



## **Cheshire West and Chester Council**

Children's Social Care Complaints and Compliments

Annual Report  
2016 - 2017

## **Introduction**

This report provides information about the Children's Social Care Compliments and Complaints received by Cheshire West and Chester Council during the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. It highlights how the service has performed against statutory timescales and indicates where improvements or revisions to services have been identified as a result of compliments in highlighting best practice as well as through the process of listening and responding to complaints.

The Council's Customer Relations team (formerly Solutions Team) which is part of the Information Governance service within the Governance directorate, was responsible for the coordination of Compliments and Complaints during this period.

In accordance with statutory guidance, responses to complaints received by the Authority should be proportionate. Officers are encouraged to resolve matters locally at the first point of contact to avoid escalation wherever possible. Concerns raised with the service and resolved by close of play the following day are not counted as statutory complaints. Where this approach does not deliver a satisfactory outcome for the complainant, matters are then referred through the formal complaints procedure.

### **The objectives of this report are to:**

- be open and transparent about our social care complaints process
- meet our statutory obligation to produce an annual report
- provide clear and concise comparative data on compliments and complaints including details of complaints broken down by subject and service area
- provide a summary of customer profile and type of customer interaction
- identify actions for service improvements identified from complaints

## **Context**

The aim of the Council's Children and Families Services is to support and protect those children, young people and families who need care and support to enable them to develop their abilities to live as independent and fulfilled lives as possible. Sometimes people are unhappy with the service we provide as an authority and we make every effort to ensure that we listen to their feedback and complaints, and that we learn from them.

Whilst considering this report it is important to see the overall picture of Children's Social Care involvement in the Cheshire West and Chester area. During 2016-17 Children's Social Care teams dealt with 4,156 children, 2,747 of these were new referrals. Of those receiving services 52 formal complaints were handled representing 1.25% of service users.

## **1.0 STATUTORY COMPLIANCE PROCEDURE**

### **1.1 The Children's Social Care Complaints Procedure**

The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006; Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000; Adoption and Children Act 2002; and the Health and Social Care Act 2003 require the local authority to have a procedure for

resolving complaints and representations received by, on behalf of, or relating to children and young people.

Complaints are considered in accordance with the statutory social care complaints procedure and there is a strong emphasis on resolving complaints at the earliest opportunity.

## **1.2 Role of the Customer Relations Team**

The Customer Relations Team act as a central independent point through which complaints can be made to the Authority without the need to refer directly to the service. Complaints can be made via telephone; in writing; through the online social care complaints portal; or directly to the dedicated social care complaints email inbox. Complaints received directly by the service that cannot be resolved within a day are referred to the Customer Relations Team.

The Customer Relations Team, often in liaison with the service, will determine whether a complaint is eligible for consideration under the statutory framework or whether an alternative procedure (safeguarding for example) would be more appropriate.

The Customer Relations Team offer training, advice and support to service staff in their consideration of complaints and also performs a quality assurance role in the preparation of complaint responses. The Team will also liaise with complainants to keep them informed on progress with their complaints, and provide advice about the complaints process and the role of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

## **1.3 What is a Complaint?**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet with the service that requires a response.

## **1.4 Who Can Make a Complaint?**

There are a variety of people who can complain:

- Any child or young person who is Looked After or who is a child in need or is a child with disabilities;
- Foster parents;
- People applying to adopt, or who are receiving services from our Adoption service;
- Care leavers;
- Special Guardians;

Complaints can also be accepted from individuals acting on behalf of a service user, for example an advocate or family member, although this must be with consent from the service user when they are considered old enough. Where a service user's capacity to make informed decisions may be in question, the Customer Relations Team - in conjunction with the Service Team Manager - will

look at whether the person pursuing the complaint is acting in the young person's best interests.

### **1.5 Stage 1 – Local Resolution Stage**

The majority of Stage 1 investigations are conducted by Team Managers from the relevant service. The investigation of a complaint is a managerial responsibility and should not be delegated to other staff. In the first instance complaints are allocated to the Senior Manager to appoint an appropriate Team Manager to investigate and draft a response to the complainant.

