

Children's Services Department
Compliments, Complaints and Representations Annual Report
1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Monitoring customer feedback provides us with valuable insight into where we can improve our service provision and/or delivery. The department has invested in the feedback team by means of the recruitment of 2 complaints officers and a complaints administrator in order to provide an enhanced service to customers and operational teams.
- 1.2 This report provides information about compliments, representations and statutory and corporate complaints received during the 12 months from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.
- 1.3 A complaint may be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response. Representations may not always be complaints; they might also be positive remarks or ideas that require a response from the local authority.
- 1.4 The majority of complaints relating to children's social care are dealt with under the statutory complaints procedures set out in *The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006* and the accompanying statutory guidance: *Getting the Best from Complaints*. Corporate complaints are in relation to wider children's services provided by the department that are not covered by the statutory framework.
- 1.5 Complaints and representations for children's services are logged and progressed by the children's services feedback team (part of the wider quality assurance team), overseen by the complaints manager. Young people who complain on their own behalf are offered the service of an advocate to support them for the duration of their complaint.
- 1.6 Unfortunately, the service has seen a further delay in the implementation of the govService customer relationship management system from Granicus. This system was hoped to bring about a more effective monitoring and handling and make the operation of the complaints function much more efficient. The aim of the implementation of the system was to enable the complainant to see the progress of their complaint, generate workflow for response and capture complaints data for better monitoring and analysis. We continue with work to incorporate a more efficient customer facing compliment and complaints system, which may also mean that an alternative solution is required.

2. Compliments

2.1 In the period between April 2023 and March 2024, the department received 615 compliments compared to 812 the previous year, a reduction of 24.3%.

2.2 During the period April 2023 to March 2024, compliments received continue to be recorded centrally, and directly from business services assistants within service areas. Most compliments are from other professionals, closely followed by parents, the highest percentage are for individual practitioners and relate to the impact and outcomes for children.

2.3 A sample of positive feedback is provided below:

"Hi, sorry just leaving you this note because I feel like it and to let you know and, it's late and I know you are not at work like now obviously, but you will probably hear this in the morning.

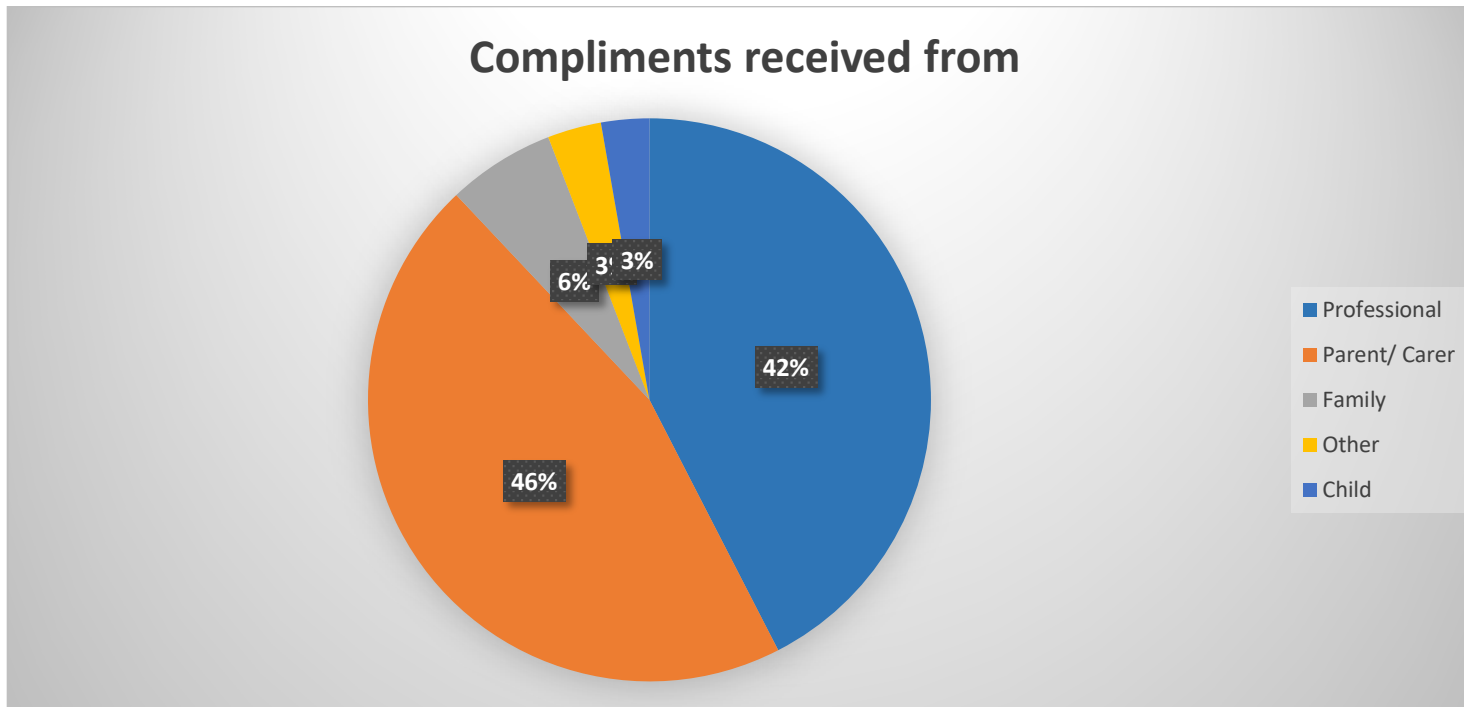
I just wanted you to know, you are one of the best Social Workers I have ever, ever had and you mean the world to me because you have looked after me and supported me so much for the last year or so and I couldn't have done it without you and just to let you know you are number one social worker and thank you so much for everything. I don't normally send voice notes so sorry. Errm, but just know that I appreciate everything you do for me because just no matter what whenever I shout at you, you never ever turn me away and that means the world to me because it means I'm going to trust you and believe in you and know that no matter what, you will be there for me every step of the way, I'm in an amazing place so just so you know you are the best social worker ever and you don't need me to send you this in a voice note as I tell you twice a day anyway but I felt like it so yeah. See you later potato. "
(Child to social worker in the high peak and north dales looked after children team)

"[Social Worker] has been our light at the end of our tunnel, she has made me believe in people again when I thought all hope was lost. She has helped this family tremendously and for that I owe her so much love and gratitude. She deserves a medal and you should be so proud of your employee she has been the rock I've needed" (Parent of a child for a social worker in the south Derbyshire social work team)

“Thank you for everything you’ve done, without you we would have been lost. You’ve explained everything and helped me understand the jargon that people just assume I know and understand” (when discussing SEN) (Parent of child for Amber Valley 0-5 early help service)

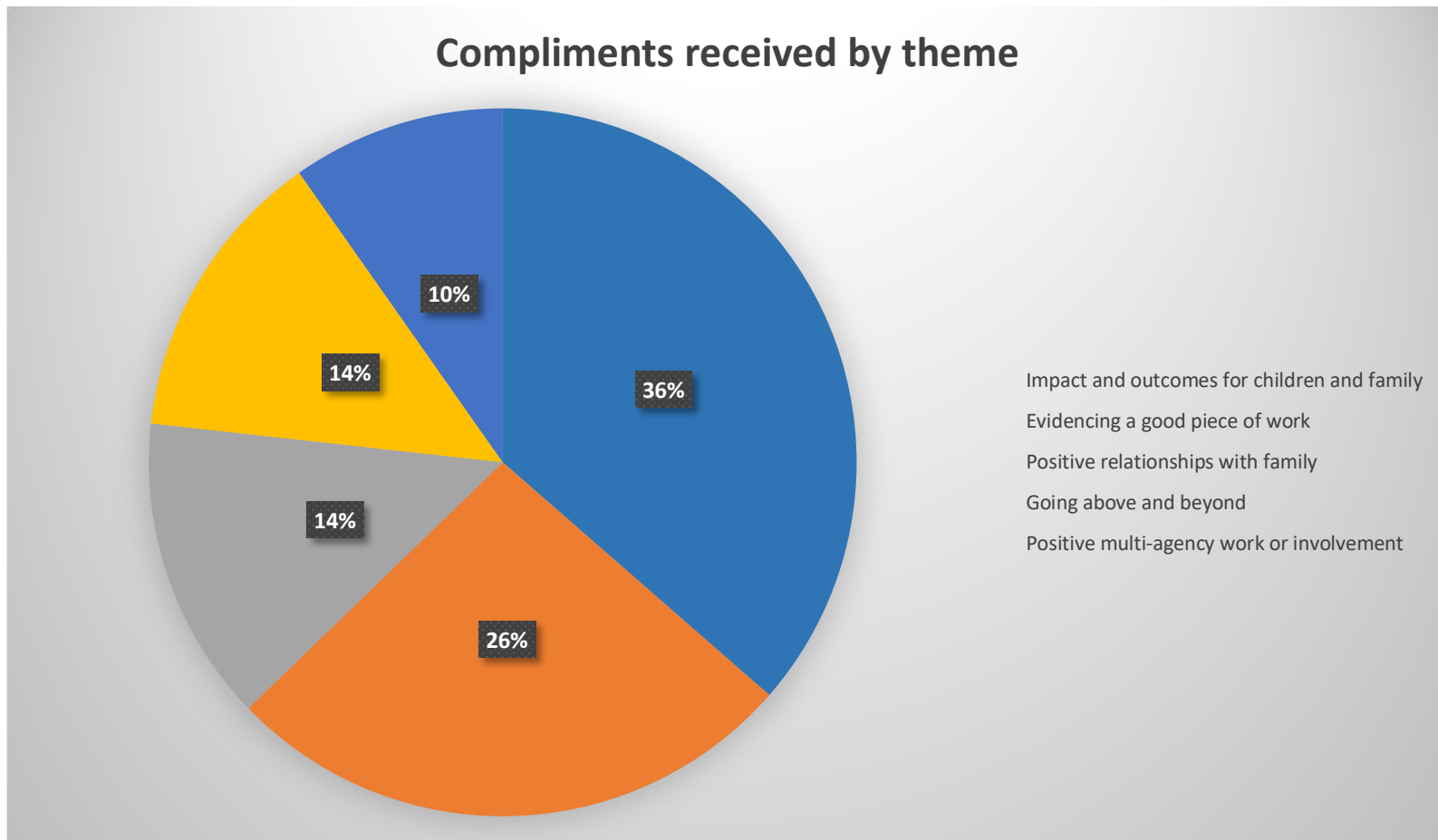
2.4 Compliments are received from many sources; the table and chart below show the number of compliments received from parents & carers, directly from children, family members, professionals, and others or anonymous.

