



Cabinet Member (Children and Young People)

Time and Date

1.00 pm on Monday, 7th October, 2019

Place

Diamond Room 1 - Council House

Public Business

1. **Apologies**
2. **Declarations of Interests**
3. **Minutes** (Pages 3 - 6)
 - (a) To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 4th February, 2019
 - (b) Matters Arising
4. **Children's Services Social Care Complaints and Representations Annual Report 2018/19** (Pages 7 - 42)

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive (People)
5. **Outstanding Issues Report**

There are no outstanding issues
6. **Any Other Business**

To consider any other items of business which the Cabinet Member decides to take as a matter of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.

Private Business

Nil

Martin Yardley, Deputy Chief Executive (Place), Council House Coventry

Friday, 27 September 2019

Note: The person to contact about the agenda and documents for this meeting is Usha Patel, Governance Services Tel: 024 7697 2301

Membership: Councillor: B Gittins (Deputy Cabinet Member) and P Seaman (Cabinet Member)

By invitation: Councillor J Lepoidevin (Shadow Cabinet Member)

Please note: a hearing loop is available in the committee rooms

If you require a British Sign Language interpreter for this meeting
OR if you would like this information in another format or
language please contact us.

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Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member for Children and Young People held at
2.30 pm on Monday, 4 February 2019

Present:

Members: Councillor P Seaman (Cabinet Member)
 Councillor J Lepoidevin (Shadow Cabinet Member)

Employees (by
Directorate):

People J Gregg, P Smith

Place S Bennett

6. **Declarations of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

7. **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 October, 2018 were agreed and signed as a true record.

8. **Expansion of the Regional Adoption Agency**

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (People) which indicated that Cabinet endorsed Coventry becoming part of a Regional Adoption Agency hosted by Warwickshire County Council called Adoption Central England (ACE) on 31 October, 2017. This was a government requirement that was published by the DfE in Adoption A vision for change in March 2016. The Regional Adoption Agency is a shared services model which includes Coventry City Council, Solihull Metropolitan Council, Warwickshire Country Council and Worcestershire Country Council. Herefordshire County Council has now applied to join ACE and in order for this to happen, all four local authorities need to agree to the expansion through its own relevant political processes.

The report identified the following benefits of the proposal:-

- An increase in the adopter pool. This will allow better matching to meet each child's needs and a wider geographical region if children need to be placed away from the local area.
- It would allow good practice to be better shared across the region
- It would bring efficiencies of scale which will provide better value in Coventry's adoption service
- It will allow ACE to be more sustainable in the future
- It will give ACE a better profile both regionally and nationally

The adoption performance in Herefordshire County Council was judged by Ofsted as good in the last Single Inspection Framework. It has good statistical performance which is likely to enhance the performance of ACE. In addition, the

size of Herefordshire and its adoption work will make up less than 10% of ACE overall. Therefore agreement for it to join will only have a marginal impact on ACE. Details of the risks to ACE and how the risk was being managed were detailed in the report.

The report indicated that if all local authorities are content to proceed, a target date for full integration is anticipated as 1 July, 2019. There is an implementation grant of £60k available from the DfE to support any initial one-off costs of Herefordshire joining ACE.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People endorses the expansion of ACE to include Herefordshire County Council and delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services to sign on behalf of the City Council.

9. **Coventry Fostering Service Annual Report 2017/18**

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (People) which provided information on the work undertaken by the Fostering Service between April 2017 and March 2018. The performance of the Service is critical to the delivery of high quality local placements that can meet the diverse needs of Coventry's Looked After Children.

The report summarised the activity of the service over the past 12 months. It highlighted the challenge of adequately recruiting and retaining the number and type of carers who can meet children's needs. It also emphasised the challenge of developing, supervising and supporting approved foster carers to meet the often complex range of needs that looked after children have. Additionally, it identifies the growth in the number of children placed in connected persons fostering arrangements. The report detailed the ongoing work of the Fostering Transformation Project to increase the percentage of looked after children who are placed within internal fostering provision.

At the end of March 2018, there were 651 looked after children in Coventry, of which 483 were placed in foster care. Of these, 260 children were placed with Coventry foster carers compared with 223 at the end of March 2017. This included both mainstream and connected persons placements and equates to 53.8% of those children in foster care. Of the 648 children, 223 children were placed with independent fostering agencies, which is a reduction compared to 238 on 31 March, 2017. Of the total number of looked after children, 39.9% were placed with Coventry foster carers, which was a further improvement in this percentage from March 2015, when only 22.8% were placed in internal foster care. Coventry's mainstream foster carers provide an average of 1.6 placements per household. The total number of approved placements on 31 March 2018 was 287. A key focus of the fostering service is to increase the percentage of these placements which are occupied. The percentage of occupied placements has remained relatively static whilst the number of approved placements has risen.

The report provided detailed information regarding the recruitment, approval and resignations of mainstream carers and indicated that there had been a significant growth in the number of enquiries to become a foster carer received in 2017.

Details of support and training provided to foster carers, included the support provided by the Foster Carer Association was also included in the report.

The following priorities for the service going forward were identified:-

1. Continuing work to increase the proportion of looked after children placed in an in house fostering placement
2. Continue to ensure that where appropriate looked after children are placed in connected persons care and that, these arrangements are well assessed and supported
3. Develop the in house specialist fostering scheme
4. Develop an in house out of hours rota of foster carers to ensure emergency placements are available as needed outside office hours
5. Develop provision of and support to parent and child fostering
6. Maintain an aggressive and robust focus on marketing, recruitment and assessment of foster carers.
7. Maximise the capacity of internal foster carers and increase the children placed in internally
8. Review and strengthen the training and development offer to foster carers (to include buddying scheme and support to sons and daughters)
9. Continue to work with children's teams to focus on placement stability
10. Review and relaunch the foster carer support strategy and charter.
11. Provide workshops and team development sessions to children's social workers on working effectively with foster carers.

The Cabinet Member expressed her appreciation of all of the work being done in this regard.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People accepts the Fostering Service Annual Report 2017/18.

10. **Outstanding Issues**

There were no outstanding issues.

11. **Any Other Business**

There were no other items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 2.50pm)

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Public report Cabinet Member Report

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

7 October 2019

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People – Cllr Seaman

Director approving submission of the report:

Deputy Chief Executive (People)

Ward(s) affected:

All

Title:

Children's services social care complaints and representations annual report 2018/19

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive summary:

There is a statutory duty for the Council to have a system for receiving representations by, or on behalf of, children who use the social care services they provide or commission; and for the Council to produce an annual report about the operation of the complaints procedure.

This report sets out the details of the comments, compliments and complaints for children's services in 2018/19, this includes both Statutory and Corporate Complaints which both follow a different process as outlined in the Complaints Handling Guidance 2018/19. It highlights the themes that arise from them and the learning and service improvements that have resulted from the feedback received.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member is recommended to:

- (1) Approve publication of the annual report in relation to complaints and representations in children's services in 2018/19.

List of appendices included:

Appendix I – Children's services complaints and representations annual report 2018/19
Appendix II – Complaints handling guidance

Background papers:

None

Other useful documents

Young people's guide to making a social care complaint

https://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/37/childrens_social_care/625/

Complaints Managers' Group (May 2016) Good Practice guidance for handling complaints concerning adults and children social care services <https://www.adass.org.uk/media/5360/good-practice-guidance-final-09062016.pdf>

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Guidance for bodies in our jurisdiction to support good complaint handling <https://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/advice-and-guidance/guidance-notes>

Department for Education (September 2006) statutory guidance for local authority children's services on representations and complaints procedures

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-getting-the-best-from-complaints>

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title:**Children's services complaints and representations annual report 2018/19****1 Context (or background)**

- 1.1 There is a statutory duty for the Council to have a system for receiving representations by, or on behalf of, children who use the social care services they provide or commission; and for the Council to produce an annual report about the operation of the complaints procedure.
- 1.2 This report sets out the details of the comments, compliments and complaints for children's services in 2018/19. It highlights the themes that arise from them and the learning and service improvements that have resulted from the feedback received.

