

Children's services complaints and representations annual report 2019-20



**COMMENTS
COMPLIMENTS
& COMPLAINTS**



Children's Services 20 19/ 20 Complaints & Representations key facts & figures

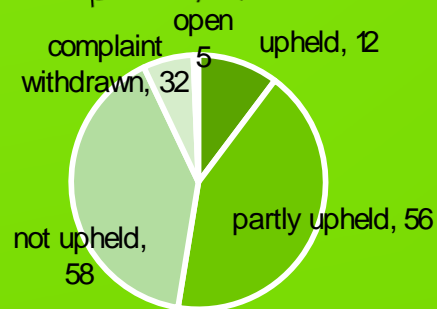


Children's services had **3,418** open referrals as of 31 March 2020.



In 2019/20, children's services received **212** complaints (163 were statutory, **34** corporate, and **15** informal). **17** complaints were made by young people; **13** supported by an advocate.

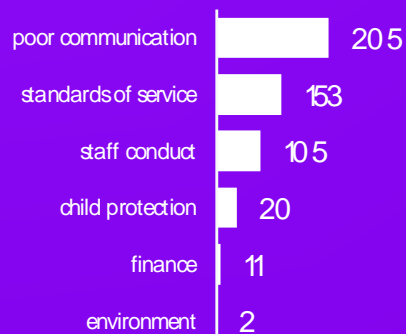
Of the 163 formal complaints just over half were at least partially upheld:



Children's services complaints can be complex & timescales can be protracted. In 2019/20:

Complaints Stage	Average time taken
Stage 1	152 10 days
Stage 2	11 47 days
Stage 3	0 0 days

The most common things people complained about were...



In 2019/20, children's social care also received **153** compliments.

Compliments were about the standard of practice, partnership working, taking a child-centred approach, and communication.

If a complainant remains unhappy after completing our complaints process, they may take their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). In 2019/20, the LGSCO received **19** complaints about education & children's services. They investigated **2** social care complaints; all were not upheld.

Listening to service users' complaints helps services improve by helping managers identify changes that are required. Key learning points from 2019/20 include: explaining why decisions were made; apologising for mistakes; managing changes in social worker; better case monitoring; and striving to resolve issues informally in the first instance.

Having your say about Children's Services

If you have a problem with children's services or if you are unhappy about something that is happening to you, this can usually be sorted out by speaking to someone you trust like your social worker, keyworker or foster carer. But if they can't put things right for you, then you can make a complaint. You can do so by asking to speak to your **Children's Rights Officer**. The children's rights officer makes regular visits to children's homes in Coventry or you can ring them on **0800 0272 118**.

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Welcome

Welcome to the 2019/20 complaints and representations annual report. As part of the Council's commitment to openness, quality assurance, service development and listening and learning from service users, this report provides summary information from comments, compliments and complaints received under the statutory procedures in relation to children's services provided by or commissioned by Coventry City Council for the year 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Background

Local Authorities are required by law (Children Act 1989, plus subsequent changes including the Local Authority Social Services Complaints Regulations (1990) as a result of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003) to have a system for receiving representations made by or on behalf of children who use the Children's Services they provide or commission. These include social work services, residential care, fostering, adoption and the provision of support to families, children with disabilities and young people in trouble with the law.

Representations are defined as comments, compliments and complaints.

Local Authorities are required by law to appoint a complaints officer to oversee all aspects of the procedure.

Some complaints received do not meet the criteria to be dealt with under the statutory procedure. When this is the case, these are registered under the Council's corporate complaints procedure. The arrangements for handling these complaints are different from the statutory process in terms of timescales and the independence of the people who investigate and review the complaints.

Children Services has a nominated officer assigned to the management of representations from children and others who present feedback on children's services.

The purpose of the comments, compliments and complaints system is to ensure that: the views and experiences of people who use services are heard; positive feedback is used to develop services and acknowledge good practice; things that have gone wrong are put right; the organisation learns from both positive and negative feedback; and the organisation sustains its focus on service users / customers / citizens.

Particular reference is made to the range of representations received and responses to them, and specific trends and issues that emerged in the reporting period.

Summary

In 2019/20 children's services completed 24,291 contacts and received 5,382 referrals. This compares to 19,074 and 5,664 in 2018/19. As of 31 March 2020, there were 3,418 referrals open to children's services, compared to 3,324 a year ago. In comparison to the 3,418 referrals open only 4.77% complaints had been received during 2019/20.

The total number of statutory and informal complaints received about children's services in 2019/20 was 212 compared to 203 received in 2018/19. The 212 complaints received consist of 163 statutory complaints, 34 corporate complaints and 15 informal complaints. The number of complaints under the statutory process continue to increase, up from 142 in 2018/19, 179 in 2017/18 and 147 in 2016/17. Included in the 212 complaints received, 23 complaints were active at the time in the court arena therefore investigations were put on hold until the court process concluded.

17 complaints were made by children and young people themselves or from an advocate complaining on behalf of a child; the remainder were from adults. There has been a decrease in the number of children or young people using an advocate to make a complaint – 13 complaints received during 2019/20 compared to 11 in 2018/19, 7 in 2017/18 and 15 in 2016/17.

Two main themes could be identified as arising from the complaints by and on behalf of users in 2019/20: issues regarding poor communication with users; and concerns about the standards of service provided.

Themes from compliments were predominantly around the good standard of practice received from individual social workers and the overall standard of service received from teams.

Feedback

Promoting feedback

Comments, compliments and complaints can tell the Council a great deal about the service users' experiences of service delivery, professional practice and the outcome of management decisions. Children's services welcome this feedback and encourages children, their advocates and anyone who uses the service or who is affected by it, to make their views known.

Where possible, issues/complaints should be handled at the point of delivery. It is when a person feels that they are still not satisfied, then it is recorded as a formal complaint and investigated as such. The length of time to investigate and resolve complaints depends on their complexity. Where there are particular complexities that will require an elongated period of investigation, a timescale is agreed with the complainant.