Parent/ Carer	Child	Family member	Not specified/ anonymous	Professional	Other
280	17	38	0	261	19

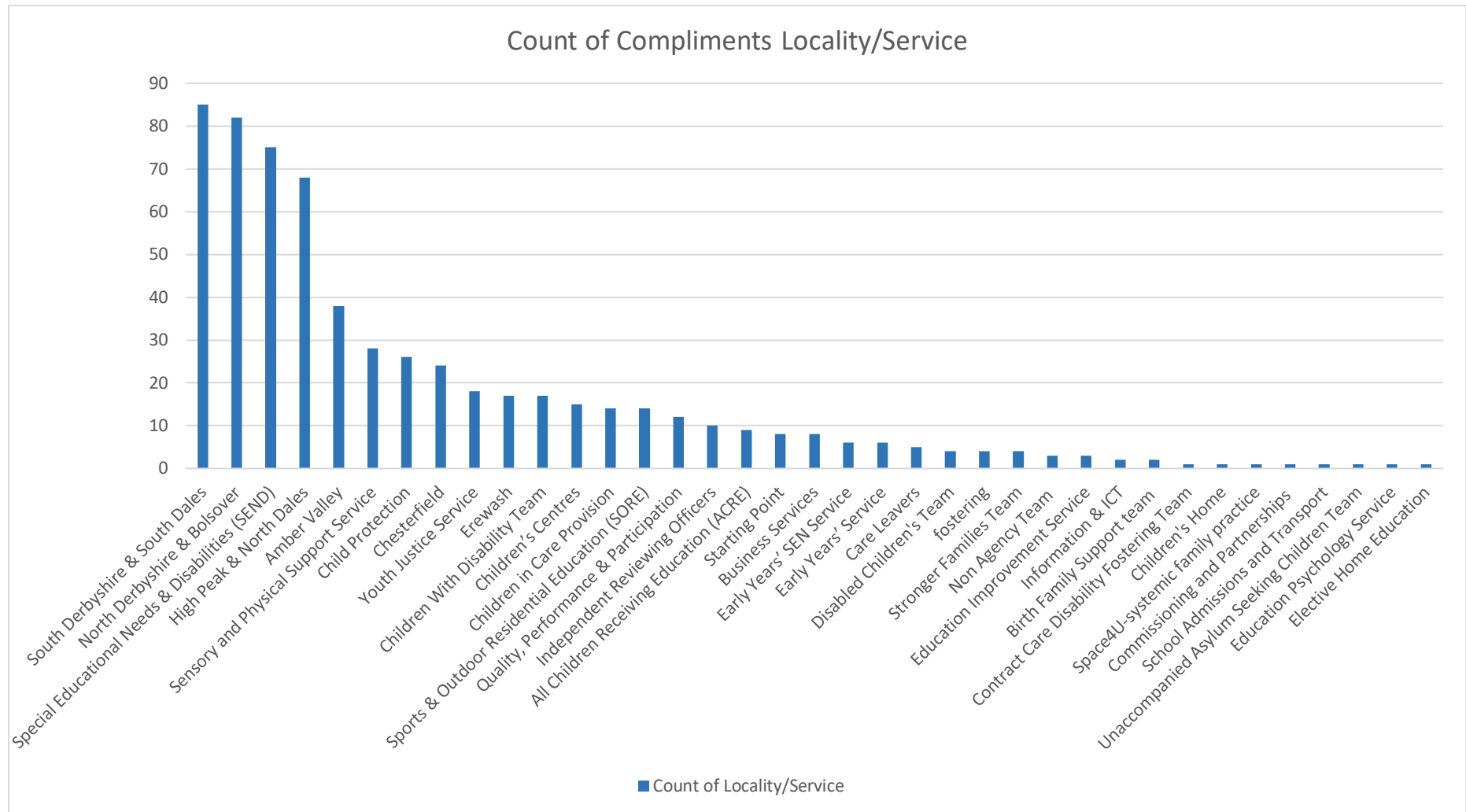


2.5 The table and chart below show the number of compliments received by theme:

Recognising a good piece of work	Going above and beyond	Positive impact and outcomes for child and/or family	Positive multi-agency work/ involvement	Positive relationships with family
162	83	224	60	86



2.6 The table and graph below show the number of compliments received by service area/ locality team.

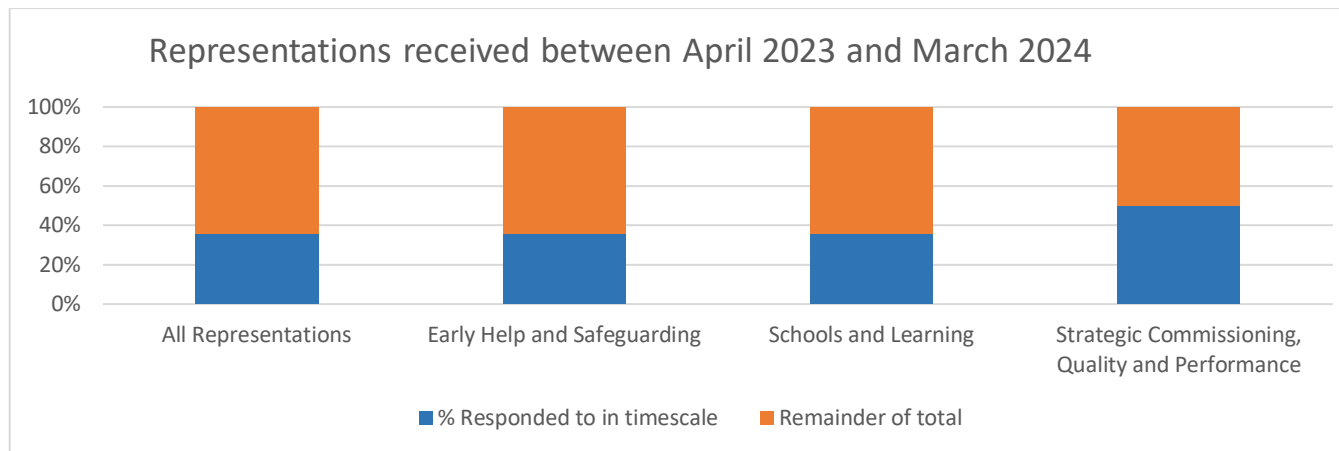


Locality/Service	Count of Locality/Service
South Derbyshire & South Dales	85
North Derbyshire & Bolsover	82
Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)	75
High Peak & North Dales	68
Amber Valley	38
Sensory and Physical Support Service	28
Child Protection	26
Chesterfield	24
Youth Justice Service	18
Erewash	17
Children With Disability Team	17
Children's Centres	15
Children in Care Provision	14
Sports & Outdoor Residential Education (SORE)	14
Quality, Performance & Participation	12
Independent Reviewing Officers	10
All Children Receiving Education (ACRE)	9
Starting Point	8
Business Services	8
Early Years' SEN Service	6
Early Years' Service	6
Care Leavers	5
Disabled Children's Team	4
fostering	4
Stronger Families Team	4
Non Agency Team	3
Education Improvement Service	3
Information & ICT	2
Birth Family Support team	2

Contract Care Disability Fostering Team	1
Children's Home	1
Space4U-systemic family practice	1
Commissioning and Partnerships	1
School Admissions and Transport	1
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Team	1
Education Psychology Service	1
Elective Home Education	1

3. Representations

- 3.1 The feedback team tracks representations made to elected members, MPs, and senior leaders, and ensures that responses are provided via the most appropriate council officer or elected member. Representations may not always be complaints; they might also be positive remarks or enquiries that require a response from the council.
- 3.2 In some cases, a complaint may already have been received or may be made following the representation. Oversight is given to these responses, and the complaints manager records and monitor the progress of the responses.
- 3.3 From April 2023 to March 2024, 626 representations were received compared with 408 last year, a 53.4% increase. There were 37 other enquiries made to the department that were re-directed to a more appropriate service to provide a response, for example a school or health service. All but 1 were acknowledged by the feedback team within 3 days. 22 remain open at year end. Overall, 228 (36.6%) received a response within the 10-day timescale. This compares to 63% in the previous year. 142 were received under the early help and safeguarding division. 478 were received under the schools and learning division, and the highest number of these (333) related to concerns in the SEND service with a further 69 relating to school transport and admissions.
- 3.4 The chart below shows the number of representations responded to within 10 working days.



4. Statutory Complaints

4.1 The statutory framework sets out a three-stage resolution process:

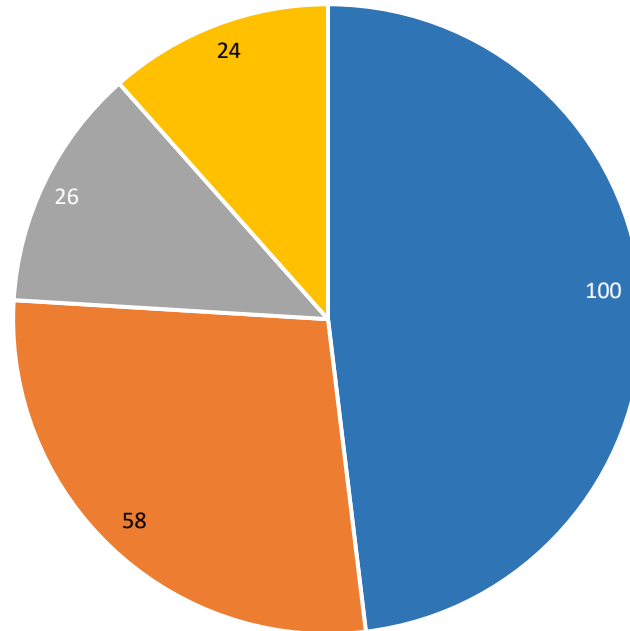
- **Stage 1 – Local resolution**
Complaints at stage 1 should be completed within 10 working days unless the circumstances are deemed complex in which case this can be extended by a further 10 working days.
- **Stage 2 – Investigation**
Where the concern is unable to be resolved locally the complainant has the right to request consideration at stage 2. Consideration of complaints at stage 2 is normally achieved through an investigation conducted by an investigating officer and an independent person. Stage 2 commences either when the complainant requests it or where the complainant and the local authority have agreed that stage 1 is not appropriate. The investigation should be completed, and the response sent to the complainant within 25 working days though this can be extended to a maximum of 65 working days where it is not possible to complete the investigation within 25 working days.
- **Stage 3 – Review panels**

Where the complainant remains dissatisfied following an investigation at stage 2, they can request consideration of the complaint at an independent review panel. The review panel should be held within 30 working days, considers the adequacy of the stage 2 investigation, and makes recommendations to try and achieve resolution.

