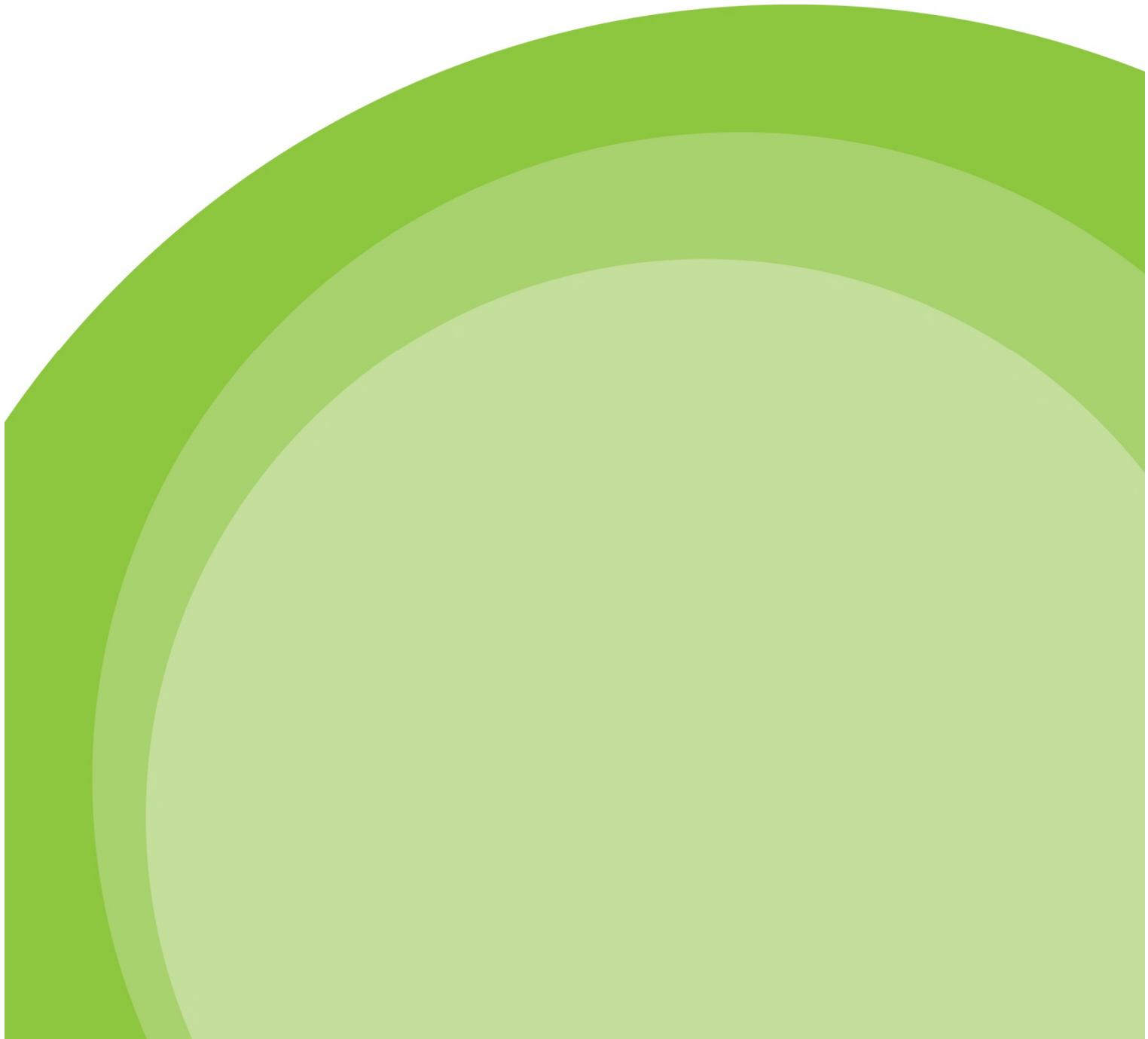




Children's Social Care Services

Customer Feedback – Compliments/Complaints
Annual Report (1st April 2015 – 31 March 2016)
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Introduction

This report fulfils the Council's statutory duty to monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure and produce an annual report for Children's Services social care complaints.

This report provides statistics for 2015/16 on the number of compliments and complaints received; a summary of complaint causes; the number of complaints that were well founded (upheld fully or in part); performance; the actions taken to improve services as a consequence of complaints; complaints considered by the Local Government Ombudsman and the effectiveness of the complaints procedure.

The report will be presented to the relevant local authority committee and will be made available on the Council's website.

The Complaints Procedure

The Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 (as amended by the NHS & Community Care Act 1990) requires us to establish a procedure for considering complaints in relation to the discharge of, or failure to discharge, any social services functions in respect of a qualifying individual. The Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 provides the legal framework for the procedures in relation to social care functions.

The regulations require the local authority to attempt to resolve complaints as soon as reasonably practicable and within specific timescales. The procedure has three stages, which are set out below, however where appropriate and with the agreement of the complainant the local authority may arrange for conciliation, mediation or other alternative dispute resolution to help resolve matters.

- Stage 1 (Local resolution by manager) – 10 working days or up to 20 working days for complex cases
- Stage 2 (Investigation by someone outside of the service area complained about) - 25 working days with maximum extension to 65 working days
- Stage 3 (Independent Review) – 30 working days to convene and hold a review panel; then 5 working days for the panel to issue its findings; and a further 15 working days for the local authority to respond to those findings

All complaints are triaged to ensure they are suitable for the process. This ensures matters are managed through the correct procedures, should an alternative process be in place. Any matters which are not suitable for the complaints process are filtered out and passed to the appropriate channel.

If customers remain dissatisfied with the Council's handling of the complaint they can refer to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). The LGO is an independent body that can consider complaints about the Council.

Executive Summary

Children's Social Care

26 compliments were received in 2015/16 for Children's Social Care services with instances of customers telling us that services were getting it right and having a positive impact on their lives.

There were 84 new complaints received, 65 of which were managed through the complaints procedure (14 directly from children and young people). The remaining issues related to child protection, legal process, internal management processes, were the responsibility of another body, were out of time, or were deemed as vexatious. These cases were filtered out and passed to the appropriate channel where necessary.

62 stage 1 complaints were concluded. There was no stage 2 or stage 3 complaints.

