



**Birmingham Children's Trust Leadership Team
2 July 2024**

Title of report	Annual Complaints & Compliments Report 2023/24
Author	Darren Shuster, Complaints & Information Manager
Sponsoring Director	Lee Yale-Helms, Director of Finances & Resources
Purpose	To provide the Executive Team with information about complaint performance, trends and compliments for the 2023/24 financial year.
Decision required from TLT	To note the contents of this report.
Has this matter been discussed with relevant Heads of Service eg. at SLT?	Not applicable
Finance Yes/no /not applicable	
Commissioning Yes/no /not applicable	
ICT Yes/no /not applicable	
HR Yes/no /not applicable	
Business Services and Support Yes/no /not applicable	
Legal Yes/no /not applicable	

1. Executive Summary

The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 (*"The Regulations"*) places a statutory duty on all local authorities to produce an annual report detailing representations made by (or on behalf of) children and young people who receive services or support from Children's Services.

This report provides information about complaints and compliments received by Birmingham Children's Trust for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

In general, the data should not be relied upon to provide a sole indicator on the quality of the service, but it can highlight specific concerns at particular times and give a guide to remedial action taken to resolve recurring issues.

The headlines from the report are:

- The number of complaints received were:
 - 371 at stage 1 – an increase of 5%.
 - 25 at stage 2 – a reduction of 2%.
 - 17 at stage 3 – a reduction of 23%.
- The number of complaints that were upheld or partially upheld were:
 - 38% at stage 1.
 - 82% at stage 2.
 - 65% at stage 3
- Approximately 51% of stage 1 complaints were responded to within deadline, with an average response time of 24.36 working days.
- 50% of stage 2 complaints were responded to within deadline, with an average response time of 70.34 working days.
- 47% of stage 1 complaints received were about service quality, while 33% of complaints related to service failure or refusal, which is consistent with previous years.
- 28 stage 1 complaints received were made by children and young people. This equates to 7.5% of all stage 1 complaints received.
- 27 complaints were referred to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, resulting in seven decisions being issued.
- The investigation of complaints over the course of the year has highlighted a number of service improvements, including reviews of practice, learning needs for staff including reminders to staff about existing practice guidance.
- 82 compliments were recorded.

2. Complaints Procedure

The procedure for investigating complaints about children's social care is detailed in the Regulations and the pursuant statutory guidance, 'Getting the Best from Complaints'. The Complaints & Information Service is responsible for managing complaints for the Trust.

The statutory complaints procedure has three stages which aim to resolve grievances and address representations as soon as reasonably practicable, and within specific timescales. The three stages are described below:

Stage 1 – Local Resolution

This stage provides the opportunity for managers and staff who have responsibility for the case, to resolve issues of dissatisfaction at a local level as early as possible. The Complaints & Information Service provides support and guidance to both the complainant and the service being complained about, to help achieve early resolution and, where things have gone wrong, ensure that matters are put right quickly with lessons learned captured and fed back into service improvements.

The timescale for resolving complaints at stage 1 is ten working days but can be extended to 20 working days (for more complex cases or if an advocate is required).

Stage 2 – Investigation

This stage allows for independent scrutiny of the original complaint. The investigation is conducted by an external Investigating Officer and an Independent Person (whose role is to oversee the fairness and transparency of the investigation process).

The Investigating Officer and Independent Person will consider all details surrounding the complaint and make recommendations for a better or improved service, and how any service failings can be remedied.

After considering the findings and recommendations of the investigation team, an Assistant Director provides a written response to the complainant setting out their view of whether they agree with the findings of the investigation.

The timescale for responding to complaints at stage 2 is 25 working days, which can be extended to 65 working days if necessary.

Stage Three – Review Panel

If the stage 2 investigation is unable to resolve matters, the complainant can request that their complaint be considered at the final stage of the procedure by a Review Panel, which consists of three independent panellists.

The Panel review the stage 2 investigation and response, and make recommendations to the relevant Director, who will then respond to the complainant on the outcome of the review and any actions to be taken.

There are three timescales for stage 3 complaints:

- Organising the panel within 30 working days of the complainant's request.
- Producing the Chairperson's report within 5 working days of the panel taking place.
- Responding to the complainant within 15 working days of the Chairperson's report.

Complaints which are not eligible for consideration through the statutory procedure may be considered through the Trust's local complaints procedure. The local complaints procedure has two stages which, like the statutory procedure, aim to resolve complaints and address representations as soon as reasonably practicable, and within specific timescales. The two stages are described below:

Stage 1 – Local Resolution

This stage provides the opportunity for managers and staff who have responsibility for the case, to resolve issues of dissatisfaction at a local level as early as possible. The Complaints & Information Service provides support and guidance to both the complainant and the service being complained about, to help achieve early resolution and, where things have gone wrong, ensure that matters are put right quickly with lessons learned captured and fed back into service improvements.

The timescale for resolving complaints at stage 1 is 20 working days.

Stage 2 – Review Stage

Stage 2 of the local procedure is a review of the stage 1 response, normally completed by a Head of Service or the Complaints & Information Manager. The reviewing manager will write to the complainant to share the findings and outcome of the review, providing the details of any actions to be taken.

The timescale for resolving complaints at stage 2 is 25 working days.

The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

Once the complaints procedure has concluded, a complainant may contact the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is a free service that investigates complaints about local authorities (and care providers) in a fair and independent way.

3. Statistical Breakdown

Volume: Overall

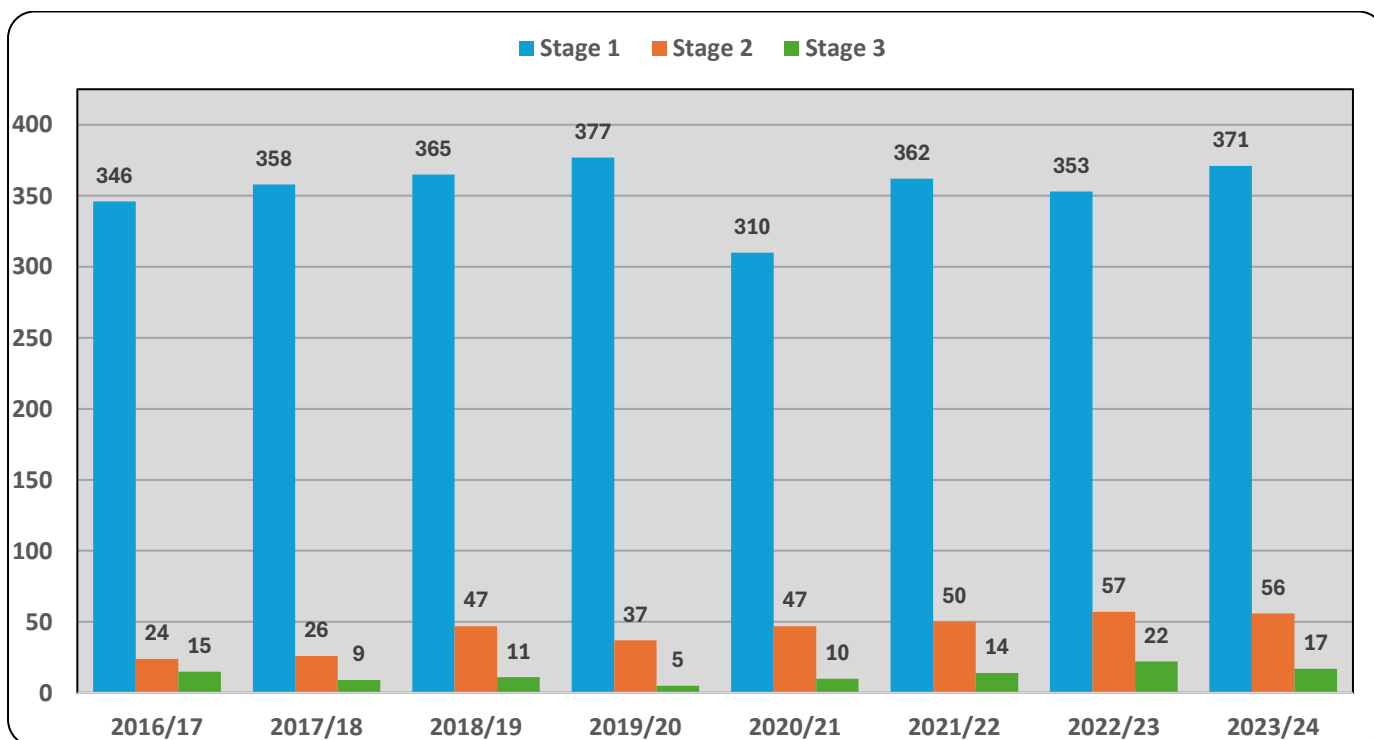
371 stage 1 complaints were received in 2023/24, an increase of 5.1% from 2022/23. 267 complaints (72%) were considered through the statutory complaints procedure, while 104 complaints (28%) were considered through the Trust’s non-statutory (local) complaints procedure.

The number of stage 2 complaints decreased from 57 in 2022/23 to 56 in 2023/24, while the number of Stage 3 Review Panels requested also decreased (17 compared with 22 in 2022/23).

