

Children's Services

Annual Report 2020 – 2021 Complaints and Compliments

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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 2020 to March 2021.

The number of complaints received during 2020-21 increased slightly with the same level escalating to Stage 2. However through successful virtual meetings and resolutions, two were not progressed. Complaints highlighted that during this period that communication was not as good as it should be, and this may be part due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the difficulties and restrictions at the time. It also highlighted the wider picture nationally where there was an increase in Domestic Violence cases and reflected with increases shown in 2020-21 for complaints related to safeguarding/welfare concerns. This is also reflective of the overall increase in demand, and the increase in the number of children and families requiring help and protection.

As the Covid-19 pandemic took hold, this led to increased pressure across all services within the Council. Resources were redirected to help support the Covid-19 efforts and focused on ensuring that the most at risk or vulnerable children were still seen and low income families were supported with food and care packages. The availability and capacity of staff over the last 18 months has been a challenge. This has been due to staff being unwell, following isolation rules or an increase in social workers leaving the profession. This is the case for many local authorities nationally and is not exclusive to Havering.

Throughout 2020-21 we saw demand increase and this has continued into the current financial year. The number of contacts received in 2020-21 is the highest it's been since 2017/18, and the number of children entering care is the highest it's been since 2016/17. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on many residents is complex and ongoing. We are seeing many families requiring support that have not accessed services before, and may not have done so had it not been for the adverse effects of the pandemic. As with almost all London boroughs, the most common assessment factor in Havering remains 'domestic abuse against the parent', with this increasing year on year. We have also seen an increase of assessments identifying mental health as a factor, as well as increase in contacts relating to neglect.

Alongside this, since children returned to school post-lockdown we have seen an increase in behaviour support requests from schools (42% increase in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20) as well as an ongoing increase in children receiving Education, Health and Care Plans. We are working with our safeguarding partners and third sector colleagues to respond to a decrease in children being 'school ready' as well as a reduction in identification of Young Carers due to a lack of visibility.

Children's Services have continued to use learning from complaints and compliments to help shape services and the increase in compliments are a welcomed shift to acknowledge the good work carried out by those within Children's Services. The 2021-22 complaints action plan identifies how Children's Services will respond to the areas of improvement identified in this report and continue to utilise good practice examples to showcase what works well.

Introduction

The 'Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006' govern complaints, representations and compliments received about Children'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.

Complaints

1.1 Ombudsman Referrals

The number of Ombudsman enquiries stayed at the same level in 2020-21 (6) compared to 2019-20 (6). Two found maladministration with injustice;

- One relating to delay in provision of suitable chair and complaint handling
- One due to failure to properly communicate with parent and partner local authority when considering safeguarding action.

	Apr 20-Mar 21	Apr 19-Mar 20	Apr 18-Mar 19
Maladministration (no injustice)			
Maladministration & Injustice	2	2	1
No maladministration after investigation	1	2	
`Ombudsman discretion			
Investigation with Local settlement			
Outside Jurisdiction			
Investigation Discontinued			
Premature/Informal enquiries	2	1	6
Closed after initial enquiries – no further action	1	1	2
Total	6	6	9

1.2 Total number of complaints

There has been a slight increase of 9% in the number of complaints in 2020-21(87) compared to 2019-20 (80), however a significant increase in the number of enquiries of 46% in 2020-21(76) compared to

2019-20 (52). Enquiries do not fall within the remit of statutory or corporate complaints and are not included in any further data within this report.

	Enquiries	Stage 1	Stage 1 escalated to Stage 2	Stage 3 Review Panel
2020-21	76	87	6	1
2019-20	52	80	6	

1.3 Stages

The number of Stage 1 complaints increased slightly in 2020-21, with the number escalating to Stage 2 at the same level in 2020-21(6) as 2019-20 (6). However, three of the six Stage 2 complaints were not progressed, one due to Court proceedings and two due to successful resolution of complaint. One complaint escalated to Stage 3 and subsequently the Ombudsman.

1.4 Teams

There has been a significant increase in the number of complaints received by Triage/MASH & Assessment which has risen by almost three fold in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20.

