



Cheshire West and Chester Council

Children's Social Care Complaints and Compliments

Annual Report
2019-2020

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 2019 to 31 March 2020. 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 2019-20 Children's Services received 13,195 child contacts via the

integrated Access and Referral Team (iART). Of these 2625 progressed to a Children's Social Care Referral, meaning that a statutory Social Work assessment was undertaken representing just over 20% of the children the Council helped. Of those 2625 receiving services, 37 formal complaints were received and responded to, representing 1.4% 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 learning and improvement is 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. Where the issue is identified as more complex, often the senior manager becomes more involved to either support the manager, or take the lead, in securing an early resolution. 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 scope of 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 List). 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 List. 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 discussions 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 List, 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 2019 to March 2020 there were a total of 135 social care complaint representations made to Cheshire West and Chester Council. Of the 135 representations received, there were 37 **valid complaints** progressed, with the remaining 98 either ineligible (54) or withdrawn / resolved via an alternative route (44).
- 4.2 Of the 37 formal complaints, 12 requested a stage 2 escalation as the complainant remained dissatisfied. 8 did not provide sufficient grounds for continuing their complaint or was in court proceedings; and 3 subsequently withdrew. 1 was transferred to be reviewed under the Corporate Complaints Policy. As none were taken to a full stage 2 investigation, no requests were made for escalation to stage 3 of the process.

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
2019-20	37	44	54	135
2018-19	57	62	38	157
2017-18	73	73	20	166

**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 35% 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 third could 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 continues to be applied by the Customer Relations team which also helps services to identify the most relevant route for the complaint. For example, we are increasingly referring complaints to the Data Protection Officer to consider as requests for one or more of the data protection rights available to customers (e.g. the right to rectification). Alternatively, the Council's corporate complaint process should support complaints against the service that are not in relation to a decision or action that directly affects or impacts on the best interests of the child or young person.

Complaint Outcomes

- 4.8 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
2019-2020	4 (11%)	19 (51%)	14 (38%)	0 (0%)	37
2018-19	11(20%)	33(57%)	13(23%)	0(0%)	57
2017-18	7(10%)	40(54%)	26(35%)	0(0%)	73

- 4.9 This year, 62% of complaints have either been upheld or partially upheld which is a decrease from 77% 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 continues to work 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
2019-20	0	0	0	0	3	3
2018-19	1	6	0	0	1	8
2017-18	0	1	0	0	0	1

- 4.10 From the 37 complaints reviewed under stage 1 of the process in 2019/20, there were 12 requests for escalation to stage 2. Of these, 8 were refused as they were being dealt with by the courts or they 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 4 that were considered valid 3 were subsequently withdrawn by the complainant and 1 was transferred to be reviewed under the corporate complaints process.
- 4.11 By comparison, there were 8 requests for escalation in 2018/19 out of 57 valid complaints, with 2 proceeding to full stage 2 investigation.
- 4.12 The higher number of initial requests (12) in 2019/2020 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. The fact that none proceeded to a full investigation also demonstrates value for money as these investigations are both costly and time consuming. We have also trialled a new approach from the Customer Relations Team to decline stage 2 requests on the grounds that they have not outlined the specific reasons for escalation, such as what outstanding injustice remains and/or what their desired outcome is, or in some cases, why the proposed remedy is not considered 'reasonable'.

- 4.13 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 2019/20 the Customer Relations Team provided advice and guidance to service managers, promoting consistency and a holistic approach to learning about complaints across the service. The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's guidance on complaint handling forms an integral part of the advice given and the Customer Relations Team promote the Ombudsman's guidance on remedies and encourages the service to use this as a guide to offering a 'reasonable' remedy to prevent further escalation and costs.

Stage 3 outcomes and comparisons with previous year

Year	Upheld	Partially upheld	Not upheld	Open cases	Withdrawn	Total
2019-20	0	0	0	0	0	0
2018-19	0	0	0	0	1	0
2017-18	0	0	0	0	0	0

- 4.14 There were no complaints escalated to stage 3 in 2019/20.
- 4.15 Again, this is evidence of more robust complaint investigations and resolutions at stage 1.

