

# Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee

14 January 2026



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
*Working better with you*

<b>Title</b>	Directorate of Childrens Services Annual Complaints & Compliments Report – 2024-25
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To note the report for information
<b>Report status</b>	Public report
<b>Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report</b>	Lara Patel – Executive Director
<b>Report author</b>	Nayana George
<b>Lead Councillor</b>	Councillor Wendy Griffith
<b>Council priority</b>	Safeguard & support the health & wellbeing of Reading's adults & children
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. That the contents of the report and intended actions to further improve service delivery and the management of representations, particularly complaints, in children's services in Reading.</li><li>2. Note the continuing work to raise awareness of all conflict resolution processes, including the statutory complaints process and encourage appropriate use by children, young people and their families.</li></ol>

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report outlines the work that Children's Services have carried out to improve customer relations. The report's main focus is on complaints and compliments. Subject Access Requests (SARs) are also covered
- 1.2. This report details information for the year 2024/25, analysis of the data, quality assurance and information on service developments as a result of learning from complaints for Children's Services. In 2024/25 children's services were delivered by Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC), a wholly owned company formed for this purpose. On 1 October 2025, Children's Services were transferred back to Reading Borough Council.
- 1.3. Under the monitoring system, information about complaints received directly by teams are reported to the Customer Relations Team upon receipt. This is to ensure that the Information Rights Services Manager, who acts as the statutory Complaints Manager, is aware of all current complaints in order to monitor their progress and highlight cases that can be resolved through alternate dispute resolution (ADR)/mediation to team managers and senior staff.
- 1.4. Complaints, particularly in the emotive arena of children's services, are inevitable. The way that they are handled, however, can help reduce the number of escalating complaints and can improve parental and family understanding of the need for

intervention by children's services and the positive outcomes for children and young people.

## **2. Policy Context**

- 2.1. The NHS & Community Care Act 1990, Children Act 2004, Department of Health and Department for Education Guidance & Regulations requires that the children's social care service sets up and maintains a complaints procedure. They also require that the local authority operates the procedure within specified timescales and that methods of investigation, a summary of statistical information on complaints and a review of the complaints process are included in an annual report.
- 2.2. Children's Services operate a 3-stage procedure in respect of statutory complaints about children's social care made by 'qualifying individuals', as specified in the legislation. Qualifying individuals are defined in national guidance as a child or young person, their parent, carer or foster carer or 'anyone who could be seen to be acting in the best interests of the child'.
- 2.3. The timescale for responding to complaints at Stage 1 is 10 working days, which can be extended to 20 working days in certain circumstances. The RBC Information Rights Services Manager, who is the designated complaints manager for children's services, also has to be aware of all complaints as they are being dealt with.
- 2.4. The corporate complaints procedure gives an opportunity for those who are not 'qualifying individuals' under the social services legislation, to still be able to complain about other aspects of children's services and this route is used for all corporate and education (incl. SEND) complaints.
- 2.5. The Council's Customer Experience Strategy includes key focus on complaints and listening to customers. It is part of our policy framework and strategic objectives.

## **3. The Proposal**

- 3.1. The 'Children's Social Care Complaints 2024/25 – Summary Report' attached at Appendix A provides an analysis of the data for statutory complaints; it explains how complaints are managed and how the learning is used to improve services. This will be made public through both Reading Borough Council's and Brighter Futures for Children's websites.
- 3.2. The Council have worked closely to drive improvements in the services offered to children and young people and to signpost to information on advocacy, early resolution and the complaints procedures.
- 3.3. Nevertheless, we recognise there is always room for improvement, and we are continuously working to better the services offered to children and families.
- 3.4. During the financial year 2024/25 children's services received 66 statutory complaints, which is a decrease of 9 (13.6 %) against the 75 received in 2023/24.
- 3.5. To give this some context, in 2024/25, 3202 children were open to children's social care, so the number of statutory complaints represents 2.09%. This compares to 3589 open children and 2.06% for 2023/24.
- 3.6. Of the 66 complaints received:
  - 11 (16.67%) were resolved through alternative dispute resolution (ADR) by the social care teams at the start of the process, before progressing to a formal Stage 1. These 11 cases were closed off following a telephone discussion with the complainant and a short-written response either by letter or email.
  - The remaining 55 (83.33%) progressed to a formal Stage 1 investigation.

