
Children's Complaints and Feedback Team Annual Report April 2021 – March 2022

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Children's Complaints Manager
April 2022**

Executive Summary

- ↓ **Compliments** - In the period between April 2021 and March 2022, the Children's Complaints and Feedback Team (CCFT) has received 204 (242)* compliments. **This constitutes a 16% decrease.**
- ↑ **Enquiries** - The CCFT received 30 (52) Enquiries, 7 (8) Councillor Enquiries, and 68 (41) MP Enquiries this year. **This constitutes a 4% increase when all enquiries are combined.**
- ↓ **Statutory Stage 1** - The CCFT have received 74 (188) Stage 1 Statutory complaints throughout this year, of which 3 (5) are still ongoing and will be responded to in the next year. **This constitutes a 61% decrease.**
- ↑ **Corporate Stage 1** - The CCFT have received 319 (179) Stage 1 Corporate complaints throughout this year, of which 17 (14) are still ongoing and will be responded to in the next year. **This constitutes a 78% increase.**
- ↑ **Statutory Stage 2** - Throughout the year, 15 (8) Stage 2 Statutory complaints were worked on. Of these, 4 (0) were initiated in previous year, and 3 (4) were ongoing as of the end of this year. **This constitutes an 88% increase.**
- ↑ **Corporate Stage 2** - Throughout the year, a total of 25 (16) Stage 2 Corporate complaints were worked on. Of these, 3 (1) were initiated in the previous year, and 1 (3) remained ongoing as of the end of this year. **This constitutes a 56% increase.**
- ↑ **Statutory Stage 3** - In this year, 5 (1) Stage 3 Statutory complaints were worked on. Of these, 1 (0) was initiated in the previous year, and 3 (0) were ongoing as of the end of this year. **This constitutes a 400% increase.**
- ↑ **Corporate Stage 3** - In this year, 7 (5) Stage 3 Corporate complaints were worked on, of these none (0) were initiated in the previous year, and 2 (0) remained ongoing as of the end of this year. **This constitutes a 40% increase.**
- ↑ **LGO enquiries** - In this year, 20 (16) Local Government Ombudsman enquiries were worked on. Of these, 5 (4) cases were initiated in the previous year, and 9 (5) remained ongoing as of the end of this year. **This constitutes a 25% increase.**

Despite a significant reduction in Statutory Stage 1s (due to updated guidance), we have still seen a 7% increase in combined (Statutory/Corporate) Stage 1 complaints in 2021/22 with a 67% increase in combined Stage 2s and a 100% increase in combined Stage 3s

* Figures in brackets are for the preceding year: April 2020 – March 2021

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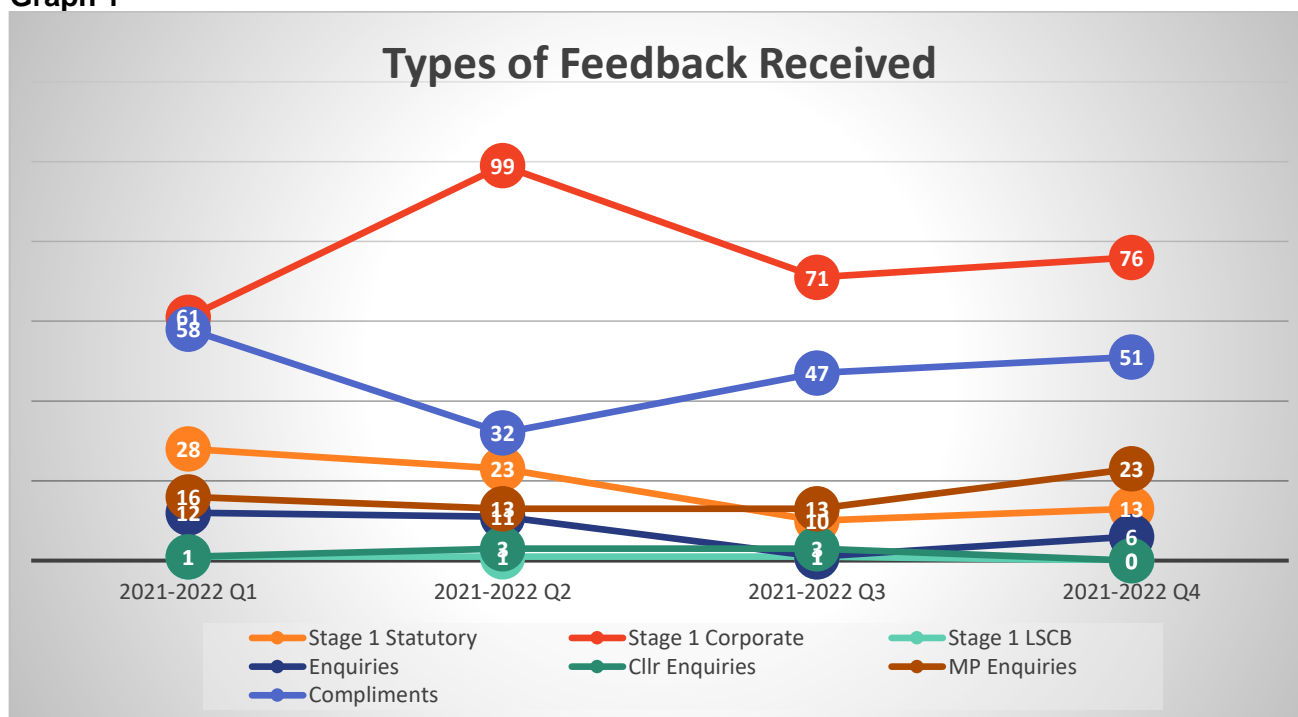
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1.0 Summary of Feedback

The CCFT 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 CCFT also dealt with 2 Representations, 10 Correspondences, 2 Resolving Professional Differences, 1 Disciplinary Matter, and 1 Social Work England enquiry in the period between April 2021 and March 2022, however given that these types of feedback are seldom received, they are not included in the graph.

Graph 1



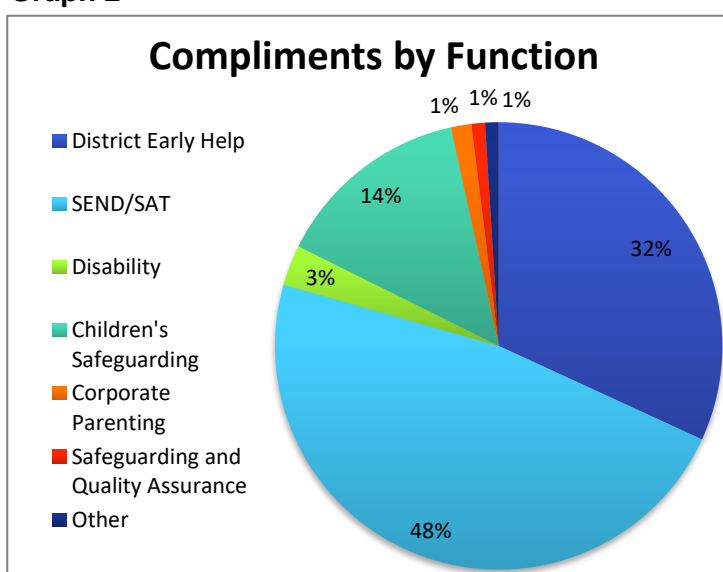
1.1 Compliments

In the period between April 2021 and March 2022, the CCFT received 204 (242) 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 CCFT 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 204 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:

Parent said of a Disability Social Worker:

"I am just writing a few words to say how happy A and I are to have you as our social worker. I will be really sad when we have to change social workers when A transfers to Adult care. I wish we could still keep you as our social worker next year"

You are so very good at your job because you have to listen to all the horrible things ie when I'm upset because A has had a massive melt down and won't stop hitting me and sometimes I have called in the middle of this to ask you to talk A down as I cannot and its terrifying.

