



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5 DECEMBER 2023

COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS ANNUAL REPORT 1 APRIL 2022 TO 31 MARCH 2023

Report from: Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People

Author: Sandy Weaver, Manager for Social Care Complaints

Summary

The annual report provides information on children's services complaints handled during 2022–2023, and includes the numbers received and the types of issues raised. The report also highlights some examples of the many positive things people have said about the provision of children's services in Medway over the same period, and the service improvements Medway Council has made as a result.

1. Recommendations

1.1. This Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the report.

2. Budget and policy framework

2.1 The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 requires local authorities to have procedures for dealing with complaints relating to complaints from children, young people, and others eligible to make a complaint.

2.2 There is a further statutory requirement to produce and publish an annual report specifying the number of complaints received, the number of complaints which the council decided were well-founded, and the number of complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

2.3 In accordance with the council's constitution, paragraph 21.2 (b) of the Overview and Scrutiny rules (chapter 4), this committee is responsible for the review and scrutiny of children's services.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Children Act 1989 defines the representations procedure as being for representations, including complaints, made by children and young people. It also applies to parents, foster carers and other adults making a complaint about services provided to a child or young person.
- 3.2 The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 and the statutory guidance, "Getting the Best from Complaints," describes a procedure for a child or young person who is likely to want to make representations. This includes complaints about the actions, decisions, or apparent failings of local authority's children's services provision; and to allow any other appropriate person to act on behalf of the child or young person concerned or make their own complaint.
- 3.3 The guidance is also about making sure that vulnerable children and young people get the help they need, when they need it.
- 3.4 The local authority should ensure that it responds to the issues raised and outlines the actions taken because of any mistakes made.
- 3.5 Local authorities should make children and young people aware of how they can make representations to the local authority and that they do not have to be complaints. The child or young person has the same right to advocacy whether the representation is a complaint or not. When the representation is a concern but not a complaint and the local authority fails to respond to the child or young person's satisfaction, they will then be entitled to make a complaint at stage 1.
- 3.6 Where a complaint is received from a representative acting on behalf of a child or young person, the local authority should normally confirm, where possible, that the child or young person is happy for this to happen and that the response to the complaint reflects his or her view.
- 3.7 Good complaint handling matters because it is an important way of ensuring that service users and customers receive the service they are entitled to expect. Complaints are a valuable source of feedback for Medway Council; they provide an audit trail and can be an early warning of failures in service delivery.

4. Managing Complaints

- 4.1 Medway Council's complaint arrangements focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for those making a complaint. The aim is to give the service user answers or an explanation to help them to understand what happened and, where appropriate, an apology and a commitment to learn from any mistakes.
- 4.2 The statutory complaints procedure has three stages.

- **Stage 1** – Any new complaint is first considered by staff at the point of service delivery with the aim of putting right any problem or mistake that may have occurred. Wherever possible we try to respond within 10 working days, however if the complaint is more complex the guidance allows us to respond within 20 working days. If the person complaining is unhappy with the outcome of their stage 1 complaint, they may request that their complaint is considered at stage 2 of the complaint procedure. Medway Council aims to address, as far as possible, all concerns at this initial stage.
- **Stage 2** – At this stage an Investigating Officer, who has not previously been involved in the case, and an Independent Person, who does not work for the council, undertake an investigation into the complaint. Both the Independent Person and the Investigating Officer write separate reports. These reports are sent to the Adjudicating Officer, who responds to the complainant in writing, setting out the findings of the stage 2 investigation. The overall statutory timescale to reply to stage 2 complaints is 25-65 working days.
- **Stage 3** – If the complainant remains unhappy with the outcome of the stage 2 investigation, they can request that their complaint is reviewed by a review panel. The panel consists of three independent people, who do not work for the council and who have not previously been involved in the complaint. The panel looks at the robustness of the stage 2 investigation and the conclusions reached. The panel presents its findings to the Director of People, who then writes to the complainant setting out the panel's findings.

4.3 If the complainant is still unhappy after stage 3, they can contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). The LGSCO will look at how Medway Council dealt with the complaint and consider how reasonable and appropriate our decisions were.

