

REPORT FOR: PERFORMANCE & FINANCE SUB- COMMITTEE

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| Date of Meeting: | 14 th December 2020 |
| Subject: | Children and Families Services Complaints Annual Report 2019/20 |
| Responsible Officer: | Paul Hewitt, Corporate Director People Services |
| Lead Member: | Cllr Christine Robson |
| Exempt: | No |
| Enclosures: | Appendix – Annual Report for Children and Families Services Complaints for period 2019/20 |

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the statutory Children and Families Services Complaints Annual Report for 2019/20.

Recommendations:

None. For Information purposes only.

Section 2 – Report

Financial Implications

There are no specific budget issues associated with this report. All payments are agreed by Service Managers and are funded within existing budgets.

Performance Issues

There are no specific particular performance issues associated with this report.

Environmental Impact

N/A

Risk Management Implications

Risk included on Directorate risk register? No

Separate risk register in place? No

Equalities implications

N/A

Corporate Priorities

The Council's vision:

Working Together to Make a Difference for Harrow

- Build a Better Harrow
- Be More Business-like and Business Friendly
- **Protect the Most Vulnerable and Support Families**

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

The Corporate Director determined the report did not require Financial or Legal clearance.

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Usman Zia, Complaints Manager, Adults & Children's Complaints,
usman.zia@harrow.gov.uk

Background Papers: None

Annual Complaints Report for Children and Families Services 2019/20

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| 1 | <p>Executive Summary:</p> <p>There were some 156 “transactions¹” within the complaints process during the year, i.e. representations, formal complaints, members enquiries and referrals to the Local Government Ombudsman. Given the nature of some of the work undertaken, such as child protection and looked after children, it is positive that numbers of complaints are so minimal. During 2019/20:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were 3,366 children who were considered to be children in need (CiN) throughout 2019/20 • A total of 2,508 referrals were received in 2019/20 by Children’s Social Care with the most common referral source being Police and Schools both accounting for 61% of referrals received • The service completed 2,570 assessments |
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¹ The total of representations, Stage 1, Stage 2, Stage 3, member enquiries & LG Ombudsman referrals within Children and Families Services.

- Of the 3,928 children who came into contact with Children’s Social Care 54% were male and 45% were female and 1% unborn or ethnicity unknown. The cohort’s ethnic breakdown is predominantly BME with a quarter being of white ethnicity. On the last day of the year (31 March 2020) a total of 1,650 children were receiving a service from Social Care with the rest having ceased throughout the year
- A total of 1,325 child protection investigations were initiated in the period with 474 leading to an initial child protection conference
- There were 672 Child Protection Plans (CPP) active at some point during 2019/20, 392 new plans were started & 399 ceased during the year. As of 31 March, 273 children were being supported and monitored through a Child Protection Plan
- There were a total of 315 Children Looked After (CLA) at some point during 2019/20. During this period, 138 children became newly looked after and 130 stopped being looked after. As of 31 March 2020 there were 185 looked after Children Looked After
- As of 31 March 2020, Harrow had 75 approved fostering households offering 133 placements
- During 2019-20 about 8,159 families accessed the Cedars and Hillview Early Support hubs and 290 young people accessed the Wealdstone Early Support hub.

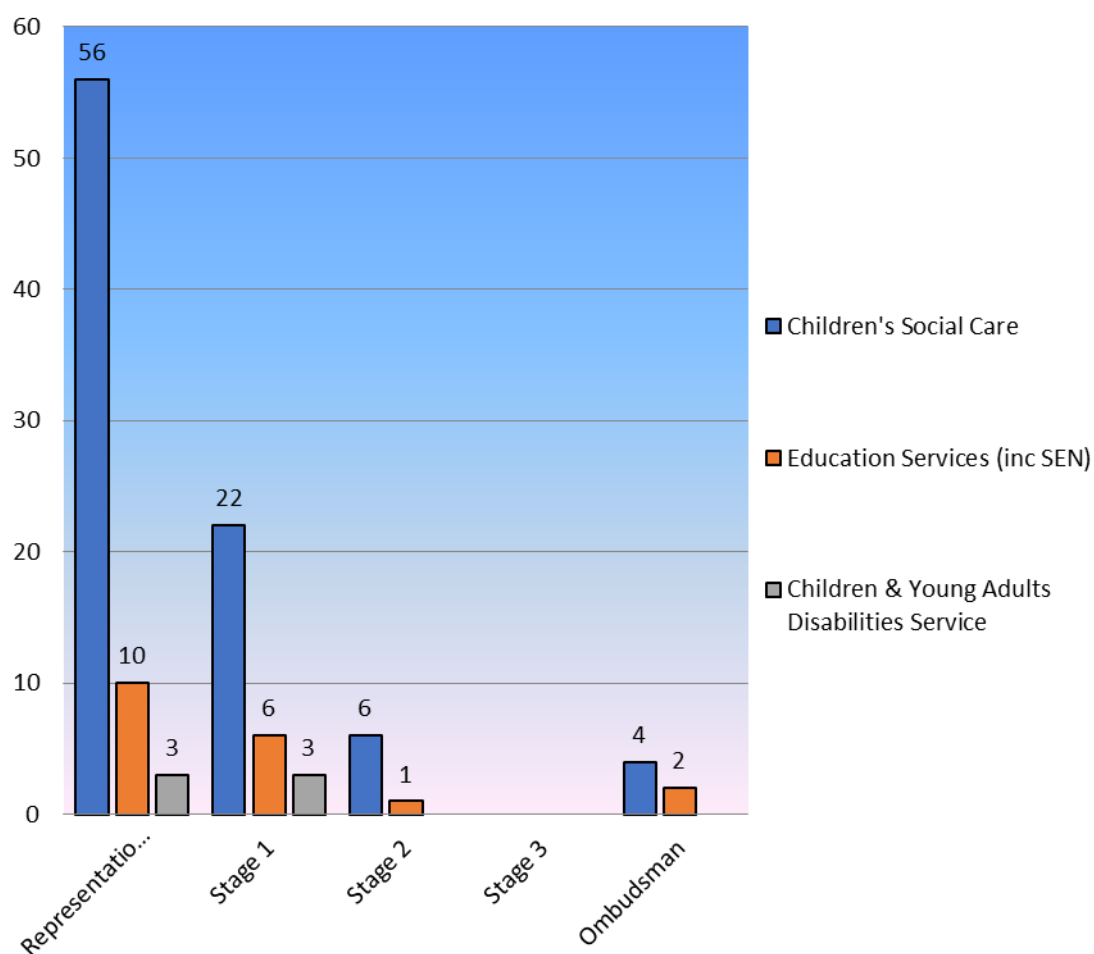
Children’s Social Care Teams² continued to attract the most contacts (78%). This reflects the nature of the statutory social work undertaken by these services, where difficult decisions regarding children and their families sometimes leads to necessary actions which can be unpopular with some families.

This report contains both positive messages and indications of areas needing more work.

- Of particular note is the high level of representations (67) which were potential statutory complaints but were resolved/actioned informally. This is significant in showing that the Council is able to listen to concerns expressed and act promptly to resolve them. Whilst this is positive in terms of the service users’ experience, it also endorses that early resolution is more cost effective for the Council by avoiding escalation with associated costs of any investigations

² Please note any reference to “Targeted Services” in previous reports is in reference to Children’s Social Care Teams and these terms are interchangeable throughout these reports and refer to the same services.