- 3.7. During this reporting period, 11 Stage 2 requests were received in respect of the Stage 1 investigations carried out in this reporting period.
- 1 of these was resolved through ADR.
  - The remaining 10 progressed to formal Stage 2 investigation.
  - 3 of the 10 Stage 2 investigations were also reviewed by a Stage 3 Review Panel.
- 3.8. Both the Customer Relations Team, and Children's Services Communications & Compliance and HR/Training teams have continued to raise awareness of the complaints process with both staff and the public.

#### **4. Contribution to Strategic Aims**

- 4.1. Customer relations contributed to RBC's aims to enhance emotional wellbeing and deliver outstanding services for children in need and those needing protection in Reading. It does this by providing an impartial and supportive service to children and families who wish to complain or raise a concern and ensuring that there is learning from complaints.
- 4.2. In 2024/25, RBC's Customer Relations Team and the Information Rights Services Manager administered this service on behalf of Brighter Futures for Children, under a Service Level Agreement. The BFfC Board, via its committees, had oversight of service delivery and on actions relating to lessons learned, as part of the Company's strategic aim to improve children's services in Reading.
- 4.3. The Council Plan has established five priorities for the years 2025/28. These priorities are:
- Promote more equal communities in Reading
  - Secure Reading's economic and cultural success
  - Deliver a sustainable and healthy environment and reduce our carbon footprint
  - Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children
  - Ensure Reading Borough Council is fit for the future
- 4.4. In delivering these priorities, we will be guided by the following set of principles:
- Putting residents first
  - Building on strong foundations
  - Recognising, respecting, and nurturing all our diverse communities
  - Involving, collaborating, and empowering residents
  - Being proudly ambitious for Reading
- 4.5. Full details of the Council Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the Council's website - [Council plan - Reading Borough Council](#). These priorities and the Council Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.

#### **5. Environmental and Climate Implications**

- 5.1. Not Applicable.

#### **6. Community Engagement**

- 6.1. Information about the complaints process is provided verbally to service users via Children's Services Family Help & Safeguarding teams and Independent Reviewing Officers, as well as by the Customer Relations Team. Full information is also on the websites [www.brighterfuturesforchildren.org](http://www.brighterfuturesforchildren.org) and [Make a complaint or compliment - Reading Borough Council](#)

- 6.2. Leaflets on the procedures are widely distributed and available in a variety of formats and languages on request to the Customer Relations Team or through the use of ReachDeck on BFfC's website.
- 6.3. In all children looked after reviews and all child protection conferences, the chair always mentions the complaints process so that our most vulnerable children are reminded of their right to complain and a leaflet is provided. Children and families are also able to register a complaint via the web, text, email directly to the Customer Relations Team, in person, by phone, in writing or via an advocate.
- 6.4. The Brighter Futures for Children website has a direct link to the complaints service, and the Customer Relations Team has published the details for the Information Rights Services Manager (as the Complaints Manager) and the Children's Services advocacy provider, Reconstruct. The Customer Relations Team signpost parents and carers who make complaints to advocacy providers in the community.
- 6.5. Translation services are provided for complainants whose first language is not English, and advocacy support is available for young people who wish to make a complaint.

## **7. Equality Implications**

- 7.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -
  - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2. The Information Rights Services Manager will ensure that the statutory complaints process is accessible to all customers regardless of their race, gender, disabilities, sexual orientation, age or religious belief.
- 7.3. The statutory complaints process is designed to ensure that any concern or issue faced by vulnerable children and their carers is addressed in a timely and impartial manner.

## **8. Other Relevant Considerations**

- 8.1. Not Applicable.

