

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

SOCIAL SERVICES

REPRESENTATIONS AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES

ANNUAL REPORT

2023/24



1. INTRODUCTION

It is a statutory requirement for local authorities to have in place a representations and complaints procedure for Social Services.

Each local authority is required to produce an annual report concerning the operation of its representation and complaints procedure.

This annual report provides information about the operation of the Social Services Representation and Complaints Procedure between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024. The report contains information about the number and type of complaints received and also provides details of the activities undertaken by the Customer Feedback, Engagement and Complaints Team during that period to develop the representation and complaints service.

2. BACKGROUND

Social Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf adopts a positive attitude towards complaints and views them as a valuable form of feedback, which assists in the development and improvement of services. Complaints also provide an opportunity to learn lessons where a service has fallen short of an expected standard.

The representation and complaints procedure is widely publicised generally and specifically to people who use our services and provides them with an opportunity to:

- ❖ Voice their concerns when they are dissatisfied in order that the issue can be rectified to their satisfaction, wherever possible.
- ❖ Make compliments.
- ❖ Suggest improvements.
- ❖ Challenge decisions.

The aim is for our representation and complaints procedure to secure a better service for all the people using social care services and is underpinned by the following key principles:

- ❖ Commitment to providing quality services.
- ❖ Accessible and supportive to those with particular needs.
- ❖ Prompt and responsive with resolution at the earliest possible opportunity.
- ❖ Strong problem solving element.
- ❖ Operated without prejudice or discrimination.
- ❖ Adheres to the principle of equal opportunity.

The representation and complaints procedure also provides an opportunity for service users to address concerns in relation to independent sector providers

where they remain dissatisfied following implementation of the agencies own internal complaints procedures.

The Social Services complaints process has two stages:

Stage One: Local Resolution – The emphasis at this stage of the process is to resolve the complaint by means of discussion and problem solving. The complainant will be offered a discussion about the issues they have raised and this can either be done by telephone or face to face in an attempt to resolve the issues. This must be done within 10 working days of the receipt of the complaint. Following this discussion and any further investigation that is necessary, a written response will be provided within 5 working days.

Stage Two: Formal Consideration – If the complainant remains dissatisfied after completion of stage one, they may request that the complaint proceeds to stage two of the process. This involves a formal investigation of the complaint with a report being produced by an independent investigating officer. The timescale for dealing with this stage is 25 working days.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the stage two investigation, they may progress their complaint to the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales.

3. STAGE 1 'INFORMAL' COMPLAINTS

In 2023/24 there were a total of 147 recorded complaints during the year, compared with 129 in the previous year. Children's Services have seen an 8.33% increase with Adult Services seeing a 21.05% increase in numbers of complaints received.

Of the Stage 1 complaints that were received across both service areas 43.54% (64) were responded to within statutory timescales which is a decrease from 45% in 2022/23.

Of all complaints made in relation to Children Services only 25.64% were dealt within timescales.

Adult Services achieved 63.77% of complaints closed within the statutory 15 working day period.

Ongoing support to teams from the Customer Feedback, Engagement and Complaints Team has been provided throughout this period and where possible the team have sought to resolve low level complaints and queries outside of the complaints process. This is reflected in the number of contacts recorded (195) which represents a 14.47% decrease compared with figures for 2022/23. Of the contacts dealt with only 3 contacts progressed to Stage 1 complaints and 2 progressed to Stage 2 Complaint.

Adult Services

69 complaints were received for Adult Services during the year. This represents an increase on the total amount received in 2022/23 when 57 complaints were received.

Of the complaints made about Adult Services, 14 (20.28%) were made by the service users themselves and 55 (79.7%) were made by their representatives e.g. carers, family members and advocates. These figures highlight the reliance of many adults on their family and carers to raise issues on their behalf and remains consistent with comments received as part of the Social Services Performance Measures Survey undertaken in January 2024.

Details of complaints received recorded by Service Area are summarised in Table 1 and compares them with the previous year.

