

APPENDIX 1

Children's Services

Annual Report 2016 – 2017 Complaints and Compliments

**Prepared for: Tim Aldridge,
Director Children's Services**

**Prepared by: Veronica Webb,
Complaints & Information Team Manager**

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1. Executive Summary

Complaints to Children's Services have increased gradually over the last few years, which is reflective of the increased activity by way of referrals to Children's Services.

Furthermore, Children's Services have made significant changes not only in structure but also its direction in providing a systemic family therapy approach across the Service, with training workshops being offered to all staff within the Service during 2016/17. The introduction of this approach, is intended to deliver increasing opportunities for intensive direct work with children, young people and families who access a wide range of services including Early Help (including Edge of Care), Child in Need, Looked After Children or on Child Protection.

Emerging changes to the structure, management and practice model appear to have influenced an increase in young people raising concerns and making complaints. Although still relatively low, this constitutes encouraging progress. With the implementation of the Advocacy Service and the introduction of the Mind Of My Own (MOMO) electronic participation app, it is hoped that this will continue to encourage children and young people to actively engage and feel confident and supported to work with social care staff and other key colleagues to resolve barriers.

The 2 year Face to Face Pathways innovation programme funded by the Department for Education will provide the Local Authority with a wide range of co-produced activity with young people to actively promote feedback loops from individuals and groups. The focus of this programme is to improve outcomes for young people in care aged 11-17, as well as those leaving care aged 14-24. By cultivating a supportive care system that allows us to spend more "face to face" time with children and families and working 'with' and not doing 'to' service users we plan to foster increasingly open lines of communication.

2. Introduction

The Local Authority Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2006' govern complaints, representations and compliments received about children and young people's services.

There are three stages covered within the regulations as follows:

Stage 1 – Local Resolution

Response times are 10 working days with a further 10 working days if required. If a young person requires an advocate this should be sought for them. If the complainant is not happy with the response at Stage 1 they can request to progress to Stage 2 within 20 working days of receiving the response.

Stage 2 – Formal Investigation

Response times are 25 – 65 working days. An Independent Investigator and Independent Person are appointed at this stage. The Independent Person must be external to the organisation. Following the independent investigation, the investigation report will be sent to the complainant, along with the adjudication letter giving the decision of the Head of Service. If the complainant is not happy with the response at Stage 2, they can request their complaint to be heard by a Review Panel within 20 working days of receiving the response.

Stage 3 – Review Panel

The Review Panel is managed independently of the Complaint & Information Team via Democratic Services. The Panel must consist of three independent people, one of whom is the Chair. The Panel must be held within 30 working days from request. Following the Panel Hearing, the recommendations will be issued to the complainant, independent people, advocate and Director within 5 working days. The Director must issue their decision within 15 working days of receiving the recommendations.

3. Complaints Received

3.1 Ombudsman referrals

Although there has been an increase in the number of LGO enquiries, it should be noted that three referred to the LGO were outside their jurisdiction. Maladministration and injustice was found in relation to special needs. This has been included within this report as Children and Adults with Disabilities Team transferred back under the responsibility of the Director of Children's Services.

	Apr16- Mar17	Apr15- Mar16	Apr14- Mar15
Maladministration (no injustice)			
Maladministration & Injustice	1	1	
No maladministration after investigation			
Ombudsman discretion			
Investigation with Local settlement			
Outside Jurisdiction	3		
Investigation Discontinued			
Premature/Informal enquiries	2	4	3
Total	6	5	3

3.2 Total number of complaints

	Enquiries	Stage 1	Stage 1 escalated to Stage 2
2016/17	43	92	1
2015/16	20	74	
2014/15	27	70	1
2013/14	36	42	5

There has been an increase of 20% in complaints in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16. Of the 92 complaints received 15 (16%) of these were directly from young people. Continued efforts are being made to encourage complaints directly from young people and the introduction of the MOMO app is working towards this.

Enquiries do not form part of the statutory process and therefore these figures are not included further in this report. However enquiries increased significantly and more than doubled in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16.

