

# Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report

2019 - 2020



**Redcar & Cleveland  
Borough Council**

**Children & Families Directorate**

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## 1. Introduction

This Annual Complaints and Compliments Report for Children and Families Directorate covers the period April 2019 to March 2020. The purpose of this report is to:

- ✓ Provide information on the number and nature of complaints received; responsiveness and their outcomes;
- ✓ Provide information on the number of compliments received;
- ✓ Identify the learning and actions resulting from the issues raised; and
- ✓ Identify challenges, future plans and actions.

## 2. Complaint Description and Procedure

A complaint may be generally defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet' in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response. A complaint may be by written or verbal expression.

It is a legal requirement that Children's Social Care Services has a distinct complaints procedure. This statutory procedure provides the means for a child or a young person to make a complaint about the actions, decisions or apparent failings of a Local Authorities Children's social care provision. It also allows an appropriate person to act on the behalf of the child or young person concerned or to make a complaint in their own right.

A prime objective of the Children's Social Care Complaints Procedure is to ensure the Local Authority develops a listening and learning culture where learning is fed back to children and young people who use services. Complaints present an opportunity for the Local Authority to learn why people who are using our services find them unsatisfactory, and how we can improve the services we provide.

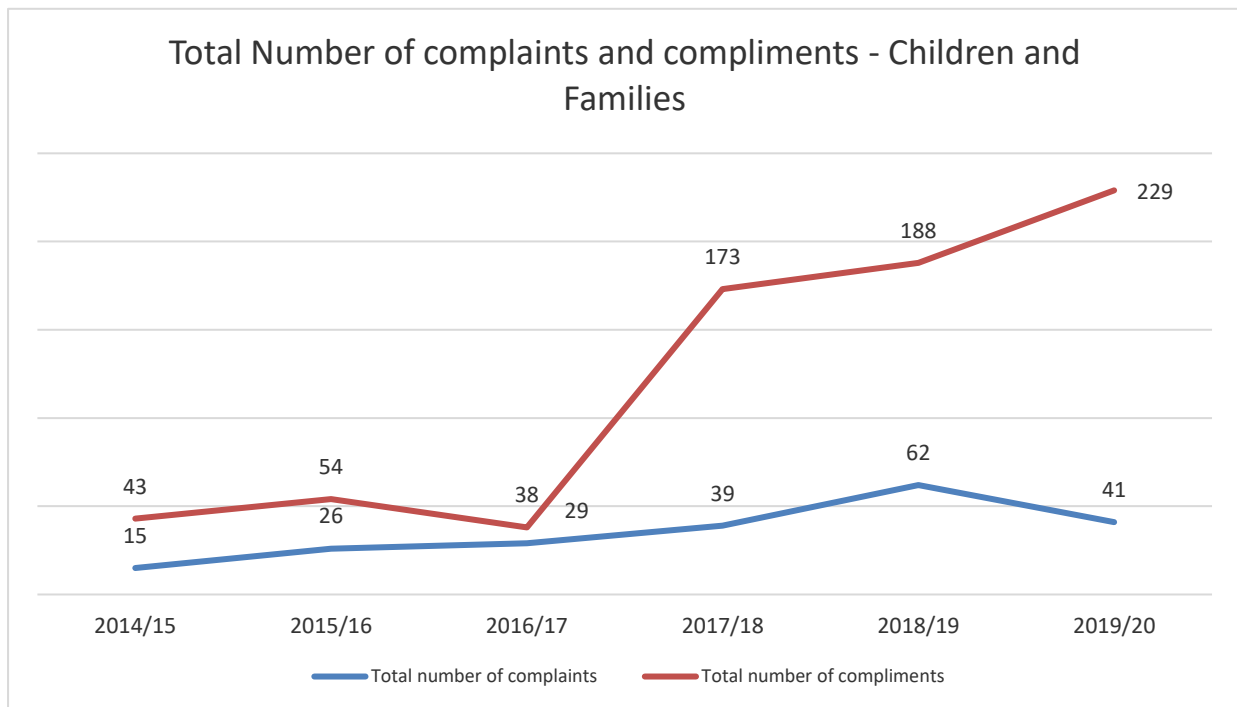
## 3. Stages of a Complaint

The Children and Families Division Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure sets out 3 stages for dealing with complaints, as below:

- Stage one - problem solving and local resolution
- Stage two - formal independent investigation
- Stage three - complaints review panel (consisting of a panel of three independent people, one of whom acts as Chair)

## 4. Representations made to the Local Authority

The graph below shows the total number of complaints and compliments received between 2014/15 and 2019/20.



