

Solihull Council Annual Complaints Report 2018-19

Childrens Services



Annual Complaints & Representations Report

Solihull Children's Services

1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019

1 Introduction

This is the Annual Report of Solihull Council's Children's Services Complaints and Representations, covering the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.

1.1 Children's Social Work Services

Every Local Authority with a responsibility for Social Care Services is required to provide an Annual Report, outlining the workings of both their Adults and Children's complaints and representations procedures.

1.2 The procedure for dealing with children's Statutory complaints and representations is determined by the following legislation:

- The Children Act 1989, Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.
- The Children & Adoption Act 2002 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and
- the accompanying guidance 'Getting the Best from Complaints' (DfES July 2006)

1.3 The requirement contained in the Children Act 1989; Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006, is that every Local Authority with a responsibility for Children's Social Care Services is obliged to have in post a Complaints Manager, part of whose role is to provide an Annual Report into the workings of the complaints and representations procedures.

1.4 Legitimate complaints relating to Children's Services, that do not fall within the boundaries of the Statutory Social Care Complaints Process, are processed via the Council's Corporate Complaints Process.

1.5 Information on how to complain, comment or make a compliment about Solihull Council's Children's Services can be found on the Council's webpages at <http://www.solihull.gov.uk/About-the-Council/Complaints/childrenscomplaints>

1.6 Information specific to Children in Care can be found on the Internet at the following link; <https://getitsorted.me/2017/11/30/complaints/> Age specific, printable leaflets have also been designed and are available on this site which explain the complaints process, provide contact details for making a complaint and suggest other people who children can talk to about their concerns. This website and the leaflets also provide contact details for the Council's contracted advocacy service for young people (NYAS); should this be required.

2 The Statutory Complaints Procedure

2.1 The Statutory Complaints and Representations procedure serves four main purposes:

- a. To provide a way for a child/young person, or a person acting on their behalf, to give their views of the service they have received.
- b. To enable Council services to learn from complaints and compliments and to change, review or maintain its services accordingly.
- c. To ensure that complaints are properly recorded and acted upon and that where necessary, things that have gone wrong are put right promptly.
- d. To ensure that staff and service users understand their rights and responsibilities within the complaints process.

2.2 The Children's Services and Skills Directorate, in conjunction with the Customer Relations Manager, has the discretion to refuse to consider a complaint which was not raised within twelve months of the incident/event occurring. In these cases, the Customer Relations Manager should write to advise the complainant that their complaint cannot be considered, explaining the reasons why they have adopted this position. Each complaint is considered on its' own merits and will be accepted beyond the twelve month timescale, where it is considered that a fair and transparent response can still be provided. This approach is outlined on the Council's complaints webpage (see 1.5 above).

2.3 The Statutory Complaints Procedure, used for complaints raised by, or on behalf children receiving a service from Children's Social Work Services, has three stages:

- Stage One - Local resolution.
- Stage Two - An independent complaint investigation.
- Stage Three - An independently chaired Review Panel.

2.4 Stage One – Local Resolution

Stage 1 offers the relevant social work team, the first opportunity to consider the complaint and respond on behalf of the Directorate. In most cases and where possible, this involves the Team Manager/Assistant Team Manager making contact with the complainant in order to resolve complaints as early as possible. This gives us the opportunity to either apologise for any mistakes made and correct any resulting disadvantage (upholding the complaint); or establish that the work undertaken was correct and enables us to explain this to the complainant (not upholding the complaint). It is important that the response is informative, accurate, fair, timely and as helpful as it can be.

There is an initial statutory 10 working day timescale for responding to the complaint, with a possible extension to 20 working days with the agreement of the complainant, where complaints are complex or if time is needed to appoint an advocate.

2.5 Stage Two – Investigation

Where a complainant is unhappy with the outcome of their Stage 1 complaint, they can request consideration of their complaints at Stage 2. All Stage 2 investigations are carried out by an Independent Investigating Officer, alongside an Independent Person, as required by the regulations. The Independent Investigating Officer and Independent Person, compile a report with findings, conclusions and recommendations. A relevant Head of Service then adjudicates the reports and provides a formal response to the complainant, along with an action plan to implement any recommendations or changes arising from the learning from the complaint.

The timescale for a Stage 2 investigation is 25 working days; however this can be extended to 65 working days, with the agreement of the complainant, if there is a significant amount of detail or there are complex issues to investigate.

2.6 Stage Three – Review Panel

Where a complainant remains unhappy with the outcome of the Stage 2 investigation, they can request a Stage 3 Review Panel. The Panel is made up of three independent people and is administered by the Council's Democratic Services Team. The timescale for setting up the Panel is 30 working days. The Panel's remit is to review the investigation; however it cannot re-investigate a complaint. The Panel provides their findings in writing to the complainant within 5 working days; the Directorate then considers the Panel's findings and produces the Local Authority's response to the Panel's findings, which is sent to the complainant within 15 working days.

3 Complaints about other areas of Children's Services

3.1 The procedure for dealing with complaints concerning other areas of Children's Services or complaints from adults regarding Children's Social Work Services, is the Corporate Complaints Procedure, which is an internally determined procedure.

3.2 The Corporate Complaints Procedure

This procedure is used to process complaints about issues such as:

- a service provided directly to family members (other than the child) involved with Children's Social Work Services
- services provided by the Council to foster carers
- complaints about services provided by the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Service
- complaints concerning any other aspect of Children's Services (unless an appeals process is already in place for this purpose).

3.2.1 The Corporate Complaints Procedure has two stages:

3.2.2 Stage One

This stage is similar to Stage 1 of the Statutory Complaints Procedure and offers the relevant Team Manager, the first opportunity for considering the complaint and responding on behalf of the Directorate. It is good practice, where appropriate, for the Team Manager to make contact with the complainant in order to resolve complaints as early as possible. Complaints at this stage should be responded to within 20 days from the date that the detail of the complaint is agreed with the Performance and Complaints Team. This timeframe can be extended to 30 working days; however this should only be in exceptional circumstances and with the agreement of the complainant.

3.2.3 Stage Two

If the customer is not satisfied that the investigator's response has answered all of the points raised/they are not happy with the resolution, then they can request to proceed to Stage 2 of the procedure.

A review of the Stage 1 complaint response at Stage 2 should be co-ordinated by or on behalf of the Head of Service and a final response sent to the complainant. This should be completed within 20 working days (where the Head of Service is involved in the complaint at Stage 1, another senior member of staff should review the complaint at Stage 2).

4 The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

If a complainant remains unhappy after exhausting all stages of a complaints process, they can take their complaint to the LGSCO. A complainant can access the LGSCO at any point during the complaint process; however the LGSCO normally allows the Local Authority the opportunity to process a complaint through every stage of the appropriate complaints procedure, before investigating it themselves. Complaints referred back to a Local Authority by the LGSCO to process are classed as 'premature' complaints.

5 The Performance and Complaints Team

In Solihull during 2018-19, the responsibility for the management and day-to-day administration of complaints for Children's Services, lay with the Performance and Complaints Team.

The Performance and Complaints Team is part of the Business Intelligence and Improvement Division within the Resources Directorate. The Performance and Complaints Team strive to ensure that:

- they achieve respectful dialogue with all complainants and work with investigating professionals to provide the best response in the most efficient timescales
- complaints are acknowledged within 3 working days

- complaints are responded to within the timescales determined by the appropriate complaints procedure, by working with the service area to achieve this
- complaints and compliments are accurately recorded, which leads to accurate performance data being produced
- when things have gone wrong, they are put right as quickly as possible
- both complainants and staff understand the relevant complaints procedure, how it relates to them and their rights and responsibilities within it
- any learning from complaints is acknowledged and that they work with the appropriate service area to ensure that the necessary changes are made to improve services provided
- internal or professional mediation is instigated, where appropriate
- high quality and timely performance reporting is provided to management teams, to ensure that they are aware of issues arising and can work with the Performance and Complaints Team and their staff, to resolve these and maintain a high quality service to service users.

6 How we received complaints for Solihull Children's Services

6.1 The information provided on Solihull Council's Internet pages enables service users to make a complaint in differing ways, by e-mail, letter, telephone and leaflet and in 2018/19 the Performance and Complaints Team was contacted via all of these methods. Predictably, in a world of increasing technology, email is a very popular, convenient and efficient way for people to raise complaints and accounts for 45% of all initial contacts made to the Performance and Complaints Team. The number of initial contacts made by email had increased year on year for the past four years; however this has decreased slightly in 2018/19 (see *fig 1* below), in favour of an increase in telephone contact.

All complainants with an email address, receive both acknowledgements and responses for their complaints, via the Council's secure e-mail system, unless otherwise requested. This is a very cost effective and efficient way for service users to communicate with the Council and the Council with them.