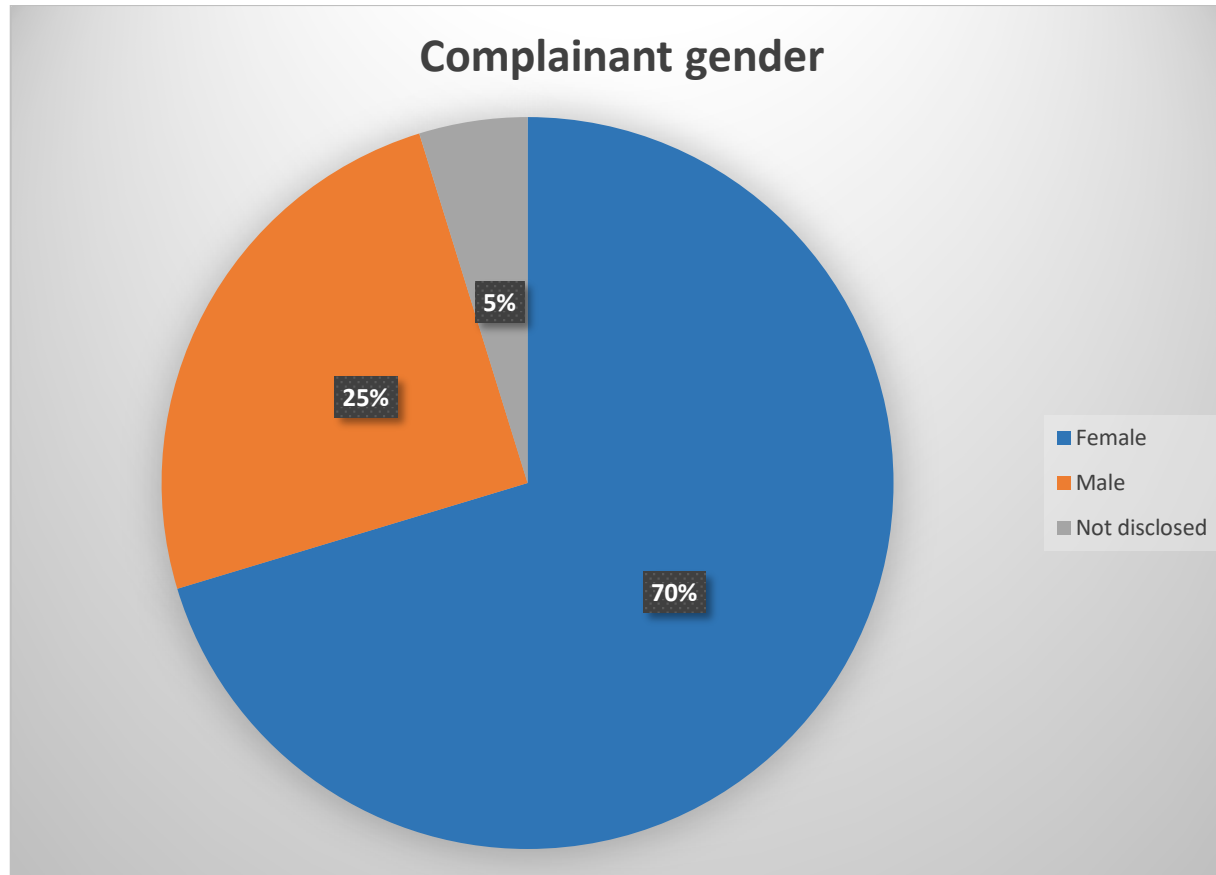
Statutory Complaints – Stage 1

4.2 208 enquiries were received between April 2023 and March 2024 regarding the local authority's social care provision (as defined in the Children Act 1989). This represents a 40.5% increase in comparison with the 148 received in 2022/23. Of the 208 enquiries received, 100 (48%) proceeded to complete the formal complaints process. This compares to 64 (43.2% of the total enquiries) Those enquiries that did not enter the formal process were classed as outside the remit, for example where the person making the complaint did not have the right to do so, by means of parental responsibility, significant interest, consent or where the complaints were historic, or where the subject of the complaint was not receiving a service from children's services and therefore was not eligible to be considered under the formal statutory complaints process. Concerns may also have been addressed informally or a complaint withdrawn from the process.

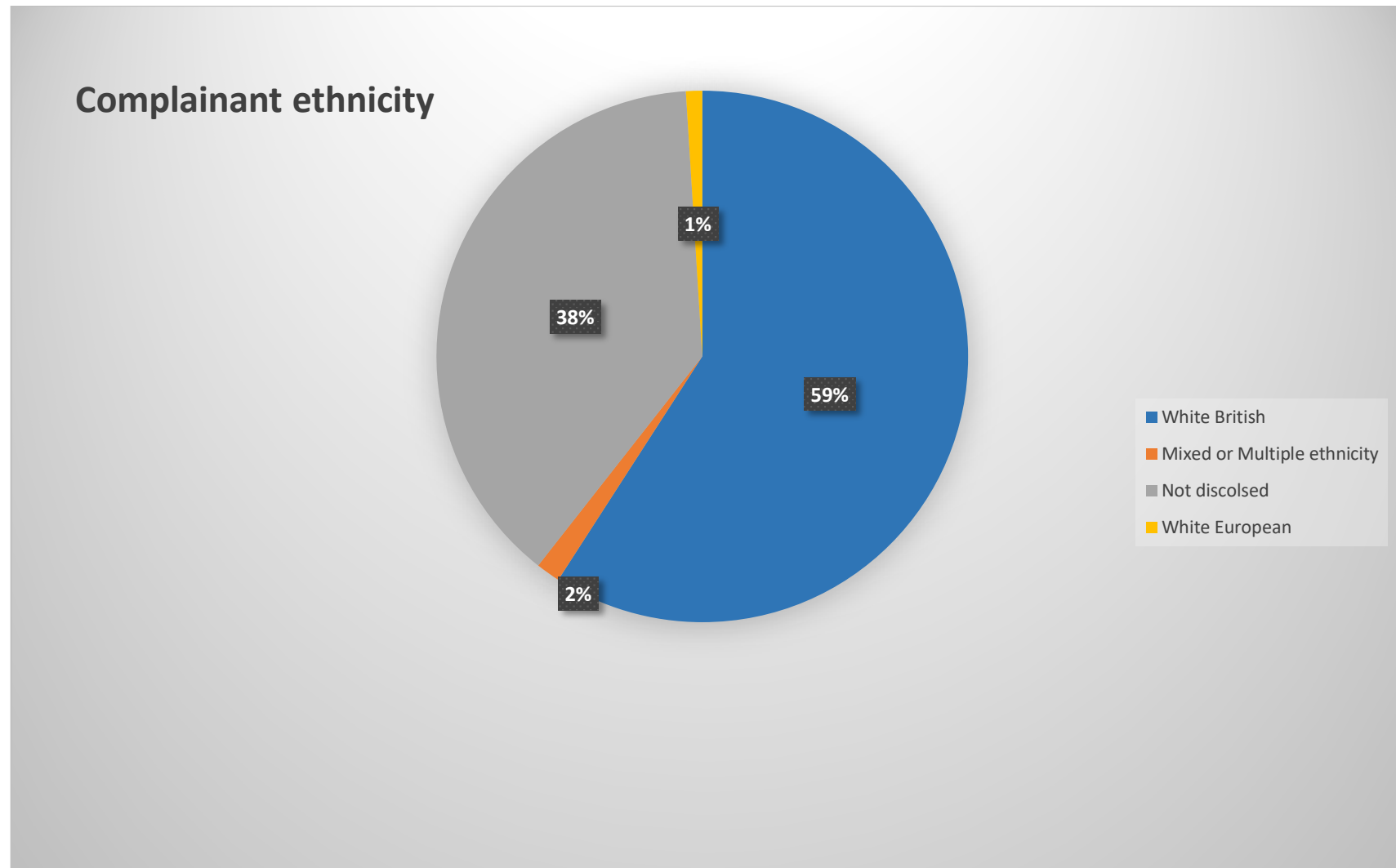
Total enquiries received



■ Proceeded to formal complaint ■ Refused ■ Withdrawn ■ Resolved informally



4.3 The above chart shows the percentage of enquiries received by gender. The majority of complaints were raised by females (70%). The department aims to improve the recording of complainant demographics, with the implementation of a customer facing CRM system that incorporates complaints, compliments and comment recording.

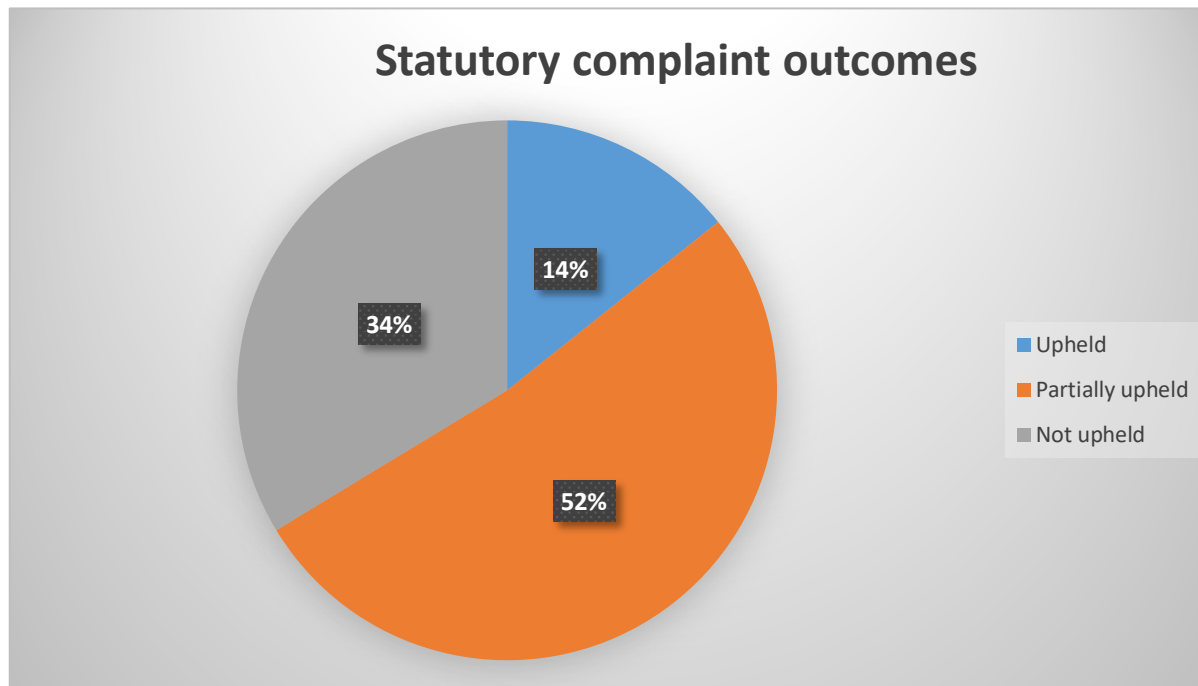


4.4 The above chart shows the percentage of enquiries received from different ethnicities. The majority of complaints were raised by complainants from a white British ethnic background (59%).

