed with V's points and said that he has been less stressed about the process over the last few weeks. During conference, the family were also complimentary of V commenting on how the triggers work in particular, was really positive. U said that the red/ amber green work made her realise how she had been, as there were lots of things that came up during this session she didn't realise she did but she has found it, really good to know. Good work V 😊 It would be good to share the work with the teams as positive practice where appropriate.

Having you as X's social worker has made a huge positive difference for both me and X. The changes that are happening now are because of your involvement, and I want to make sure that the situation that unfolded when I became his Appointee never happens again - not to X, and not to anyone else.

The **Edge of Care Service** is a multi-agency team that provides intensive support to vulnerable children and families, helping children remain safely at home and preventing the need for care. Working with a range of specialists, the service delivers targeted early intervention and has successfully prevented over 90% of the children it supports from entering care.

Comments include:

Both Y and Z were great with my daughters. My children really have a good rapport with them. Both Y and Z do go above and beyond.

I do want to thank Y and Z for the time they gave to the family.

I found both A and B to be respectful and courteous and was happy that they were so child centred.

Having them assist in bringing the family pet to see the children from their fathers.

Taking time to build a positive rapport making my children feel more valued and respected.

You are a superstar! Having someone to vent to while everything was going on. Offering help and advice. Even though you're a 'professional' you seemed like family to us.

Sending out the Happy New Year texts before it goes mad! Good riddance 2025 & here's to a happy & healthy 2026 for everyone.

I don't accept help & struggle with kindness but thank you for giving me both those things these last few months when I've needed it most!

You didn't give up on me & maybe that's all I've ever needed.

Thanks for just being you C & we'll see you in the New Year.

The **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)** service provides independent oversight of care planning for looked after children and those subject to Child Protection Plans. The service reviews progress, chairs statutory reviews and Child Protection Conferences and works with children, families and partner agencies to ensure effective safeguarding and positive outcomes.

Comments include:

I don't know if you will see the answers I have given on the questionnaire but I feel it is important for you to know that you have been so helpful since you've been the IRO for my children. I always feel heard, seen and understood after having chats with you and the way you reassure the children that while you cannot make decisions for them you are able to make recommendations that benefit them and their wishes and feelings. We can all appreciate this is a difficult time for the children and having someone who is for them makes a huge difference to them. I don't think words will ever be enough to thank you for your dedication and hard work that you put into these CLAR meetings.

And if you could please let D know via feedback that having her at the CLAR meetings for E and F was lovely to hear positive feedback from contact and it made us feel that not everything is bad.

I have loads of gratitude for you.

I have met with G a few times over the last few weeks and can't tell you how helpful she has been. She has very kindly given me her time; Sharing with me some of the systems she has in place and things that have worked for her team, and it's been really useful for me.

We have also talked about some of the challenges we have experienced in our respective teams and some of the ways we have both overcome these, sharing practices, shared experiences, managements systems etc

Mostly, it's reassuring for me to know about other managers who have overcome challenges and that with perseverance and determination improvements are made, and things do get better.

Just wanted to share some feedback following an RCPCC I attended this am chaired by H.

I have sent this direct to H.....

I just wanted to comment that I have attended a few meetings with yourself and wanted to say that I think you have a wonderful approach, you are conscious of jargon/language used in meetings, you are clear and concise, put families at ease and very balanced in your engagement with professionals and families.

My team have also commented on how lovely H is and heard other professionals comment also, so wanted to share 😊.

We have received a compliment for a conference I chaired on the 31/07/2025. Father, I stated that he enjoyed the conference (ICPC) and felt that it was organised and run well by the conference chair.

Adult Social Care - Statutory Independent Professional Advocacy (IPA)

Providers

Bridgend County Borough Council 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

During the 2025/26 reporting period, the BVC Advocacy Hub received an average of 65 phone contacts per quarter, an increase from the 35 per quarter the previous year. The helpline also reported dealing with a high proportion of contacts requiring intensive advocacy intervention, suggesting that many enquiries related to complex advocacy needs requiring specialist support.

Professionals remained the primary source of helpline enquiries, accounting for 58% of contacts, whilst 41% came directly from individuals or family members. This highlights the important role professionals continue to play in facilitating access to advocacy services, while also demonstrating growing direct engagement from service users and their families.

Referrals and contacts to the BVC Hub are triaged and referred to the most appropriate support service. During the reporting period:

- 54 cases (approximately 27%) resulted in a statutory advocacy referral;
- 54 cases (approximately 27%) involved signposting or transfer to another service;
- 107 cases (approximately 54%) received information, advice and coaching support;

A further 11 support service referrals, 8 welfare/safeguarding interventions, 8 non-statutory advocacy referrals, 5 self-advocacy support interventions and 4 direct advocacy interventions were provided.

Across 2025/26, the BVC Hub made referrals to six specialist advocacy organisations: Mental Health Matters Wales, People First Bridgend, Advocacy Support Cymru, Tros Gynnal Plant, Llais Cymru and National Youth Advocacy Services. Mental Health Matters Wales received the highest number of referrals (35), followed by People First Bridgend (15) and Advocacy Support Cymru (14).

Overall, the BVC Hub answered more than 260 calls, generated almost 3,000 website views, reached 80 people through events, and made 70 advocacy referrals during the year. The majority of contacts were resolved through information, advice and coaching, with substantial numbers also requiring formal advocacy referrals or signposting to alternative specialist services.

Most referrals received by advocacy providers related to key adult social care processes, including assessments, care and support planning and reviews, accessing information and advice, accommodation issues, safeguarding concerns and complaints. Data from People First Bridgend demonstrated that care and support planning/reviews and access to information and advice were the most common advocacy issues. Mental Health Matters Wales also reported increasing involvement in complex safeguarding, legal, family and care-related cases, indicating sustained demand for specialist advocacy support to help individuals participate in decision-making, prevent escalation of issues and maintain wellbeing throughout statutory processes.

Children and Family Services – 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 led by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.

