Sandwell Children's Trust

COMPLAINTS & COMPLIMENTS

ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025

2024/2025

285 Stage 1 Complaints & Representations Received

194	13	78
COMPLAINTS	ENQUIRIES	SERVICE REQUESTS

RESPONDED TO WITHIN TIMESACALE 231

54 RESPONDED TO OUTSIDE TIMESACALE

Complaints Representations	Theme
82	Actions/Conduct of Worker
57	Poor Communication
49	Quality of Service
47	Decision making
28	Financial Assistance
9	Accuracy of Assessments and Reports
7	Delay in Receiving Services
5	Family Time
1	Access to Service

285	7	2	4
STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	LGO

LGO

If a complainant remains unhappy after completing our complaints process, they may take their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).
In 2024/25 LGSCO received 4 complaints related to SCT, 1 of which was upheld.

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Introduction

Each local authority responsible for children's social care services must create an annual report detailing the complaints activity related to the service.

Responsibility for handling complaints is divided between Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC). SCT manages Stage 1 of the complaints process, while SMBC, through the designated Statutory Complaints Manager, handles unresolved cases beyond Stage 1. The Statutory Complaints Manager also offers advice and guidance at any stage as needed. The specific roles of SMBC and SCT are outlined in a Service Level Agreement (SLA), ensuring both entities collaborate closely to provide seamless service to our customers.

This seventh annual SCT report provides a detailed analysis of compliments, complaints, and informal feedback from children and young people, promoting a culture of continuous learning from complaints. It covers the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025.

Statutory Complaints Procedure and Local Government Ombudsman

Most of the representations received by SCT concerning the operations of Children's Social Care is processed through the statutory complaint's procedure. This procedure is outlined in The Children's Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006. It permits children and young people to express their grievances, including complaints about the actions, decisions, or perceived shortcomings of a local authority's children's social care services. Additionally, it allows any relevant person to represent the child or young person or to file a complaint independently on their behalf (Getting the Best from Complaints, DfE, 2006).

While most complaints about Children's Social Care are covered by the statutory procedure, not all of them are. Once a representation is classified as a statutory complaint, it follows a three-stage process.

Stage 1 - Local Resolution

The goal is to settle complaints early. The Team Manager should talk directly with the complainant to resolve issues swiftly by sharing information, reasoning behind decisions, and seeking mutual agreement. This process should take up to ten working days, extendable to a maximum of twenty for complex cases.

Mediation

SCT provides mediation for complainants who are unhappy with the result of their Stage 1 complaint and wish to request a Stage 2 investigation. The mediation involves the complainant and a Senior Manager from the relevant service area. Mediation is a voluntary process that is offered to help resolve any unresolved issues for the complainant as promptly as possible. If a complainant decides not to participate in mediation, their complaint will proceed as a Stage 2 complaint.

Stage 2 - Investigation

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the results from Stage 1, they can request a Stage 2 investigation. An Independent Investigating Officer will conduct this investigation, alongside an Independent Person who ensures openness, transparency, and fairness. After completing their investigation, both officers compile a report, which is submitted to a Director within SCT, known as the Adjudicating Officer, for review.

The Adjudicating Officer examines the reports and provides a response to the complainant on behalf of SCT. The Stage 2 process is intended to be finalised within 25 working days, but this period can be extended to 65 working days for more complex complaints.

Stage 3 - Review Panel

Following a comprehensive Stage 2 investigation, a complainant can request further review by a panel consisting of two independent persons and an independent chair. The panel makes recommendations to the Chief Executive. Following the review meeting, the Independent Chair will send a letter with the panel's findings to the Chief Executive within five working days. Subsequently, a Director will issue SCT's final response within fifteen working days. The entire process should not exceed fifty working days.

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

After the three stages of the complaints process, complainants can refer their concerns to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. They also have the option for an early referral at any point during the procedure.

The Complaints Service

SMBC handles the processing of complaints using SMBC's complaints management system to ensure all complaints for SCT are properly recorded and monitored. SCT assigns Stage 1 complaints to the appropriate managers within the service and ensures they are addressed.

SMBC oversees managing all Stage 2, Stage 3, and Ombudsman complaints and enquiries received through a service level agreement with SCT.

Total Number of Individual Complaints Received

During the reporting year of 2024/25 SCT received 285 representations (194 stage 1 complaints and 91 request for service/enquiries) which were dealt with as a Stage 1 complaint or request for service, this is an increase of 13% (33 representations) compared to the previous reporting year.

How Complaints Have Been Received

Complaints can be logged into the 'Contact Us' system by SMBC. Customers have the option to create a portal account called 'MySandwell' on Contact Us, allowing them to file a complaint directly through their account. Once established, customers can access their accounts at any time to track the complaint's progress and view responses. Complaints can also be submitted through the Trust's web page, Sandwell Voice, or by calling the Customer Services Contact Centre, via their representatives, or by emailing the Customer Experience Team's mailbox.

Who Made Complaints

A large majority of the complaints received continue to be made by adults who are expressing their dissatisfaction with the service provided by children's social care.

There were 16 complaints, and 14 requests for service/enquiries received from Young People during 2024/25 either made by themselves or via an Advocate – this is a decrease of 5 representations made by Children and Young People in comparison to the previous year.

Stage 1 Complaints

Outcome of Stage 1 investigations

Year	No. of Stage 1 Complaints / Representations	Upheld / Partly Upheld	%
2024/25	285	130	46%
2023/24	252	141	56%
2022/23	241	155	64%
2021/22	205	135	66%
2020/21	213	134	63%
2019/20	270	198	73%