As a frontline team, the increase shown for Triage/MASH & Assessment were mainly complaints around referrals and allegations being made or child contact arrangements.

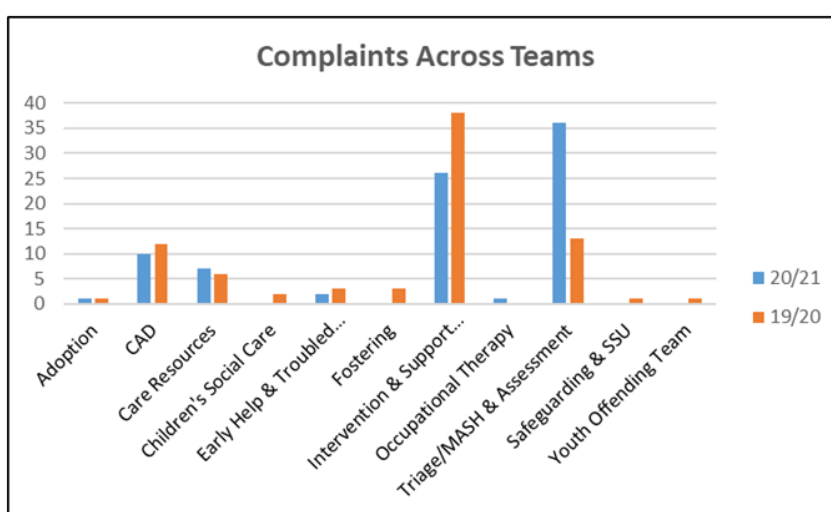
The overall number of contacts received by the service in relation to domestic violence more than doubled in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20. During 2020-21 there was a national trend of an increase in domestic abuse concerns and research suggests this can be attributed to families spending more time together during the lockdown and increased pressures and anxieties during the pandemic.

The definitions of domestic abuse have also expanded to include non-violent behaviours including financial abuse, stalking and coercive / controlling behaviour with the case management system being updated to reflect this. Contact arrangements also became more complex for families during the lockdown, with isolation rules in place and residents managing their own anxieties about the transmission of the virus.

Care Resources saw a very slight increase of 17% in 2020-21(7) compared to 2019-20(6) and Intervention & Support Services saw a decrease of 32% in 2020-21(38) compared to 2019-20(26).

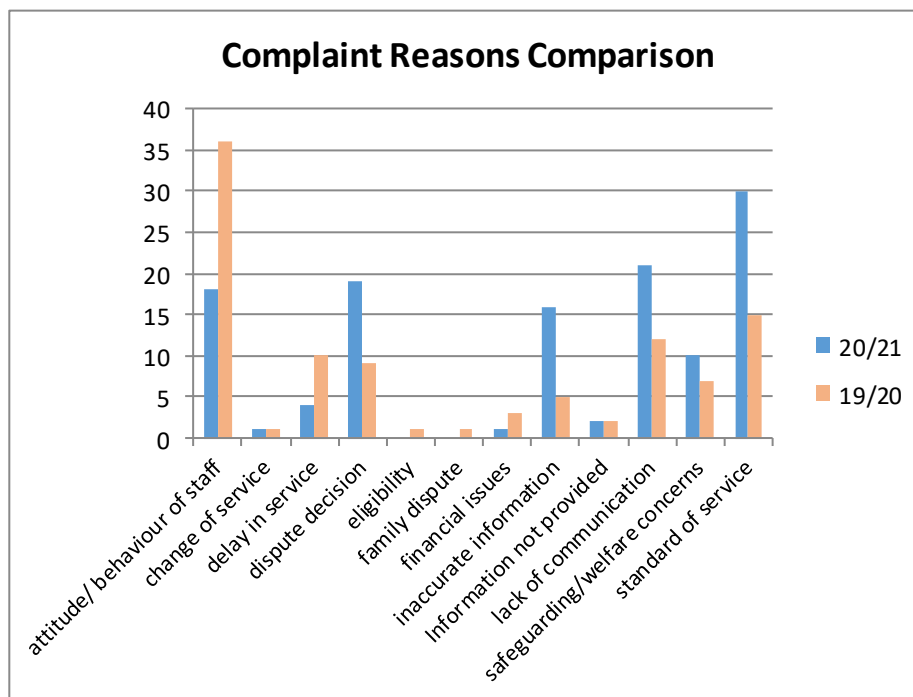
1.5 Reasons

'Attitude/behaviour of staff' has decreased significantly by 50%. It has been highlighted that the way this has been recorded previously may have contributed to the high numbers in 2019-20. This is being addressed through review on recording practices and training.