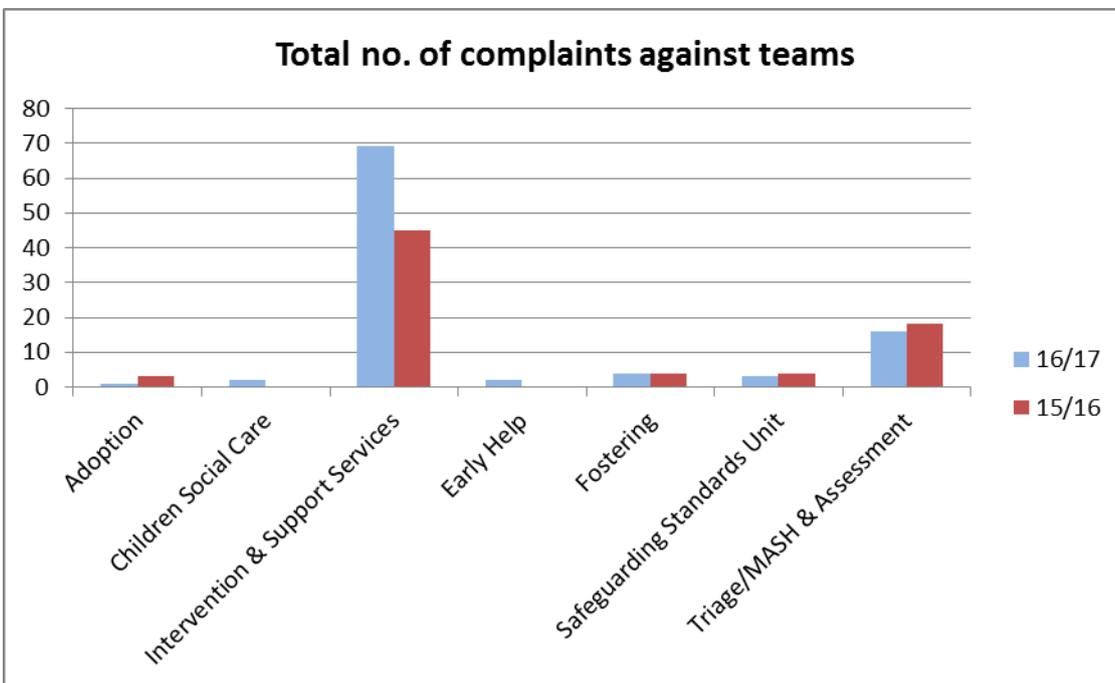
3.3 Stages

Stage 1 complaints increased by 20% in 2016/17 with 92 received in 2016/17 compared to 74 in 2015/16, with one Stage 1 complaint progressing to Stage 2. In 2016/17 four requests to progress to Stage 2 were not progressed as these did not reflect young persons' wishes. A continued trend over the last few years has shown that complaints have not progressed to Stage 3 with no Stage 3 complaints in 2016/17.

3.4 Teams

A restructure within Children’s Services resulted in a number of teams merging and changing to reflect the direction as the Service adapted to a more systemic family approach. Team names are therefore not reflective of the current Children’s Services Structure. Comparisons are shown where possible below.

The Children’s Social Work under 12s showed a significant increase from 25 in 2015/16 to 52 in 2016/17 more than double. Under the restructure this area falls within the Intervention and Support Services. Although the number of children looked after in the borough increased on average by 5% in 2016/17(228 to 239) and those on child protection plan decreased slightly on average from 290 in 2015/16 to 285 in 2016/17, the number of referrals to Children’s Services that led to assessments increased by 13% (1,937to 2,194) in 2016/17.

