



THE LONDON BOROUGH OF  
**MERTON**

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# ANNUAL COMPLAINT REPORT

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Children's Social Care Complaints 2022-2023

DRAFT

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# 1 Introduction

The Children's Act 1989 requires councils which provide children's services to set up a three-stage complaint process for some complaints and produce an annual report to show findings.

The procedure covers complaints about services delivered to children and young people under Part 3 of the 1989 Act and specific functions under Parts 4 and 5 of the Act. This includes services to children in need or in care; about how the council applies to take a child into care; and about fostering, special guardianship, adoption services and services to children leaving care.

Under the procedure, complaints made by the child or young person, their parents, foster carers, special guardians, adopters, and others who may have an interest in their wellbeing may be considered.

Complaints about child protection matters or how the council assesses families and prepares reports for court in private proceedings are excluded from the statutory process. These and all other complaints about the council's Children, Lifelong Learning and Families Department are dealt with under the council's corporate complaints procedure and are reported on separately.

The guidance says every council must:

- Follow the process.
- Chose the appropriate procedure.
- Deal with complaints in a timely manner.
- Make it a seamless service.
- Look for a swift resolution.
- Keep an ongoing record of:
  - All complaints made under that statutory procedure.
  - The outcome of each complaint
  - Whether the statutory timescales were kept to

In addition, the annual report must be made available to any person on request, and include the following data sets:

- The number of complaints at each stage and any that were considered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).
- The customer groups that made the complaints.
- The types of complaints made.
- Details about advocacy services provided under these arrangements.
- Learning and service improvement, including changes to services that have been implemented and details of any that have not been implemented.
- A summary of statistical data about the age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and ethnicity of complainants.
- A review of the effectiveness of the complaint's procedure.

## 2 Definitions

**2.1 What is a complaint:** The guidance produced by the Department of Education and Skills (DofE), titled “Getting the Best from Complaints” defines a complaint as:

“An expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response.”

**The number of complaints received:** This is the total of the complaints submitted under the statutory complaint procedure. Not all complaints received result in a formal complaint investigation. Where we cannot formally investigate a complaint, the complainant will be advised, and signposted, where possible, to the correct procedure.

**The outcomes of the complaints:** There are generally four outcomes of a complaint, these are:

- Upheld – where we agree with the complainant.
- Partially upheld – where we agree with the complainant in part, but not fully.
- Not upheld – where we do not agree that there has been a service failure.
- Inconclusive – where we do not have evidence to conclude the complaint one way or another.

The ‘partially upheld’ and ‘inconclusive’ outcomes are currently being phased out in line with LGSCO advice.

**Whether the complaints were responded to in time:** Whether the statutory timescales were kept to. For complaints submitted under the statutory procedure they should be responded to within 10 working days.

Where the local authority cannot provide a complete response, it can implement a further 10 days’ extension. If necessary, the local authority may also suspend Stage 1 until an advocate has been appointed. The maximum amount of time that Stage 1 should take is 20 working days. After this the complainant can request consideration at Stage 2 if he so wishes. There is no time limit on requesting a stage 2 investigation.

**The number of complaints at each stage:** Children’s statutory complaints have a three-stage procedure. The stages are described below:

**Stage 1 – Local Resolution complaints are:**

- investigated by service team.
- responded to by service team manager/head of service.
- required to be answered within 10 working days, although an extension to 20 working days is allowed.
- escalated at the request of the complainant.
- have no time limit for escalation.

## **Stage 2 - Independent Investigation complaints are:**

- investigated by external/independent investigator and overseen by external independent person.
- responded to by Head of Service/Director
- required to be answered within 25 working days which may be extended to 65 working days.
- Are escalated at the request of the complainant.
- Subject to a 20-working day limit for escalation.

## **Stage 3 – Review Panel complaints are:**

- referred to an external/independent review panel.
- Required that a panel is arranged within 30 working days.
- Responded to by the chair of the review panel within 15 working days of the panel hearing.
- Escalated to the LGSCO at the complainant's request.
- There is a one-year limit for escalation to LGSCO.

**The number of complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman:** The Council will do its utmost to resolve complaints. However, if having received a complaint response at the final stage, the complainant remains unsatisfied, they may refer their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. There are some circumstances whereby the LGSCO will accept an early referral.

**Which customer groups made the complaints:** The following groups of people can make complaints:

- any child or young person (or a parent of his or someone who has parental responsibility for him) who is being looked after by the local authority or is not looked after by them but is in need.
- any local authority foster carer (including those caring for children placed through independent fostering agencies).
- children leaving care.
- Special Guardians.
- a child or young person (or parent of his) to whom a Special Guardian Order is in force.
- any person who has applied for an assessment under section 14F (3) or (4).
- any child or young person who may be adopted, their parents and guardians.
- persons wishing to adopt a child.
- any other person whom arrangements for the provision of adoption services extend.
- adopted persons, their parents, natural parents, and former guardians; and
- such other person as the local authority consider has sufficient interest in the child or young person's welfare to warrant his representations being considered by them.

