



## **Cheshire West and Chester Council**

Children's Social Care Complaints and Compliments

Annual Report  
2018- 2019

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This report provides information about the Children's Social Care Complaints and Compliments received by Cheshire West and Chester Council during the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. It highlights performance against statutory and internal timescales for complaint handling and provides assurance that improvements or revisions to services have been identified as a result of listening and responding to both compliments and complaints.
- 1.2 The Council's Customer Relations team, within the Governance directorate, was responsible for the coordination of Compliments and Complaints during this period. The Children's Social Care team are responsible for responding to complaint matters. The Customer Relations Team review all draft responses and provide advice and support to the service on reasonable outcomes or remedies to complaints, from a layperson's perspective.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 The objectives of this report are to:
  - i. be open and transparent about our social care complaints process
  - ii. meet our statutory obligation to produce an annual report
  - iii. provide clear and concise comparative data on compliments and complaints, including details of complaints broken down by subject and service area
  - iv. provide a summary of customer profile and type of customer interaction
  - v. identify service improvements as a result of complaints and compliments and demonstrate learning and improved practices and processes from these

## **2. Context**

- 2.1 The aim of the Council's Children's Social Care Service 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.
- 2.2 Whilst considering this report it is important to know the overall picture of Children's Social Care involvement in the Cheshire West and Chester area. During 2018-19 Children's Services received 13,369 child contacts via the integrated Access and Referral Team (iART). Of these 2561 progressed to a Children's Social Care Referral, meaning that a statutory Social Work assessment was undertaken representing 19% of the children the Council helped. Of those 2561 receiving services, 57 formal complaints were received and responded to, representing 2.2% of the children the Council helped.

### **3. Statutory Compliance Procedure**

#### **3.1 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. A local authority must also ensure that action is taken if necessary in the light of the outcome of a complaint.

- 3.2 The current Children's Social Care and Health complaints procedure consists of a three stage process. The complainant retains the right to approach the independent Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman at any time. However, the Ombudsman would expect the local authority to consider the complaint initially. To comply with the above requirements, Cheshire West and Chester have adopted the operational procedures set out in the following paragraphs of this section of the report.

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

- 3.3 The Customer Relations Team is responsible for the handling and consideration of complaints and acts as a central point through which complaints can be made to the Council. 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 are currently referred to the Customer Relations Team to be assessed for eligibility.
- 3.4 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 route (for example safeguarding or through the corporate complaints process if the issue complained about is not related to the quality of care provided) would be more appropriate.
- 3.5 The Customer Relations Team offer training, advice and support to staff in their consideration of complaints and perform a quality assurance role in the preparation of complaint responses. The Team 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 & Social Care Ombudsman.
- 3.6 The Team also coordinates the completion of Learning Action Reports for the service, which ensures there is learning and improvement identified from investigations into complaints. This is recorded and reported centrally and monitored to ensure that the implementation of identified, agreed actions following the outcome of complaints is carried out. Learning is shared with other services, where it is relevant to do so, in order to improve service delivery Council-wide.

## **What is a Complaint?**

- 3.7 Any expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided by the council or by a contractor or partner) that requires a response. There is no difference between a 'formal' and an 'informal' complaint. Both are expressions of dissatisfaction that require a response.

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

- 3.8 There are a variety of people who can complain:
- i. Any child or young person who is Looked After or who is a child in need or is a child with disabilities
  - ii. Foster parents
  - iii. People applying to adopt, or who are receiving services from our Adoption service
  - iv. Care leavers
  - v. Special Guardians
- 3.9 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.

## **Initial Expressions of Dissatisfaction**

- 3.10 Initially complaints are always assessed or 'triaged' by the Customer Relations team. If, from initial assessment, it looks like the complaint can be resolved by close of play the following day, it is not required to proceed through the complaints process. These concerns/issues are often relatively minor and resolution can most easily be addressed locally through the service. The customer is always advised how they can progress their complaint if they remain dissatisfied

## **Urgent safeguarding issues and alternative paths**

- 3.11 The Customer Relations Team also review the complaint to identify any potential safeguarding risks or concerns that need immediate attention. Where safeguarding issues are identified, those matters are redirected to be considered under the appropriate safeguarding procedures without delay. Where there are no obvious safeguarding concerns complaints are referred via the Customer Relations Team to a Senior Manager to be considered through the social care complaints procedure.
- 3.12 All, or parts of a complaint may not be eligible under the social care complaint process. Where this is the case all non-social care elements will be referred to the corporate complaints policy or a more appropriate 'alternative path' and the customer kept informed about how their complaint, or parts of their complaint, will be dealt with.