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proportion of Stage 1 complaint responses sent within timescales was 90% in 2019/20, slightly up from 89% in 2018/19 • The relative escalation rate of complaints between the stages of the complaints process is low and reflects the successful efforts made by officers to understand and address concerns when they arise as complaints and representations. Escalation of all initial representations and Stage 1 responses to the next formal Stage 2 was 7%. This means around 93% of representations and formal complaints are resolved with the first initial response from the Council demonstrating the quality of first attempt resolution. • Key actions that were set for 2019/20 in the previous year have been met. |
| 2 | Summary of Activity |
| 2.1 | <p>Overall Complaint Activity:</p> <p>Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, the Council received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 69 representations i.e. potential statutory complaints that did not lead to a formal complaint; • 31 statutory Stage 1 complaints; • 7 Stage 2 complaints; • No (zero) Stage 3 complaint received (no panel hearings); • Six Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) complaints. <p>Additionally, there were 43 MP and Councillor enquiries managed by the Complaints Service. In comparison, 52 enquiries were received last year. This slight decrease may be explained in the same reasoning with the Stage 1 numbers below.</p> |
| | <p>Table 1: Number of Complaints by Service area: April 2019 to March 2020</p> |



Number of Complaint Transactions by Service area: April 2019 - March 2020

| Service Area | Representations | Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 | Ombudsman | Total |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|------------|
| Children's Social Care | 56 | 22 | 6 | 0 | 4 | 88 |
| Education & Commissioning | 10 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 19 |
| CYAD | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Total | 69 | 31 | 7 | 0 | 6 | 113 |

Key message: Overall the picture suggests a continuation of high quality investigative and governance standards.

Analysis: During 2019/20 there was a decrease in the number of formal Stage 1 complaints received (a reduction of from 51 to 31 in comparison to

the previous year). This is likely due to the efforts made by the Complaints Service in providing both one on one feedback and team training in pre-complaint stage de-escalation of issues and early resolution work. The intent of this work is to empower front line staff and team management to be better prepared in resolving potential issues before they become complaints.

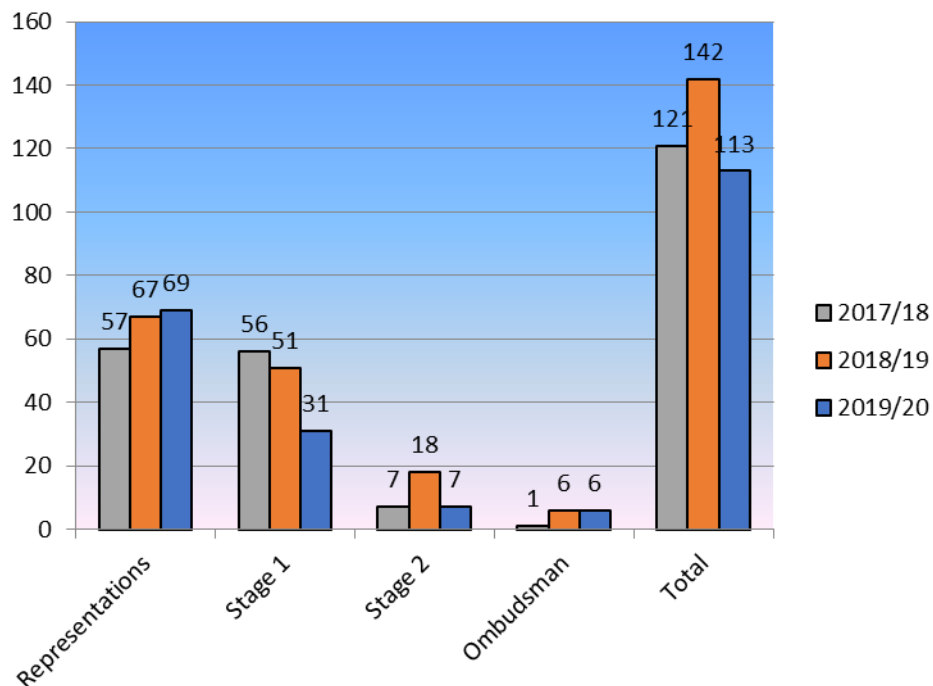
In line with the above, there was a slight increase in representations (69 in comparison to 67 last year) which shows an increased willingness to provide solutions via informal means which are usually faster and more direct.

As with previous years, the majority of received transactions (both representations and formal complaints) are via Children’s Social Care (78%).

There were seven Stage 2 complaints received. This represents an escalation rate of 21% of all Stage 1 complaints and a very low approx. 7% escalation of all initial transactions. No (zero) complaints progressed to a Stage 3 panel hearing.

There were six new LGO referrals within the year.

Table 2: Comparison of Complaints over the last 3 years



| | Representations | Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 | Ombudsman | Total |
|---------|-----------------|---------|---------|---------|-----------|-------|
| 2019/20 | 69(61%) | 31(28%) | 7(6%) | 0(0%) | 6(5%) | 113 |
| 2018/19 | 67(47%) | 51(36%) | 18(13%) | 0(0%) | 6(4%) | 142 |
| 2017/18 | 57(47%) | 56(46%) | 7(6%) | 0(0%) | 1(1%) | 121 |

Analysis: There was a decrease in the number of total complaints or

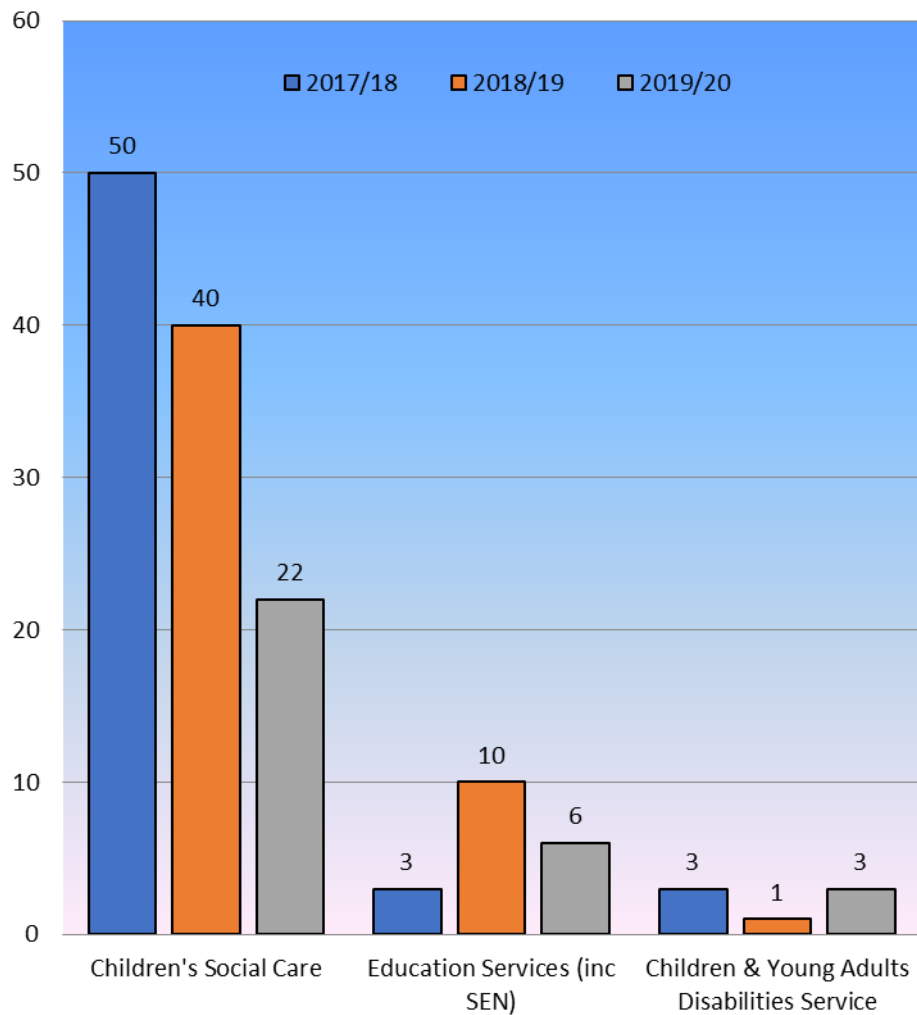
| | |
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| | <p>'transactions' in 2019/20 (113) compared to 2018/19 (142). The decrease in numbers was primarily within children's social care teams where a large number of complaints at times are not about decisions or outcomes, but about the involvement of the social care within the lives of families and the difficult adjustments that some families can feel.</p> <p>The decrease in this area is likely due to the discussed work with teams and staff to try and resolve such matters before they become complaints or representations and is a positive indication that social care staff as a whole can be empowered to resolve problems and issues.</p> <p>Escalations beyond Stage 1 have remained low in line with previous years and have dropped in line with the drop in initial Stage 1 complaints.</p> <p>Key message: Previous research (e.g. Jerry White, Local Government Ombudsman & Steve Carney, Head of Complaints, CQC) has suggested that Councils with high levels of complaints/representations tended to receive good performance ratings and demonstrated a willingness to hear concerns, address them and improve services as a result.</p> <p>Key action: To attempt to maintain a high level of representations against actual complaints, as this demonstrates good early resolution for our citizens and families.</p> |
| <p>3</p> | <p>Outcomes for key actions in 2019/20</p> |
| | <p>All of these outcomes have been met or are currently being progressed.</p> <p>The overall timeline of all responses was 91% (above the 85% target).</p> <p>Improvements have been made by working more closely with Team Managers who have helped to drive improvements in performance. Trends in cases and escalations have been consistently monitored in weekly catch up meetings by the Complaints Team and as part of quarterly improvement board reports. The Complaints Service also continually encourages Managers, Heads of Service and Directors to ensure a constant line of feedback and complaint resolution and prevention-based suggestions and solutions.</p> <p>The Complaints team also offered more one to one sessions and team training for staff members in handling complaints and reflective discussions with managers who were involved in complaints received to manage future situations where complaints may arise. This work has likely fed into the reduced amount of formal complaints received in this area as discussed above.</p> <p>The Council website was updated in this financial year to allow a clearer way to get information about the complaints process and direct access to a</p> |

