

Children's services complaints and representations annual report 2020-21



**COMMENTS
COMPLIMENTS
& COMPLAINTS**

**ONE
COVENTRY**

www.coventry.gov.uk/complaints/

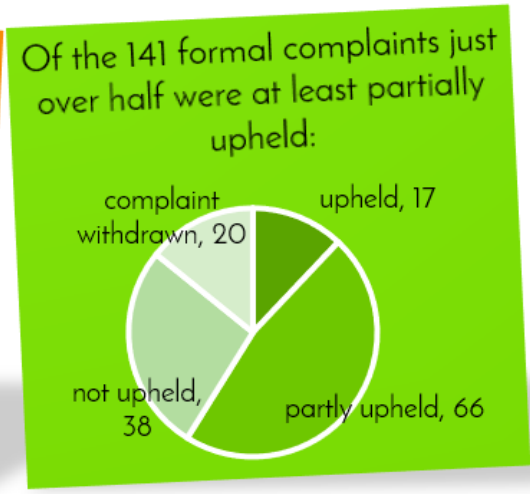
Children's Services 2020/21 Complaints & Representations key facts & figures



Children's services had **5,754** open referrals as of 31 March 2021



In 2020/21, children's services received **157** complaints (141 were statutory, 4 corporate, and 12 informal). 17 complaints were made by young people; 8 supported by an advocate.




Children's services complaints can be complex & timescales can be protracted. In 2020/21:

Stage	Average time taken
Stage 1	152 9 days
Stage 2	11 20 days
Stage 3	1 26 days




In 2020/21 children's social care also received **445** 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 2020/21, the LGSCO received **13** complaints about education & children's services. They investigated **1** social care complaint; which was upheld.

Listening to service users' complaints helps services improve by helping managers identify changes that are required. Key learning points from 2020/21 include: explaining why decisions were made; apologising for mistakes; managing changes in social worker; better case monitoring; and striving to resolve issues informally in the first instance.

Having your say about Children's Services

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

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
Equality	9
Ombudsman.....	11
Comments	11
Compliments.....	11
Service improvements and learning points	14
Further information	21

Welcome

Welcome to the 2020/21 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 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Background

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

Some complaints received do not meet the criteria to be dealt with under the statutory procedure. When this is the case, these are registered under the Council's corporate complaints procedure. The arrangements for handling these complaints are different from the statutory process in terms of timescales and the independence of the people who investigate and review the complaints. Children Services has a nominated officer assigned to the management of representations from children and others who present feedback on children's services.

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

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

Summary

In 2020/21 children's services completed 25,875 contacts and received 5,754 referrals. This compares to 24,291 and 5,382 in 2019/20. As of 31 March 2020, there were 3,640 referrals open to children's services, compared to 3,418 a year ago.

The total number of statutory and informal complaints received about children's services in 2020/21 was 157 compared to 212 received in 2019/20. The 157 complaints received consist of 141 statutory complaints, 4 corporate complaints and 12 informal complaints. The number of complaints under the statutory process has decreased from 212 in 2019/20, and we received 142 in 2018/19 and 179 in 2017/18.

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 – 8 complaints received during 2020/21 compared to 13 in 2019/20, 11 in 2018/19 and 7 in 2017/18.

Two main themes could be identified as arising from the complaints by and on behalf of users in 2020/21: issues regarding poor communication with users; and concerns about the standards of service provided.

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

Feedback

Promoting feedback

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

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

Providing feedback

People can provide feedback directly to the service or team; to customer services; or to the Complaints Officer. Further information about how to make a complaint, access advocacy or support, and the complaints process is available on the Council's website at www.coventry.gov.uk/comments. It is vitally important that the comments, complaints and compliments system is easily accessible. This maximises the opportunities for individuals to make their views known. Complaints can be accepted through the contact centre via a visit to the centre, by letter, by an online form or by telephone. Complaints may also be made directly to the team that is providing them with a service. Sometimes, complaints are also made via elected members (Councillors), the Chief Executive; or directly to senior managers. Complaints can also be referred to the Council from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). Complainants who contact the complaints team directly are encouraged to use the contact centre to ensure that their complaint can be processed efficiently.

In 2020/21, 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 was also 17 last year. Work has taken place with Barnardo's advocacy service to ensure that more feedback is received from children and young people.

Since 1st April 2004, the Advocacy Services and Representations Regulations 2004, have required councils to make arrangements for the provision of advocacy to children and young people making representations under the Children Act 1989. Of the 17 children and young people making complaints during the year, 8 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 141 statutory children's services complaints. It also dealt with 4 under corporate procedures; and 12 informally.