5. The role of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

5.1 The LGSCO's role is to provide remedies in cases of service failure, which has caused injustice to the complainant. It is a free service to the complainant.

5.2 The Local Government Ombudsman's recommendations aim to put complainants back into the position the complainant was in before the fault or injustice occurred.

6. Analysis of complaints: 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

6.1 The following table provides the headline figures for stage 1 complaints:

Stage 1, 2 & 3 complaints for 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023	No. complaints
---	----------------

Brought forward from 31/03/22	1
Complaints received	46
Complaints closed	46
Complaints withdrawn	1
Open complaints still awaiting response as at 31/03/23	0
Complaints dealt with within 10 working days	32
Complaints dealt with within 20 working days	42
Total number of stage 1 complaints handled in 22-23	47
Stage 2 investigations completed in 2022-2023	3
Ongoing stage 2 investigations	3
Stage 3 Panel	1

6.2 Monthly breakdown of stage one complaints from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

	April	May	June	Q.1	July	Aug	Sep	Q.2	Oct	Nov	Dec	Q.3	Jan	Feb	Mar	Q4	Total
Complaints cfwd from 2021-22	1								2				3				
No. complaints received	2	3	1	6	5	7	2	14	3	4	10	17	6	3	0	9	46
No. complaints responded to	0	4	3	7	4	6	2	12	4	4	8	16	5	4	2	11	46
No. complaints withdrawn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
No. complaints dealt with in 10 days	0	3	1	4	4	4	1	9	4	4	7	15	3	0	1	4	32
% complaints dealt with in 10 days	0	75%	33%	57%	100%	75%	50%	75%	100%	100%	89%	94%	60%	0%	50%	36%	70%
No. complaints dealt with in 20 days	0	3	3	6	4	6	2	12	4	4	8	16	4	2	2	8	42
% complaints responded to in 20 days	0	75%	100%	86%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	80%	50%	100%	73%	91%
% complaints acknowledged within 3 days	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
No. complaints cfwd to next qtr				0				2				3				0	

6.3 The following table shows the number of stage 1 complaints received in each of the last five years:

Year	Volume of complaints
2018-2019	114
2019-2020	133

2020-2021	58
2021-2022	26
2022-2023	46

6.4 The total number of complaints handled in 2022-2023 was 47, there were 46 new complaints and 1 complaint carried forward from 2021-2022.

6.5 The following table shows the number of stage 1 complaints received in 2022-2023, by service.

Service Area	Total
First Response Assessment Team	4
Family Solutions	1
MASH	1
Adolescent Team	9
CIC Team 1	4
CIC Team 2	2
CIC Team 3	1
CIC Team 4	2
CSW Team 1,2,3,4	3
CSW Team 5,6,7,8	1
All CSW Teams	4
Adoption/ Special Guardians	0
Fostering	4
Leaving Care Team	3
Disability Team 0-25 years	8
Parklands	1
Total	48*

*This is more than the 46 complaints received in 2022-2023 as two complaints involved two teams

6.6 The following table shows the ethnicity of the children, who either made their own complaint or a representative made a complaint on their behalf.

Ethnicity	No. of complaints received in 2022-23
White / British	35
White other background	2
Black / Black British	1
Black / Black British / Nigerian	1
Black/Caribbean	1
Black /African	1
Mixed/multiple / White Asian	1
Mixed/Multiple/Any other mixed background	3
Other ethnic group Arab	1

Total	46
--------------	----

6.7 The following table shows the ethnicity of the children who were recorded in the Child in Need return as having received services in 2022-2023. This includes looked after children and children in need.

Ethnicity	No. of children's service users in 2021-22
Number of recorded white ethnicity	4443
Number of recorded black ethnicity	592
Number of recorded mixed ethnicity	491
Number of recorded Asian ethnicity	230
Missing/refused/not recorded ethnicity	95
Number of recorded other ethnicity	115

6.8 The following table shows the percentage of service users, by ethnicity, who made a complaint during 2022-23.

Ethnicity group	Number of children using services	Number of persons making a complaint	Percentage of service users who made a complaint.
White	4443	37	0.8%
Black	592	4	0.7%
Mixed	491	3	0.2%
Asian	230	1	0.6%
Other	115	1	0.8%

7. Responses to Stage 1 Complaints

7.1 Medway Council aims to deal with complaints quickly and comprehensively. Sometimes the council is not able to issue responses to the complainant within 10 working days, in which case the timescale is extended to the statutory deadline of 20 working days. Medway Council will always make contact to explain the reason for any delay and confirm when the complainant will receive a response.