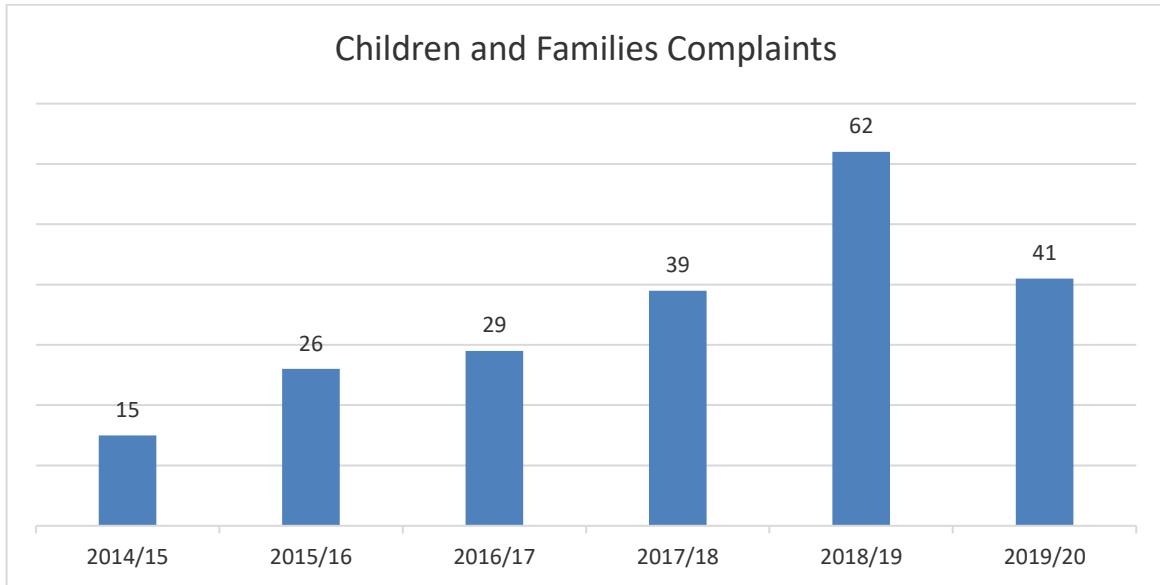
### Key headlines

- There were less complaints (41) in 2019/20 as compared to the previous year (62)
- More compliments were received in 2019/20 than in any of the previous 5 years
- In 2019/20 11 complaints originally submitted at stage 1 were withdrawn
- Of the remaining 30 stage 1 complaints, 21 received a stage 1 investigation and 9 were resolved informally
- 3 complaints reached Stage 2 with 1 request for Stage 3 panel
- 83% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to within the statutory timescales
- 66% of Stage 2 complaints were responded to within the statutory timescales