2 Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 Between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019, there were 142 statutory complaints received about children's services. The number of statutory complaints has decreased from 156 in 2017/18. In addition, there were 56 corporate complaints and 5 informal issues raised.
- 2.2 78 compliments were received in the year compared with 64 in 2017/18 and 91 in 2016/17.
- 2.3 28 complaints were made by children and young people themselves or from an advocate, the remainder were from adults. There has been an increase of children and young people using an advocate – 11 during 2018/19, compared to 11 in 2017/18 and 15 in 2016/16.
- 2.4 Two main themes continue to be identified as arising from the complaints by and on behalf of users in 2018/19: complainants reported being dissatisfied with communication and the standards of service provided.
- 2.5 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. 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. A selection of compliments from children and young people and families have been included in the appendix.
- 2.6 Appendix I sets out the children's services comments, compliments and complaints annual report for 2018/19, highlighting trends and the themes that has arisen from complaints and the learning and service improvements that have resulted from the feedback received.
- 2.7 Appendix II sets out the Council's guidance for handling complaints.

3 Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 None identified or undertaken.

4 Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 Areas for development and improvement have been included within the divisional and relevant team plans for implementation in 2018/19.

5 Comments from Director of Finance and Corporate Services**5.1 Financial implications**

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. Financial remedies

resulting from any complaints are paid out of service budgets. All complaints relating to financial issues were investigated and rectified accordingly.

5.2 Legal implications

This report meets the legal requirement for the Council to monitor arrangements made in accordance with regulations by keeping a record of each representation received, and compiling a report every 12 months on the operation of the procedure.

6 Other implications

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council Plan?

This annual report sets out the progress made by the service towards the One Coventry Plan vision to be locally committed, by improving the quality of life for Coventry people, by contributing to the priority to protect our most vulnerable people, including our looked after children. Children, young people and others acting on their behalf are encouraged to report any concerns about the care and services they are receiving so that these can be addressed quickly.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

There are reputational as well as financial risks when things go wrong. It is, therefore, important that the Council acts and learns from the outcome of complaints.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

The co-ordination and management of complaints involves considerable officer time. Therefore, where things have gone wrong, it is important for the Council to put things right, learn from the experience and make the necessary improvements. The feedback that is received from complaints and other representations is reported to managers on a regular basis to inform service planning and improvements.

6.4 Equalities and equality and consultation analyses (ECA)

ECAs have been built into the delivery of work in children's services. As part of continuous improvement, the service will continue to review the integration of equality and diversity into operational practice and performance monitoring.

This year, the complaints officer began collecting data on complainants by protected characteristics such as ethnicity, sex and disability status. This will enable the Council to identify if its complaints policy is operating as intended, eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity in line with the public sector equality duty. An insight into this data will be provided in the Children Services Social Care Complaints and Representations Annual Report 2019/2020.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

Children's services may be delivered in-house, or by external agencies for instance partner organisations commissioned by the local authority. The responsibility remains with the Council even when services are delivered by external agencies or partner organisations. Therefore, it is important for the Council and partner organisations to learn from the experience when things go wrong, and work together to make the necessary improvements.

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26/09/2019 08:08:27

Contributor/ approver name	Title	Directorate or organisation	Date doc sent out	Date response received or approved
Contributors:				
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Neil Macdonald	Strategic Lead – Quality Assurance	People	10/06/2019	21/08/2019
Jaspal Mann	Equality and Diversity Officer	People	04/09/2019	18/09/2019
Paul Smith	Strategic Lead – Looked After Children	People	10/06/2019	21/08/2019
Rebecca Wilshire	Strategic Lead – Early Help and Protection	People	10/06/2019	21/08/2019
Usha Patel	Governance Services Officer	Place	04/09/2019	06/09/2019
Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)				
Finance: Rachel Sugars	Finance Manager	Place	04/09/2019	23/09/2019
Legal: Julie Newman	City Solicitor and Monitoring Officer	Place	04/09/2019	05/09/2019
Gail Quinton	Deputy Chief Executive (People)	People	20/09/2019	23/09/2019
John Gregg	Director of Children's Services	People	10/06/2019	21/08/2019
Members: Cllr Pat Seaman	Cabinet Member (Children and Young People)		04/09/2019	17/09/2019

This report is published on the Council's website: www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings/

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Children's services complaints and representations annual report 2018-19



Children's services 2018/19 complaints & representations key facts & figures

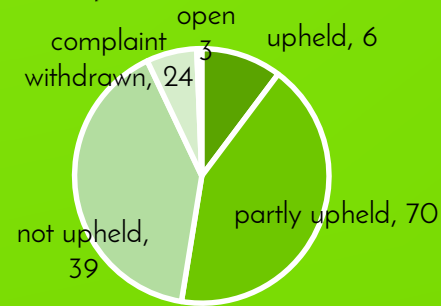


Children's services had **3,284** open referrals as of 31 March 2019.



In 2018/19, children's services received **203** complaints (142 were statutory, **56** corporate, and **5** informal). **17** complaints were made by young people; **11** supported by an advocate.

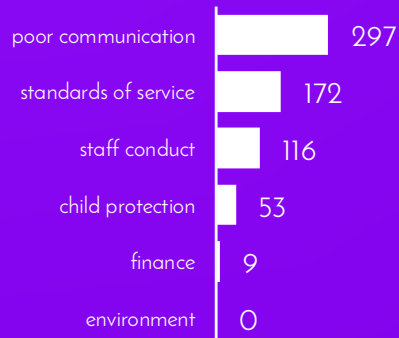
Of the 142 formal complaints just over half were at least partially upheld:



Children's services complaints can be complex & timescales can be protracted. In 2018/19:

Complaints	Average time taken
Stage 1 134	12.70 days
Stage 2 7	45.14 days
Stage 3 1	78 days

The most common things people complained about were...



In 2018/19, children's social care also received **78** 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 2018/19, the LGSCO received **18** complaints about education & children's services. They investigated **1** social care complaints; all were upheld.

Listening to service users' complaints helps services improve by helping managers identify changes that are required. Key learning points from 2018/19 include: explaining why decisions were made; apologising for mistakes; managing changes in social worker; better case monitoring; providing effective advocacy; 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 2018/19 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 2018 to 31 March 2019.

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 social care 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.

The People Directorate has a nominated officer assigned to the management of representations from children and others who present feedback on children's services. This is the People Directorate Complaints Officer.

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 2018/19, children's services completed 19,074 contacts and received 5,664 referrals. This compares to 21,035 and 5,871 in 2017/18. As of 31 March 2019, there were 3,284 referrals open to children's services, compared to 3,623 a year ago.

The total number of statutory and informal complaints received about children's services in 2018/19 was 203 compared to 179 received in 2017/18. The 203 complaints received consist of 142 statutory complaints, 56 corporate complaints and 5 informal complaints. The number of complaints under the statutory process continue to increase, up from 179 in 2017/18, 147 in 2016/17 and 133 in 2015/16.

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 – 11 complaints received during 2018/19 compared to 7 in 2017/18, 15 in 2016/17 and 17 in 2015/16.

Two main themes could be identified as arising from the complaints by and on behalf of users in 2018/19: 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 People Directorate 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/complaints/.

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 2018/19, 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 a decrease on last year (21). 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, 11 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 142 statutory children's services complaints. It also dealt with 56 under corporate procedures; and 5 informally.