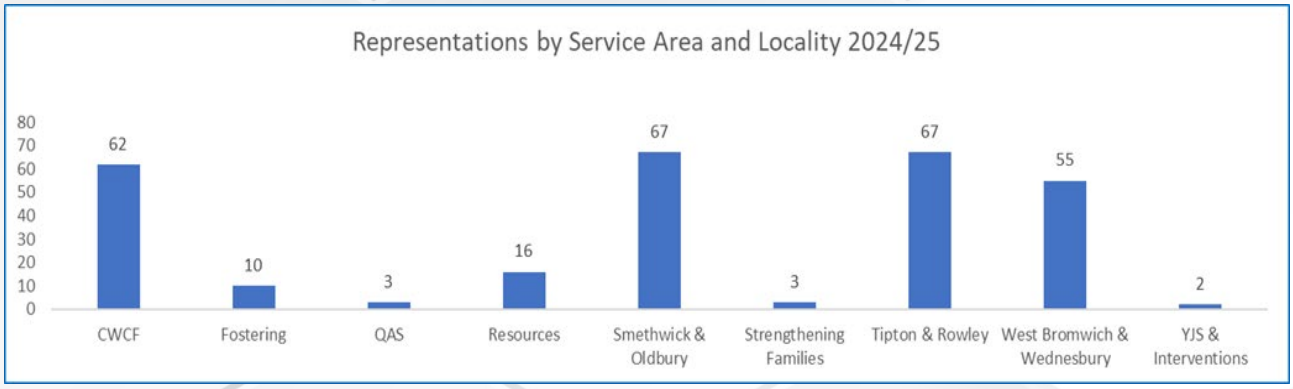
The data in the table outlines the number of Stage 1 complaints/representations received, as well as the percentage of those complaints that were upheld or partly upheld, across multiple years. In the year 2024/25, there were 285 Stage 1 complaints/representations, with 130 of those being upheld or partly upheld, equating to 46% of the total.

Comparatively, in 2023/24, there were 252 complaints, with 141 upheld or partly upheld, resulting in a higher percentage of 56% of complaints upheld or partially upheld. This indicates an increase in the total number of complaints/representations, but a decrease in the percentage upheld.

The comparative figures show that although the number of complaints has risen, a smaller proportion are being upheld, indicating improved handling and resolution of concerns. This highlights ongoing progress in complaints management and quality assurance.

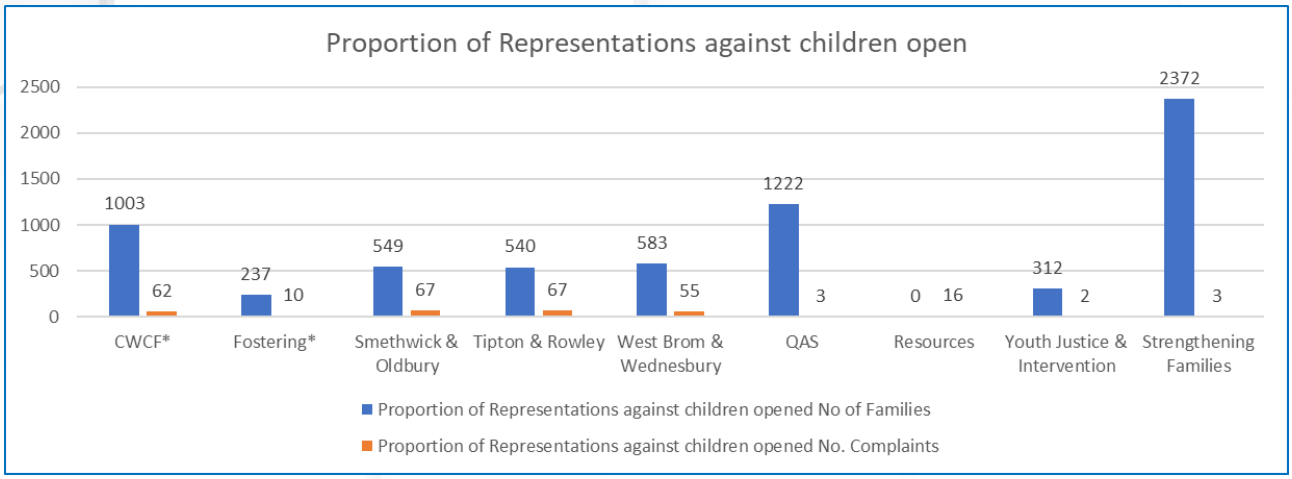
Breakdown of Representations by Service Area and Locality

Breakdown of the 285 Stage 1 representations received by service area and locality



Tipton and Rowley and Smethwick and Oldbury have higher representations, which could signify higher demand or indicating an area of focus for resources and interventions. Conversely, Strengthening Families and YJS & Interventions may require less focus. This analysis evidences the need for a tailored approach to each service area, ensuring efficient and effective allocations, responses and learning is progressed. This is addressed through specific learning shared with each service tailored to their locality, or service area on a weekly basis.

Proportion of representations against open cases 2024/2025



The Strengthening Families service supports a large number of families but has received only 3 representations, indicating high user satisfaction. Conversely, Tipton and Rowley serve fewer families yet have a notably higher complaint rate. Regular discussions at Locality/Service meetings help to conduct an in-depth analysis, allowing managers to pinpoint and address any potential areas for improvement.

Breakdown of Stage 1 Complaints by Ethnicity

Proportion of complainant's ethnicity against open cases 2024/2025

	Complaints		Open Children & Young People March 31st 2025	
Ethnicity Group	**Total Individuals**	**Ethnicity Proportion**	**Total Individuals**	**Ethnicity Proportion**
Asian/Asian British	33	12%	407	15%
Black/Black British	38	13%	331	12%
Mixed Heritage	42	15%	516	19%
White	152	53%	1364	49%
Other	18	6%	89	3%
Not Obtained	2	0.7%	67	2%

The table shows the number of children, young people, and families represented in 2024/25. Note that the small sample size of complaints is much smaller compared to those who received services.

The White ethnic group has the highest number of representations (152), which is consistent with their representation as of 31st March (1364).

The Mixed Heritage group, despite making up 8% of open Children & Young People, has a higher proportion of representations (15%). Both the Asian/Asian British and Black/Black British groups have similar proportions of representations (12 & 13%).

This analysis reveals potential areas of focus where certain ethnic groups might be experiencing more issues leading to complaints.

Repeat Complainants

In 2024/25, 79 people submitted two or more Stage 1 repeat complaints to SCT. These repeat complaints typically involved related follow-up issues from earlier complaints.