7.2 The following table shows the time taken to answer stage 1 complaints in 2022-2023:

Reply sent	Within 10 days	11-20 days	21- 25 days	Total
Stage 1	32	10	4	46
Percentage	70%	21%	9%	100%

7.3 This table shows the volume of complaints responded to in 20 working days and compares this with performance against previous years.

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
No. complaints answered in 20 working days	88	116	53	24	46
% complaints answered within 20 working days	85%	91%	91%	96%	91%

7.4 Outcomes of stage 1 complaints responded to in 2022-2023

Complaint type	Not upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Total
Lack of communication	2	1	5	8
Behaviour/attitude of staff	4	4	4	12
Behaviour of foster carer.	0	0	1	1
Foster placement	1	0	0	1
Lack of support	3	1	0	4
Service provided	8	2	0	10
Delay in paying Special Guardianship allowance	0	0	1	1
Delay in arranging direct payments	0	0	1	1
Delay in providing a Later Life Letter.	0	0	1	1
Family Time	1	2	2	5
Incorrect information in an assessment	1	0	0	1
Father did not receive the Child and Family assessment.	0	0	1	1
Father not involved in the C&F assessment.	1	0	0	1
Cancelled meeting	0	0	1	1
Total	21	10	17	48

*** This number is greater than the 46 complaints responded to 2022-2023 as one complaint can cover several different issues.**

7.5 The following table shows the volume and percentage of complaint upheld and compares this with previous years.

Year	No. complaints fully upheld	% complaints fully upheld	No. complaints partially upheld	% complaints partially upheld
2022-23	17	35%	10	21%

2021-22	12	44%	7	25%
2020-21	27	31%	10	12%
2019-20	52	32%	20	12%
2018-19	41	30%	13	9%
2017-18	36	30%	5	4%
2016-17	58	30%	20	10%

7.6 The following table shows how many complaints were upheld about the attitude of the social worker or lack of communication and compares this with previous years.

Year	Complaints upheld	
	Attitude of social worker	Lack of communication
2022-23	4	5
2021-22	2	3
2020-21	6	8
2019-20	13	11
2018-19	7	7
2017-18	6	5

7.7 Two complainants made more than one complaint in 2022-2023, compared with one in 2021-2022, two in 2020-2021, six in 2019-2020, six in 2018-19, and five in 2017-2018.

8. Stage 2 investigations

8.1 The following table shows how many complainants were unhappy with their stage 1 response and compares this with previous years.

Year	No. complainants unhappy with stage 1 response	% of complainants unhappy with stage 1 response
2022-23	8	17%
2021-22	5	19%
2020-21	17	29%
2019-20	28	21%
2018-19	20	19%
2017-18	17	19%

8.2 The outcomes for the complainants who were unhappy with their stage one response were as follows:

- Six complainants requested a stage 2 investigation.

- One complainant was satisfied after an Alternative Dispute Resolution meeting.
- One complainant was satisfied following a further response.
- Three stage 2 investigations were completed in 2022-2023.
- Three stage 2 investigations were carried over into 2023-2024.

8.3 The outcomes of stage 2 investigations were as follows.

8.3.1 A mother made a complaint that her daughter Y ran away from the foster carer following a medical appointment. The mother complained that the foster carer made no attempt to prevent Y from running away and did not phone 999 when she realised that she did not know where Y was. The complaint was upheld, and an apology given for the distress Ms C and Y experienced, and that Ms C was not informed about how Y went missing. Lessons learnt were that while there are policies about transporting children, staff need to consider every child's case individually and think about the most appropriate way to safeguard a vulnerable child with complex needs, for example, the need for another adult to travel with the foster carer. Good practice would have been to contact the mother the next working day to apologise and explain what happened.

8.3.2 The stage two investigation was about the lack of support offered to a foster carer. Some of the complaint issues were upheld and the foster carer was offered a financial remedy for the distress she experienced when she was harassed by birth parents.