The table below indicates how the complaint was received:

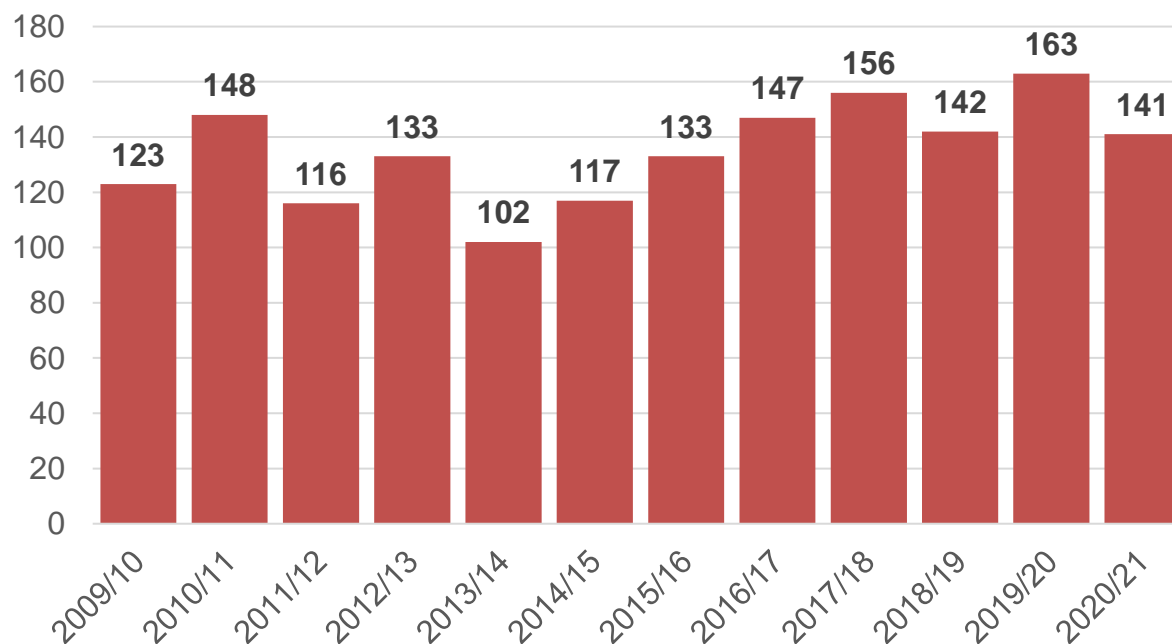
Method	Number of complaints
Email	92
Online form/ Contact Centre	57
Letter	4
Telephone	4

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

Statutory complaints

141 statutory complaints were received about children's services in 2020/21. This compares to 163 in 2019/20.

Statutory complaints overtime



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

The table below sets out the number of complaints in 2020/21 by resolution:

Statutory complaints by upheld status

Status	Number of complaints	%
Upheld	17	12
Partly upheld	66	47
Not upheld	38	27
Complaint withdrawn by complainant	20	14
Total	141	

Statutory complaints by team

Team	Complaints
Through Care	25
Team West	19
Children's Disability Team	18
Looked after children	18
Team South	17
Team East	16
Team Central	13

Team	Complaints
Fostering & adoption	4
MASH	4
Quality & Assurance	2
Social Work Academy	2
Edge Family Centre Hub (Team East)	1
Family Hub (Team South)	1
Youth Offending Services	1
Total	141

Resolution of complaints

Local resolution (stage 1)

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

There were 141 statutory complaints, of which 131 were resolved at Stage 1. That is, 93% of complaints were resolved at Stage 1 of the complaints process, this is the same as the percentage of 93% during 2019/20. 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 2020/21, there were 9 investigations carried out at Stage 2, compared with 11 in 2019/20. These investigations were undertaken by external investigators. At the conclusion of all Stage 2 investigations the investigating officers' reports are read by senior managers for them to consider and act upon before a response is sent to the complainant.

Review panel (stage 3)

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

There was 1 Stage 3 review during 2020/21. This was an increase compared to 2019/20 where no Stage 3 complaint was received.

Timescales

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

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

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

Statutory complaints by stage and timescales

Stage	Timescales	Number of
1	Within 10 working days	92
	Over 10 working days	39
2	Within 25 working days	7
	Over 25 working days	2
3	Within 30 working days	1
	Over 30 working days	0
Total		141

Average timescales by stage in calendar days

Stage	Number of complaints	Average timescales
1	131	9
2	9	20
3	1	26

The average time in days to complete Stage 1 complaints was 9 working days in 2020/21, compared to 10 days in 2019/20. This is a decrease of 1 day. Weekly meetings with senior managers have ensured that complaint timescales were mostly maintained despite a decrease in the number of complaints.

