

Children's Services Directorate

**Annual Compliments, Complaints and
Representations Report**

2024/25

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Annual Compliments, Complaints and Representations Report is a public document, providing a mechanism by which Hampshire County Council's Children's Services Directorate (the Directorate) can be kept informed about the operation and effectiveness of its complaints procedure and support learning from complaints. This document covers the period 01 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.
- 1.2. Representations increased by 44% to 2,610.
- 1.3. There were 98 Children's Social Care (CSC) Complaints, a 19.7% decrease. This is the second consecutive year to see this number fall.
- 1.4. There were 781 Corporate Complaints, a rise of 42.3%. Of note is the number of SEN complaints reducing by 19.9%.
- 1.5. Call Back Requests proved highly effective, with a 97% success rate out of 323 instances, preventing escalation to formal complaints.
- 1.6. CSC Stage Two and Three complaints decreased significantly, to 12 and 5 for the year. The previous year saw 46 and 13 respectively.
- 1.7. New recommendations include:
 - Developing a strategy to manage AI-generated complaints.
 - Increasing use of the eForm to improve complaint quality and triage.
 - Reducing ad hoc representations not within the Council's remit.
 - Improving timeliness through service led contact and Power BI dashboards.
 - Enhancing advocacy signposting for Young People.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. The Children's Act 1989 requires all local authorities with social services responsibilities to have a formal complaints procedure for Children's Social Care (CSC) complaints. Getting the Best from Complaints (statutory guidance issued by the DfE, 2006) provides guidance for local authorities on implementing the complaint process for social care complaints made in relation to Children's Services.
- 2.2. This Annual Report is produced in line with national guidance and is designed to share information more widely with members of the public. For completeness, although not required by the statutory guidance, this report also includes Corporate complaints pertaining to Children's Services.
- 2.3. The relevant guidance has been provided in Appendix 1.
- 2.4. This report looks to follow the national guidance but to support with the flow of the report, headings have been shortened and combined where relevant.
- 2.5. The core data supporting this report can be found in Appendix 3, with this report providing context and analysis.
- 2.6. The report covers Hampshire County Council's (HCC) Children's Services Directorate's formal feedback and representations for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. The Report details the compliments and complaints formally recorded by the Children's Services Directorate's Complaints Team (CSCT). In addition to annual reporting, internal reporting takes place on a quarterly basis, with more regular monitoring reports for services issued on request. This regular monitoring of formal feedback enables ongoing improvement.
- 2.7. Key terms and their definitions to support in the reading of this report can be found under Appendix 2.
- 2.8. Table 1, below, is a year on year comparison of the type of representations the CSCT have processed.

Table 1:

Type of representation	Reporting Period			
	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
CSC representations				
Complaint	98	122	240	280
Refused	35	50	17	37
Withdrawn	0	0	5	1
Total	133	172	400	449
Corporate representations				
Complaint	781	549	477	355
Refused	106	30	4	4
Withdrawn	0	0	5	6
Total	887	579	487	438
Area initiated complaint	0	0	2	13
Pre-complaint	179	225	215	213
Professional to Professional Complaint	114	49	4	24
HSCP	7	5	1	1
LGSCO	107	65	62	52
Local Response / case concern	420	119	100	65
Compliment	25	37	24	15
GDPR, FOI or SAR	6	13	15	112
Ad hoc	409	242	349	273
Call back requests	323	305	65	n/a
Total other representations	1590	1060	753	741
Total representations	2610	1811	1640	1628

Pre complaints are initial queries which do not have all the mandatory information required for processing. In these circumstances the information is requested, and if no response is received they remain logged as 'pre-complaints'.

Case concerns are pieces of feedback handled more informally and therefore not logged as a formal complaint, they still require a response from the relevant service.

Call back requests are phone calls made with the relevant service to discuss a concern. These are not logged as formal complaints and the complainant is aware of this when requesting this type of response.

LGSCO are the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman related queries.

