



Complaints & Compliments

Annual Report for 2022 - 2023

CONTENTS

| | | |
|-----------|---|----------------|
| 1 | Background | Page 4 |
| 2 | Statutory Complaints Procedure and Local Government Ombudsman | Page 4 |
| | 2.1 Stage 1 – Local Resolution | |
| | 2.2 Mediation | |
| | 2.3 Stage 2 – Investigation | |
| | 2.4 Stage 3 – Review Panel | |
| | 2.5 Local Government Ombudsman | |
| 3 | The Complaints Service | Page 5 |
| | 3.1 Total Number of Individual Complaints Received | |
| | 3.2 How Complaints Have Been Received | |
| | 3.3 Who Made Complaints | |
| 4 | Stage 1 Complaints | Page 6 |
| | 4.1 Breakdown of Stage 1 Complaints by Service Area | |
| | 4.2 Complaints by Ethnicity | |
| | 4.3 Monthly Trend for Receiving Complaints | |
| | 4.4 Repeat Complainants | |
| | 4.5 Compliance Within Timescales | |
| 5 | Complaints and Informal Feedback from Children and Young People | Page 11 |
| | 5.1 Complaints from Children and Young People | |
| | 5.2 Analysis of Formal Complaints from Young People | |
| | 5.3 Analysis of Themes of Formal Complaints from Young People | |
| | 5.4 Analysis of Informal Feedback from Young People | |
| | 5.5 Analysis of Themes of Informal Feedback from Young People | |
| | 5.6 Learning from Children’s and Young People Formal Complaints and Informal Feedback | |
| 6 | Mediation | Page 24 |
| 7 | Stage 2 Complaints | Page 24 |
| | 7.1 Compliance with Timescales | |
| | 7.2 Cost of Stage 2 Investigations | Page 25 |
| 8 | Stage 3 Complaints | Page 25 |
| 9 | Local Government Ombudsman Complaints | Page 25 |
| | 9.1 Learning and Actions Taken Following Ombudsman Complaints | |
| 10 | Analysis of Themes of Stage 1 Complaints | Page 27 |

| | | |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| 11 | Learning from Complaints | Page 28 |
| 12 | Compliments | Page 36 |
| | 12.1 Analysis of Compliments Received | |
| | 12.2 Examples of Compliments Received | |
| 13 | Service Improvement 2022/23 | Page 41 |
| 14 | Next Steps 2023/24 and 2024/25 | Page 43 |

1 Background

Every local authority with a responsibility for children's social care services is required to produce an annual report outlining the complaints activity for the service. Responsibility for the complaints function is shared between Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) who facilitate Stage 1 of the complaints procedure and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) who provide the role of Statutory Complaints Manager to manage any complaints which do not get resolved at Stage 1. The Statutory Complaints Manager provides advice and guidance when required at any stage in the process. The roles of SMBC and SCT are clearly documented in a Service Level Agreement (SLA) and both work closely together to provide a seamless service to our customers.

This is the fifth annual report produced by the SCT which includes a detailed analysis of compliments, complaints and informal feedback made by children, to embed a culture of continuous learning from complaints. This report covers the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

2 Statutory Complaints Procedure and Local Government Ombudsman

The majority of representations that SCT receives regarding the functions of Children's Social Care fall under the statutory complaint's procedure. The procedure is defined in *The Children's Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006*. The statutory procedure allows for Children and Young People "to make representations, including complaints about the actions, decisions or apparent failings of a local authority's children's social services provision; and to allow any other appropriate person to act on behalf of the Child or Young Person concerned or make a complaint in their own right" (Getting the Best from Complaints, DfE, 2006).

Not all complaints regarding Children's Social Care fall under the statutory procedure, although the majority do. The statutory complaints procedure has three stages once a representation has been accepted as a statutory complaint.

2.1 Stage 1 - Local Resolution

The aim is to resolve as many complaints as possible at this early stage. The Team Manager should discuss the complaint with the complainant and attempt to address the issues as quickly as possible. They should exchange information and thinking behind decisions and try to agree a way forward. This should take up to 10 working days, with a maximum extension of up to 20 working days for complex complaints.

2.2 Mediation

SCT offers mediation where a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of their Stage 1 complaint and may request a Stage 2 investigation. Mediation takes place between the

complainant and a Senior Manager from the relevant service area, it is not compulsory but is offered in efforts to resolve any outstanding issues for the complainant as quickly as possible. If a complainant chooses not to accept mediation, then their complaint will be considered as a Stage 2 complaint.

2.3 Stage 2 - Investigation

When a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 1, they may request a Stage 2 investigation. The investigation is conducted by an Independent Investigating Officer who is accompanied by an Independent Person, whose role is to ensure that the investigation is open, transparent and fair. Both officers complete a report following the investigation which is passed onto a senior manager within SCT (Adjudicating Officer) for the adjudication process.

The Adjudicating Officer then considers the reports and responds to the complainant on behalf of SCT. The Stage 2 process should be completed within 25 working days, although this timescale can be extended to 65 working days for complex complaints.

2.4 Stage 3 - Review Panel

Following a full Stage 2 investigation a complainant can request that their complaint is considered further by a review panel. The panel consists of two independent persons, plus an independent chair. Following a review meeting, the panel make recommendations to the Chief Executive who then decides on the complaint and any actions needed and sends a final response to the complainant on behalf of SCT. The review panel should be held within 30 working days of the request. Within five working days of the review panel meeting, the Independent Chair will send a letter to the Chief Executive, outlining the panel's findings and recommendations and the Director of Operations will then provide SCT's final response within a further 15 working days. The whole process should take a maximum of 50 working days.

2.5 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

At the end of the three stages of the complaints process the complainant has the right to escalate their concerns to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for consideration. Complainants also have the right to make an early referral to the Local Government Ombudsman at any stage of the complaint's procedure.

3 The Complaints Service

SMBC are responsible for processing complaints on SMBC's complaints management system to ensure that all complaints for SCT are accurately recorded and monitored. SCT allocate all Stage 1 complaints to appropriate managers within the service and ensure they are responded to.

SMBC are responsible for the management of all Stage 2, Stage 3 and Ombudsman complaints and enquiries that are received.

3.1 Total Number of Individual Complaints Received

During the reporting year of 2022/23 SCT received 241 complaints which were dealt with at Stage 1 this is an increase of 15% (36 complaints) compared to the previous reporting year.

3.2 How Complaints Have Been Received

Complaints are recorded by SMBC on the system known as 'Contact Us', as part of the complaints SLA shared between SMBC and SCT. Customers can choose to create their own portal account known as 'MySandwell' on Contact Us which enables them to register a complaint directly through their account. Once an account is set up customers are then able to access this at any time to view progress on the complaint and see the response once it has been responded to. Complaints can also be received directly via the Trust web page, via a telephone call to the Customer Services Contact Centre, via their workers, or directly to the Customer Experience Teams mailbox.

3.3 Who Made Complaints

A large majority of the complaints received continue to be made by adults who are expressing their dissatisfaction with the service provided by children's social care.

There were 22 complaints received from Young People during 2022/23 either made by themselves or via an Advocate – this is a decrease of 6 complaints made by Children and Young People in comparison to the previous year, and a further decrease of 12 complaints made by Children and Young People in comparison to the 2021/22 reporting period.

There were also 241 Stage 1 complaints received during 2022/23.

4 Stage 1 Complaints

Table 1 below shows a breakdown of the total number of Stage 1 complaints received during the reporting year and the outcome of complaint investigations.

There have been 36 more complaints received during 2022/23 than the previous reporting year. Notably there has been a 2% decrease in the number of Stage 1 complaints upheld or partly upheld compared to 2021/22.

| Year | No. of Stage 1 complaints | Upheld/Partly Upheld | % |
|---------|---------------------------|----------------------|-----|
| 2022/23 | 241 | 155 | 64% |
| 2021/22 | 205 | 135 | 66% |
| 2020/21 | 213 | 134 | 63% |
| 2019/20 | 270 | 198 | 73% |
| 2018/19 | 263 | 144 | 55% |

Table 1 Outcome of Stage 1 investigations

4.1 Breakdown of Stage 1 Complaints by Service Area and Locality

Below is a breakdown of the 241 Stage 1 complaints received by service area and locality.