Repeat complainants for 2024/25

No. of people making more than one complaint	Number of complaints made
56	2
17	3
3	4
0	5
1	6
1	7

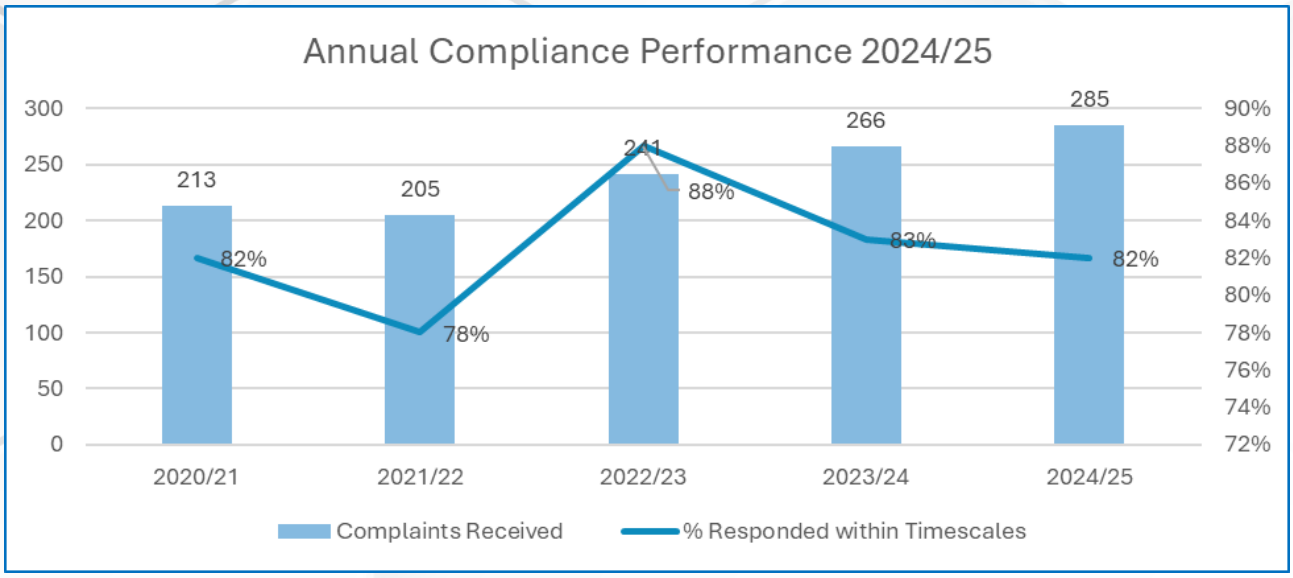
Compliance with Timescales

The table below provides a breakdown of whether the timescales were either met or missed, for the 285 representations /Stage 1 complaints received between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025.

Stage 1 compliance against timescales

Stage 1 Timescales 2024/2025	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total No of complaints within timescales	Percentage
Timescale Met	51	74	43	66	234	82%
Timescale Missed	11	15	14	11	51	18%

Comparison of complaints responded to within timescales over previous years



In the 2024/25, 82% of Stage 1 complaints/representations were resolved within the statutory deadlines. This represents a 1% decrease in response compliance compared to the previous year, where the compliance rate was 83%.

Complaints and Feedback from Children and Young People

When Children and Young People contact us to make a complaint, the Voice Team play a key role in providing advocacy support to them throughout the whole complaints process. In line with our rights based approach, participation processes were established to ensure children and young people understand their rights and enable them to tell us how they feel.

Children and young people receive information on how to provide feedback through their social worker, personal advisor, an advocate, or the Voice Team during Coming into Care or 17+ visits. Other professionals can also assist them in raising concerns using established forums, the web based *Sandwell Voice* feedback form, or the child friendly complaints form.

The website www.sandwellvoice.co.uk was launched as a platform to provide children and young people with information and the opportunity to submit feedback online. The site also enables users to download the Your Voice compliments, comments, and complaints form. Additionally, the Voice Team developed merchandise for professionals to distribute to children and young people, such as highlighters, stress balls, pens, notepads, and key rings featuring QR codes for direct website access.

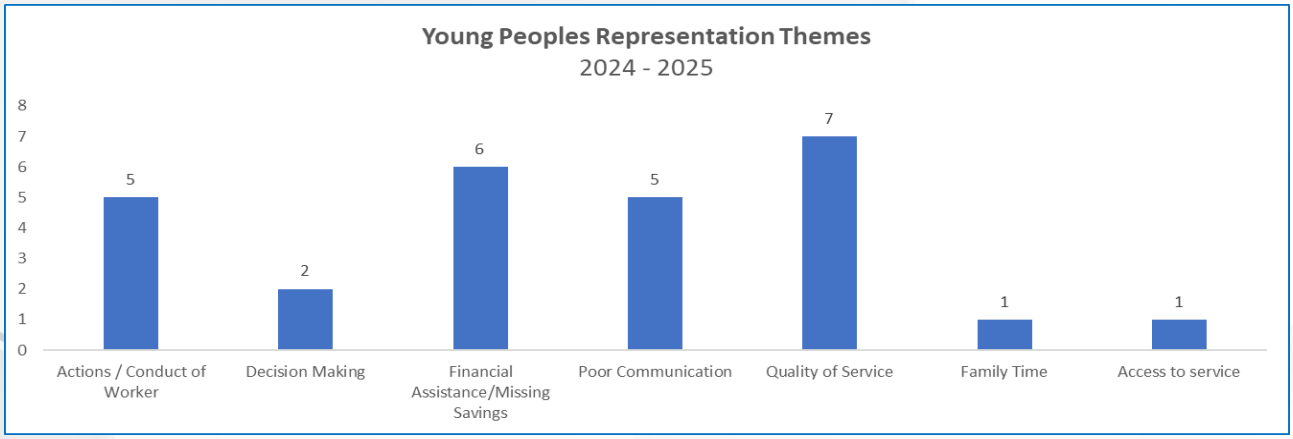
The Voice Team will also follow-up with those Children and Young People that have made representations direct to the Trust (not through an advocate) at the end of the complaints process, undertaking work to ensure that we are closing the loop and making sure that Children and Young People feel they have been listened to and their concerns taken seriously.

Analysis of Formal Complaints from Young People

In 2024/25, SCT received a total of 30 representations from young people, comprising 16 complaints and 14 service requests or enquiries. These submissions were received either directly from young people through the Sandwell Voice website, via an advocate, or through the CS Firmstep mailbox. This figure represents a decrease of five representations compared to the previous year. The increased visibility provided by the dedicated young people page on the SCT website has facilitated easier feedback submission from young people.

How we respond, report, share, and learn from their feedback directly with the service, we feel has had a direct impact with the decrease in the complaints received, and positively the increase of compliments from Young People received.

Representations made by Children and Young People



In 2024/2025 out of the 16 Young Peoples complaints, the Voice Team contacted 5 Young People to establish their satisfaction across several metrics:

- How was the young person feeling about their experience of making a complaint
- Did the child understand their rights and entitlements
- Did the child know how to give feedback
- Did the child understand what has happened as a result of their complaint
- Was the complaint taken seriously
- Was the necessary action taken
- Has the service improved as a result
- Was the child made aware of independent visitors or advocates

This ensured that we were aware if they were satisfied with the Trust's response, 2 of the Young People could not be contacted. The remaining 9 Young People were being supported by an advocate who carry out their own satisfaction activity. This information is shared in regular meetings with the Children's Society.

