

## **Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**3 October 2024**

### **Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024**

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#### **Summary**

The annual report provides information on children's services complaints handled during 2023–24, 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. Recommendation**

- 1.1 The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

#### **2. Background**

- 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. Analysis of complaints: 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

#### 3.1 Statutory children's social care complaints were handled as follows.

Stage 1, 2 & 3 complaints for 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024	No. complaints
Brought forward from 31 March 2023	0
Complaints received	18
Complaints closed	16
Complaints withdrawn	1
Open complaints still awaiting response on 31 March 2023	1
Complaints dealt with within 10 working days	10
Complaints dealt with within 20 working days	15
Total number of stage 1 complaints handled in 2023-24	18
Stage 2 investigations completed in 2023-24	4
Ongoing stage 2 investigations	0
Stage 3 Panel	3

#### 3.2 Monthly breakdown of stage one complaints from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

	April	May	June	Q.1	July	Aug	Sep	Q.2	Oct	Nov	Dec	Q.3	Jan	Feb	Mar	Q4	Total
Complaints cfwd from 2022-23	0			0				1				0				0	
No. complaints received	3	2	1	6	2	1	1	4	2	1	0	3	2	1	2	5	18
No. complaints responded to	1	2	1	5	3	1	0	4	1	1	1	3	0	3	1	4	16
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	1	1 (0)	0	2	3	1	0	4	1	1	0	2	0	1	1	2	10
% complaints dealt with in 10 days	100%	50%	0%	40%	100%	100%	0%	100%	100%	100%	0%	67%	0%	33%	10%	50%	63%
No. complaints dealt with in 20 days	1	2	1	4	3	1	0	4	1	1	1	3	0	3	1	4	15
% complaints responded to in 20 days	100%	100%	100%	80%	100%	100%	N/A	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	N/A	100%	100%	100%	94%
% 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				1				0				0				0	1

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

<b>Year</b>	<b>Volume of complaints</b>
2019-20	133
2020-21	58
2021-22	26
2022-23	46
2023-24	18

3.4 The following table shows the number of stage 1 complaints received in 2023-24, by service.

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Total</b>
Assessment Team	1
Disability 0-17 years	3
Disability Team 0-25 years	2
Adolescent Team	1
CIC Team 1	2
CIC Team 2	2
CIC Team 3	1
CIC Team 4	0
All CSW Teams	2
Fostering	1
Leaving Care Team	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>

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

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number</b>
White / British	14
Mixed /Multiple /White and Black African	1
Mixed White/Asian	1
Mixed/any other background	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>

## 4 Responses to Stage 1 Complaints

4.1 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.

4.2 The following table shows the time taken to answer stage 1 complaints in 2023-24.

Reply sent	Within 10 days	11-20 days	21- 25 days	Total
<b>Stage 1</b>	10	5	1	<b>16</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	62.5%	31.5%	6%	<b>100%</b>

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

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
<b>Complaints answered in 20 working days</b>	116	53	24	46	16
<b>% complaints answered in 20 working days</b>	91%	91%	96%	91%	94%

4.4 Outcomes of stage 1 complaints responded to in 2023-24

Complaint type	Not upheld	Upheld	Total
Lack of communication	0	6	<b>6</b>
Behaviour/attitude of staff	3	0	<b>3</b>
Lack of support	3	0	<b>3</b>
Service provided	2	1	<b>3</b>
Delay in providing support	0	2	<b>2</b>
Delay in receiving savings	1	0	<b>1</b>
Delay in providing a safety plan	0	1	<b>1</b>
Family Time	1	0	<b>1</b>
Incorrect information in an assessment	1	0	<b>1</b>
Cancelled visit	0	1	<b>1</b>
Not providing photos of a child as agreed.	0	1	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>23*</b>

\* This number is greater than the 18 complaints responded to 2023-24 as one complaint can cover several different issues.

4.5 On the advice of the LGSCO the category of partially upheld was not used in 2023-24 which resulted in a higher number of complaint issues being upheld.