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| | webform which allows citizens to choose their service area of complaint. |
| 4 | Priorities for 2020/21: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To ensure that on time Stage 1 complaint response rates continue to exceed the target of 85%• To continue the core offer of training for front line staff and managers on complaints prevention, resolution and handling.• To review the impact of COVID-19 with respect to social care complaints• To continue to review and update complaints literature and communications as necessary. |

5 Stage 1 Complaints:

5.1 Stage 1 Complaints Overall Activity

Table 3



Stage 1 Complaints Received

| | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Education & Commissioning | 3 | 10 | 6 |
| Children's Social Care | 50 | 40 | 22 |
| CYAD | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Total | 56 | 51 | 31 |

Key message: Almost inevitably Children's Social Care attracts a higher level of complaints. The data below will evidence the majority of complaints are from parents/family members. As the "nature of complaints" section will demonstrate below, many complaints arise from parents having a negative view of social care intervention as this will often involve some assessment of their parenting or difficult discussions around family relationships.

In 2019/20, there remains a number of complaints with respect to Education

and in particular, SEND. This is likely attributed to the increase in SEN students overall and may indicate that this area may continue to present more complaints in future in line with national trends.

*“The **number** of pupils with **SEN** has increased across all school types. Specifically, 1.8% of pupils in state-funded primary schools have an EHC plan in January **2020**, compared to 1.6% in 2019, while 12.8% have **SEN** support, up from 12.6% last year.”* – Special Education Needs in England Department for Education Academic Years 19/20

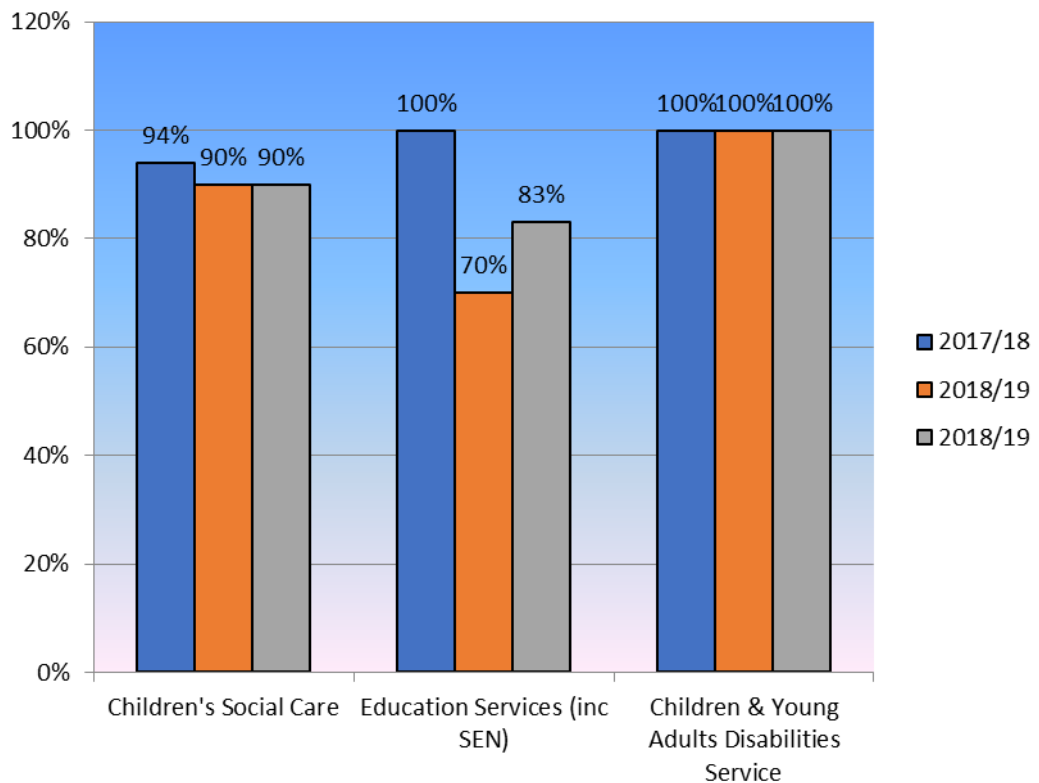
Children’s Social Care is child focused and based on statutory duties which can be at odds with the initial expectation of Children’s Services involvement from parents. However, Children’s Social Care has seen a significant decrease since last year likely due to additional work around informally resolving complaints by Children’s Services.

There were 43 MP and Councillor enquiries managed by the Complaints team, which is a decrease from 52 in the previous year as likely early resolution work meant fewer families felt like they had to contact their local MP or Cllr.

MP and Councillor enquiries varied greatly in nature and it is not possible to determine if they would have actually led to a formal complaint. Due to this variation, it also allows responses to queries such as asking about free school meals etc. which would not necessarily come under any complaints procedures. This ensures the Complaints Service are able to assist with responses and resolutions to a wide area of issues beyond the usually defined complaint remits.

5.2 Stage 1 Response Times

Table 4



Key message: There has been a very slight increase in the level of Stage 1 complaints completed on time during 2019/20 compared to the previous year. Any complaints over timescale were almost always due to complaint complexity and wanting to ensure the information and response that goes out was the correct one rather than sending an incomplete response to meet deadlines.

The overall level of on time complaints during 2019/20 was 91%.

Analysis: On time response rates were above the 85% target. The Complaints Service values that responses are provided with adequate investigation and preparation time and this will always be kept as a priority.