8.3.3 A sister X complained about the lack of financial support following her sister Z going missing and a breakdown of Z's relationship with her Special Guardian. There was a delay in completing the connected carers assessment and four weeks allowance was back paid to X. The sister was given an apology about the delay in responding to her request for support and financial assistance. The sister complimented the connected carer's social worker and Z's allocated social worker for the support they are currently offering.

8.3.4 One complainant requested a further response to her complaint that she did not know how much money she would receive as a Special Guardian. The complainant received a further response explaining what financial help she would receive.

8.3.5 One complainant was dissatisfied with the response to his stage one complaint. The Team Manager and the Manager for Social Care Complaints met with Mr X to discuss further services that could be offered to his son. He was satisfied with the outcome of the meeting.

9. Stage 3 review panels

9.1 Medway Council convened one stage 3 panel in 2022-2023. This was a very late request about a complaint made in 2018. A mother complained about a meeting which was held at the hospital soon after she had given birth. The meeting was to discuss the discharge plan for the mother and the child. This meeting caused the mother distress, she was not told that the meeting was

voluntary, and the purpose of the meeting was not explained to her. The mother received an apology and given a financial remedy of £500.

10. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

10.1 Five complainants referred their complaints to the LGSCO in 2022-2023. One complainant made two referrals to the LGSCO.

10.2 The LGSCO closed six investigations in 2022-2023.

- i. A father complained to the LGSCO that Medway Council had not put a red flag on his children's medical records which are held by their GP. The LGSCO did not investigate Mr X's complaint because they could not add to the response the council had already provided on this matter, which explained that the information held on Mr X's children's medical records is a matter for the NHS and not the council.

Closed after initial enquiries – no further action.

- ii. A mother, Ms T, complained about unfair and inaccurate information in a child and family assessment. She complained to Medway Council in multiple emails specifying the inaccuracies. The team manager and the social care complaints manager met with Ms T to discuss the assessment. A letter was sent to Ms T after the meeting which stated that the following would be placed on her child's file:

- a. a summary of Ms T's concerns,
- b. a copy of the assessment with Ms T's annotations on it.

The LGSCO did not investigate Miss T's complaint because it was unlikely they could achieve a significantly different outcome.

Closed after initial enquiries - no further action.

- iii. A foster carer complained to the LGSCO about the lack of support she received as a foster carer when she was harassed by the mother of the children in her care. The LGSCO referred this complaint back to Medway Council as the foster carer had not completed any of the three stages of the children's complaints procedure.

Closed - premature referral.

- iv. The LGSCO did not investigate a complaint about a social worker's report for court as these matters would be discussed in court. The law prevents the LGSCO from investigating complaints about matters that are being, or have been, considered in court. The LGSCO did not investigate Ms X's complaint about a data breach as this is best considered by the Information Commissioner's Office.

Closed after initial enquiries – Out of jurisdiction.

- v. The LGSCO did not investigate Miss X's complaint concerning the council's involvement when removing her children from her care. This is because the issues Miss X raised could not be separated from legal decisions, so her complaint matters lie outside the LGSCO's jurisdiction.

Closed after initial enquiries – Out of jurisdiction.

- vi. The LGSCO could not investigate Miss X's complaint about the council's court report because it lies outside their jurisdiction. The law prevents the LGSCO from investigating complaints about matters that are being, or have been, considered in court.

Closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction.

11. Listening to children

11.1 Looked after children have told us what they want:

- To tell their story once
- For us to listen and take seriously what they say
- Understanding that it is not easy to complain.
- To be kept in touch with what is happening.
- For their issues to be dealt with quickly but thoroughly.

11.2 Medway Council commission an advocacy service from Young Lives Foundation (YLF), which provides an advocacy service to assist children and young people in making complaints, or to resolve concerns that they might have.

11.3 A young person attending a Joint Housing Assessment meeting will have an advocate to ensure that they understand the choices available to them.

