



Children's Social Care Services

**Customer Feedback – Complaints, Comments,
Compliments and Signposts**

Annual Report 2018 – 19

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Table of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Version
CA	Children's Assessment (formerly Referral & Assessment)
CiC	Children in Care
CP	Child Protection
CS	Children's Safeguarding (formerly Children & Families)
DCYP	Disabled Children & Young People
LG&SCO	Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman
YSS	Youth Support Service

Executive Summary

This executive summary highlights key points from the analysis of Children’s Social Care feedback received between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019.

The total number of Social Care compliments received is lower than the previous year (107 compared to 135 in 2017/18), though it is positive that over half of them were received directly from young people or families. Their content demonstrates the high standard of service provided, with service users and professionals detailing their appreciation of the work carried out, and the positive impact it has had.

The number of Social Care contacts we have managed as Informal Local Resolutions or Comments and outside the statutory process rose by 93.22% in 2018/19, increasing from 59 in 2017/18 to 114 this year.

The number of formal Social Care complaints received this year has increased (178, compared to 153 in 2017/18). Of these complaints, 97% were not taken beyond the provision of a Stage 1 response. 5 Social Care complaints have been independently investigated at Stage 2 of the complaints procedure. Where people have remained dissatisfied following receipt of a Stage 1 response, we have often been able to achieve resolution by arranging a meeting between them and an appropriate senior manager so that an agreement can be reached. 16 Social Care complaints were taken to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, 11 of which resulted in the Ombudsman undertaking an investigation. Quality of service was the most frequently raised reason for Social Care complaints in 2018/19.

Compliments - an overview

1. This section looks at compliments received. The table below compares the number of compliments received in 2018/19 with the number received in previous years.

Social Care compliments received by year	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
	200	196	135	107

2. 3 of the compliments we have logged were put in by young people, and 3 care leavers took the time to put their praise of a staff member on record. There were 54 compliments received from carers, prospective carers, parents or other family members. We continue to log compliments from professionals and colleagues that recognise the positive work done by teams and the individuals within teams.
3. All the frontline Social Care team types (Children in Care, Children’s Assessment, Children’s Safeguarding, Families First, Youth Support) received compliments.

What positive things are people saying?

4. Some examples of the positive comments made by service users and parents are:
 - A parent of a child known to an Assessment team wrote *‘[y]ou cannot afford to lose XXX he is truly exemplary’*.

- Another parent of a child known to an Assessment team wrote '*[w]e are very grateful to XXX for the way she interacted with the whole family as well as with the children as individuals. The children were very positive about XXX's visits*'.
- A parent said of the DCYP service that '*they had offered an all round excellent services for [their] child and XXX Lead Professional is a credit to them*'.
- A Family Support Worker was described by parents as '*approachable, open and honest in her communications*'. They also said the worker '*doesn't sugar coat things and doesn't condescend*'.
- In regard to their Leaving Care Worker, a care leaver wrote that they'd '*found someone who actually cares and shows she's interested in him as a person*'.
- Another parent of a child known to an Assessment team wrote '*I have never had any involvement with any Children's Services in the past, and hope to never have any in the future – in the nicest possible way! XXX was very professional, understanding and above all incredibly supportive of my situation*'.
- A parent wrote about three workers in the Contact team, saying they are '*exceptionally good at what they do*' and that they '*[appreciated] the continuity provided*'

Comments - an overview

5. Where possible, we have continued to try to find ways to resolve concerns quickly, outside the formal complaints process. We have used our experience in regard to the type of issues raised and their relative complexity when deciding whether to adopt this approach.
6. This approach is in line with *Getting the Best from Complaints, 2006*, the Department for Education and Skills (DfE) guidance for local authorities on implementing the complaints procedures laid out in the Children Act 1989.
7. The 114 Social Care contacts in 2018/19, where we sought to manage the concerns raised as an Informal Local Resolution, is a significant increase on the 59 managed in this way during the previous year. Such an approach requires active support and input from team managers, with them responding promptly to the queries / concerns raised. This might be with a view to offering an apology, arranging a meeting, providing an explanation, or simply outlining the actions which will be taken and the timescale in which this will happen.
8. Where it is not possible to achieve resolution informally, we can still take concerns forward under the statutory complaints process or the council's complaints process (also known as the Corporate Complaints Policy), as appropriate.
9. This approach, including arranging meetings between managers and the people with whom their teams are working, is in line with Restorative Practice. This complements

the approach employed by Children’s Services in their work with children, young people, and families.