Investigations of Stage 2 complaints under the statutory procedure often need to be extended beyond the 25 working days timescale up to 65 working days due to the complexity of the issues being considered. In these situations, the importance of keeping the complainant informed and securing their agreement to an extension of

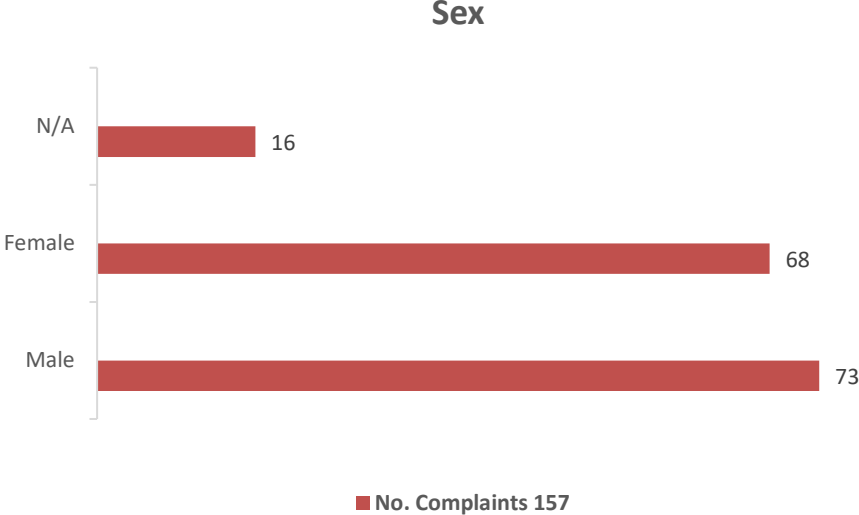
the timescales, is recognised and addressed. Stage 2 complaints were resolved within an average of 20 working days in 2020/21 compared to an average of 47 working days in 2019/20. 2020/21 has seen a slight decrease in investigation times for Stage 2 complaints from the previous year by 1 day.

The stage 3 complaint was resolved within 26 working days compared to no Stage 3 complaints in 2019/20. 2020/21 has shown on average, that Children’s Services has achieved resolving complaints within the statutory timescale guideline of 10 working days for Stage 1 complaints. The data shows that complaints at Stage 2 were also resolved within the statutory timescale guidelines of 20-65 working days. Further data shows that Stage 3 complaints were reviewed within the statutory timeline of 30 working days.

Equality

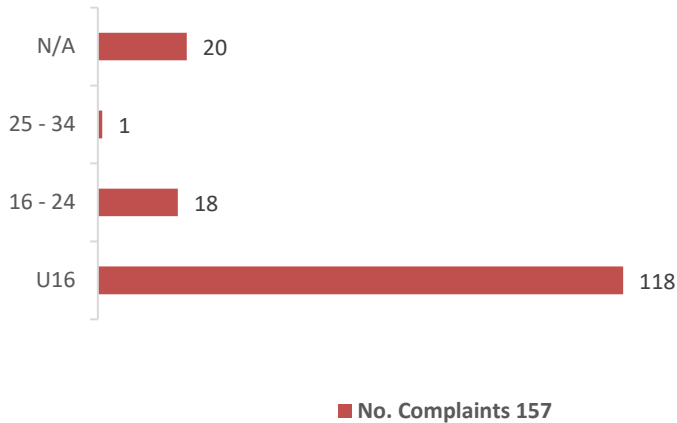
During 2020-21, we captured Equality Data to obtain further information and a characteristic insight on the complainants and service users who made complaints within Children’s Services. The below graphs illustrate the data captured but this does not include complaints submitted for the SEN service area as we were unable to obtain those details.

The below graph shows out of 157 complaints received during 2020-21 (excluding SEN), 73 (46%) were from male complainant’s/service users, 68 (44%) were from female complainant’s/service users and 16 (10%) were non- applicable (N/A) as they were made by the public and not service users, therefore those details were not captured.



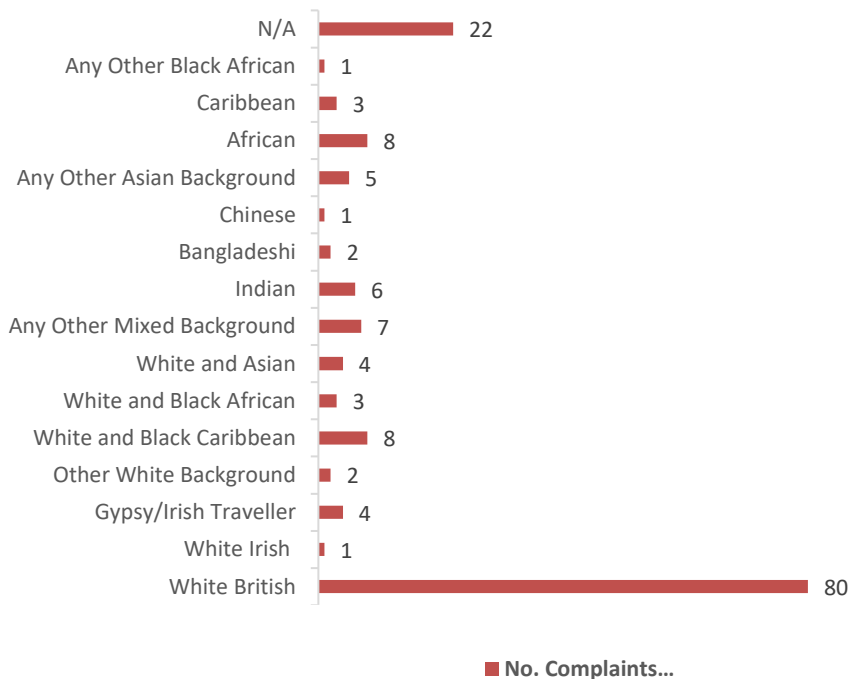
The below graph shows the age range of the complainant or service user. 118 (75%) of the complaints received in 2020-21 (excluding SEN) were from or submitted on behalf of young people under the age of 16, 18 (11%) of complaints received were from or submitted on behalf of young people between the ages of 16- 24 and 1 complaint (1%) was received between 25 – 34. 20 (13%) were non-applicable (N/A).