12. Complaints from children and young persons

12.1 Five young people made a complaint in 2022-2023 compared with:

- 5 in 2021-2022
- 5 in 2020-2021
- 5 in 2019-2020
- 11 in 2018-2019
- 12 in 2017-2018

12.2 The outcomes of the five complaints are summarised as follows:

- i. A looked after child, G, complained that her social worker did not answer her phone calls, that she is very blunt and does not answer her questions. G was very unhappy about the placement she was moving to. G asked for another social worker as she felt isolated and needed to sort everything out herself. A leaving care social worker was allocated to G. She has settled into her new placement.

- ii. A care leaver Z complained that his personal advisor was negative and bitter towards him and would not agree to the visit being recorded. He asked for another personal advisor. The group manager explained that staff have the right to leave a meeting if someone is recording that meeting without their permission. The group manager agreed to his request to reallocate a different personal advisor as he was not getting along with his current personal advisor. The Head of Service arranged a meeting with Z but he did not attend.
- iii. A care leaver complained that she had not received all her savings when she left her placement in 2021. This was investigated and established that she was due the savings collected by her foster carer. She received a cheque in September 2022.
- iv. A care leaver complained that she was not supported when she moved to a flat and the purchase of a bed was delayed. There was slight delay in ordering the bed, but it was delivered in time for the young person to move into her flat.
- v. A care leaver complained that she had not received a Later Life Letter or her pathway plan. She had requested funding for a private medical assessment. The funding was approved, she received a copy of her pathway plan, and the Later Life Letter was completed.

12.3 These complaints highlight the importance of good communication with young people when they are moving to another placement.

12.4 Young people leaving care should receive their savings, and important documents in a timely manner.

13. Non-statutory complaints

13.1 The Children Act 1989 complaints procedure does not apply when:

- the person wishing to complain does not meet the requirements of “who can complain” and is not acting on behalf of such an individual,
- the issues complained about are older than 12 months.
- the complaint is not about any actions or decisions of the local authority or anybody acting on the local authority’s behalf,
- the same complaint has already been dealt with at all three stages of the children’s complaint procedure.

13.2 The local authority has discretion in deciding whether to consider complaints where to do so would prejudice any of the following investigations:

- Court proceedings
- Tribunals
- Disciplinary proceedings
- Criminal proceedings
- Standard of Care investigations

- Safeguarding children

13.3 Complaints that do not meet the criteria for a Children Act 1989 complaint are handled as non-statutory complaints and receive a response. If they are still dissatisfied, they can ask for a further response or refer their complaint to the LGSCO.

13.4 During 2022-23, 48 complaints were regarded as a non-statutory complaint.

13.5 This table explains the reasons a complaint was taken as a non-statutory complaint.

Issues of concern	Total
Court proceedings	6
Separated parents' disputes about their children's contact and residency.	6
Disputes about outcome of child and family assessment	6
Persons who do not have a right to make a complaint under the Children Act 1989 regulations.	6
Request change of social worker	3
Decision made in court	3
Complaint issues older than 12 months	3
Complaint about child being on child protection plan/child in need plan	3
Referred to other services such as school, housing, police and SEN.	2
Social worker visiting	2
Disagreed about a referral	2
Disorganised family meeting	1
Information shared at a meeting	1
Father wanted more family time	1
Standard of care assessment	1
Disagreeing with a negative viability assessment	1
Lack of liaison with school	1
Total	48

13.6 During 2022-23, 64 complaints were rejected. The following table explains why the complaints were rejected.

Court proceedings	18
Persons who do not have a right to make a complaint under the Children Act 1989 regulations	15
Ongoing child and family assessment	5
Outcome of Child protection conference	3
Pre-proceedings	3

Decision made in court	3
GDPR issue	2
Safeguarding investigations.	2
Outcome of Viability assessments	2
Out of timescale	2
Repeat complaint.	2
Outcome of a referral	1
NHS records	1
Section Seven court reports	1
Separated Parents disputes about contact and where the child lives.	1
Referred to LADO.	1
Referred to other services such as the NHS.	1
Complaint about a professional not employed by Medway Council	1
Total	64

