

# Children Services

## Annual Report 2019 – 2020 Complaints and Compliments

**Prepared for:**

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## **1. Executive Summary**

Children's Services complaints fall within the remit of 'The Children Act 1989' and 'The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006' which includes the requirement to publish an annual report. This report covers the period April 2019 to March 2020.

Children's Services are committed to use complaints to help support improvements and practice within the service and welcomes all feedback.

Improvements have been evidenced with the decrease in the number of complaints regarding 'inaccurate information' and this has been achieved through the continued efforts and focus of Team Managers in reviewing and scrutinising the assessment process. We have also continued to focus on embedding a consistent approach to threshold application and timeliness of intervention to ensure that families receive access to the right service at the right time.

There was an increase of enquiries in 2019-20 compared to the previous year, however we are pleased to see a reduction in the number of stage one complaints and a consistently low number of these escalating to stage two. Our staff continue to benefit from certified training in systemic practice and input from our clinical team, which results in the development of skills in undertaking difficult conversations and co-producing interventions to ensure the most positive outcomes. We have also been proactively linking our quality assurance activity with the complaints processes to ensure learning is fed back into the service.

It is worth acknowledging that some complaints made are regarding issues beyond our control, for example; court timetables, allocation of resources by partner agencies and eligibility for services. We will continue to ensure that our communication with parents and carers is effective, and that the reasons for decisions being made are explicit and understood. During 2019-20 we embedded a more consistent approach to having a face to face conversation at the point of initial enquiry, and we have found this to be effective in preventing escalation and reducing anxiety.

The increase in complaints from families and young people aged 15-17 and in particular those aged 18+ is reflective of the age demographic of those we support. The number of adolescents accessing statutory services has increased significantly in recent years, with over half of our children in care population aged 14+. We encourage young people to use their voice and let us know if there is something they are unhappy with or we could have done better. We received eight complaints directly from young people last year. We will always encourage young people to have a conversation with their allocated worker before a formal complaint is made, to see if concerns can be addressed and issues resolved in an informal way.

Looking forward, 2020-21 has provided us with significant challenges and but also a number of opportunities to engage with our service users differently. The use of virtual platforms has been effective in some instances and we will take the learning from this forward in to our continued response to complaints and enquiries. We also continue to remind staff to highlight compliments and comments, so as to ensure a fair and balanced reflection of the feedback received about the services delivered and the impact this has on our service users.

## **2. Introduction**

The 'Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (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

The number of Ombudsman enquiries decreased in 2019-20 (6) from 2018-19 (9). Two found maladministration with injustice relating to foster care (from 2018-19) and the handling of complaint.

	Apr19-Mar20	Apr18-Mar19	Apr17-Mar18
Maladministration (no injustice)			
Maladministration & Injustice	2	1	1
No maladministration after investigation	2		
Ombudsman discretion			
Investigation with Local settlement			
Outside Jurisdiction			
Investigation Discontinued			
Premature/Informal enquiries	1	6	1
Closed after initial enquiries – no further action	1	2	
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>

#### 3.2 Total number of complaints

The total number of complaints decreased in 2019-20 (80) by 25% from 2018-19 (106). There were eight complaints made directly by young people. The number of enquiries almost trebled and increased by 206% in 2019-20 compared to 17 in 2018-19. Many enquiries involved ongoing Court proceedings, or Court decisions that were outside the remit of Children's Services.

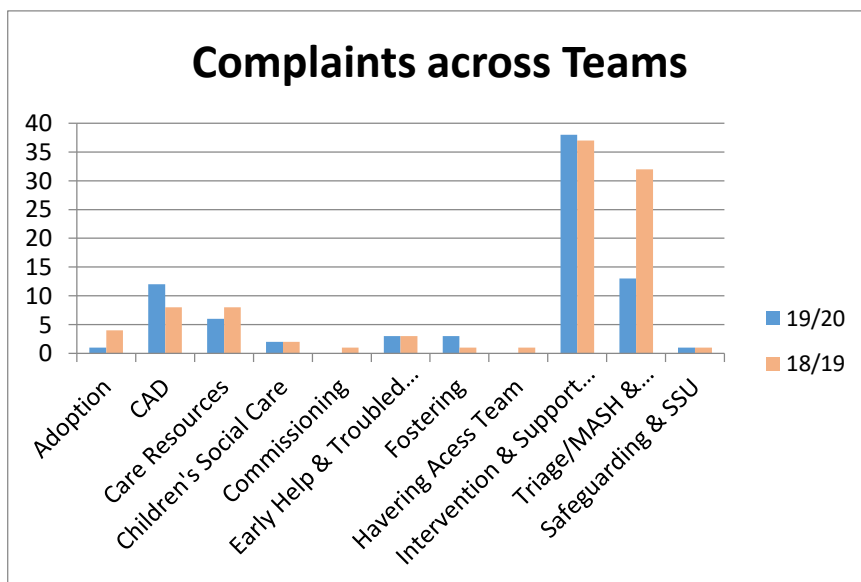
	Enquiries	Stage 1	Stage 1 escalated to Stage 2
2019-20	52	80	6
2018-19	17	106	6