10. The following are examples of concerns and representations which have been resolved informally :

- When concerns were raised that the council was displaying a bias towards one side of a family, a restorative meeting was held. Following this, the complainant felt the situation to be resolved.
- When concerns were raised in regard to the accuracy of a report, a request was made that all copies of that report be returned to the council so they could be destroyed. A verbal apology was given by the relevant team manager, and a formal, written apology was provided by the social worker.
- When concerns were raised about the way a social worker had conducted themselves in conversation, the team manager called the complainant and assured them that the matter would be raised in the worker’s supervision. They were also assured that they should not be put off from contacting the council in the future.

Complaints - an overview

11. Complaints about the action, decisions, or apparent failings of Children’s Services, made by or on behalf of children and young people, follow the statutory complaints process. Where concerns are unconnected to the well-being of a child or young person with whom Social Services is involved, they will be managed under the council’s Corporate Complaints Policy.

Details of the statutory complaints process can be found [here](#), while the Corporate Complaints Policy can be found [here](#). The Corporate Complaints Policy was updated this year.

12. The table below details the number of complaints dealt with at various stages of the complaints processes.

Number of Social Care or Corporate Social Care complaints managed at :	During 2015/16	During 2016/17	During 2017/18	During 2018/19
Stage 1	171	168	153	178
Stage 2	7	4	1	5
Stage 3	1	1	1	1

13. We have also been able to work with complainants when they were dissatisfied with the initial response they received, and agreed alternative ways of addressing their concerns. This usually involved a meeting between them, the complaints manager and a senior manager from the relevant service area to agree actions. 4 Stage 2 investigations have been completed in 2018/19 and a fifth is ongoing. 3 of the investigations have followed the Children’s Social Care complaints procedure, with the other 2 following the council’s Corporate Complaints procedure. All 5 investigations have been undertaken by independent investigators.

14. The volume of complaints dealt with should be viewed in the context of all the work undertaken by Gloucestershire Children's Social Care.

	2017/18	2018/19
Total number of contacts received by Children's Services	19,953*	29,854*
Total number of children in care	649	716
Total number of children subject to Child Protection Plans	653	754
Total number of children assessed as Children in Need	2,287	2,359
Total number of Single Assessments completed	8,601	8,297
Total number of Single Assessments completed in up to 45 working days	6, 851	6,517

*These figures are not directly comparable

15. The total number of Children's Social Care complaints received represents less than 1% of the total contacts dealt with by the service.

16. Appendix 2 (page 14) records the distribution of complaints according to the Children's Social Care team working with the child or young person. Those teams on the frontline, where there is involvement with many families (for example, Children's Assessment and Children's Safeguarding teams), receive the most complaints.

17. 97% of complaints were resolved following an investigation and response at Stage 1 of the complaints procedure, or with further intervention.

18. There has been an increase in the number of complaints and comments received this year. As well as a 16% increase in formal complaints recorded for 2018/19, there has also been an increase in the number of complex complaints. Examples of these complexities include; extensive and extremely detailed written complaints; additional issues being raised during and after an initial response or meeting; concerns being raised about the actions of more than one team and relating to a longer time period. There have been more contacts which have been managed outside the formal process.

19. 1 complaint has progressed to a Stage 3 review panel this year. The review panel meeting was delayed until 2019/20, however, at the complainants' request.

20. In 2018/19, we were notified of the outcomes of 16* complaints referred to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman regarding Gloucestershire Children's Social Care.

The table at the top of the next page sets out the outcomes from the Ombudsman, as recorded in their published annual figures for the year ending 31 March 2019. The council has taken the actions requested by the Ombudsman in the cases where we were found to be at fault.

* A further 8 complaints were recorded by the Ombudsman for Children's Services. These are areas of the council outside the scope of this report (e.g. Home to School transport, SEN services, and school admissions appeals).

LG&SCO Decision received in year ending 31 March 2019			
No investigation / Closed after initial inquiry	Premature	No fault	Fault/Injustice
5 (including 1 withdrawn by the complainant)	3	4	4