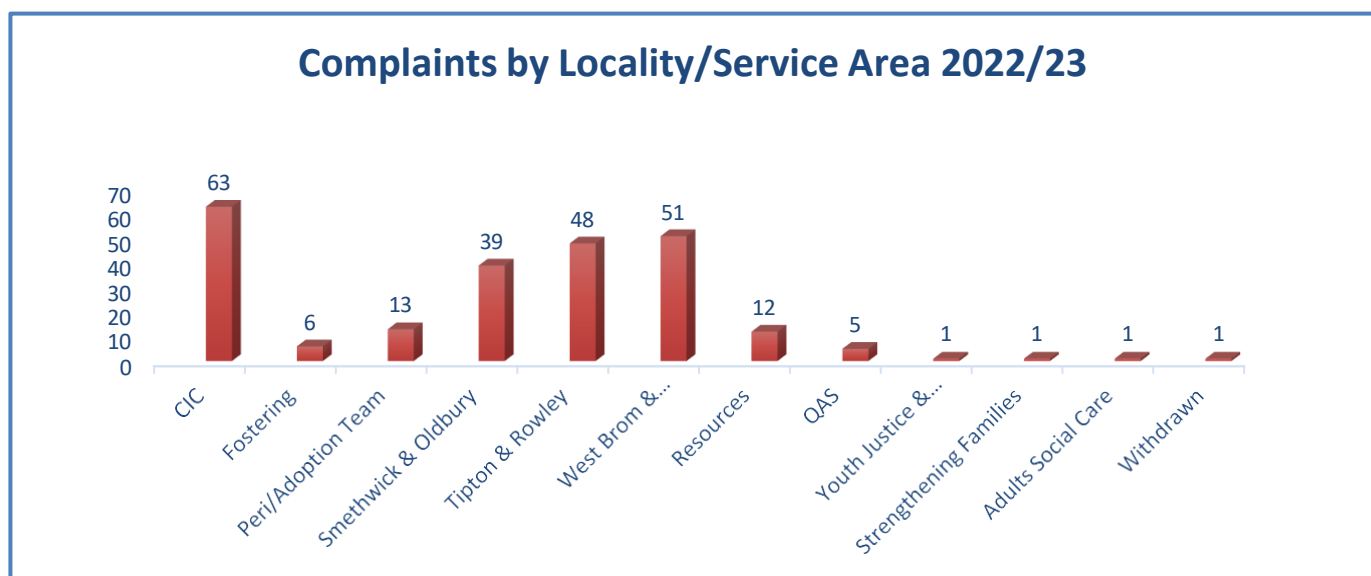


Table 2 Complaints by Locality/Service Area 2022/23

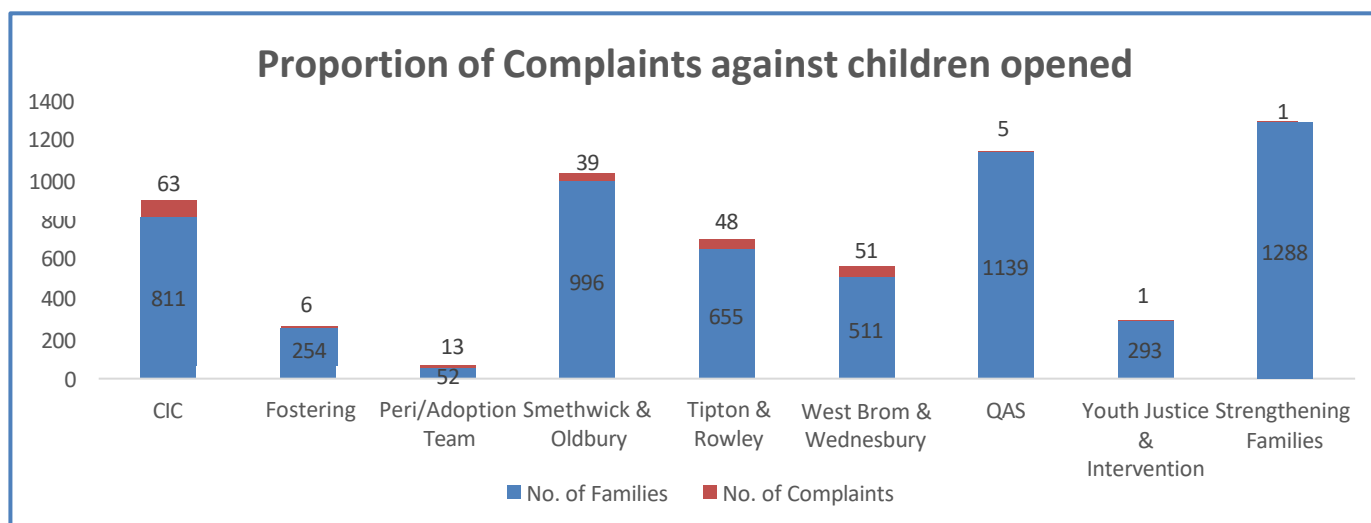


Table 3 Proportion of complaints against open cases 2022/2023

The Peri/Adoption team during reporting period of 2022/23 received a higher proportion of complaints, 25% of complaints received against the number of children they held, followed by West Brom and Wednesbury at 10% of the proportion of complaints received. This is routinely analysed/progressed in Locality/Service meetings to provide deeper analysis to enable the manager to identify and address any learning opportunities.

4.2 Breakdown of Stage 1 Complaints by Ethnicity

| Ethnicity Group | Total Individuals - Complaints | Ethnicity Proportion - Complaints | Total Individuals - CIN Return 22-23 | Ethnicity Proportion - CIN Return |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Asian/Asian British | 49 | 17% | 1170 | 19% |
| Black/Black British | 38 | 13% | 767 | 12% |
| Mixed Heritage | 67 | 24% | 952 | 15% |
| White | 116 | 41% | 3031 | 49% |
| Not obtained | 11 | 4% | 118 | 2% |
| Other | 1 | 0% | 205 | 3% |
| Grand Total | 282 | 100% | 6243 | 100% |

Table 4 Proportion of complainant's ethnicity against open cases 2022/2023

The above graph highlights the number of CYP that there were representations for in 2022/23. Please note the small sample size of complaints compared to the number of CYP that received a service.

It highlights that the highest ethnicity group we have had contact with during the reporting is from the white ethnicity group who have proportionately made fewer complaints.

The mixed heritage ethnicity group has made a higher proportionate of complaints compared to the number of contacts made suggesting that the mixed heritage ethnicity group is proportionately the group that remain dissatisfied with the service they receive.

4.3 Monthly Trend for Receiving Complaints

Analysis of the total number of Stage 1 complaints per month for 2022/23 in comparison to the previous three years seems to suggest that complaints although may have peaked in some months but generally followed a similar trend with regards increase and decrease in demand according to the time of year.

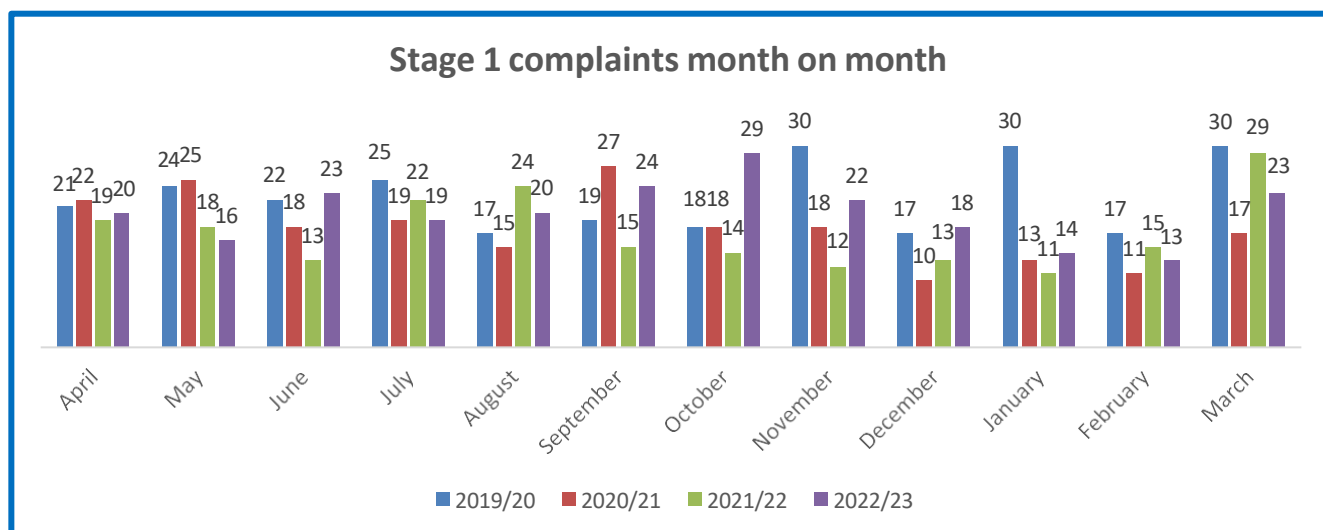


Table 5 Number of Stage 1 complaints received during 2019 to 2023 month on month

4.4 Repeat Complainants

SCT received two or more Stage 1 repeat complaints from 25 people during 2022/23 (see Table 7 below). The number of repeat complainants for Stage 1 complaint often involved complainants that had follow up concerns to their previous complaint that were related issues.

| No. of people making more than one complaint | Number of complaints made |
|--|---------------------------|
| 10 | 2 |
| 9 | 3 |
| 1 | 4 |
| 2 | 5 |
| 3 | 6 |

Table 6 Repeat complainants for 2022/23

4.5 Compliance with Timescales

Table 8 provides a breakdown of whether the timescales were either met or missed, for the 241 Stage 1 complaints received between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023.

| Stage 1 Timescales 22/23 | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Total No. of Complaints with timescales | Percentage |
|--------------------------|----|----|----|----|---|------------|
| Timescale Met | 50 | 55 | 58 | 48 | 211 | 88% |
| Timescale Missed | 9 | 8 | 11 | 2 | 30 | 12% |

Table 7 Stage 1 compliance against timescales

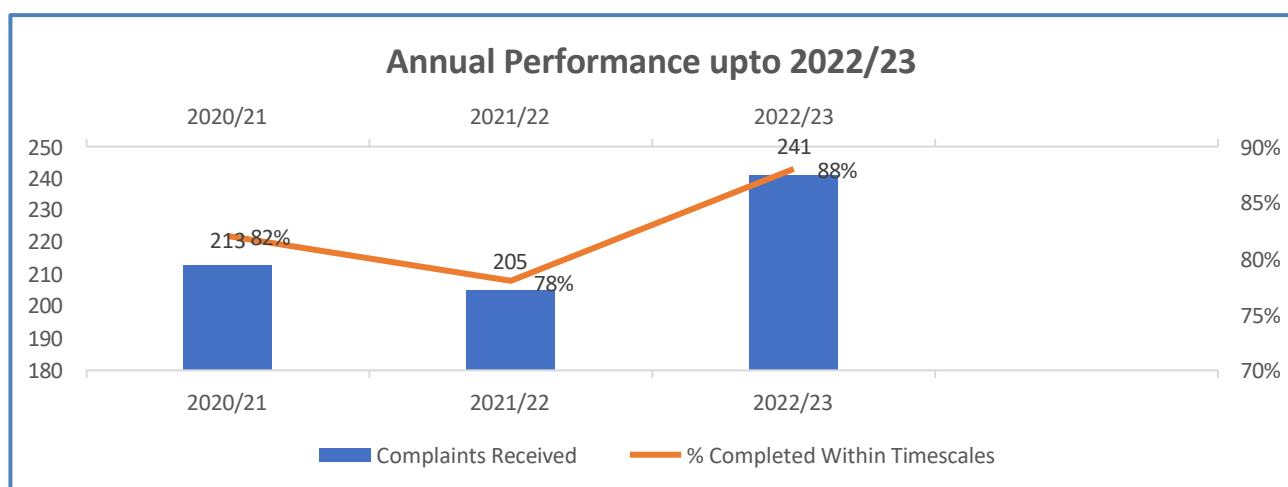


Table 8 comparison of complaints responded to within timescales over previous years

During 2022/23, 88% of Stage 1 complaints were dealt with within statutory timescales. This is an increase of 10% response compliance in comparison to performance the previous reporting year, which was 78%. This is the best compliance response time the Trust has achieved.

