



Audit & Governance Committee
5 June 2024

Annual Complaints Performance Report

Purpose of the report

To give the Audit & Governance Committee an overview of the nature of complaints received by the Council and complaint handling performance in 2023/24 and to demonstrate how feedback from customers has been used to improve services.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee note the report, specifically the complaint management processes in place, the inclusion of complaints within the Risk Register and the manner in which the feedback derived from complaints contributes to service improvements.

Introduction

1. The Council has three Customer Relations teams managing complaints and enquiries, one each for:
 - Adult Wellbeing and Health Partnership (AWHP) services;
 - Children Families and Lifelong Learning (CFLL) services;
 - All other Council services.

The procedures for dealing with complaints about children's and adult social care functions are set out in law. The corporate complaints procedure (covering all other Council services) is based on best practice. This report gives an overview of complaint management for all three procedures.

2. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) is the final stage for complaints about councils and some other organisations providing local public services. The Ombudsman issues an Annual Review letter in July to each local authority. This will be the subject of a separate report to the Committee later in the year.

3. This report also includes complaints made about Surrey County Council's Pensions Service. Pension complaints are dealt with through a separate complaints procedure and have a separate Ombudsman, The Pensions Ombudsman. The Pensions Service provides separate reports on complaints received to the respective Pensions Funds.

Background to complaints handling in Surrey County Council

4. Effective complaint handling is critical to delivering good customer service and good outcomes for our residents. As well as putting things right when they go wrong, every complaint presents a potential opportunity to learn from what our residents and customers tell us and use this to inform and improve the services we deliver, rebuilding and maintaining trust.
5. The volume of complaints does not in itself indicate the quality of the Council's complaint handling performance. Low complaint volumes can be a sign that an organisation is not open to receiving feedback.
6. Escalation rates and uphold rates are a better measure of performance because these indicate where complaints were not resolved at service level and where fault has been found. Low escalation rates are a positive sign indicating robust responses and early resolution as appropriate.
7. Where fault is found, actions are put in place to resolve the complaint for the customer and to make sure we improve our service. Specific examples are highlighted in **Annex 1**.
8. Even if a complaint is not upheld, the opportunity to learn about why the customer has made a complaint and how their experience or customer journey could have been improved is always considered.
9. Where there is an alternative route for resolution such as legal forums and appeals procedures, the matter will not be considered through the complaint procedure. Examples of these include data breaches, Special Educational Needs (SEN) tribunals and school transport appeal panels.
10. It is important to capture a balanced view of services and to recognise and learn from good service, which is why compliments received by customers are also recorded and referenced in this report. Examples are given in **Annex 2**.

Early Resolution and use of online complaints form

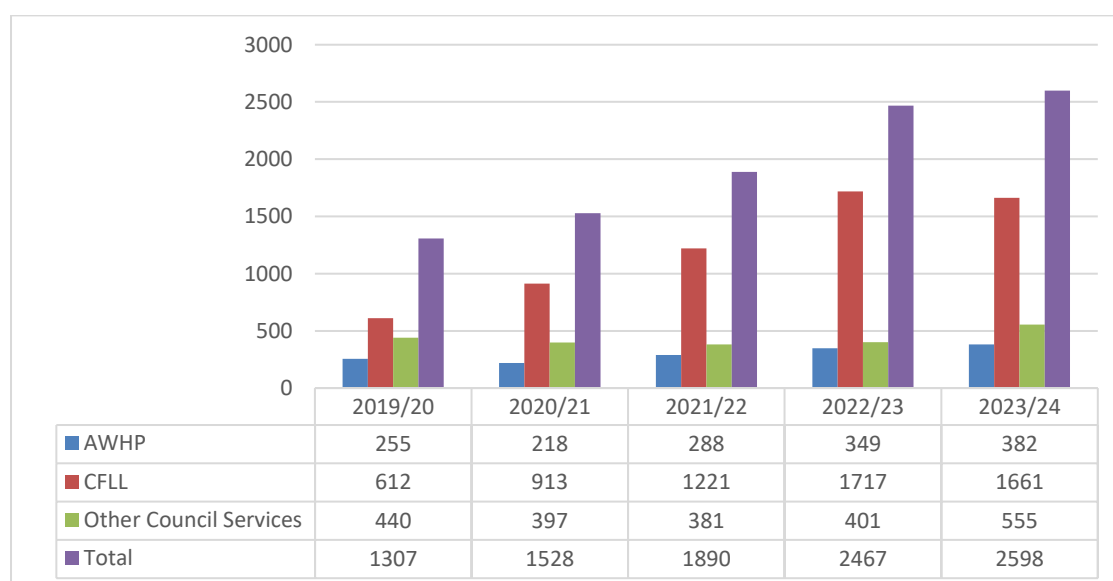
11. The Council's online complaint form makes it easy for customers to make contact with any concerns at their convenience as they can access this route at any time of day. Several service requests are received through this route, as well as residents commenting on policy decisions. While the online form is popular, it is recognised that not everyone has access to, or can use, digital services. This is why there are other ways to make complaints, such as by telephone and written correspondence.

12. The Council's early resolution approach means that all complaints are reviewed when they are received to make sure any enquiries are properly routed to the person or service best placed to help or respond. It is also determined at an early stage whether what the customer has asked for can be achieved without the need to go through the complaint procedure.
13. The Customer Relations Teams proactively work with services to prevent issues escalating where the required advice, information or preferred outcome can be provided quickly outside of the complaint procedure. This is an example of Early Resolution in the context of Alternative Dispute Resolution. This approach enables a proportionate and resolution focused service; it is not designed to prevent complaints being made.
14. This approach helps distinguish complaints from service requests quickly and makes sure they are properly routed with minimum delay. During 2023/24, 3,415 online (web) complaint forms were submitted compared to 2560 in the previous fiscal year. This demonstrates that our online form is accessible and used by our customers.
15. Many customers who used the online form were contacting about the delivery of non-social care or education provision services, primarily highways issues (1,252). The next most frequent contact related to Education Services (717) primarily relating to Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) for children and young people with Additional Needs and Disabilities (AN&D). 180 online enquiries were recorded about support from Children's Services. A further 295 online contacts recorded related to the delivery of Transport Services, with 63 of these relating to Home to School Transport. The least number of online contacts (135) were recorded in relation to Adult Social Care.
16. Some of the regular issues reported through the online complaints form that were unrelated to the provision of education services, home to school transport services and the delivery of social care support for both children and adults, included:
 - **Highway enquiries** - trees and vegetation enquires, roadworks/road closures and potholes.
 - **Insurance claims** - claims for damage to vehicles.
 - **District & Borough Council matters** - recycling and bin collections, and environmental issues.
 - **Waste** charges and questions relating to the community recycling centres.
 - **Countryside** - overgrown footpaths/vegetation issues.
 - **Bus services** - changes to routes / bus operators, timetables, queries regarding bus passes etc
 - **Trading standards** - comments about local businesses not trading correctly.
 - **Property** - reports about lighting / alarms / generators.