The initial timescale for providing a response is 10 working days, although this can be extended to 20 working days when a matter is more complex. The Customer Relations Team works with managers to ensure that quality responses are produced within the specific timescales. Decisions are recorded for each complaint as upheld, not upheld or partially upheld. The learning outcomes and remedial actions are shared with the complainant within the written response.

### **1.6 Stage 2 – Formal Independent Investigation**

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the findings of the Stage 1 complaint investigation, or has not received a response to Stage 1 within the 20 working days allowed, then a request for a Stage 2 investigation can be made.

Once the Stage 2 investigation has been agreed an Investigating Officer (IO) will be appointed. Investigators can be an officer from the service who has no previous knowledge of the complaint and no line management responsibility. However, there is a presumption in favour of the IO being appointed from the North West List of Independent People. The IO will lead, and has overall responsibility for the investigation and will prepare the main report which will state outcomes and make recommendations to the service where appropriate.

A second person, the Independent Person (IP) will be appointed from the North West List of Independent People. The IP ensures that the process of investigation is open, transparent and fair. They work alongside the IO to provide an independent and objective view of the investigation. They see all the same relevant files as the IO and participate in all interviews and discussion relevant to the investigation. The IP reads the IO's report and produces his/her own report on the investigation, commenting on each complaint element and stating whether he/she agrees with the IO's findings.

There are up to 25 working days for the completion of the Stage 2 investigation, with an extension of up to 65 working days available for complex cases.

Following an investigation the findings and any recommendations are set out in a report to the Director and the Service Team Manager. The service must provide a written response to the report and this will be sent to the complainant, along with a copy of the report, within 10 working days of receiving the report. The service may consider offering a meeting with the complainant to discuss the report and the response.

### **1.7 Stage 3 – Independent Review Panel**

Where complainants wish to proceed to Stage 3 they have 20 working days (from the date that they received notification of the department's response to the stage 2 report) to request a Review Panel.

The Independent Review Panel consists of three independent people drawn from the North West List of Independent People, one of whom is appointed as Chair of the Panel.

Following the investigation, panel members have 5 working days to agree the report. The report has to be sent to the complainant within the 5 working days and a copy is also given to the Director of Children's Services.

The Director has 20 working days from the day of the panel to write to the complainant with their response to the report. The letter should outline what the directorate intends to do as part of learning from the complaint. The letter will also explain that if the complainant remains unhappy they can contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

### **1.8 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman**

Where complaints remain unresolved to the satisfaction of the complainant following the conclusion of the three stage process, a referral may be made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for consideration. This can be done by the complainant following completion of all stages of the children's social care complaint process or at an earlier stage if there is a mutual agreement between the complainant and the Council to do so. The Ombudsman will require reasons for the referral if it is done prior to completion of all stages of the policy.

## **2.0 PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY**

### **2.1 Summary of Complaint Activity**

From April 2016 to March 2017 there were a total of 140 social care complaint representations made to Cheshire West and Chester Council. Of the 140 representations received, there were 52 **valid complaints** progressed, with the remainder either ineligible (24), withdrawn (10) or resolved via an alternative route (54). Of the 52 formal complaints, 6 requested a stage 2 escalation as the complainant remained dissatisfied. 3 of the 6 were taken to a full stage 2 investigation, and all 3 concluded with an outcome of partly upheld. 3 requests for escalation did not progress to a full stage 2 investigation as they could not demonstrate sound justification for continuing their complaint and the service felt all issues had been resolved as far as possible. None of the 2016-17 complaints have progressed to a Stage 3.

To provide some context to these figures, it is important to note that the number of complaints represent only 1% of active cases.

### **2.2 Comparison with Previous Years**

The table below shows the number of considered and progressed complaints for the year compared with the previous three years.