Reasons for complaint

21. This section of the annual report analyses the reasons for complaints and identifies trends.

Communication	Data breach	10	102
	Delay in provision of information / response / returned contact	30	
	Feel they are not being kept informed / involved	33	
	Information, policy, plan or rule has not been properly explained	10	
	Proper courtesy not being shown, with no notification / little notification being given	16	
	Relevant staff not being available at time of contact	3	
Cost	Inappropriate charge for service	0	8
	Not receiving payments that are due	5	
	Tax payers' money wasted	2	
	Unhappy with changes to financial support	1	
Delay in decision or provision of service	Issues not dealt with within given timescales	5	23
	Service taking too long to deliver	18	
Discrimination	Discriminated against due to age	0	22
	Discriminated against due to class	0	
	Discriminated against due to gender / sex	5	
	Discriminated against due to mental / physical health or disabilities	3	
	Discriminated against due to race	1	
	Discriminated against on a personal level	13	
Eligibility	No / restricted access to payment or service (general)	0	1
	No / restricted access to payment or service (personal)	1	
Non delivery	Frequency of visits / meetings not at appropriate level	11	37
	Support not provided (e.g. help not given with achieving agreed outcomes, or requested therapy sessions not arranged)	26	
Quality of service	Errors made in assessment / letters / minutes / statement	43	106
	Insensitive application of service by authority / team	34	
	Policy / guidelines not being adhered to	11	
	Sees no benefit from authority's involvement	4	
	Teams not communicating with each other / working together	0	
	Too many changes of social worker / carer	14	
	Website navigability / quality	0	

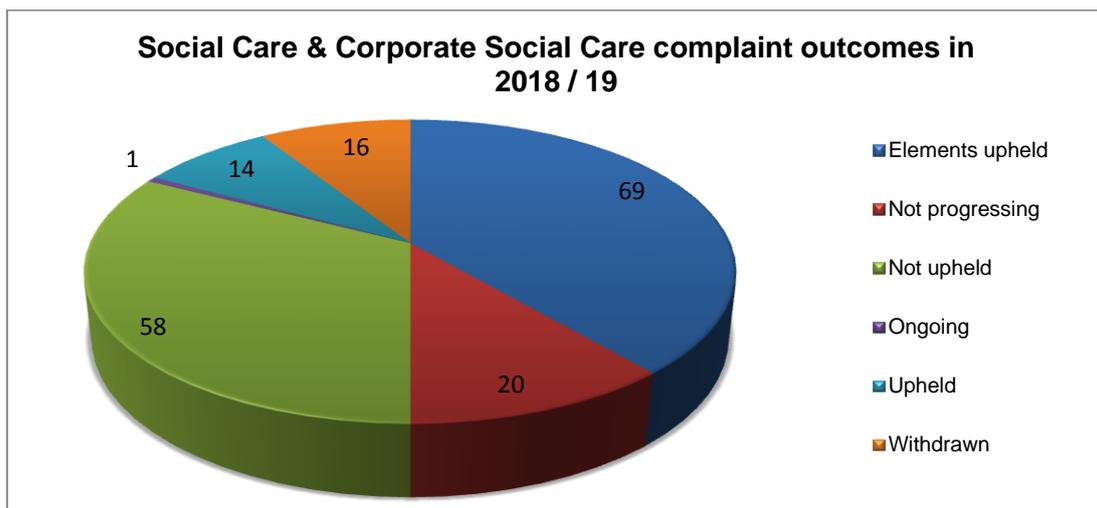
Staff attitude	Staff member displaying a lack of empathy / being unhelpful	24	66
	Staff member displaying a lack of knowledge / competence	9	
	Staff member displaying rude / aggressive behaviour	33	
Unwelcome or disputed decision	Unhappy with case being closed	3	44
	Unhappy with other decision made by social worker / authority	25	
	Unhappy with the frequency of contact with child(ren)	12	
	Unhappy with outcome of assessment	4	

22. The chart above provides a breakdown of the reasons for complaints received. Issues associated with the quality of service are the reasons most frequently given for complaints. There can be multiple reasons for a complaint, which is why the total number of complaints and total number of reasons for complaint are different.

23. Figures recorded in 2017/18 also showed that the mostly frequently raised issues related to Quality of Service and Communication.

Social Care complaint outcomes

24. The chart below shows the outcomes for the 178 Stage 1 Social Care and Corporate Social Care complaints received in 2018/19. Overall, 47% of them were found to have some justification, and were recorded as being fully or partially upheld. This represents a decrease from 2017/18, when 54% of complaints were found to have been justified, but an increase from 2016/17, when 34% of complaints were found to have been justified.



25. Where the Complaints team has not received information on the outcome of concerns raised, these have been recorded as 'not progressing'.

Improving services as a result of complaints

26. Learning from complaints can actively contribute to practice development and service improvement. To effectively enable this learning to be embedded into practice, there needs to be greater stability of staff in Children's Services than during 2018/19.

27. The following table details examples of actions which have been taken by individuals or teams as a result of concerns being raised.