Complaint volumes and key themes in 2023/24

17. During the year 2023/24, the three complaint teams within Surrey County Council recorded a total of 2,598 complaints: a 5% increase across the board compared to the previous fiscal year (2,467).
18. Breaking this down into the three main areas:
 - AWHP services saw a 26% increase from 302 in 2022/23 to 382 during 2023/24.
 - CFLL services saw a 6% decrease from 1,771 in 2022/23 to 1,661 in 2023/24.
 - All other services saw a 38% increase from 401 to 555 at stage 1 of the formal complaint process.

Figure 1: Total complaints received.



Children’s Social Care services and Education services

19. Complaints about Children’s Social Care Services decreased by 18% from 607 during 2022/23 to 495 in 2023/24, which is indicative of the successful transformation and quality assurance work underway across social care services, embedding the family safeguarding model, increasing team capacity and staff retention, improving partnership working, finding more stable homes for looked after children and expanding services for care leavers.
20. In terms of themes in social care complaints, there has been an increase in complaints about the personal data held by the Council and the accuracy of that data, which are translating into Requests for Rectification under GDPR 2018. Another theme in Children’s Social Care related to concerns about the application of the Direct

Payments Policy, which staff have consequently reviewed and relaunched.

21. Complaints about Education Services increased by 30% from the previous year, from 832 to 1,078.
22. An estimated 65% of these complaints related to delays in completing an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Needs Assessment, issuing a final EHC Plan or completing an Annual Review. These delays, particularly in assessments, have been well documented as a national issue, caused in large part by the shortage of trained Educational Psychologists available to meet the increasing demand.
23. Cabinet approved a £15 million investment in July 2023 to address this challenge, and with implementation now well underway, the number of complaints regarding delays is expected to gradually reduce in 2024-25. The overall number of complaints directed to the SEN service between October 2023 and April 2024 has already reduced from a peak of 109 active complaints in October, to 67 in April.
24. Other Education-related complaint themes included disagreement with the Council's decisions; desired provision not being put in place, especially for children not attending school; and standards of communication.
25. For both social care and education provision, 30% of complaints included an element related to communication, with families requesting more frequent updates and more timely responses from key workers. As part of the new improvement plan following last year's Ofsted inspection, the Additional Needs & Disabilities Partnership has now established a Delivery Group specifically focused on improving Communication, Relationships and Collaboration. Restorative practice training is also being rolled out across the CFLL directorate, and Customer Champions have been appointed in each service to help embed the Council's refreshed Customer Promise.
26. Complaints about Home to School Transport decreased by 68% from 278 recorded during 2023/23 to 88 recorded during 2023/24.
27. This is reflective of the changes made within the structure of the service and adoption of an early resolution approach. It also includes reimbursement of costs incurred by parents transporting children themselves amongst other procedural changes.
28. The work is supported by a team of dedicated customer relations and complaints officers within the Home to School Transport Service, a successful model which has now also been replicated in SEN services, with a complaint lead in each geographic area working closely with the CFLL Customer Relations team.

29. In 2023/24, 1,446 enquiries were raised via MPs and Councillors, with 1,090 (75%) of these relating to Education services. Communication is underway to encourage residents to contact the CFLL Customer Relations team directly, particularly as over half of these enquiries relate to existing complaints.
30. For Education Services, primarily in provision for children with additional needs and disabilities, concerns can also be pursued through the appeals process.
31. For Adult Social Care, the increase in volume of 26% partly reflects the increased numbers of complaints relating to charges applied once someone has had a financial assessment. In Surrey a high number of people receiving care support will be making a client contribution towards their care costs and it is difficult to manage and balance the expectations sought when the care comes at an increased cost, due to the cost-of-living crisis.
32. Additionally, we are also experiencing a rise in complaints from mental health clients who are struggling to navigate the complex landscape of accessing support and differentiating between Adult Social Care Services and Surrey and Borders Partnerships service provisions.
33. The most frequent subject of complaint for each of the complaint procedures are shown in Figure 2 below. Service specific delivery issues followed by lack of communication were the most frequent complaint categories.

Figure 2: Complaint categories 2023/24

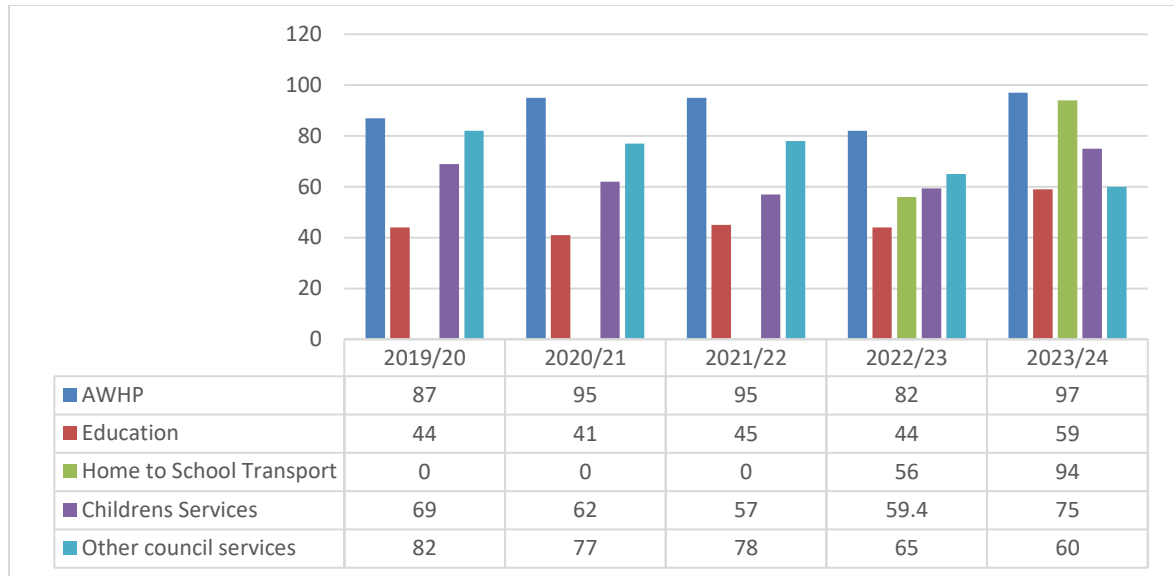
CORPORATE	CHILDREN, SCHOOLS & FAMILIES	ADULT SOCIAL CARE
Road works/resurfacing	Disagreement with assessment, content, and outcomes	Communication, Staff Conduct and Decision Making
Trees/vegetation	Children out of education and without alternative provision	Assessment Process
Parking	Delays in EHCP process/disagreement with content	Financial
Flooding/drainage	Direct Payment Policy does not meet requirements of pertinent legislation as it is too prescriptive	Service Provision
Libraries	Children not meeting the criteria for support from Children with Disability Services	Safeguarding