Complaints were seen as important feedback for services and a means of considering how to improve. Managers listened to customers' views with 55% of stage 1 complaints either upheld fully or in part. The main reason for complaints this year related to customer care and communication issues.

Performance in complaints handling has improved from last year in that 84% (compared to 78%) of complaints received a stage 1 response within 20 working days or less. Not all cases were resolved following the stage 1 response and 10 complainants took up the offer of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). This led to the cases being actioned without escalation to the next stage. The types of ADR offered ranged from conciliation meetings, Head of Service Review and additional responses to challenges and queries. The use of ADR helped the complainants to feel heard and helped to rebuild confidence and improve communications between the complainant and the service.

Individual cases had specific remedies put in place and the majority of wider service improvements resulted in reviews of some of the current processes in place within Children's Social Care. For wider service improvements see Section 5.

The LGO considered seven complaints about Central Bedfordshire Council's Children's Social Care Services during the period. The LGO decided not to investigate in four of those cases as it was satisfied that the local authority had addressed those complaints appropriately. The remaining three cases progressed to investigation by the Ombudsman. In one case the Ombudsman found no fault with the actions of the local authority and the remaining two cases were pending a decision at the end of the period. One LGO case reported in the previous year (2014/15) received a decision notice in this period. The LGO agreed with the Council's finding of fault and a financial remedy of £900 was agreed to settle the complaint.

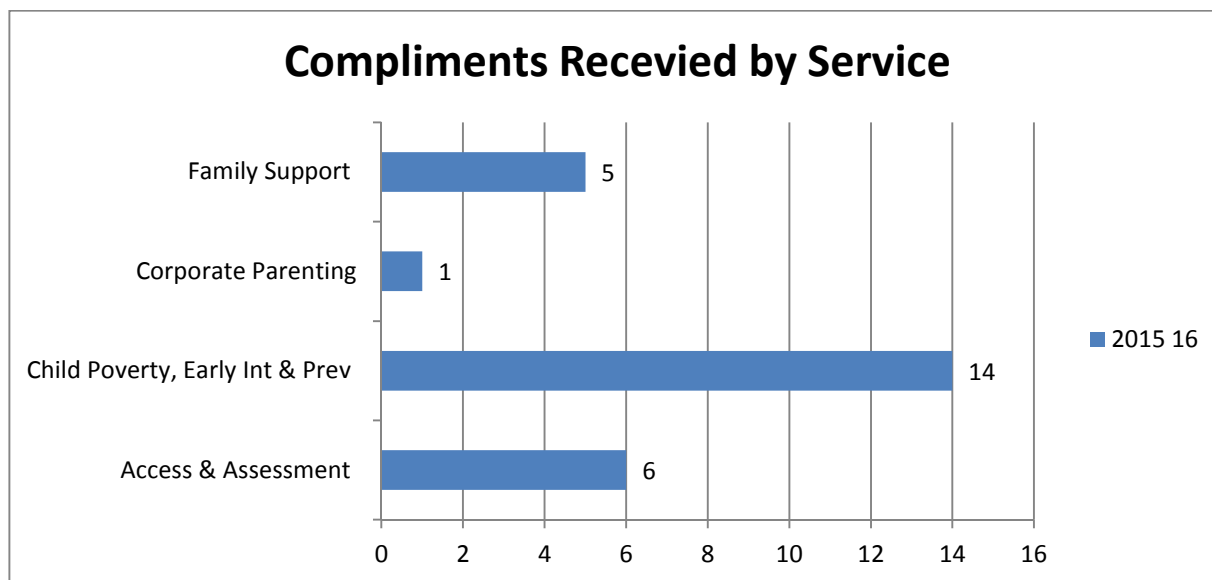
Effectiveness

The activity for this reporting period shows the complaints procedure has been effective at resolving customer complaints at a local level. Learning from the customer experience through complaints has led to improvements to practices however there is some room for improvement in managing complaints to timescales and to establish the root-cause of complaints to identify further learning for services.

1. Representations Made to Central Bedfordshire Council

1.1 Compliments Received

26 compliments were recorded across Children's Social Care Services relating to good customer care and the quality of support to children and their families. The below chart shows the number of compliments received by service area in 2015/16:



The breakdown of compliments received by service is detailed below:

Child Poverty, Early Intervention and Prevention

Positive feedback from young people who enjoyed the Protective Behaviours training sessions (6); thanks for positive impact and support during steps to withdraw services; thanks from young person given help with friendships; praise for parental support (5); thanks to worker who made family feel at ease and has not been judgemental.

Access & Assessment

Thanks to social worker who has worked wonders with teen aggression; sensitive, honest and professional approach from social worker; thanks to social worker who has provided support in a professional way whilst remaining encouraging and friendly; factual and empowering advice provided to protect children; positive feedback from a young person on their first meeting with their social worker; social worker listening to needs and thoughts of family.

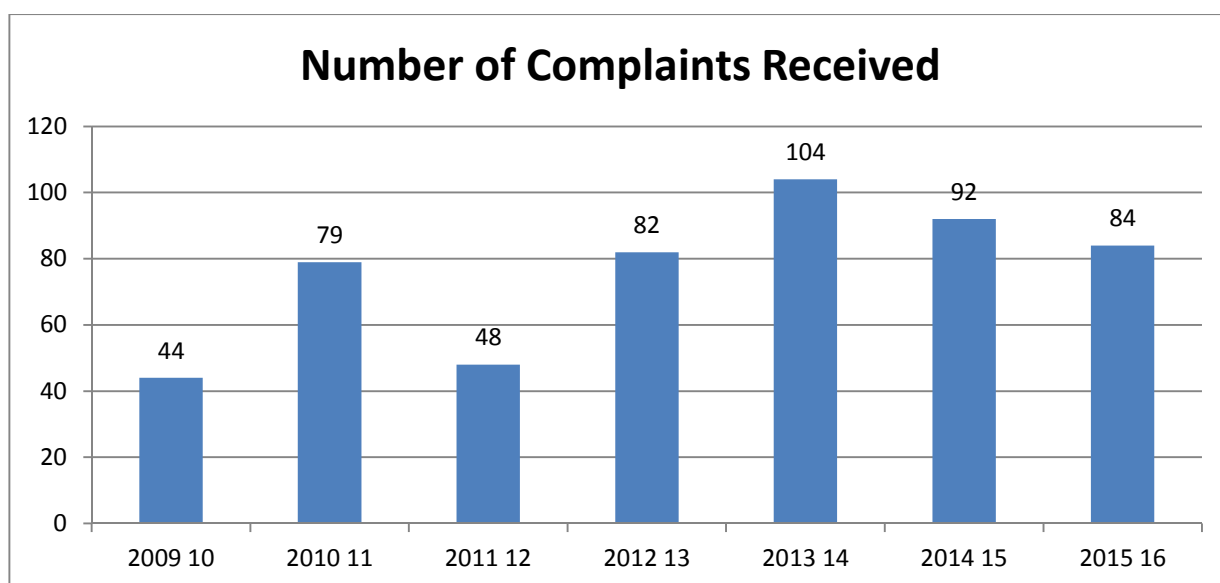
Family Support

Thanks from a member of the Children's Society for the opportunity to shadow a social worker; thanks from a Judge to social workers in relation to cases before the court (3); praise for social worker from CafCass in relation to child focused case management.

