

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Annual Report on the Children and Supporting Families Department and the Adults, Health and Well-being Department's Complaints, Enquiries and Expressions of Gratitude Procedure for 2022-23</b>
<b>PURPOSE</b>	<b>To prepare an Annual Report on the implementation of the Representations and Complaints Procedure for submission to the Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee in order to scrutinise and monitor the arrangements for dealing effectively with complaints received from service users and their representatives</b>
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<b>CABINET MEMBERS</b>	<b>Councillor Dilwyn Morgan</b> <b>Councillor Elin Walker Jones</b>
<b>DATE OF CYNGOR GWYNEDD CABINET MEETING</b>	<b>11/04/2024</b>

<b>1.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
1.1	In accordance with the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 that came into force on 1 August 2014, the Director of Social Services is required to produce an annual report on the way complaints are handled and investigated within the Children and Supporting Families Department and the Adults, Health and Well-being Department. The report is produced by the Customer Care Officers of both Departments, on behalf of the Director of Social Services.
1.2	The purpose of this report is to provide information on the number of complaints received by the Children and Supporting Families Department and the Adults, Health and Well-being Department during the year, the reasons for them as well as the solutions. The report also contains a summary of the lessons learnt and the action taken on the complaints received. There are also details about the number of access to information requests and freedom of information requests received during this period.
<b>2.</b>	<b>CONTEXT</b>
2.1	Both Departments are required to put a statutory Representations and Complaints Procedure into practice, in accordance with the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014. There is commitment to prepare an Annual Report on the implementation of the Representations and Complaints Procedure

	<p>for submission to the Council's relevant Scrutiny Committee so that it can scrutinise and monitor the arrangements for dealing effectively with complaints received from service users and their representatives. It is important that a record is kept of the representations and complaints so that the Department can learn lessons from them, as part of the process of improving the services provided. It is good practice to share the annual complaints report with the members of the Council to ensure transparency. The statistics for complaints under the Department's Representations and Complaints Procedure are reported separately to those for complaints where a response was provided under the Council's corporate Concerns and Complaints Policy. This enables the Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet to regularly scrutinise the statistics for complaints.</p>
2.2	<p>The Children and Supporting Families Department's Customer Care Officer is managed by the Senior Safeguarding and Quality Manager within the Children and Supporting Families Department.</p> <p>The Adults, Health and Well-being Department's Customer Care Officer is managed by the Department's Senior Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager.</p> <p>Although the Officers are based within their Departments, it is important to note that the Officers are independent to ensure that complaints are dealt with according to the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014. The Social Services Complaints Procedure specifically concerns individuals receiving a service from one of the two Departments, or who have the right to represent the service users.</p> <p>The Customer Care Officers are responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinating the service's arrangements in order to comply with the Representations and Complaints Procedure;</li> <li>• Record complaints and positive and negative representations from service users and their representatives;</li> <li>• Monitor the response to complaints within the timetables determined in the regulations for dealing with complaints under Step 1 of the procedure;</li> <li>• Co-ordinate investigations by independent investigators into formal complaints under Step 2 of the procedure;</li> <li>• Ensure that a formal written response is sent along with a copy of the independent investigation report (or a summary of the outcome) to the complainant within 25 working days under Step 2 of the procedure, and inform the complainant if a delay is anticipated;</li> <li>• Co-ordinate responses from Social Services to enquiries from the Office of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales regarding complaints about matters relating to the Adults, Health and Well-being Department;</li> <li>• Monitor Action Plans to ensure that lessons are learnt from complaints in order to improve the quality of services;</li> <li>• Develop the internal Representations and Complaints Procedure;</li> <li>• Ensure that information is available to facilitate access to the Representations and Complaints Procedure for service users and their representatives.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide training and support to promote understanding of the Representations and Complaints Procedure among the staff of the Adults, Health and Well-being Department.</li> <li>• The Customer Care Officer for Adults is a member of the Disabled Parking Spaces Panel which is responsible for coordinating the process of assessing applications from the public for designated disabled parking spaces outside their property.</li> </ul>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Ease of the Complaints Procedure</b>
3.1	When a person contacts the Customer Care Officers, it relates to dissatisfaction with the Departments' service, and deciding to make a complaint is usually their last resort. The Customer Care Officers focus on facilitating access to the Complaints Procedure so that people are aware of their right to be heard and have a full investigation into their complaint.
3.2	To this end, information about the complaints procedure receives considerable publicity and is available in a variety of formats e.g. leaflets, on-line and 'easy read' versions. All the information is available in Welsh and English so that the complainant can choose his/her preferred language. Alternative arrangements such as Braille or other languages are available on request. Advocacy or other support is available to the complainant in their chosen language in order to assist the progress of the Complaints Procedure. Information leaflets are continuously amended and updated.
3.3	In accordance with the arrangements of the complaints procedure, on some occasions, it is not possible to receive a complaint at that time. If there is a current Police investigation, an investigation under the Safeguarding procedure, a current Child Protection investigation, or the matter is being addressed before the Court, we cannot accept the complaint. Accepting a complaint could disrupt any ongoing investigation that is currently taking place. In such a case, we would advise the complainant of the reasons, once the investigation has come to an end we can then start the complaints process.
<b>4.</b>	<b>Matters recorded as Enquiries</b>
4.1	The aim is to respond to every complaint with fairness, impartiality and respect so that the individual is confident that his/her complaint will be handled professionally and positively, rather than negatively. Often, when the individual chooses not to follow the Complaints Procedure, the matter is dealt with as an enquiry or an informal complaint. Another example of this would be a letter from a Member of Parliament or local Councillor who wishes to express dissatisfaction or wants an answer to a specific question.
4.2	By responding positively during these initial stages, some matters can be effectively resolved without the need for the Complaints Procedure as this is an opportunity to address any misunderstandings or to respond to enquiries. Without a doubt, this is the best outcome for everyone. See Table I(a) and I(b)

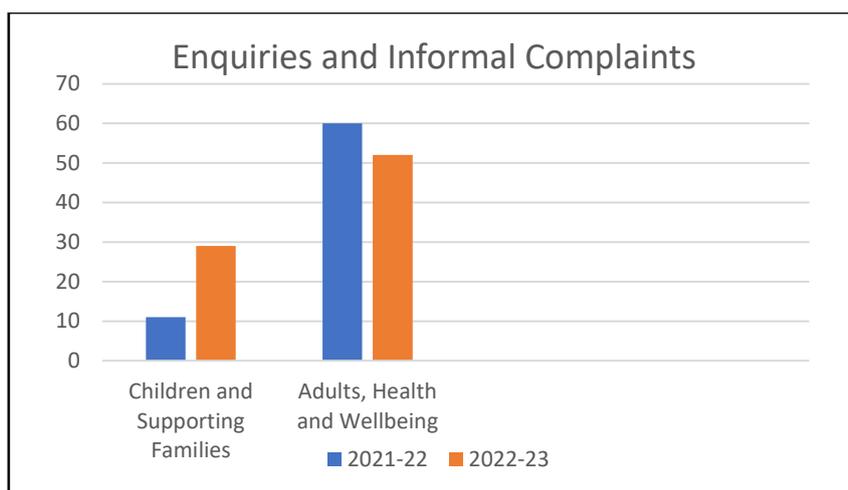
below for a breakdown of the source of each enquiry and the unit/service that is responsible for responding to that particular enquiry.