Complaint-handling performance

34. For corporate complaints, the target is for 90% of stage 1 complaints to be responded to within 10 working days. This year, 60% were responded to within timescale, compared to 65% the previous year. The adoption of accountability for parking enforcement and maintenance of our verges has contributed both to the increase in volume of complaints reflected as a 63% increase in complaints about Highways compared to the previous 12 months. Timeliness of responses for Highways has decreased from 77% during 2022/23 to 67% for 2023/24.
35. The Customer Relations Team is working with Highways colleagues to identify barriers and challenges to timely responses, aiming to improve response performance. This includes delivering localised training on complaints management and arranging training webinars to be delivered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman during the Autumn of 2024.
36. For Adult Social Care, the target is for 90% response within 20 working days (extensions can be agreed). The figure for this year was 97% compared to 82% in the previous year 2022/23.
37. CFLL services are working towards 80% compliance within the 10 working days target (extended to 20 working days with the customers agreement if necessary). Additional resourcing in the second half of the year, both in the CFLL Customer Relations team and in the SEND service (four dedicated complaint specialists, one in each of the four quadrant teams), have enabled improvements in timeliness towards this target. 75% of complaints in Children's Social Care services were responded to within timescale (15% improvement on the previous year) and 59% in Education services (12% improvement).
38. 94% of complaints about Home to School Transport were responded to on time during the year. This is an increase of 5% when compared to the previous 12 months when 89% of complaints were responded to within timeframe. This continues to reflect the positive impact of a proactive early resolution approach.
39. The ongoing Cost of Living challenges continue to impact customers and residents presenting challenges for front line staff in providing appropriate and proportionate support. The longer response times for Children's Services and Education are not unexpected because of the increasingly complex nature of concerns shared by families.
40. There were 78 complaints still open at the end of the year (31 March 2024), either because they were still within the response time or because they had yet to be resolved and responded to. The breakdown was:
 - 1 (Adult Social Care)
 - 33 (Children's Services)
 - 35 (Education)

- 0 (Home to School Transport)
- 9 (all other services)

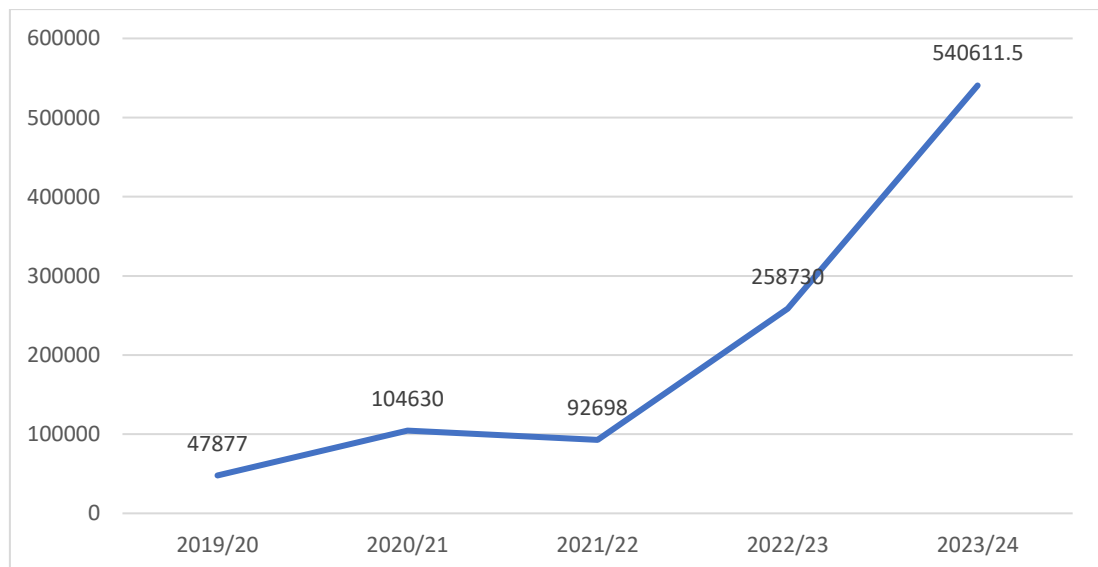
Figure 3: Performance against response target



Financial Redress

- Where fault is found following a complaints investigation, financial redress can be recommended where appropriate. All financial awards are approved by the relevant Head of Service and, if greater than £1,000, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member. The Ombudsman can also recommend financial redress if they find fault following an investigation.
- During 2023/24 the total amount paid in financial remedies was £540,611.59.

Figure 4: Financial Redress payments year-on-year



43. The notable increase in remedy payments from the previous year is due in part to a recent change in guidance from the Ombudsman, which encourages local authorities to provide financial remedies at an earlier stage, as well as remedies on an on-going basis for delays to EHC needs assessments and plans, regardless of the final decision to assess or to issue a plan.
44. Appendix 4 illustrates the month-on-month improvement in issuing plans within statutory timescales. Timeliness for initial needs assessments is also improving at an even faster rate, with almost 60% forecast within timescale by the end of May 2025. It is worth noting that although EHCP delays are gradually reducing, the volume of complaints reaching the Ombudsman, and consequent remedies, will take longer to reduce as they can relate to cases from up to two years prior.
45. Of the remedy payments directed by the LGSCO, £222,657.20 were for reimbursement costs to address missing provision. Where it is agreed that a child should have been receiving certain provision, the Council may make a symbolic financial payment to recognise each month of that missed provision. These payments therefore are funds that the Council would be spending to meet assessed needs irrespective of a complaint being made. This portion of the remedy payments equates to 68% of the total financial remedies directed by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
46. Missing provision is often due to delays in the EHCP process, as the appropriate provision for each child is dependent on first completing an assessment and agreeing this provision in the child's EHCP. As timeliness improves, provision will be put in place within normal service delivery rather than retrospectively through remedies.
47. Another cause of missed provision is related to children missing education for other reasons. The Council has undertaken an analysis of complaints under this theme, reviewing its responsibilities under section 19 of the Children's Act and implementing a series of recommendations.
48. For Adult Social Care, the total paid was £15,400 which was a result of recommendations from the Ombudsman. The largest of these included payment for the following complaint:
 - This amount includes a payment of £9,150 made due to the care provider, acting for the Council, being at fault as they charged an additional fee with no top up agreement being in place. The Council were instructed to repay the top up fee.
49. There were no remedy payments made for corporate services.
50. The totals of financial redress payments are shown below (figure 5).