Age



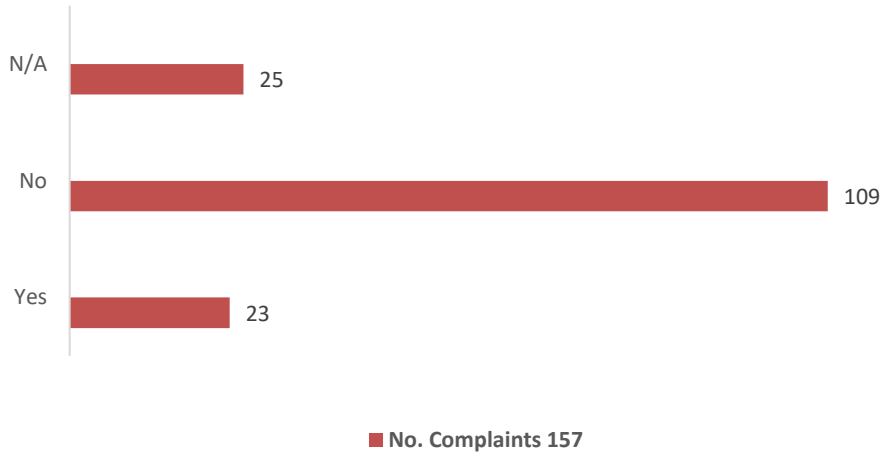
Out of the 157 complaints received in 2020-21, 80 (51%) of the complainant's/service users were White British, followed by African, and White and Black Caribbean with 8 (5%) each. 7 complaints were received from those with any other mixed background (4%). 6 complaints were from an Indian background (4%). 5 complaints received from Any Other Asian background (3%). 4 complaints from White and Asian (3%). 3 from Caribbean and 3 White and Black African (2%) each. 2 complaints from both Other White background and Bangladeshi (1%) each. White Irish, Chinese and Any Other Black African background 1 (1%) each. 22 complaints (14%) were unable to be captured.

Ethnicity



The data captured during 2020-21 showed that 23 (15%) of complainants had a disability and that 109 (69%) did not, with 25 (16%) as non-applicable (N/A) due to this information not being able to be captured.

Disability



Ombudsman

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

In 2020/21, the LGSCO received 12 complaints or enquiries relating to the category of education and children's services for Coventry City Council. The LGSCO does not separate Education and Children's Services and do not necessarily inform the Local Authority of every complaint or enquiry received, so it is unclear how many of these related specifically to children's services.

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

The LGSCO undertook full investigations for 1 Children's Services complaint (and 1 Education complaint). 1 Children's Services case was upheld, and 1 Education case were upheld.

Comments

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

No comments were recorded in 2020/21.

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.

445 compliments were received during 2020-21, compared to 153 received in 2019/20.

The majority of compliments reflected satisfaction about the standard of practice in social work; and the standard of service provided by a social worker and/or child and family worker. Other compliments received and categorised were about good partnership working; child-centred practice; and the quality of communication.

Compliments recorded include those from other professionals and partner organisations, for instance, advocates, police officers, judges, schools; as well as compliments from foster carers and service users, for instance, parents/carers, children and young people, and other family members.

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

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

Mother feels extremely supported following today's meeting, although she shared that it was exhausting for her, she feels very positive about moving forwards with all of the support. Mother shares that the support and plan created today with professionals has allowed her to focus on supporting the children, and creating a happy home

I would just like to take the opportunity to share my gratitude for the support given by the social worker.

On the whole, we have a great relationship and rapport. Especially in our times of need and even despair, they are always there to listen and support. Despite all their cases, the social worker manages to pick up the phone and 'check in'. That is a priceless quality - somewhat rare too. Equally, thank you for supporting the social worker in supporting us.

Thank you for all your help, support and advice. It really has been a pleasure working with someone as caring and committed as you are, we feel you have taken the time to get to know us and our children well. In our experience working within Social Care and many professionals you really are one of the best!

During my visit I observed a mother come into the Hub with her children for support. I was genuinely moved when the mother emotionally referred to the staff as being her 'family', which is a testament to the relationships she's built with them. The immediate response from the team to her needs was excellent; welcoming her and her children into the Hub and supporting them with current challenges they were facing. Clearly the re-opening of the Hub is of significant value to families in the local community and I wish you all the very best with the re-opening of the Hub.