6.2 Information for children in and on the edge of care is provided on the Children in Care webpage (see 1.6 above), giving children and young people the information they need to be able to make a complaint. A direct link is also provided to the Complaints Team e-mail box at candacomplaints@solihull.gov.uk

6.3 Further information is provided on the Children in Care webpage, so that should they wish, children and young people can contact an advocate directly for help to raise any concerns. This can be found at the following link:
<https://getitsorted.me/2018/02/15/useful-links-contacts/>

6.4 Complaints leaflets specifically aimed at both younger and older children are now available on the Council's Internet page at <http://www.solihull.gov.uk/About-the-Council/Complaints/childrenscomplaints> as well as on the webpage for Looked After Children at <https://getitsorted.me/2017/11/30/complaints/>; and are in addition to the leaflet which is more appropriate for adults making their own complaints about Children's Services, or complaints on behalf of their children. These leaflets can then be printed and completed and sent in to the Performance & Complaints Team by complainants.

- 6.5 The Performance and Complaints Team will also, where requested, assist children and young people to acquire an advocate who will assist with their complaint, by contacting the advocacy service commissioned by Solihull (NYAS) directly, requesting them to make contact with the complainant.
- 6.6 Postcard style leaflets are available to social work staff who have contact with Children in Care so that these can be given to these children, signposting them to information about making a complaint or raising a compliment.
- 6.7 The Performance and Complaints Team correspond directly with all complainants / their advocates, whether their complaints are statutory or corporate, in order to properly understand their complaints and hence make it easier for both complainants and investigating managers.
- 6.8 Figure 1 (below) shows the ways that Solihull Children’s Services have received initial contacts about complaints since 2014/15.

Method	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Email	37.50%	42%	48%	55%	45%
Telephone	29%	30%	36%	22%	38%
Letter	28.50%	18%	6%	7%	7%
Leaflet	5%	10%	10%	11%	3%
Web Form	-	-	-	4%	7%

Fig 1

- 6.9 The percentage of initial contacts received by e-mail has gradually increased year on year which, in an age of increasing technology where more and more people are using computers, is to be expected. However, in 2018/19 there was a decrease in the number of contact via email and an increase in the number of Initial contacts received by telephone. Telephone contact is still the second most popular method used by people to communicate their concerns, behind email contact.

Contact by letter decreased quite dramatically between 2014/15 and 2016/17 (28.5% to 6%) and has remained consistent in 2017/18 and 2018/19 (7%) whilst the percentage of contacts using the complaints leaflet has decreased in 2018/19 (shown in *fig 2* below) in favour of the on-line web form.

The leaflet used for making a Children’s Social Work complaint is readily available in an on-line format (see 6.4 above). The leaflet guides the complainant through the type of information required to raise their concerns.

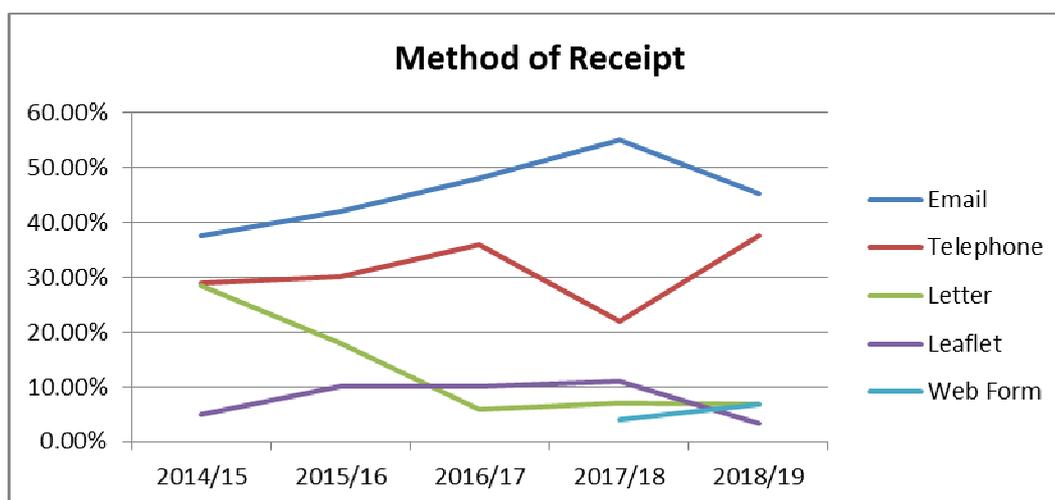


Fig 2

6.10 In 2018/19, the Performance and Complaints Team continued to invest important time speaking directly to prospective complainants, regardless of how the initial contact was made. This is always an important opportunity to build a trusting relationship with the complainant/service user, giving them a point of contact throughout the duration of their complaint. This is particularly important when dealing with more involved complaints, as it enables the Performance and Complaints Team to fully understand the concerns being raised and then to define them appropriately, which in turn helps investigating managers to provide clearer, more detailed responses to complainants, assisting their understanding of the outcomes reached.

The benefit of such responses is further endorsed by the fact that all but four new Statutory complaints received since 1st October 2013, have been resolved at Stage 1, without the need to progress to an independent investigation. The last Stage 2 investigation dates back to March 2015.

6.11 Talking to complainants also ensures that where it is appropriate and possible, that concerns are resolved, without the need to progress to the formal complaints process. This can prove to be a quicker and more beneficial means of resolution for all concerned. The Performance and Complaints Team have, in 2018/19, handled 44 such "duty" cases for Children's Services.

7 Who made complaints?

7.1 65 of the 67 new complaints made during 2018/19 were received from adults, making complaints either on behalf of their children or in relation to a service impacting them directly. Of the other 2 complaints; one was from a professional advocate acting on behalf of a child and 1 was made by the young person themselves, who contacted the Council directly.

7.2 64% of new complaints were received from females and 27% from males, with 9% of complaints being made jointly by parents (compared to 62%, 33% and 5% respectively in 2017/18).

- 7.3 The complaint received directly from a young person in 2018/19 was from a looked after young person.

In 2018/19, one (6%) of the 17 new Statutory complaints raised were in relation to services to Looked After Children. This is a decrease when compared with 19% of complaints in 2017/18 (4 out of 21).

- 7.4 The report by Ofsted following their last inspection of Solihull Children's Services stated that "*Children know how to complain. When they do, their complaints are taken seriously.*"
- 7.5 The main area of complaint raised by or on behalf of Looked after Children, was "Unsatisfactory Communication".

Unsatisfactory Communication is one of the main issues being raised across all complaints. Within the reporting process to senior management these issues are broken down further; enabling the Performance and Complaints Team to highlight any specific concerns to managers in Children's Services.

8. A summary of Children's Social Work complaints recorded for the 2018/19 financial year

8.1 Unresolved complaints carried forward from 2017/18

- 8.1.1 There were 8 live complaints under investigation and carried forward from 2017/18 and these were at the following stages: 6 at Stage 1 and 2 at Stage 2.
- 8.1.2 All of the complaints carried forward at Stage 1 were resolved at Stage 1 during 2018/19. One corporate complaint originally closed in 2017/18 was reopened at Stage 2 during 2018/19 and resolved.
- 8.1.3 The 2 complaints brought forward at Stage 2 were corporate complaints that were resolved during Quarter 1.

8.2 New complaints received for Children's Social Work Services during 2018/19

- 8.2.1 During the 2018/19 financial year, Solihull Council's Children's Social Work Services received 67 new complaints. 17 were Statutory complaints (those from children and young people or their representatives) and 57 were Corporate complaints which are usually complaints made by adults, in relation to the impact that a service provided by Children's Social Work Services has had upon them directly, rather than their child. Some service users make complaints spanning both the Corporate and Statutory processes The number of new complaints for 2018/19 (67) is an increase of 8 new complaints compared to the 59 received in 2017/18.
- 8.2.2 All of the new Statutory complaints received in 2018/19 were resolved at Stage 1.
- 8.2.3 7 Stage 1, Corporate complaints progressed to Stage 2 during 2018/19 and all were responded to and closed in the year.

8.2.4 All but 4 of the new Statutory complaints received since 1st October 2013 have been resolved either through mediation, via investigation at Stage 1 of the complaints process, or through a combination of both. Most complainants therefore appear to have been satisfied with the responses that they have received at Stage 1, choosing not to request progression of their complaint to the next stage.

8.3 Children’s Social Work complaints carried forward into 2019/20

8.3.1 At the end of the 2018/19 financial year, the number of live complaints carried forward to 2019/20 remained low, at 5. This is three more than the previous year. All of these had been received at the very end of the 2018/19 financial year and hence the timescales for investigation would mean they were expected to carry forward.

8.3.2 Of the 5 carried forward to 2019/20, one was at Stage 1 of the statutory process, three were Stage 1 of the corporate process and 1 covered both processes.