The table below indicates how the complaint was received:

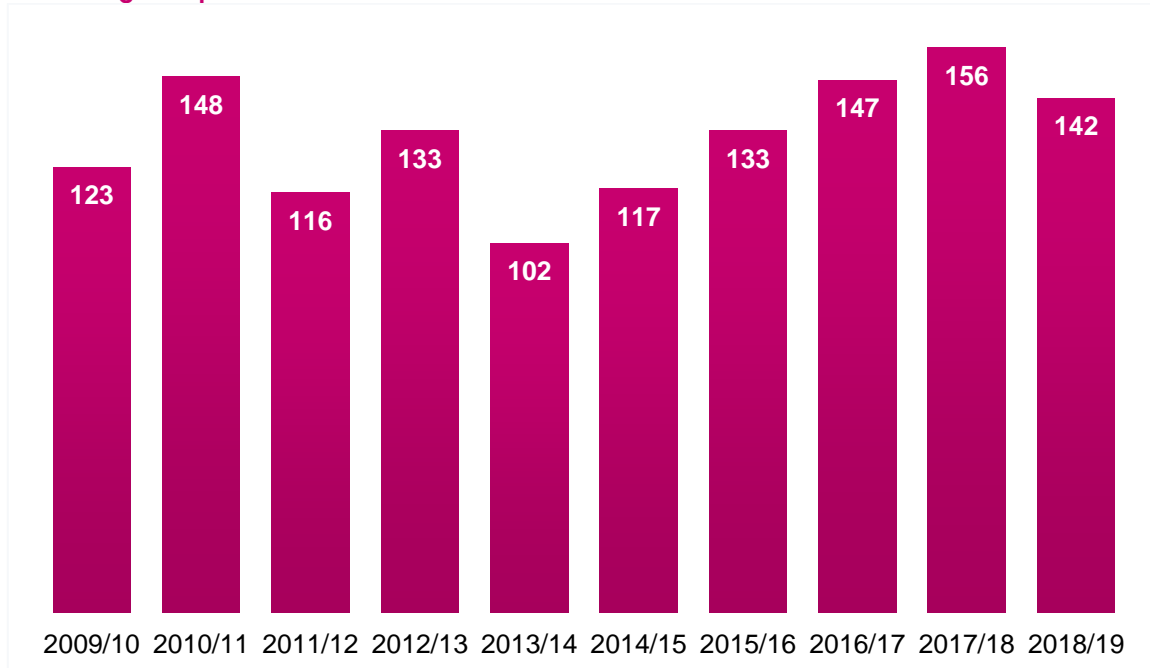
Method	Number of complaints
Email	94
Online form	84
Letter	8
Telephone	4

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

Statutory complaints

142 statutory complaints were received about children's services in 2018/19. This compares to 156 in 2017/18.

Statutory complaints over time



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 2018/19 by resolution:

Statutory complaints by upheld status

Status	Number of complaints	%
Upheld	6	4%
Partly upheld	70	49%
Not upheld	39	28%
Complaint withdrawn by complainant / alternative dispute resolution	24	17%
Open	3	2%
Total	142	

Statutory complaints by team

Team	Complaints
Looked after children / looked after children permanency	23
Fostering & adoption	9
Team South	17
ThroughCare	22
Team West	27
Team East	10
Team Central	21
Multi-agency safeguarding hub / responsive services	5

Team	Complaints
Children's Disability Team	5
Team Wood End	1
Team Radford	2
Safeguarding	0
Commissioning	0
Total	142

Resolution of complaints

Local resolution (stage 1)

The service aim 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 142 statutory complaints, of which 134 were resolved at Stage 1. That is, 94% of complaints were resolved at Stage 1 of the complaints process, this is a slight decrease from the percentage of 98% during 2017/18. 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 2018/19, there were 7 investigations carried out at Stage 2, compared with 3 in 2017/18. At the time of reporting, 6 complaints have been successfully resolved at Stage 2.

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 complaints 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 was 1 complaint reviewed at Stage 3 during 2018/19.

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 days)	10 working days
2	25 working days (can be extended to 65 working days)	20 working days
3	Within 30 working days of complainant's request	Not applicable

The complexity of social care 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 complaints
1	Within 10 working days	75
	Over 10 working days	59
2	Within 25 working days	2
	Over 25 working days	5
3	Within 30 working days	0
	Over 30 working days	1
Total		142

Average timescales by stage in calendar days

Stage	Number of complaints	Average timescales
1	134	12.70
2	7	45.14
3	1	78.00

The average time in days to complete Stage 1 complaints was 12.70 working days in 2018/19, compared to 15.79 days in 2017/18. This is a decrease of 3.09 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 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 also working alongside the availability of complainants to discuss complaint concerns Stage 2 complaints were resolved within an average of 45.14 working days in 2018/19 compared to an average of 124.66 working days in 2017/18. 2018/19 has seen a great improvement in investigation times for Stage 2 complaint from the previous year.

During 2018/19 we reviewed one complaint case at Stage 3 which was completed within 78 days which is 38 days over the statutory timescale, however due to complex investigations and the availability of the complainant to attend the Stage 3 review the extension was mutually agreed.

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 2018/19, the LGSCO received 18 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.

The LGSCO undertook full investigations for 1 children's services complaint (and 3 education complaints). 1 children's services case was upheld, and 1 education case was also 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 2018/19.

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.

78 compliments were received during 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 were 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:

Thank you for your time today, I would like to thank you for your professionalism, your understanding of a 4-year old's development and your complete open and transparent assessment of my concerns. I can only wish that more people like you are involved in the decision making and process of private law child arrangement orders.

I would just like to say thank you to the Social Worker who came and visited us today. I hope she'll have a good influence on my troublesome lad and help him with better choices. She was kind and listened to all my worries and about his future.

Thank you for your time and all that you are all doing to help us as a family. So much appreciated. At Coventry you certainly, offer a first-class service well above other authorities whom we have dealt with regarding the Social Worker, and possibly surviving on equally diminished resources. We are pleased to go along with her directions

I just wanted to say a big thank you for how helpful and professional the Social Worker has been to me and my family. She has been very caring and thoughtful at this very difficult time for me and my family. she has made numerous calls on my behalf to professional services which I was finding hard to deal with at the time. I just wanted to say that she is a credit to your department. We are all quick to criticise but when someone deserves credit I believe that they should receive it.

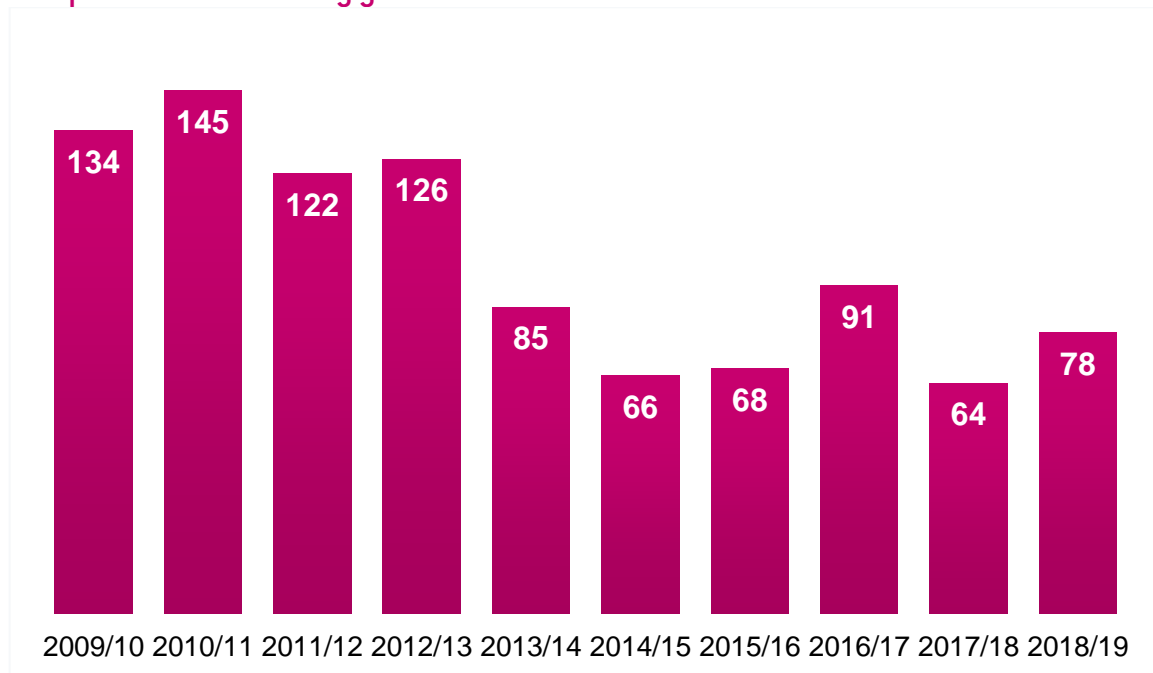
I would like to thank Children's Social Services for helping me succeed in turning my life around and being given the opportunity to attend the Queens Garden Party.

