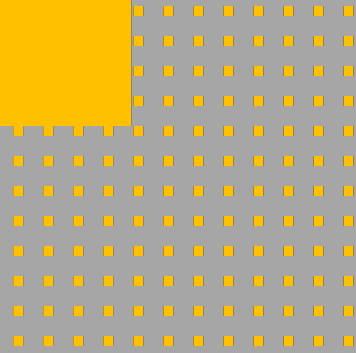


CS Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Children's Services – Complaints & Compliments

2023¹⁹-24 – Quarters One & Two



Agenda Item 47.



The purpose of this report is to...

1. Apprise the Committee of the position with complaints and compliments for Children's Services – focussing on quarters one and two of the present financial year (2023-'24)
2. Highlight data around the volumes
3. Draw out key themes from complaints
4. Provide updates on what action is taken in response to complaints
5. Address any queries that are raised by Members of the Committee and/or the public

There are two complaints processes that we follow within Children's Services...

Children's/YP social care complaints



This is a *statutory* process – the requirement for which is set out in the Children Act 1989. We work in accordance with guidance issued by the DfE around the process called ['Getting the Best From Complaints'](#)



The scope of the process covers any complaints about the Council's children's social services provision. It is intended to provide a platform for children and young people to voice their concerns, and for us to understand and learn from these



The key differences with this process are at the latter stages – with stage two involving an independent investigator and stage three involving an independent panel

CS Corporate complaints



This is a *local* process – whilst not statutory at present, it will soon be required to be so from April 2024. The process followed for corporate complaints is defined in the Council's ['Customer Voice Policy'](#)



The scope of the policy essentially covers *any other* complaints about Children's Services that are not covered by the scope of the social care process – i.e. SEND, School Admissions



Similar to the social care process, the intention of the corporate process is to provide a voice to customers wishing to express dissatisfaction, and gives us the opportunity to respond and learn



Key differences in process are that (i) there is no stage three panel and (ii) the stage two investigations are completed locally by our Customer Relations team

In case anyone is unfamiliar with the complaints processes, the following is a brief breakdown of each stage...

Children's/YP social care complaints

Early resolution

An informal stage of the process where attempts will be made to resolve concerns through discussion – either on a call or face to face

Stage one

An investigation completed and a formal, written response sent by the Team Manager for the relevant service (**10-20 working days**)

Stage two

Appointment of independent professionals to complete investigation and submit report detailing findings/recommendations (**25-65 working days**)

Stage three

Appointment of – and arrangements for – independent panel to consider adequacy of stage two investigation and submit report detailing findings/recommendations (**30-45 working days**)

CS Corporate complaints

Early resolution

As has been detailed for social care complaints

Stage one

As has been detailed for social care complaints

Timescale: **15 working days**

Stage two

An investigation is completed and a formal, written response is prepared by Customer Relations on behalf of the Assistant Director/Director for the relevant service

Timescale: **20 working days**

In view of the highlighted differences between the two processes...

1. This report/presentation has been split between two different sections
2. The first part will focus on those complaints/compliments received under the statutory children's social care process
- 23
3. The second part will focus on complaints/compliments received by Children's Services under the corporate complaints process