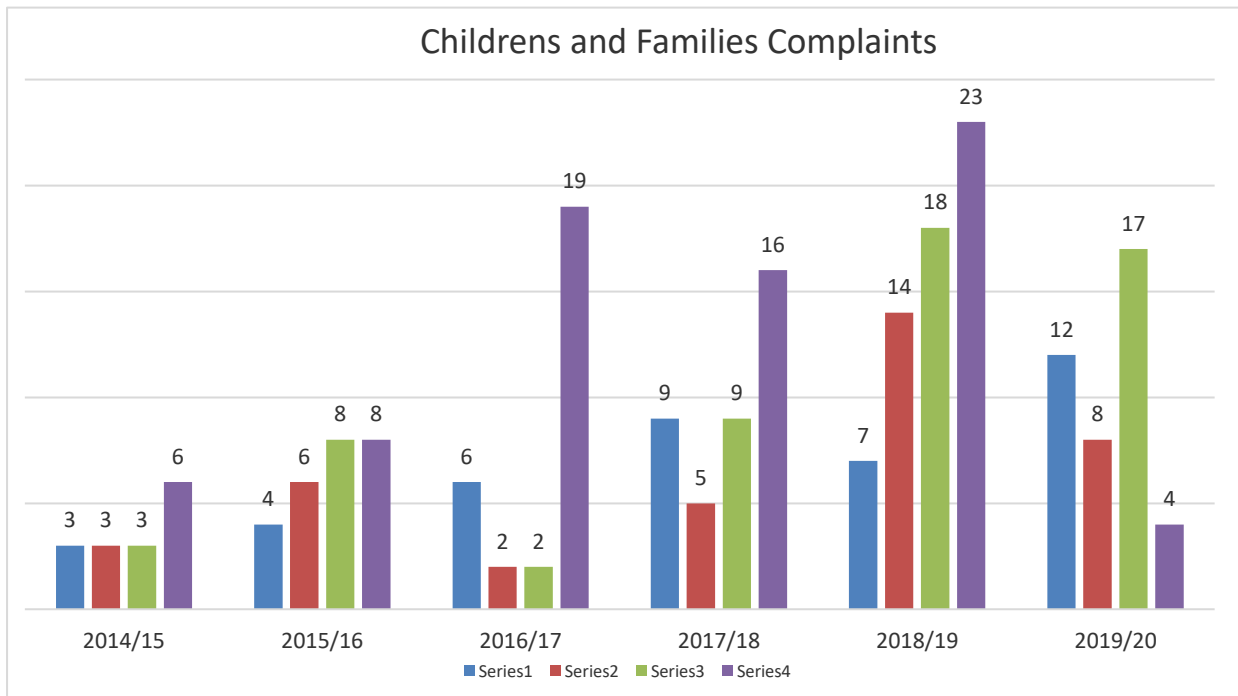
## 5. Analysis of Complaints

### Number of complaints received

The graph below shows a comparison of Children & Families complaints received since 2014/15.



A total of 41 complaints were received in 2019/20, compared to 62 complaints received in 2018/19. This is a decrease of 21 complaints.



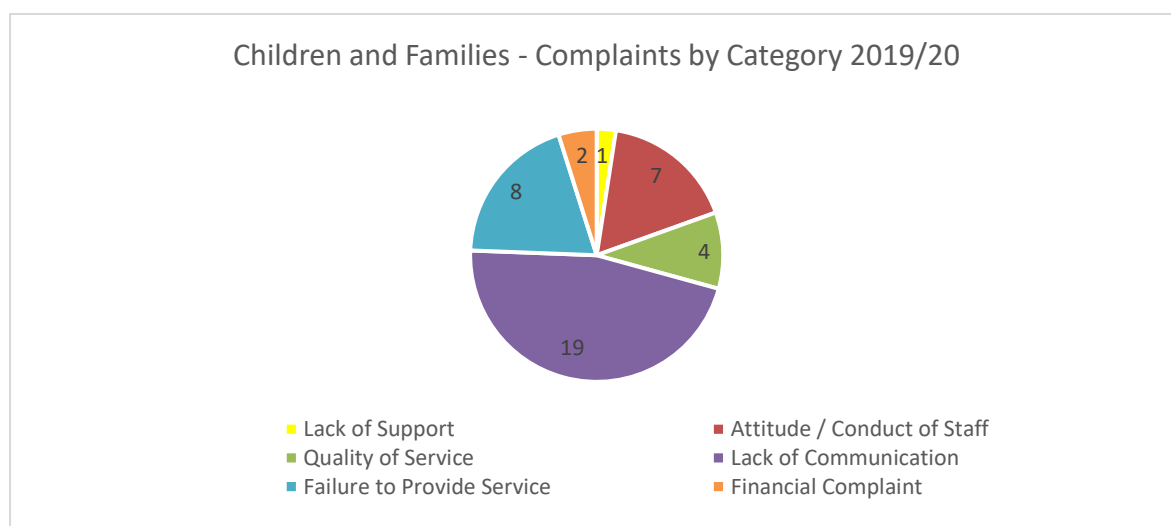
The quarterly review demonstrates a significant increase in complaints being received in quarter 4, of most years. In Q4 of 2019/20 the Covid-19 pandemic could have resulted in a decrease in complaints.

