

Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

17th September 2024

Customer Feedback Annual Report 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

Recommendation

That the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers and comments on the contents of the report.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This is the annual customer feedback report for Children and Families and Education Services covering the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.
- 1.2 The report summarises compliments, complaints, comments received by these two services including learning and service improvement. Data, trends, and themes have been compared over the last three years.
- 1.3 A new customer feedback system was implemented on 15 January 2024, part way through the reporting period and consequently information has been taken from both systems for the purposes of this report.
- 1.4 Following a review in 2023/24, Warwickshire County Council's Customer Complaints Policy, including the updated Childrens and Adults Social Care statutory procedures, was approved by Cabinet on 15 February 2024. The revised policy is available on the Council's website [here](#).
- 1.5 At an organisational level, overall feedback received has returned to pre-pandemic levels and in 2023/24 it is at the lowest over the last six years. The number of complaints decreased by 16% from 1809 in 2022/23 to 1520 in 2023/24.
- 1.6 In Children and Families Services, the overall number of complaints have decreased from 246 in 2021/22 to 183 in 2023/24, with an approximate 14% reduction each year. In Education Services, over the last year complaints have decreased by 21% to 105 in 2023/24.
- 1.7 Children and Families worked with 12,969 children during 2023/24 (total for Early Help and Social Care), and the 183 complaints make up 1.4% of the total. In Education, Admissions processed 25,555 transition and in-year applications in the 2023-24 academic year and SENDAR processed 1,621

requests for EHCP needs assessments and worked with 6,588 children with an EHCP.

2. Complaints Process

- 2.1 Every local authority with a responsibility for Social Care services is required to provide an annual report, outlining the workings of both their adults and children's complaints and representations procedures.
- 2.2 The procedure for dealing with children's statutory complaints (those raised by or on behalf of children relating to our Social Work Services) and representations is determined by the following legislation:
 - The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006,
 - The Children & Adoption Act 2002,
 - Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, and
 - the accompanying guidance 'Getting the Best from Complaints' (DfES July 2006).
- 2.3 The requirement contained in the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006, is that every local authority with a responsibility for Children's Social Care services is obliged to have in post a complaints manager, part of whose role is to provide an annual report into the workings of the complaints and representations procedures.
- 2.4 Complaints relating to Children's Services, which do not fall within the boundaries of the statutory Social Care complaints process, are processed via the council's corporate complaints process.
- 2.5 The statutory complaints and representations procedure serves four main purposes:
 - i. To provide a way for a child/young person, or a person acting on their behalf, to give their views of the service they have received.
 - ii. To enable council services to learn from complaints and compliments and to change, review or maintain its services accordingly.
 - iii. To ensure that complaints are properly recorded and acted upon and that where necessary, things that have gone wrong are put right promptly.
 - iv. To ensure that staff and service users understand their rights and responsibilities within the complaints process.

- 2.6 The statutory complaints procedure, used for complaints defined by the relevant legislation and raised by, or on behalf of children receiving a service from Children's Social Work Services, has three stages:
- Stage One - Local resolution.
 - Stage Two - An independent complaint investigation.
 - Stage Three - An independently chaired review panel.
- 2.7 Warwickshire County Council (WCC) takes every submitted feedback case seriously, especially complaints, as it wants to make sure its complainants are dealt with fairly, consistently and within appropriate timescales, and to ensure that learning and improvements can be registered and actioned.
- 2.8 Procedures relating to how WCC deals with and responds to complaints are detailed in [Warwickshire County Council's Complaints Policy](#) and [Warwickshire's County Council Children's Statutory Complaint Procedure](#)
- 2.9 These policies have been developed in line with best practice recommendations and legislation that covers complaints about local authorities' services. In the Complaints Policy, a complaint is defined as:
- "... any expression of dissatisfaction with a service that the Council (or one of its partners or contractors) has provided, and that requires a response."*
- 2.10 The Statutory Complaint Procedure clarifies the types of complaint that are covered by the relevant legislation and subject to the three state statutory complaints process.

