

**Annual Complaints Report -  
1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023**

## Introduction

This Annual report gives an overview of compliments, complaints and feedback received by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) from service users, patients, their carers and families for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

We are committed to listening and learning from all of our patients and service users; particularly when the care provided may not have been to the standard that we ourselves would expect. The overall number of complaints received increased from 823 to 840 this year (this includes follow on complaints where complainants came back to the Trust to request further information).

We aim to respond to complaints within 20 working days, where possible. We strive to ensure there is a full, fair and objective review of the issues and concerns raised and that an effective response/outcome is provided. The Trust takes every opportunity to resolve issues at local level and encourages complainants to contact the Trust again should they remain dissatisfied. We will continue to do our utmost to resolve complaints. Compliments, suggestions/comments made by service users and patients are acknowledged and shared with the relevant staff/teams.

The Northern Health and Social Care Trust provides a range of health and social care services to a population of approximately 479,000 people across a geographical area of 1,733 square miles (2,773 square km) making it the largest geographical trust in Northern Ireland.

- 83,275 inpatients, inclusive of elective inpatients (compared to 95,306 in 2021/22)
- 523,842 acute outpatients across all specialties (compared to 327,538\* in 2021/22) (\*The figures for Mental Health outpatients were not available for 2021/22 due to changeover to a new information system)
- 150,557 attendances at Emergency Department and Minor Injury Units (increase from 143,954)
- 36,039 day case patients across all specialties (increase from 20,287)
- 3,650 births (decrease from 3,857)
- 774 children looked after by Trust (increase from 750)
- 464 children on child protection register (decrease from 522)
- 4,982 domiciliary care packages for older people provided in the community (decrease from 6,983)

## Facts & Figures

3404  
Compliments

840  
Complaints  
\*(823)

112  
Reopened

51%  
Compliance  
\*(67%)