Providing feedback

People can provide feedback directly to the service or team; to customer services; or to the Complaints Officer. Further information about how to make a complaint, access advocacy or support, and the complaints process is available on the Council's website at www.coventry.gov.uk/comments. It is vitally important that the comments, complaints and compliments system is easily accessible. This maximises the opportunities for individuals to make their views known. Complaints can be accepted through the contact centre via a visit to the centre, by letter, by an online form or by telephone. Complaints may also be made directly to the team that is providing them with a service. Sometimes, complaints are also made via elected members

(Councillors), the Chief Executive; or directly to senior managers. Complaints can also be referred to the Council from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). Complainants who contact the complaints team directly are encouraged to use the contact centre to ensure that their complaint can be processed efficiently.

In 2019/20, the majority of complainants chose to make a complaint via email or through the contact centre.

Advocacy

Of particular importance is the need to inform children of their opportunity to make representations and to find methods they can easily use. There have been 17 complaints from children and young people themselves this year, which is the same as last year. Work has taken place with Barnardo's advocacy service to ensure that more feedback is received from children and young people.

Since 1st April 2004, the Advocacy Services and Representations Regulations 2004, have required councils to make arrangements for the provision of advocacy to children and young people making representations under the Children Act 1989. Of the 17 children and young people making complaints during the year, 13 used an advocate to support them in making their complaint. Since April 2006, the Council has commissioned Barnardo's to provide an advocacy service.

Complaints

The Council received 163 statutory children's services complaints. It also dealt with 34 under corporate procedures; and 15 informally.

The table below indicates how the complaint was received:

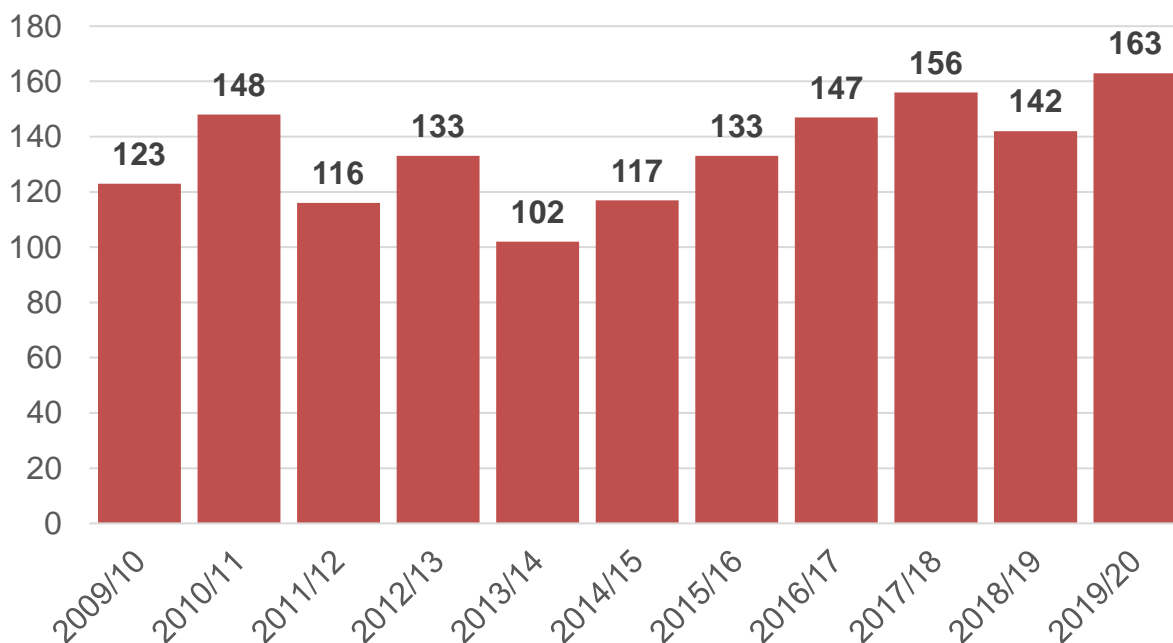
Method	Number of complaints
Email	88
Online form/ Contact Centre	103
Letter	17
Telephone	4

Note: table above includes non-statutory and informal issues. Not knowns excluded.

Statutory complaints

163 statutory complaints were received about children's services in 2019/20. This compares to 142 in 2018/19.

Statutory complaints overtime



Listening to service users' complaints helps services improve by helping managers identify changes that are required. The statutory procedures offer a three-stage process, and the corporate procedures offer a two-stage process, both of which aim to provide a satisfactory resolution to any complaint, preferably as quickly as possible.

The table below sets out the number of complaints in 2019/20 by resolution:

Statutory complaints by upheld status

Status	Number of complaints	%
Upheld	12	7%
Partly upheld	56	34
Not upheld	58	36
Complaint withdrawn by complainant	32	20
Open	5	3%
Total	163	

Statutory complaints by team

Team	Complaints
Children's Disability Team	11
Fostering & adoption	4
Looked after children	31
MASH	7
Safeguarding	2
Social Work Academy	3
Team Central	12

Team	Complaints
Team East	27
Team South	11
Team West (this includes 2 additional teams)	33
Through Care	22
Total	163

Resolution of complaints

Local resolution (stage 1)

The service aims to resolve problems, whenever possible, at Stage 1. At this stage, the allocated manager (usually the manager responsible for the service being complained about) will try to identify what's needed so that the complainant feels able to continue to work with the service. Examples of the types of resolutions offered can be found later in this report.

There were 163 statutory complaints, of which 152 were resolved at Stage 1. That is, 93% of complaints were resolved at Stage 1 of the complaints process, this is a slight decrease from the percentage of 94% during 2018/19. More emphasis on local resolution has been introduced this year, due to the restructure of children's services, helping to keep the percentage resolved at stage one of the process at a high level.

Formal investigation (stage 2)

In certain circumstances a formal investigation of the circumstances leading to a complaint is a more appropriate response, although this tends to be a lengthier process. This may be required when complainants remain dissatisfied with the conclusion reached at Stage 1 or when the complaint is particularly complex or involves a number of service areas. These investigations are always conducted by someone outside the direct line management of the service and the person about whom the complaint is being made.

In 2019/20, there were 11 investigations carried out at Stage 2, compared with 7 in 2018/19. At the time of reporting, 7 complaints have been successfully resolved at Stage 2, and 4 are still under investigation.

These investigations were undertaken by external investigators. At the conclusion of all Stage 2 investigations the investigating officers' reports are read by senior managers for them to consider and act upon before a response is sent to the complainant.

