
Children's Customer Care Team Annual Report April 2020 – March 2021

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April 2021

Executive Summary

- ↓ **Compliments** - In the period between April 2020 and March 2021, the Customer Care Team has received 242 (255)* compliments. **This constitutes a 5% decrease.**
- ↓ **Enquiries** - The Customer Care Team received 52 (42) Enquiries, 8 (20) Councillor Enquiries, and 37 (62) MP Enquiries this year. **This constitutes a 22% decrease when all enquiries are combined.**
- ↓ **Statutory Stage 1** - The Customer Care Team have received 188 (274) Stage 1 Statutory complaints throughout this year, of which 5 (14) are still ongoing and will be responded to in the next year. **This constitutes a 31% decrease.**
- ↑ **Corporate Stage 1** - The Customer Care Team have received 179 (127) Stage 1 Corporate complaints throughout this year, of which 14 (8) are still ongoing and will be responded to in the next year. **This constitutes a 41% increase.**
- ↔ **Statutory Stage 2** - Throughout the year, 8 (8) Stage 2 Statutory complaints were worked on. Of these, none (5) were initiated in previous year, and 4 (0) were ongoing as of the end of this year. **This % has remained the same.**
- ↑ **Corporate Stage 2** - Throughout the year, a total of 16 (8) Stage 2 Corporate complaints were worked on. Of these, 1 (2) was initiated in the previous year, and 3 (1) remained ongoing as of the end of this year. **This constitutes a 100% increase.**
- ↓ **Statutory Stage 3** - In this year, 1 (4) Stage 3 Statutory complaint was worked on, it was initiated in this year and remains ongoing as of the end of this year. **This constitutes a 75% decrease.**
- ↑ **Corporate Stage 3** - In this year, 5 (3) Stage 3 Corporate complaints were worked on, of these none (1) were initiated in the previous year, and none (1) remained ongoing as of the end of this year. **This constitutes a 67% increase.**
- ↓ **LGO enquiries** - In this year, 16 (18) Local Government Ombudsman enquiries were worked on. Of these, 4 (2) cases were initiated in the previous year, and 5 (4) remained ongoing as of the end of this year. **This constitutes an 11% decrease.**

To conclude, we have seen an 8% decrease in combined (Statutory/Corporate) Stage 1 complaints in 2020/21.

* Figures in brackets are for the preceding year: April 2019 – March 2020

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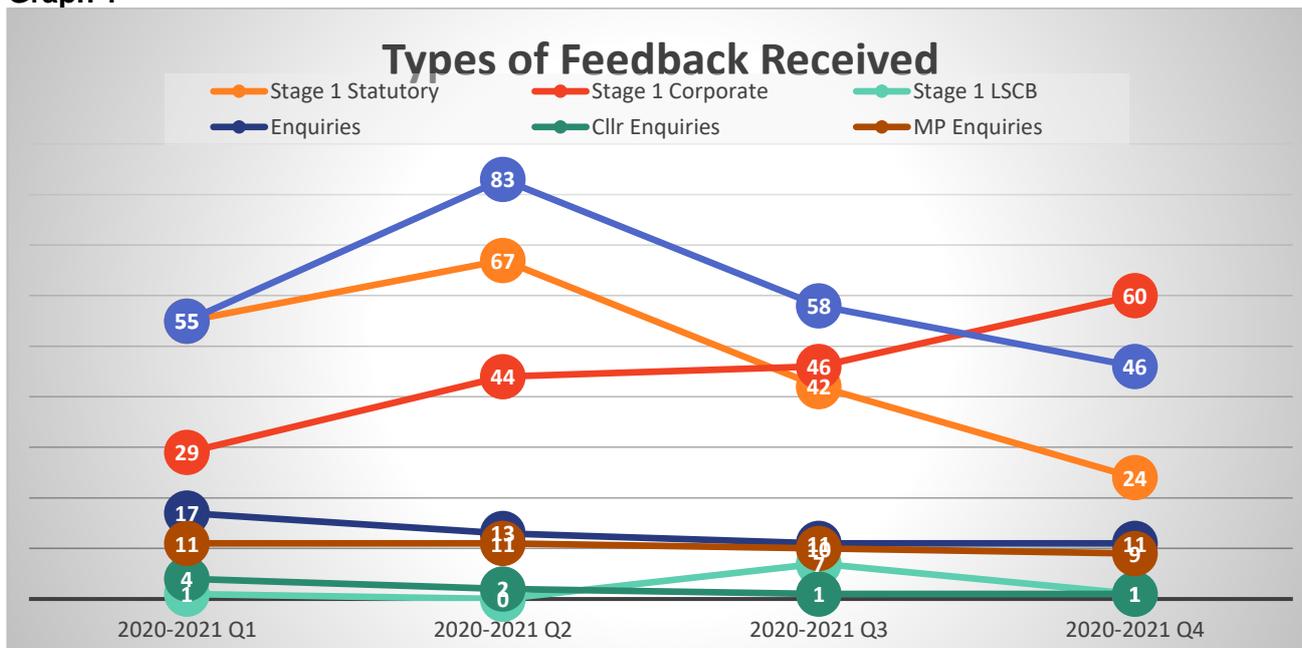
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1.0 Summary of Feedback

The Customer Care Team (CCT) are responsible for receiving and recording all forms of feedback regarding Children’s Services across Cambridgeshire County Council. Graph 1 gives an indication of the volume of different types of feedback received throughout the past four quarters.

In addition to the types of feedback recorded in the graph, the CCT also dealt with 2 Comments, 17 Correspondences, 8 Representations, 2 Resolving Professional Differences, and 1 Social Work England enquiry in the period between April 2020 and March 2021, however given that these types of feedback are seldom received, they are not included in the graph.