While the volumes of complaints may appear high, the volumes should be considered in the context of the number of referrals received by the Trust and the number of Family Assessments undertaken. Historically, Birmingham has had a low level of complaints compared with the number of referrals received and assessments undertaken, and this remains the case in 2023/24.

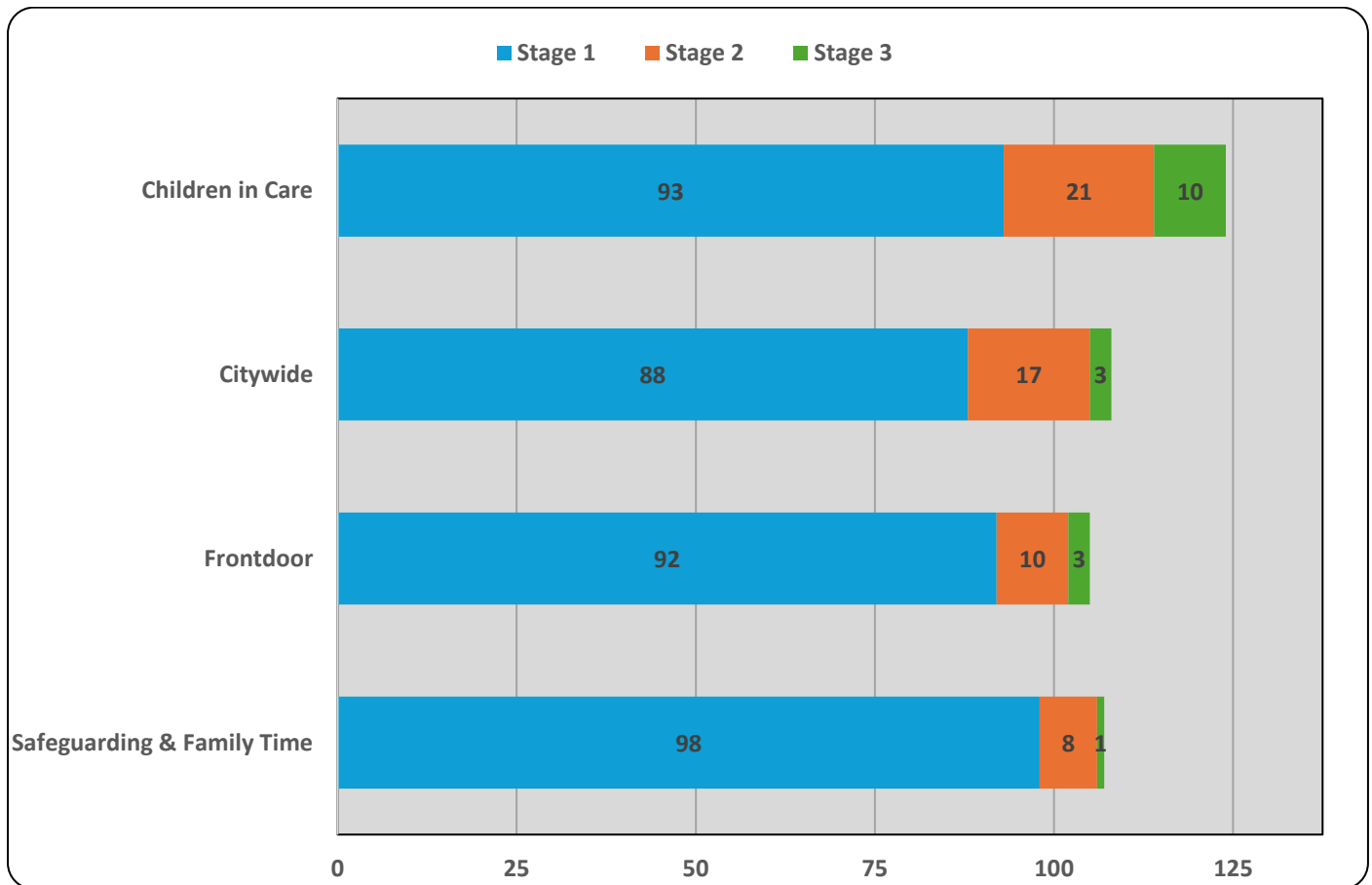
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Referrals Received	15,636	18,173	18,078
Ratio of S1 Complaints to Referrals	2.32%	1.94%	2.05%
Family Assessments Completed	11,588	17,678	17,969
Ratio of S1 Complaints to Family Assessments	3.12%	2.00%	2.06%

Ratio of stage 1 complaints to referrals/assessments



Number of complaints received since 2016/17

Volume: By Theme



Complaints received by theme and stage.

Volume: By Service

The services who received the most stage 1 complaints were:

- South Safeguarding (46)
- Children with Disabilities (36)
- Children in Care – North West Central (31)

The services who received the most stage 2 complaints were:

- Children in Care – North West Central (10)
- Children with Disabilities (8)
- Children in Care – East (6)

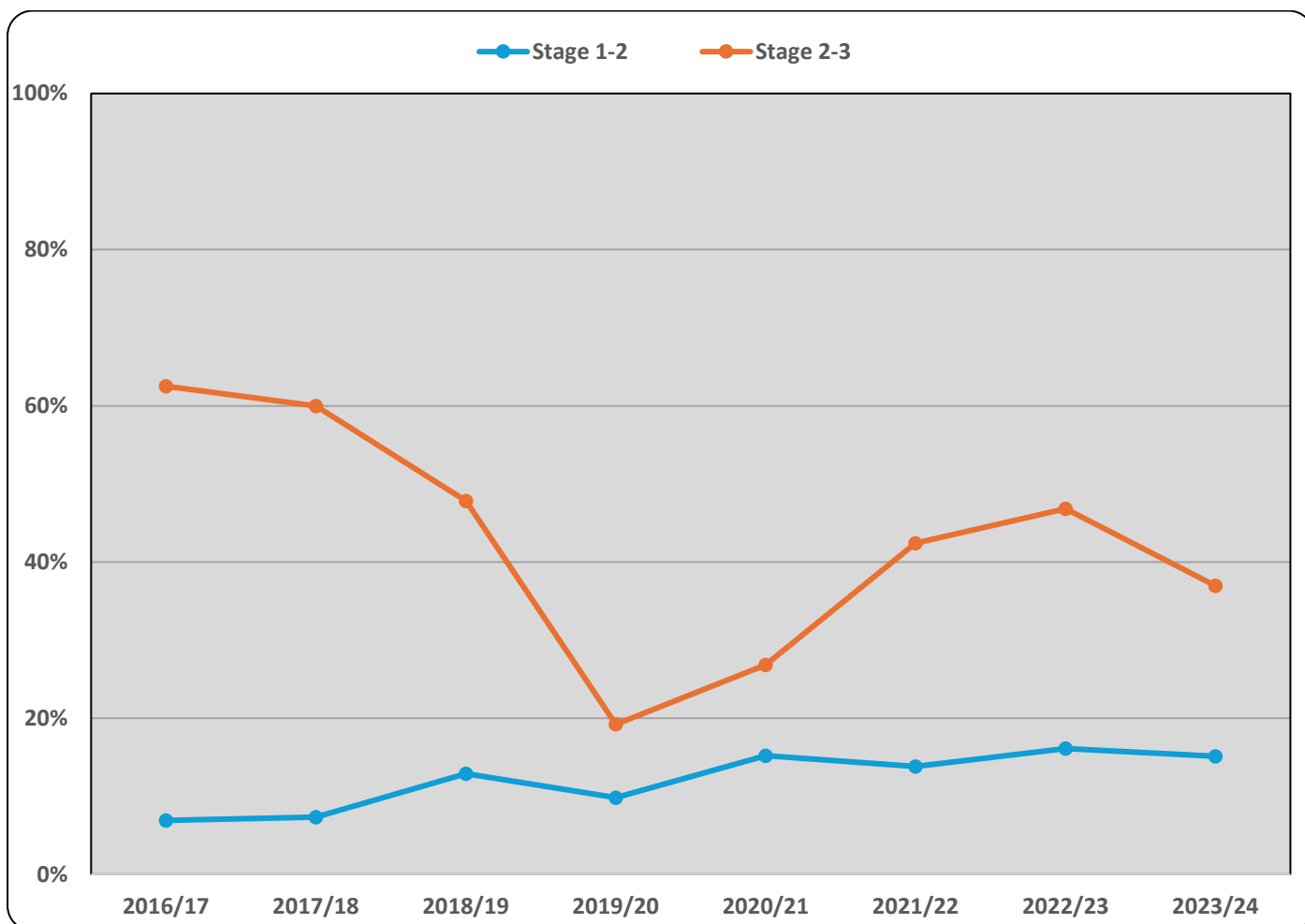
The services who received the most stage 3 complaints were:

- Children in Care – South (4)
- Children in Care – East (3)
- Children with Disabilities (3)

A breakdown of all registered complaints broken down by service can be found at Appendix A.

Escalation of complaints

The percentage of complaints which escalated from stage 1 to stage 2 was 15.1% (compared with 16.1% in 2022/23). For the first time since 2019/20, the percentage of complaints which escalated from stage 2 to stage 3 decreased (from 46.8% in 2022/23 to 37.0%).