3. Analysis of customer feedback received during 2023/24.

- 3.1 During 2023/24 feedback from members of the public was recorded on both the previous 'Contact Us' system and from 15 January 2024, the new customer feedback system.
- 3.2 Feedback can be shared through an online portal, by telephone, by post or via email and it is categorised into complaints, compliments, and comments. Questions from the public are not recorded on the system but are dealt with directly by the appropriate service.
- 3.3 The following analysis covers data, trends and themes compared over the last three years and, where relevant, also before and after the pandemic. This offers a clearer understanding of changes in customer feedback during these periods.

Feedback cases over time – All WCC Services

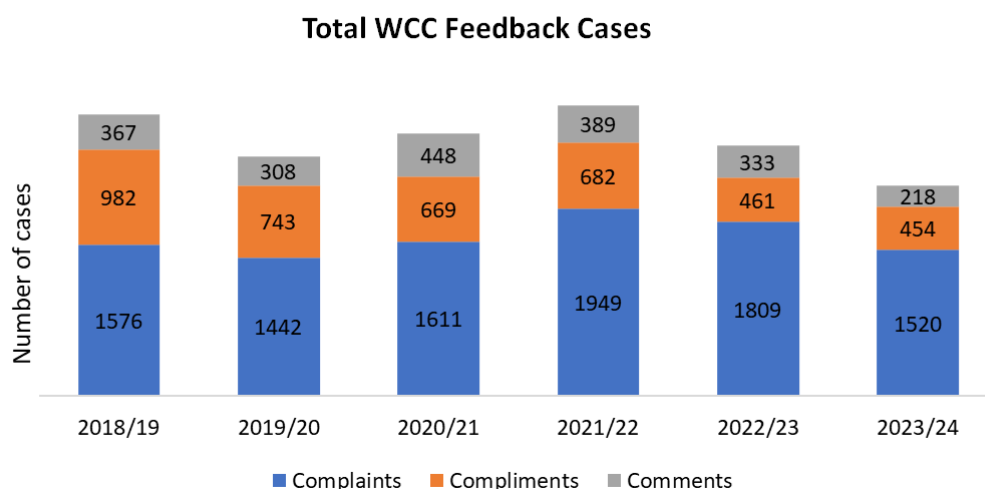


Figure 1: Number of complaints, compliments and comments received from 2018/19 to 2023/24 across all WCC services.

Overall cases:

3.4 The total number of cases raised over the last three years decreased by 27% from 3020 in 2021/22 to 2192 in 2023/24. As figure 1 indicates, overall feedback received has returned to pre-pandemic levels and in 2023/24 it is at the lowest over the last six years.

Complaints:

3.5 Complaint numbers peaked in 2021/22, likely due to increased customer interaction following the end of the lockdown period. The number of complaints decreased by 16% from 1809 in 2022/23 to 1520 in 2023/24.

Compliments:

3.6 The previous reduction in compliments over time has continued with a 33% decrease from 682 in 2021/22 to 454 in 2023/24. As figure 1 indicates, the number of compliments received across all services has reduced by 54% since 2018/19. Previous initiatives to encourage positive feedback have not been undertaken across all services since the pandemic and in addition, this type of feedback is not always shared and recorded in the corporate feedback system but is held locally.