CS Overview & Scrutiny Committee

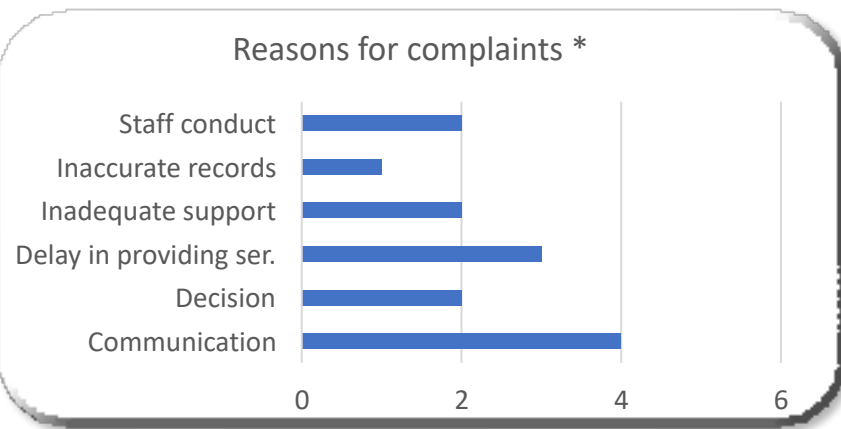
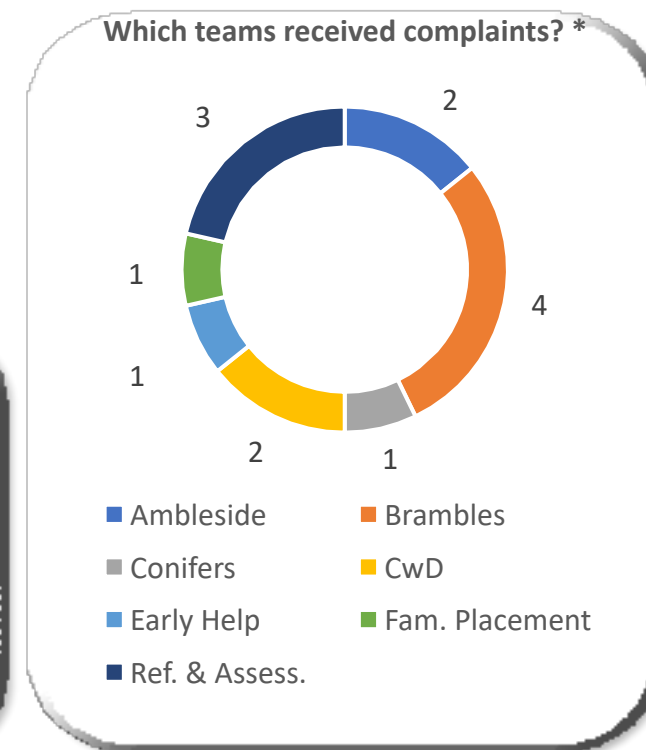
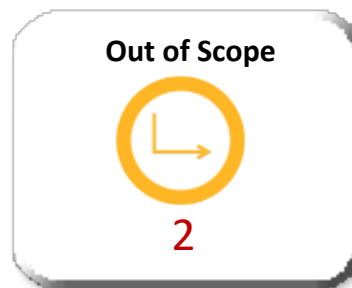
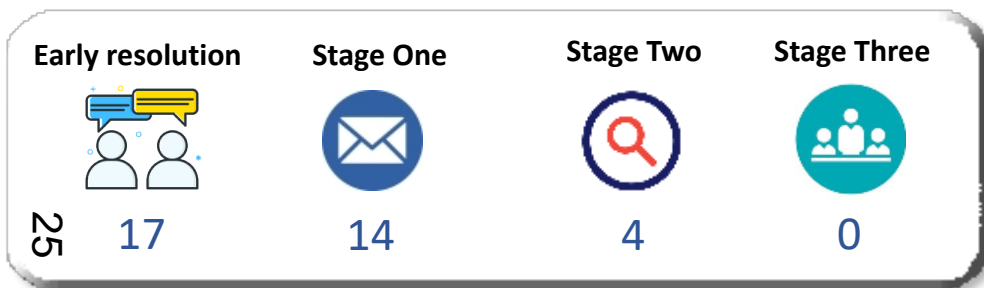
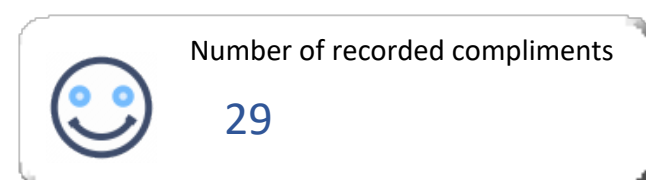
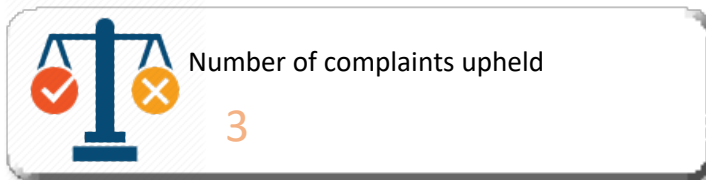
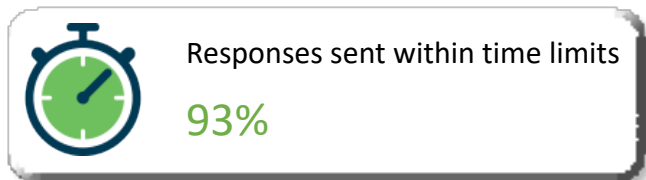
Statutory Social Care – Complaints & Compliments