Breakdown of Timescales to Respond to Stage 1 Complaints 2022/23

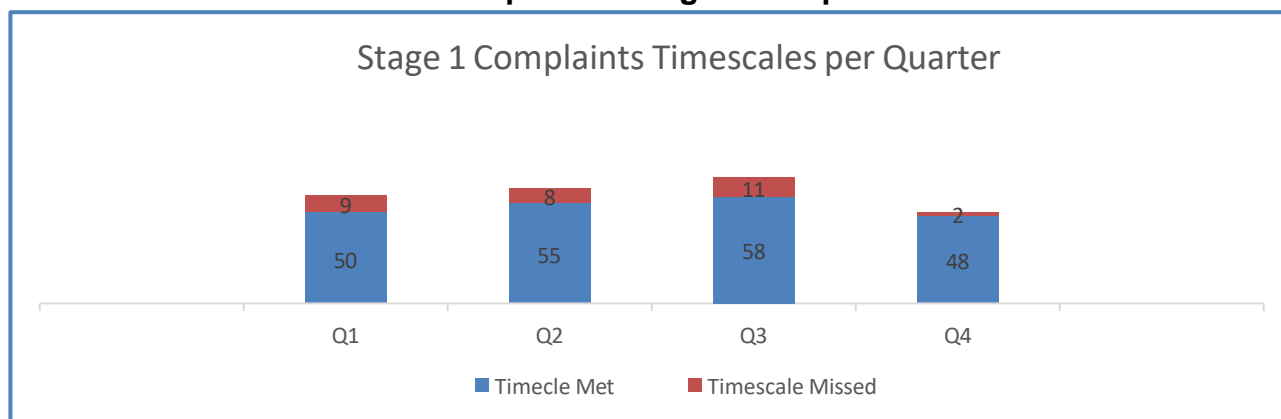


Table 9 Breakdown of timescales to respond to Stage 1 complaints per quarter

5 Complaints and Informal Feedback from Children and Young

When Children and Young People contact us to make a complaint, the Participation Team play a key role in providing advocacy support to them throughout the process. In line with our rights-based approach to participation processes were established to ensure children and young people understand their rights and enable them to tell us how they feel.

Children and young people are informed about the ways that they can do this via their social worker or personal advisor, an advocate, the Participation Team or any other professional, raising through one of our established forums, telling us through the web based *Sandwell Voice* feedback form or by the child friendly complaints form.

In February 2023, the new website www.sandwellvoice.co.uk was launched as a platform for children and young people to obtain information and to provide feedback using the online platform, it also allowed children and young people to download the Your Voice compliments, comments and complaints form. The Participation Team also created a series of merchandise for professionals to give to children and young people, these were highlighters, stress balls, pens, notepads and key rings with QR codes with direct access to the website.

The Participation Team will also follow-up with Children and Young People at the end of the complaints process, undertaking work to ensure that we are closing the loop and making sure that Children and Young People feel they have been listened to and their concerns taken seriously.

5.1 Analysis of Formal Complaints from Young People

During 2022/23 SCT received 22 complaints from Children and Young People, either directly from them or via an advocate; this is 6 less than the previous year, and a further decrease of 12 complaints in comparison to the 20/21 reporting year.

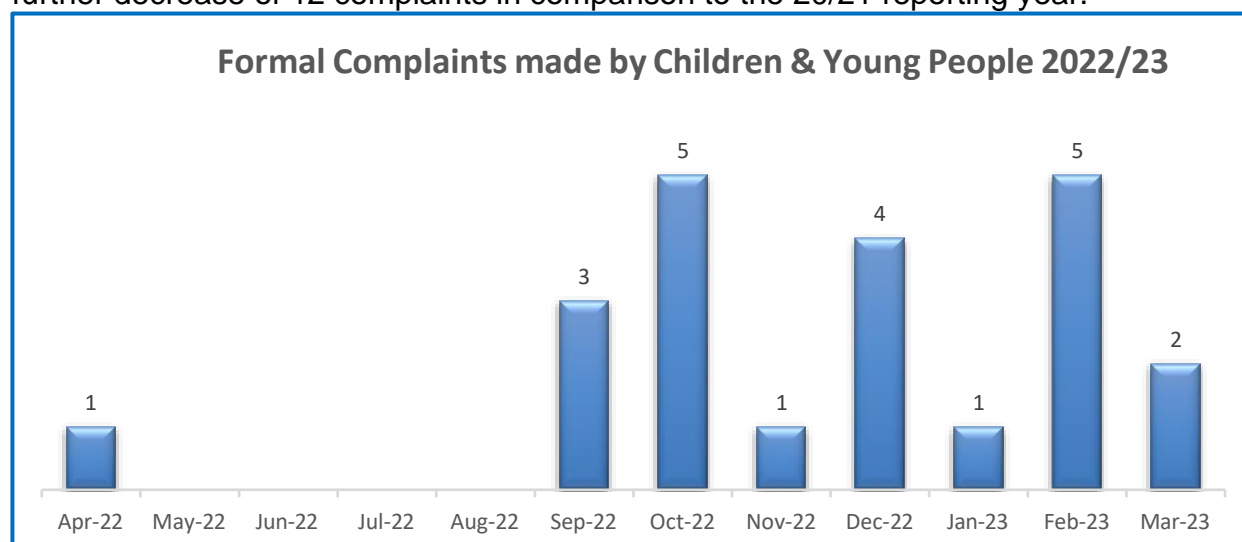


Table 10 Formal Complaints made by Children and Young People

Of the 22 complaints received from Children and Young People 10 were upheld, 7 partially upheld, and 5 not upheld. 15 of the 22 complaints were supported by an external advocate.

In 7 out of the 22 formal complaints, the Participation Team confirmed with the Young People that they were satisfied with the Trust's response – the remaining 15 children and Young People are being supported by an advocate who carry out their own satisfaction activity. This information is shared in regular meetings with the Children's Society.

In all cases, the Child or Young Person were either contacted by the Participation Team to offer support, or the Children's Society Advocacy Service if the complaint was made through them.

Weekly meetings take place between the Participation Team and the Customer Experience Team to track complaints made by Children and Young People and deal with any issues arising which need to be escalated or resolved.

The learning and themes raised through Children and Young People's complaints are shared in several forums, including:

- Through Trust Communication channels, team meetings, locality and service meetings and with the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Board and Voice of Sandwell & Forum for Independent Young Adults
- Reflective supervisions have also taken place with Social Workers following a complaint as part of their learning
- Reported to Executive Management Team and the Trust Board
- Through continued consultation with Children and Young People and by sharing and acting upon what they tell us to enhance how they can influence their care plans they will also be part of our continued improvements
- Shared with the Quality Assurance Service, triangulating with findings from audits and performance data. The Customer Experience and Participation Teams have also undertaken audits of Children and Young People's complaints jointly with the Quality Assurance Team as part of a thematic audit to evidence how we capture the voice of the child. A continued programme of audits of Children and Young Peoples feedback and complaints has been planned
- Through the Practitioners Forum
- Shared with the Voices of Sandwell Board, Forum for Independent Young Adults and the Corporate Parenting Board.

In all cases, follow up satisfaction activity was undertaken at the end of the complaints process for each complaint to ensure that Children and Young People were satisfied that their complaint had been responded to and actions completed.

5.2 Analysis of Themes of Young Peoples Formal Complaints

The themes identified from the 22 formal Young Peoples complaints during 2022/23 are:

| Complaint Theme | No. of Complaints Received |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Actions / Conduct of Worker | 2 |
| Decision Making | 2 |
| Financial Assistance/Missing Savings | 3 |
| Poor Communication | 3 |
| Lack of Support | 4 |
| Delay in receiving Service | 2 |
| Quality of Service | 6 |

Table 11 Themes of Young Peoples formal complaints

Through raising the profile of how we respond, report, share and learn from feedback received from Children and Young People we have reduced the number of complaints received from Children and Young People by 22% (6 complaints) less than the previous reporting year.

The following Young Peoples formal complaint themes have been analysed as:

Actions / Conduct of Worker

A total of two complaints received from Children and Young People concerned the actions or conduct of their practitioner. Issues raised include:

- Young Person unhappy with the Social Worker to allow their personal items to be thrown out when they were thrown out of the property
- Upset Young Person complains that their worker has taken their mobile phone off them and they do not know when they will get it back

Decision Making

We received two complaints from Children and Young People regarding our decision making. Issues raised include:

- Young Person is upset, and confused why the planned contact with her sibling who's plan is for adoption, has declined and been agreed to only have letterbox contact in the future
- Young person complains that they want to return back to their mother's care

Financial Assistance/ Missing Savings

Three complaints were made by Children and Young People in relation to financial assistance. Issues raised include:

- Complaint from Young Person regarding the status of their savings whilst in care with previous Foster Carers
- Young Person complains/enquires regarding their savings and pocket money allowance

whilst in care, and any other support that may be available to them as they transition into living independently

- Young Person complains that they do not have all their savings whilst being in care, has not received all their PIP payments, does not have a bank account, or an appointee in place

Poor Communication

Three complaints from Young People who were frustrated regarding the lack of communication from their Social Worker

- Young Person complains they are unhappy with Social Worker regarding lack of support and visits from them
- Complaint from a Young Person about the poor relationship they have with their Social Worker, and that they do not visit them
- Young Person complains that the plan of rehabilitation home to the care of his mother has not been communicated to him, and has been put on hold due to unsuitable accommodation that his mom was living in

Lack of Support

We received four complaints from Young People concerned about:

- Two Young People complain that they are still waiting for their car seats to become available after 6 months of waiting
- Complaint from Young Person who is frustrated regarding the lack of support from the trust, regarding financial assistance for their coat, the money agreed to be paid for the loss of their belongs and the date their ILA is paid
- Young Person complains that they do not know where they will be living when they are due to turn 18 years old
- Young Person complains about the drift and delay from the Trust in implementing the therapeutic work she requires to support her past trauma.

Delay in receiving Service

We received two complaints where Young People made complaints regarding the delay in receiving a needed service

- Two Young People complain that they have not received their Passport following a long delay in progressing the information that was needed

Quality of Service

We received six complaints from Young People who raised complaints concerning:

- The lack of support offered to her as a care leaver and her siblings
- Young Person complains that he does not want a social worker anymore
- There has been a delay in getting important documents sorted for him
- Young Person complains that they cannot go to school as they need someone who is medically trained to travel with them in case, they have seizures
- Young Person complains about the care she and her brother received whilst in care with her sibling with previous foster Carers
- The delayed progress of Passport, and payments of savings from previous years in care

We have identified the following area to focus on for future improvements following the

analysis of the Young Peoples complaints:

Continue to embed how we learn from compliments and complaints

- Alongside the Quality Assurance Service, continue to evidence and embed how learning from compliments and complaints can directly contribute to practice improvement
- Continue to develop the programme of practice reviews, observations and audits of complaints, from Children and Young People, Parents and Carers and Partners with the Quality Assurance Service.