14. Learning from complaints

- 14.1 The Manager for Social Care Complaints reports on lessons learnt from complaints and compliments in the quarterly reports to the Director of People - Adult and Children's Services, the Deputy Director, and the Heads of Service, and at performance management meetings. The Manager for Social Care Complaints, the Investigating Officer and the Independent Person discuss the outcomes of stage two investigations with the Deputy Director and the relevant Head of Service.
- 14.2 A main theme in complaints is poor communication. This can be about not explaining the child in need procedures, the process of undertaking a child and family assessment, not explaining how long their information is held on record, not sending minutes of meetings to parents, or returning phone calls in a timely way. It is essential that parents have the correct details about the time and venue for a meeting. Good practice is to return phone calls and answer emails as soon as possible, even if it is just to say that you are busy and will ring later. However, if there is a high volume of emails and or phone calls the social worker can explain that it is not possible to answer so many emails or phone calls individually and emails will only be answered once week unless they are urgent. Good communication is a foundation to a good relationship essential for working with children and families.
- 14.3 Fathers should be involved in a child and family assessment and receive a copy of the child and family assessment. If the parents are separated it might be necessary to redact some information.
- 14.4 A relative complained about lack of financial support while she was assessed as a special guardian. She received an apology and payments were made retrospectively. It is important to provide relatives who are

being assessed to become special guardians with details about special guardians' allowances such as the financial assessment and the difference between an application for special guardianship in public care proceedings and private family court procedures.

- 14.5 Every effort should be made to prevent last minute cancellations of meetings or visits and to ensure that all the relevant information is available prior to a meeting. If a meeting was cancelled alternative dates should be arranged as soon as possible.
- 14.6 A respite foster carer complained that payments for respite care were delayed as the invoices had to be checked and signed by several people and sick leave an annual leave delayed the process even more. The foster carer was reassured that the system for paying for respite care was being reviewed.
- 14.7 A mother and father complained that their child went missing while having respite care. She had managed to open a back door that was not shutting properly. The manager of the respite centre arranged for the door frame to be fixed and installed a chimer to beep if the door has been kept open for a period. The manager addressed the health and safety issues with the staff.
- 14.8 A social worker shared very sensitive information in a meeting. The information was historic and not relevant to the issues being discussed at the meeting. The social worker should have asked the mother's permission to share this sensitive information.
- 14.9 Social workers should ensure that travel warrants for parents to attend contact are sent to parents well in advance. A schedule of contact should be drawn up for several months, so parents are aware of future contact arrangements.
- 14.10 Several parents complained that social workers did not understand their child's special needs such as autism and ADHD. It is important that all social workers are aware of these disabilities and that training courses are available for all social workers to attend.
- 14.11 It is important to ensure there are no delays in providing direct payments and social workers are familiar with the process regarding direct payments.

15. Learning from compliments

- 15.1 Medway Council is proud to receive compliments and thanks from people who are satisfied with Medway Council Children's Services and happy about the way the social workers work with them.
- 15.2 The Social Care Complaints Manager received and logged 7 compliments about Children's Services in 2022-2023, compared with 14 in 2021-2022, 22 in 2020-2021 and 7 in 2019 -2020.

15.3 Medway Council can learn lessons from compliments about what works well, and which services and practices are effective in achieving positive outcomes for parents and their children.

15.4 A mother complimented an Independent Reviewing Officer in an email:

"I have found X to be the most professional, fair, equal, and extremely understanding person I have experienced. Being a neurodivergent woman with a child who has the same condition, you can easily be misunderstood, especially with professionals that have limited understanding and training around Autism and PDA. I feel lucky to have had X. He took the time to research what ASD and pathological demand avoidance is, this made me feel validated and safe. X makes time and effort to allow me to have pre-discussions before each meeting and always asks me how he can accommodate for my reasonable adjustments. He is clear in his emails with direct explanations on how the meetings will be carried out and is very prompt in responding to my emails, generally, which alleviates my anxiety surrounding uncertainty.

During the meetings, he has been the only one to have consistently acknowledged my diagnosis and taken it in consideration where there are communication differences, which is really refreshing for me to hear. X is incredibly balanced and his involvement with my daughters' case makes me feel safe because I know that he will listen, and he is able to explain things to me in a way which is PDA friendly.

X has an extraordinary ability to communicate in a way that doesn't make me feel threatened or unsafe, he corrects me if I am misunderstanding something or if I have said something that is not relevant or beneficial to the situation, but he does it in a way that I do not feel he is criticising me or judging me for my differences.