I feel very lucky to have your support in knowing you want the best for A as I do. Also you help me when things get on top of me because over time you have got to know me well and know where I am coming from and how much A means to me (also my son) they mean everything to me and I always try to support them both in the best way I can and to protect them when needed. A has grown into a beautiful young lady and I just want her to have opportunities to enjoy life and to achieve as much as her abilities allow her too.

You are a brilliant social worker and a very caring person who does a fantastic job especially as its a job that there are not many people that want to do it. I wish we could keep you for longer as you make me feel stronger just knowing your at meeting about A [...]"

Foster Carer said of Children in Care Social Worker:

"I would like to comment on our foster child's Social Worker - H, regarding the transition and arrangement for K coming into our care.

Communication with H was excellent from the outset. Her standard of organisation was exceptional. She prepared the children well, organised for us to visit the current foster carers and then for the 3 children to visit us and the other foster carer, who will be caring for the other 2 siblings.

With all her hard work and great communication, the children were happy, as prepares as possible, as were we. This made the transition go as smooth as possible"

Parent said of Child and Family Centre Worker:

"Totally enjoyed and learned a lot in a comfortable environment for the kids. Your style and approach to accommodate both our children was amazing. You presented in a clear and engaging way. We were very much impressed about your energy and passion towards the workshop till the last session. We loved the content and exercises and all the info you shared with us to go with the flow of our children and still helping them learn. It was great to hear your tips on how to practice the same at home. It helped us think out of the box. We loved how you recap every week and that made us feel good about the progress we were making.

We would like to commend your attention to details. For instance, we liked how you considered little things such as painting and music instruments that we mentioned the kids were not used to at home, and you incorporated those into our sessions. That provided a new and interesting ground for kids to have fun and learn at the same time.

We really liked how prompt your email communications were with regards to the follow-up. We were lost amidst lots of things and the pandemic was not being easy in the sense for kids to access group activities where they would be able to watch their peers and learn. You created a very organised yet friendly setting to compensate for that. Appreciate every session was fresh and informative. You were honestly so brilliant and captivating that we were shocked to know on the last day that this was your first workshop. You are amazing and thankyou very much for making us feel confident at the end of the workshop"

P.s. The lady bird book is a massive hit with our children. We as a family love working with you. Thankyou and cheers !!"

1.2 General Enquiries

From April 2021 to March 2022, 30 (52) general enquiries were worked on, all of which were initiated and concluded in this year.

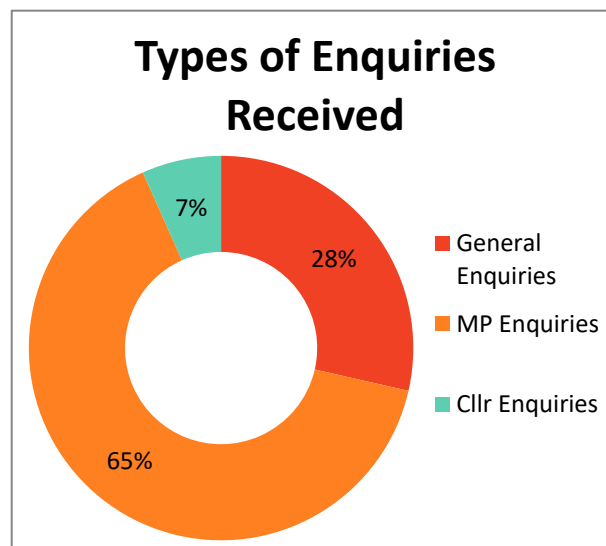
1.3 MP and Councillor Enquiries

The CCFT 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 2021 to March 2022, 7 (8) Councillor enquiries were worked on, all of which were initiated and concluded in this year.

From April 2020 to March 2021, 68 (41) MP enquiries were worked on. Of these, all were initiated in this year and 4 (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/>

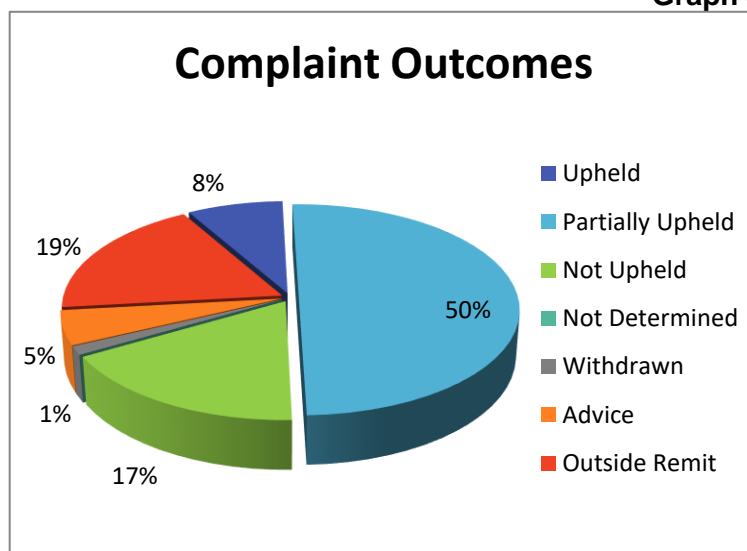
1.5 Stage 1 Statutory Complaints

From April 2021 to March 2022, the CCFT worked on 79 (203) Stage 1 Statutory complaints. Of these, 5 (15) were received in the previous year and carried forward into this year. Out of the 79 complaints worked on, 76 (198) received a response, therefore 3 (5) cases were still open and thus ongoing at the end of this year.