#### 3.3 Stages

There were six escalations to Stage 2 in 2019-20, which has remained at the same level as in 2018-19. Four escalated to Stage 3 Review Panels, three of which escalated from complaints in 2018-19.

### 3.4 Teams

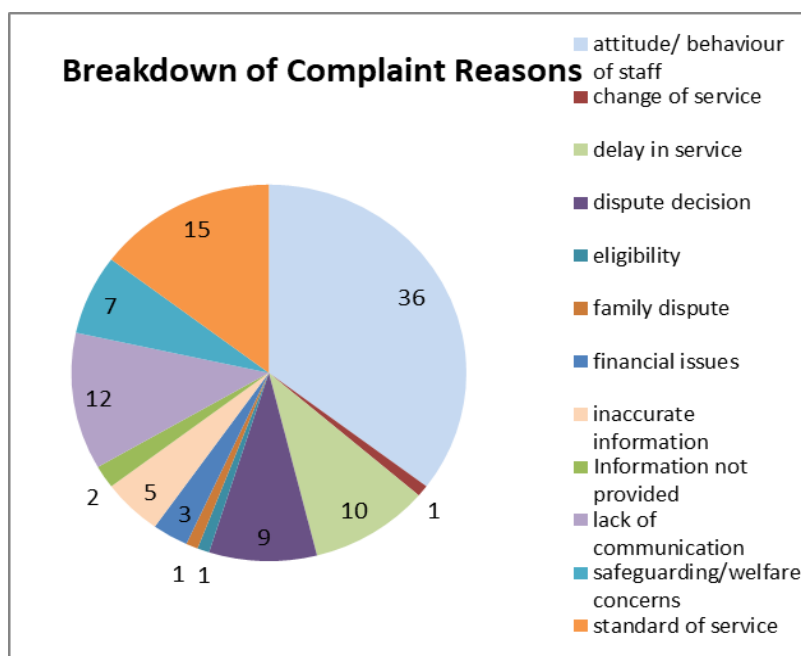
There was a slight increase in the number of complaints received by Intervention & Support Services in 2019-20 compared to 2018-19. This is reflective of unwelcomed intervention by Children's Services. Increases were also evident across Children & Adults with Disabilities Team (CAD) of 50% (12 in 2019-20; 8 in 2018-19), and Fostering, although low in numbers doubled in 2019-20. The number of complaints received by Triage/MASH & Assessment has decreased significantly by 59% in 2019-20 (13) from 2018-19 (32).



### 3.5 Reasons

The breakdown of reasons for complaint shows that 'attitude/behaviour of staff' is the highest reason followed by 'standard of service'. Where 'attitude/behaviour of staff' was the reason the majority of these complaints were about the unhappiness of family members/parents about a social worker's involvement, the decisions they have taken or, the lack of support for the parent or family member, which may not always be in line with the needs of the child or children.