## **9. Legal Implications**

- 9.1. The statutory foundation of the children's social care services complaints procedures are the Local Authority Social Services Act (1970), The Children Act (1989), The Children Act (2004), The Human Rights Act (1998), Children (Leaving Care) Act (2000), Adoption and Children Act (2002), the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act (2003). and The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (2006).
- 9.2. This statutory guidance for local authority children's services on representations and complaints, Getting the Best from Complaints, takes all of the above legislation into account.
- 9.3. It is a requirement of the Department of Health's standards and criteria for complaints management for children's social care that an annual report including complaints is presented to a public meeting.

## **10. Financial Implications**

- 10.1. There are no capital or revenue implications arising from this report. However, BFfC had an obligation to ensure the service provided by RBC's Customer Relations Team was value for money, that the SLA was regularly monitored and that all complaints were handled in a trauma informed, restorative and timely manner to minimise the likelihood of legal costs associated with escalation of complaints that could have been better resolved earlier.

## **11. Timetable for Implementation**

- 11.1. Not Applicable.

## **12. Background Papers**

- 12.1. 'Getting the Best from Complaints' Government Publication, August 2006.

## **Appendix A**

### **Children's Social Care complaints for Children's Services (Brighter Futures for Children) 2024/25**

#### **Summary report**

##### **Introduction**

This is a summary report of the data for statutory complaints received by Children's Services for the financial year 2024/25. The report shows there were 66 statutory complaints received, a decrease of 9 (13.6.%) compared to the 75 received in 2023/24.

This report will be made available to the public through the Reading Borough Council (RBC) and Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) websites.

In addition to the quality of service provided, there are many factors that can affect the number of complaints received such as satisfaction, customer expectations, awareness of the complaints process, and the extent of promotional activity.

A high number of complaints should not be interpreted simply as meaning that Children's Services provided a poor service, while at the same time a low number of complaints should not be interpreted as meaning people are satisfied with the service. When interpreting the statutory complaints statistics, it is important to take into account not just the number received but the number and proportion that are upheld.

Children's Services welcome feedback through the complaints process. As well as providing opportunity to identify where services have not been provided as they should be, feedback can also provide customer insight and help identify shortfalls in practice, policies and procedures. This contributes to learning and continuous improvement.

##### **Statutory complaints procedure**

Complaints dealt with through the statutory procedure involve three stages.

At Stage 1 complaints are investigated and responded to by a manager in the relevant service area.

If the complainant feels that the issues they have raised remain unresolved, they have the right to progress their complaint to Stage 2. Consideration of complaints at Stage 2 is normally achieved through an investigation conducted by an independent investigating officer and an independent person. The independent person is involved in all aspects of consideration of the complaint including any discussions in the authority about the action to be taken in relation to the child. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent person and the investigating officer prepare independent reports for adjudication by a senior manager (usually the Director of Children's Social Care).

When Stage 2 of the complaint's procedure has been concluded and the complainant is still dissatisfied, they can request a review of the Stage 2 investigation, by a review panel at Stage 3. The Panel must consist of three independent people.

The statutory children's social care complaints process encourages the complainant and the local authority to consider Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) at every stage of the complaints process. This means resolving a complaint or concern informally through a face-to-face meeting or telephone discussion. Entering into ADR does not restrict the complainant's right to request a formal investigation at any stage. It is the complainant's right to request the presence of a customer relations manager at any face-to-face meeting.

## Summary of complaints themes

The top three themes for 2024/25 for all statutory complaints received were as detailed below. The figures for 2023/24 and 2022/23 have been given for comparison.

	2024/25		2023/24		2022/23	
Staff conduct	24	36.4%	26	34.7%	23	29.9%
Quality of service provided or received	13	19.8%	42	56.0%	17	22.1%
Service provision	12	36.4%	Not in the top three in previous years			

Examples of complaints recorded as **Quality of service provided or received** include the parent or carer disagreeing with the content of an assessment or care plan proposed for a child or young person and being given the opportunity to input to the assessment.

**Staff conduct** complaints are recorded as such when complaints are received about specific individual members of social work staff.