Table 1: Summary of complaints by Service Area

Service Area	2022/23	2023/24
Long Term Assessment - Locality Teams	26	28
Complex Learning Disability Team	4	12
Short Term Intervention Support @ Home	0	9
Mental Health	2	4
Finance/Grants	1	4
Independent Sector Domiciliary Care	6	3
Extra Care	0	2
Short Term Intervention – Care Management	8	2
Residential Care RCT	3	1
Day Services	1	1
Business Support	0	1
Safeguarding	0	1
Supported Living	0	1
Independent Sector Residential Care	1	0
Community Reviewing Team	2	0
Cross cutting	3	0
Total	57	69

The highest number of complaints were received by the Long-Term Assessment Teams which is consistent with Children's Services and reflects the complex nature of providing longer term care and support. Whilst remaining low in number, there have been increases in complaints for Support@Home and Complex Learning Disability in this reporting period.

There are no identifiable themes for Support@Home or Complex Learning Disability. 2 complaints related to the withdrawal of the night sitting service and 1 of these complaints has progressed to Stage 2 and remains ongoing.

Table 2 below sets out in more detail what the complaints were about and compares them with the previous year.

Table 2: Summary of what complaints were about.

Nature of Complaint	2022/23	2023/24
Lack of Information/Communication	13	22
Financial Issues	1	12
Quality of Service	10	9
Failure to provide a service	5	6
Quality of Care	13	6
Staff issues	6	4
Waiting for Assessment	1	2
Safeguarding	0	2
Care and Support Plan	1	1
Issues Around Adaptations	4	1
Failure to comply with policies/procedures	0	1
Information Governance	0	1
Occupational Therapy Issues	0	1
Physical Environment	0	1
Issues Around Standards	1	0
Missed Calls	1	0
Change in Call Times	1	0
Total	57	69

This year a rise in the number of complaints that relate to finances have been noted with delays in assessments and families being unclear about charges for care and services.

Of the 69 Stage 1 complaints received for Adults Services, 67 were resolved locally, and two required no further action.

Children's Services

78 complaints about Children's Services were received during the year. This represents a 8.33% increase compared to 2022/23 when 72 complaints were received.

Table 3: Summary of complaints by Service Area

Service area	2022/23	2023/24
Intensive Intervention	49	57
Early Intervention	18	15
Children Looked After	0	3
Safeguarding	0	1
Contact Centre	0	1
Miskin	0	1
16+ Team	2	0
Information Advice and Assistance	2	0

Information Management	1	0
Total	72	78

Of the 78 complaints received 10 progressed to Stage 2 Complaints.

Out of the 78 complaints received 22 were made by fathers with 6 out of the 10 Stage 2 complaints being raised by fathers. This has been a theme that has been identified in terms of how Children Services both engage and include fathers in assessments and Child Protection Procedures.

Representations

There were no representations received from children in this reporting period.

The Council commissions an Independent Advocacy Provider for children and young people in line with the requirements of the Social Services Well-being Act (Wales) 2014 and the National Approach to Advocacy. This involves all children over the age of 5yrs being offered the support of an advocate when they become a Child Looked After or subject to Safeguarding arrangements.

The Advocacy Service supports children and young people to have their say and effectively supports children and young people to raise any concerns about their care and support. Whilst it is positive to see representations by children and young people it is reassuring that the commissioned advocacy service is supporting young people to resolve issues successfully outside of the complaints procedure.

Table 4: Summary of complaints from Parents/Carers

Nature of complaint	2022/23	2023/24
Lack of information/communication	29	27
Staff issues	18	21
Quality of Care/Service	14	8
Failure to provide a service	3	5
Contact Issues	1	4
Information Governance	5	4
Finance	0	3
Safeguarding	0	1
Challenge to information	1	1
Care and Support Planning	0	1
Corporate	0	1
Issues Around Adaptations	0	1
Physical Environment	0	1
Equality	1	0
Total	72	78

As in previous years complaints relating to lack of information/communication remain the highest category along with staff issues; however numbers remain relatively low in the context of the number of involvements for this period.

The majority of cases that relate to lack of information are generally resolved following a discussion/meeting and an explanation of the situation/process. It is noted that advocacy can and does assist in helping parents to work through and understand statutory interventions and this is noted to now be more readily available for parents.

4. CONTACTS AND CONCERNS

This year the Customer Feedback, Engagement and Complaints Team has again focused on attempting to resolve issues at source where this is considered appropriate and have worked collaboratively with managers across both services resulting in a reduction in complaints being passed to front line services.