## Complaints by Service Area

The table below shows a breakdown of complaints received by Service Area.

Service area	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Ombudsman
Early Help & Partnerships (incl. Health Visiting and School Nursing)	2	0	0	0
Safeguarding & Children In Our Care	25	0	0	0
Education & Skills	13	3	1	1
Other	1	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

## Nature of complaints received



The highest volume of complaints received were for Safeguarding and Children In Our Care. Lack of Communication and Failure to Provide Service were the highest categories.

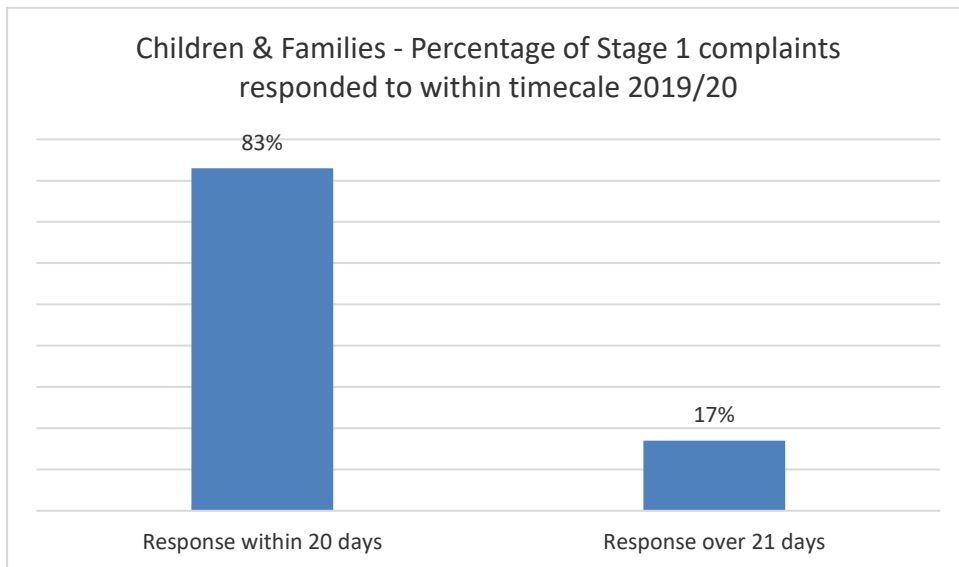
Where complaints concern the attitude and conduct of staff, these can be particularly difficult to resolve. At times complainants disagree with the action of the Local Authority and these complaints require careful professional judgement to determine if staff conduct has been inappropriate, or if the action has been necessary to protect the welfare of children.

Although it is widely acknowledged that it is important for children to have consistency with the professionals involved in their lives, there are times when a breakdown in the relationship with the parents necessitates a change of social worker, despite attempts to resolve matters.

The complaints procedure is not designed to deal with allegations of serious misconduct by staff. These situations are covered under the separate disciplinary procedures of the Council.