Active Offers & Issue-based Advocacy (IBA)

During the year, 113 children and young people accessed the Issue Based Advocacy (IBA) service, presenting with a total of 135 issues. This represents a decrease of 20 young people compared to 133 who accessed the service in the previous year. Of the 113, 42 were accessing the service for the first time, down from 58 first-time users in the previous year.

There was also a decrease in Active Offers (AO), with 34 received this year, compared to 66 last year. A total of 107 children and young people were eligible for the AO during the year, a 19% reduction from 132 the previous year. Of those eligible, 34 were referred for AO, meaning that 32% of eligible individuals received a referral, compared to 50% the previous year.

The reduction in the number of children and young people accessing advocacy through the AO may be attributable to a decrease in the number of children becoming care experienced and a reduction in the number of children involved in child protection processes. To strengthen advocacy provision and promote improved uptake of the AO, TGP has met with the local authority to review current advocacy arrangements and recording mechanisms. This work aims to increase understanding of the local authority's responsibilities in promoting the AO, strengthen referral pathways, and support more effective monitoring of advocacy access and outcomes going forward.

7. STATISTICAL INFORMATION 2025/2026

Number of Representations Received and Timescales

Table 2

Total Number of Complaints and Representations Received Statutory Complaints Procedure – 1 st April 2025 to 31 st March 2026		
Complaints	Adult Social Care	Children and Family Services
Informal (resolved outside of the formal complaints procedure)	46	105
Stage 1	11	12
Stage 2	2	2
Total Complaints	<u>178</u>	
Compliments	Adult Social Care	Children and Family Services
	257	150
Total Compliments	<u>407</u>	

A total of 170 complaints were received in the previous period 2024/25. The table above shows a small **increase in complaints** received during this reporting period, + **4.7%** compared to the previous year.

A total of 374 compliments were received in the previous period 2024/25. The table above shows an **increase in compliments** received during this reporting period, + **8.8%** compared to the previous year.

Timescales

97% of all 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 acknowledgment date by the individual investigating the complaint. This person is usually the relevant manager responsible for the service area related to the complaint. After resolving the complaint, a written response should be provided on behalf of the Local Authority within 5 working days of the discussion or meeting.

During the reporting period, **30%** of complaints led to a meeting or telephone call held within 10 working days, which is an increase from the 16.6% the previous year. However, only **3.8%** of Stage 1 complaints received a written response within 5 working days following the telephone discussion or meeting. If no meeting or call took place, compliance is calculated based on those who received a written response within 15 working days from the start date of the complaint.

The increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) to draft complaints has had a significant impact on complaint handling times. While AI-generated complaints are often well-structured, they are typically longer, more complex and raise multiple issues within a single submission, increasing both the volume and complexity of complaints received. Additionally, they can include misinformation if not proof-read by the complainant prior to submission. Many have included references to English legislation that do not apply in Wales, which can inadvertently mislead complainants and cause frustration.

AI has also made it easier for complainants to generate follow-up correspondence, resulting in a substantial rise in emails requesting updates or reiterating existing concerns. This increase in correspondence has created additional administrative demands and placed further pressure on staff resources. In addition, where AI-generated correspondence is submitted without being fully reviewed by the complainant, or where responses are not carefully considered by complainants and copied straight into AI chat-bots, misunderstandings or misinformation can be produced that prolong the complaints process and lead to unnecessary frustration and delays.

Despite these challenges, staff remain committed to conducting thorough and fair investigations and ensuring that all issues raised are fully considered. Complainants are therefore advised that current response times may exceed those set out in the complaints policy due to the increased volume of AI-generated correspondence to try and appropriately manage expectations. They are also advised that sending multiple emails about matters already under investigation will not expedite a response and may instead contribute to further delays. While complainants are always encouraged to raise any new concerns, this attempt to limit repetitive correspondence helps the complaint department manage complaints more effectively and maintain compliance with complaint-handling timescales, wherever possible.

Delays in accessing independent complaints advocacy services have also had an impact on ability to adhere to the timescales set out within our Complaints Policy. In some cases, complainants have required advocacy support before they are able to fully engage with the complaints process. Waiting times for advocacy services can therefore delay the progression of investigations, the agreement of complaint issues and the provision of formal responses. While these delays are often outside of the department's direct control, they can result in complaints remaining open beyond the prescribed timescales and contribute to overall performance challenges in meeting statutory deadlines.

At Stage 2, the guidelines specify that an investigation must be completed, and a full written response issued to the complainant within 25 working days of the start date. Unfortunately, no Stage 2 complaint investigations were completed, and reports issued within this timeframe. This is consistent with previous years. The complexity and seriousness of the complaints that reach this stage have resulted in investigations exceeding the 25-working day limit. The severity and intricacy of the issues investigated during the reporting period necessitated thorough and detailed investigations, requiring more time to ensure all aspects are carefully considered.

Another factor causing delays in complaint investigations is the complexity of the complaints, particularly those that reach a formal stage. A significant proportion of complaints are highly detailed and involved multiple complex issues. During the reporting period, **45%** of

complaints covered multiple issues, which is an increase from the 41% reported the previous year. While we strive to meet the timescales outlined in our complaints policy, the complexity of these complaints necessitates a thorough approach to ensure meaningful and positive outcomes for complainants. Additional time is required to ensure all aspects of each complaint are fully considered and addressed.

Additionally, **9%** of complaints involved multiple teams within the local authority, a decrease from the 14% the previous year. Although there has been a slight decrease, it still must be acknowledged that some complaints necessitate co-ordination among various service managers, which can prolong enquiries and the investigation process for some complaints.

When evaluating compliance with timescales, we must also take into account the significant increase in complaint volumes during the 2022/23 reporting period. That year experienced a 158% rise in complaints compared to the previous year. Although there was a slight decrease of 5% in 2023/24, followed by another decrease of 6.5% in both 2024/25 and the last year, the overall number of complaints remains substantially higher than it was when the Welsh Government last reviewed the application of complaint timescales in 2014.