Ad hoc is a capture all category for anything outside of the before mentioned categories, such as safeguarding, school matters and queries relating to other Local Authorities.

- 2.9. A total of 5.1% (133) of representations were considered in accordance with the CSC statutory guidance, compared to 9.5% in 2023/24. Of this total, 73.4% were managed as complaints.
- 2.10. 33.9% (887) were considered in accordance with the Corporate Complaint process, compared to 32% in 2023/24. Of this total, 88% were managed as complaints.
- 2.11. 60.9% (1590) of the team's work relates to matters recorded as 'other representations'. The most significant element within that being 'Local Response / case concern'.
- 2.12. Ad Hoc complaints are matters that fall outside of the County Council's responsibilities. They make up 15.7% (409) of 'other representations' and 15.7% of all representations. In 2023/24, 'ad-hoc' equated for 22.8% of those recorded as 'other representations' and 13.4% of all representations.
- 2.13. Call back requests account for 14.3% (323) of all representations.
- 2.14. Call back requests had a success rate of 97%, with only 3% of call back requests escalating to formal complaints.

3. Compliments

3.1. 25 compliments were recorded in this period, a decrease of 12.

3.2. Frequent mentions were made for individual County Council Officers and 'Children's Services' in general. The compliments are spread across many services from SEN to libraries and Social Workers to Data Protection Officers.

3.3. A word cloud of the top 10 words used in the compliments is below. This illustrates the positive impact so many County Council Officers are having.

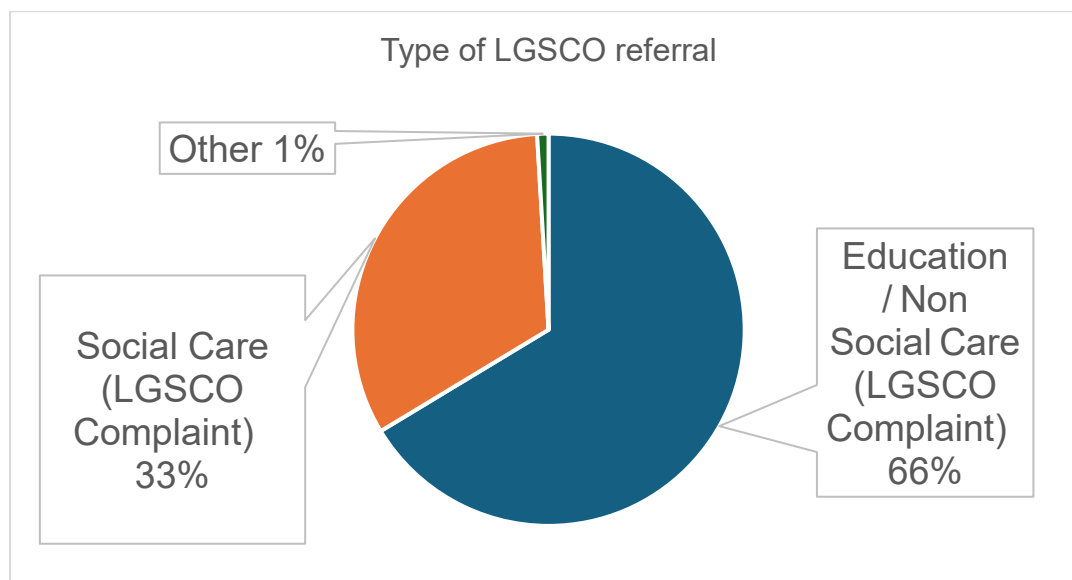


4. The number of complaints at each stage and any that were considered by the LGSCO

Referrals

- 4.1. The number of decisions received via the LGSCO (107) during the reporting period increased by 65% compared to the previous period (65).
- 4.2. Chart 1 illustrates that 66% (71) of referrals related to 'Education / Non-Social care'. In 2023/24 this was 39 cases and equated to 43% of referrals.
- 4.3. 35 (33%) referrals related to Statutory Social Care complaints, comparable to 2023/24 when the total was 26 (28%).

