

Supplement to the agenda for

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 22 July 2025

2.00 pm

**Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane
Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE**

8. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S QUALITY ASSURANCE BRIEFING

Pages

3 - 16

Children's Complaints and Compliments

Statutory Quarterly Report, Q1

1st April – 30th June

2025 / 2026

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Introduction

This report covers the first quarter of 2024-25 reporting and provides an overview of the complaints dealt with through the Complaints Team. It provides an opportunity to reflect on the lessons to be learnt and the subsequent actions to be implemented to improve our services to our communities.

This report will focus on the complaints processed through the Children's Representations and Complaints Policy.

NB: complaints processed through the Corporate Complaints Policy are reported separately.

The Statutory Children's Representations and Complaints Policy covers complaints about:

- Council's services to children in need or in care (children looked after)
- How the council applies to take a child into care
- Complaints about fostering, special guardianship and adoption services
- Complaints about services to children leaving care.

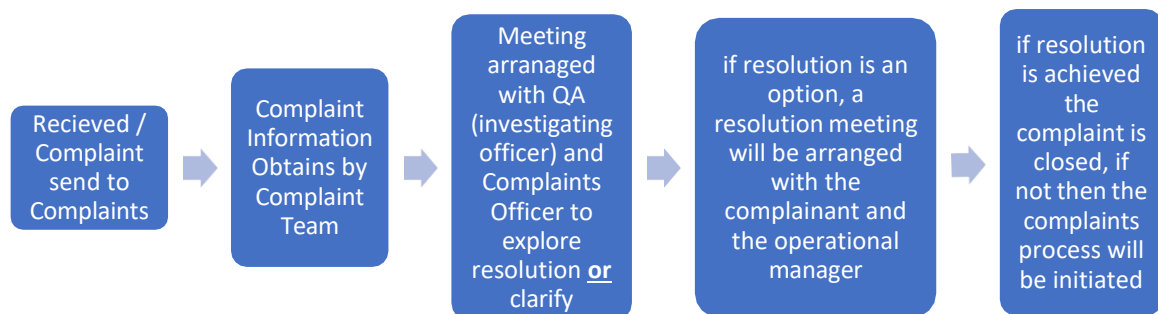
This report also covers the external Compliments received and any learning that has been identified by the Local Authority.

Performance Metrics

In this quarter, 7 complaints were managed through the Children's Representations and Complaints Statutory Policy. In comparison to the 22 received in quarter one last year this is a commendable decrease in complaints received. The below chart shows the number of complaints received by month.

Of the complaints dealt with, 0 were completed outside of the timescale at the time of this report, meaning 0% of responses went over the statutory timescales. This is a significant, commendable, improvement from the 79% of the response that were last in quarter 1 last year.