I will forever be grateful for all the help and support I have received in my journey and cannot express how satisfied I feel knowing future children will receive the support they need. There isn't enough PAs and managers who always have the children's best interest at heart and are in the job for the right reasons, the confidence I now have since working with you is beyond words.

I wish to acknowledge the good work and practice Children's Social Services are doing with a child. He is doing well now as a direct result of the support and services that have been put in place for him.

We would like to thank you for helping us through a difficult stage in our family's life. Thank you so much for the support you have provided for my family. You helped us so much and I am so grateful for everything'

Compliments recorded by year



Compliments by category in 2018/19

Category	Compliments received
Standard of Service	26
Standard of practice (social work)	16
Good partnership working	16
Good child focus	14
Good communication	6

Compliments by category received in 2018/19

Compliment from	Compliments received
Parent/Carers	25
Professionals	25
Police/Judge/Legal	8
Young Person/Child	6
Foster Carers	6
School/Education	5
Adopters	3

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 recorded, it is not unusual for a complainant to raise more than one concern in the same complaint. For example, a complaint may make a complaint about communication and finance as issues experienced during the same incident and both concerns would be recorded accordingly. From the 142 formal complaints received, the table below highlights the different types of concerns raised within these complaints and a total figure during 2018/19.

Currently our system does not capture an individual breakdown of the outcome of each concern – so the figures below reflect the alleged complaint, rather than whether a complaint was upheld or not.

Complaint issue/category

Category of concern raised	Number of times raised
<i>Communication</i>	297
<i>Standards of service</i>	172
<i>Staff conduct</i>	116
<i>Child protection issues</i>	53
<i>Finance</i>	9
<i>Standard of environment</i>	0

Note: totals do not add up to the number of complaints because more than one concern can be raised in each complaint. Concerns raised does not necessarily reflect concerns/complaints upheld.

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 social worker, 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

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 paid in 2018/19:

Detail	Amount
Allowances	£50.00
Reimbursement of savings	£50.00
Cost of passport	£58.50
Total	£158.50

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.
- Reducing timeframe for responding to complaints, by providing support to front line managers in responding to complaints at Stage 1 and reinforcing the need to return calls in accordance with corporate timescales.
- Re-emphasising to social workers 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.

Progress on actions

A number of actions were identified in the 2018/19 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.

Information hub for social services

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 with the process.

Further revision of the Stage 1 process

All Stage 1 complaints to be monitored and managed more effectively. For the first three quarters of 2018/2019 the average time in days to complete Stage 1 complaints was 17.47 in Q1, 12.06 in Q2, 13.07 in Q3 compared to 9.23 working days in Q4 which has shown a significant improvement to Q1. Further work has continued in 2018/19 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.

Further revision of the Stage 2 process

There were improvements in completing Stage 2 complaints in 2018/19 with the average time in days to completion being 42.14 working days, compared to 125 working days in 2017/18. The Complaints Officer will meet 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 now working more closely with Barnardo's and meets 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 can make complaints, compliments and representations.

Review on ease of access to complaints process

There will be a review in 2019/20 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.

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 2018/19 as it has been effective in monitoring complaints and any issues arising.

Training for team and managers on complaint processes

Complaints Officer to provide training sessions on all aspects of complaint processes in 2019/20 to all existing and new staff within Children Social Care. Feedback sessions will also be provided on positive and negative areas of categories of complaints.

Specific service area improvements/learning which have been identified

Team Central

For Central there are 2 main areas of learning and development to focus on as follows:

Communication and Engagement– Clarity around why social care are involved and the process that is followed when undertaking an assessment. Advanced Practitioners are to hold a workshop in May 2019 to remind staff of the importance of engaging with children and families. Particular focus will be on relationship based social work and utilising Signs of Safety to ensure families are involved in their assessments and communication is clear from the onset what a family can expect from Social Care.

Introductory packs for families are being introduced in May across the service area so that families have information about the assessment process and sharing information and also how to let us know if they are unhappy with the service they receive.

Children's Disability Team

The three complaints received in the Children's Disability Team (CDT) related to the level of support provided, Social worker's approach/conduct, poor communication and contact with the Social Worker.

Level of support– It was identified that the Short-Breaks package of care provided was not sufficient, and the complaint resulted in this being rectified quite quickly. This highlighted the need to listen to parents and understand carefully what the child's and family's needs are. Short-Breaks are designed to support the child's needs, but also to ensure that parents receive a regular break from their caring responsibilities. CDT are trained in using the Signs of Safety approach which ensures that families are entirely involved in assessment and planning for the support they need, that should always be purposeful, proportionate and effective in meeting the needs of the family. All Assessments are reviewed by Team Managers to ensure there is a good level of quality assurance.

Approach/conduct– The Team have been reminded, and are very aware of the importance of relationship-based practice and how important this is to enable them to work with families to achieve the best outcome.

Communication and contact– The Team have been reminded about the importance of communication and explaining to families the reason for our involvement, which is conducive to a positive working relationship. All Social Workers have shared their mobile numbers with families and are also added to email correspondence.

We are also making sure that every family receives their assessments in a timely manner, and Team Managers are providing assurance for this. CDT are dedicated to getting it right for children and families, but acknowledge that there are times when this is not achieved. We are committed to and have started seeking regular parent feedback to understand what we need to do better and what is working well, to improve our service delivery and improve our relationship with families.

Looked after children (LAC) and permanency

In the looked after children service, themes identified are around insensitive and timeliness of communication, parents/ carers not receiving paperwork/minutes and recommendations from meetings especially around the organisation of family time/contact. Letter box contact has been problematic for some birth families; some complaints have been made regarding the timeliness of communication around such contact (indirect contact)

Communication continues to be a concern in respect of the timeliness of responses and, difficult conversations being delivered in a sensitive manner. This highlights a need for the improvement around communication.

The current contact provision is not currently supporting the needs of our looked after children and our families. The systems offer no flexibility is overly cumbersome, this causes unnecessary delays. A review of the current contact provision is being undertaken to look at more streamlined approach

As ongoing development, the messages regarding complaints will continually be reinforced at team meetings and cluster meetings and supervisions. This will create the opportunity to change the culture of responding to challenge at the earliest opportunity.

The services recognise that there is a requirement for individual training needs analysis for each social worker and managers. This will allow the opportunity to explore the range of skills and training shortfalls/gaps amongst the team. We will then able to ensure that suitable training is available to meet individual training needs, improve the skills of the workforce and to ultimately provide a consistently good service.