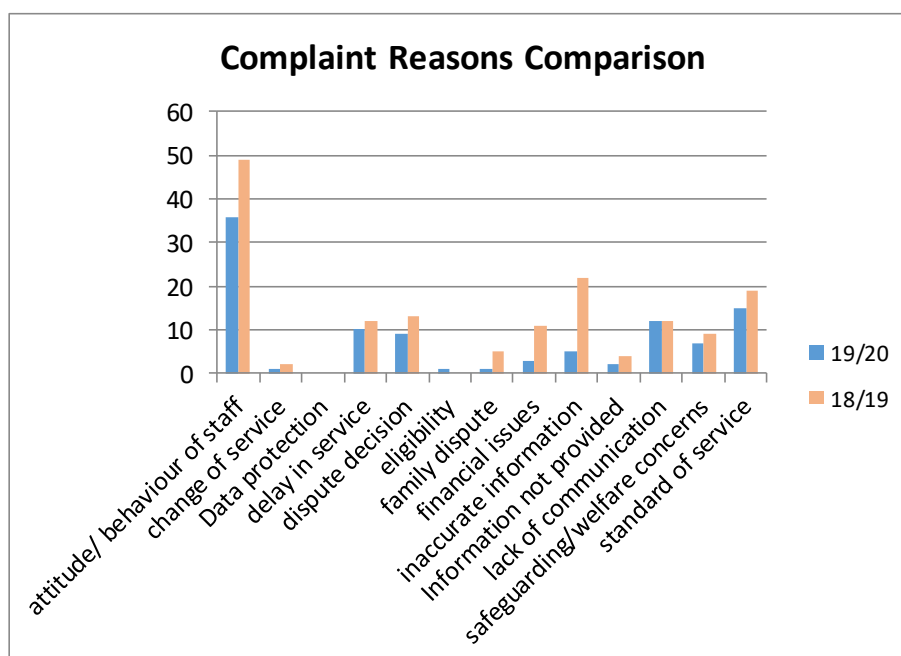
Continued efforts by social work staff to be mindful of the sensitivities with families, particularly where there are relationship breakdowns and ensure that all parties are listened to and their feelings and wishes are accurately represented.



Below shows the comparison between 2019-20 and 2018-19. 'Attitude/behaviour of staff' and 'standard of service' decreased in 2019-20 by 27% (36 in 2019-20; 49 in 2018-19) and 21% (15 in 2019-20; 19 in 2018-19) respectively.

In 2019-20 'inaccurate information' decreased significantly compared to 2018-19 by 77% (5 in 2019-20; 22 in 2018-19). This has resulted from the continued audits and quality assurance by Team Managers who scrutinise assessments around potential bias and accurate recording of information during the assessment process.

Children's Services continue to use the Quality Assurance framework and other feedback loops to understand the standards of service provided in the community to children and families. The reintroduction of the audit programme gives children and families a greater say in service delivery and development and provides feedback from parents and young people for each audit completed. Citizen Space also provides an online platform for families and professionals to give their views.



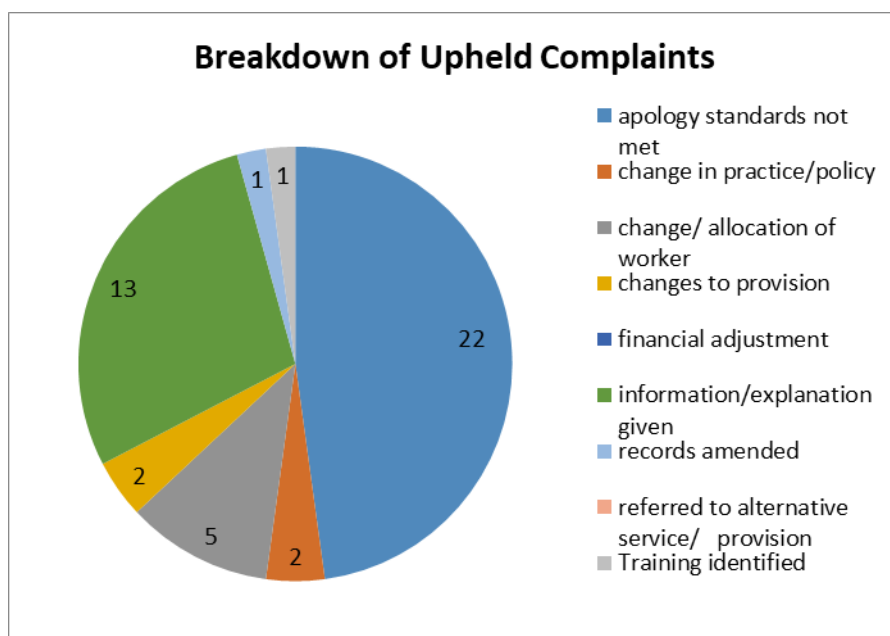
### 3.6 Outcomes & Learning

Of the total number of complaints for 2019-20 (80), 48% not upheld, 24% upheld and 15% partially upheld. Complaints withdrawn totalled 11 in 2019-20, due to information or consent not provided, also following initial enquiries establishing ongoing Court proceedings.