**Service Provision** complaints are concerns from parents or carers about contact arrangements with their child looked after and the child or young person being unhappy about the move to a different placement.

## Quality assurance

The Customer Relations Team carries out checks of all complaint responses to ensure the quality of the response and that the language and terminology used is easy for the complainant to understand, particularly if the complaint is from a child or young person.

All responses made during the year (100%) were checked by the Customer Relations Team before being sent out. The findings and recommendations arising from complaints were shared regularly with BFfC's Board via its Audit and Risk Committee, Senior Leadership Team and operational managers. The Information Rights Services Manager and the Customer Relations Team are also available to the complainant and the investigator for advice on best practice during the complaint investigation but remain impartial. Customer Relations Team staff undertook trauma informed practice training to align with Children's Services practice.

The Information Rights Services Manager delivers training on investigating and responding to statutory Stage 1 complaints and also on the corporate complaints procedure for Children's Services staff. The Information Rights Services Manager also attends team meetings to provide training and advice to front line staff. Training is available online and can be accessed by all social care staff through Children's Services training department and training portal. Take up of this on-line training is low, however, face-to-face training sessions for operational managers are available at request. Training for Children's Services staff in 2024/25 focused on the new complaints' management system.

The complaints procedure is promoted to external groups and publicity material is available to staff, children and young people on both RBC and BFfC's websites. Parents or carers with learning difficulties or other needs can access the information using the ReachDeck accessibility tool on the [BFfC website](#), or they can be signposted to local, impartial organisations, such as Reading's Information Advice and Support Service (IASS). ReachDeck will also translate and 'speak' web documents.

The Information Rights Services Manager attends Team Meetings to provide training and advice to Teams and Senior Managers when required. A case management system was introduced in July 2024 to assist with managing complaints across the Council and includes children's social care statutory complaints. Children and families are able to log complaints via the BFfC or RBC website into the new case management system. A new webform was created and went live in July 2024.

Children's Services senior managers receive weekly updates on all complaints which are live and under investigation.

Monthly reports of the Service Level Agreement were provided to the Children's Services Contract Manager. Monthly reports, a compliance dashboard, was shared with the BFfC Board, via its Audit and Risk Committee and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and for the Council's Corporate Management Team (CMT).

### Support network

The Information Rights Services Manager participates in the Southern Region Complaints Managers' Group and is the current chair of the group and also attends the National Complaints Managers' Group. Both groups continue to support customer relations and complaints managers in sharing good practice, both nationally and locally. Where cases are complex the Information Rights Services Manager often seeks advice and guidance from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's advice line or through Teams meetings with the LGSCO External Training & Liaison Manager.

### Complaints activity statistics

In the year 2024/25, children's social care received 66 statutory complaints, which is a decrease of 9 (13.6%) compared to the 75 received in 2023/24.

During this reporting period:

- 11 Stage 2 requests were received.
- One was dealt with through ADR/Mediation. The remaining 10 progressed to a Stage 2 investigation.
- Of these 10, 3 progressed to a Stage 3 investigation.

The above related to Stage 1 complaints received in this reporting year.

Of the 10 Stage 2 investigations:

- 5 agreed with the Stage 1 investigation and did not uphold the complaints;
- The remaining 5 Stage 2 investigations either upheld or partially upheld the complaints;
- Of the 3 cases that progressed to Stage 3, all 3 agreed with the Stage 2 investigation outcomes.

Of the 66 Stage 1 complaints received:

- 11 (16.66 %) were resolved as representations informally through alternative dispute resolution (ADR) (Stage 0) by the social care teams.
- 55 (83.33%) were investigated formally at Stage 1 to an outcome.

Of the 55 complaints investigated at stage 1, 32 (58.2%) were responded to within timescale, with the remaining 23 (41.8%) complaints responded to over timescale.

The above information is summarised in the following tables.