**TABLE I(a) – Enquiries and Informal Complaints received by the Children and Supporting Families Department**

	2021/22	2022/23
Solicitors		1
Ombudsman Enquiry		2
Local members		1
Members of Parliament or Assembly Members	11	7
Service Users		
Relative		18
The Public		
Foster Carer		
Other Agent e.g., advocacy service		
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>29</b>

**TABLE I(b) – Enquiries and Informal Complaints received by the Adults, Health and Well-being Department**

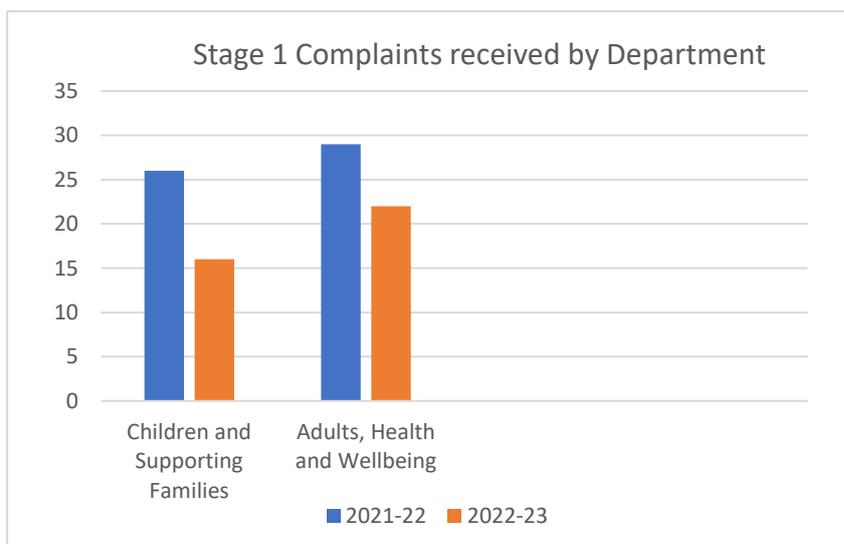
	2021/22	2022/23
Solicitors	1	
Ombudsman Enquiry		
Local members	5	4
Members of Parliament or Assembly Members	25	25
Service Users	1	2
Relative	12	9
The Public	10	9
Issues with Disabled Parking Spaces	1	
Other counties	1	
The Police	2	
Older People's Commissioner	1	
External Companies Providing Care		1
Cyngor Gwynedd Staff (other Department)	1	1
Health Board Staff		1
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>52</b>

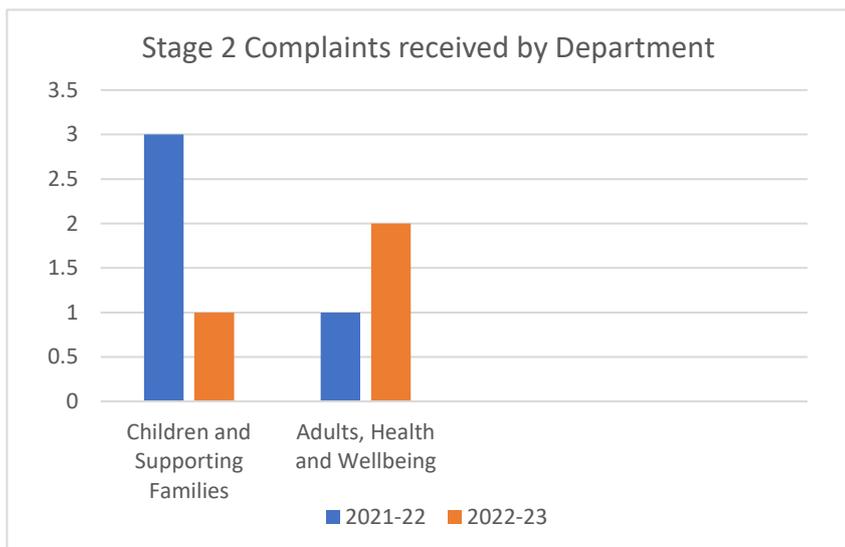


5.	<b>Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure – Local Resolution</b>
5.1	<p>Every effort is made to resolve the complaint so that the complainant and the Service are satisfied. Obviously, a local resolution is the best resolution for everyone and this can be achieved by investing time and effort earlier on. However, if the complainant decides to make a formal complaint, the usual procedure is to have contact over the phone, by e-mail, or face to face with the complainant or representative to try to resolve the matter. Over the years, the Customer Care Officer has successfully established close working relationships with the teams, managers and legal service as a means of discussing and resolving matters, and this is reflected in the small number of complaints that reach Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure.</p>
5.2	<p>Sometimes, a concern can be resolved by the end of the following working day, and in such cases, it does not need to be recorded as a complaint under Stage 1 of the Complaints Procedure and they are recorded as Informal Enquiries and Complaints. In addition, the service user may declare that they do not wish to make an official complaint under Stage 1 or Stage 2 of the same Procedure.</p> <p>At other times, the concerns received are related to historic issues and, consequently, they are not eligible for investigation under the Complaints Procedure, albeit some sort of response will be provided when appropriate. In the case of some concerns, it is not possible to respond to them under the Complaints Procedure if doing so would harm legal proceedings or adult protection investigations currently underway. The complainant will be informed of their right to resubmit the complaint once the current case is concluded, if they so wish.</p>
5.3	<p>Formal complaints are known as a Stage 1 Complaint under the Social Services complaints procedures. Following receiving the complaint, it is sent on to the relevant Senior Manager. The Senior Manager would contact the complainant over the phone to discuss their complaint and try to find a solution. Following this discussion, the Senior Manager sends a letter confirming the discussion on to the complainant. If the complainant does not want a phone discussion, then it is possible</p>

	to only send a written response. In accordance with the guidelines, the Department has 10 working days to contact the complainant to discuss their complaint, and then five working days to confirm the discussion by letter.
5.4	If the complainant is unsatisfied with the response under Stage 1 of the complaints process, then they can ask for the matter to be escalated to Stage 2 of the Social Services Complaints procedure. In accordance with the guidelines, the relevant Department has 25 working days to complete a Stage 2 investigation. In exceptional cases, it is possible to extend the timetable if necessary.
5.5	Examples of the complaints received by both Departments are seen in Appendix I(a) and I(b).