In every instance, the Child or Young Person was offered support by either the Voice Team or the Children's Society Advocacy Service if they filed the complaint through them.

The Voice Team and the Customer Experience Team meet weekly to monitor complaints from Children and Young People and address any issues that need escalation or resolution.

Insights and themes identified from the complaints of Children and Young People are disseminated through various channels and forums, including:

- Trust communication channels, team meetings, locality, and service meetings, as well as with the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Board and the Voice of Sandwell & Forum for Independent Young Adults.
- Childs Voice Group, made up of representatives from the Trust
- Reflective supervisions with Social Workers post-complaint to facilitate learning.
- Reports presented to the Executive Management Team and the Trust Board.

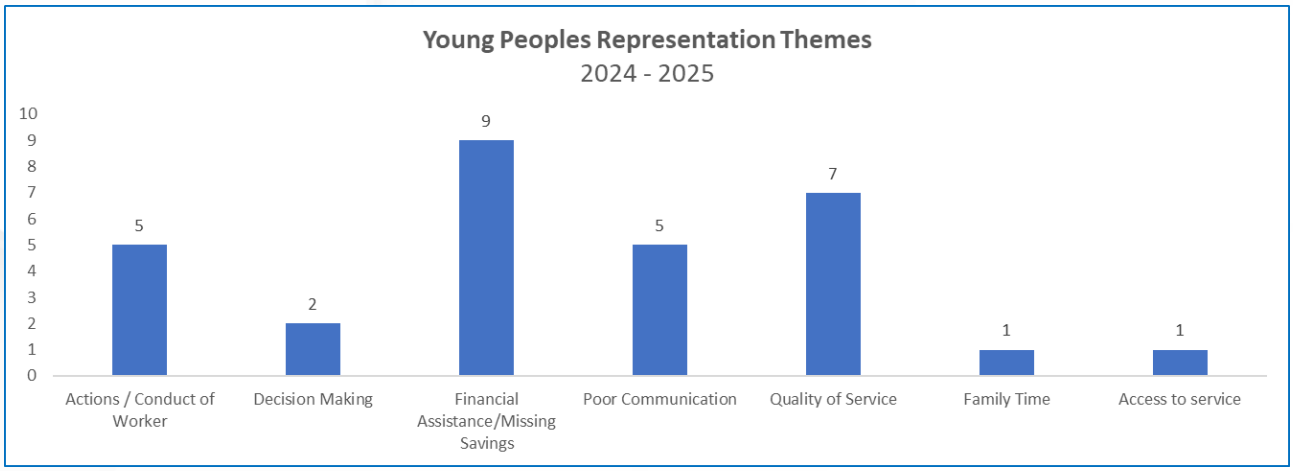
- Ongoing consultations with Children and Young People, ensuring their feedback is considered and acted upon to improve their influence on care plans, contributing to continuous improvements.
- Furthermore, these insights are shared with the Quality Assurance Service, aligning with practice review findings and performance data. The Customer Feedback and Voice Team, in collaboration with the Quality Assurance Team, have conducted audits on Children and Young People's complaints to showcase how we incorporate the child's perspective.
- A programme of auditing feedback and complaints from Children and Young People has been scheduled.
- Through the Practitioners Forum, and Managers Reflective sessions.
- With the Voices of Sandwell group, the Forum for Independent Young Adults, and the Corporate Parenting Board.

Follow up satisfaction activity was conducted at the conclusion of the complaints process for each complaint to ensure that Children and Young People were satisfied with the response to their complaint and that the necessary actions were completed.

Analysis of Themes of Young Peoples Representations

The themes identified from the 30 Young Peoples representations during 2024/25

Themes of Young Peoples representations



By enhancing awareness of how young people access information regarding their rights and entitlements, through the website, visits, and reviews, we have reduced the number of formal representations from children and young people by five compared to the previous reporting year. This improvement is directly attributable to earlier engagement with young people by Social Workers, Independent Reviewing Officers, Carers, Advocates, and the Voice Team in addressing their enquiries.

The following Young Peoples representation themes have been analysed as:

Actions / Conduct of Worker
A total of five complaints received from Children and Young People concerned the actions or conduct of their practitioner.

Decision Making
We received two complaints from Children and Young People regarding our decision making.

Financial Assistance/ Missing Savings
Nine complaints were made by Children and Young People in relation to financial assistance.

Poor Communication
Five complaints from Young People who were frustrated regarding the lack of communication from their Social Worker.

Delay in Receiving Service

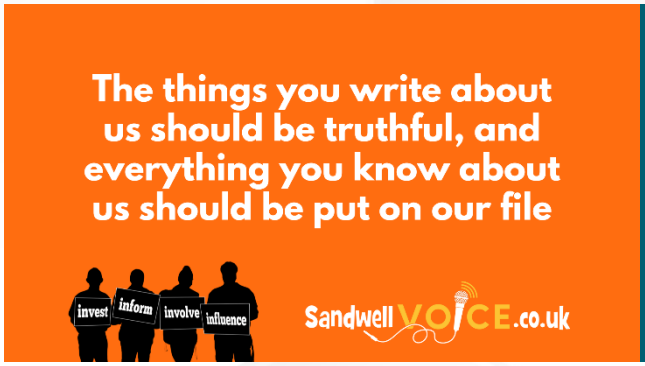
We received five complaints where Young People made complaints regarding the delay in receiving a needed service.

Quality of Service

We received seven complaints from Young People who raised complaints about the quality of the service they received.

Family Time

We received one complaint from a young person who raised a complaint about family time.



Learning and Impact from Children and Young Peoples Representations

When Young People contact us to make a complaint, the Voice Team continue to provide advocacy support to them throughout the process. In line with our rights-based approach to participation processes to ensure children and young people understand their rights and enable them to tell us how they feel.

The Voice Team to continue to visit all children over 8 years old who come into care and all children who turn 17 years old to talk through their rights, how they can get involved and how to make a compliment, complaint or comment. They also take out other merchandise and information to ensure children and young people are empowered to have their voices heard.