Chart 1: Type of complaints received by Children's Services from LGSCO



- 4.4. When the LGSCO find fault, the Ombudsman makes recommendations to remedy the complaint and/or identify learning for the County Council in terms of practise and processes.
- 4.5. Similarly, after having sight of the County Council's complaint responses, the LGSCO may conclude that they are unlikely to come to a materially different conclusion and therefore choose not to progress their investigations.

Outcomes

- 4.6. The LGSCO Assessment Team will sometimes make enquiries in relation to the status of a complaint to establish if it has gone through the County Council's complaint process and/or if they are likely to come to a different conclusion to the County Council. These enquires sometimes result in the LGSCO deciding a complaint is not to be investigated. In this reporting period

that accounted for 84 (79%) cases.

4.7. Chart 2 illustrates that 19 (18%), were upheld for maladministration, suggesting the LGSCO found fault which caused injustice.

4.8. The totals of charts 1 and 2 may differ as the LGSCO can log more than one type of referral for a single complaint.

4.9. Further data on LGSCO complaints can be found in table 12 within Appendix 3.

Table 2: Outcome of LGSCO investigation

Outcome	Total	Percentage of total
Not Upheld - No Evidence of Maladministration	4	4%
Upheld – Maladministration – actions in progress	0	0%
Upheld – Maladministration - no further action organisation already remedied	0	0%
Upheld – Maladministration – no injustice	1	1%
Upheld – Maladministration - remedy complete and satisfactory	17	16%
Upheld - Injustice remedied during LGO consideration	1	1%
Advice given	2	2%
Incomplete/Invalid	5	5%
Closed after initial enquiries	41	38%
Assessment (referred back for local resolution)	36	34%
Awaiting outcome	0	0%

Percentage totals are rounded up.

5. Which customer groups made the complaints

- 5.1. Parents continue to be the group most likely to make a complaint to Children's Services, with the same percentage share as 2023/24 at 88%.
- 5.2. The two most popular methods for making a complaint continue to be by 'email' and 'e-form' with 671 (65%) and 348 (34%) respectively. In 2023/24 'email' and 'e-form' accounted for 58% and 39% respectively of all complaints.
- 5.3. The use of the e-form has decreased from the previous reporting period from 39% to 34%.
- 5.4. Complaints made via the e-form are significantly more likely to include all the mandatory information necessary to enable investigation and therefore increases the likelihood of the complaint being processed more effectively.
- 5.5. A recommendation is included to improve this.
- 5.6. Data pertaining specifically to Young Peoples' complaints (as a subset) is included in table 4 in Appendix 3.
- 5.7. A further breakdown of who made complaints and how they were submitted can be found in table 5 within Appendix 3.

6. The types of complaints made

Children's Social Care (CSC) Complaints

6.1. The highest category for the reason (nature) why CSC complaints are made is 'Poor Communication' with 29 (18%), followed by 'Insufficient Support from CSD' with 28 (17%) and 'Conduct of Worker' with 18 (11%).

6.2. The top reason for 2023/24, 'Quality of Service', has reduced to 5 (3%) instances. This is a result of an agreement that this category is challenging to analyse, so more specific categories were encouraged when logging complaints.

6.3. 'Poor Communication' remains quite static, only increasing by one instance (28 to 29) and a 4% increase. 'Insufficient Support from CSD' saw the largest increase (20 to 28) with a 7% increase on 2023/24.

6.4. 'Conduct of Worker' decreased from 26 instances to 18, a 2% decrease on 2023/24.

6.5. It's important to note that while a percentage share is a good measure, Statutory Social Care complaints have decreased by 19.7% (24). This should be considered when making a year on year comparison.

6.6. This is the second year in a row where complaints of this nature have decreased. To see them reduce so significantly is a positive outcome for the relevant services, whose hard work and commitment to continuous improvement have resulted in more satisfied service users.

