

# SOCIAL SERVICES COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND REPRESENTATIONS ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

SOCIAL SERVICES FEEDBACK TEAM



## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 It is a statutory requirement for local authorities to have in place a representations and complaints procedure for social services under the *Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014* and the associated guidance document, *A Guide to Handling Complaints and Representations by Local Authority Social Services*.
- 1.2 Each local authority in Wales is required to produce an annual report concerning the operation of its representations and complaints procedure.
- 1.3 This annual report provides information about the operation of the Social Service's Representation and Complaints Procedure between the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2023 and the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2024. The report contains information about the number and type of complaints received and provides details of the activities undertaken during this period to develop the service.

## 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Our approach is based on “*getting it right*” first time and if not, then “*putting it right*” as soon as possible.
- 2.2 An effective complaint handling system is one that provides confidence that complaints are dealt with effectively through the following three steps:
  1. Arrangements for enabling people to make complaints are customer-focussed, visible, accessible, and valued, and supported by management.
  2. Complaints are responded to promptly, handled objectively, fairly, and confidentially. Remedies are provided where complaints are upheld and there is a system for review.
  3. There are clear accountabilities for complaint handling and complaints are used to stimulate and mandate (as appropriate) organisational improvements.
- 2.3 The Council's Social Services Complaints Procedure seeks to allow service users, or those eligible to speak on their behalf, to voice their concerns in relation to the exercise of Social Service functions.
- 2.4 The Social Services Feedback Team are committed to ensuring that concerns raised are listened to and resolved as quickly and efficiently as possible. Lessons learned from this process are fed back to relevant teams and used, wherever possible, to improve future service delivery.
- 2.5 Similarly, Social Services adopts a positive attitude towards complaints and views them as valuable feedback, to assist in the development and improvement of services.
- 2.6 The aim is to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity (sometimes without the need for lengthy and costly investigations) and teams in both Services are encouraged to be proactive in achieving this goal.
- 2.7 Where someone has been deemed ineligible to utilise the Social Services Complaints Procedure, in accordance with the guidance, the Feedback Team will endeavour to aid them informally in order to provide the best possible service to the complainant. The Feedback Team keep account of these types of contact, and these are referred to throughout this report as “comments”.

- 2.8 Where a complaint relates to a young person, a care leaver, or an adult who requires support to engage in the complaints process, the local authority has a duty to provide information about advocacy services and to offer help in obtaining an advocate to support them through the complaints process.
- 2.9 Effective engagement with advocacy services enables more individuals and groups to make use of the complaints process at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.10 Experience indicates that complainants who opt to use the services of an advocate, tend to have more of an understanding of their circumstances, their rights, expectations, and the Authority's responsibilities. Additionally, in most cases individuals can reconcile their feelings about the situation through an advocate and resolution is more speedily achieved, often without pursuing a formal complaint.

### 3. SOCIAL SERVICES FEEDBACK TEAM

- 3.1 During Quarter 2 of 2023/24 a new database was put in place, this has allowed for better management of complaints, compliments, and comments, as well as the storage of all necessary information within one location.
- 3.2 Due to long-term sickness absence, administrative support to the Feedback Team was reduced – this meant the Feedback Team were placed in a difficult and unusual staffing position, and we are taking steps to remedy this.
- 3.3 The email account for the Social Services Feedback Team receives a high volume of emails each day as demonstrated by the table below.

Table 1 Emails Received by the Feedback Team

| Year:     | Total Emails Received: | Average Per Working Day: |
|-----------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2019/2020 | 2619                   | 10.3                     |
| 2020/2021 | 4694                   | 18.6                     |
| 2021/2022 | 4220                   | 16.7                     |
| 2022/2023 | 4,321                  | 16.6                     |
| 2023/2024 | 4,170                  | 16.0                     |

### 4. SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF COMPLAINTS AND ENQUIRES.

Key performance indicators – summary overview:

| Key Performance Indicator                                     | Actual          | Target           |
|---|-----------------|------------------|
| % complaints resolved informally                              | 72%             | 50 % / < 10 days |
| Stage 1 investigations completed within Regulation timescales | 22 working days | 15 working days  |
| Stage 2 investigations completed within Regulation timescales | 78 working days | 25 working days  |

|  |   |     |
|--|---|-----|
| Number of cases investigated by the PSOW | 0 | < 2 |
|--|---|-----|