Graph 1



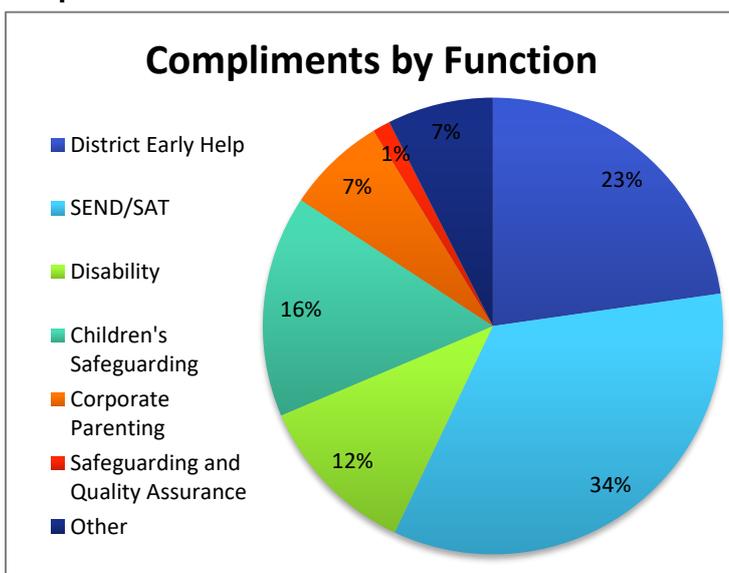
1.1 Compliments

In the period between April 2020 and March 2021, the CCT received 242 (255) compliments. They are divided into compliments from young people, parents, other family members and foster carers; from external professionals; and other members of staff.

Graph 2 identifies compliments received by function.

While the Customer Care Team receives a range of compliments about Children’s Services, we are aware that some parts of the service collect and report back separately and those compliments are not all reproduced here.

Graph 2



We have received 242 compliments in total this year which are available to view online at:

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/contact-us/council-complaints-procedures>

They have been anonymised both in terms of the children and families concerned and also in terms of those individual members of staff being praised. A variety of examples are included below:

Young Person said of an Early Help Transitions Advisor:

I'm not sure if you'll remember me but last year, you helped me enormously with getting accepted onto my Access to Medicine Diploma. I wanted to let you know that I did very well on the course, achieving straight distinctions. I also benefitted in many other ways. One being developing my self-confidence, which was greatly lacking before. Thank you so much for helping me back when I was very unsure of everything. You really have helped to change my life for the better.

Foster Carer said of Fostering Support Team and Children's Team:

I wanted to say a massive thank you for all your input and work this morning and our efforts working together to ensure that T has the planned move today !!

This is a successful day whereby we have achieved a child focused positive outcome, that would have made a massively positive experience for T. Hopefully T can move forward with the insight and trust that he has the positive support of professionals around him that are meeting his needs.

With thanks 😊

Parent said of Children's Assessment Team:

I was really frightened about the conference and was surprised about the level of support offered, thought they were out to get me and they are not, they want to help.

If another parent was coming to conference I would be happy to talk to them and tell them 'there is nothing to fear'.

Today has been an eye opener and a learning curve. I would like to thank you all.

I feel appreciated more now than I did last year. I recognise the concerns and I was cutting my nose off to spite my face.

I appreciate all the help given to me, you have given me hope and guidance.

Legal Advisor said of the Youth Offending Service's SAFE Team:

During these difficult times, I often find myself writing emails of concern or complaint about the broken Criminal Justice System within which we work, so it is perhaps even more important now, more than ever, to highlight the positives and communicate with each other when things are working well, and that is the reason I am writing to you.

I have witnessed first-hand the excellent work of the SAFE Team (Safer Relationships for Exploited Children) over the past 15 months. A member of the SAFE Team, B, has worked with a young client of mine throughout that period.

My client is a vulnerable child and if you can imagine the worst background you can and multiply it tenfold, then you might just be scratching the surface. It is difficult to put into words the difference that the SAFE Team's work has made to this child's life, but it was recognised recently in court.

The child appeared in custody before the Cambridge Magistrates' Court on [date]. I addressed the court at length as to the history over the past year, which includes a previous finding by the Home Office that he is the victim of modern slavery, and the important and meaningful work of the SAFE Team which would be lost if he were remanded into youth detention or placed outside of the Cambridgeshire area. The chair of the bench, Mr C, who I understand is a retired police officer, granted bail and commented "I wish I could meet B because she sounds like an amazing person."

I genuinely do not know where my client would be now if it were not for the involvement of B and the SAFE Team, so simply wanted to say thank you for all your hard work in making a real difference to some of the most vulnerable in society.

Parent said of an Early Help Family Worker:

I am writing in regards of family worker P of his outstanding dedication in his profession. P was our family worker for just over 12 months and within that period had undertaken a substantial amount of time in resolving issues with my children that in the past no other family worker had been that committed to their job. He went above and beyond including psychiatry appointments for my daughter, making sure my twins received the relevant help with SEN putting forward an EHCP, coordinating with paediatrics and school, liaising with both X District Council & Y District Council, Outreach and GP.

His efforts have been significantly appreciated and his patience has been put to the test on numerous occasions.

I would highly recommend him to any family not just for his pleasant and caring attitude but his ability to care for the family he works with. I was sad to see him leave my family and wish him all the best success for the future. He is a credit to his co workers and the district team.

1.2 General Enquiries

From April 2020 to March 2021, 52 (42) general enquiries were worked on, all of which were initiated and concluded in this year.

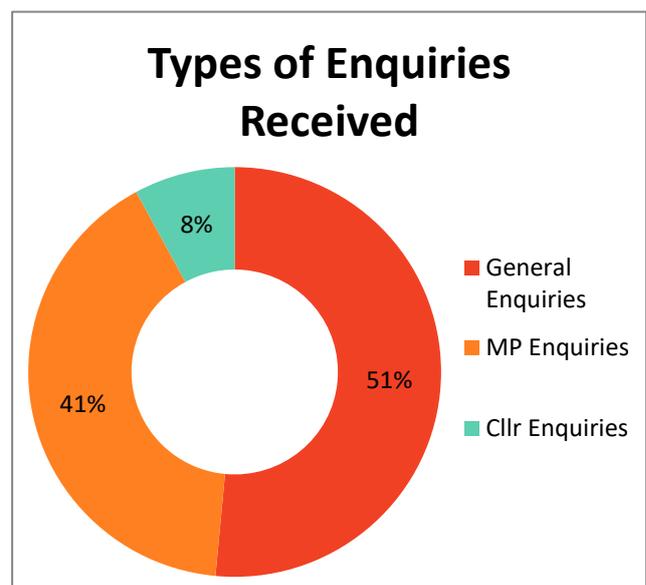
1.3 MP and Councillor Enquiries

The Customer Care Team facilitates responses to MP and Councillor enquiries relating to children, however these are not counted as complaints. In some, but not all cases, a complaint may already have been received or may be made subsequent to the enquiry from the MP or Councillor. Every care is taken with these responses, which are written in the expectation that they will be shared by the MP or Councillor's with their constituent.

