

Complaints and Compliments Annual Report

2018 - 2019



**Redcar & Cleveland
Borough Council**

Children & Families Directorate

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Complaint Description and Procedure	3
3. Stages of a Complaint	3
4. Representations made to the Local Authority	4
Key headlines	4
5. Analysis of Complaints	5
Complaints by Service Area	6
Nature of complaints received.....	6
Percentage of complaints responded to within timescale	7
Outcome of complaints received.....	7
6. Complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman	8
7. Supporting Young People.....	8
8. Analysis of Compliments.....	9
9. Equal Opportunities Monitoring	10
10. Repeat and Vexatious Complaints	10
11. Learning from Complaints.....	11
Organisational learning arising from complaints.....	11
12. Actions to be Taken Forward	11
13. Conclusions	12

1. Introduction

This Annual Complaints and Compliments Report for Children and Families Directorate covers the period April 2018 to March 2019. 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.

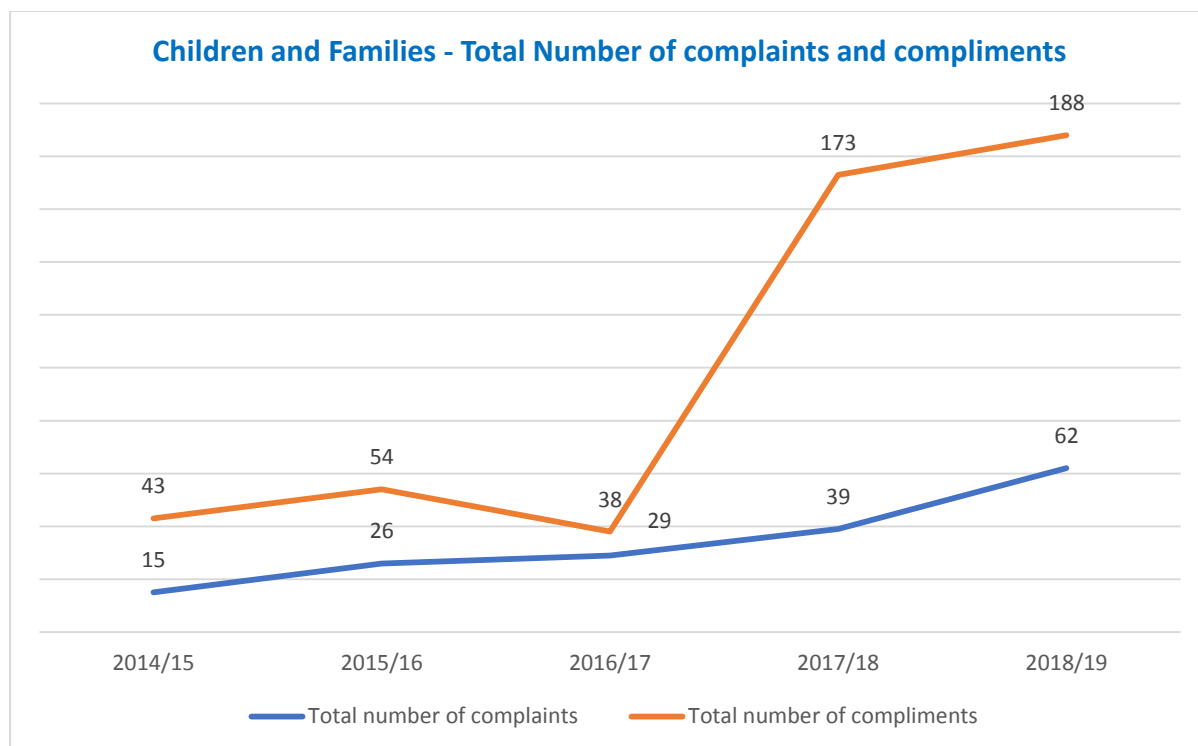
3. Stages of a Complaint

The Children and Families Directorate Complaints Procedure sets out three 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 2018/19.