6.7. All the services, which can have a complaint considered under the Social Care complaints process are as follows:

- Adoption/Permanence
- Care Leavers
- CAST
- Child in Need
- Child Protection
- Children In Care
- Disabled Children's Team
- Early Help Hub
- Family Support Service
- Fostering
- HantsDirect / Out of Hours

- Independent Reviewing Service
- Intensive Support Service
- MASH/CRT
- Not receiving a service
- Occupational Therapy
- Out of Hours
- Reception & Assessment
- Safeguarding Team
- Services for Young People / YSS
- Specialist Residential Provision
- YOT

Corporate Complaints

6.8. In 2023/24 the top reason for complaints was 'Poor Communication' with 167 (18.8%). The top two reasons in 2024/25 were 'SEN – Lack/type of communication' with 185 (14%) and Poor communication with 131 (10%). In third was Conduct of Worker with 75 (6%).

6.9. 2023/24 saw the joint second top reasons were 'Conduct of Worker' and 'Quality of Service', both with 64 (7%) instances.

6.10. The SEN service continues to receive the most Corporate complaints with 45% of complaints, this is compared to 49.2% in 2023/24.

6.11. For the last four years complaints to the SEN service have increased incrementally from 143 in 2020/21 to 438 in 2023/24. However, this year SEN has seen a decrease in complaints of 19.9% (87).

6.12. This is a very positive sign and shows that significant enhancements are being implemented by the service to improve, despite a significantly challenging environment, not entirely in their control.

6.13. It is also worth noting that analysis shows the triaging of complaints by the CSCT has improved significantly with regards to SEN complaints. This has resulted in fewer complaints being accepted, where they should not be, such as those relating to tribunal matters.

6.14. In 2024/25 there were 223 complaints relating to CAST (162 Corporate complaints and 61 CSC complaints). This is a decrease of 78 from 2023/24 which saw 301 complaints relating to CAST (157 CSC complaints and 144 Corporate complaints). This is a decrease of 25% overall.

- 6.15. Complaints for CAST recorded as Corporate complaints have increased by 18 and by 5% of the total corporate complaints (from 144, 16% to 162, 21%).
- 6.16. It is important to note that better recording of specific teams has seen the spread of complaints become more accurate. As the Children's and Families service continues to restructure and change in the coming months and years, the allocation of complaints will need to change also. This will make year on year comparison more challenging.
- 6.17. School Transport saw a 5% decrease in the total share of all corporate complaints year on year, reducing from 150 complaints to 91. Libraries also benefitted from a reduction in complaints from 68 to 50 while the Payments Team and Legal Intervention Team recorded their first formal complaints in the Annual Complaints Report, with 12 and 7 retrospectively.
- 6.18. A further breakdown of the nature of complaints made can be found in Tables 6 and 7 within Appendix 3. Year on year comparisons of the services involved can be found in tables 8 and 9 of Appendix 3.

7. The outcome of complaints

7.1. A breakdown of the action carried out to resolve a complaint can be found in Table 11 within Appendix 3.

Table 3:

Statutory Social Care complaints		
Outcome	Total	Percentage of total
Not upheld	49	50%
Upheld	33	34%
Partially upheld	16	16%
Corporate complaints		
Outcome	Total	Percentage of total
Not upheld	203	26%
Upheld	471	60%
Partially upheld	107	14%

7.2. Table 3 shows that with regards to Social Care complaints, those with an upheld element accounted for 50% of all complaints.

7.3. Table 3 also shows that with regards to Corporate complaints the total percentage of complaints with an upheld element was 74%.