Graph 4

Out of the 76 (198) complaints concluded this year:

- ↓ 6 (10) were upheld
- ↓ 38 (82) were partially upheld
- ↓ 13 (37) were not upheld
- ↓ 0 (4) were not determined
- ↓ 1 (13) was withdrawn
- ↓ 4 (11) did not qualify, as advice was sought (enquiry)
- ↓ 14 (41) received were deemed outside of the complaint remit, as the complainant had insufficient interest to raise a complaint, the issues had already been investigated, were historic, or were being dealt with within the Court arena

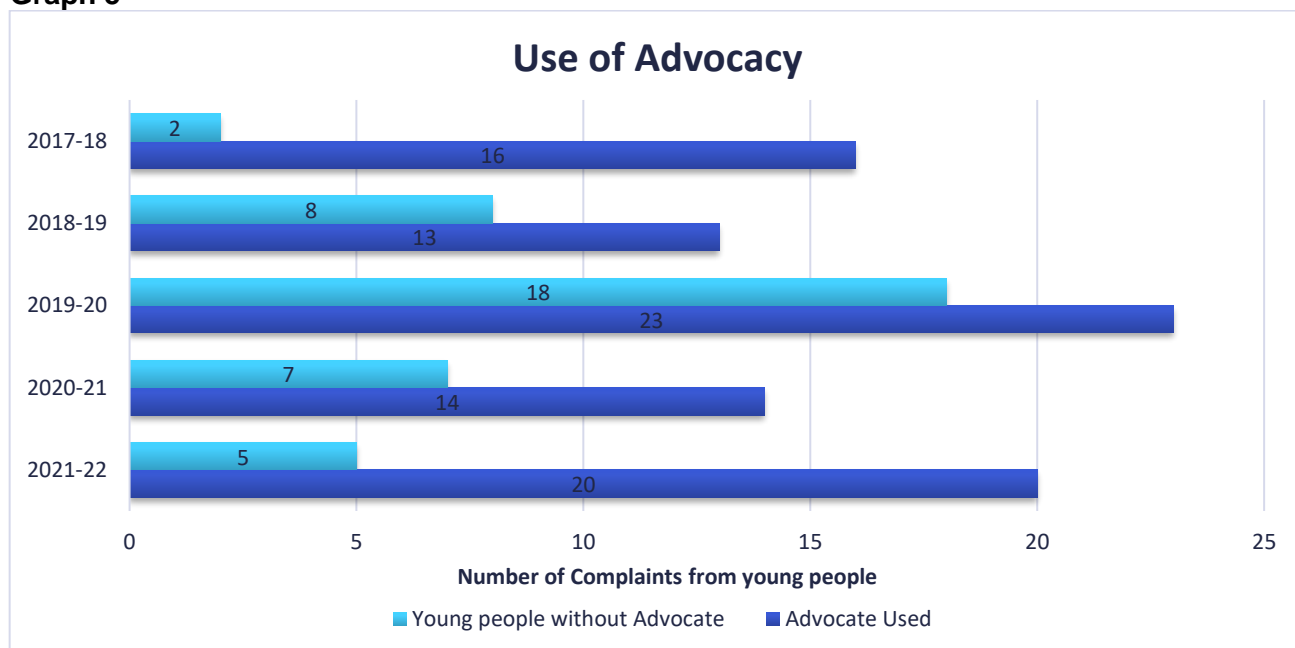


Out of the 76 Statutory complaints for which responses were provided during this year, 17 (35) were from complainants who returned with further concerns to their initial complaint, at which point their Stage 1 complaint was re-opened for investigation, which constitutes 22%. 4 (3) of these complainants re-opened their complaint multiple times at Stage 1.

Out of the 74 (188) complaints received this year, 37 (109) complaints had been submitted by complainants who had made at least one complaint previously which equates to 50%.

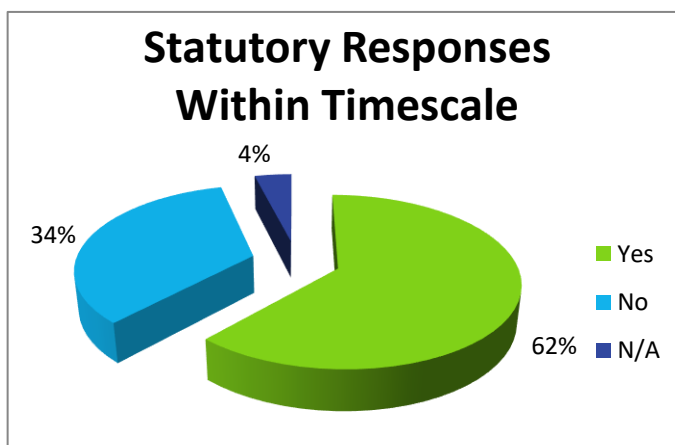
Out of the 74 Statutory complaints received this year, 37 (146) were made by parents or stepparents which equates to 50%, 25 (21) were made by young people which equates to 34%, 8 (16) were made by other family members which equates to 11%, and 4 (5) were received from a non-family member which equates to 5%. Advocates have been involved in 21 (14) complaints received this year, 14 (10) of these were supporting Children in Care, 5 (4) were Care Leavers, 1 (0) was supporting Disability, and 1 (0) was Fostering. 18 (13) advocates were from NYAS.

Graph 5

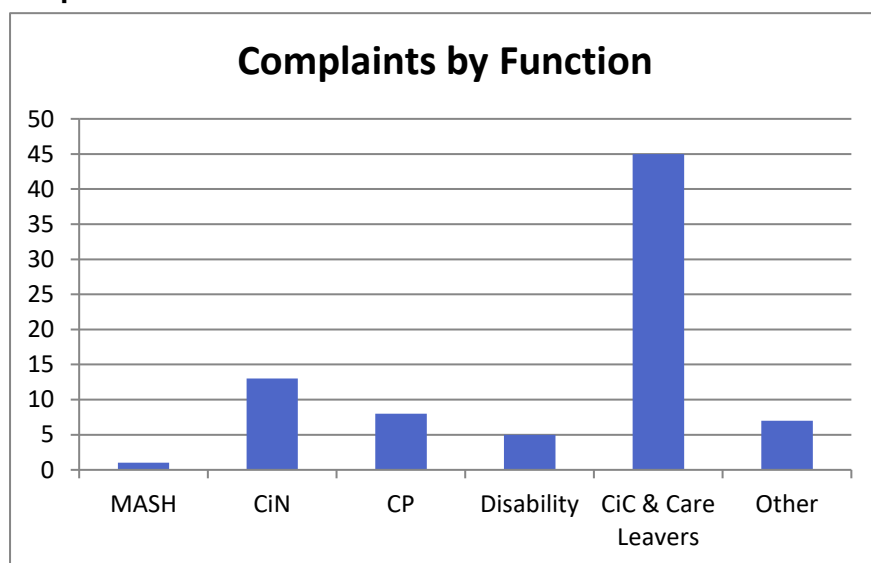


Out of the 76 Stage 1 statutory complaints responded to in this year, 23 (38) responses were extended from the initial 10-working-day timescale to a 20-working-day maximum which constitutes 30%.

26 (35) of all statutory complaints responded to were outside of the prescribed timescale (whether it was 10 or 20 working days) which equates to 34%.