**The type of complaint made:** The guidance allows for complaints to be made about many different aspects relating to statutory social services functions, and an expansive list is included on pages 5-8 of “Getting the best from Complaints – Social Care Complaints and Representations for Children, Young People and others”. Most complaints fall into the following categories:

- an unwelcome of disputed decision.
- concern about the quality or appropriateness of a service.
- delay in decision making or provision of services.
- delivery or non-delivery of services including complaints procedures.
- quantity, frequency, change or cost of a service.
- attitude or behaviour of staff.
- application of eligibility and assessment criteria.
- the impact on a child or young person of the application of a local authority policy.
- assessment, care management and review.

**Advocacy services provided:** The advocacy service, Jigsaw 4 U, is commissioned by London Borough of Merton to support young people in making representations. Other advocacy services are also available, and these are published on the council’s website with contact details. [Family Services Directory | Merton directories](#)

**Learning and Service Improvement:** How issues identified through the complaints process have been or will be addressed in response to the findings.

**A summary of the statistics about complainants:** to include age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and ethnicity of complainants.

**A review of the effectiveness of the complaint procedure**

This report is written to comply with The Children Act 1989, the expectations of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Council’s own Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy.

### **3 Putting the data in to context.**

To put the data included in this report into context it is helpful to know that in 2022 - 2023:

**2,251** Children In Need (CIN) assessments were completed.

**183** children were in care/or had periods of time in care as defined by the Department of Education's statutory reporting criteria.

**366** Looked After Children reviews were completed.

**297** Child Protection cases.

### **4 Key figures**

#### **Stage 1 – Local Resolution**

25 complaints were submitted under the statutory procedure.

11 (48%) of complaints were upheld or partially upheld

3 (13%) of stage 1 statutory complaints were responded to within the statutory target deadline of 10 working days.

14 (61%) of stage 1 statutory complaints were responded to within the extended deadline of 20 working days.

#### **Stage 2 – Independent Investigation**

12 escalation requests were submitted.

7 cases proceeded to stage 2 investigation.

4 cases were upheld or partially upheld.

3 cases were not upheld.

2 cases withdrawn and addressed through Alternative Dispute Resolution

3 cases transferred to 2023-2024

#### **Stage 3 – Review Panel**

4 escalation requests were submitted.

3 cases proceeded to Panel.

3 cases were upheld or partially upheld.

1 case was withdrawn from the process with agreement from LGSCO due to lack of cooperation from the complainant.

#### **Considered by Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman**

10 cases were referred to LGSCO.

3 cases proceeded to investigation.

1 case upheld.

**41 Compliments were received about Children's Social Care services.**

## 5 The number of complaints made.

There has been an increase in the number of complaints through the Children's Statutory complaints procedure. In 2022 – 2023, 23 cases were investigated at stage 1, compared with 18 the previous year. Despite there being an increase, the numbers of complaints remain low. It is expected that 1-2% of service users will make a complaint for any given service. This demonstrates that the complaints' function is accessible, people trust the complaint process and know how to make a complaint.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) was used to address two cases where the complainant's desired outcomes could not be reached through the complaints process. That is, it was unlikely that a service failure would have been established and the complaint would not have upheld. This enabled the complainant's voices to be heard by senior managers without going through an escalated complaint procedure.

**Table 1: Number of CSC complaints at all stages by year and team.**

Year	2018/2019			2019/2020			2020/2021			2021/2022			2022/2023		
	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Access to resources & CWD	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	4	2	0
MASH & Child Protection	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	3	1
Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	9	1	0	7	0	0	1	0	0	4	1	0	8	1	1
Safeguarding and Care Planning	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	9	1	0
Other	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	1
Split	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Sub-totals	14	1	0	11	1	0	2	1	0	18	3	0	23	8	3
<b>Case totals</b>	<b>15</b>			<b>12</b>			<b>3</b>			<b>21</b>			<b>34</b>		

\*only complaints completing stage are included, withdrawn complaints have not been included.



## 6 Complaint Outcomes at all stages

In 2022 – 2023, just over 50% of the 23 of the complaints responded to at stage 1 were either upheld or partially upheld. The Ombudsman discourages the use of the “partially upheld” outcome – so these figures have been recorded as one.

It is usual, but not a requirement that stage 2 complaints follow on from stage 1. However, it should be remembered that there is no time limit to requests a stage 2 investigation, and these cannot be refused for eligible complaints/complainants. Sometimes it is more appropriate for a complaint to be independently investigated.

Eight complaints were investigated at stage 2. Most escalated from stage 1 complaints submitted in 2022 – 2023, but one case was from the previous year. One case entered the process at stage 2, as it had previously been responded to by a senior member of staff as a member enquiry and therefore an independent investigation was felt to be the most appropriate channel.

Three cases progressed to stage 3 panel, and all upheld at stage 3. The cases held upheld previously in the complaints process, but the complainant and council had not agreed on remedies. The complainants of two out of the three cases took there complaints to Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman after completing the statutory complaint process.

**Table 2: Complaint outcomes by service team and stage.**

Stage Team	Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 3	
	No of cases	Upheld or partially upheld	No of cases	Upheld or partially upheld	No of cases	Upheld or partially upheld
Access to resources & CWD	4	1	1	0	0	N/A
MASH & Child Protection	1	1	3	1	1	1
Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	8	5	1	1	1	1
Safeguarding and Care Planning	9	5	1	1	0	N/A
Other	0	N/A	2	1	1	1
Split	1	0	0	N/A	0	N/A
Totals	23	12	8	4	3	3

## 7 Keeping to statutory timescales

The children's statutory complaints procedure is the most complex of all the complaints procedures. By the nature of the complaints, they are also complex in nature.