Figure 5: Financial Redress breakdown 2023/24

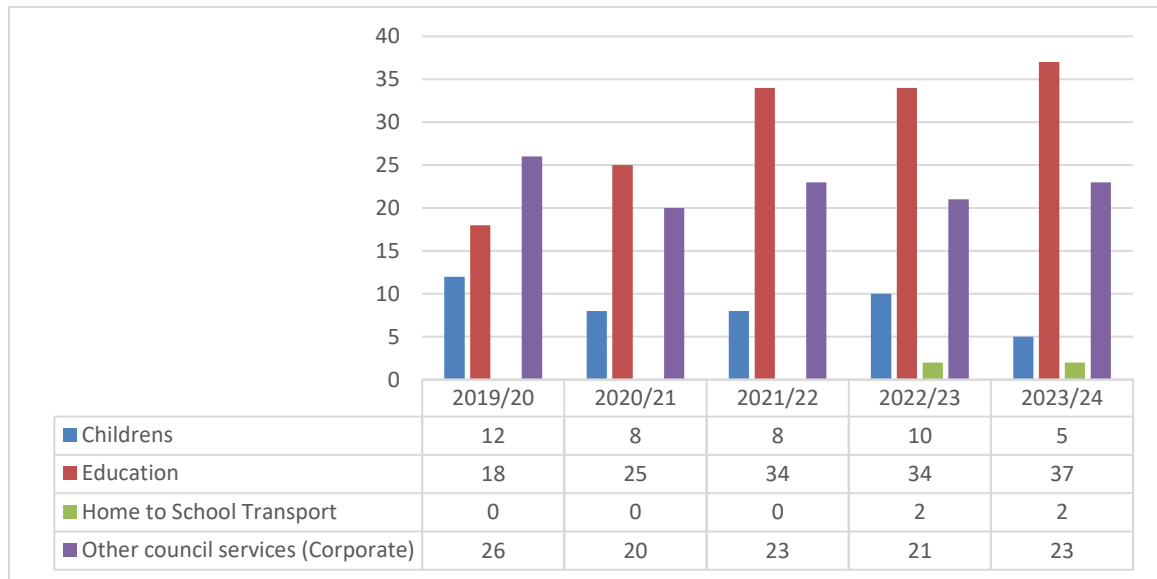
	FINANCIAL REMEDIES	
	2023-2024	2022-2023
Adult Wellbeing and Health Partnership (AWHP)	£15,400.00	£1550.00
Children Families and Lifelong Learning (CFLL)	£525,211.59	£258,730.53
Other Council Services (Corporate)	None Paid	None Paid
TOTAL	£540,611.59	£260,280.53

Complaint Escalation

51. The aim is to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity; however, customers can escalate their complaint, both to the next stage of the Council’s complaints process (where this option applies) and to the LGSCO for external independent investigation. Escalation rates are a good indicator of how successfully complaints are being handled at point of service.
52. 26.5% of complaints (147 out of 555 Stage 1 complaints) were escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2 of the Council’s corporate complaints procedure in 2023/24. This is a 5.5% increase on 2022/23 (21%). Some escalation requests reflected the delay in responding at the initial stage of the complaint process. As indicated earlier in this response the Customer Relations Team is working with operational colleagues to identify barriers in timeliness of response. 22 complaints were taken on immediately at stage 2 due to the complex nature of the concerns and to avoid further frustration for customers.
53. During the 2023/24 financial year, 27 complaints (5% of complaints) about Children’s Services escalated to independent investigation at the second stage of the complaint process. This is 5% lower than the previous 12 months and reflects the increased use of an Alternative Resolution Approach that focuses on resolving the complaint rather than simply investigating the complaint. The aim of Alternative Dispute Resolution is to focus on drawing matters to a close as speedily as possible and to improve both the timeliness and appropriateness of support for children and young people in Surrey.
54. 37% of complaints about Education Services escalated to investigation at the second stage, a 3% increase when compared to the previous 12 months. This figure largely reflects the number of complaints related to delays in EHCP which were upheld at each stage. The SEND service has since recruited to four dedicated complaint roles to lead on early resolution and to coordinate more comprehensive responses at Stage 1, which will reduce escalation rates going forward.
55. 2% of the complaints recorded about Home to School Transport escalated to the second stage of the complaint process. This has remained unchanged since 2022/23 and continues to reflect the positive impact following the appointment of a dedicated complaints lead within the

Service. Prior to 2022/23 Home to School Transport complaints were included within the figures for Education.

Figure 6: Complaint escalation year-on-year



56. Adult Social Care is required by law to have a one stage complaint procedure. This is why there is no escalation rate for Adult Social Care complaints.

Escalation to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

57. Only a very small number of complaints escalate to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. The vast majority are successfully resolved and responded to by the Council.
58. The Ombudsman issues their annual letter in July each year. This year's annual letter will confirm the enquiries and complaints received about Surrey County Council during 2023/24. A further report analysing this letter will be brought to a future meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee.

Pensions Complaints

59. Pension complaints are dealt with through a separate complaints procedure and have a separate Ombudsman, The Pensions Ombudsman. The Pensions Service provides separate reports on complaints received to the Pension Fund. A total of 54 complaints were received for the year 2023/24 for Surrey County Council's Pensions Service, with no change from the year before, when there were 55.
60. During the last financial year there has been a single recorded case of a complaint referred to the Pensions Ombudsman. This is ongoing with an outcome yet to be shared by the Pensions Ombudsman.

Learning from complaints

61. Every complaint presents an opportunity to put things right for the complainant and for the Council to learn and improve. An individual complaint may result in a single action to put that situation right or to mitigate against that situation re-occurring. Multiple complaints about the same issue could indicate a need to review how a service is delivered. Actions underway as a result of complaint themes in CFLL have been described in paragraphs 19 – 28 and more detail is provided in the final section on Conclusions. Specific examples are given in **Annex 1**.