Feedback cases over time – Children and Families and Education Services

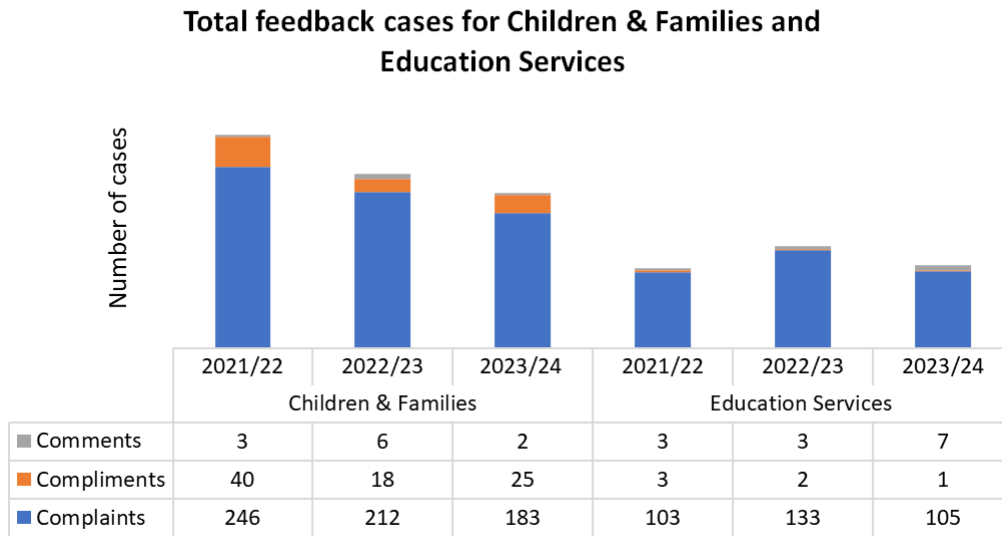


Figure 2: Number of cases assigned to Children & Families and Education Services by type from 2021/22 to 2023/24.

Children and Families:

Complaints:

3.7 The overall number of complaints have decreased from 246 in 2021/22 to 183 in 2023/24, with an approximate 14% reduction each year. The consistent downward trend in complaints suggests potential service improvements or other factors such as the volume and complexity of cases since the pandemic. Examples of service improvements include evaluation of complaints to ensure learning and improvements in communication, a focus on the customer and ensuring apologies are made where appropriate, and a focus on remedying issues at an early stage where possible. Children and Families worked with 12,969 children during the year and the 183 complaints therefore make up 1.41% of the total number of contacts.

Compliments:

3.8 There is a drop in the number of compliments from 40 in 2021/22 to 18 in 2022/23. However, in 2023/24 the number of compliments increased by 39% to 25, indicating a possible improvement in service and customer satisfaction. This aligns with the trend of a decrease in complaints as detailed above.

Education:

Complaints:

3.9 The number of complaints increased from 103 in 2021/22 to 133 in 2022/23 which was the year School Admissions service was added to the portfolio. Since 2022/23, complaints have decreased by 21% to 105 in 2023/24. This would indicate increased improvements in service delivery over the last

year and includes a 66% decrease in the number of School Admissions related complaints. In Education, Admissions processed 25,555 transition and in-year applications in the 2023-24 academic year and SENDAR processed 1,621 requests for EHCP needs assessments and worked with 6,588 children with an EHCP.

Compliments:

3.10 The number of compliments has decreased over the three years from 3 in 2021/22 to 2 in 2022/23, and further to 1 in 2023/24. This follows the organisational trend and may in part be attributed to this type of feedback not being encouraged or recorded centrally.

Initial feedback contact method for Children and Families and Education Services

3.11 The ‘type of initial feedback contact method’ (figure 3) is new data collected since 15 January 2024 due to improvements made when developing the new customer feedback system. There is therefore, no comparative data and the figures below do not include all cases raised in these services in 2023/24. However by using percentages of data held for January to March 2024, trends can still be identified.

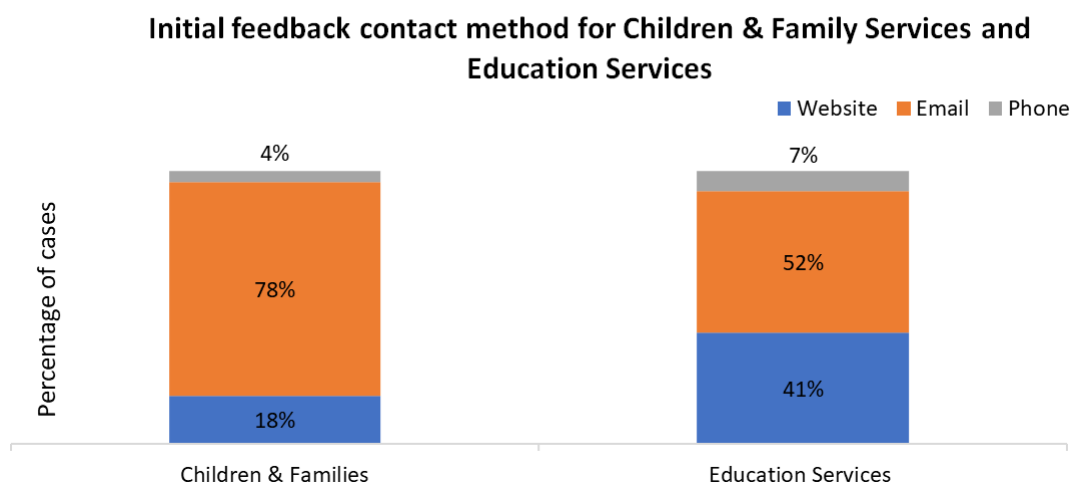


Figure 3: Percentage breakdown of original contact method for complaints, comments and compliments received since 15th January 2024.