Review panel (stage 3)

Within the statutory complaint's procedure, where complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of a formal investigation at Stage 2, they can request that a review panel of three independent people be convened to examine the investigation. Review panels can make recommendations to the Director of Children's Services if they conclude that the complaint is justified, or that more could be done to resolve the matter, or if they feel the Council should take action to prevent similar situations arising in the future.

There were no Stage 3 reviews during 2019/20. This was an improvement compared to 2018/19 where 1 Stage 3 complaint was received.

Timescales

The legislation and corporate procedures set out timescales for dealing with complaints at each stage of the process. The timescales are:

Stage	Statutory complaints	Corporate complaints
1	10 working days (can be extended to 20 working	10 working days
2	25 working days (can be extended to 65 working	20 working days
3	Within 30 working days of complainant's request	Not applicable

The complexity of Children's Services issues means that complaint resolution can sometimes be protracted, and achievement of the time-scales can suffer as a result. The complaints officer, therefore, undertakes rigorous monitoring of progress in relation to responding to complaints.

Statutory complaints by stage and timescales

Stage	Timescales	Number of
1	Within 10 working days	98
	Over 10 working days	54
2	Within 25 working days	2
	Over 25 working days	9
3	Within 30 working days	0
	Over 30 working days	0
Total		163

Average timescales by stage in calendar days

Stage	Number of complaints	Average timescales
1	152	10
2	11	47
3	0	0

The average time in days to complete Stage 1 complaints was 10 working days in 2019/20, compared to 12.70 days in 2018/19. This is a decrease of 2.70 days. Adherence to timescales had previously been a challenge; weekly meetings with senior managers have ensured that complaint timescales were mostly maintained despite an increase in the number of complaints.

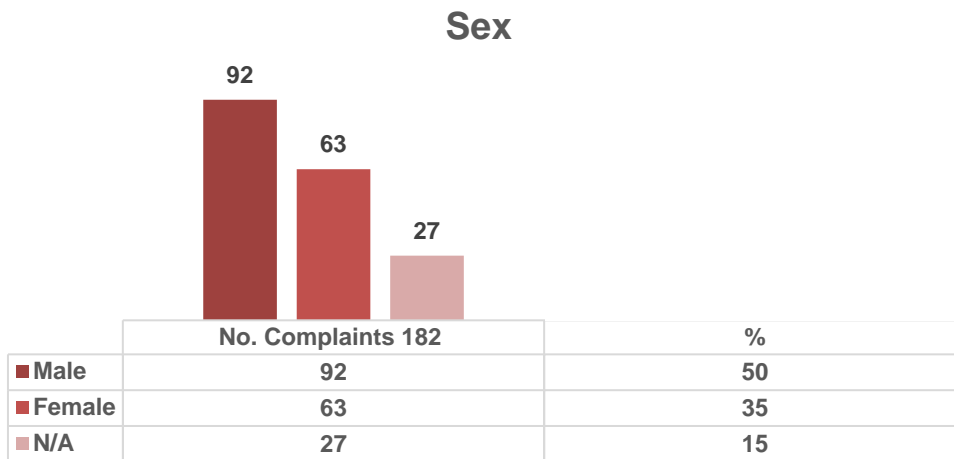
Investigations of Stage 2 complaints under the statutory procedure often need to be extended beyond the 25 working days timescale up to 65 working days due to the complexity of the issues being considered. In these situations, the importance of keeping the complainant informed and securing their agreement to an extension of the timescales, is recognised and addressed. Due to complex investigations and working alongside the availability of complainants to discuss complaint concerns, Stage 2 complaints were resolved within an average of 47 working days in 2019/20 compared to an average of 45.14 working days in 2018/19. 2019/20 has seen a slight increase in investigation times for Stage 2 complaints from the previous year by 1.86 days.

2019/20 has shown on average, that Children's Services has achieved resolving complaints within the statutory timescale guideline of 10 working days for Stage 1 complaints. Further data shows that complaints at Stage 2 were also resolved within the statutory timescale guidelines of 20-65 working days.

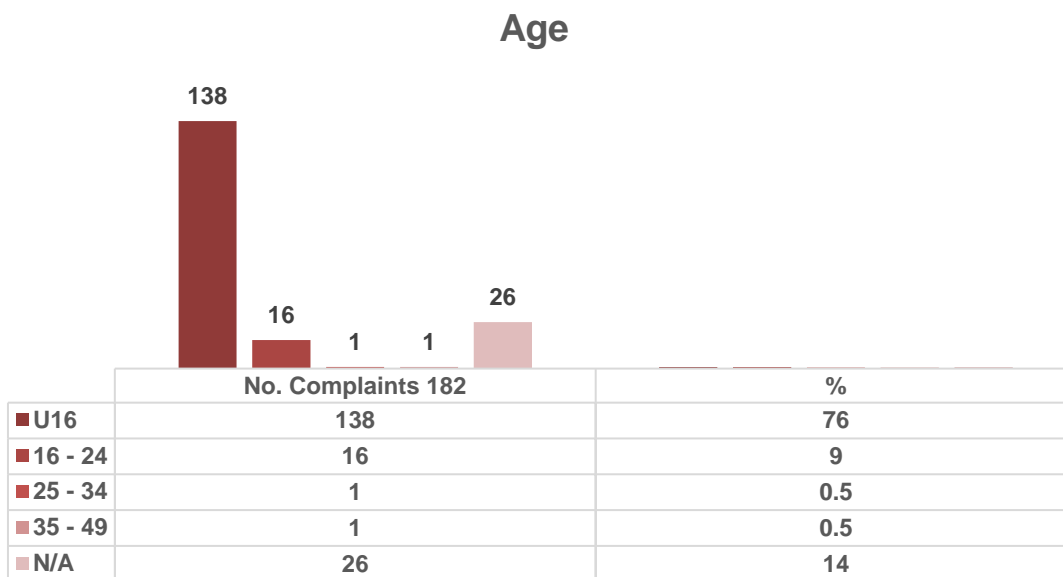
Equality

During 2019-20, we captured Equality Data to obtain further information and a characteristic insight on the complainants and service users who made complaints within Children's Services. The below graphs illustrate the data captured but this does not include complaints submitted for the SEN service area as we were unable to obtain those details.