My hope for the future of social care and local authorities is that they all have people like X working within them, training staff/social workers to better communicate and understand people of all neurotype, it is something that I feel passionate about changing so that families like mine are understood and well supported."

15.5 A solicitor sent an email complimenting a team manager:

"Z is one of the best team managers I have ever encountered in over 7 years. She's decisive, on the ball and always proactive. I cannot express how impressed I am with her and what a unique pleasure it has been to work with her. She is difficult, hard work, oppositional and a very difficult client to have as a solicitor, but she is brilliant, keeping me accountable and challenging everyone to create the best outcomes for the children involved, which is exactly why we all do this overwhelmingly endless job of trying to protect vulnerable children.

I have taken the time to send this email because I believe the world operates on a basis where people only take the time to recognise complaints, failings

and provide criticism, rather than appreciating the good things in life. Z is one of them.”

15.6 A mother gave the following feedback: *“I feel that the 0-25 Disability Team have been supportive, and I could not have managed without their help throughout the years. Thank You to you all.”*

15.7 A headteacher emailed a social worker:

“I just wanted to say a huge thank you for the support that Q has been giving a staff member for one of our cases. He has told me that yesterday when a tricky situation came up for us Q was available at the end of the phone and incredibly helpful. We absolutely realise that social care cannot be available 24/7 but as a school, when something like that comes up it is very reassuring to know that we have the support from another agency. Thank you so much – you made a big difference to us yesterday and it is appreciated.”

15.8 A mother telephoned and said *“I would like to give my son’s social worker a big thank you”* for all his hard work to support her disabled son. She said the social worker worked hard and she is over the moon with the day placement he arranged for her son.

15.9 A mother complimented a youth worker and thanked him for his work with her son. She described the youth worker as *“calm, professional and helpful”*. She said that her son had responded to him with enthusiasm, had learnt a lot, and has a more sensible approach to issues.

15.10 A mother emailed *“This was the first contact I ever had with a social worker, I was scared and anxious because I did not know what to expect. I was literally shaking. The social worker put me at ease as soon as she answered the call. She was calm, reassuring and explained the whole process to me. She explained the process twice as I was anxious. I put the phone down and could breathe knowing that I spoke to someone who cared about me and my sons. I felt she listened and that no question was too silly to ask. I am much calmer now as she offered reassurance and spoke to me respectfully. I am sure I wasn’t the easiest parent to contact because of how anxious I was. She was informative, clear on the processes and kept me updated. I don’t think there is anything I could suggest that would improve the experience.”*

16. Risk management

16.1 Risk management is an integral part of good governance. The Council has a responsibility to identify and manage threats and risks to achieve its strategic objectives and enhance the value of services it provides to the community.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Not handling complaints properly and more importantly not	Good complaint handling, including the identification of improvement	Improved management and control of complaint procedures and	D III

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
learning from complaints could put a child at risk.	opportunities, supports the delivery of quality services and minimises the possibility of a child being put at risk.	learning from complaint analysis helps to identify and minimise potential risk or impact of risk to children	

For risk rating, please refer to the following table

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely	I Catastrophic
B Likely	II Major
C Unlikely	III Moderate
D Rare	IV Minor

17. Equalities Data

17.1 Our service users come from many different ethnic backgrounds, and many have disabilities. The Customer Relations Team will refer all looked after children to the advocacy service, and if a complainant is not able to send in a written complaint, a member of the team will meet the complainant at a venue that is convenient and accessible for them. Where English is not the complainants first language, the team organise a translator if required. Medway Council actively looks at ways of improving equality and diversity monitoring to ensure that services are provided fairly to service users who come from different ethnic groups and religious backgrounds. The Customer Relations Team gathers and analyses data to understand which groups need more help to be able to tell us their views and concerns.

18. Financial implications

18.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. The statutory framework for the handling of representations (including complaints) under the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 and Statutory Guidance is summarised above. Local Authorities must publish an annual report of its consideration of representations under that framework.

19. Legal implications

19.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report

Lead officer contact

Sandy Weaver, Manager for Social Care Complaints
Customer Relations Team, Customer and Business Support (CABS)

Appendices

None

Background papers

None