To address these challenges, we acknowledge that additional work is required to ensure compliance with the timescales outlined in our complaints policy. Therefore, we are looking to review our internal workflows with the goal of refining and accelerating our processes. We are currently collaborating with our regional partners to address the challenges of adhering to timelines to Welsh Government. This is due to mutual acknowledgement that similar issues have arisen across the region, and evidence that the landscape of complaints has changed dramatically since the introduction of complaint timescales in 2014. Additionally, we wish to explore ways to empower complainants to effectively use AI tools for clearer communication, while raising awareness of the limitations regarding inaccuracies and vexatious correspondence.

To support adherence to timelines at Stage 2, we continue to work to expand the pool of available independent investigators. This includes sharing information about both new and experienced investigators with local authorities across Wales, as well as exchanging insights into the quality of investigative work conducted, all while maintaining the confidentiality of complainants.

Additionally, we are considering how to address potential barriers related to the requirement for an enhanced DBS check registered with the Update Service. Although this is a requirement we have, Bridgend County Borough Council are currently unable to carry out DBS checks, which has created barriers for investigators who struggle to find an umbrella organisation. We are currently liaising with counterparts in other local authorities to try and resolve this issue.

Overcoming the above challenges would help ease the pressure on existing resources, support adherence to timelines and ensure the continued delivery of high-quality investigations.

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 **84.8%** of complaints resolved informally during this reporting period (pre the complaints procedure). This is consistent with the 84% of complaints resolved informally in 2024/25. The high percentage continues to reflect the Directorate’s commitment to achieving early resolution for complainants.

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

You really are a marvel J 😊

Just wanted to give some feedback regarding K.

I have been a manager of a team for many years and over that time I have had a lot of experience of dealing with complaints.

Since K has been in post I can honestly say that dealing with complaints has been a much more positive experience. K provides support and direction to me as a manager and attending meetings with the complainant means that in most cases we are able to resolve issues together at an early stage. I feel I have learnt a lot from K about how to respond to complaints through her approach in these meetings which is always professional but also warm and empathic. She explains things to myself and complainants in an easy to understand way both verbally and in writing which I feel goes a long way in making resolution easier.

There have been some occasions over the last year in particular when I have had a number of complaints on the go at the same time but I have always felt supported by K. She has also given me the confidence to feel like I am able to deal with complex complaints and I feel she has enabled me to this part of my job better.

K always responds to emails and calls and my cries for help! She is the voice of reason and calm when I get frustrated over certain situations. She simply makes my job a lot easier.

We don’t often take time to appreciate our colleagues so I just wanted to take a bit of time to say how much I appreciate K and what a great job she is doing.

I have to say you are the most helpful person I've spoken to. Keep up the good work.

Thank you so much for your help, support and guiding me through the process, it was much appreciated at a difficult time.

Thank you. Just listening to our concerns, this means an awful lot to us. Dad came home this morning so just trying to reacquaint him with Mum and the bungalow. Once again thank you.

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 the local resolution stage 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 communication - **13%**
- Staff conduct - **13%**
- Lack of support - **12%**

Further information on themes can be found on Page 21 of this report.

Stage 2 complaints are investigated by an Independent Investigating Officer (IIO) independent from the Council. Complaints relating to Children and Family 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 and Family Services	Total
Not Upheld	0	1	1
Partially Upheld	2	1	3
Upheld	0	0	0
Total	2	2	4

The following complaints were upheld following independent investigation:

Children and Family Services

The Education Engagement Team did not keep any records of the meetings between the Education Engagement Team Manager and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Team Manager, despite the seriousness they had placed on the matters under investigation.

A professional complained about how the proposal for a potential professional concern meeting was communicated. The complainant expressed concerns that this information was shared before they received any formal notice regarding the discussion.

Adult Social Care

The complainant wrote to the former Chief Executive to share details about her personal tragedies in order to provide background context for her complaint. She specifically requested that this sensitive information not be shared as part of her complaint. However, her letter had been shared with the Complaints team, others involved in the Stage 1 investigation, and the Stage 2 investigating officer.

Complainant's standing frame therapy was stopped without notice or explanation, and no date was provided for when it will resume.

Between March and June 2025, the family contacted Bridgend Social Services for support in caring for their relative but were only provided with information on private care agencies and were not offered a carer's assessment.

The social worker did not complete a Carers Assessment for the complainant, preventing her from receiving the support and assistance she was entitled to.

Although there was an agreement in August to reassess the care and support needs of the complainants' mother, the reassessment was not completed until the following May.

Corporate Complaints Procedure

There are situations where certain aspects of a complaint do not fall under the Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure; in these cases, the Authority's Corporate Complaints Procedure is utilised instead. During the 2025/26 period, the Local Authorities' Corporate Complaints team received **1** complaint regarding Children and Family Services, specifically concerning a breach of GDPR. This breach involved a birth mother being informed of the personal details of prospective adopters. The Council Annual Complaints Report details this complaint, along with others received across various directorates, 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 2025/26	Total	Percentage
Lack of communication	37	13.31%
Staff conduct	37	13.31%
Lack of support	33	11.87%
Case management/review decisions	33	11.87%
Safeguarding concerns raised	20	7.19%
Delays	17	6.12%
Factual Inaccuracies/False Accusations	16	5.76%
Failure to act in a way the complainant believes council should have	14	5.04%
Request	12	4.32%
Other	11	3.96%
Breach of confidentiality	7	2.52%
Financial charging	6	2.16%
Issue with assessment	6	2.16%
Concern relates to an outcome from Court	5	1.80%
Removal/reduction of service	5	1.80%
Frequent changes of staff	5	1.80%
Direct Payments	3	1.08%
Quality of service	3	1.08%
Court order not followed	3	1.08%
Historic concerns	2	0.72%

Complaints regarding a lack of communication

As seen in Table 4, the joint-largest proportion of complaints received during this period (37 complaints) centred around a lack of communication. Complaints concerning communication included delays in responding to enquiries, failure to provide timely updates, and a lack of clarity regarding care planning and decision-making processes. These concerns often resulted in frustration and reduced confidence in the service. Efforts continue to focus on improving responsiveness, providing clear information and ensuring that people who are in receipt of services and their families are kept informed at all stages of intervention. The Complaints Manager regularly highlights service areas where communication has been identified as a recurring theme with the relevant service managers and senior leaders. This enables targeted learning and improvement activity to be implemented, supporting managers to address underlying issues and with the aim of enhancing the overall experience of service users and families.