Graph 7

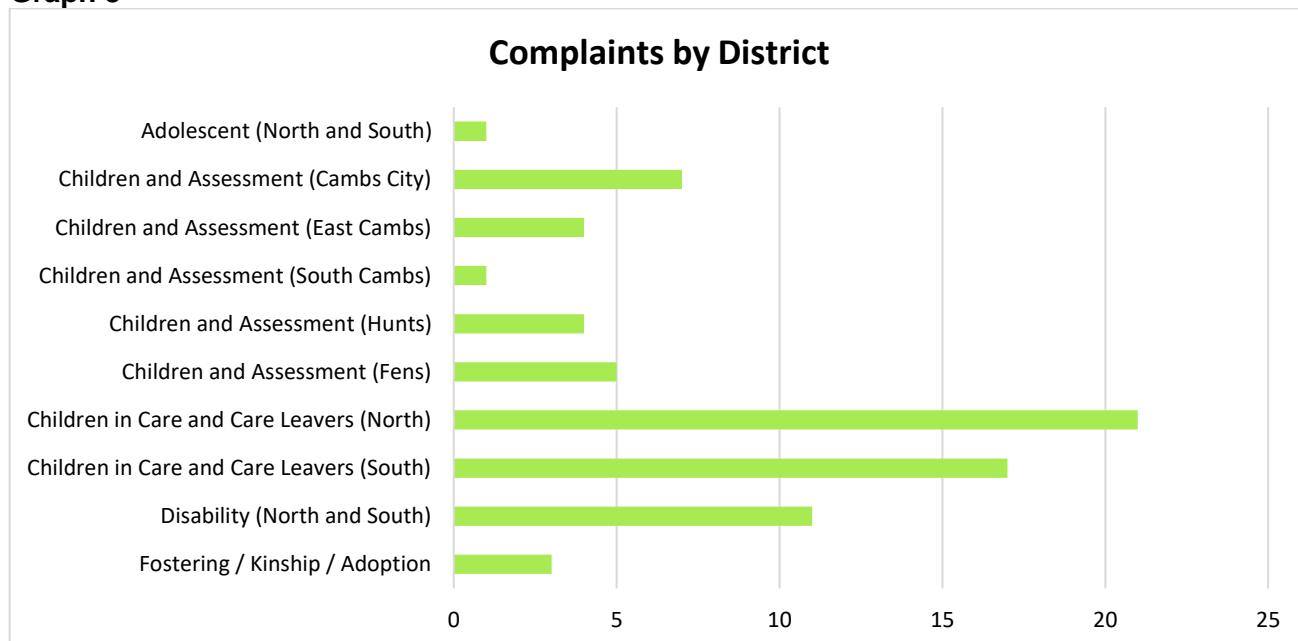


There was a range of issues raised within Statutory Stage 1 complaints.

The highest volume of complaints received were in relation to Children in Care and Care Leavers with 45 (62) complaints.

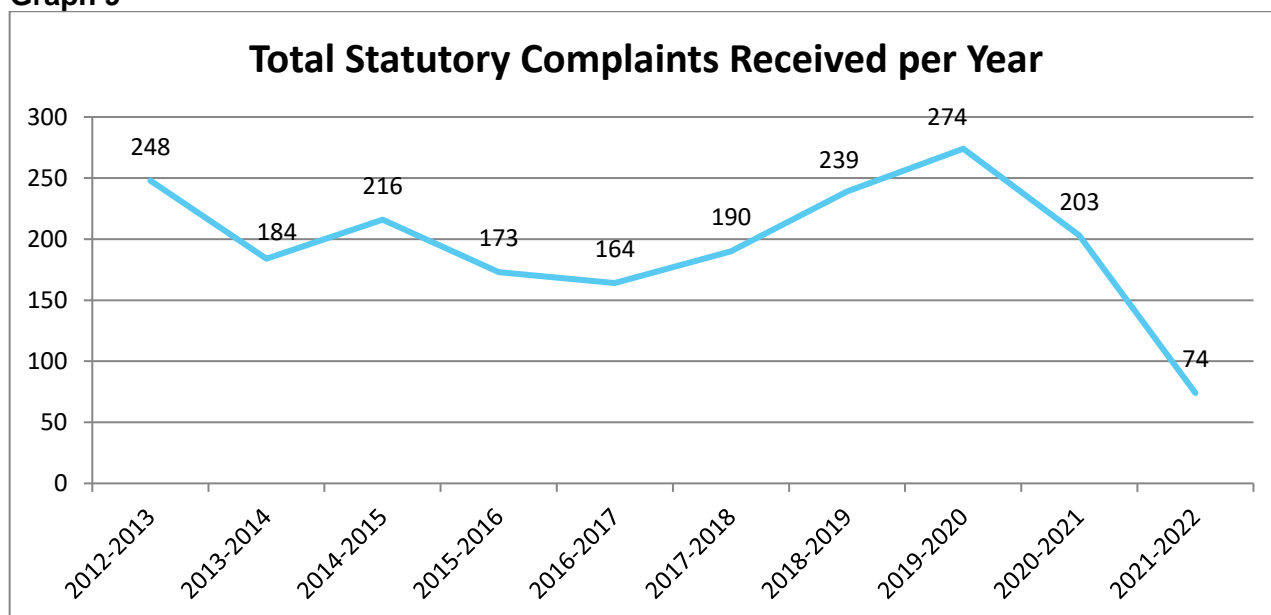
The category of 'Other' included complaints relating to Fostering and Adoption.

Graph 8



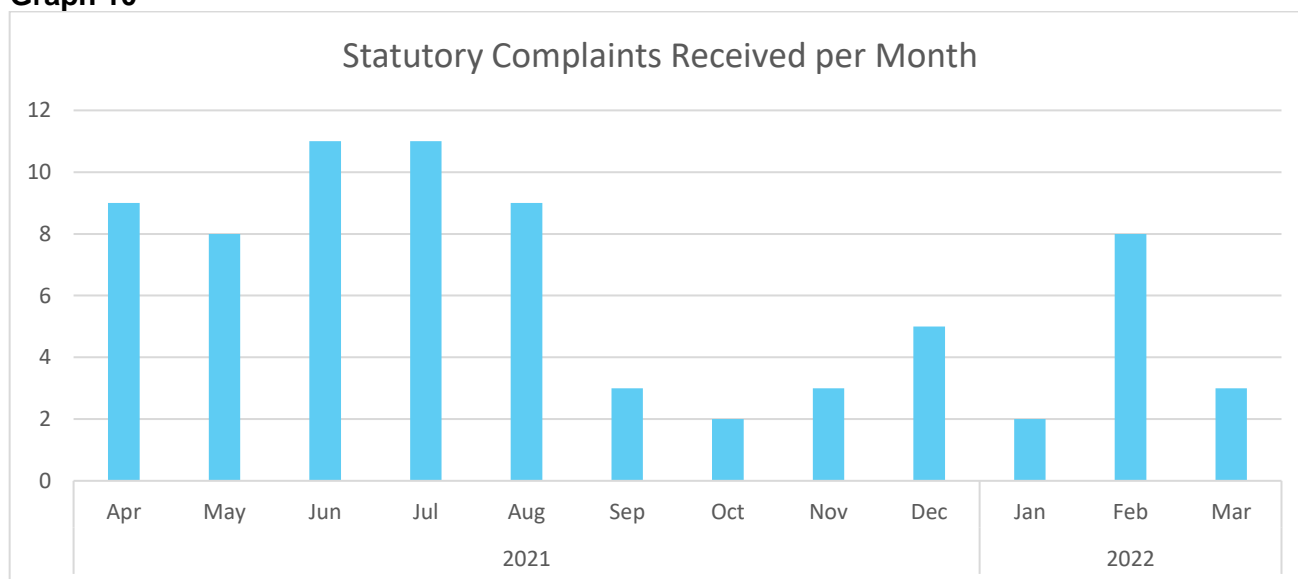
The majority of Statutory Stage 1 complaints within the Service were received in relation to the Children in Care and Care Leavers teams with 21 (20) in the North team and 17 (27) in the South team.