### Stage 1 investigation outcomes:

Outcome	Explanation	2024/25		2023/24		2022/23		2021/22	
Fully upheld	There is evidence to support the complainant's view	6	10.9%	7	12.3%	11	16.7%	7	14.0%
Partially upheld	The issues the complainant is raising are accepted, but it is out of Children's Services hands or remit to resolve the matter to the complainant's satisfaction	2	3.6%	2	3.5%	6	9.1%	8	16.0%
Not upheld	Where there is evidence to support the local authority's	16	29.1%	6	10.5%	21	31.8%	16	32.0%

Outcome	Explanation	2024/25		2023/24		2022/23		2021/22	
	account of events complained about								
No recordable outcome	There are conflicting accounts of an event with no evidence to support either party	0	0.0%	2	3.5%	1	1.5%	1	2.0%
Several outcomes	A combination of the above (where complaint has multiple strands)	31	56.4%	40	70.2%	27	40.9%	18	36.0%

**Total number of Stage 1 complaints (including those resolved by alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and eventually withdrawn) received in the last five years.**

Year	Number of complaints received	% Increase against previous year	Number of children open to Children's Services	% of complaints against open cases
2023/24	75	-2.60%	3589	2.09
<b>2024/25</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>-13.63%</b>	<b>3202</b>	<b>2.06</b>

**Outcomes for those investigated to a completion (excluding those resolved via ADR and those eventually withdrawn)**

Outcome	2024/25 Number	% of Total	2023/24 Number	% of Total	2022/23 Number	% of Total
Upheld	6	10.9%	7	12.3%	11	16.7%
Partially upheld	2	3.6%	2	3.5%	6	9.1%
Not upheld	16	29.1%	6	10.5%	21	31.8%
No outcome	N/A	0.0%	2	3.5%	1	1.5%
Multiple outcomes	31	56.4%	40	70.2%	27	40.9%
Total	55	100%	57	100%	66	100%

#### **Timescales: Investigations**

Reporting Year	Total Investigated to an Outcome	In Timescale	% of Total	Over Timescale	% of Total
2021/22	50	22	44%	28	56%
2022/23	66	28	42.4%	38	57.6%
2023/24	57	25	43.9%	32	56.1%
<b>2024/25</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>58.2%</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>41.8%</b>

#### **Timescales: Informal Resolutions**

	Total Resolved Informally	In timescale	% of Total	Over Timescale	% of Total
2021/22	9	6	66.7%	3	33.3%
2022/23	10	5	50.0%	5	50.0%
2023/24	17	7	41.2%	10	58.8%
<b>2024/25</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>54.5%</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>45.5%</b>

**Main theme of all complaints received during 2024/25**

(NOTE: This includes all complaints received and resolved informally, withdrawn, and investigated to an outcome at Stage 1, but does not include complaints investigated at Stages 2 & 3, as these themes are duplicates of Stage 1)

Theme of complaint	2024/25 Number	% of Total	2023/24 Number	% of Total	2022/23 Number	% of Total
Assessment Process	1	1.5%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Communication	9	13.6%	6	8.0%	11	14.2%
Complaint about Placement	1	1.5%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Court Issues	1	1.5%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Failure to Resolve Issue	N/A	N/A	0	0	1	1.3%
Financial Issue	1	1.5%	1	1.3%	1	1.3%
Lack of Support	N/A	N/A	0	0	10	13.0%
Missed Appointment	1	1.5%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Procedure	N/A	N/A	0	0	14	18.2%
Quality of service provided	13	19.8%	42	56.0%	17	22.1%
Safeguarding	3	4.5%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Service Provision	12	18.2%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Staff conduct	24	36.4%	26	34.7%	23	29.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Who the complaint was received from:**

Who made the complaint	2024/25 Number	% of Total	2023/24 Number	% of Total	2022/23 Number	% of Total
Advocate*	7	10.6%	1	1.3%	6	7.8%
Child *	0	0.0%	1	1.3%	0	0
Extended Family (Siblings, Aunts & Uncles, and Grandparents)	5	7.57%	9	12.1%	8	10.4%
Friend	0	0.0%	0	0	0	0
Landlord	0	0.0%	0	0	0	0
Parent (Incl. Adopted or Foster Parents & Guardians)	52	78.7%	63	84.0%	54	70.1%
Professional (Care Worker, Social Worker, etc)	1	1.5%	0	0	1	1.3%
Self **	1	1.5%	1	1.3%	8	10.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>100%</b>

\* These are complaints received directly from a child, usually under the age of 12, sometimes via an advocate.