Many complaints giving 'attitude/behaviour of staff' were in relation to parents being unhappy about the decisions that had been made. This is linked to increases shown across 'disputing decisions' which more than doubled in 2020-21 and reflects partly on what could be seen as unwelcomed decisions.

'Standard of service' has doubled in 2020-21(30) compared to 2019-21(15), with 'inaccurate information' also showing an increase three times higher in 2020-21(16) compared to 2019-20 (5). Those relating to inaccurate information tended to be around not agreeing with information within reports/assessments. There was also an increase in 'lack of communication', which may have been impacted during the Covid-19 pandemic with face-to-face contact being restricted and staff resources being stretched. The increase in 'safeguarding/welfare concerns' reflect the increase shown in Triage/MASH & Assessment in relation to referrals.

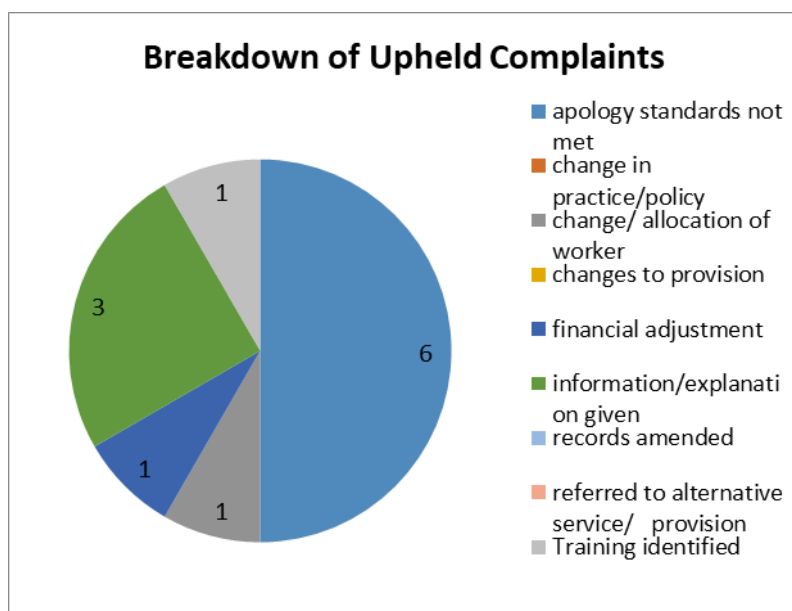


1.6 Outcomes & Learning

The number of complaints 'upheld' decreased by more than half, however those 'partially upheld' increased by more than double in 2020-21(28) compared to 2019-20(12). Complaints 'not upheld' rose slightly by 5% in 2020-21(40) compared to 2019-20(38).

For those complaints upheld or partially upheld these resulted in an apology, linked to further information or explanation being provided, as shown in the breakdown of upheld complaints below. This appears to be reflected in the increases shown in 'lack of communication' and 'inaccurate information'. Consideration needs to be given on how information is communicated to ensure this is given in a clear and concise way and that it is understood.

The recommendations from the Ombudsman, highlighted the need for improved cross-border communication and closer working with local authority outside of London and the need for refresher training on Safeguarding. As a result Safeguarding training was commissioned to take into account the learning from the complaint and to ensure practitioners and managers understood and adhered to the Pan London Child Protection Procedures. Cross-border communication with local authority was improved and joint meetings were held, with Head of Quality Assurance contacts being made available in the event of escalation being required outside their individual line management structure.



	upheld	not upheld	partially upheld	withdrawn
20/21	6	40	28	13
19/20	19	38	12	11

During 2020-21 the Covid-19 pandemic diverted Council resources to meet the crisis. It is acknowledged that with the Covid-19 pandemic, came changes to the way of working, with face-to-face contact being restricted, closures of schools and nurseries and the pressures put on families would have an impact.