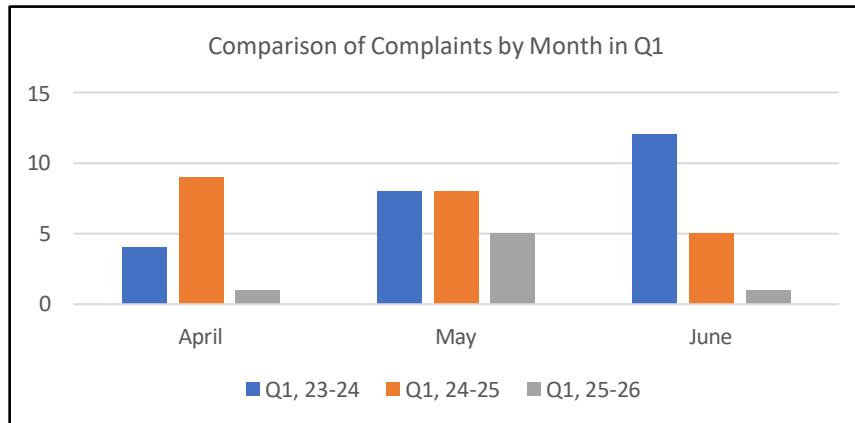
Resolution/Complaints Procedure



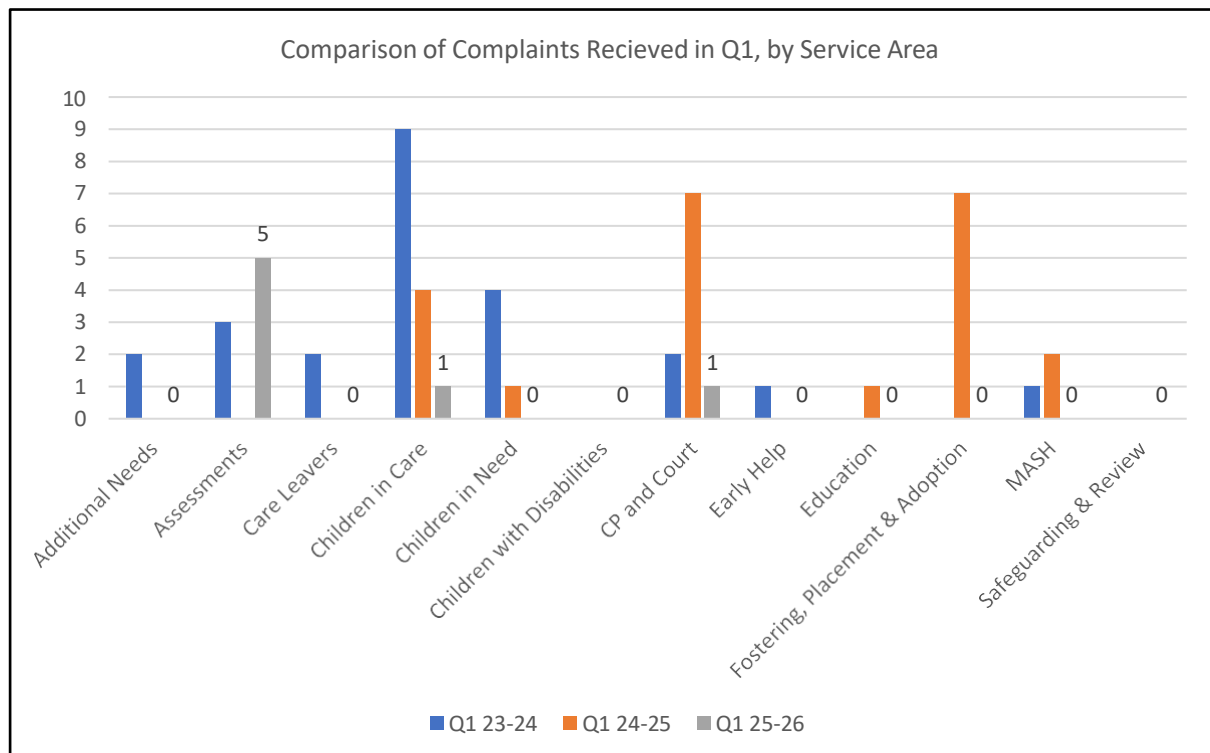
Complaints Procedure



Quarter 1, Children's Complaints and Compliments Report

Complaints by month:**Complaints by Service Area:**

Complaints are reported by service area, this allows us to track, monitor and take necessary action within the relevant service areas.



Unlike with previous years, the Assessment and Support service received the most complaints this quarter. The complaints submitted consistently raise concerns about the content of assessments being written about children and families. Of the 5 complaints, 4 were partially upheld.

It is important to understand the specifics of the individual complaint where it is upheld or partially upheld as in some instances these are upheld as a reflection of the way a service user has felt or experienced a service as opposed to a finding that the service has made a finding that they have done inappropriate or poor practice