Graph 9



Since implementing the LGO revised guidance to Local Authorities; *Effective Complaint Handling for Local Authorities – October 2020*, we have been processing many more Social Care related complaints through the Council's Corporate complaint procedure. As such, the lower numbers of Statutory Stage 1 complaints (graph 9) and higher numbers of Corporate Stage 1 complaints (graph 13) are largely due to this change in approach.

Graph 10



1.6 Stage 1 Corporate Complaints

From April 2021 to March 2022, the CCFT worked on 333 (187) Stage 1 Corporate complaints. 14 (8) of these were received in the previous year and carried forward into this year. 17 (14) cases were still open and therefore ongoing as of the end of this year.

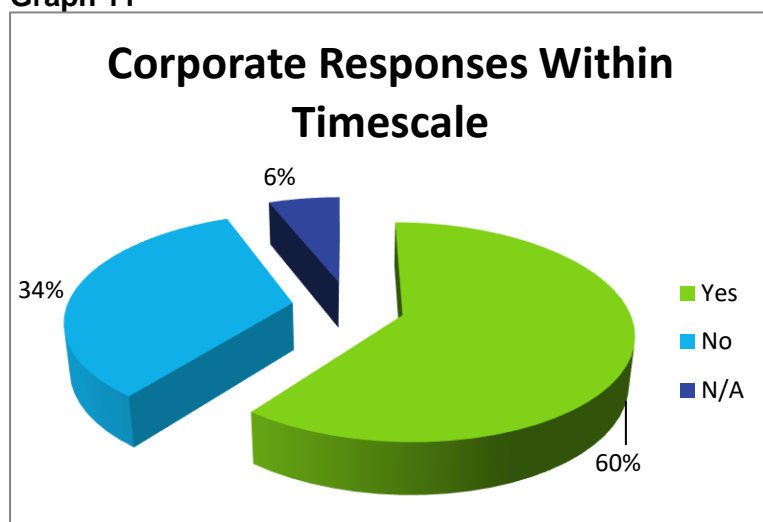
Out of the 316 (173) complaints which concluded in this year:

- ↑ 52 (29) were upheld
- ↑ 146 (54) were partially upheld
- ↑ 63 (50) were not upheld

- ↑ 6 (1) were not determined
- ↑ 18 (12) were withdrawn
- ↑ 9 (6) did not qualify as advice was sought (enquiry)
- ↑ 22 (21) did not qualify as they were outside of the complaints remit

Out of the 316 Corporate complaints for which responses were provided this year, 41 (62) were from complainants who returned with further concerns to their initial complaint, at which point their Stage 1 complaint was re-opened for investigation, equating to 13%. Out of the 319 (179) complaints received this year, 134 (82) complaints had been submitted by complainants who had made at least one unrelated complaint previously equating to 42%.

Graph 11



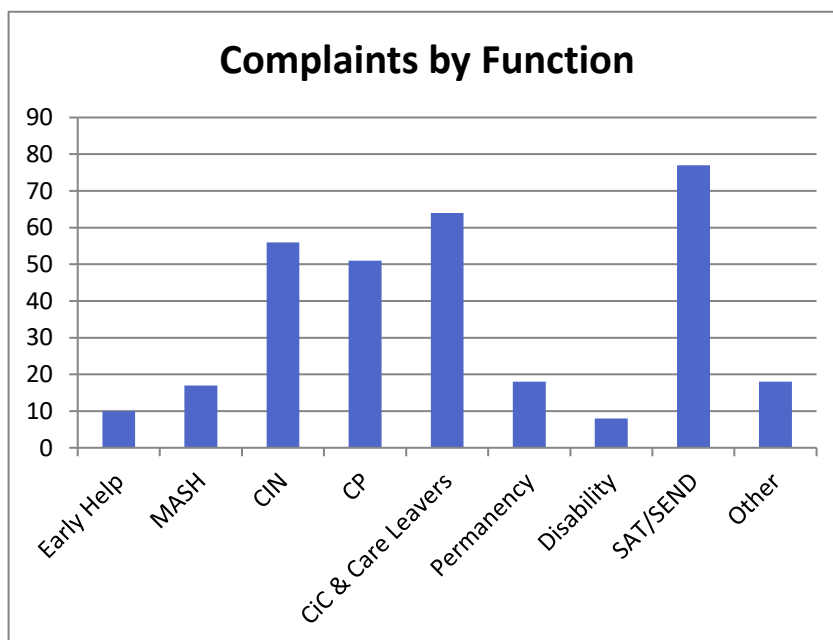
Out of the 316 Corporate complaints responded to this year, 74 (32) responses were extended from the initial 10-working-day timescale to a 20-working-day maximum.

106 (31) were responded to outside of the prescribed timescale (whether it was 10 or 20 working days) which constitutes 34%.

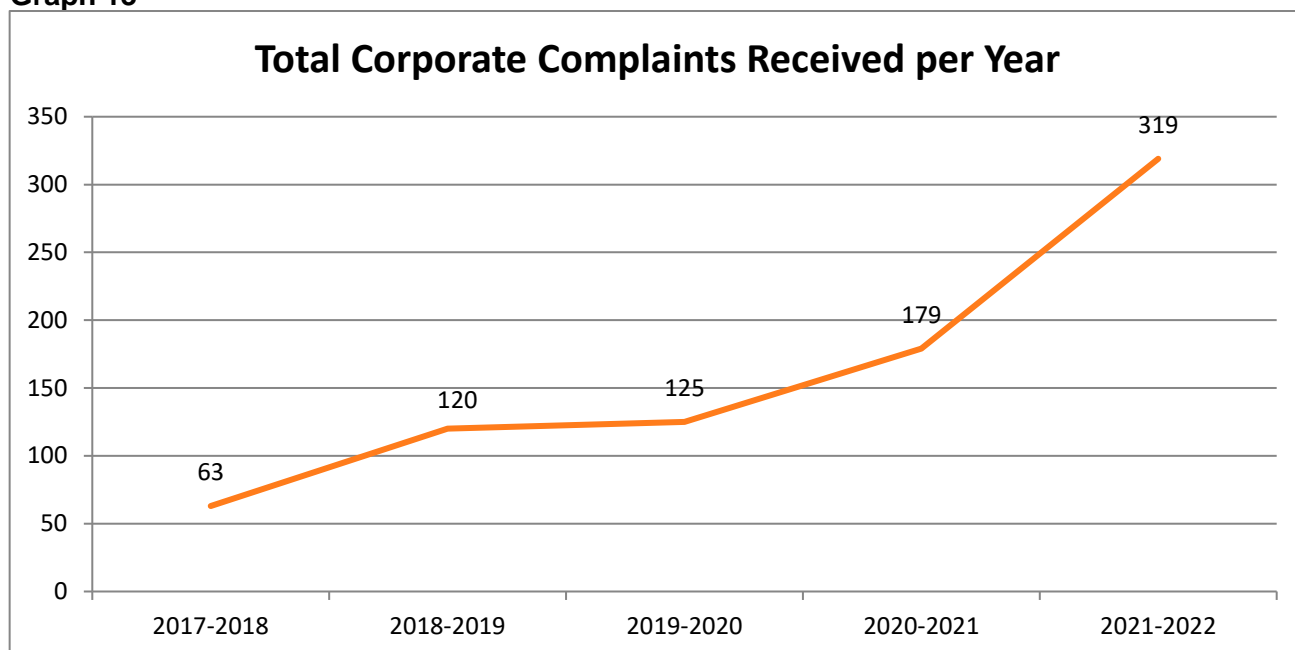
Graph 12

Out of the 319 complaints received this year, 252 (120) were made by parents or step-parents, 5 (6) were made by the young person themselves, 36 (27) were made by other family members, and 26 (26) 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) and Special Education Needs and Disabilities Team (SEND) with 77 (38) complaints, followed by Children in Care and Care Leavers with 64 (33) complaints received this year.



