

SOCIAL SERVICES
COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS
AND REPRESENTATIONS
ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22



1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 It is a statutory requirement for Local Authorities to have in place a representations and complaints procedure for Social Services under the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the associated guidance.
- 1.2 Each Local Authority is required to produce an annual report concerning the operation of its representations and complaints procedure.
- 1.3 This Annual Report provides information about the operation of the Social Services representation and complaints procedure between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022. The report contains information about the number and type of complaints received and provides details of the activities undertaken during this period to develop our services.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Our approach is based on “Getting it right” first time and if not, then “Putting it right” as soon as possible.
- 2.2 An effective complaint handling system is one that provides confidence that complaints are dealt with effectively through the following three steps:
 - 1. Arrangements for enabling people to make complaints are customer-focussed, visible, accessible, and valued, and supported by management.
 - 2. Complaints are responded to promptly, handled objectively, fairly, and confidentially. Remedies are provided where complaints are upheld and there is a system for review.
 - 3. There are clear accountabilities for complaint handling and complaints are used to stimulate and mandate (as appropriate) organisational improvements.
- 2.3 The Council’s Social Services Complaints Procedure seeks to allow residents to voice their concerns in relation to the exercise of our Social Service functions.
- 2.4 The Feedback/Complaints Team are committed to ensuring that concerns raised are listened to and resolved as quickly and efficiently as possible. We adopt a positive attitude towards complaints and view them as valuable feedback as they assist in the development and improvement of services.
- 2.6 The aim is to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity and teams and practitioners are encouraged to be proactive in reaching this goal.
- 2.7 Where someone has been deemed ineligible to utilise the Social Services Complaints Procedure, in accordance with the guidance, the Team will still endeavour to assist them with their queries. The Team keeps account of these contacts, and these are referred to throughout this report as “enquiries”.
- 2.8 Where a complaint relates to a young person, a care leaver or an adult who requires support to engage in the complaints process, the Local Authority has a duty to provide information about advocacy services and to offer help in obtaining an advocate to support them through the complaints process.
- 2.9 Effective engagement with advocacy services enables more individuals and groups to make use of the complaints process at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.10 Experience indicates that complainants who opt to use the services of an advocate, tend to have more of an understanding of their circumstances, their rights, expectations, and the Authority’s responsibilities. Additionally, in the majority of cases individuals are able to reconcile their feelings about the situation through an advocate and resolution is more speedily achieved, often without pursuing a formal complaint.

3. COMPLAINTS TEAM

- 3.1 Expected benefits of an online complaints system, introduced in 2019/20, have not been fully realised. Work continued during 2021/2022 to understand the system against our requirements, it was agreed between the Team that the system provided a useful online form which can be accessed by the public 24 hours a day 7, days a week. However, it is felt that the system is more time-consuming than time-savings and does not provide the overview necessary to perform the role effectively. An Excel complaint tracker was in use from November 2020 to March 2021 and was replaced in April 2022 with a new version following identified improvements and a built-in performance overview.
- 3.2 Work is now on-going to find a long-term solution that will provide an effective and informative overview and tracker with performance overview and the ability to link to the official complaint file, which is required to contain all the work associated with a complaint. A new system is hoped to be in place by April 2023.
- 3.3 A Customer Care Officer was recruited in September 2020, initially to March 2021 and extended to September 2022 to provide capacity within the Team to develop learning from the complaints and improve systems. The role also took on complaint handling for social services from December 2020 to cover the Complaints Officer during an absence from work. The Complaints Officer returned full-time in July 2021.
- 3.4 The Complaints Officer role is now shared across the permanent Complaints Officer and temporary Customer Care Officer roles providing capacity within the Team for learning and development to ensure that Social Services understands complainants, learns from compliments, comments and complaints and provides a timely and effective service.
- 3.5 Administrative support to the Complaint function has been temporarily increased from 0.5 FTE, the Complaints Administrator to 1 FTE Complaints Administrator from the end of January 2021 to the end of September 2022. This additional support is required to ensure the service maintains a high level of customer service and to ensure the system, tracker and complaint files are up to date.
- 3.5 During 2021/22 the email address for the team changed from 'get.sorted@powys.gov.uk' to SocialServicesFeedback@powys.gov.uk, this was needed to encompass the wider remit of the role and to move away from 'sorting out' issues.
- 3.6 The email account for the Social Services Feedback Team receives a high volume of emails each day as demonstrated by the table below.

Table 1 Emails Received by the Feedback Team

Year:	Total Emails Received:	Average Per Working Day:
2019/2020	2619	10.3
2020/2021	4694	18.6
2021/2022	4220	16.7

4. SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF COMPLAINTS AND ENQUIRES.

- 4.1 It is important to remember that an increase or decrease in the number of complaints does not necessarily reflect a change in the standard of service provided. An increase may indicate the positive view that is taken towards complaints, and that people are more well-informed about how to make a complaint.

- 4.2 The following graphs show that the number of complaints decreased this year compared to 2020/21 and were fewer than in 2017/18 and 2018/19. The percentage share of informal enquiries continues to grow. Enquiries are the principal way in which concerns are resolved.
- 4.3 Complaints in general continue to be more complex and involve a number of service areas or themes and consequently, often take longer to investigate and resolve.
- 4.4 Responding to enquiries takes up a considerable proportion of the Feedback team’s time. Unlike formal complaints which are passed onto the relevant team manager to address and resolve, most enquiries are dealt with directly by the Feedback Team, who work to understand and clarify concerns, and liaise with relevant teams for information and resolution.