Compliments

62. It is important to present a balanced view of services and to recognise and learn from good service. Throughout the year Surrey residents and customers have taken the time to compliment the standard of service they have received. In 2023/24, the Council recorded 1,105 compliments about its services: 49 for Children's Services, 64 for Education, 1 for Home to School Transport, 674 for Adult Social Care and 317 for all other services.
63. The Customer Relations Teams are encouraging the logging of individual compliments received direct by services to enable identification of areas of good practice. Compliments are now routinely captured on our casework management system. Some extracts from compliments received are given in **Annex 2**.

Conclusions

64. What are we doing well?

- a) Regular weekly and quarterly reporting on customer relations activity across the three areas to the Chief Executive and Senior Leadership Team. This has increased transparency and informed changes in service delivery.
- b) Providing high quality advice, training on complaints management and support on general complaint handling across all three areas.
- c) Focusing on early resolution – actively reviewing initial enquiries to prevent unnecessary complaint escalation.
- d) Providing timely and full responses to Ombudsman enquiries. Proactive prompting of deadlines is in place to help set clear and consistent standards.
- e) The appointment of an internal investigator for the consideration of escalation requests relative to complaints about Children's Services has enabled a shift in focus to Alternative Dispute Resolution. This continues to have a positive impact on reducing the volumes of complaints escalating to independent investigation and through to the Ombudsman.

- f) Within Children, Families & Lifelong Education (CFLL) services, the CFLL Customer Relations team have worked collaboratively with colleagues in Education Services to recruit and train additional staff both within the Customer Relations team and within the SEND service. This has enabled a gradual improvement in quality and timeliness of responses, which will continue into 2024-25.
- g) Members of staff across Education services have been trained in restorative practice, with additional customer service improvements pending an end-to-end review of the EHCP process. As part of the new Additional Needs & Disabilities Improvement Plan, the CFLL Customer Relations team present key themes and recommendations on a quarterly basis to the delivery group for improved communication with families.
- h) The CFLL Customer Relations team also meets quarterly with senior leaders in social care services at the Practice Challenge Leadership meetings, presenting insights and case reviews to inform service improvements.
- i) Adults, Wellbeing and Health Partnerships Customer Relations Team holds urgent case reviews with all senior managers to ensure a proactive approach to complaint handling and continues to deliver training and guidance for new managers and practitioners on handling complaints and responding effectively.
- j) Adults, Wellbeing and Health Partnerships Customer Relations Team also uses learning from complaints to inform practice improvement and periodic learning space activities; we follow up with teams to complete actions agreed on upheld complaints where learning has been identified.
- k) All teams provide guidance on good and timely communication with people who use services and their families to help with the delivery of key messages, to manage the impact on service delivery and to improve relationships with customers.

65. What do we need to continue to work on?

- a) Training and support to create a strong customer ethos that cuts through each part of the organisation – putting our customers at the heart of what we do every day.
- b) Using learning from complaints to drive changes to behaviours and the way we work, so that we can build better relationships with our customers and support improved collaboration and engagement. This change will be built on the refreshed Customer Promise and underpinned by the Customer Service Transformation programme. The CFLL Customer Relations team is undergoing training in Plain English language to make complaint responses more accessible and more customer-centred. They will share this training with colleagues in operational services as well as initiating a quality assurance step in the process to review responses before they are sent.

- c) Reduce the financial impact of complaints by getting things right first time more often and make sure all staff feel empowered and have the time to respond positively to customer complaints.
- d) Showcase good practice and share more widely the learning from complaints.
- e) The Corporate (Other council services) Customer Relations Team will:
- Deliver training on effective complaints handling for corporate complaints, focusing on sharing the premise behind the Joint Complaint Management Code drawn up between the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman.
 - Arrange the delivery of Training on Effective Complaints Management by the LGSCO to improve services understanding of the role of the Ombudsman as well as the quality of initial complaint responses.
- f) The Children's Customer Relations Team will:
- Continue to support services in embedding a culture of learning from complaints. This will be achieved both through continued collaborative working and through formal participation in Practice Learning Challenge and Customer Service Improvement meetings.
 - Review and improve written language and tone of voice in line with the Customer Promise principles and introduce a consistent quality assurance process for all written responses to complaints and enquiries.
 - Support service colleagues in developing a 'hands on' proactive communication approach to managing concerns with a focus on resolution and putting things right.
66. Adults, Wellbeing and Health Partnerships (AWHP) Customer Relations Team will:
- Focus on the link between complaint handling and service performance by continuing to support teams with their complaints responses and highlighting the key trends identified from the quarterly reports.
 - Promote getting the basics right by highlighting the need for good record keeping and encouraging the necessity for clear audit trails of how and why decisions are made.
 - Provide advice/support managers across the Directorate who lead on the investigation and responses.

Financial and value for money implications

67. Payment of financial redress (as shown in Figures 4 and 5) is the financial implication of complaint handling. Responding to complaints quickly and resolving concerns as early as possible ensures complaints do not escalate unnecessarily through the process and minimises the requirement to pay financial redress.

Section 151 Officer Comments

68. The Council continues to operate in a very challenging financial environment. Local authorities across the country are experiencing significant budgetary pressures. Surrey County Council has made significant progress in recent years to improve the Council's financial resilience and whilst this has built a stronger financial base from which to deliver our services, the cost of service delivery, increasing demand, financial uncertainty and government policy changes mean we continue to face challenges to our financial position. This requires an increased focus on financial management to protect service delivery, a continuation of the need to deliver financial efficiencies and reduce spending in order to achieve a balanced budget position each year.
69. In addition to these immediate challenges, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2024/25 remains uncertain. With no clarity on central government funding in the medium term, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority, in order to ensure the stable provision of services in the medium term.
70. The learning from this Annual Complaints report will enable services to make improvements and as such the s151 Officer endorses this report.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

71. Ensuring we maintain good complaint handling processes enables our service to remain accessible to all. We continually review ease of access to all three complaints procedures to ensure groups, and individuals with protected characteristics, are not disadvantaged in any way. Should an equality or diversity issue be identified through a complaint investigation, this will be addressed directly with the service concerned and remedial actions put in place. The learning will also be shared as part of the Council's commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Risk Management & Legal Implications

72. The complaints process does not have any direct risk management implications; however, complaints do carry both a financial risk and a risk to the council's reputation if the subject of the concerns is not appropriately addressed by the services to which they relate. Complaints are included in the Risk Register for the appropriate service and monitored accordingly. We routinely review and report on complaints data to ensure our processes are effective and to minimise any risk.