4.5 Of the 208 statutory complaint enquiries received:

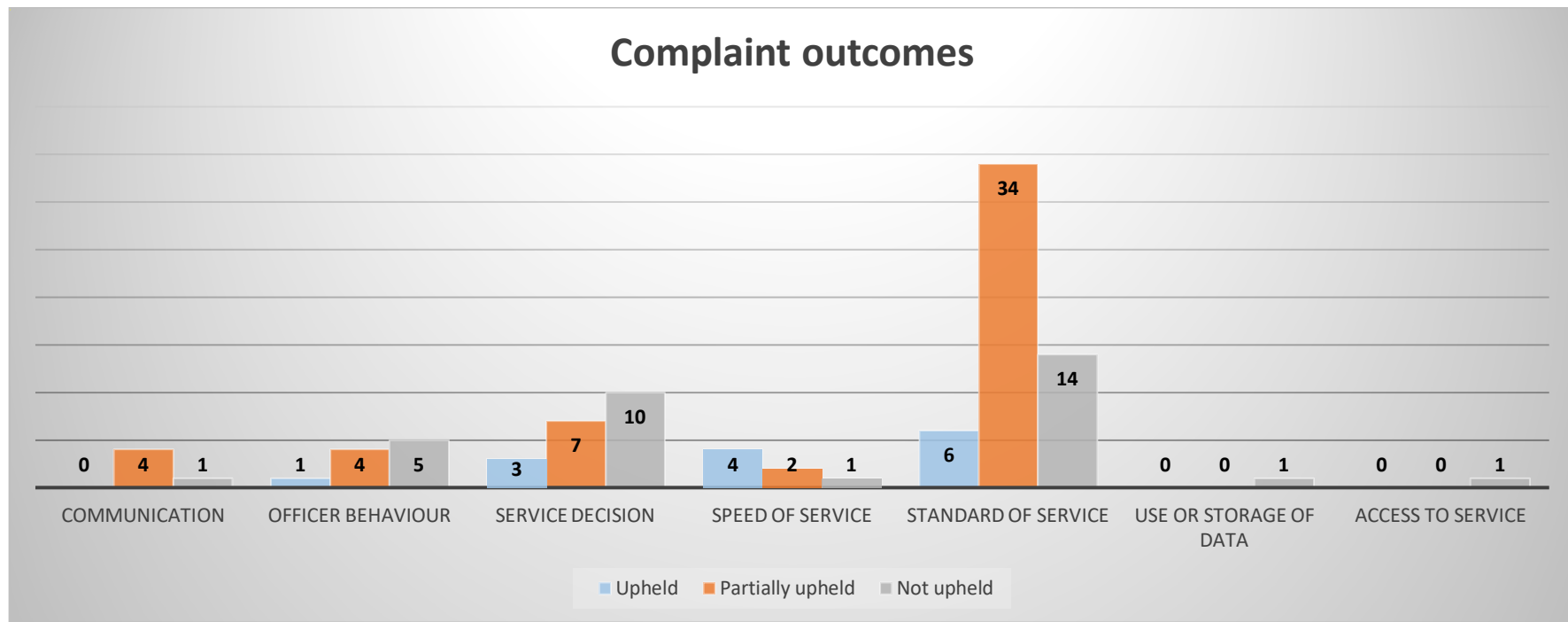
- 100% were acknowledged within timescales.
- Of the 100 that proceeded to a formal complaint, 34 (34%) of these were responded to within 20 working days, this is a large decrease from 63% the previous year.
- 1 complaint was still active at the end of March and 17 had been placed on hold due to another concurrent investigation.
- 14 (14%) were upheld, 51 (51%) were partially upheld, 33 (33%) were not upheld and 1 complaint did not receive a response at stage 1 and progressed immediately to stage 2 of the statutory process.

4.6 The chart below show the outcomes of the statutory complaints.

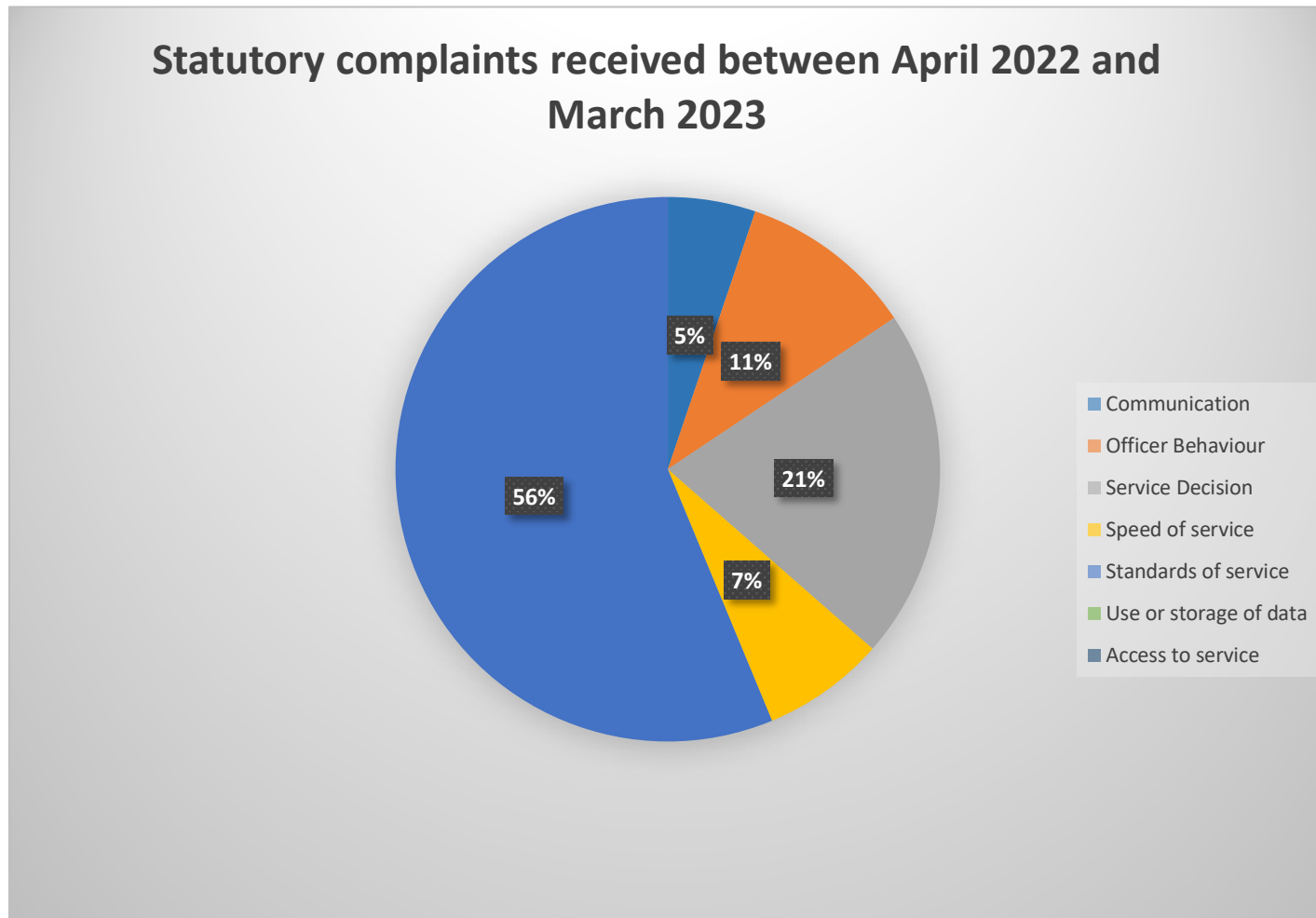


	Communication	Officer behaviour	Service decision	Speed of service	Standard of service	Use or storage of data	Access to service
Total	5	10	20	7	54	1	1
Upheld	0	1	3	4	6	0	0
Partially Upheld	4	4	7	2	34	0	0
Not Upheld	1	5	10	1	14	1	1

*Does not add up to 100 as one of the complaints progressed directly to stage 2 of the statutory process and therefore did not receive a response at stage 1 and 1 remains open.

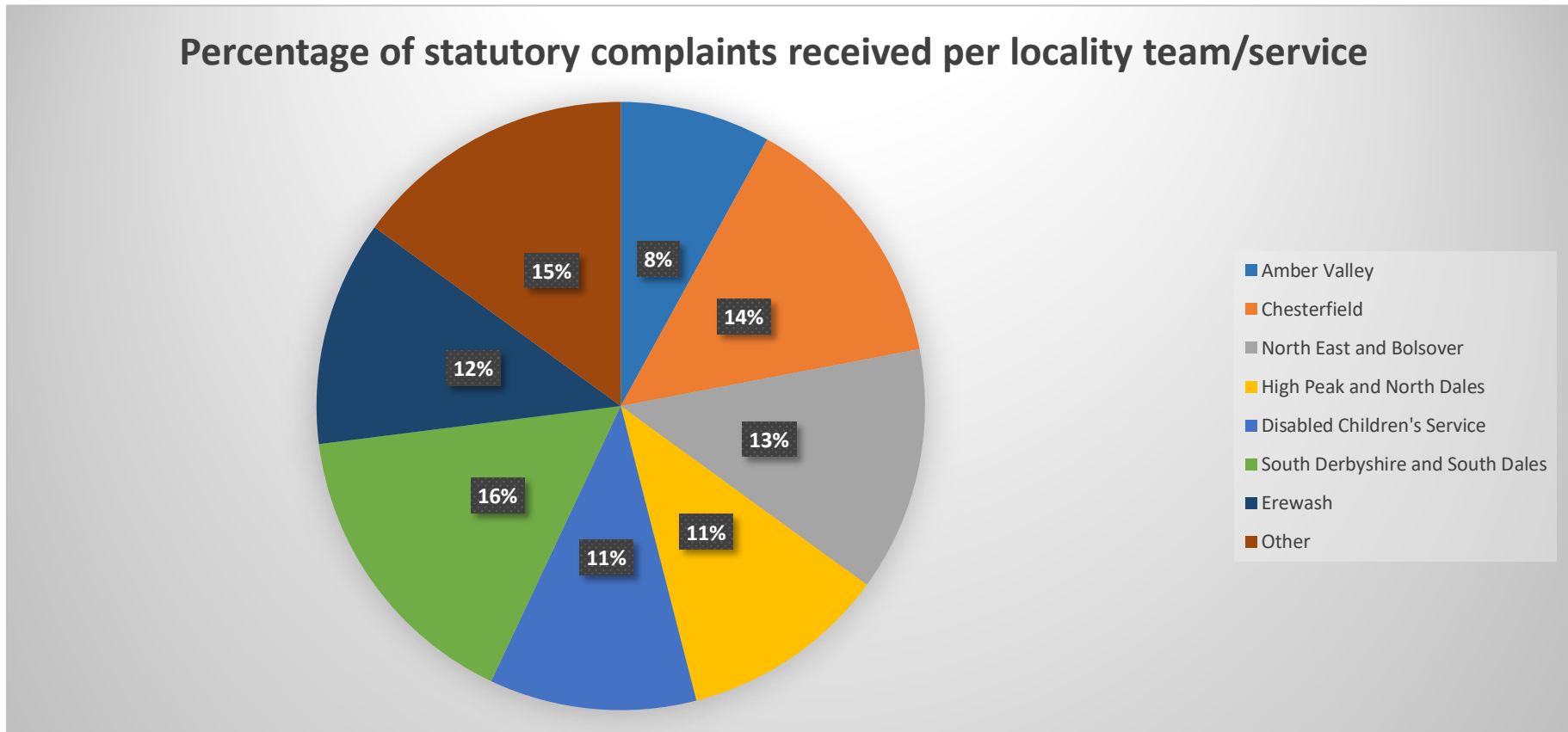


4.7 The chart above shows the number of complaints upheld, partially upheld, and not upheld by complaint category.



4.8 The chart above shows the the complaints received by theme. The largest bnumber of caomplaints received were for the standard of service.