3.12 The data shows that whilst submitting feedback by post is an option, no postal feedback was received between 15 January and 31 March 2024 for either service.

3.13 Figure 3 highlights a notable difference in how customers are engaging with Education Services compared to Children and Families Services during this period, with more cases being uploaded directly through the new customer portal. This could indicate a correlation with the ability of Children and

Families Services customers being able to contact social workers directly to try and resolve issues in the first instance.

- 3.14 In 2023/24, the Customer Relations team continued to invest time speaking directly to prospective complainants, regardless of how the initial contact was made or the service that their feedback relates to. This proactive approach provides an important opportunity to build a trusting relationship with the complainant/service user, particularly critical when handling more complex complaints. This allows for a more thorough understanding of the concerns raised and desired outcomes, and in turn supports investigating managers to provide more precise and detailed responses.
- 3.15 Talking directly to complainants also ensures that where it is appropriate and possible concerns are resolved without the need to progress to the formal complaints process. This can prove to be a quicker and more beneficial means of resolution for all concerned.

Complaints data trends by month:

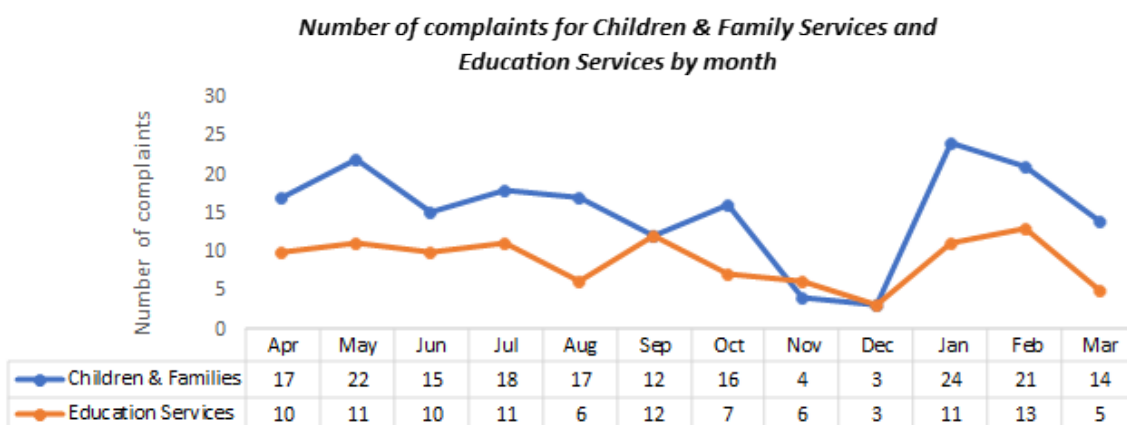


Figure 4: Number of complaints assigned to Children & Family and Education Services by month for 2023/24.

Children and Families Services:

Trend increases:

- 3.16 Data shows the most significant increase in complaints occurred in Children and Families Services in January 2024. This aligns with the introduction of the new customer feedback system, which involved transferring 15 cases from the old system and therefore registered those transfers as “January” complaints. There was also a relaunch of the complaint process and the dissemination of training to teams at that time advising of a change in process to a centralised loading and initial triage of all feedback by Customer Relations team.

Trend decreases:

3.17 A decrease in complaint numbers is shown in months June, August, March and December. This trend is consistent with previous years. (see appendix 1). This would align with decreased interaction during the Christmas period and summer holidays.

Education Services:

Trend increases:

3.18 Data shows the most significant increase in complaints for Education Services in January 2024. As with Children and Families Services, this aligns with migrated cases from the old system to the new customer feedback system.