In all instances of informal feedback, the Young Person was contacted by the Voice Team or Social Worker to address their concerns, this initial contact ensured that:

- The child was aware of their rights
- The nature of the feedback was understood and agreed by Young Person and The Voice Team
- The Voice Team explained the process to the Young Person

Improve compliance for responding to complaints

- Increased the compliance of complaints responded to within timescales during 2025/26 and ensure that the quality of the responses remains a key focus of improvement to ensure that we hear the voice of the Young Person or their adult's complaint and capture and respond to their complaint effectively.

Continue to embed how we learn from compliments and complaints

- Alongside the Quality Assurance Service, we continue to evidence and embed how learning from compliments and complaints can directly contribute to practice improvement
- Share any learning from compliments and complaints at Practitioners Forums, and Managers Reflective Sessions, as well as directly with the service areas
- Continue to develop the programme of practice reviews, observations, and direct feedback from complaints from Young People, Parents and Carers and Partners with the Quality Assurance Service
- Share the learning with Young People directly to enable them to shape and inform future improvments

Improve how we share and recognise where we are getting it right

- Continue to develop and adapt our approach to celebrating compliments, including working with existing internal forums to share the learning from compliments and complaints

Improve how we track actions from complaints

- Continue to improve and develop our recording and reporting mechanism for tracking the actions from complaints that evidences impact and improvement.

The Voice Team will also follow-up with Children and Young People who made a complaint direct to the Trust, at the end of the complaints process, undertaking work to ensure that we are closing the loop and making sure that Children and Young People feel they have been listened to and their concerns taken seriously.

Impact for children and Young People

Learning from complaints raised by children and young people has led to significant and meaningful improvements in our practice. Central to our approach is the adoption of a relationship based model, ensuring that all feedback, whether from children, young people, or adults, is met with open and ongoing dialogue. This commitment to hearing every voice is now firmly embedded in our ST*R partnership practice model, which is strengths based, trauma informed, and relational at its core.

The insights provided by children and young people have directly informed the development of our Participation Strategy, 'Working Together', ensuring that their perspectives shape our direction. Regular effective complaints handling training has been designed and delivered to Managers, Student Social Workers, and Newly Qualified Social Workers across the Trust, with a focus on sharing learning and promoting best practice.

Our Voice Team has taken proactive steps to ensure children and young people are fully informed about how their views are heard, distributing information and resources at key events such as the Voices Heard event, the FIYA awards, and other forums. There is now a more integrated system in place with the Children's Society, our advocacy provider, enhancing collaboration and consistency.

We have established feedback mechanisms, enabling children and young people to express how they feel their complaints have been handled and to comment on the impact these processes have had on them. Care experienced young people are regularly informed about their rights and entitlements through the Local Offer, a resource increasingly referenced by the Care Experienced Young People Service.

In addition, the process for effective complaint handling training continues to evolve, ensuring that learning is consistently cascaded to managers throughout the Trust. For young people over sixteen, we now ensure they are informed about who their Personal Adviser is and engage with them at the earliest opportunity. Alongside this, we have reviewed our processes to better address savings for children in our care, with Independent Reviewing Officers now recording the status of savings at every review.

We have developed systems to ensure that all young people in our care have access to their passports or that applications are made to secure this. Regular meetings with the Children's Society allow us to share learning and drive ongoing improvements. The Voice Team also visit all children entering care and those approaching their seventeenth birthday to explain their rights, entitlements, and how they can make a complaint, comment, or suggestion, supported by accessible materials and our website.

These enhancements demonstrate our commitment to listening to our children and young people and ensuring their experiences lead to tangible changes across our services.

Mediation

During 2024/25 we offered 28 complainants who wished to progress to a Stage 2 complaint the opportunity for mediation. Of the 28 requests made:

- 23 complaints were successfully resolved at this mediation stage with no further progression of the complaint
- 5 complaints progressed to a Stage 2 complaint

By utilising mediation, we have successfully resolved most complainant issues without needing to move on to a Stage 2 investigation. This approach allows for earlier resolution for our Children and Families, which subsequently strengthens the relationships between SCT and our Children and Families.

The offer of mediation has also resulted in cost savings for SCT.

Stage 2 Complaints

During 2024/25 **seven stage 2 statutory** complaint investigations were progressed, plus an additional **one stage 2 corporate** complaint. These numbers are 50% less than the previous year.

Compliance with Stage 2 Timescales

Out of the eight Stage 2 complaints completed, seven were not concluded within the specified timescales. Several Stage 2 complaints involved complex issues, which resulted in investigations extending beyond the maximum 65 day timescale.

During 2024/25, the Trust Complaints Manager and Complaints Manager at Sandwell MBC continued to work together to reduce the number of days taken to respond to Stage 2 investigations. This work will continue into the next reporting year to ensure improved compliance with statutory timescales in relation to Stage 2.

In four out of the eight stage 2 complaints we were able to use independent internal investigators at no financial cost to the Trust who work alongside the Independent Person for the statutory complaints.

Stage 2 investigations progressed and concluded in 2024/25

Stage 2 by Service	Type of Complaint	Complaint	Date of request	Date TOR signed	Date Closed	No. of working days
West Brom & Wednesbury	Statutory	Person 1	24 Nov 23	17 June 24	10 Feb 25	164
Tipton & Rowley	Statutory	Person 2	14 March 24	21 May 24	20 Dec 24	151
West Brom & Wednesbury	Statutory	Person 3	14 March 24	7 April 24	1 July 24	44
Smethwick & Oldbury	Statutory	Person 4	16 Sept 24	23 Sept 24	15 April 25	143
Children We Care For	Statutory	Person 5	30 Sept 24	18 Nov 24	4 April 25	97
Tipton & Rowley	Statutory	Person 6	11 Nov 24	18 Dec 24	21 May 25	90
West Brom & Wednesbury	Statutory	Person 7	22 Nov 24	19 Dec 24	21 May 25	89
Resources	Corporate	Person 8	18 March 24	12 May 25	27 June 25	44

Stage 3 Complaints

SCT received three Stage 3 requests in the 2024/25 period. Two have been completed, one was declined due to restrictions put in place with the complainant.

Local Government Ombudsman Complaints

The Ombudsman raised four matters with SCT during 2024/25:

- The LGO found fault with SCT after reviewing new information on one complaint; we accepted their recommendation and updated our policy.
- The LGO advised another complaint was premature and should proceed through the complaints process.
- A previous complainant was informed the LGO found no fault in the stage 2 investigation or response.
- Another complainant was told the LGO would not investigate as the issue related to Court matters or should be referred to the ICO.