Complaints Received In Month

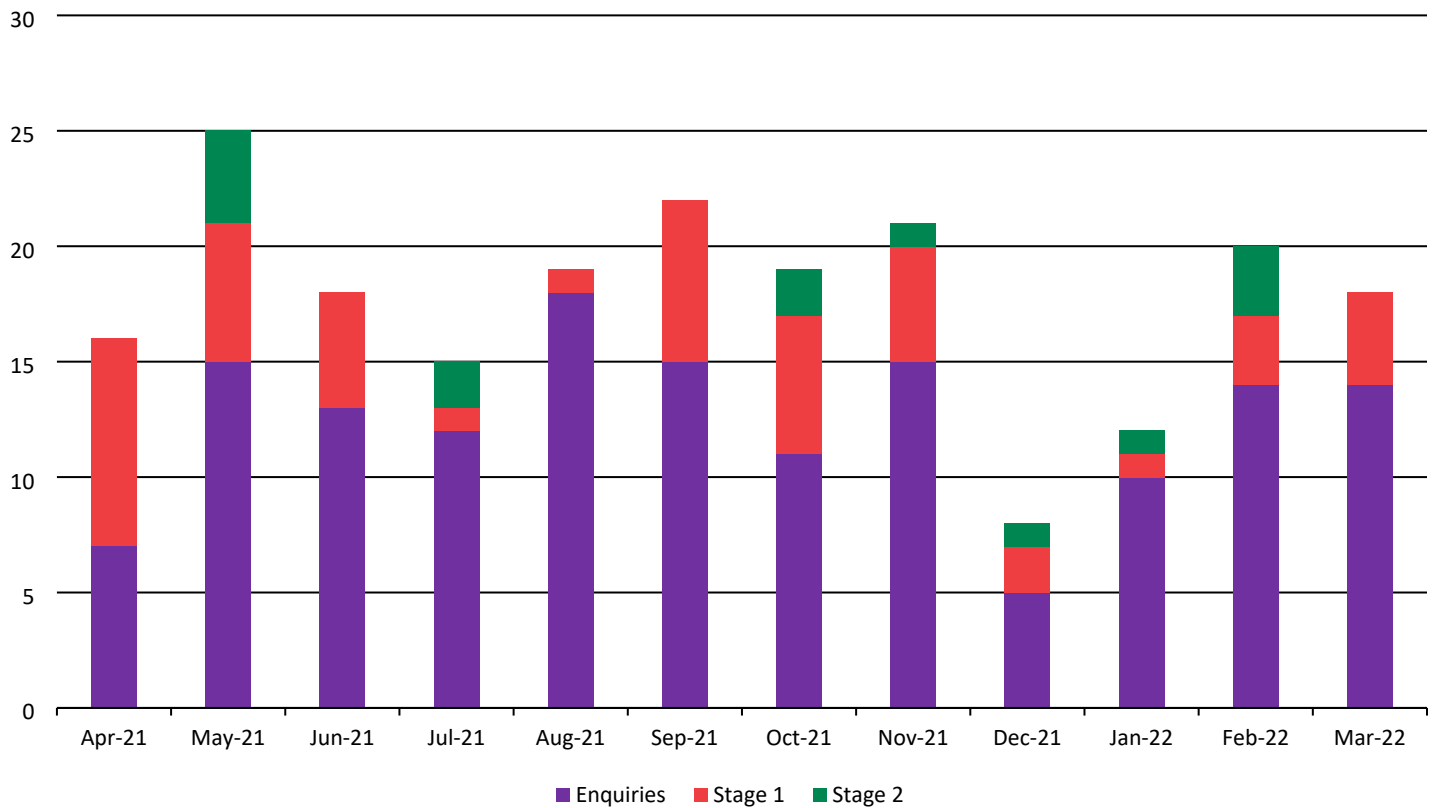


Figure 1 Complaints Received in Month 2021/22

Number of Complaints 2017 to 2022.