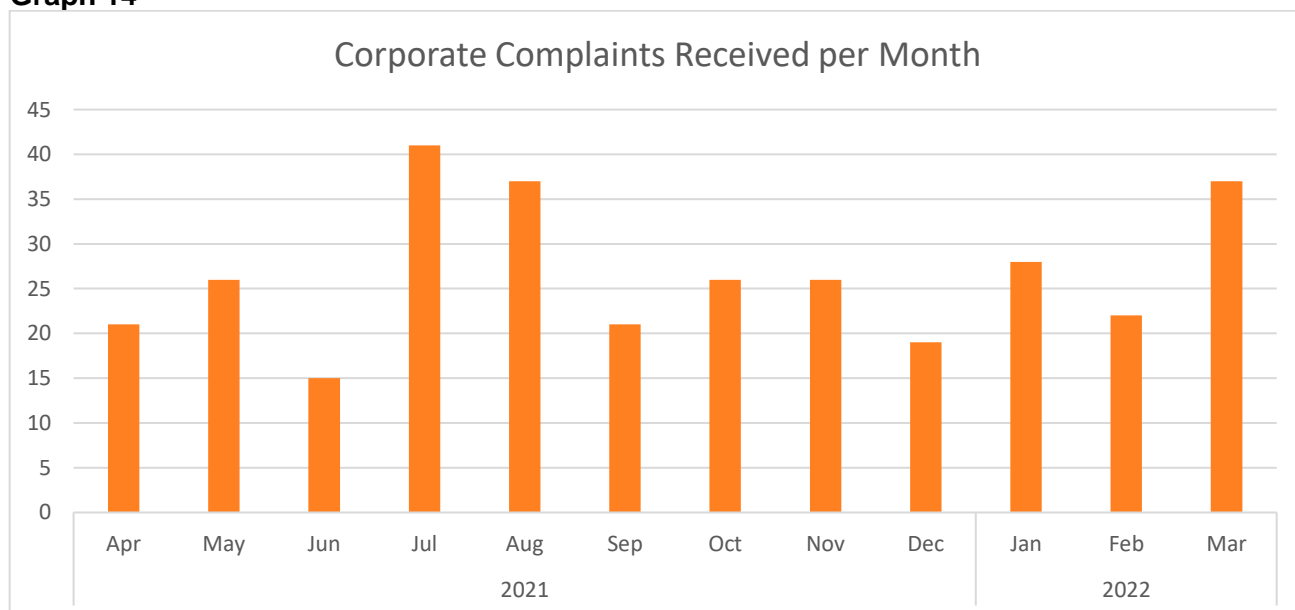
Graph 13



Graph 13 depicts the number of Stage 1 Corporate complaints received each year over the past five years, at which time the Children's Complaints and Feedback Team assumed responsibility for SEND Services' complaints. Prior to this, SEND Services managed their own complaints.

As of 2021-2022, the Team have implemented the aforementioned LGO revised guidance to Local Authorities; *Effective Complaint Handling for Local Authorities – October 2020*, which has impacted the number of Corporate complaints received, insofar as many more Social Care related complaints have been processed through the Council's Corporate complaint procedure. This accounts for the sharp increase in Corporate Stage 1 complaints this year (graph 13), as compared with the decrease in Statutory Stage 1 complaints (graph 9).

Graph 14



1.7 Stage 2 Statutory Complaints

From April 2021 to March 2022, the CCFT worked with 15 (8) Stage 2 Statutory complaints. 4 (0) of these were received in the previous year and carried forward into this year, and 3 (4) were still open and therefore ongoing as of the end of this year.

Out of the 12 (4) Stage 2 investigations which were concluded this year, 10 (2) were extended from the initial 25-working-day timescale to a 65-working-day timescale, with 3 (0) being responded to outside of the prescribed timescale.

Out of the 12 (4) complaints which concluded in this year:

- ↑ 8 (1) were partially upheld
- ↔ 1 (1) was not upheld
- ↔ 1 (1) did not qualify as it was outside of the complaints remit
- ↑ 2 (1) did not qualify as it was withdrawn

Of the 11 (8) Stage 2 complaints received in this year, 5 (6) were made by a parent, and 6 (1) were made by the Young Person themselves. 1 (1) was made in relation to a Care Leaver, 7 (2) were made in relation to a Child in Care, 1 (1) was made in relation to Child Protection, 1 (4) was made in relation to a Child in Need, and 1 (0) was made in relation to Adoption.

1.8 Stage 2 Corporate Complaints

From April 2021 to March 2022, the CCFT worked with 25 (16) Stage 2 Corporate complaints, 3 (1) of which were initiated in the previous year, and 1 (3) case was still open as of the end of this year.

Within the 24 (13) complaints which concluded in this year:

- ↑ 3 (1) were upheld
- ↑ 16 (5) were partially upheld
- ↓ 2 (3) were not upheld
- ↔ 2 (2) were withdrawn
- ↔ 1 (1) did not qualify as it was outside of the complaints remit

Out of the 24 complaints which concluded in this year, 11 (6) responses were extended from the initial 10-working-day timescale to a 20-working-day timescale. 6 (5) were responded to outside of the prescribed timescale which equates to 25%.

Of the 22 (15) Stage 2 complaints received in this year, 18 (13) were made by a parent, 1 (0) was made by the young person themselves, 2 (1) were made by another relative, and 1 (1) was made by a non-family member. 8 (5) of the complaints were made in relation to SAT services, 5 (4) were made in relation to Child Protection, 2 (2) were made in relation to a Child in Care, 1 (1) was made in relation to Adoption, 3 (1) were made in relation to Children in Need, 2 (0) were made in relation to the Integrated Front Door, and 1 (0) was in relation to Early Help services.

1.9 Stage 3 Statutory Complaints

From April 2021 to March 2022, the CCFT worked with 5 (1) Stage 3 Statutory complaints. 1 (0) of these was received in the previous year and carried forward into this year, and 3 (1) was still open and therefore ongoing as of the end of this year.