**Table 1: Total number of complaints considered**

Year	Total no. of valid complaints processed	Withdrawn/ not pursued/ other	Ineligible*	Total no. of complaints representations considered
2016-17	52	64	24	140
2015-16	68	48	22	138
2014-15	85	14	13	112
2013-14	60	15	8	83

*\*Complaints not valid through the Social Care procedure, for example complaints that were being dealt with through court proceedings or the complainant was not directly involved with the child or does not have parental responsibility and is therefore ineligible.*

### **2.3 Numbers of Complaints - Observations**

The number of valid complaints investigated by the Council has decreased by nearly 24% compared to the previous year. However the total number of complaint representations handled by the Customer Relations team has remained stable compared to the previous year.

This demonstrates the Customer Relations team's improved focus on the initial triage of complaints and by clearer communication on first contact with potential complainants, identifying where to route them through to the correct services for an immediate resolution to their concerns. This, together with closer working within the operational social work teams has, the Customer Relations team believe, resulted in fewer customers pursuing formal complaints. 54 cases were resolved locally via this process in 2016-17.

Following last year's report covering 2015-16, Members requested that benchmarking or comparative information should be included in future reports where available.

Consequently, a request was sent to a number of statistical neighbour authorities with a view to sharing information on the number and rate of complaints received by service user population.

To date the response is limited and we are unable to report to any useful extent due to a lack of comparative data. However all authorities will be required to publish their complaint figures and so a wider data set will become available as the year progresses. Initial review of the limited data we have received against our own figures suggests we are performing well. Members may request an interim report later in the year.

## 2.4 Complaint Outcomes

The table below shows where a formal complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. Where complaints are complex and raise a number of different issues, there is a greater likelihood that some elements of a complaint will be upheld, whilst others not, and consequently the complaint will be classified as partially upheld overall.

**Table 3 - Stage 1 outcomes and comparisons with previous year**

Year	Upheld	Partially upheld	Not upheld	Outstanding	Total
<b>2016-17</b>	<b>7(13%)</b>	<b>31(60%)</b>	<b>14(27%)</b>	<b>0(0%)</b>	<b>52</b>
2015-16	13 (19%)	28 (41%)	27 (40%)	0 (0%)	68
2014-15	15 (18%)	41 (48%)	29 (34%)	0 (0%)	85
2013-14	6 (10%)	30 (50%)	24 (40%)	0 (0%)	60

This year, 73% of complaints have either been upheld or partially upheld which is an increase from 60% in the previous year. This demonstrates that the increased rigour in triage by the Customer Relations team is working effectively as although there is a reduction in formal complaints, the complaints which are being accepted are more likely to be valid issues which need review by the service. This may also be as a result of increased awareness of complaint handling rolled out to the service so that officers are better able to identify or admit fault and offer a reasonable remedy.

**Table 4 - Stage 2 outcomes and comparisons with previous years**

Year	Upheld	Partially upheld	Not upheld	Open cases	Withdrawn	Total
<b>2016-17</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2015-16*</b>	0	4	0	0	0	4
2014-15	1	3	0	0	0	4
2013-14	1	1	0	0	0	2

\*15-16 figures amended to reflect final outcomes in 15-16.

Of the 52 formal complaints, 6 requested a stage 2 escalation as the complainant remained dissatisfied. 3 of the 6 were taken to a full stage 2 investigation, of which all 3 concluded with an outcome of partially upheld. 3 requests for escalation did not progress to a full stage 2 investigation as, in the Customer Relations Team's view, they could not demonstrate sound justification for continuing their complaint and the service felt all issues had been resolved as far as possible. These are usually where complainants voice a continued dissatisfaction with the outcome of the complaint rather than evidence any continued wrongdoing or outstanding injustice.

For comparison, there were 11 requests for escalation in 2015/16 out of 68 valid complaints. So a reduction from 17% escalation in 2015/16 to 12% 2016/17 has been observed.

The Customer Services Team and Children's Services Senior Management Team communicate regularly to review management of the complaints and escalations to Stage 2 and 3. There is a clear commitment to resolve complaints at Stage 1 across

the service in order to improve customer satisfaction with the complaint process, as well as reducing the costs associated with escalation.