Team East

A review of the complaints received in respect of the East area has identified that the majority relate to poor communication from the service or a dissatisfaction with the service received.

The service is beginning to seek regular feedback from the families that we work with. It is hoped that this will assist in strengthening the quality of the interactions that we have with families. In addition, the ongoing embedding of Signs of Safety promotes an inclusion of the family as partners within the intervention.

Practice Standards will be reviewed with Social Workers as part of their 1:1 supervision and there will be reflection on relationship based practice within area team briefings.

Team South

The complaints that were either upheld or partially upheld related to staff conduct, poor communication; not involving or listening to families, data protection and quality of reports.

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 our plan around seeking service user feedback which takes place on a monthly basis now; intended to improve our service delivery based on the views of families.

Work is also being done around the quality of our engagement with families, and of our general practice; very much around recording and all the Team will be undertaking Recording Training. All staff have also now completed their Data Protection Training, which is mandatory.

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.

Team West

The West has experienced some challenges around making the workforce permanent. Addressing these issues properly will be ongoing until the workforce is made permanent and further service improvement plans will be put in place during 2019/20.

A review of the complaints received in Team West has identified the following themes, delay in responses, not providing enough information or support and a lack of clarity about the work, poor communication, changes of social workers and not involving parents enough.

There is a very clear focus on achieving stability. Staff will be consistently reminded that relationship-based practice is the key to helping children and families and the team will be focusing on this to provide support, help and guidance quicker.

Multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and responsive services

The learning from complaints is shared with the social work staff which helps them to deal with families appropriately and aids their own learning and development.

Where parents have made complaints, the MASH have responded promptly and have been open and honest. In particular, where parents are in dispute with each other about the childcare arrangements the MASH Social workers will direct a parent to seek legal advice and offer Early Help services.

Signs of Safety continues to be reflected in the decision making along with the application of the threshold for Right Help Right time. This enables families to receive the right advice at the right time. Staff have been reminded that some parents find social care involvement difficult, and we must hold this in mind when working with parents

MASH staff have been reminded that during these conversations parent's views should be reflected back to them to give them an opportunity to really hear what they have actually said and to ensure we have captured their views accurately. Staff have been reminded that in many situations, parents have not always felt empowered to take steps to change without support to do so and we are there to help and support.

On learning from some of the complaints the MASH initial triage team is now manned by qualified Social Workers who are trained to manage difficult conversations in a transparent and respectful manner. Staff have also been reminded to be aware of the tone of their voice when speaking to both parents and professionals. As a Local Authority we are embedding Signs of Safety which enables workers to ensure families' voice is better included.

ThroughCare

The majority of complaints to Through Care this year have been around children who are looked after as opposed to care leavers. The main issues for Looked after children fall into 3 main areas; around tasks not being completed by previous social workers, concerns around placements and issues around contact arrangements.

In response tasks not being completed these issues relate to the earlier part of the year before a more stable staff team was in place. The reduction of agency workers to only being used to cover maternity posts has meant that children now have consistency in social workers and are able to hold them to account. The issues around Placements are feeding into a wider piece of work about the quality of placements available for LAC and care leavers. This has improved throughout the year as new internal children's homes have opened but still significant challenges in finding suitable placements to meet the needs of some children.

The issues around contact relate to children that are subject to care proceedings and the main learning here is to ensure information is communicated well although due to nature of decisions even with good communication this will still be an area which causes contention. Positively there was a big reduction in complaints around

entitlements which demonstrates the training given to staff following the redesign and newsletters that are sent out regularly are having a positive impact.

Fostering

During this year there have been 2 further complaints about special guardianship support. This follows on from actions taken last year in relation to complaints about this. The information booklet for Special Guardians has been completed and is in use and the policy on financial support to Special Guardians has been updated and clarified. There have been practice developments also in understanding when the local authority has brokered a placement rather than the family making a private arrangement. Processes for notice of change of allowances have been clarified and there is now a system in place to ensure allowance reviews are conducted in a timely way.

A complaint was made in relation to the payment for sessional work. This identified that there needed to be a clear contractual understanding at the point of a piece of work being commissioned of what work was to be undertaken and arrangements for payment.

Individual practice issues for staff members and foster carers have also been addressed with these individuals following complaints.

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/.

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People Directorate Complaints Officer
Insight Team
Coventry City Council

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Insight Development Manager (Place and Public Sector Transformation)

September 2019



Insight Team
Coventry City Council

Complaints handling guidance

Guidance for managers and officers dealing with comments, compliments and complaints



**COMMENTS
& COMPLIMENTS
& COMPLAINTS**



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Introduction

About this guide

This document is an internal document that provides guidance for managers and officers dealing with comments, compliments and complaints. It is to be read in conjunction with the complaints policy at www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/. In line with the Council's values to be open, honest and transparent, this guide is made available to members of the public too.

Making things right

Coventry City Council is committed to putting local people and their needs at the heart of what it does. As employees of the Council, we work to ensure that people have a positive and trouble-free experience with us in all transactions and interactions. However, sometimes things go wrong. When things go wrong, we encourage people to speak up, so that we can make things right.

Effective management and resolution of complaints, as well as learning from complaints, help ensure that Council services meet the needs of local residents and communities, and helps build a foundation of trust in order for the Council to have new conversations with residents, communities and partners to enable people to do more for themselves as active and empowered citizens. A key principle of this is continuous improvement, and this includes reviewing the Council's complaints processes and systems to ensure consistency and improve the way the Council serve the people of Coventry.

The complaints policy

Coventry City Council's complaints policy sets out how individual members of the public can complain to the Council, as well as how the Council handle compliments, comments and complaints. Where possible, complaints should be resolved informally. If this is not possible, they can formally complain to the Council.

The complaints policy can be found at: www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/. The policy defines complaints as *"any expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the Council or its employees, which the customer feels should have been provided"*.

Depending on the subject and nature of the complaint, a different pathway is followed:

- complaints about **children's social care** including care homes and other providers commissioned by the Council follow the statutory process for representations made by or on behalf of children using social care services provided by / commissioned by the Council arising from the Children Act 1989;
- complaints about **adult social care** including care homes and other providers commissioned by the Council follow the statutory process for representations made by or on behalf of an adult using social care services provided by / commissioned by the Council arising from the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Services Complaints Regulations 2009;
- **all other complaints** relating to Council services are dealt with by the corporate complaints policy.

Note that complaints about non-Council services, for instance, schools, hospitals; complaints by employees; or complaints about elected members (councillors) are outside the scope of the complaints policy.

The Council strives to act in accordance with best practice. This includes:

- the National Complaints Managers' Group (May 2016) [Good Practice guidance for handling complaints concerning adults and children social care services](#);
- guidance from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO):
 - [guidance on good complaint handling](#) (for instance, running a complaints system; managing unreasonable complaint behaviours and remedies); and
 - [single complaints statement](#) guidance for councils and care providers on best practice in receiving and dealing with comments, complaints and feedback about their services.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The LGSCO is the final stage for complaints about councils, all adult social care providers (including care homes and home care agencies) and some other organisations providing local public services. It is a free service that investigate complaints in a fair and independent way; and provides a means of redress to individuals for injustice caused by unfair treatment or service failure.

If a complainant has exhausted all of the Council's own complaints process, and remain dissatisfied with the Council's decision and/or its handling of the complaint, they have the right to take the complaint to the LGSCO. When a complaint has exhausted the Council's complaints procedure, they are informed of this right – and provided detail with how to contact the LGSCO.