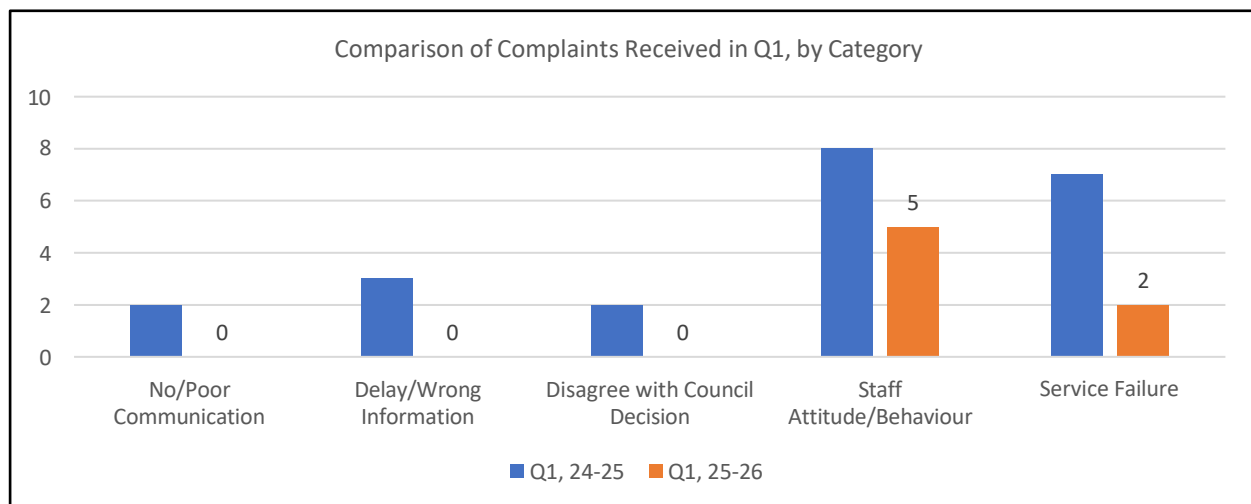
Complaints by category:

Categories of complaint follow the most common categories for complaint identified by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman: service failure to follow procedures, poor communication, negative staff attitudes, giving out wrong or misleading information, and poor decision making.

NB: Service failure is defined by the LGSCO as:

- *A failure in a service which it was the function of an authority to provide, or*
- *A failure to provide such a service*

The graph below shows the volume of complaints received this quarter by category in comparison to reporting year 24-25:



The highest reasons for service users complaining remains around 'staff attitude' and 'service failure', suggesting that the way we are interacting with families is not having the desired positive impact for all families. However it is important to see this small number in the context of the significant volume of new and open cases the service is dealing with each day.

It is, positive that no complaints have been categorised as 'Delay / Wrong Information', 'No/Poor Communication' and 'Disagree with Council Decision', a previously low area of category in the previous year, in comparison, but another commendable point of improvement.

Outcomes:

Of the 7 complaints received and investigated, 5 contained elements that were upheld by the investigating officer. Outcomes of complaint investigations can be defined as;

- **Upheld:**

An upheld complaint is the result of a thorough investigation where evidence supports the complainant's claims and or recognises their experience. The officer investigating the complaint agrees with the complainant and or acknowledges their experience and or practice could be improved..

- **Partially Upheld:**

If a complaint has multiple issues and only some are found to be Upheld and or some Not upheld, the overall complaint is recorded as "partially upheld". The planned service quartile reporting will address the greater detail behind this data in its analysis report.

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Number of Complaints	Upheld	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld
7	1	2	4

Timeliness:

- **0%** of Children's complaints were responded to out of timescale or not at all.

Children's Representations and Complaints Policy Timescales are Statutory.

The timescales in working days for the Children's Representations and Complaints procedure are:

- 10 days at Stage 1 (with a further 10 days for more complex complaints or additional time if an advocate is required)
- 25 days at Stage 2 (with maximum extension to 65 days)
- 10 days for the local authority to respond to the findings by Adjudication letter
- 20 days for the complainant to request a Review Panel
- 30 days to convene and hold the Review Panel at Stage 3
- 5 days for the Panel to issue its findings
- 15 days for the local authority to respond to the findings.

Number of Complaints	Response within 10 days	Response within 11-20 days	Response over 20 days
8	2	5	0

Stage 2: Independent Investigation

At the time of writing this report, **20** complaints are actively open and being investigated at stage 2 of the complaints process.

7 complaints escalated to stage 2 this quarter.