Complaints regarding staff conduct

The other largest proportion of complaints received during this period related to the conduct of individual members of staff (**37** complaints), which although high, is a slight reduction from the 41 complaints received regarding staff conduct in the previous reporting period. Complaints regarding 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, and are provided with details of how to also raise a concern separately, should they wish to do so.

Complaints regarding a lack of support

The second largest proportion of complaints received during this period centred around a perceived lack of support in various areas critical to our responsibilities under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. This theme reflects a range of concerns expressed by service users, carers, and families regarding the adequacy of the assistance provided.

In Adult Services, complaints regarding inadequate support varied widely. For example, one complainant expressed frustration over not receiving help to access medication while in prison, while another highlighted the lack of assistance for their husband in securing a place at a day centre for respite. Complainants, family members and advocates also voiced concerns about the level of involvement and support provided to their vulnerable relatives, believing that social services should be doing more to meet their needs.

In Children and Family Services, a recurring issue during the reporting period was a lack of support for families with children who have behavioural difficulties or additional needs. These parents/carers expressed feeling isolated and unsupported in meeting their child(ren)s needs. Another recurring theme regarding support during the reporting period was complaints from young people in the care system / care leavers, who required support with finances, housing and health care.

This feedback highlights the importance of timely intervention across both Adult and Children and Family Services. Addressing these concerns remains a key priority for the directorate as we continue to work on improving the quality and responsiveness of the services we provide.

Complaints regarding safeguarding concerns

During this reporting period complaints were raised that highlighted safeguarding concerns, either entirely or in part of their complaint. Of these complaints; **12** related to Children and Family Services, while **5** were regarding to Adult Social Care.

In Children and Family Services, of the 12 complaints; 5 were referred directly to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) or relevant social work teams due to ongoing safeguarding involvement, with detailed outcomes unable to be shared in some cases because of GDPR restrictions and complainant not holding parental responsibility. 1 complaint was referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and investigated under Part 5 of the Wales Safeguarding Procedures, although the outcome could not be disclosed as it related to a member of staff's personal information. 2 complaints progressed to Section 47 safeguarding investigations, and following this both progressed as formal complaints explaining the authority's actions and limitations. 1 complaint concerning a missing person was appropriately referred to the police; a subsequent complaint about this decision progressed to Stage 2 of the complaints procedure and was not upheld. 1 complaint made by a young person regarding harm caused by his mother did not progress to investigation because he was no longer in her care and at risk of harm, although a related complaint remains at Stage 2 of the complaints procedure. 1 complaint concerning social media content was considered under safeguarding procedures but did not meet the threshold for investigation, and this was explained to the complainant in response to their complaint. 1 further complaint relating fathers concerns with his child's welfare did not progress to investigation, but the information was considered as part of Early Help intervention work with the family.

In Adult Services, of the 5 adult services complaints received; 1 was considered under Wales Safeguarding Procedures, Part 5 and the Professional Concerns Process. The concerns were found to be unsubstantiated, with the outcome informed by a Coroner's Inquest, an internal provider investigation and subsequent review by the complaints and commissioning team. 1 complaint, submitted by the mother of an adult leaving prison, was considered jointly by Adult Safeguarding and the Early Intervention and Prevention Hub; however, the outcome could not be shared as the individual did not consent to his mother acting on his behalf or to social work involvement. 1 complaint related to an alleged criminal matter involving a care provider and was referred appropriately to the Police, while any potential risks to other residents were considered under the Wales Safeguarding Procedures. 1 complaint concerning a private care home was also referred to Adult Safeguarding for consideration under Wales Safeguarding Procedures. 1 complaint related to safeguarding concerns arising from a reduction in services; however the support was immediately reinstated and complainants concerns were addressed through the assessment and review process.

8. HOW COMPLAINTS WERE RESOLVED and LESSONS LEARNED

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

Liaison Between Complaints Officers, Management, and Complainants

- Fostering good working relationships between complaints officers, management and complainants. These working relationships allow collaboration between complaints officers and relevant managers to swiftly identify and agree on informal resolutions to issues raised.
- Facilitate meetings wherever possible between managers and complainants to encourage honest and open communication, which helps in understanding the complainants' concerns and desired outcomes.

Collaboration and Best Practices

- Fostering positive working relationships with Social Services Complaints Departments across other Local Authorities in Wales to share best practices and ensure consistency in handling complaints. This collaboration ensures that complainants receive fair and equitable treatment. For particularly complex cases, engage in collaborative problem-solving while maintaining confidentiality.

Communication with Complainants

- Providing complainants with clear explanations of the reasons behind decisions, both verbally and in writing.
- Maintain transparency by offering apologies when necessary.
- Identifying areas for service improvement and ensure that corrective actions are documented and followed up on.
- Offer reassessments when appropriate.

Advocacy Advice/Support and Independent Consideration

- Directing complainants to advocacy services such as Llais, TGP Cymru, and BVC for additional support.
- Referring complaints to Stage 2 of the Social Services Complaints Procedure for independent review and consideration.

Quality Assurance and Improvement

- Collaborate with the councils Quality Assurance Officer to discuss recurring issues and trends in complaints. This dialogue allows for a targeted focus on areas needing service quality improvement. The Quality Assurance Officer considers how identified learning outcomes align with broader service improvement plans.