10  
Complaints  
escalated to SAI  
\*(4)

13  
Ombudsman  
Cases ongoing

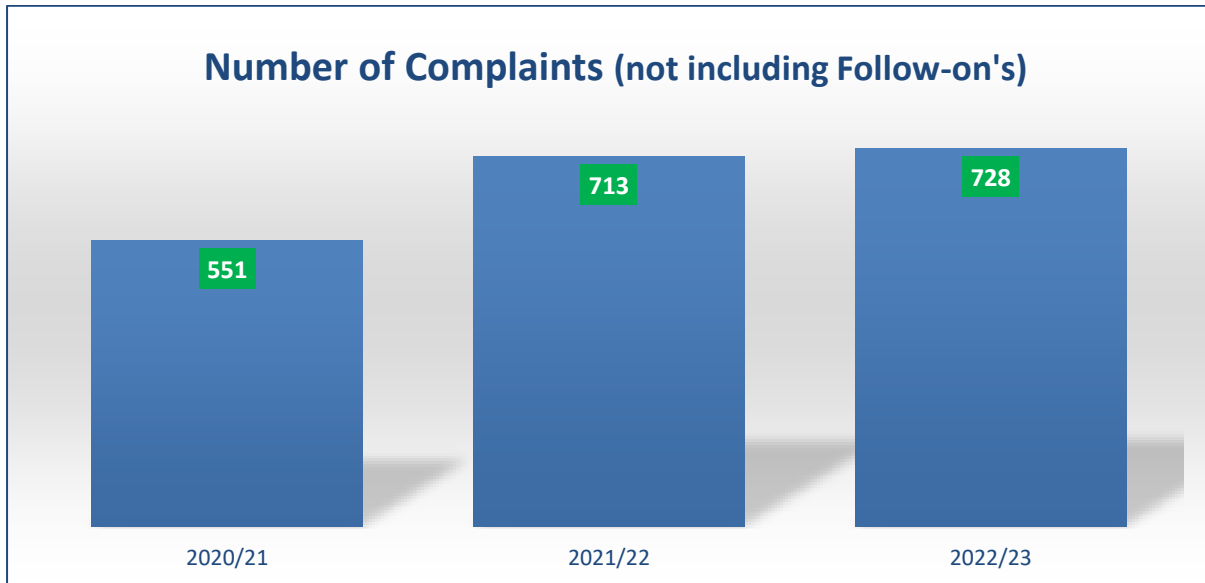
6  
Independent  
Sector  
Complaints

0  
Children Order  
Cases

100%  
Of complaints were  
acknowledged  
within 2 working  
days

\*Data in () denotes previous financial year activity

## Number of Complaints by Financial Year



## What People complained about

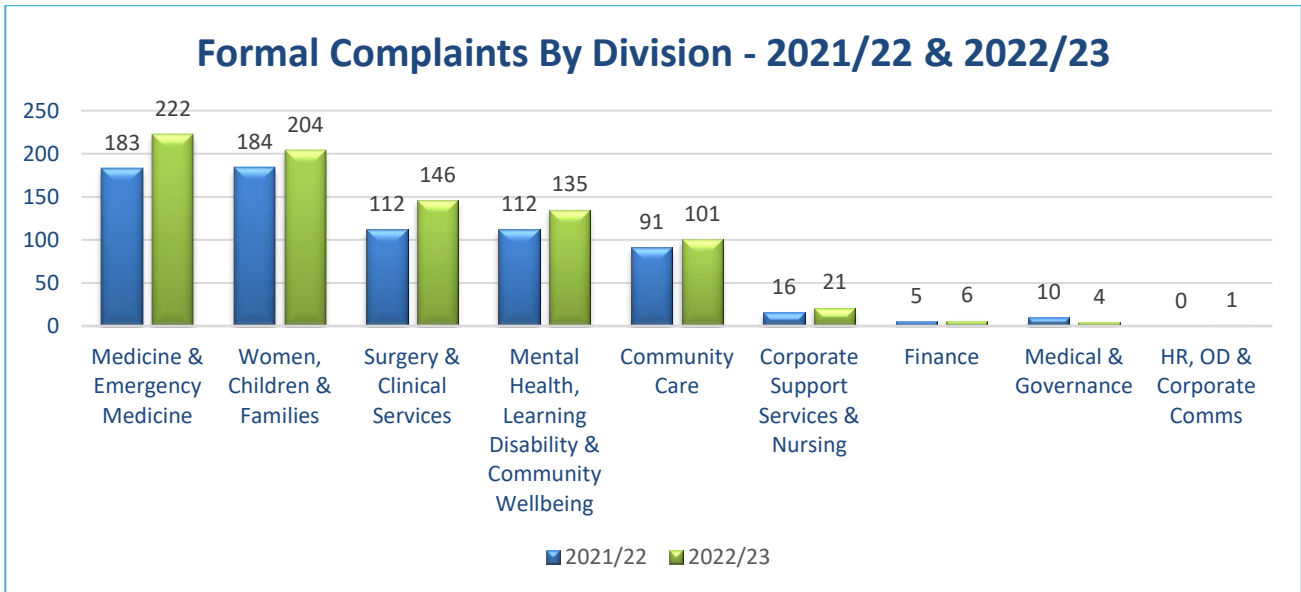
The chart below shows the number of complaints by subject in 2022/2023. The top 3 reasons why people complained were Quality of Treatment & Care, Staff Attitude/Behaviour & Communication/Information.



73% of complaints were received by email, 11% by letter, 14% via the Trust Feedback Form and 2% in person.

## Complaints Received by Division

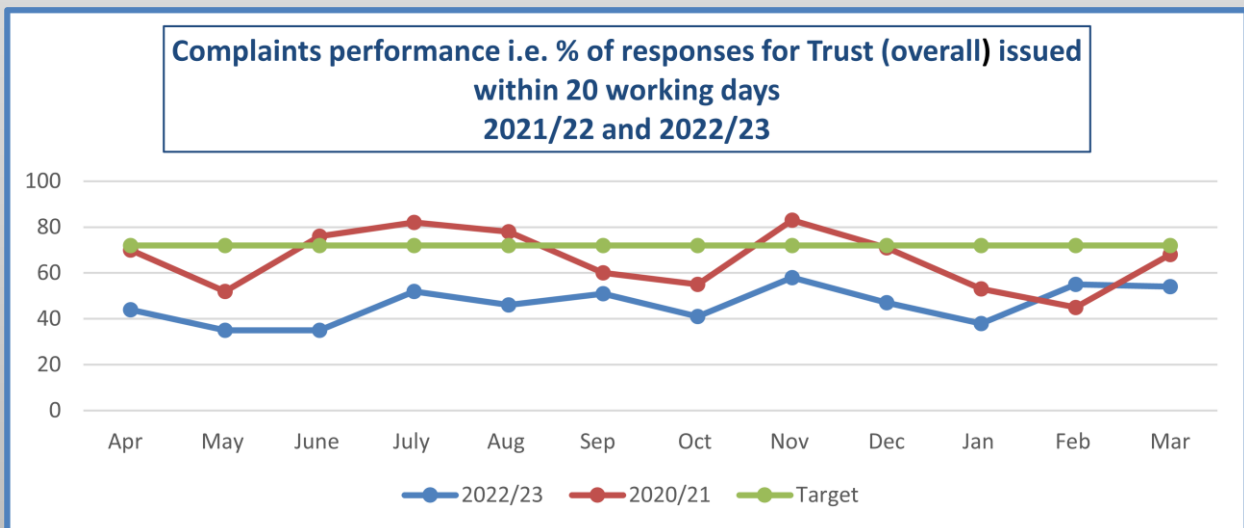
The services provided by the NHSCT are organised into 10 Divisions. The graph below shows the distribution of complaints across these Divisions over the past year 2 years.