Complaint Withdrawn	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld
11	19	12	38

Below shows the breakdown of the various outcomes for complaints upheld. There could be many elements to complaints and the outcomes mainly resulted in an apology given and information or explanation given. These are the two highest outcomes, and possibly linked to where a worker had not fully explained a particular part of the process, the need for intervention or provided information in a timely manner. Children's Services should explore how information is given, and whether this is consistent and what appropriate steps can be taken to improve in this area.





### 3.6.1 General Themes and Trends 2019-20

‘Attitude/behaviour of staff’ continue to be the highest reason or complaint. Continued efforts by Children’s Services to ensure that staff clearly explain the need for particular interventions, keep families updated and informed about the process, whether that is where a child and family agree to a voluntary arrangement under s20, child protection process under s47, or where a child may be looked after under s17. Also through continued promotion of Havering’s Face to Face Model advocating for purposeful, planned and focused (PPF) Practice evidenced by establishing a clear purpose, only intervening when Children’s Services can help, ensuring that there is a plan that responds to identified need, and a sharp focus on how to achieve change.

It is encouraging to see the decrease in the number of complaints regarding ‘inaccurate information’. The scrutiny by Team Managers on quality assurance of assessments and plans had a positive impact and is reflected in the percentage decrease in complaints relating to ‘inaccurate information in 2019-20.

In 2019-20, the number of complaints made directly by young people was low (8). Attempts to establish whether this is because of the focused work with young people and the alternative avenues they may have to raise concerns is resulting in the low numbers. Also whether concerns are being dealt with in a positive way, resulting in less of a need to make formal complaints.

Complaints data is shared with the Quality Assurance Team and the Children’s Service Improvement Meeting on a quarterly basis. Quality Assurance activity triangulates the trends and incorporates into the audit activity and training from the Social Care Academy.

### 3.7 Response times

Statutory complaints timeframes are 10 working days with a further 10 working days at Stage 1. The response times in 2019-20 have improved with 64%(51) responded to within the 20 working days timeframe, compared to 52% in 2018-19 (48). Continued efforts to meet statutory timeframes to improve response times are required as well as balancing the priorities of the Service while recognising the increased complexities with cases.

	Within 10 days		11-20 days		Over 20 days	
	Apr19-Mar20	Apr18-Mar19	Apr19-Mar20	Apr18-Mar19	Apr19-Mar20	Apr18-Mar19
Stage 1	19	18	32	30	29	44
%	24	17	40	28	36	42

## 4. Expenditure

The majority of expenditure shown for Independent Investigators, relates to six Stage 2 investigations from 2018-19, with costs also associated with Stage 3 Review Panels held in 2019-20. The majority of costs for Stage 2 investigations undertaken in 2019-20 will be shown in 2020-21. The costs for payments is the total paid to complainants, resulting from Stage 3 recommendations carried over from 2018-19 and Ombudsman investigations.

	Publicity/leaflets	Independent investigators	Payments	Total
Apr 2019 – Mar 2020		£19,531.65	£8,200	
Apr 2018 – Mar 2019		£5,346.45	£200.00	£5,546.45

## 5. How Complaints were received

In 2019-20 the preferred method of contact was email, with those preferring the telephone as the next method, as in 2018-19. Online has remained at the same level in 2019-20.

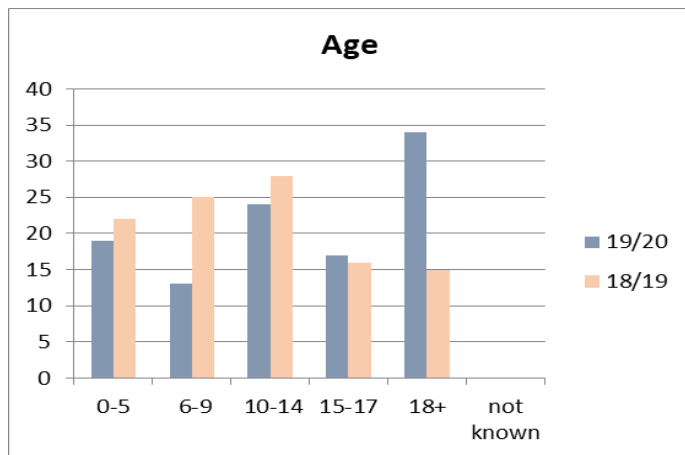
	Letter	E-mail	Complaint Form/Leaflet	Telephone	In Person	Online	Social networking
2019-20	3	38	2	22	2	13	
2018-19	12	55	6	18	3	13	2