Number of Complaints open at stage 2	Reports sent to complainant	Reports sent for adjudication	Statement of Complaint Meeting Pending	Reports due within 55 working days
20	2	3	9	6

Complainants have the right to escalate their complaint to stage 2 at any point during the stage 1 complaints process. They have the right to escalate their complaint due to a lack of response and they can escalate their complaint regardless of the outcome or finding i.e even if stage one uphold their complaints. Reasons for complaints being escalated to stage 2 can be seen below;

Number of escalations to stage 2	No response at stage 1	Dissatisfaction following mediation meeting	Lack of follow-up action from stage 1 response	Dissatisfied with stage 1 response	Request for stage 2, not stage 1
7	1	0	0	4	2

It is important we understand the quality of stage 1 by cross referencing any differences between findings in stage 2 by the independent investigators against the findings in stage one from the service. Going forward this more detailed analysis will be reported on in the quarterly reports.

Compliments

The below table identifies external compliments that have been received via compliments@herefordshire.gov.uk, these compliments range from being about individual professionals to the whole service.

NB: internal compliments are logged with Employee Appreciation.

There were **31** compliments received from external sources this quarter.

Compliments have been categorised into three areas of compliment; Specific Behaviours or Actions, Individual Skills and Qualities and Impact on Others

1. Specific Actions or Behaviours could include:

Responsiveness:

Compliments focused on how quickly and effectively a team or individual addressed a request or need.

Problem-solving:

Acknowledging the ability to resolve issues or overcome challenges.

Efficiency:

Appreciation for completing tasks or processes quickly and smoothly.

Communication:

Compliments on clarity, transparency, and helpfulness in communication.

Guidance and Support:

Recognising when staff provide helpful advice, training, or assistance.

Professionalism:

Acknowledging courteous, respectful, and ethical conduct.

2. Individual Skills and Qualities could include:

Expertise:

Compliments on specialised knowledge or skills.

Empathy and Compassion:

Appreciation for understanding and caring for others' needs.

Creativity and Innovation:

Recognising original ideas or approaches.

Leadership and Mentorship:

Acknowledging positive influence and guidance.

Patience and Kindness:

Compliments on demonstrating these qualities, particularly in challenging situations.

Dedication and Commitment:

Recognising hard work and going the extra mile.

3. Impact on Others could include:

Positive Influence:

Acknowledging the impact of an individual's work on others.

Confidence Building:

Compliments on helping others feel more confident or capable.

Motivation and Inspiration:

Recognising individuals who inspire others.

Community Engagement:

Compliments on contributions to the broader community.

Creating a Positive Environment:

Acknowledging those who contribute to a positive and welcoming atmosphere

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Compliment Received
"I would just like to thank you for the lovely CLA meeting letter for X. Its really well written up in a way that X can understand whilst still being factual".
I just wanted to say however how full of praise X was for Vanessa. X said how great Vanessa had been in keeping her up to date on attempts to arrange contact and how sorry she was to see her go. It was definitely the most glowing report of a social worker I have received from X. She thinks you are brilliant Vanessa which is all the more impressive based on the journey you have been on together!
When asked what had helped their family the most? "Being listened to and having someone who had good intentions for me and my family". Is there anything we could do better? "No just being yourself and that makes people feel more safe and trusting".
Hope all is well. I wanted to share some wonderful feedback I received during a complaint meeting yesterday afternoon. The complainant, Mr. X, had nothing but praise for the service he has received from you. He specifically mentioned your responsiveness and how he felt genuinely listened to. This is a stark contrast to his reported previous experiences, and it was really refreshing to hear such positive comments after a long day.
I just wanted to let you know how fantastic Danny has been with my daughter X, myself and my husband through the time we have been working with him. He has understood domestic abuse which has been problematic in the past as some social workers don't fully understand it with it being so complex. He formed a great bond with X and I have valued all his input and help that he has given us. I am thankful that Danny came along and gave us all the help and support with the on going issues that surrounded domestic abuse and commend him for not giving up, as I know X's case has not been easy for him due to behaviours from Mr Y. He should be greatly valued as a member of the Hereford children's services. As much as we are all over joyed to be moving away from the Local authority with X's care order being discharged, Danny will be very much missed by us. But I am sure he will be changing the lives for the better for other children who need him. He really is an amazing person and social worker so thank you for sending him our way! I just wanted to send this to you so you are aware of how great Danny is which I am sure will be appreciated. And I feel he should have recognition for all his efforts he has made for the sake of X and the family.
"Bonnie is an excellent IRO. I have attended many CLAR's over the years and she is by far one of the best. She is excellent with the children in my opinion. She is approachable and relatable, and I enjoy going to reviews!"