Roles and responsibilities

Customer services

Complaints by members of the public should typically be made through customer services:

Web: https://www.coventry.gov.uk/form_speakup
 Email: customer.services@coventry.gov.uk
 Telephone: 08085 834 333

Members of the public may also choose to seek help and advice from elected members (councillors) or from agencies (such as Citizens Advice, or the Ombudsman) for help and support in making their complaint. These complaints should also be passed to customer services to ensure it is recorded and tracked on Dash.

Investigating officers

Complaints should be dealt with by the individual service area in line with the complaints policy. The officer leading the complaint response is known as the investigating officer.

Complaints co-ordination

The Insight Team provides a co-ordination function for People Directorate complaints (via the People Directorate Complaints Officer) and all complaints escalated to the LGSCO (via the Ombudsman Liaison Officer). The Business Support Manager in Place Directorate provides a similar function for the Place Directorate.

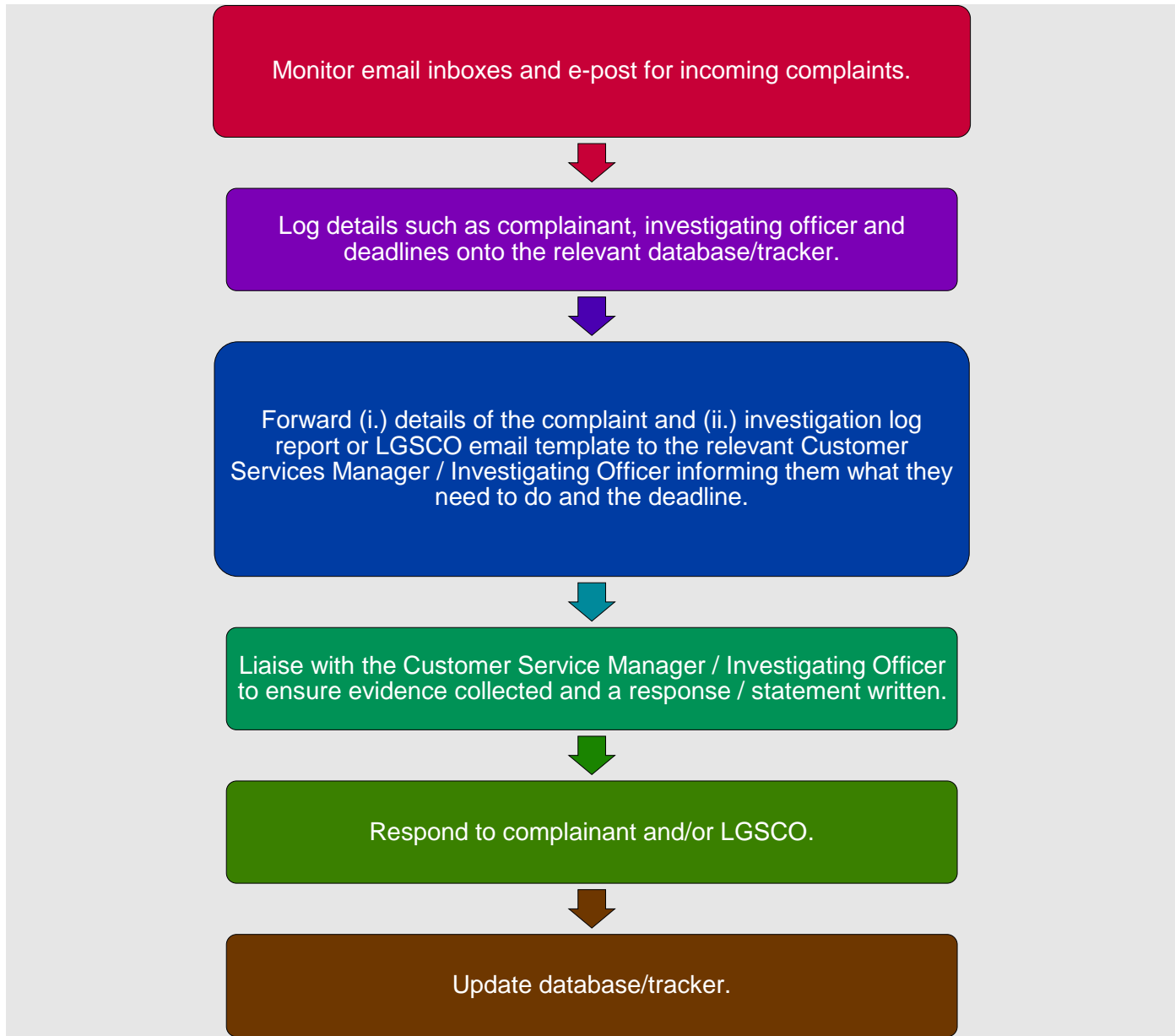
In addition to co-ordinating complaints, the complaints co-ordination function also:

- manages the 3Cs Info Hub, a one-stop shop on the intranet;
- holds regular meetings with managers and advocacy services to provide progress updates and discuss cases;
- appoints independent investigators and facilitate service investigations and reviews, in conjunction with children's services and commissioning;
- provides regular reports and statistics on complaint numbers, timescales and key messages to senior management; and
- produce annual reports.

Complaints co-ordination role

Process flowchart

The following flowchart sets out how the complaints co-ordination process handles complaints and representations from members of the public:



Getting help

The complaints information hub

Further guidance, reports and information available for Council staff on the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Information Hub (**3Cs Info Hub**) at <https://coventrycc.sharepoint.com/sites/3CsInfoHub/>.

Getting help

If an investigating officer needs help in responding to a complaint, please speak to your line manager at first instance. If you need further help, please contact:

People Directorate Complaints Officer

- Adult social care complaints: AdultSocialCareCustomerRelations@coventry.gov.uk
- Children's social care complaints: CLYPCustomerRelations@coventry.gov.uk

Place Directorate

The Place Directorate Business Support Manager provides support and co-ordination for handling complaints involving the Place Directorate.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Link Officer

- Coventry City Council's Ombudsman Link Officer: Ombudsman@coventry.gov.uk

Complaint processes, stages and escalation

The key stages of the Council's complaints processes are as follows:

Type	Corporate	Adult social care	Children's social care	LGSCO
Stages	Informal resolution Stage 1: service investigation Stage 2: service investigation review	Informal resolution Stage 1: local resolution	Informal resolution Stage 1: local resolution Stage 2: investigation Stage 3: review panel	Enquiry and assessment Investigation Decision and remedy
Timescales (in working days)	Acknowledgement: 3 days Stage 1: 10 days Stage 2: 20 days	Acknowledgement: 3 days Stage 1: 20 days	Acknowledgement: 3 days Stage 1: 10 (to 20 ¹) days Stage 2: 25 (to 65 ¹) days Stage 3: 30 days	Enquiry: 1-3 days Investigation: 20 days Draft decision: 5-10 days Remedy: as set out in the final decision statement
Services	All other services ²	Adult social care	Children's social care	All
Recording	On the corporate customer relationship management system, Dash .	On the corporate system, Dash plus the social care complaints database .	On the corporate system, Dash plus the social care complaints database .	On the Tracker on the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman management portal.
Reporting	Quarterly summary trends and indicators on the 3Cs Info Hub ³ .	Weekly progress reports provided on the 3Cs Info Hub and regular progress meetings held with relevant managers. Quarterly trend and context provided to relevant management team and indicators on People Leadership Team dashboard. Annual report to the relevant Cabinet Member.		Upheld complaints referred to the Monitoring Officer for follow-up action. Quarterly trends and context on the 3Cs Info Hub . Annual report to relevant committees and relevant Cabinet Member.