- 4.1 It is important to remember that an increase or decrease in the number of complaints does not necessarily reflect a change in the standard of service provided. An increase may indicate the positive view that is taken towards complaints, and that people are more well-informed about how to make a complaint.
- 4.2 The following graphs show the number of complaints each year; we have seen a steady decrease, with a significant drop for 23/24. This can be down to several factors, such as the reduction in agency staffing, as well as lower staff turnover creating consistency with clients. There have also been service provider changes which saw a substantial number of complaints and enquiries during 2021 continuing through to the middle of 2023. It is submitted that improved leadership, together with improved systems of learning developed and refined since 2021, have also been contributing factors.
- 4.3 Complaints in general continue to be complex and involve several service areas or themes and consequently, often take considerable time to be thoroughly investigated. A response is compiled containing enough detail, but which is also concise while answering all of the individual's questions and concerns.
- 4.4 Enquiries still account for 70% of the contact received by the team and are the quickest and simplest informal path to resolution - the majority of enquires do not progress to complaints.

|   | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| % of complaints dealt with as an enquiry. | 31%     | 50%     | 60%     | 72%     | 70%     | 70%     | 72%     |

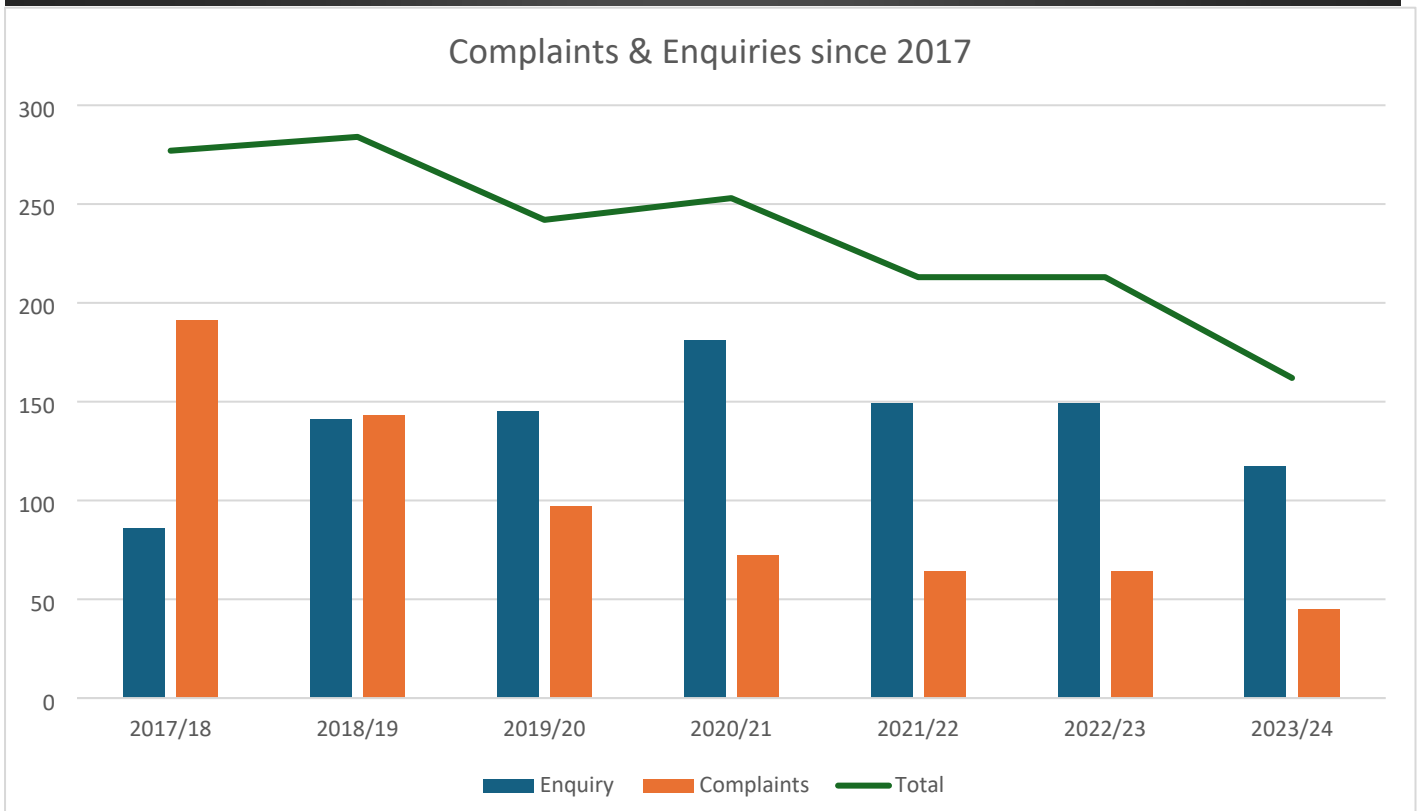
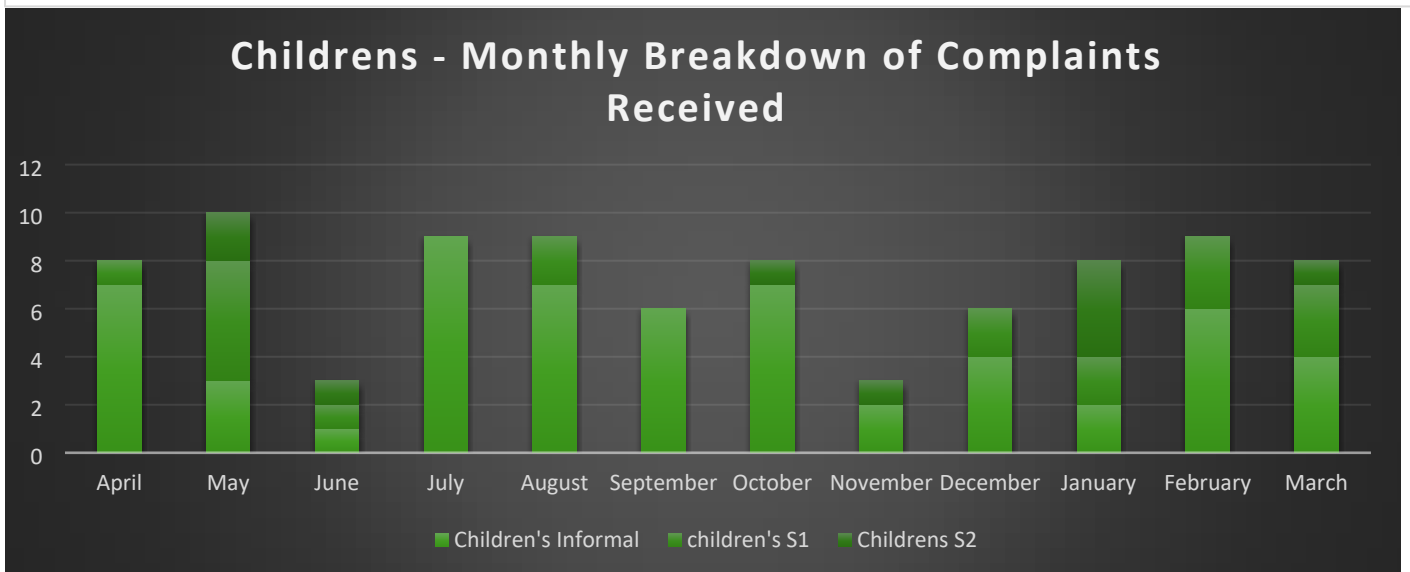
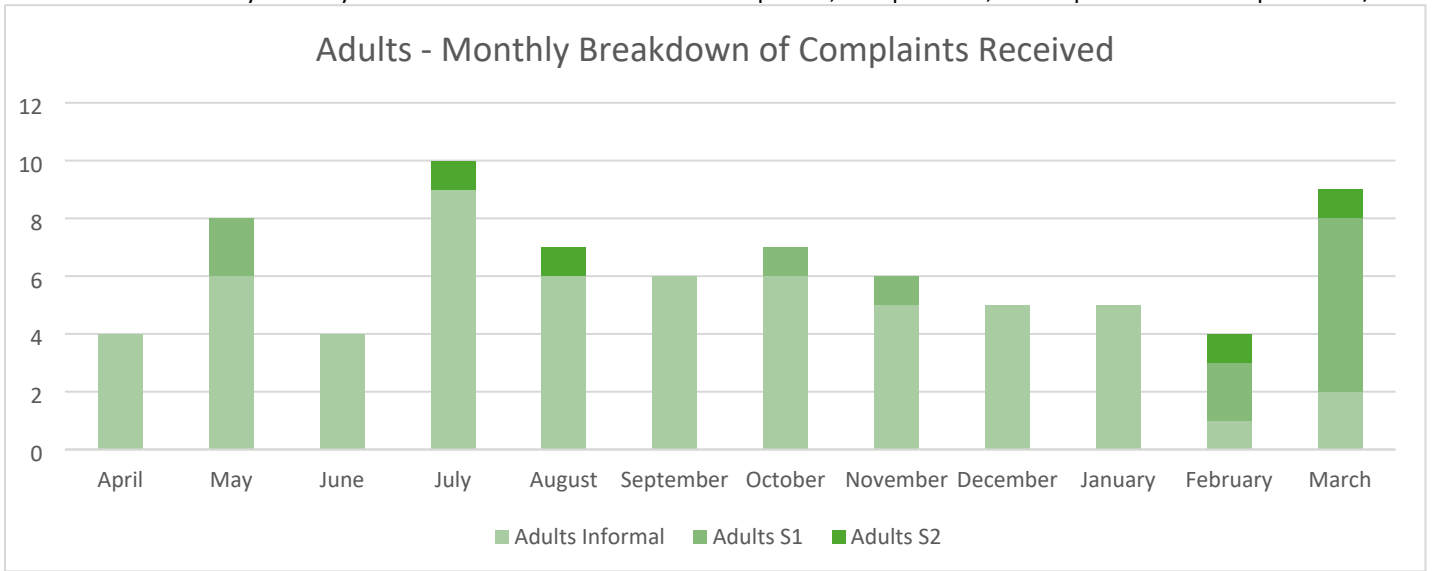