Escalation of complaints to stages 2/3 since 2016/17

How quickly are we responding to complaints¹?

For the fourth successive year, there has been a drop in performance with respect to the percentage of stage 1 complaints that were responded to within the 20 working-day deadline. 50.7% of responses were issued within deadline (compared with a compliance rate of 52.3% in 2022/23). However, the average stage 1 response time was 24.36 working days, an improvement from the 2022/23 performance, which was 25.64 working days.

8.0% of stage 2 complaints were responded to within the primary deadline of 25 working days, while 50.0% were responded to within the secondary deadline of 65 working days. This compares with the 8.8% and 47.4% respectively in 2022/23. The average response time was 70.34 working days (compared with 75.73 working days in 2022/23).

¹ Commentary does not include cases which were outside the jurisdiction of the complaints procedure or withdrawn by the complainant.

	% Responded Within 20 Working Days	Average Response Time (Working Days)
Children in Care	41.2%	26.72
Citywide	49.4%	25.53
Frontdoor	67.9%	18.60
Safeguarding & Family Time	40.6%	27.67
TOTAL	50.7%	24.36

Stage 1 responsiveness

	% Responded Within 25 Working Days	% Responded Within 65 Working Days	Average Response Time (Working Days)
Children in Care	0.0%	47.4%	78.37
Citywide	7.1%	42.9%	71.43
Frontdoor	33.3%	66.7%	54.11
Safeguarding & Family Time	0.0%	50.0%	67.63
TOTAL	8.0%	50.0%	70.34

Stage 2 responsiveness

Outcomes

The percentage of complaints which were upheld or partially upheld reduced at stages 1 and 3 compared with 2022/23. The percentages were 37.6% at stage 1 (from 39.2%) and 64.7% at stage 3 (from 68.2%).

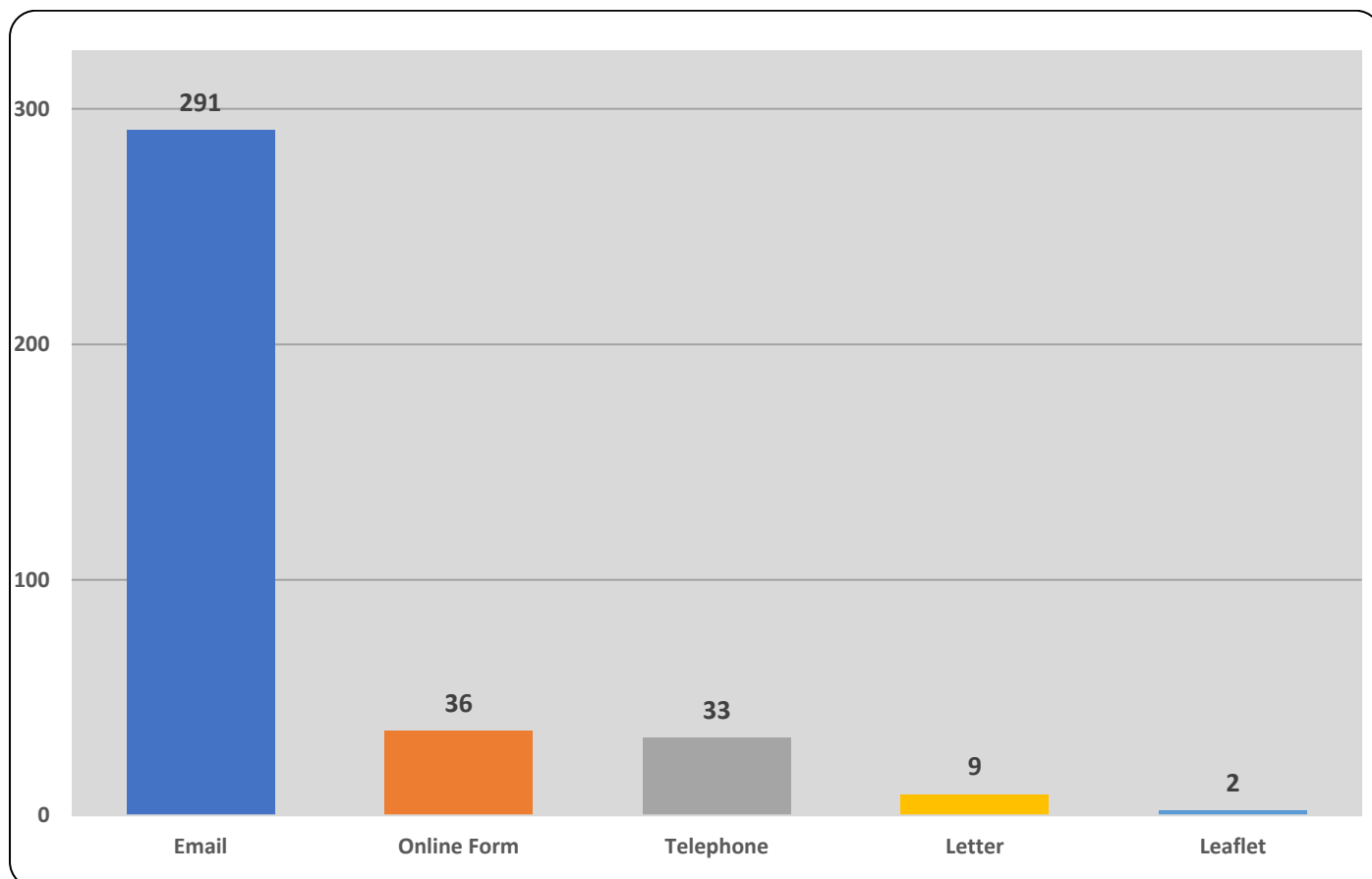
By contrast, the percentage increased at stage 2, with 82.1% of complaints upheld or partially upheld compared with 70.2% in 2022/23.

	Stage 1 ²	Stage 2	Stage 3
Upheld	12.1%	8.9%	0.0%
Partially Upheld	25.6%	73.2%	64.8%
Not Upheld	40.4%	16.1%	23.5%
Inconclusive	0.5%	-	5.9%
Outside Jurisdiction	8.1%	-	5.9%
Withdrawn	13.2%	1.8%	-

Outcomes of complaints

How are complaints being made?

The majority of stage 1 complaints (approximately 88%) were submitted via email or by an online complaint form. The number of complaints made by post (i.e., by letter or hard-copy complaint form) decreased for the sixth consecutive year.



Method of complaint

² Percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Who is complaining?

The most common source of complaints was parents and extended family members, comprising approximately 74% of all the stage 1 complaints which were received. This is a small reduction from 2022/23, when the percentage was 76%.

There was a small increase in the number of complaints received directly from children, young people or care leavers. 28 complaints were submitted (compared with 25 in 2022/23), which equates to 7.5% of all stage 1 complaints received. This is the second successive increase in the number of complaints made by children and young people.

In addition, a further 22 children, young people or care leavers were supported to make complaints by an advocate.

4. What complainants told us

A summary of complaint themes broken down by core operational service areas is detailed below.

Assessment & Short-Term Intervention

- **Conduct of workers and quality of intervention:** Many of the complaints received accused social workers of being biased, discriminatory, dishonest, or unprofessional in their dealings with the families. Some of the allegations include defaming, manipulating, threatening, shouting, lying, and ignoring families' views and needs. Complaints were also made about the lack of support, issues with communication, or the quality of intervention from the social workers.
- **Breaches of confidentiality:** Concerns were raised about breaches of data / confidentiality as information had been inappropriately discussed with or sent to third parties.
- **Concerns about the safety or welfare of children:** Several complaints raise concerns about the welfare and safety of their children. Complainants questioned the Trust's decisions, interventions, and assessments regarding the children's needs, risks, and best interests. Complainants also reported incidents of harm, abuse, neglect, or violence that their children had experienced or witnessed.
- **The quality and format of assessments:** Some of the complaints concerned errors, inaccuracies, inconsistencies or omissions in assessments. Concerns were also raised about delays, the lack of communication, and the lack of consent in the assessment process. Complainants challenged the findings, outcomes, and evidence relied on in assessments.

CASS & EDT

- **Complaints about decision making:** Several complaints were received from parents who were dissatisfied with the Trust's decision not to offer support or an assessment for their children. These complaints outlined the challenges that parents faced caring for their children, who had special needs / disabilities.
- **Accusations of false allegations and breach of confidentiality:** A number of parents accused the Trust of making or investigating false allegations against them, or of sharing sensitive information with the wrong individuals, which had caused distress and anxiety.
- **Feedback on the call handling and attitude of staff:** Some parents provided feedback on the call handling and attitude of staff, such as being rude, unprofessional, gaslighting, or not providing their name or contact details.
- **Concerns about mental health and wellbeing:** Concerns were also expressed by some complainants about their own mental health and wellbeing as a result of the Trust's involvement, or the impact of the Trust's actions on the mental health and wellbeing of their children. Parents commented that the Trust had not offered adequate support or empathy.