### **Stage 3 outcomes and comparisons with previous year**

There were 2 complaints from 2015-16 escalated to stage 3 in 2016-17 with an outcome of 'partially upheld'. No complaints received in 2016-17 have been accepted at stage 3. Again, this is evidence of more robust complaint investigations and resolutions at stages 1 & 2 and/or a commitment to take on board findings from the IO and IP at stage 2. Adjudication letters at stage 2 more often than not accept the independent findings and recommendations.

## **2.5 Breakdown of complaints received by Service Area**

Table 5 below shows a breakdown of complaints received by each service area.

**Table 5**

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Number of Complaints per Year</b>			
<b>Children in Need</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2013-14</b>
Winsford	11	6	16	17
Chester	13	15	8	10
Ellesmere Port	8	19	13	7
<b>Children in Care</b>				
Winsford	2	7	5	5 + 1*
Chester	5	4	18	10
Ellesmere Port	1*	1	3	3
<b>Leaving Care</b>	1	6	5	3
<b>Children with Disabilities</b>	7	7	8	4
<b>Provider Services</b>				
Fostering	0	0	2	0
Adoption	0	0	1	0
<b>Integrated Early Support</b>	0	1	1	1
<b>Safeguarding</b>	0	1	6	0
<b>Contact and Referral Team</b>	1	1	0	0
<b>Transition Team</b>	3	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>60</b>

*\*multi-service 'shared' complaint covering two or more service areas*

The locality areas that received the most number of complaints i.e. Winsford and Chester also serve the highest population and so we would expect the volume of complaints to be proportionally higher.

Within the Winsford area, staffing has continued to fluctuate and there have been some changes especially with agency workers which could account for some of the increase. A further learning has emerged in terms of empowering workers to address the complaint at the earliest stage which still recognises the right to complain but can prevent escalation. Learning from complaints has been addressed through exercises in the team meeting and we will endeavour as part of this learning to ask workers to explore how issues could have been addressed earlier to prevent formal complaints being made. However it is recognised that due to the sensitive nature of the work we undertake, families may use the complaint process



to reflect their dissatisfaction with their situation as well as to complain about process and decision.

There has been a decrease in complaints received within Ellesmere Port Locality. The reason behind this is the quality of service delivery which has greatly improved over the past 12 months, previously the service had a number of agency social workers covering vacant posts. The management team have worked hard to create stability within the workforce and improve timeliness and quality of work. There are no agency staff being used at all in Ellesmere Port and the staff group are stable and settled, this has resulted in a better service for customers and a reduced number of complaints being received.

## 2.6 Breakdown of complaints received by Subject

By their nature, complaints are specific to the circumstances of the individual and cover a wide range of individual experiences. The majority of complaints also relate to more than one aspect of a service that has been received.

Complaints received by the Authority have been classified on the basis of the primary area of concern (subject) identified by the complainant. Detailed below are the numbers that fall within each category:

**Table 6**

<b>Complaint Subject</b> (primary area of concern)	<b>2016-17</b>	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14
<b>Standard of Service Delivery</b>	<b>22</b>	22	23	31
<i>Inaccuracies in assessments</i>	5	0		
<i>Lack of support</i>	12	14		
<i>Failure to investigate concerns</i>	4	3		
<i>Issues with contact arrangements</i>	1	5		
<b>Social Worker</b>	<b>20</b>	17	27	20
<i>Allegations of Misconduct</i>	1	11		
<i>Issues with Attitude / Behaviour</i>	12	6		
<i>Lack of Support</i>	4			
<i>Preference for one parent over another</i>	3			
<b>Communication</b>	<b>7</b>	10	25	3
<i>Lack of response</i>	4	7		
<i>Late / missing reports</i>	1	2		
<i>Cancellation of appointments</i>	2	1		
Child Protection Issues	0	3	1	0
Financial Issues	0	0	2	2
Accommodation/Placement Issues	3	6	3	0
Adoption	0	1	0	0
Fostering	0	3	3	2
Eligibility for Service / Unhappy with Social Care involvement	0	6	0	2
Data Protection Issues	0	0	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	68	86	60

There has been an improvement in contact arrangements as the Senior Practice leads have focussed upon the importance of contact in plans for permanence. There has also been an increase in support workers within the contact service and foster carers are facilitating contact sessions where appropriate.