Figure 1 Number of Complaints 2017 to 2024

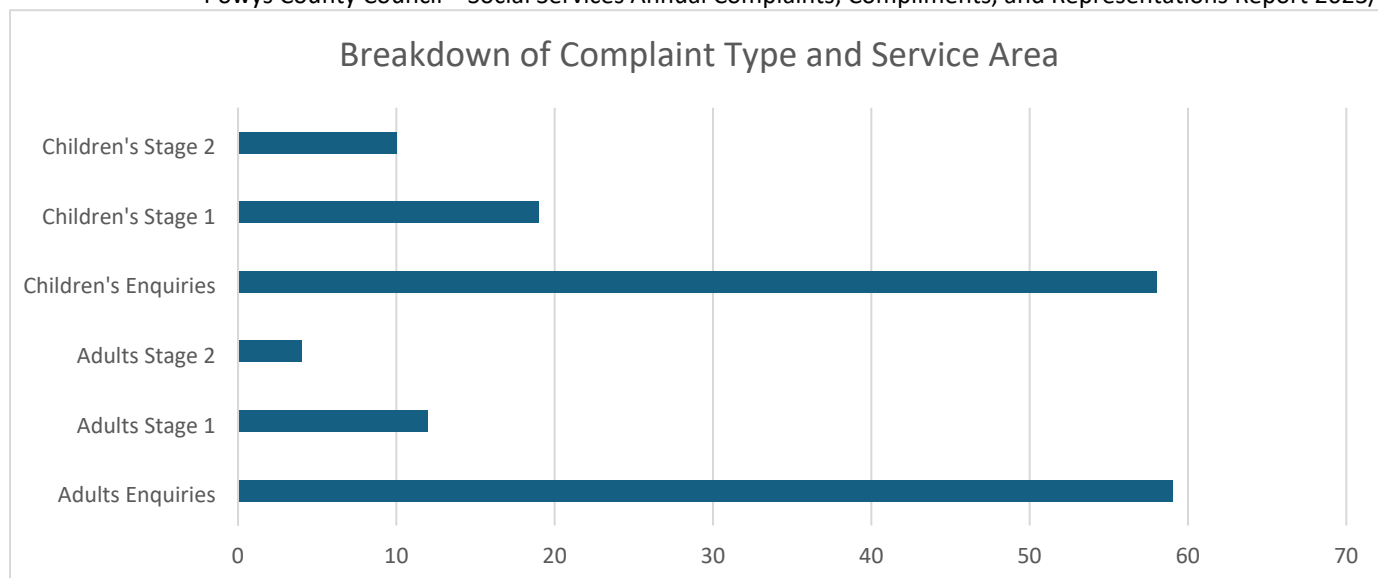
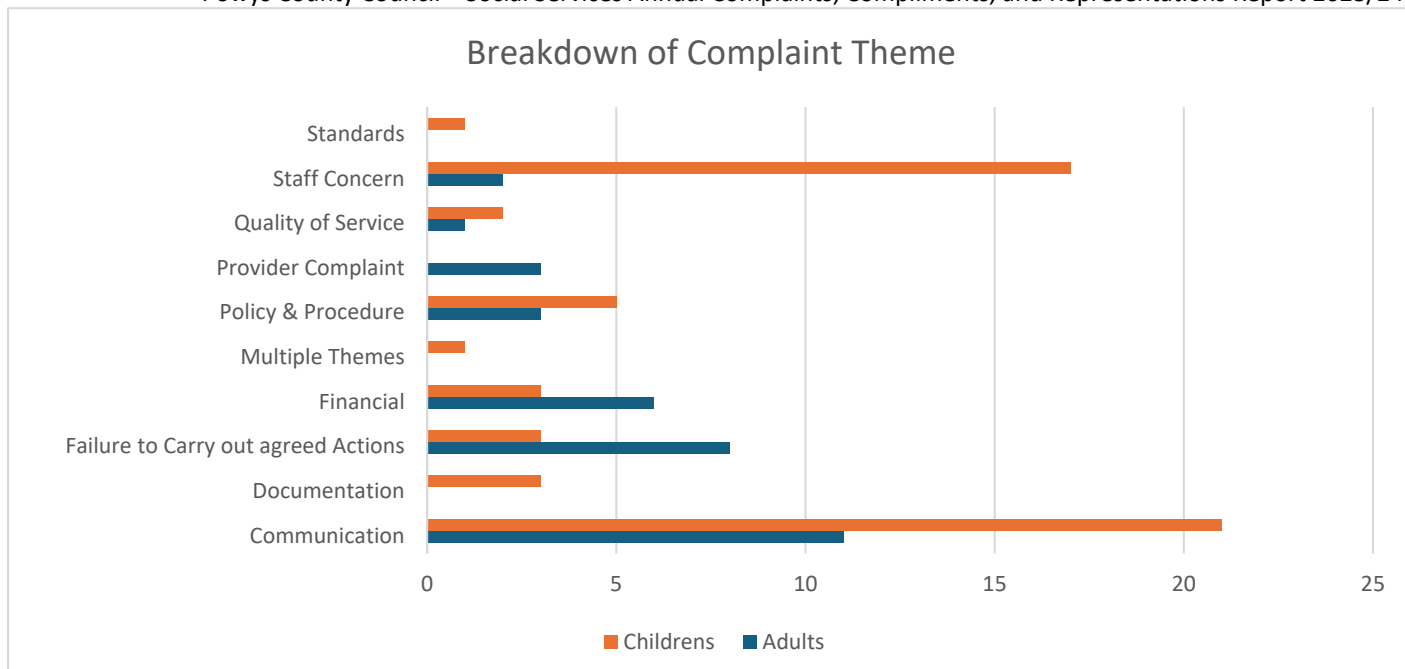