The below graph shows out of 182 complaints received during 2019-20 (excluding SEN), 50% were from male complainant's/service users, 35% female complainant's/service users and 15% were non-applicable (N/A) as they were made by the public and not service users, therefore those details were not captured.



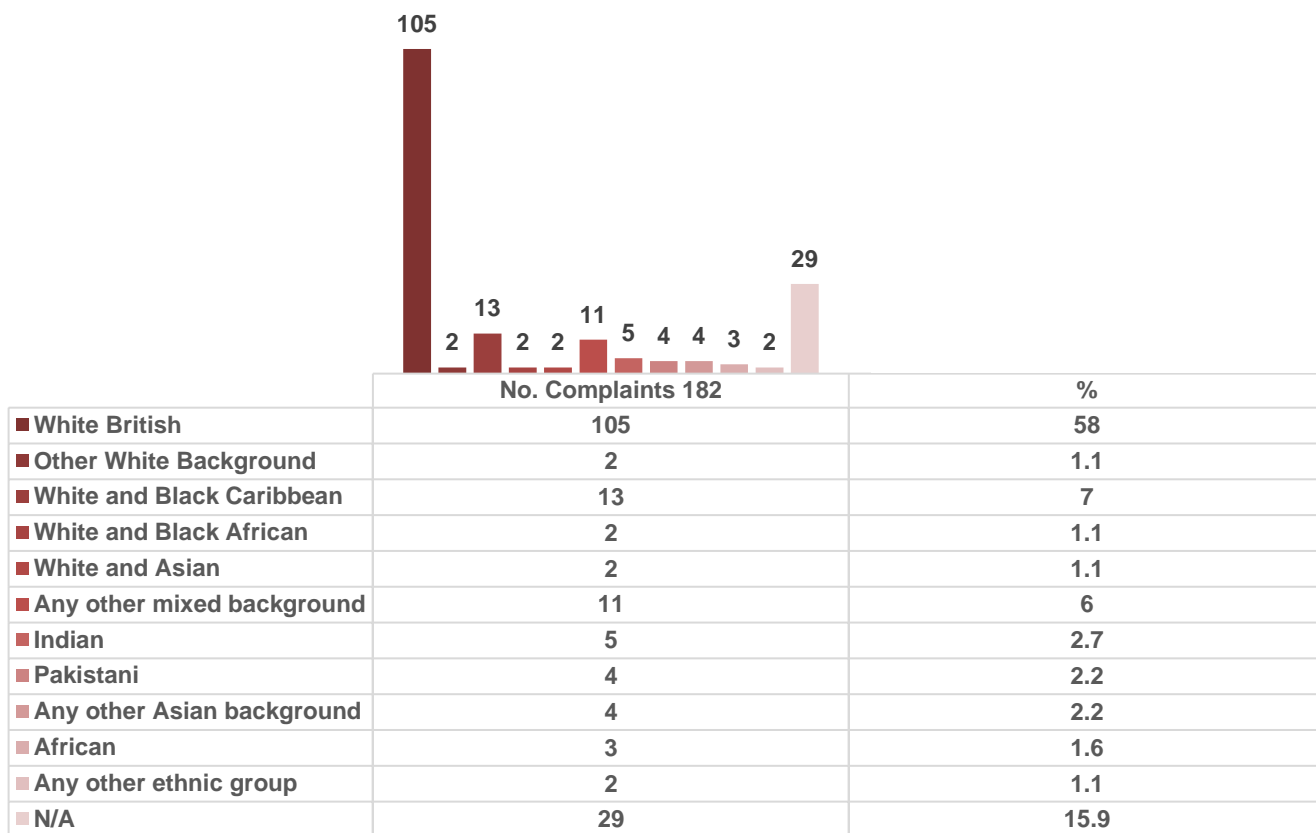
The below graph shows the age range of the complainant or service user, 76% of the complaints received in 2019-20 (excluding SEN) were from or submitted on behalf of young people under the age of 16, 9% of complaints received were from or submitted on behalf of young people between the ages of 16 - 24, 0.5% were received between 25 – 34. 0.5% of complaints were also received between the ages of 35 - 49 and 14% were non-applicable (N/A) as the information was not available.



The majority of complainant's/service users in 2019-20 were White British with a total of 58%, followed by White and Black Caribbean at 7%. Any other mixed background had 6% of the total complainants/service users recorded (excluding SEN), with Indian at 2.7%, Pakistani and Any other Asian background 2.2% and African at 1.6%. Other White Background, White and Black African, White

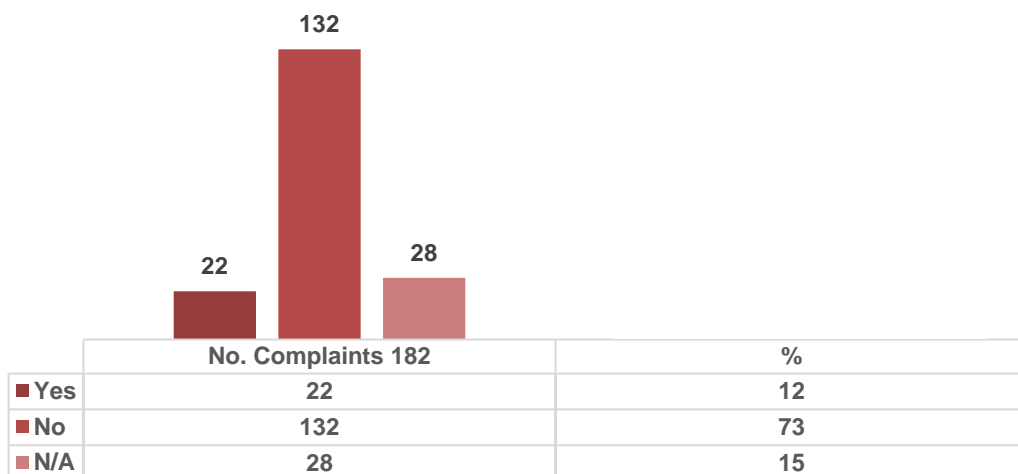
and Asian and Any other Ethnic Group recorded 1.1% each. 15.9% was unable to be captured due to the information not being available and recorded as non-applicable (N/A).