73. This report is a noting report and there are no legal implications directly arising from the contents. The implementation of our learning from complaints and listening to our residents should lead to a reduction of complaints received and a reduction in those going to the Ombudsman or the Courts. Social Care services for Adults and Children are required to follow a separate procedure stipulated by the Department of Health (DOH) and Department for Education & Skills (DFES) as set out in the report. Regular reports on the Council's performance in responding to complaints assists the Council to ensure that it complies with its best value duty to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Next steps:

74. The Audit & Governance Committee to receive information on operation of the Council's complaints procedures on an annual basis, supplemented with a mid-year update and separate report on the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's annual letter.

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Sources/background papers:

- Surrey County Council complaints tracker, Adult Social Care Customer Relations Team, Children's Customer Relations Team.
- Decision Notices available on LGSCO [website](#)

Annexes:

Annex 1 - Examples of learning identified through customer feedback

Annex 2 - Extracts of compliments

Annex 3 - Summary graphs from main report

Annex 4 - Data showing EHCP requests and timeliness

Annex 5 - Additional detail on financial remedies

Annex 1: Examples of learning identified through customer feedback

Customer said: The Social Worker's comment about being disappointed that family couldn't attend a pre-planned meeting caused offence and complainant shared that it made her feel misunderstood and unvalued.

We did: Learning identified was around communication style. There is a need to recognise that we should approach situations with sensitivity and be mindful to people's feelings. The Social Worker was happy to call the family and apologise personally to ensure they work together in a collaborative way in future.

Customer said: Daughter raised concerns around father's residency at a Nursing Home, issues included lack of records to reference medication times, staff behaviour and absence of any stimulating activities. The response daughter received from CQC, and the Team, initially alleged she claimed they did nothing to address or resolve the Management issues reported at the home.

We did: A review of everyone's placement at the home took place and we were happy that they were receiving the appropriate level of care.

We also asked CQC to inspect the home and they asked the home to make a series of improvements. Through the Provider Intervention & Support Process, we held Provider Support Meetings. These meetings were attended by the home and professionals (including CQC). At these meetings we discussed areas of concern and how they could make improvements with their standards of care. We were happy that the standards had now been improved.

Customer said: Parent complained about insufficient reimbursement of costs incurred when transporting a child to and from school due to delay in providing contractual Home to School Transport

We did: We reviewed the Transport Policy to ensure that parents are not financially disadvantaged; we published a Guide to Home to School Transport that accompanies the Policy for ease of reference for residents, families, young people, and council officers. We appointed an officer as complaints lead within the Service to enable early resolution of complaints.

Customer said: Parent complained that the Council was incorrectly directing how Direct Payments should be used. This impacted on a young person's ability have their social and networking needs met.

We did: We reviewed and revised the Direct Payment Policy. The new policy provides clear information about the use of Direct Payments and a more flexible approach for out of Panel decisions to enable prompt resolution of concerns. This in turn will ensure that children and young people are not disadvantaged if the parent encounters unforeseen challenges in using the Direct Payment as originally agreed and provides for a fair and equitable approach.

Customer said: Parent complained that the Council did not consider the customer (child or young person) and the wider family in terms of impact and poor customer experience associated with delays in putting appropriate education provision in place.

We did: In association with the outcome of a recent internal audit considering the management of complaints about children and education services, we have recruited four complaint leads to work with the customer relations team. The aim is to embed a culture of early resolution to improve the customer journey and experience thereby enabling a reduction in the receipt of unnecessary complaints. This is in addition to an increased focus on improving the customer journey with the implementation of a cross-sector partnership 'Communication, Relationships and Collaboration' Improvement Delivery Group.

Customer said: Complaint that following reconstruction of pathways, vehicle cross overs do not meet the specifications set out on our Policy Documents.

We did: We clarified that the specifications contained within the Policy relate to newly installed vehicle crossovers. The council has a duty to ensure that following reconstruction the existing cross over must retain the original specifications.

Customer said: Complaints about failure to appropriately address risks associated with concerns about road safety in rural areas.

We did: We recognised that we did not have a published document that captures the actions taken to assess road safety concerns when brought to our attention. We are capturing these actions in the form of a Standard Operating Procedure that can be published on our webpage.

Customer said: They were not given sufficient advance notice of the impact on visitor parking permits not being valid following the transfer of parking enforcement from Districts and Boroughs to the County Council.

We did: We undertook to honour the visitor parking permits for the 12 months following the transfer of parking enforcement thus enabling residents to make alternate arrangements and purchase the new visitor permits.

Annex 2: Extracts of compliments received.

ADULTS:

Mental Health Specialist Services Team: I wanted to acknowledge how helpful and supportive the Enabling Independence Team worker has been. She has been integral to me getting through some of the hardest times of my life. My sincere appreciation of her, she has gone above and beyond.

Guildford & Waverley: Thank you for all your help during a very difficult time. X is settling in well at her new home. We are starting to get back into a normal routine again.

Transition Team: Words can't really express how grateful I am to you for the kindness, help and support you have all given over the extremely difficult past few weeks. I know how extremely hard everyone has worked and I can't thank you all enough.

Elmbridge Locality Team: We can't thank you enough for your diligence and professionalism in resolving the issues around finding a suitable care home for Mum. Your recommendation on a suitable home has been excellent - more than we could have hoped for. Your work is a real credit to your profession and your locality team.

Reigate and Banstead Locality Team: Thank you for your professional, practical and realistic advice, and help. You worked with us through a difficult period in Mum's care and helped Mum, us and her carer reach a much happier situation. Mum had her 98th birthday and she enjoyed her weekend of celebrations in a way that I hadn't thought would be possible at Christmas.

Learning Disability and Autism Team: Social Worker is truly an inspirational person, kind, considerate, very professional, and totally understands my daughter. A big thank you. You have a lovely member of your team.

CHILDREN'S & EDUCATION

Children's Services

I am a foster carer under the watchful eye of SSW AX. She's just wonderful, everything a SSW should be. [...] I think AX deserves some recognition for just being great and going above & beyond. She has helped transport my little charge to nursery whilst my foot recovers, offers of help with shopping. [...] She had big boots to fill as I lost PKr who was just the greatest, but she's filling them and is making my world a little easier. It's all too easy to recognise the bad, but the great need some recognition too.