\*\* These are complaints received from young people who are open to the service in their own right and are aged over 12.

The majority of complaints are from children's birth parents who disagree with social care involvement and outcomes from assessments and care plans and wish to challenge a

professional decision. Of the 66 complaints received 52 (78.7%) are from parents. Complaints of this nature are inevitable, however high-quality record keeping and clear communication with a clear distinction between fact and opinion reduces the opportunity for dispute.

#### Statutory complaints received by team:

Team	2024/25 No. of Complaints	%	2023/24 No. of Complaints	%
Children Looked After Team	7	10.7%	8	10.7%
Children's Single Point of Access	3	4.5%	3	4.0%
Children & Young People's Disability Team	9	13.6%	15	20.0%
Early Help Team	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Edge of Care	1	1.5%	0	0.0%
Family & Friends	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Fostering Service	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Leaving Care Team	4	6.1%	2	2.7%
Occupational Therapy	1	1.5%	0	0.0%
Together for Families Teams	40	60.6%	47	62.6%
Under 5's Team	1	1.5%	0	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100%</b>

The three areas which received the highest number of complaints were the Together for Families Teams (TFF) with 40 (60.0%), the Children & Young Person's Disability Team (CYPDT) with 9 (13.6%), and the Children Looked After Team (CLA) with 7(13.6%). This can mainly be attributed to the high volume of children open to these services compared to others listed above and the volume of their direct contact with children and families.

#### Methods used to make a complaint

Method	2024/25 Number	% of Total	2023/24 Number	% of Total	2022/23 Number	% of Total
Email	49	74.6%	51	68.0%	51	66.2%
Letter	2	3.0%	1	1.3%	3	3.9%
Telephone	5	7.5%	17	22.7%	17	22.1%
Webform	10	14.9%	6	8.0%	6	7.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>100%</b>

The above demonstrates that the complainants have a number of methods they can use to contact the Customer Relations Team with their complaints.

### Demographic Information:

Ethnicity	2024/25 Number of Complaints Received	% of Total	2023/24 Number of Complaints Received	% of Total	2022/23 Number of Complaints Received	% of Total
Asian/Asian British	7	10.60%	2	2.7%	3	3.9%
Black or Black British	3	4.55%	4	5.3%	1	1.3%
Black or Black British / Black Caribbean	2	3.03%	3	4.0%	3	3.9%
Black or Black British / Black African	3	4.55%	2	2.7%	2	2.6%
Mixed Black & White	2	3.03%	0	0.0%	1	1.3%
Mixed Black & Asian	1	1.51%	1	1.3%	0	0/0%
Mixed White & Asian	0	0.0%	3	4.0%	3	3.9%
Mixed White & Black African	8	12.12%	1	1.3%	0	0.0%
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	5	7.58%	6	8.0%	6	7.8%
Mixed Other	2	3.03%	3	4.0%	3	3.9%
Not Stated	6	9.09%	14	18.7%	22	28.5%
Other White European	4	6.06%	1	1.3%	1	1.3%
White British	20	30.30%	34	45.4%	31	40.3%
White Other	3	4.55%	1	1.3%	1	1.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>100%</b>

For equality monitoring purposes, staff have been encouraged to seek personal demographic information from people who make a complaint to help assess if there are groups of people who are proportionally complaining more or less and to explore the possible reasons.

The offer of the translation service and easy read versions of complaint responses are made available by the Information Rights Services Manager to those complainants who need these.

### Complaints from young people involving advocates

Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, 5 complaints were recorded as coming from young people via an advocate.

Children's Services staff ensure that children are given information on their advocacy and rights at each Children's Looked After review, they are also made aware of their right to complain about the service they receive.