Children's Services have reflected on these challenges and work is ongoing to refresh the Model of Practice, providing learning and support materials for staff online, including online webinars on Domestic Abuse. Children's Services are also in the process of undertaking a significant amount of work to improve the forms and processes on the case management system to improve accuracy and efficiency.

1.7 General Themes and Trends 2020-21

There is a continuation of the general theme regarding parents understanding of the reasons behind intervention from Children's Services. It has highlighted that parents are not always aware of either the legitimate reasons for intervention or the limitations of Children's Services to intervene where there may be discord among separated parents or family members in relation to children. Consideration may need to be given on how information is communicated to parents/families to ensure consistency and to provide awareness of the role of Children's Services when it comes to their intervention.

Inaccurate information showed an increase during 2020-21 and although the pandemic has caused pressures on staff resources, this will need to be revisited through quality assurance and the continued audits of case records. During 2020-21 Children's Services have developed Case Recording Standards which details the roles and responsibilities of all staff in the timeliness and accuracy of records. This is available to all staff and will be further developed as part of a Staff Handbook in 2021-22.

As much as the pandemic has provided accelerated progression in the use of technology in our working lives, it has become evident that the impact of face to face conversations cannot be replicated digitally. As soon as the restrictions allow, it will be the service position that all visits are undertaken in person, unless there is valid reason not to.

1.8 Response times

Stage 1 complaint responses within 10 working days improved in 2020-21(27) compared to 2019-20 (19), with a slight decrease of responses within 11-20 working days. 67% of complaints were responded to within 20 working days. With the change of priorities during Covid 19, this did affect response times and efforts will need to be made to improve this going forward.

	Within 10 days		11-20 days		Over 20 days	
	Apr 20-Mar 21	Apr 19-Mar 20	Apr 20-Mar 21	Apr 19-Mar 20	Apr 20-Mar 21	Apr 19-Mar 20
Stage 1	27	19	31	32	29	29
%	31%	24%	36%	40%	33%	36%

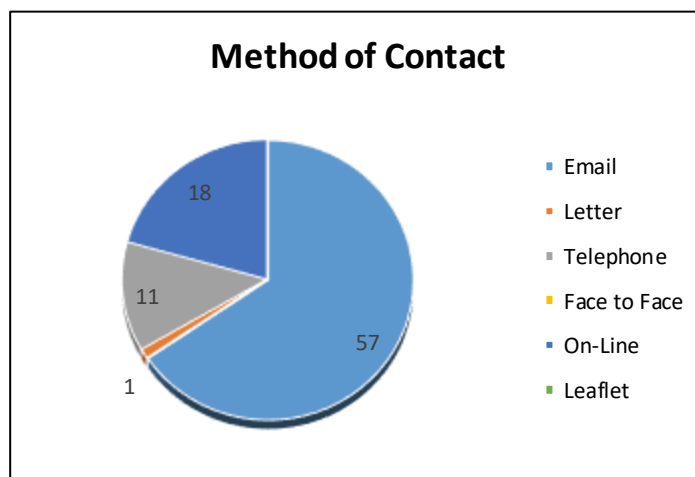
1.9 Expenditure

The cost of independent investigations decreased significantly in 2020-21, due to the withdrawal of three Stage 2 escalations. This resulted in a 78% reduction in spend year on year.

	Publicity/ leaflets	Independent investigators	Payments	Total
Apr 2020 – Mar 2021		£6,087.95		£6,087.95
Apr 2019 – Mar 2020		£19,531.65	£8,200	£27, 731.65

1.10 How Complaints were received

Email was the preferred method of contact during 2020-21, which increased by 50% compared to 2019-20. The number choosing to complain online has also increased, with a reduction during 2020-21 of those choosing the telephone.