Corporate Parenting

Praise for the standard of support provided by the social worker.

1.2 Complaints Received



In 2015/16 there were 3388 child records loaded by Children's Social Care Services.

84 new complaints were received in 2015/16. The number of new complaints received in 2015/16 reduced slightly from the previous year (by 9%).

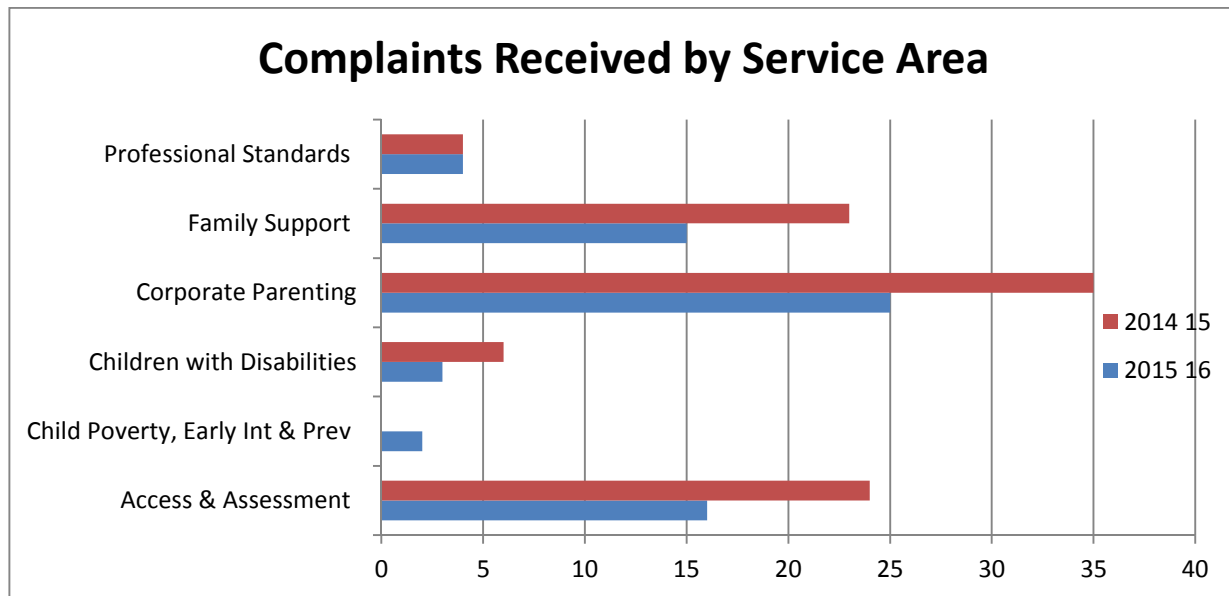
Of the 84 new complaints received, 65 were managed through the complaints procedure at stage 1. The remaining issues related to child protection, legal process, internal management processes, were the responsibility of another body, were out of time, or were deemed as vexatious. These cases were filtered out and passed to the appropriate channel where necessary.

Of the 65 new complaints managed through the complaints procedure at stage 1, 14 were directly from children and young people. The number of new complaints directly from children and young people has increased from the previous year (by 9%).

2. Complaints Received Analysis by Stage

2.1 Stage 1 Complaints by Service Area

The below chart shows complaints received by each service area within Children's Social Care, managed at stage 1.



Over the year the majority of the complaints were received by Corporate Parenting (26). This was also the service receiving the majority of complaints last year. The teams which form this part of the service are responsible for the care of looked after children and young people, including those in residential care and foster care. The nature of this team's work is therefore considered likely to give rise to more complaints.

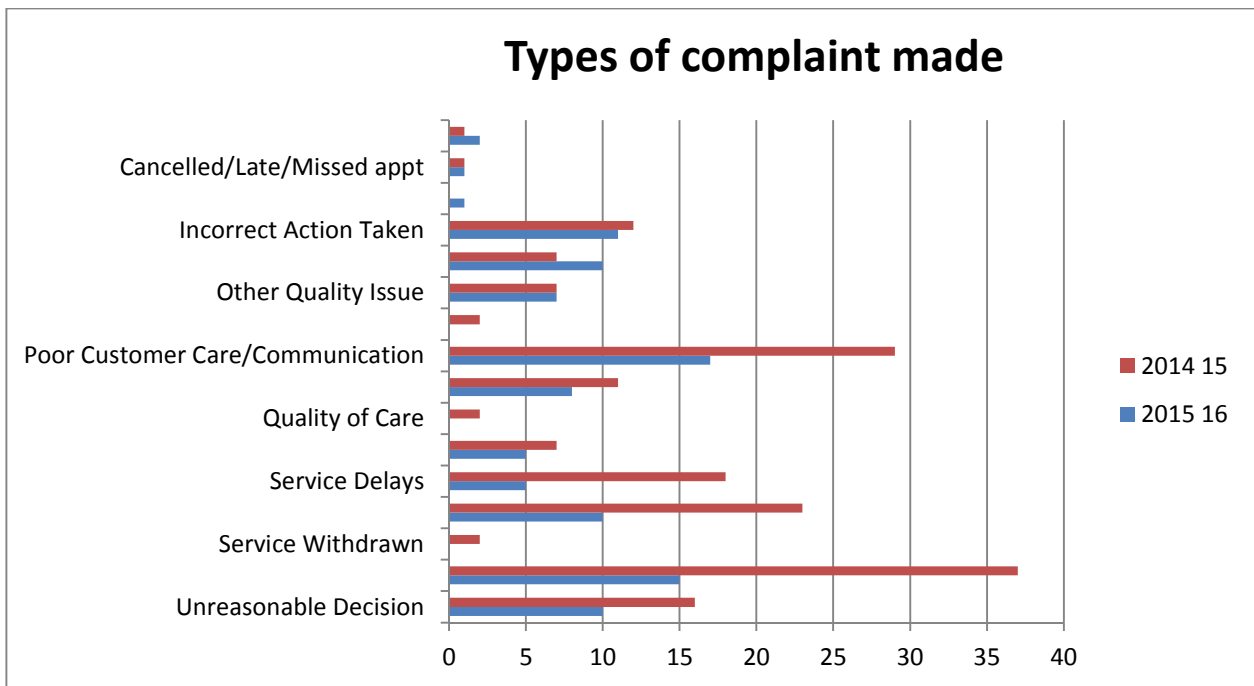
Of the 14 complaints received directly from children and young people, 12 were for the Corporate Parenting Service and 2 were for the Professional Standards Service.