The Information Rights Services Manager also meets Children's Services teams and managers to reinforce the importance of capturing verbal complaints. Staff are encouraged to record and analyse comments or concerns, as many children's and young people's issues are resolved this way rather than using the complaints process. If the young person is unhappy but does not wish to make a formal complaint, the Customer Relations Team also offers to try to resolve matters informally through mediation.

### **Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman**

Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO) received 8 representations from dissatisfied children and families for issues relating to Children's Services. This is the same number as the previous year.

Of the 8 cases, the LGSCO assessed all 8 and investigated 3. One was upheld, the other 2 were not upheld. Of the remaining 5 cases 2 were closed without further investigation and 3 were deemed premature and referred to the Council to complete the complaints process.

In respect of the one case upheld, the LGSCO asked the Council/BFfC to apologise and provided financial redress for distress and time and trouble. There were no formal public reports issued in 2024/25.

### **Learning from complaints**

Children's Services welcomes feedback from children and families to inform the improvement of services. All compliments and complaints are logged and learning is disseminated to managers. Issues arising from complaints, how the specific service has addressed them, and emerging themes were reported to the Children's Services Senior Leadership Team, the BFfC Audit and Risk Committee and BFfC Quality Assurance Improvement Committee in 2024/25.

### **Examples of learning**

#### **Children with Disabilities**

Stage 1 complaint following a Children's Service decision for a reduction in care package for a child. Whilst the reduction was proportionate, the complaint highlighted the lack of consultation with parents before the decision was made. Learning from the complaint was shared with the service, whereby practice was updated to ensure that if a significant amendment is made to a child's package of care, a single assessment would be completed to clearly evidence the change in need for the child and their family. This ensures that families are participating and kept informed of changes. Staff were reminded that Social Workers must take responsibility for sharing reasons for changes to packages of care and the outcome of panels in a timely manner with parents and carers.

#### **Corporate Parenting – Children in Care and Care Leavers**

Our Children in Care and Care Leaver teams considered complaints to their service over 2024/25 and took a range of actions in response to complaints. Learning was shared and explored in team and service meetings with the aim of improving communication, transparency, and collaborative practice.

This learning has collectively enhanced communication, accountability, and partnership working, leading to increased satisfaction among parents and carers, improved compliance with statutory duties, stronger multi-agency collaboration, and could

contribute to a reduction in the number of complaints and escalations. Specific actions included:

- Clearer communication with parents, carers and professionals. The impact has been improved trust and confidence among parents, carers and professionals. Clear updates also reduced uncertainty and demonstrated accountability, resulting in stronger relationships and fewer escalations. Parents, carers and professionals have shared that they feel more informed and respected, which supports partnership working and reduces repeat complaints.
- A strengthened focus on reflective practice to ensure language is supportive and empowering. As a result, language in reports and meetings is more strength-based and inclusive, promoting dignity and collaboration. Feedback from children and families has shown that families feel less judged and more engaged in planning, which has supported better outcomes for children.
- Improving the timeliness of assessments and information sharing and improving clarity regarding roles and expectations at the beginning of placements. Setting clear expectations at the start of placements reduced delays and improved the quality of assessments. Professionals reported greater confidence in meeting deadlines, and carers reported feeling better prepared for their role.
- Strengthened expectations that Social Workers send minutes of looked after reviews; Personal Education Plans and Family Contact Reports to families and professionals within reasonable timescale following meetings, ensuring transparency and continuity of care. Families and professionals have improved access to essential information in a timely manner, which has supported collaborative planning and reduced frustration.

### **Next steps**

Learning from complaints is embedded in Children's Services' new Quality Assurance Framework, launched in summer 2025. Learning from complaints will be a dedicated agenda item at Children's Services quarterly Making A Difference meeting, chaired by the Executive Director for Children's Services and attended by managers across children's services. Themes arising from complaints, as well as actions taken in response, will inform workforce development planning and training, and quality assurance and audit activities.