<b>TABLE 2 Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure</b>		
<b>CHILDREN AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>
Stage 1	26	16
Stage 2	3	1
Ombudsman	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>ADULTS, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING DEPARTMENT</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>
Stage 1	29	22
Stage 2	1	2
Corporate Complaints Procedure	3	0
Ombudsman	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>24</b>





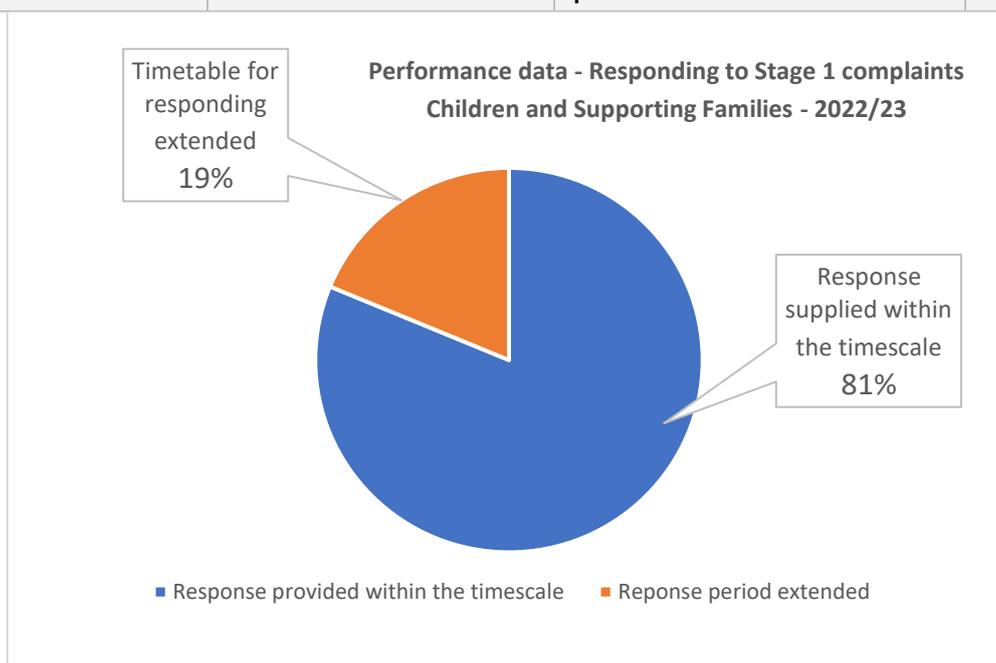
<b>6.</b>	<b>Stage 2 – Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure – Formal Investigation</b>
6.1	<p>Should a complainant wish to escalate his/her complaint to Stage 2, he/she would have to provide a full record of the complaint along with any achievable outcomes; this would then form the basis to what we call a Stage 2 Investigation. For both Departments, the investigation is conducted by a person independent of the Council, known as the Independent Investigator. In addition, in a case of a complaint regarding the Children and Supporting Families Department, an Independent Person needs to be appointed. Their role is to meet the complainant, interview relevant staff and read the social care file. Following this, they create a report of their findings along with any recommendations for the relevant Departments. The Department will prepare a response to these recommendations to be shared with the complainant.</p> <p>Both Departments are responsible for funding their own investigations by commissioning an independent investigator, and the independent person when relevant, as a self-employed individual. Investigation costs vary according to the complexity of the matter and the time needed to gather the evidence and produce the report.</p> <p>If the complainant continues to be unhappy after following the Stage 2 process, they can ask the Ombudsman to investigate further.</p> <p>By following the principle of focusing on an early and local solution successfully, and dealing with matters quickly and effectively, the need to move complaints forward to Stage 2, is uncommon in Gwynedd. It is understood that Gwynedd leads all other north Wales counties in this regard. It is a clear sign of the commitment of the Customer Care Officers, through the willing cooperation of the relevant staff in each individual case, to resolve every complaint in an effective and timely way.</p>

6.2	<p>During 2022/23, the Children and Families Department received one request to escalate a complaint to Stage 2 of the Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure. In this case, the Independent Investigator partially accepted the complaint.</p> <p>Two complaints to the Adults, Health and Well-being Department moved on from Stage 1 to Stage 2 during 2022/23. The Independent Investigator decided not to uphold either complaint, and did not identify any recommendations for improvements to the Department's work as a result of his investigation to the matters in question.</p>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Investigations into complaints received by the Public Services Ombudsman</b>
7.1	<p>If the complaint is not resolved at the end of an investigation under Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure, the complainant has the right to refer the case to the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales, or the Welsh Language Commissioner, or the Equality and Human Rights Commissioner, depending on the nature of the complaint.</p>
7.2	<p>Usually, if the complaint has not already been dealt with under Stage 1 of the Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure, the complaint will be referred back to the Department in an attempt to resolve the complaint locally. If the individual is still dissatisfied after that, he/she has the right to escalate the complaint to Stage 2 of the Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure or return to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, the Welsh Language Commissioner or the Equalities and Human Rights Commissioner (depending on the nature of the complaint) so that an investigation can be held.</p>
7.2	<p>Every historical matter that was open under the Ombudsman has now been resolved and closed to the Children and Supporting Families Department. No new investigations were received by the Ombudsman's office in 2022/23 by either of the two Departments during the period of this report.</p>
<b>8.</b>	<b>Complaints about services jointly provided with the Health Board</b>
8.1	<p>A joint complaints protocol exists for Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and the six Local Authorities in North Wales. No joint responses were submitted to complaints under this protocol during 2022/23.</p>
<b>9.</b>	<b>Adherence to the Statutory Complaints Procedure Response Timetable</b>
9.1	<p>The Local Authority has a duty to provide information on the way it investigates and deals with complaints within the timetable noted in the Guidelines and Regulations. Once a complaint is received, the relevant manager or senior practitioner will offer to contact the complainant to propose a meeting/phone call within 10 working days in order to discuss the complaint and seek a resolution.</p>

	Then, we will write to the complainant within 5 working days of the discussion to confirm the terms of the complaint resolution.
9.2	The Adults, Health and Well-being Department managed to respond to 73% of Stage 1 complaints within this timetable during 2022/23. The Children and Supporting Families Department managed to respond to 82% of complaints within the same timetable during 2022/23.
9.3	<p>The reasons for any late responses were mainly related to the complexity of the complaint in question, and the research work that needs to be undertaken to be able to provide a full response. The sickness absences, annual leave etc. of the Customer Care Officer and staff associated with the complaint also have a significant impact on the ability/failure to adhere to the response timetable.</p> <p>The timetable for providing a written response confirming the outcome of the discussion is very tight, namely 5 working days. Nonetheless, most complainants do receive a response within the timetable or have agreed to extend the timetable.</p>