From April 2020 to March 2021, 8 (20) Councillor enquiries were worked on, all of which were initiated and concluded in this year.

From April 2020 to March 2021, 41 (64) MP enquiries were worked on. Of these, 4 (2) were received in the previous year and carried forward into this year, and none (4) were still open at the end of this year and therefore ongoing.

Graph 3



1.4 Formal Complaints Procedure

Children's Social Care has a formal complaint procedure* offering three Stages, which is in line with Regulations and National Guidance. A detailed description of Cambridgeshire's procedure is available to members of the public on:

* <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/contact-us/council-complaints-procedures/childrens-services-representation-and-complaint-procedure/>

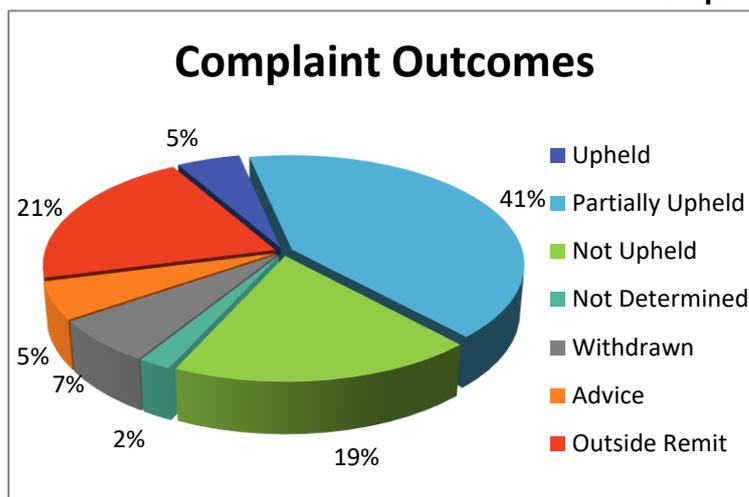
1.5 Stage 1 Statutory Complaints

From April 2020 to March 2021, the CCT worked on 203 (293) Stage 1 Statutory complaints. Of these, 15 (19) were received in the previous year and carried forward into this year. Out of the 203 complaints worked on, 198 (279) received a response, therefore 5 (14) cases were still open and thus ongoing at the end of this year.

Graph 4

Out of the 198 complaints concluded this year:

- ↓ 10 (26) were upheld
- ↓ 82 (139) were partially upheld
- ↓ 37 (50) were not upheld
- ↔ 4 (4) were not determined
- ↑ 13 (6) were withdrawn
- ↑ 11 (4) did not qualify, as advice was sought (enquiry)
- ↓ 41 (50) received were deemed outside of the complaint remit, as issues had already been investigated, were historic, or were being dealt with within the Court arena

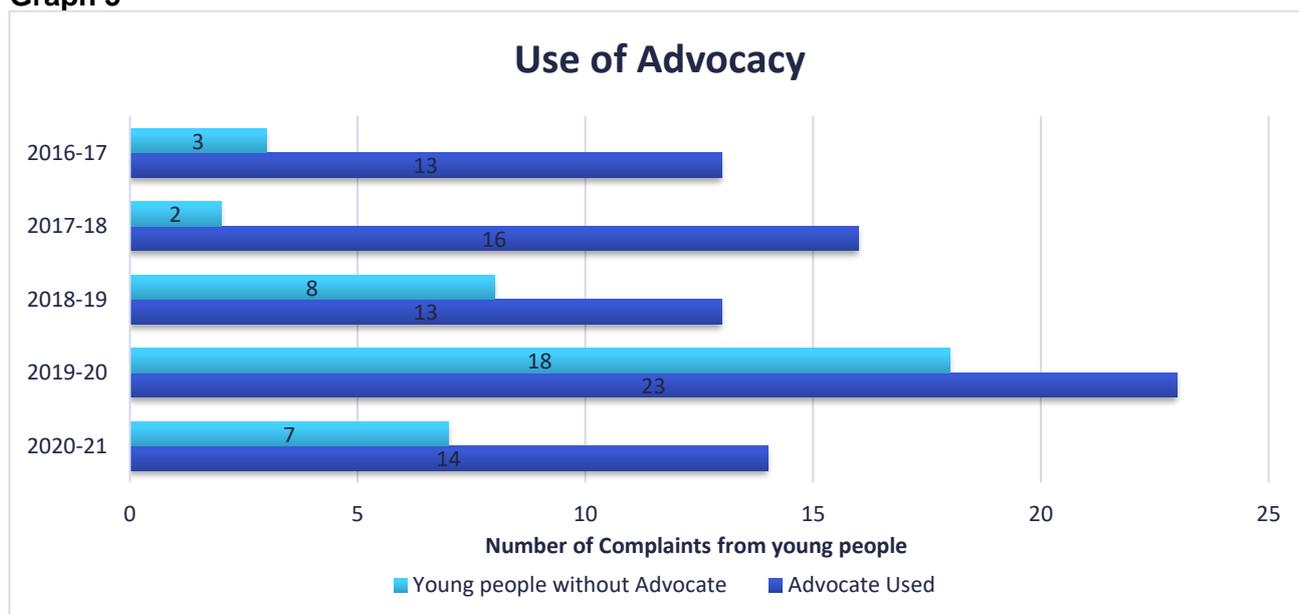


Out of the 198 Statutory complaints for which responses were provided during this year, 35 (54) complainants returned with further concerns to their initial complaint, at which point their Stage 1 complaint was re-opened for investigation, which constitutes 18%. 3 (8) of these complainants re-opened their complaint multiple times at Stage 1.

Out of the 188 (274) complaints received this year, 109 (97) complaints had been submitted by complainants who had made at least one complaint previously which equates to 58%.