Ethnicity



The data captured during 2019-20 showed that 12% of complainants had a disability and that 73% did not, with 15% as non-applicable (N/A) due to this information not being available.

Disability



Ombudsman

If the complainant remains unhappy following the outcome of the Council's complaints process, they have the option of taking their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

In 2019/20, the LGSCO received 19 complaints or enquiries relating to the category of education and children's services for Coventry City Council. The LGSCO does not separate Education and Children's Services and do not necessarily inform the Local Authority of every complaint or enquiry received, so it is unclear how many of these related specifically to children's services.

Please note that this figure is an estimate, as on occasion when the annual letter is received in July, the LGSCO include some other decisions as full investigations- currently, only decisions that were either held or not upheld have been included.

The LGSCO undertook full investigations for 2 Children's Services complaint (and 3 Education complaints). No Children's Services cases were upheld, and 2 Education case were upheld.

Comments

People may also express disappointment, disagreement or observations about services without necessarily wanting to complain. Feedback of this nature will be recorded as a comment on the Council's central customer relationship management and forwarded to the relevant service area for consideration and action.

No comments were recorded in 2019/20.

Compliments

Compliments tell the Council what people appreciate about services and the way they are provided. Positive feedback also encourages and motivates staff and enables them to celebrate their good performance. Every compliment received is shared with the individual or team to whom it refers and copied to the relevant managers.

153 compliments were received during 2019-20, compared to 78 received in 2018/19.

The majority of compliments reflected satisfaction about the standard of practice in social work; and the standard of service provided by a social worker and/or child and family worker. Other compliments received and categorised were about good partnership working; child-centred practice; and the quality of communication. Compliments recorded include those from other professionals and partner organisations, for instance, advocates, police officers, judges, schools; as well as compliments from foster carers and service users, for instance, parents/carers, children and young people, and other family members.

It is not currently possible to distinguish between compliments from children and young people themselves, or carers, or staff without manually going through every compliment.

Below is a selection of compliments from children/young people and parents/carers:

I'm a Foster carer for Coventry.

I wanted to send you a brief email to let you know how impressed I was with the social worker during the short time I worked with them last week. Their level of communication with me was exceptional from start to finish of the placement. Their care and concern about baby were exemplary and how I feel a CSW should be.

They certainly made an impression on me. and I look forward to working with them again in the future.

I wanted to express to you how I felt and for the social worker to be recognised for their exceptional work

I am a foster carer of two girls who were placed with me on the 20th June 2019 on an Emergency Protection Order by two Social Workers.

Children almost always experience loss and trauma in varying degrees when they are removed from their home. One of the girls was very, upset and crying and determined not to stay and she walked out of the house and the two social workers had to work with her. I had not met the two Social Workers before, but their approach portrayed qualities of empathy, patience and persistence. I am writing this email to express my appreciation of the professional way they handled the situation.

I just wanted to express my gratitude to you and

the team for the wonderful learning experience I had with yourselves. I have learnt so much and enjoyed being part of such an amazing team. I have attached my work experience report as I thought you may be able to gain some insight into how beneficial the experience is for students like myself.

Just wanted to say a massive thank you for allowing the weekend camping activity to happen, my 3 young people had the best time and so did I!

They were happy to see their friends and make lots of new ones too! They made lots of new memories they will treasure for a long time ahead - it really was a fantastic experience for everyone - thanks again it is lovely to do activities with Foster Families.

I wanted to formally put on record my appreciation of the sterling work that the Youth Offending Service Officer has been undertaking as the coordinator for the VRU Pilot. They have been 'absolutely tremendous' and have made a real positive impact/difference to the work within the area.

It was really lovely to see the café so busy, an incredible friendly atmosphere where people can 'be' and seek support and guidance in a warm friendly family hub. It was also a little sad to see so many families being put into this position, so very grateful for all of the team that make this happen. It was so encouraging to see so many young youth's accessing the facility knowing they can speak out in confidence which will aid their personal confidence as they grow into young adults. I thought the fresh fruit and veg store is a brilliant idea allowing people to buy produce that they may not always be able to buy.

A great experience which I thoroughly enjoyed. Thank you to the team at the hub.

I would like to pass on a thank you and the Professionalism from the Senior Administrator who works in the Fostering Service. They were very helpful and very understanding with all my queries I had in relation to getting my daughters savings together. They kept in contact with me throughout with timescales and were very responsive. They informed me of their managers name who ensured the payment was completed in a good timely manner. Overall the service I received was tremendous considering it was a something which I wasn't aware of nor was my adopted daughter.

We have a very good relationship with the child's social worker. We communicate regularly, and they always respond to any queries via phone, text or email' and that we have felt very supported by them throughout the placement.