## Percentage of complaints responded to within timescale

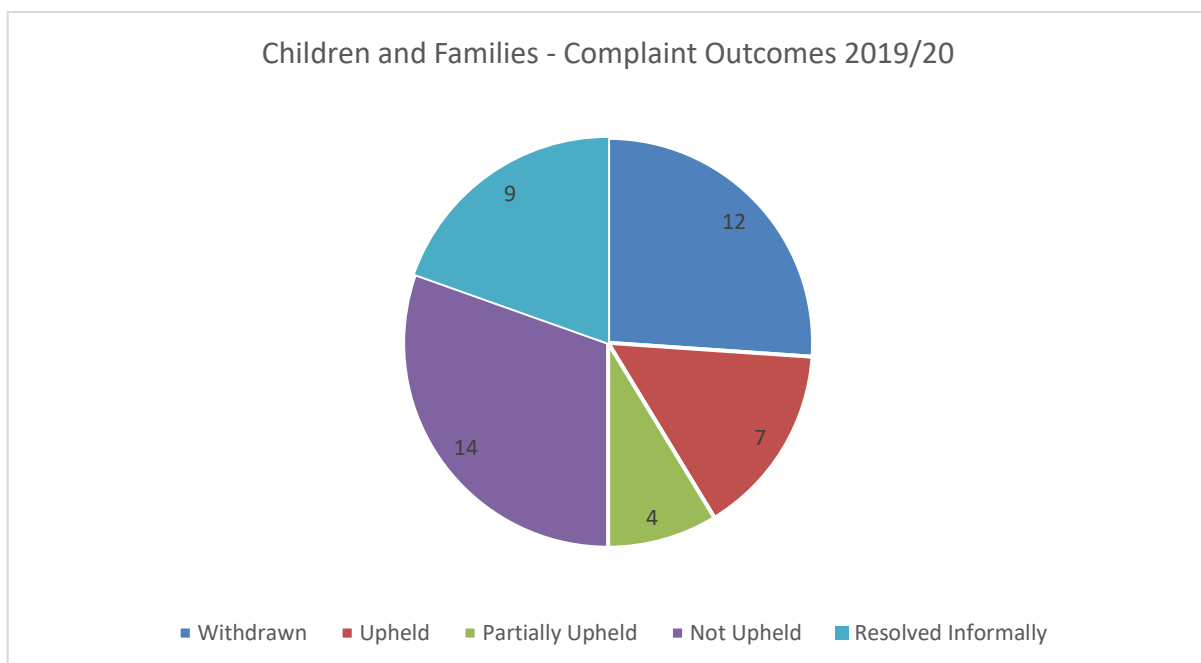
The graph below shows the response timescale of our Stage 1 complaints.



There has been an increase in the withdrawal of formal complaints due to teams being able to manage complaint responses informally and enabling early resolution. There continues to be complex caseloads and staffing pressures within the Directorates that impacts on the ability to keep to timescales across the Directorate, and this has unfortunately led to delays in responding to complaints. 17% of complaints were responded to outside of the 20 working day timescale.

## Outcome of complaints received

A total of 46 complaints were closed between 1 April 2019 and the 31 March 2020. This data includes 5 complaints that were received in 2018/19.





A low number of complaints were fully upheld but it is always important to listen to what we are being told about services for children & families, in order to put matters right at the earliest opportunity, and to learn and improve.

Organisational learning arising from complaints

We are constantly improving our approach to our learning from complaints.

It was recommended that the Council consider support and training for Stage One Investigating Officers in order that our responses to the complainant are specific and transparent, and our complaint findings clear. As a result, the Council is reviewing and updating the response templates for all complaint responses to provide consistent approaches. We have also had Local Government Ombudsman training provided across the Council which was open to Stage One Investigating Officers to attend. This training focused on complaint investigation and how to compile responses, which should result in better quality investigations and consistent approaches.

## **6. Complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman**

If a complainant, at the conclusion of the complaints process, remains dissatisfied with the response to the complaint they may refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).

During 2019/20 we were made aware of 1 complaint that was referred to the LGO. At the time of producing this report, we have not received the outcome of their investigation.

An ombudsman complaint made in 2018/19 was not upheld by the ombudsman in June 2019 when it concluded.

## **7. Supporting Young People**

Every child or young person is offered an advocate when they make, or say they wish to make, a complaint. The service contract for advocacy with National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) is available to support and assist children and young people to make complaints and support them through the complaints process.