4.9 The chart below shows the percentage of total complaints received and responded to formally by locality team/service.



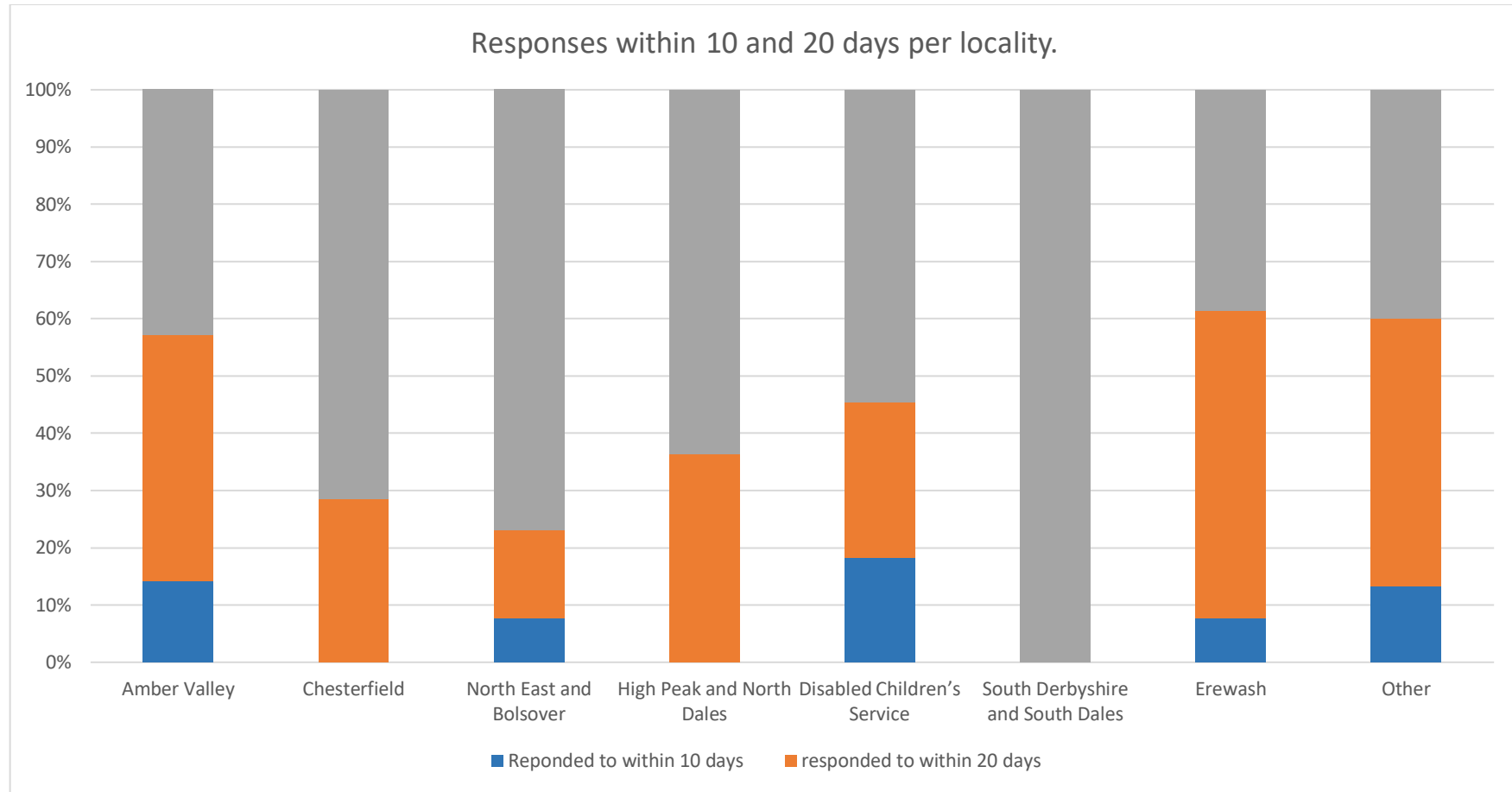
Number of complaints received by locality:

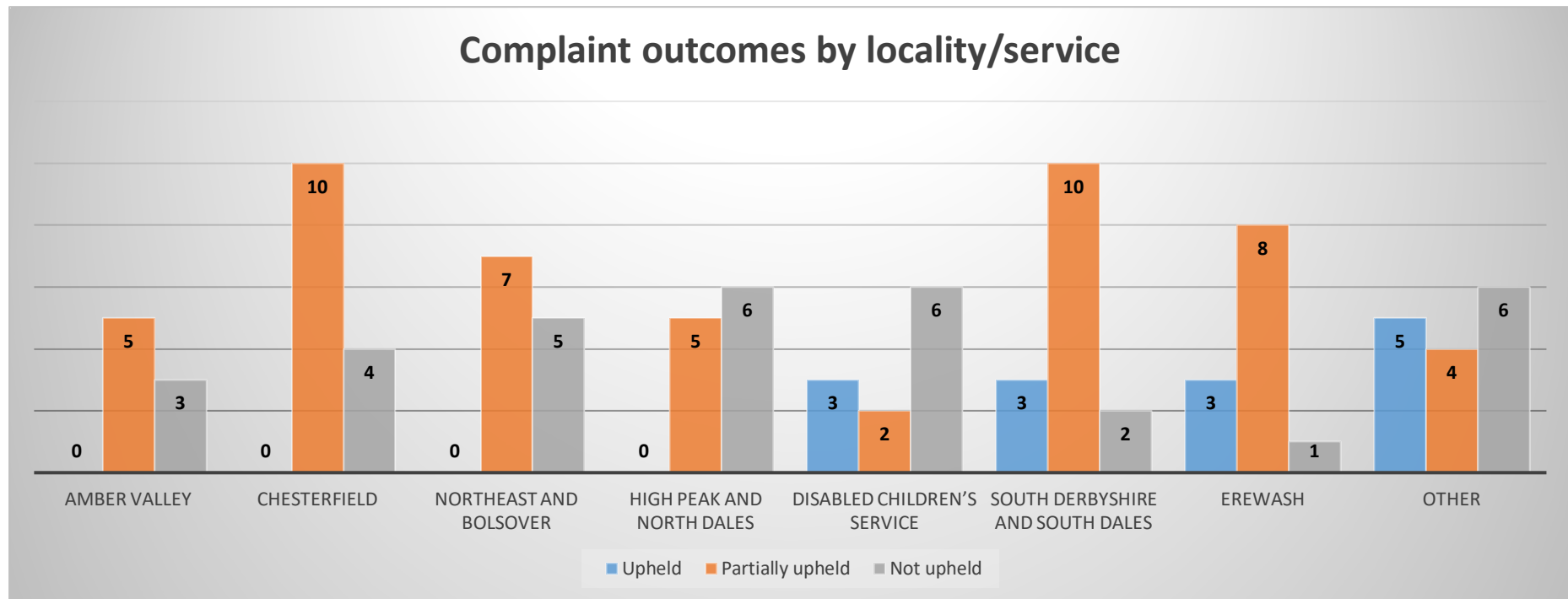
Locality/ Service	Amber Valley	Chesterfield	Northeast and Bolsover	High Peak and North Dales	Disabled children's service	South Derbyshire and South Dales	Erewash	Other
Number of formal complaints	8	14	13	11	11	16	12	15
Responded to with 10 days	1	0	1	0	2	0	1	2
Responded to within 20 days (includes those responded to with 10 days)	4	4	3	4	5	0	8	9
Complaint upheld	0	0	0	0	3	3	3	5
Partially upheld	5	10	7	5	2	10	8	4
Not upheld	3	4	5	6	6	2	1	6
Number that remained open at year end	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Requested stage 2	2	3	5	4	5	4 (1 directly)	3	2

*These columns do not add up as one of the complaints progressed directly to stage 2 of the statutory process and therefore did not receive a response at stage 1 and 1 remains open.

4.10 Included in the 'other' category are starting point, fostering and adoption services, leaving care service and the child protection service. The 2 stage 2 requests in the 'other' category were for starting point and the leaving care service.

4.11 The chart below shows the complaints received by locality/ service and those complaints responded to in 10 and 20 working days.





4.12 The chart above shows the number of complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld by locality/ service.

Amber Valley

12 enquiries were submitted to the Amber Valley locality. 8 progressed to be formally investigated.

Chesterfield

23 enquiries were submitted to the Chesterfield locality. 14 progressed to be formally investigated.

Northeast Derbyshire and Bolsover

18 enquiries were submitted to the Northeast Derbyshire and Bolsover locality. 13 progressed to be formally investigated.

High Peak and North Dales

18 enquiries were submitted to the High Peak and North Dales locality. 11 progressed to be formally investigated.

Children with Disabilities Service

14 enquiries were submitted to the children with disabilities service. 11 progressed to be formally investigated.

South Derbyshire and South Dales

22 enquiries were submitted to the South Derbyshire and South Dales locality. 16 progressed to be formally investigated.

Erewash

16 enquiries were submitted to the Erewash locality and 12 progressed to be formally investigated.

5. Statutory Complaints – Stage 2

5.1 31 requests for escalation to stage 2 of the statutory complaints process were received between April 2023 and March 2024. (Some of these requests were from complaints initially made in the previous financial year).