I would like to let you know how amazing my Social worker is (which I am sure you already know). Throughout my time fostering I have always felt supported by them, but during lockdown and struggling at the beginning I felt I was listened to and understood by them. They are amazing and I think they deserve the praise and recognition from higher up (as do they all) for always going above and beyond in making sure we are ok and checking in when needed. I completely trust them and always feel like I can be honest and know I will get honesty back. So, I would like to thank them by telling you and I hope it will get back to them

I just want to say thank you for the amazing support to the families you have worked with, your strong approach has really helped with the family and your support to the young person has helped her to find herself. What you do is invaluable and nothing short of amazing.

We were very pleased with the support we received throughout the whole process and the panel were warm and welcoming and a lot less daunting than we were expecting. It was a very positive experience.

Both social worker and social worker warned us that there would a lot of paperwork and that the process was intrusive. We understand the need for this level of scrutiny. We were helped and given papers in a timely fashion and at regular intervals. The three-day course was very interesting and informative. We did miss the information regarding filling in the standards- post the three- day course and it was social worker that enlightened us. We have also found the other courses very helpful.

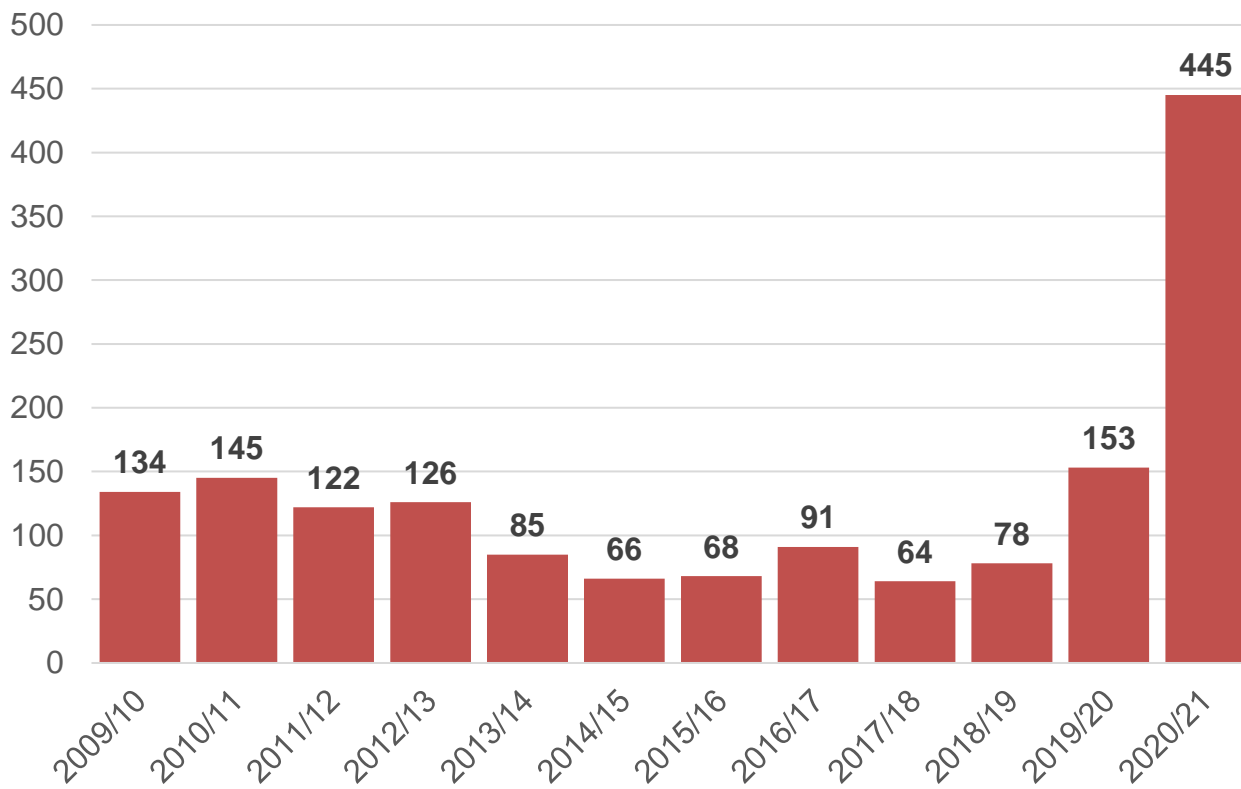
Thank you to social worker for all her help support and expertise

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the SW. She is a great support and goes above and beyond in her role as my SSW. I would also like to thank the placements team, again very supportive. Both are assets to City Council

Thank you for all your help, support and advice. It really has been a pleasure working with someone as caring and committed as you are, we feel you have taken the time to get to know us and our children well. In our experience working within Social Care and many professionals you really are one of the best!

I just wanted to take the time and acknowledge how impressed I have been with the social worker, with how she has picked up the family, quickly taken on board the issues and is working really hard to address them and co-ordinate a robust plan around the family. We are by no means out of the woods in terms of our level of concern about the stability of the placement, particularly with the considerable pressure that is being placed on Grandad due to COVID-19, social isolation and escalating challenging behaviours, however the social worker has clearly been working extremely hard on shifting sands to co-ordinate the support available from the professional team and extended family, she is monitoring this closely and reviewing as needed.