4.6 The following table shows how many complaints were upheld about the attitude of a staff member or lack of communication and compares this with previous years.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Complaints Upheld - Attitude of social worker</b>	<b>Complaints Upheld - Lack of communication</b>
2023-24	3	6
2022-23	4	5
2021-22	2	3
2020-21	6	8
2019-20	13	11

4.7 Two complainants made more than one complaint in 2023-24, compared to two in 2022-23, one in 2021-22, two in 2020-21, and six in 2019-20.

## 5. Stage 2 investigations

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

<b>Year</b>	<b>No. complainants unhappy with stage 1 response</b>	<b>% of complainants unhappy with stage 1 response</b>
2023-24	4	25%
2022-23	8	17%
2021-22	5	19%
2020-21	17	29%
2019-20	28	21%

5.2 This is a higher percentage than the previous two years because the partially upheld outcome of was removed.

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

- Four complainants sent an email saying they were dissatisfied with the response to their stage 1 complaint.
- Two complainants attended an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) meeting and were satisfied with their response following the ADR meeting.
- Two complainants were happy with a further written response to their complaints.
- Four stage two investigations were carried forward from 2022-23 to 2023-24.

5.4 A mother complained that she had not received extra support when her son was without a school placement. She received a further response, and the care package was increased.

5.5 A mother complained that a social worker did not visit her son while he was in A&E or go to the police station when he was arrested. An alternative dispute resolution meeting was arranged, and the mother was happy that the social worker apologised for saying that going to the hospital to see her son was not a priority. The social worker also said he would be more sensitive in future.

- 5.6 A mother complained that a manager had promised to finance a company to declutter and deep clean her house. There was a delay in obtaining a quote for the decluttering and deep clean. The Manager for Social Care Complaints met with the mother to discuss a resolution to her complaint. The solution she wanted was a bunch of flowers for her daughters to thank them for their hard work in decluttering and cleaning her house.
- 5.7 A mother was unhappy that children's services were involved in her child's life. A further response was sent to her explaining that children in need services are voluntary and the case was closed.
- 5.8 The outcomes of the stage two investigations completed in 2023-24 were as follows:
- i. An adoptive foster carer complained that the child who was placed with her and her husband was removed from her care as they had not fully committed to adopting him. The complaint, which related to poor communication about when the placement would end, was upheld.
  - ii. Parents of an adolescent complained about a lack of communication with them and lack of support for them. They complained that they were not included in their child's joint housing assessment meeting and some of the child in need meetings. They also complained that their child was not receiving enough support. The outcome of the stage two investigation was an apology for the lack of communication and because the social worker did not say goodbye to the child when she left Medway Council. All the relevant documents were sent to the parents.
  - iii. Parents complained that they did not agree with their daughter being placed in supported living accommodation, that they were not involved in the decision making and that the social worker did not consider their daughter's disabilities when placing her in supported accommodation. The parents received an apology for the poor communication and the lack of a plan to support their daughter, and because the social worker did not contact the parents after their daughter climbed out of her car following her interview with the accommodation provider.
  - iv. A mother of a looked after child made a complaint on behalf of her son about the way the foster carer spoke to her son. The foster carer's comments to the son were inappropriate. It was acknowledged that this should not have happened and caused him distress. The mother and her son received a written apology and the foster carer apologised and understood how her comments about his mother had upset him.

## 6. Stage 3 review panels

- 6.1 Medway Council convened three stage 3 panels in 2023-24.
- 6.2 Parents of an adolescent were concerned about the lack of a safety plan for their son when he went into foster care as he was known to self-harm. Parents complained about the lack of communication from social workers and that they were not sent minutes of child in need meetings or the section 20 consent form. They complained

about the changes in social workers. They complained they were not involved in important decisions regarding their son and felt that the supported lodgings he was living in was not meeting his needs. They complained that the social worker did not visit as frequently as she should have and that she cancelled a visit at the last moment which upset their son. All their complaints were upheld, and the parents received £750 as a financial remedy for the distress caused.