Out of the 188 Statutory complaints received this year, 146 (172) were made by parents or step-parents which equates to 77%, 21 (41) were made by young people which equates to 11%, 16 (37) were made by other family members which equates to 9%, and 5 (24) were received from a non-family member which equates to 3%. Advocates have been involved in 14 (27) complaints received this year, 10 (18) of these were supporting 'Children in Care', and 4 (4) were Care Leavers. 13 (23) of 14 advocates were from NYAS.

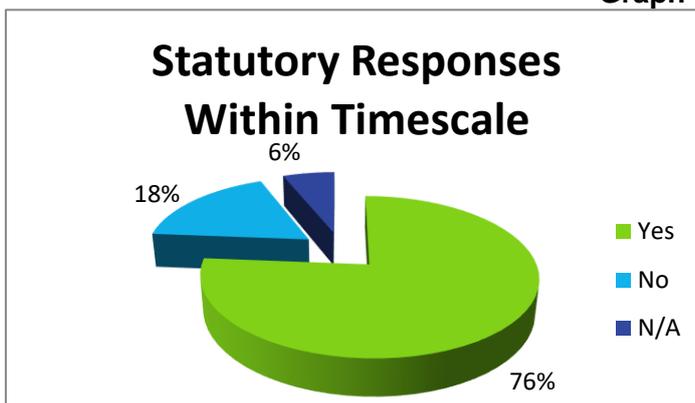
Graph 5



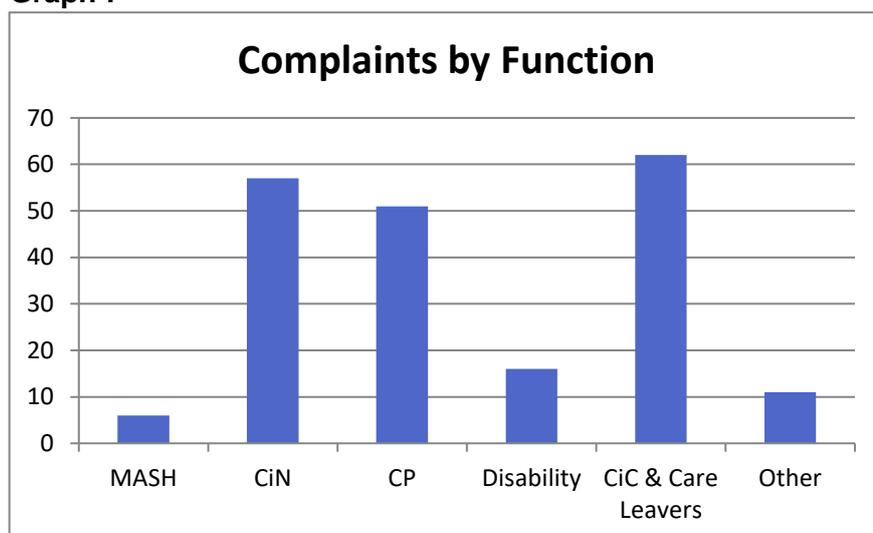
Graph 6

Out of the 198 Stage 1 statutory complaints responded to in this year, 38 (55) responses were extended from the initial 10-working-day timescale to a 20-working-day maximum which constitutes 19%.

35 (139) of all statutory complaints responded to were outside of the prescribed timescale (whether it was 10 or 20 working days) which equates to 18%.



Graph 7

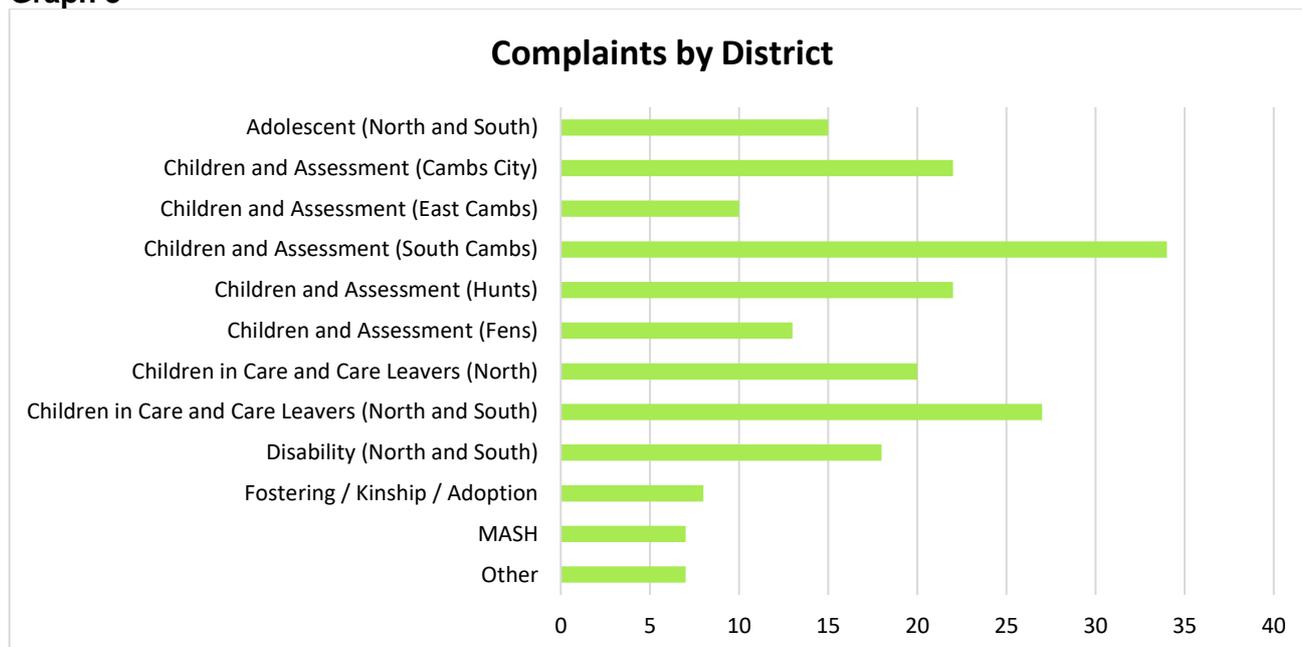


There was a wide range of issues raised within Statutory Stage 1 complaints.