A summary of key lessons learned during 2025/26 were as follows:

Table 5

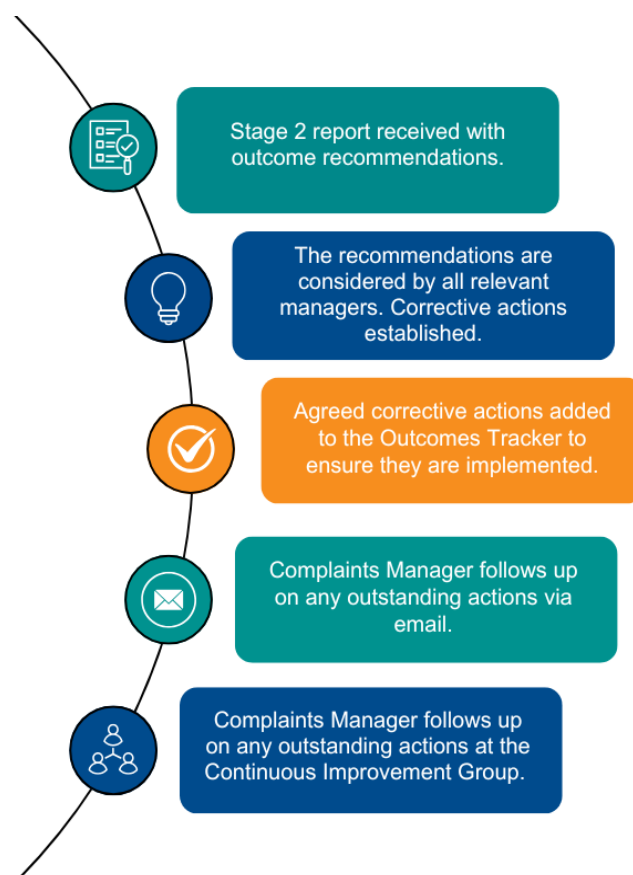
Team	Lessons Learned / Actions Implemented
ICNT East / Support at Home	The investigator recommended that the complainant receive apologies for all aspects of the complaint that were upheld, including any upset caused, as well as the time and energy she invested in pursuing the complaint. This was provided in the response to her complaint.
ICNT East	The investigator recommended that the local authority collaborate with the complainant to create a contract of expectations. This contract should outline the available care providers, support for transitioning to a new provider, effective communication methods, expectations for respectful interactions, a process for raising concerns, the minimum number of cares in her team, and the consequences of declining appropriately trained carers. Although we accepted this recommendation and attempted collaboration in the way the investigator recommended, the complainant chose not to engage with it pending legal advice.
ICNT East	The investigator recommended that the complainant's care plan be updated to specify how often she will receive assistance with showering. Following this, the care plan was updated to include the specific days when support for showering will be provided, ensuring clearer communication and managing expectations with the complainant moving forward.
ICNT East	The investigator recommended the local authority provide assistance to the complainant to recruit or commission standing frame therapy through direct payments. We agreed with this recommendation, acknowledging it would allow greater voice, choice, and control over the complainant's care arrangements. However, complainant declined the offer. Following this an alternative provider was sourced through the local authority.
EIPH	The investigator recommended that both the complainant and her mother receive apologies for all upheld aspects of the complaint. This includes acknowledging the upset caused, as well as the time and energy spent pursuing the complaint. Although some aspects of the complaint were not upheld, the investigator identified areas of communication and practice that could have been improved. We acknowledged this and offered a sincere apology for all elements of the upheld complaints.

EIPH	The investigator recommended that the complainant and her mother be given a copy of the assessment and care plan completed by the newly assigned social worker. The investigator recommended that these documents should be updated based on the feedback received from the complainant. After the complaint was made, this action was completed and complainant provided detailed positive feedback regarding the newly assigned social worker's involvement, which was later recorded as a compliment for the service.
EIPH	The investigator recommended that although the section on carers in the recent assessment completed by the social worker indicated that the complainant did not wish to have a further carers assessment, based on the findings of this investigation, the investigator suggested that the complainant be offered a new carers assessment. The complainant was offered a carers assessment. They were also informed that if they decided at any time that they would like a reassessment, they could contact the social worker, who would be happy to discuss the offer and explain the process.
EIPH	The investigator recommended that senior leaders ensure all practitioners working in the Early Intervention and Prevention Hub understand the legal obligation to proactively offer a carers' assessment. This should include guidance on how to communicate this offer in a way that is clear and comprehensible, particularly for those who may not have prior knowledge or understanding of what a carers' assessment entails. Following this recommendation, the Early Intervention and Prevention Hub conducted a workshop focused on understanding our duty to carry out carers' assessments. Additionally, the service worked on a project aimed at enhancing support for carers. The objective of this project was to improve the quality of service delivery by presenting information in a clear and understandable manner, especially for individuals who may not be familiar with what a carers' assessment involves.
EIPH	The investigator recommended that the practitioners involved in assessing the complainant's mother be supported in reflecting on and learning from this complaint, to focus on the experiences of both the complainant and her mother through workshops, as well as individual coaching and mentoring. This was completed and additionally, the service established a dedicated role for a Carers Assessment Social Worker, implemented enhanced auditing and monitoring practices, and integrated actions within the Carers Steering Group and training program.

Adult Social Care	The investigator recommended that the lessons learned from this complaint be shared with the leadership team within Adult Services, and that relevant insights are also disseminated across the service, focusing specifically on the experiences of those seeking help and support. Significant learning was derived from this complaint through staff workshops and targeted initiatives involving the staff directly involved in this complaint. Improvements were made such as established a dedicated role for a Carers Assessment Social Worker, the introduction of enhanced auditing and monitoring processes, and incorporated action plans into the Carers Steering Group and training programs. These action plans were subsequently reviewed during senior leadership and directorate quarterly performance meetings.
MASH / EET	The investigator recommended that the local authority establish a policy or protocol to be implemented immediately upon receiving a referral that involves a staff member. Since the complaint was made, the Children and Family Services, in collaboration with the Education Early Years and Young People Directorate, developed a clear joint protocol for handling referrals related to staff members.
MASH / EET	The investigator recommended that when a referral is received, only the minimum number of staff members be informed on a strict need-to-know basis. Following the investigation it was communicated to staff that only those directly involved in managing or responding to the referral will be notified, in accordance with data protection requirements and confidentiality principles.
EET	The investigator recommended that EET work closely with schools to ensure they fully understand the referral process when there are concerns regarding a member of staff. This includes the necessity of handling such information confidentially. Following the investigation the EET confirmed it will continue its collaboration with schools to clarify and reinforce the referral process in cases involving BCBC employees. Schools receive regular updates about these processes, which are incorporated into their safeguarding training. Each school has a designated education engagement coordinator who serves as a point of contact for safeguarding advice and guidance. The EET has emphasised the importance of maintaining confidentiality and sharing information appropriately. Furthermore, the EET reviewed and enhanced the training offered to schools. They will also continue to hold vulnerable group surgeries with schools and conduct annual safeguarding audits in partnership with them to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the referral process.