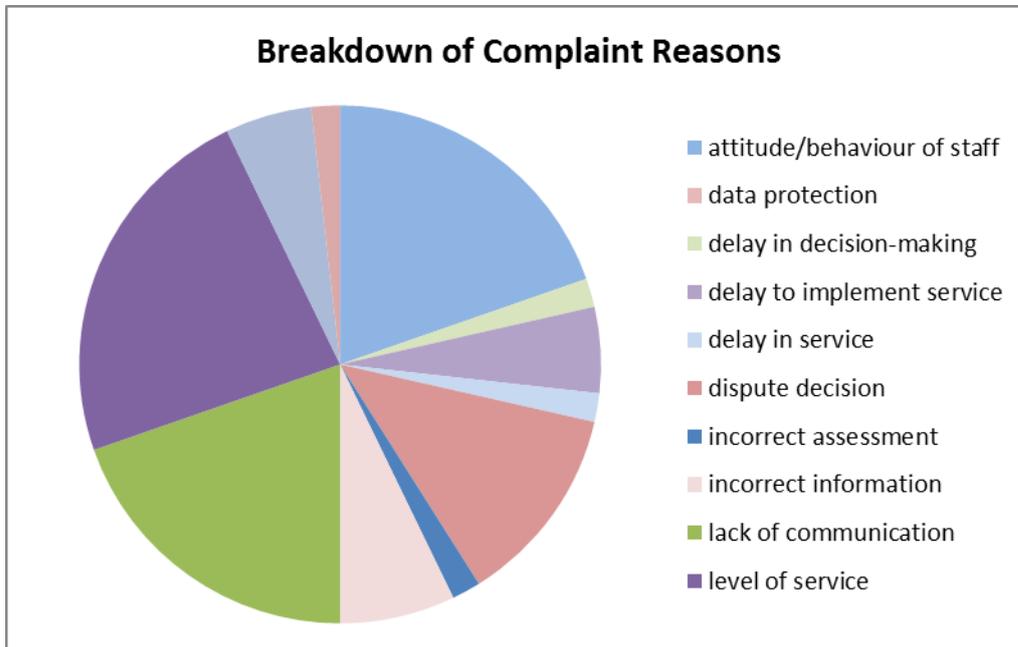


Column1	Adoption	Children Social Care	Intervention & Support Services	Early Help	Fostering	Safeguarding & Service Standards Unit	Triage/ MASH & Assessment
16/17	1	2	69	2	4	3	16
15/16	3		45		4	4	18

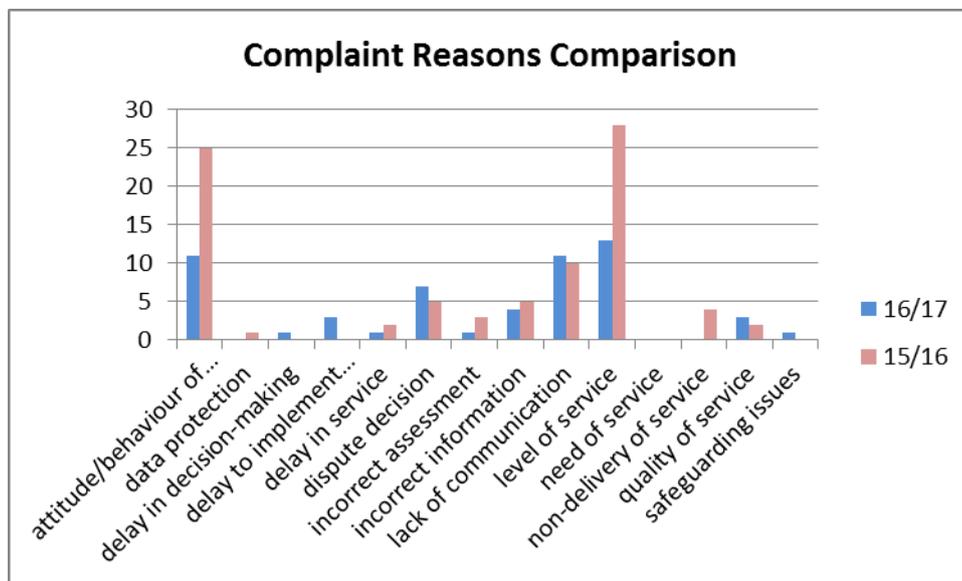
3.5 Reasons

The breakdown of complaint reasons below shows ‘level of service’, ‘lack of communication’ and ‘behaviour of staff are the main reasons for complaint. Complaints regarding behaviour of staff covered issues around lateness for meetings, insufficient or late information, decisions made on cases, communication and lack of financial support. This is also linked to

the unwelcomed intervention by Children’s Services and social workers that have a duty to carry out initial enquiries following concerns raised about a child(ren). Some of these complaints were parents who were angry about what they perceived as bias towards one parent to another particularly where they are estranged, or grandparents who did not agree with the decisions regarding their grandchildren.