8. Details about advocacy services provided under these arrangements

- 8.1. The Getting the Best from Complaints statutory guidance advises the following regarding advocacy;
- 8.2. "If a child or young person wishes to make a complaint, local authorities are required to provide him with information about advocacy services and offer help to obtain an advocate..."
- 8.3. In all cases where a child or young person had a complaint investigated, advocacy was either already in place, or the service was appropriately offered.
- 8.4. There were two instances where an individual made a complaint and it seemed to be that they were a young person, however this was not a certainty. Because limited details were provided this was not clear. Attempts to receive further information were not responded to so the complaints did not progress. Best practice would have been to signpost them to advocacy given the uncertainty of the individuals age. An action has been provided to address this.

9. Compliance with timescales, and complaints resolved within extended timescale as agreed

- 9.1. During 2024/25, the average time taken to investigate and respond to new CSC Stage One complaints was 20 working days. This is an increase of 4 working days on average compared to the previous reporting period.
- 9.2. It is important to note that the 20 days includes a phone call and a written response to close down the complaint, being actioned.
- 9.3. CSC complaints for this reporting period have seen 20% of CSC complaints responded to within 10 working days at Stage One (33% in 2023/24); 46% between 10-20 working days (29% in 2023/24) and 34% exceeded the maximum 20 working day limit (39% in 2023/24).
- 9.4. In some instances, going beyond the 20 working days was considered in the best interest of the complainant. Examples of where the timescale was exceeded include, complainants not being available to speak for a number of weeks, causing delay. Secondly, where colleagues have been on annual leave or sick leave and their contributions have been considered so valuable the deadline of 20 working days should be exceeded.
- 9.5. For Corporate Stage One complaints, the average was 24 working days, which is over the allotted time of 20 working days to provide a response.
- 9.6. Of all Corporate Stage One complaints, 126 (16%) were responded to within 10 working days; 268 (34%) between 10-20 working days and 387 (50%) exceeded the maximum 20 working day limit.
- 9.7. In 2023/24 CSC complaints saw 46 Stage Two investigations and of those 13 proceeded to Stage Three Review Panel. 2024/25 saw Stage Twos decrease to 12 and Stage 3s to 5. This is a decrease of 74% and 62% respectively.

10. Learning and service improvement

- 10.1. The following recommendations were put forward, within the 2023/24 report, for completion by the CSCT and/or directorate service areas during the 2024/25 reporting period:

Recommendation 1: Further reduce Ad-hoc queries

- 10.2. The total number of representations logged as ad hoc increased from 242 to 409. At 409, ad hoc representation accounted for nearly a fifth of all correspondence in to the team.
- 10.3. In response to this recommendation, steps were taken to update the eForm, in the hope it was more informative and effective at signposting individuals not to contact the County Council. Given that the use of the eForm has remained static, it seems that other steps will need to be taken to reduce such a high volume of representations that are not for the County Council to action.

Recommendation 2: Increased use of the eForm

- 10.4. The use of the eForm dropped as a percentage share (35% to 34%) year on year. Analysis of this has determined that where the webpage has a link to the eForm and a copy of the team email address, complainants are choosing to email.
- 10.5. When the eForm is used to submit a complaint, it is more likely to progress for investigation as all the required information is collected.
- 10.6. Equally, following the proven success of call back requests to both prevent complaints and resolve matters promptly, the eForm should be encouraged to further increase the use of this process.

Recommendation 3: Further expansion of the 'poor communication' and 'conduct of worker' complaint type, to allow for better analysis and prevention

- 10.7. This was completed ready for 1 April 2025, with all categories having clear sub categories to increase ability to analyse the data.

Recommendation 4: Share and utilise the URCCB guidance

- 10.8. The URCCB guidance was replaced in November 2024 by a new Unacceptable Actions by Customers (UAC) policy. Extensive work has been done to communicate and raise awareness of this policy. This includes email

communications, attending all managers meetings, mention at the all staff briefing and a pro-active approach to highlight the policy when it is felt it should be applied, but hasn't been.