Figure 2 Breakdown of Complaints Per Service

- 4.5 Children's Services received most of the complaints as shown in Figure 3. This is expected given the nature of the work undertaken. At its broadest level, Children's statutory duties centre around ensuring that children are kept safe and protected from harm, whilst Adult Services centre around supporting people to live as independently as possible, doing what matters to them, as well as working to safeguard adults at risk of abuse and neglect.
- 4.6 It should be noted that several of the complaints will be double/triple counted as they are included in each stage of the complaints process that they triggered in the year. However, not all complaints at Stage 2 will have been at Stage 1 in this year. Similarly, not all stage 1 complaints will have been dealt with as an enquiry initially.
- 4.7 Table 3 shows the outcome of elements at different stages of the complaints process. Following changes to the recording process for 2023/24, the number of elements has been recorded for nearly all complaints (due to capacity within the team, there were a small number of complaints in Quarter 1, where the number of elements were not recorded). Since Quarter 2, the number of 'Upheld', 'Not Upheld' and 'Partially Upheld' elements has been recorded for all closed complaints.

| Outcome                  | Adult Elements |         | Child Elements |         | Total |
|--------------------------|----------------|---------|----------------|---------|-------|
|                          | Stage 1        | Stage 2 | Stage 1        | Stage 2 |       |
| Upheld                   | 4              | 14      | 7              | 5       | 30    |
| Partially Upheld         | 2              | 0       | 9              | 5       | 16    |
| Not Upheld               | 15             | 9       | 17             | 7       | 48    |
| Total Number of Elements | 21             | 23      | 33             | 17      | 94    |

- 4.8 As complaints are received, they are given a theme, as per the graph below.



4.9 “Communication”, “Staff Concerns” and “Failure to carry out agreed action(s)” are the top issues across Social Services.

*Communication* deals with issues relating to how the individual has been communicated with by staff or the department.

*Staff Concerns* are where concerns are raised about the actions or professionalism of a member of staff.

*Failure to carry out agreed actions* is where an action was taken by the social worker or department, this can include actions that took longer than the service user expected, such as panel approval for funding or finding a care provider to deliver care.

4.10 Complaints are dealt with in line with the *Social Services Complaints Procedure (Regulations) Wales 2014*, which state a complaint must be acknowledged within 2 working days and responded to within 15 working days at Stage 1. Stage 2 complaints should be completed within 25 working days.

We try to acknowledge receipt of any correspondence within 2 working days and resolve any enquiries to the team within 2 working days.

The table below shows the average time taken to close an enquiry or complaint:

| Average Duration | Adults | Childrens |
|------------------|--------|-----------|
| Enquiry          | 5.1    | 15.2      |
| Stage 1          | 20.2   | 25.3      |
| Stage 2          | 60.5   | 97.9      |

4.11 Due to limited capacity during 2023/24, there were significant periods where it was difficult to complete complaint work timeously due to substantial pressure on teams. Conversations continue through both Children’s and Adult’s Operational Manager Team Meetings to ensure that staff are supported to respond to enquiries and complaints in a timely manner. However, complaint work

Powys County Council – Social Services Annual Complaints, Compliments, and Representations Report 2023/24 needs to be diarised by managers, who need to seek further information and review notes to be able to respond, and due to continued sustained pressure on the service and nature of the work with matters sometimes becoming urgent at short notice, complaints need regular follow-ups by the Complaints Officer to ensure compliance with the Regulations.