Outcome of Complaints raised with the Ombudsman 2024/25

Name	Date Received	Decision
Person 1	18/03/2024	Fault Found
Person 2	28/11/2024	Premature Enquiry
Person 3	05/11/2024	No Fault
Person 4	13/01/2025	Not Investigate

Outcome of Complaints raised with the Ombudsman 2024/25

Decision	Number of decisions against Category
Upheld and recommendations accepted	1
Closed after initial enquiries - no further actions	1
Advised to progress through complaints process	1

Analysis of Themes of Stage 1 Complaints

Stage 1 Breakdown of complaints categorised by theme

Complaint Theme	No. of Complaints Received
Actions/Conduct of a Worker	82
Poor Communication	57
Quality of Service	49
Decision Making	47
Financial Assistance	28
Accuracy of Assessments & Reports	9
Delay in Receiving Services	7
Family Time	5
Access to Service	1
Total	**285**

The themes of complaints received during 2024/25 are consistent to those in the previous year. This continues to be addressed through improvement activity during 2025/26, such as sharing the identified areas of improvement needed through various platforms, learning events, training and system improvements enhanced by a more stable frontline workforce with more consistent tracking of agreed actions.

Learning from Complaints

Learning from complaints remained central to our improvement work in 2024/25. We continued our close collaboration with the Quality Assurance Service, triangulating insights from complaints alongside compliments, practice reviews, and performance data to drive meaningful practice improvements.

The Voice Team involved Young People in reviewing complaints from the previous months; these were quality assured by Voices of Sandwell and the Forum for Independent Young Adults. The Voice Team also discussed feedback themes with Young People, who then proposed solutions. These were shared with the Customer Experience Team, ensuring Young People have a direct role in shaping service delivery.

Insights from complaints and compliments are regularly communicated during training sessions for managers and discussed in team meetings. We also share this information through various forums and reflective sessions with managers across the whole Trust.

We have strengthened collaboration with service areas and managers to exchange insights on a weekly basis to identify improvement opportunities. This approach will continue in 2025/26, ensuring feedback from complaints and compliments is thoroughly integrated across the Trust and its impact on children and Young People is clearly demonstrated.

Transparency, honesty, and empathy underpin our work with families. We ensure that we communicate the importance of allowing families the opportunities to respond to and challenge

records or statements about them promptly and respectfully. Our communication is tailored to each family's needs, with continual reflection on its impact.

Sharing the lessons learned from complaints helps inform officers about the need for families to feel informed and understand decision making processes. Officers have been advised that parents should be given timely access to assessments and the opportunity to raise concerns regarding them. In cases where information is found to be inaccurate or lacking evidence, it should be corrected and an apology provided. Officers are also expected to treat all parents equally, supporting principles of fairness and inclusion.

We alert officers to ensure that they involve parents fully in care planning, meeting minutes are completed and shared without delay, fostering transparency and active engagement in their child's care.

For Young People, including those on remand, we proactively offer support whenever possible. If financial assistance is delayed, for our Young People or Carers we provide clear explanations, maintaining open communication, and ensure any lessons learned are shared across the Trust. We reinforce that timely, effective communication is essential to building trust; any lapses are addressed transparently, with apologies offered as needed. We uphold honesty, reflection, and equitable treatment, ensuring families and Young People feel heard, respected, and supported throughout their engagement with our services.

Compliments

Employees continue to be encouraged to share and acknowledge good practice; they continue to respond positively to this public acknowledgement of their hard work and dedication to improving outcomes for children and families.

Compliments are received from our Young People, Parents, Carers, and other Professionals as well as from colleagues in other areas of SCT.

Analysis of Compliments Received

During 2024/2025 we received 294 external compliments from outside of the Trust, these sources were from Children and Young People, Parents, Carers, legal, Police, education, and health partners.

440 compliments were additionally received from internal sources, such as colleagues recognising good practice and support offered by colleagues.

Both external and internal compliments total 734 compliments throughout the reporting period.

We continued sharing and celebrating our compliments through various platforms. Compliment Café which are supported by EMT that are held quarterly where senior leaders and colleagues come together to celebrate their successes and share with each other what was working well. The sessions during this reporting year have been well received and welcomed by staff.

Key messages and learning from compliments are also shared frequently though existing communication forums such as Practitioners forums, Managers Reflective sessions, and training with student Social Workers, and NQSWs.

Examples of Compliments Received

Below are some examples of the 294 external compliments received from outside of SCT.

Children / Young People

Compliments received from Children and Young People are evidencing our passion and commitment to improving their lives. They also demonstrate the effectiveness of our relational practice approach:

"I want X back she has helped me a lot and my family, she helped to explain to my mom about ASD and why I behaved and got angry like I do. This really helped me I felt like finally someone got me and understood how by brain works. I could talk to her, and she put up with what I said you know she didn't make me feel stupid or anything. I know I can get into trouble at time and will lash out but knowing that I need to calm it at times helped. X was helping me to learn how to deal with. I don't really speak to my parents about my anger as I felt as though they didn't get it but, but they seem to understand more - we still can shout at each other it just feels more normal you know. When I had X, I was calmer before she came along I was vile to my parents and would call them everything."

Compliment from a young person

"I have just received your letter as you stated you have been my IRO since 2020. I am sad to hear that you are leaving but life takes you ways you sometimes can't control. I want to say thank you for all the work you've put into me because if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be where I am today. I am deeply grateful for all you have done for me and my sisters. I'm glad you have seen me grow into the person I am today and hopefully we can keep contact and you can continue to see me grow. Once again, I am so grateful to have had you as an IRO because you have made my experience more bearable and a lot more valuable."

Compliment from a young person

"My time with YJS has been really positive, and I'm grateful for the impact it's had on my life. Working with you has been a pleasure. Your guidance has made a big difference in how I approach things now, and I find myself thinking twice before making any decisions to avoid committing another offence. One specific example of how your support has helped is when you referred me to Connexions. That connection has opened up opportunities for me in terms of employment and apprenticeships, which I might not have pursued otherwise. Additionally, you've played an important role in helping me shift my mindset away from a criminal one, allowing me to behave in a way that aligns with who I want to be. Overall, I'm really grateful for everything you've done and the positive influence you've had on my life. You definitely deserve a 5-star review for your work. Thanks again for all your support."

Compliment from a young person

"X is an amazing social worker. X has helped my brothers to stop fighting. My brother likes to rap, so X has helped my brother when he is angry to find a beat and make a rap. X is a good social worker, and I enjoy speaking to him."