Compliments recorded by year



Compliments by category in 2020/21

Category	Compliments received
Standard of Service	199
Standard of practice (social work)	101
Good partnership working	131
Good child focus	92
Good communication	45

Compliments by category received in 2020/21

Compliment from	Compliments received
Professionals	172
Young Person/Child	112
Parent/Carers	95
Foster Carers	26
School/Education	26
Police/Judge/Legal	14
Adopters	0
Other	0

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

Service improvements and learning points

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

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

From the 141 formal complaints received, the table below highlights the different types of concerns raised within the complaints received in 2020/21 under the main category. This does not show the actual number of complaints received but only the main reasons of complaints data. Currently our system does not capture an individual complaint code breakdown of the outcome of each concern – so the figures below reflect the alleged complaint, rather than whether a complaint was upheld or not within those specific categories.

Complaint issue/category

Category of concern raised	Number of times raised
Communication	186
Standards of service	144
Staff conduct	61
Child protection issues	10
Breach of Confidentiality	4
Standard of environment	2
Finance	1

Resolutions

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

Compensation/Remedy

There were no compensation payments for any statutory complaints in 2020/21.

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 their own

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:

- Ensure information regarding permanence for children processes are clear and easy to understand.
- To ensure any reports or assessments are concise and accurate with all information detailed in the appropriate depth and these are completed within allocated deadlines.
- Making certain complaint responses cover all points that have been raised and these are addressed in a clear and precise way so complainants can see all points have been considered.
- Ensure social workers are aware of the processes when a service user has no Recourse to Public Funds, so lack of information does not delay advice and support.
- Social workers to continue keeping up to date with the most recent Covid-19 protocols when visiting those at home.
- Ensure all information sharing adheres to the Data Protection Act and all training around Data Protection is continued to be completed and up to date.

Progression Actions

A number of actions were identified in the 2020/21 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 in 2019/20. This is currently being refreshed in 2020/21 and a new leaflet is to be issued which will also be available in various languages. There will be two available leaflets which will appeal to all ages.

Complaints, Comments and Compliments Information Hub

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

Further revision of the Stage 1 process

All Stage 1 complaints are monitored and managed more effectively. For the first three quarters of 2020/2021 the average time in days to complete Stage 1 complaints was 7 in Q1, 8 in Q2, 8 in Q3 and 8 working days in Q4. Further work has continued in 2020/21 to streamline the process and a more informal approach to investigate complaints has been undertaken to ensure that, where possible, complaints are not escalated within the complaints process, and are resolved more quickly. A complaints report is provided to the senior management teams on a quarterly basis outlining the themes and average days taken to investigate Stage 1 complaints.

Internal Investigation Form - In 2020/21 we have launched an internal investigation form to capture the learning and understanding of complaints to ensure service area and teams are consistently improving their services.

Complaints monitoring dashboard- In 2020/21 we are producing a complaints dashboard for senior management within children's services, to be able to monitor complaints on a daily basis This will ensure timeframe are met and any further learning is captured.

Further revision of the Stage 2 process

There was a decrease in completing Stage 2 complaints in 2020/21 with the average time in days to completion being 20 working days, compared to 47 working days in 2019/20. The Complaints Officer meets with managers on a regular basis to monitor and manage the Stage 2 complaints to ensure they are completed in a timely manner. The quarterly reports include stage 2 complaints, the timeframe and the themes.

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

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

Review on access to complaints process- (Shelia Bates)

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

Complaints, Comments & Compliments External Web Pages

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

RAG report and action plans

A RAG report was introduced in 2016/2017 to ensure managers were able to have an overview of complaints in their area. It enabled current complaints to be monitored weekly and discussed at Management Team Meetings monthly, allowing joint working and responses. This process has continued into 2020/21 as it has been effective in monitoring complaints and any issues arising.

Training for team and managers on complaint processes

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

Specific service area improvements/learning which have been identified

Children's Disability Team

There have been two main themes arising from complaints over the past year in CDT. Complaints received have highlighted the importance of consistent communication. Specifically, this relates to Social workers keeping families updated in a timely and consistent manner.

The second theme relates to ensuring that there is information available and easily accessible to families about the amount of short break hours that they may be entitled to, and that this information is shared with families at the outset of involvement.

In terms of actions to be taken forwards, the above learning will be shared with all team members as we strive to achieve a consistently good service for all children and families.

Work will be taken forwards to improve the information available about short breaks and this will be shared with families.

Fostering

During this year there have 4 complaints about the fostering service.

Of these 2 are related as both are made by a birth parent against a foster carer whose child she can been caring for. Those aspects of the complaints which were upheld in relation to the foster carer were managed through the standards of care process in relation to that carer. In addition, the fostering service has improved our induction offer to new foster carers in order to ensure that they are clearer about the boundaries of their role when newly approved.