The guidance advises that at stage 1, complaints should be answered within 10 working days, but this time can be extended for complex cases to 20 working days.

There has been a slight improvement in the numbers of cases responded to in time, with 57% of stage one complaints being responded to within 20 days against 47% last year.

At stage 2, no complaints have been completed within the deadline, this included the extended deadline of 65 working days.

Finding Independent Investigating Officers proved problematic in the first half of the year. In November 2022, the Complaints Manager engaged with RRC, a company specialising in providing guidance to local Authorities in dealing with children's statutory complaints, and who source independent persons and independent investigating officers.

This has resolved the issue of finding independent investigating officers and independent persons. There have been no further delays since we started working with RRC.

Feedback from RRC is that staff are often slow to respond to information requests and are unsure about passing information over. Where staff have left the service, it has been difficult to locate contact details, and this has delayed interviews on several occasions.

Complaints outcomes have been delayed at the adjudication stage.

The guidance states that the adjudicating officer should be a senior manager, reporting to the Director responsible for Children's Services. Only a few people are suitably positioned to act as adjudicating officer. This creates a 'bottleneck'.

At stage 3, all complaints were completed within the deadlines.

**Table 3: Timeliness of responding to complaints.**

Stage Team	Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 3	
	No of cases	Responded to in time (20 days)	No of cases	Responded to in time	No of cases	Responded to in time
Access to resources & CWD	4	3 (75%)	1	0	0	N/A
MASH & Child Protection	1	0 (0%)	3	0	1	1
Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	8	3 (38%)	1	0	1	1
Safeguarding and Care Planning	9	6 (67%)	1	0	0	N/A
Other	0	N/A	2	0	1	1
Split	1	1 (100%)	0	N/A	0	N/A
Totals	23	13 (57%)	8	0	3	3

## 8 Referrals to Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

Ten cases were referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, with only three being taken forwards to full investigation, the others being closed after initial enquiries or being referred back to the council for local resolution. Of the three cases that were investigated, just 1 upheld.

The case began in April 2021, and was upheld because the council failed to complete stage 2 of the statutory complaints procedures within the timescales agreed in a previous ombudsman investigation.

At that time the Council was facing difficulties in both finding independent investigating officers to investigate the case, and there was a lack of confidence within the Council to adjudicate on statutory complaints.

The upheld complaint has reference number 20 000 100 and is available to view on the LGSCO website and can be viewed from the following link [22 000 100 - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#).

Since the LGSCO findings were published, statutory complaint specialists RRC have been engaged to deal with stage 2 investigations and stage 3 panels.

**Table 4: Referrals to LGSCO by year and outcome**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>2018/2019</b>	<b>2019/2020</b>	<b>2020/2021</b>	<b>2021/2022</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>
<b>Out of jurisdiction</b>		1		2	0
<b>Closed after initial enquiries</b>		1		6	4
<b>Referred back for local resolution</b>		5		3	3
<b>Not upheld</b>		1		0	2
<b>Upheld</b>		2		5	1
<b>Postponed due to covid</b>		4		0	0
<b>Total cases</b>	8	14		16	10

## **9 Compliance with LGSCO recommendations**

Once a service failure is established, it is expected that organisations will learn from their mistakes and put the complainant back into the position they would have been in had the failure not occurred.

Recommended actions consist of one or more of the following:

- An apology
- Conciliation and mediation
- A reassessment of the children or young person's needs
- Practical action specific to the particular complainant
- A review of practice
- Financial redress

It often takes several months or longer for complaints to progress to the Ombudsman. During 2022 – 2023, LGSCO continued to deal with the backlog of complaints from the pandemic. Therefore, some of the compliance cases were from complaints submitted from the previous year.

In dealing with the complaint that led to case 21 010 242 regarding delays to stage 2 process. There were difficulties firstly finding an independent investigation officer and independent person to look at the case, and delays were compounded when there were delays in finding a suitable person to adjudicate on the case within the council amid staff changes. This resulted in the compliance being recorded as “not complete and not satisfied”, and the additional case be opened 22 000 100. The stage 2 complaint was completed, albeit out of time.

**Table 5: Compliance with LGSCO recommendations**

Case number	Decided	Remedy	Remedy target date	Remedy achieved date	Satisfaction
20010409	12/01/2022	Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble Provide services to person affected	29/07/2022	26/06/2022	Complete and satisfied
21010242	20/12/2021	Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble New appeal/review or reconsidered decision	18/03/2022	03/04/2022	Not complete and not satisfied
22000100	13/04/2022	Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble	16/05/2022	25/05/2022	Completed late