Child Protection & LADO

The complaints received outline concerns with the way Child Protection Conferences were conducted and the decisions that were made. The recurring issues raised were:

- Being denied access to meetings.
- Not receiving the plan or minutes within the specified timeframes.
- Not being consulted or prepared adequately for the Conference meeting.

- Not being provided with reports from other agencies
- Not being able to dispute or challenge the evidence presented.

Safeguarding

- **Dissatisfaction with social workers:** Many of the complaints received outlined concern that social workers were biased, rude, unprofessional, or unsupportive. Complainants also expressed concern that children's views and feelings had been disregarded.
- **Actions taken and adequacy of support:** Complainants accused social workers of acting inappropriately, including breaching Court Orders, threatening to remove the children, sharing confidential information with third parties, or failing to provide adequate support that families required.
- **Communication difficulties:** Complainants reported that social workers did not respond to their calls or emails, did not keep them informed of the progress or plans, did not send them the reports or minutes, and did not listen to their views or concerns.
- **Quality / accuracy of assessments or report:** Complainants were unhappy with assessments or reports written, which were considered to be misleading, biased, incomplete, or incorrect. Some complainants commented that the assessments did not reflect the evidence available and had a negative overall impact on the family.
- **Behaviour or conduct of the social workers:** Complainants commented that social workers had been disrespectful, unkind, dishonest. Other complainants accused social workers of shouting, bullying or of being threatening to families.

Disabilities

- **Data privacy and communication:** Personal or family information was shared with third parties without the complainant's consent, or families had not been informed of meetings or decisions that affected them.
- **Assessments:** Assessment had not been conducted properly, fairly, or in a timely way. In addition, assessment outcomes did not reflect the families' level of need and the requests for support which had been made.
- **Social worker conduct and competence:** Social workers were described as being rude, unprofessional, biased, or inexperienced. Also, workers did not listen to families' concerns.
- **Lack of support:** Complaints were received from parents who were unhappy that they were not receiving adequate support or access to short breaks, or that support had been reduced, suspended, or terminated without justification.
- **Direct Payments and carers:** Concerns were raised by parents about the Direct Payments system, such as delays, errors, or lack of transparency, or that they had experienced difficulties with commissioned to meet an assessed need.
- **Transitioning arrangements:** Some complainants observed that they had not received clear or timely information about the transition process to Adult Services, or that they had not been adequately involved in the transition process.

Children in Care

- **The rights and welfare of children in care:** Many of the complaints received outlined the concerns of parents, carers, or former children in care about how the Trust had failed to protect, support, or listen to children in their care. This included exposing children to abuse, neglect, or exploitation,

denying them contact with their families, ignoring their wishes and feelings, or not providing them with adequate education, health, or identity documents.

- **Quality and professionalism of the social workers:** Several complainants voiced their dissatisfaction with social workers, accusing them of being rude, dishonest, biased, inexperienced, or unresponsive. Some of the complaints received cited the frequent changes of allocated workers, the lack of transparency and accountability, and breaches of confidentiality by social workers.
- **Decision-making and care planning:** Complainants challenged decisions and plans made regarding their children's care, such as disputing assessments, reports, or recommendations, disagreeing with the placement or contact arrangements, or questioning the compliance with Court Orders or the Trust's policies and procedures. Some complainants alleged that the Trust has discriminated against them or violated their right to a family life.
- **Delays and lack of communication:** Complainants detailed their frustration with the slow or inadequate responses to queries, requests, or concerns, such as by not providing them with information, updates, or feedback, not attending or informing them of meetings or reviews, not sharing documents or reports, or not following up on their actions which had been agreed. Some complainants explained the impact of these failings on their emotional wellbeing, financial situation, or legal rights.

Independent Review

Some of the recurring themes raised in complaints included:

- IROs not listening to the views of children and carers.
- IROs not providing timely and accurate information.
- IROs not following policies and procedures.
- IROs being rude and disrespectful.
- IROs not addressing concerns raised at Child in Care Reviews.

Care Leavers, UASC & Homelessness

Some of the recurring themes raised in complaints included:

- An inappropriate disclosure of a care leaver's address to family members.
- The conditions at a young person's placement, and the conduct of the staff at the placement.
- The amount of Independent Living Grant provided.
- The quality of broadband at a young person's placement.
- The withdrawal of financial support.

A detailed breakdown of complaint categories used to record complaints can be found at Appendix B.

5. Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

27 complaints were referred to the Ombudsman's office in 2023/24, an increase from the 19 referrals made in 2022/23. Eight complaints were redirected to the Trust as premature referrals, while the Ombudsman declined to investigate 12 of the complaints they received.

The Ombudsman issued seven decisions, finding fault in six of the complaints considered. A summary of each investigation and the remedial actions identified (where applicable) is detailed below.

Complaint 1 (South Children in Care – Complaint Upheld)

The Trust was at fault on the basis that it had not responded to the complainant's stage 2 complaint.

The Ombudsman found that there had been a delay following the receipt of the independent investigation reports.

To remedy the fault identified, the Trust agreed to apologise to the complainant and conclude its response to the stage 2 complaint. The Trust also agreed to make a payment to the complainant of £250 to recognise the impact of the delay on the complainant.

Complaint 2 (Historical Care – Complaint Upheld)

The complainant asserted that there had been serious child protection failings between the 1970s and the 1990s. The complainant was also unhappy with how his complaint had been considered; specifically, he was unhappy with the apology provided and the level of financial remedy offered to remedy the fault identified.

While the Ombudsman upheld the complaint, they declined to investigate further on the grounds that an investigation would be unlikely to add to the investigation the Trust had completed and would not achieve the outcome the complainant was seeking.

Complaint 3 (Children with Disabilities – Complaint Upheld)

The Trust was at fault on the basis that it had not responded to the complainant's stage 2 complaint.

While the Ombudsman upheld the complaint, they declined to investigate further as the Trust agreed to conclude its response to the stage 2 complaint.

Complaint 4 (Multiple Services – Complaint Upheld)

The Trust was at fault in the way it ended the foster placements for three children, the investigation it carried out prior to the placement ending, and the way it communicated with the complainant throughout this period. The specific concerns raised were:

- The Trust made a false claim to the Police.
- The complainant was told that she would be de-registered as a foster carer if she did not resign.
- A social worker made an inappropriate comment during an unannounced home visit.

The Ombudsman found that the Trust's investigation of the complainant's concerns had been robust. Moreover, there was no evidence to substantiate the specific concerns the complainant had raised with

the Ombudsman. However, the Trust acknowledged in its response to the Ombudsman's enquiries that there had been a delay responding to the complaint.

To remedy the uncertainty and frustration caused by this delay, the Trust offered to make a payment to the complainant of £300. The Ombudsman considered this an appropriate remedy.

Complaint 5 (Historical Care – Complaint Upheld)

The complainant was unhappy with how the Trust dealt with her complaint about abuse and harm she experienced whilst in local authority care. Specifically, the Trust had:

- Downplayed and belittled the harm experienced.
- Used unprofessional and inappropriate language when referring to things that happened to her as a child.
- Failed to accept or acknowledge the abuse and harm the complainant experienced.
- Failed to provide suitable outcomes and remedies following its investigation.

The Ombudsman identified concerns with the Trust's response to the stage 2 complaint in terms of the tone and language used, and that it had downplayed the abuse the complainant had experienced when she was a looked after child. The Ombudsman also found that the Trust had failed in its duties as a corporate parent to protect the complainant from harm. Finally, the Ombudsman identified there had been delays in the Trust's consideration of the complaint.

To remedy the faults identified, the Ombudsman recommended the following:

- Apologise to the complainant for the fault identified by the Ombudsman.
- Make a payment of £1,000 to remedy the fault identified by the Ombudsman.
- Make an interest payment for the delayed payment of the complainant's savings from when she was in care.
- Provide guidance to staff and the Trust's pool of independent investigators to ensure that recommendations are made to acknowledge the impact of delays in the complaints procedure.
- Provide guidance to the Trust's pool of independent investigators on victim blaming and the use of language.

Complaint 6 (Children with Disabilities – Complaint Upheld)

The Trust failed to provide appropriate support for the complainant's disabled son and failed to uphold all of his complaints. The specific concerns the Ombudsman considered were:

- How the Trust responded to safeguarding referrals made by the complainant.
- How the Trust dealt with the complainant's request for overnight short breaks.
- Care and payments made during Covid restrictions.

The Ombudsman found that the Trust had appropriately considered the complainant's concerns but that there had been a failure to communicate with the complainant regarding the residential short break unit that had been identified for his son. The failures identified meant the complainant could not access respite for his son to meet his assessed needs. The Ombudsman also identified that the financial remedy the Trust offered the complainant (£250) was not sufficient.

To remedy the fault identified, the Ombudsman recommended that the Trust apologise to the complainant and increase its financial remedy to £500.

Complaint 7 (East Assessment & Short-Term Intervention – Complaint Not Upheld)

The Trust did not involve the complainant in its assessment of his daughter. In addition, the Trust told the complainant that he could not have contact with his daughter without explaining why. Finally, the Trust delayed in responding to the complaints made by the complainant.