## 6. Monitoring Information

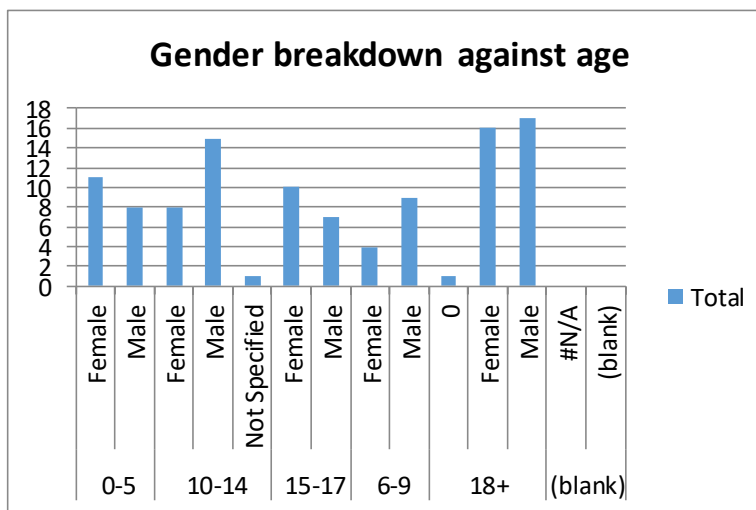
### 6.1 Age & Gender

Monitoring information has been based on all children within the family unit, where a complaint has been made, however may not relate to all children within the family.

The number of complaints involving families with young people between the ages of 15-17 has increased slightly by 6% in 2019-20 (17) compared to 2018-19 (16) and 18+ has more than doubled in 2019-20 (34) compared to 2018-19 (15). Although there is an apparent increase, the number of complaints for Care Resources, which includes the Leaving Care Team, has decreased in 2019-20.

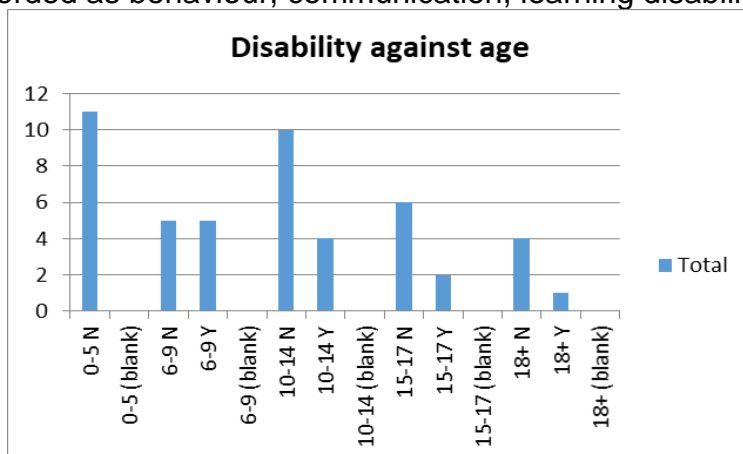


The gender breakdown against age below shows that for those age ranges 10-14; 6-9 and 18+ has a higher number of male children to female children, while those aged 0-5 and 15-17 female children has the highest number.