EET	The investigator recommended that EET ensure schools clearly understand the threshold for determining whether a referral is related to welfare or safeguarding concerns. Following the complaint investigation the EET confirmed they would continue to provide information, advice, and guidance to schools to help them better understand the appropriate thresholds for identifying referrals that qualify as welfare or safeguarding concerns. It was considered how this support must align with existing safeguarding guidance, procedures, and the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board Threshold Guidance. Additionally, a new regional threshold document has been shared with schools to promote consistency.
EET	The investigator recommended that EET consider how to accurately record the information and discussions within the BCBC record-keeping system. This will help provide evidence in case of future complaints regarding their actions. As the transition to a new case recording system is underway, EET will explore ways to effectively use this system to ensure that significant safeguarding information is recorded accurately and appropriately. The directorate is examining various management information systems to determine the best methods for capturing relevant information. In the meantime, EET is utilising the existing system for information sharing until the new system is implemented.

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 management meetings in both Adult and Children and Family Services. These groups, attended 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 section of the Council's [website](#) have been translated and are readily available in Welsh and English.

9. 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 15), **407** compliments were received during 2025/26 compared to 374 the previous year, a welcome **increase of 8.8%**. Please see a cross selection of the compliments received for 2025/26 in the table below:

Table 6.

Compliments - Adult Social Care:
I am so pleased that my mother has been given a flat in Ty Ynysawdre. She has been struggling for the past year or so and desperately needed more support. I had been trying to get a social worker for my mother since last July but was told that she wasn't a priority. She eventually was allocated a social worker after having a fall at home in December and ending up in hospital for two months. Once the social worker was allocated my mother got the extra support she needed as he was able to coordinate with other council departments, hospital, etc. And was instrumental in securing the extra care needed through the team at Ty Ynysawdre. Her move to her new flat has gone very well so far and the support given by all the staff has already improved hers and my own wellbeing.
I spoke to a lovely unpaid carer yesterday (the wife of L) and she spoke very highly of the service her husband receives from MRT. She said that the service is "fantastic" and that it works so well, and the staff are "wonderful".
M had relayed during my visit today "I would never be where I am now, without your support, your humour and way you just are, has been amazing. You don't judge" M was very complimentary , had a hug when I was leaving and shed some tears of thanks. I supported her to recall all the positives achieved, her journey so far and distance travelled, and reminded her to be kind to herself, keep thinking positively and moving forward with her life goals. Courtesy call to Daughter - explained ending my involvement. N was very complimentary "You've been great, we have not had such progress for years, you really built a relationship, thank you" I discussed remaining positive , expecting some blips in life , but focusing on progress and positiveness. Explained contacting for any future needs to Adult Social Services. Courtesy call to Sister "You have been a thorough support and guide" I relayed what a huge support O had been, and thanked her for this.
I wanted to write to you personally to say thank you for everything you've done for my father and for our family over the last 18 months. This has been such a hard and emotional journey for us, and through it all you never gave up. You stayed with my father's case, even when things were complicated or took longer than any of us hoped, and you kept going because you wanted to be sure it was right for him. That determination and care meant so much to us. You always took the time to listen and to really understand who my father is, not just what was written on paper. When we were tired, unsure, or overwhelmed, you helped us make sense of things and gave us the reassurance we needed to keep moving forward. Having someone we trusted so completely made all the difference. Because of your support and persistence, my father is now in a residential care placement that feels safe and right for him, and reaching this point has brought our

family a huge sense of relief. We honestly couldn't have got here without you.

On a personal level, I want you to know how grateful we are for your kindness, patience, and commitment. You handled everything with such humanity, and that will always stay with us.

Thank you for not giving up, for standing by us, and for caring so deeply about getting this right for my father.

Caring hands, gentle and true, we see the difference made by you, with patience, kindness everyday, you brighten hearts along the way, you've given dad safety and comfort, and given mum the chance to rest, for us as a family, that means so much, we cannot thank you enough, your work is not easy, yet you do it with such compassion. Please know that your efforts noticed, valued and deeply appreciated. From our hearts, thank you.

This was my first exposure to such a meeting and I was really impressed with the process. I would like to thank you both for the effort that you had clearly put into the various assessment criteria to come up with an appropriate score for Mum in each category. The blank set of questions that you provided to us had the criteria for each category and grades that was set out very clearly and were easy to follow. It was good to be part of the assessment process and to hear that sometimes yours and P's assessments were slightly different, because, after all, they are very subjective, and 2 pairs of eyes are better than 1! What I also liked was that you were discussing the outcomes with each other and asking for mine and my dad's thoughts too, which meant we certainly felt part of the assessment. Keep up the great work as I'm sure your caseloads are massive and we are both very happy with the outcome.

I just want to start by saying thank you to CDAT for the amazing work that has come from you guys to help me to get my life back. My life in addiction has been more than 20 years on and of the recovery road, since working with CDAT I first worked with Q and she was such a kind and caring soul of inspiration she helped me feel human she empowered me and helped me back to my feet I am forever grateful to her for her commitment and love for her job that shines out of her so brightly. I then hit a bump in the road and R was my saviour he came and held his hand out with his encouraging words or support and wisdom and I grabbed it with both hands. R has consistently supported me with no judgment and has gone above and beyond to help me to the road of recovery again he has been a rock when I have needed it he has consistently reminded me of my self-worth that is well lost when you're in a dark hole like I was he has helped my mental health by supporting me with home visits and supported me by bringing me to cooking group so I did not have to face it alone he has pushed and stayed by my side and I thank god for him he is the reason I am where I am I think this world would be a better place with more R's in it and I say that from knowledge of working on my recovery in other towns and cities all over the place in and out of Wales I don't even know how to thank R enough for the support he has given me I am truly humbled by his caring work I feel it that R is not just getting up to do a 9-5 he wakes up in the morning wanting to make a change in the world of addiction and I can hand on heart say that anyone that works with R that trusts in his process and takes his care and support on board will have a better shot at life and all that they have lost will be resorted I am now alive and living my life my children have a mother that is constantly present

and I have a life that is full of possibilities and full of opportunities to prosper. I know I have gone on and on here but honestly this is not even a little bit of how I feel right now due to the care and support I have received and like I say thank u soooo soooo much I am truly humbled and sooo grateful for having my life back. I am definitely scared to move on from Wales as I am relocating to live near family in England so if I do fall I will not have the support of CDAT again but I just know that I have a better life right now and I'll take each day as it comes I will live my life to the fullest make happy memories with my family and as I said will forever remember R for the rest of my life as the person that kept the faith in me and got me here with that big heart for recovery in people that he has. Thank you R wish you all the best and I hope you can continue to help people change their life for as many more years to come as possible and I also hope that if and when you do have to leave the role that people will take you as an inspiration to go by how they work too as you are fab 🤓