Improve how we share and recognise where we are getting it right

- Continue to develop and adapt our approach to celebrating compliments, including working with existing internal forums to share the learning from compliments and complaints

Improve performance of Stage 2 Complaints

- Continue to develop the improved stage 2 response times with continued engagement with SMBC to investigate the Stage 2 complaints whilst ensuring that any recommendations are actioned and implemented as soon as possible.

Improve compliance for responding to complaints

- Increased the compliance of complaints responded to within timescales during 2022/23 and ensure that the quality of the responses remains a key focus of improvement to ensure that we hear the voice of the Child, Young Person or adult's complaint and capture and respond to their complaint effectively

Improve awareness of compliments and complaints with our Foster Carers

- Continue to promote compliment and complaint processes with Foster Carers to ensure they are aware of how they, or the children in their care, can make a compliment or complaints. We have done this through updates in the Foster Carers newsletter, improved Foster Carers Web page access to compliments and complaints, attendance at service meetings to ensure that all staff inform our Foster Carers how to support Young People to feedback to us, as well as themselves

Improve how we track actions from complaints

- Continue to improve and develop our recording and reporting mechanism for tracking the actions from complaints that evidences impact and improvement

Explore Mystery Customer Activity

- explore the use of satisfaction surveys, feedback mechanisms to determine how we are doing, and use the outcomes to inform future service improvement

5.3 Analysis of Young Peoples Informal Feedback

Informal feedback is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction made by any channel other than the formal complaints process. Feedback can be made in person, online through sandwellvoice.co.uk, Your Voice leaflet, via the telephone, or through a support worker.

Between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023, the Trust received 13 informal feedback contacts from Children and Young People.

During this reporting period there was an 8% decrease in Children and Young People who contacted us to provide informal feedback compared to the previous reporting year. Although the decrease in Young Peoples complaints may be due to Social Workers addressing Young People's concerns earlier, we acknowledge that there may be some Young People that need support to understand how they can share their worries or concerns with us. This decrease has been highlighted to senior officers and team managers, and the Participation Team continue to engage with staff to share all the opportunities that are available to our Young People to feedback to us.

In all instances of informal feedback, the Young Person was contacted by the Participation Team or Social Worker to address their concerns, this initial contact ensured that:

- The child was aware of their rights
- The nature of the feedback was understood and agreed by Young Person and Participation Team
- The Participation Team explained the process to the Young Person

5.4 Analysis of Themes of Informal Feedback from Children and Young People

| Informal Feedback Theme | Feedback Received |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Loneliness/Anxiety | 1 |
| Health | 1 |
| Not Feeling Listened To | 3 |
| Family Time | 1 |
| Local Offer | 3 |
| Violence & Aggression | 1 |
| Positive feedback | 1 |
| School Issues | 1 |
| Finance | 1 |
| Total | 13 |

Table 12 Themes of children's informal feedback

The Participation Team will identify an issue raised by Children and Young People and determine whether they are expressing dissatisfaction. The informal feedback will be dealt with by the practitioner to resolve the concern raised, and the Participation Team will undertake satisfaction activity at the end of the process. This includes contacting the Young Person to find out about their experience and if they feel satisfied with both the process and the outcome.

5.5 Learning from Children's Formal Complaints and Informal Feedback

Below is a summary of the learning from both formal complaints and informal feedback received from Young People during 2022/23.

| Theme of Complaint / Feedback | Learning Identified |
|--|---|
| Actions / Conduct of the Worker | <p>It is crucial to recognise the importance of effective, sensitive, and responsive communication when we become involved in a Young Person's life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We have reinforced through Reflective Managers Sessions, Practitioner Forums, and sharing messages directly within the importance of ensuring Social Workers build effective relationships with Young People to understand the Young Persons lived experiences. We must do this in a sensitive and timely manner that is right for each individual. This has been communicated through training, practice reviews and observations and audit feedbacks and through reflective supervisions held by Team Managers. <p>We must ensure that any decisions that are made are clearly communicated with the Young Person and recorded on their files, with a clear rationale provided.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We have reiterated this important message through existing Trust Communication channels, sharing complaints learning with service areas, localities and team meetings, about the importance of being honest and transparent with our Young People ○ Reflective discussions are also held with Social Workers to reflect the learning from complaints and identify what could have been done differently to ensure that Young Peoples feedback could have been captured more effectively ○ Learning and any identified service improvements resulting from complaints continue to be progressed jointly alongside the QAS and shared across the Trust through team meetings, training, and Trust Comms, and other forums. <p>When we are unable to do what we say we will, we must communicate the reasons why in an honest, open and transparent manner with the Young Person.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We have reiterated this message through the regular Compliments and Complaints training for all managers, |

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| | and through Trust Communication channels, and training. |
| Financial Assistance | <p>We must ensure that we plan well in advance any impact of financial cost a Young Persons may face as they get older and are required to become more independent</p> <p>We must ensure Young People are fully aware, of Sandwell's Local Offer and supported when they are making decisions about their future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We have reiterated this important message through Service, Team Meetings, training and through existing Trust Communication channels, the importance of being honest and transparent and preparing the Young People in a timely manner <p>We must ensure that Young People are aware of how much savings they are entitled to have each year, so when they turn 18 years old we are aware of how much each Young Person will receive - this action will also be captured during Children in Care reviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Systems have been established to ensure that Foster Carers are clear and accountable of their responsibilities for Young Peoples savings. This is also evidenced as part of the regular reviews that Children in Care have. |

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Decision Making | <p>We must ensure that we behave in an open and transparent manner with our Young People. It is important that we listen when they are telling us of their wishes and feelings. By giving a clear rationale of decisions made and ensuring we clearly evidence the wishes and feeling of the Young Person this avoids additional anxiety or distress for them. It also reassures the Young Person that we do listen to their views and helps build and maintain good relationships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Employees have attended whole Trust sessions regarding SCT's Purpose, Ethos and Standards which reiterate how we should work with our children and families. ○ We also take forward learning and any identified service improvements resulting from complaints alongside the Quality Assurance Service and share these directly within service and Locality Team Meetings, Practitioner Forums, Managers Reflective Sessions and through training. <p>We should ensure that when we make decisions in a multi-agency agreement then this is communicated clearly to the Young Person, clearly stating the rationale behind these decisions.</p> <p>Young People should feel confident that we will consider their feedback, concerns on an individual basis and not be restricted to existing policy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Learning and any identified service improvements resulting from complaints are being progressed jointly alongside the Quality Assurance Service and shared across the Trust through Team meetings, training, and Trust Comms. |
| Family Time | <p>Young People should be engaged in decisions regarding family time and have their wishes and feeling evidenced early on in their care plans.</p> <p>We must ensure that Parents feel part of the decision making for their own Children and understand why it is important that their own involvement with us must be considered and assessed.</p> <p>This will help assure Young People that we are not working against them but will help us in assessing the impact of their family time. We must ensure that family members fully understand their responsibilities and the support that we can give them to facilitate successful family times. We must also</p> |

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|---------------------------|--|
| | <p>ensure that we adhere to the agreed arrangements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This message has been shared across the service via existing communication channels and discussed within team and service meetings. |
| Issues with Carer | <p>We must ensure that when we are communicating with Children and Young People that we allow them to be able to express themselves without interruption within a safe environment. This will ensure that Young People feel confident in sharing their feelings and wishes with us, and feedback to us any concerns they may have.</p> <p>We need to ensure that Young People are made aware of how they can inform us how they are feeling, good or bad, through using various mechanism in place Your Voice or through their dedicated web page</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The use of this platform is encouraged at reviews, and is promoted internally through existing communication channels, inductions for all staff and various training. This is also discussed with our Children and Young People's through the various forums in place. |
| Poor Communication | <p>We must ensure that Social Workers inform Children and Young People details regarding changes of the Social Worker as timely as possible with the transparently reasons why. We must fully understand the effect and trauma that Young People face when they have to repeatedly retell their lived experiences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The important message of building effective relationships is shared and reinforced within training and supervision with Social Workers. It is also underpinned by the practice standards that all Social Workers practice within. ○ This key learning have also been further explored within the Social Worker and Practitioner forum and through reflective supervisions. |
| | <p>We must ensure that we support and prepare our Young People well when they are due to transition into alternative accommodation or placements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Children in Care Service will ensure that Personal Assistants are identified in an appropriate timescale to ensure that transition preparations take place when our Young People are due to turn 18 years old so they are prepared. <p>When Young People are worried about issues that may impact</p> |

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| | <p>on their daily lives and their ability to live healthily, we must ensure that we think creatively to support their needs. It is important to engage with our partners early to work together in providing solutions for Children and Young People.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We work with our Partners to identify and support solutions to Young People's concerns and agree the best way to respond in a timely and efficient manner. This will give Young People the confidence that we do listen and collectively work together to support their needs ○ We have reiterated the important message of providing a clear rationale to Young People of decisions that are made, through Service, Team Meetings, training and through existing Trust Communication channels, the importance of being honest and transparent whilst fully listening to Young Peoples wishes and feelings and also acknowledging when we have got it wrong. ○ The important message of building effective relationships is shared and reinforced within training and reflective supervisions with Social Workers. This key message will be further explored within the Reflective Managers sessions and Practitioner forum. |
| Change of Social Worker | <p>Where Young People feedback that they are unhappy with decisions made and wish to change their Social Worker, it is important that we listen and where possible act upon it.</p> <p>We must ensure that where there is a change in Social Worker that there is an appropriate handover between the current Social Worker and the new Social Worker. Where this cannot be done, it is important that the Team Manager ensures that the Young Person is informed as soon as possible.</p> <p>Where a change in Social Worker is unavoidable, then we must ensure that we effectively communicate this to Children and Young People so that they understand the decision-making process.</p> <p>Whenever possible, handovers must take place face to face to avoid causing any anxiety for the Young Person, and to also enable the new Social Worker and Young Person to develop a strong relationship.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The case transfer protocol has been revised to include the Child's Voice with a focus on handover and direct |

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| | <p>work sessions undertaken with Children and Young People when Social Workers leave the service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Updates have also been made to our child's file recording system to ensure Team Managers and Workers will not be able to progress to the next stage of the transfer without completing the checklist in the protocol. ○ In collaboration with the Voices of Sandwell Board and Practitioner Improvement Board (PIB), the Customer Experience Team and Participation Team have developed best practice guidance for changes of Social Worker, and a postcard and letter for departing and new Social Workers, is available for different ages. |
| Quality of Service | <p>We must ensure we are proactive in progressing applications for key identification documents such as passport applications, in order to avoid delay and disappointment for Children and Young People.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We have put systems in place to speed up applications for key documentation such as citizenship applications and passport applications. <p>We must ensure that we provide the most effective support to our Young People when they are moving through to independence, clearly identifying what expectations they can expect from their PAs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This key message has been shared across the service and discussed within team and service meetings and also via existing communication channels |

The Participation Team offers support to children and young people throughout the complaints process, whether it has been categorised as a formal or informal piece of feedback. The team keep in regular contact with the child or young person, and when the complaint is resolved, or the process has concluded, the team will guide the child or young person through a series of questions to establish how they feel. The questions, which help the Trust 'close the loop' are taken from [Ofsted's ILACS framework](#) and help the child or young person feel confident that their voice has been heard. The Participation Team will contact the child or young person to ask them these questions, this could be a telephone call, email or via an [online survey](#) that can be sent via SMS, WhatsApp or email.