There has been a decrease in the number of complaints regarding behaviour of staff, and this is due to the scrutiny of recording practices, to ensure that the reason is correctly reflected. It does still remain one of the main reasons for complaints, and is still linked to the unwelcomed intervention by Children’s Services rather than staff’s behaviour.



3.6 Outcomes & Learning

The highest outcomes were ‘explanation or information provided’ which again shows that clarity is needed when intervention by Children’s Services occurs. It is always a very emotive time for those going through a process where a child is taken into care or there is a child protection process to be followed. The Service has taken positive steps in providing clear

information leaflets for children/young people on child protection and being a looked after child, which explains these processes. Continued efforts needs to be taken to ensure parents/carers also have a clear understanding of the duty and responsibility of social workers when they do intervene. With this in mind, there has been a steady increase in complaint meetings with parents/carers which has proven successful and provided helpful feedback for managers, but also more importantly a better understanding for the parent/carer of why a certain course of action is required.

Of those complaints received, 40 of the 92 (43%) were not upheld and 37 (40%) were upheld. Of the remaining 17% complaints were either withdrawn, no action/no further action was required.

It should be noted that there can be more than one outcome resulting from a complaint, which is shown in the table below.

Changes to assessment	Change to Practice	Complaint withdrawn	Explanation & Apology given	Explanation given	Financial assessment/award	Information provided	No further action required
2	1	8	27	48	2	48	2

3.6.1 General Themes and Trends 2016/17

Complaints during 2016/17 showed that the number of young people that are making complaints directly has increased since the previous year. The use of the MOMO app is taking effect, although there are a number of young people that have made their complaints by email or by telephone. The general themes around young people's complaints are lack of support/advice for those leaving care. In the early part of the year complaints were about young people's savings on turning 18. The Service acted quickly to alleviate further complaints and distress for young people by adjusting the protocol for the management of savings and taking proactive action to resolve and/or prevent anticipated difficulties in this area.

There is a continued theme regarding communication between workers and families, where they are not always provided with adequate notice for changed arrangements for meetings, and in particular notification regarding changes of social worker. Structural changes to the service and significant improvement with the recruitment and retention of permanent staff over the past 12 months (from 40% to 70% permanent workforce) has minimised changes in allocated social workers, which is often a significant contributory factory to dissatisfaction levels.

Regular meetings held between complainants and the Service continued to be more successful and helpful to the complainants and provides them with a platform to be heard and also better understand the reasons for intervention. This will continue to be factored into Service planning..

3.7 Response times

Response times have not improved as hoped, however there is a continuation of increased numbers and complexity to complaints, with more time being spent on ensuring responses are appropriate and addressing all the issues so that complaints are resolved more effectively. The recent Complaints & Information Team restructure will hopefully lead to a strengthening of the complaints functions to reflect the increasing demands. Continued efforts are being made to review processes along with Children's Services to improve response times.

	Within 10 days		11-20 days		Over 20 days		Withdrawn	
	Apr 16 Mar17	Apr 15 Mar16	Apr16 Mar17	Apr 15 Mar 16	Apr16 Mar17	Apr 15 Mar 16	Apr16 – Mar 17	Apr15- Mar 16
Stage 1	21	25	30	25	41	23	8	2
%	23	34	33	34	45	32		

4. Expenditure

Expenditure was incurred for 2016/17 which related to one Stage 2 complaint. The resultant costs were due to the increased rates in appointing independent people, along with the complexity and length of the investigation that was undertaken.