1 complaint related to a foster carer being included into group emails from the service to carers. In response to this we have clarified processes for foster carers to be taken out of the group emails if they would like to. The 4th complaint related to actions surrounding allegations against a foster carer. Some criticism was upheld in relation to the foster carer review process. Since the complaint issue occurred, the service has undertaken training on the completion of reviews. The wider children's services have also been reminded of the importance of contributing feedback to these reviews.

Looked After Children (LAC) and Permanency

The key themes from last year's complaints relate to changes in social workers, the timeliness of communication and delays in the organising of family time. During Covid 19 families experienced a pause and changes to the way in which their family time was supported. As a service we worked hard to adapt family time in line with government guidance to ensure important relationships were maintained for children. We are working closely with our commissioned family time service to continually explore opportunities to develop processes around family time in the best interests of children and their families. It is essential that we continue to receive feedback from our families around their experiences as this will enable services to be enhanced for the future.

We have received a number of complaints around a lack of communication from social workers to families. The learning we have taken from this is that social workers need to maintain communication regarding any changes to be planning / arrangement to family time at the earliest opportunity.

This year the service has faced challenges in respect of social work retention. It is recognised that changes in social workers impact upon the experiences and progress for our children. An increase in resource has allowed the service to grow, creating smaller social work teams and opportunity for the development of practice and support for social workers. It is hoped this along with a focus on staff retention will support stability in the workforce in the best interests of children.

Feedback from complaints is shared, where appropriate, with relevant staff members and their line manager so that any learning can be incorporated into their individual supervision. Key themes from complaints are shared within management and team meetings. We are committed to improving our service and we ensure we gather feedback from families regularly, so they feel valued and listened to. This forms part of our improvement journey.

Multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and responsive services

Between 2020 and 2021 there has been a reduction in complaints to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub. This is due to development work with the team to understand the importance of good and effective communication with adults, children and professionals. Quality Assurance activity has supported practitioners to reflect on the experiences of children and families and how they can best share concerns and work collaboratively with families to ensure they feel valued and respected. There has been a focus on working with significant males which has resulted in a reduction in complaints from fathers. There have been no particular themes within the four complaints received during the last year, but reflective learning has taken place within team meetings and supervision to ensure that the team continue to improve upon the service that they deliver.

The MASH is committed to continuously improving the service, understanding the experiences of families and greater engagement with both parents and children making sure they feel involved, are listened to and their views clearly recorded in all contacts and referrals where possible

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

During this year there has been one complaint received in respect of this service area and this related to parents not being able to take part in a virtual child protection conference relating to their children. As a consequence of this, they were concerned that the minutes of the meeting didn't fully and accurately represent their family situation, their views and opinions. They also raised concern that they felt the preparation and planning with them for the meeting was lacking and they should have had relevant information shared and explained with them in advance.

In respect of their attendance, a full apology was given to the parents and an explanation provided around the circumstances that led to them not being able to take part. It was advised that at the time of the conference in April 2020, as a result of newly imposed national lockdown restrictions because of the COVID-19 Pandemic, all child protection conferences had just started to be delivered using a virtual platform and, on this occasion, there were technical difficulties that meant it was not possible to support the virtual attendance of the parents. They did have a pre-conference discussion with the chairperson, but the apology acknowledged that this did not sufficiently mitigate them not being able to take part in real time.

With regard to the minutes of the meeting, parents were given an opportunity to provide any comments for consideration of their inclusion in an addendum to the minutes.

Their concern relating to lack of preparation and planning for the meeting was acknowledged and passed forward to the relevant social work team to consider, given the social work role and responsibility for ensuring opportunity for effective engagement and involvement of parents in the initial planning and preparation stages for their child protection conference.

The key area of learning for the child protection conference chair service is drawn from the situation whereby the parents were not able to take part in the meeting. Notwithstanding the valid reason for this that has been outlined, it would have been prudent for consideration to have been given to any scope for postponing/rearranging the meeting to enable the attendance of the parents. The Service Manager for the service has ensured this message has been clearly communicated to the team of conference chairs, including to any agency/temporary members of staff when this is the case.

The Child Protection Chair Service has been acutely mindful of the impact of the pandemic on the operating environment for holding child protection conferences and the challenges of using virtual platforms as regards the engagement of parents/family members in their meetings. When restriction easing has allowed, a hybrid child protection conference model has been employed that allows for improved family participation. The team have also regularly reviewed any technical issues/problems with support from ICT and digital colleagues, to prevent any reoccurrence as far as is practicably possible.

LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) Service

The LADO Service received one complaint in respect of this service area over 2020-2021 and this related to personal and sensitive information being shared in error by the LADO with a person of concern; this led to that person being able to identify the child that had made the allegation of abuse against them. The complainant acknowledged that this was completely unintentional on the part of the LADO but there was a significant impact.

The LADO Service rightly took this matter extremely seriously, accepting that this fell short of expected standards of practice on this occasion wholly accepted the mistake and a full, unreserved and sincere apology was made.

The learning from this complaint was reflected upon very carefully within the service and with Data Protection colleagues, with the need to check and double check before sharing information being the key message.