- Did you understand your rights, entitlements and responsibilities?
- Do you understand what happened as a result of your concerns?
- Do you feel that your concerns were taken seriously?

- Do you think that necessary action was taken in response to your concerns?
- Was the response that you received to your concerns in the time promised?
- Do you feel that things have improved as a result of your raising your concerns?
- Were you made aware of the advocacy and independent visitor services available to you

Impact for children and Young People:

As a result of tracking formal and informal complaints raised by children and young people the following improvements have been implemented:

- A relationship based approach is now at the heart of responding to any feedback or complaint that we receive from children young people or adults and conversations are always part of the process to ensure that their voices can be heard throughout the process
- Work has been developed to change the case transfer protocol to include a handover of new worker where possible, but more importantly to inform the child directly. If a handover cannot take place, then a letter can be sent to the child or a postcard given on the initial visit of a new worker. These changes have been implemented on LCS
- Children and Young People are informed around the theme of loneliness and anxiety that they can take part and wish to join the virtual and face to face forums. This includes a Forum to offer support with anxiety and loneliness
- Complaints training has been developed and delivered to managers across the Trust where learning is also shared
- Learning – post 16 tell young people who their PA is and start working with them at the earliest opportunity
- Process drafted to address savings for children in care, including IRO recording status of savings at each review
- More joined up system with the Children's Society - our advocacy provider
- Feedback mechanisms are now in place to establish how the child or young person feels their complaint was dealt with and an opportunity to share any outcome, or impact it may have had on them
- Coming new into care visits have been undertaken by the Participation Team to ensure Children and Young People are aware of their rights when they first come into care. A member of the Participation Team and Care Experienced Ambassador will do a home visit where possible with an information pack which includes know your rights, sandwellvoice.co.uk merchandise, coming into care booklet, Your Voice and info on how to join Voices of Sandwell group.

6 Mediation

During 2022/23 we offered 19 complainants who wished to progress to a Stage 2 complaint the opportunity for mediation. Of the 19 requests made:

- 16 complaints were successfully resolved at this mediation stage with no further progression of the complaint
- 3 complaints progressed to a Stage 2 complaint

Through mediation we have been able to resolve the large majority of complainant's issues successfully without progressing onto a Stage 2 investigation. This means that we are achieving earlier resolution for our Children and Families which will in turn enable relationships between both SCT and our Children and Families to be strengthened.

The offer of mediation has also resulted in cost savings for SCT

7 Stage 2 Complaints

During 2022/23 seven Stage 2 statutory complaint investigations were progressed, plus an additional three stage 2 corporate complaints. Two of the seven Stage 2s were requested in the previous reporting year and completed within this reporting period. The remaining five Stage 2 complaints were initiated within 2022/2023, two of which were concluded outside of the reporting period.

7.1 Compliance with Stage 2 Timescales

Of the seven Stage 2 complaints completed five were completed outside of timescales. The average number of days to respond to a Stage 2 complaint was 76 days. Four of the Stage 2 complaints were particularly complex in nature, causing the investigation to take longer than the 65-day maximum timescale to conclude.

During 2022/23, the Trust Complaints Manager and Complaints Manager at Sandwell MBC continued to work together to reduce the number of days taken to respond to Stage 2 investigations. This work will continue into the next reporting year to ensure improve compliance with statutory timescales in relation to Stage 2.

7.2 Cost of Stage 2 Investigations

The cost of Stage 2 complaints this year is slightly more than the previous year. Five out of the seven stage 2 complaints we were able to use independent internal investigators at no financial cost to the Trust who work alongside the Independent Person.

The table below evidences the timescales, and costs of Stage 2 complaints

| Stage 2 by Service | Complaint | Date of request | Date TOR signed | Date of Adjudication | Date Closed | No. of working days |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Children in Care | Person 1 | 5 Jan 22 | 22 Feb 22 | 3 June 22 | 14 June 22 | 75 |
| Children in Care | Person 2 | 24 Feb 22 | 28 March 22 | 6 June 22 | 13 June 22 | 57 |
| Children in Care | Person 3 | 11 Nov 22 | 12 Jan 22 | 6 April 22 | 9 June 22 | 81 |
| Children in Care | Person 4 | 21 Nov 22 | 12 Jan 23 | 3 March 23 | 27 March 23 | 53 |
| Children in Care | Person 5 | 21 Nov 22 | 13 Feb 23 | 5 April 23 | 9 June 23 | 80 |
| Children in Care | Person 6 | 16 Dec 22 | 30 March 23 | 31 May 23 | 18 Aug 23 | 96 |
| Tipton & Rowley | Person 7 | 10 March 23 | 5 May 23 | 20 Aug 23 | 14 Sept 23 | 91 |
| Total | | | | | | |

Table 13 above shows the costs for Stage 2 investigations concluded in 2022/23

8 Stage 3 Complaints

SCT did not receive any Stage 3 requests during 2022/23.

9 Local Government Ombudsman Complaints

The Ombudsman raised six matters with SCT during 2022/23, of which were:

- For one complaint the Ombudsman stated fault was found with SCT and recommendations were made which were implemented
- For three complaints the Ombudsman stated they would not investigate, with one deemed outside of their jurisdiction
- The remaining two complaints the Ombudsman advised that the complaint was premature and should progress through the complaints process

| Name | Date Received | Decision |
|----------|---------------|-------------------|
| Person 1 | 21/04/2022 | Fault Found |
| Person 2 | 15/07/2022 | Not Investigated |
| Person 3 | 01/08/2022 | Premature Enquiry |
| Person 4 | 15/11/2022 | Not Investigated |
| Person 5 | 27/02/23 | Not Investigated |
| Person 6 | 03/03/2023 | Premature Enquiry |

| Decision | Number of decisions against Category |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Upheld and recommendations Accepted | 1 |
| Closed after initial enquiries - no further actions | 3 |
| Advised to progress through complaints process | 2 |

Table 14 Outcome of Complaints raised with the Ombudsman 2022/23

9.1 Learning and Actions Taken Following Ombudsman Complaints

Complaint - Following a complex Stage 1 investigation the complainant complained to the LGO their dissatisfaction with the response received and complained that we had not investigated the stage 1 complaint within the correct timescale. The LGO acknowledged that the Council/SCT handled some of the issues the complainant had complained about over the months after they complained, however it took around six months to fully complete the stage 1 of the process. This was deemed as a significant delay and is at fault.

The LGO recommended that we apologise, pay a time and trouble payment of £180 to the complainant and commence a Stage 2 investigation, which we agreed to and actioned.

The learning from this complaint was to ensure that the Complaints Team keep a closer scrutiny to all communications that take place between investigating officers and complainants, and when communications take place via a telephone call then a record of the discussion and any agreements should be captured and recorded.

The Trust has provided follow up evidence to the LGO for the recommendations that we agreed to carry out where they judged us to be at fault. We also evidenced any lessons learnt that have been implemented following the learning from their findings and recommendations.

Our training offer complimented by the introduction of reflective spaces and greater offer of support for managers and practitioners is evidence of our commitment towards learning from compliments and complaints and improving the quality of overall practice.

We also ensure that any complaints meeting, or mediation meeting have closer scrutiny and a written evidence of the meeting with actions and outcomes is provided.

10 Analysis of Themes of Stage 1 Complaints

The table below identifies Stage 1 complaints categorised by theme.

| Complaint Theme | No. of Complaints Received |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Actions / Conduct of Worker | 58 |
| Decision Making | 45 |
| Poor Communication | 36 |
| Lack of support | 27 |
| Quality of service | 23 |
| Delay in Receiving Services | 22 |
| Financial Assistance | 12 |
| Missing Savings | 1 |
| Family Time | 2 |
| Accuracy of Assessment/Reports | 12 |
| Actions of the Trust | 2 |
| Access to Service | 1 |

Table 15 Breakdown of complaint themes 2022/23

Four of the top five themes of complaints received during 2022/23 are the same as those in the previous year. This continues to be addressed through improvement activity during 2023/24, such as sharing the identified areas of improvement needed through various platforms, learning events, training and system improvements enhanced by a more stable frontline workforce.

Of the top five themes of complaints the table below shows those that have been either upheld or partially upheld over the last two years

| Theme 2021/22 | Upheld/Part Upheld | Theme 2022/23 | Upheld/Part Upheld |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| Actions / Conduct of Worker | 30 | Actions / Conduct of Worker | 37 out of 58 64% |
| Decision Making | 16 | Decision Making | 20 out of 45 44% |
| Poor Communication | 12 | Poor Communication | 25 out of 36 69% |
| Financial Assistance | 7 | Lack of Support | 20 out of 27 74% |
| Quality of Service | 8 | Quality of Service | 16 out of 23 70% |

Table 16 Top five themes – 2021/22 and 2022/23

11. Learning from Complaints

Learning from complaints continues to be a focus of improvement work during 2022/23. During this year, we continue with the strong links with the Quality Assurance Service to ensure that learning from complaints is triangulated alongside other intelligence, including learning from compliments, audits and performance data to continue to informing practice improvement.

Whilst the themes of complaints are similar in nature to those of the previous year, it must be acknowledged that the issues regarding the frontline staff workforce recruitment and retention challenges experienced by the Trust during this reporting year are all significant factors which have impacted upon how well we have embedded the learning from complaints and compliments during 2022/23.