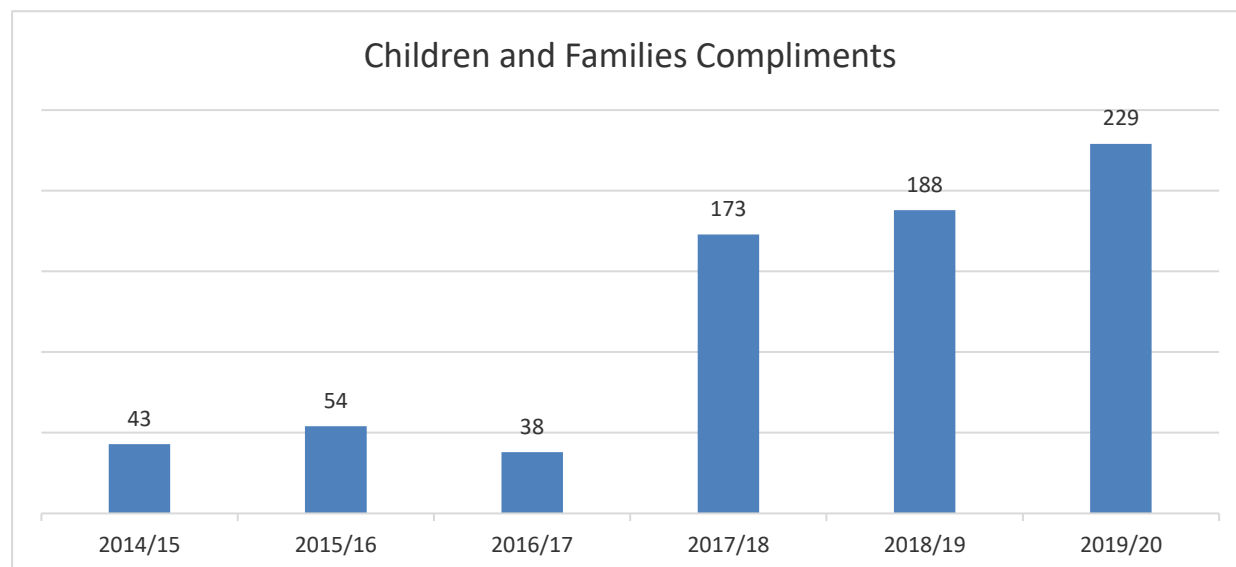
Aside from the advocacy process a complaint can be progressed through our Independent Reviewing Officers for children in our care and we make available complaint forms via our website and Personal Advisors as ways of young people making complaints or giving feedback to the service should they wish to do so.

In 2019/20 we received 1 complaint via an advocate service.



## 8. Analysis of Compliments

The graph below shows a comparison of compliments received since 2014/15.



We received 229 compliments in 2019/20 which is an increase on previous years. This can be attributed to a proactive approach and a focus on customer engagement.

The number of compliments received are detailed by service area in the table below:

Service Area	Total 2019/20
Social Work and Assessment Teams	71
Special Educational Needs & Disabilities	10
Children In Our Care	19
Early Help and Youth Services	46
Health Visiting and School Nursing	59
First Contact (MACH)	2
Education and Skills	9
QA and Practice Development	2
Review and Inspection Unit	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>229</b>

Compliments were relatively widespread across the Children and Families Directorate. The area receiving the highest volume was the Social Work and Assessment Teams, Health Visiting & School Nursing, followed by Early Help and Youth Services.

Examples of compliments received include-

**Looked After Children** - I would like to say XX is amazing, inspired me a lot and the only social worker I trusted and I love the fact that every time she would come to see me she would always have a smile on her face even when I'm having a bad day. She always knew how to make me smile, she didn't make it feel like I was in the system she made me feel like I was normal and made me feel like I belonged somewhere. XX also gave me hope and when people would think I was a waste of space she wouldn't she would treat me like I was someone special. She has really changed me and if there was any way I could thank her for what's she's done for me I would but there is nothing in this world that could make up for how happy she's made me, she's made me dream again.