- 6.3 A foster carer complained about the lack of support when she was harassed by the birth mother and her associates. She decided to move out of Medway to avoid the harassment and complained that she was not offered enough support and was not happy with Medway Council's financial offer towards her costs of moving house. The panel and Medway Council acknowledged that the harassment was distressing and caused her and her husband distress. The level and extent of the abuse was unprecedented and targeted towards the foster carer, the social worker, the Independent Reviewing Officer, and the social worker's parents. Medway Council and Kent Police worked together to keep those involved safe. The foster carer was signposted to Foster Talk to obtain support, guidance, and advocacy and was offered £8,000 as a contribution towards her costs to move house and offered a meeting with a senior manager which she declined.
- 6.4 Parents of an adolescent were unhappy with their stage two investigation and asked for their complaint to be reviewed by an independent panel. The panel upheld that their daughter's needs in relation to her disabilities were not considered when making the decision to place her in supported accommodation. The lack of support for the daughter when she stayed in supported accommodation was also upheld. The parents and their daughter received an apology for the poor service they had received. Medway Council paid the mother, the father and the adolescent child £600 each as a financial remedy for the stress they experienced.

## 7 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

- 7.1 Ten complainants referred their complaints to the LGSCO in 2023-24.
- 7.2 The LGSCO closed ten investigations in 2023-24. The outcomes of these referrals were as follows:
- i. The LGSCO did not investigate a father's complaint that Medway Council failed to respond to his concerns about his son and had failed to provide appropriate information and services to him and his family. The LGSCO could not add anything significant to the investigation which had already been carried out under the statutory procedure for complaints about children's services. **Final decision - closed after initial enquiries, no further action.**
  - ii. The LGSCO did not investigate a complaint about matters relating to Medway Council's child protection involvement with the complainant's family and about a data breach. The Ombudsman said that the child protection matter lies outside its jurisdiction because it was being considered in court proceedings and the data matter was best considered by the Information Commissioner's Office. **Final decision - closed after initial enquiries, no further action.**

- iii. The LGSCO did not investigate a complaint because there was no sign of fault in the council's decision not to accept the complaint because the complainant did not have parental responsibility for the children concerned. **Final decision Closed after initial enquiries - no further action.**
- iv. The LGSCO did not investigate a complaint as the law prevents it from considering complaints about matters that are being, or have been, considered in court proceedings. **Closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction.**
- v. A mother complained to the LGSCO that children's services were undertaking a child and family assessment following a referral from the midwife. The LGSCO did not investigate Miss X's complaint because it could not achieve what she wanted. It is not for the LGSCO to intervene to question the professional judgement of officers. Investigation by the Ombudsman would not result in the outcome the complainant was seeking. The Ombudsman's final decision was **Closed after initial enquiries – no further action.**
- vi. The LGSCO did not investigate a complaint from a foster carer about the support provided to her in her role as a foster carer. This is because investigation by the Ombudsman would not add anything significant to the investigation already carried out or lead to a substantially different outcome. The Ombudsman's final decision was **Closed after initial enquiries – no further action.**
- vii. The LGSCO did not investigate a complaint about a report written for court which the complainant said did not accurately reflect the situation and which she felt put her at risk. This was because the courts were involved and the Ombudsman is prevented in law from investigating complaints about what happens during court proceedings. **Closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction.**
- viii. A complainant said that Medway Council refused his request for reasonable adjustments to help him fully participate in the Child Protection meetings despite him repeatedly asking for these for three years. He asked for an advocate to help him, which he said the Council had failed to provide. He asked for extra time to read and understand written reports about his children, which the Council agreed but he alleged the council then failed to consistently provide. The complainant wanted the council to consistently provide the reasonable adjustments he needed. The LGSCO saw no evidence to show the council had deliberately sought to exclude the complainant or his views from the process. Nor was there evidence to show the council had ignored its duties to provide reasonable adjustments to help ensure he can participate in the discussions about his children, noting that he had attended all child protection conferences and meetings the council had held about his children. The Ombudsman found that the council had also taken his concerns about others involved in his children's lives seriously and acted in response and that the council's records showed that the father had actively participated in the meetings held about his children and recorded his views. The LGSCO was satisfied the council had had due regard for Mr L's disabilities and needs while interacting with him, noting that the council had said it would continue to look for ways in which it can further



support him while its involvement with his children continued. **Not upheld – no fault.**