Out of the 2 (0) complaints which concluded in this year:

- ↑ 2 (0) were partially upheld

Of the 4 (1) Stage 3 complaints received in this year, all 4 (1) were made by a parent. 2 (0) were made in relation to a Child in Care, 2 (1) were made in relation to Children in Need, and 1 (0) was made in relation to Adoption.

1.10 Stage 3 Corporate Complaints

From April 2021 to March 2022, the CCFT worked with 7 (5) Stage 3 Corporate complaints. Of these, none (0) were initiated in the previous year, and 2 (0) remained open and ongoing as of the end of this year.

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

- ↔ 3 (3) were partially upheld
- ↔ 1 (1) was not upheld
- ↑ 1 (0) was signposted to the LGO

Of the 7 complaints received this year, 7 (4) were made by parents, and 1 (0) was made by a non-family member. 3 (3) complaints were made in relation to SAT services, 1 (1) was made in relation to Child Protection, 1 (0) was made in relation to a Child in Care, 1 (0) was made in relation to the Integrated Front Door, and 1 (0) was made in relation to Early Help.

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

1.11 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

From April 2021 to March 2022, the CCFT worked with 20 (16) Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) enquiries. 5 (4) enquiries were initiated in the previous year, 11 (11) cases were closed this year, therefore 9 (5) cases were ongoing as of the end of this year.

Of the 11 enquiries which concluded this year:

- ↓ 2 (3) were upheld
- ↔ 2 (2) were not upheld
- ↑ 7 (6) were deemed outside of remit

Of the 15 enquiries received this year, 13 (9) were made by parents, and 2 (3) were made by another family member. 2 (2) complaint were made in relation to Child in Need services, 3 (1) were made in relation to Child Protection, 3 (3) were made in relation to Children in Care, 1 (3) was made in relation to Adoption, 1 (0) was in relation to the Integrated Front Door, 4 (2) 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 emerging themes, the majority are not indicative of systemic practice issues.

2.1 Communication

- A flowchart has been devised and implemented to illustrate the process to be followed when conducting a carer's means tested allowance re-assessment for Panel
- Issues encountered over poor communication and pathway planning for a disabled young person moving counties, to be improved through transition planning discussions between Childrens and Adults Social Care
- When teams change contact numbers it is important to ensure old numbers are linked to the new number or a message is recorded to signpost to the new number
- Processes reviewed to ensure Early Help Hub staff know to send closure letter/message
- Inaccurate case records should have a management note added to represent the complainant's views
- Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) to work with the Child in Care teams to strengthen the referral process for letterbox contact
- RAA to work with Childrens Safeguarding Teams to better understand practice and processes supporting adoption, in particular Foster to Adopt
- RAA's Family Finding Social Workers to remind Foster Carers of the importance of keeping memorable items for memory boxes
- Guidance on home to school transport to be updated, as responsibility unclear and update shared with team
- Cover arrangements should be put in place when workers are on leave
- The Protocol between Children's Services and the Disability Social Care 0-25 Services called *Promoting a seamless transition for young people with additional needs who require ongoing services into adulthood* is to be reviewed to ensure it provides a clear transfer pathway for young people, documenting both financial and case responsibility and the process of allocating a Personal Advisor. A Young Person's guide on the same topic to also be created
- The Policy with regards to financial entitlements for young people leaving care will be reviewed, additionally a Young Person's version should also be created
- Estranged parents should not be excluded from participating in Conferences
- Workers are reminded of the need to meet the Council's corporate 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 to be clearer in their written communications over expectations of families

2.2 Assessments, reports and plans

- Staff reminded to add parents' feedback to assessment reports, to the child's case record
- Head of Service to produce and circulate a Practice Guidance Note around *Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse (APVA)* for staff and the Childrens Safeguarding Board
- Assistant Director to write to the Chair of Governors at a secondary school requesting their complaints procedure and policy on consultation with pupils and parents is reviewed and arrange for an independent review of SEND provision at the school

- A parent consent form has been created to ensure full transparency for parents receiving post adoption support from therapists who will now be expected to share information over intervention provided
- Post Adoption Support (PAS) to review literature to ensure it includes the role of PAS, how to apply to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) and what it can be used for
- PAS to ensure revised information includes links to ASF website, so parents have access to up-to-date information and guidance, as well as contact numbers
- PAS to complete a review on the retention of their records, providing full access for all staff in the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Team to CHARMS case recording database
- Head of Service to ensure concerns over the suitability of a residential placement for a child in care, will be reviewed at a stability meeting and a plan with SMART outcomes will be made ensuring the voice of the young person is included
- Service Manager to remind all staff to record the views, wishes and feelings of young people when spoken to, using their own words, and to make sure they understand what has been said to them, when and important message has been shared
- Service Manager to speak to the Placements Team to make sure young people's needs are considered when proposing secure transport between placements
- Service Manager to review current processes to make sure children and young people are getting timely and specific therapeutic interventions that meet their needs
- Changes to EHCPs to be negotiated through consultation with parents
- Caution should be taken in completing and signing off assessment, 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...'
- 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
- Statutory Assessment Team (SAT) to review its internal processes for communicating tribunal decisions to all relevant professionals involved in a case
- SAT to review how it follows up outcomes from tribunals in a timely way and then monitors implementation of the decisions
- SAT to highlight to all staff the difference in application processes between Peterborough Regional College and Cambridge Regional College and their respective 14-16 provision
- SEND Transformation Programme (a large-scale review of tuition) is due to take place in the Spring Term 2022. As part of this review, the Local Authority will be examining cohorts of pupils who have remained on a school roll whilst on tuition packages. The Local Authority will also review the application process for 14 -16 provision
- A review of the *Cease to Maintain* protocol in SAT will be conducted in the summer term
- As part of Cambridgeshire's SEND Transformation Programme, an EHCP and Annual Review Improvement Plan is underway which will include how to effectively capture parent and pupil voice

2.3 Worker Behaviour

- Reasons why an assessment report cannot be shared should be explained
- Workers to be cautious not to be over familiar with children, potentially breaching professional boundaries
- Workers should be sensitive to the timing of sharing difficult messages
- Workers reminded to be careful of children listening in on sensitive conversations
- Workers reminded to keep their own opinions private
- Workers to keep families informed if they are going to be late to an appointment

- Workers reminded to add an out of office assistant message or voicemail message to their account if on leave or off sick
- Workers reminded of the need to complete goodbye visits to children if leaving or ending a piece of work
- Workers to take the time to explain the assessment process
- Workers are reminded to remain professional at all times and adhere to data protection guidelines when discussing families

2.4 Policy

- Workers reminded of the need to be cautious when using pre-populated case recording forms to avoid data breaches
- Local Authority to reimburse cost of CCTV and burglar alarm following data breach over whereabouts of family
- Local Authority to fund the purchase of a second-hand bike for a care leaver due to misleading information on Local Offer website following internal review
- The Local Authority to develop guidance/advice for parent/carers making it clear that payments for independent assessments will only be authorised if agreed in writing prior to the assessment taking place
- Workers reminded of the need to explain *Setting Up Home Allowance* with care leavers to avoid confusion.