**Health Visiting and School Nursing** – This is just a little thank you to say a big thank you for you all as a team. Since having XX I've been supported by many of you, XX at the start of my journey, XX with so much help breast feeding, XX for our reviews and countless at weigh ins and clinics. Each of you have helped and guided me and XX on our journey so far and sure you will all at some point in the future.

**First Contact** - Before XX become involved with our family we seemed to be getting passed around & getting nowhere with help of the services, it broke my heart but made a decision to phoned social services myself to ask with some help. When XX first came to see us they called to check timing and date was okay for us all. When it came to our home, XX made us feel at ease to talk to him. XX explained everything and answered our questions. XX helped us put strategies into place with our daughter and told us this is how it has to be if she likes it or not for her own sake keeping. XX would call us to see if things were going ok and would call round when appointment were made. Since XX first visited us things with XX have settled a lot and we as a family would like to say a Massive THANK YOU XX!!

The promotion and communication of compliments has already taken place within team meetings to encourage staff to record the compliments received.

## 9. Equal Opportunities Monitoring

Whilst efforts have been made to monitor the ethnic origin of the Authority's complainants; many have elected to not complete the diversity questionnaire.

Due to the limited data returned, a true and accurate reflection of the Authority's Complainants cannot be reported.

## 10. Repeat and Vexatious Complaints

It should be noted that a small number of complaints received in 2019/20 may be construed as either vexatious or repeated. This type of complaint impacts greatly on the time of both the investigating officer and departmental staff, and hinders the completion of other complaints.

The Local Government Ombudsman remains a source for advice in these situations.

## 11. Learning from Complaints

In order to demonstrate learning from complaints and the Directorates commitment to use the learning from complaints to improve standards and services, all recommendations arising from complaints have been recorded and shared in the Children and Families Practice Improvement meetings. As a result of complaints, some of our internal guidance documents and policies have been updated and staff have received additional training and in some cases management guidance.

Learning from complaints has identified some training needs and has led to a number of service improvements and changes to processes, some of which are listed below;

- Further training for staff to ensure the correct fitting of car seats and safe transportation of children in our care.
- Guidance for staff to ensure they are aware of good practice in returning calls to parents in a timely manner.
- Individual learning and development around communication skills when speaking to service users and parents and keeping parents involved as appropriate following a referral.
- Review of tracking and recording processes within the SEND team to ensure continuous improvement when recording the status of service users who require support to enable them to access education and training.
- Transport requests to support parents in their caring role to be discussed at the Children's SEND panel to ensure requests are given full consideration and there is a robust and consistent approach taken within the decision-making process.
- Short Break Statement revised to ensure it is up to date, robust and relevant.
- Review of timescales for providing paperwork for children in our care so as to ensure it is distributed in a timely manner as stated within our policy.

Weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual complaints/compliments reports have been reviewed and revised. This has ensured that the complaints received can be acted upon in a timely manner. Reports are discussed and reviewed in weekly management meetings and monthly performance meetings.

## 12. Actions to be Taken Forward

The following actions have been agreed to be progressed:

- To continue to emphasise to staff the importance of making service users aware of the complaints and compliments process, as this provides valuable feedback to ensure the Directorate focuses on the quality of service we deliver.
- To provide support and training for staff completing Stage 1 investigations and responses e.g. development of templates and attending relevant training.
- To constantly review the way in which we engage with service users and use their comments and concerns to feed into how we design and review the services we deliver.
- To promote advocacy services for the young people we care for and support.

## 13. Conclusions

The number of complaints received decreased in 2019/20 and this could be the impact of starting to resolve concerns and complaints at an early stage with service users. Strict monitoring and follow up of complaint investigations continues to be a priority to ensure complaints are responded to effectively and within the statutory timescales.

The number of compliments received has increased year on year. This is a positive reflection on service improvement in recent years. Learning from complaints can provide a valuable insight into areas for practice development which in turn can result in further compliments.

Children, young people and their families should continue to be routinely informed about the complaints procedure and encouraged to exercise their right to complain should they be dissatisfied with the service received. Equally they should be encouraged to submit any comments and compliments regarding service delivery where appropriate.