Compliment from a young person

Parents

"Just wanted to send a quick email to give feedback on our experience of working with SW. Both myself and my son felt quite anxious when we found out that we would be having involvement from social services, you hear so much negativity that you can't help but worry. Then SW was allocated to us. SW made us feel so comfortable and at ease. SW took the time to alleviate our fears and reassured not only myself but my son also that we hadn't done anything wrong, she was purely there to support us during a challenging time with his dad. My Son is typically quite shy and guarded when he first meets new people, but SW was very quickly able to break down this barrier and experience the kind, confident, funny young boy that he is, quicker than most too. My son came to see SW as a trusted adult and friendly face which meant a lot to me as a parent. SW is truly wonderful at her job and her passion is infectious. She is a real asset to the service, and we thank her for her time and support."

Compliment from parent

"I would like to give my feedback about my amazing social worker X that we have had during our difficult time. I call her a gift from God because she came the exact time that we needed her. Me and my children needed someone to guide us, and she was always there for us. Before I was very scared of social workers, but she calmly and patiently explained and had been doing everything to help me and, my children to be happy and comfortable. she got people to help me with my emotions and found out what I like. She got support for me to do volunteer work. I was very distressed and she helped me to feel when I call , she always ready to support and encourages me to try different things. when she was sick and poorly, my children were asking for her. when we are around her, we feel at ease .to us she is a member of our family. I have a good knowledge now if someone scared about social services I can say no because I get good support and she is always kind. We will never forget the endless aid and support that she has given us."

Compliment from parent

"We needed X because of YP, and we needed help. I would say I am being honest and still working on time individually, and that's just because there were a lot of changes. X would ask questions, but not in an offensive way. One of her best qualities is she listens to you. She definitely did 100%. You know, when you have help, sometimes they don't make you feel comfortable, but she made me not feel tense. X would come out, and my husband can be hit and miss, but she was brilliant with him. He can be Jeckle and Hyde, but she understood and worked with this. I loved doing the graded care profile with her. I really enjoyed it; it made me work and think of things in a different way and it was an eye-opener for us both. The ways she spoke to the kids were good; she was bombarded when she visited but never said wait to them and gave them all attention. With YP, X got her to open up—she understood she was the only girl in a male household. I think her doing a budgeting thing with me was good. If I could say one thing, I wouldn't let her go she is 100% amazing."

Compliment from parent

"If it weren't for X, me and my children wouldn't be where we are now. After my husband passed away, I didn't have anything, and all of the other social workers who came to see me and my children didn't help or follow through with what they said they would. I'm not going to lie to you, when I first spoke to X on the phone, I was very angry, as I felt the previous worker hadn't followed through with what she said, and I took that out on X, but as soon as I met X in person, her presence was amazing, and I knew that she had been sent to help me and my children. X is my angel, and she has set me and my children free. X is a credit to Sandwell, and you need to bottle her and share her with social workers, as the passion she shows and the dedication to families are amazing. It's not only me who thinks this but my children too. My older children were let down as they don't even have a passport, bank account, etc. and can't do anything, but now we have got the ball rolling, and we wouldn't have been able to do this without X. I have informed my pastor and also the MP who is supporting me about how amazing X is, and I want to make sure she gets the recognition she deserves as I'm finally getting the support and help me and my children needs."

Compliment from parent

Foster Carers

Compliments received from our foster carers reflect the good relationships we have with them, and a joint commitment to improving the lives of our Children and Young People.

"It was nice to see you today, and thank you for the session you have undertaken with L. I acknowledge this must have been a difficult conversation where you needed to address and inform L of the reasons she is looked after. Explaining to her about her mom and the reasons behind this is difficult, but with no doubt a topic important to her moving. At her age, I have noticed young people start questioning issues relating to them and their past. I feel your timing in sharing the information with her was great, which will definitely help her in filling the gaps regarding her life and responding to questions she may have. I know this may cause unrest for her in the coming few days, but I will support her through it. I appreciate your approach to the topic and for choosing to undertake the session during half term. This does not always happen, and I am saying this through my experience as a foster carer. Thanks once again"

Compliment from Foster Carer

Advocate

"When I became involved with the family, their relationship was a significant worry and there was a clear risk of family breakdown, child potentially coming into care and crises on a daily basis. Since your involvement, you have built an amazing relationship with both mother and daughter and have supported massively in changing the dynamics within the family home. Both YP and her mum speak highly of you which is a testament to your dedication and positive impact you've had on the family. You have played a crucial role in mitigating the risks in the family home and making life better for YP. It has been a pleasure working with you and I look forward to working with you both again - on another family."

Compliment from advocate

Partner Agencies

We have received compliments from a wide range of our partners, including schools, police, health professionals and local authorities. Our compliments are evidencing good partnership working and how we are working collaboratively for our Children and Families.

"I am emailing you to provide some feedback on SW's outstanding practice. His advocacy and consistency in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of YP since the attempted murder is to be commended. My team have been reflecting on this case and there is a lot that we have learnt from SW's leadership and practice."

Compliment from NHS Professional

"I just wanted to say a huge thank you for last night. The energy of the young people and passion of the team were contagious. It's been a long time since I had the fortune of direct work with young people, and it really took me back, although I am definitely feeling my age today. What you and your team do for those young people is incredible, and spending time with them, chatting and laughing, enabled them to express how much they appreciate the opportunities you give them. I am really proud and feel very humbled for the opportunity to spend the time with them and with you all. Please, can you pass on my thanks and gratitude to be allowed into their session and to be so welcomed."

Compliment from Partner Agency

"We have been working with X since April 2024 and would like to note our experience of working with him. His passions, dedication and commitment to improving children's lives is immense. We have been blown away by how he has driven the project within Sandwell Children's Trust and he has been a pleasure to work with."

Compliment from Provider

Courts

Compliments from court are held in particularly high regard. They demonstrate our professionalism and evidence our good practice:

"District Judge was very complimentary of SW and all of the hard work she has done to progress the discharge. In addition, he stated that her statement was a pleasure to read and clearly evidenced the progress that Mom had made. I sat there feeling immensely proud of SW."

Compliment from Judge

"I just wanted to say a big thank you for the work you have done with X family! We were in Court today to consider the extension of the DOL Order for YP, and the Counsel, the Guardian and the Child's Solicitor all stated how hard the Social Work Team and Social Worker were working to keep YP safe and ensuring that he knows how much everyone cares for him. His Lordship Judge, sitting as a Section 9 Judge, stated that he knew that "good social workers tend to move onwards and upwards, but I hope it is my jurisdiction." You can't get better praise than that."