	Publicity/ leaflets	Independent investigators	Total
Apr 2016 – Mar 2017		£9,432.00	£9,432.00
Apr 2015 – Mar 2016		£2,614.20	£2,614.20

5. How Complaints were received

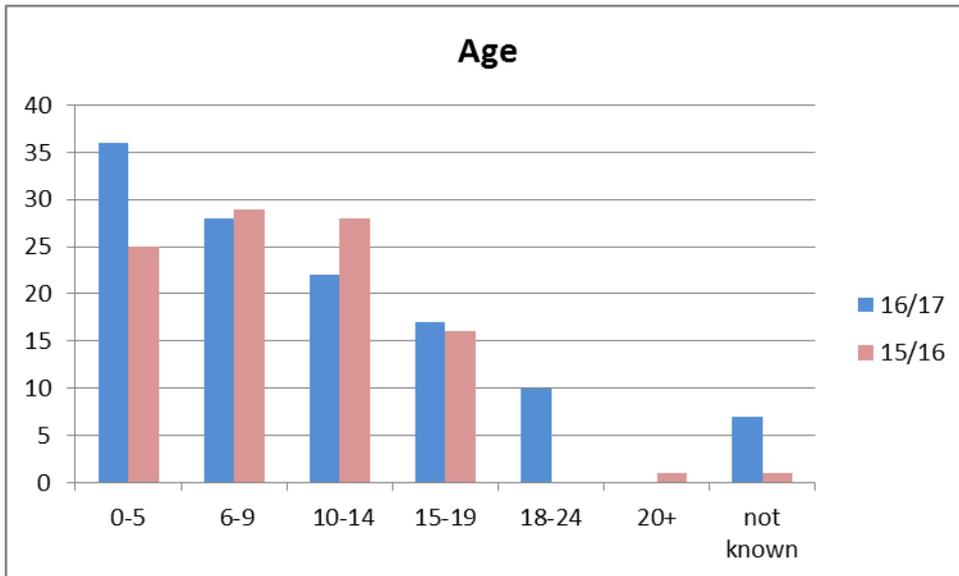
Complainants preference has continued to be either by email or by telephone contact and in particular telephone contact has increased more than double in 2016/17 compared to the previous year. It should also be noted that there has been an increase in complainants using the online facility, however four of these were via the MOMO app which enabled young people to make complaints directly.

	Letter	E-mail	Complaint Form	Telephone	In Person	Online
2016/17	16	33	4	28	1	9
2015/16	21	35		11	2	4

6. Monitoring Information

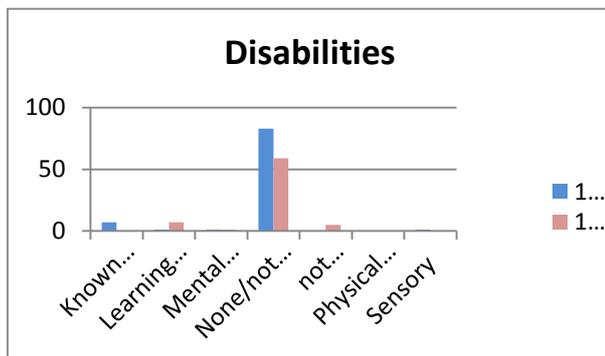
6.1 Age

The number of complaints involving children aged 0-5 increased in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16. Children's Services had an increase in the number of children on a Child in Need (CIN) Plan in 2016/17 with an average of 321 compared to an average of 267 in 2015/16. The number of children on CIN Plan under the age of 1 was almost double with an average of 12 in 2015/16 compared to an average of 22 in 2016/17, which may have contributed to the increase in age 0-5. As age categories differ i.e. age range 15 – 24 within this report there is an overlap, however this will need to be looked at for future reports.