"it was one of the best stage 1 responses I have seen as an Investigating Officer"
"she has been amazing, she's been on it, on the ball, if there's an issue she will speak to you, she works with me, in partnership with me"
Can't speak highly enough of Tanya, she's taken time to understand this case and my daughter.
These are excellent Minutes - a clear and well structured summary and I picked up an additional point we missed in our post panel discussion. Please thank Becks.
I have spoken to a dad today and he shared that you have been a star and he can't sing your praises high enough. You have supported him and the children, and challenged school about using isolation which was having a huge impact on his son. X shared he has had bad experiences in the past with social workers and family support workers, and he said that working with you has been brilliant.

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I have been encouraged by X (aged 10) and Y (aged 7) at their review to pass on compliments about their social worker Jake. They wondered if he can have a pay rise!!! I told them I wasn't sure about that one, but would certainly tell his managers what they have said.
They said in the review they really like Jake and can not think of anything he could do better. Y repeatedly asked when she could see Jake next and this was really important to her.
I just wanted to pass on compliments from X, I was tasked with completing an audit and X shared the Nana is wonderful and communication is brilliant
I wanted to write to compliment you both on such an excellent Final Report.
I was particularly struck by how strengths-based you were in your writing Debz, and also in turn how Dwayne also identifies the importance of his own strengths based recording in practice.
X has advised that Louise has listened to her request for her biological father Y to be referred to as "Y" not dad. A has advised that Louise is the best social worker so far because "she listens" and "doesn't criticise me".
'The previous young persons SW Tejan Leigh was outstanding. Very supportive of both YP and us. Understood our concerns and worked with us and not against us at all. He supported our ideas and our suggestions on her future.'
We both thoroughly enjoyed reading our report. Zarnain has articulated our reasons for wanting to become foster carers exceptionally well and has provided a detailed and accurate account of our childhood, adolescence, and current lifestyle. Zarnain has fully taken into account our reasons to foster and articulated this clearly in her report. The training that she has provided has been exceptional and delivered in an engaging format both in person and online. Zarnain took into account our working hours with our jobs and was able to fit training in to suit these needs which we were really grateful for. We would like to place on record our thanks and appreciation for the work she has undertaken and how she has supported us on our first steps towards fostering.
I have just obtained some feedback from X regarding the CP conference recently held. As part of this feedback X shared that she cannot thank Lyndsey enough for all her help and support thought the CP process. X wanted to share that both you and Lyndsey have gone above and beyond anything she would ever expect in regard of your input. X believes Lyndsey has everything it takes to be a great social worker.
I just want to let you know that X has shared some lovely feedback with me today following a phone call to the mum of * Mum wanted to thank you both for the support that you offered (last year), which she said that she really appreciated and valued, finding the support really helpful. The family are now stepping down to a TAF in the community!
Hope your well. X is due to finish college this month . He has passed with a merit & I have to say Gloucester college have done wonders for X. He has been accepted at Brighton university I know his EHCP ceases but I just wanted to thank you for everything you have done for X over the years without your help he wouldn't be where he is now so thank you so much . Take care.