You'd make a good councillor, you're very calm and kind. Thank you for listening to me. Thank You, Thank you

You don't know how grateful I am for your call today, you've been very helpful, thank you for cheering me up, S

Compliments – Children and Family Services:

My worker is very kind when she comes to see me.

Could I note the following compliment from children noted during observation of T's practice for consolidation. The children noted the following.

During the session with T she did direct work with the children and focused on people being different animals and why. Afterwards the assessor for T asked which animal T would be and why.

They said T would be a panda (which is the same animal they picked for their kinship carer) as she listens, she's kind and does what she says she will.

T also had excellent feedback from her tutor observing her practice. T has had some excellent feedback and compliments lately in terms of her practice which has been so lovely to see!

I'm sure better people than me have told you this :- the new fostering team is second to none and we are very happy 🌟🌟

I am writing to inform you that the Minister for Children and Social Care has recently received a letter from foster carers within your local authority, praising the support and professionalism of members of the Bridgend County Borough Council fostering team.

The Minister was very pleased to receive such positive reflections, particularly the carers' comments about the dedication, child centred practice, and strong safeguarding ethos demonstrated by your staff. She has now issued a formal response to the foster carers acknowledging their feedback and thanking them for their continued commitment to fostering.

The correspondence specifically highlighted the excellent work of U, V and W. The Minister has asked that this praise be shared with the fostering team and their managers please. Given the significance of the work they undertake, it is great that their contribution has been recognised.

X has undertaken work to support a young man back into the care of his parents from foster placement. The situation was at risk of breakdown due to family relationships with Mum and Step Dad – lots of clashes etc. After working with X the placement is now stable to the point the family are looking forward to discharging the Care Order.

Mum's feedback was: "X has been absolutely amazing, she has supported us in everyway possible, she really has been a Godsend".

Just a quick one to say thank you for helping me with the forms, the work and patience you put in for me and helping me to reflect and change, the work with you I have benefited from more than anyone because you've seen I learn differently and adapted to me to help me understand and your very clear and put things into perspective, I have enjoyed our sessions with you and I have learnt a lot. Thank you so much

I am sat here crying actual tears of relief. I cannot thank you enough for all your help and support, you and Y have been invaluable and made me feel heard. In doing this it's going to take a huge weight off my shoulders, it will allow me to focus all my support on getting this little girl to where she needs to be. I will never ever give up on her.

I just wanted to highlight the positive feedback received during Z's RCPC this morning; A (mother) commented on how much support she has received from the support services involved. A said that B is an excellent social worker and goes through everything in detail. B's updates in the RCPC were thorough and easy to understand. It is apparent from the updates that B is very child focussed. Thank you, B!

10. ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2025/26

Promoting a Positive Complaints Culture

Through various management meetings and engagement with staff, the complaints team has fostered a positive attitude toward complaints as opportunities for learning and development. This initiative has clarified the complaints process and the roles within the complaints department, aimed to reduce defensiveness, and has promoted complaints as valuable opportunities for learning, growth and service excellence, thereby improving overall attitudes toward complaints.

Swift/Informal Resolution of the Majority of Complaints

A notable achievement this year is the high proportion of complaints resolved at an early, local level. The majority of concerns were successfully addressed informally or at Stage 1 of the Social Services Complaints Procedure, with only **2.3%** advancing to a formal independent investigation (Stage 2). This emphasises the effectiveness of early resolution approaches and highlights the commitment of teams to provide successful, local complaint resolution.

Embedding of the Most Significant Change (MSC) Approach

Last year marked the beginning of implementing the Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology as a tool for learning from complaints. MSC enables the collection of compelling narratives that illustrate meaningful change and service impact. By providing qualitative insights that may not be evident through traditional complaint analysis, MSC enhances our understanding of service effectiveness and supports a more reflective, person-centred approach to service improvement and development.

Clear Service Improvement Through Complaint Outcomes

There have been targeted service improvements in Adult Social Care have focused on enhancing the understanding of the duty to proactively offer carers' assessments. Efforts have been made to improve clear and accessible communication and to ensure the consistent identification of eligible carers. In response to the learning from a Stage 2 complaint, the service implemented several initiatives: staff workshops, a dedicated Carers Assessment Social Worker role, enhanced auditing and monitoring processes and actions have been embedded within the Carers Steering Group and training program. These improvements resulted in greater staff awareness, better governance and increased consistency in service delivery. There is now a stronger emphasis on proactive, person-centred support, leading to an improved experience for both carers and those seeking help.

In Children and Family Services, an investigation findings highlighted the need to strengthen governance, maintain confidentiality and ensure consistency in handling referrals involving members of staff. Clearer guidance for schools regarding safeguarding processes and thresholds was developed in conjunction with the Education directorate. This joint-protocol reinforces a strict 'need-to-know' approach and enhances collaboration with schools through training, audits and ongoing engagement to improve understanding of referral processes and safeguarding thresholds. Improvements also focused on improvements to record-keeping, which supports accountability and transparency. Collectively, these actions enhance safeguarding practices, information governance, and the consistency of decision-making, ultimately leading to greater confidence in how concerns of this nature are managed.