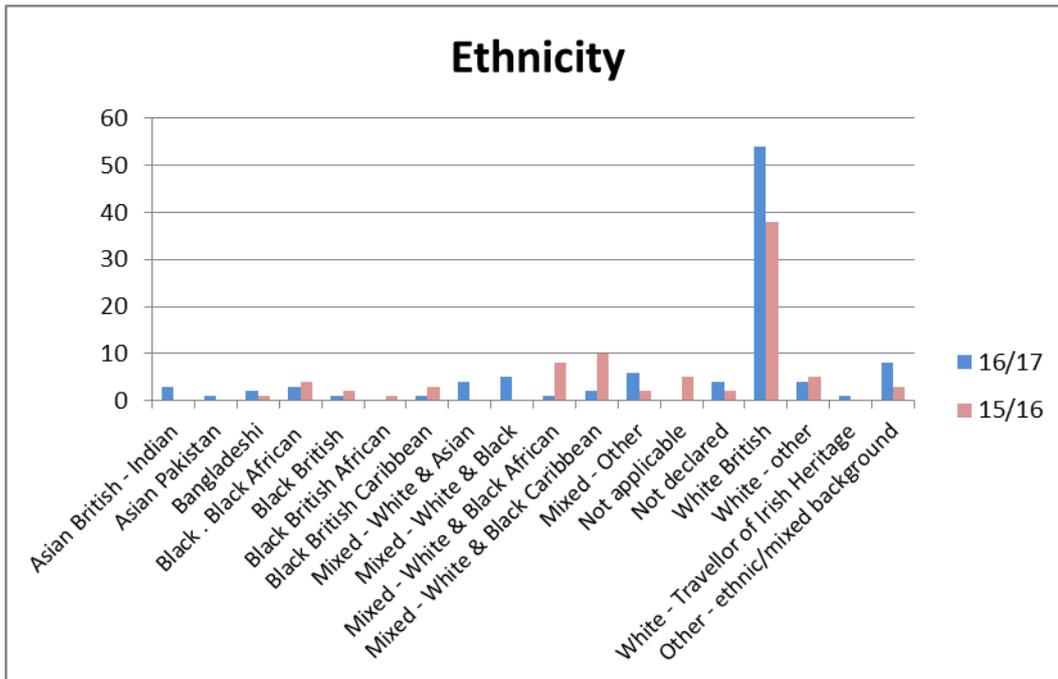
6.2 Disability

It has not been possible to be clear on those that either do not have a disability or it is not known. However there were seven with a 'known disability', a decrease in those with a learning disability from seven in 2015/6 to one in 2016/17 and one with a sensory disability in 2016/17. Ways in which disability information is captured will need to be explored further.



6.3 Ethnicity

There was an increase across some ethnic backgrounds, such as 'White British'; and particularly across 'other mixed ethnic backgrounds', 'mixed White & Asian' and 'mixed White & Black'. It is encouraging that differing ethnic backgrounds have accessed the complaints process.



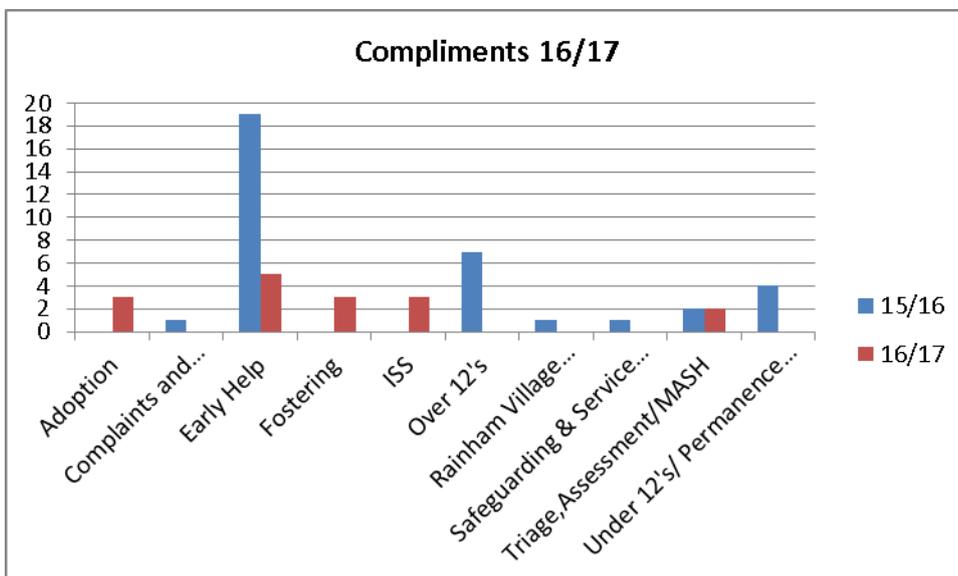
7. Members Correspondence

Members' enquiries have almost trebled in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16 with 75% being responded to within timescale.