Children's social care now have a permanent team manager team across all areas of their service provision. The team management team are cohesive in their approach to managing staff and performance, this has had a positive impact upon all areas of practice, therefore reducing allegations of misconduct.

An increase in complaints about attitude and behaviour could be a result of increased statutory involvement across the board in all localities. Our services have increased their involvement in issuing care proceedings which often impacts greatly on the relationship and interface between families and the support we are trying to deliver to improve outcomes. Often complaints are raised by families within this context sighting behaviour and attitude. Our Senior Practice Leads facilitate reflective practice sessions with social workers in order to assist practitioners in gaining insight into how our statutory involvement impacts upon families and how to moderate their responses to challenging situations.

## 2.7 Complaint Response Times

Of the 52 valid complaints, the department responded to 34 within the statutory timescales (20 working days).

The following tables give a breakdown of the responses that met the timescales at each stage of the complaints procedure, and a comparison with previous years.

**Table 7 - Complaint response times**

Statutory time frames	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14
10 working days or less	14	20	16	20
20 working days or less*	20	24	25	20
Outside the statutory timescale	18	24	45	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>60</b>

\*(extension from 10 days for complex cases)

Overall, performance has been maintained this year in meeting the statutory deadlines for complaint responses with 65% of cases answered in time, the same as in 2015-16.

The service aim to improve compliance to a minimum standard of 85% within 2017/18 – this has unfortunately not been achieved in 2016/17 largely due to demand on officers time. There is still an issue for social workers in balancing replies to complaints against the operational demands of the service. Managers have received complaints training this year and have reported that they often complete responses in their own time due to competing demands at work. The training undertaken has led to an improvement in the quality of responses and the service has focused successfully on this with a view to reducing escalation of complaints, which has a positive impact on financial budgets. However all staff are

aware they have a commitment to achieving this target and the aim is to get responses to individuals in a more timely manner.

The Authority remains committed to ensuring that the complaints process continues to develop and remains open, transparent and accessible to those who need to use it.

## 2.8 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

The number of cases referred to the LGSCO during this reporting period was:

Number of CSC complaints referred to the LGSCO in 2016/2017	1
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Referral of cases to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has decreased from 6 cases in 2015/16 to 1 case in 2016-17. This 1 case was closed after initial enquiries with no further action required.

There has been increased focus upon the early resolution of complaints, often resulting in face to face meetings and regular communication with complainants. This has contributed to improved performance in this area.

## 2.9 Point of receipt for complaints within the authority

The following table shows that the established systems for ensuring that complaints are directed to the Customer Relations team for co-ordination are continuing to work well.

**Table 8**

Point of receipt	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14
Service Area	5	12	2	8
Customer Relations Team	45	50	82	48
Director	1	5	2	4
Chief Executive	0	0	0	0
Other	1	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>60</b>

## 2.10 Method by which complaints were lodged with the authority

**Table 9**

Method of receipt	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14
Letter	4	12	18	14
Telephone/verbal	11	10	16	5
Email	35	43	29	15
Online complaints	0	2	22	20
Feedback form	2	1	1	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>60</b>

The feedback form is part of the information pack previously mentioned in this report that is provided to customers by the Social Worker during their first visit and

provides an option for people to complete a form in writing; however this year has clearly seen email as the preferred option with 63% of complaints being emailed direct to the Social Care Complaints email address.

### 3.0 **PROFILE/CATEGORY OF COMPLAINANTS**

A summary of customer profile and type of customer interaction has shown the following:

**Table 10**

Person making the complaint	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14
Child or young person being looked after or in need	1	1	2	4
Parent/s	37	55	57	43
Local Authority foster carer	6	3	5	0
Special guardian	0	0	0	0
Persons wishing to adopt	0	0	1	0
Persons with sufficient interest in child's welfare	3	3	10	6
Advocacy service	5	6	11	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>60</b>

The number of complaints received either directly from young people or via an advocate is low, and we believe this is because young people's complaints are as much as possible resolved informally before they become "formal" issues in the majority of cases.