- ix. A father complained that Medway Council had wrongly sought to portray him as a perpetrator of domestic abuse, sided with his former partner, and separated him from his children by moving them out of the area. He said his former partner is not fit to parent his children. The LGSCO did not investigate the complaint because the matters the father complained about were not separable from matters where he had a right to go to court. Where someone has already approached a court, the LGSCO cannot investigate related matters. **Closed after initial enquiries – Out of Jurisdiction.**
- x. A complainant complained to the LGSCO that Medway Council would not accept her complaint until the child and family assessment was completed. The LGSCO was unable to investigate the complaint until the complaint had been through Medway Council's complaint procedure and it signposted the complaint back to Medway Council as it is best placed to resolve things that have gone wrong. The complaint was recorded as **premature.**

## 8 Listening to children

### 8.1 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.

8.2 Medway Council commissions 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.

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

## 9 Complaints from children and young persons

### 9.1 Five young people made a complaint in 2023-24 compared with:

- 5 in 2022-23
- 5 in 2021-22
- 5 in 2020-21
- 5 in 2019-20
- 11 in 2018-19

9.2 The theme from these complaints highlights the importance of explaining to a young person why family time arrangements were decided and what needed to happen if the young person wanted to change the arrangements.

## 10 Non-statutory complaints

### 10.1 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.

### 10.2 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

### 10.3 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.

### 10.4 During 2023-24, 63 complaints were regarded as a non-statutory complaint and were handled as follows.

<b>Non-statutory complaints during 2023-24</b>	<b>Volume</b>
Complaints brought forward from 31 March 2024	<b>4</b>
Complaints received during 2023-24	<b>63</b>
Total number of complaints handled in 2023-24	<b>67</b>
Complaints responded to during 2023-24	<b>59</b>
Complaints withdrawn during 2023-24	<b>6</b>
Complaints carried forward on 1 April 24	<b>2</b>
Complaints dealt with within 20 working days	<b>50</b>

### 10.5 This table provides information about the issues complained about in non-statutory complaints.

<b>Issues complained about</b>	<b>Volume</b>
Attitude/Behaviour of staff	15
Lack of communication	14
Family Time	8

<b>Issues complained about</b>	<b>Volume</b>
Service provided	8
Disputes about outcome of child and family assessment	5
Lack of support	5
Separated parents' disputes about their children's contact and residency	4
Reasonable adjustments for person with a disability	2
Delay in providing a passport	1
Cancelled visit	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>

## 11. Learning from complaints

- 11.1 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 Assistant 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 Assistant Director and the relevant Head of Service.
- 11.2 Complaints continue to highlight the need for good communication. Good communication is a foundation to a good relationship, essential for working with children and families. Each complaint is an opportunity to improve our services.
- Social workers should explain processes such as child and family assessments, the procedures for children in need, child protection and the looked after children's procedures to parents and young people.
  - Parents and children need to know when they can reasonably expect their phone calls to be returned.
  - Social workers need to discuss how they will communicate with parents whose children are in foster care as they will not have information to share on a daily or weekly basis.
  - When seeking consent to contact other professionals during a child and need assessment, social workers should explain what we do with their personal information and how long their information is held on record.
  - Parents should be informed that child in need services are voluntary.
  - Three complainants highlighted the importance of informing parents of the outcome of a safeguarding enquiry.
  - Reports for child in care reviews should be sent to parents before the review meeting.

### 11.3 Actions promised should be completed in a timely way.

- A parent of a child in care complained that she had not received photos of her child at special occasions such as his birthday.
- Referrals to other organisations should be sent in a timely way and followed up. There should be a record of when the referral was sent.
- Reports for child in care reviews should be sent to parents before the review meeting.
- Managers and social workers should ensure that actions on a child's plan are completed in a timely way.
- A mother asked for financial assistance to declutter her house. She was promised that Medway Council would pay for a company to declutter her house. This promise was rescinded but Medway Council paid for three skips. It is important that the staff do not make promises without knowing the financial implications of the discussion. If an action cannot be completed as promised this needs to be explained to the parent or young person, a new plan agreed, and an apology given.