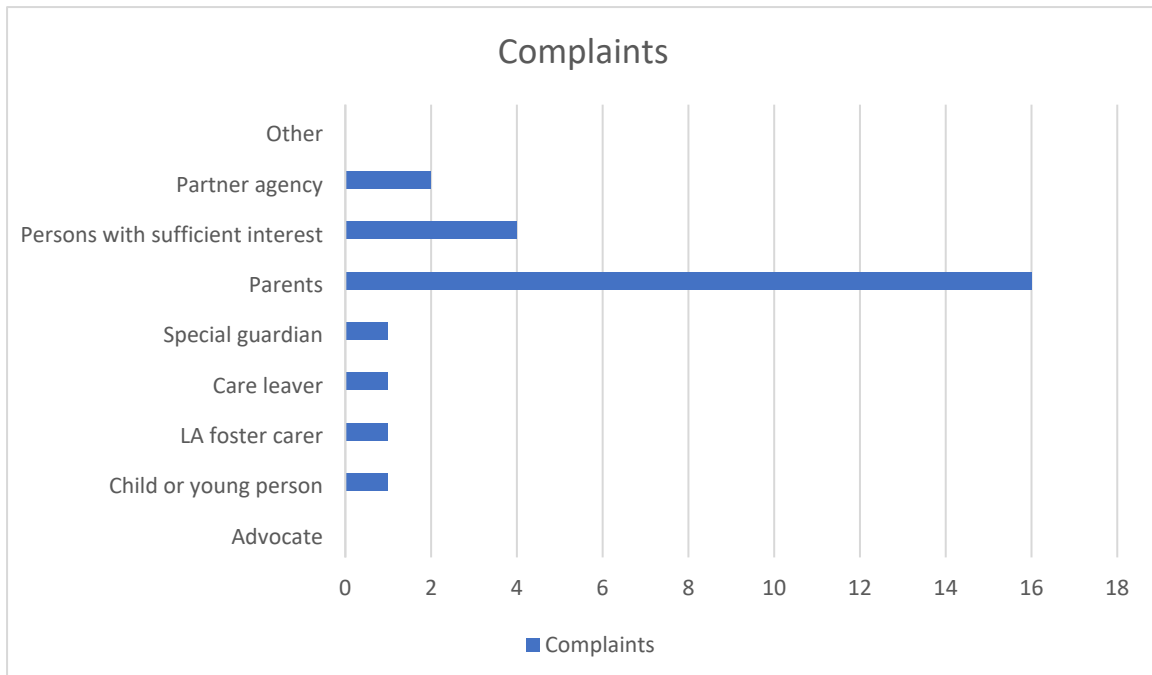
## 10 Complaints by relationship to the child or young person

The vast majority of complaints are submitted by parents. There are few representations made by any other group. This could be an accurate representation, however, it could also indicate that other groups, including the children and young people the statutory complaints process was designed for are not sure how to make a complaint.

The Complaints Team have, via the Council's Participation and Engagement Manager, contacted the Youth Council for input about how best to ensure children and young people know how to complain.

A new case management system has been under development throughout 2022 – 2023 and will include a webform.

**Graph 1: Shows the distribution of as submitted by relationship to the child or young person**



## **11 Complaints breakdown by types of complaints.**

Under the children’s statutory complaints channel, the guidance stipulates what may be complained about and what is excluded from the process.

Table 5 attempts to categorise the complaints received into subject areas as listed in the guidance document “getting the Best from Complaints”.

Complaints regarding children’s services tend to be complex, and each complaint may cover several issues.

**Table 6: shows complaint by type with number of cases upheld or not upheld.**

Reason for complaint	Number of cases	Number of cases upheld or partially upheld	Number of cases not upheld
Application of eligibility and assessment criteria	1	1	0
Assessment, care management and review	2	1	1
Attitude or behaviour of staff	9	4	5
Delay in decision making or provision of services	2	2	0
Delivery or non-delivery of services	1	0	1
Impact on a child or young person of a policy	0	N/A	N/A
Quality or appropriateness of a service	5	3	2
Quantity, frequency, change or cost of a service	1	0	1
Unwelcome or disputed decision	3	1	2
Other	0	N/A	N/A
Total	24	12	12

## 12 Details about advocacy services provided under these arrangements.

The council commissions the advocacy service Jigsaw 4 U to support children and young people through a number of processes and interactions with the council. No complaints were submitted via the advocacy service in 2022 – 2023.

## 13 Learning and service improvements.

### Assessment, care management and review

- The assessment service to make every effort to ensure that fathers who have parental responsibility for their children, are made aware of referrals and are included in the assessment process from the beginning.
- All professional involved with families should be invited to CIN meetings.
- Minutes of CIN meetings must be accurately recorded and shared with all of the network

### Communication

- Social workers to advise parents and carers of annual leave in advance.
- Where possible and appropriate, home visits should be pre-planned

### Delay in decision making or provision of services

- Complaints must be addressed within the statutory timescales

### Delivery or non-delivery of services including complaints procedures

- Feedback to be obtained on all ASF funded applications to ensure that therapy has been completed satisfactorily and within time the scale agreed.

- Staff to be trained to correctly assign complaints to statutory complaints procedure.

#### **Foster Care**

- Guidance for kinship foster carers specifically tailored to their situation.

#### **Quality or appropriateness of a service**

- Priority should be given to young people visiting the Council offices and they are dealt with in person whenever possible.
- The council must proactively liaise with other councils where responsibility/duty is uncertain.