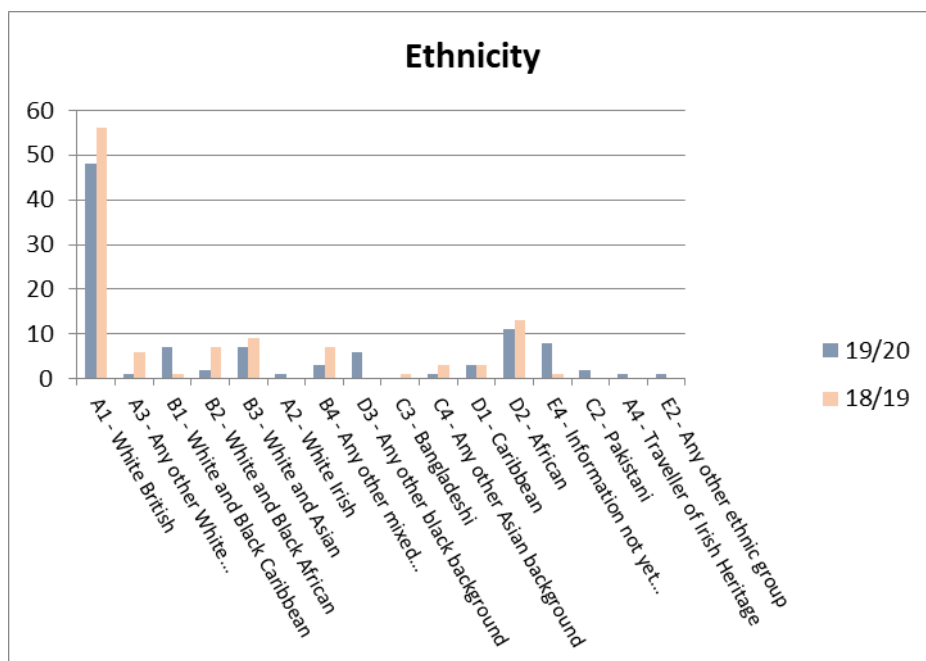
## 6.2 Disability

The number of children recorded with a disability is low across all ages. The majority of children with a disability diagnosed with Autism or Aspergers syndrome, with other disabilities recorded as behaviour, communication, learning disability, mobility and visual impairment.



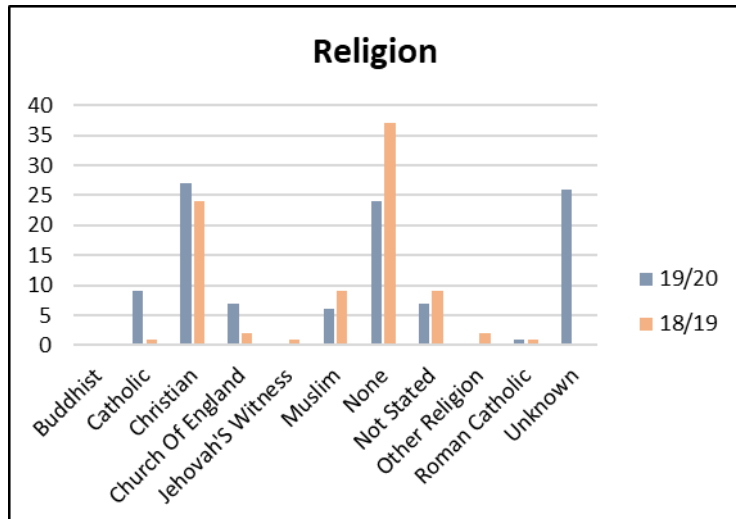
## 6.3 Ethnicity

Children are represented across a number of ethnic backgrounds. 'White British' is the highest as reflected in the borough's population make up. The number of 'White and Black Caribbean', as well as 'any other Black Background' has increased in 2019-20.



## 6.4 Religion

Families of 'Catholic', 'Christian' or 'Church of England' faiths have increased in 2019-20. There are 26 recorded as 'Unknown' and recording of religion will need to be looked at by Children's Services.



## 7. Members Correspondence

Members' correspondence increased by 17% in 2019-20 with 91% being responded to within timescale.

	2019-20	2018-19
Members	55	47

Correspondence		
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## **8. Compliments**

There were very few compliments recorded for Children's Services during 2019-20 (3). Children's Services will need to ensure that compliments are logged, so that these may be reported in 2020-21 report.

## **9. Conclusion**

Although the number of complaints have decreased in 2019-20, the number of Stage 2 investigations have stayed at the same level. The move towards having initial meetings with complainants may impact on the number of Stage 1 complaints escalating, however with the Covid-19 situation it is not clear how this will impact on complaints in 2020-21.

Complaints are playing an important role in service improvements and the Children's Service Improvement Board looks at quality assurance and learning from complaints, while also linking to appropriate training. This is evident in the decrease in the number of complaints regarding inaccurate information due to the continued quality assurance and audits.

Although Children's Services may be receiving compliments, teams to be reminded to forward compliments for recording purposes, as the numbers may not be representative of compliments actually received and the recognised work being done within teams.