We have continued to work more closely with service areas and Managers to share the learning and identify practice improvements. Work will continue into 2023/24 to ensure that learning from complaints and compliments continues to be embedded throughout the Trust and importantly shows the impact upon the Children and Young People we support.

Below are some examples of learning from the top five themes of complaints received during 2022/23.

| Issue | Learning Identified and Improvements Made |
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| <u>Actions / Conduct of the Worker-</u> Parents, Carers and Young People often complain about: poor communication from our Social Workers, their unprofessional attitude, lack of preparation with visits, and meetings, quality of assessments - often bias or inaccurate information recorded, and lack of transparency of the Trusts intervention and the lack of involvement in the Young Persons care planning. | <p>We should ensure that we spend time with families to build relationships and always speak sensitively and professionally with families, especially when we may have the need to have challenging conversations with them.</p> <p>When Social Workers visit families, we must ensure that they spend quality time with them and acknowledge their anxieties of having intrusive social care involvement within their lives and behave in a transparent manner.</p> <p>We must prepare well prior to visiting families, to ensure that families feel confident we know them and want to get to understand their lived experiences better, especially those experiences that impact on their children.</p> <p>We must ensure that we communicate with families effectively as possible, do what we say we will, return communications with them, if the agreed times for visits or meetings are delayed, or if meetings have to be cancelled let them know in advance.</p> <p>We must ensure that we allow families to have their voice captured within our assessments and they have the opportunity to consider what we have written about</p> |

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| | <p>them in a timely manner and allow time for challenge if required. This will ensure that we have better assessments that will inform the best care plans for our children, as well as clearly setting the expectations we have for the Carers.</p> <p>We continually focus upon and share the impact that our interventions may have on the Children and Families, both positively and negatively if we get it wrong. With various processes that we now have in place we have opportunities to promote good practice and areas that we must improve upon.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Through various forums, and through existing Trust communication channels, these key learning points and identified service improvements resulting from complaints learning, are being shared and progressed. These messages are also shared alongside the Quality Assurance Service, and within Complaints Handling Training, Team Meetings, and induction sessions, for new starters and students. ○ We share this learning through Practitioners forums, Managers Reflective sessions, and direct with Service areas, and Localities ○ New forms have been added to LCS system to ensure timely progressions, and scrutiny of case progress to support effective care plans ○ Escalation processes are in place and challenge and resolution systems are used by the IRO service ○ Governance processes are in place to share complaints learning and this has close oversight by EMT, and Trust Board Members ○ This information is fed into the wider Quality Assurance analysis as part of the Quality Assurance Framework. |
| <p><u>Decision Making-</u></p> <p>Parents, Carers and Young People complain about decisions made that impact on their lives.</p> <p>They complain about:</p> <p>Policies and procedures not being followed correctly, not agreeing</p> | <p>We must ensure that we explain our decision making and rational to families, especially with regards decisions made regarding assessments for their children as open and honestly as possible, and that these decisions are not made by the Social Workers in isolation.</p> <p>We should always behave in an open and transparent manner, allowing Young People and families time to reflect and challenge assessments or decisions that are made about them.</p> <p>We must communicate and evidence that we adhere to</p> |

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| <p>or unhappy regarding decisions made re assessments, decisions of the plans for their children, intervening with their family, stopping support too soon, delays in finding appropriate placements, information used within assessments/reports leading to Court judgments</p> | <p>policies and procedures and have set guidance, criteria in place regarding assessments and that decisions are often considered as part of a multi-agency decision based on evidence and assessments, rather than judgments.</p> <p>We must support Young People, carers and families to access the correct or alternative support to challenge our decisions if required and identify and signpost to other support they may access.</p> <p>We must allow families the time to consider what information we have recorded about them and the decisions we have made or supported.</p> <p>We must be available to listen and reply to any challenges they may want to make.</p> <p>We must ensure that we involve Young People and their families in their care plans, and capture their voices within any assessments, reviews or reports concerning them.</p> <p>The learning from these complaints is consistently shared within service and locality meetings as well as the QAS service to triangulate learning. Reflective discussions and focus learning events also take place directly with practitioners for discussion within team meetings, reflective supervisions, training, as well as part of the practice learning events.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We share this learning through Practitioners forums, Managers Reflective sessions, and direct with Service areas, and Localities ○ Supervisions has been a focus for the Trust to ensure that there is quality time given to reflective discussions, with a new supervision policy now in place ○ Practice reviews are undertaken by Managers to QA the effectiveness of our interventions ○ Thematic reviews, audits take place to ensure that we capture Young Peoples voices ○ Practice Observations are planned with managers with greater scrutiny from the Quality Assurance Service |
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| <p><u>Poor Communication-</u></p> <p>Carers and Young People feel frustrated, upset with poor communication.</p> <p>Young People and Carers complain that:</p> <p>Workers do not return their calls, messages, or emails, they are not informed when workers leave, are off sick or on holiday.</p> <p>Social Workers often do not communicate with them in a professional manner, both verbally or in written form, or often do not listen to them when they disagree with the Trusts involvement, or interventions needed.</p> <p>Carers complain that we do not act upon agreed actions or share information in a timely manner, and this often happens when workers change or leave the Trust.</p> <p>Parents complain that they are not consulted about their child's plans, or that they are often not appropriately communicated with to capture their voice within assessments, or reports.</p> <p>Carers complain that meeting are cancelled at</p> | <p>It is crucial to reinforce the message that we must recognise the importance of effective communication when we become involved in a family's life, which can often be at traumatic times in their lives.</p> <p>We must endeavour to communicate as effectively and professionally as possible with all our families and also ensure that Social Workers and Practitioners understand the importance of how they present themselves with Families, especially when first becoming involved with them, and understand any anxiety that families may feel.</p> <p>We must ensure our workers are aware of their tone and body language when engaging with Young People and families, and ensure they spend quality time with them.</p> <p>If Social Workers are on annual leave, or when tasks remain outstanding when staff unexpectedly leave the Trust, Team Managers must advise the Young people or families in a clear transparent manner with any reasons if tasks are outstanding or if timescales cannot be met.</p> <p>We must ensure that we have systems in place to respond to emails, calls text messages to avoid people feeling frustrated that they are being ignored.</p> <p>If Social Workers leave the Trust, we must ensure that we inform Young People and families and advise them of the name of the new worker as soon as possible.</p> <p>Both parents and cares views must be captured within assessments and reports equally, and they should be given the opportunity in a timely way to consider what we have recorded about them. We should be available for any disputes or challenges they may have.</p> <p>We need to prepare and plan for meetings and visits in a timely manner, so that we can communicate and prepare families in advance of meetings to ensure that we can facilitate the best care planning for our Young People and families. By allowing Young People and Parents to contribute as part of the care planning process, they will gain an understanding what is working well, and what needs to change, whilst understanding their own responsibilities within the process.</p> |
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| <p>short notice, or minutes of meeting are not shared in a timely manner.</p> | <p>We have implemented systems to share these crucial messages and learning about effective communication, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reinforcing these key message through Service/Locality meetings, Trust Comms and through the Social Workers practitioner's forums, Managers Reflective sessions, training, we share the impact of when we get it right or when we need to improve with the communication with our Young people and families, and the impact it may have upon them. This is also a key message that is addressed through our approach to relationship-based practice within the Quality Assurance Framework, and Practice Standards and a focus for reflective discussions within supervisions. ○ Monitoring forms have been developed to assist our quality assurance responsibilities and provide us with the evidence to evaluate the impact we are having on children's lives and to make improvements to the service we provide when needed. ○ Thematic audits capturing Young Peoples Voices are in place to ensure that we can evidence that their wishes and feelings are heard within the care plans. ○ The introduction of the RAG rating following children's review meetings and encouraging more consistency in resolution and challenge support effective communications. ○ Improved recording on children's files with improved child sensitive case notes now has closer quality assurance scrutiny through practice reviews and observations that are conducted by managers. ○ We have focused learning sessions to support the quality of assessments ○ Quality assurance of systems that are in place to best support effective communication when Young People and families want to contact us. ○ Developed the intranet and web pages to make contacting us easier. |
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| <p><u>Lack of Support-</u></p> <p>Carers and Young People often complain that they are not supported adequately.</p> <p>They share their concerns telling us that:</p> <p>We do not plan well in advance for when transitions are needed for Young People.</p> <p>We do not support Young People and Carers adequately or financially.</p> <p>We stop support too soon, we do not do the things we say we have agreed to, or we do not have the correct care planning in place.</p> <p>People complain about not having an allocated Social Worker for periods of time.</p> <p>Carers will complain that we are not supporting or assessing children with additional needs adequately</p> <p>Connected Carers complain they need support to avoid placement breakdown and Foster Carers looking to adopt need to be supported better and aware of the support available to them.</p> | <p>We must ensure that we provide the right support at the right time to friends or family members who care for our children whilst assessments take place, and Social Workers should be transparent in the support that the carers can access. The information provided to them should also be clearly recorded on the Young Persons file. This will support our Young People being cared for and reduce placement breakdowns.</p> <p>We must ensure that Foster Carers are aware of policies regarding fees and that this is effectively communicated to manage their expectations, especially when they are considering an SGO.</p> <p>We must ensure that Foster Carers who express an interest in becoming Adopters are fully aware of the scope and remit of all the available support.</p> <p>We need to prepare and plan for any transition periods that our Young People may go through to ensure that they are prepared and supported to live independently.</p> <p>Workers must be clear on SCT's policy in relation to the Local Offer, and advice and support must be progressed in a timely manner.</p> <p>We must ensure that we carry out the agreed action needed, especially when we are due to step down or stop the intervention or support, we have given to our families.</p> <p>We must ensure that when workers leave unexpectedly that we inform Young People and families of the newly allocated Social Worker in a timely manner</p> <p>These key messages from complaints learning have been shared across the whole of SCT, including within the regular Effective Compliments and Complaints training that the Customer Experience Team deliver to managers, new starters and students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We have a developed a refreshed workforce strategy as part of the Sandwell Deal to recruit and retain Social Worker ○ SCT's Adoption Support Policy, SGO, and CWD Policy was shared across the service to ensure |
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| | <p>Practitioners offer consist advice to Foster Carers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We have developed closer links with our adoption agencies and have collaborative systems in place to support adopters and Young People throughout the adoption process ○ Closer scrutiny by developed reviews are now taking place by the IRO service to ensure that any concerns are raised and addressed earlier ○ Briefing sessions have taken place to better support workers to identify and support Fostering arrangements, and connected carers ○ Regular reflective sessions led by the PSW have focused on capturing the voice of the child, and the practice standards we must work within to ensure we deliver the best support to our Young people, Carers and families ○ Through reflective discussions that are encouraged within supervisions we promote the important messages about being reflective and curious and ensure that we communicate as professionally and sensitively as possible |
| <p><u>Quality of Service-</u></p> <p>Carers and Young People complaint about:</p> <p>Drift and delay, often due to too many changes in Social Worker or being unallocated, poor communications</p> <p>Not completing tasks fully when we end our interventions of support</p> <p>Changes in family time, without consultation</p> <p>Young People complain about: delays with receiving important documentation, like citizenship,</p> | <p>We must continue to work hard to ensure timely outcome focused interventions for Children, Young People and Families.</p> <p>We must also ensure that families have the opportunity to read, challenge or review their assessments in a timely way. We must be available to listen and reply to any challenges they may want to make.</p> <p>We must ensure that minutes and reports are shared within the appropriate timescales, to allow Parents sufficient time to review before meetings.</p> <p>We must ensure that we plan well with Young People, families and carers, as well as our partners to support timely care planning for our Young People. We must evidence their wishes and feelings and those of their carers.</p> <p>We must ensure that we keep to the agreed family time contact arrangements, and whenever this may not be possible due to Social Workers being off sick, on annual leave or leaving the Trust unexpectedly the Team Manager should progress any updates with the family and action Family Time accordingly.</p> <p>Whilst applications for certain key documentation such as passports applications were delayed due to</p> |