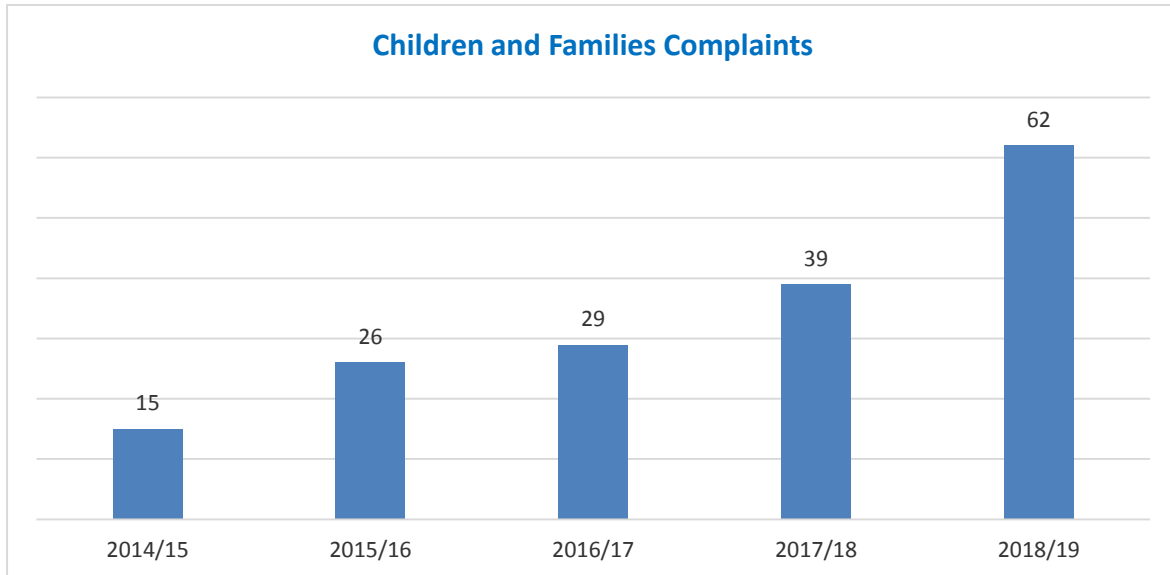
Key headlines

- The most complaints were received in 2018/19 (39 in 2017/18 compared to 62 in 2018/19)
- The most compliments were received in 2018/19 (173 in 2017/18 compared to 188 in 2018/19)
- In 2018/19 61 complaints were taken through the formal complaints procedure. 49 reached Stage One, 12 reached Stage Two with no requests for Stage 3 panel
- One complaint was investigated by the Local Government Ombudsman in 2018/19 and was upheld
- 20% of complaints were resolved informally, the complainant confirming their withdrawal their complaint at Stage One of the complaints process
- 52% of complaints were resolved within the statutory timescales at Stage One of the complaints process
- 28% of complaints were resolved outside of the statutory timescales at Stage One of the complaints process

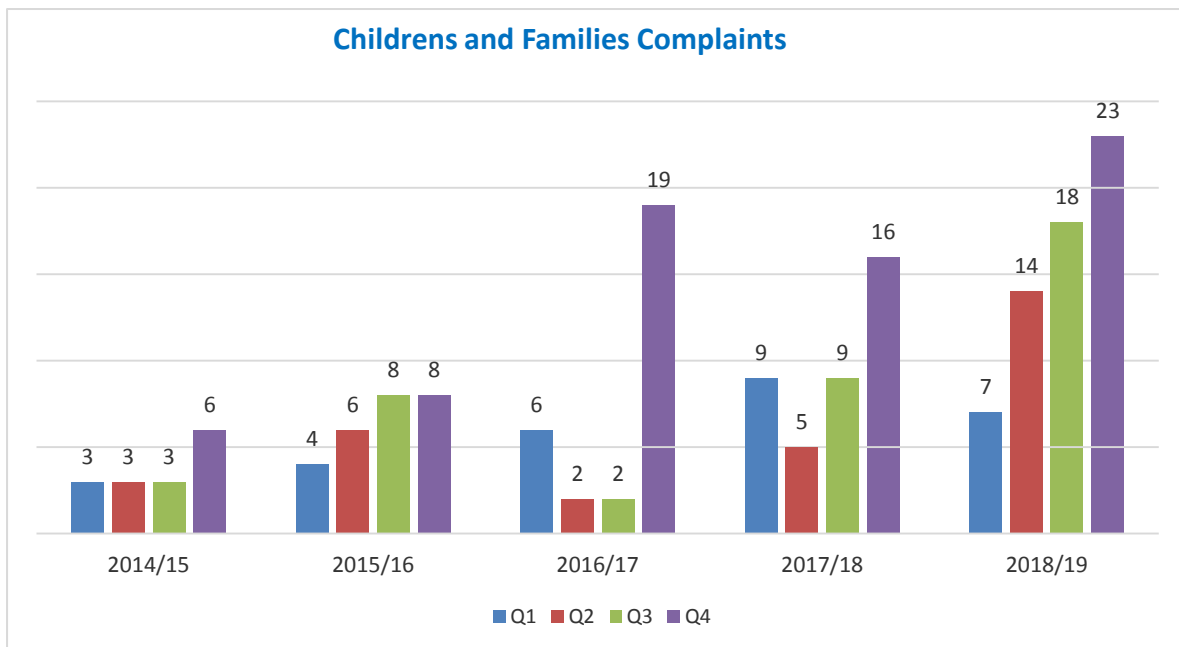
5. Analysis of Complaints

Number of complaints received

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



A total of 62 complaints were received in 2018/19, compared to 39 complaints received in 2017/18. This is an increase of 23 complaints.