## Response Times

The HSC Complaints Procedure outlines that complaints should be acknowledged within 2 working days and that complaints should be responded to within 20 working days, if at all possible. Various factors can impact on the time taken to review a complaint, such as information may be awaited from other agencies or due to the complexity of the complaint review.

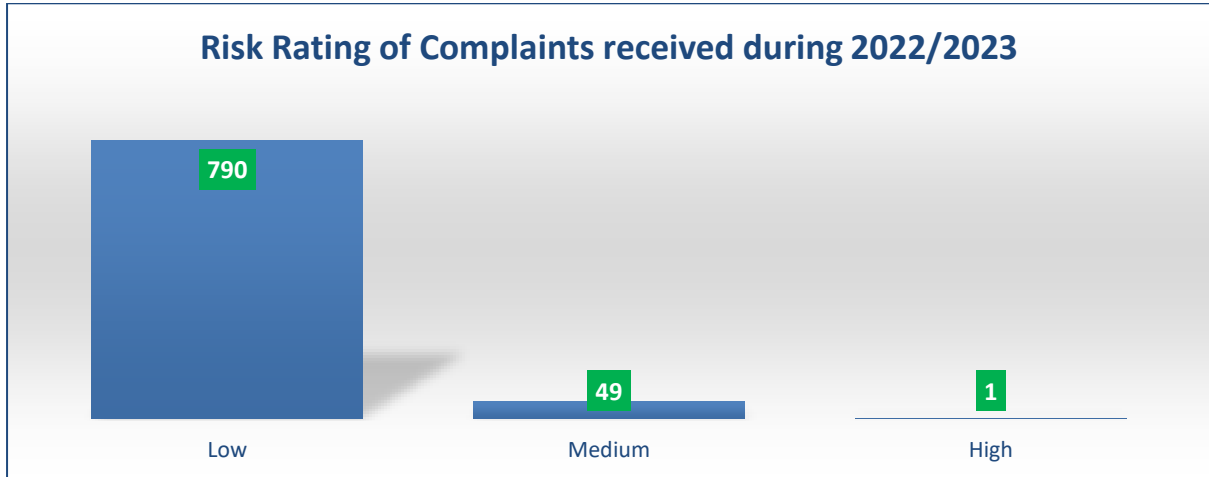
During 2022/2023, 51% of complaints were responded to within 20 working days, during 2021/2022, 67% was responded to within 20 working days. (The target response time is 72% within 20 working days). **100% of complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days.**



## Average Length of Time Complaints Open

Of the 840 complaints received the average length of time that complaints were open was 27 days.

## Risk Rating of Complaints Received



### Independent Sector Providers

There were 6 Formal Complaints raised with the Trust during the year that related to Independent Sector providers/establishments.



## Learning from Complaints

The Trust values all feedback received from service users/patients including complaints so that we can learn lessons and improve our services. An action/learning pro forma is completed where appropriate for complaints. We use this information to provide feedback to service users/patients and staff on the changes and improvements made. Complaints are discussed with relevant staff and issues brought to staff meetings where service improvements are agreed.

## Lessons Learnt/Improvement from Complaints

### You told us:

Your elderly grandparent did not receive adequate food during their time in the Emergency department.

### We did:

Apologised that your grandparent was given nothing more substantial during their 6hr+ stay. The ward sister also issued a reminder to staff of the importance of ensuring all patients are provided with sustenance especially those patients with diabetes.

### You told us:

Service User has been on a waiting list for 15 months for Tinnitus and has been informed their issue will now not be investigated.

### We did:

A clinical validation was undertaken to ensure those patients who require ongoing micro suction are seen in a timely manner. Patients on the review waiting list were assessed against criteria agreed by the ENT Consultants and GPs. Regrettably the current waiting time for routine appointments is longer than expected. The Trust closely monitors waiting lists to ensure patients are seen and treated as quickly as possible which may include the use of the Independent Sector to manage waiting lists.

### You told us:

A Service user was admitted with severe confusion. During their time in hospital they were moved to three different wards and then to a nursing home. On each occasion the next of kin was not informed and is unhappy with this lack of communication.

### We did:

Apologised and acknowledged that trying to get updated information about loved ones can be difficult. The teams involved are working on an initiative to improve communication between ward staff and families.