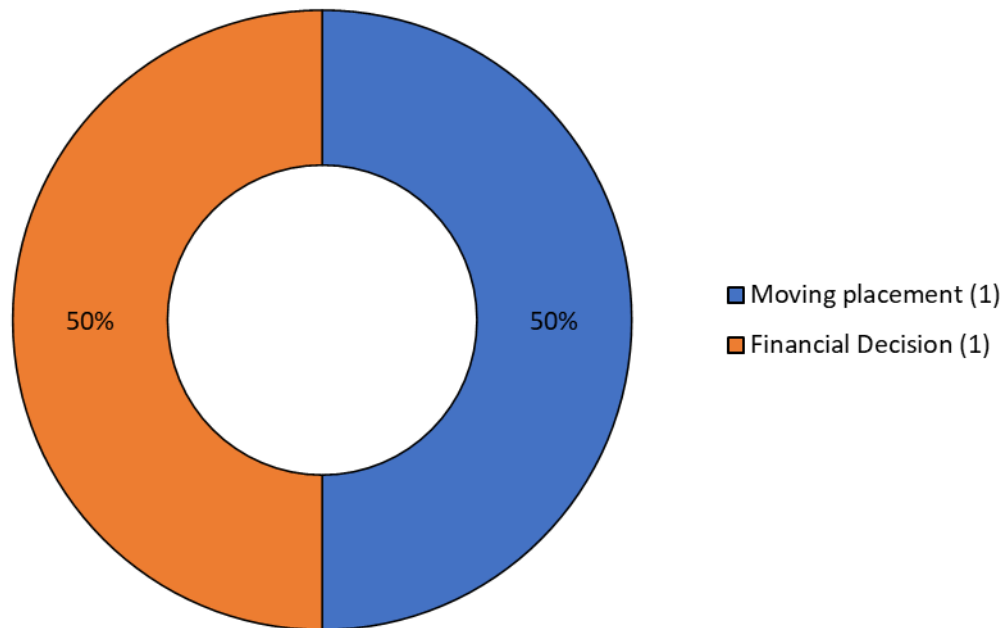
Key action 1: To continue to meet and exceed the 85% local target timescales for on time Stage 1 complaints throughout 2020/21.

5.3 Stage 1: Nature of Complaints

Table 5

Nature of Stage 1 Complaints from Young People 2019/2020

Tht



This year had fewer formal complaints directly from young people. However, there were several representations from young people which did not become formal complaints ensuring we work to resolve complaints as soon and as informally as possible for young people to avoid them having to unnecessarily experience a formal ongoing process.

The two formal complaints also had advocacy representation for the young people involved to ensure their views and wishes were appropriately represented throughout the formal process.

Complaints Examples from Young People

Moving Placement

Did not want to move placement due to personal connection in current area

This type of complaint will usually be due to the young person having settled into a placement and having made social connections there. Usually sensitive and honest conversations are required to help both young person and services reach an understanding which values young person's feelings but

also ensure their best interests are promoted.

Financial Decision

Unhappy that the current financial decision/policy in place did not give full financial support for a young person in education over term holidays

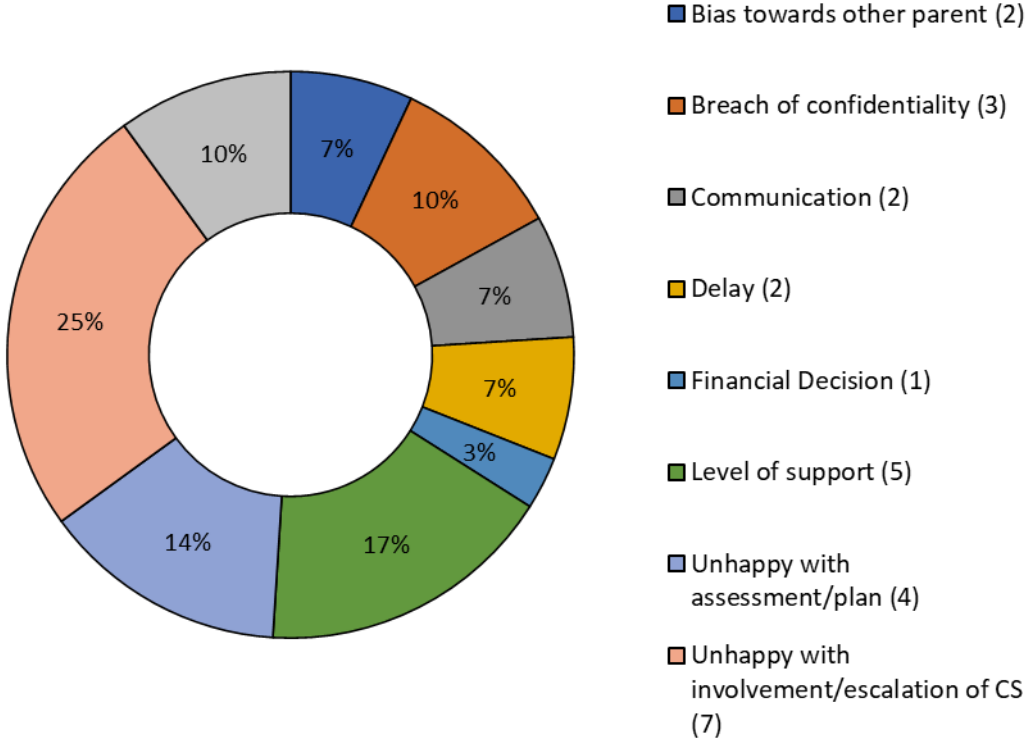
This complaint highlighted that trying to place consistent support for young people may be difficult as inevitably everybody’s circumstances will be different. Due to the complex and legal issues raised via this complaint, this was not fully explored and resolved until Stage 2 which is further discussed later in this report.

Analysis

As noted in the previous year’s report, young people tend to raise more practical complaints usually based around managerial decisions with reference to their living or financial circumstances which their social worker usually does not have the authority to resolve individually. This trend has not changed in 2019/20.

Table 6

Nature of Stage 1 Complaints from Parents/Guardians and Relatives 2019/2020



Complaints Examples from Parents/Guardians and Relatives

Bias toward other parent

Children's Services are often in a position where they have to work with parents who are in a difficult or even acrimonious relationship – as such one parent may perceive bias from Children's Services towards the other.

An example of this type of complaint is:

Feeling that CS is taking the side of my wife

Breach of Confidentiality

An individual may be unhappy how certain information or correspondence may have been shared or recorded by Children's Services.

An example of this type of complaint is:

Unhappy that CS made records of our discussions at visits

Communication

Families can often have expectations for when they are meant to receive a callback or correspondence which if not met, can lead to a complaint.

An example of this type of complaint is:

Meeting with social worker did not take place

Delay

Often cases within children's services are complex and involve the input and work of multiple agencies which means even with statutory timescales for some matters, that case actions and progress can take some time. At times, a citizen may feel that matters are taking too long and the complaint will often see if the involved timescales were necessary or reasonable.

An example of this type of complaint is:

There has been a delay in issuing the EHCP

Level of support

These complaints normally are from the perspective that the local authority is not doing either enough or not doing specifically what the family would like as support and are specifically requesting

An example of this type of complaint is:

My child requires mentoring support from this organisation

Unhappy with assessment/plan

Parents or family members who are unhappy with the contents of an assessment (e.g. social work assessment) often raise this via the formal complaints route to address these.

An example of this type of complaint is:

Unhappy with how my relationship with my child has been described in this report

Unhappy with the involvement/escalation of Children's Services

This category contains complaints where the parent or involved family feel the level of involvement of social care is not justified and often want the case to be closed or stepped down as an outcome.

This formed the highest amount of formal complaints this year and is often via cases that cannot be resolved informally or via manager or social worker intervention attempts. Some families feel continually upset or aggrieved that there is social work intervention in their life and for a few complainants, their formal complaint allows them an avenue to raise their objections to the process outside of the social care teams they are dealing with regularly.