2.2 Stage 1 - Types of Complaints Made

The below chart indicates the types of complaints received over the year at stage 1 in comparison to complaints received in the previous year. Each complaint received can have a number of aspects, so one complaint may cover a number of the complaint causes set out in the chart below.

The main cause for complaint in 2015/16 has been in relation to poor customer care and communication.

Of the 14 complaints received directly from children and young people, 4 were about not being listened too; 4 were in relation to services not being provided; 2 were around allegations of historical abuse; 2 were about poor communication and 1 was in relation to 'other quality'



The breakdown of complaints received by service is detailed further below:

Corporate Parenting

Court Work (14): Poor communication or unhappy with contact arrangements; not being kept informed about child in foster care; feeling intimidated and put down by workers; requested to complete unachievable tasks in order to have children returned; delay in making CAMH referral and name change; IRO directions at Review not actioned; lack of duty and care towards child in placement; not informed of placement moves; quality of social work practice; lack of support with housing issues to allow adoption; attitude of social worker; lack of information about a child provided to prospective adopters, derogatory and unprofessional comments/conduct; delays in providing reports and information; social worker unwilling to work with prospective adopters social worker; video of prospective child left with adopters; agreed actions and recommendations not completed; carers not informed about information shared with child; untimely and poor response from manager.

13+ Transition & Asylum (8): Not keeping appointments; not returning calls; lack of help to find accommodation; placement too far away; failure to complete a viability assessment for family of young person's choice; financial allowances not provided; failure to involve young person in decisions around placement; insufficient support given to care leaver; lack of action from staff to reported concerns about placement; lack of basic living comforts provided for independent living; not provided with public funds due to not being English; refusal to provide food.

Adoption (4): Poor communication about adoption panel eligibility; allowing adoptive parents to amend letterbox contact; mistakes and inaccurate information provided to adoption panel; lack of support/information about child's medical history; assessment for adoption not completed;

Assessment

Child & Family Assessment was bias/findings and outcomes not discussed/poor quality/blaming/factually incorrect; not listened to/contains lies/was rushed/; tone of social

worker; poor/contradicting advice/explanation given; poor quality of investigation into abuse allegation; appointment cancelled and not rearranged; Child in Need meeting arranged at short notice/not focused on concerns/was rehearsed/minutes were not accurate/views were ignored/GP not invited; lack of support; lack of financial support provided to sister looking after sibling; unclear decision about why child was open to Children's Services; home visit undertaken following family bereavement; declined request for case to be reallocated to another social worker; not contacted in a timely manner after a police referral; complaints and evidence ignored; prejudice; poor response to calls/requests

Access Hub (3): Name incorrectly given as a referrer; lack of information provided to a school about a pupil; denied meeting to discuss referral letter content; false allegations included in referral letter.

Family Intervention Service (1): Inappropriate attitude/commend from staff member.

Family Support

Family Support East (10): Quality of parenting assessment/dismissive of children's feelings; attempts to restrict contact with child; parent not told child was being taken into care under section 20; false information shared with the community; lack of participation in Child in Need Meeting; hostile attitude of social worker; passing on concerns about one parent to another; delay in actioning remedy following a decision by the Local Government Ombudsman; not listened too; meeting minutes not provided; badly managed child minding agreement; phone calls terminated; unprofessional; lack of understanding; case information shared with relative; disclosure of work email address to ex partner; failure to keep children safe in care of father; misleading information presented; poor handling of allegations of abuse

Family Support South (5): social worker making threats; social worker only communicating with one parent; social worker refused to leave family home; poor communication; quality of assessment; quality of social worker's case handling; lack of support to looked after children without placement; residence of child;

Children with Disabilities

Social Work Team (3): bias towards mother; no risk assessment in making decisions at JAP; confirmation provided that family are living in the area;

Professional Standards

Conference & Review (4): Failure to place child in safe environment; conduct and actions of Fostering Review Officer; incorrect information used; excluded from meeting without good cause;

Child Poverty/Early Childhood Intervention & Prevention

Early Help, Access & Assessment Team (1): unprofessional/blaming/dismissive/judgemental staff; inappropriate sharing of information;

2.3 Complaint Escalations (Stages 2 & 3)

Where a complaint is not resolved locally at stage 1, the complainant has the right to request consideration of the complaint at stage 2. Consideration of complaints at stage 2

is normally achieved through an investigation conducted by an externally commissioned investigating officer and an independent person. Where stage 2 has been concluded and the complainant is still dissatisfied, the complainant can request further consideration of the complaint by a review panel at stage 3.

Whilst there are three stages to the complaints procedure nothing should preclude either the complainant or the local authority from suggesting Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). There are significant cost savings by remedying cases without the need for externally commissioned investigators and the local authority should therefore explore this option if it is agreed by both the complainant and the Customer Relations Manager. However entering into ADR should not restrict the complainant's right to escalate their complaint.

On conclusion of the local authority complaints process the complainant should be advised of their right to refer the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman.