The highest volume of complaints received were in relation to Children in Care and Care Leavers with 62 (112) complaints; followed by 57 (40) complaints relating to Children in Need.

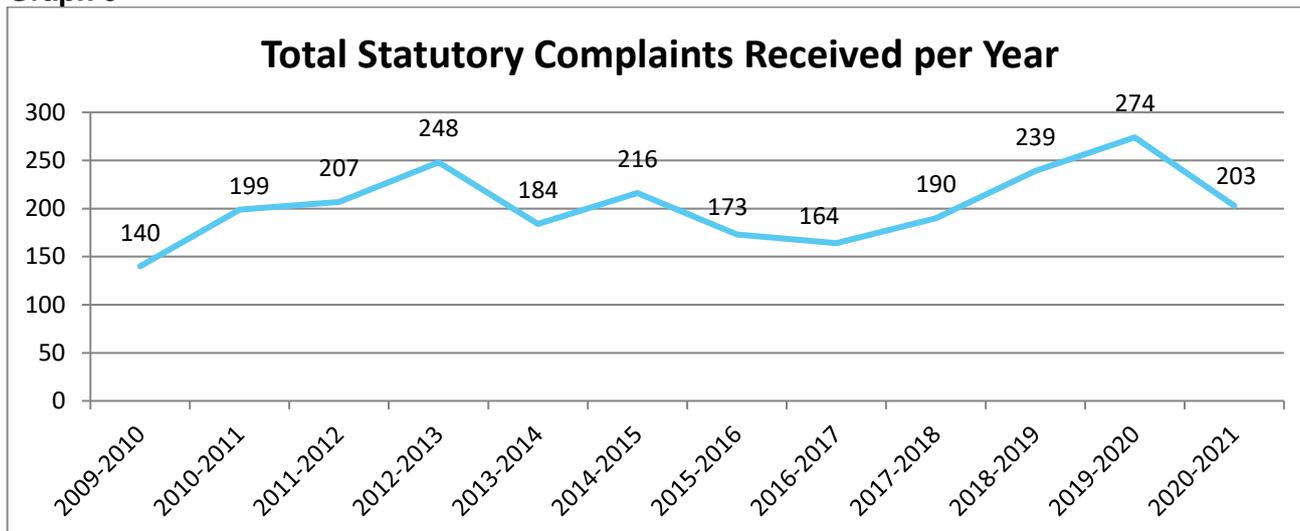
Under the category of 'Other' included complaints relating to Fostering and Adoption.

Graph 8

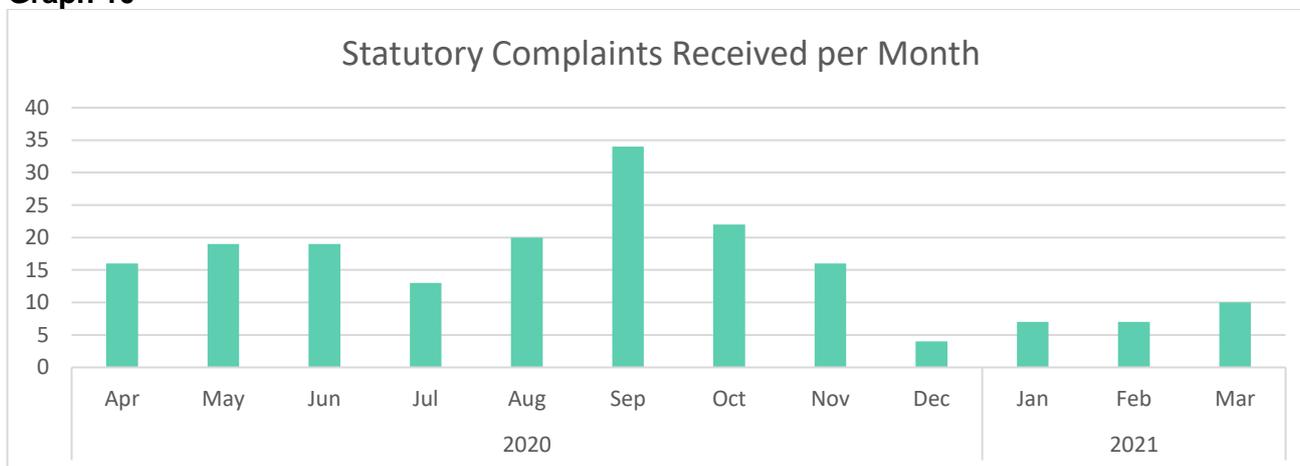


The majority of Statutory Stage 1 complaints within the Service were received in relation to the South Cambridge Children and Assessment Teams with 34 (25) complaints, followed by Children in Care and Care Leaver (South) Teams with 27 (25) complaints received this year.

Graph 9



Graph 10



1.6 Stage 1 Corporate Complaints

From April 2020 to March 2021, the CCT worked on 187 (134) Stage 1 Corporate complaints. 8 (7) of these were received in the previous year and carried forward into this year. 14 (8) cases were still open and therefore ongoing as of the end of this year.

Out of the 173 (126) complaints which concluded in this year:

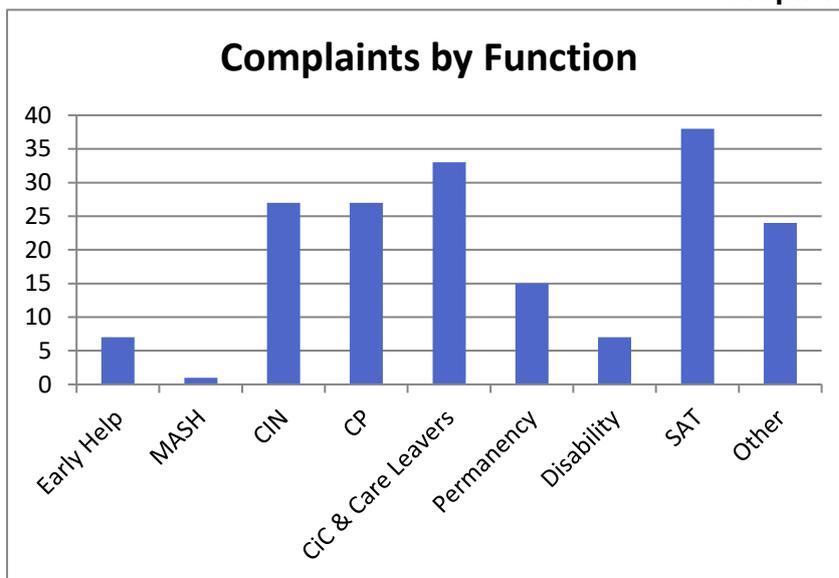
- ↑ 29 (24) were upheld
- ↑ 54 (52) were partially upheld
- ↑ 50 (27) were not upheld
- ↓ 1 (3) was not determined
- ↑ 12 (4) were withdrawn
- ↑ 6 (3) did not qualify as advice was sought (enquiry)
- ↑ 21 (13) did not qualify as they were outside of the complaints remit