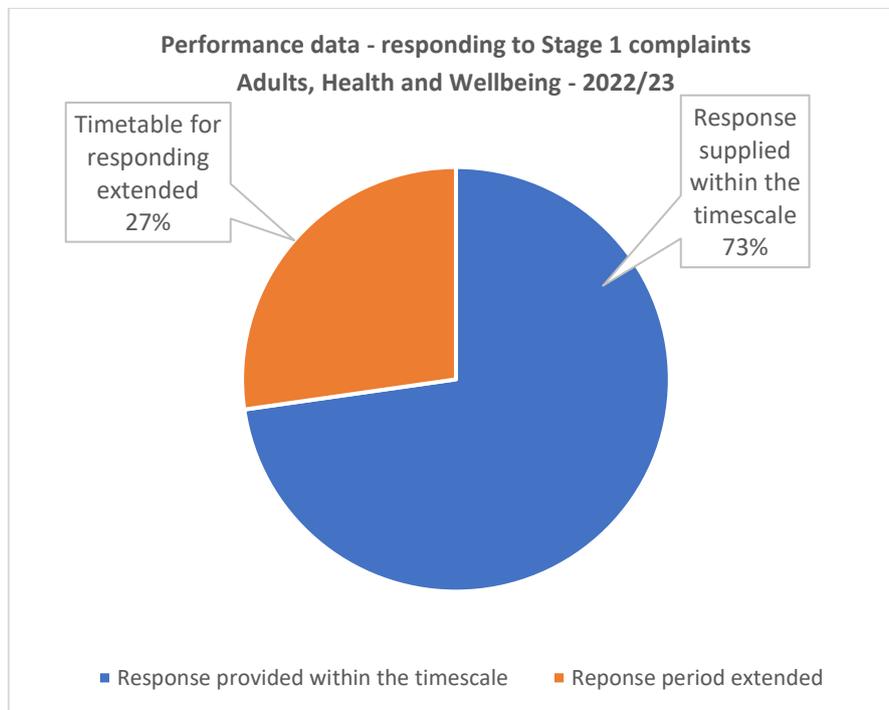
**Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure – Children and Supporting Families Department – Response Performance 2022/23**

<b>Stage 1 (total – 16)</b>						
<i>Complaints received within 12 months of the incident</i>	<i>Complaints received 12 months after the incident</i>	<i>Acknowledged within 2 days</i>	<i>Discussion to resolve within 10 days</i>	<i>Decision announced within 5 days</i>	<i>Response time extended</i>	<i>Average number of days extended</i>
14	2	16	13	13	3	5
<b>Stage 2 (total – 1)</b>						
<b>Number acknowledged within 5 days</b>	<b>Number of responses received within 25 working days</b>		<b>Total delayed under exceptional circumstances</b>		<b>Number completed within 6 months</b>	
1			1		1	



**Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure – Adults, Health and Well-being Department – Response Performance 2022/23**

<b>Stage 1 (total – 22)</b>						
<i>Complaints received within 12 months of the incident</i>	<i>Complaints received 12 months after the incident</i>	<i>Acknowledged within 2 days</i>	<i>Discussion to resolve within 10 days</i>	<i>Decision announced within 5 days</i>	<i>Response time extended</i>	<i>Average number of days extended</i>
22	0	22	19	16	6	8
<b>Stage 2 (total – 2)</b>						
<b>Number acknowledged within 5 days</b>	<i>Number of responses received within 25 working days</i>		<i>Number delayed under exceptional circumstances</i>		<i>Number completed within 6 months</i>	
2			2		2	



<b>10.</b>	<b>Cyngor Gwynedd's Corporate Complaints Procedure</b>
10.1	Some matters that are beyond the remit of the Social Services Complaints Procedure are dealt with under Gwynedd's Corporate Complaints Policy. Complaints that are handled under the Corporate Complaints Procedure mainly relate to matters that are not associated directly with the care services that the Department offers under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.
10.2	No complaints were received during 2022/23 that were addressed under the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure.

<b>11.</b>	<b>Learning Lessons and Identifying Trends</b>
	<b>Learning Lessons</b>
11.1	Quarterly reports on dealing with complaints are presented to the Management Teams of the Children and Supporting Families Department and the Adults, Health and Well-being Department. This is an opportunity for Senior Managers to analyse every complaint and to discuss and learn in order to improve the service provided to Service Users.
11.2	The Management Teams include the lessons learnt in their amended work plans and any training needs are identified. The current lessons to be learnt log is administered by the Customer Care Officers. The log is regularly distributed amongst the Senior Managers to notify them of the lessons that have been identified. The log will be updated with any information about actions taken in connection with the lessons to be learnt. It is hoped that this will be a more effective way of identifying lessons and ensuring that improvements are actioned.
	<b>Complaints Trends – Children and Supporting Families Department</b>
11.3	The Children and Supporting Families Department works daily with a wide range of different families. Some families come to the Department's attention through a direct request for assistance, for example, if their child is disabled. Most families come to the Department's attention because of concerns for a child or young person's health and safety.
11.4	Due to the nature of the Department's work, and specifically Social Workers, tension or conflict with families is unfortunately inevitable at times. Social Workers have to make very difficult decisions, and families are not always happy. The Department understands and accepts that families can be dissatisfied, which then leads them to make a formal complaint against the Department.

11.5	It is fair to note that it is difficult to see whether there are specific trends or clear themes in the complaints received during 2022/23, as each complaint tends to be unique to each case. In accordance with the Complaints Procedure, the Team Manager or the Senior Manager will discuss the complaint with the complainant. Through discussion, the Team Manager is able to respond to matters directly and most cases are resolved over the phone; it is clear that this way of dealing with complaints works. In most cases, the complaint stems from misunderstanding and miscommunication. Once the matters are fully explained, the complainant will be happy most of the time.
11.6	It is also very important to note, on several occasions when a complainant initially contacts the Customer Care Officer, they are highly emotive – they could be angry or concerned about a decision or a misunderstanding. In most cases, the complainant will be satisfied once they have been given the opportunity to discuss their concern with the Customer Care Officer, first of all, and then with the relevant Team Manager, and they would be happy with the outcome of these discussions.
	<b>Communication</b>
11.7	During 2022/23, there was a trend yet again of complaints due to a lack of clear or consistent communication with families. Clear and consistent communication is very important, and the way things are explained to families from the outset is critical in ensuring that they understand why the Department does what it does, what the Department is able to offer and why, in some cases, it is not possible to offer any service at all. It is also important to note that the expectations of families to receive updates and responses to their enquiries from Social Workers are extremely high, and unattainable in several cases. That is, families would expect a response immediately if they contacted the Department, and they would be displeased if the relevant Social Worker cannot contact them back within a few hours of that day, even if it is not an urgent matter.
	<b>Families' Expectations</b>
11.8	This trend is seen annually in the complaints made against the Department, and it is difficult to respond to complaints by families that feel that the Department should do more to support them, that believe they should receive more services/contact/intervention and believe that their children should be returned to their care. Parents' expectations of what the Department is able to offer are high, if they feel that they have been failed in any way by the Department, they lodge a complaint. When such complaints are made, full investigations will be held and, in most cases there will be clear evidence indicating that the Department has acted appropriately and in accordance with the protocol.