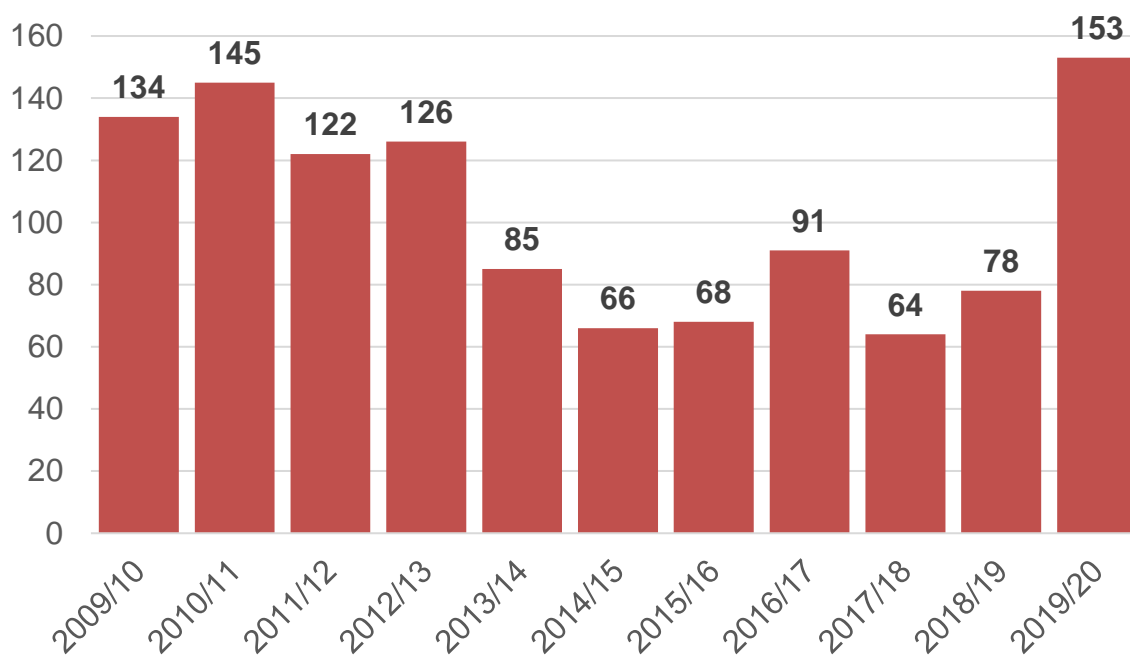
To the social worker and team,

Thank you for all your hard work and helping me get back on my feet. You all have given me so much help and support which I'm truly grateful for and giving me the motivation and encouragement I've needed to

help myself

and the kids to lead a much happier life.

Compliments recorded by year



Compliments by category in 2019/20

Category	Compliments received
Standard of Service	66
Standard of practice (social work)	78
Good partnership working	57
Good child focus	67
Good communication	31

Compliments by category received in 2019/20

Compliment from	Compliments received
Parent/Carers	54
Professionals	52
Police/Judge/Legal	16
Young Person/Child	5
Foster Carers	13
School/Education	12
Adopters	0
Other	1

Note: totals may not add up because numbers may fall under more than one category.

Service improvements and learning points

Children's Services are committed to learning from customer feedback. Where complaints highlight that things have gone wrong, managers must identify any remedial and developmental action required to improve service delivery.

When complaints are received, they are recorded on a database and each concern raised within the complaint is logged under a 'reason of complaint code'. These codes include main categories and subcategory subjects. An example of this would be Standard of Service which has the subcategory reason codes *service level/care plan dispute*, *lack of/access to/eligibility* for service and *delay in receiving service*. It is not unusual for a complainant to raise more than one concern in the same complaint. For example, a complainant may submit a complaint about communication and finance issues experienced during the same incident, and both concerns along with any additional subcategories within the complaint codes would be recorded accordingly under that complaint.

From the 163 formal complaints received, the table below highlights the different types of concerns raised within the complaints received in 2019/20 under the main category. This does not show the actual number of complaints received but only the main reasons of complaints data. Currently our system does not capture an individual complaint code breakdown of the outcome of each concern – so the figures below reflect the alleged complaint, rather than whether a complaint was upheld or not within those specific categories.

Complaint issue/category

Category of concern raised	Number of times raised
Communication	205
Standards of service	153
Staff conduct	105
Child protection issues	20
Finance	11
Standard of environment	2

Resolutions

All staff dealing with complaints are encouraged to make any reasonable effort to ensure that the complaint is resolved. Common resolutions this year were: a full explanation of why decisions were made; apologies for mistakes made and any distress caused; a change in practitioner, where this could be managed in the best interests of the child; the opportunity for complainants to ensure their view is recorded on the social care file; additional monitoring of the case through the usual supervision route; provision of advocacy to ensure child's voice could be heard; and to aim to deal with complaints informally in the first instance – this often achieves a positive resolution in many cases, which in turn decreases complaint escalation.

Compensation/Remedy

For some complaints, compensation was paid. The key principle for any financial remedies paid is that a remedy should, as far as possible, put the complainant back in the position they would have been in but for the fault identified. Typically, compensation will be considered if a service user has had to use their own finances due to the delay in offering a service or if their belongings have been damaged or lost through no fault of theirs.

The following table sets out compensation/remedy paid in 2019/20: A remedy payment of £350.00 was provided to a complainant as an outcome of a Stage 2 complaint. The payment was provided as a goodwill gesture.

Detail	Amount
Goodwill gesture payment	£350.00
Total	£350.00

Service Improvements

Upon completion of the complaint investigation, officers are asked to identify specific service improvements as a result of the complaint. On the completion of Stage 2 upheld complaints these are regularly monitored by the Complaints Officer and Operational/Strategic Leads of the service areas and discussed within the senior leadership meetings for regular review and improvements.

Examples of some of these improvements include:

- To ensure reports, minutes and support plans are completed accurately and within allocated timescales.
- Improvement with communication demonstrating empathy and understanding between social workers and service users/families. This is to ensure a timely delivery of service is provided and information is communicated correctly and efficiently.
- To continue with on-going training for social workers around S47 investigations
- Ensure Child Protection Processes are followed in accordance with statutory timeframes
- Re-emphasising to practitioners and front-line staff the importance of keeping data safe and records are stored in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), with training supported and advised by the Council's information governance team and by the Council's information management strategic group.
- Training on work with fathers and engaging with fathers

Progression Actions

A number of actions were identified in the 2019/20 report. Progress on these actions is as follows.

Distribution of new leaflets

Newly designed complaint leaflets, explaining the process for children and young people were distributed to all service areas and service users. This is currently being refreshed and a new leaflet is to be issued. There will be two available leaflets which will appeal to all ages.

Equality

In 2020/21 the complaints team will be looking to be in a position to carry out comprehensive comparative analysis between the equalities profile of complainants with the profile of service users more generally – in order to identify any potentially negative impacts and service improvements.

Complaints, Comments and Compliments Information Hub

A new information hub has been launched in 2019 to provide complaint information and processes to members of management and staff within social services to support the investigation and complaints process. The information hub will further develop going forward to provide all information to support Children Services with the complaints process.

Further revision of the Stage 1 process

All Stage 1 complaints are monitored and managed more effectively. For the first three quarters of 2019/2020 the average time in days to complete Stage 1 complaints was 8.9 in Q1, 9.6 in Q2, 9.3 in Q3 and 9.5 working days in Q4. Further work has continued in 2019/20 to streamline the process and a more informal approach to investigate complaints has been undertaken to ensure that, where possible, complaints are not escalated within the complaints process, and are resolved more quickly. A complaints report is provided to the senior management teams on a quarterly basis outlining the themes and average days taken to investigate Stage 1 complaints.