10. OBJECTIVES FOR 2026/27

Improving the Management of Vexatious, Repeat and AI-Generated Correspondence to Support Timely Complaint Resolution

As touched upon earlier in this report, collaboration has already been initiated with Welsh local authorities to raise awareness with Welsh Government of the evolving complaints landscape, including the increasing volume of AI-assisted submissions and automated follow-up correspondence. In the year ahead, we would be looking to advocate for a review of existing statutory complaints timescales, in light of the growing challenges all councils face in meeting the current timescale requirements. The aim of this is to support the development of more realistic and achievable expectations for complainants, improve transparency and reduce frustration arising from delays beyond organisational control.

Another objective for the year ahead is to review or consider working guidance to support the council's Unreasonable Behaviour or Vexatious Complainant Policy to provide clearer guidance, enhance staff confidence and promote a consistent and proportionate approach to managing persistent or unreasonable communications. This will help minimise the disproportionate impact that a small number of complainants can have on service resources, enabling greater capacity to support the wider public more efficiently and effectively, which we anticipate will, in turn, support with adherence to complaint timescales.

A further objective for the year ahead is to work in partnership with BCBC's Digital and ICT teams to look at improving the structure and functionality of online complaint submissions. The aim is to introduce a redesigned form with clearer guidance and mandatory fields, to encourage focused and accurate complaint submissions, reduce the misuse of AI-generated content and improve the quality of information received. Uptake, effectiveness and impact will be monitored throughout the year to inform further improvements.

Further Promotion of a Culture of Learning and Continuous Improvement Through the Most Significant Change (MSC) Model

This year we are aiming to embed the Most Significant Change (MSC) model as a structured approach to capturing, reflecting on and learning from the experiences of complainants and the outcomes achieved through complaint resolution. By regularly identifying and sharing examples of meaningful change, this approach will strengthen organisational learning, highlight effective practice, and provide valuable insight into the real-world impact of our interventions.

This objective will support our current performance reporting and provide evidence-based service improvements. It will ensure that lessons learned from these insights inform future practice, and help shape services around the lived experiences of those we support, ultimately enhancing the quality, responsiveness and effectiveness of complaint handling across the organisation.

Expanding and Strengthening the Pool of Independent Investigators

Building on existing collaborative arrangements with neighbouring local authorities, we aim to explore new opportunities to recruit and develop a broader pool of suitably qualified Independent Investigating Officers. Increasing investigative capacity will help reduce pressure on current resources, support compliance with complaint handling timescales and provide greater flexibility in allocating investigations.

A larger and more diverse pool of investigators will strengthen the resilience of the complaints process, ensure investigations remain independent and impartial, and contribute to the delivery of high-quality, robust and timely outcomes for complainants and services alike.

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.

We do not currently request or record equalities information from complainants. As a result, we are unable to report on the proportion of complaints received from individuals with protected characteristics as defined under the Equality Act 2010.

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

Appendix A:**Glossary of Terms and Acronyms**

Term / Acronym	Meaning
Active Offer (AO)	A statutory offer of independent professional advocacy made to eligible children and young people, particularly those who are looked after or involved in child protection processes.
Advocacy	Independent support that helps people express their views, understand their rights and participate in decisions affecting them.
BCBC	Bridgend County Borough Council.
BVC	Bridgend Voice & Choice, part of the commissioned advocacy service model in Bridgend.
Carers Assessment	An assessment carried out under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 to identify the support needs of unpaid carers.
CDAT	Community Drug and Alcohol Team.
Child Protection Conference (CPC)	A multi-agency meeting held to consider concerns about a child's safety and determine whether a Child Protection Plan is required.
CLAR Review	Children Looked After Review. A statutory review meeting to monitor the care plan and progress of a looked after child.
Citizen Voice Body (Llais)	The independent organisation responsible for representing the views and experiences of people using health and social care services in Wales.
Corporate Complaints Procedure	The Council's complaints process for matters that fall outside the Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure.
CVB	Citizen Voice Body, operating under the name Llais.
Direct Payments	Payments made directly to eligible individuals to enable them to arrange and manage their own care and support services.
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service. Criminal record checking process used to assess suitability for certain roles.
EET	Education Engagement Team.
EIPH	Early Intervention and Prevention Hub.
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation. Legislation governing the use, storage and protection of personal information.
IBA	Issue-Based Advocacy. Advocacy support provided to children and young people regarding a specific issue or concern.
ICNT	Integrated Community Network Team. A multi-disciplinary team supporting adults with complex health and social care needs.
Independent Investigator (IIO)	An independent person appointed to investigate Stage 2 complaints under the Social Services Complaints Procedure.
Independent Person (IP)	An independent individual appointed to oversee Stage 2 investigations relating to Children and Family Services complaints.

IPA	Independent Professional Advocacy. Statutory advocacy support available to eligible individuals.
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer. Responsible for independently reviewing care plans and safeguarding arrangements for children.
LADO	Local Authority Designated Officer. Responsible for managing allegations against adults who work with children.
Llais	The operational name of the Citizen Voice Body in Wales, providing representation, information and advocacy support.
Local Resolution (Stage 1)	The first stage of the Social Services Complaints Procedure, focused on resolving concerns quickly and informally.
MASH	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. A partnership arrangement where agencies work together to assess safeguarding concerns.
Member Referral	An enquiry, concern or complaint raised on behalf of a constituent by an elected member, Member of Parliament or Senedd Member.
MSC	Most Significant Change. A qualitative evaluation approach used to identify and learn from examples of meaningful change and service improvement.
PSOW	Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. An independent body that investigates complaints about public services in Wales.
RCPC	Review Child Protection Conference. A statutory meeting held to review the progress of a Child Protection Plan.
Social Care Wales	The regulator for the social care workforce in Wales.
Stage 2 Investigation	The formal investigation stage of the Social Services Complaints Procedure, undertaken by an independent investigator.
Statutory Complaints Procedure	The complaints process prescribed by Welsh Government regulations for Social Services functions.
TGP	Tros Gynnal Plant, an advocacy provider for children and young people.
Welsh Government Complaints Guidance	"A Guide to Handling Complaints and Representations by Local Authority Social Services", which sets out statutory complaint requirements in Wales.