Recommendation 5: Increase compliance with response times

- 10.9. Timeliness of responses, particularly at Stage One, continue to be an issue, however latter stages of the complaint process have seen excellent adherence to the statutory timescales.
- 10.10. A recent change, to continue working on improving timeliness, is being trialled within the services. This change sees services call or meet with complainants to discuss their concerns, with a brief follow up coming from the complaints team to conclude the response.
- 10.11. It is hoped this new initiative will remove the administrative burden of having to write a reply to a complainant, which was often the cause of any delay.

New recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Use of AI

- 10.12. The Complaints Team are finding a significant increase in the use of AI, by complainants, to submit complaints. This often makes submissions unnecessarily complex and often incorrect and/or non sensical.
- 10.13. A clear strategy should be created to respond to this ever increasing use of AI, to avoid it becoming a significant resource drain on the team and potentially preventing complainants progressing their concerns.

Recommendation 2: Increase use of the eForm

- 10.14. Following the same recommendation from the last annual complaints report, further steps should be taken to increase the use of the eForm.

Recommendation 3: Decrease ad-hoc requests

- 10.15. Also a continuation of the last report, this recommendation is that more work is needed to reduce the amount of work being processed by the CSCT, which is not in relation to the responsibilities of the County Council.

Recommendation 4: Timeliness

10.16. The timeliness of responses has room for improvement, therefore an appropriate strategy is required to address this. Solutions could include further use of the automated reporting on eCase, more regular escalations to senior managers and also the use of a new Power BI dashboard (see recommendation 5).

Recommendation 5: Power BI dashboard

10.17. A Power BI dashboard has been trialled in the summer months of 2025 and feedback has been positive. It is recommended this dashboard is rolled out to all services, with appropriate training to encourage use on a regular basis.

Recommendation 6: Advocacy

10.18. Develop and implement a protocol to ensure that, in cases where a complainant's age is unclear and they may therefore be a young person, staff proactively signpost them to appropriate advocacy services.

APPENDIX 1

The relevant section of the guidance for this annual report is copied below;

5.6 Annual report

5.6.1 Local authorities must each financial year publish an Annual Report (regulation 13(3)). This should draw upon the information already gathered under section 5.1 for recording purposes. However, this Annual Report is a separate requirement and should not contain personal information that is identifiable about any individual complainant.

5.6.2 The Annual Report should be arranged by the Complaints Manager and should provide a mechanism by which the local authority can be kept informed about the operation of its complaints procedure. The report should be presented to staff, the relevant local authority committee and should be made available to the regulator and the general public. It should provide information about:

- representations made to the local authority;
- the number of complaints at each stage and any that were considered by the Local Government Ombudsman;
- which customer groups made the complaints;
- the types of complaints made;
- the outcome of complaints;
- details about advocacy services provided under these arrangements;
- compliance with timescales, and complaints resolved within extended timescale as agreed;
- 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; and

a review of the effectiveness of the complaints procedure (see section 5.7 on Monitoring and Quality Assurance).

APPENDIX 2

Key terms:

Children's Services Complaints Team (CSCT): The team within the Children's Services Directorate responsible for processing all complaints.

Representation: A representation is a piece of work requiring action by the CSCT, regardless of whether or not it is processed as a complaint. A representation could trigger a single and simple piece of work lasting a matter of minutes, a large piece of work over many months with numerous activities or anything in between.

Children's Social Care (CSC) Complaints: These complaints follow the County Council's CSC Complaints Procedure for Children's Services (Stage One – local resolution; Stage Two – investigation; Stage Three – complaint review panel). When a complainant has exhausted the three stage complaints process, they can ask the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) to consider their complaint. Complainants are also able to refer their complaint to the LGSCO at any point in the formal process, however, if the complaint is still being considered by the local authority the LGSCO may deem the complaint premature and direct the complainant back to complete the local authority's complaint process.

Corporate Complaints: The majority of the remainder of complaints for Children's Services fall under the County Council's Corporate complaints procedure, ensuring compliance with the Local Government Act 1974. For example, these may be complaints about a support service or administrative process rather than children's social care.