Breakdown of complaints received by Service Area

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

Table 4

Service Area	Number of Complaints per Year		
	2019-20	2018-17	2017-18
Children in Need			
Winsford	5	10	13
Chester	5	14	14
Ellesmere Port	8	5	8
Children in Care			
Winsford	4	8	8
Chester	1	4	6
Ellesmere Port	1	4	5
Leaving Care	2	5	5
Children with Disabilities	5	3	4
Provider Services			
Fostering	0	1	3
Adoption	0	0	1
Integrated Early Support	1	1	0
Safeguarding	2	1	0
Integrated Access and Referral Team	2	0	4
Transition Team	1	1	2
Total	37	57	73

- 4.17 Whilst there is an overall reduction in the number of complaints, it should be noted that, there is a significant reduction in the previously high area such as Children in Need in Winsford and Chester.
- 4.18 Officers are empowered to address the complaint at the earliest stage which still recognises the right to complain but can prevent escalation.
- 4.19 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. Plus, sometimes, the service could have handled a situation differently which has justifiably resulted in a complaint.

Breakdown of complaints received by Subject

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

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

Table 5

Complaint Subject (primary area of concern)	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18
Standard of Service Delivery	14	19	29
<i>Inaccuracies in assessments</i>	3	3	1
<i>Lack of support</i>	6	10	15
<i>Failure to investigate concerns</i>	1	0	5
<i>Issues with contact arrangements</i>	0	1	4
<i>Other</i>	4	5	4
Social Worker	14	24	31
<i>Allegations of Misconduct</i>	0	1	3
<i>Issues with Attitude / Behaviour</i>	2	1	16
<i>Lack of Support</i>	3	5	7
<i>Preference for one parent over another</i>	2	2	4
<i>Social Worker and Team Manager</i>	7	15	1
Communication	5	8	4
<i>Lack of response</i>	5	7	1
<i>Late / missing reports</i>	0	1	1
<i>Cancellation of appointments</i>	0	0	2
Child Protection Issues	0	0	1
Financial Issues	2	0	1
Accommodation/Placement Issues	0	3	3
Adoption	0	0	0
Fostering	0	2	1
Eligibility for Service / Unhappy with Social Care involvement	2	1	2
Data Protection Issues	0	0	1
Total	37	57	73

- 4.22 2019-2020 demonstrates a further decrease in the number of complaints received across most categories with 'Service Delivery' seeing a significant 26% reduction.
- 4.23 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

- 4.24 Of the 37 valid complaints, the department responded to 13 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 can negotiate new timeframes. The following tables give a breakdown of the responses that met the timescales at each stage of the complaint procedure, and a comparison with previous years.

Table 6 - Complaint response times

Statutory time frames	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18
10 working days or less	0	12	14
20 working days or less	13	28	31
Outside the statutory timescale	24	17	28
Total	37	57	73

- 4.25 Overall, performance has reduced this year in meeting the statutory deadlines for complaint responses with 35% of cases answered in time compared to 70% in the previous year.
- 4.26 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 2020/21 to improve on this performance rate.
- 4.27 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 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 as is demonstrated in the reduction in the overall number of complaints received which is a further downward trend on previous years.

- 4.28 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 is 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)

- 4.29 The Ombudsman reports on local authority figures based on the number of cases it receives in the reporting year; the number of decisions it makes in the reporting year (which may include cases ongoing from the previous year) and the Council's compliance with any recommendations. The number of cases received by the LGSCO during this reporting period for Education and Children's Services was 20, of which 6 were relating to Education services and 7 were premature where advice was given to the complainant but the case was not referred to the Council (we cannot break this figure down into Education or social care).

The outcomes of the 7 remaining cases received that related to CSC were:

Outcome	Number
Open – case ongoing	1
Not Upheld	1
Closed after initial enquiries, out of jurisdiction	1
Closed after initial enquiries, no further action	2
Premature – referred to Body in Jurisdiction (Council)	2

The number of cases decided by the LGSCO during this reporting period for Education and Children's Services was 19. Of those, 9 were considered premature and advice was given to the complainant and 1 was incomplete/invalid. We cannot break this data further down to distinguish between education and children's social care.