In 2023/24 the Team dealt with a total of 195 contacts compared with 228 in 2022/23. Of the contacts received only 3 complaints progressing to Stage 1. 68 contacts related to Adult Services and 127 contacts were received for Children's Services. The Team also received 20 concerns where the subject specified that they did not wish to make a complaint but where action was identified as necessary. These were recorded and passed to the relevant service area where they were successfully resolved.

5. STAGE 2 'FORMAL' COMPLAINTS

Overall, there were 11 Stage 2 complaints made during 2023/24 which is a slight increase from last year when there 9 received.

Adult Services

There was 1 stage 2 complaint received for Adult Services, as shown in Table 5 below. This is a decrease from the previous year.

Table 5: Summary of complaints made at Stage 2

Nature of complaint	2022/23	2023/24
Quality of Service	2	1
Failure to Provide a Service	1	0
Quality of Care	1	0
Total	4	1

Children's Services

There were 10 Stage 2 complaints received relating to Children's Services, as shown in Table 6 below. This is an increase on the previous year.

Table 6: Summary of complaints made at Stage 2

Nature of complaint	2022/23	2023/24
Lack of Information/Communication	0	4
Quality of Service/Care	4	2
Failure to provide a Service	0	2
Contact Issues	0	1
Inaccurate Information	0	1
Safeguarding Issues	1	0
Total	5	10

As previously identified 6 out of the Stage 2 complaints were made by fathers who felt they had not been engaged with and treated equally to their (ex)partner. This theme is supported by work undertaken by Children Services Quality Assurance Board and the sampling of fathers included in assessments.

6. OMBUDSMAN Enquiries/Complaints

In 2023/24, 21 complaints were made to the Public Services Ombudsman, 13 for Children’s Services and 8 for Adult Services.

There were no Ombudsman investigations with all complaints being closed or directed back to the Council for resolution.

7. LEARNING THE LESSONS

A number of recommendations for improvements have been identified following complaints made at both Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the Complaints process. Some of these have already been actioned and resulted in service change, training for staff and informing wider service planning. Learning themes will contribute to the overall quality assurance, learning and improvement process in both Adult and Children’s Services. Recommendations include:

- Exploring how Children’s Services can adapt services and/or develop services to meet the needs of carers and young people with neuro diverse conditions.
- Improve case recordings to accurately reflect and differentiate between unsubstantiated and substantiated concerns in assessments and court reports.
- Explore how work with absent fathers can be improved through a webinar for practitioners developed as a result of themes identified through complaints.
- Review information available to families on the Child Protection process and the right to have an advocate to support.
- Ensure there is an active offer for a carers assessment throughout a family’s involvement with the Disabled Children Team.

- Ensure charging fact sheets are provided with financial forms and that care managers pro-actively revisit the issue to ensure families understand and financial matters are dealt with in a timely way.
- Any discussions around charging to be accurately recorded.
- Any changes to domiciliary care packages to be documented and care staff notified directly to ensure they are aware of individuals needs and what care is required.
- To ensure that when changes to services are planned that there is a clear communication plan which addresses how individuals affected will be informed and supported if considered necessary to relieve any anxiety.

8. COMPLIMENTS

Compliments provide valuable information regarding the quality of services that are provided and identify where they are working well. The number of compliments recorded in 2022/23 was 144 and is consistent with 145 received in 2023/24.

Adult Services

In 2023/24 there were 90 compliments received for Adult Services, this is a slight increase on figures for 2022/23 (74 compliments received). Table 7 below sets out the number of compliments recorded by Service Area.

Table 7: Summary of compliments received.

Service areas	Number	Percentage
Short Term Intervention	36	40%
Long Term Assessment - Locality Teams	33	37%
Residential Care RCT	9	10%
Complex Learning Difficulty	6	7%
Short Term Care Management	4	4%
Bereavement Services	1	1%
Complaints Team	1	1%
Total	90	100%

The following are examples of some of the compliments received for Adult Services during 2023/24

- Email received from family thanking SW for being a friend and for showing massive support over the last few years and mentioned how "professional and yet very approachable" that they are and will miss them.
- Son would like to pass on thanks to carer and said that he was "absolutely fantastic" and that his dad was treated with respect throughout his care.
- Niece and great niece have said "The kindness and compassion that we have witnessed not only towards our Uncle, but to us as his nieces has been very moving" and made them feel truly supported in the last part of their Uncle's life.