The Ombudsman found that the Trust had appropriately considered the concerns raised by the complainant and had taken appropriate remedial action to identify the fault which had been identified. While there were small delays in the Trust's responses to the stage 2 and stage 3 complaints, these did not amount to fault.

6. Learning & Improving from Complaints

The learning arising from customer feedback plays a crucial role in helping the Trust understand how customers experience the services we provide. When responding to complaints, managers are encouraged to identify any areas for improvement and any measures which can be taken to prevent a recurrence of the event which led to the complaint.

This learning is captured and disseminated across the Trust. In addition, this learning feeds directly into the Trust's quarterly Performance & Quality Assurance reporting to inform the Trust's approach to improving practice and quality of services.

As part of its work with Trust's Practice Hub, the Complaints & Information Service continues to liaise with Trust's Learning & Development Manager to identify how the learning arising from practice complaints feeds into training and development plans.

Examples of learning and service improvements identified as a direct result of complaints made in 2023/24 are detailed below.

Stage 1

- Complaints about the chairing of Child Protection Conferences resulted in the following:
 - Reminders provided to Conference Chairs and Business Support staff to ensure that Child Protection Plans are reviewed prior to sending to ensure that they accurately reflect what was agreed at Conference.
 - A reflective discussion held with Conference Chairs regarding the importance of ensuring there is sufficient time allotted to prepare for Conferences.
 - A discussion held with the Partnership Delivery Group around the provision of partner agency reports to parents prior to Conferences.
 - A review of the information available for parents and children prior to Initial Child Protection Conferences, and how we engage with children and young people to encourage them to participate (where they are able to do so).
 - A discussion with Conference Chairs on the importance of confidentiality and data protection, and the guidance that has been produced for staff,
- A complaint from a parent about Early Help involvement identified the necessity of providing timely notifications to families when an allocated worker has an extended absence from work.
- A complaint from a parent about a Section 47 enquiry resulted in all members of the team being instructed to hand-deliver reports 48 hours prior to Conference to ensure that parents have sufficient time to consider the report. The same complaint also identified a 'glitch' whereby the names of family members were not correctly being populated in the assessment document. This was raised with ICT to resolve.
- A complaint from a parent of a child in care identified that there needed to be more effective consideration to parents' financial situation when making decisions around contact, particularly when the parents are not working and/or they live in a different local authority area to their child.

- A complaint from an extended family member about Child Protection involvement resulted in reminders being provided to Assessment & Short-Term Intervention social workers on the Trust's practice standards, policies and procedures, to ensure that the service provided to families is fair and transparent.
- A complaint from a parent about Child Protection involvement resulted in social workers being directed to draw up pre-birth plans for all families (where applicable) and be clear to families about which professionals are working with the family (and what each professional is responsible for).
- A complaint from a parent about how the Trust managed a referral resulted in a reflective discussion with the Social Worker and Senior Practitioner. The central issues considered were the importance of recording information accurately and the impact of incorrect recording on the children's safety for partner agencies (and for families).
- A complaint from an adopted adult about accessing their records resulted in a review of practice and timescales for complying with records requests.
- A complaint from a parent about an intervention from an Assessment & Short-Term Intervention service resulted in a review of the information / literature is provided for families to help them understand why the Trust was involved.
- A complaint from an advocate who was supporting a young person who had presented as homeless identified that further learning and development was required with respect to the Southwark Judgement and our duties towards homeless 16- and 17-year-olds.
- A complaint from a parent about a Children in Care service prompted reminders to Team Managers to ensure that they are quality assuring evidence / Court submissions to ensure that references to third parties are not included.
- A complaint from an advocate who was supporting a child in care resulted in a reflective team discussion around appropriate information sharing and the importance of sensitive communication. The complaint also identified training needs for workers around supporting young people who identify as transgender.
- A complaint from a parent about a Safeguarding intervention led to a spot audit of Child in Need Plans after it had been identified that dates were not being updated when the plan was reviewed. A reflective discussion was held with the team to remind them of the importance of setting target dates and being clear when progress has been achieved (or documenting the reason for any delays or lack of progress).
- A complaint from a child in care regarding the inappropriate use of her social media image on the Trust's case management system identified a training need around the use of personal data.
- A complaint from a parent about an intervention from an Assessment & Short-Term Intervention service resulted in a group supervision session on language, body language and communication.
- Complaints received about how Subject Access Requests had been process resulted in discussions within the team to discuss/consider:
 - The prompt recording of requests when they are received.
 - How to process requests where a young person lacks capacity to give consent.

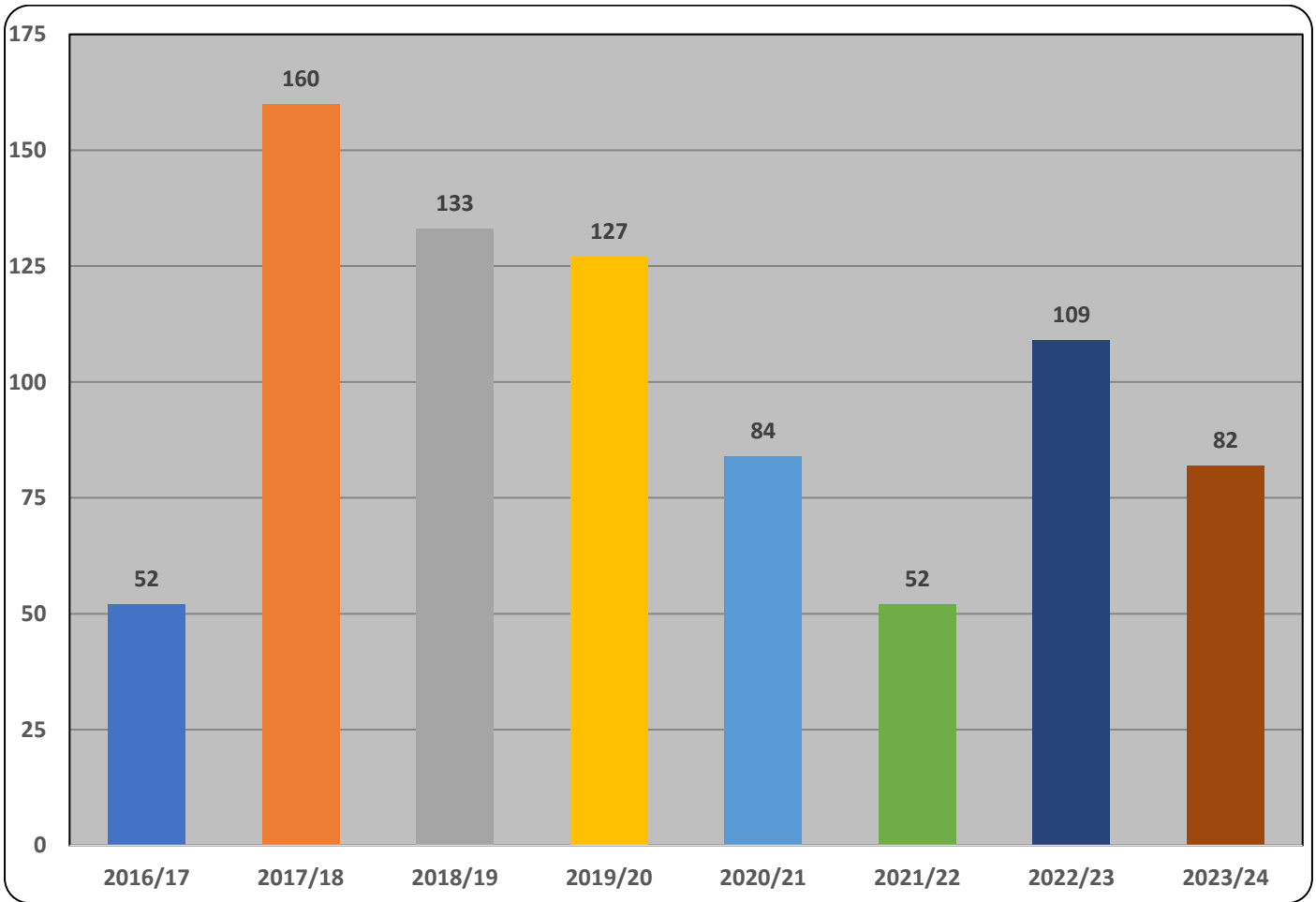
- The importance of carefully checking records prior to disclosure to ensure that third party data is not shared.
- More effective communication with data subjects when there are delays disclosing records.
- Prompt notification to data subjects and the Trust's Data Protection Officer when confirmation is received that records are lost, destroyed or cannot be located.