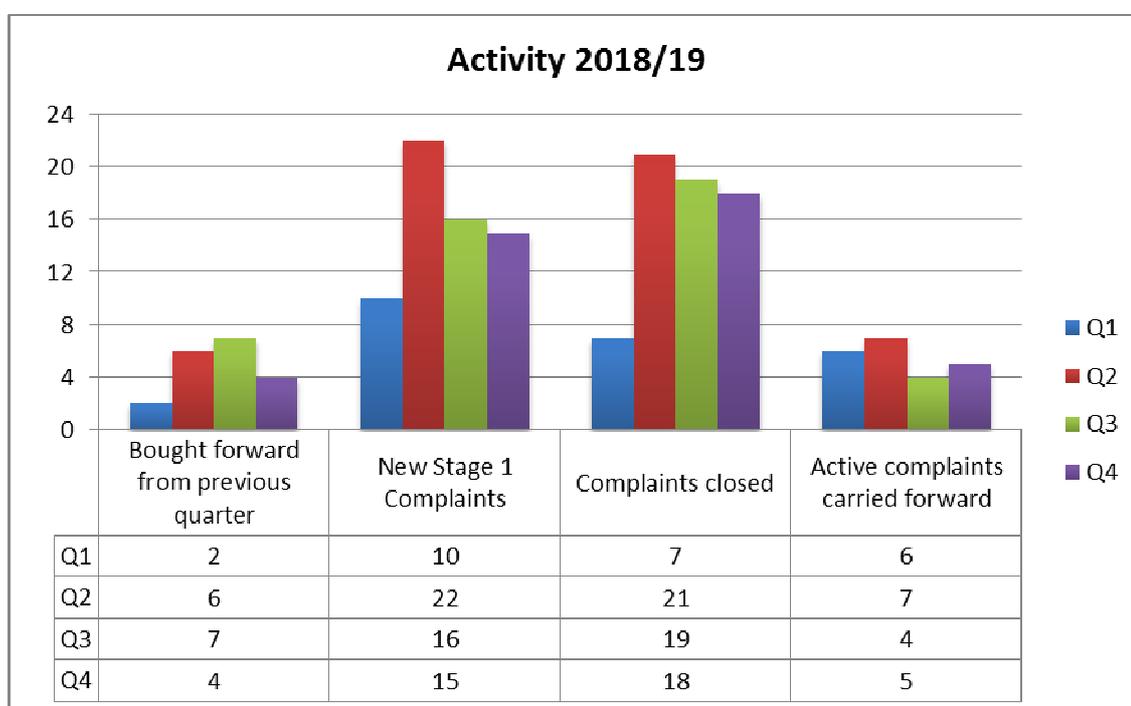


Fig 3

8.3.3 Between quarter 2 and quarter 3 and quarter 3 and quarter 4, the number of new complaints received for Children’s Social Work Services decreased and the number of complaints carried forward at the end of each quarter has remained fairly consistent.

9. Timescales for responding to complaints in Children’s Social Work Services

In 2018/19 the Performance and Complaints Team have continued to provide accurate data concerning response timescales for complaints processed under both the Statutory and Corporate complaints processes to senior management. Timescales for each process are described below.

9.1 Statutory Complaint timescales

The timescale for processing Stage 1 complaints within the Children's Statutory Complaints Process is 10 working days, (extended to 20 working days for complex cases and as agreed with the complainant).

- 9.1.1 Children's Social Work Services aim to respond to as many Stage 1 Statutory complaints within the initial 10 day timescale, as possible; whilst at the same time ensuring an appropriate level of detail and accuracy, so that the complaint can be resolved as quickly as possible; this being positive for all concerned.

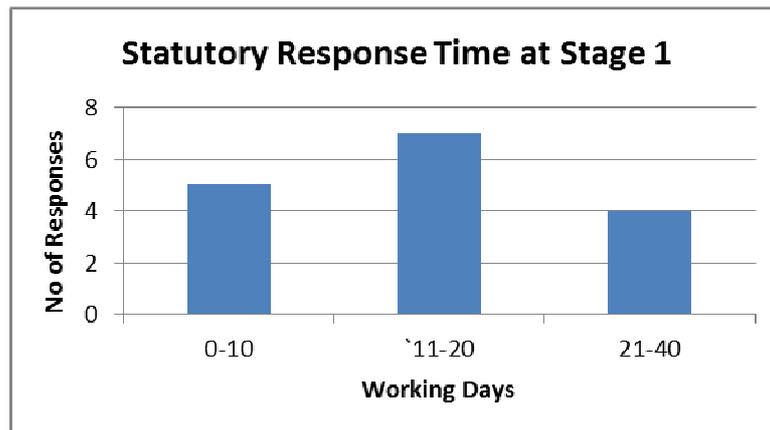


Fig 4

- 9.1.2 Figure 4 above shows the timescale in which complaints were responded to at Stage 1 of the Statutory process in 2018/19. 5/17 (29%) of complaints were responded to within 10 days (the initial response timescale), compared to 23% in 2017/18.
- 9.1.3 A further 7 (44%) were responded to within 11 – 20 days, giving an overall total of 12 (70%) complaints being responded to within 20 days (the extended timescale), compared to 38% and 61.5% respectively in 2017/18.
- 9.1.4 Four (25%) of Stage 1 Statutory complaints, were resolved between 21 and 40 days and none took longer than 40 days to respond to. This is an improvement when compared with 2017/18, when 3% of Statutory complaints took longer than 40 days to respond to.
- 9.1.5 The Performance and Complaints Team will continue in 2019/20, to work with investigating managers in Children's Social Work Services, to try and reduce the numbers of Stage 1 Statutory complaints that take more than 20 days to respond to, with an additional aim to respond to more complaints within the initial 10 working day timescale.
- 9.1.6 The number of Stage 1 Statutory complaints responded to within 20 working days has increased in 2018/19, whilst the level of detail included in Stage 1 responses has been maintained. This reassures complainants that their complaints have been properly looked into and addressed.

9.1.7 Despite four of the complaint responses being outside of the 20 working day timescale, the responses appear to be resolving complaints at a local level, without complainants feeling the need to progress their complaint to the LGSCO (see 9.2.4 below). This can only be positive for both the complainant and the Local Authority.

9.2 Corporate complaint timescales

The timescale for processing complaints at Stage 1 within Solihull Council's Corporate Complaint Process is 20 working days (extended to 30 working days for complex cases) and 20 working days at Stage 2; where an appropriate senior officer, usually the Head of Service, responds to the escalation of the complaint.

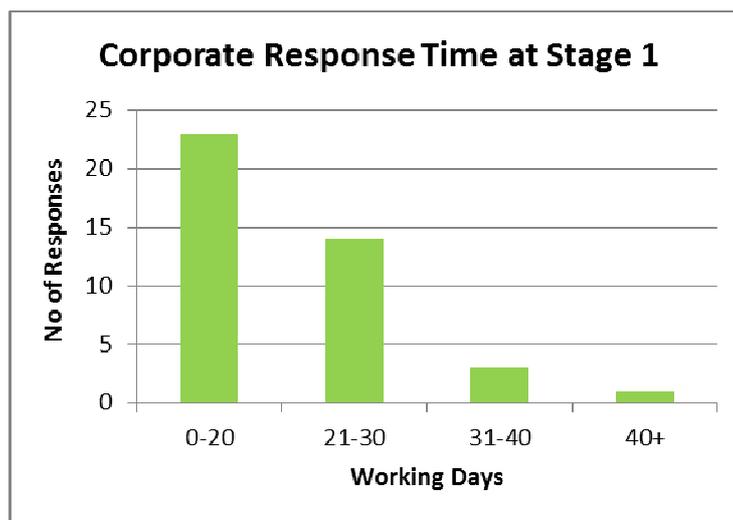


Fig 5

9.2.1 In 2018/19, 41 Corporate complaints were investigated and responded to by Solihull Children's Social Work Services. Figure 5 above, shows that 23 (56%) Stage 1 complaints were responded to within 20 days, compared to 52% in 2017/18, whilst 14 (34%) took 21 – 30 days, meaning that 37/41 (90%) complaints were resolved within the extended 30 working day timescale.

9.2.2 Only four (10%) Stage 1 Corporate complaints took longer than the 30 working day timescale to respond to, which is the same number as in 2017/18. When complaint responses exceed the timescale, this is often because the complaint is detailed and we need to ensure the response is as thorough as possible. The Complaints Team will liaise with the complainant to agree this and keep them fully informed.

9.2.3 Only 7 (17%) of Stage 1 Corporate complaints progressed to Stage 2 during 2018/19, compared to 16% in 2017/18. 5 of the Stage 2 complaints received were responded to within the maximum 20 working days allowed at Stage 2 compared to 2 in 2017/18; 2 complaints were responded to within 21-30 days and no complaints exceeded 30 working days.. This is an indication that response times at Stage 2 of the Corporate procedure have improved over the past few years.

9.2.4 Only 4 complaints were received from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman in relation to Children's Social Work Services in 2018/19 and the LGSCO declined to investigate all of them. As outlined at 9.1.6 above, the level of detail which continues to be included in complaint responses from investigating managers is a significant contributor to this. This can sometimes have a slight

impact on response times, but does appear to reassure the complainant that their complaints have been properly investigated and responded to and resolves their complaint without the need to refer to the LGSCO. The Performance & Complaints Team keep lines of communication open with all complainants regarding the response times for their complaint.

10 Trend Data for Children’s Social Work complaints

10.1 The 67 new complaints received in 2018/19, represent a 13% increase when compared to the 59 complaints received in 2017/18 (this was a decrease of 2% from 2016/17 when there were 60 new complaints).

During 2018/19 Children’s Social Work Services provided a service to 3154 service users and therefore complaints are received from only 2.1% of these people/ their families.