The service will consider how to capture complaints from children and young people and ensure that they are aware of their options to escalate matters if they choose to. However, the primary focus will continue to be on ensuring the early resolution of issues that are causing the child or young person concern.

### 4.0 **COMPLIMENTS RECEIVED**

The Council welcomes positive or negative feedback from its users. A total of 34 compliments were recorded during the year, which represents a decrease on the previous year's figures.

**Table 11**

Year	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14
<b>No. of Compliments</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>20</b>

A selection of compliments recorded is included below as examples:

*Thank you very much for your reassurance yesterday. I was feeling lost in unfamiliar territory but now feel fully supported by your fabulous service. I'm so glad me and my family have such an amazing group of professionals supporting us.*  
**Fostering Team Winsford**

*XXXXXX made a point of expressing to me on the phone after their visit how impressed he was with his social worker, commenting that he found her to be very intuitive and insightful, presenting as having a very thorough understanding of XXXXX and needs. XXXXX pointed out that it was meeting with the social worker that persuaded him to offer XXXXXX the placement with them, despite knowing that this will be a very challenging placement, as the social worker gave XXXX the confidence that XXXXX is in receipt of the highest standard of social care support and this is a major contributing factor to the success of a placement for XXXXXX with such complex and challenging needs.*

**Children with Disabilities Team**

*I wanted to inform you that on a number of recent occasions I have had the opportunity to observe the professional social work of XXXXX. I have been very impressed with the quality of her analysis and her ability to manage difficult situations. She is a very good role model, in my view, for young social workers and I hope that you will be able to leverage her skills to train and mentor other social workers in maintaining consistently high standards. In any event, I commend her to you as an excellent asset and wanted to place my admiration on record."*

**Children in Need Team - Chester**

*Dear .... Throughout my life a lot of social workers have come & gone both for me and for (child's name). You are only one of two who I have been honestly able to say has believed in me & done everything in your power to help me better myself not only for my child but for me too. To be able to do your job & do it as amazingly as you do you genuinely have to be in it because you care & that is why you are so good at the job you do because you whole heartedly care about the people that you work with. I genuinely cannot & don't think I ever will be able to put into words how much I do/always have/always will appreciate the time & effort you have always made for my child and myself & for helping me through what has been one of the hardest years of my life. You have ALWAYS had my back & always stuck up for me! You have ALWAYS told me I can do it & have always had faith in me. I don't think I would have got through this year without your support! I can speak for both me and my child to say you are amazing at your job & we will miss your visits so much! Thank you SO much for everything you have done for us! lots + lots of love xxx I promise I will do you proud x turn it over as well .....XXXXX (kisses written by child)*

**Children in Need Team – Winsford**

*We just wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for all you have done and are doing for baby. Also for the support and sound advice you have given to us. You have been instrumental in making this placement run smoothly, always thinking of everything. It has been clear that you care very much for baby. We have been very impressed by your professionalism.*

**Children in Need Team – Ellesmere Port**

#### 4.1 **Table 12- Compliments by Service Area**

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2013-14</b>
<b>Children in Need</b>				
Winsford	2	19	1	7
Chester	6	4	1	6
Ellesmere Port	2	2	7	4
<b>Children in Care</b>				
Winsford	2	1	0	1
Chester	1	3	0	1
Ellesmere Port	11	6	0	0
<b>Children with Disabilities</b>	1	3	0	1
<b>Provider Services</b>			0	
Fostering	5	4	1	0
Adoption	2	3	4	0
		0		
<b>Safeguarding</b>	2	0	0	0
<b>Contact and Referral Team</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>20</b>

We are aware that most compliments are not being formally recorded and the Customer Relations team have encouraged staff to forward compliments for recording. A definition of what is a compliment will also be provided as part of the updated toolkit, making clear that it can come from anyone – a complainant, family member, stakeholder or other agency professional and as much as possible identify/evidence performance at or above and beyond expected standards where learning/good practice can be identified.