Stage 2

- A complaint from a parent about a Child Protection enquiry identified the following:
 - Reminders to social workers of the need to complete reports for Conference within the timescales prescribed in the regional procedures.
 - Reminders to social workers of the importance of recording the details of home visits to ensure that there is an audit of significant events.
 - Review the proforma for Review Conferences reports so that the date the report was completed is recorded, along with the date of the manager's comments.
 - Reminders to social workers to upload risk assessments onto the relevant electronic record.
- A complaint from a parent of a disabled child identified the need to review the information / literature produced to ensure that the eligibility criteria for Short Breaks is clear.
- A complaint from a parent of a disabled child resulted in reflective discussion between the Head of Service and Team Managers to consider a recommendation that safety plans should be clearly recorded, developed and agreed with by parents.
- A complaint from a parent of a disabled child identified the following:
 - Reminders to team managers and social workers regarding the importance of completing assessments within timescales.
 - Review the process for submitting reviews to Community Resources Panel.
 - Reinforce with team managers and social workers the importance of seeking and recording the views of all children in the household as part of the assessment process.
 - Review the process / mechanism for ensuring that agreed actions arising from mediation meetings are appropriately shared and actioned.
- A complaint from a parent of a child in care identified the following actions:
 - Where a parent has a disability that affects their ability to participate in meetings, this should be recorded on the child's record, in order that professionals are aware.
 - Reminders to independent reviewing officers (IROs) of the requirement to make reasonable adjustments to enable a disabled parent to participate in their child's review.
 - Reminders to social workers and IROs around the importance of accurate case recording.
- A complaint from a parent of a child in care resulted in reminders being issued to social workers on the importance of accurately recording any verbal information supplied to them by external agencies, particularly with respect to Child Protection enquiries.

- A complaint from a connected carer resulted in practice reminders being issued to social workers with respect to:
 - The legislation and caselaw relating to the circumstances in which a child being cared for by a connected person should be treated as a foster placement of a looked after child.
 - That assessments must be shared with the child's parent(s) / carer(s).
 - That the outcome of Section 47 enquiries must be provided in writing to the child's parent(s) / carer(s).
 - That Child in Need Plans should not be closed down if there are uncompleted actions on the plan, unless a management decision has been taken and is clearly recorded on the case file.
- A complaint from a parent whose children were assessed by the Assessment & Short-Term Intervention service resulted in a reflective supervision discussion regarding the use of language.
- A complaint from a foster carer regarding how the Trust managed a safeguarding alert identified the need to provide reminders to team managers and social workers of the requirement to notify the relevant local authority where a Strategy Meeting is convened for a child who lives outside of Birmingham. The complaint also resulted in reminders being issued regarding the requirement to conduct a home visit at the earliest opportunity where concerns are raised regarding the safety and wellbeing of a child.
- A complaint from a parent about a Child Protection referral resulted in reminders being provided to social workers around the importance of clear and timely communication with parents during periods of assessment, as well as the importance of recording communication with parents and professionals, especially where the activity is linked to a Child Protection action.
- A complaint from the parent of a disabled child identified the need to review the existing literature to ensure that the eligibility criteria for Short Breaks are clear for parents.

7. Compliments



Compliments received since 2016/17

82 compliments were recorded during 2023/24, a reduction of approximately 25% compared with the previous year. A sample of the compliments received during the year is detailed below.

“Sarah is the social worker for one of our kids. We have been working alongside her for the past year and we can honestly say she is one of the best social workers we have worked with! Nothing is too much trouble for her, she genuinely cares about her young people. She always comes in with a smile on her face. We think she deserves some recognition for the good work that she does.”

Sarah Zamani (East Children in Care)

“I would like to thank everyone who helped us get to this point from the care service, especially Matthew Bellerson who has been a great help to myself and both of the boys.”

Matthew Bellerson (South Children in Care)

“We just had the first review for T, and I just wanted to praise the child’s social worker. Kay has done an amazing job; understanding the needs of black children and having been clear about identifying the right match for this little girl. It’s been a great experience working with a Local Authority that is advocating so well for their children. I would also like to say that Tracy, family finder, has done an amazing job with coordinating this transition so well. She put together a great introduction plan that

has allowed everyone to have a voice in this; and been so very helpful throughout this process. It was a pleasure working with Tracy and Kay and I just wanted to let you know and give some feedback.”

Kay Bedi (North West Children in Care) and Tracy Rose (Adoption)

“The children’s guardian and I would wish to express our gratitude to the social workers for their hard work and commitment to these three children. It has not been an easy case! The social work practice on this matter has been truly exemplary. Today we were able to achieve the best possible outcome for these children and that was assisted by the social workers being able to work in partnership and cooperation with the children’s guardian - this is an excellent example of the LA and Guardian working together in the best interests of the children. In this current climate it does seem that social workers only get negative press but never any mention of when things go well and there is excellent and positive work. It is recognised by us that the social workers have had to work hard when dealing with this family and children.”

Georgina McPherson & Louise Pagett (East Children in Care)

“Leah Fyfield was involved with my family for the duration of a month. I want Leah to get the recognition that she deserves for being such a reassuring and supportive authority figure. Leah was there through every step and has helped me to build my confidence up for the future ahead. Leah has given me the motivation and the push to be able to seek further accommodation which I probably wouldn’t have had the courage to do. Leah made me feel very reassured in my decisions and supported me in every aspect, to the point where I was quite upset to find out she would no longer be in contact with me. Leah really is an asset, and I believe that she really does have the ability to change people’s lives. I am so grateful for the support I received and would like Leah to know how much of a difference she is making in the community. Thank you!”

Leah Fyfield (East ASTI)

“I just wanted to let you know how fabulous Amreen has been working with one of our students, I feel like Amreen is the first worker she has had that has really taken the time to hear her voice and lived experiences, the young person is so quiet and finds it hard to open up by she has really been so honest with Amreen and this is testament to the work Amreen has put in getting to know her and allowing her the time to open up. We feel that things are now moving in the direction they need to with the ICPC now being in place for January. We know that social workers and the whole team work so hard, and we just wanted to share some positivity with you as we know it’s often only the negatives that get passed on.”

Amreen Sarwar (North West Central ASTI)

“Thank you so much for your help kindness and patience today. I really appreciate it.”

Anne Gondo (EDT)

“I want to thank Angela Watts for being straightforward in communicating with us. From a first phone call to me, she shared the process and how it all works as I was extremely anxious, not knowing how the 'system' works and what to expect, as we - as a family - have never been involved in anything similar like this.”

Angela Watts (South ASTI)

“Chenelle is kind, diligent, understanding, experienced, loving and fair. Chenelle speaks the truth. Chenelle is absolutely excellent at what she does. Chenelle comes to see S and J at my son's place, as is required, and she never lets them down by not turning up and also turns up on time. Chenelle can be trusted around as she has experience with children. Chenelle is so good that she is one in a million. The family are so comfortable around Chenelle because of her experience with the twins. I would like you to know that the family is privileged to have Chenelle because she is experienced both with the children and the family and she carries out her job very well indeed. In closing, Chenelle is fair and is a trusted and valuable member of staff.”

Chenelle Miller (East Safeguarding)

“Just to say thank for all your support, for everything you've done and are still doing for us, but most of all for just being you; genuine and caring. I truly believe someone up there sent you our way.”

Lydia Moore (North West Central Safeguarding)

“I cannot thank Christene enough for all her support she has given. L isn't an easy one to engage with but not once has Christene given up on her. She follows through and chases up enquires etc and checks up on us both weekly. I will be honest; without Christine's support I would not have managed L for as long as I have, she would have been placed into care by now. Christene is one of a kind and a rare social worker who is in the job for the right reasons, Birmingham Children's Trust are extremely lucky to have her and hopefully they recognise this. Christine deserves the recognition for all her hard work; she is a credit to the team.”

Christene Harrison (South Safeguarding)

“I would like to say a big thank you to my social worker, Marva. She has been a great support through my difficult time and has supported me to do the right thing for my children. She is a wonderful lady. My children like Marva and she was brilliant with my kids. I appreciate all the support and help I've been given for the children. I think Marva is great and a credit to your team. Thank you so much for everything.”

Marva Cunningham (South Safeguarding)

“I don't know if you remember me or not, but I came to your information evening twice, once alone and once with mum. Just wanted to say thanks you for being the start of my journey. I have a little 2-year-old boy with me now, had him for a month and it all started with you. Just wanted to show my appreciation for all the information you gave and shared with me on those information evenings.”

Sandie Paul (Adoption)

“Terri has been amazing from the care leavers service. Terri has never let me down she has always had my back. She has never let me down once and I can't say a bad word against her and my mom likes her as well. Terri has been the only person that I have been able to open up to during dark times. Terri has always fought by battles with me. Terri is a star.”

Terri Farrington (Care Leavers, UASC & Homelessness)

“Holly is an exceptional PA who is attentive, wise, professional, compassionate and insightful at all times. Her input into J's life has been both considerable and consistent: she has always provided clear

and accessible information regarding every aspect of his care and wellbeing. She communicates accurately, responds to every question we have and pushes back against a dysfunctional system deep maturity and sensitivity. She has advocated for J repeatedly and held others to account when they have failed to engage with us as a family. Holly is an exceptional professional and we are deeply grateful for her investment into J's transition to adulthood."

Holly White (Care Leavers, UASC & Homelessness)

"I am from a Sandwell school and needed advice/support from the Bham Lado. Sharon Griffin was brilliant and helpful in every way. Her response was timely, supportive and informative. Sharon kept in regular contact, offered feedback and gave clear recommendations. Sharon was professional and diligent in carrying out her duties and as teacher dealing with a challenging situation, I felt listened to, supported and had clarity about the process because of Sharon. She is a credit to the service."