10.2 Detailed in the chart below (*Figure 6*) is a comparison of the number of complaints received per quarter between 2014/15 and 2018/19.

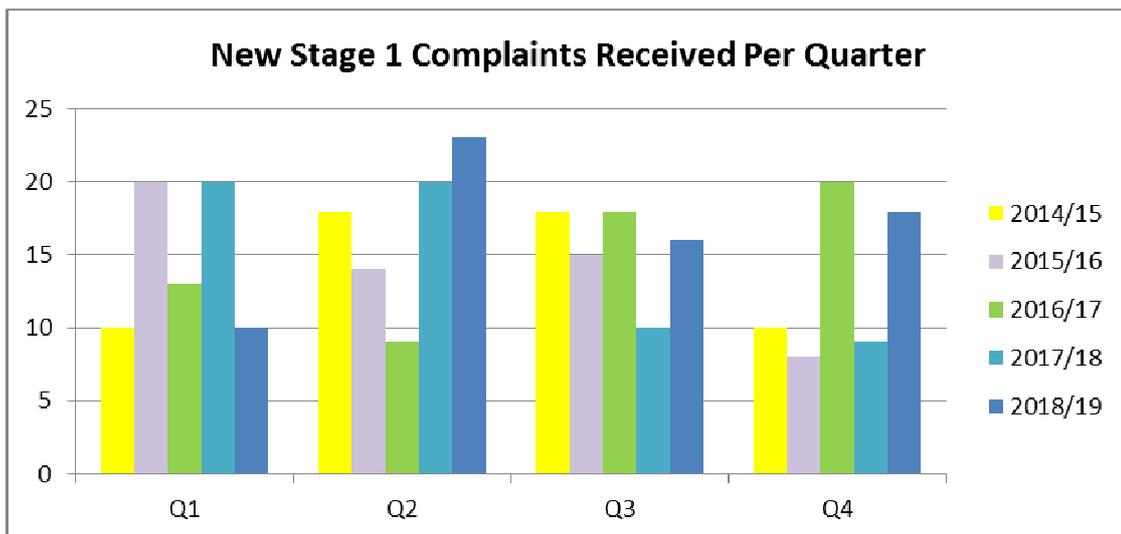


Fig 6

10.3 Figure 6 above, shows that a higher number of complaints in 2018/19, were received in quarters 2, 3 and 4 (July 2018 to March 2019); with a smaller number of complaints received in Quarter 1, compared to recent years.

10.4 Further research did not uncover any particular trend for the higher level of complaints received in the latter part of the year for 2018/19. These complaints were spread across teams and no trend or particular reason could be found.

10.5 In 2018/19, the number of new complaints received in Quarter 1 (April to June) was low compared to recent years; however there was a significant increase in quarter 2 and complaints decreased in quarters 3 and 4; however they were at the higher end, compared to other years.

10.6 Having mapped the quarterly trends for receiving new complaints over 5 years, it demonstrates the difficulty of pre-empting numbers of new complaints and hence planning workload.

11. An Overview of Complaints and Issues for Children’s Social Work Services by Team

11.1 Figure 7 below, shows a breakdown of the numbers of new complaints (both Statutory and Corporate) received during 2018/19, along with the number of corresponding issues for each of Solihull’s Children’s Social Work teams.

New Stage 1 Complaints & Issues Per Team	Total Issues	Total Statutory Complaints	Total Corporate Complaints
Child Asylum & 16+ Team	9	1	1
Child Protection & Court Team	41	2	6
Child Protection Unit	6	-	3
Children In Need Team	29	1	8
Children's Assessment Team	60	4	8
Children's Disability Team	76	8	10
Emergency Duty Team	2	1	1
ENGAGE	12	-	3
Finance Admin	1	-	1
Fostering Team	2	-	1
Looked After Children	36	-	10
MASH Team	11	-	5
Grand Total	285	17	57

Fig 7

11.2 In 2018/19, the highest number of complaints were received in relation to the Children’s Disability Team and totalled 18. Numbers of new complaints for this team spiked in quarter 2 (see fig 8 below) and then began to decrease; a decrease which has continued into 2019/20. This decrease coincided with a change to the management team and a more pro-active approach to communicating with those people who raise concerns about services provided by this team.

NEW COMPLAINTS RECEIVED	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Children’s Disability Team	3	7	4	4

Fig 8

11.3 After the Children’s Disability Team, the teams receiving the highest number of new complaints were the Children’s Assessment Team (CAT) with 12 and the Looked After Children Team who received 10 as indicated below.

NEW COMPLAINTS RECEIVED	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Children’s Assessment Team (CAT)	4	2	3	3
Looked After Children’s Team	1	5	1	3

Fig 9

11.4 In 2018/19 the majority of complaint issues for the Children’s Assessment Team related to “Quality of Assessment.” Most of these issues related to 3 separate complaints and the outcome in the majority of cases was not upheld. Any learning which was identified from complaints for this team was implemented following each complaint and this should assist with keeping the numbers of new issues low for this team moving forwards. There were no issues of this type received in quarter 4 (as shown in fig 10 below).

11.5 In 2018/19 the highest number of complaint issues received by the Looked After Children’s Team related to unsatisfactory communication and again, learning has been highlighted to try and reduce the number of complaints received.

12 Categories of Issues Raised within Complaints

12.1 Defining complaint issues, the detail within these and what this tells us, is something that is regularly reviewed by the Performance and Complaints Team, in liaison with senior managers in Children’s Services. This enables a depth and accuracy of performance reporting, both via monthly live complaints reports to heads of service and the Assistant Director and quarterly reporting to the Senior Management Team and Directorate Leadership Team; in order to ensure that any areas of concern are highlighted and dealt with efficiently.

12.2 The Performance and Complaints Team supply within reporting to senior managers, a further breakdown under the categories of issues which show the higher number of complaints, so that they are more easily able to define any potential areas of concern and use this along with the learning highlighted from complaints to improve practice/review procedures.

12.3 The accurate definition of complaints by the Performance and Complaints Team means that several issues are often identified within each complaint. This assists investigating managers to respond efficiently and accurately to each part of the complaint.

12.4 Within the 67 new complaints received during 2018/19, there were a total of 280 new separate issues defined (as detailed in fig 10 below). This is comparable to the total of 286 in 2017/18, demonstrating that although the number of complaints has increased, the number of individual issues raised has fallen

New Issues per Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Breach of confidentiality			2	2	4
Change of social worker / family support worker		1			1
Child safety issues (non safeguarding)				1	1
Decision Making		4			4
Freedom of Information request					0
Impact of LA policy on service user					0
Quality / Accuracy of minutes		1			1
Quality / Accuracy of Social Work reports			10	1	11
Quality of Assessment/s	25	15	11		51
Quality of Review/s		1			1
Recording of Information			1		1
Attitude or Behaviour of Staff	9	32	16	28	85
Failure to complete agreed outcome	5	2			
Telephone call handled inappropriately				1	
Poor interaction with child		1	1		
Inappropriate comments/actions	2	19	8	23	
Failure to meet with parent(s) / carers	1	6			
Accusation of Racism/ Harassment	1	1			
Accusation of bias		2	5	3	
Refusal to have a meeting		1			
Accusation of conflict of interests			2		
Inappropriate physical contact				1	
Delivery / Non Delivery of Service	10	13	12	3	38
Delay in undertaking assessment		1		1	
Delay in providing report/documentation		2	1	1	
Support not provided by SW/ Children	1	7	5	1	
Delay in providing support	1		2		
Correct process/ procedure not followed	2	2	3		
CP Plan procedure not followed					
Delay in providing direct payments	3				
Delay in completing DBS check	1				
Delay in Completing hair strand test	1				
Meetings not held on time	1		1		
Respite not provided		1			
Contact Issues	0	4	0	0	4
Full contact time not provided		1			
No contact arranged		1			
Amount of intervention by workers		1			
Challenge to level of control of conversation		1			
Finance Issues	3	1	0	2	6
Special Guardianship Allowance				2	
Travel Expenses	3				
Assessment not undertaken		1			
Unsatisfactory Communication	12	36	13	11	72
Incorrect information given	1	8	1		
Contradictory information given		8			
Documentation / Information not provided	6	6	5	2	
Not being listened to		1	1		
Calls / Email not returned	2	8	3	4	
Not advised of changes in care					
Call terminated inappropriately					
Rudeness	1	3	1		
Inappropriate method of communication	1	1			
Tone of letter inappropriate	1				
Not provided with an update		1	1	2	
Not contacted on a regular basis				1	
Not informed/invited to meetings			1		
Contact made when not requested				2	
Grand Total	59	108	65	48	280

Fig 10

- 12.5 During 2017/18, the Performance and Complaints Team broke down the issues relating to delivery/non delivery of service and contact into sub categories, in order to provide a better understanding to managers regarding the specific reasons for complaint. During 2018/19, this was extended to unsatisfactory communication, attitude / behaviour of staff and finance issues (see fig 10 above). This enables managers to focus, where required, on any area that receives repeat or higher levels of complaints, looking at possible reasons for this, so that learning can be focussed in these areas and implemented in order to improve practice.
- 12.6 As in previous years, attitude/behaviour of staff and unsatisfactory communication were in the top three areas of complaint (see fig 10 above). There were also a significant number of issues raised in relation to Quality of Assessments during 2018/19, with the majority of these relating to 3 individual complaints, the majority of which were not upheld.
- 12.7 The number of new issues received in relation to attitude/behaviour of staff and delivery/non-delivery of service have decreased during 2018/19 when compared with 2017/18 (as shown in fig 11 below) which indicates that the learning implemented for these areas of complaint is having an impact.