#### **Record keeping**

- That agreements made with parents regarding the attendance of their child to care facilities need to be put in writing and signed by all parties.
- Centres providing care have a clear recording system to record incidents of abuse towards staff.
- Staff reminded that all discussions should be added to the case file records.
- Any differences of opinion between staff and parents is to be noted on case files, with both opinions clearly recorded.

#### **Supervision of staff**

- On call management support for co-ordinators so there is appropriate senior management oversight in real time.

## **14 Compliments.**

Spontaneous feedback from the Borough's residents includes compliments as well as complaints. The compliments logged have been received to the [compliments@merton.gov.uk](mailto:compliments@merton.gov.uk) mailbox and have not formed part of a survey. They have been sent in without any prompt to do so.

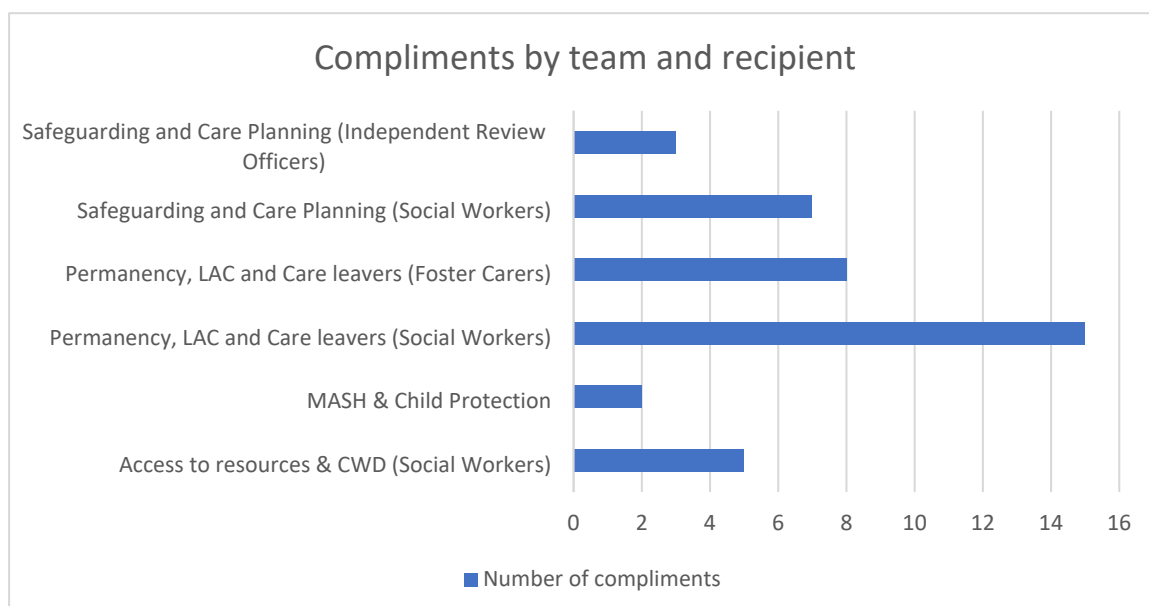
The compliments are listed in the appendices and detail examples of good practice and the positive difference social workers make to those families they work with.

The Social Care team received 41 compliments during the year 2022-2023, with Children, lifelong learning and families receiving 47 compliments in total.

The compliments are listed in the appendices and detail examples of good practice as noted by other professionals, and the positive difference social workers make to those families they work with.



**Graph 2: Compliments by team/recipient**



## **14 Summary of statistical data about the age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and ethnicity of complainants.**

With such a small pool of complaints (23 cases), it is difficult to achieve useful statistical outcomes.

The Council is obliged to record statistics regarding for age, gender, disability, sexual orientation and ethnicity of complainants. In viewing the figures, it is important to note that and under these parameters:

0 records where complainants have stated they have a disability.

17% of complainants have not stated their age.

43% of complainants have not stated their ethnicity.

74% of complainants have not stated their sexual orientation – the others (6) have all answered heterosexual.

**18** complaints were submitted by females.

4 complaints were submitted by males.

1 person did not specify their gender.

Complaints can be made:

- Verbally to any member of council staff
- In writing to any member of council staff
- From June 2023, via the Council's website

Social care teams are encouraged to make sure that they, and their service users are aware of complaints channels open to service users, and that all formal

complaints or representations should be forwarded to [childrensservicescomplaints@merton.gov.uk](mailto:childrensservicescomplaints@merton.gov.uk).

**Table 7: Complaint submissions by age of complainant and team**

Team	Information Not available	Age					
		Under 18	19 - 25	26 - 35	36 - 50	50 - 65	Over 65
Access to resources & CWD	0	0	0	2	1	1	0
MASH & Child Protection	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	1	1	1	0	1	3	1
Safeguarding and Care Planning	3	0	1	1	4	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Split	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	4	1	2	3	7	4	2

**Table 8: Complaints received by ethnicity of complainant.**

	Complaints Received In 2022 - 2023	% of complaints in 2022/2023	Distribution of service users by % ethnicity	Merton % of general population	London % of general population	England % of general population
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	2	8.7		18.6	20.7	9.6
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	0	0		10.6	13.5	4.2
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	4	17.4		5.9	5.7	3
White	7	30.4		60.2	53.8	81
Other ethnic group	0	0		4.6	6.3	2.2
Not stated	10	43.5				
Total	23	100		100	100	100

Reference date from data.merton.gov.uk Source: ONS, Census 2021

## **15 A review of the effectiveness of the complaint's procedure.**

As a statutory complaint process, the children's social care complaints is largely laid down in guidance. However, the Complaints team is keen to continually improve its complaint handling practice.