2023-'24 – Quarters One & Two

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Children's Services – Complaints & Compliments | Statutory Social Care Dashboard



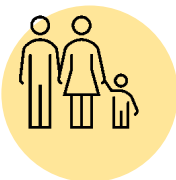
Ombudsman cases

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In the first two quarters of this financial year we have received no new cases from the LGSCO

There is of course still the possibility that complaints received in this quarter could be escalated to the LGSCO at a later date

Analysis of social care data

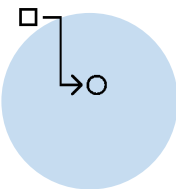


Volumes of complaints for **children's social care** have been relatively even in terms of those received by the long-term care teams, Referral & Assessment, CwD and Family Placement



When focussing on **complaint outcomes** for those considered at formal stages, we had three that were upheld, six partially upheld and four not upheld

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Service users raised concerns about **strategy decisions made, alleged misconduct of staff, communication** (i.e. tone, delay) and **alleged inaccurate records**

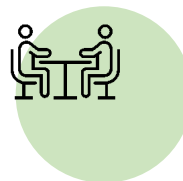


As has been the case for the last three financial years, the **number of compliments received by services outweighs the volume of complaints** – examples of these have been provided later in the report

Actions/responses



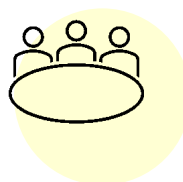
Where there was evidence of fault on part of services, these were immediately **acknowledged in formal responses** and **actions were taken** in response



If something had gone wrong, **apologies have always been made** by services as a first step – something that is common practice with social care complaints



With regard to learning from complaints there have been a number of steps, such as **discussions within supervision, training sessions** scheduled for wider teams, **inaccurate records being amended**, and **working practices clarified**

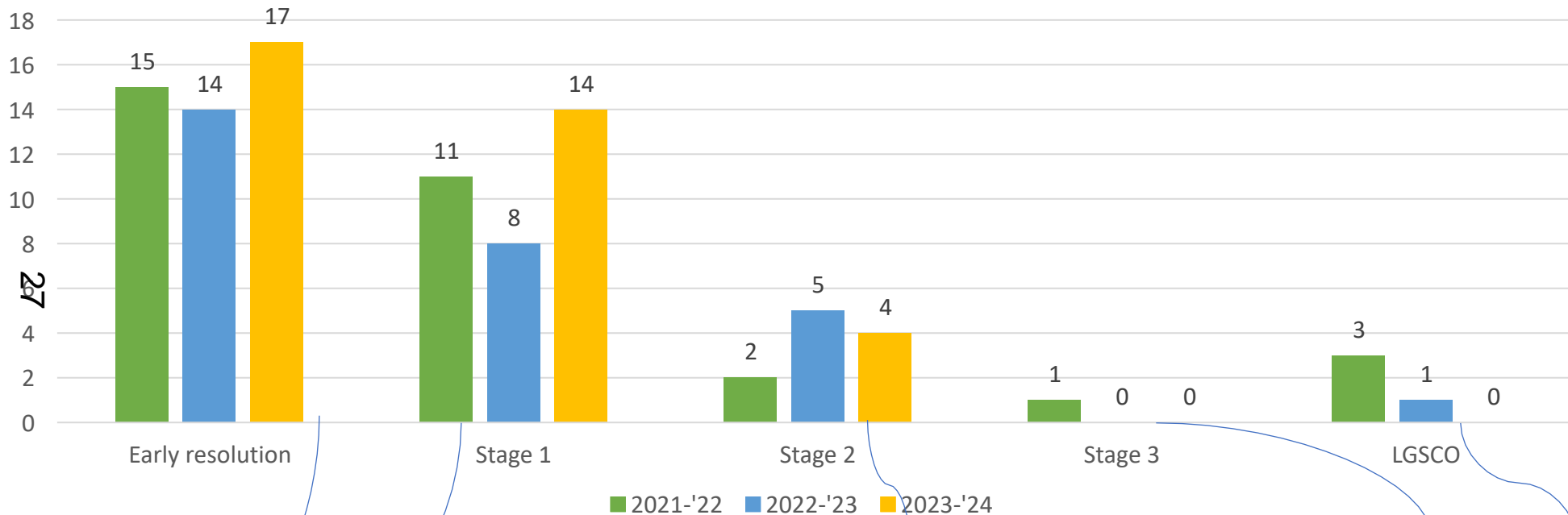


Where we have been unable to resolve cases locally – either at early resolution or stage one – we have always **highlighted the option to escalate** and **assisted service users in doing so** where they have decided to take their concerns further