Out of the 173 Corporate complaints for which responses were provided this year, 62 (16) complainants came back with further concerns to their initial complaint, at which point they were re-opened for investigation at Stage 1 equating to 36%. Out of the 179 (127) complaints received this year, 82 (39) complaints had been submitted by complainants who had made at least one unrelated complaint previously equating to 46%.

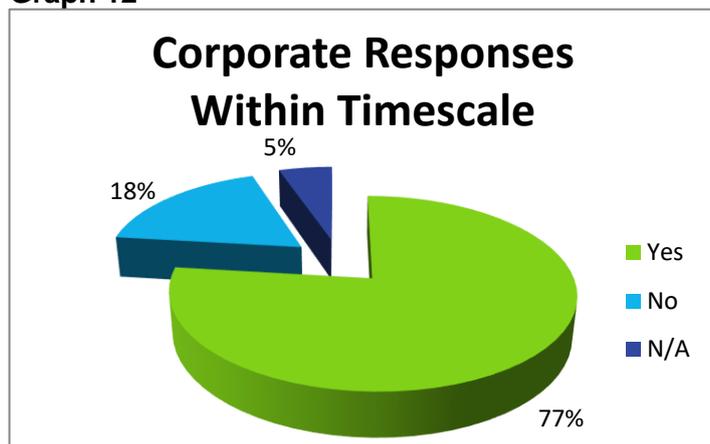
Graph 11

Out of the 179 complaints received this year, 120 (71) were made by parents or step-parents, 6 (4) were made by the young person themselves, 27 (21) were made by other family members, and 26 (31) were received from a non-family member.

The highest volume of Corporate complaints within a service-specific area was seen in relation to the Statutory Assessment Team (SAT) with 38 (31) complaints, followed by Children in Care and Care Leavers with 33 (24) complaints received this year.



Graph 12



Out of the 173 Corporate complaints responded to this year, 32 (23) responses were extended from the initial 10-working-day timescale to a 20-working-day maximum.

31 (52) were responded to outside of the prescribed timescale (whether it was 10 or 20 working days) which constitutes 18%.

Graph 13



1.7 Stage 2 Statutory Complaints

From April 2020 to March 2021, the Customer Care Team worked with 8 (8) Stage 2 Statutory complaints. None (5) of these were received in the previous year and carried forward into this year, and 4 (0) were still open or suspended and therefore ongoing as of the end of this year.

Out of the 4 (8) Stage 2 investigations which were concluded this year, 2 (7) were extended from the initial 25-working-day timescale to a 65-working-day timescale, with none (0) being responded to outside of the prescribed timescale.

- ↓ 1 (6) was partially upheld
- ↑ 1 (0) was not upheld
- ↑ 1 (0) did not qualify as it was outside of the complaints remit
- ↑ 1 (0) did not qualify as complainant was non-responsive

Of the 8 Stage 2 complaints received in this year, 6 (2) were made by a parent, 1 (0) was made by the Young Person themselves, and 1 (1) was made by another relative. 1 (0) was made in relation to a Care Leaver, 2 (1) were made in relation to a Child in Care, 1 (1) was made in relation to Child Protection, and 4 (0) was made in relation to a Child in Need.

1.8 Stage 2 Corporate Complaints

From April 2020 to March 2021, the CCT worked with 16 (8) Stage 2 Corporate complaints, 1 (2) of which was initiated in the previous year, and 3 (1) cases were still open and therefore ongoing as of the end of this year.

Within the 13 (7) complaints which concluded in this year:

- ↓ 1 (4) was upheld
- ↑ 5 (2) were partially upheld
- ↑ 3 (1) were not upheld
- ↑ 2 (0) was withdrawn
- ↑ 1 (0) did not qualify as it was outside of the complaints remit
- ↑ 1 (0) did not qualify as complainant was non-responsive

Out of the 13 complaints which concluded in this year, 6 (4) responses were extended from the initial 10-working-day timescale to a 20-working-day timescale. 5 (1) were responded to outside of the prescribed timescale which equates to 38%.

Of the 15 (6) Stage 2 complaints received in this year, 13 (5) were made by a parent, 1 (0) was made by another relative, and 1 (0) was made by a non-family member. 5 (4) of the complaints were made in relation to SAT services, 4 (1) were made in relation to Child Protection, 2 (0) were made in relation to a Child in Care, 1 (0) was made in relation to SEND services, 1 (0) was made in relation to Adoption, 1 (0) was made in relation to a Child in Need, and 1 (0) was made in relation to another service.

1.9 Stage 3 Statutory Complaints

From April 2020 to March 2021, the CCT worked on 1 (4) Stage 3 Statutory complaint, which was initiated this year, and remained ongoing as of the end of this year.

This complaint was made by a parent, and it was in relation to a Child in Need. The outcome of this complaint will be recorded in the next Annual Report.

1.10 Stage 3 Corporate Complaints

From April 2020 to March 2021, the CCT worked with 5 (3) Stage 3 Corporate complaints. All 5 (3) complaints were initiated this year, and none (1) remained open and ongoing as of the end of this year.

Within the 5 (2) complaints which concluded in this year:

- ↑ 1 (0) was upheld
- ↑ 3 (1) was partially upheld
- ↔ 1 (1) was not upheld

Of the 5 complaints received this year, 4 (3) were made by parents, and 1 (0) was made by another relative. 3 (3) complaints were made in relation to SAT services, 1 (0) was made in relation to Child Protection, and 1 (0) was made in relation to another service.