Of the 9 remaining cases that had a decision 5 related to Children's social care and the outcomes were:

Outcome	2019-20 Number
Upheld	1
Closed after initial enquiries, no further action	3 (1 of these related to a persistent customer managed under the Council's Managed Contact Policy).

Premature – referred to Body in Jurisdiction (Council)	1
--	---

The 1 case Upheld against the service was recorded as “Upheld: maladministration, no injustice”.

It related to a complaint from a young person with support from an advocate. It concerned how the Council worked with her when, and after, she was subject to an Interim Care Order. The Council was at fault as it did not properly involve Miss X in care planning. It then delayed accepting she was a care leaver and it failed to escalate her complaint properly through the statutory children’s complaint procedures. However, these faults did not cause her a significant injustice. The Council has apologised, arranged support and addressed faults with its officers.

Another upheld decision, recorded against Adult Care Services as “Upheld: no further action” relates to the transition of a young person into adult care.

The Ombudsman decided not to investigate Mr A’s complaint about the Council failing to offer a financial payment for the injustice he has suffered. This is because the Council has offered Mr A £500 for its failure to implement a transition plan plus an additional £250 for the time and trouble he has encountered pursuing a complaint. The Ombudsman is satisfied this remedies the injustice caused to Mr A.

This will be referred to further in the ASC Complaints report but demonstrates that the services need to continue to work closely to ensure that young people are supported during their transition into adult support services.

In both cases, prompt action by the service/s in receipt of the complaint ensured that the Ombudsman was satisfied with the remedies offered and it is promising that these remedies were deemed sufficient to resolve any injustice without the Ombudsman needing to make any further recommendations.

4.30 These figures compare to the previous year 2018-19 as follows:

- 4 out of 12 cases received related to CSC. Whilst the volume of cases received has increased the % relating to CSC is comparable (33% in 2018/19 and 35% in 2019/20).
- 6 out of 17 cases decided related to CSC (35% in 2018/19, 26% in 2019/20)
- 2 out of 6 cases decided upon were Upheld (33% in 2018/19 compared to 20% in 2019/20).

This suggests that the service is endeavouring to resolve complaints at every stage, even when they have reached the Ombudsman, taking a proactive approach rather than waiting for an outcome and recommendations.

- 4.31 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

- 4.32 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	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18
Service Area	5	4	11
Customer Relations Team	31	51	61
Director/Head of Service	1	2	2
Chief Executive	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0
Total	37	57	73

Table 8

Method of receipt	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18
Letter	7	7	8
Telephone/verbal	2	7	15
Email	20	28	41
Online complaints	5	13	7
Feedback form	3	2	2
Total	37	57	73

68% of complaints are submitted by email or online form.

- 4.33 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, again, this year demonstrates that e-mail is the preferred method of communication.

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	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18
Child or young person being looked after or in need	4	1	7
Parent/s	30	35	50
Local Authority foster carer	1	0	0
Special guardian	0	1	2
Persons wishing to adopt	0	0	0
Persons with sufficient interest in child's welfare	0	6	5
Advocacy service	2	14	9
Total	37	57	73

- 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 18 compliments were recorded during the year. 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	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18
No. of Compliments	18	31	37

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

Xxxxx and I would like to thank you for the support you have given us as a family, regarding our son xxxxx. Who had struggled with his disability for a long time, you gave us hope when we had none. You have always been on the end of an Email, to answer any questions or doubts we have had.

We wish you luck in your new position. Although we would love for you to stay. Life is too short, and we know you need to progress in your profession. Whoever you get, to look out for will be looked after exceptionally. As you have for me, xxxxxx and xxxxx.

Once again thank you for the support you have given us, in this great fight. It is not an easy job to do, and we are so grateful for the help you have given us. Working above and beyond within your scope of practice.

Very best of luck to you.

xxxxx has come on leaps and bounds with your help, and become a lovely, happy, stress free young man. Thanks to your work, we now have our son back.

(Parent)

Dear xxxx. Many thanks from all of my family for all your hard work. Your role must be incredibly difficult at times. I have a new respect for this now. I realise now it is not all about statistics and targets etc. I really felt you cared about our family and the outcome of working with us. I am so grateful for you chasing up the referral and I'm personally glad we were assigned you as the children's social worker because you have restored my faith in a system which I had believed to be corrupt.