This category shows that despite potential best efforts by staff, there will be unavoidable upset and distress due to the difficult and sensitive work of children's social care and safeguarding.

An example of this type of complaint is:

My child should not be on a child protection plan

Unhappy with LA decision

This can be a wide-ranging area but is often regarding some kind of decision made by a local authority team or employee that can impact a family:

An example of this type of complaint is:

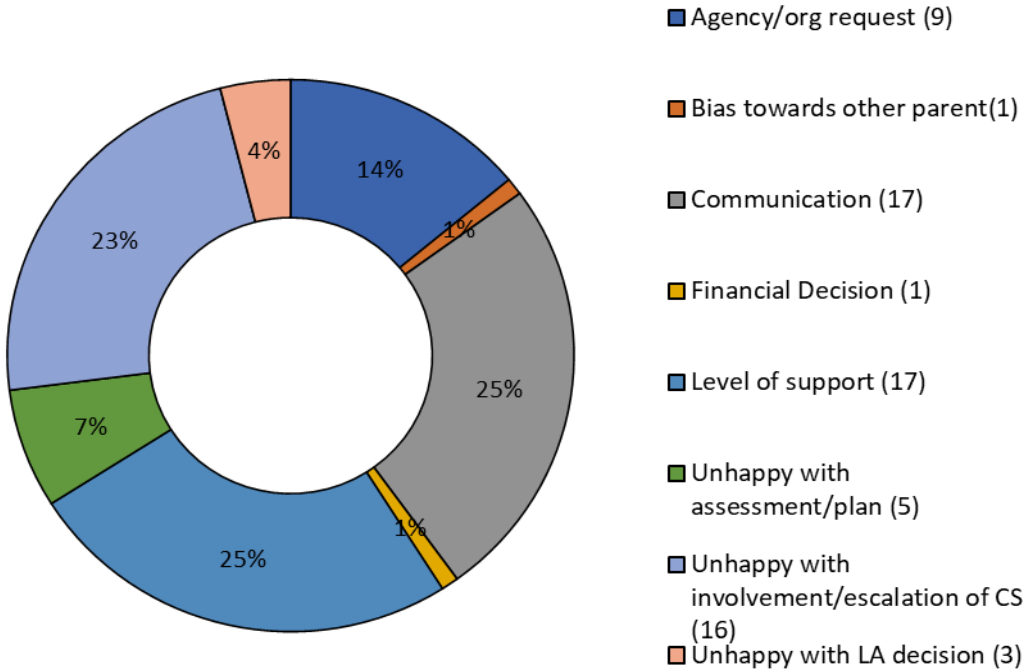
Unhappy that LA initiated court proceedings and want my court costs paid for

Analysis

While the above shows a varied basis of complaints, the low numbers of formal complaints shows that parent/guardians/family members are using the complaints procedure as a means of either challenging or addressing issues they may have with local authority support, financing, decisions etc or around the involvement of social care altogether.

This suggests that general disagreements about social care opinion or day to day process are being addressed more informally. Below shows the majority of communication-based dissatisfaction for example was tackled informally.

Nature of representations 2019/20 – Table 7



Analysis – As discussed above, these representations that were resolved informally took on a large number of “perception/disagreement” complaints. i.e. ones where family members were unhappy with the support, communication or involvement of social care.

At times the service may also receive potential complaints or concerns around other partner agencies or processes such as with schools/admissions or housing. Best efforts are made to either signpost the individual or work with those services to ensure the request is progressed and actioned.

| 5.4 | | Stage 1: Complaints Outcomes | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|-------|-------|------------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | | Table 8 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Not Upheld | | | Partially Upheld | | | Upheld | | | Total | | |
| | | 19/20 | 18/19 | 17/18 | 19/20 | 18/19 | 17/18 | 19/20 | 18/19 | 17/18 | 19/20 | 18/19 | 17/18 |
| | Education & Commissioning | 5 | 9 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 10 | 2 |
| | Children's Social Care | 19 | 33 | 41 | 4 | 13 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 23 | 47 | 50 |
| | CYAD | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| | Total | 26 | 43 | 45 | 6 | 14 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 33* | 58 | 55 |
| | Total of overall Stage 1 outcomes, by percentage | 78% | 74% | 82% | 18% | 25% | 14% | 4% | 1% | 4% | | | |
| | | <p>Analysis: Managers and staff within service areas and the Complaints Service have worked towards a more balanced and open approach to complaints, where concerns from service users are recognised and receive appropriate responses. This includes the need to listen to complainants and adopt a less defensive approach when reflecting on practices and making decisions on the outcomes of each complaint.</p> <p>This approach is evidenced in consideration of the complaints discussed above directly from young people. Out of the two direct formal complaints from young people, one was partially upheld at Stage 1 and resolved. The other complaint involved some complex legal points but was upheld at Stage 2 and resolved - leading to internal changes in the legal approach involved.</p> <p>This evidences not only a willingness to listen and carefully consider the wishes and feelings of young people by management, but also that young people are able to correctly be signposted to when they should escalate a complaint when they had such important concerns and issues to highlight.</p> <p>Children's Social Care has 19 non-uphold complaints out of a total of 23 complaints. This fits the ongoing trend that as a consequence of statutory duty of Children's Social Care to investigate safeguarding concerns and/or to provide support to children as identified as being in need, this can lead to some parents feeling that they have been negatively judged or that their interests or personal requests are not being prioritised.</p> <p>As a result, complaints are raised to dispute the statutory involvement/level of services or with respect to the level of support they require – not over the</p> | | | | | | | | | | | |

actual quality of the work which the non-uphold rate evidences.

For the complaints where the overall outcome is non-uphold, the Complaints Service ensures these responses are helpful in explaining the rationale and reasoning behind the key issues so that families can find these responses of value and help regardless of the outcome

6 Stage 2 Complaints

6.1 Percentage of Complaints escalating to Stage 2 (2019/20)

Table 9

| Service | Stage 1 | Stage 2 | % escalation |
|---------------------------|---------|---------|--------------|
| Education & Commissioning | 6 | 1 | 16% |
| Children's Social Care | 22 | 6 | 27% |
| CYAD | 3 | 0 | 0% |
| Total | 31 | 7 | 21% |

6.2 Escalations to stage 2 trend over time

Table 10

| Service | Escalations to Stage 2 | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|---------|---------|
| | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
| Education & Commissioning | 33% | 30% | 16% |
| Children's Social Care | 12% | 32% | 27% |
| CYAD | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Total | 12% | 31% | 21% |

Some 21% of Stage 1 complaints went on to be considered at Stage 2. This is a lower percentage than previous year of 31% as the above shows. This is in line with the efforts made to informally resolved matters where possible to provide the most efficient resolution for all involved.

Ultimately, individuals are clearly informed of their right to go to Stage 2 and are not dissuaded from exercising this. Stage 2 is taken as an opportunity to again fairly investigate the issues raised and provide a considered line of reasoning to any outcomes reached.

The majority (6) of the 7 Stage 2 complaints were for Children's Social Care, which reflects the difficult statutory social work discussed above undertaken by the service.