Issue	No of issues 2014/15	No of issues 2015/16	No of issues 2016/17	No of issues 2017/18	No of issues 2018/19
Attitude/behaviour of staff	68	54	98	87	84
Unsatisfactory communication	102	53	82	65	75
Delivery/non-delivery of service	58	32	26	67	39

Fig 11

New issues relating to unsatisfactory communication have increased slightly in 2018/19; however the number of new complaints within which these issues fall, have also only slightly increased by 6. As outlined above at 12.5, these issues are reported to senior management in detail to identify any possible areas of concern, so that managers can focus, where required, on any area that needs their attention, so that learning can be focussed in these areas in order to improve practice.

- 12.8 During 2018/19, 51 issues were raised concerning the quality of assessments and care plans, however the majority of these were not upheld. This can sometimes be due to expectations from parents/carers regarding the content or process of an assessment, which cannot be fulfilled.

Issue	Total	Inconclusive	Not upheld	Partly upheld	Upheld
Quality of assessments	51	5	35	4	7

Only 7 of the 51 issues raised regarding the quality of an assessment were upheld; whilst 4 were partly upheld and 35 were not upheld.

13 Outcomes of resolved complaints by issue for Children’s Social Work Services

The table below shows the percentage of issues that have been upheld/partially upheld for the top 3 areas of complaint between 2014/15 and 2017/18.

Type of issue	% upheld & partially upheld				
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Unsatisfactory communication	50%	44%	51%	44%	78%
Delivery / non delivery of service	43%	50%	56%	34%	50%
Attitude or behaviour of Staff	29%	32%	23%	7%	28%

Fig 12

13.1 The percentage of complaint issues upheld/partially upheld has increased in 2018/19 for all 3 main areas of complaint (see fig 12 above); however the number of issues raised for attitude and behaviour of staff and delivery/non-delivery of service during 2018/19 has decreased (see fig 11 above) which may therefore have had an impact on the percentage upheld.

Only 28% of issues raised in relation to attitude or behaviour of staff were upheld/partially upheld and a large number of complaints relating to attitude/behaviour of staff are found to be inconclusive. This is due to a lack of evidence from both the complainant/the Council; however these complaints are monitored and appropriate is action taken by the Council when required.

13.2 Following the completion of the investigations for these complaints, the investigating managers have looked in detail at the learning issues that have been highlighted and learning actions have been outlined and put into place, to try to ensure that the same issues do not reoccur, (see learning from complaints in Section 18 below).

13.3 A total of 58 complaints (284 issues) were responded to during 2018/19 and the outcome of each issue within these complaints is recorded and reported to senior managers by the Performance and Complaints Team (see fig 13 below).

13.4 The outcomes for all complaint issues closed in 2018/19 were as follows: 47 (16%) were upheld, 49 (16%) were partially upheld, 139 (46%) were not upheld and 49 (16%) were found to be inconclusive. In addition, 13 issues were withdrawn, (either by the complainant, or where evidence came to light and they were unable to be investigated within the confines of the complaints process). 12 issues were still being investigated at the end of the year.

These outcomes are shown in Figure 13 below.

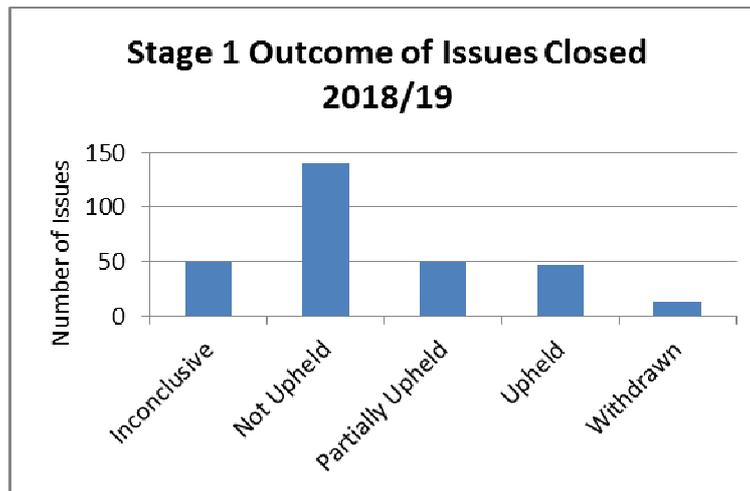


Fig 13

13.5 Upheld or partially upheld issues constituted 34% of all issues responded to in 2018/19, exactly the same as in 2017/18. This demonstrates a consistency of approach by investigating managers and it would not raise any concern about the types of outcome being found by investigating managers.

13.6 Learning from these issues was identified and progressed as described in Section 18 below.

14. Complaints for other areas of Children, Young People & Families Services

14.1 During 2018/19 there were no formal complaints received for Solihull Council's Youth Offending Service and three formal complaints (12 issues) for the Council's Early Help Service of which was 9 issues were not upheld; 2 were partially upheld; and 1 was upheld.

15. Complaints relating to services provided by the SEND 0 - 25 Service

15.1 Complaints made in relation to services provided by Solihull Council's StART Team are processed via the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

15.2 During 2018/19, 45 formal complaints relating to the START Team were received, compared to 19 in 2017/18, which is a significant increase in new complaints. In addition, 11 Duty cases (those cases where concerns are raised and resolved, but do not progress to a formal complaint) were also received and handled by the Complaints Team. This increase in complaints can be attributed to several factors; there has been an increase in the number of requests for service engagement, some under capacity within the service and significant pressure within the education system to provide sufficient specialist places.

15.3 Of the 45 formal complaints received during 2018/19, only 5 (11%) progressed to Stage 2 of the Corporate process. Reasons for this can be attributed to the level of detail included in Stage 1 responses, which reassures complainants that their complaints have been properly looked into and addressed.

- 15.4 45 complaint investigations were completed and responded to during 2018/19, 38 at Stage 1 and 7 at Stage 2.
- 15.5 6 complaints for the START Team were carried forward to 2017/18 and all were at Stage 1.
- 15.6 1 new complaint was received in respect of the SISS (Specialist Inclusion & Support) Team during 2018/19 and was responded to at Stage 1. The complainant did not request to progress the complaint any further.
- 15.7 Figure 14 below shows the 45 new complaints received per quarter. Complaints dipped in quarter 2 (which corresponded with the summer holidays) and spiked in quarter 3 (which corresponded with the beginning of the autumn term). The number of new issues followed the same pattern.

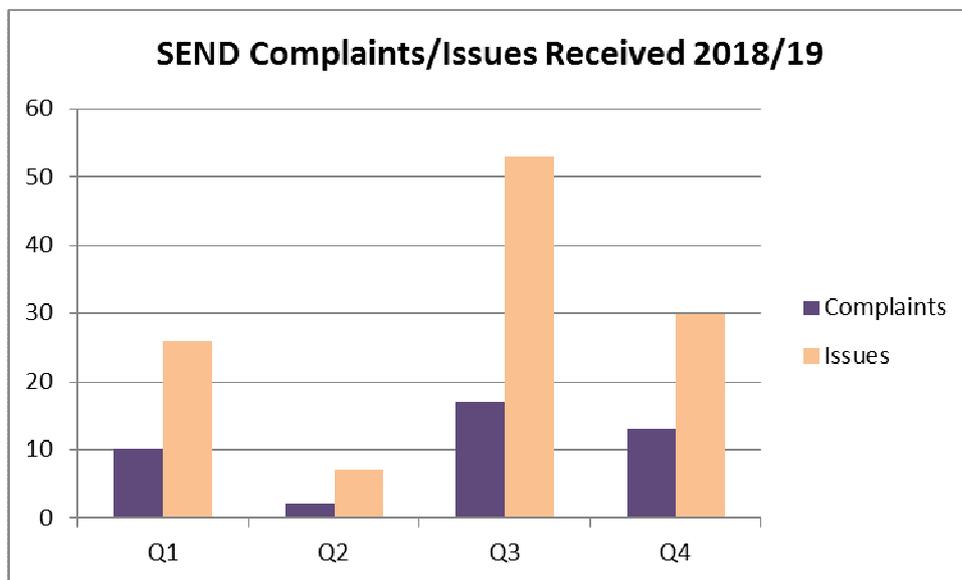


Fig 14

- 15.8 In 2018/19, a total of 116 issues were received within the 45 new complaints outlined above. The 2 main issues raised concerned EHCP's (Education, Health & Care plans) not being completed within timescales, and unsatisfactory communication (see fig 15 below).