Further revision of the Stage 2 process

There was a slight increase in completing Stage 2 complaints in 2019/20 with the average time in days to completion being 47 working days, compared to 45.14 working days in 2018/19. This was due to the availability of complainants to discuss their cases and concerns. The Complaints Officer meets with managers on a regular basis to monitor and manage the Stage 2 complaints to ensure they are completed in a timely manner. A complaints report will also be provided to the senior management teams on a quarterly basis outlining the themes and average days taken to investigate Stage 2 complaints.

Close working with Barnardo's and the Children's Champion to ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard

The Complaints Officer is working more closely with Barnardo's and is in regular contact with them on a regular basis to review cases. Work is to be done with the Children's Champion to gain more feedback from children and young people, including ways to improve the way children and young people, including ways to improve the way children and young people can make complaints, compliments and representations.

Review on access to complaints process

There will be a review in 2020/21 on how children and young people can access the complaints process. The Complaints Officer will work directly with children and young people in conjunction with the Children's Champion to ensure the Council has a process that is accessible, and a complaint is easy to process this will include online and leaflet-based media.

Complaints, Comments & Compliments External Web Pages

A refresh of the external web pages for Complaints, Comments and Compliments will commence during 2020/21 to include more information on the complaints process to target all age groups and to incorporate an easy to read process tailored for younger children.

RAG report and action plans

A RAG report was introduced in 2016/2017 to ensure managers were able to have an overview of complaints in their area. It enabled current complaints to be monitored weekly and discussed at Management Team Meetings monthly, allowing joint working and responses. This process has continued into 2019/20 as it has been effective in monitoring complaints and any issues arising.

Training for team and managers on complaint processes

The Complaints Officer continues to provide training sessions on all aspects of complaint processes in 2020/21 to all existing and new staff within Children's Services. Feedback sessions will also be provided on positive and negative areas of categories of complaints.

Specific service area improvements/learning which have been identified

Children's Disability Team

The main theme in relation to the complaints that were upheld/partially upheld demonstrates the need to improve communication between Social Workers, other professionals and families to ensure that this is clear, timely and consistent. There has been a recent focus on strengthening the use of the Signs of Safety practice framework within CDT and this will continue. Signs of Safety is a relationship-based approach which has an emphasis on communicating issues and concerns in a clear manner. There was also a theme of issues and concerns relating to Social Workers being unable to identify providers and to provide targeted short breaks/ care packages for children with complex needs, in a timely manner. A tendering exercise has recently been concluded and this has resulted in a new framework being in place, including new providers. The new framework places an emphasis on quality and outcomes for children and young people."

Fostering

During this year there has been 1 further complaint about special guardianship support. This follows on

from some complaints over the periods 2017-18 and 2018-19. This latest complaint relates to communication which predated those actions taking place. Our actions from the last review were that an information booklet for Special Guardians was produced and the policy on financial support to Special Guardians was updated and clarified. Processes for notice of change of allowances were also clarified in 2019.

One complaint related to reimbursement for expenses incurred by a connected person foster carer to create a suitable bedroom space for a fostered child. In response to this, arrangements for financial support via the Pathways to Care policy have been clarified and updated.

A third complaint related to an assessment outcome and it is apparent that appropriate processes were followed in this case.

Looked After Children (LAC) and Permanency

The key themes from last year's complaints relate to timeliness of communication from Social Workers, timeliness of progressing family time sessions and communication around future contact schedules. There were also complaints around fostering payments not being made in a timely way and not being stopped when they should be.

The main area of complaint is around lack of communication. The learning we have taken from this is that social workers need to alert fostering finance at the earliest opportunity when a placement is made or has ended. Our Social Workers have continual clarity from managers regarding the expectations around fostering processes.

We have worked hard to simplify the process of accessing the supervised family. This means that there is now less delay in setting up family time for children and their family. Social Workers are continually reminded of the need to provide rationale to the family as to why contact is reducing and to ensure family time schedules are in place.

We are committed to improving our service and we ensure we gather feedback from families regularly, so they feel valued and listened to. This forms part of our improvement journey.

Multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and responsive services

A review of the complaints received in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub has identified that the majority relate to disputes between parents that are separated over contact with their children. Learning from complaints is shared within the team which supports their learning and development needs.

The MASH team are committed to improving our service and engagement with both parents making sure they feel involved, are listened to and their views clearly recorded in all contacts and referrals where possible. We have dip sampled cases to identify potential areas for development and recognise that there needs to be a greater emphasis on both parents being consulted with as part of the triage process in MASH. As a Local Authority we have embedded Signs of Safety within our triage process and all the team have clear objectives around completing holistic assessments and including both parents' voices.

MASH have a stable workforce and they have had 'Back to Basics training delivered to them in a number of different areas which has developed confidence around application of thresholds and identifying safety plans for children and young people.

Quality and Assurance (Child Protection Conference Chair Service and Participation Service) / Child Protection Conference Chair Service

During this year there has been one complaint received and this related to a parent not having had timely notification regarding meetings being cancelled/rearranged. A full and frank apology was offered as an acknowledgement that this is not the standard of communication and practice expected or usually provided in the service. Administrative and human error had contributed to this. The opportunity to check systems and processes, as well as remind staff of the importance of good communication and explanation to parents when things are not progressing as planned, was taken as a result of this complaint. The experience of children and families is very important to the Child Protection Conference

Chair Service and over 20/21, the Service will be ensuring there are effective feedback methods in place, so we can understand what we can do better or differently and make improvements moving forward.

Participation Service

The need for staff who are working with children/young people in a group setting to ensure there is clear communication with each other and then with the children/young people about behaviour expectation and ground rules – to avoid any potential for confusion and mixed messages.

For staff to be ever mindful of how their interaction and tone could come across to a young person, to avoid any misinterpretation; have a good understanding of children and young people's preferred communication styles and interactions to support this.

Social Work Academy

The SWA report has three complaints attached to it. However, one relates to the East Team, not the academy. The two that have been held within the SWA pertain to one being a lack of communication and understanding about the actions Children's Service take to process a referral and the other about a lack of communication regarding the update on a child's future placement. The learning from both have been discussed individually and in team meetings to express the importance of ensuring children and families have a clear understanding about why Social Workers are involved in their lives, and what actions they are taking. This continues to be an area the academy will always support to improve and uphold.