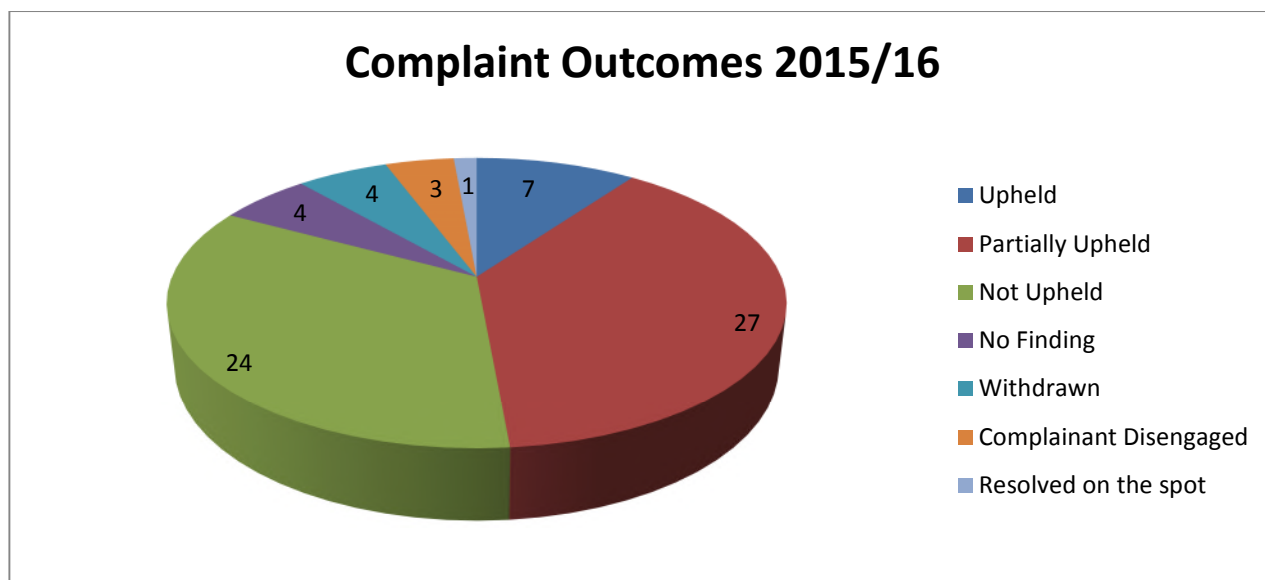
Of the 65 new complaints received in 2015/16, 10 complainants took up the offer of ADR which led to the cases being actioned without escalation to the next stage. The types of ADR offered ranged from conciliation meetings, Head of Service Review and additional responses to challenges and queries. The use of ADR helped the complainants to feel heard and helped to rebuild confidence and improve communications between the complainant and the service.

There was no stage 2 or stage 3 complaints in 2015/16.

3. Outcomes from Concluded Complaints

There were 70 complaints concluded in the period. Four cases were withdrawn; the complainant disengaged with the process in three cases and one case was resolved on the spot. The remaining 62 cases were concluded at stage 1.

The below chart indicates the outcomes from complaints at stage 1 in 2015/16:



The above chart shows that 55% of complaints were upheld either fully or partly at stage 1.

The below table indicates that the upheld rates were impacted predominantly by customer care/communication issues and unreasonable decisions:

Types of Complaint	% of Upheld or Partially Upheld
Poor Customer Care/Communication	16%
Unreasonable Decision	16%
Staff Conduct/Attitude	12%
Poor Quality Information	9%
Incorrect Action Taken	9%
Not Listened Too	9%
Service Delays	7%
Service Not Provided	7%
Report/File/-Accuracy/Integrity	7%
Other Quality Issue	5%
Quality of Care	2%

Complaints were seen by services as an important means of identifying areas for improvement. Remedies were put in place for individual complainants. Section 5 sets out wider actions and improvements resulting from complaints.

4. Performance in Complaint Handling

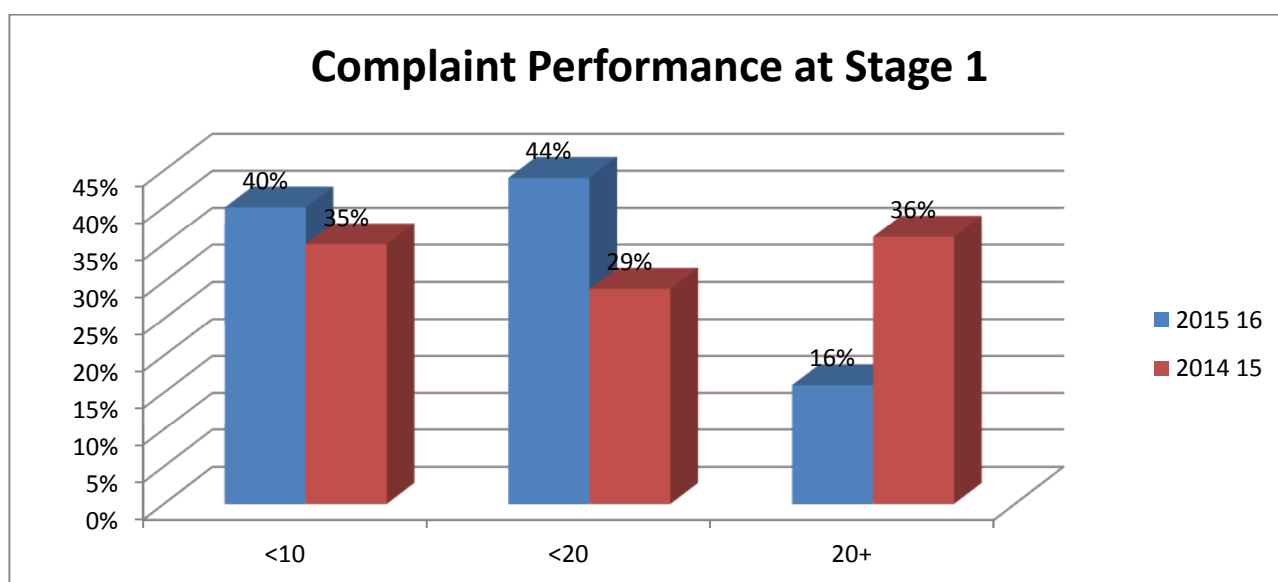
62 complaints were concluded at stage 1 in 2015/16; there were no escalated complaints at stage 2 or stage 3.

The complaints procedure allows for 10 working days for completion of a stage 1 complaint with a further 10 working days for more complex complaints or additional time if an advocate is required.