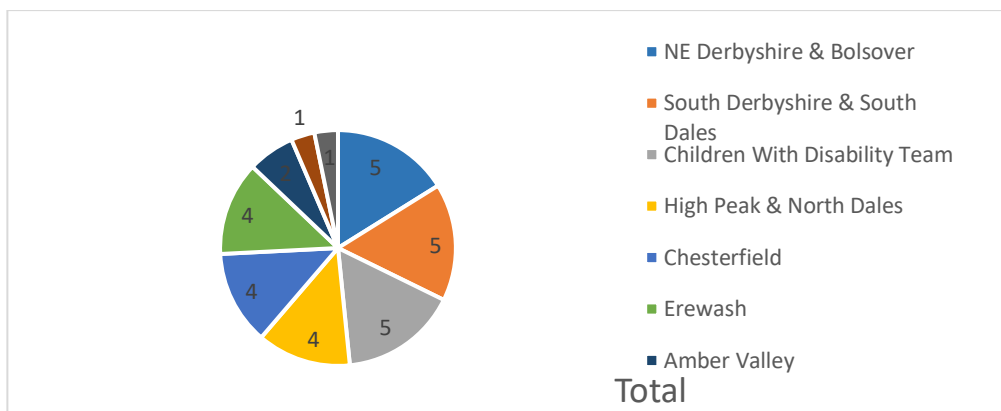
5.2 Although 31 requests were made, 20 progressed formally to stage 2 investigation (compared to 17 the previous year) with others being resolved prior to the completion of the investigation or withdrawn. Reasons why some stage 2 requests did not proceed to investigation are detailed in the table below. Where a complaint is recorded as on hold, this is because there was another concurrent investigation (for example a court process) which prevented the complaint being investigated in accordance with statutory guidance.

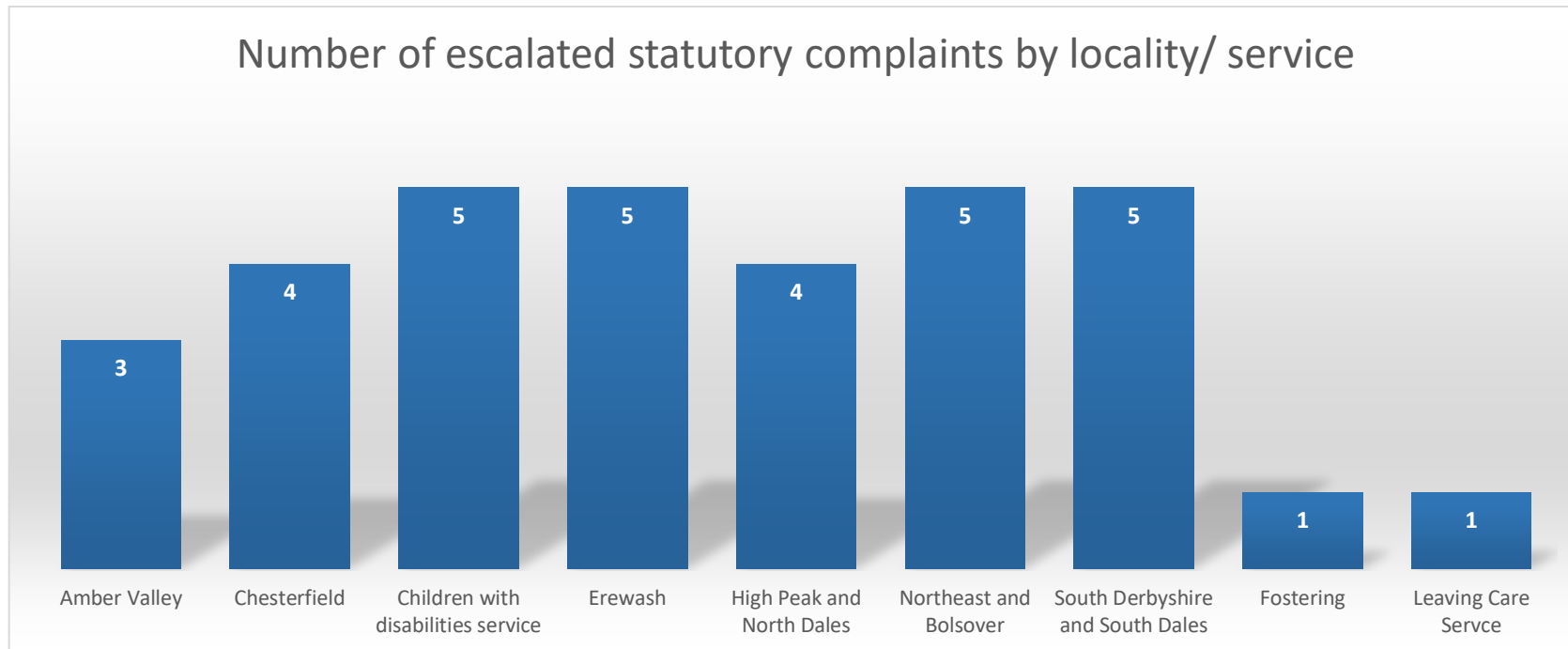
5.3 14 of the 20 have completed the investigation process and 6 remain open and under investigation. 10 of the 14 were completed within a timescale agreed by the complainant and 4 exceeded this timeframe by a few days in each circumstance. 8 of those that have completed the investigation process have been partially upheld, 1 was upheld and the remaining 5 were not upheld.

Total received	On hold	Resolved or withdrawn	Total Investigated	Upheld	Partially upheld	Not upheld	Open at time of report
32	2	5	14	1	8	5	6

5.4 The investigating officers also worked on completing investigations that remained open or on hold from 2022/23 during this financial year.

Locality	Count
NE Derbyshire & Bolsover	5
South Derbyshire & South Dales	5
Children With Disability Team	5
High Peak & North Dales	4
Chesterfield	4
Erewash	4
Amber Valley	2
Leaving Care	1
Fostering & Adoption	1
Grand Total	31





6. Statutory Complaints - Stage 3

6.1 During 2023/23, the children's services received 11 requests for a stage three panel review. 6 of these have been completed, compared to 4 in the previous year. The department uses independent panel members and panel chairs contracted through a provider of independent social workers.

6.2 Most review panels were convened at a time agreeable to the complainant and took place on a virtual basis via Microsoft Teams or via a hybrid approach. 1 panel was held completely in person.

6.3 2 of these were withdrawn by the complainants. One was withdrawn as the complainants decided they did not wish to progress to a panel review and one complainant who had allowed her parents to represent her views through the complaints process, withdrew her consent at stage three.

6.4 Children's services have 3 panel reviews which we are waiting to hold. Two of these have been postponed, one due to complainant illness and one due to the chair of the panel needing to rearrange. The final stage has a date set for completion in May 2024.

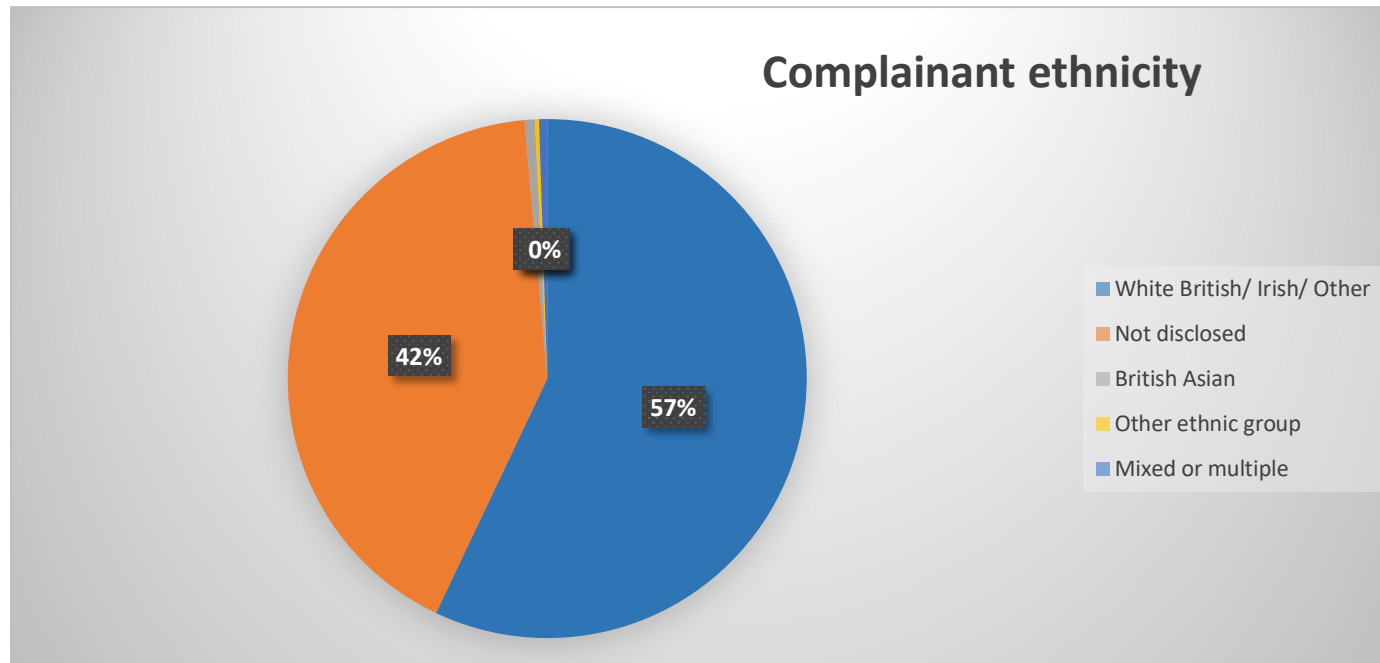
6.5 Of the 6 stage three panel hearings which have taken place last financial year, the panel agreed with 4 of the outcomes that were found at stage two investigation and disagreed with 2, where on one of the panels, the panel overturned 5 of the previous not-upheld points of complaint, the second, the panel changed the outcome on three of the previous findings from the stage two investigation.