2.5 Other (including payment issues, data breaches, delays and staffing problems)

- Workers reminded of the need for caution when discussing extended families without explicit consent
- All Business Support have been reminded to double check email addresses, deleting the option for default addresses to be added to correspondence.
- Incomplete tasks should be handed over when a worker leaves
- All staff in a residential setting for disabled children to retake their safe manual handling people training, which will include the use of slings and hoists requiring manager sign off
- Transition planning meeting should have been held prior to child starting school
- SAT have appointed additional temporary staff and recruited several permanent new caseworkers to address the backlog of cases from Covid and the increase of demand on the Service
- SAT to introduce a new Personal Budget Casework Officer post, who will take on a specific caseload of Personal Budget pupils
- SAT to procure a new case management system to track actions/monitor statutory due dates
- The Local Authority to review its approach to Connected Carers placements
- SAT to ensure there is a procedure in place for reviewing cases of staff who are on long-term sick leave to ensure key actions are not missed

3.0 Children's Complaints and Feedback Team Update and Conclusion

Following an unprecedented 2019-20 with COVID-19, we worked hard through 2020-21 to address the backlog of suspended Statutory Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints, meaning we started 2021-22 carrying forward two remaining Statutory Stage 2s, both of which were investigated in Q1.

During the rest of this year, we sought to embed a new way of working following the publication of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) *Guide for Practitioners on the Children's Statutory Complaints Process* (March 2021). This guidance offered further clarification on which complaint procedures should be followed when considering complaints relating to Children's Social Care. This allows Councils to use their discretion to consider all parts of a complaint in a single investigation rather than separating issues out based upon which procedure is likely to produce the best result for the complainant, child or young person. As a result, there has been a significant reduction in complaints being investigated through the Statutory Complaint Procedure (see graph 9), however these complaints have still been investigated through the Council's own Corporate Complaint Procedure, hence the significant increase in Corporate Stage 1s (see graph 13).

Despite fewer complaints being investigated at Stage 1 of the Statutory Complaint Procedure, there has still been a significant increase in escalation requests for these complaints to be considered at Stage 2 (88%) and at Stage 3 (400%). This unprecedented demand has placed pressure upon the Complaints Team, Children's Social Care and the Council's contractual partner, Coram Voice, to fulfil such investigations and reviews, however once a complaint has been accepted as a Statutory Stage 1, the Local Authority is obliged to ensure that the complaint proceeds to Stages 2 and 3 of this procedure, if that is the complainant's wish.

Whilst COVID-19 restrictions have all but been removed, complaint investigations and reviews have continued to be held virtually and most likely will remain this way, unless the complainant has IT access issues or expresses a desire for a face-to-face meeting. Largely this is due to the unintended consequence of saving costs by avoiding travel time and expense and the positive feedback received as to how efficient and effective virtual interactions and meetings have been, enabling a higher level of engagement.

Of all the Statutory Stage 1s received this year, 45 (61%) were received from or related to a Child in Care or Care Leaver. 25 (34%) complaints were received from young people of which 21 were supported by an advocate.

Common complaint themes raised by young people in care or by care leavers relate to the Setting-Up Home Allowance (SUHA)/Leaving Care grant, late allocation of a Personal Adviser, issues accessing their Junior ISA savings accounts, outdated pathway plans, delayed post-18 planning into Leaving Carer status and transfer arrangements to Adults Social Care at 18yrs.

There has been specific learning and service improvements made as a result of young people complaints as mentioned earlier, such as:

- Where there are any concerns over the suitability of a young person's placement, a stability meeting will be held to review the concerns and develop a plan that has SMART outcomes (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely) ensuring the voice of the young person is included.
- When secure transport is being considered to move a young person between placements, the Placements Team will ensure that this is appropriately explained to the young person and their understanding is checked out.
- A review of the current *Promoting a seamless transition for young people with additional needs who require ongoing services into adulthood* to be completed to ensure it provides a clear transfer pathway for young people, documenting both financial and case responsibility and the process of allocating a Personal Advisor, and in addition to this, a version to be completed specifically for young people to access.
- A review of financial entitlements for young people leaving care will be completed, creating a version specifically for young people to access.

As identified within the Executive Summary (cover page), due to our change of practice, we have seen an increase in Corporate Stage 1s (78%) as these now incorporate complaints relating to Children's Social Care as well as SEND Services and Early Help. We have also seen an increase in Corporate Stage 2s (56%), an increase in Corporate Stage 3s (40%) and an increase in LGSCO complaints (25%). These too place additional pressure upon the CCFT and Children's Services but

as this is an internal three stage complaint process, the cost of external Stage 2 investigations or Stage 3 reviews can be avoided.

As mentioned earlier, the highest area of complaints accepted at Stage 1 of the Corporate Complaint Procedure relates to Statutory Assessment (24%), closely followed by Children in Care (20%), then Children in Need (17%) and Child Protection (16%).

Common complaint themes raised by parents of children and young people with special educational needs relate to late Personal Budget payments, the Local Authority failing in its duty to ensure educational providers are delivering the provision as stated in the child's EHCP to meet their needs, delays in issuing draft/final EHCPs, delays in taking cases to County Resourcing Panel, delays in completing a Needs Assessment or re-Assessment, inaccuracies in the EHCPs, lack of contact from Casework Officer and no educational provider named in the EHCP.

The Local Authority has recently embarked on a change programme which will consider complaints regarding EHCPs and the Annual Review process in the Improvement Plan. Alongside this, a bespoke IT/Data system for SAT is due to be implemented in September 2022. This will provide significant efficiencies and will further improve monitoring and tracking by the Service, as well as increasing their accountability.

There has also been learning taken in the way we manage children's complaints, as a result of this we have made a number of our own Service improvements;

- In the Government Guidance 'Getting The Best From Complaints (2006)' which supports the Statutory complaint legislation, the complainant's right to approach the LGSCO at any time is made clear, and the Local Authority should explain this in its publicity. Also, the guidance goes on to say that the Ombudsman would ordinarily expect the Local Authority to consider the complaint initially and may refer the complaint back to the relevant Complaints Manager if this has not been done (para 3.2.4). All our literature has been updated to reflect this.
- Following the conclusion of a recent Corporate complaint into SEND services, we were criticised by the LGSCO for suspending elements of a complaint due to an ongoing *concurrent procedure*, as described in Getting The Best From Complaints (2006), namely mediation prior to appeal at tribunal which denied the complainant the chance to resolve these issues sooner. As a result of this feedback, we now no longer suspend such concerns, allowing them to run parallel with concurrent procedures.
- We now summarise the concerns expressed in complaints in our acknowledgement letters, inviting complainants to clarify if we are focusing the investigation on the right issues. This move has been implemented to reduce the number of re-opened complaints.
- We now commence all Stage 2 investigation timescales on the day the escalation request is first received, rather than when we have agreed the Schedule of Complaint with the complainant, to avoid drift and delay.
- Finally, we received feedback to suggest our Team name and job titles were misleading, so we have now changed our name from the Children's Customer Care Team to the Children's Complaints and Feedback Team. Accordingly, we have changed our contact details and job titles too, all of which are reflected in our updated literature.

The Annual Report for April 2021 – March 2022 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 Children's Complaints and Feedback Team

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