Team Central

Between 2019 and 2020 complaints have reduced as improved practice is embedded.

From the complaints either Upheld or partially upheld there are 3 common themes

- 1) Communication,
- 2) Conduct of the Social Worker
- 3) Concerns around the assessment process.

Social Workers are encouraged to respond to families and professionals in a timely way and share information about the Children and Families Assessment Process at the onset of their intervention.

An introduction pack has been introduced that will provide families with the necessary knowledge to improve their understanding of the work we undertake which should ensure that they feel valued and respected throughout the process. Guidance around expectations of Social Workers is now also introduced so they are clear on what constitutes best practice.

These complaints were personally addressed with individuals at the time by the Team Manager.

Furthermore, learning from complaints remain on the agenda of supervision sessions, team meetings and whole team meetings. Managers discuss compliments and complaints each week in management meetings also.

Team East

The main themes identified within the complaints for the service from this year relate to issues around communication (written and verbal) and Social Worker's conduct.

The East Area Team continues to develop staff within the area with a particular focus on relationship-based practice. Monthly development sessions are now taking place with the expectation that all staff in the service attend.

Feedback from complaints is shared, where appropriate, with relevant staff members and their line manager so that any learning can be incorporated into their development plan.

The service wants to ensure that all children, young people and their families feel listened to and receive the appropriate support.

Team South

The complaints that were either upheld or partially upheld show themes of poor communication; not involving or listening to families, data protection and quality of records.

The South Area are committed to improving our service and engagement with children and families, making sure they feel involved, are listened to, are respected and work alongside Social Workers by using the Signs of Safety, relationship-based approach. We have embedded a system where we routinely seek service user feedback every month and, we discuss the feedback in the team and the learning themes. It is important to us that all children and families receive a good service overall, receive the support they need and that we continue to listen to families as a partner to help us improve our help and protection offer.

We are also working to improve our recording so that records are presented more professionally and show the child's journey more. All staff are required to use and complete Recording Guidance templates and to attend Mandatory Data Protection Training.

As some of the complainants felt their complaints were not responded to fully at Stage 1, we are planning training with managers so that they are clearer about the need to respond more comprehensively to complaints.

Team West (Including 2 additional teams)

In reviewing the complaints received by Team West 2019-20, there were:

33 Statutory Complaints received in total comprising of, 31 Stage 1 Complaints with an average timeframe of 11 days for completion (1 day over average). 3 of these complaints were withdrawn, which if excluded from the overall figures would reduce the average timescale to 8.5 days. 2 Stage 2 Complaints with an average timeframe of 62 days (hit the timescale) and 21 Compliments received.

There were 33 statutory complaints in total, a slight increase on the total of 27 last year. 3 of the 31 Stage 1 complaints made were withdrawn after being open 14, 41 and 61 days respectively. This has led to the overall figure for resolution being inflated to 11 days and if these 3 were excluded the number of days for resolution would be 8.5 days.

The main themes captured in the complaints relate to issues of Communication and Staff Conduct, with the majority of the issues having been raised about the practice of Social Workers that no longer work for the Local Authority, which made them difficult to investigate, but learning was able to be captured.

Having reviewed all the outcome letters there is a wide variation in the quality of the responses received by complainants, in relation to the content of the investigation, evidence considered and resultant outcomes. In addition, the learning from the complaints had not been consistently identified in order that improvements in practice can be made. There is now a permanent management tier responsible for the investigation of complaints in place in Team West which has started to improve the quality of the complainant responses, and is particularly evident in the second half of the 2019/2020 period. There is also a systematic process in place for the analysis of learning themes from complaints and compliments, in addition to service user feedback to ensure that the required improvements in practice are being captured at the monthly management/team meetings, and incorporated within the West Service Performance plan. Compliments are also celebrated at team meetings and best practice escalated to the Principal Social Worker and Director of Childrens Services for recognition with a "Good Job Card".

Recommendations:

To consider whether complaints that are subsequently withdrawn, should be included in overall figures.

The Complaints Officer to provide a virtual re-fresher workshop to the Management Team to ensure greater consistency of investigation process and the capture of learning outcomes.

Operational Lead to continue to quality assure all complaint responses for consistency, ensuring that learning is captured within the double-loop system and shared across the team/service as appropriate.

To remind all Team Managers to register all compliments with the Complaints Team.

Through Care

Last year the majority of complaints to Through Care were around 3 main areas; around tasks not being completed by previous social workers, concerns around placements and issues around contact arrangements. Positively, out of these issues only contact arrangements remain an issue this year, and these complaints are in the vast majority of cases not from the children or young people. The biggest issue around contact, were family members not agreeing with contact arrangements that were in place. Although most of these complaints were not upheld, there is some learning in being clear how contact arrangements are communicated. Due to the nature of decisions even with good communication this will still be an area which causes contention.

Complaints directly from children and young people have mainly been around either disagreeing with care planning decisions or issues with their worker. In both these areas where complaints have been upheld this has been around communication issues and not the actual decisions. Although this is in a small number of situations, we are working with staff around how to ensure children and young people are fully involved in care planning decisions even when there are difficult decisions to make.

Positively there is only one complaint about a change in worker this year reflecting the much more stable nature of the workforce in Through Care. There have also been complaints investigated by Through Care but these complaints have also crossed referenced to our neighborhood teams when a service user has transferred services.

Learning from complaints overall

Our teams take complaints very seriously and we continue to use these to inform our practice throughout Children's Services. We have monthly Practice Improvement Forums, where all Children Services Practitioners come together to consider learning and development and this includes feedback and learning from complaints and audits, this enables us to continuously reflect on the service we provide and improve. We have the same forums each month for managers, to ensure the same learning is applied.

We will continue to develop these forums and continue to learn from all feedback from children, young people, parents, carers, families and professionals, to ensure the service we deliver continues to be improved.

Further information

Further information about complaints and representations and a copy of the Council's complaints policy and [complaints handling guidance](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/) is available at www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/.

Ilius Ahmed

Complaints Officer

Insight Team

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Insight Team

Coventry City Council September 2020



Insight Team
Coventry City Council