Refresher mandatory Data Protection and Information Security training was undertaken by the LADO to support this.

Participation Service

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

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

Social Work Academy

The two complaints that relate to the Social Work Academy involve issues regarding:

- Consent
- Lack of clarity regarding the assessment process
- Ensuring that Social Workers are easily contactable.
- A parent feeling uncomfortable about what she felt was an inadequate level of personal protective equipment worn by a social worker.

The learning from both have been discussed individually and in team meetings to express the importance of ensuring children and families have a clear understanding about why Social Workers are involved in their lives, and what actions they are taking.

The Academy will ensure that this learning is embedded in the training and development program for current and future cohorts.

Team Central

Team Central Between 2020 and 2021 complaints have reduced as improved practice is embedded. From the complaints either Upheld or partially upheld there are 3 common themes:

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

Social Workers are encouraged to respond to families and professionals in a timely way and share information about the Children and Families Assessment Process at the onset of their intervention. An introduction pack is now routinely used by social workers when they visit a family for the first time to provide families with the necessary knowledge to improve their understanding of the work we undertake which should ensure that they feel valued and respected throughout the process. Guidance around expectations of Social Workers is now also introduced in the form of Practice Standards so they are clear on what constitutes best practice. This is provided as part of a social Workers induction and routinely monitored by managers. Any complaints are personally addressed with individuals at the time by the Team Manager. Furthermore, learning from complaints remain on the agenda of supervision sessions, team meetings and whole team meetings.

Team East

A review of the complaints received in the East Area over this period, has identified the main themes of those upheld or partially upheld. These are communication and the conduct of social workers. This relates to our interaction with families and the production of written documents in a timely manner.

Where complaints have been upheld/particularly upheld, the learning has been shared with relevant members of staff and incorporated into development plans if appropriate. Any themes are discussed as part of whole area meetings. These meetings are also used to share good practice to assist in staff development.

As an area, we will continue to work with and develop the staff group as we want to ensure that all children, young people and their families feel listened to and receive the appropriate support.

Team South

The complaints that were either upheld or partially upheld show themes of poor or unprofessional communication; not involving or listening to families, data protection, quality of records and, records not being shared with families in a timely way. In addition, there were complaints where families have had to communicate with a number of Social workers or Managers, and this has been confusing or created delay in the help being provided.

The South Area is committed to improving our service and engagement with children and families, making sure they feel involved, are listened to, are respected using a relationship-based approach. We have embedded a system where we routinely seek service user feedback every month and, we discuss the feedback in the team and the learning themes. It is important to us that all children and families receive a good service overall, receive the support they need and that we continue to listen to families as a partner to help us improve our help and protection offer. We are also working to improve our recording so that records are presented more professionally and show the child's journey more. All staff are required to use and complete Recording Guidance templates and to attend Mandatory Data Protection Training. Unfortunately, there is a national shortage of Social Workers and recruitment and retention of Social workers is a challenge but, Coventry Children's services is addressing this and keeping this situation under close review so as to avoid children and families having to have changes of workers.

Team West

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

19 Statutory Complaints received in total. This represents a significant reduction in the number of complaints, having received 33 in the previous year 2019/20. Five of the 19 complaints could not be investigated as the matters under dispute where the subject of court proceedings. The remaining 14 complaints were all resolved at Stage 1 of the Complaints Process.

During the same period, there has been a drive by the Team Managers in West Area to seek to resolve complaints at the earliest stage possible through an informal resolution process. This has been very successful, with very few complaints being escalated through a formal process.

The main themes captured in the complaints relate to issues of Communication and Staff Conduct, including disputes about information recorded in assessments and/or shared between professionals.

Having reviewed all the outcome letters there continues to be a variation in the quality of the responses received by complainants, the new letter template is not being consistently used by Team Managers which supports the identification of learning.

The Operational Lead will continue to quality assure all complaint responses for consistency, ensuring that learning is captured and shared across the team/service as appropriate.

Through Care

The majority of the complaints to Through Care were centred around contact arrangements during Covid-19 and a small number around communication of care planning decisions. In regard to contact arrangements these related to changes in contact due to restrictions as a result of Covid-19. Although the majority of these complaints were not upheld as changes were in line with government guidance, it is evident that there is learning in respect of how we communicated. There is a working relationship between Through Care and the contact centre to ensure all changes are communicated in a timely way and with the resuming of face to face contact there have not been any further complaints.

There were a small number of complaints from young people namely around care planning decisions. However, these were resolved, and we are continuing to work with practitioners and in partnership with IROs around ensuring children and young people are fully involved in care planning decisions.

Through Care are committed to work in partnership with children, young people and their families. We champion practicing relationship-based work which includes ensuring good communication and ensuring decision making is clear and communicated. We are devising a welcome pack for Care Leavers to ensure they have all relevant information and entitlements from the beginning of our intervention.

It is important that children and their families feel listened to and there will be a reflective session within the management team in respect of the themes identified. This will enable learning and reflection from complaints and compliments received within the Through Care service.

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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