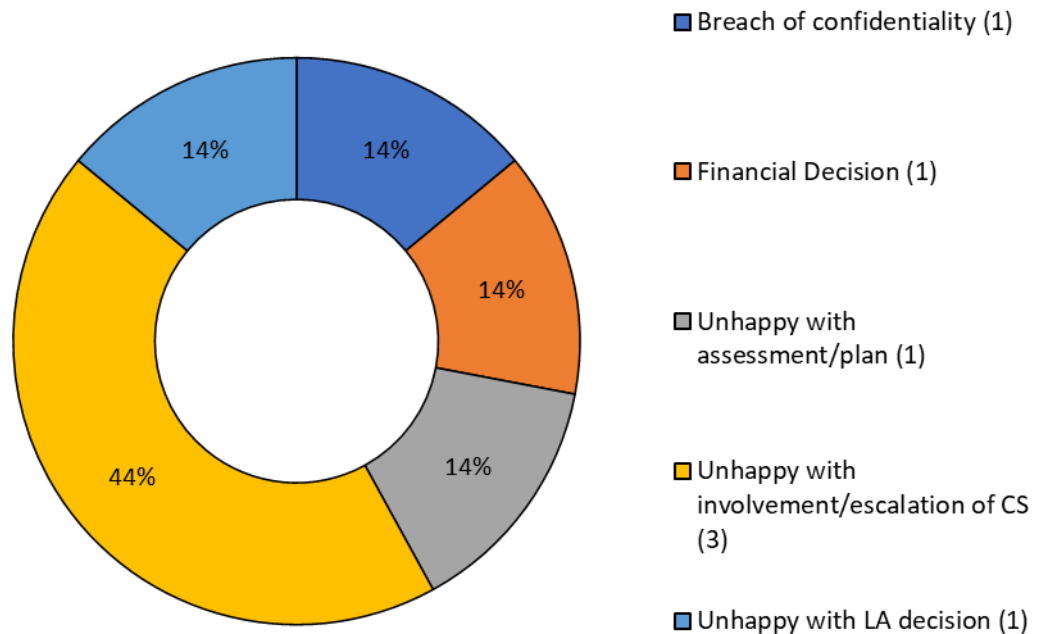
Some families also raised similar issues through different individuals within the family and at different times. This means multiple complaints and escalations can be raised within the same family unit. All reasonable efforts

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|------------|---|--|--|--------|
| | are taken by the complaints service to ensure even where this occurs that valid complaints are reasonably addressed. | | | |
| 6.3 | Stage 2 Outcomes 2019/20 Table 11 | | | |
| | Service | Not Upheld | Partially Upheld | Upheld |
| | Education & Commissioning | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| | Children's Social Care | 5 | 0 | 1 |
| | CYAD | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Total [Grand Total = 7] | 6 | 0 | 1 |
| | <p>During 2019/20, six Stage 2 complaints were not upheld and the one complaint (from a young person) was upheld.</p> <p>The summarised reasons for the uphold was:</p> <p><i>Ensuring the local authority information and communication was better in line with the Children Act which does not define a specific period for higher education vacation support</i></p> | | | |
| 6.4 | Stage 2 Response Times of known outcomes Table 12 | | | |
| | Service | Within Timescale 2019/20 (2018/19) | Over Timescale 2019/20 (2018/19) | |
| | Education & Commissioning | 0(2) | 1(1) | |
| | Children's Social Care | 6(12) | 0(2) | |
| | CYAD | 0(0) | 0(0) | |
| | Total | 6(14) | 1(3) | |
| | <p>At Stage 2, there is more emphasis on thoroughness than speed. Nevertheless, the majority of Stage 2 complaints (86%) were completed within timescale.</p> | | | |

6.5 Stage 2: Nature of Complaints

Table 13

Nature of Stage 2 Complaints 2018/2019



Analysis: Stage 2 complainants remained diverse in their nature. Any Stage 1 outcomes that may have not changed a local authority decision that the individual was unhappy with would have likely been referred to Stage 2 to provide the individual with another opportunity for that decision or explanation to change.

With some complaints involving finance or financial support, as sometimes the requested outcome was significant, it is understandable that individuals would choose another opportunity for the potential to receive a sum of funds/value of support.

Other complaints that did not revolve around a local authority decision or request for support of finance, would have been to do with continued protest or disapproval of Children's Services involvement or perspective.

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|-----|--|----------------------------|-----------------|-------|
| 7 | Stage 3 Complaints: | | | |
| | There were no requests for a Stage 3 review in 2019/20. | | | |
| 8 | Ombudsman (LGO) Complaints | | | |
| 8.1 | Complaints made to the LGO Table 14 | | | |
| | Service | No finding against Council | Partial finding | Total |
| | Education and Commissioning | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| | Children's Social Care | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| | <p>The Council received six referrals/complaints from the (LGO).</p> <p>Two of these complaints were fully investigated and led to a final decision from the LGO.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>In the first case the LGO found a partial finding of fault due the way the local authority assessed a child's needs for post-adoption support. The LGO stated the local authority failed to provide clear information and advice about the post adoption support process and for taking too long to initiate the EHC needs assessment process</i> - <i>In the second case the LGO proposed the local authority was not at fault because it followed the necessary guidance when it considered the safeguarding referral and then conducted a thorough assessment before deciding to recommend the implementation of a child protection plan.</i> <p>Four of these complaints were initially investigated and the local authority provided information and evidence to the LGO so they could reach a determination on how to proceed. These were not fully investigated by the LGO for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>In three of these cases the LGO felt they were unlikely to find fault/injustice with the local authorities' decisions</i> - <i>In the fourth case the LGO determined the case was outside of their remit as court would be the appropriate avenue to address those concerns.</i> <p>Any recommendations from the LGO in the case with the partial finding were implemented by the service. For context while the local authority received six referrals for children's services, the 2018-19 figures from the LGO show that they made 1,732 education and children's services case decisions.</p> | | | |

| | | | | | |
|-----------|--|---------|---------|---------|-----|
| 9 | Escalation comparison over time: Table 15 | | | | |
| | | Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 | LGO |
| | 2019/20 | 31 | 7 | 0 | 6 |
| | 2018/19 | 51 | 18 | 0 | 6 |
| | 2017/18 | 56 | 7 | 0 | 1 |
| | Analysis: The escalation between the complaints stages and LGO stage over the past three years has remained low overall (keeping in mind the additional 69 representations) despite having a clear method of escalation for complainants. | | | | |
| 10 | Remedy Payments: | | | | |
| | A “remedy payment” is made in line with the LGO guidance on Remedy Payments. One remedy payment was made in 2019/20. | | | | |
| | A remedy payment of £300 was made to a young person as they did not initially receive their vacation support and bursary payments as per the Children Act. The £300 was to reflect their time and trouble in raising the complaint and having to have had the matter adjudicated via this process to receive the correct level of support. | | | | |
| 11 | Mediation and Alternative Dispute Resolution: | | | | |
| | <p>During 2019/20 the Complaints Service facilitated the following as examples of mediation/ADR and to assist with reaching a resolution and preventing further formal escalation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing support to schools in dealing with several difficult complaints by providing guidance and support to best find a resolution and correctly follow their complaints procedures as expected by the Department for Education • Arranging a meeting with a young person, advocate and translator so they could confidently express their experience with children’s services • Ensuring a series of calls took place between a child protection chair, a team manager to resolve a matter of language used in child protection documentation that was caused a parent concern. • Meeting with parents and the relevant Head of Service who were concerned about being able to find a placement that would meet their child’s needs. The meeting led to a positive resolution and the complaints did not progress formally | | | | |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with a senior member of staff and a parent to hear their concerns about their child not attending school and informing them that they should seek independence advice about school absentee laws under the Education Act so they were informed and aware. |
| 12 | Joint NHS and social care complaints |
| | During 2019/20 there were no joint NHS and social care complaints. |
| 13 | Learning Lessons/Practice Improvements |
| | <p>Examples of lessons learnt/practice improvements include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The complaints service worked directly with schools and the Education Lead within the MASH team to provide support to involved schools and headteachers to learn from one another's complaint's experiences and good practice. Resolution techniques particularly around informal resolution and expectation management were key learning points • A meeting was arranged with legal services and the relevant Head of Service to stress the importance of checking that the language used within local authority communications fully convey and comply with the statutory expectations of the Children's Act. The service amended their practice following the complaint • To ensure when an allocated social worker has to change on a case that the involved family are kept up to date with the transition and handover, so they do not feel uncertain of the status of the case • To take additional checks when writing to parents that they are not sharing an email address or such information that the other may not have wanted to share with the other • Reminding staff that when a school calls the MASH team for advice with respect to whether a referral should be shared with a parent that the matter is thoroughly discussed to ensure the school staff have clarity on how to progress the referral. |