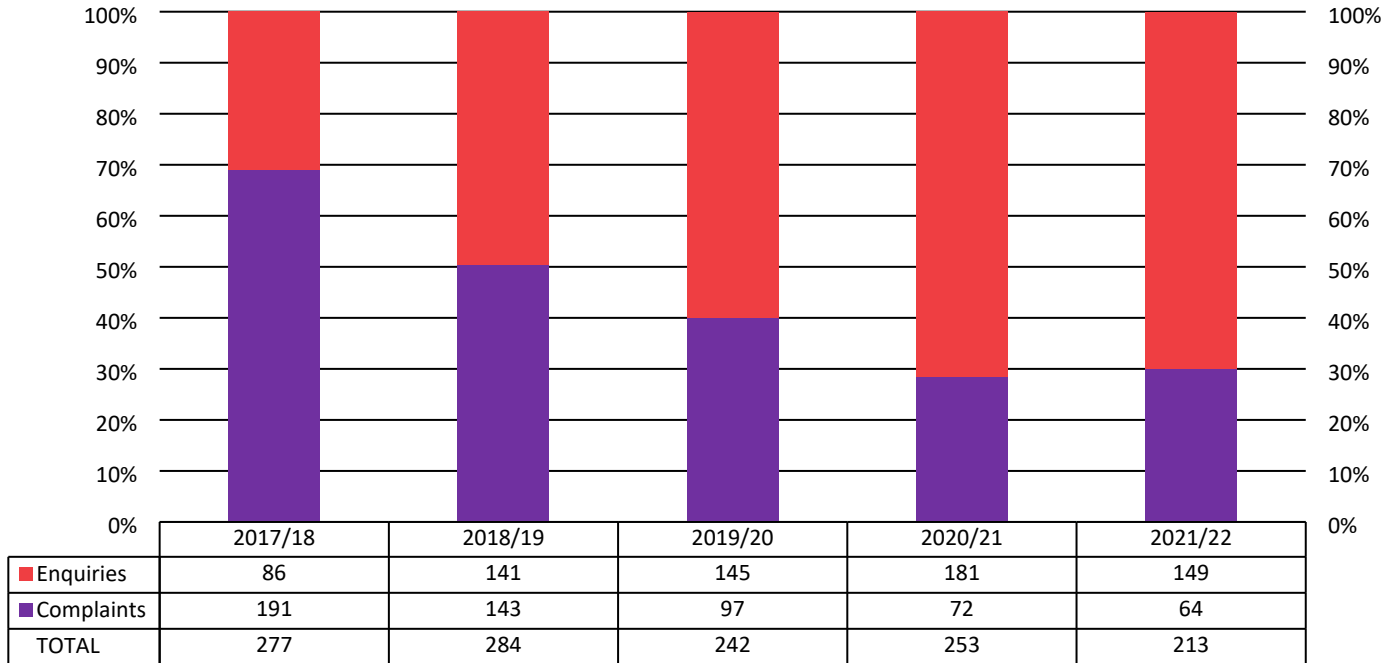


Figure 2 Number of Complaints 2017 to 2022

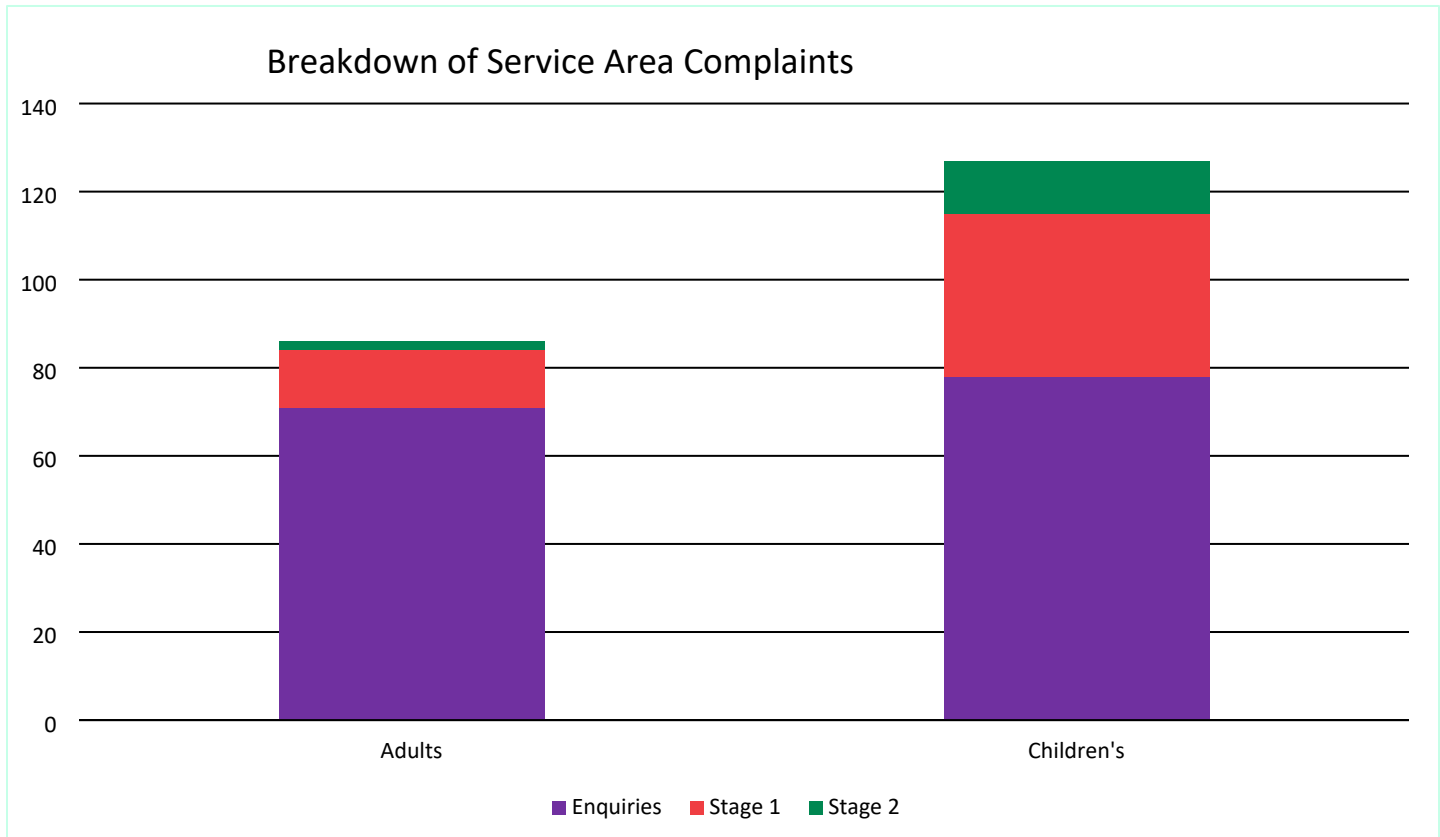


Figure 3 Breakdown of Complaints Per Service

4.5 Children’s Services received the majority of the complaints as shown in Figure 3. This is expected given the nature of the work undertaken in Children’s Services. At its broadest level, Children’s statutory duties centre around ensuring that children are kept safe and protected from harm, and Adult Services

centre around supporting people to live as independently as possible, doing what matters to them, as well as working to safeguard adults at risk of abuse and neglect.

- 4.6 It is important to understand the context of how many complaints are received against the number of active referrals to the service. The figures below are the total number of complaints throughout the year, divided by the number of active referrals on the 31st of March. The number of active referrals is shown in brackets.