	2016/17	2015/16
Members Correspondence	61	24

8. Compliments

The number of compliments received has decreased in 2016/17 to 16 compared to 35 in 2015/16. With changes in the Children's Services structure the Complaints and Information Team will need to ensure that teams are aware and reminded that compliments should be forwarded to the team to be logged.



Some examples of compliments received are shown below:

An expat living abroad wrote in about the social worker assigned to her, although did not remember her name 'I was horrible to her at the beginning but she stuck with me through thick and thin. On one of the most terrible days of my life she was with me and cried with me as I signed away the rights to my daughter. I would like to thank her for her kindness ...' –

Adoption

A young person sends a thank you card saying 'thank you for being there to listen and help me and my mum. With your help you showed us many support places which will benefit us.'

- Early Help

A foster carer thanks the service and writes how happy and proud to have been able to know and able to share our lives with so many young people.' – **Fostering**

Parents write to the manager who investigated their complaint thanking her 'for the thorough response to our complaint. We very much appreciate the time taken to fully investigate the situation. We also appreciate the understanding shown and the apologies that were given for all the matters that were raised.' – **Intervention & Support**

A mother writes to a social worker 'thank you for the sensitive way in which you handled speaking to our boys and for the advice and support you offered.'

Triage/MASH & Assessment

9. Conclusion

Complaints have continued to rise with a 20% increase in 2016/17. Although enquiries are not included within the figures in the main report, it should be noted that with the increase of enquiries, which more than doubled in 2016/17, and also member enquiries, which tripled in 2016/17, this has impacted on response times and the demands on the Service.

There is still a need for complaints to be embedded in terms of service improvements and this will come with time as the Service settles into its new structure.

The increase in the number of young people making complaints is also encouraging and it is hoped that this will increase year on year as young people feel confident in making a complaint.

Communication between social workers and families still remains a main theme of complaints and this should improve with the move towards a more stable workforce and with the range of training offered to social workers by the Service.

Complaints continue to be a useful information tool and should be used to inform the Service in identifying areas for improvement, whilst also recognising through compliments good practice by the Service.

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10. Complaints Action Plan

Issues Identified	Lessons Learnt	Action to be taken	Department	Timescale	Review
S20 – parents not clear about process and implications	clear explanation/ information on possible implications needs to be given at early stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social workers to be reminded to provide concise and clear information. • Managers to ensure that communication is addressed through the PDR process. 	Triage/MASH & Assessment	On-going	Child focussed leaflet was produced explaining the process for looked after children and launched on 3 April 2017,
S47 – parents not given sufficient information about process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determination of S47 needs to be consistent. • Clear explanation/ information about process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process already in place that two senior managers sign off S47s. • Social workers to give clear and concise information about process 	Triage/MASH & Assessment	On-going	Children focussed leaflets were produced on s47, and Looked after Children (LAC) to explain the process and were launched on 3 April 2017
Important information is not always recorded appropriately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information leading to an action/decision should be recorded in detail. • Information needs to be recorded accurately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work is already being undertaken to look at improved recording across the service. • Assessments to identify clearly fact from opinion and identify the source of the information. 	All	On-going	Managers continue to carry out case file audits to ensure recording is appropriate.
Better communication around contact arrangements and case progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication around changes in contact with families. • Communication gap when social worker leaves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To explore better communication re contact arrangements and case progression 	All	On-going	A further restructure of teams took place in 2016-17 to assist in improving practice overall. Staff retention remains an issue but it is improving and ensuring better communication with families and better handovers is being addressed in supervision and through the Council's Personal Development Review (PDR) process.