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## 10. Complaints Action Plan

Issues Identified	Lessons Learnt	Action to be taken	Department	Timescale	Review
S47 – parents not given sufficient information about process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents to be provided with all relevant information about child protection processes at the beginning of our engagement with a family.</li> <li>Clear explanation/ information about process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team managers sign off S.47's in the service</li> <li>Social workers to give clear and concise information about process</li> <li>Social workers to be clear with parents as to why we are involved (purpose) and what our involvement will look like (plan)</li> </ul>	Triage/MASH & Assessment  ISS	On-going	Leaflets not distributed due to possible changes. Will look at information sharing processes over the next 6 months to look at developing an information resource for children and families.
Important information is not always recorded appropriately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information leading to an action/decision should be recorded in detail.</li> <li>Information needs to be recorded accurately</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear links between the purpose as to why we are involved, our analysis and plans for actions based on our understanding as to what change needs to happen</li> <li>Work is already being undertaken to look at improved recording across the service.</li> <li>Assessments to identify clearly fact from opinion and identify the source of the information.</li> </ul>	All	On-going  Twice yearly practice week audits. Monthly case file audits by team managers.	<p>Managers continue to carry out case file audits to ensure recording is appropriate.</p> <p>Introduction of 'Obsession with Assessments' training/briefing sessions introduced to reinforce the need for accurate reporting.</p> <p>Introduction of Liquid Logic from December 2018 will also help this.</p>
Better communication around contact arrangements and case progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication around changes in contact with families.</li> <li>Communication gap when social worker leaves.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved understanding as to when and why information got lost between whom and identification of how best to improve means of communication</li> <li>To explore better</li> </ul>	All	On-going	Management arrangements were strengthened during 2014-2015 and a further restructure of teams took place in 2016-17 and in 2018 to assist in improving practice overall. It is improving and ensuring better communication with families and better handovers is being

		<p>communication re contact arrangements and case progression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All families will be notified in writing when there are significant changes in service delivery for example, a change of Social Worker. The allocated Social Worker will also complete a handover whenever this is possible to introduce the new worker and share the existing Social Care Plan.</li> </ul>			<p>addressed in supervision and through the Council's Personal Development Review (PDR) process. The embedding of systemic supervision across the service is also improving this.</p> <p>Use of generic emails to ensure continued communication when a social worker leaves service areas to ensure consistency.</p>
S7 reports/court reports – inaccurate information/interpretation of information					Managers to quality assure and sign off all reports that go to Court
Improved response times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responses need to be completed in a timely manner.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complaints to be tracked on a weekly basis by Senior Leadership Team within Children's Services</li> </ul>	Assistant Director/SLT	On-going	Complaints representation on quarterly monitoring meetings with SLT.
Assessments –	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>data breaches from copy and pasting</li> <li>source of information to be clearly identified</li> <li>care re bias of father's views</li> <li>information from professional discussions may be backtracked.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The ICS assessment templates have been remodelled in line with our PPF model of practice, including considerations of the relationship between the practitioner and different family members. This new template, in addition to staying focused on purpose and plan prompts social workers to become more reflective regarding the information they are inputting into the assessments. Following the restructure,</li> </ul>	Assessment & ISS	Quarterly review of audit findings which is tracked via SMT	



		<p>management oversight and grip has been strengthened thereby allowing for greater quality assurance of assessments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The allocation system of work in the assessment service has been strengthened which has reduced caseloads and the urgency for work to be completed in a fast paced environment. This will allow more thoughtful and reflective time thereby strengthening practice.</li> <li>• Supervision informed by systemic practice principles including conversations about the self of the supervisee and how their lived experiences are informing their assessments</li> </ul>			
Representatives/ Advocates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly identify role and level of formality for someone acting on someone else's behalf</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the commencement of a complaint Complaints &amp; Information Team clarify role of individual acting on someone else's behalf and to understand that role throughout the process</li> </ul>	Complaints & Information Team	On-going	
General communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telephone contacts to be followed up in writing</li> <li>• Clarify when a case is closed to an individual rather than service.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will be picked up within teams and through the new social care system.</li> <li>• Workers are to clearly specify whether the case is being transferred/reallocated and communicate to families.</li> </ul>	All	On-going	
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