## **Stage 1 – Local Resolution**

- 3.13 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.
- 3.14 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.

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

- 3.15 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.
- 3.16 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. Alternatively the IO can be appointed from the North West Complaint Managers Group 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. The Council's current practice is to recruit exclusively from this list.
- 3.17 A second person, the Independent Person (IP) will be appointed from the North West Complaint Managers Group 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 their own report on the investigation, commenting on each complaint element and stating whether they agree with the IO's findings.
- 3.18 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.
- 3.19 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.

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

- 3.20 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.
- 3.21 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.
- 3.22 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.
- 3.23 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.

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

- 3.24 Where complaints remain unresolved to the satisfaction of the complainant, a referral may be made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) for consideration. This can be done by the complainant following completion of all 3 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. The Council will usually seek advice from the Ombudsman's office before making any referral.

## **4. Performance Activity**

### **Summary of Complaint Activity**

- 4.1 From April 2018 to March 2019 there were a total of 157 social care complaint representations made to Cheshire West and Chester Council. Of the 157 representations received, there were 57 **valid complaints** progressed, with the remaining 100 either ineligible (38) or withdrawn / resolved via an alternative route (62).
- 4.2 Of the 57 formal complaints, 13 requested a stage 2 escalation as the complainant remained dissatisfied. 5 did not provide sufficient grounds for continuing their complaint and 1 subsequently withdrew. 7 were taken to a full stage 2 investigation. 1 of the 2018-19 stage 2 complaints initially requested escalation to stage 3 of the process but subsequently withdrew.

### **Comparison with Previous Years**

- 4.3 The table below shows the number of considered and progressed complaints for the year compared with the previous two 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
2018-19	57	62	38	157
2017-18	73	73	20	166
2016-17	52	64	24	140

*\*Complaints assessed as being not valid through the statutory Social Care complaint 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.*

### **Numbers of Complaints - Analysis**

- 4.4 The number of valid complaints investigated by the Council has decreased by 22% compared to the previous year, as well as seeing a slight decrease in the overall number of complaint representations handled by the Customer Relations team.
- 4.5 One reason for complaints reducing by over a fifth can be attributed to the service being more proactive in working with families at the earliest stage to resolve issues. This has been a priority for all teams because it not only avoids families having to go through the formal complaints process and help maintain positive relationships between us, but also it potentially prevents time consuming and costly investigations having to be undertaken.
- 4.6 A further observation has been the improved transition arrangements when a child needs a different type of support or support from multiple teams / agencies. Communication here has improved and there now seems to be a more 'joined up' approach between different service areas, in particular between children's services, adult-facing services; and housing services.
- 4.7 A robust triage process continuing to be applied by the Customer Relations team also seems to be helping services to identify the most relevant route for the complaint.
- 4.8 Members have previously asked for benchmarking or comparative information to be included in future reports. This has proved difficult to obtain from a sufficient number of local authorities willing to participate in the exercise, in time for publication of this report. This is something that will be explored in 2019/20 by the Customer Relations Team working with colleagues in the Research, Intelligence & Communications team and, with the LGSCO's new interactive mapping tool introduced in July 2019 we hope to be able to make more comparative assessments of our performance.