Children’s Services – Complaints & Compliments | Comparison

Q1 & Q2 - Comparison with previous financial years



Focus on earlier stages



Over the last few financial years the large majority of cases have either been resolved informally through discussion or at stage one. This is beneficial for both the service user and the LA

Consistent volumes



The number of cases we have seen escalate to stage two has remained relatively consistent over the last three years

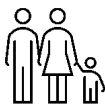
No new cases



We have not had any cases escalated to stage three panel or the Ombudsman so far this year. This is positive as it demonstrates a focus on resolving complaints at an early a stage as possible



Children's Services – Complaints & Compliments | Social Care Compliments



Feedback from School Safeguarding Lead for Social Worker

"He said he wanted to thank you to the SW for all his hard work that he had done in supporting the family and how it had made a difference. Really lovely words from education shared within the conference"



Young person giving feedback for SW at CiC Council

"One of your young people was absolutely singing your praises about the excellent support you have given him over many years. He said you are so helpful and supportive.."

Foster carer giving feedback for service after 25 years of care



"I'd like to say THANK YOU for the last 25 years. All of the children have made us better human beings, better able to cope with our own lives and still inspire us every day, so again ... Thank you!"

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Feedback from school worker to SW



"Continuing on with the theme of feedback, I just wanted to add to my email below that, having now had some time to build a more or a relationship with the SW, she is just as wonderful and I still have only positive things to say about the incredible support I am getting 😊"

ICPC positive feedback for the Chair



"I felt it was really well managed and structured. It was my first unborn experience and the way you have chaired the meeting made it a positive experience for me."

Compliment from child to SW



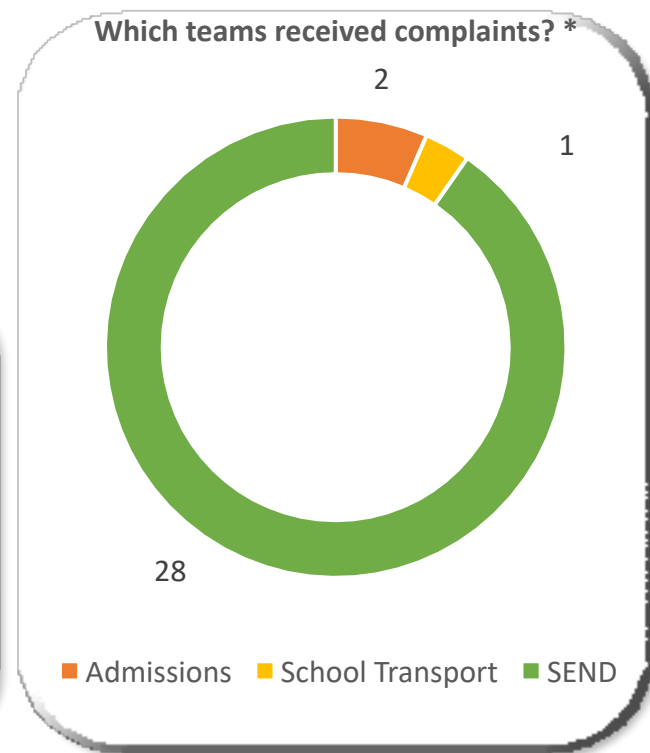
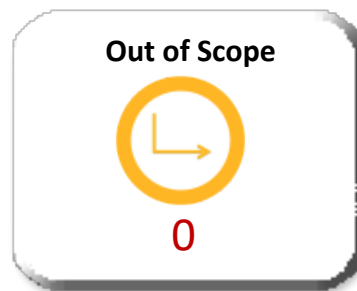
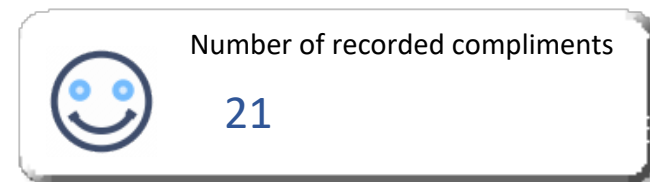
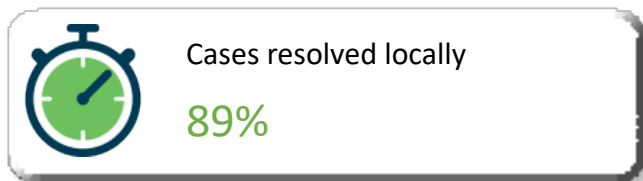
"She said you were absolutely lovely, you listened to her and are very professional. Just thought I would feed it back to you although I agreed with her you are indeed! and I am glad she had such a positive experience."