Table 2 Complaints per 1,000 Active Referrals

Complaints per 1,000 referrals	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022
Children's	33 [1466]	54 [961]	52 [943]
Adults	11 [4665]	6 [3410]	4 [3871]
Social Services	2	17	13

- 4.6.1 The table shows that the average number of complaints doubled during the pandemic, which is not surprising, given the pressures of lockdown, etc. However, Adult services complaints have reduced by a third.
- 4.7 It should be noted that a number of the complaints will be double/triple counted as they are included in each stage of the complaints process that they triggered in the year. However, not all complaints at Stage 2 will have been in Stage 1 in this year. Similarly, not all stage 1 complaints will have been dealt with as an enquiry initially.
- 4.8 Table 3 shows the outcome of complaints. Complaints where no elements are upheld are recorded as Not Upheld. Complaints where all the elements are upheld are recorded as Upheld. Complaints where one or more elements are upheld are recorded as Partially Upheld.

Table 3 Stage 1 and 2 Complaint Outcomes

Complaint Outcome	Upheld	Partially upheld	Not Upheld
Adults	3 [23%]	8 [62%]	2 [15%]
Children's	4 [7%]	36[68%]	13 [25%]
Total	7 [10%]	44 [67%]	15 [23%]

- 4.8.1 Adults Services had 1 (one) Stage 2 complaint during the year, which was partially upheld. Children's Services had 10 (ten) Stage 2 complaints, 1 was not upheld, 2 were upheld and 7 were partially upheld.
- 4.9 The number of Stage 2 complaints completed in 2021/2022 was 12, this is up from the 2020/2021 [7] and 2019/2020 [9]. An increase is not necessarily indicative of a poor service or investigation, as shown in 4.8.1, where only a ¼ of the complaints were fully upheld. Complainants have the right to escalate to Stage 2 if they are dissatisfied with the Stage 1 for whatever reason and the Council has no grounds to refuse, in line with the Regulations.
- 4.10 As complaints are received, they are given a theme, for some complaints this is straightforward, such as a missed phone call would be 'Communication', however more complaints are now multi-element,

Social Services Annual Complaints, Compliments, and Representations Report 2021/22 which makes theming the complaint difficult. Table 2 and Figure 4 show the breakdown of complaint themes received in 2021/2022.

Table 4 Breakdown of Complaint Themes during 2020/2021

Theme	Children	Adults	Total Number of Complaints	% Share Total of complaints
Assessment	1	3	4	2%
Communication	19	24	43	20%
Failure To Carry Out Agreed Actions / Services	14	5	19	9%
Financial	8	2	10	5%
Other	4	8	12	6%
Policy & Procedure		2	2	1%
Quality Of Service	28	29	57	27%
Staff Issues	12	46	58	27%
Standards		8	8	4%

Complaint Themes (Received in Month)

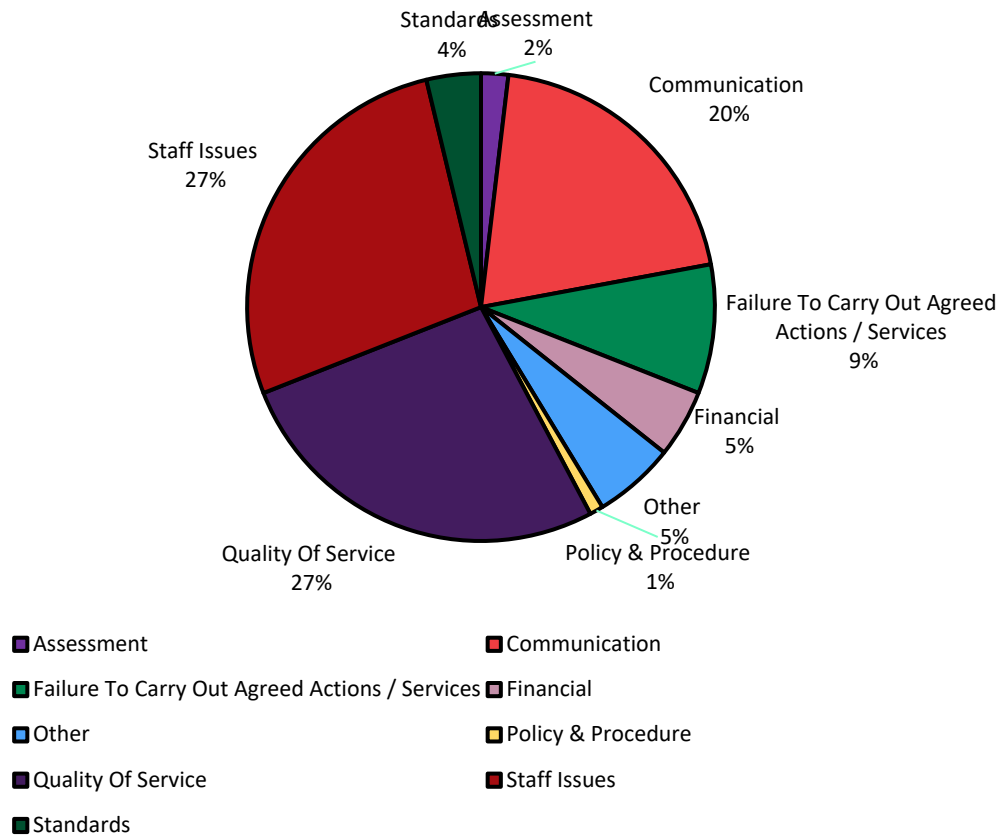


Figure 4 Visual breakdown of complaint themes

4.11 Staff Issues and Quality of Service were equally scoring, making up a quarter of all complaints. Communication accounts for one-fifth of complaints

4.11.1 Staff Issues generally relates to a complaint received specifically about a member of staff and the individual is unhappy with their approach, tone, attitude, or competence.