### **Complaint Outcomes**

- 4.9 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 2 - Stage 1 outcomes and comparisons with previous year**

Year	Upheld	Partially upheld	Not upheld	Outstanding	Total
<b>2018-19</b>	<b>11(20%)</b>	<b>33(57%)</b>	<b>13(23%)</b>	<b>0(0%)</b>	<b>57</b>
2017-18	7(10%)	40(54%)	26(35%)	0(0%)	73
2016-17	7(13%)	31(60%)	14(27%)	0(0%)	52

- 4.10 This year, 77% of complaints have either been upheld or partially upheld which is an increase from 64% in the previous year. This demonstrates that the robust approach, by both the Customer Relations team and the Children's Services team, in triaging complaints and signposting to alternative paths is working effectively. 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 and officers are better able to identify or acknowledge fault at an earlier stage and offer a reasonable remedy. It should also be noted that there has been further improvement in cross-service working within the Children's Services teams and an ongoing commitment by the Customer Relations Team to encourage services to accept fault rather than adopt a defensive position.

**Table 3 - Stage 2 outcomes and comparisons with previous years**

Year	Upheld	Partially upheld	Not upheld	Open cases	Withdrawn	Total
<b>2018-19</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>
2017-18	0	1	0	0	0	1
2016-17	0	3	0	0	0	3

- 4.11 From the 57 complaints reviewed under stage1 of the process in 2018/19, there were 13 requests for escalation to stage 2. Of these, 5 were referred back to the service as, in the Customer Relations view, they did not provide reasonable grounds for continuing their complaint and the issues raised had been resolved as far as possible, or an offered remedy was considered reasonable, or redirected to the most appropriate route for resolution. Of the 8 that were considered valid 1 was subsequently withdrawn by the complainant and 7 were investigated under stage 2 of the process. At the time of this report, 5 are closed, 4 with outcomes of partially upheld and 1 upheld in full. The other 2 are still being investigated.
- 4.12 By comparison, there were 8 requests for escalation in 2017/18 out of 73 valid complaints, with 1 proceeding to full stage 2 investigation.
- 4.13 The higher number of initial requests (13) in 2018/2019 could be attributed to people's greater expectations and demands on service delivery. The Customer Relations team and the service strive to promote engagement and ongoing dialogue and this is demonstrated by the number that were referred back to the service to agree resolution rather than proceed to stage 2.
- 4.14 The Customer Relations 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 routine



business stage or Stage 1 across the service in order to improve customer satisfaction with the complaint process, as well as reducing the costs associated with escalation. During 2018/19 the Customer Relations team provided advice and guidance to service managers, promoting consistency and a holistic approach to learning about complaints service-wide. The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's guidance on complaint handling forms an integral part of the advice given.

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

Year	Upheld	Partially upheld	Not upheld	Open cases	Withdrawn	Total
2018-19	0	0	0	0	1	0
2017-18	0	0	0	0	0	0
2016-17	0	0	0	0	0	0

- 4.15 There was 1 complaint escalated to stage 3 in 2018/19. The complaint was withdrawn because, whilst they were not entirely satisfied with the outcome of the stage 2 investigation, they accepted that it had been thorough and a stage 3 review would be unlikely to find fault with the way the investigation had been conducted.
- 4.16 Again, this is evidence of more robust complaint investigations and resolutions at stages 1 and 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 in full.

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

- 4.17 Table 4 below shows a breakdown of complaints received by each service area.

**Table 4**

Service Area	Number of Complaints per Year		
Children in Need	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17
Winsford	10	13	11
Chester	14	14	13
Ellesmere Port	5	8	8
<b>Children in Care</b>			
Winsford	8	8	2
Chester	4	6	5
Ellesmere Port	4	5	1
<b>Leaving Care</b>	5	5	1
<b>Children with Disabilities</b>	3	4	7
<b>Provider Services</b>			
Fostering	1	3	0
Adoption	0	1	0
<b>Integrated Early Support</b>	1	0	0
<b>Safeguarding</b>	1	0	0
<b>Contact and Referral Team</b>	0	4	1
<b>Transition Team</b>	1	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>52</b>

- 4.18 A reduction in the overall number of complaints will be noted which is a general trend across all services. The locality areas that received the most number of complaints i.e. Winsford and Chester also serve the highest population, therefore it is expected that the proportion of complaints would be higher in these areas.
- 4.19 Officers are empowered to address the complaint at the earliest stage which still recognises the right to complain but can prevent escalation.
- 4.20 The Customer Relations team will continue to work closely with the Children's Services team both at the gateway when complaints are initially received, and by reflecting on the outcomes of case reviews. However it is recognised that due to the sensitive nature of the work we undertake, some families will always use the complaint process to reflect their dissatisfaction with their situation as well as to complain about practice and decisions.