The quarterly review demonstrates a significant increase in complaints being received in quarter 4, of most years.

Increased communication to service users, confirming how to make complaint, is thought to be a reason as to why complaints have increased significantly in 2018/19.

Previously some complaints received for the Children and Families Directorate were dealt with informally. The process has developed and complaints are now all formally recorded. This formal recording of complaints is also a factor to consider when reviewing the increase in complaints.

Complaints by Service Area

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

Early Help and Partnerships

- Stage 1 - 11
- Stage 2 - 3
- Stage 3 - 0
- Ombudsman - 0

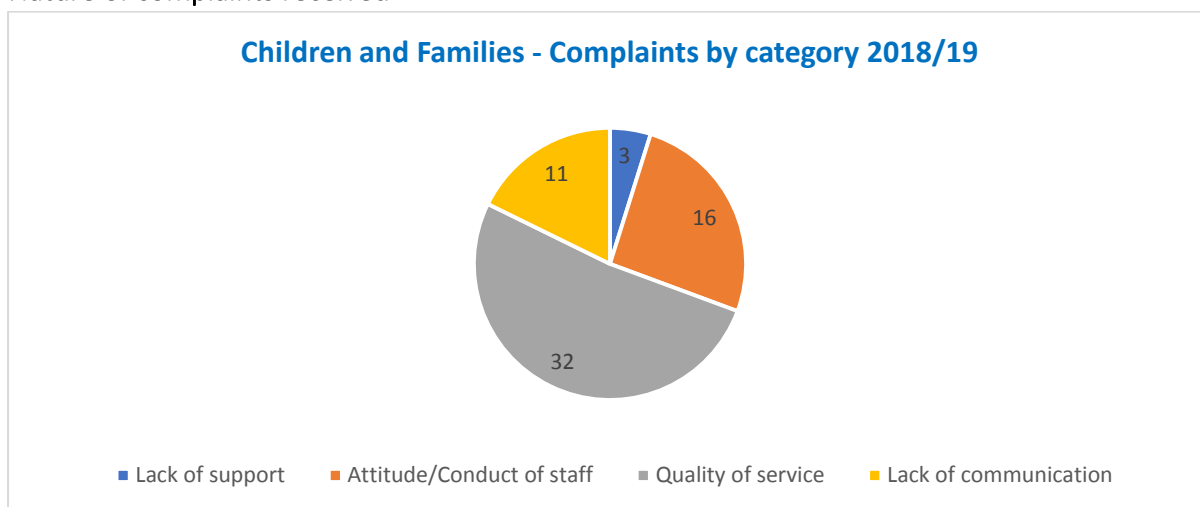
Safeguarding and Children in Our Care

- Stage 1 - 37
- Stage 2 - 9
- Stage 3 - 0
- Ombudsman - 0

Education and Skills

- Stage 1 - 0
- Stage 2 - 0
- Stage 3 - 0
- Ombudsman - 0

Nature of complaints received



The highest volume of complaints received were for Safeguarding and Children In Our Care. Quality of service was the highest category. This is reflective of the sensitivity of the work handled by these services and that they have the highest volume of direct contact and interactions with customers.

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.