Sharon Griffin (Child Protection & LADO)

"I just wanted to say that Robyn is an amazing social worker, and in the 20 years of Fostering, I have never come across an amazing social worker who puts her whole heart in the child she is responsible for. Robyn gives a lot of respect to us as Foster Carers and cares about what we need. As you know, I went through a lot of hurdles in the hospital and if I didn't have Robyn's support, I know that I wouldn't have our little baby. She deserves something like a social worker of the year award. Robyn is just amazing. It's not just me who loves Robyn, my children and my pets love her too that's how amazing she actually is."

Robyn Robinson (Children with Disabilities)

"I would just like to take the time to say a massive thank you to Sukhjinder who has been supporting my family over the last few months. She was always very polite and listened to what I had to say. She also kept good communication with me and always arrived on time when she would be visiting the home. My girls are very happy with the support Sukhi has put in place for them (from Barnados) and have loved the sessions."

Sukhjinder Kaur (Early Help & Prevention)

"Me and my children have been supported by Jodie Smith for the last few months. I just wanted to send my upmost praise for Jodie, she has gone above and beyond to help us in all the areas we have struggled in and made such a difference to us as a family. I am sad Jodie is leaving us shortly but very grateful that I was given such a fantastic support worker. Jodie has left no stone unturned from finance to emotional support, nothing has been too much trouble and she is an asset to you and your team. Thank you for taking the time to read this"

Jodie Smith (Early Help & Prevention)

"Just wanted to thank you for everything you have done for me and my family. Things are better. You have left a place in my heart, made me a better mom to my girls and I'm so thankful for that. Thank you for everything."

Linda Ritchie (Early Help & Prevention)

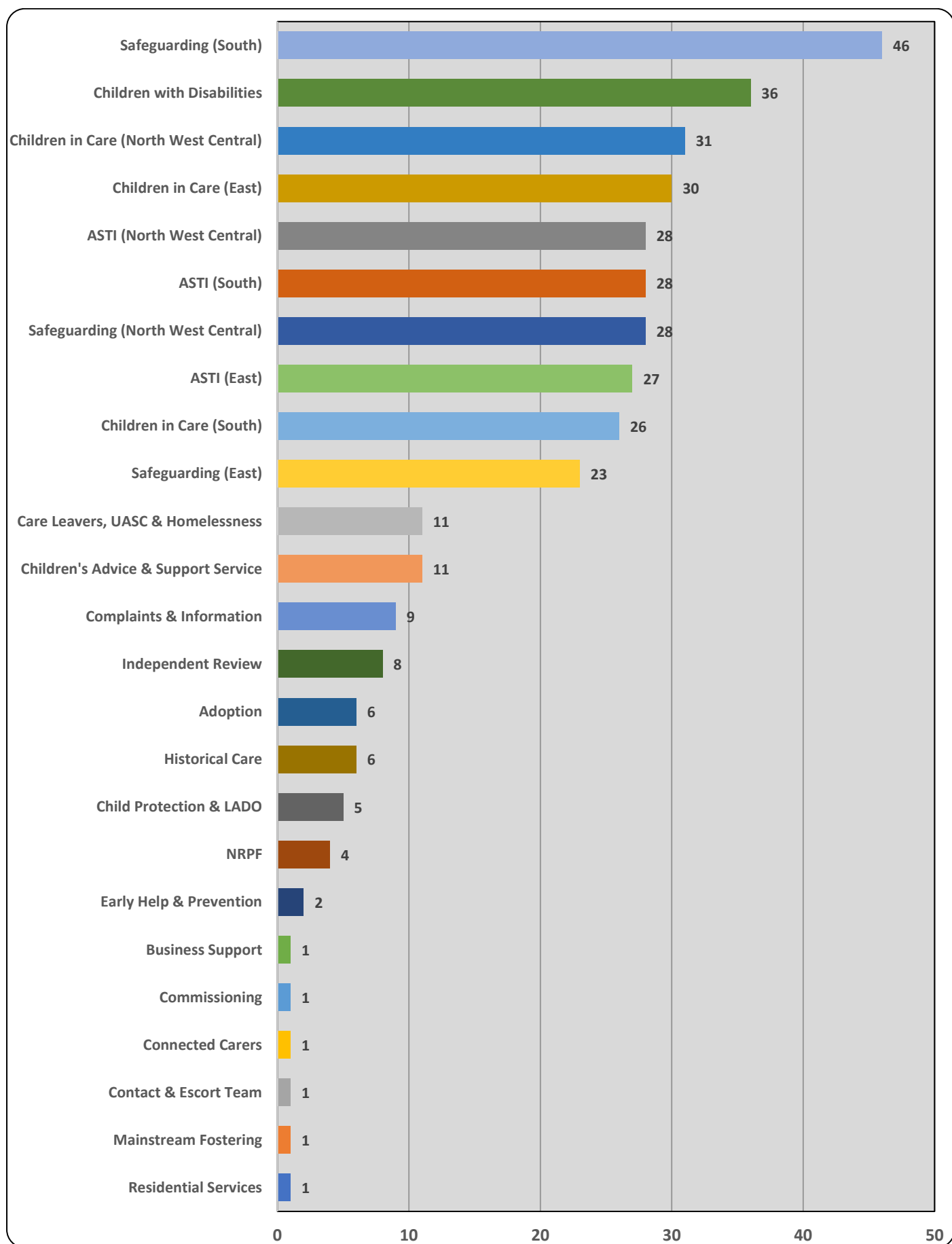
8. Next Steps

Complaints should always be viewed as an opportunity to learn from any systemic (or one-off) failings and make necessary improvements. As a learning organisation, we must embrace complaints to improve services and respond to these openly and honestly. While complaints can highlight failings, they often illustrate examples of good practice.

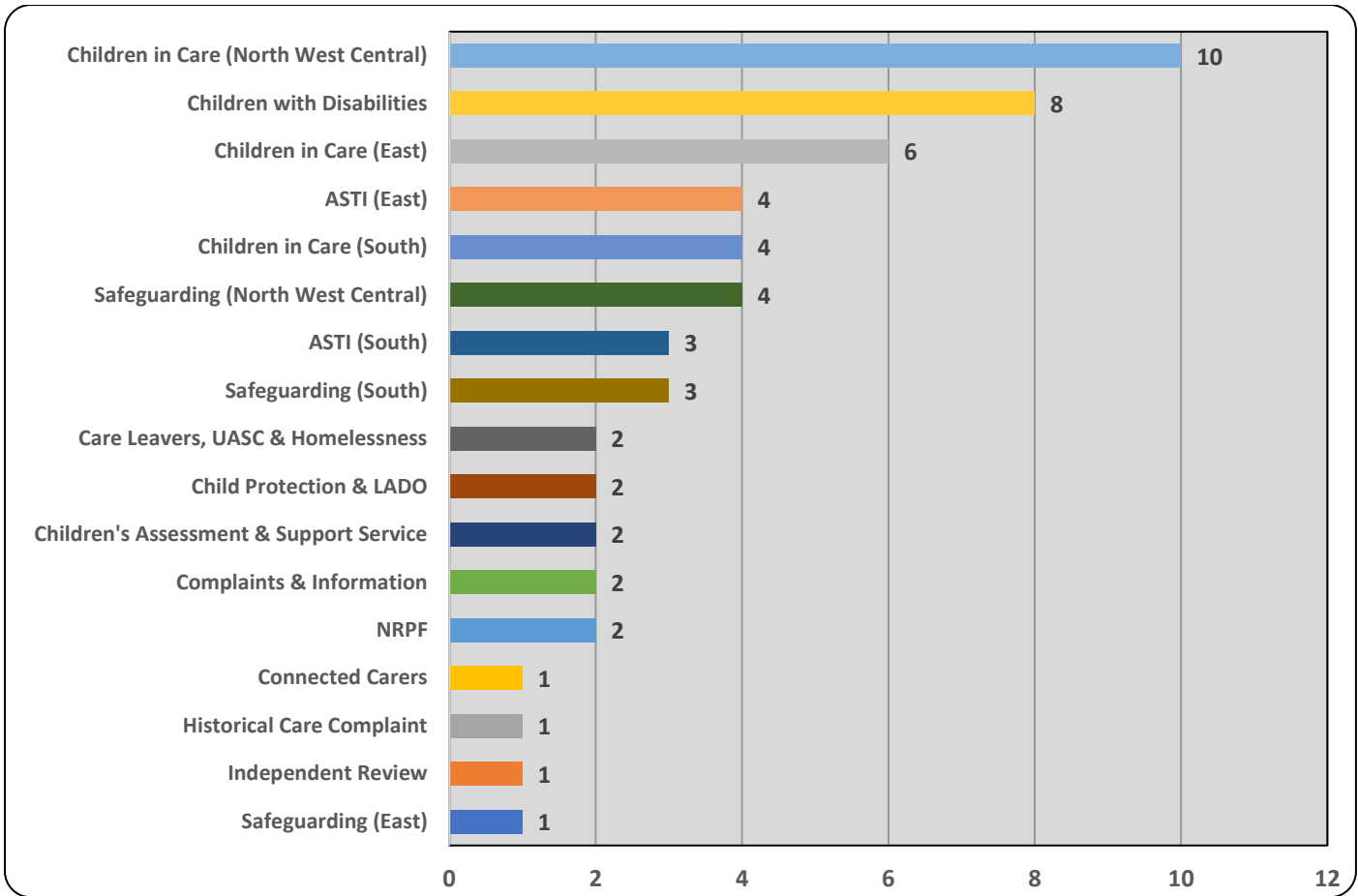
The following points highlight areas for improvement going forward:

- Continue to review quarterly performance reporting to ensure that the learning arising from complaints (and compliments) is more effectively shared across the Trust.
- Identify how compliance with stage 1 and stage 2 complaints and timeliness can be improved.
- Establish quarterly meetings with the Principal Social Worker and Head of Learning & Development to ensure the learning from complaints feeds directly to practice and staff development.
- Continue to listen to concerns raised by children, young people and families, and act on any failings their feedback highlights with respect to the effectiveness of complaints management.
- Update the Trust's complaints policy, website and related literature.
- Strengthen the training offer for Team Managers and Heads of Service around investigating and responding to complaints, particularly for new managers.
- Identify appropriate training resources for members of the Trust's pool of independent complaints investigators.
- Expand the existing mechanisms for monitoring the completion of actions arising from complaints at all stages of the complaints, ensuring that there is appropriate escalation where agreed actions have not been completed.
- Utilise the learning arising from decisions published on the Local Government Ombudsman & Social Care Ombudsman's website for other local authorities, briefing relevant managers in the Trust where appropriate.

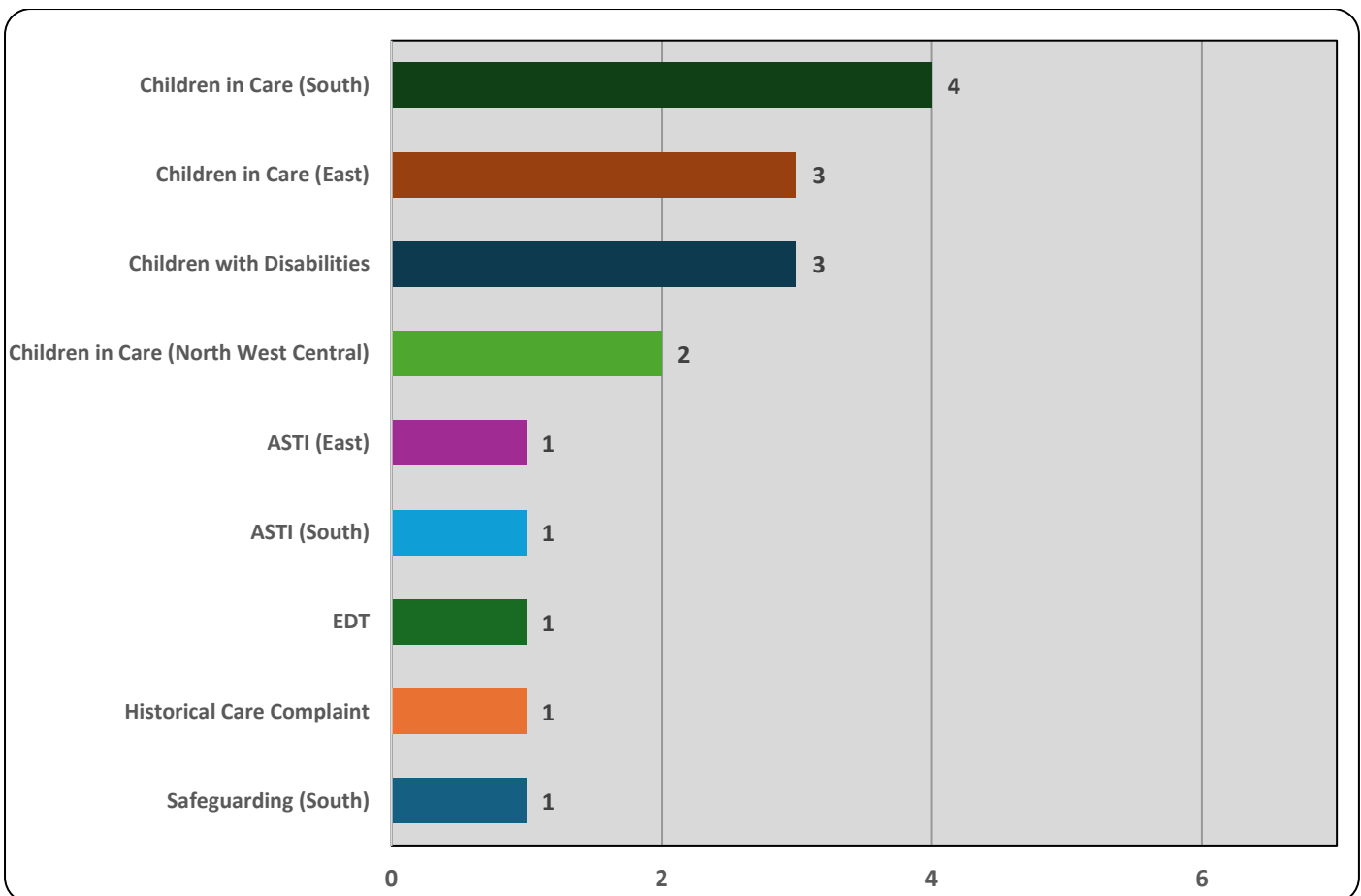
Appendix A – Breakdown of Complaints by Service



Stage 1 Complaints by Service



Stage 2 Complaints by Service



Stage 3 Complaints by Service

Appendix B – Reasons for Complaint

Of the 371 stage 1 complaints received, 1,148 separate complaint issues were raised, which are broken down below:

Category	Sub-Category	Complaints	%age Upheld or Partially Upheld
Delay	Consult / Notify	4	50.0%
	Invite to Meeting	1	0.0%
	Make a Decision	1	0.0%
	Meet or Contact Customer	9	33.3%
	Other / Miscellaneous	9	55.6%
	Provide a Service / Support	16	62.5%
	Provide Advice / Information	1	0.0%
	Respond to Telephone Call / Message	17	52.9%
	TOTAL	58	50.0%
Policy	Trust Policy	1	100.0%
	TOTAL	1	100.0%
Service Failure / Refusal	Change of Allocated Worker	7	42.9%
	Consult / Notify	24	37.5%
	Follow Guidance / Policy / Procedure	5	40.0%
	Invite to Meeting	8	50.0%
	Listen	35	17.1%
	Make a Decision	1	0.0%
	Meet or Contact Customer	44	47.7%
	Other / Miscellaneous	1	0.0%
	Provide a Service / Support	65	35.4%
	Provide Advice / Information	81	32.1%
	Provide Name / Identification	9	44.4%
	Respond to Emails / Letters / Text Message	16	43.9%
	Respond to Telephone Call / Message	8	25.0%
	Take Action	71	15.5%
	Work in Partnership	3	33.3%
TOTAL	378	31.5%	

Service Quality	Appropriateness of Venue	2	50.0%
	Availability of Staff	1	0.0%
	Breach of Confidentiality	24	50.0%
	Breach of Court Order	7	14.3%
	Breach of Legislation	2	50.0%
	Change of Allocated Worker	6	33.3%
	Change of Placement	3	0.0%
	Concerns about Care Provision	24	29.2%
	Disagreement with Assessment	41	0.0%
	Disagreement with Decision	46	15.2%
	Disagreement with Statement	14	14.3%
	Inaccurate Information Recorded	60	31.7%
	Inadequate Service / Support	68	29.4%
	Inappropriate Action Taken	92	26.1%
	Inappropriate Service Offered	18	22.2%
	Incorrect Advice Given	17	29.4%
	Lateness / Non-Attendance	8	12.5%
	Loss of Information	3	66.7%
	Loss or Damage to Property	1	0.0%
	Meeting Cancelled / Re-scheduled	4	25.0%
	Meeting Terminated	1	0.0%
	No Allocated Worker	2	50.0%
	No Consent to Act	12	16.7%
	Organisational Discrimination	3	0.0%
	Other / Miscellaneous	2	0.0%
	Poor Communication	20	45.0%
	Service Cancelled / Reduced / Withdrawn	17	17.6%
	Unable to Reach Staff	10	30.0%
	Unreasonable Decision	22	18.2%
	Wrong Information Provided	6	16.7%
TOTAL	536	24.6%	

Staff Conduct	Accusatory Conduct	5	20.0%
	Bias	8	12.5%
	Bullying / Threatening	24	20.8%
	Conflict of Interest	3	33.3%
	Discriminatory Behaviour	10	0.0%
	Dishonest Conduct	11	18.2%
	Inappropriate Conduct	35	25.7%
	Lack of Customer Care	12	25.0%
	Lack of Knowledge/Training	6	66.7%
	Lack of Ownership	3	0.0%
	Lack of Professionalism	28	25.0%
	Rude or Aggressive Behaviour	24	8.3%
	Unhelpful Attitude	6	0.0%
	TOTAL	175	20.0%
TRUST TOTAL	1,148	27.5%	