### You told us:

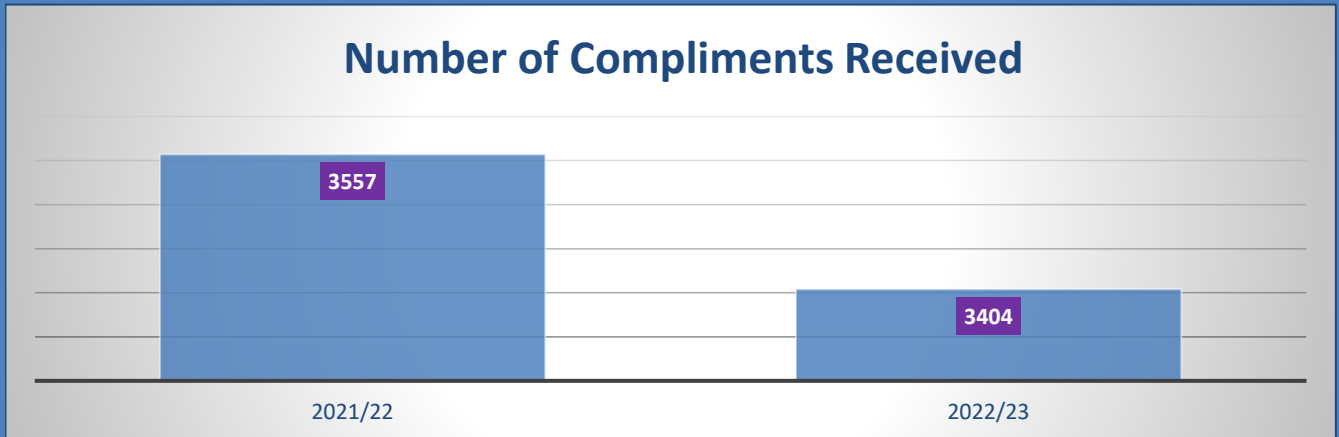
You have been waiting eight months for an appointment with the Autism service:

### We did:

Apologised for the length of wait, to help manage service user's expectations on receipt of referrals going forward service users will be provided with updates when there are significant changes to projected waiting times.

## Compliments received

Services across the Trust receive many compliments in the form of Thank You letters, emails, cards and verbal feedback. During 2022/2023 over 3404 compliments were received across service areas. Divisions/services also monitor and record the compliments they receive locally. Compliments are always appreciated as they allow service users/patients positive experience to be shared with our staff, they also identify areas of good working practice that can be shared with other service areas. Below are some examples of compliments received during 2022/2023.



I would like to compliment the Occupational Therapy Unit in Coleraine for the capable and friendly way in which I was assessed, I felt very reassured during the whole process.

I have just attended the Breast Clinic at Antrim Area Hospital – what a great set up! Lovely staff, appointment on time, seen by Consultant, mammogram, ultrasound and a biopsy with initial results given, all within an hour and a half. Very impressive! Well done all!

I have had the most exceptional care following my Gynae surgery. Every member of staff I encountered was pleasant, friendly and caring. Everything was really well explained to me at every stage. I am so very grateful to the entire team for taking the stress and worry out of my surgery and for making me so comfortable. Thank you all for the invaluable service you provide.

Service users attended the breast screening clinic for a check-up. She wishes to convey her thanks and appreciation to all the doctors, nurses and staff who looked after her. They were simply WONDERFUL! She cannot praise them highly enough, they were considerate and gentle. God Bless them.



## Children Order Complaints

Complaints by, or on behalf of children about services provided to them under Part IV of the children (NI) Order 1995, are dealt with under a separate procedure – the Children Order Representations & Complaints Procedure.

During the year, there were no complaints dealt with under this procedure. The timescale for responding to Children Order complaints is 28 days.

## Additional Information

There were 79 formal enquiries and 413 informal enquiries received during 2022/2023 with most being received from MLAs, MPs or local councillors. Some of these were also received from service users/patients, carers or other third parties.

During 2022/2023 over 610 staff were trained, 415 undertook E-Learning Complaints Training Level 1, and 195 Complaint Reviewer Training Level 2. Complaints Training was also included in a number of other courses delivered during the year including Corporate Induction and Managers Induction.

### **If complainants are dissatisfied:**

Sometimes people are not always happy with the outcome of the review of their complaint. The Trust encourages people to let us know if they are unhappy, and we will consider other options to attempt to resolve their concerns. The Trust routinely offers to meet complainants, as this allows the opportunity for more detailed discussions, on a face-to-face basis.

### **Ombudsman**

Sometimes people are not always happy with the outcome of the review of their complaint. For those who remain dissatisfied, they may approach the NIPSO Office directly. The Advice, Support Service and Initial Screening Team (ASSIST) is the public's first point of contact with the office. Where the ASSIST team decide that they cannot resolve the complaint, the case is forwarded to the Ombudsman's Investigations Team.

In 2022/2023, there were 23 requests for information from the NIPSO Office:

- 9 cases were not accepted for investigation,
- 1 case letter of apology was issued,
- 13 are on-going.