New SEND Issues Per Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Breach of confidentiality	1			1	2
Recording of Information	1				1
Attitude / Behaviour of Staff	3	3	0	1	7
Inappropriate comments/actions	2	2		1	
Telephone call handled inappropriately	1	1			
Send Issues	13	4	38	17	72
Delay in contacting parent approved school	1		1		
Delay in finding school	1		5	1	
Delay in providing EP report				3	
Delay in providing home schooling				1	
Delay in request for EHC Assessment		1		1	
EHCP not being followed	1		4	2	
EHCP not completed within timescales	7	3	11	6	
EHCP process not followed	1		4	1	
EPA Not Actioned					
Lack of support to child			3	2	
Lack of support to parent			3		
Lack of support to school			1		
Parent not involved in process	1		3		
Quality of EHCP	1		2		
SW Assessment not provided			1		
Unsatisfactory Communication	8	0	15	11	34
Calls / Email not returned	1		11	2	
Contact made when not requested				1	
Documentation / Information not provided	2		1		
Inaccurate information provided	4			5	
Inappropriate information sharing					
Not being listened to	1				
Not contacted on a regular basis			3		
Not provided with an update				3	
Grand Total	26	7	53	30	116

Fig 15

- 15.9 35 complaints were responded to by the StART Team at Stage 1; 13 (37%) were responded to within the 20 working day timeframe and a further 15 (43%) received a Stage 1 response within the extended 30 working day timeframe. This means that a total of 80% of the complaints responded to at Stage 1, were completed within 30 working days. Only 7 complaint responses exceeded the 30 working day timeframe allowed at Stage 1.
- 15.10 Of the 7 complaints escalated to Stage 2, three received a response within the 20 working day timeframe at Stage 2 and 4 complaints exceeded the 20 working day timeframe at Stage 2. There were no active Stage 2 complaints carried forward to 2019/20.

In 2019/20 the Performance and Complaints Team will work with the StART Team to try and increase the numbers of Stage 1 complaints responded to within the initial 20 working day timescale and to ensure that all Stage 2 complaints are responded to in this timescale.

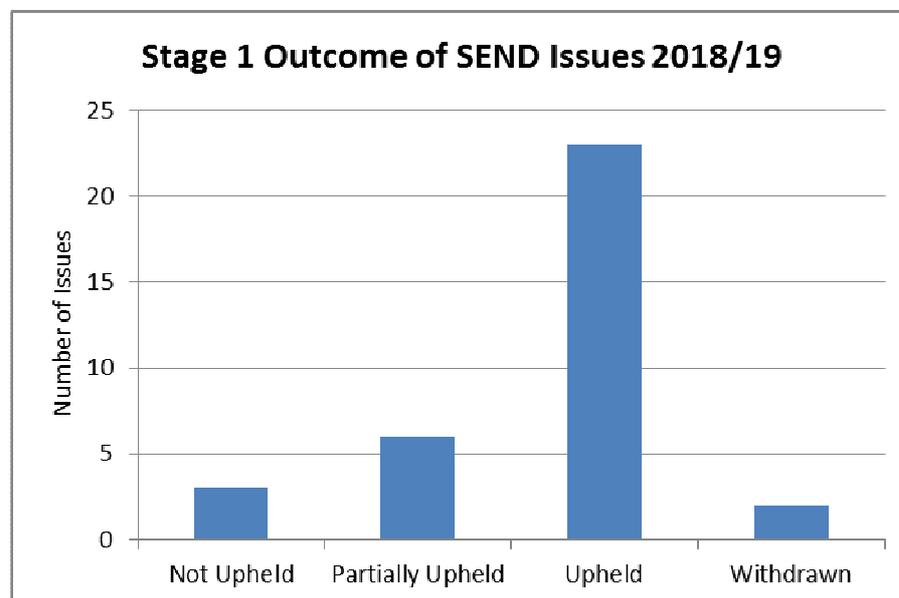


Fig 16

15.11 Of the 34 issues which were responded to at Stage 1 by the START Team, 23 (68%) were upheld, 6 (18%) were partially upheld, 3 (8%) were not upheld and 2 (6%) were withdrawn (as shown at fig 16 above).

The 7 Stage 2 complaints that were responded to during 2018/19 had 17 issues within them. 9 were upheld, 3 were partially upheld, 2 were not upheld and 3 were inconclusive.

15.12 The Children’s Disabilities Team (CDT) is the Social Work Team within the SEND 0-25 Service and details of the complaints for this team are included within the detail of sections 9 - 13 above.

15.13 Only 1 StART (education related) complaint progressed to the LGSCO in 2018/19 (see section 17 below) which highlights that the quality of response from the Council is high and resolves complainants concerns at the Local Authority level.

16. Complaints for other areas of Children’s Learning and Achievement

16.1 There was one formal complaint received for Children’s Planning, Performance & Commissioning which was partially upheld.

16.2 The Performance and Complaints Team received 2 new complaints in relation to ESCOS (Education Service for Children Out of School), one was partially upheld and one was not upheld.

16.3 The Performance and Complaints Team also received 5 new complaints in relation to School Admissions; one was partially upheld, 3 were not upheld and one was withdrawn.

17 Complaints considered by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

17.1 During 2018/19 there were 6 new complaints referred to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) for Solihull Children’s Services (the same number as in 2017/18). This is against the national trend upwards.

The LGSCO declined to investigate 5 of these.

17.2 Fig 17 below shows the outcomes for each of the 6 LGSCO complaints that were both received and closed by the LGSCO in 2018/19:

Outcome	Children’s Services Team
Declined to investigate	Looked After Children
Declined to investigate	Looked After Children
Declined to investigate	Child Protection & Court Team
Declined to investigate	Child Protection & Court Team
Declined to investigate	School Admissions
Fault Found - pay £7,500 (subject to receiving receipts) plus review of processes	StART Team

Fig 17

17.3 The level of detail provided in the responses from Children’s Services appears to being having a direct link to the numbers of complaints referred to and investigated by the LGSCO (see also 9.2.4 and 15.13 above).

18 Areas for Learning and Improvement highlighted by team managers and heads of service for Children’s Services

18.1 Learning for Children’s Social Work Services

During 2018/19, the Performance and Complaints Team has continued to send learning forms to investigating managers for each complaint responded to and to liaise with those managers through to the implementation of learning. 75% (58 out of 77) of the learning forms sent to managers during 2018/19 have currently been completed and returned and learning outcomes have been categorised, which are shown in figure 16 below. The Performance & Complaints Team will continue to follow up the outstanding forms until all of them have been returned and any learning is highlighted and implemented.

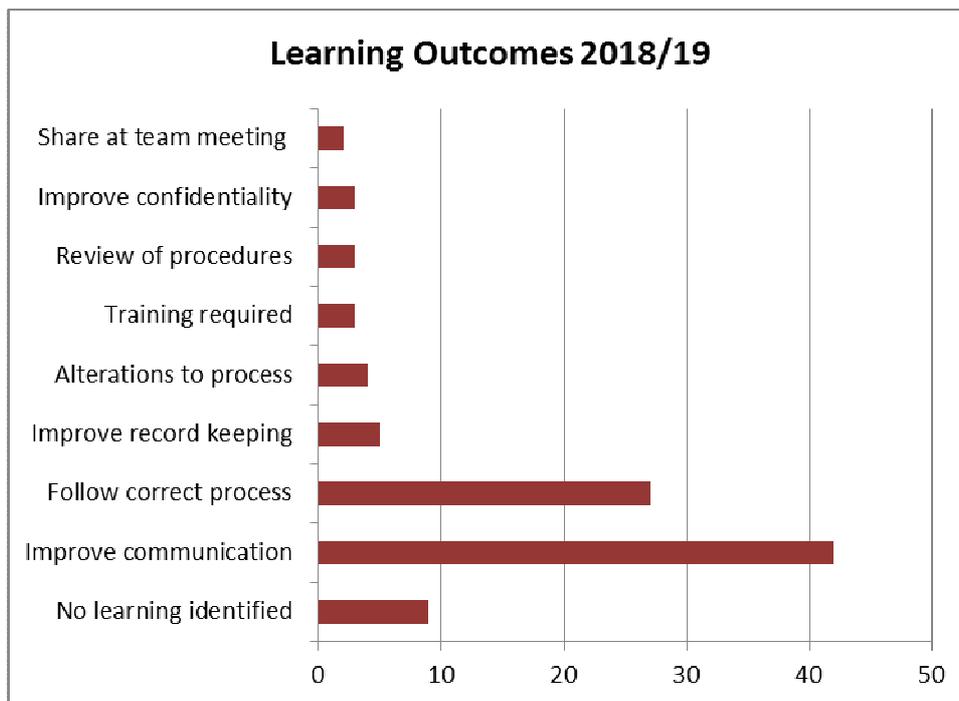


Fig 18

- 18.1.1 As shown above, the main area highlighted for improvement has been to improve communication, which unsurprisingly relates directly to a high number of complaints raised concerning unsatisfactory communication, (see sections 12.5 and 12.6 and 12.7 above). All learning issues highlighted by investigating managers are tracked by the Complaints Team through to implementation.
- 18.1.2 Other areas highlighted for improvement are: to follow the correct process, to improve record keeping and to carry out alterations to process, although there were only a small numbers of learning issues arising for the latter two, they either already have or will be addressed efficiently and mapped by the Performance and Complaints Team, through to implementation.
- 18.1.3 Some examples of the types of learning that have been identified and put into place and hence used to inform service improvements are demonstrated below:
- *Following a complaint received from a parent unhappy with the way a referral had been dealt with:*
 - To ensure case recording is completed and recorded accurately to reflect the conversation
 - The Manager will bring the outcomes for learning to the attention of the team, so that they are all reminded of the importance of the impact this has on children and families.
 - To ensure clear lines of communication with service users/their families

- *Following a complaint received from guardians unhappy with a LAC review:*
 - Speak with the Independent Reviewing Officer about the issues - with focus on clarifying the expectations relating to respectful practice, keeping an accurate diary, and, exploring the impact their error had upon the complainant directly
 - The Social Worker will meet with the complainant to share the contents of her report to the Looked After Children Review, so that she is fully aware of the child's current needs and Care Plan
 - Speak with the Team more broadly about the issue and instigate a discussion and review of the arrangements for ensuring that meetings are booked correctly into calendars and for ensuring that where meetings are postponed, participants are advised at the earliest opportunity.