- 4.11.2 Quality of Service generally relates to complaints that have multiple elements which cross over multiple themes, such as concern with a member of staff, documentation not received, and failure for agreed actions to be carried out, and so on.
- 4.11.3 Communication is about the communication with the individual, such as missed calls or appointments. Communication will feature across other themes, as such it should not be taken that all complaints about communication are under this theme, as nearly every complaint dealt with has an element of poor communication, whether perceived or actual.
- 4.12 These three themes account for nearly 75% of the complaints received, which given the ongoing restrictions to keep individuals and staff safe and new ways of working following the pandemic, is perhaps unsurprising. Individuals often express in almost all complaints that had communication been better they would not be making a complaint, but feel they have no other option to have their voice heard.
- 4.13 It is recognised that there is still a level of agency staff and staff turnover that services would like to reduce, which will possibly contribute to a reduction in complaints due to a more stable and continuous workforce. Social Services remained in business continuity mode throughout the year, due to the increasing demand on both services combined with recruitment difficulties as the nation faced a shortage of social workers. Both Services developed and deployed recovery plans during Quarter 4 of 2021/2022 to guide services out of business continuity and resume business as usual, including new ways of working.
- 4.14 Complaints are dealt with in line with the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Regulations) Wales 2014, which state a complaint must be acknowledged within 2 working days and responded to within 15 working days at Stage 1. Stage 2 complaints must be completed within 25 working days. We try to acknowledge receipt of any correspondence within 2 working days and resolve any enquiries to the team within 2 working days.

Children's Services:

# Working Days	Time to Receipt	Time to Acknowledge	Time To Complete Informal	Time To Complete Stage 1	Time To Complete Stage 2
Same Day	55%				
1-2 Days	18%	29%	28%	0%	0%
3-5 Days	6%	16%	8%	2%	0%
6-10 Days	1%	11%	15%	9%	0%
11+ Days	0%	0%			
Not Receipted / Acknowledged	19%	34%			
11-15 Days			11%	16%	0%
16-20 Days			7%	14%	0%
21-30 Days			10%	25%	0%
31-40 Days			7%	11%	0%
41+ Days			14%	23%	100%

Adult Services:

# Working Days	Time to Receipt	Time to Acknowledge	Time To Complete Informal	Time To Complete Stage 1	Time To Complete Stage 2
Same Day	57%				
1-2 Days	12%	22%	33%	0%	0%
3-5 Days	0%	22%	12%	0%	0%
6-10 Days	0%	11%	16%	27%	0%
11+ Days	0%	0%			
Not Received / Acknowledged	31%	44%			
11-15 Days			16%	13%	0%
16-20 Days			6%	27%	0%
21-30 Days			9%	13%	0%
31-40 Days			0%	7%	0%
41+ Days			7%	13%	100%

- 4.15 It is important to note that Stage 2 complaints usually take 20 to 25 working days to investigate, the report then needs to be checked to ensure it meets the standards we require. Once the report is accepted, it takes around 20 working days for the letter to be drafted and sent to the complainant with the report, this is due to ensuring that the recommendations are seriously considered, and lessons can be learnt from the report. To ensure this timeframe is as short as possible, the Director now has allocated diary time each month to consider Stage 2 reports.
- 4.16 Further work is needed to ensure every piece of correspondence is received by the team and that every stage 1 receives a formal acknowledgement within 5 working days.
- 4.17 It is important to note that only 4 Stage 1's in adults did not receive a formal acknowledgement and 8 in Children's. However, of those 8, 3 Stage 1 investigations were received between the 28th and 31st March and later received a formal acknowledgement, which is not reflected in the 2021/ 2022 performance information. A further stage 1 was not acknowledged and withdrawn as the complainant did not respond to confirm the complaint. Of the 4 not acknowledged in adults, 1 was withdrawn by the complainant just before the investigator was appointed, and one was resolved informally by the team upon receipt.
- 4.18 Nearly 30% of Children's Stage 1 investigations and 16% of Adult investigations were not completed within the required time frame. As complaints are more complicated and pressure on the service remained high throughout the year and was significantly up on pre-pandemic levels, managers found it difficult to conduct a full and proper investigation, take note of their findings and write a full response within the required time frame. Extensions were agreed with complainants to ensure that they were kept up to date on the progress of their complaint, and when they could expect their concerns to be resolved.
- 4.18 The Ombudsman received 6 complaints in relation to Children's Services and 3 in relation to Adults Services. The Ombudsman opened no investigation into Children's or Adults Services during the 2021/2022 period. The Ombudsman completed 1 historical investigation, the findings of which were upheld, and the Local Authority was ordered to pay £2,000 compensation. There were no active Ombudsman Investigations at the end of 2021 / 2022.

5. COMPLIMENTS

5.1 Table 5 shows the breakdown of compliments the service has received over the last 4 financial years. The overall number of compliments continues to increase with more compliments being recorded for Children's Services, but a decreasing number being recorded for Adult Services.

Table 5 Break down of Compliments 2017 to 2022.

Compliments	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Children's	14	14	61	77
Adults	126	130	93	87
Total	140	144	154	164

5.2 There continues to be an effort within Children's Services to record compliments, as shown by the increasing number. Reminders continue across Adults Service, however since the pandemic working practices have changed and some work has not taken place such as annual surveys, which means a reduction in the opportunity for compliments to be made.

5.3 It is clear that the individuals who have taken the time to submit formal compliments are clear about the value and positive impact that services provided have had on them and their loved ones, clearly highlighted in the sample of compliments presented below.