Escalation of complaints

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, and they consider that one or more of the following apply: relevant information was not taken into account in investigating the complaint; procedures have not been properly applied in handling the complaint; there has been an incorrect interpretation of Council policy, they can ask for the complaint to be reviewed via a service investigation review. The review will either be conducted by a senior manager of the service or, a senior officer or manager outside the line management of the service depending on the circumstances. The complainant will be expected to explain, in writing or verbally, the grounds for seeking a review. With children's social care complaints, in line with the Department for Education statutory guidance for local authority children's services on representations and complaints procedures, a complaint may be escalated to a Stage 2 investigation or Stage 3 review panel if a complainant wishes for it to do so. When this happens, a senior officer will always work with the complainant to see if the complaint can be resolved without escalation first.

¹ This is the maximum extension for complex cases as defined by the statutory guidance.

² All other services, e.g.: adult education; benefits and tax; children's transport; corporate, finance and legal; education and libraries (except schools or education admissions appeals); environmental services (including household waste collections, noise complaints); housing services; planning; parking, etc.

³ Indicators currently provided on the People Leadership Team dashboard. This is accessible via the 3Cs Info Hub and the Performance Hub (coming soon).

Escalation to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

If a complainant is unhappy about the way the Council has dealt with their complaint, they can contact the LGSCO. The LGSCO would normally expect a complaint to be made within twelve months of when the complainant first knew of the problem that they are complaining about, and normally require all complainants to go through all stages of the Council's own procedure before considering the complaint. However, in certain circumstances the LGSCO has the discretion to waive this requirement. Note that a complainant can approach the LGSCO at any stage of the complaints process.

Remedies, compensation and financial redress

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. Any financial redress should be agreed with the relevant director, in line with LGSCO guidance set out at <https://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/guidance-notes>. Where a complaint has gone to the LGSCO, the local authority has the option of suggesting a remedy to resolve the complaint – or to accept the LGSCO's recommendation.

Learning from complaints: the complaints investigation log report

It is important for services to treat complaints as an opportunity to learn lessons from previous experiences. By learning from complaints, services can become more responsive to the needs of residents. Upon completion of a complaint investigation, investigating officers are asked to complete a complaints investigation log report. This will provide additional learning from the complaints received, for example, improvements to training or to inform changes to procedures. The Council regularly publishes reports on complaints, including lessons learned, to ensure that complaints are properly communicated to elected members.

Equality monitoring

It is important to ensure any equality dimensions identified through complaints are addressed and rectified. Operationally, it is important that equality data such as the protected characteristics such as ethnicity, sex and disability status is collected as part of handling complaints; and issues are raised to the strategic equality, diversity and inclusion project board. This will enable the Council to identify if its complaints policy is operating as intended, eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity in line with the public sector equality duty.

Privacy and information governance

Please remember that complaints, investigations and information about it are private and confidential and must not be disclosed to third parties.

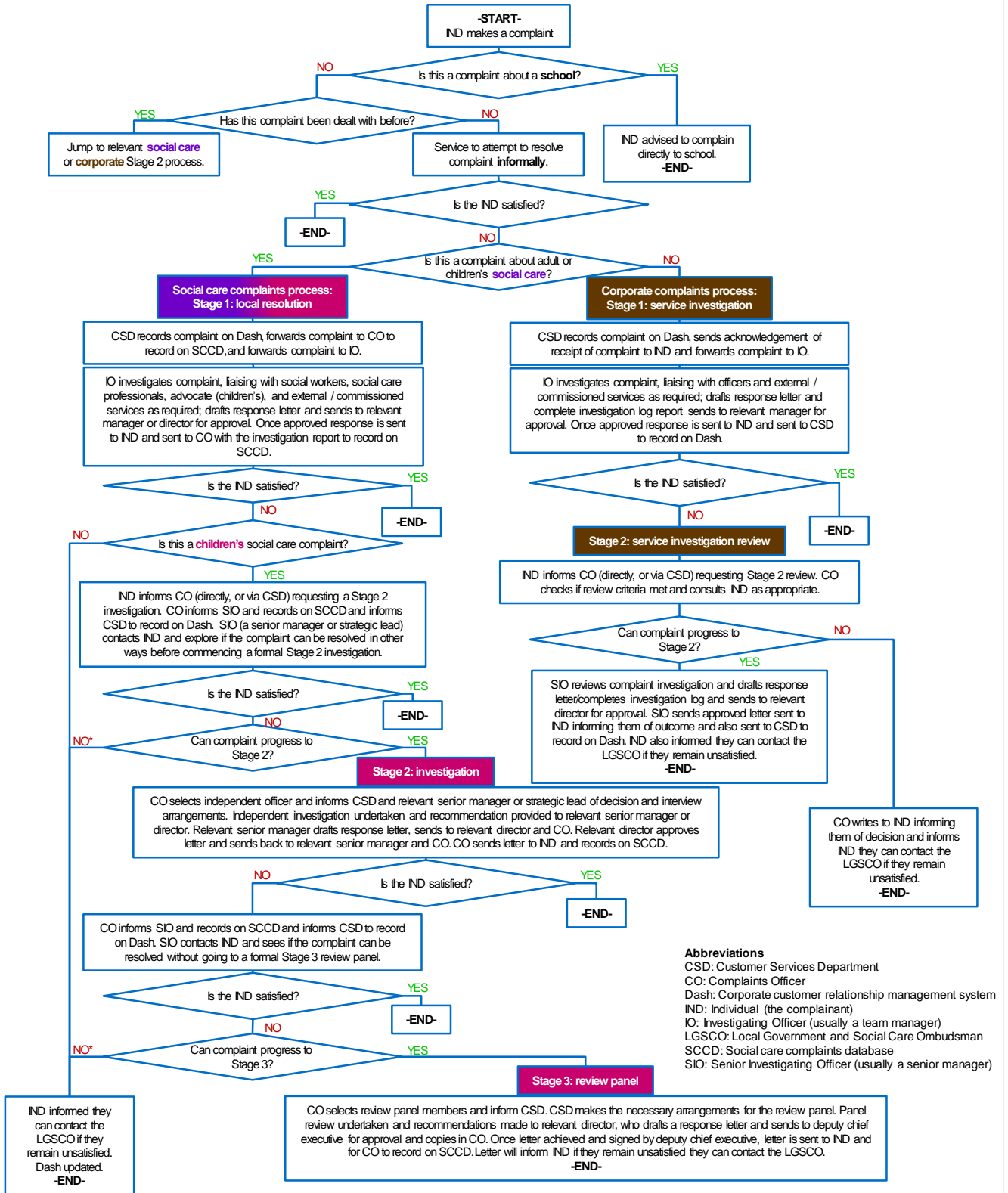
Our summary privacy notice states:

We will use the information you provide to handle your complaint in line with the Council's complaints policy available at www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/. We may share this information with other organisations which may include independent external investigators, children's advocacy services and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. We will only share your information if this is part of solving your complaint. More information on how we handle personal information and your rights under the data protection legislation can be found in the full Privacy Notice: www.coventry.gov.uk/privacynotice/.

You can help ensure that we protect people's information by ensuring that you follow the Council's information governance and data protection policies. In particular, please:

- **ensure that any correspondence containing personal or confidential data is sent in a password protected zip archive with the password provided in a separately email;** and
- **double-check** people's names, contact details, email addresses, mailing addresses and telephone numbers!