11.4 Teams need to consider how they can minimise the impact that frequent changes of social workers have on parents and particularly on children and young people. This should include good handovers and goodbye visits.

11.5 Complaints highlighted the importance of keeping good records of meetings and the need for clearly recorded safety plans and support plans.

11.6 Complaints highlighted the importance of making reasonable adjustments for young people with autism to cope in supported accommodation, such as extra support with budgeting their finances, helping with planning meals and food shopping as well as help to attend medical appointments. This should be written into their support plan.

## 12. Learning from compliments

12.1 Medway Council is proud to receive compliments and thanks from people who are satisfied with Medway Council's Children's Services and who are happy about the way the social workers work with them.

12.2 The Social Care Complaints Manager received 31 compliments in 2023-24 about Children's Services compared with 7 in 2022-23, 14 in 2021-22, 22 in 2020-21 and 7 in 2019 -20.

12.3 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.

12.4 A mother complimented a social worker: *"I am so sad to see you leaving. Being a mum to 3 autistic children I can honestly say over all these years you truly are the best social worker we ever had. Your consistency, your honesty, your kind heart, and you just being you have made a huge positive effect on this family, and I can say from bottom of our hearts you will be truly missed."*

- 12.5 Foster carers thanked a fostering social worker: *“Thank you for all of your support today and your kind words, it was very much appreciated.”*
- 12.6 All the fostering panel members commented on how comprehensive and well written a report for panel was, that it flowed, and they enjoyed reading it. Panel members also liked seeing the direct work completed with X and could see that the social worker was well prepared for panel. Z came across as confident and clearly understood the process and role of a foster carer.
- 12.7 A mother complimented a social worker from the assessment team: *“X was so reassuring, she didn’t judge and engaged with myself and my children in a really friendly and approachable manner, she encouraged me to seek counselling giving me a gentle reminder and deadline which prompted me to sort that out. She listened and allowed me time to talk things out, I never felt rushed though I’m sure she had lots of places to be. She gave us information and helplines that we have accessed. I really appreciate her input and kindness in this situation.”*
- 12.8 A manager thanked a private foster carer for the support, care, stability, love, and attuned parenting she gives X.
- 12.9 An Independent Reviewing Officer emailed a support social worker: *“I observed a very good and supportive relationship between the social worker Z and the foster carer U. Z has shown understanding of the children’s complex needs and clearly appreciates the foster carer’s hard work. He encouraged U to raise any support needs with him to be able to put in the support in a timely manner.”*
- 12.10 A father sent an email to a social worker *“I am writing to express my sincere gratitude for the outstanding and compassionate service you provided to my family. Your professionalism, dedication, and genuine care were truly evident throughout our interactions, and it was clear that you always had our best interests at heart. Your guidance and patience at every turn made a significant difference in our journey. Your commitment to our well-being has left a lasting impression on all of us, and we are truly thankful for your support. If I were to rate your support and that of Medway Social Services on a 5-star scale, you would undoubtedly receive the full 5 stars.”*
- 12.11 A mother emailed an OT in the Children and Young People’s Disability Team: *“I want to say a big thank you for all the help and support you have given me in finding an adapted house. I am more than happy with that the house, I am over the moon, thank you so much. You don’t know how grateful I am. Knowing I have a house has lifted a big weight of my shoulders, thank you.”*
- 12.12 A foster carer thanked a fostering support social worker for organising respite care so quickly. *“I told you he could stay until Friday morning if necessary and you told me Thursday would be better so we could have the night to ourselves before T comes tomorrow afternoon. You were right. I know myself and my family are very appreciative of the breather tonight before someone else comes in tomorrow. You have really kept our well-being at the forefront, and I just wanted you to know how appreciated it is. Whenever I’m talking to other carers, they say how good you are. Thank you for your care and being so excellent at your job. I appreciate it”.*