CS Overview & Scrutiny Committee

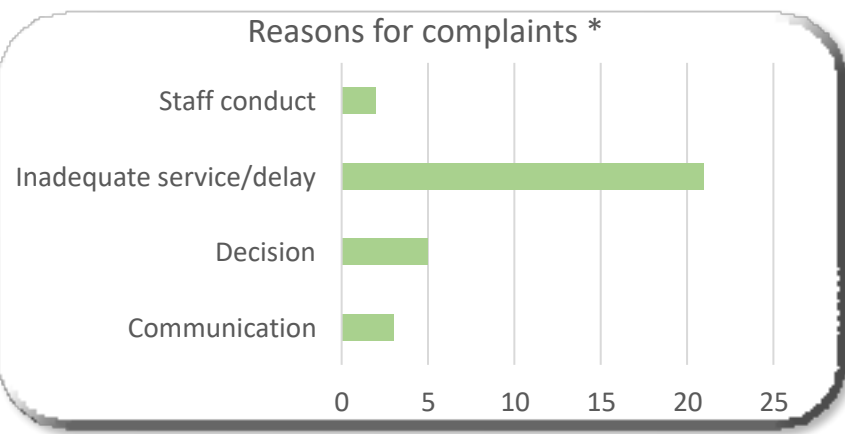
Corporate Process – Complaints & Compliments

2023-'24 – Quarters One & Two





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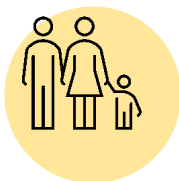


Ombudsman cases

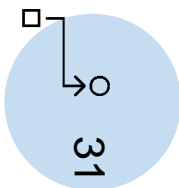
3 In the first two quarters of this financial year we have received three new contacts from the LGSCO on corporate complaints

Two are in connection to SEND and provision under Education, Health & Care Plans; one is in connection to provision of school transport

Analysis of corporate complaint data



As has been highlighted on the previous slide, the large majority of cases received under the corporate complaints process are for SEND



Service users raised concerns about **inadequate service delivery, inadequate communication** and **delays in providing services**



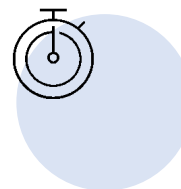
Having liaised with SEND, it has been confirmed the rise in complaints can be **attributed to greater scrutiny of assessment requests and draft EHC plans**. This shift in practices is essential to balance the Council's SEND statutory obligations without neglecting its financial responsibilities

Although this adjustment period may generate a higher number of complaints, **the aim is to work collaboratively with families and schools** so that they better understand the assessment process and what funding is available

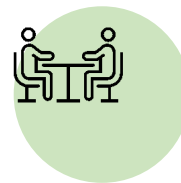


SEND also receive the bulk of the formally recorded compliments under the corporate process – with **21** being received as feedback for excellent services

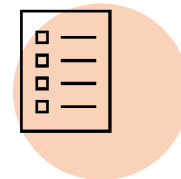
Actions/responses



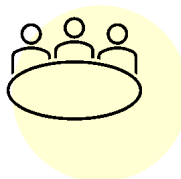
As highlighted in the volumes for cases, the majority of complaints are **resolved at the earlier stages** – demonstrating a commitment by the services to work **with families to resolve issues locally**



Services take a transparent approach when responding to complaints – **acknowledging where fault has occurred and apologising** for this



As complaints have predominantly been around service delay and/or inadequate service, the key actions taken by services in response to concerns have been to **highlight delays within the discussions/supervision, provide services that were outstanding, and outline actions to reduce likelihood of reoccurrence**