### Breakdown of complaints received by Subject

- 4.21 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.
- 4.22 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 5**

<b>Complaint Subject</b> (primary area of concern)	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2016-17</b>
<b>Standard of Service Delivery</b>	<b>19</b>	29	22
<i>Inaccuracies in assessments</i>	3	1	5
<i>Lack of support</i>	10	15	12
<i>Failure to investigate concerns</i>	0	5	4
<i>Issues with contact arrangements</i>	1	4	1
<i>Other</i>	5	4	
<b>Social Worker</b>	<b>24</b>	31	20
<i>Allegations of Misconduct</i>	1	3	1
<i>Issues with Attitude / Behaviour</i>	1	16	12
<i>Lack of Support</i>	5	7	4
<i>Preference for one parent over another</i>	2	4	3
<i>Social Worker and Team Manager</i>	15	1	0
<b>Communication</b>	<b>8</b>	4	7
<i>Lack of response</i>	7	1	4
<i>Late / missing reports</i>	1	1	1
<i>Cancellation of appointments</i>	0	2	2
<b>Child Protection Issues</b>	<b>0</b>	1	0
<b>Financial Issues</b>	<b>0</b>	1	0
<b>Accommodation/Placement Issues</b>	<b>3</b>	3	3
<b>Adoption</b>	<b>0</b>	0	0
<b>Fostering</b>	<b>2</b>	1	0
<b>Eligibility for Service / Unhappy with Social Care involvement</b>	<b>1</b>	2	0
<b>Data Protection Issues</b>	<b>0</b>	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	73	52

- 4.23 Again there is a decrease in the number of complaints received across most categories. Some areas have seen significant reductions in the number of complaints received: 'Service Delivery' by a third but more significant is the reduction in complaints about 'Attitude and Behaviour' which has decreased by 94%. However, this category needs to be compared to the increase in complaints relating to Social Worker and Team Manager which has increased from 1 in the previous year to 15 in this reporting period. It is recognised that there will be some subjectivity by the Customer Relations Team in deciding on the primary reason for the complaint that may mean some inconsistency in categorisation over the year.
- 4.24 Part of the role of the service is to issue care proceedings via Court in order to safeguard children. This can often impact greatly on the relationship and interface between families and the support being offered to try and reduce risks and improve outcomes. It is therefore understandable that complaints are raised by families within this context. In some circumstances, officers have responded or managed situations differently which has contributed to some complaints. Therefore our Senior Practitioners continue to facilitate reflective practice sessions with social workers in order to help them gain insight into how our statutory involvement impacts upon families and how to deal most effectively to challenging situations.

### **Complaint Response Times**

- 4.25 Of the 57 valid complaints, the department responded to 40 within the statutory timescales. Initially 10 working days which can be extended to 20 working days for more complex cases requiring longer to investigate. Wherever possible, customers are kept informed and are able to negotiate new timeframes. 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 6 - Complaint response times**

<b>Statutory time frames</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2016-17</b>
10 working days or less	<b>12</b>	14	14
20 working days or less	<b>28</b>	31	20
Outside the statutory timescale	<b>17</b>	28	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>52</b>

- 4.26 Overall, performance has improved this year in meeting the statutory deadlines for complaint responses with 70% of cases answered in time compared to 62% in the previous year.
- 4.27 The target of a minimum standard of 85% compliance within statutory timescales continues to be challenging for the service. Whilst this has not been met further work will be undertaken in 2019/20 to improve on this performance rate.
- 4.28 The reasons for not meeting this target remain the same as the nature of work within the service has not changed; in fact, teams report an increased complexity of work coming through to them, which may give some explanation as to why it takes

longer to investigate and respond thoroughly to complaints. Also noticeable is the range of issues raised in some complaints that will take time to look investigate. What we do know is there is greater focus on complaints at all levels of the service and efforts have improved to resolve issues raised by families to prevent them escalating into formal complaints.