'I just wanna say thank you so so much. I know I said it but I feel like nothing in this world can tell you how grateful I am for you coming into my life and becoming such a huge support system for me. Thank you for believing in me, making me feel like I can do anything I can set my mind to[...] Thank you for making me feel seen and for making me feel like I matter, thank you for taking the time to understand me and get to know me and I am eternally grateful that

you didn't just see me as just a case. [...] You are such an amazing person and without u I don't know if I could have had the courage that I have had during the 4 years I have known you, everything you have taught me and shown me I will never ever forget. [...] I mean it from the bottom of my heart thank you for everything along my journey'

Education Services

Thank you so much for your hard work and I am over the moon with the fencing. I can now relax a little knowing that my son is safe whilst playing in the garden. Can I also mention that the 2 Workmen that fitted and replaced the fence were amazing, polite and professional.

We just wanted to reach out today to thank you for all the time and effort you spent on our daughter and her out of cohort application over the last five months. We really appreciate everything you did, from calling to check about the status of our school request to triple check we were withdrawing for this year, to suggesting we make late applications for the schools we have received agreement from so these can be on our application for next year. You made a particularly complex and stressful situation that bit easier, and remained calm, even on the day we sent you four emails in a row!! We hope that this week is not too stressful and look forward to this being us next year. Thanks again for all your help, please let us know if there's anywhere we can feed back more formally for you.

Home to School Transport

Thank you so much for your help and support. You really did very well on our request. Highly appreciated and kind to us.

CORPORATE (other council services):

Highways: What a fantastic job your team has done in Wey Road. So quick, so efficient, and a nice bunch of contractors too. All the residents I've spoken to are most impressed. I've done my fair share of complaining in the past, but credit where is due. So thank you very much, and please pass on the collective thanks of the residents in Wey Road for a job well done.

Trading Standards: Thank you, yes I have received notification from my bank of the deposits made to my account and as far as I can tell, all is well. I would have been so overwhelmingly stressed by this situation that I would have been incapable of handling it without your help, and I cannot express in words how much I appreciate your dedication and support. Thank you so much.

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service: Last night we called your fire brigade to attend a car fire at my house. I was given an incident report number and told that there would be a report as I need to pass this onto my insurers and so forth. I want to say a massive thank you to the guys who came over, they were at the house within minutes and were so helpful and lovely. They also attended a house fire we had last year, and it was the same group of men, so just want to say a massive thank you for continuing to help us!"

Waste Sites: I spoke to an officer from the Weybridge site with a query on how to get rid of some breeze blocks and he was very helpful and said to go to the Slyfield site. I went on Sunday morning and was most impressed by how helpful and customer focused the people working there were. I also needed to get rid

of a duvet. I saw another man ask where it would go, and he said where the black bags go. He was very helpful, and I went over to the black bag area and was met with another person who was really helpful. All three people I came across today were happy, helpful and customer focused. I would just like to say thank you.

Registrations: Good morning to you all. I would just like to pass on a lovely message from the family who you all helped massively last week. You all went above and beyond to help this nice family and as a result of that they were able to bury their little son the following day. I telephoned the father and he said that everyone has been so kind and accommodating and with everyone's cooperation the funeral went ahead as planned. He said you were exceptionally kind at the mortuary and that the Registrar was amazing. He totally appreciates all the stops that were pulled out to get this to happen. I would like to also thank you for taking care of this nice, sadly bereaved little family. As you know they have recently moved to the UK, so not near their relatives.

Countryside: Thank you so much for reducing the grass verge cutting in my area. We find it much more attractive with longer grass and our daughters noticed a particular rare caterpillar in the grass/ flowers which when we searched online had a national decline of 85%. Please cut our verges as little as possible! We feel very disappointed when the mower comes around! :).

Blue Badge: I just want to give feedback for the Blue Badge team. They have been very quick and helpful - prioritising our application after a change in circumstances of my son - and have gone beyond what I hoped or expected. It is much appreciated and will have an immediate and beneficial impact on his care. Thank you.

Contact Centre: My elderly mother's been in St. Peter's this month and it's been a nightmare trying to get the discharge team there to sort anything out or even do basic communications with me or her local authority in London. During this awful time, I called the Surrey ASC helpline twice for advice. On both occasions you've been outstanding. The advice on navigating the system, what phrases mean, what forms are and do, and how to simply get through to the end of the nightmare has been a life raft in a crisis. I was so grateful you for your practical support and compassion, especially when Mum's not in any way your responsibility. Thank you so much.

Annex 3: Summary graphs from main report

Figure 1: Total complaints received.