## 5. ANALYSIS OF COMMENTS

5.1 Comments are made by individuals who do not wish to pursue a complaint, or where it is not viewed as a complaint. Available data from previous years does not separate out comments into service areas. Previous years have seen comments being recorded as enquiries, since 2022 the team have been working towards ensuring that comments are distinguished from complaints.

5.2 The high level of comments received during 2022/23 were due to the high number of correspondence asking for help with single care support provider. This has been resolved now and the number of comments for 23/24 has markedly reduced.

| Comment    | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 |
|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Children's |         |         |         |         | 21      |
| Adults     |         |         |         |         | 23      |
| Total      | 21      | 17      | 39      | 104     | 44      |

5.3 Comments during 2023/24 relating to several matters including:

- Concerns regarding the quality of supervision provided by a care provider in the supported living tenancy they live near to.
- Concerns copied to a Councillor regarding the quality of service delivered by a substance misuse service.
- Concerns regarding the delay in being allocated appropriate housing, which allowed them to seek support from social services. [This was not a complaint about the delay in services, but housing]
- Concerns about the delay in the Out of Hours phone line being answered [this is a contract managed by Customer Services]
- An historic complaint regarding the conduct of a police officer.
- Demand for compensation by a holiday-let owner following damage being inflicted by a young person looked after there.
- Request for contact details to arrange post-adoption support for their child's behaviour.

## 6. COMPLIMENTS

6.1 Table 5 shows the breakdown of compliments the service has received since 2018. The overall number of compliments continues to increase with more compliments being recorded for Children's Services, but a decreasing number being recorded for Adult Services.

Table 2 Break down of Compliments

| Compliments | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 |
|-------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Children's  | 14      | 14      | 61      | 77      | 64      | 99      |
| Adults      | 126     | 130     | 93      | 87      | 56      | 39      |
| Total       | 140     | 144     | 154     | 164     | 120     | 138     |



6.2 During Quarter 3 of 2023/24 Children’s Services implemented an all-service staff fortnightly bulletin, which included a section on compliments, this has seen a surge in compliments being sent into the team, with staff complimenting excellent work, and forwarding remarks by families and external professionals that previously went unrecorded. We understand that Adult’s Services are also introducing a newsletter/bulletin, and we will use this to share good practice and learning.

Adult Services at the same time have implemented a new feedback system, formally collating feedback from across the service area. This has collated several compliments about the service, but unfortunately, they have not yet fed into the formal compliments process. Integrating this will be focused on during 2024/25.

6.3 The individuals who have taken the time to submit formal compliments are clear about the value and positive impact that services provided have had on them and their loved ones.

#### EXAMPLE OF CHILDREN’S COMPLIMENTS

| Team                         | Compliment  |
|------------------------------|---|
| Quality Assurance & Training | Hi, first of all I wanted to say a huge thank you for the work you guys do, you always reply quickly and are always great at letting us know what training is available to us 😊   |
| Through Care 14+             | <p>Dear [Social Worker]</p> <p>We wish to extend our sincere thanks to you for the significant support and assistance you provided to our Child Practice Review.</p> <p>This was a complex and challenging review and it was extremely important to the panel that family engagement was approached in a sensitive, person-centred manner, in light of the trauma that the family has experienced and the exacerbation of this via the notable press interest that this case has attracted.</p> <p>The trusting relationship that you have built with the family was a vital link in establishing and continuing family engagement and support throughout the lengthy process of the review, and we are extremely grateful for your professionalism and dedication throughout the review process, without which the effective engagement achieved, simply would not have been possible.</p> <p>Thank you for all of your support to the family and for ensuring that their voices were able to be heard.</p> <p>Yours sincerely,<br/>Chair, on behalf of the CYSUR 3 2021 Panel</p> |
| Family Time                  | <p>Just want to give a big shout out to J for today. Had an absolute blast with the girls from the monkey impressions to comic portraits and the rest of stuff in-between, and let’s not forget the fly. As that was a good laugh also, so thanks for playing along J. The best feeling is being with the girls, as spending time together means so much, not only for them but me also. even though we had such I good laugh throughout contact, it was also lovely to have a conversation with them.</p> <p>Once again J thanks for being a such good sport, as in playing along and taking part in stuff we did.</p>   |
| IDS North                    | <p>Good Morning D,<br/>We both hope you are well.</p> <p>X has been supported by Social Services in the Children's Disability Department. The complete team for the last 11 years has been outstanding, especially the last couple with D, our Well Being Officer, who has supported X and our family. With her professionalism she has arranged multiple people who are involved with X to meetings, regular meetings which have been very important through this transition period. Having DI at the end of the telephone or knowing a meeting is coming up adds a lot of comfort to a family with a child with complex needs.</p> <p>Can we take this opportunity to thank all the team for your support in Children's Disability Service.</p>   |