- *Following complaints about the lack of communication from social work teams*
 - Learning was for the worker as well as the team and is to be discussed within team meetings to ensure that they keep in regular contact with parents, even if there are no answers to give at the time, or we are awaiting a response.
 - All social workers involved in supporting and facilitating contact to be spoken to in order to ensure that: a. All relevant contact notes are made available to parents in a timely way and; b. Requests from parents are being followed up
 - Speak to social workers to ensure that minutes of meetings, including Core Group meetings, are sent in a timely way
 - To carry out a review regarding the way contact times and dates are communicated with parents to ensure that any changes in circumstances are shared with all parties involved.
 - Communication between social workers and family members to improve, in order to ensure that the right information is shared with all family members involved.
 - On-going supervision to take place with social worker re identifying challenging parents and agreeing strategies to prevent escalation of concerns
 - Teams to be clear regarding when to use restrictions for communication with families where restrictions are in place.
 - Manager to ensure the worker understands the importance of keeping parents informed. Social Worker to ensure that they contact parents as soon as they are allocated the case.

- *Following a complaint about how a child's placement was dealt with*
 - Take the learning from this complaint, particularly in respect of managerial oversight and induction of agency workers and review our development programme to ensure that this is taken into account.
 - Consider with the External Placements Management Team how we corroborate information about suitable placements.
 - Ensure the details of the complaint are passed to the Independent Reviewing Officer.

- 18.1.4 Learning from complaints is discussed by investigating managers with both individuals (where appropriate) and their teams and is also shared with the relevant service area by heads of service through wider management meetings, so that all areas of Children's Services can learn from the issues arising.

Where applicable, these issues are also shared with the Workforce Development Team in order that, where necessary, they can be mapped and addressed through staff training and supervision.

- 18.1.5 The Performance and Complaints Team produces a separate learning report for implemented learning on a regular basis, which is circulated to the Assistant Director, heads of service and managers and lists the learning under each team. This provides an overview of all learning for Children's Social Work Services for which team managers are required to highlight the difference the learning has made in practice.
- 18.1.6 The report by Ofsted following their last inspection of Solihull Children's Services stated that "*Learning from complaints is used well to improve practice,*" and "*Strong on complaints, the Local Authority acts on the learning from each one, using a spreadsheet to track the response and identify emerging themes.*"

18.2 Learning for the SEND 0-25 Service

During 2018/19, the Performance and Complaints Team has sent learning forms to the investigating managers in the SEND 0-25 Service for each complaint responded to. The following is an example of some of the learning highlighted:

- *Following a complaint about a breach of data protection:*
 - For staff to receive further training in relation to Data Protection
 - The StART Manager will ensure that all staff have completed the appropriate Data Protection training and further protocols will be put in place to minimise the risk of this event happening again

- *Following a complaint about the delay in completing an EHCP:*
 - To liaise with the relevant school to arrange the review asap
 - To appoint a Link Officer
 - To ensure Social Work support is included as required
 - Increase capacity within the StART Team
 - Develop systems to ensure Echo's progress within timescales
 - A review of staffing and separation of the assess and review functions

- *Following complaints in relation to poor communication*
 - Develop good practice guidance and provide additional training
 - To ensure telephone conversations are accurately recorded
 - Review and improve the Communication Strategy
 - Remind staff of the importance of maintaining contact with customers
 - Build in better communication steps within the EHCP process

- *Following complaints in relation to the quality of EHCP's*
 - Develop a quality assurance process at draft and final stage
 - Ensure that there is additional training and discussion with the member of staff in question to ensure that we remain child focused; we are not driven by the process and to reduce the risk of ambiguity by ensuring schools to fill out the prescribed form
 - Ensure all information is gathered to contribute to assessment

19 Compliments for Children's Services

19.1 92 compliments were received for Children's Services during 2018/19 compared to 91 in 2017/18. These included 57 professional and 35 service user compliments as shown in the tables below:

Social Work Team	Professional	Service User	Grand Total
Child Asylum & 16+ Team	2	1	3
Child Protection & Court Team	10	2	12
Children In Need Team	1		1
Children's Disability Team	7	9	16
Early Help	10	14	24
Looked After Children	2	1	3
LSCB	1		1
Youth Offending Team	5	2	7
Grand Total	38	29	67
Learning & Achievement Service	Professional	Service User	Grand Total
SEND Team	4	6	10
Education Improvement Team	1		1
ESCOS	1		1
Employment & Skills	1		1
Family Information Service	1		1
Planning, Performance & Commissioning	11		11
Grand Total	19	6	25

Fig 19

19.2 Below are some examples of compliments received in the year:

19.2.1 Service User compliments

Child Asylum & 16+ Team

One of our young people, Child A asked me to thank the team for the Christmas voucher. She sent me a lovely text message saying how it cheered her up when she received it through the post. Her words: "When I thought things were going horrible this came in the post and it brought a smile to my face! It just made my Christmas, so thank you very much to you and the team who gave this to me, I feel so grateful so thank you thank you thank you."

Child Protection & Court Team

Both father Mr A and the school head teacher vocalised their praise for Social Worker X and her conduct of this case; they felt that she connected well with N and had a good understanding of the case issues and N's best interests at heart which has led to a positive outcome for N.

Children's Disability Team

I just wanted to thank you for helping in sorting out the non-payments for me. Also, thank you so much for your help now and also this year during the madness of events with X when he was at RC. Social Worker C has been such a diamond. I appreciate more than you may know the help our family received. I can only imagine what you and your team may face on a daily basis. You have one of the most rewarding yet frustrating jobs at times (in my opinion hahaha). I always get told how I just smile and get on with the cards I have been dealt with in raising my two boys. I have never been so grateful and touched in my entire life when Social Worker C listened to me during that crisis and my cry for help and acted accordingly in our best interests and that's when you came on board. You have all gone above and beyond for us. The gratitude and admiration I have for you guys are second to none. I was always brought up that manners cost nothing. Also recognition for the damn hard work you and your team do and have done. I will never ever forget all of the help I received in keeping my boys happy and safe. Without that help I honestly believe we would have gone under (which doesn't bear thinking about) - despite I'm the mom, I'm nothing without the solid love and support of you guys in this horrendous times. It's all about team work and trust me, we are the dream team. Many thanks for everything you do and how you have created an amazing team too.

Engage (Early Help)

You helped me see the light at the end of the tunnel. Knowing you were coming regularly really helped me. I don't think I could have done it all without your help. You showed me how to be practical and positive and even told me when to remember myself in all of it. You are a lovely woman and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

StART Team

Just a quick note of thanks and to let you know that M has settled in well at W and is thriving. Thank you so much for all of your support to bring this situation about expediently. I'm sure you get a lot of issues to deal with in your job so just wanted to make sure you get a thank you too. We really do appreciate your help. Thank you so much.

Youth Offending Team

YOT have been fantastic, regular updates on what's happening and how they see Child A. However, custody staff don't contact me unless there's an issue or I phone and ask. Would like to thank Staff N and Staff D who have kept me informed on Child A and have been very helpful during what has been for our family, a very difficult stressful time.

19.2.2 Professional compliments

Child Asylum & 16+ Team

I know the figures are provisional at the moment but just want to alert you that 16+ Team are on track to have 100% health checks completed for the year end. That's a first! It is often, as we know tricky, getting young people to do anything they don't want to do and health checks may not sound that appealing. I feel this figure reflects the whole teams drive and commitment to encourage young people to access health support and be proactive about health. As health colleagues we appreciate all the teams work very hard but ...100% for 16 + is just something else.....

Child Protection & Court Team

I just wanted to share the feedback we received from HHJ T at the conclusion of a case that was run in the High Court. She praised the LA for the high quality age assessment undertaken earlier in the proceedings and gave particular praise to Social Worker X who worked extremely hard with the family to achieve a good outcome as well as producing good quality evidence. Legal Services have been commended throughout and she was complimentary of Solihull as a whole. Well done all and well deserved!