Of the 5 complaints which concluded this year, all 3 (2) were extended from the initial 10-working-day timescale to a 20-working-day timescale. 4 (1) were responded to outside of the prescribed timescale.

1.11 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

From April 2020 to March 2021, the CCT worked with 16 (18) Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) enquiries. 12 (16) enquiries were initiated this year. 11 (14) cases were closed this year, therefore 5 (4) cases were ongoing as of the end of this year.

Of the 11 enquiries which concluded this year:

- ↔ 3 (3) were partially upheld
- ↑ 2 (0) were not upheld
- ↓ 6 (10) were deemed outside of remit

Of the 12 enquiries received this year, 9 (11) were made by parents, and 3 (5) were made by another family member. 2 (1) complaint were made in relation to Child in Need services, 1 (5) was made in relation to Child Protection, 3 (5) were made in relation to Children in Care, 3 (1) were made in relation to Permanency, 2 (3) were in relation to SAT services, and 1 (1) was made in relation to another service.

2.0 Themes, Learning, and Actions

The issues raised in complaints are inevitably similar at all three Stages of both the Corporate and Statutory Complaints Process. While each point contains valuable learning, it should be remembered that the total number of complaints is low.

Please note that learning has been taken from all complaints including MP and Councillor enquiries, rather than just those that were upheld or partially upheld, and it should be noted that the examples presented are case specific. Whilst there may be some common emergent themes, the majority are not indicative of systemic practice issues.

2.1 Communication

- Unsuccessful prospective adopter applicants to be contacted within three working days of the decision to reject their application, to ensure that the decision and next steps can be clearly understood.
- The vulnerability of prospective adopters' financial circumstances needs to be addressed with them from the outset of the adoption assessment process.
- Workers reminded of the need to obtain consent from either the child or those who hold Parental Responsibility before divulging confidential information with extended family members.
- Core Group meetings should use separate dial-in numbers for parents to participate via, when they are unable to be present at the same time or to have contact with each other.
- Estranged Parents should not be excluded from participating in Conference based solely on allegations, decisions to exclude should be made based upon evidence to support claim.
- A review to be held into the Adoption Service's arrangements for completing Carers allowance reviews, including ensuring that further Panels are scheduled to catch up with outstanding decisions. Business Support to upload these decisions onto the IT system and ensure that letters are promptly sent out confirming decisions made.
- Prospective Adopters to be invited to attend disruption meetings, following concerns that the placement may breakdown.
- Welcome (information) Pack for families to be reviewed with a view to including relevant information about what the Assessment Team does and the possible outcomes of our involvement.
- When a parent is subject to a Non-Molestation Order, rather than excluding them from participating at their child's Conference, a second Conference should be convened.
- Workers reminded of the need to meet the Council's Customer Service expectations over returning requests for contact via phone, email, letter whereby staff will respond to telephone messages within two working days, respond to e-mail enquiries within five working days, and written correspondence within 10 working days.
- A response to a request for contact must be made, even if there is nothing new to update.
- Workers reminded that minutes of meetings should be sent out within practice standards timescales.
- Any delays in the completion or sharing of assessments or reports should be communicated to the family with an explanation provided due to the difficulties, and a timescale provided as to when the task will be completed by and by whom.
- Workers reminded to be cautious in falsely raising expectations that carers may receive a carers allowance, how much it might be and for how long they might receive it.

2.2 Assessments, reports and plans

- Both unannounced and scheduled visits should be conducted on children subject to Child Protection planning.
- Notice is required over scheduled contact sessions to ensure such sessions aren't missed.
- Caution should be taken in completing and signing off Assessments to identify any mistakes being made.
- Workers to be cautious in using labelling behaviour which is opinion based, and should prefix judgement with 'in my opinion based on...'
- Caution to be taken when completing Assessments with Carers who do not have Parental Responsibility to ensure consent is obtained from those who do.
- Thorough handovers to be undertaken when Workers leave the employment of the Local Authority.

- Chronically Sick and Disabled Person's Act (CSDPA) plan wording will be updated to specifically state allocated hours must be used within timescale of plan and are not transferable or able to be carried forward to avoid misunderstanding.
- Workers reminded of the importance of using the name the family member wishes to be referred to within formal reports.
- Workers reminded of the importance of fact checking with families to minimise the potential for misleading information being shared, leading to loss of faith and trust.
- Workers reminded of the importance of allowing families time to read and reflect upon the contents of assessments or reports in advance of Conference.

2.3 Worker Behaviour

- Workers reminded of importance of maintaining eye contact and building rapport when using a laptop to make notes during a home visit.
- Workers reminded of the need for personal space and to be cautious if using tactile reassurances.
- Conferencing Service to review how they distribute Child Protection Plan and minutes to identify where improvements can be made.
- Workers to be cautious when comparing parents with each other.
- Workers reminded of the need to seek consent before photographing children.
- Conference Chairs to ensure minutes are checked for accuracy.
- Workers to avoid drawing comparisons over own circumstances and that of others.
- Workers encouraged to check written communication to avoid misunderstandings or offence.
- Workers to avoid discussing their own personal life with families.
- Workers to check latest guidance on the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) prior to conducting home visits.
- In neglect cases, any photos taken at the home address should be shared with a parent without delay.
- Workers are reminded of the need to provide handover details to families if leaving the employment of the Local Authority.
- Workers to take the time to explain the assessment process and the difference between meetings such as Family Network Meetings and Family Group Conferences.
- Workers are reminded of their responsibility to remain professional at all times and adhere to data protection guidelines when discussing families.
- Workers need to ensure any provision stipulated in an Education Health and Care Plan is arranged in a timely manner.

2.4 Policy

- Workers to be reminded there is no legal basis for refusing parents from recording meetings for their own personal use.
- Residential Placement to review their allocations process and establish clear timeframes for response to requests that have been received from families. Topic of extended stays and approvals to be raised at the Children's Homes Update Meeting and discussed with all Registered Managers, with a view to improving communication about allocations.
- Workers reminded of the need to explain 'setting up home allowance' with care leavers to avoid confusion.
- Work to be undertaken with partner agencies through the Safeguarding Children Partnership Board to promote sending Agency reports out prior to Conferences.