- Daughter would like to pass on thanks towards SW and felt very fortunate to have his care and mentioning that he has been "invaluable".
- Service user wanted to thank the morning staff for the care and support received and said that "Nothing was ever too much trouble for them. Over, the period. they've rebuilt my confidence".
- Compliment in relation to Social Worker off brother, I found him to be Honest caring and he acted at all times in the best interest of NAME, in a word he's was superb he kept us informed and had time for us as a family"
- Family has thanked the residential home where son stays for respite and mentioned that it gives them a "significant peace of mind" when son staying at respite.
- Family of service user passing on thanks to social worker for the help support and professionalism in arranging smooth discharge from hospital.
- Daughter of service user passing on thanks for the support and service provided by carers for her mum over the past 12 years. Saying "they are a credit to the Authority and it has been a pleasure to welcome them in our home".

Children's Services

The number of compliments recorded in 2023/24 was 55 compared to 70 received in 2022/23. Table 8 sets out the number of compliments recorded by Service Area.

Table 8: Summary of compliments received.

Service areas	Number	Percentage
Intensive Intervention	27	49%
Fostering Support	8	14%
Miskin Project	7	13%
Disabled Children's Team	5	9%
Enquiry & Assessment	4	7%
Resilient Families Service	2	4%
Education Welfare Service	1	2%
Reviewing Team	1	2%
Total	55	100%

The following are examples of some of the compliments received for Children's Services during 2023/24

- School teacher has made positive comments about the help, support and guidance that has been provided this year and that it has been invaluable.
- Service user sent Miskin Worker a card thanking them for everything that they have done for them and how far they have come since their help and support.
- Mother has thanked Miskin worker for being "fab at her job" and for giving them an "amazing" person to work with.

- Probation officer wanted to highlight positive work that was undertaken regarding a difficult case which has resulted in a very positive 3 way meeting with a way of moving forward for the SU.
- CASP review completed and mother wanted to thank the DCT for support and how it has helped her grow being a mother and a person.
- Carer passed on compliment for SW to say that they have been great to work with and is "reliable, approachable and efficient".
- Safer Fostering wanted to thank officer for helping with respite which allowed the family to go on holiday and said "Thank you so much name, I can't tell you how much of a difference your support has made today".
- Young Person wanted to thank social services and for helping her "turn her life around" and said that they are "amazing".
- Compliment received from Capcoch Primary School for SW and that they have worked really hard on a complex case while working in collaboration with several professionals.
- Mother of service user giving thanks saying "we appreciate everything that you've done for us as a family and tried your utmost best for NAME as he hasn't been the easiest to engage with until recently. Thank you for everything"
- I just want to take the time to thank NAME from children service's for all the work he has put in to support my family. He came to us when we were at breaking point and helped put things in place to make things much better. He worked tirelessly and fought for our family, and for that I can never repay him.
- I'm emailing to let you know that I completed a Direct Observation visit with NAME earlier today as part of her CPEL Consolidation Programme. I was impressed at how well NAME interacted with the mother and how child-focused she was. The feedback from the mother is excellent and in her own words she said "If it was a different social worker I wouldn't have come so far".

9. WORK PROGRAMME, PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The Customer Feedback, Engagement and Complaints Team has continued to provide individual support and advice to managers on complaint handling and has provided guidance on writing complaints responses for managers where need has been identified.

A priority for 2024/25 is to consider how the team can support individual services areas to improve the timeliness of complaints handling ensuring that performance is regularly reviewed and monitored against the Statutory timescale of 15 working days and the Complaints Standards Authority's suggested target of 75% of all Council complaints resolved within a 20-working day period within which social care data is included.

The Customer Feedback, Engagement and Complaints Team continues to support service areas with the management of unreasonable and persistent customers and provides advice on early interventions and appropriate use of the Council's Unreasonable Persistent Complainers policy.

In 2023 the Team introduced improved mechanisms for reporting complaints and compliments using Microsoft Power BI enabling more accurate data and

performance analysis. This will be used to develop further the annual report for 2024/25.

Complaints information on the Council's website is subject to review to ensure individuals are clear as to the Social Services complaints process and what support is available to assist with making a complaint and to ensure the Council complies with recent recommendations made by the Equality Commission in relation to appeals.

Complaints information for Children and Young People to be reviewed and to be updated to coincide with the review of information currently available on the 2sides website.

All complaints and appeal literature to be reviewed to ensure information is up-to-date and available in a range of formats.