| | |
|----|--|
| 14 | Compliments |
| | <p>The majority of service users that compliment staff and the Council provide their feedback through verbal communication in care meetings or by phone.</p> <p>However, both professionals as well as families who use our services do write in to let us know their positive feedback and experiences. The below is correspondence received in 2019/20 and in total the below equates to almost the same amount received as formal Stage 1 complaints, showing an excellent ratio of positive feedback to accompany received complaint numbers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I wanted to acknowledge D's help today regarding S. It is very clear that he genuinely cares about the young people he works with and despite her age (almost being an adult) displayed willingness and commitment to prioritise her wellbeing and helped in every attempt made to engage with her.</i> • <i>I am was very happy and touched to see that London Borough of Harrow, my Borough has engaged in looking at how to encourage our young people in the job market as well as gaining a career. Harrow has taken the opportunity of offering the shadowing schemes for our young people in our Borough. Thank you for thinking of all us especially our Young Adults.</i> • <i>You are most welcome, and in fact it is just our humble gesture of gratitude for the extra mile, care and dedication you extended to us during the past months. Best wishes and catch up soon enough!</i> • <i>I went shopping with M yesterday, we purchased his Laptop Computer. M remarked 'his life improved once I became his social worker! and he doesn't know what he would have done without me!' to support him during his first year at University, 'because he can now see where he has grown up and changed'. Regards, thanks again and most appreciated 'Team Harrow!</i> • <i>Thank you for your email. God bless you for helping me out. wish everyone could work like you. please forward this email to your seniors.</i> • <i>As you already aware, the judge today made care and placement orders in respect of B. Please find attached a copy of counsel's note of the judgement. I will send a copy of the final order once received.</i> |

A and S have worked extremely diligently on this case, always providing prompt instructions ensuring that C was safeguarded in any event. It has been a pleasure working with both of you on this case. I have been informed by counsel that the Guardian is going to write to A's team manager commending her for her excellent work.

Counsel who is very experienced also stated "that the social work team were excellent - so fair and thorough and I include J and her team. It was so obvious that Mrs A had been so fairly assessed and if there was any way that B could have been placed with her, it would have happened."

Counsel also asked me to pass on to J that the Judge said: "J was an impressive witness. She identified their strengths, she liked them. J came across as a deeply empathetic and non-judgmental person. If she could have found a way child could be there with the MGM and with support, she would have."

- When me and S met with the family they were very positive about both J and D saying they have been very happy about their service. Great work guys – I believe the family will be eager to hear from you since they've had such a positive experience with you*
- I have had a wonderful six years at Harrow and I am sad to be leaving, which has nothing to do with Harrow. It has been a pleasure working on behalf of Harrow social care and, having worked with other local authorities, I can say with confidence that Harrow has been head and shoulders above my other experiences. Being a social worker is, in my humble opinion, one of the most important jobs in society, far more than being a lawyer. I have found that the relationships, which Harrow social workers have built up with their children often in very difficult circumstances, have been invaluable not only to me, but most importantly to the children concerned. I wish you all the very best.*
- Hello, I just wanted to write to acknowledge and thank you for the efforts you made today to get this CLA review in place within a matter of days. I am very grateful that you managed to get an interpreter and a room available to hold the meeting in, the carers and their SSW to attend at very short notice, thanks again.*
- I am just dropping you a note to say we are really pleased with the quality of feedback we have been getting from most departments after engagement events, especially the documents from J and M on the consultation in January and the consultation in May. The documents*

are very detailed and provide the answers parents have been asking for. They also provide information on where to seek further support.

- Many thanks. It's been a very long and tough two years but they are finally at X School. I would like to thank you all for putting up with me calling every week asking about Bs place on the waiting list. You are all working under immense pressure and it is appreciated*
- The only reason I consider my work was made easy, is because everyone worked really hard in this ICO hearing case. The end result can clearly be seen from the high quality of work that I was sent from your team. Thanks again for all the hard work and support.*
- The training and support you have given to me as a chaperone has been invaluable and I feel confident in fulfilling my duties as a chaperone because of this. I very much hope it continues as I believe this will prevent harm to children in the long term.*
- Now that E has finished their placement, and it has been marked as a pass, we just wanted to get in touch to say thank you for your continued support in giving placement opportunities to B students. Placements have been very successful this year and we cannot continue to achieve this without our partners.*
- I wanted to give some feedback about the service I received from the social worker K and your team during the difficult time I faced with domestic violence and my social situation at home with my x partner. The service I received and the care was fantastic. I was communicating with the social worker regularly, she put things in place for me by connecting me with the right service for each of my needs. Working in the health profession myself it's never easy to know where you can reach out for help at difficult vulnerable times and I feel the communication and care women can receive at this time is very important and I cannot praise your team enough for the support given. I know the strain on services and limitations it has but just to have someone at the end of the phone to discuss your needs is a great asset. K was great with my children making sure they were supported, and this is paramount especially when they are more of a victim than the parents during these times. I would like to thank you all for the amazing work you do with families and to the team for all the support you provide.*
- E is always very responsive and listens to any worries that may arise. She has been working with an incredibly challenging parent and she has remained calm and positive throughout. The mother of the family*

involved actually thinks E goes over and above to help her and her children. E has also supported me in ways to have difficult conversations with the family. It is great to be working with another professional who just puts the children at the centre of everything, despite having numerous other cases and obstacles.

- I would also like to thank you for all your support in helping us to ensure that our young people at our school to achieve their best outcomes. Have a good summer, looking forward to working with you next term.*
- This is F's last review and as IRO I spoke with her about her experience of being Looked After and her care by the local authority. F said she felt positive about how she has been cared for and that she felt that her views and wishes were listened to and taken into consideration. she felt that the move that had meant she had lived with her sister had been good. F said there was nothing significant that she felt could have been done differently to make her care any better than it had been. overall she said it had been a good experience and she has been well supported and cared for.*
- We are willing to work with a new Social Worker until L returns from her vacation. But in the long-term management of our case, we want and need her because, working with her has brought about an enormous positive change in the way we perceive and comprehend our matter unlike before. We have found it easy to actively engage with other necessary Services. We deeply fathom that this participation has contributed immensely, making a very good impact on our emotional and physical wellbeing and we are in a much, much better state to proceed with the daily routine chores of life. We heartily appreciate L's optimistic involvement, unprejudiced views, profound judgement and zeal for helping us to progress as required by the Social Services.*
- Just wanted to say that I thought you were great in conference yesterday; I love the way you are so open with concerns but are also be completely alongside and support the family which they clearly really appreciate.*
- I just wanted to say how impressed I was with L at his CLA review – he did really well in expressing his views . From observations you have*

developed an excellent relationship with him as well as his family which has helped stabilise a very worrying and vulnerable young man. Hopefully leading to a successful reunification