Of those 62 complaints concluded at stage 1:

- 25 were completed within 10 working days
- 27 were completed within 20 working days
- 10 exceeded 20 working days.

The below chart indicates the performance in handling complaints at stage 1 received over the year in comparison to complaints received in the previous year.



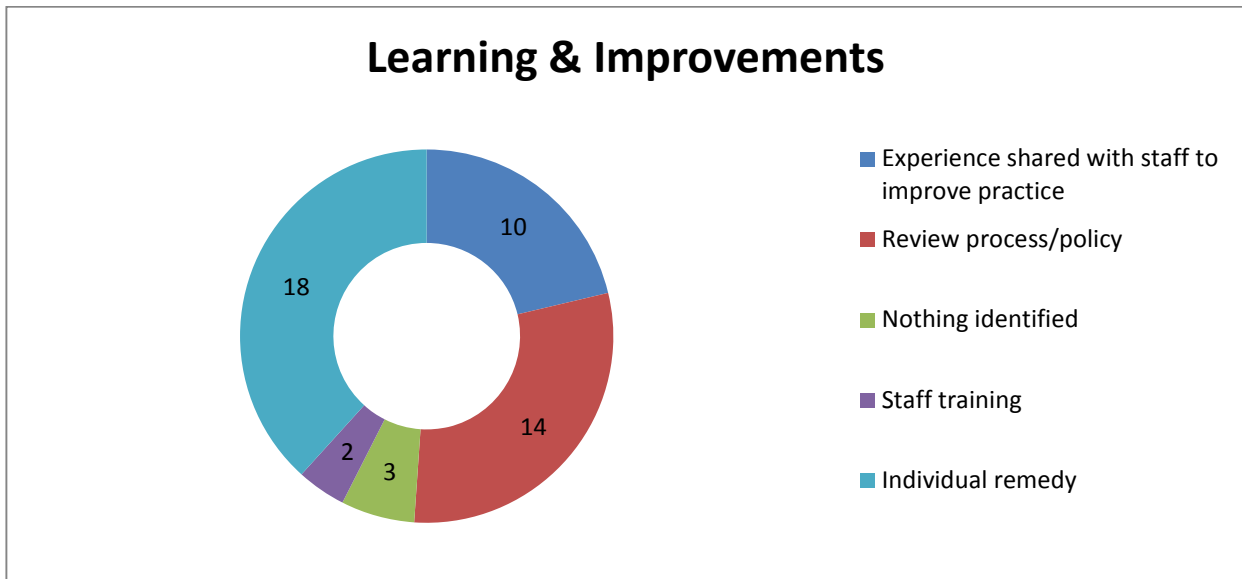
The below table indicates the reasons why complaints took more than the standard 10 working days to conclude:

Performance Delay Reasons	<20	20+
Service Delay	16	1
Extension agreed	10	2
Detailed or Historical	1	3
Eligibility Query		2
Availability of Key Personnel		1
Complainant's Delay		1

5. Learning and Improvements from Complaints

Where complaints are upheld either fully or partly complainants will receive an apology. However service areas are also expected to put in place a remedy which may be for the individual complainant or undertake wider learning across the service to ensure mistakes are not repeated.

The below chart shows the types of learning identified from complaints in 2015/16, in addition to an apology.



The above chart shows that the majority of improvements identified resulted in individual remedies for complainants. This was followed closely by reviews of current processes.

Key improvements to Council services included:

- Reasons why a case cannot be allocated to another social worker are to be confirmed in writing to ensure clarity.
- The Customer Relations Team has briefed staff on the principles of the persistent communicators' guidance in order to improve the handling of difficult communications, prevent escalation of behaviours and to support effective communications.
- A reconfiguration of FAST has been undertaken. Roles and responsibilities of FAST workers have been set out and a new manager put in place to ensure implementation. Agreement is for staff to ensure they record actions and decisions and to adhere to FAST plans in relation to intervention.
- An enhanced auditing of recording and evaluation in relation to Child in Need Plans has been undertaken.
- Recording Policy has been revised and improved to ensure more consistency.
- Foster Carer Reviews are dip sampled to review the quality of minutes.
- A tracking form has been developed to establish when review are completed and minutes are distributed to ensure standards are being met.

- Any agreed plans for payment arrangements and any changes are to be out in writing.
- A review of how post adoption contact and support is managed due to the loss of a Post Adoption Contact Co-ordinator.
- Joint Allocation Panel processes reviewed with health partners.
- Support offered to families is to be clearly written in terms of what services are being provided, by who, when, how and who is the point of contact if there are any concerns.
- A review with the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) has been undertaken in relation to the inconsistency of information on the internet setting out the LSCB complaints procedure and local practice not referring customers to the process. Working Together 2015 removed the requirement for the complaints process about child protection conferences however the web still referred to the process which is still being utilised.
- Head of Service for Access and Assessment introduced an expectation for meeting minutes to be sent out within a week where possible but making 2 weeks the maximum timescale.
- Head of Service for Access and Assessment met with Legal colleagues to discuss a policy for voice recordings during meetings.

6. Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Complaints

6.1 Complaints Received and Decision Notices

The LGO annual statistics show that they received 19,702 complaints and enquiries about local authorities in 2015/16. In comparison the LGO considered seven complaints about Central Bedfordshire Council's Children's Social Care Services during this period.

The table below sets out the complaints received and any Ombudsman decisions reached:

Complaint	Ombudsman Decision
The complainant says he was excluded from attending two core group meetings regarding his children; was not told in advance that he has to have separate core group meetings from his ex-partner; is not satisfied with the response provided by the Council	The Ombudsman will not investigate this complaint about the complainant's attendance at core group meetings for his children. This is because she could not add anything of significant to the Council's investigation or achieve any further worthwhile outcome.
The complainant says the Council place her with a foster carer whom it know had abused other and that she suffered abuse at his hands	The Council's decision to place the complainant in foster care in 2000 when she was a child is outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction because a court decided where she should live. There is no evidence on the files from the period 2000 to 2004 when she was in foster care that suggests the Council failed to consider safeguarding risks.
The complainant says the Council has failed to follow a Court judgement to take steps to reunite his family and to provide him with therapy. He also says the Council failed to support the family and should not have issued Court proceedings	The Ombudsman will not investigate this complaint about the Council's Children Services Tam failing to work with his family. It is unlikely she would find fault in the Council's approach as the children and mother live abroad.
Complaint about the Council's involvement with the complainant's two children who live with his former partner. The complainant says the Council has not investigated complaints he has made about his former partner but the Council has accepted complaints she has made about him.	<i>Pending Ombudsman Decision at 31.03.16</i>
Injustice caused by the Council's accepted errors in providing suitable services to the complainant and her child.	<i>Pending Ombudsman Decision at 31.03.16</i>
The complainant says that Children's Services has failed to provide services to her as a childminder and to a young person. She says this has caused her to loose money.	The Ombudsman will not investigate the complaint because it is unlikely she would find the complainant has any outstanding significant injustice caused directly because of the Council's faults and it is unlikely she could add to the Council's response
The complainant is unhappy with the way	The Ombudsman will not investigate the

the Council's Children's Services Team has dealt with him. He says he was asked to leave a child protection conference and he did not like the way the Chair treated him. He says it is not fair that his grandchildren cannot have contact with him at his home.