3.19 September increases are consistent with previous years' trend (see appendix 1) and is directly related to increased interaction due to the new academic year. This is still an overall decrease in total numbers of complaints over the same period in the previous three years. There was a 57% decrease from complaints in September 2023/24 (12) compared to 2022/23 (28). (See appendix 1)

Trend decreases:

3.20 Decreased numbers of complaints in August and December 2023 are consistent with previous years. This is a trend across education and all social care related services due to decreased engagement during holiday periods (see appendix 1).

Complaints data by stage for all WCC services:

Complaint Stage	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Stage 2	97	45	48
Stage 3	6	10	8

Figure 5: Breakdown complaints by stage 2 and 3 for 2021/22, 2022/23 & 2023/24 across all WCC services.

3.21 All initial complaints once triaged (and confirmed as being the correct feedback type and complying with the complaints policy's definitions) are then allocated to the appropriate service area at Stage 1 for local resolution.

3.22 As per policy if a customer remains dissatisfied, they can then request a Stage 2 investigation of the complaint, which is undertaken by the Customer Relations team. Figure 5 shows a reduction of over 50% of Stage 2's across all WCCs services from 2021/22 (97) to 2023/24 (48). There is a slight increase on the numbers from 2022/23 of 3 cases. The high number in 2021/22 is likely due to increased customer interaction following the end of the lockdown period.

- 3.23 From 2021/22 to 2023/24 Stage 3 reviews increased by 2 cases but have decreased by 2 from 2022/23 to 2023/24. Please note Stage 3 are for complaints in relation to children’s social care that meet the statutory definitions only.
- 3.24 Customer Relations have worked to reduce the number of reviews by liaising with services to seek de-escalations, where it is felt that the issue could be resolved with complainants before a complaint is accepted as a Stage 2.
- 3.25 Customers can at any time in the process, approach the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) for them to consider their complaint. The proportion of customers that complain to the LGSCO compared to the total number of customer contacts is very small. The annual review and summary of upheld complaints issued by LGSCO in the financial year 2023/24 was recently taken to Cabinet on 5 September 2024. Report can be found here.
[Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman – Annual Review and Summary of Upheld Complaints.](#)

Complaint categories by subject

3.26 The data in the table below indicates differing trends for service areas in terms of categories of concern, and facilitates more targeted, specific training in each of the services areas.

	Children & Families Services		Education Services	
	Number of complaints	%	Number of complaints	%
Protection of user	44	24%	14	13%
WCC Service Standards	43	23%	39	37%
Staff conduct	41	22%	1	1%
Communication	41	22%	40	38%
Financial Issues	9	5%	2	2%
Policy	2	1%	2	2%
Discrimination	1	1%	0	0%
Not categorised	1	1%	1	1%
Commissioned Service Provision	1	1%	2	2%
Outside Complaints process	0	0%	4	4%
Physical environment issues	0	0%	0	0%

Figure 6: Breakdown of subject categories per service for 2023/24.

Children and Families Services:

3.27 The top categories within this service area are.

- Protection of user (24%): This category is selected when a staff member is specifically named in a complaint.
- WCC Service Standards (23%): This is chosen when the customer believes the council has not provided a service that they feel they are entitled to.
- Staff Conduct (22%): This is selected when a staff member's delivery of a message is being questioned and the staff member is not a manager.
- Communication (22%): This category is used when customers feel they have not had the expected level of contact with a worker.

3.28 This is consistent with previous years, with the protection of user and communication being consistently the highest assigned complaint categories in Children and Families Services. The number of complaints in these categories have reduced compared to previous years, as overall numbers of complaints have decreased (see appendix 1).

Education Services:

3.29 The top categories within this service area are:

- Communication (38%)
- WCC Service Standards (37%)
- Protection of user (13%)

3.30 This is consistent with previous years, with communication and WCC service standards being consistently the highest assigned categories in Education Services. The number of complaints in these categories have reduced compared to previous years, as overall numbers of complaints have decreased (see appendix 1).

Complaints per team

3.31 With the introduction of the new customer feedback system, the opportunity was taken to refine and update teams. This has meant that this analysis is not a direct comparison with previous years e.g. the Children's initial response is now split into three areas etc. The data in figures 7 and 8 below is shown by system and a yearly trend analysis has taken place for those teams with the highest number of complaints in each.