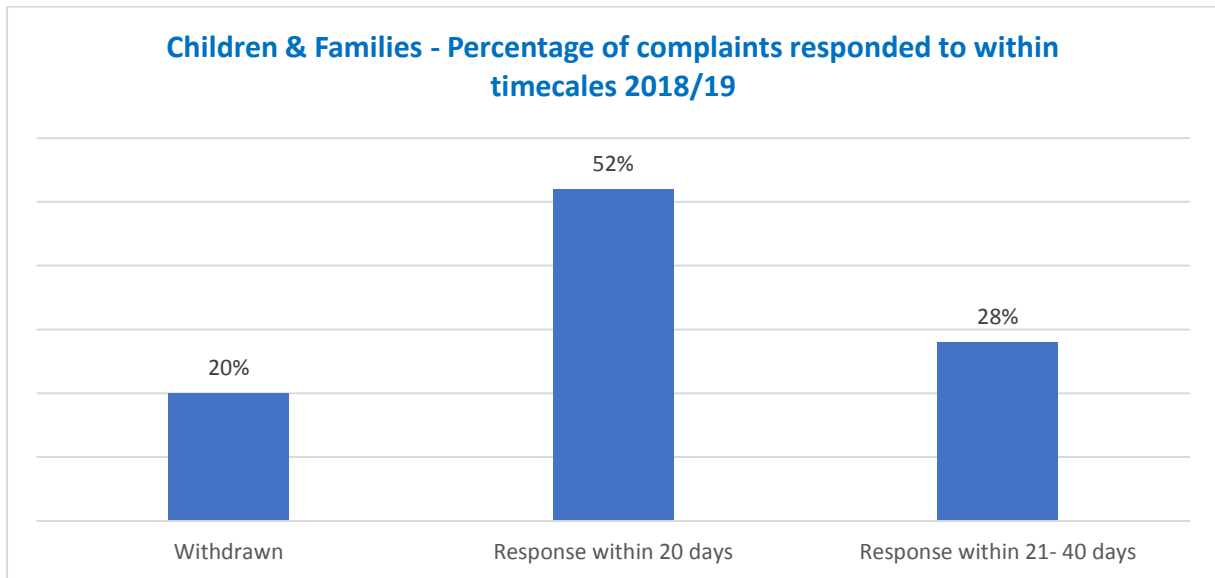
Although it is widely acknowledged that it is important for children to have consistency with the professionals involved in their lives, there are times when a breakdown in the relationship with the parents necessitates a change of social worker, despite attempts to resolve matters.

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.

Due to the nature of individual complaints it is sometimes difficult to categorise these into specific themes and the categorisation is therefore a broad categorisation. Whilst we have seen an increase in complaints, there is no particular pattern to the complaints received.

Percentage of complaints responded to within timescale

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



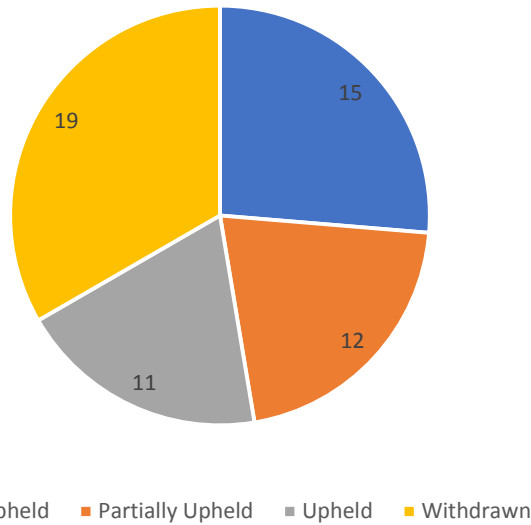
There has been a reduction in the compliance of timescales for responding to the complaints within ten working days, the average response timescale of a stage One complaint being within twenty working days.

The increase in volume of complaint investigations, complex caseloads and staffing pressures continue to impact on the ability to keep to timescales across the Directorate, and this has unfortunately led to delays in responding to complaints. 28% of complaints were responded to outside of the twenty-working day timescale.

Outcome of complaints received

A total of 57 complaints were closed between 1 April 2018 and the 31st March 2019. This data relates to all complaints that were investigated and closed within the performance year 2018/19, therefore some complaints may have been received and recorded outside of this period.

Children and Families - Complaint outcomes 2018/19



The fact that only eleven complaints were fully upheld, does not necessarily mean that complaints received are not reasonable or have no value. 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.

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 2018/19 we were made aware of one investigation by the LGO that resulted in an Upheld complaint against the Council.

The learning from this includes:

- A review of our responses to complainants, ensuring that when providing an apology, it is sincere, meaningful and unambiguous.
- A review of our communication with family members, when a child is in Foster Care.