	<b>Historical Complaints</b>
11.9	<p>New themes that have emerged over the last year are historical complaints. Individuals submit a complaint about an event/experience that happened to them some years ago. The social services statutory complaints procedure notes that the Department is not required to investigate a complaint from over a year ago. Clearly, looking into historical complaints is challenging as the majority of staff that related to the case at the time have now left the Council's employment or have retired. In the absence of that individual, it is difficult to question them or get to the root of any incident or decision. As a Department, we do not like to refuse a complaint, and if it is possible for the Department to conduct a fair and full investigation, then we would do that. In some cases, this is not possible as so much time has passed. However, these individuals have received a service from us and we can use their experiences to improve services for the children and young people of Gwynedd in the future. In response to such situations, we have agreed on an alternative procedure, by inviting the individual to discuss with the Independent Person to share their experiences and ensure that they receive a full hearing. The Independent Person will write a short report for the attention of the Head of Department to learn and improve the services in the future. This might not have been the response that the complainant had hoped to receive, but as a Department, we try to ensure that they receive a full and fair hearing at all times.</p>
	<b>Complaints and Enquiries Trends – Adults, Health and Well-being Department</b>
11.10	<p>The Customer Care Officer is part of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit (Adults) and has a close relationship with the Care Monitoring Officers and the Safeguarding Officers. This is essential in order to share information to identify Safeguarding cases. Sharing information about any complaints received about the care of individuals in residential homes is useful to identify broader care problems in those organisations that will require further investigation by the Monitoring Officers.</p>
11.11	<p>A variety of complaints and enquiries were received on different themes during the year. Very similar to last year, the most prominent theme that was brought to our attention during the year was complaints and enquiries about the impact of the difficulties we have faced as a Department to be able to arrange domiciliary care packages and arrange residential/nursing care placements in good time.</p> <p>During one quarter this year, three enquiries were received from Members of Parliament and Assembly Members on this theme, which included subjects such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enquiry about an explanation as to why an external care company had withdrawn from a care package at short notice;</li> <li>• Enquiry on behalf of a service user's family about the reasons why we could not provide sufficient hours of domiciliary care;</li> <li>• Enquiry on behalf of a service user's family as to why we could not arrange EMI day care locally.</li> </ul>

A specific problem became apparent during the last weeks of the quarter as an external care company gave five working days' notice to the Department before withdrawing from the care packages of many service users in the Porthmadog area. During the first quarter of the year, two complaints were received from the families of service users about this matter as we had not managed to arrange replacement long-term domiciliary care at the time.

During the second quarter of this year, this matter continued to cause the Department to receive more complaints and enquiries. 4 out of 7 complaints received during Quarter 2 had been submitted by the families of service users about the impact changing a care provider had on them. Through the hard work of the Department's staff in holding further discussions, it was managed to maintain the domiciliary care service in the majority of these cases in the short term, and the Department continued to work hard to be able to provide care for the long-term.

3 out of 4 complaints received during the third quarter were involved with the difficulties faced by the Department in providing some aspects of domiciliary and residential care. The complaints received were based on concerns from families/carers about relatives failing to be discharged from hospital and/or a care home due to a shortage of domiciliary carers, and a response was provided to these complaints under Stage 1 of the Complaints Process. Four additional enquiries were also received from Local Members and/or Parliamentary Members on behalf of families on the same theme.

Three complaints were received about the quality of work of one external provider that had been commissioned to provide Direct Payments services to service users. As the company is external to the Council, our policy on handling complaints about external providers was implemented. Under this policy, we have a duty to assist the service user to submit a complaint directly to the external company. This procedure is followed in order for the external company to have an opportunity to respond under their internal complaints procedure in the first instance. The complainants can still use the Department's complaints procedure if they are unsatisfied with the response. The Business Unit is aware of the complaints and is working closely with the company to ensure improvements in the service.

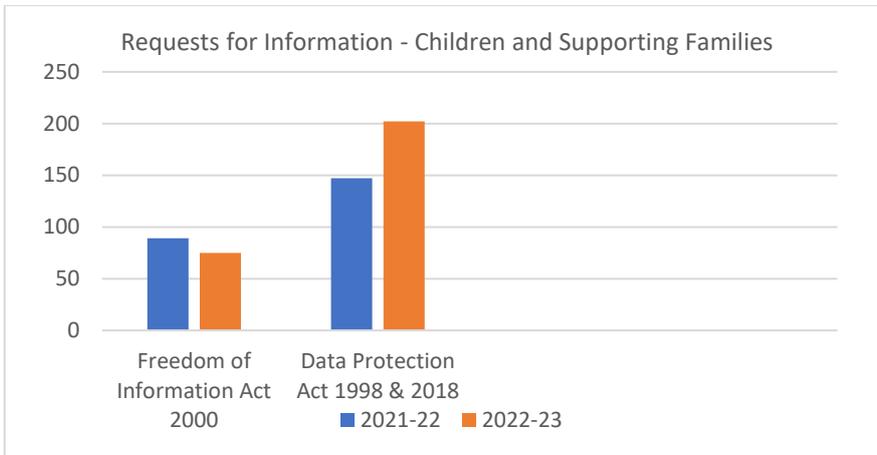
During the third and fourth quarters this year, a reduction was seen in the number of enquiries/complaints about the difficulties currently faced by the Department to provide some aspects of domiciliary/residential care as we only received one complaint about this particular theme during this period.

In order to improve the situation, substantial work continues within the Department to recruit staff and increase the day and respite care provision and ensure that the increasing demand on our domiciliary care services can be met. In addition, the Domiciliary Care Project to reorganise and improve the provision available is continuing.

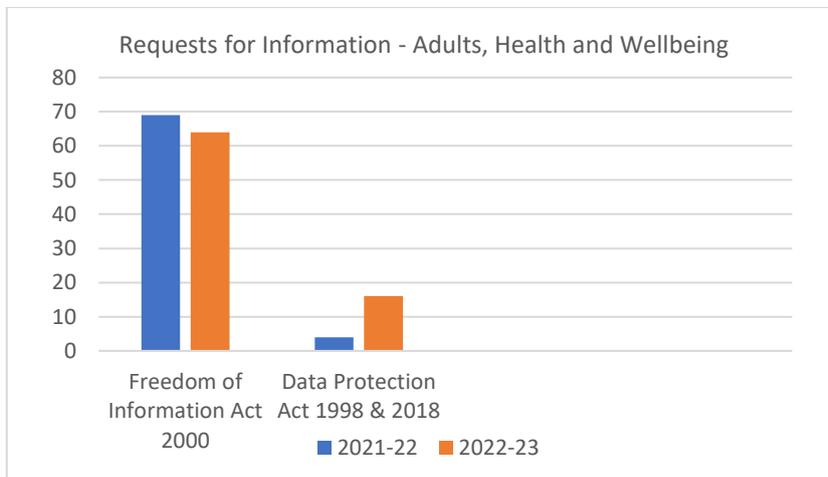
<b>12.</b>	<b>Training and Staff Awareness of the Complaints Procedure</b>
12.1	Providing training to staff about the Complaints Procedure is an important aspect of Customer Care, so that staff members are fully aware of the procedure and are confident of their role within it. The Customer Care Officers are always available to discuss any specific cases with the Departments' staff members and offer advice on the best way of dealing with enquiries or complaints against the Department. An e-learning session for every staff member of both Departments has been developed to ensure that staff are fully aware of the complaints procedure and the expectations on staff during the process. We will monitor the numbers undertaking the training and target staff members that have not completed it.
<b>13.</b>	<b>Other Duties</b>
13.1	The Adults, Health and Well-being Department's Customer Care Officer is a member of the Disabled Parking Spaces Panel, which is responsible for coordinating the process of assessing applications from the public for designated disabled parking spaces outside their property. A Panel meeting is held every three to six months. The Officer is responsible for ensuring that application forms are up-to-date and correct, and is responsible for receiving enquires over the phone, by letter and e-mail. The Customer Care Officer is responsible for the whole process of recording the receipt of applications and their outcomes, co-ordinating Panel meetings, and communicating application outcomes by letter after each Panel meeting.
13.2	The Children and Supporting Families Customer Care Officer also deals with access to information requests in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 / Data Protection Act 2018. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 were introduced on 25 May 2018, and as a result, there were some changes in the way access to information requests are dealt with. The Adults, Health and Well-being Department has an Administrative and Information Officer that is responsible for receiving and responding to these requests.
13.3	The access to information requests under the Data Protection Act 1998 / Data Protection Act 2018 are made by individuals, the Police, Solicitors, the Health Board as well as other Local Authorities. In accordance with the Act, there are specific timetables to adhere to, and the response timetable has become much more challenging since the new Act was introduced.
13.4	Determining what information is appropriate to be released is work that demands skill and can be emotionally challenging at times. The Officers who deal with information requests spend long hours on some of the more complex requests that the Departments receive. This means that a large bulk of hours are spent to ensure that information requests are responded to within the specified time.
13.5	It is also the responsibility of the Children and Supporting Families Department's Customer Care Officer to coordinate responses to freedom of information requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The number of requests under the Data Protection Act 1998 have increased over the last year. We are