Compliment from Solicitors & Judge

"I do join the Guardian in her comments as to the positive work done by the allocated social worker, and that work is certainly very commendable to read. I attach a copy of the order and a copy of the Guardian's position statement for further on the positive comments about SW's work with these children."

Compliment from Judge

Service Improvement 2024/25

The following outlines the service improvements made to the compliments and complaints function in 2024/25, reflecting our ongoing commitment to excellence in service delivery and responsiveness to feedback.

We have significantly enhanced the ways in which we share and recognise areas of success. Throughout the year, 'Compliment Café' sessions were held with senior leaders and colleagues, generating highly positive feedback. Compliments are now routinely shared across the SCT via regular communications, training events, reflective sessions, and direct reporting to service areas and localities. Colleagues have been encouraged to access the dedicated intranet page for compliments and complaints, and our Trust's website has been further developed to facilitate easier feedback from service users.

Our approach to learning from compliments and complaints has continued to evolve. We have embedded learning from both positive and negative feedback and informal comments through specialist training and improved our communication channels to ensure that this learning is regularly shared with teams. The insights gained from compliments and complaints now inform our core training programmes, in collaboration with the QAS and L&D teams, and we have strengthened links with the ASYE and Student Academy to share this learning. Our contributions to QAS have enhanced 'practice conversations' with practitioners, fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

We have also focused on improving engagement with children and families. Key themes from children's complaints and informal feedback are now actively shared with children, Young People, and the Children's Society our commissioned advocacy service. We have expanded the avenues available for children and families to contact us and made our web and intranet pages more accessible and informative for those wishing to leave compliments or raise concerns.

The quality of complaints responses has been raised through the regular dissemination of learning from quality assurance activities and the provision of ongoing training for managers, IROs, and CP Chairs across the Trust. For children's complaints and informal feedback, we have refined our processes for closing the loop and reporting on outcomes and developed a set of themes to accurately capture and address issues raised carried out by the Voice Team.

Strengthening partnership working has been a priority, with our relationship with the Black Country Advocacy Service now more robust than ever. The Advocacy Service provides quarterly reports and attends team meetings when invited, ensuring effective collaboration and representation.

Governance mechanisms have been firmly established, with robust reporting for all compliments and complaints. The EMT receives monthly updates through Customer Feedback information reporting, the Trust Board maintains monthly oversight via the Quality Assurance Report, and learning is shared with the Senior Leadership Team, Team Managers, and front-line practitioners. Regular sharing of learning within Trust Comms and weekly meetings with the Directors ensure early identification and escalation of concerns, supported by strategic oversight. Additionally, complaints and compliments learning are disseminated through the Voices of Sandwell forum.

Finally, we continue to strive for improved compliance in responding to complaints, maintaining our focus on ensuring all responses are timely and meet the required standards. These efforts demonstrate our commitment to delivering an open, responsive, and high-quality service for all those we serve.

Next Steps during 2025/26

Looking forward into 2025/2026, the function will focus on a series of key improvements to further enhance our approach to compliments and complaints. We are committed to refining how we share and recognise good practice consistently, ensuring greater visibility of achievements. This will involve refreshing our approach to celebrating compliments by working with internal forums and consulting with Young People to shape how we share, learn from, and celebrate the feedback received.

We will continue to embed learning from both compliments and complaints by evidencing, in collaboration with the Quality Assurance Service, how this learning directly contributes to practice improvement. Our planned programme of complaint audits will cover feedback from children and young people, parents, carers, and partners. By establishing closer links with neighbouring Customer Feedback Teams, we aim to enhance our information sharing and support good practice across the region. Strengthening resources within our team will allow us to provide more detailed analysis of compliments and complaints specific to each locality or service area, with future reporting reflecting the Trust's Principles and the STaR practice model.

Improving the performance of Stage 2 complaints remains a priority, and we will continue to work closely with SMBC to improve timeliness. We are also determined to increase compliance in responding to complaints, aiming to raise the percentage of complaints addressed within agreed timescales, while maintaining a strong focus on quality assurance. Enhanced communication will ensure foster carers, and the children in their care, are fully aware of the processes for making compliments or complaints, supported by the addition of a direct link on the Foster Carers web page.

Tracking actions from complaints consistently will be improved through more robust recording and reporting mechanisms, ensuring clarity and accountability for follow-up and outcomes. Performance reporting will be further developed, with team level data supporting managers and Heads of Service in overseeing complaints, and quarterly reports providing more in-depth analysis of themes, learning, and practice improvements. The implementation of an electronic system will streamline how we record and manage compliments and complaints, driving greater efficiency and accuracy.

We are committed to increasing the volume of informal feedback received through the Your Voice mechanism and the Trust's website. This will be achieved by raising awareness among practitioners, rolling out promotional materials across SCT, and engaging directly with young people. The refreshed web page will make it easier for young people, carers, and partners to provide feedback.

Learning from compliments and complaints will continue to be shared directly with service areas and localities on a weekly basis, as well as through the Practitioners Forum and Reflective Managers sessions. Developed regular meetings with service areas will ensure deeper analysis and the embedding of learning, leading to targeted service improvements. Clear lines of accountability will be maintained for the Customer Feedback Team and operational teams, supported by EMT, to ensure effective complaint responses. Initiatives like the Compliment Café celebration session will continue to be developed to enhance its success. We will also strengthen relationships with complaints managers in neighbouring authorities to further analyse complaints, particularly handling of AI (artificial intelligence) complaints, Stage 2 complaints, and explore secure platforms that facilitate easier file sharing for investigations.

Support for newly qualified social workers and students will be prioritised, ensuring they understand the functions of the Voice Team and Customer Feedback Teams. We will continue to deliver effective compliments and complaints training to managers and explore the introduction of a new system that enables more effective complaint recording than our current arrangements.

How to contact us

If you wish to give a compliment or make a formal complaint please complete this form and email CS_Firmstep@sandwell.gov.uk with the details

Alternatively

You can contact the Customer Feedback Team who can help you access this service on 0121 569 7867 or, you can raise this request through your MySandwell Account at www.sandwell.gov.uk/mysandwell

Download the Statutory Complaints Policy here

We have a dedicated website and contact point for children and young people to get in touch: https://sandwellvoice.co.uk/have-your-say-contact-the-trust