	Letter	E-mail	Complaint Form/Letter	Telephone	In Person	Online	Social Media
2020-21	1	57	0	11	0	18	0
2019-20	3	38	2	22	2	13	0

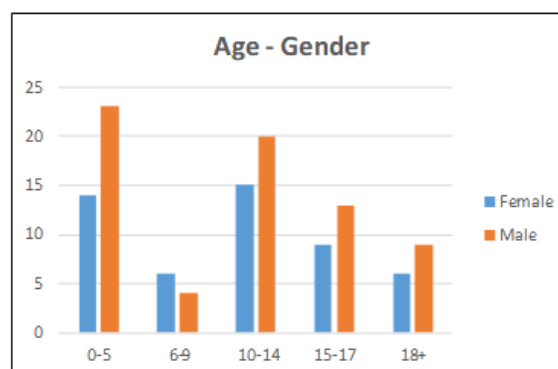
Monitoring Information

2.1 Age and Gender

During 2020-21 there were noticeable increases across ages 0-5, and 10-14 with a slight increase of complaints involving children age 15-17.

It should be noted that data collected for the monitoring information will include all children within a family unit from which a complaint is made.

Across age ranges 0-5, 10-14, 15-17 and 18+ there were a higher number of males in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20, with a higher number of females ages 6-9.



	0-5	6-9	10-14	15-17	18+
20/21	37	10	35	22	15
19/20	19	13	24	17	34

2.3 Disability

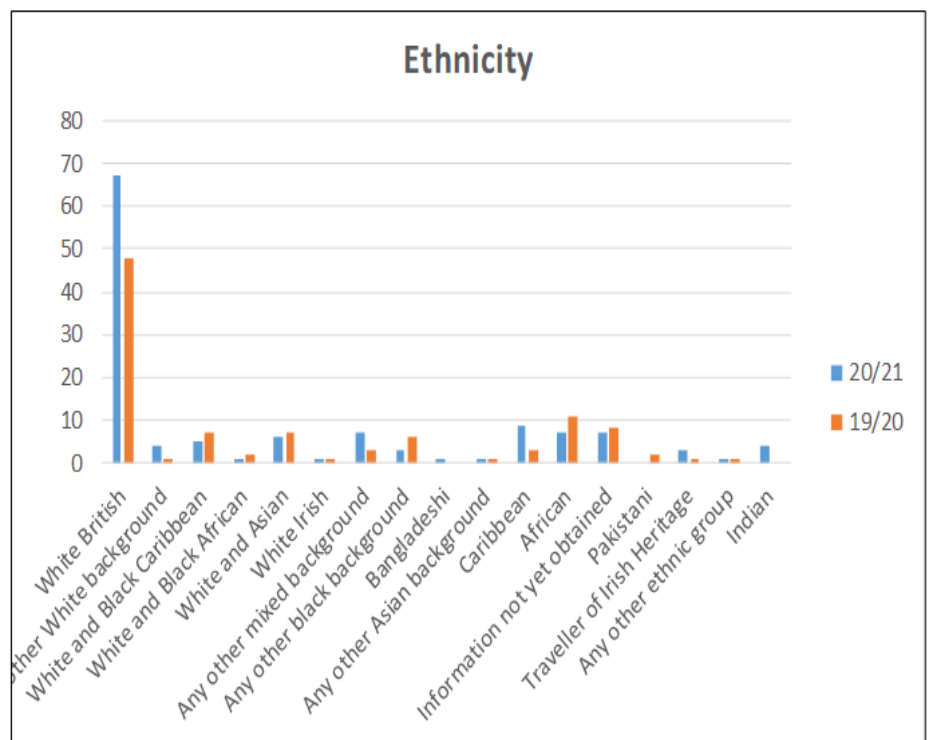
There are a low number of children that had a recorded disability, with the majority having Autism/Aspergers syndrome in 2020-21, which is similar to 2019-20. We know that overall we have low numbers of children accessing SEN Support in Schools, however the number of requests for Education, Health and Care Plan assessments has increased and we expect to see this continue in 2021-22.