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 web site and

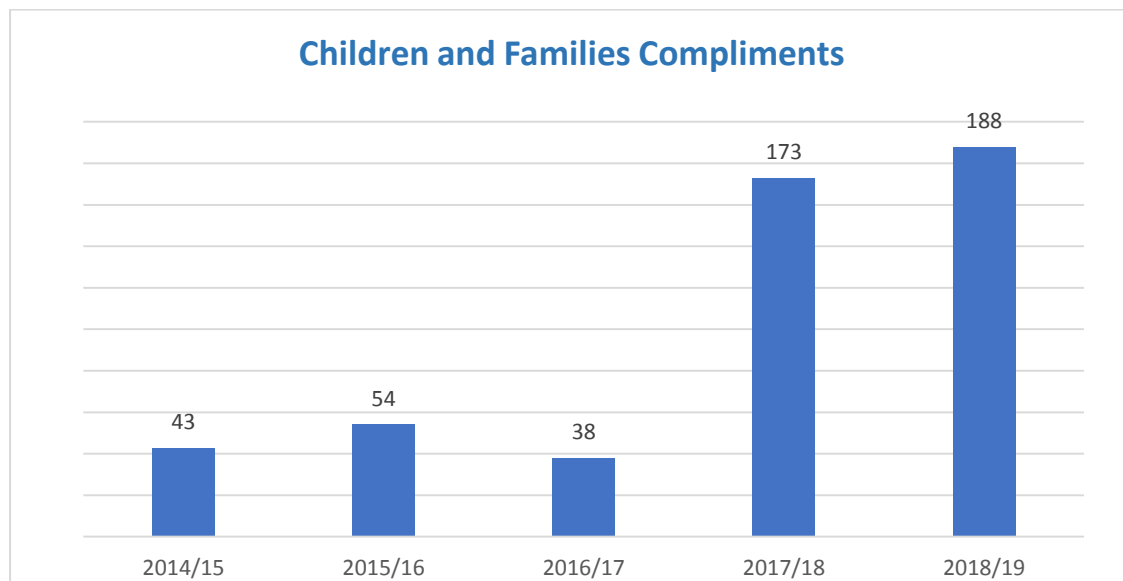
Personal Advisors as ways of young people making complaints or giving feedback to the service should they wish to do so.

We recognise that the current young person's complaints form requires promoting. We are in the process of promoting this and making it more accessible and easier to understand to facilitate the making of complaints by young people.

In 2018/19 we received two complaints via an advocate service.

8. Analysis of Compliments

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



We have received 188 compliments this year 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 list below:

- Social Work field teams - 53
- Special educational needs and disabilities - 20
- Review and inspection - 7
- Children in our care - 17
- Early help - 47
- Health visiting and school nursing - 24
- First contact - 6
- Youth services - 3
- Education - 11

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

Examples of compliments received include-

Fostering - I would like to express my absolute thanks and gratitude for the support given to myself and XX whilst XX was ill. XX went above and beyond her role in supporting us all during this very difficult and distressing time. XX came and supported us at the hospital on her days off, even offering to collect XX at the weekend so that he could visit us when XX was transferred to another hospital. XX is always supportive however I think on this occasion she should be commended for outstanding compassion and support.

First Contact - You gave me confidence to be who I am now; XX was brilliant social worker who looked after me and my daughter' 'Listen' 'Helped' 'She listened to me and my daughter; she helped both of us when we needed help. If it wasn't for XX me and my daughter would not be here.

SEND - Helped support XX to enjoy new environment and face their fears. Very helpful and supportive.

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 not completed 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 were received in 2018/19 which may be construed as either vexatious or repeated. This type of complaint impacts greatly on the time of both the Investigating Manager 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.

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.

Organisational learning arising from complaints

Following an Inspection of Children and Families Services in 2017, Ofsted found that there was a limited systematic evaluation and dissemination of wider learning from complaints. As a result, we have improved our approach to our learning from complaints.

It is acknowledged that investigating and responding to complaints can be quite complex. A review of all complaint responses received in 2018/19 has found that complaint responses were inconsistent and findings were not always clearly expressed to the complainant at Stage One of the complaints process.

It has been 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 currently reviewing the training available for all Stage One Investigating Officers. This training will have a specific focus on complaint investigation and how to compile responses, which should result in better quality investigations and consistent approaches.

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 continue to raise awareness of the need to forward all complaints and compliments relating to Children and Families Services to be recorded centrally for monitoring and reporting purposes.
- To provide support and training for staff completing Stage One investigations and responses.
- To promote the Young Persons Complaints Form and advocacy services for the young people we care for and support.
- To review the complaint and compliments form to increase the data capture against the ethnic origin of complainants.

13. Conclusions

It is recognised that using external investigators and independent persons does cause delay in some cases, albeit the use of external independents is deemed as good practice to ensure a fair and objective view of the more complex complaints.

The number of complaints received increased in 2018/19; and the time taken to deal with these continues to increase, due to the complexity of the concerns.

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.