- Change to Policy due to COVID-19 to allow parental participation in statutory meetings via teleconference calls.
- Changes to Threshold and Resource Panel (TARP) process, so when placements of birth parents are considered, the location of any previously removed children is checked first.
- Local Authority to use uplift following new Government guidance on weekly support payments due to COVID-19, to boost support to young people through grants and extra visits.

2.5 Other

- All Business support have been reminded to double check email addresses, deleting the option for default addresses to be added to correspondence.
- Training to be organised for Statutory Assessment Team business support over processing Personal Budget payments.

3.0 Customer Care Team Update and Conclusion

Last year when writing the Annual Report, COVID-19 lock down restrictions had just come into effect, and we had no idea how long the restrictions would impact on Childrens Services Feedback and Complaints, little did we know that we would spend the next 12 months under such conditions.

We reported on how the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) had temporarily suspended their complaint line at the end of March 2020, and how the Customer Care Team was approaching the business of complaint handling with respect to COVID-19. Therefore, I will start by providing an overview of the past 12 months and the impact of the pandemic on the complaint process, as well as emerging themes and trends arising.

Quarter 1

During Q1 (April-June 2021), one enquiry and nine complaint responses were delayed due to capacity issues as a direct result of staff self-isolating due to COVID-19 related symptoms. Five escalation requests for Statutory Stage 2s were suspended as we were unable to proceed due to an inability to facilitate external investigations at that time. 12 complaints, representations, MP and general enquiries, were received specifically relating to changes in practice / services as a result of COVID-19, these included complaints about parental participation within Conferences, workers interpretation and compliance with Government's lockdown instructions and social distancing rules, contact with those shielding, accessing respite support for a disabled child, education provision for child with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or weekly support payments for care leavers to be considered.

As mentioned earlier, during this quarter the LGO temporarily suspended their telephone line for new complaints and issued guidance to Local Authorities over how to deal with complaints during this period. As a result of this LGO guidance and following initial lockdown restrictions over visitors accessing Council premises (preventing external investigators from reviewing on-line case records), we suspended all Statutory Stage 2 investigations and Stage 3 Reviews. As the quarter progressed and staff capacity increased, we were able to reinstate suspended Corporate Stage 2 investigations, meaning we were able to consider Statutory Stage 2 requests through this route as an alternative means of progression (subject to the complainant's consent), leading to two complainants accepting this option.

On a positive note, despite early capacity concerns, there was an improvement in Q1 in Stage 1 complaint responses being sent within timescale, with only 23% (12) of Statutory Stage 1 and 9% (3) of Corporate Stage 1 being sent outside of timescale.

Quarter 2

By the end of this quarter, Statutory Complaints had risen back to pre-COVID-19 lockdown rates and compliments exceeded previous levels. However, Corporate Complaints maintained consistently high throughout Q1 and into Q2.

The LGO re-instated their phone line on 29 June 2020 (end of Q1) and started to investigate complaints again. Also, during this quarter we were able to initiate two previously suspended Statutory Stage 2 investigations, providing external investigators access again to children's records, with staff interviews being facilitated virtually through Teams.

For a second successive quarter we noticed an improvement in Statutory Stage 1 complaint responses being sent out within timescale, with only 14% (23%) being sent outside timescale, whether that be 10 or 20 working days. Unfortunately, there was some slippage in Corporate Stage 1 responses going out in timescale, from 91% to 83% going out on time.

Quarter 3

During quarter three as a result of increasing COVID levels and a tightening of restrictions on families' movements with the second National Lockdown, this meant a lack of access for some children to their special education provision, particularly those deemed to be critically vulnerable which caused additional pressures on these families. As a result, we received a series of complaints from parents of affected children, raising concerns over respite provision and access to enhanced Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for carers. In order to remedy this situation, the Council continued to collaborate with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to ensure concerns relating to PPE supplies and respite support were addressed.

Despite the tightening of COVID restrictions, the LGO advised Councils to continue investigating complaints. Therefore, having reinstated Statutory Stage 2s, we continued to initiating new investigations around our limited access to Councils buildings to view children's records.

Also during this quarter, the LGO issued revised guidance to Local Authorities; 'Effective Complaint Handling for Local Authorities – October 2020' and as a result of this guidance we amended some of our working practices i.e. we will no longer consider how the Council assesses families and prepares reports for Court in private proceedings (Section 7 or 37 reports) under the Statutory Procedure, instead these concerns will now be considered under the Council's Corporate complaint procedure. The LGO also advised Councils to be careful in deciding which is the most appropriate complaint procedure to follow from the outset, so we have started to investigate more complaints relating to Children's Social Care through the Corporate complaint procedure, particularly when the issues raised do not relate directly to the needs of the child and the perceived injustice is to the parent or carer. As such, the reduction in Statutory Stage 1 complaints reported is partly due to this change in approach, rather than a reduction in complaints relating to Social Care per se.

In addition to the earlier mentioned pattern of complaints from parents of disabled children, we received a series of complaints from Special Guardians and Foster Carers about their eligibility and receipt of caring allowances either ceasing altogether or being reduced in line with the implementation of a Countywide change of policy in September 2020. We understand that all affected carers were written to at the end of 2019 to advise them of the forthcoming changes, however for some, these changes appear to have caught them off guard.

Quarter 4

In this final quarter of the year, we have continued to address the backlog of Statutory Stage 2 complaints, resulting in our first and only Stage 3 Review Panel of the year which was held entirely virtually via Teams. At year end we have two remaining Statutory Stage 2s suspended, both of which will be investigated in Q1 of 2021/211.

In conclusion, as the executive summary shows, the only increase in statistics we have seen across the year have been in Corporate Complaints, the reason for which I explained earlier. However, overall with both Statutory and Corporate complaints combined, there has been an 8% reduction.

The Annual Report for April 2020 – March 2021 is available to the public on the main County Council website through the following link:

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/contact-us/council-complaints-procedures>

4.0 Customer Care Team Contact Details

Please note our new address from May 2021:

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