Children and Families Services:

Children & Families Teams – Contact Us (1 Apr 2023 – 14 Jan 2024)	Complaints	%	Children & Families Teams – Customer Feedback System (15 Jan 2024 – 31 Mar 2024)	Complaints	%
Childrens Initial Response	31	25%	Children with Disabilities Team	9	16%
Childrens with Disabilities	19	15%	Warwick Childrens Team	7	12%
Nuneaton Childrens Team	14	11%	Initial Response South	5	9%
Bedworth and North Warwickshire Childrens Team	12	10%	Bedworth & North Warwickshire Children's Team	5	9%
Childrens MASH	8	6%	Rugby Childrens Safeguarding and Support Team	5	9%
Stratford Childrens Team	8	6%	Strengthening Families	4	7%
Warwick Childrens Team	8	6%	Stratford Childrens Team	4	7%
Children in Care 14-18	7	6%	Asylum and Leaving Care	3	5%
Childrens Strengthening Families	5	4%	Initial Response East	3	5%
Childrens Early Help and Targeted Support	4	3%	Initial Response North	3	5%
Rugby Childrens Team	4	3%	Children and Families Front Door	2	4%
Childrens Fostering	3	2%	Early & Targeted Family Support	2	4%
Childrens UASC and Leaving Care 18-25	2	2%	Nuneaton Childrens Team	2	4%
Children in Care Support Team	1	1%	EDT	1	2%
			Refugee Resettlement	1	2%

Figure 7: Breakdown of complaints per team for Children & Families for 2023/24.

- 3.32 For most of the year (April 23 to Jan 24) the team with the highest number of cases was Children’s Initial Response (25%) followed by Children with Disabilities (15%) and Nuneaton Children’s team (11%). The numbers by teams do correlate with teams that deal with the largest number of children and families.
- 3.33 Yearly trend analysis indicates Initial Response to be consistently the team with highest numbers in 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 (see appendix 1). The introduction of teams by area in the new feedback system will allow for further analysis to enable targeted support for teams with the highest cases.

Education Services:

Education Services Teams – Contact Us (1 Apr 2023 – 14 Jan 2024)	Complaints	%	Education Services Teams – Customer Feedback System (15 Jan 2024 – 31 Mar 2024)	Complaints	%
SENDAR	47	61%	SEND and Inclusion	27	96%
School Admissions	23	30%	Children Missing Education and Elective Home Education	1	4%

Figure 8: Breakdown of complaints per team for Education Services for 2023/24.

- 3.34 In 2023/24, the team with the highest number of complaints in both systems is Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This is in line with national trends and is consistent with previous years' (see appendix 1).
- 3.35 School admissions data shows a significant reduction from the highest number of complaints in 2022/23 at 68 (51% of all educations complaints) reducing to 23 in 2023/24, a 66% decrease.

Remedies:

- 3.36 A remedy can be required by the Local Government Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) where they consider someone has suffered injustice, and in those cases the LGSCO will require that the Council should aim to try to put the complainant back in the position they would have been had the error not occurred. More information on remedy guidance can be found here: [LGSCO Guidance on remedies](#)
- 3.37 Remedies can take many forms, including apologising, taking corrective action to put things right such as the service provided, a change in process or policy, or a quantifiable financial remedy.