## 5.0 **LEARNING AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT**

The Customer Relations team have developed a Complaint Toolkit and a revised Children's Social Care Complaint Policy during 2016-17. The Toolkit reflects current best practice as well as the statutory requirements of the complaint process.

The intention is to now make this available to the service to support Officers in answering complaints at all stages of the process going forward and it will feature twice yearly in the Council's corporate training catalogue managed by HR.

A new training course has also been devised to support Team Managers in answering complaints, with a focus on achieving satisfactory resolution of complaint at the first stage of the process, with a view to reducing request for escalation and therefore cost to the Council. The training will be rolled out in Quarter 2 and 3 2017-18.

### 5.1 **Learning from Complaints Cases**

There have been a number of valuable learning points from complaints cases which have led to service improvements, and the following examples highlight the changes made:

*Example 1:* A complaint was received expressing dissatisfaction with educational provision for foster child. As a result there was a meeting with the SEN Team Manager to confirm the process of school transfer for children subject to Education Health Care Plans and to invite her to a Children in Care team meeting to ensure all social workers have a full understanding of processes and to improve communication between the teams. The virtual school locality advisor is now based within the Chester Children in Care Team one day per week in order to provide ongoing advice and support to the Social Work team. In addition to this the locality advisor also attends Children In Care team meetings no less than quarterly to ensure effective learning and communication within the team.

#### **Children in Care Team - Chester**

*Example 2:* A service user was unhappy with a Social Worker not providing the correct equipment for their child. As a result improvement has been made to the guidance for this equipment available to Social Workers including reference to appropriate legislation. This has been reinforced during team meetings and external training has been sourced and was provided 7.12.16. Staff asked for further practical training which has also been arranged.

#### **Children in Need Team – Ellesmere Port**

*Example 3:* A complaint was received that not enough contact or support was received from the Transitions Team. As a result of the complaint an enhanced Training Plan was devised by the Transition Management Team to ensure all staff are fully trained to undertake the role effectively; to respond in the expected timescales and to ensure effective communication with Service users and families; a decision was made to increase capacity of the Team by 3 in order to strengthen the team's ability to respond in a timely manner; There was change in 'working practices' so that all service users open to the Transition Team have a designated Worker –this gives all stakeholders a point of contact within the team and reduces the risk of potential risk of miscommunication.

#### **Transitions Team**

## **5.2 Other Service Improvement Activities**

During 2017-18 other service improvements that had a basis in complaint included:

- The update of the Single Assessment Recording policy
- The introduction of an appeals process with regard to conference discussions, negating the need for families to use the complaints process for this.
- Local Government Ombudsman complaint handling training for Team Managers and the Customer Relations Team.
- The Local Safeguarding Children Board identified 'Transition' as an area requiring further work and development. This area had also been identified within a recent complaint and as a result it was agreed that a task and finish group should be established. To date an Independent Chair has been appointed and Terms of Reference agreed. Adult and Children's facing services are represented on this multi-agency group and they are in the process of updating the protocol and the associated pathway. The work is due to be completed by November 2017.

## **6.0 FUTURE PLANS FOR COMPLAINT HANDLING**

During 2017-18 the Customer Relations Team aim to progress the following with regard to complaint management:

- Review and update of both the Intranet and Internet to ensure complaint information and guidance for staff and customers is up to date and reflects current processes.
- Roll out of a Children's Social Care Complaint Toolkit to provide detailed guidance and support to staff about the complaint process, includes process and templates.
- Approval of the updated Children's Social Care Complaint Policy, and publication of that Policy and associated Equality and Diversity Questionnaire.
- Delivery of Complaint Training to Children's Social Care Team Managers.
- Investigate, commission and develop a new Complaint Management System with a view to implementation of the system from 2018-19.
- Development and rollout of a toolkit for Independent Officers/Independent Persons when working for Cheshire West and Chester Council to ensure consistent standards and payments.
- Support the Aspiring Team Manager programme by running an Effective Complaint Management workshop.
- Investigate, commission and develop a new Complaint Management system with a view to implementation of the system from 2018-19.

End Report.