Children's Disability Team

Finally, I would like to add that the calm and compassionate way that you worked with mother was evident at the conclusion of this case in that you were able to offer mother some comfort when she really needed it. It was also clear when you were giving evidence that you really knew Child A and had formed your view of what was in his best interests from that perspective, which came across to the Judge.

Looked After Children Team

This case finished on Tuesday when the Court discharged the care orders for all of the children. This was a difficult case to manage due to the complex nature of the issues but Social Worker X received well deserved praise from the Judge, the other advocates and the parents! The judge in particular went to great lengths to say how pleased he was with the high calibre of social work. I look forward to working with Social Worker X on the next case!

StART Team

I thought I would email you just to say that my Head of 6th Form made a comment tonight that Solihull do a better job in comparison to other LA's around transition with education and adult social care - so I thought I would share that positive comment with you both - well done

Youth Offending Team

Panel member commented Worker X is very extremely friendly, warm and efficient. He gets back to us promptly when we request information. Worker X is fabulous at presenting detail and preparing us for the panel without influencing our decision. He is very calm and nurturing towards the young people and did extremely well calming a young person down when they became angry during panel.

19.3 Learning from compliments, as well as complaints is something that Children's Services can use, in order to share good practice and highlight what has worked well for staff involved. This can then be considered and used appropriately by other Children's Services staff to enhance service provision.

20. Maintaining high standards in Children's complaints processing

20.1 During 2018/19, the Performance and Complaints Team have continued to work hard to ensure that any improvements made to the administration of complaints in previous years are maintained and have continue to do all that they can to ensure that the processing of Children's Services complaints is of the highest standard.

20.2 Detailed conversations with prospective complainants both by telephone and e-mail and which continue, where required, throughout the complaint, ensure that customers feel listened to and reassured that their concerns will be dealt with. This approach is consistent with the report from the LGSCO in June 2016, entitled *"Running a complaints system,"* which highlights that *"Features of an effective complaints procedure includes early direct contact with the person making the complaint and continued contact through the complaints process."*

20.3 A number of concerns have been resolved outside of the formal complaints process with the agreement of the complainant. The Performance and Complaints Team have handled 44 such cases for Children's Social Work Services in 2018/19, helping to ensure that concerns are resolved as quickly a possible; whilst all but 5 formal complaints received during 2018/19 have been resolved at Stage 1 of either the Statutory or Corporate process. This is an indication that high standards and continued customer liaison have a positive impact on the quality of responses provided to complainants, aided significantly by the quality checking process provided by the Performance and Complaints Team. This has also had a positive impact on the number of requests by complainants to progress to the next stage in the complaints process.

20.4 When it is apparent to complainants that their complaint has been taken seriously and thoroughly investigated, with apologies made where appropriate and where the response is sufficiently thorough for them to understand how the outcome has been reached and that Children's Services has taken any appropriate learning from the complaint; then it is much more likely that complainants will be satisfied with the response they have received and less likely to request an escalation of their complaint. This is substantiated by the fact that there was only 1 investigation by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman for Solihull Children's Services in 2018/19.

20.5 Throughout complaint investigations, the Performance and Complaints Team have maintained positive relationships with existing Children's Services staff and also built new and positive relationships with staff taking up new positions in the Children's Services & Skills Directorate.

20.6 Careful analysis of complaints made in relation to Children's Social Work Services ensures that complaints continue to be investigated through the correct complaints procedure. This system of analysing Children's Services complaints was endorsed in the Local Government Ombudsman publication, *"Are we getting the best from children's social care complaints?"* published in March 2015.

- 20.7 The efficient records management system used by the Performance and Complaints Team to record complaint details ensures swift responses to complainants, Children's Services staff and the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman. It also ensures that any member of the Performance and Complaints Team can, at any time, establish the current status of a complaint along with the detail of any correspondence that has taken place in relation to that complaint. This ensures an excellent level of customer service.
- 20.8 Customer feedback is sought following each complaint via an on-line questionnaire (also available on request in printed format) which has been developed and published on the Survey Monkey website. Complainants/their representatives are invited to feedback their comments concerning their experience of the Complaints Procedure. This in turn, will feed into the learning and improvement process.
- 20.9 During 2018/19 the Complaints Team received the following compliments:

20.9.1 Compliments from complainants

"My profound thanks to you for all your help and support you have given me over the past months... you are a credit to your profession and the empathy you have shown, priceless."

Ms x said that she was grateful that someone had taken the time to actually read her letter and to understand why she had concerns. She complimented a member of the Complaints Team on the way that the complaints had been captured. Ms x thanked the team member for the letter.

During her request to escalate her complaint, Ms x complimented a member of the Complaints Team on her patience and taking the time to speak with her. She said the team member was very patient and did a very good job

"Thank you for your comprehensive response to my complaint. I am encouraged that you will be taking up the issues raised in this complaint to enhance practice."

20.9.2 Compliments from internal staff

I wanted to say an extra 'thank you' at the year-end for all the brilliant work you have done for us... and I'm sure will continue through 2019. As you heard from colleagues, your input and expertise is very valued indeed. Thank you, it's a pleasure to continue working with you.

21 Reporting on Complaints

- 21.1 The reporting process to senior management is an important part of the complaints process in Solihull. This is essential if the issues raised in complaints and the learning from them, is to have a positive impact on practice. Any improvements which are identified, however minor, are built into the process and an example of this is the further breakdown of complaints issues as outlined at 12.4 above. This assists senior staff to easily identify if there is a common issue being raised by complainants, so that it can be reviewed and dealt with appropriately, in order to improve the service where required and prevent further complaints.

- 21.2 The Respond database used for recording complaints is an essential tool when providing accurate performance reporting. The Performance and Complaints Team provides in-depth reporting to management at all levels, including percentages of complaints received under each process (at which stage and for which teams), issue type and numbers and investigation timescales, along with outcomes and the number of learning forms that have been distributed, completed and returned and whether the learning has been implemented. The benefits of this have been outlined throughout this report.
- 21.3 Detailed reports for heads of service and the Directorate Leadership Team are produced on time and at regular intervals (both monthly and quarterly). These highlight areas needing attention and have been an integral part of the complaints service provided by the Performance and Complaints Team. Accurate recording on the Respond database also enables one-off reports to be produced efficiently and as requested by managers, where complaint processing and monitoring suggests that there are issues that need attention in specific areas of Children's Services.
- 21.4 Heads of service and the assistant directors receive monthly reports of live complaints, enabling them to track performance against timescales and intervene if there is a risk that a complaint will not be dealt with within the desired time limit.
- 21.5 Directorate Leadership and Senior Management teams receive quarterly complaints reports, detailing activity and performance, categories of complaint and learning and outcomes by service area and team, which highlight any emerging trends. This ensures that managers can identify trends and again intervene early if a problem is highlighted.
- 21.6 Ombudsman activity / responses are also reported to DLT on a monthly basis and any new complaints referred from the LGSCO are reported immediately to the Director/ appropriate Assistant Director. The Link Officer role is now situated within the Complaints Team and hence the team have a role in the collation of information and oversight of responses to ensure that responses to the Ombudsman are within the timescale requested by the Ombudsman.

22 Looking ahead to 2019/20

- 22.1 In 2019/20 a training session will be organised for staff new to Solihull or to a management role, who respond to complaints. In addition, one-to-one training is always available to investigating managers and the Performance and Complaints Team are always happy to assist and provide advice and guidance to managers on an on-going basis.
- 22.2 During 2019/20, the Performance and Complaints Team will continue to review/update the Council's procedure for dealing with Statutory Complaints (those relating to Children's Social Work Services), in order to ensure that current senior members of staff have the opportunity to feed into and shape this.

23 Conclusion

- 23.1 During 2018/19 the Performance and Complaints Team have continued to work closely with Children's Services staff to ensure that as many responses as possible meet the appropriate timescales and that complaint responses are of a high quality.

- 23.2 The quality of complaint responses have continued to have a positive impact on the requests for escalation and hence the numbers of complaints investigated by the LGSCO.
- 23.3 Detailed and quality reporting to senior management has continued with the Performance and Complaints Team providing a very detailed breakdown of the issues complained about, so that learning and subsequent actions taken; can be even more focussed and hence have a bigger impact on service improvement.
- 23.4 The numbers of learning forms being returned in 2018/19 is high at 75%. Learning data from 2018/19 has been formatted into spreadsheets and distributed to senior staff and the appropriate team managers, highlighting learning and implementation dates, both on a service wide and team-by-team basis, so that managers can comment on the differences that learning has made to practice. The evidence is then collated by the Performance and Complaints Team and is available to inform the inspection process.
- 23.5 Ofsted have labelled the complaints process in Solihull as being “strong” and one where “*Children know how to complain*” and “*When they do, their complaints are taken seriously.*”
- 23.6 During 2019/20, as in previous years, the Performance and Complaints Team will constantly review its practice in accordance with feedback from both complainants and Children’s Services and will then work with managers and staff to make any changes that are essential, to enhance overall performance.

June 2019