	seeing an increase in requests from the Police, other Agencies and subject access requests, the reason for this increase is unclear.
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<b>TABLE 5. Information requests – Children and Supporting Families</b>		
	2021/22	2022/23
Requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000	<b>89</b>	<b>75</b>
Data Protection Act 1998 / Data Protection Act 2018 Requests	<b>147</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>277</b>



<b>TABLE 5. Information requests – Adults, Health and Wellbeing</b>		
	2021/22	2022/23
Requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000	<b>69</b>	<b>64</b>
Data Protection Act 1998 / Data Protection Act 2018 Requests	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>80</b>



<b>14.</b>	<b>Expressions of Gratitude</b>
14.1	<p>As well as responding to concerns, complaints and other representations from service users, their families, and members of the public, it is also crucial that we acknowledge and record the expressions of gratitude we receive from our service users, families, members of the public and from staff from other agencies.</p> <p>In addition to the thanks and compliments recorded by the Customer Care Officer on the RESPOND recording system, we are also aware that a large number of thanks, gifts etc. have been delivered to Council residential homes. These come mainly from families of service users who wanted to show their appreciation to staff for taking such great care of their relatives.</p>

<b>NUMBER OF EXPRESSIONS OF GRATITUDE DURING 2022-2023 – ADULTS, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING</b>					
Adults Services (including Area Teams, Learning Disabilities Team, Mental Health Team and Occupational Therapy)	Internal Provider (Domiciliary care and residential)	Business and Finance	Telecare	Customer Care and Safeguarding	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>34</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>74</b>

<b>NUMBER OF EXPRESSIONS OF GRATITUDE DURING 2022-2023 – CHILDREN AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES</b>	
	<b>TOTAL</b>
	<b>85</b>

**EXPRESSIONS OF GRATITUDE AND PRAISE – EXAMPLES FROM 2022/2023**

<p>“Good morning Sue, I am writing to thank you and all your colleagues for the welcome you gave to the Deputy Minister for Social Services, and the officials accompanying her, on her visit to Plas Pawb last Friday. I received feedback that the Deputy Minister enjoyed the visit very much, speaking to those who provide parenting and family support in Gwynedd, including the work on out of court parenting support and with the Ukrainian families settled in your area. We really appreciate the effort you put into this. It was invaluable for the Deputy Minister to get insight into the important work you all do to support parents and families. Thank you very much to you all”.</p>	<p>Thank you</p>	<p>Meirionnydd and Dwyfor Children's Team</p>
<p>“I send these few words to note my full appreciation of your department's staff who have been so kind and hard-working to plan to have a stairlift in our home for my wife, XX recently. I would like to say a special thanks to Edward Owen, your occupational therapist, for his courtesy every time when arranging to have the stairlift in place. Colin, the young man from the DSL Mobility company must also be praised for his tidy work here. My wife greatly appreciates everything and is very pleased with the new machine. Her life is much more pleasant at the minute and the journey upstairs is now much kinder on her mobility! Thank you very much to Cyngor Gwynedd and their gracious staff once again, on behalf of my wife and I”.</p>	<p>Thank you</p>	<p>Adults Occupational Therapy Service (Internal Provider)</p>
<p>"Hello just a email to highlight the support I have had from Maria since XXXXXXXX. My first thought was that it was going be a nightmare and all negative support and I was dreading it ... but to my surprise I have had 100% brilliant support and advice from the service... the help has got me on track and taught me different ways of being a parent .... not just this it has mentally helped me. Finance advice which I had very good support from Maria with I cannot praise enough she pointed me in the right direction, and I could message or call her any time for any advice which helped me a lot when you sit there over thinking things. Thank you for this support"</p>	<p>Thank you</p>	<p>Edge of Care Team</p>
<p>“We recently lost our Mother who was a resident at the Plas Hafan home in Nefyn. She lived very happily there for three years and as a family we are indebted to all the staff who cared dearly for her and for all the joking and laughter she always experienced there. Despite the obstacles they faced during the pandemic, knowing that Mum was receiving the best care possible was a great comfort to the family and we had an</p>	<p>Thank you</p>	<p>Residential and Day Care (Internal Provider)</p>

<p>opportunity to chat with her via Facetime or safely outside in the garden. Nothing was too much trouble. I will be eternally grateful to them for their tireless commitment to ensure that the well-being of residents is a priority at all times.</p> <p>Mum never said a bad word about Plas Hafan and she was a lady who was always forward with her opinion on various matters!</p> <p>During her final weeks, every member of staff caring for her went the extra mile to ensure that Mum was comfortable and received everything she needed conveniently and within her reach. We were looked after as a family when visiting and a cup of tea and a piece of cake was never far away. We will be eternally grateful to Plas Hafan for making my Mum's last years very happy, full of entertainment and laughter.</p> <p>Words like these are not enough to convey our gratitude for the care she received and passing Plas Hafan in Nefyn will bring back very fond memories to us.</p> <p>We would like you to convey our thanks to them – every member of staff there for their hard work and affection when caring for my Mum. Their kindness will remain with us forever.”</p>		
<p>"I would just like to compliment one of your social workers Dylan Wyn Owen in relation to the child XXXX. Dylan has been fantastic in his correspondence with Conwy Social Worker, ensuring that XXXX has had the best transfer from Gwynedd SSD to Conwy SSD. Dylan definitely at all times has had XXXX best interest at heart and has worked to ensure that his transition to Conwy LA has been as smooth as possible. I have just chaired a meeting that Dylan attended which was so positive and demonstrated such good practice from Dylan that I felt the need to email you and let you know. This is a great example of how social workers and neighbouring LA's should definitely work and all credit to Dylan who has demonstrated 'good practice'."</p>	Thank you	I6+ Team
<p>“We laid A to rest last Thursday, in her garden with her beloved dog. We had a very quiet ceremony with just immediate family, a very simple but loving service - followed by tea with neighbours and friends looking at photos and remembering A. A walk on the beach plus ice cream from T on Friday followed, all in the beautiful Welsh sunshine. It was a joyful couple of days with everyone staying at the cottage, not empty after all but filled with love and laughter, and some tears!!</p> <p>Thank you for everything you did for A, to enable her to stay in her cottage. I know this was not always easy, and that she provided some challenges along the way, but you were crucial in her being allowed to see out her days in her own home by ensuring she was provided with all the equipment and supplies</p>	Thank you	Domiciliary Care (Internal Provider)