Complaints Remedy per Service 2023/24

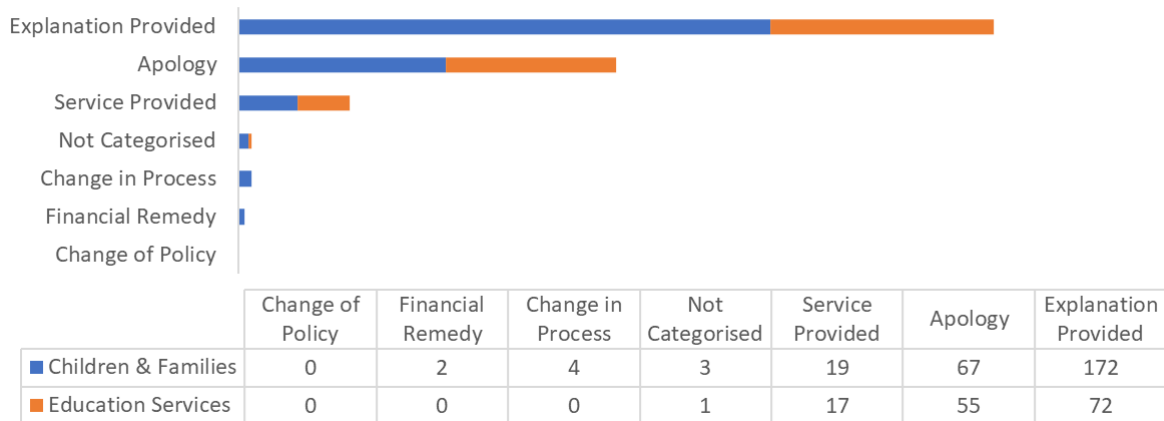


Figure 9: Closed complaint remedies for Children & Families and Education Services in 2023/34.

- 3.38 Data analysis indicates the top 3 remedies are consistent for both Children and Families and Education Services.
- 3.39 The most impactful remedy was an “explanation provided”. This would usually take the form of a fuller, more person-centred explanation, which may include clarifying of the process or language being used. This has remained the top remedy for all previous years (see appendix 1).
- 3.40 An apology ranked second as the most used remedy. Recently, the Customer Relations team provided training to services emphasising that apologies should be a "matter of course" for all upheld complaints.
- 3.41 “Service provided” is the third ranked remedy selected by services and is again consistent with previous years. This would be entered when the original service requested via the complaint, has been delivered or granted following the complaint e.g. The service that was late has now been provided (see appendix 1).
- 3.42 To note, the new Customer Feedback system allows multiple remedies for different stages of the complaint, so there may have different remedies applied at different points e.g. Stage 1 ends an apology, Stage 2 may end up with financial remedy.

Outcomes:

- 3.43 Categories of outcomes have changed in the new feedback system to improve data accuracy. For example previously a case may have initially been recorded as a complaint but later closed as a “question answered” once clarification was received from the member of public. However, it would have remained recorded as a complaint as this is what it was initially categorised as. The new feedback system allows for a reallocation if the wrong feedback type was initially selected, and outcomes are only recorded against complaints.

3.44 The categories have been analysed in respect of the three statutory reportable categories “upheld, not upheld and partially upheld” and excludes complaints in the old system that were closed as “questions answered” and any withdrawn complaints. This data has been analysed from both systems.

Children and Families Services:

Outcomes	Complaints	% of Stage 1 Complaints
Upheld	14	10%
Partially Upheld	52	37%
Not Upheld	53	37%

Figure 10: Complaints closed by outcome (excluding withdrawn complaints).

3.45 During 2023/24 the highest category was “not upheld”, and this indicates that 37% of complaints (52) had no failings identified following an investigation. However, the second highest outcome was “partially upheld”, and accounts for a similar percentage of complaints at 37% (51), which shows after investigation some failings have been identified and a recommendation in the form of remedy and/or service improvement is likely to have been implemented.

3.46 This is consistent with the trend in 2022/23 (See appendix 1).

Education Services:

Outcomes	Complaints	% of Stage 1 Complaints
Upheld	26	29%
Partially Upheld	8	9%
Not Upheld	18	20%

Figure 11: Complaints closed by outcome (excluding withdrawn complaints).

3.47 During 2023/24, “upheld” was the highest category used. This would indicate following investigation that failings were proven to be found. This is again in line with last year’s trend. (See appendix 1) Specific examples are given under lessons learned at paragraph 3.50.

3.48 The second highest outcome was partially upheld; this would indicate a complaint has more than one issue and after investigation “some” failings have been identified but not all on all the issues and therefore some remedies should be undertaken. This is again in line with last year’s trend (See appendix 1).

Timescale compliance:

3.49 Timescales are different and dependent on the type of complaint type and process followed. The relevant timescales for each type of complaint are covered in the Council's Complaints Policy and associated Procedures.