In the 2021-2022, five high level recommendations were made to improve the effectiveness of the complaint procedures across all complaint streams.

They were:

1. A revision of the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy should be carried out.
2. Improve access to the complaints service.
3. Introduce a case management system.
4. Provide Additional staff resource for the Complaints Team
5. Support culture change in attitudes to complaints

Specifically, regarding the children's statutory complaint process, timekeeping and ensuring the process is accessible to those who may require it, were identified as key areas for improvements.

- 1. A revision of the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy should be carried out.**

This is not applicable to the children's statutory complaint process, as this is a statutory framework. However, the performance indicators show that statutory timelines are not being adhered to. Although this may be attributable to conflicting work pressures and lack of available resource - it is clear that staff need to develop confidence in using the complaints procedure. With that in mind, the Complaints Manager has sought specialist training to be delivered in Autumn 2023.

- 2. Improve access to the complaints service.**

Work has begun on improving access to the complaints service. A new webform has been developed and will become available for use on the Council's website in Spring 2023. The form ensures that information required is captured at first contact. The form will be available across a range of electronic devices such as mobiles, tablets

In Autumn 2023, it is expected that the Complaints Team telephone line will open for longer and will have an improved call data and voicemail facility.

Moving forwards, the Complaints Team will work with social care teams, communications team to promote the complaint service through website and other publications.

- 3. Introduce a case management system.**

During 2022 – 2023 the Complaints Team has carried out a huge amount of work to develop a case management system for complaints. The Microsoft Dynamics system will work with an app to allow service teams to easily see and respond to complaints. The system will allow service managers to review reports and will send out

automated reminders. It is hoped that along with training, this will prevent complaints from going overtime, and in cases where a complaint cannot be responded to, an extension request would need to be requested from a manager which will also prompt an update to be sent to the complainant.

#### **4. Additional staff resource for the Complaints Team**

For much of the year 2022- 2023, the Complaints Team has been under-resourced. There was difficulty recruiting following the unexpected departure of a member of staff from the team and another member of staff who went on maternity leave. The issue was compounded by additional work to develop the case management system. Children's Statutory Complaint process was prioritised, but at times it was necessary to prioritise other complaints based on impact to the complainant.

#### **5. Support culture change in attitudes to complaints**

The Complaints Team continues to work closely with other teams within the council. As part of the development of the case management system most service teams have been invited to give their requirements for the new system and review procedures to make the procedure more efficient.

The system has been developed to include customer feedback to aid service development. The system also includes recording of lessons learned from complaints and tracking of remedial actions. The system should support staff in improvement of service delivery.

## **16 Conclusion**

Whilst there have been complaints against the service, there has also been a lot of positive feedback. There have been almost double the number of compliments to complaints – reflective of excellent practice.

Despite the small number of complaints submitted at stage 1, a relatively high proportion did escalate to stage 2. Escalations can largely be avoided by providing high quality, robust stage 1 responses. Those responding to complaints are encouraged to hold face to face meetings, video calls or telephone calls with the complainant to properly understand the complaint before responding. This is one of the most effective ways to prevent escalation.

## Appendix 1 – Compliments by team

	Team	Compliment
CSFC22003	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	"I feel very supported by my SSW I feel very lucky to have her by myside, I can address everything with her."
CSFC22004	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	"We can call her at any time, and she will direct us. She really helps us and motivates us."
CSFC22005	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers (Foster carers)	"██████████ is my backbone, she is always there to support me and guide me."
CSFC22006	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	"Her support is second to none, ██████████ is the more amazing SSW you can ever have"
CSFC22007	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers (Foster carers)	"I'm feeling good it is much better than the previous placement", "I just want to say thank you for everyone. My feeling is now good"
CSFC22008	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers (Foster carers)	" I am very happy where I am at. I respect her like my mother and she also respects me. I am very happy. She supports me the most...I feel safe at this home...She is the best in the world"
CSFC22009	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers (Foster Carers)	"they are the best carers I ever had" " I feel perfect I love my carers so much and they help me do so well in life and I love my fish" "My room is sick. They are so nice to me, and they are so good with what decision are made ..."
CSFC22010	Safeguarding and Care Planning	Thanks to you all at the Youth services for your support to ██████████ and to our family generally. You have made it possible for ██████████ to come through this Order stronger in himself, with an ability to be able to recognise and avoid situations that may have the potential of negative outcome for him, or the general society. I am hopeful that with these tools, ██████████ is in a better place to make correct decisions going forward.
CSF22011	Safeguarding and Care Planning (Independent Review Officer)	I just wanted to write my thanks you have been such a great service. I have been so impressed with your efficiently and kindness and support you have shown ██████████ and are putting in place. ██████████ it was a very helpful meeting thank you so much for coming to it.
CSFC22012	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers (Foster Carers)	"I am happy with everything, ██████████ has guided me very well to be independent, I am proud of my choices"
CSFC22013	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers (Foster Carers)	██████████'s birth family feedback received by the IRO's report. This was gathered on 07/06/22. Their feedback is positive. They said 'anyone who has ██████████ as a foster carer is lucky'.