Behaviour	Communication	Autism/Aspergers	Hearing
2	2	9	1

2.4 Ethnicity

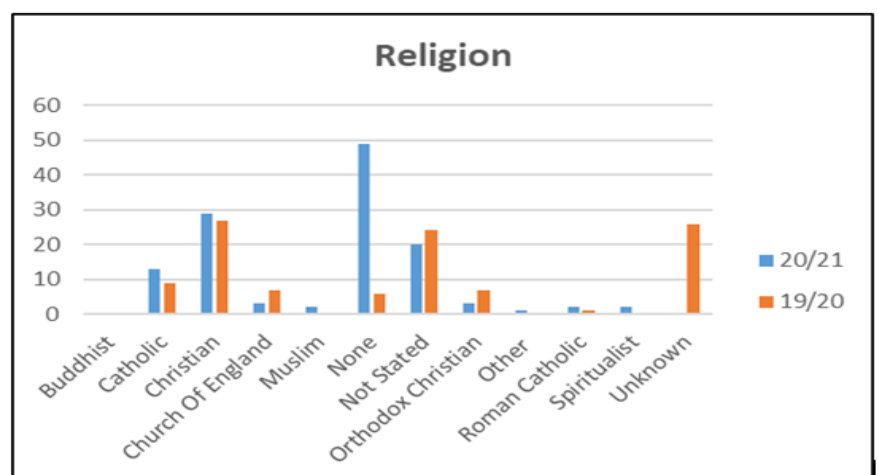
The high number of 'White British' continues to reflect the population within Havering however is not representative of the service users across Children's Services. There are representations across many ethnicities with slight increases shown across 'Any Other White Background', 'Any Other Mixed Background', 'Caribbean', 'Traveller of Irish Heritage' and 'Indian'.

As part of the work being undertaken by the service to understand the disproportionate representation of some BAME groups in our statutory services, we need to ensure that all families and young people feel able and empowered to complain or to share compliments and good news.



2.5 Religion

There is a significant increase in those recorded as having 'none' and this may be reflective of the number of children within age-range 0-5. Those recorded as 'Catholic' 'Muslim' 'Roman Catholic' and 'Spiritualist' have had a slight increase in 2020-21.



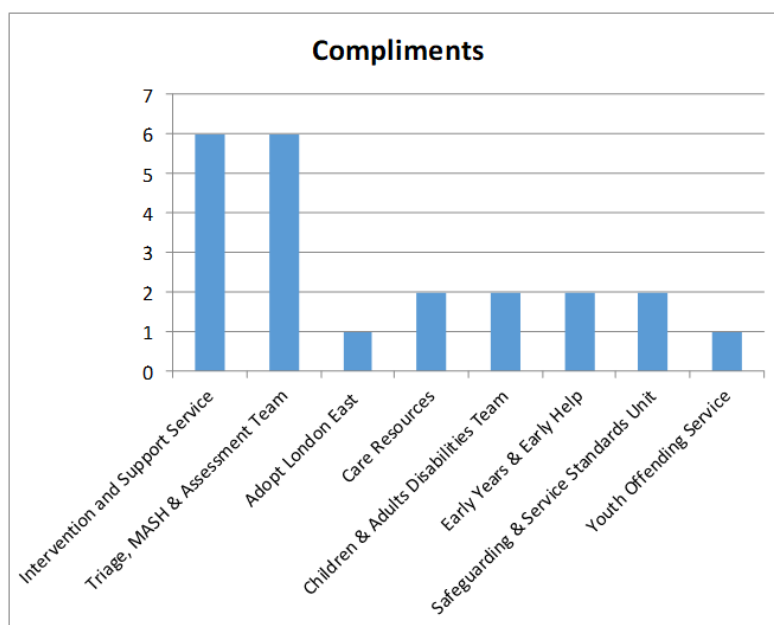
Members Correspondence

The number of Members correspondence increased by 25% in 2020-21 (69) compared to 2019-20 (55) with 92% being responded to within timeframe.

	2020-21	2019-20
Members Correspondence	69	55

Compliments

There has been a significant increase in the number of compliments in 2020-21(22) compared to 2019-20(3), which is encouraging with compliments being shared for recording purposes for Children's Services. It is particularly encouraging to see that the Triage/MASH & Assessment Team received the highest number of compliments, and that even though received the highest number of complaints, that their good work was appreciated.