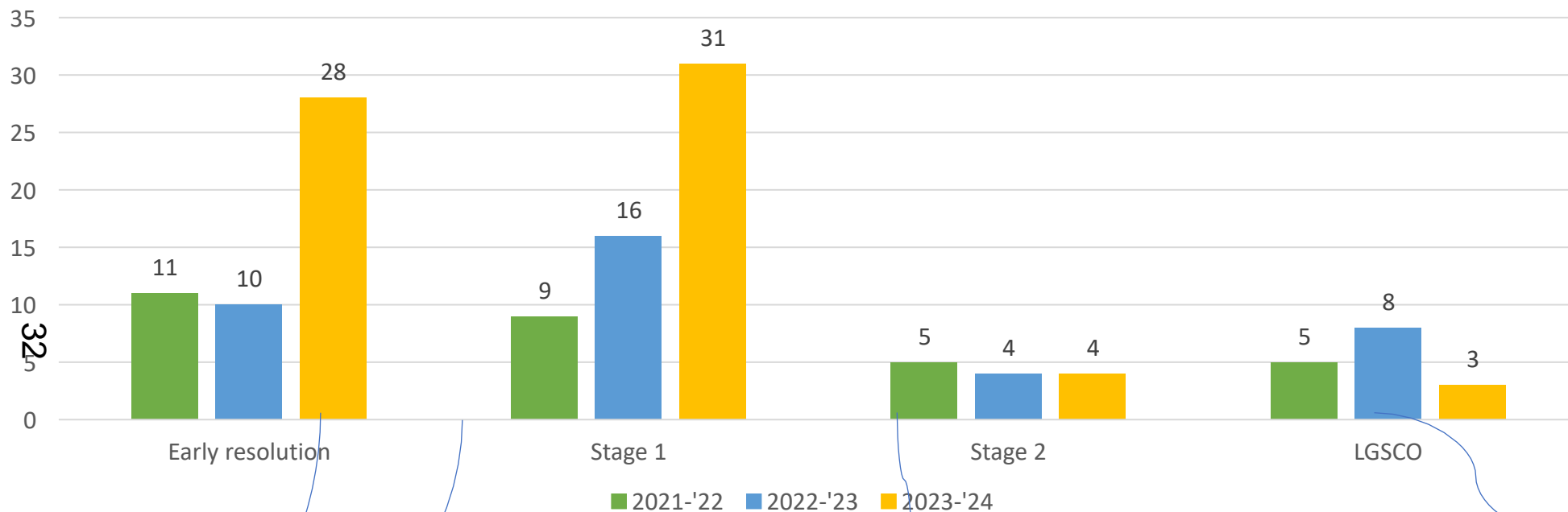


Where we have been unable to resolve cases locally – either at early resolution or stage one – we have always **highlighted the option to escalate** and **assisted service users in doing so** where they have decided to take their concerns further



Children's Services – Complaints & Compliments | Comparison

Q1 & Q2 - Comparison with previous financial years



Volumes have increased



The number of complaints received has increased – particularly this financial year. This has largely been driven by the factors outlined on the previous slide

Escalations remain static



Despite the increase in complaints at earlier stages, the number that are escalated has remained static. This has been due to a commitment from the services to resolve concerns as soon as possible

Ombudsman cases due to backlog



The increased cases in the last two financial years was due to the Ombudsman working through a backlog – post pandemic



Children’s Services – Complaints & Compliments | Compliments



Feedback from service user to SEND Case Officer

“I received a call from the SEND Case Officer and she was so helpful and approachable. She took the time to answer my questions and gave me a really thorough explanation of what I’m finding to be a daunting and complicated process. She was great!”



Positive comments for Senior SEND Officer

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“Thank you for bringing us this piece of terrific news. Updated EHCP received safe. Thank you very much for handling our son’s case professionally all along.”



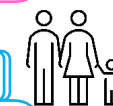
Great feedback for another SEND Case Officer

“I really do appreciate the effort that you have put into this process, and am grateful that you responded to all my emails in a timely manner, and made time to speak with me virtually as well.”



A service user passes on their thanks to SEND

“I would like to take this opportunity to thank you both for all your support during what was a very difficult time for us. From the first moment we made contact with Wokingham Local Authority in order to obtain support for our son, we were met with professional, kind and supportive staff. Our experience has been entirely positive, in sharp contrast to other Local Authorities and parents going through the same process.”



Feedback from school worker to SW

“Continuing on with the theme of feedback, I just wanted to add to my email below that, having now had some time to build a more or a relationship with the SW, she is just as wonderful and I still have only positive things to say about the incredible support I am getting 😊”



Compliment from child to SW

“She said you were absolutely lovely, you listened to her and are very professional. Just thought I would feed it back to you although I agreed with her you are indeed! and I am glad she had such a positive experience.”

End of report

Happy to assist with any queries

We appreciate this is the first time this report has been presented at Children's Overview & Scrutiny so any recommendations for improving/expanding the content to fit the needs of the Committee are welcomed

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