- Had a meeting last week where L was present to support a learner (P in year 10) She was excellent. Very supportive of the learner and the school. Looking forward to working with her again. Please pass on my positive comment to her manager.*
- Thank you so much words cannot explain our gratitude for the kind you showed, the support you gave, you went out of your way to do something really special. From G and family.*
- I just wanted to write and say thank you for two very informative training sessions on Monday. I think it was really beneficial that the whole of the school staff team heard your messages and learnt what next happens with safeguarding concerns. Thank you for making the training concise, informative and well-presented. The feedback from our team was extremely positive for both sessions. I am glad we could offer this as part of our safeguarding workshop, as feel it is so important that everyone understands the wider picture and the work that we do in partnership with Harrow. Thanks again and wishing you a happy term ahead.*
- I had called the Harrow Council Education team this morning. I was looking for more information on availability of spaces at Reception for my 4 year in the new postcode we are moving into soon. The call was answered by a polite, well spoken lady M. I'm absolutely impressed with her helpfulness. She was eager to help and had no problems answering all my questions with equal delight. It was client and customer service at its very best. Well done to M and to Harrow Council. Happy to be in the Borough.*
- I have just got off the phone with the Associate Headteacher at X school and he has asked me to pass on how impressed he was with A at the Core Group meeting yesterday for the N siblings. He was shocked at how calmly and professionally A dealt with him. He said that he thinks A is an excellent social worker and he really appreciates his support in working with this particular parent.*
- I have worked with S on three different cases as a parenting assessor and I have found her to be proactive in her approach with families, considered and rational in her case management when in court*

proceedings and I find with her support I have been able to complete my assessments with full confidence that I have up-to-date information. The families I have met have been very positive about having S as their social worker and as we know that can be difficult when in proceedings.

- *Dear G and U, Thanks very much for your support on Friday afternoon. I think it went better than we could have hoped and there was a really good turn out. I received lots of very positive feedback from headteachers and think this is definitely something we should try to do on a termly basis if we can. Thanks again for your support*
- *The feedback we have received has been universally positive (please see below) and one Head has since emailed me to say that the "Training was brilliant!". I am making you aware of this as I think it is a really good example of partnership work where we have used the skills and knowledge of LA Officers and school partners to support schools and to provide training that I am confident will have been of genuine value to the senior teachers who attended.*

| | | | |
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| 15 | Equalities Information | | |
| 15.1 | Equalities Information – Stage 1 Complaints | | |
| | Table 16 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
| | Gender of Service User: | | |
| | Male: | 23 (45%) | 12 (39%) |
| | Female: | 28 (55%) | 19 (61%) |
| | Table 17 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
| | Ethnic Origin of Service User: | | |
| | ASIAN OR ASIAN BRITISH | | |
| | Afghanistani | 1 | |
| | Bangladeshi | | |
| | Indian | 6 | 6 |
| | Pakistani | 2 | 1 |
| | Sri Lankan | | |
| | Sri Lankan Tamil | | |
| | Other Asian | 4 | 3 |
| | BLACK/BLACK BRITISH | | |
| | African | 4 | 1 |
| | Caribbean | 11 | 7 |
| | Somali | | |
| | Other Black | 2 | 2 |
| | OTHER ETHNIC GROUP | | |
| | Arab | 3 | |
| | Chinese | | |
| | Iranian | | |
| | Iraqi | | |
| | Kurdish | | |
| | Lebanese | | |
| | Other Ethnic Group | 3 | 3 |
| | MIXED | | |
| | White & African | | |
| | White & Caribbean | | |
| | White & Asian | | 1 |
| | Other Mixed | 2 | |
| | WHITE | | |
| | Albanian | | |
| | British | 9 | 3 |
| | Irish | | |
| | Roma Traveller | | |
| | Irish Traveller | | |
| | Polish | | |
| | Romanian | 1 | |

| | | | |
|-------------|--|----------------|----------------|
| | Serbian | | |
| | Other White | 1 | 3 |
| | PREFER NOT TO SAY/NOT KNOWN | 3 | 1 |
| | | | |
| | Table 17 Origin of Complaints | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
| | Service User (Young Person) | 5 | 2 |
| | Parent/relative | 41 | 29 |
| | Advocate | 4 | 2 |
| | Solicitor | 1 | 0 |
| | Friend/other | 0 | 0 |
| | | | |
| 15.2 | Equalities Information – Stage 2 Complaints | | |
| | Table 19 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
| | Gender of Service User: | | |
| | Male: | 8(44%) | 3 (43%) |
| | Female: | 10(66%) | 4 (57%) |
| | | | |
| | Table 20 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
| | Ethnic Origin of Service User: | | |
| | Sri Lankan | | |
| | African | 2 | |
| | Other Black | | 2 |
| | Mixed Background – White & Asian | | 1 |
| | Other Asian | 1 | |
| | Caribbean | 4 | 3 |
| | White British | 6 | |
| | Unknown | 2 | |
| | Arab | 1 | |
| | Chinese | 1 | |
| | Indian | 1 | 1 |
| | Total | 18 | 7 |
| | | | |
| | Table 21 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
| | Origin of Complaints | | |
| | Service User | | 1 |
| | Parent/relative | 17 | 6 |
| | Advocate | 1 | 1 |
| | Solicitor | | |
| | | | |

16. The Complaints Process explained:

This report provides information about complaints made during the twelve months between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020 under the complaints and representations procedures established through the Representations Procedure (Children) Regulations 2006, and the Council's corporate complaints procedure.

All timescales contained within this report are in working days. Text in quotation marks indicate direct quotations from the 2006 Regulations or Guidance unless otherwise specified.

16.1 What is a Complaint?

“An expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response.”

However,

“The Children Act 1989 defines the representations procedure as being for ‘representations (including complaints)’.”

Therefore both representations and complaints should be managed under the complaints procedure (unlike for Adult social services, where only complaints need be captured).

16.2 Who can make a Complaint?

The child or young person receiving or eligible to receive services from the Council or their representative e.g. parent, relative, advocate, special guardian, foster carer, etc:

“The local authority has the discretion to decide whether or not the representative is suitable to act in this capacity or has sufficient interest in the child's welfare.”

16.3 What the complaints team do:

- Letter-vetting
- Liaising with services to try resolve the issue informally
- Mediation
- Training
- Raising awareness / staff surgeries
- Learning facilitation and agreed actions monitoring
- Deliver a unique complaints support SLA to schools
- Advocacy commissioning and support

16.4 Stages of the Complaints Procedure

The complaints procedure has three stages:

Stage 1: This is the most important stage of the complaints procedure. The Service teams and external contractors providing services on our behalf are expected to resolve as many complaints as possible at this initial point.

The Council's complaints procedure requires complaints at stage 1 to be responded to within ten working days (with an automatic extension to a further ten days where necessary).

Stage 2: This stage is implemented where the complainant is dissatisfied with the findings of stage 1. Stage 2 is an investigation conducted by an independent external Investigating Officer for all statutory complaints and an internal senior manager for corporate complaints. A senior manager adjudicates on the findings.

Under the Regulations, the aim is for stage 2 complaints falling within the social services statutory complaints procedures to be dealt within 25 days, although this can be extended to 65 days if complex.

Stage 3: The third stage of the complaints process is the Review Panel under the statutory procedure. Under the corporate complaints process, there is no Stage 3. This panels remit is not to reinvestigate the complaint.

Where complainants wish to proceed with complaints about statutory Children's Services functions, the Council is required to establish a complaints Review Panel. The panel makes recommendations to the Corporate Director who then makes a decision on the complaint and any action to be taken. Complaints Review Panels are made up of three independent panellists. There are various timescales relating to stage 3 complaints. These include:

- setting up the Panel within 30 working days;
- producing the Panel's report within a further 5 working days; and
- producing the local authority's response within 15 working days.

Local Government Ombudsman

The Ombudsman is an independent body empowered to investigate where a Council's own investigations have not resolved the complaint.

The person making the complaint retains the right to approach the Local Government Ombudsman at any time. However, the Ombudsman's policy is to allow the local authority to consider the complaint and will refer the complaint back to the Council unless exceptional criteria are met.