- 4.29 The Customer Relations team are working closely with the Service to identify how best to coordinate casework and improve response times, between the Customer Relations Team, Senior managers and the team managers who tend to investigate the complaint in the first instance. This likely to be through a designated customer contact coordinator, reflecting the model across all other Council services which is generally working well. The Customer Relations Team will continue to offer drafting advice and support.

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

- 4.30 The number of cases received by the LGSCO during this reporting period for Education and Children's Services was 12. The number of cases decided by the LGSCO during this reporting period for Education and Children's Services was 17. Of those, 6 were referred back to the service as premature, and of the 11 remaining 5 related to Social Care. 3 out of the 17 cases were Upheld and 2 of these 3 were from Children's Social Care.
- 4.31 This demonstrates an increase on the previous year 2017/18, where 11 cases were decided, all of which were premature, incomplete, or advice given with the exception of 1 for Education Services that was Not Upheld. The 2 upheld cases for Children's Services this year were due to maladministration and injustice. These were complex cases concerning transition to adult services with remedies requiring:
- i. An apology
  - ii. Financial redress: avoidable distress/time and trouble (totalling £850)
  - iii. Procedure or policy change/review
- 4.32 Although there was a common theme to the 2 upheld complaints each matter concerned specific and individual circumstances; and all of the Ombudsman recommended remedies have been actioned, it is not anticipated that there will be a reoccurrence of complaints on similar issues.
- 4.33 The Authority remains committed to ensuring the complaints process continues to develop and remains open, transparent and accessible to those who need to use it.

### **Point and method of receipt for complaints within the authority**

- 4.34 The Customer Relations Team records both the 'point of receipt' and 'method of receipt' of complaints into the Council. This intelligence can help support service improvement decisions. Table 7 shows that the established systems for ensuring that complaints are directed to the Customer Relations Team for co-ordination are working well, with those sent into the service re-directed to the Customer Relations Team. Table 8 shows an increase in preference of customers for contacting us using the on-line complaint form.

**Table 7**

Point of receipt	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17
Service Area	4	11	5
Customer Relations Team	51	61	45
Director	2	2	1
Chief Executive	0	0	0
Other	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>52</b>

**Table 8**

Method of receipt	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17
Letter	7	8	5
Telephone/verbal	7	15	11
Email	28	41	35
Online complaints	13	7	0
Feedback form	2	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>52</b>

72% of complaints are submitted by email or online form.

- 4.35 The feedback form is part of the information pack 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 digital communication as the preferred option.

## 5. Profile/ Category of Complainants

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

**Table 9**

Person making the complaint	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17
Child or young person being looked after or in need	1	7	1
Parent/s	35	50	37
Local Authority foster carer	0	0	6
Special guardian	1	2	0
Persons wishing to adopt	0	0	0
Persons with sufficient interest in child's welfare	6	5	3
Advocacy service	14	9	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>52</b>

- 5.2 The number of complaints received from a child or young person is low; feedback from children and young people indicate that they enjoy positive relationships with their Social Workers and Personal Advisors, therefore there is always emphasis on resolving a child/ young person's complaint as much as possible informally before they become "formal" issues. It will be noted that there has also been an increase in the use of advocacy services, indicating a growing culture of children and young people accessing independent professionals to advocate their wishes on their

behalf, again demonstrating that the service is listening to young people either directly or through another route.

- 5.3 The service will continue to consider how best 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.

## **6. Compliments Received**

- 6.1 The Council welcomes positive or negative feedback from its users. A total of 31 compliments were recorded during the year, which represents a small decrease on the previous year's figures. The service wants to strengthen how compliments are reported as it believes more compliments are received than are actually recorded. When this has been analysed by senior managers, the consensus is that this figure does not accurately reflect the level of compliments received from both families and other professionals. The service will be looking at its approach to acknowledging compliments to make sure that the number is accurate and fully reflective of the positive feedback it does receive.