- 12.13 A young person emailed the manager of the 16+Team: *"I just wanted to say that Y is arguably one of the best personal advisors. He always makes sure he listens to what I have to say, always helping me out on everything that needs to be done asap always making sure I'm good and checking up on me seeing if there's anything else he can help me with. He takes no crap and speaks to you like he's one of your mates which is a good thing due to me being able to be more comfortable and ask him for advice and any support I need. Thank you. I think you should give him a pay rise 😊😁 joking."*
- 12.14 A foster carer emailed a fostering manager complimenting a support social worker and an SEN support worker Y. *"I would like to take a minute to say a thank you to my support social worker X and the SEN support worker. I want you to know how much I appreciate their hard work. X has been a great support, whenever I have had a concern or needed advice she has responded immediately, she has highlighted training opportunities, helping widen my skills base. She indicated and identified new avenues for me to explore with my child. She has listened and cared about not just me but all my family. X is very approachable and continues to do her utmost to make the fostering journey a positive one for me. I have met with Y through the SEN support groups; she is sensitive to the needs of the carers of SEN children... she gets us. Her friendly helpful support is valued not just by me but all the other carers who regularly attend. She goes above and beyond to give us details of events and activities we can tap into for our children and has brought new and interesting guest speakers along to enrich our knowledge and points of contact. I have had great support from all the team supporting myself and my child, but I just wanted you to know how much these ladies are appreciated."*
- 12.15 A private foster carer thanked a fostering social worker *"thank you very much for helping Q with her move, that was very kind of you! She called me very happily that evening and her first impression is positive. I haven't heard her so happy in a long time. Thank you again from the bottom of my heart for your support, we really appreciate it!"*
- 12.16 A social worker complimented an Independent Reviewing Officer: *"I would just like to let you know of the excellent review that X chaired for my family. The family are experiencing difficulties, particularly birth mum and P was very emphatic to mum's needs and went at a pace that was manageable for all. The young person participated also, via a school link, using teams and again P demonstrated care and attention to the child. P praised the mum and daughter for their courage and will be following up with the family in 6 weeks times, despite a CP plan not being agreed as the family will be going on a CIN plan."*
- 12.17 A father emailed a manager *"I am writing to express my deep appreciation for the exemplary support and care provided by X who has gone above and beyond in assisting my children and myself during a challenging time. As a dedicated member of your team X has demonstrated an exceptional level of commitment, professionalism, and compassion that has made a significant positive impact on our lives. From the moment X became involved, I noticed a remarkable difference in the way my children responded to the support they were receiving, unlike the previous social workers. X genuinely looked at things from both sides and judged on the actual evidence that was clear to see. She consistently displayed a genuine interest in my children's*

*wellbeing and my stepdaughter's. She took the time to build a trusting and nurturing relationship with each of them. Her ability to connect with my children on a personal level while also providing invaluable guidance and support has been truly remarkable. Furthermore, X has proven to be an effective advocate for my children, ensuring that their needs are met, and their voices are heard. She has demonstrated exceptional problem-solving skills, resourcefulness, and a willingness to go the extra mile to ensure that my children receive the best possible care and support. I firmly believe that X exemplifies the qualities of an outstanding social worker, and she is a true asset to your organisation. Her dedication and genuine concern for the well-being of the families she serves are truly commendable and deserving of recognition. I am truly grateful for the difference X has made in our lives."*