complaint as it is unlikely she could add to the Council's reply. She could not alter the contact arrangements and is unlikely to criticise the Chair's decision not to allow him to attend the child protection conference.

One LGO case reported in the previous year (2014/15) received a decision notice in this period.

- The complaint related to poor communication regarding social work interventions and failing to clarify the complaints procedure. The Council, based on findings and recommendations of an independent investigation, identified the fault involved in this complaint and for the most part appropriately remedied the fault. To fully remedy the fault the Ombudsman recommended the Council pay the complainant £900 for avoidable distress.

6.2 Improvements from LGO Complaints

Key improvements for services following the complaint upheld by the LGO are as follows:

- If a meeting has to be cancelled social workers need to inform parents and/or professionals as a matter of priority, by phone. A letter should also be sent apologising for the cancellations, outline the reasons for this and confirm an alternative date to meet.
- Where a joint piece of work is being undertaken parents should be advised of the role of each professional. A letter confirming the purpose of the work, how it is to be undertaken and the roles of each professional involved should be sent to the parents and recorded in the case file.
- When cases are temporarily transferred to alternative social workers the line manager should ensure the newly allocated social worker reads the case file to understand the child's background and current issues. The manager should inform the child and/or the parents of the change of social worker, the reason for the change and the timescale.

7. Equality and Diversity Monitoring

The purpose of capturing equalities data is to monitor access to the complaints procedure; to ensure services are appropriate for all service user groups; and to check whether any issues relating to discrimination have been raised. Data relates to the service user affected by the complaint or a person who has been affected by the actions taken by the service. Generally we record the child as the service user however where a complaint is made by an adult (usually a parent/carer) about their own experience of intervention the adult's data is captured as the service user.

Whilst information is not always provided by a complainant the system used for complaints has the facility to capture the service user's gender, ethnicity, age group and whether the service user describes themselves as having a disability or not. Further work is required to ensure the system is meeting the current needs of equality and diversity monitoring and linking in with information that may already be held in this respect about our service users. If we are able to improve this area it will enable us to undertake further analysis in relation to complaint trends and accessibility.

7.1 Accessibility to Complaints

By having a range of contact options for complainants to make their complaints the Council aims to meet the needs of its service users in accessing the complaints procedure. People can make complaints in person; face to face; or via telephone (including a direct line to Customer Relations); in writing; via email; letter; or complaint form (a complaint form specifically designed for young people is available). Complaints can be made by a representative of the service user or an advocate.

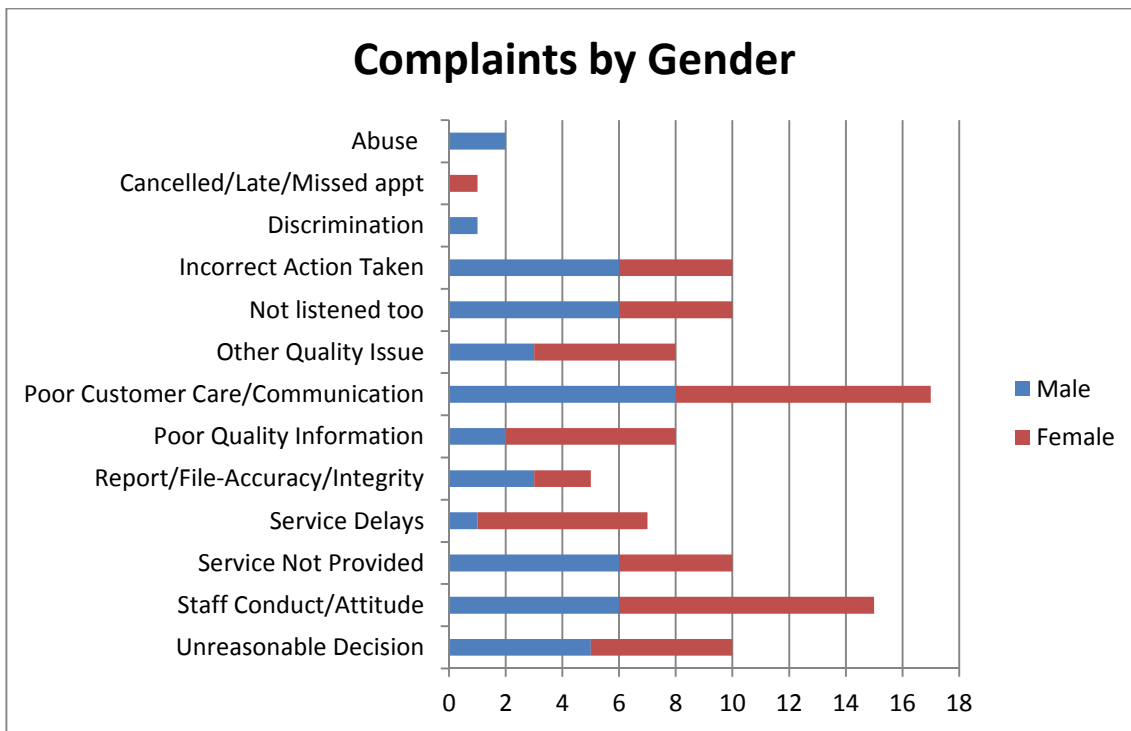
The 65 new complaints received in 2015/16 were by the following methods:

Email	Telephone	Letter	Complaint form
41 (63%)	13 (20%)	7 (11%)	4 (6%)

7.2 Social Care Complaints – Gender

In 2015/16 there were 3388 child records loaded by Children's Social Care Services. Of those records 51% were male, 47% were female and 2% were unborn/unknown. There were 65 new complaints received in 2015 16. 51% of complaints recorded the service user as male and 49% recorded the service user as female.