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
|                          | Kind regards,<br>Mum, dad and child.  |
| Through Care 0-14        | Thank you D, I really am looking forward to next contact. You made everything a breeze for me and the girls.  |
| IDS North                | I cannot speak highly enough regarding the support V has offered RA and his family during the 13 months he has resided at Carriage House. During this time RA has regularly displayed resistance to engaging with most professionals but V has been the exception to that rule as he has, almost without fail, engaged with V in a very positive manner. I believe that Vicky has built an accord with RA over many years, and he has come to value V as a confidant, which has been beneficial to us here at Carriage House and RA. V's intervention with the family and support during their visits has also been of great value to all parties and has allowed us all to discuss, and agree, progressing these contacts over the next 12 months, which is a credit to V and her engagement in this process.  |
| Support For Family South | <p>I would like to give some feedback about our time with TAF.</p> <p>The girls and I have come a long way in the last year and really don't think we would have done so without K. We would still be stuck in a rut with the girls being completely traumatised and shut down and not talking to anyone except me. I would still be in a constant state of stress, grief, and traumatised; trying to cope with the numerous issues we were facing, and failing because everything was too overwhelming.</p> <p>Along came K, and for the first couple of months I couldn't hold a conversation with her or anyone else for that matter without crying. K was like a breath of fresh air, and the girls took to her quicker than any other professional in their involvement. K showed me the way, both with coping with the girls and their very many difficulties with diagnoses and also with getting myself mental health support.</p> <p>One year on, and the girls now talk to K, my sister, their grandparents and sometimes others when they feel able to. Having completed the Triple P programme, I can cope better with their difficulties with extreme anxiety. The girls are planning for their futures, and they are much happier in themselves generally. They are looking forward to having an au pair to help them with home schooling, something they would not have wanted at all a year ago.</p> <p>I have been discharged from complex PTSD trauma therapy and I have made my own plans, I am over half way through a Diploma in Paramedicine, and I have applied to go to University to train as a Paramedic from September this year. A year ago, I would never have dreamt that would be possible.</p> <p>K is an inspiration, and an absolute credit to her profession, if anyone deserves support worker of the year it's her (if there is such a thing).</p> <p>Thank you for 'holding my hand' and cheering us on, you are pure gold.</p> |
| Support For Family South | <p>Hello I had support off J for my son. J was fantastic she really listened and explain everything to me and to my son and took extra time to really make him feel comfortable with what was going on as he was very worried.</p> <p>J really helped with his school and offered some amazing advice.</p>  |
| Assessme nt North        | <p>Good morning, thank you so much for all your help &amp; support, you have been amazing &amp; I can't thank you enough, when everyone else didn't believe in me, you did &amp; I will forever be thankful to have you in my corner helping me &amp; my family, you made the whole process so much easier. I still can't believe the improvements M has made. I feel like I can breathe again now M has her diagnosis &amp; Is getting her treatment, despite the struggles we have been treated amazing by the support we've had in place, so thank you for absolutely everything.</p> <p>We won't forget :)</p>  |

## EXAMPLE OF ADULT COMPLIMENTS

| Team                     | Compliments  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Adults with Disabilities | <p>"I wanted to pass on all the positive feedback, *** sister – **** has given about your time working with ****.</p> <p>She was full of praise for you and commented several times how lovely with **** you were.</p> <p>We often get caught up in the negatives, or people can be quick to complain, so I always like to pass on any positive feedback I hear, as its good to be appreciated and know how much</p> |

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
|                          | our effort means.<br><br>Thanks Gemma."   |
| Older Persons Team North | As a family we would like to thank B for all her commitment, support and hard work in finding a short-term care placement and then a care package for a family member. This is greatly appreciated.   |
| Older Persons Team North | Julie I just wanted to let you know that mum passed away peacefully today at [Care Home]. Mum had a nasty chest infection and due to not eating for a month her defences were down and she had nothing to fight with.<br>The staff were brilliant, we could not have received better care anywhere. The care and compassion shown to us as well as a family was amazing by all staff.<br>Thanks for everything you did for mum and us. Your care, kindness, compassion towards mum self-centred care was outstanding. We appreciate everything you did to facilitate mums move from Newtown hospital. |
| Mental Health            | I wanted to drop you a note to thank you for all you have done, above and beyond, for my Dad.<br>From the very first time we spoke back in July I trusted you. I could sense your genuine concern and firm focus on all you could to support and keep driving what was obviously necessary for Dad.   |
| Mental Health            | I want to say a huge thank you to you for all that you have done for both A and myself. You have been a constant which has been so necessary for A. He thinks a lot of you and said to E that he was going to miss you and that were a lot of things he has been able to confide over the years.<br>I know I will miss your updates and level headedness. You have been a great support to me in the mine field of mental health.<br>I wish you every happiness and success wherever you go and whatever you do.  |