<p>she needed, especially in the final few months when A was so dependant on the help of others.</p> <p>You always treated A with such respect and kindness, nothing seemed too hard or complicated for you and your team. You gave her dignity when she deserved it, and I think that given the constraints that I know you have to deal with, financial and time being two of them, this was such an achievement. You were always there to listen to us, reassure us, and explain to us what was needed, you always organised things so quickly, you always returned our calls and messages, you understood how difficult it is as worried family wanting the best for their loved one, basically you were AMAZING.</p> <p>I am sure that there are many other families benefitting from your expertise and support, you do such brilliant work, thank you again. Take care of yourself too though."</p>		
<p>"Since suffering a stroke some years ago Mum was housebound at home and was lucky enough to receive regular domestic visits from the beautiful people formerly working with Abercare, and more recently for the Gwynedd Care Service. Words cannot express enough our thanks for all the love and hard work provided. Mum was always a staunch proponent of workers rights and would certainly agree that our beloved care workers deserve better pay and conditions. We thank the care workers for respecting the wishes of elderly and vulnerable care recipients, and getting things done often under difficult circumstances."</p>	Thank you	Domiciliary Care (Internal Provider)
<p>"I wanted to send you a message (Haf Owen), Ann Taylor, Stephanie and the Drws y Nant Team, if you see them please give them a huge thanks for the past two years and I want to say sorry to everyone for how I was before but I have changed and I'm so proud that I have and that is through the help of Ann Taylor and Tara with therapy and giving me the chance, so I want to thank you for everything with XXXX and XXXX, you've been fair with me throughout it and I mean this in the nicest possible way, but I hope that I will never see social ever again but thank you so much x"</p>	Thank you	Edge of Care Team, Arfon 2 Children's Team, Support Service and Reviews Team
<p>"In a world full of complaints, I am pleased to send a message of thanks, appreciation and praise. My mum is deteriorating and yesterday morning I received a message from a neighbour expressing concerns. Soon afterwards, a carer went to visit mum as she knew her, and she found my number and phoned me to report her concerns. She did not have to, and I really appreciate it. During the afternoon, another worker/manager from your service visited mum on a usual visit that had been arranged and they contacted me via mobile phone and left a text message when there was no answer. I thanked her and received a kind and courteous message full of care and concern</p>	Thank you	Domiciliary Care Service (Internal Provider)

<p>outside working hours. I would also like to thank Hayley and Rowenna for everything and, unfortunately, it is likely that further contact will be needed with them and their colleagues in the future as mum's condition deteriorates – old age is inevitable. I am awaiting a report on the way forward, but the purpose of this message is to recognise the commitment and say thank you"</p>		
<p>"After the recent passing of my sister, I would like to thank all the staff at Plas Pengwaith for the care and devotion demonstrated towards my sister during the last 5 years whilst she was a resident there. Whenever I visited I always felt that she was in a warm, friendly, caring environment and she only had words of praise for all the staff who looked after her.</p> <p>Thank you very much for your kindness towards her and also for your devotion, commitment and kindness. As a family, we have appreciated your tender care of her. She is now at rest and singing with the angels."</p>	<p>Thank you</p>	<p>Residential and Day Care (Internal Provider)</p>

15.	<b>Work Plan for 2023/24</b>
15.1	<p>The Customer Care Officers will continue to respond to concerns, enquiries and complaints by following the Welsh Government Social Services Complaints Procedure, ensuring that the lessons to be learnt from every case are addressed by the Departmental Management Team regularly and timely. Continue to monitor actions that take place to develop the service.</p>
15.2	<p>The Customer Service Officer will continue to chair the North Wales Customer Care Officers Group (NWCOG) for the coming year. Meetings are held every three months.</p>
15.3	<p>Further work will also be completed to try and encourage workers across both Departments to contact the Customer Care Officers to share any thanks or complimentary observations that they receive. There is currently a sense that staff members feel that it is not appropriate to share some observations, but the Customer Care Officers are eager to change this.</p>
15.4	<p>Encourage the staff to complete the e-learning training session to ensure that they are fully aware of the process and are familiar with the steps needed to take during the process.</p>
15.3	<p>The Customer Care Officers will work jointly with the Public Relations and Communication Manager to update and re-design the Council's webpages on the procedures of the Complaints Process. The above work is essentially important to ensure that the information on how to submit a complaint is clear and currently accurate, and to also ensure that the process is open to all who need it. It is anticipated that this work will be completed by the end of summer 2023.</p>

<b>16.</b>	<b>Statistics on the use of Welsh and English when responding to complaints and enquiries</b>
16.1	The Customer Care Officers respond to enquiries and complaints in the chosen language of the enquirer or complainant. See the relevant figures on the use of both languages below.

<b>The Complainant's language choice to make an enquiry/complaint in 2022/2023 – Adults, Health and Well-being Department</b>			
	<b>Welsh</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Informal Enquiries and Complaints</i>	23	29	<b>52</b>
<i>Stage 1</i>	7	15	<b>22</b>
<i>Stage 2</i>	1	1	<b>2</b>
<i>Corporate</i>	0	0	<b>0</b>
<i>Ombudsman</i>	0	0	<b>0</b>

<b>The Complainant's language choice to make an enquiry/complaint in 2022/2023 – Children and Supporting Families Department</b>			
	<b>Welsh</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Stage 1</i>	2	14	<b>16</b>
<i>Stage 2</i>	0	1	<b>1</b>
<i>Corporate</i>	0	0	<b>0</b>
<i>Ombudsman</i>	0	0	<b>0</b>

**APPENDIX 1(a) – EXAMPLES OF COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS TO THE CHILDREN AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES DEPARTMENT DURING 2022/23**