Stage three review panels by locality social work team

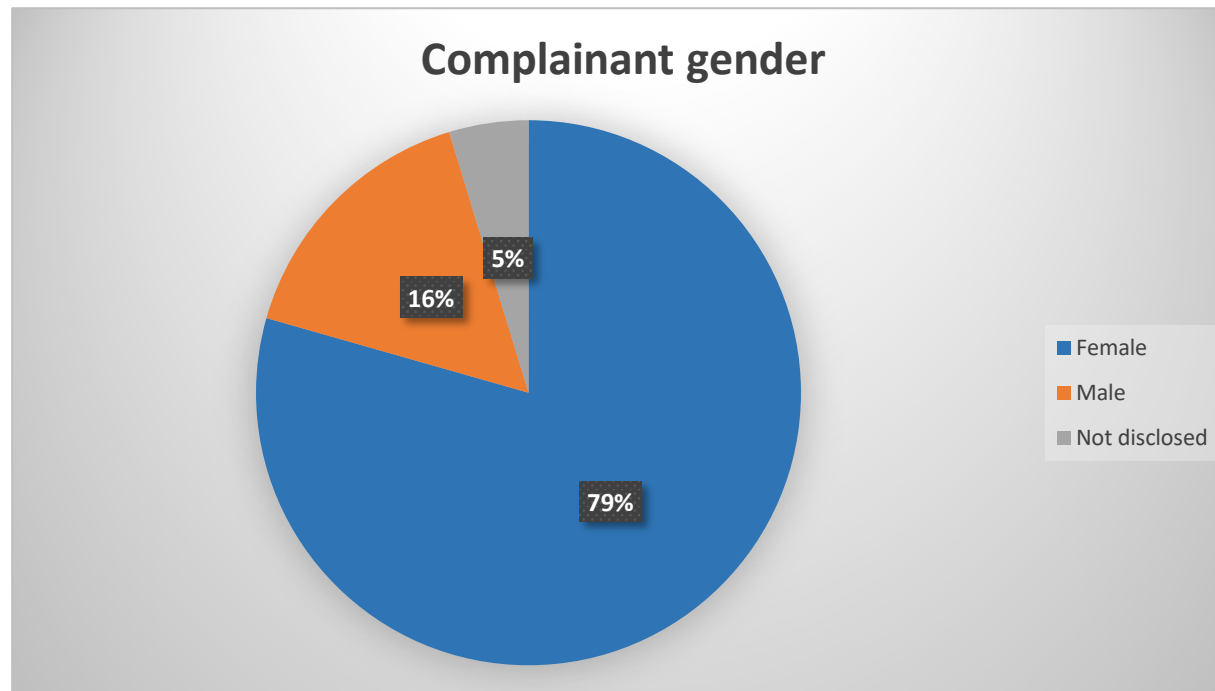
Locality or Service	Count of completed review panels
South Derbyshire & South Dales	0
Chesterfield	1
NE Derbyshire & Bolsover	1
Children With Disability Team	0
Erewash	2
High Peak & North Dales	1
Amber Valley	1
Grand Total	6

7. Corporate Complaints

- 7.1 The statutory complaints procedure covers complaints about councils' actions under Part 3 and some of Parts 4 and 5 of the Children Act 1989, as well as some adoption and special guardianship services. All other complaints are considered under the council's corporate complaint procedure.
- 7.2 Under the current corporate complaints procedure, attempts should be made to respond to complaints in a timely manner and will usually involve the complaint being:
- Dealt with at the time by the officer receiving the complaint with no need for an additional response.
 - Passed to the appropriate line manager or senior manager for consideration and response.
- 7.3 Where the complaint is not resolved at the time, within 3 working days of receipt an acknowledgment will be sent including the expected date for the response. A full response should be made at the earliest possible time and in general this should not exceed the standard target of 28 calendar days. To ensure all the relevant facts are available and enable a full investigation to be carried out the target date can be extended. If the complainant is unhappy with the initial response this may be passed to a senior manager for consideration and a final response provided.
- 7.4 951 enquiries were received in 2023/24 compared to 500 the previous year: a 90.2% increase. A total of 787 of these were formally responded to under the council's corporate complaints procedure compared to 392 the previous year. 784 (99.6%) of those formally investigated were acknowledged within 3 days and 367 (46.6%) were responded to within the target of 28 calendar days. This is a significant decrease from 60% the previous year.
- 7.5 The corporate procedure would be used when issues or concerns resulting in a complaint fall outside of the scope of the statutory procedure; this means that some social care teams have received corporate complaints alongside statutory ones.

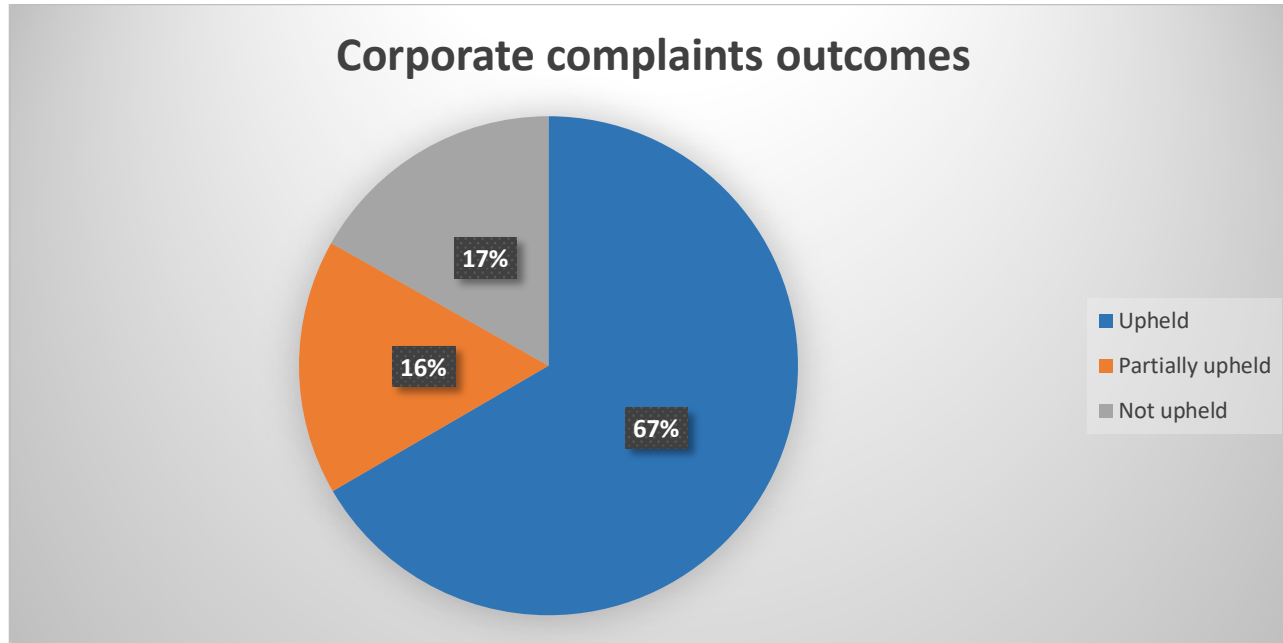


7.6 The above chart shows the percentage of complaints received from different ethnicities. The majority of complaints were raised by complainants from a white British background (57%). The table above does not show those who did not disclose their ethnicity. Within Derbyshire's 0-17 population, 5.5% are from 'all other ethnic groups combined'.



7.7 The above chart shows the percentage of complaints received by male and female gender. The majority of complaints were raised by females (79%) as the primary person to have raised the complaint. Only 16% of complaints were raised by males, but an increase from 8% the previous year. The council continues to aim to improve the recording of complaints from complainants of different genders with the implementation of the customer relations management system or alternative complaints management system.

7.8 The chart below shows corporate complaint outcomes. Complaints made to the SEND are more likely to be upheld.

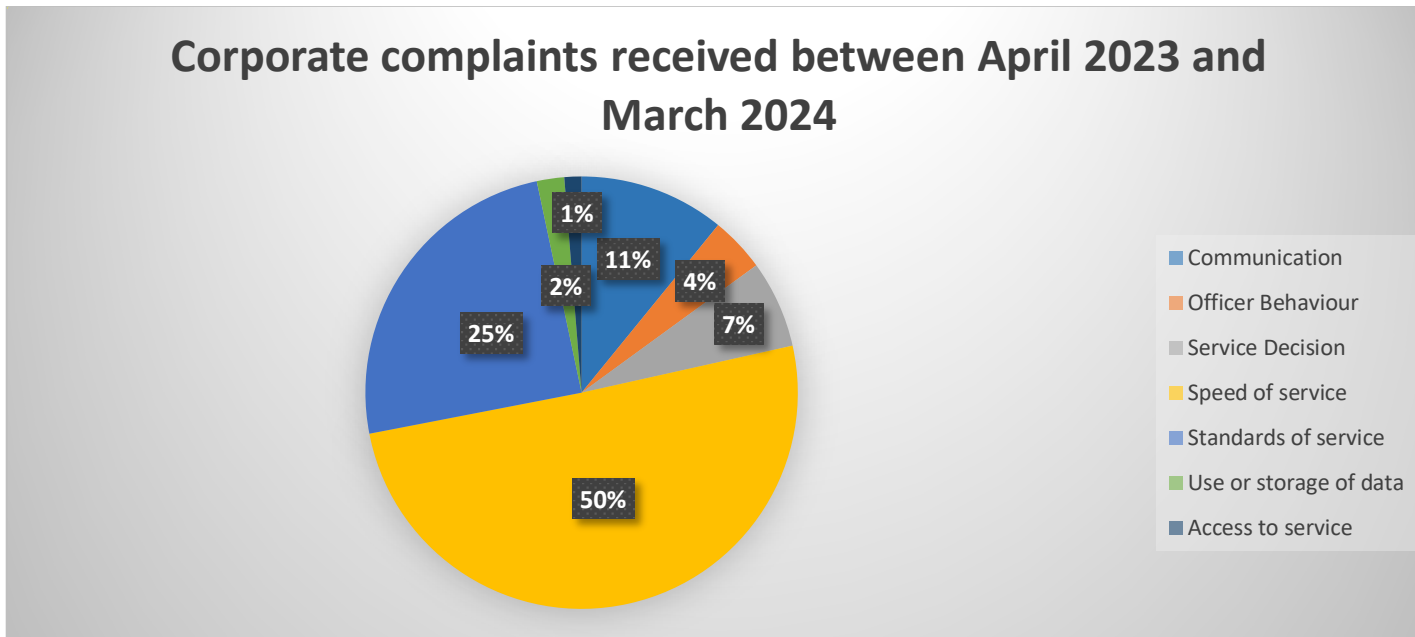


2023/24	Communication*	Access to service	Officer behaviour*	Service decision*	Speed of service*	Standard of service*	Use or storage of data
Total*	85	10	32	51	394	193	16
Upheld	41	6	4	12	338	87	7
Not Upheld	15	3	9	21	23	52	4
Partially Upheld	21	1	16	15	27	48	5

*These columns do not add up as some of the complaints progressed directly to a final response of the corporate process or remained open at the time of completing the report.

7.9 6 of the total complaints progressing for investigation are complaints that have not yet had a theme recorded as they were on hold at the time of writing the report.

7.10 The chart below shows the the complaints received by theme.



7.11 The highest number of corporate complaints related to the speed of service (394). All but 12 of these relate to SEND.