CSFC22014	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers (Foster Carers)	"I love them, and I learnt a lot from them. I learnt the language and how to live at home"
CSFC22015	Safeguarding and Care Planning (Independent Review Officer)	Annual Household review 07/10/22 feedback on ██████████, IRO "The IRO is brilliant, she is really good. ██████████ is working on the information, she has seen her (the child) on a Saturday, and listening to her feelings"
CSFC22016	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	"My social worker has been invaluable to me this past year and saw me through some problematic issues. ██████████ always replies to me.... Very professional and understanding"
CSFC22017	Safeguarding and Care Planning (Independent Review Officer)	Thank you so much for your contribution to the review of ██████████ as per the requirements of the national panel. I was so struck by how well you knew both children, their lived experiences and your use of language that was thoughtful and relational. Thank you so much for your oversight and advocating for both YP.
CSFC22018	Safeguarding and Care Planning	I just wanted to let you know how fantastic ██████████ is. Since she has taken over as the social worker for ██████████ has done so much work regarding ██████████ and her family in the short time she has been working with them. I have had concerns for ██████████ for a long time now and felt she should have been on a CP plan a long time ago but my concerns, and those of others seemed not to be listened to. ██████████ pushed for an ICPC and ██████████ is now on a CP Plan. ██████████ seems to be hard working, robust is a credit to your team.
CSFC22019	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	I hope you are well. I would just like to provide some feedback regarding a referral received from your SW ██████████ today for the above-named child. The team gave great feedback about the way it was written, it really captured the child and her knowledge of him. It outlined our concerns but written in in such a way that you see the child before you see the behaviour.
CSFC22020	Permanency, LAC and Care Leavers	██████████, you have engaged so beautifully with this family, navigating some really difficult behaviours, immense trauma and some really painful situations with this family. I have always been so struck by how compassionate you are in your language, full of empathy and thoughtful practice- even when making difficult decisions. Thank you so much for being you ██████████ and for all the heart you bring to our work. Thank you ██████████ too as I know how much you care and work so hard alongside everyone in your team to be the best we can be for our children.
CSFC22021	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	The above case is complex, with deep rooted difficulties that will take the family time to work through. However, from discussions with you, reading the file, conference report and attending conference today it is evident that

		<p>your approach with the family is starting to demonstrate small, but positive changes.</p> <p>Your conference report was detailed and well written, and your presentation in conference today was clear and direct, which is what the family respect and are responding to.</p>
CSFC22022	Safeguarding and Care Planning	<p>I just wanted to highlight the kind, empathetic and, yes, loving, social work [REDACTED] completed today settling [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] into [REDACTED] today. The social work [REDACTED] completed allowed different narratives to emerge about [REDACTED]'s parents as they embark on the challenging experience of a family assessment centre. [REDACTED] went from feeling overwhelmed to saying clearly "I can do this". I think it's really important for [REDACTED]'s life story to know that her mum felt hopeful for them on their first day out in the world.</p>
CSFC22023	Safeguarding and Care Planning	<p>I was impressed with the social worker's evidence. It is clear to me she has maintained a focus throughout her professional involvement on [REDACTED]'s welfare and has tried hard to explore with [REDACTED] the idea of spending time with her mother.</p>
CSFC22024	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	<p>This is such a wonderful piece of story board with your excellent work. You have made such a big difference for this boy with your relational work. Thank you for persevering and for your creative work that has made such a brilliant difference for this young boy. You inspire me!</p>
CSFC22025	Access to resources & CWD (Social Worker in Schools)	<p>Both auditors found that cases audited from the Social Worker in Schools Team were consistently of good quality. There was evidence of contextual safeguarding plans being integrated into CIN plans. Case summaries, chronologies and genogram were regularly updated and on file.</p> <p>The team have set a benchmark of good practice.</p>
CSFC22026	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	<p>I just wanted to share some photos of the amazing affirmation card keyrings that [REDACTED] has made for the [REDACTED] children. These are intended to give the children a little 'boost' when they need it at school or at home to remind them how wonderful they are. The children have chosen some of the affirmations themselves and their big brother [REDACTED] helped choose some for them as well.</p>
CSFC22027	Safeguarding and Care Planning	<p>I would like to share some of my thoughts and positive feedback regarding [REDACTED]'s work and approach with the family. [REDACTED] has worked well to build and maintain a positive supportive relationship with Mum, Gran and [REDACTED] throughout being allocated this very complex case and with [REDACTED] being a relatively newly qualified social worker this needs to be acknowledged and congratulated. This case has been subject of a CPP for over one year, there is a complex history and working relationships with the family have not always been easy.</p>