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| <p>Passports, NI numbers, support to access bank accounts, or financial help or support to live independently</p> <p>Accuracy of Assessments - Inaccurate information recorded within reports and assessments</p> | <p>government agency own organisational issues, we have reviewed and strengthened our practice and processes to mitigate these issues. This will ensure that Children and Young People have access to these documents in a timely way, and therefore do not feel anxious or worried.</p> <p>Key learning from these complaints has been shared directly within Service areas, and locality team meetings, and identified improvements have taken place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ As part of our wider plan for continuing to embed learning from these complaints, we have work with operational services to review guidance and communicate any revised guidance to practitioners around the timeliness for completing applications for citizens and passports, whilst also promoting via the IRO service challenge opportunities when this does not happen ○ We have developed a refreshed workforce strategy as part of the Sandwell Deal to recruit and retain Social Worker and have career progressions in place for existing staff ○ Internal processes and escalation points have been further developed to support the actions needed to ensure that meeting minutes are distributed in a timely manner. ○ Practice standards, practice reviews and practice observations have been developed further to ensure that we have greater quality assurance processes in place. Identified learning is shared within teams, and reflective manager sessions are facilitated ○ Developed IT systems have progressed to ensure that effective case progression is in place, and holds managers to accountability ○ Quality of assessment training has been a key focus for frontline staff to ensure we offer the support to our Young People and families in a timely manner ○ Learning, and intervention hubs have been developed to support workers and ensure they have the tools and support to ensure the support, and intervention we offer is as effective as possible. |
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Learning from compliments and complaints continues to be shared as part of regular Compliments and Complaints training sessions delivered to managers, as well as shared with managers and practitioners as part of their team meetings; we also share learning through other forums, and hold regular reflective sessions with Managers across the Trust.

12 Compliments

Employees continue to be encouraged to share and acknowledge good practice; they continue to respond positively to this public acknowledgement of their hard work and dedication to improving outcomes for children families.

Compliments are received from our Young People, Parents, Carers and other Professionals as well as from colleagues in other areas of SCT.

12.1 Analysis of Compliments Received

During 2022/23 we received 359 compliments, 156 more than the previous year from Children and Young People, their Families, internal and external Professionals, and Partners. This is an increase of 43% more compliments than the previous year.

We continued sharing and celebrating our compliments through various platforms. Compliment Café are regular sessions with EMT that are held regularly throughout 2022/23 where senior leaders and colleagues come together to celebrate their successes and share with each other what was working well. The sessions during this reporting year have been well received and welcomed by staff.

Key messages and learning from compliments are also shared frequently through existing communication forums.

12.2 Examples of Compliments Received

Below are some examples of the 196 external compliments received from outside of SCT.

Children / Young People

Compliments received from Children and Young People are evidencing our passion and commitment to improving their lives. They also demonstrate the effectiveness of our relationship-based practice approach:

Im very happy with what's been done. Id also just like to communicate to yourself how grateful I am to SW. She has gone above and beyond for me since she took over my case about 2 years ago. She has always done everything in her power to help and support me. She has kept me sane throughout the process with the flat as I could trust that she was doing everything in her power to sort it out which she did. Myself and my parents are very thankful. - Young Person

SW has been amazing, going the extra mile to help us and really made sure the issues within the family were discussed and resolved in an appropriate manor. Unlike others you listened to us and spent time talking to us about the issues and it made us feel

much more respected. – Young Person

YP is now at home and she informed me that she has had 18 social workers since coming into care. She then told me that her social worker, is the best social worker that she has had. YP said that she is sad to turn 18 next month as this will mean losing SW as her social worker. - From Young Person

Thank you for sticking around for so long, always listening and fighting my corner as well as my parents. You have supported me through so much and I am extremely grateful to work with you. You are the most amazing social worker I've had. Thank you so much – Young Person

Reasons SW is a good social worker. SW is not rude unlike other social workers I have had. When problems arose in my school place, SW did his best to help me. SW sat next to me and talked with me, played games with me. He was a very active part in helping with my EHCP making other worker edit my EHCP. He helps to make the restriction order to move on. When other social workers used to call me learning disabled SW was very careful in his words talking to me. SW is very helpful making sure I Don't become mentally unwell, and making the right decisions regarding going to school. He understands I will go mentally unwell if I go. He seems like a dad to me which I never had before. THANK YOU SW!

Parents

Compliments received from parent's evidence and demonstrate the impact of relationship-based practice on the lives of our children and families.

Just wanted to pass on a HUUUUUGE THANK YOU from Dad, YPs dad. He said we were the best help and support him and YP ever had and can't thank us enough. YP is completely changed at home, arguments stopped, both of them are calmer and the atmosphere is too. Wait for this, YP has also been attending school EVERY DAY (whole week before Easter and back in on Monday without a blip) – From Parent

Just wanted to say a Big THANK YOU to Worker for supporting YP through this difficult period. Worker has built up an excellent working and trusting relationship with YP, which has helped YP with engagement with the services. Worker has gone over and beyond his job role to ensure YP's needs are being met in order to meet the actions on referral order.

Worker has supported him with housing, education and SEMH needs. Worker has highly advocated for Jamel when communicating with other Agencies i.e Job Centre, Children Services, Speech and Language etc.

From Workers extensive support YPs has now been provided with suitable Supported Accommodation. YP still has a long way to go but is now in a position to start moving forward now that he has safe accommodation and financial support. I cannot thank him enough for all his extended efforts. – Parent

I just wanted to acknowledge SW's hard work and persistence with YP. Mother has had a lot of negative involvement with the Trust, and she said yesterday that working with SW has given her trust in social workers again. has guided these parents and encouraged them throughout the time she has been involved and this has supported

them to get to where they are today, caring for Lance full time. She is a supportive and empathetic social worker, whilst still being realistic and transparent with them about the changes that were needed to be evidenced. I wanted to congratulate her on a piece of work well done.- From Parent

"nice to have a social worker that sticks to us". "She is getting things in place". "She is also trying to work with X". "She is brilliant with the kids, she is really professional and came out to do some work with YP, playing board games, he was enjoying it. I get on well with SW, the first one, I didn't like her because she said she would be taking it further and I was worried the children might be taken away". "I was reluctant at first, but SW, restored my faith. SW sees all my children as individuals". "I was unwell at the last CORE group, so I couldn't attend; so, I would like to see what was written". "SW concentrates on the children which is good".- From Parent

"SW has been there, I felt able to disclose to her when it was all happening and she gave me the strength to do so. She calmed me down, she told me what would happen. She has said how proud she is of me. SW has treated me nicely, always tried to help and I'm very thankful for that. YP smiles when he knows that SW is coming, and YP is happy when SW visits; she likes to speak to SW and is comfortable speaking to her on her own. I am happy with SW speaking to the children on her own, I trust her. SW is a tough Social worker, she says exactly what she thinks and she is able to get me talking, she won't let things go. I think this is really important, and if I had someone like SW sooner, things might have been different".- Parent

I'd like to say I've never come across a human that puts so much heart and soul into her work, nothing is ever too much for Practitioner she went above and beyond for my family and I will be forever grateful for the load she took off my shoulders. This beautiful lady made me and my family feel more like a friend than a support worker. I really do hope she gets the praise she more than deserves as there's not a lot of workers that put their heart and soul into jobs anymore. She is one in a million thank you for assigning her to us our family has changed for the better there may still be a few more snags to fix but nothing that can't be solved now. - Parent

Foster Carers

Compliments received from our foster carers reflect the good relationships we have with them, and a joint commitment to improving the lives of our Children and Young People.

"When you first became the boys' social worker, I was nervous that the change in social workers would mean that the boys wouldn't be very open with you. But I was amazed at how quickly they became attached to you. You always give them good advice and give them positive encouragement. Especially since your own children are a similar age, you have a good understanding of the level of independence they should have, what games they should be playing etc which really makes them value and respect your opinion. You are always very positive and come with a big smile and we are all very happy when we see you. Whenever myself or the boys need advice, you are there for us and give us very realistic & sensible advice.

On the flip side, you have set good boundaries on what's acceptable and not acceptable.

You hold the boys accountable for things they have done wrong in a fair way - so they don't get upset but they understand your point.