Learning from complaints is an integral part of our improvement journey. We will continue to seek out the voice of children and families and use these alongside our understanding of their lived experiences to drive improvements to consistently deliver good outcomes for children in Reading.

### **Subject Access Requests (SARs)**

The Customer Relations Team processes all SARs requests for Children's Services. These are open and closed children's social care cases (historical cases where paper and microfiche files are held at the records centre) and Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) cases.

In 2024/25 the Customer Relations Team received 58 requests for records, 17 less than the 75 requests received in 2023/24 relating to Children's Services.

Of the 58 requests received 20 requests were completed. 20 were declined as invalid requests. The remaining 15 cases are waiting to be processed as at the end of March

2025, this number would have altered by the time this report is presented at Adults, Childrens and Education Committee.

The main reasons for the backlog are as follows:

- Large volumes of paper files need to be copied from microfiche and scanned to PDF format before redactions can be completed.
- Information is held on case management systems as well as shared files and emails. These have to be searched, converted to PDF and redacted before the file can be shared with the requestor.
- The Customer Relations Team and the Information Governance Team carry out six monthly audits of open cases and contact the customer with updates on the progress of their case.

The Council has purchased new software for the redaction work; at the time of writing this report we had carried out user acceptance testing and training. There are some system limitations we are working with the supplier to resolve.

### Compliments

Compliments are not consistently formally recorded and logged centrally. Improvement is needed in this area to accurately capture the positive feedback that we receive from children, families and professionals which also provides valuable insight and learning into what is working well.

Examples of compliments received from parents, carers and young people during 2024/25 include:

- We want to say thank you from the bottom of our hearts. The Family Workers team is excellent and provides extraordinary ideas and guidance to individuals with autism – *parent feedback to a family worker*
- The centre has amazing staff. They are so nice, they are happy to talk about anything and I feel I can turn to them if I need someone to talk to – *a parent praising family group workers after attending events during the summer programme at one of our children's centres*
- Thank you so much for all your help with both of my children. The work you have done has definitely made a difference in and out of school – *feedback for an educational mental health practitioner*
- He was incredibly supportive and genuine, even taking the time to go for a coffee after a visit to Crown Court – *feedback from a parent to a social worker*
- I don't know where I would be without your help and I really appreciate what you have done for me. I don't know how to repay you – *young person to youth support worker*
- She is the best family worker in the world. Thank you so much for letting her be a part of my family because she is doing all that she can – *family feedback about one of our social workers*
- I have had so many questions, but everyone has been so helpful, supportive and responsible, even though our situation is unusual – *parent feedback to the SEND team*
- They helped me get back into education which was a struggle for me and showed me future opportunities that I could follow up on, which helped significantly – *young person about the support they receive from YJS.*

## Appendix B

### Contact information: How to make a complaint

Some complaints can be sorted out by discussing your problem with your social worker or a manager. If you want to make a complaint, you can contact the Customer Relations Team by telephone, letter, in person, by email or via the BFfC website on its [compliments and complaints](#) page.

Telephone the Customer Relations Team on 0118 937 2905 or e-mail: [socialcare.complaints@reading.gov.uk](mailto:socialcare.complaints@reading.gov.uk).

If you wish to make your complaint to us in writing, our address is:

Customer Relations Team  
Reading Borough Council  
Floor 2 South Rear  
Civic Offices  
Bridge Street  
Reading  
RG1 2LU

You can also text us with your complaint, type SPKUP & your message to 81722. Your complaint will be recorded and if we can't sort out the problem immediately it will be passed for further investigation and action.

The Customer Relations Team can take your complaint over the telephone and explain the complaints procedure in more detail or send you a leaflet explaining how to complain. Leaflets for adults and for children & young people are also available in council buildings or via the [Brighter Futures for Children website](#).

You can also make a complaint about children's social care via the Reading Borough Council website: [Complaints](#).

You can also use these contact details to tell us if you have a concern (but do not want to make a complaint) or if you want to make a compliment about a service you can do so here: [Compliment](#).