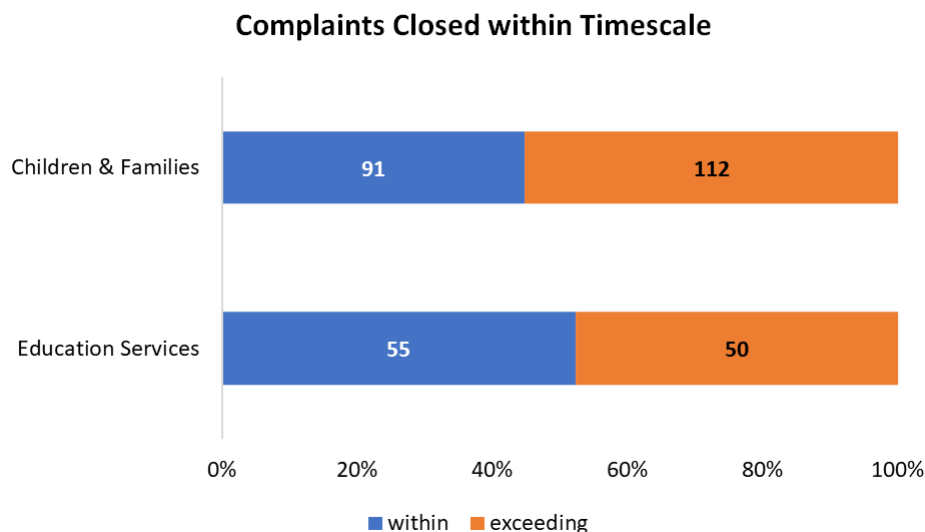


Figure 12: Timescales for closed complaints for Children & Families and Education Services for 2023/24. The graph does not include the 14 closed migrated cases for Children's and Families and 6 for Education Services as they span two systems and timescale reporting data is incorrect.

Children and Families Services:

3.50 The above data shows that a high proportion of complaints are completed outside of timescales. This is not consistent with previous years (See appendix 1). More targeted work is required with services on the importance of closing complaints within timescales.

3.51 To note, the system and internal policy timescales on which the figure 12 is based, allows for 10 working days to complete a Stage 1 investigation, however national guidance "[Getting the best from complaints](#)" does allow a further 10 days if the case is complex. This will be considered by services when completing an investigation.

3.52 As well as the increased complexity of complaints, the services have also advised other factors:

- The front door in Children and Families has seen a 30% rise in contact and referrals (requests for support).
- The service has had the highest proportion of agency social workers and experienced unusually high staff turnover in some teams.

Education Services:

- 3.53 The above data shows that over 50% of complaints are closed within timescale. This is consistent with previous years. Since September 2023, the emphasis in the service has been on improving communication. In addition, at the beginning of the Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) process a contact point with families is put in place, where families receive a call, when requested, to talk them through the process.

Lessons learned and actions taken to improve services.

- 3.55 Identifying, actioning, recording, and sharing of 'lessons learned' is critical in improving customer experience with council services. It is an opportunity for staff to reflect on how that case could have been prevented/gone better and how, as a council, it can improve with future cases. This is then used for learning and training purposes for not only the team who have handled the case, but also for the wider council.
- 3.56 Examples of lessons learned, and actions taken from past cases within Children and Families and Education Services include:
- Clear and timely communication throughout the edge of care process.
 - Consider parental responsibility before request for outcome letters is made.
 - When workers are off sick, Team Leads ensure that things are still being progressed to prevent delays.
 - Addressing capacity issues with ongoing recruitment.
 - Identifying specific training e.g. neurodiversity training undertaken by the customer relations team.
 - Updated training for Children and Families staff on specific areas like Special Guardianship Order.
 - Training and briefings for managers about responding to and investigating complaints.

Specifically:

- A complaint to the LGSCO identified online learning as inappropriate interim education provision whilst a school placement for a child with SEND was being identified. Since then, when interim education provision is required, professionals consider whether online learning is appropriate.
- A stage two review highlighted that because a stage one complaint had responded on a point regarding NHS provision, this would now be part of the stage two review. As a result, items for other complaints processes are now redirected within stage one responses.

3.57 The Customer Relations Team have also implemented several actions throughout both Children and Families and Education Services following feedback from customers and local services, which include:

- Updated policies and procedures to make it easier for both services and complainants to understand the complaints process.
- Updated letter templates for service use.
- Day to day guidance for services on process and system-based issues.
- Additional training on how to handle complaints and use the new customer feedback system.

4. **Financial Implications:**

4.1 There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

5. **Environmental Implications**

5.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

Appendices

Appendix 1: C&YP OSC Feedback data

Background Papers

None

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Councillors Yousef Dahmash, Sue Markham and Kam Kaur.