		<p>This has been a rather a challenging case, for which I doubt ██████ would have had previous experience of in her current role. ██████ has worked well to progress the plan and has communicated effectively with all involved. I have found ██████ responsive and open when working with her and she readily takes on any advice and guidance I've had to offer in the capacity of my role. Well done ██████!</p>
CSFC22028	Access to resources & CWD (Social Worker in Schools)	<p>You clearly built a wonderful relationship with this young person and ██████ has done so well. You clearly worked well with her for the past year and what a difference you have made! I love how you have asked what her grandparents make of it. So nice to hold her and her family and those relationships that mean so much to her. Well done. I am so chuffed you are here and we are very lucky in Merton!</p>
CSFC22029	Access to resources & CWD (Social Worker in Schools)	<p>Since 1 and half years our family was under Social Worker, and ██████ was Social Worker, I would like to say she was brilliant. Everything she handled in professionally, friendly way. We never thought one Social Worker working with our family. Whenever we needed help or advice she was there, she worked as a bridge to reconnect with other family members. All my family used to like her, she was a good listener, good adviser.</p>
CSFC22030	Safeguarding and care planning	<p>Apologies for the delay in sending this email, but I just wanted to let you all know, that when we were in court for ██████, the judge Recorder ██████, was very complimentary of the level of work the local authority (you all) had done with ██████. She commented that it was very clear that the local authority had gone to great lengths and done everything they could to prevent ██████ from coming into care.</p> <p>I just thought you'd like to know that your efforts have not gone unnoticed as it is not often we get to hear that in this line of work.</p>
CSFC22034	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers (Foster carers)	<p>I wanted to share some lovely feedback I had from a family member about ██████ today in ██████'s final Child in Care Review. His Nan ██████ attended the review and on behalf of the family she shared her thanks and gratitude to ██████ for looking after ██████ so well. She was also grateful of the positive communication they have had and how ██████ has kept her up to date.</p> <p>██████ has been living with ██████ and ██████ for over 4 years. I have been ██████'s IRO for about 18 months and have always found visits to their home a positive experience and have been made to feel very welcome.</p>
CSFC22035	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	<p>I must let you know that you coordinated the conference very well by starting on time, balancing making the client and husband feel relaxed with getting your professional views and recommendations well understood.</p>



		<p>As a Black Female professional, I felt that you also demonstrated mutual respect and highlighted the strengths of the client using a Whole Family Approach.</p> <p>It was a pleasure working with you.</p>
CSFC22037	MASH & Child Protection	<p>I wanted to acknowledge ██████'s input, commitment and positive impact with this family leading up to and during conference last Friday. This is a complex and sensitive family situation and ██████ showed a good understanding of the issues. She demonstrated a Think Family approach and ensured that ██████, her adult son and her 17-year-old were all able to attend conference in person by picking them up and bringing them into the Civic Centre. She had also made clear efforts to contact the father and arrange split meeting, unfortunately he could not be reached.</p> <p>██████ showed cultural sensitivity and understanding and had clearly built a good relationship with the family. The 17-year-old commented positively during the conference about the support that they had received from ██████.</p> <p>██████'s report for conference and plan was clearly written and to a good standard. She had considered all family members when planning and thinking about safety. ██████ had ensured that ██████ understood the content of the report by using an interpreter to summarise the report ahead of the conference.</p> <p>██████'s approach and communication was professional, she was able to share her worries with the family and the network sensitively and constructively.</p> <p>This is a really good piece of social work</p>
CSFC22038	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	<p>We held a CIC Review for ██████ in December, during the meeting ██████ (maternal grandmother) shared how brilliant staff from ██████ have been. The Children's Court Guardian also commented on how well ██████ seemed to have worked with the staff there.</p>
CSFC22039	MASH & Child Protection	<p>Thank you so much for all your help. You helped me so much with so many strategies during a time that I needed support. Your practice wisdom has helped my practice to develop.</p> <p>I wish you the very best and every blessing as you continue with your amazing work.</p>
CSFC22040	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	<p>"██████ has been amazing and she explains things very patiently. "</p>
CSFC22041	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	<p>"My social worker has been invaluable to me this past year and saw me through some problematic issues. ██████ always replies to me.... Very professional and understanding"</p>

CSFC22042	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	The IRO is brilliant, she is really good. Jay is working on the information, she has seen her (the child) on a Saturday, and listening to her feelings”
CSFC22043	Permanency, LAC and Care leavers	“It is [sic.] been great to work with [REDACTED] she is very professional and she has been supporting me in my emotional and health needs.”
CSFC22045	Safeguarding and care planning	I wanted to give you a quick feedback from yesterday’s RCPC for [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] and the family seem a fantastic match. All 3 of them were full of praise for her, and in the relative short time that she is their social worker she has managed to build meaningful and trusting relationships with them together and individually.
CSFC22047	Access to resources & CWD	<p>I wanted to add that during the conference [REDACTED] from the school praised [REDACTED] for her work and how well she has liaised with the professional network, particularly around arranging family time with [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] commented on the “turn around” she has seen in [REDACTED]’s behaviour and progress he is making. [REDACTED] is a lot more settled, he is happier coming into school in the mornings and going home. I can see that [REDACTED] has worked really hard to build trust with [REDACTED] and to build a relationship with him and his father. The work that both [REDACTED] had [REDACTED] are doing has helped to significantly improve the family relationships and homelife.</p> <p>This is a very complex and tragic case, and I am aware that [REDACTED] is still relatively newly qualified, so I feel that it is particularly important to share positive feedback around social work practice. This is a really good piece of social work, well done [REDACTED].</p>