**Table 10**

Year	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17
No. of Compliments	31	37	34

- 6.2 A selection of compliments recorded is included below as examples:

### **Fostering Team:**

We just want to say a big thank you to all your team for helping us out with XXXXX. I'm sorry this is late sending to you. I especially want to praise XXXXXXXX. She has been fantastic with us and there should be more XXXXXs in this world. She is a fantastic social worker. We wouldn't of done this without her. I also need to thank XXXXX and XXXXXXXX for all their support and kindness.

### **Children with disabilities**

...XXXXXX was different and on the ball she really amazed me by reassuring me everything will be fine and she is there to help my family , and doing her best to help us, when she left she always kept me updated weekly with our progress of our application as well as giving us information to look at for my boys disability youth clubs .It was an absolutely pleasure having XXXXX as our support worker , I thought I should share my experience with you ,it's not every day you hear about outstanding service. Well done for keeping your staff so motivated and caring for families who are struggling with their kid's disabilities.

### **Edge of Care team**

Always upbeat, very approachable, excellent at what she does, always positive. The children really liked her she is a credit to her profession. She is a credit to your

department. She has the knack of making people feel good and positive by the end of every visit

### **Children in need Ellesmere Port**

I had a fantastic social worker to work with, XXX. He was the best in many, many years. We now have XXX who is good, listens, is there when needed and does what she says she will do.'

## **7. Outcomes- Learning and Service Improvement**

- 7.1 The Council has identified areas and opportunities from which learning can be taken from the complaints and the compliments process and used to improve future service delivery.

### **Learning from Complaints**

- 7.2 There have been a number of valuable learning points from complaints cases which have led to practice service improvements, and the following examples highlight the changes made:
- i. The leaving care team were reminded of the importance of supervised contacts for young people and will ensure that they take place as stated within care plans.
  - ii. Improvements in keeping both parents fully up to date in relation to assessments and plans regarding their child(ren).
  - iii. Improvements to the way information is shared between parents in conflict, and ensuring this is recorded when it has been and that it is done within a professional meeting format.
  - iv. Policy and procedure were changed following specific complaints regarding young people who transition from children's services to adult services. A new Senior Manager for Disability Services oversees this and the working relationship between these 2 service areas has improved significantly.
  - v. Locality Social Work Teams regularly look at themes arising from complaints and these are discussed at Team Meetings. Any significant themes are also shared at service events that are attended by Social Workers and Team Managers

## **8. Future Plans for Complaint Handling**

- 8.1 **ICT:** A new Complaint Management system has been commissioned and will be developed and tested in 2019/20 to support the requirements of the Social Care and Customer Relations teams. It is expected to improve efficiency and data recording, with an enhanced reporting facility. This should become operational from April 2020. As part of the rollout of the new system, improved networking with Social Care teams via a dedicated customer contact coordinator will ensure any bottlenecks with complaints are dealt with more efficiently and effectively, this will be reviewed regularly by the Customer Relations Team to ensure it is working well. There will also be more scope to share learning at structured meetings between

CSC and the Customer Relations team, and through improved system reporting. Additionally, the corporate training programme for Effective Complaint Management will continue in future years.

- 8.2 Reporting categories have historically been based on the best practice guidance as set out by the former Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), which authorities are signposted to in section 5.6.3 of 'Getting the Best from Complaints'. The Care Quality Commission has since superseded CSCI and the Council will, for the next report in 2019/20 consider aggregating some similar categories and/or introducing fresh categories in consultation with relevant bodies and other local authorities.
- 8.3 Whilst escalation of complaints to stage 2 and 3 continues to be low they do come at a significant cost to the Council. The Customer Relations Team will be reviewing, with the service, how they can reduce these costs by considering other options for the recruitment of IOs. We will continue to recruit the IP from the NWCMG List as there is a requirement for these to have complete independence from the local authority.

#### **New Ways of Working Programme:**

- 8.4 This is a transformational approach to strengthening culture and practice across the children's workforce within Cheshire West and Chester. It is being driven forward by the Children's Trust and is a DfE funded Innovation Programme until March 2020. The focus of the programme is developing a model of practice that focuses on the trauma a child has experienced and understanding the root causes of it. By having a shared approach to how all professionals work, the aim is to identify need as early as possible and work alongside families and building on their strengths to help meet these needs.