(Parent)

Good Afternoon xxxx

I just wanted to send you a quick email to say how thankful I am to all the social services that have been involved with myself and my 3 children over the past year or so.

xxxxx and xxxxx in particular have been absolutely amazing to me and my children. We have all benefited so much, and I have completely changed my outlook on social services thanks to these two women. I never thought I'd say this, but I am so glad I've had you all involved.. it's helped me as a person/mother.

Thank you so much to you all.

(Parent)

Amazingly happy with the work xxx has done. She was incredibly empathetic and has the ability to look at the wider issues. She chased all of the other services continually on our behalf until appropriate action was taken...she did everything and more for us....she truly is the best Social Worker we have ever worked with.

(Parent)

A lot of help. Helped me see and understand my past a brilliant Social worker.

(Young person)

Prior to closing, I wanted to let you know that I thought your written work and social work practice were of an excellent standard. Your reports to court were analytical, child focussed, balanced and fair. It was clear that you had done everything possible to facilitate xxxxxxxx rehabilitation to xxxxxx and whilst this did not work, I am content that the final orders made were in xxxxxx best interests.

(Children Guardian CAMHS)

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.

Our Way of Working Programme:

This is Children's Services' practice model and the framework by which professionals work with families. It's rooted in everyone being trauma-informed and understanding the root causes of why a child and/ family behaves in the way they do with any associated problems. This greater understanding is helping practitioners and managers to think carefully about how they engage families,

communicate with them and respond to the problems they are facing. This could be having a positive impact on the complaints that families make, especially if they are sensing that they can form a more positive relationship with their worker.

Learning from Complaints

- 7.2 There has been significant learning across the service in how the relationships practitioners form with families can have a positive impact on how they respond to our concerns and become motivated to change in order to reduce risks to their children. Although further evaluation is needed, it appears that our workforce being more trauma-informed has contributed to the overall reduction in complaints to the service; and it hoped that this continues as the new practice model becomes more embedded. Learning has also shown that by intervening earlier and calling the family directly can help us address issues/ concerns they may have before matters escalate.
- 7.3 An area of specific learning has been in the Children with Disabilities Service. This area has had some complaints which have helped us to improve our approach to supporting families, in particular, making sure that we do this fairly. This has improved the way in which we communicate with families and ensured that support is provided based on an up to date assessment of the child's needs.
- 7.4 A further theme has been around the use language in assessments and other paperwork. Again, our new practice model is helping us to learn better from complaints and how generalised wording can impact on families. Some complaints have helped us learn that we need to be continually specific, evidence-based and trauma-informed.

8. Future Plans for Complaint Handling

- 8.1 **ICT:** A new Complaint Management system was commissioned and intended to be developed and tested in 2019/20 to support the requirements of the Social Care and Customer Relations teams. It was expected to improve efficiency and data recording, with an enhanced reporting facility and intended to become operational from April 2020.

Plans for this were on track in early February/March 2020 but the impact of responding to the pandemic shelved these. Whilst this report focuses on 2019/20 data, it should be noted that the ICT plans will be scheduled for review in 2020/21 as part of the recovery and return to 'business as usual' following the pandemic.

- 8.2 As part of considering new ways of working in social care, the system is planned to be part of a wider review of complaints handling in the service and Customer Relations team. It will also refresh policies and processes to link into the Council's planned update of its Customer Care Policy and supporting processes.
- 8.3 **Stats on provider complaints:** Currently the Customer Relations Team does not

receive any figures from the contracts team with regards to complaints against providers. Provider complaints are managed through the contract management process. As we move to a model of commissioning which expects strong performance management processes in place we need greater oversight of complaint management and customer satisfaction within specific elements of our commissioned portfolio. The Customer Relations team will work with the service to identify those specific contracts that we require this increased overview of, undertake some process mapping to determine the existing and recommended flow of information, review the contractual agreements and identify areas of improvement in relation to complaints and make proposal which will enable provider complaint data to be shared at a service level across the health and wellbeing directorate.

End of report