Some examples of the appreciation shown are given below:

1. A thank you card received from a young person to Independent Reviewing Officer (Safeguarding & Standards Unit)

"Thank you so much"... "I am really sad that you will not be my IRO anymore" "I am really grateful for all the hard work you have done for me".... "You are one of the most hardworking people I know who shows a true care the work they do"..... "You are the best ever".

2. Appreciation shown for a Social Worker (Intervention & Support Services)

"Please be advised that I have found the Social Worker a breath of fresh air" ... "she heard my struggle".

"I could articulate myself in a relaxed and open environment because she understood. I didn't have to feel misunderstood or classified/judged".

I was able to explain myself, pains and hurts in this country without judgement. She was extremely professional at all times, and seemed to sense when I am going through financial hardships".... "I have struggled with asking for what might be considered handouts. She seems to pull this off with ease and tact".

3. Grateful parents express their gratitude (Early Help)

"We just wanted to communicate what a great job we think you have done".

"We have been impressed with your management, knowledge and ability to pull all together, your constant attention to detail, your openness to considering all the options, your appropriate chasing of people to complete their tasks and by the date they said they would get it done, your identification of any missing things to be done or people that needed to be included (etc. - I could go on).

"We are grateful to you and wish you well for the future" –

4. Parents express their appreciation (Children & Adults Disabilities)

"I thought I'll drop you an email to let you know the exceptional service provided by XX.

"As a result of this me and my wife have some breathing space and my son is a happy child again".

"XX listened to our concerns, he followed it up, kept us on the loop about the progress and got things done. I'm lucky to have dealt with XX and I really was impressed with his professionalism and I'm extremely grateful for solving our problems".

5. A care leaver showing appreciation for their key worker (Care Resources)

"I wanted to send this email just to say thank you for all of your support throughout the years. I feel so lucky to have had such a lovely key worker, who never gave up on me, even when I made the most stupid decisions at times haha. Her help and support I was able to keep a roof over my head, become a good parent to my daughter and Finnish at university and give my little girl a mum to be proud of. You really made me feel cared for and was backing me 100 percent and helped me to believe in myself. You made me feel like I was worthy of a good life when my own parents didn't and you will never know how much that means to me".

"You gave me so much reassurance and made me feel like I was doing a good job. Thank you so much".

"Over the years I have been in care I have felt supported and managed to achieve my potential. Without all of your support I wouldn't be a registered nurse now. Thank you so much! "

6. Parents thanking their Social Workers (Assessment Team)

"XX and XX met the challenge with honesty and impartiality to matters that was very welcomed. Despite the logistical hurdles of the pandemic, they made active efforts to ensure the views of all parties involved were considered and ensured neutral observations could take place. When the dynamics involved changed, they quickly were able to arrange an additional observation - again this was greatly appreciated.

XX kept me apprised of progress during their routine checks and investigations which as a concerned parent helped to allay any concerns I had. I thank them both for their input in my own situation and wish them the best of success in their ongoing work. Being actively involved with my family for a year gave her unique insights into creative approaches to support us. This included a range of measures that sought the input of the various health and education professionals who were involved.

The final recommendation made by XX for a shared care pattern initially seemed strange to me and I think the other parties involved. It quickly became apparent that this approach was both a beneficial and a long-sighted one. Due to the dynamics of my own situation, the pattern ensured consistent weekday and weekend time with our daughter, whilst not infringing upon the other parent's time-it was welcomed.

I would highly recommend this schedule/pattern of contact is trialled wherever it is possible and there is a similar history of parental differences and poor communication (whatever the cause) but both parents are logistically and evidentially able to care for the child/children.”

Conclusion

Although the number of complaints have increased in 2020-21, the number of Stage 2 investigations have stayed at the same level. Initial meetings with complainants did result in two cases be resolved which were not progressed. We will continue to advocate meetings and monitor the impact this may have on the number of Stage 1 complaints escalating.

Response times were affected during the pandemic, and we will need to improve this as the pressures of the pandemic lessen.