## 7. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND LEARNING

- 7.1 The Feedback Team and Quality Assurance Officers continue to work closely together to identify themes and any repeating or significant areas of concern. These help to inform the work around quality assurance to improve and promote best practice.
- 7.2 The link between Feedback Team and Quality Assurance Officers is important to ensure we take on board what people like about our service from compliments and learn lessons where we have made mistakes. It is also important to look at why individuals have made a complaint, regardless of the outcome.
- 7.3 Since November 2020, officers from both teams usually meet every month to discuss the closed complaints from the previous month. This has contributed to a monthly focus on communication, and consideration on how managers could be supported differently to respond to concerns before a complaint is made.
- 7.4 During 2023/24 a Laming Visit by members of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee took place during these Quality Assurance Meetings. Members were happy that this took place, and it was clear that complaints were taken seriously and analysed to establish learning not just within a single complaint, but across the complaints closed and utilising knowledge from previous months. The visits did highlight the lack of formal actions noting from these minutes as such an action log is completed during each meeting to ensure that learning is logged, and any actions monitored to ensure completion.

- 7.5 Training offered by the Complaints Standards Authority has not taken place during 2023/24 as it was not being offered by the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales due to a vacancy arising in their training team. We understand that this will be resumed in 2024/25.
- 7.7 Since April 2021, Children’s Service staff induction has included an overview of the complaints process. During the year, 27 members of staff had been through the induction sessions. Adults Services have included an “Overview of Complaints” fact sheet in their staff induction.

## 8. UPDATE ON 2022/23 IMPROVEMENT PLAN

| Area Of Work   | Outcome  |
|--|--|
| <p>During 2023/24, we will roll out a Complaint Handling training course to complement the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales Complaint Investigation training.</p> <p>This training will focus on what complaints are under the Regulations, how to respond, the reasons for complaints, as well as acting as a forum for investigators to share best practice.</p>   | <p>Due to the limited capacity of the team during 2023/24 due to long-term staff absence this training was not delivered routinely. An initial session in quarter 4 took place with around a dozen student social workers. The feedback from this session was positive.</p> <p>Unfortunately, no Public Service Ombudsman for Wales training was delivered during 2023/24, due to the trainer no longer being in post.</p> <p>If this training is still offered, then further training will be delivered during 2024/25 in conjunction with further internal complaint investigation training to be commenced later in 2024/25.</p>  |
| <p>We believe that there are many more compliments and a small number of informally resolved low-level complaints being dealt with that are not being officially recorded.</p> <p>It is important that staff know how to record and respond upon receipt of a compliment or complaint, so that it can be officially recorded for our statistics, as well as learning from best practice to continually improve our services.</p> | <p>Through Operational Management Team Meeting (OMT) and Senior Management Meetings (SMT) staff have been reminded of the importance of forwarding compliments and complaints to the team in a timely manner. Furthermore, an overview of complaints and compliments are provided through these meetings, and opportunities for learning discussed.</p> <p>There is a reality that not every matter will be forwarded to the team, and we accept that for low-level matters this is acceptable, provided staff continue to recognise complaints that may be serious in nature, controversial or not satisfactorily resolved.</p> <p>Compliments in Children’s Services have increased following the introduction of their fortnightly bulletin which includes a section on compliments.</p> <p>Adults Services continue to have a lower level of compliments, however work during 2024/25 to address the current non-reporting of compliments through their feedback form will address this.</p> |

## 9. 2024/25 IMPROVEMENT PLAN

9.1 During 2024/25, we will put in place the following improvements:

| Area Of Work                 | Outcome  |
|------------------------------|--|
| Training                     | <p>Look for professional development opportunities for members of the team to ensure continuous improvement.</p> <p>Deliver training sessions to Social Services staff looking at best practice for complaint investigation to share best practice across the service.</p> |
| Communication                | We will do further work with teams across both Services to understand team difficulties in communicating with clients to establish how administrative support can assist with this issue.  |
| Accessibility of information | We will ensure that key information brochures about making a complaint and submitting feedback will be available in alternative formats (e.g., Large Print, Easy Read, Clear Print, etc.) on the Council's website.  |