A. EXAMPLE OF CHILDREN'S COMPLIMENTS

Team	From	Compliment:
Family Support	Mother	Thank you for all your support and help during my hard times! You have always been really easy to talk to and really quick at replying/contacting me if I need anything. I felt you really helped me during my dark time and without your support I don't think I would of gotten the help I needed/gotten out of that dark place as quickly as I did. I'll miss talking to you but I know it's a good thing and that your always around if I ever feel down like I did before. Thank you for everything I really do mean it.
Family support	Mother	We have received a referral for Mother of A and she has specifically requested you as you have been so helpful to her friend. Well done 😊
Exploitation & Safeguarding	Professional	Can I thank you for yesterday's meeting, you handled it very sensitively and firmly and I think it was one of the most emotional reviews I've been at, and I'm so glad that there will be movement for A going forward.
Through Care	Young Person	A expressed his thanks to [Support Worker]. A felt listened to.
Family Support	Father	Dad stated that he was really happy with the support he has received off everyone. From the Early Help team and other agencies involved. Our support has over exceeded his expectations and the children have been happy too.
Bannau / Camlas	Parents	Yourself and the rest of the Bannau team have been absolutely fantastic looking after A since February. It was clear that he was very settled and extremely happy living at Bannau.

		<p>A huge thank-you to yourself and the rest of the Bannau team for everything that you have all done.</p> <p>I hope that he is as happy and content.</p>
Care & Support	Professional	<p>[Social Worker] has been very involved in progressing this link by directly meeting with A's prospective adopters and spending several hours with them talking through whether this was the right match. This followed a difficult meeting on Teams where the adopters presented as hesitant and not committed.</p> <p>The unusual circumstances of being assessed remotely as prospective adopters during the pandemic and linking discussions held remotely as well left the prospective adopters feeling disconnected and this was compounded with the unusual circumstances of being linked with a relinquished baby. Please pass on to S our warmest gratitude for her hard work and going the extra mile...</p>
Assessment	Parents	<p>Just want to say a massive thank you for all you've done last few months. I'm very grateful for everything. Will definitely miss you, I take awhile to trust ppl and feel comfortable with them to talk openly (probably where A gets it from) but even after our 1st meeting I felt very at ease.</p>
Adoption	Adopters	<p>I just wanted to pass onto you the comments from A (prospective adopters) today.</p> <p>They stated they have felt extremely well supported by Powys and the Social Work team during the planning of the introductions and throughout the transition.</p> <p>They also praised [Foster Carer] and her partner for the preparation work that they did with A prior to the move.</p> <p>It is early days, but this was an extremely positive first review.</p> <p>Thank you to everyone involved.</p>
Care & Support	Professional	<p>This was a difficult case for both the Social Worker and senior management in circumstances where our position was being constantly criticised. It would have been easy to fold under the pressure being exerted by A, especially with the IRO having been provided with potentially misleading information by A. In my view, [Senior Manager] was entirely justified in maintaining her position throughout and should be commended for doing so. The Social Worker was constantly having to hear criticism via A in Court and for her to have the support of management was vital. This was a difficult case, and both the Social Worker and Sharon should be praised for sticking to their analysis in tough circumstances. There can be no better endorsement of our analysis than the fact that HHJ Lloyd was entirely content in approving the care plans that we presented and was not in any way swayed by the reservations that had previously been expressed by A.</p> <p>I am glad that we were able to reach an outcome that the Court was entirely satisfied with, and everyone involved should be given credit for doing so...</p> <p>If any issues crop up with this case, please let me know.</p>
Care & Support	Parents	<p>Parents of A & siblings today reported that they had felt very supported by [Supported Worker]. They said they had wished to 'thank [Support Worker] who they had felt had helped move the CP Plan on to the point of the</p>

		outcome of today's meeting being to De-register all children from the CP Register'
Family Time	Professional	<p>I have just heard that you are no longer working in the Family Team, and I just wanted to say thank you for the support you have provided for our contact arrangements during your time with the team. I appreciate that it can't be easy to juggle the arrangements but, from our point of view, things have worked out well. I recall the number of times when you rode in the car with the girls to Newtown for contact and this was a great help in releasing me from the need to make the journey. Your colleagues have also been a great help in creating a positive atmosphere when the girls have been a bit stressed during contact. I appreciate that contact can sometimes be tricky and thanks for the professional way in which you have approached it. I know that the girls have valued contact with Mum and siblings, and they have appreciated the way in which it has been organised.</p> <p>Thanks again for all your support and all the best in your new post.</p>
Care & Support	Family	<p>I am currently mentoring [Newly Qualified Social Worker] whilst she completes her first three years in practice following her qualification as a Social Worker last November. As part of her portfolio, she is required to be observed in practice and last week I accompanied [Social Worker] on a visit. Following the visit, [Social Worker] left, and I remained to seek feedback from the mother, again as part of the requirement of the portfolio content.</p> <p>The mother of the three children [Social Worker] is social worker for made the following comments about [Social Worker] –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •[Social Worker] is always on time for appointments and is always prepared •[Social Worker] always listens and takes time to figure things out and makes suggestions on how to work through things •[Social Worker] has been brilliant •Her communication is 100%. She is fantastic and will always text me back if she can't talk to me •She is genuinely lovely and not what you expect from a social worker. •I trust her 100% <p>I have provided the feedback to [Social Worker] verbally already and advised her I would be notifying you all of the positive feedback.</p>
Through Care	Parent	<p>You have been a breath of fresh air since taking over from [Previous Social Worker] - your quick understanding of all aspects has been a key factor in A's imminent homecoming.</p> <p>I cannot thank you enough, but can promise that we will remain a huge part of the support required to ensure my special granddaughter thrives in her new circumstances.</p> <p>Have a great weekend – we will catch up soon I'm sure.</p>
Through Care	Parent	<p>Just a quick note to say a massive thank you for all your hard work getting the Special Guardianship Order through. It has been a long road and we are so excited to start the next chapter in our lives. A will have a much more</p>

