

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



**COMMENTS
& COMPLIMENTS
& COMPLAINTS**

**ONE
COVENTRY**

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

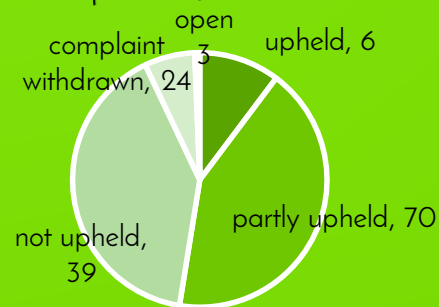


Children's services had **3,284** open referrals as of 31 March 2019.



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.

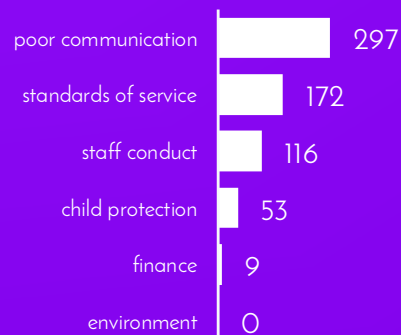
Of the 142 formal complaints just over half were at least partially upheld:



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**.

Table of contents

Infographic.....	2
Welcome	3
Background.....	3
Summary.....	4
Feedback	4
Advocacy.....	5
Complaints	5
Statutory complaints	6
Resolution of complaints	7
Timescales	8
Ombudsman	8
Comments.....	9
Compliments	9
Service improvements and learning points	12
Further information	17

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:

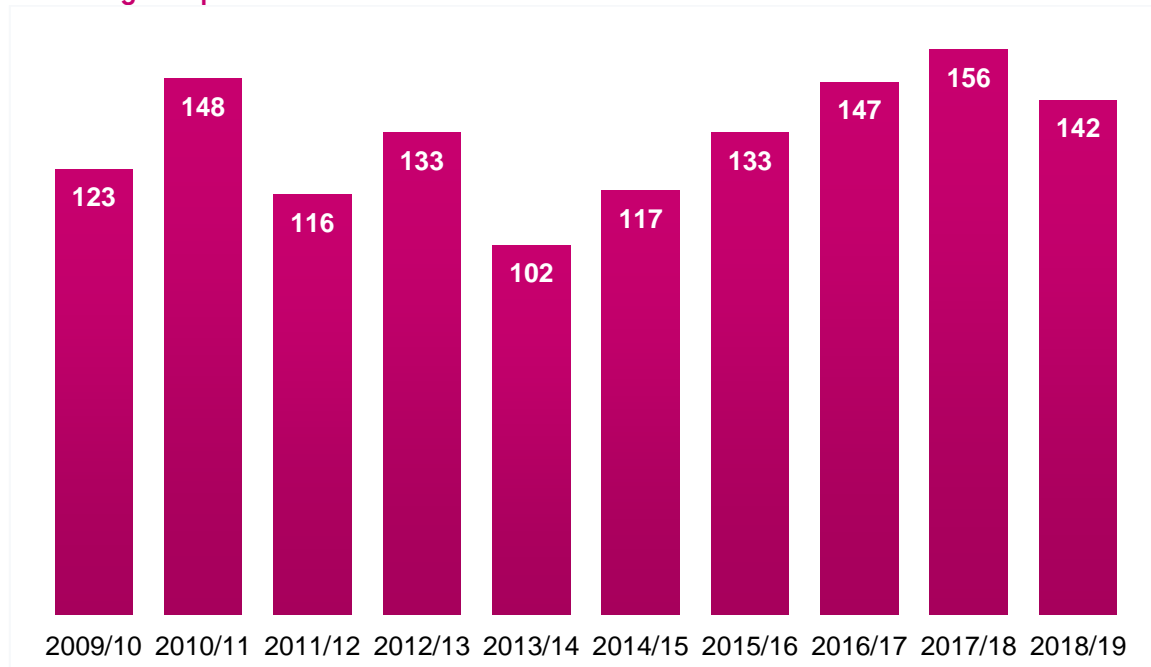
Method	Number of complaints
Email	94
Online form	84
Letter	8
Telephone	4

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.

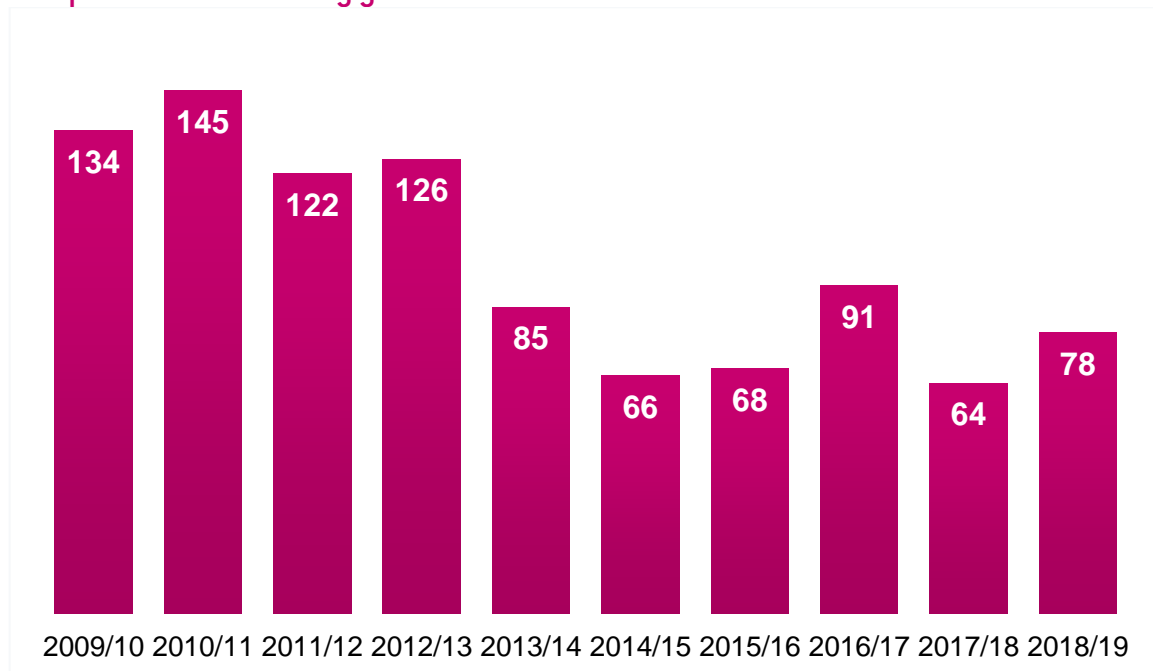
I would like to thank Children's Social Services for helping me succeed in turning my life around and being given the opportunity to attend the Queens Garden Party.

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/.

Ilius Ahmed
People Directorate Complaints Officer
Insight Team
Coventry City Council

Si Chun Lam
Insight Development Manager (Place and Public Sector Transformation)

September 2019



Insight Team
Coventry City Council