Complaints are playing an important role in service improvements and this is recognised by senior management. Liquid Logic the Social Care case recording system should prove a better tool to record and report complaints. As pressures from the pandemic ease for Children's Services the use of the complaint module within Liquid Logic will be reviewed.

The recording and monitoring of complaints is continually being reviewed and it is recognised that performance in this area needs to be improved. Further training will be put in place and reviewed regularly. The Children's Services Improvement Board looks at quality assurance and learning from complaints, while also linking to appropriate training and, going forward, quarterly meetings will be held with the Children's Services Senior Management Team to review progress against the action plan and any complaints received in the preceding quarter.

Although Children's Services may be receiving compliments, teams again need 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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Complaints and Compliments Action Plan

	Task / Action	Owner	Intended Outcome / Impact	Target Completion Date	Quarterly Update
1	<p>Review and update process for receiving, allocating and responding to complaints within Children's Services including clear roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Development of a robust structure within the process, as to tasks that should be completed within the ten day response timescale e.g. phone call to complainant.</p>	Tara Geere	Response timescales will be improved with a clear process in place, and regular senior management oversight.	Revised process to be in place by 30.01.22	
2	<p>Quarterly meetings between SCCI team and children's senior management team to be diarised.</p> <p>The purpose of this will be to review any complaints and compliments from the preceding quarter, discuss themes/learning and follow up on any current or overdue tasks</p>	Tara Geere	Improved management oversight of complaints will improve timeliness and quality of responses	First meeting to take place by 30.01.22	
3	<p>Bi-annual practice week to include a 'lessons learned from complaints' session for all social care staff and managers.</p> <p>Purpose being to come to gather to consider themes and learning from complaints and compliments received in the preceding six months as well as learning from what happened at each stage to prevent escalation.</p>	<p>Lynne Adams / Candice Stephens</p> <p>Practice Development Manager</p>	Learning from complaints becomes a whole service task, with clear evidence for Ofsted as to how we feed learning from complaints back into the service	To be in place for Practice Week March 2022	
4	All managers to ensure that compliments are captured and shared with SCCI team for collation and reporting; to take responsibility for ensuring that a log of all compliments forwarded is kept up to date	All Heads of Service, Group Managers and Team Managers	Compliments are recognised and celebrated with the workforce and any learning from good practice is utilised.	On-going	

5	Children's Services Case Recording Standards to be a regular discussion item at service and team meetings, and case recording to be a standard item within the PDR for all case holding practitioners and managers.	All Heads of Service and Group Managers	Improved case recording should result in fewer complaints regarding improper or inaccurate recording of information.	To be in all PDRs for 2022/23	
6	Introduction of a more formal process for learning from local and national serious case reviews / rapid reviews to be shared consistently across the service	Kate Dempsey / Practice Development Manager	Practice development and learning is disseminated across the service to ensure positive changes occur as a result of serious incidents.	TBC	
7	Sufficient information about the purpose of S47 investigations, along with detail about the process and next steps to be shared with all relevant parents and children. To be evidenced as part of case recording and reviewed in supervision and quality assurance activity.	Sharon Richards/ Helen Harding/ Lynne Adams	Reduction in the number of complaints where families have not been provided sufficient information regarding a S47 investigation taking place	On-going	
8	Process to be developed for families to be notified in writing of any significant changes to service delivery, and the reasons why e.g. new social worker or any significant decisions made (for example, contact arrangements, change of care plan or end of intervention)	Sharon Richards / Helen Harding	Improved communication regarding significant changes should result in fewer complaints regarding poor communication	Process to be in place by March 2022	
9	All managers to be responsible for ensuring compliance with data protection regulation (GDPR) within key documents such as assessments and care plans before they are shared; to be checked through quality assurance processes	All Heads of Service, Group Managers and Team Managers	All information shared is relevant, proportionate and compliant with our duties under data protection regulation, therefore reducing the likelihood of complaints in this area.	On-going	
10	All staff to undertake annual refresh GDPR training, with this included as part of the PDR			To be in all PDRs for 2022/23	