The below chart shows that the top area of complaint for both gender groups was poor customer care/communication and staff conduct/attitude. For female service users the other main areas for complaint were around quality of information. For male service users it was services not being provided; not being listened too and incorrect action being taken.



7.3 Social Care Complaints – Ethnicity

The last census on population by ethnic origin (2011) showed that 89.7% of the population in Central Bedfordshire were 'White British' and 10.3% were classified as 'Other'.

Of the 3388 child records loaded by Children's Social Care Services in 2015/16, 80% of service users were described as being of white ethnicity.

In 40% of new complaints received in 2015 16 the ethnicity of the service user was recorded as unknown. Where information was recorded 49% of service users were recorded as 'White British'. The remaining 11% were recorded as representing those service users with 'Black Ethnicity', 'Asian Ethnicity', 'Mixed Ethnicity' and 'Other'.

The issues affecting service users with a minority ethnic background were wide ranging and were also raised by those with a 'White British' background with no difference in themes.

7.4 Social Care Complaints – Disability

Of the 3388 child records loaded by Children's Social Care Services in 2015/16, 9% of service users were described as having one or more disability.

A significant proportion of complaints (97%) were recorded as 'unknown' or 'no' in relation to disability of the service user. Where data was captured 1.5% of service users were described as having a physical disability and 1.5% was described as having a learning disability.

There were three complaints related to the Children with Disabilities service. Two of those complaints had similarities to complaints where they were not related to children who had a disability. Similarities were social worker approach to separated parents (bias) and

incorrectly sharing information. The remaining complaint was specific to the Children with Disabilities Service and related to resource decision making.

7.5 Social Care Complaints – Age

Of the 65 new complaints received in 2015 16;

- 42 affected people under the age of 18
- 16 affected people 19-64
- 7 cases age was unknown

The majority of complaints affecting children and young people were made by adults however 14 young people pursued their own complaints.

During the course of a child or young person making a complaint, the local authority should support them by actively providing information and advice. The child or young person is entitled to advocacy support that is independent and confidential. Children's Social Care Services have a Service Level Agreement in place with the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) who provide advocacy support for Central Bedfordshire Council.

Of the 14 complaints made directly by children and young people, 12 chose to be supported by the advocacy service provided by NYAS.

8. Monitoring and Quality Assurance

8.1 Effectiveness of Complaints Handling

Service users, their representatives and people affected by the actions of Children's Social Care services can access the Council's complaints procedure and the Local Government Ombudsman.

The Customer Relations Team monitors the operation and effectiveness of the complaints procedure as well as how information about complaints is being used to improve services and delivery.

Stage 1 of the complaints procedure has generally been an effective means of dealing with complaints during 2015/16 with there being no escalations to stage 2 or stage 3.

Seven complaints were under consideration by the Local Government Ombudsman this year. The Ombudsman decided not to investigate in four of those cases as it was satisfied that the local authority had addressed those complaints appropriately. The remaining three cases progressed to investigation by the Ombudsman. In one case the Ombudsman found no fault with the actions of the local authority and the remaining two cases were pending a decision at the end of the period.

Complaints were seen as important feedback and a means of identifying how practices may be changed for the better. The customer experience in complaints has led to some improvements to practice. Last year we reported that there was room for improvement in understanding the root cause for complaints at a local level to fully identify learning opportunities. Customer Relations continues to support services to improve in this area.

8.2 Financial Implications

There are a number of ways in which the local authority can incur costs as part of the statutory complaints process for Children's Social Care Services.

Stage 2 is normally achieved through an investigation conducted by an investigating officer and an independent person. The investigating officer may be employed by the local authority or be externally commissioned. The investigating officer however cannot be in direct line management of the service complained about. Due to the nature of the complaints that tend to escalate to stage 2 the usual practice is to externally commission an investigating officer specifically for that piece of work. The independent person however must not be an employee of the local authority and is therefore externally commissioned.

Stage 3 requires the local authority to arrange a panel hearing which must consist of three independent people, which means they cannot be employees of the local authority. This requires the panel members to be externally commissioned.

In addition there may be rare occasions where financial redress is offered through the complaints procedure. This can be through local settlement following investigation by the Local Government Ombudsman but can also be recommended during the local authority three stage process.

Any financial costs incurred are the responsibility of Children’s Social Care Services. In order to assist in minimising the risk of costs the Customer Relations Team is actively involved in quality assuring stage 1 responses to reduce escalation, proactive in offering alternative dispute resolution where appropriate and consistent in assessing whether complainants are eligible to use the statutory complaints procedure.

The below table details the total costs incurred during 2015 16:

Reasons for Cost	2015 16 Spend
Stage 2	£0.00
Stage 3	£0.00
Financial Redress	£900 (LGO recommendation)

9. Customer Relations Team – Supporting Children’s Social Care

The Customer Relations Team supports Children’s Social Care Services by:

- ✓ Providing guidance, advice and support to staff on the management of complaints
- ✓ Supporting staff involved in all stages of the complaints procedure
- ✓ Quality assurance of complaint responses
- ✓ Managing challenges to complaint handling and responses
- ✓ Liaison with the Local Government Ombudsman
- ✓ Overseeing the arrangements for communicating and publicising the complaints procedure
- ✓ Evaluating and reporting on the numbers, types, outcomes and trends of complaints to inform practice, development and service planning
- ✓ Providing a means to capture the learning from complaints to contribute to practice development, commissioning and service planning

During 2016/17 the Customer Relations Team will focus on a number of initiatives:

- Continue to ensure the complaints procedure is accessible, particularly to young people
- Promote the Customer Relations root-cause analysis tool to help managers with identifying systemic improvements
- Promote the Customer Relations toolkit for handling persistent customers consistently and fairly
- Continue to ensure complaints are handled responsively promoting alternative dispute resolution where appropriate
- Work collaboratively with colleagues to achieve a reduction in levels of complaints upheld
- Maintain the low levels of complaint investigations by the Local Government Ombudsman and where the LGO finds fault
- Improve capture of equality and diversity information



Central Bedfordshire

A great place to live and work

Contact us...

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