Number of corporate complaints received by service:

Locality/ Service	Amber Valley	Chesterfield	Northeast and Bolsover	High Peak and North Dales	Disabled children's service	South Derbyshire and South Dales	Erewash	SEND *	Other
Number of formal complaints	14	26	16	16	8	23	20	600	64
Responded to with 10 days	4	0	1	0	1	2	3	75	19
Responded to within 28 calendar days (includes those responded to with 10 days)	7	5	10	3	2	7	8	192	30
Complaint upheld	2	5	4	8	1	0	1	462	20
Partially upheld	7	9	5	0	4	12	14	54	20
Not upheld	4	10	7	7	3	9	5	66	16
Number that remained open at year end (including on hold)	1	2	0	1	0	2	0	13 (+ 5 that moved directly to final response)	8

*These columns do not add up as some of the complaints progressed directly to a final response of the corporate process.

7.12 600 (76% of the total) related to the SEND service compared to 270 the previous year (68% of the total). 192 of these were responded to within the 28 calendar day timescale, 32% compared to 88.5% the previous year.

8. Escalated corporate complaints

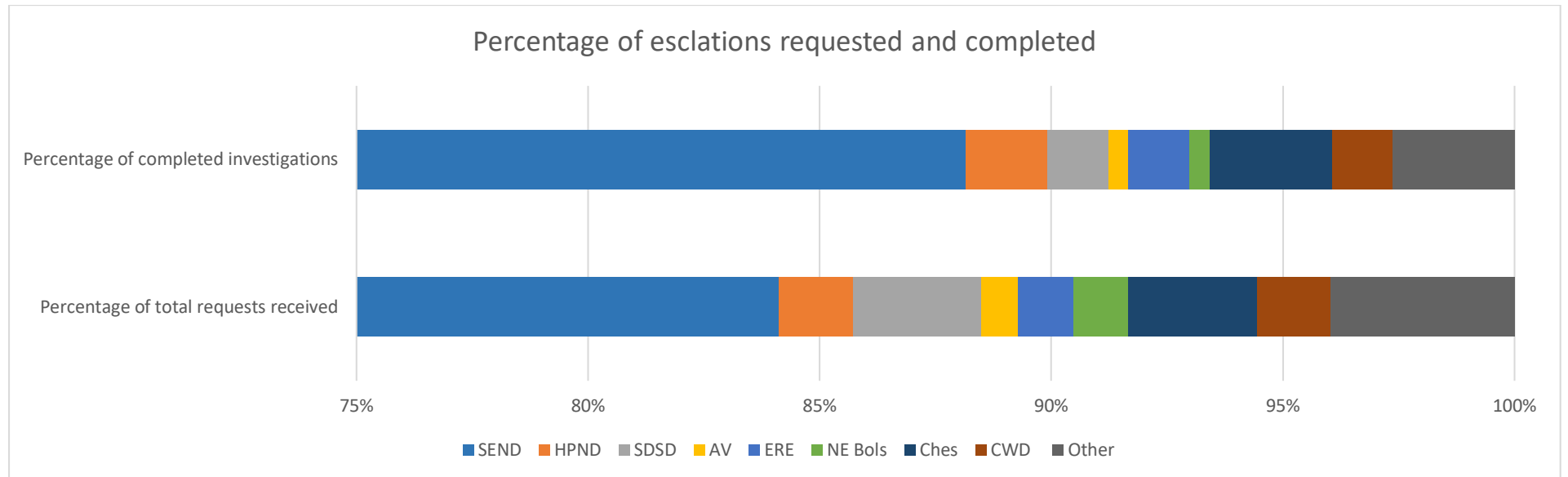
8.1 250 requests to escalate corporate complaints were received. This compares to 90 the previous year.

Locality or Service	Count of requests to escalate received
SEND	212
South Derbyshire & South Dales	7
Chesterfield	6
ACRE	3
NE Derbyshire & Bolsover	3
Children With Disability Team	3
Erewash	3
High Peak & North Dales	4
Amber Valley	2
Place	2
Educational Psychology Service	1
Early Years Services	1
Starting Point	1
Safeguarding	1
School Placement & Transport	1
Grand Total	250

8.2 11 of these remained open at year end 2023/24 and 11 were withdrawn or resolved, therefore 228 (91.2%) of the total of the requests received progressed and received a final response. 31.8% of all corporate complaints received have escalated to be

reviewed by a senior manager. This is numerically more and a percentage of the total increase. 23% that were escalated in 2022/23.

8.3 201 of the 228 (88%) completed corporate final responses related to SEND. This compares to 49 the previous year, meaning a percentage increase of 300%. 21 related to locality social work or early help teams, this compares to 12 the previous year.

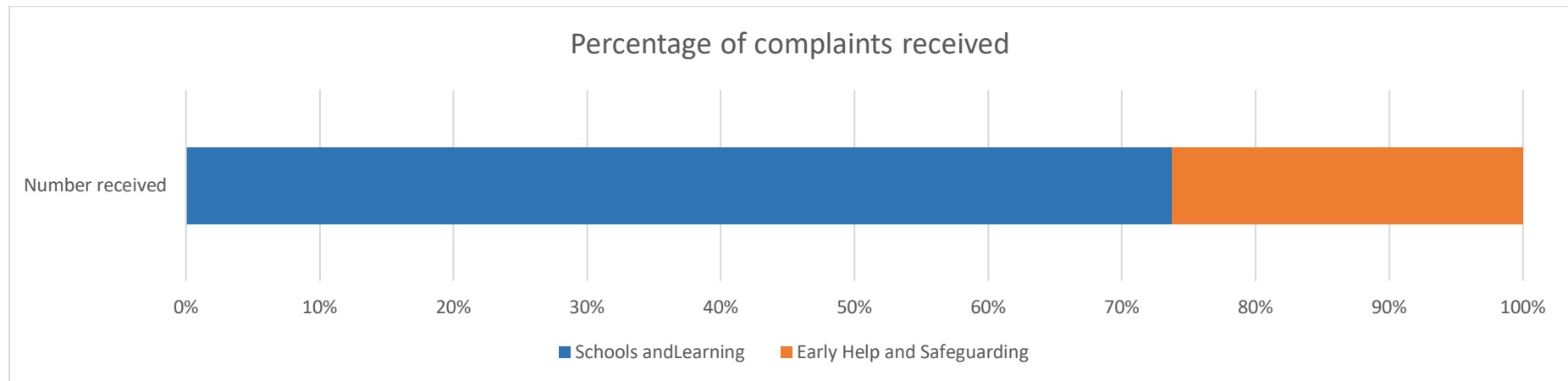


8.4 183 final responses saw complaints upheld; 27 partially upheld and 19 not upheld. Only 2 of the escalated responses were completed within a 20 day timescale.

9. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

9.1 Complainants who approach the LGSCO are asked to raise their complaint with the council before it will be considered by the Ombudsman. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response following the council's investigation into the matter, the Ombudsman will scrutinise the process used for handling the complaint and provide a response on their findings.

9.2 There were 80 LGSCO enquiries from complainants considered between 01 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 with 55 progressing and/or completing full investigation compared with 42 enquiries the previous year (26 of which progressed to assessment and full investigation). Of the 80, 25 were premature referrals which required the department's complaints process to be completed before the Ombudsman would consider the complaint, 1 was not considered as it was a duplicate of another complaint investigated and a further 14 were not investigated, or the investigation discontinued as they were not within the remit of the LGSCO, or the requested outcome could not be achieved or the council had already offered an appropriate remedy.



9.3 Of the 55 that progressed and completed a detailed investigation, 23 remain open for investigation. Of the 32 completed investigations, LGSCO upheld 30 complaints, 93.8% of the number completed investigated. In 100% of cases the LGSCO are satisfied the council had successfully implemented the recommendations.

10. Complaints about Services Commissioned by the Local Authority

- 10.1 All commissioned services are required to have their own complaints procedure within the terms of their contract with the council. Ofsted regulate many of these services and set out how they manage complaints regarding these services on their website. All services provided under Ofsted regulation must have an internal complaints procedure, however, where complainants remain dissatisfied with the response provided by the commissioned service, they may use the council's complaints procedures.
- 10.2 When the department investigates complaints about commissioned services regulated by Ofsted it will routinely inform Ofsted of its investigation and outcomes where the case is reviewed or resolved. There were no complaints about a commissioned service in 2023/24.

11. Learning and Improvement within Children's Services Complaints

- 11.1 Learning is an important aspect of the complaints procedure and significant changes have taken place in Derbyshire, particularly in the SEND service in order to reduce delays in the education, health and care plan process and improve communication with the parents of children and young people.
- 11.2 A re-model of the SEND assessment service took effect on 20 February 2023. This was in preparation for a full-service redesign which is at the final planning stage at the time of this report.
- 11.3 Prior to 20 February 2023 the service worked in a locality model. There were six localities, each with a lead SEND officer and four SEND officers.
- 11.4 Since the remodel, the service has an assessment team which undertakes new assessments and processes incomers to Derbyshire, two primary review teams and two secondary review teams, each maintaining EHC plans and managing the annual review process. There is a dedicated tribunal team, two SEND transport officers and two complaints officers. Additional business support officers have been attached to the SEND assessment service to support the new service structure.

- 11.5 The service previously recruited plan writers in the assessment team to address the backlog, this has now significantly reduced. Therefore, they have now disbanded the team of plan writers and replaced them with interim senior officers, this has doubled the assessment team capacity in order to improve our timeliness.
- 11.6 Interim staff are in place until the full restructure is put into place and permanent staff are then to be recruited.
- 11.7 The impact of the changes is being monitored and further additional business support assistants were moved to the assessment team when it was identified that draft EHC plans which had been written, and EHC plans which could be finalised, were not being issued in a timely manner due to business support capacity issues.
- 11.8 On-going additional training is being delivered to all officers in the SEND assessment service due to the number of new staff recruited since February 2023, and due to the changes in practice resulting from the council's determined efforts to reduce delays in completing EHCNA's and increasing compliance with statutory timescales for issuing final EHC plans.
- 11.9 As the backlog of EHCNA's is being addressed and the service settles into the new way of working, communication with parents and schools is improving. Schools once again have access to manager's individual email addresses to escalate cases.
- 11.10 Derbyshire have also completed the IDOX purchase- EHC Hub to improve the following:
- Ensuring that the child or young person is at the centre of everything we do
 - Process and decision transparency: Clear, accessible and timely information for all stakeholders
 - Easing the administrative burden: Efficient recording, supporting The Golden Thread
 - A truly collaborative approach to assessment, planning and review: Secure and easy multi-agency working
 - Supporting compliance whilst driving practice improvement
 - A robust and effective EHCP review process with clear outcome measurement
 - A vehicle for cultural change – True digital transformation