People Directorate and social care complaints process flowchart



Abbreviations
 CSD: Customer Services Department
 CO: Complaints Officer
 Dash: Corporate customer relationship management system
 IND: Individual (the complainant)
 IO: Investigating Officer (usually a team manager)
 LGSCO: Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
 SCCD: Social care complaints database
 SIO: Senior Investigating Officer (usually a senior manager)

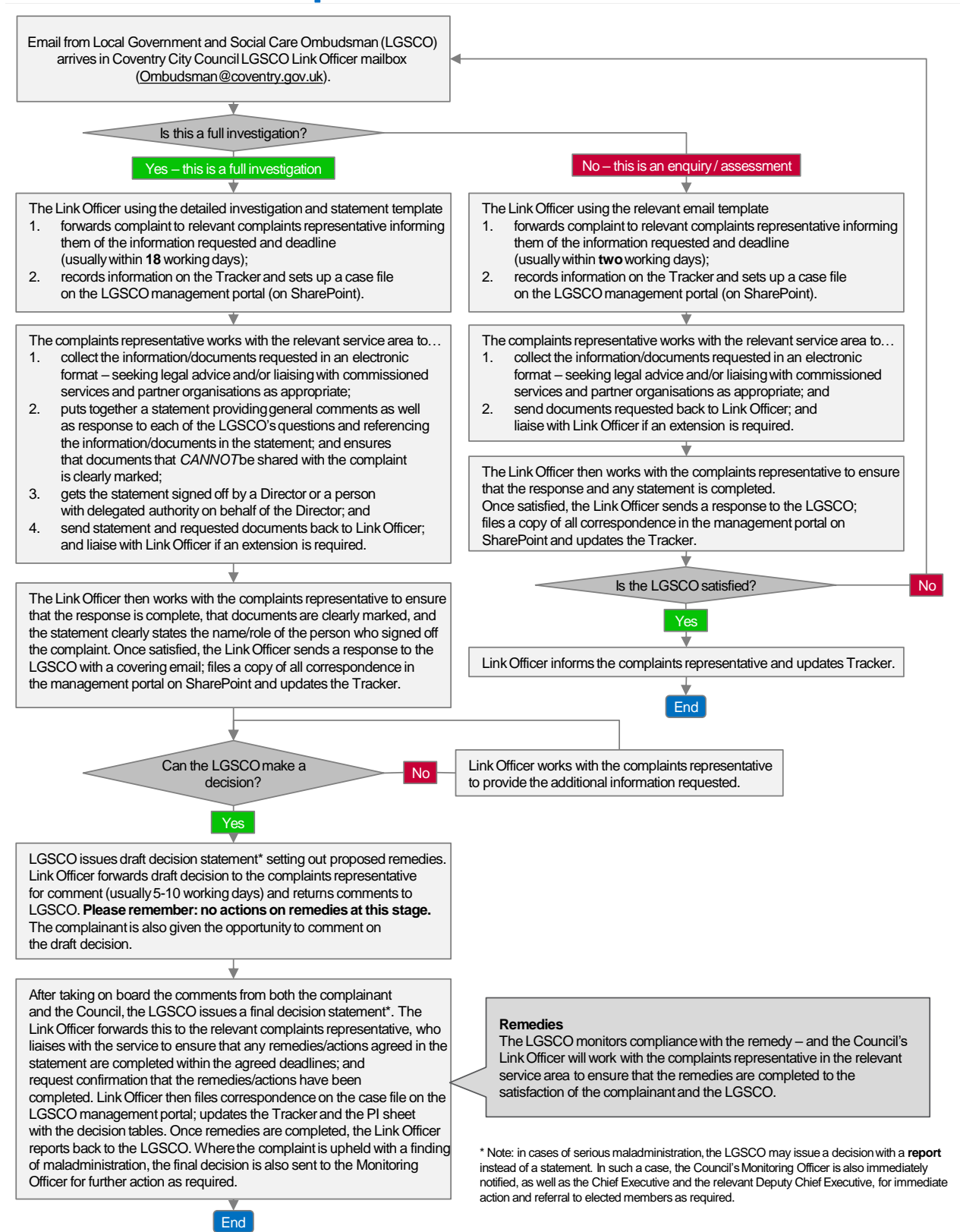
* on rare occasions a complaint may not progress to the next stage, (e.g. out of timescale)

Local Government and Social Care

Ombudsman process complaints guidance

Stage	Notes
Enquiry / assessment	The request will have a short deadline of between 1 to 3 working days . At this stage, the LGSCO will ask the Council for a copy of its formal complaint responses; and confirmation that the complaint has fully completed the Council's complaints process. The request will not include any new actions and should be returned to the Link Officer by the date specified.
Premature	If a complaint has not completed the Council's own complaints process, the LGSCO will return the complaint as a "premature" complaint for consideration under the Council's complaints process. The Link Officer will send the relevant department the information using the premature email template. It is important to remind complainant of their right to complain again to the LGSCO when they exhaust the Council's complaints process. Following completion of the complaints process (whether it is resolved or not), a copy of the final response should be sent to the Link Officer.
Investigation	The Link Officer will send a covering email using the Ombudsman detailed investigation template which includes the statement document requesting a written response to the LGSCO's questions. This needs to be returned by a set deadline, usually within 18 working days , so that the deadline (within 20 working days) can be met. The response must be provided as a statement , providing general comments as well as responses to each of the questions. It must also include the name and role of the author, and be signed off by the Director or a nominated person. Any supporting evidence must be provided as electronic attachments and referenced in the statement. Any information that cannot be shared with the complainant should be clearly marked and packaged separately. It may be necessary to seek legal advice and/or liaise with commissioned services and partner organisations as appropriate. The Link Officer needs confirmation that this has been done (in the form of an email trail). If the LGSCO investigator has asked us to consider whether we are prepared to remedy any injustice that may have been caused – we should comment on this as this is an opportunity for us to resolve the issue.
Draft decision	Following the investigation, the LGSCO will typically issue a draft decision statement . This will state whether the complaint was upheld or not, and detail the investigator's findings and explains the decision made. At this stage, the Council is asked whether it agrees with the decision and remedy. This is an opportunity to comment on the decision, and suggest any changes or corrections. At this stage, remedial actions must not be taken yet – remedies should only be completed after the final decision. We are usually requested to respond within 5-10 working days . <i>Note: the investigator may choose to issue a decision as a report (under Section 30(1) of the Local Government Act 1974) in which case the Council's Monitoring Officer is notified.</i>
Final decision	The final decision letter and statement should be circulated, as appropriate, to everyone who was involved in the investigation and everyone who needs to know of the investigation outcomes. Action on remedies should now be completed. In cases where the LGSCO makes a finding of maladministration , the final decision letter and statement is also forwarded by the Link Officer to the Monitoring Officer. The Monitoring Officer will decide if any further action is required.
Remedy	The LGSCO aims to remedy personal injustice when its investigations reveal there has been fault. Remedies are not intended to be punitive and are not just about money: the remedies also look into the root causes and recommend improvements to systems when they haven't worked properly, so that others do not suffer the same problems in future. The LGSCO monitors compliance with the remedy – and the Link Officer will work with the complaints representative in the relevant service area to ensure that the remedies are completed to the satisfaction of the complainant and the LGSCO. Confirmation and evidence that all actions required, as per the final decision letter and statement. This can be as soon as within 5-10 working days ; or longer for more complex issues.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman process flowchart



Version control

Document Location

Published location: <https://smarturl.it/cov-complaints-guide>

SharePoint: [https://coventrycc.sharepoint.com/teams/ChiefExec/PublicHealth/Insight/Documents/Complaints handling guidance 2019.docx](https://coventrycc.sharepoint.com/teams/ChiefExec/PublicHealth/Insight/Documents/Complaints%20handling%20guidance%202019.docx)

Reviewing arrangements

This guidance is reviewed annually with the annual complaints report.

Revision History

Revision date	Summary of Changes
13/09/2018	3.1 Integrated guidance, combining previously separate complaints handling guidance for the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and People Directorate and social care into one document.
04/09/2019	4.0 Updated with new section on roles and responsibilities, updated with the new complaints investigation log and statement template.
20/09/2019	4.1 Added section on equality monitoring.



Insight Team
Coventry City Council