You have done so much for the boys and I over the past year and we are all extremely grateful. I forget that it is only a year you have been with us. It's been a pleasure! – Foster Carer

Can I leave some positive feedback for SW who has been on Duty over the past few days that the girls have been missing. I cannot express enough Thanks to this man He was great and really helped and supported P and I during this traumatic time and was constantly in touch with us throughout. – Foster Carer

I just wanted to bring to your attention my gratitude and admiration for how you went above and beyond to recognize, in my opinion; what was in the best interest of YP. As you know my circumstances and this case was not an easy one. However, you came and assessed for yourself, me and the children on a regular basis until you were satisfied that being with me at this time was really in the best interest of the children. I have no doubt that other social workers would not have fought so hard for the children and it would have been a lot easier to separate or place the children somewhere else and not take into account, the children's wishes and how settled they have become over the 8 months of being in their current placement. You have remained professional and supportive and I would just like you to know, that on behalf of myself and the children; All your efforts and hard work have been appreciated. Thanks ! – Foster Carers

I am a Foster Carer, and together with my husband we have recently had a placement who has now successfully moved on. The IRO was SW and I just wanted to tell you how much we enjoyed having them as IRO. IRO was professional, very easy to talk to and willing to listen to all my moans, groans and doubts. I know that without IRO the process would have been far more difficult than it proved to be. They were straight talking, and I knew exactly where I was with them. It turned out we were similar in that respect and therefore, we worked well together, and I hope to work with them again in the future. I have confidence in IRO, and that really helped when the placement turned in a different direction, and they understood and respected my concerns, and for this I felt valued. As it turned out, we both changed our thoughts and opinions and were pleased with the outcome, and for this I have IRO to thank for helping me through this. – Foster Carer

Courts

Compliments from court are held in particularly high regard. They demonstrate our professionalism and evidence our good practice:

HHJ Lopez was extremely complimentary and appreciative to the social work team on this matter and the hard work and efforts that they are putting in for YP and his family, in what is a very difficult matter. – Judge

Judge took the time to express the Court's gratitude to the social work team for its efforts and wished there wasn't a need to change the social work team due to the high quality of work undertaken - Judge

Circuit Judge made specific reference to SW's section 7 report. She commented it

was a fully detailed report and extremely helpful. This was a verbal comment made in open court today,- Judge

Partner Agencies

We have received compliments from a wide range of our partners, including schools, police, health professionals and local authorities. Our compliments are evidencing good partnership working and how we are working collaboratively for our Children and Families.

"I worked with SW on the YPs cases.

Both cases were very challenging in their own individual ways, but SW managed them both. I simply wanted to say that SW is a true professional, she was outstanding in her conduct; she kept in contact with me at all times, which is key in a working relationship. I enjoyed working with her and I only wish there were more X-SW! SW is clearly an asset to your team and I wish her all the very best for her future" Cafcass

" I Just wanted to get in touch to ask if you would be able to pass on our thanks and feedback. We have just attended a meeting where X was the IRO. This was a CP case that has moved to Sandwell from X. This is the second case we have attended where he has been the chair. His manner, professionalism and use of questions to ensure the full facts of the case are discovered and disclosed is excellent. He will tease out the required information to make sure that all agencies have as much knowledge of previous and ongoing concerns as possible. All of this at the same time as being respectful to the parents and family involved.

We as a school felt that it was only right to ask if our thanks and credit was given to him. We really appreciate his support and work on these cases. Well done X." School

"I hope you don't mind me emailing you, but I really wanted to let you know about how amazing your member of staff, X, is. She has supported a number of our students and their families here at the Academy, and all our staff who have worked with X cannot speak highly enough of her.

X has been working with the family of a student I have been working closely with for the past three years. X has been incredible since the very first moment she started working with them – she gets in touch with me most days to liaise and keep me in the loop which I know must be incredibly time consuming! X has gone above and beyond in terms of the support she has offered and, I believe, has ultimately helped save the life one of our students who was being targeted by a local gang. X tirelessly hassled the police about the safety and welfare of this student, and this has ultimately resulted in several arrests, weapons confiscated and a safer environment for the public as a whole.

I just wanted to highlight how amazing X is – what an absolute hero!!" School

"I would like to thank you for taking the time to listen and hear my complaint.

Communication is a wonderful thing, the interaction between the Trust and families should be encouraged so that any fears, worries or concerns can be dealt with early on and not allowed to fester.

I am extremely pleased to hear that you will ensure the learning from my situation will be shared within the Trust to ensure the best support is provided to children and their

families in the future.” **Complainant**

I just wanted to let you know that when I was talking to Dr X, Consultant Pediatrician this afternoon to seek an update on YP, she wanted me to pass her gratitude and compliments to the sensitivity, care and support you showed last night to both the carer and the parents. She described your manner with them as excellent and supportive and she wished for me to pass this on to you.” **NHS**

“I just wanted to say thank you for the extremely positive ‘meeting’ X and I just had with yourself. It was an absolute delight, to speak to someone who has such a positive approach to the ongoing nightmare we have been living for over six years. Having had a one-hour chat with you, we feel, at last, we are dealing with someone who is moving in the right direction with regards to YP. We appreciate how you respected us as professionals and decent human beings, not as someone to be suspicious of; this has not happened before. Whatever the issues have been with YP, it is imperative the focus remains on our two dear Grandchildren. It is about time these children were allowed a childhood, to have a natural relationship with all their family. You have no idea how we have missed being a Nan and Grandad; this is our greatest wish.” **Family Members**

“I just wanted to thank you again for meeting with me this week to discuss Practice Education and your strategy within Sandwell Childrens. Practice Education is clearly a priority focus for you, and it was great to hear about your plans to increase your placement offer to students through a variety of routes. I was especially impressed with your commitment to promoting the Practice Educator role to all levels of social workers, planting the seed early on in their careers, and having monthly briefings. Your format for the quality assurance of PEs and ASYE assessors has been requested by other local authorities to help them establish their own QA methods, so you’ve set a great example there.” **Consultant Social Worker – Partners Agency**

“During a review held, for a family, the father is particularly hostile towards SWs, which was noted by X. In a professional manner, X challenged this and reminded the father of the need to be respectful. This was helpful in keeping the meeting child focussed and not allowing father’s views of the SW’s to infringe on purpose of the meeting. The Guardian in this matter was particularly impressed with Xs suggestion of holding a restorative meeting to try and improve the relationship between SW and parents and she put this forward as a suggestion in Court today.” **Guardian**

13 Service Improvement 2022/23

The following is a description of improvements made to the compliments and complaints function in 2022/23.

Improved how we share and recognise where we are getting it right

- Refresh and relaunch of face to face Compliment Café sessions with Senior leaders and colleagues throughout the year
- Continue to share compliments across SCT, through regular updates via our communications channels, training events, reflective sessions and

- reporting direct to service areas and localities
- Share with colleagues the intranet page dedicated to compliments and complaints
- Developed the Trusts Web page to make it easier to provide feedback

Continued to embed how we learn from compliments and complaints

- Continued to develop our approach to learning to include learning from compliments and informal feedback through Compliments and Complaints training
- Developed our communication channels for sharing the learning from compliments and complaints directly with teams on a regular basis
- Ensured that learning from compliments and complaints informs the core training offer with links with the QAS, and L&D teams
- Established links with the ASYE and Student Academy
- Contributed to QAS to support 'practice conversations' with practitioners to share learning

Improved how we engage with Children and Families

- Through sharing the themes of children's complaints and informal feedback with Children and Young People and the Childrens Society
- Improved the avenues for children and families to contact us should they wish to
- Improved our Web and internet pages to make it easy and informative for anyone wanting to leave a compliment or make a complaint

Improved the quality of complaints responses

- Regularly share learning from quality assurance activities to improve quality
- Delivering regular Compliments and Complaints training to managers, IROs and CP Chairs across SCT

Children's Complaints and Informal Feedback

- Improved how we complete closing the loop activity and report on findings
- Developed a set of themes for children's complaints and informal feedback to accurately capture issues

Strengthened Partnership Working

- We have strengthened our relationship with the Advocacy Service, with the Sandwell Advocacy Forum regularly reporting on a quarterly basis, and the service attending team meeting when invited

Established governance

- Robust reporting mechanisms for all compliments and complaints received is embedded ensuring EMT receive monthly updates through Customer Feedback information reporting, Trust Board has monthly oversight through the Quality Assurance Report, and learning is also shared with Senior Leadership Team, Team Managers and front line practitioners
- Learning from compliments and complaints continues to be shared within Trust Comms
- Weekly meetings continue to be held with the Director of Operations to ensure that any concerns are identified and escalated early on with strategic

oversight

- Complaints and compliments learning are also shared with the Voices of Sandwell forum

Improved performance of Stage 2 Complaints

- Continued close relationships with SMBC Complaints Manager to build on the improved timeliness of Stage 2 complaints
- Improved performance reporting for Stage 2 complaints

Improved compliance for responding to complaints

- Continue to strive to improve the quality and compliance of complaints responses to ensure they are within all within timescale.

14 Next Steps during 2022/23 and 2023/24

The following improvements are planned for the next two years across the function:

Improve how we share and recognise where we are getting it right

- Continue to develop and refresh our approach to celebrating compliments, including working with existing internal forums to share the learning from compliments
- Consult with Young People to influence how we share, learn and celebrate the Compliments that are received

Continue to embed how we learn from compliments and complaints

- Alongside the Quality Assurance Service, evidence how learning from compliments and complaints is directly contributing to practice improvement
- Work with the Quality Assurance Service to continue a programme of audits of complaints, from Children and Young People, Parents and Carers and Partners
- Establish links with neighboring Customer Experience Teams, to develop relationships to enhance information sharing to support good practice

Improve performance of Stage 2 Complaints

- Through working closely with SMBC strive to build upon the improved timeliness of Stage 2 complaints

Improve compliance for responding to complaints

- increased the percentage of complaints responded to within timescales during 2022/23 whilst focusing on the quality assurance of the response

Improve awareness of compliments and complaints with our Foster Carers

- Through improved communication we must ensure Foster Carers are aware of how they, or the children in their care, can make a compliment or complaints. There has been a direct link added on the Foster Carers web page to access this function.

Improve how we Track Actions from Complaints

- Improve our recording and reporting mechanism for tracking the actions and outcomes from complaints

Improve Performance Reporting

- Continue to develop performance data at team level to support managers and Heads of Service in managing complaints within their service
- Further develop quarterly reporting that includes deeper analysis of the themes, learning and practice improvement from compliments and complaints

Explore Mystery Customer Activity

- Explore the use of satisfaction surveys to determine how we are doing, and use the outcomes to inform future service improvement

Implement Electronic System

- Improve how we record and manage compliments and complaints

Increase the Number of Informal Feedback Received Through *Your Voice* Mechanism and the Trusts developed web site

- Communicate with practitioners to raise awareness about the different methods for capturing informal feedback
- Roll out promotional material across SCT with details of how to capture feedback
- Contact Young People to promote informal feedback
- Refresh the Web page to make it easier for Young People, Carers and Partners to feedback to us.