		"normal" life and continue to grow and thrive, being the amazing person he is.
Front Door	Professional	<p>I just wanted to thank you for your support.</p> <p>I know how stretched social services are at the moment, but whenever I call for advice, you never rush me, you never make me feel like I am taking up your time and I always feel listened to. I am very grateful.</p>
Through Care	Professional	<p>I just wanted to commend [Social Worker] good practice in working with this young person generally but in particular, in creating an exemplary transition plan to support A moving placements. It was a really good piece of work which took account of A's needs and the needs of the new family and in allowing them time to get to know each other and to form a positive connection prior to the move. The foster carer also commented how measured and supportive the plan was and on speaking with A today it is clear that this was a good foundation on which to build a really positive placement experience. Naturally it is early days, and anything can happen but by formulating a good transition plan the chances of this placement being successful for A and the family have been enhanced.</p>

B. EXAMPLE OF ADULT COMPLIMENTS

Team	From	Compliment:
Occupational Therapy	Service User	"My life is better because of the equipment you have provided", "I want to thank you all in the team, especially [Occupational Therapist]. For all the hard work you have done to make my life soo soo much better". "[OT] has been amazing and has helped me so much".
Reablement	Family Member	<p>I am the granddaughter and next of kin for my Nain. She has been having reablement carers for a number of weeks now after being very reluctant to receive the help that she has needed. It hasn't been easy for any of us, and my Nain has been quite a challenge in some respects, but I just wanted to express my gratitude to a few of the carers that have attended to Nain. I can't remember their surnames...but [Reablement Worker] and [Reablement Worker] have gone above and beyond to help both myself and Nain. They have both been fantastic at keeping in contact with me with any queries or concerns, something I really appreciate as I work full time and I am unable to spend as much time helping Nain as I would like. [Reablement Worker] has been brilliant. She is caring, thoughtful, helpful and has Nains best interests at heart. [Reablement Worker] also has been wonderful to Nain. They are both an absolute credit to the reablement team, and I know both myself and Nain will be sad to see them go when the regular care package starts. I am so grateful to have their support and know that Nain is being looked after by such amazing people. They look after Nain as if she were their own family.</p>
Older Person's South	Family Member	<p>Hope you are keeping well as we are still in these strange times. It has been rather re-miss of me not to have thanked you earlier for all the effort you gave to providing the care package for mum.</p> <p>As I am sure you are aware by now that mum passed away in February. She was very lucky to be at home with her family and it was a downward spiral at the end.</p>

		<p>I just wanted to thank you personally for all the hard work you do and comfort you give to families like ours in what must be a very stressful job. Without the care package we could not have managed and it made such a difference to her end of life comfort.</p> <p>With many thanks .</p>
Older Person's North	Family Member	<p>Hi [Social Worker], that's absolutely great news, I'm meeting my Sister in Law at mums tomorrow and she will drop a bag off in the afternoon. I can't begin to tell you what a relief this is and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your compassion & swift response in supporting mum and us as a family, If you send me your email and your managers I would be only to happy email them to inform them too, thank you, catch up soon.</p>
Older Persons South	Family Member	<p>We, as a family, really appreciate all the effort and support you have provided in ensuring the best care for my father at this difficult time in his life.</p>
Occupational Therapy South	Service User	<p>[Service User] commented that the work was "absolutely brilliant", and that it was "all down to [Social Worker]", who she said was "amazing" and "second to none".</p>
Reablement	Service User	<p>I will remember for the rest of my life, how good everyone has been and taken the time to talk to me'. I was grateful for what you have done and we had a laugh.</p>
ASSIST	Service User	<p>I have just returned from an assessment for [Service User].</p> <p>Her daughter who phoned and made the original referral spoke to [ASSIST Worker] who went on to make the referral.</p> <p>Daughter has told me how 'wonderful' [ASSIST Worker] was and what peace of mind he gave her whilst talking to her. She told me she had never had to do anything like this before and [ASSIST Worker] had totally put her at ease and assured her that everything would be looked at.</p> <p>She really could not sing his praises enough.</p> <p>Thanks [ASSIST Worker] and well done, it certainly makes it so much easier for me to follow on from such a positive initial encounter with our service.</p>
Older Persons South	Family Member	<p>This is just a quick note to inform you as to how helpful my mother's social worker has been. It has been a difficult time since we were informed by Abacare that they were pulling out of the area and ending my mother's care package.</p> <p>[Social Worker] has not left a stone unturned despite it being extremely difficult to put something else in its place. We now have a successful outcome and I am extremely grateful for all his help. This note is just to inform you of how appreciative I am of this.</p>
Occupational South	Family Member	<p>Just a brief note. I'm sorry to be writing with sad news, but we just wanted to let you know that Dad died, on 26th October, and to thank you once again for all your efforts to help him stay at home and be comfortable. You did a wonderful job. He was at home and we were with him.</p>
Mental Health	Service User	<p>I wanted to say how appreciative I was for all your support on Friday.</p> <p>I had an excellent day and if it wasn't for you convincing me to attend I wouldn't have had the pleasure.</p> <p>I will definitely be attending future ones.</p>

		I hope you are well and take care.
Occupational Therapy	Family Member	Mum had been failing last week and was put onto morphine patches. They weren't enough, and a driver was put in. She was sleeping from Sunday, peaceful and in no pain. Tuesday, the District Nurse thought a couple of days, tops. In the afternoon the vicar - a friend to both me and Mum- came and prayed with us. She told Mum that Dad would be so excited to see her. She passed away at 11.30pm.

6. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND LEARNING

- 6.1 The Feedback Team and Quality Assurance Officers continue to work closely together to identify themes and any repeating or significant areas of concern. These help to inform the work around quality assurance to improve and promote best practice.
- 6.2 The link between the Team and Quality Assurance Officers is important to ensure we take on board what people like about our service from compliments and learn lessons where we have made mistakes. It is also important to look at why individuals made a complaint, regardless of the outcome.
- 6.3 Since November 2020, officers from both teams meet monthly to discuss the closed complaints from the previous month. This has contributed to a monthly focus on communication, and consideration on how managers could be supported differently to respond to concerns before a complaint is made.
- 6.4 More work needs to be done to ensure we report on lessons learnt and actions to managers so that they can take the appropriate action within their team as a result of a complaint. Currently, we are trialling a quarterly bulletin-style update on the feedback we receive for all social care staff to view. Furthermore, learning and recommendations from Ombudsman investigations have been the focus of structured programmes of work, while at the same time informing our policies and procedures.
- 6.5 Monitoring of Stage 2 complaints and Ombudsman investigations is now underway with recommendations being monitored by the Complaints Officer.
- 6.6 Training offered by the Complaints Standards Authority on investigation skills has been taken up by 25 investigators across both Adult and Children services. This training will help the service respond more consistently to complaints and in line with best practice recognised by the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales. This will be a continual programme of training every year.
- 6.7 Children's Service Induction since April 2021 has included an overview of the complaints process. During the year 52 members of staff had been through the induction sessions. Adults Services have included an "Overview of Complaints" fact sheet in their staff induction.

7. UPDATE ON 2021/22 IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Area Of Work	Outcome
Outstanding 2020/21 Actions	
1. Completion of the Customer Care Charter.	<p>The Customer Care Charter has been developed and agreed across Children's and Adults Services. Due to the continued pressure on the service, it has not been possible to launch the charter as the services need to recover, stabilise and ensure they can deliver the charter before it is formally launched on the staff intranet, etc.</p> <p>It is now available on the website; https://en.powys.gov.uk/media/15412/Social-Services-Customer-Care-Charter/pdf/Social_Services_Customer_Care_Charter.pdf?m=1650363934730</p>
2. Completion of the Social Services Complaints Policy Review and Complaint Handling Guide.	The Social Services Complaints Policy has been completed and approved.
3. Completion of Complaints Webpage & Leaflet, including leaflet being sent out to teams to ensure old stock are disposed of.	<p>The Complaints leaflet was reviewed and circulated to services in Quarter 4 of 2021/22, with an Easy Read and Young Person-friendly leaflet in final stages of draft.</p> <p>It is important with the Easy Read and Young Person Friendly versions to consult with these user groups to ensure they inform the final versions.</p>
4. Roll-out of GOSS System for staff to review and respond to complaints.	A full system review has taken place of the GOSS system, and whilst there are a number of benefits to the system, it is clear that it is not the correct system to act as a complaints tracker in its current iteration, as such a redeveloped complaints tracker was prepared ready for Quarter 1 2021/22 and has been deployed successfully. This is an interim solution whilst work continues to identify the best solution, a full business case has been drawn up and officers will meet in Q1 2022/23 to progress this.
5. System of monitoring Stage 2 and Ombudsman actions to ensure compliance.	A system for monitoring complaints is now in place with recommendations and agreed actions now recorded on a tracker, and a monthly meeting between the Complaints Officer and Business and Resource Officer to update the tracker and ensure learning is being monitored and recorded from Stage 2 and Ombudsman investigations.
Improved Complaint Handling	
1. Further increase of Independent Investigators and Independent Persons to increase skill and knowledge range of investigators and ensure impartiality.	Our pool of Independent Investigators has increased with a broad range of investigators from a variety of social work backgrounds.

2. Continued roll-out of Ombudsman training to Managers who handle complaints to promote consistency in complaint handling across the service.	Ombudsman training took place during 2021/2022, and further sessions have been planned for 2022/23 and will continue on an annual basis.
3. Promotion of the Complaint Handling Guide and templates to staff who are complaint handling to promote consistency, and <i>‘Investigate Once, Investigate Well’</i> .	The service continues to work with investigators to improve how managers respond to and investigate complaints. The Complaints Officer continues to look at Stage 1 responses and ensure they are understandable and cover the whole complaint made. Templates are now in place across various parts of the complaints process to ensure a consistent response across the service and key information is given to complainants at each stage.

8. 2022/23 IMPROVEMENT PLAN

8.1 During 2022/23, we will put in place the following improvements:

Area Of Work	Outcome
Complaint Management Improvement	<p>The Team will continue to identify areas of improvement to ensure a consistent and customer-focused service.</p> <p>We focus on ensuring complaints are acknowledged and responded to quicker and that learning from complaints is better embedded in the services.</p>
Complaint Regulation Improvement	<p>The team will work with the Director to ask Welsh Government to review the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014. The current Regulations have not been reviewed since they were implemented and could be improved in line with best practice on complaint resolution as identified by the Public Service Ombudsman over the last 8 years.</p> <p>Identified improvements include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realistic Time Frames to respond to enquiries and investigate Stage 1 or stage 2 to take place, and then be responded to. This needs to consider the national shortage of Social Workers and the pressure services faced pre and post pandemic. • Clearer guidance on Representations and the Legal Proceedings exemption. <p>Whilst the improvements may seem to suggest extending the time available to investigate a complaint, it will provide a better customer service as the service will be able to better plan time to respond to complaints including setting aside time to investigate.</p>

9. CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 There has been a similar number in the overall complaints received by Social Services with a reduction in the number of formal complaints being investigated. This shows that an initial proactive, compassionate and enquiring approach in dealing with complaints before they escalate has been well-received; however, we recognise that our response times to enquiries need to be quicker and this is a key performance target.
- 9.2 Improvements as a result of complaints are continuously being reviewed to ensure that individuals receive the best service consistently and that learning opportunities from enquiries are being acted upon as quickly as possible to provide a better customer experience.
- 9.4 There is still much work to be done to learn from our lessons and ensure individuals know when they can make a complaint, and where teams proactively respond to individuals who may not be happy with the service they receive.
- 9.5 We are confident that governance, oversight, and assurance to “Get it right” first time and if not, “Putting it right” as soon as possible, is in place and working more effectively this year than last, and next year will improve further.