Issue	Action
The parents of some looked after children had not been receiving school reports, photos or telephone contact	Missing documents were provided, contact arrangements reviewed, and the parents updated
The impact on an adopted child following a safeguarding concern being raised	The team to engage with adoption support services at an early stage, going forward, if their work is with adopted children
A father was seeking regular updates in regard to his child, and support in resuming contact	Intervention by a social worker enabled direct contact to be resumed. The worker was also reminded of the importance of sharing reports / information with the father
A parent was unhappy that a Single Assessment which contained inaccuracies had been sent to professionals before them	Agreement that the inaccuracies would be corrected and the assessment reissued
A young person felt their views had not been considered in the decisions taken by Children's Services	A referral was made for advocacy support; the young person was invited to attend meetings about them; the worker supervising contact was changed; staff were reminded to introduce themselves to young people in a suitable and timely manner, and explain their role
A parent was experiencing ongoing difficulties with contact arrangements	A clear contact plan was written up, which detailed what would happen in regard to preparation, notification, and any changes which might occur. A lead contact was also identified for the parent
A concern was raised about an in-house foster carer	All foster carers were reminded of the policy / guidance around purchasing alcohol for young people under 18, and the correct use of allowances
A complaint was received from parents about their experiences during the Child Protection and Allegations Management processes.	The Local Authority Designated Officer to provide training to the team. Changes were made to the CP conference process, going forward (e.g. inviting parents / young people to speak earlier in the meeting)
Concerns were raised about the transition	The information provided to foster carers

arrangements for young people reaching 18 in foster care	about care leavers 'Staying Put' was reviewed
A Stage 1 complaint did not receive a timely response	A reminder was issued to all team managers about the statutory timescales in place for Children's Social Care complaints
A parent had concerns about the council's communication with them	The team in question were asked to check with parents as to how they wanted workers to communicate with them. Where text messages are the preferred form of communication, workers were asked to include a request for a response, allowing follow-up if no response is provided
A young person felt they were not being given enough time to prepare for meetings	A plan was implemented which gave the young person advanced notice of meetings, and an opportunity to plan

How quickly are we responding to complaints?

28. This section looks at our performance in relation to the standards expected for responding to complaints. The aim is to acknowledge all complaints within 2 working days and to respond to them within the statutory timescales. The statutory timescale for response is 10 working days, though this can be extended to 20 working days if the complaint is complex / staff important to the investigation are absent.

29. 95% of complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days. The reasons for delays in acknowledging complaints included :

- Complaints not being sent directly to the Complaints team
- The Complaints team not being able to obtain information necessary to the acknowledgement from Children's Services (e.g. the name of the person who will be responding)
- Complaints incorporating multiple issues, where it has taken time to establish the team or teams who will be responding
- Awaiting responses from team managers, when review of the contact indicates the concern could be resolved informally

30. The table below shows our performance for responding to complaints at Stage 1 of the process.

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
% of Social Care complaints responded to within agreed timescale	76%	82%	55%	60%

Reasons for late responses include:

- The person investigating the complaint / involved staff members having other work commitments, delaying the investigation
 - Staff turnover
 - The detail and complexity of the complaint
 - Annual leave and sick leave of key members of staff
31. 5 complaints have been investigated at Stage 2. Of these, 2 investigations followed the statutory Children's Social Care complaints process and the investigation was completed within the permitted timeframe (65 working days). The 3 other complaint investigations followed the council's Corporate Complaints process. 1 of these is still ongoing, while the other 2 investigations exceeded the council's 25 working day timeframe. Where delays have occurred, the Complaints team always aims to communicate regularly with the complainant to advise them of the reasons for this. The 1 complaint which progressed to a Stage 3 review panel this year was delayed until 2019/20, at the complainants' request.

Who is using the complaints procedure?

32. This section looks at who is raising issues, complaints or concerns in regard to Children's Social Care, and offers some analysis of the equalities and diversity data which has been returned to us.
33. The following key points can be identified in regard to the people using the Children's Social Care complaints process, and who answered our equalities monitoring questions :
- Complaints from children and young people themselves (or those made via an advocate) represented around 8% of Children's Social Care complaints
 - 66% of complaints were made by parents
 - Foster carers and Special Guardians represented 6% of complaints made
 - More complaints were received by women (56%) than men (38%)
 - Where it was stated, 16% of complainants considered themselves to be British
 - Where it was stated, 20% of complainants considered themselves to be disabled

How are children and young people supported to raise concerns?