Reference	Brief description	Stage	Team	Response	Lessons to be learnt	Grounds to the complaint
GC/11975-22	Complaint received from a parent regarding the Service. The father parent did not feel that the Service was taking his concern seriously. He wanted an investigation into what had been raised and wanted a new Social Worker on the case.	Stage 1	Meirionnydd and Dwyfor Children's Team	The relevant Team Manager contacted the parent over the phone to discuss the complaint further. He received confirmation that each concern had been addressed in full. Following the full explanation, the complainant felt better and they continued to work with the Service for the benefit of the children.	No lesson identified.	No grounds to the complaint.
GC/12605-22	Complaint received from a parent about a member of staff. The parent felt that the staff member had breached confidentiality.	Stage 1	Fostering Team	The matter was addressed by Helen Parry, the Council's Senior Data Protection Statutory Officer. She identified that there was no evidence of breach of confidentiality.  The Senior Operational Manager – Resources wrote to the complainant with the outcome. The Department understands, although there was no evidence of a breach of confidentiality, the complainant was very emotive about the situation. The staff member wrote personally to the complainant to apologise.	No lesson identified.	No grounds to the complaint.
GC/13021-22	Complaint from a parent about a Social Worker. Felt that the Social Worker did not keep in contact with him and that the relationship with the Social Worker had broken down. Wanted a new Social Worker.	Stage 1	Meirionnydd and Dwyfor Children's Team	The relevant Team Manager contacted the complainant to discuss. It became clear that the parent had high expectations in terms of contact with the Social Worker. The role of the Social Worker was discussed with him, and he was happy to continue working	No lesson identified.	No grounds to the complaint.

				with the Social Worker for the benefit of the children.		
GC/13065-22	A complaint arrived regarding the way the Out of Hours Team dealt with an emergency case regarding assessing an individual to the Hergest Unit.	Stage 1	Out of Hours Team	<p>The relevant Team Manager looked into the complaint and wrote a full response to the complainant. It was important to note that the Out of Hours Team were responding jointly with the Psychologist on call that night.</p> <p>Any decisions regarding the individual's emergency care had been made by the Health Board's staff. The Manager apologised on behalf of the Team for any animosity on that night.</p>	No lesson identified.	No grounds to the complaint.
GC/13488-23	Complaint arrived from a relative of a child. They are unhappy with the result of an assessment and want the matter to be addressed by a Senior Manager.	Stage 1	Fostering Team	As this matter is in the Court, we are unable to process the complaint at this point. Once the final hearing has passed, we will process the complaint in accordance with the procedures of the social services complaints process.	We will look at this once the complaint has been investigated.	We will look at this once the complaint has been investigated.
GC/13706-23	Historical complaint by an individual. The individual wanted to make a complaint that the Social Worker had not listened and responded to her following an incident from ten years ago. She wanted a full investigation into her complaint.	Stage 1	Arfon Children's Team	<p>The Senior Manager discussed fully with the Senior Complaints Officer as ten years had passed. The Social Worker did not work here anymore, therefore we would need to rely on records only to investigate the complaint.</p> <p>As so much time has passed, it would not be possible to conduct a fair investigation into the complaint. However, to ensure that the individual has the opportunity to have a</p>	We have not received the Report yet.	In accordance with the complaints guidelines, as the matter is a historical one and after a full discussion, it was decided that it was not possible to fully investigate the complaint.

				hearing, the Department appointed an Independent Person to meet the complainant to listen to her experiences and write a short report. The Department will use the observations to learn and improve the service in the future.		
GC/13022-22	Another historical complaint, dating back once again around ten years. The individual felt that the Department had let her down, not kept her safe and wanted to pursue compensation.	Stage I	Arfon Children's Team	As the individual had declared that she was going to bring a compensation claim against the Department, it would not be suitable for the Department to respond to the complaint at this point. Providing a response could disrupt any Court process.	No lesson to note.	We cannot look further into the complaint as she declared her intention to pursue compensation.
GC/13656-23	Complaint by a parent about an Independent Reviewing Officer. The parent had received information that the Officer had used inappropriate language when describing her in a conversation with her ex-partner.	Stage I	Safeguarding and Quality Unit	The Senior Safeguarding and Quality Manager investigated the complaint. The complainant received a letter explaining fully the steps taken and the outcome of the investigation. There was no evidence to correspond with what had been noted within the individual's complaint letter.	No lesson identified.	No grounds to the complaint.

**APPENDIX I(b) – EXAMPLES OF COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS TO THE PARENTS, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING DEPARTMENT DURING 2022/23**

Reference	Brief description	Stage	Team	Response	Lessons to be learnt	Grounds to the complaint
GC/12025-22	A relative concerned about the long delay before being able to arrange domiciliary care provision for a service user who is waiting temporarily in a residential home	Stage 1	Adults Service	Apology and an explanation provided about the reason for the lack of domiciliary care hours' availability. Department committed to try to arrange domiciliary care as soon as possible	No lesson identified.	Confirm that there are grounds to the complaint
GC/12085-22	Service user unhappy that a member of staff had contacted her via telephone instead of sending an e-mail	Stage 1	Adults Service	Apology provided and a note added to the file to ensure that staff only send e-mails from now on	Important to check what means of contact service users prefer	Confirm that there are grounds to the complaint
GC/12806-22	The family of a service user expressed concerns about a domiciliary care service coming to an end as the external care company was withdrawing from the area, and no service was available to replace it. Family urgently sought an explanation and solution	Stage 1	Adults Service	An apology and a full explanation were provided about the circumstances that had arisen as an external care company had withdrawn from a specific area. Several care packages had ended, and hard work was being carried out to try to get another provider to take over	No lesson identified.	Confirm that there are grounds to the complaint
GC/12860-22	Neighbour of service user reporting that domiciliary care staff leave farm gates open as they come and go to care for him.	Stage 1	Domiciliary Care (Internal Provider)	A full apology was provided, as well as distributing clear instructions to all domiciliary care staff about the importance of keeping gates closed for safety reasons	Remind staff of the Countryside Code and the importance of closing farm	Confirm that there are grounds to the complaint

					gates at all times	
GC/12979-23	A service user's family expressing concern about the lack of domiciliary care provision available to enable their relative to be discharged from hospital	Stage I	Adults Service	Information provided on the reasons for the delay before the domiciliary care could be arranged in this case. Commitment made to seek to resolve the problem as soon as possible	No new lesson identified	Confirm that there are grounds to the complaint
GC/13605-23	A service user wanted to submit a complaint about the lack of support from the service to meet their needs.	Stage I	Adults Service	The Area Manager undertook a home visit to discuss her concerns and to resolve the matters in question	No new lesson identified	No grounds to the complaint
GC/13765-22	A service user's relative expressing concern about the long time that had passed since her relative had been placed on the waiting list for domiciliary care.	Stage I	Adults Service	Information provided as well as full information about the reasons why many people were experiencing a long delay before being able to commence domiciliary care packages	No new lesson identified	Confirm that there are grounds to the complaint
GC/13825-23	An advocate on behalf of a service user's family noting allegations by the family that personal information about them had been shared with another family member without their consent	Stage I	Adults Service	Full investigation carried out. No evidence that information had been shared with any person that should not have received it. Full response provided.	No new lesson identified.	No grounds to the complaint