- 12.18 A mother sent an email complimenting two staff members from the 0-25 Disability Team, *"I can't thank you both enough for all your support with everything, it really means a lot, you both listened and heard me! And from that, we are now going to be so much happier, stress levels dropped by at least 80%"*
- 12.19 A mother sent a social worker from the assessment team a thank you card saying *"Not all hero's wear capes. Thank you for your kindness. A lot of people fear social services. I was one of those, but you made the process like a conversation. I never felt judged. Thank you for the report, you captured our family very well. You are amazing."*
- 12.20 A father complimented and thanked a YOT officer for his calm, professional and helpful manner. The YOT worker recognised his son's needs. His son responded enthusiastically and was very happy to work with the YOT officer. The father said that his son learnt a lot and developed a more sensible approach to issues.
- 12.21 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, and T put me at ease as soon as she answered the call. She was calm, reassuring and explained the whole process to me, she put me at ease and even repeated the process because I was anxious. I honestly think that if all social workers can do what she did then social workers would not get bad press. I put the phone down and could breathe knowing that I spoke to someone who cared about me, and my children. I felt she listened and that no question was too silly to ask. I am so much calmer now and like I said she explained the processes, offered reassurance, and spoke to me respectfully, so do thank her again. She was informative, clear on the processes and kept me updated. I don't think there is anything I could suggest improving because she explained it all. "*
- 12.22 A mother complimented a social worker Z *"who was able to identify the true picture of my case at a time of much uncertainty. I had no hope left, I had lost my health, my children (3 months separation) I was fighting through court to get my children back from their father. I was at my absolute lowest. However, with the help of Z I was able to prove my case and gained strength to fight back. My daughter is a victim of parental alienation, and she was refusing to ever speak to me again, to the point she had said she wished I was dead. X's intervention in my case helped my daughter to re-build our relationship and helped her to understand about parental illness and how illness affects a person's ability to cope. After 6 months my daughter contacted me and began meeting me. I thank Z from the bottom of my heart for re-uniting us. Z is*

*experienced, she was always helpful and made me understand time is key and we need to go at a certain pace to win my daughter back. She listened to me and always made me feel heard.*

*Z gave me advice about court proceedings to apply for custody of my children. She tried to work with their father about contact. I thank Z from the bottom of my heart and will never forget her help on this journey. I believe she should be promoted for this outstanding work.”*

- 12.23 There were nine compliments from foster carers thanking their fostering support social workers, the children’s social workers, a manager and a family support worker for their support.
- 12.24 There was one compliment about the positive changes in the fostering service.
- 12.25 These compliments reinforce the importance of being calm and respectful and engaging with parents and children. A positive experience at the first point of contact can make the difference between a parent not engaging with the service and a parent who is keen to work with the social worker to ensure their child’s needs are met.

### 13. Risk Management

- 13.1 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 learning from complaints could put a child at risk.	Good complaint handling, including the identification of improvement opportunities from complaints received, helps ensure that Medway Council provides quality services in a timely way, minimising the possibility of a child being put at risk.	Improved management and control of complaint procedures and learning from complaint analysis helps to identify and minimise potential risk or impact of risk to children	D III

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



## 14. Equalities Data

14.1 Our service users come from many different ethnic backgrounds, and many have disabilities. We will refer all looked after children to the advocacy service. If a complainant is not able to send in a written complaint, we will see the complainant at a venue that is convenient and accessible for them. We will organise a translator if required. We actively look at ways of improving equality and diversity monitoring to ensure we are providing services fairly to service users who come from different ethnic groups and religious backgrounds, and to understand which groups need more help to be able to tell us their views and concerns.

14.2 The following table shows the ethnicity of the children, who either made a complaint or a representative made a complaint on their behalf. This includes both statutory and non-statutory complaints.

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Total No. of complaints received in 2023-24</b>
White / British	52
Mixed White Asian	4
White other background	3
Mixed/any other background	3
Mixed White and Black African	2
Black /African	2
Asian/Asian any other background	1
Missing/refused/not recorded ethnicity	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>

14.3 The following table shows the percentage of service users, by ethnicity, who made a complaint during 2023-24.

<b>Ethnicity group</b>	<b>No. children using services</b>	<b>No. persons making complaint</b>	<b>% service users making complaint.</b>
Mixed	557	12	2.2%
Other	151	3	2.0%
White	5130	63	1.2%
Black	717	2	0.3%
Asian	287	1	0.3%

14.4 Two complainants were service providers and therefore there was no information on ethnicity.

## 15. Financial and Legal Implications

- a. There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.
- b. The statutory framework for the handling of representations (including complaints) under the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 and Statutory Guidance is summarised in [Getting the Best from Complaints \(Department for Education and Skills guidance\)](#)
- c. Local Authorities must publish an annual report of its consideration of representations under that framework.

### Lead Officer Contact:

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

### Appendices

None

### Background papers:

[Getting the Best from Complaints \(Department for Education and Skills guidance\)](#)

[Managing Complaints](#)

[The Role of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman \(LGSCO\)](#)