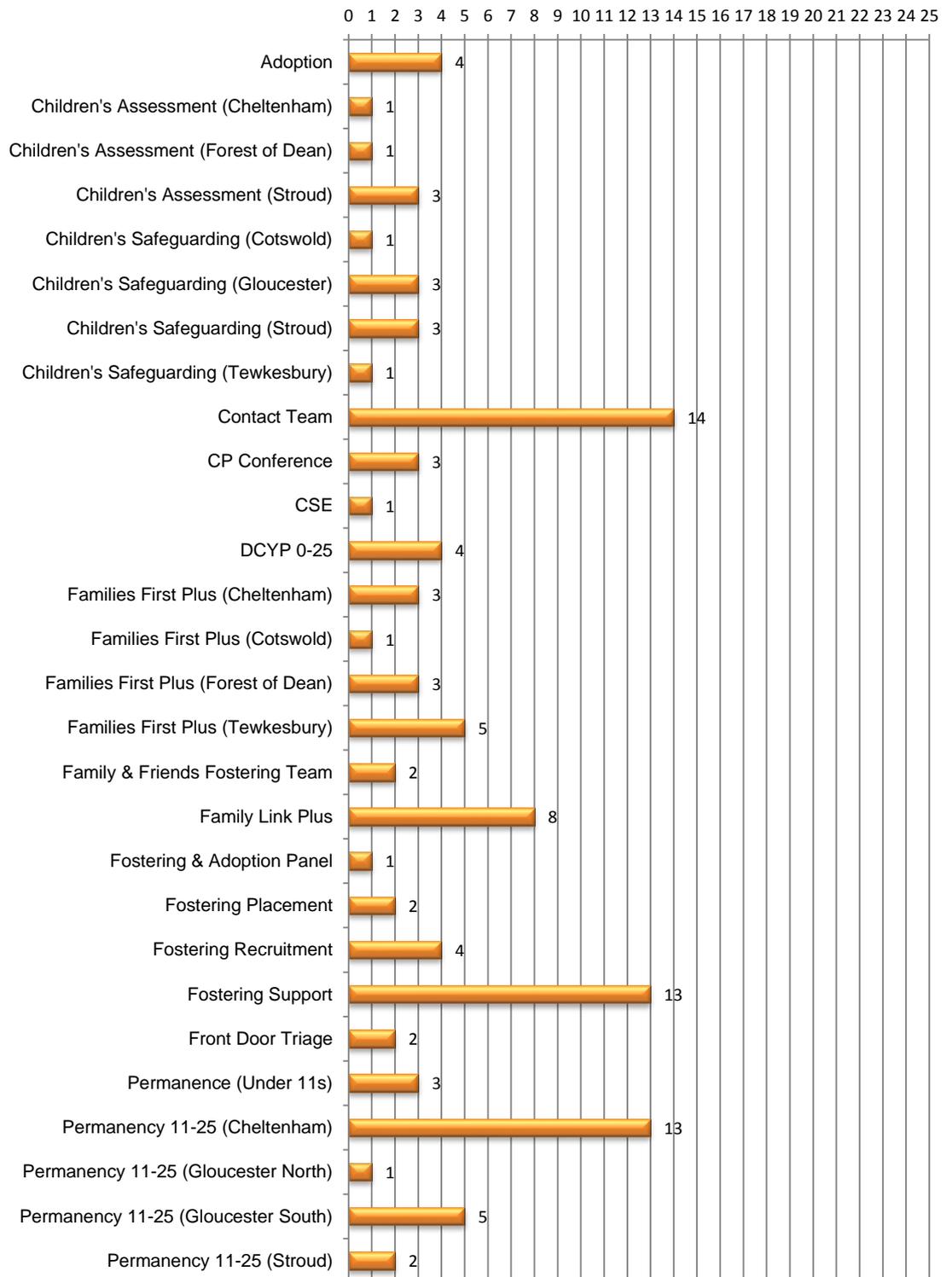
34. Barnardo's continues to provide an advocacy service, which supports young people in complaining about the actions of Children's Social Care. Their advocates are familiar with the statutory complaints process, and information about the service is included on the Children's Social Care complaints page of the council's website.
35. Young people are also supported by Barnardo's in raising concerns, informally, with the social worker or team with whom they are working. This is in line with best practice, and the Complaints team is not typically made aware when such interventions have been successful in resolving a young person's issues.

36. Of the 25 young people who raised comments and complaints this year, 3 were supported by Barnardo's advocates in making their complaints.
37. 7 young people used the Mind of My Own app to raise concerns. Children's Services' Participation Team support and co-ordinate this, following up on how young people's concerns have been managed.
38. There is no statutory requirement to offer advocacy for adults raising complaints relating to their children. It has been possible at times, however, for provision to be found for people who require additional support.

Caroline Jones
Complaints Manager (Children's Services)
Gloucestershire County Council

Appendix 1

Number of compliments received for Social Care, by team, in 2018/19



Appendix 2