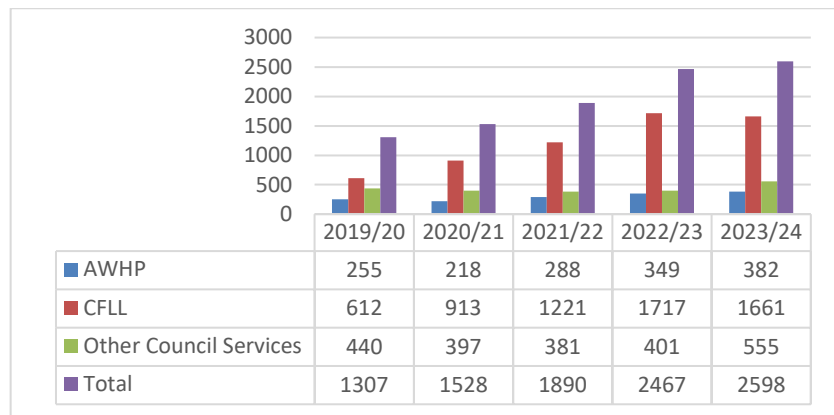


Figure 4: Financial Redress payments year-on-year

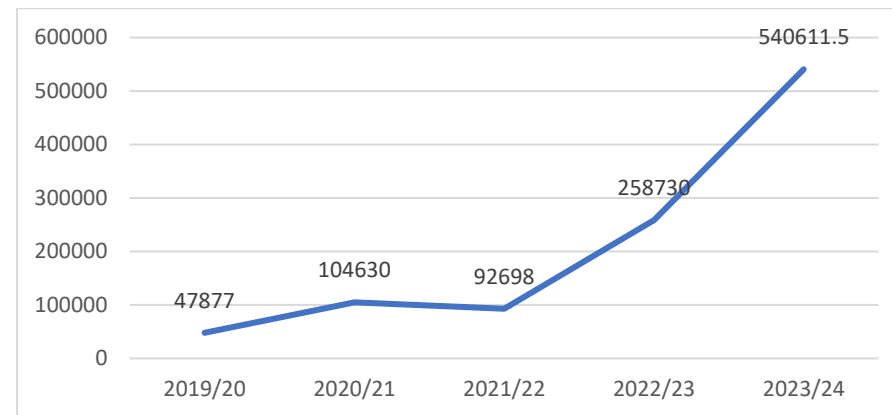


Figure 3: Performance against response target

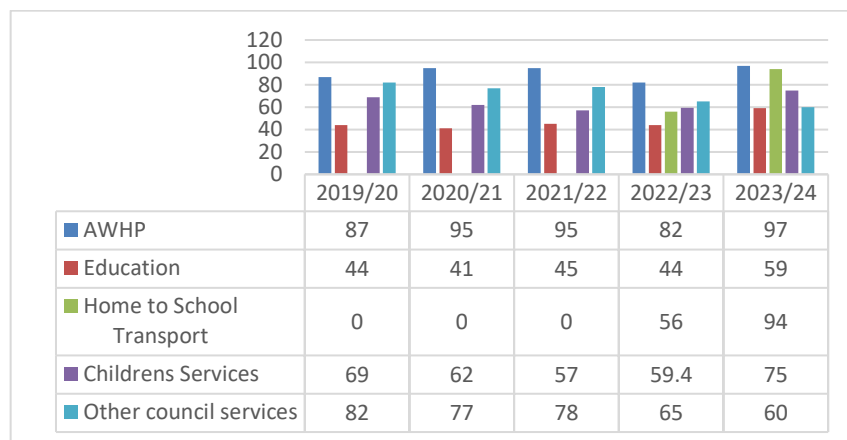
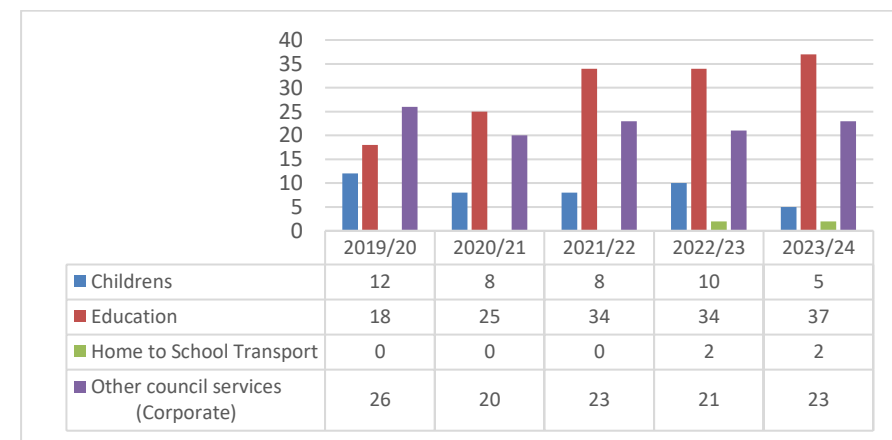
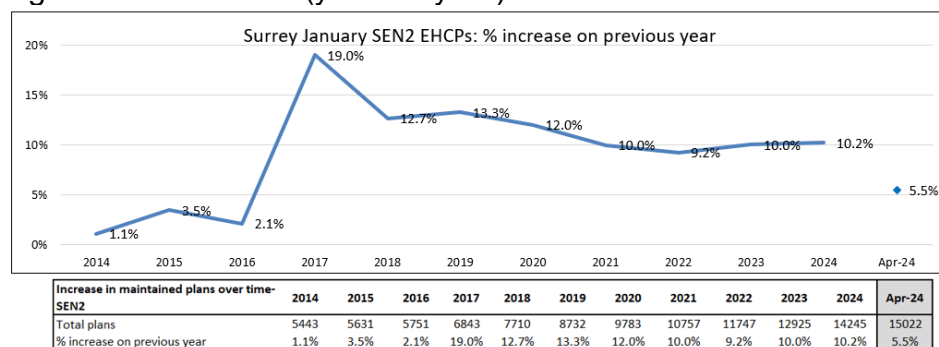


Figure 6: Complaint escalation year-on-year



Annex 4. Data showing EHCP request volumes and timeliness

Figure 7: % increase (year-on-year) in number of Education Health and Care Plans



Increase in maintained plans over time- SEN2	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Apr-24
Total plans	5443	5631	5751	6843	7710	8732	9783	10757	11747	12925	14245	15022
% increase on previous year	1.1%	3.5%	2.1%	19.0%	12.7%	13.3%	12.0%	10.0%	9.2%	10.0%	10.2%	5.5%

Figure 8: Number of EHC Plans issued each month and percentage issued within statutory timescales.

Month in which EHCP is issued	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24
	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual
Overdue EHCPs issued inc tribunal/ mediation	172	156	239	179	209	148	264	265
On time EHCPs issued inc tribunal/ mediation	29	17	25	19	32	31	61	103
EHCP timeliness % (does not include tribunal/ mediation)	16%	12%	10%	10%	13%	17%	18%	29%

Annex 5: Additional detail on financial remedies in CFLL

- a) The total amount paid in remedies (£540,611.59) equates to an increase of £281,880.76 (109%) when compared to the previous 12 months (£258,730.53).
- b) For CFLL services, redress payments totalled £525,211.59, a significant increase of £266,481.06 when compared to the previous 12 months. £329,759.70 of the remedy payments were directed by the LGSCO (an increase of 160% when compared to the previous 12 months) and £194,851.89 were local remedy payments agreed by the Council (an increase of 45% on the previous year).
- c) The balance of £107,102.50 was paid in symbolic financial remedies to recognise the impact of the fault identified, for example distress and anxiety and time and trouble taken in pursuing the complaint. This is an increase of £19,656.85 (11%) when compared to the previous 12 months.
- d) Of the LGSCO directed payments:
 - a. £255,318.58, related to Education Services, including a payment of £12,900.00 which included elements of missed education and delay.
 - b. £74,441.12 related to Children's Social Care. £43,245.70 was a single payment related to an acknowledged error in the management of financial support following a Special Guardianship Order.
- e) Of the £194,851.89 local remedy payments:
 - a. £168,683.73, related to Education Services. This includes two payments (of £12,486.00 and £12,400.00) which included loss of education provision and delay.
 - b. £26,168.16, related to Children's Services. This includes a single payment of £9,140.96. This included reimbursement of legal fees and related to poor communication with the family about accommodating a young person under Section 20 of the Children Act.