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I have just heard the very sad news that Donna Savoury will be moving on. Donna has changed our children's centre for the better. She has made great changes for all our families. Always approachable to myself, colleagues and the clients that come through our door. The opportunities for families and activities at the centre has been outstanding. Donna will be greatly missed by all our team. She will be sadly missed by all.
'Laura really did manage and I can't talk highly enough of her. She had been extremely supportive and helped me manage some very challenging situations with some of the Y/P in particular X in the latter part of last year. I felt very lucky to have such a conscientious, kind, caring and thoughtful social worker and we had a very good connection and she went above and beyond to make me feel supported when times had been particularly challenging and I was very sad to hear she was no longer going to be my social worker.'
'Aisha Aziz, is my new social worker, I haven't been working with Aisha for that long, but we get on well and I've found her very helpful and supportive and always there if I need to talk with her, which is very reassuring for me. I hope she will remain my social worker for many months ahead.'
We would like to thank you for the efficiency, understanding and kindness that the staff has shown during this process.
We truly appreciate all your support. You and Dawn have made our relocation process so much smoother, and we're very grateful for everything you've done.
Testimony to excellent PLO work and I commend Frank and yourself in such regard. Please feel free to share this message with your line manager. I have also copied in X so that she is aware of the excellent work undertaken pre-proceedings.
I look forward to a closure of all proceedings and just being able to enjoy family time with my children as brilliant as children services in Hereford have been I have thoroughly enjoyed working with all staff and have felt supported at all times so I just wanted to say thank you again you have been brilliant
The parent spoke very highly of Claire and described her as amazing; always available when I needed to speak with her; professional but approachable; included our wishes and feelings in the assessment; was able to build a positive relationship with me and the child quickly; always did what she said she would do; was always reliable with appointments and visits & made a positive difference to our family.
"hey ffon its X i just wanted to say thank you for everything you helped me so much you made me realise my worth and i can't honestly be more thankful if it wasn't for your constant check ups and support i honestly dont think id be here today so thank you "
ECHO worker Jane Dunderdale has been "absolutely fantastic- she was my Mary Poppins, checked how we are doing, actually listened and was responsive to our problems, she worked with my kids and seemed to actually care for us – she really was fantastic!"
At the same time, I would like to thank you for your fantastic presentations (on both sessions), which were very meaningful, informative and deep in their meaning, which gave me a lot of material to reflect on. I was also very impressed how skilful you were in creating a very open, safe and creative atmosphere where people were so easy to share their opinions, thoughts and feelings.

Complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

There are **2** complaints for this quarter being dealt with by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO); we are awaiting outcomes on all of these, this does not mean they are being investigated.

Financial Implications

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The current spend on stage 2 and 3 complaint investigations this financial year is £11,507.60 This figure has been taken from invoices submitted following the conclusion of stage 2 investigations and stage 3 panel hearings.

Whilst, as explained earlier in the report, we have no control over these escalations, and they are not necessarily indicative of the quality of the stage 1 responses. However we recognize the cost to the LA in these and as such it is important we work together to locally resolve complaints and implement remedies, outlined in LGSCO guidance, in an attempt to resolve complaints and prevent escalation.

NB: the figure spent by the end of each quarter is not indicative of the complaint received that quarter. Due to timescales of the stage 2 and stage 3 procedure more often than not the financial implications of escalations is not seen until a minimum of 4 months has lapsed

Analysis and Recommendations

This quarter's statutory report on Children's Representations and Complaints signals a period of significant positive transformation, particularly in complaint volume and process adherence, yet also highlights specific areas requiring focused intervention. This report presents a mixed but largely positive picture regarding complaint management, demonstrating significant improvements in key areas while highlighting specific challenges requiring focused attention.

A key positive message is the commendable decrease in overall complaint volume this quarter, from 22 to just 7, alongside an exemplary achievement of 100% of responses completed within statutory timescales, representing a dramatic improvement from 21% last year. This indicates a robust and efficient initial complaints handling process, adhering strictly to procedural requirements.

We see "staff attitude" and "service failure" remain the highest categories of complaint,. This suggests ongoing challenges in front-line interactions and adherence to established procedures, impacting service user satisfaction in this cohort of complainants. However as noted overall these are small numbers of service user complaints in comparison to the high volume of service users open and active to the services. Future cross reference with compliments will however put a balanced context to both issues.

Key Recommendations:

1. **Enhance Effectiveness of Stage 1 Resolution:** Joint services work on improving the quality, timeliness and satisfactory outcome of Stage 1 and Stage 2 to reduce Stage 2 and or Stage 3 escalations and associated costs. This could involve empowering investigating officers with greater discretion for immediate remedies, exploring mediation, or providing additional training on effective complaint resolution techniques that fully address and acknowledge issues raised.
2. **Leverage Compliments for Best Practice Dissemination:** Analyse the themes from the 31 compliments received to identify specific positive behaviours, individual skills, and qualities that lead to positive service user experiences. Disseminate these best practices widely across all service areas to foster a culture of excellence and learn from what is working well.

