



Children's Social Care and Education Services

Customer Feedback – Complaints, Comments & Compliments

Annual Report 2020 – 21

Foreword

It is often said that we do most of our learning through our failures, rather than our successes. It is for that reason the complaints are an integral part of our quality assurance arrangements and an important contributor towards organisational learning. In every case we strive to ensure that the complainant's views have been listened to and, when appropriate, that action has been to address those concerns, including changing our practice or processes.

We aim to address complaints at the earliest and most appropriate level through informal dialogue whenever possible. We also recognise that some complainants will want to exercise their right for independent review and referral to the Local Government Ombudsman when they feel their concerns have not been addressed.

We work closely with our colleagues in the Complaints Team to ensure we are timely and robust in our responses, in accordance with our complaints policy and the requirements for independent review when requested. A particular feature of this year's report has been a focus on translating the learning from complaints into our improvement activity, which is set out in detail in Section 6.0. Good progress has been made in this respect but there is always more that can be done to improve our arrangements, particularly in response to the continuing demands and challenges of Covid.

I hope this report is informative and provides an assurance to our partners, stakeholders and service users that we take their concerns seriously and that the learning forms part of our work to improve outcomes for children and families in Gloucestershire .

Best wishes



Chris Spencer
Executive Director of Children's Services



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1.0 Executive Summary

This executive summary highlights key points from the analysis of Children's Social Care and Education feedback received between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021.

For this period for Children's Social Care and Education service, the Council managed:

- 224 comments (i.e. contacts received and resolved without them becoming formal complaints)
- 267 formal Stage 1 complaints
- 28 Stage 2 complaints
- 1 Stage 3 panel
- 237 compliments
- 16 formal referrals from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

224 contacts were managed and resolved outside of the formal complaints process, 202 for Social Care and 22 within Education services.

Of the 267 Stage 1 complaints received, 239 were in relation to Social Care and 28 were in relation to Education services.

The number of formal Social Care complaints received for the year increased by 20.1% (239, compared to 199 in 2019/20). The number of formal Education complaints received increased by 27% (28 compared to 22 in 2019/20).

Where resolution at Stage 1 could not be achieved, 3 Social Care complaints were independently investigated at Stage 2 of the statutory complaints' procedure by an Independent Investigator from outside of the Council; a further 18 were investigated internally in line with Stage 2 corporate complaint procedures. In Education services, 7 complaints were escalated to Stage 2 of the corporate complaints' procedure.

A further 8 Statutory Stage 2 complaints were investigated which were delayed from 2019-20 due to Covid-19 restrictions.

The Ombudsman received 16 referrals where complaints could not be resolved by the Council, 12 for Social Care, of which 4 resulted in the Ombudsman undertaking a formal investigation, with 2 outcomes of fault / injustice found. The remaining 4 referrals were for Education services, 1 of which resulted in a formal investigation that resulted in a finding of fault / injustice.

Between the various stages of the complaints process, the rate of escalation for complaints is low. This reflects the successful efforts made by officers to understand and address concerns when they arise.

While the increase in formal complaints this year demonstrates that quality of practice / the outcomes achieved for children and young people should continue to be the focus of our drive for improvement, the increase should also be considered against a backdrop of increasing demand across Children's Services as a whole and the added demands of delivering a service against the backdrop of Covid-19.

The total number of compliments received increased from the previous year by 70.5% (237 compared to 139 in 2019/20).

2.0 Children's Social Care Comments - an overview

Where possible, the Complaints Team and relevant service area have continued to try to find ways to resolve concerns quickly, outside of the formal complaints process. This is why 202 Social Care contacts were managed as comments in 2020/21, representing only a small drop from the 208 managed that way in 2019/20.

It is an approach that requires active support and input from managers, with prompt responses being provided to the queries and concerns raised. It may be the case that they:

- offer an apology, if it is recognised that there has been fault on their service's part
- arrange a meeting with the complainant(s), so their views can be heard and their concerns discussed
- simply provide an explanation for what has happened, and outline the actions which will be taken as a result / the timescale in which these actions will happen

Where it is not possible to achieve resolution in this way, the Council can still take concerns forward under the statutory complaints process / its own complaints process (also known as the Corporate Complaints Policy), as appropriate.

Key message – In the reporting period, the Complaints Team and the service areas have made good progress in working together to proactively resolve issues at the earliest point possible. Moving forward, a priority for the Complaints Team is to continue to work with the service to enhance this approach. This should hopefully lead to a sustained increase in the number of contacts resolved outside of the formal complaints processes.

3.0 Children's Services Complaints - an overview

Social Care

When complaints have been made by or on behalf of children and young people with whom Children's Social Care are involved, and they are about Social Care functions, they will likely be considered under the statutory complaints process. Where concerns are about how the Council has treated an individual as an adult, or relate to non-Social Care functions, they will likely be managed under the Council's Corporate Complaints Policy.

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

Number of Children's Social Care complaints managed at:	During 2016/17	During 2017/18	During 2018/19	During 2019/20	During 2020/21
Stage 1	168	153	178	199	239
Stage 2	4	1	5	11	21
Stage 3	1	1	1	2	1
LG&SCO	5	7	16	21	12

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

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Total number of contacts received by Children’s Services	29,854*	26,118*	28,333
Total number of children in care	716	740	789
Total number of children subject to Child Protection Plans	754	715	719
Total number of children assessed as Children in Need	2,359	2,185	1,818
Total number of Single Assessments completed	8,297	9,234	8,406
Total number of Single Assessments completed in up to 45 working days	6,517	7,192	7,040

Stage 1

There were 239 complaints dealt with at Stage 1, which represents an increase of 20.1% from 2019/20, when 199 were recorded.

91.2% of complaints were resolved following an investigation and response at Stage 1 of the complaint’s procedure, or with further informal intervention.

Stage 2

21 complaints started to be investigated at Stage 2 in 2020/21. Of these, 3 cases were completed followed the statutory complaints process and were all undertaken by independent investigators, external to the Council. The other 18 followed the corporate complaints Stage 2 process and were responded to by the relevant Head of Service.

A further 8 complaints (not included in the 21) were investigated independently of the Council under statutory procedures. These were outstanding from 2019/20 due to being suspended because of Covid-19.

The learning from these complaints, including the 8 suspended cases is reported on in section 6 below.

Stage 3

1 complaint was progressed to a Stage 3 review panel in 2021/21. The concerns related to a number of service areas with which the parent had interacted, across Social Care and Education Services, and mostly revolved around the parent not feeling properly involved / feeling the support in place was inadequate. This complaint was partially upheld, and the Council agreed to a number of measures, including producing quarterly practice guidance in relation to learning from Children’s Services complaints, refining the monitoring process in place so that change and

effectiveness can be evidenced, and providing the complainant with a £1000 goodwill payment for their time and trouble.

Education

Complaints about services in Education are managed under the Council’s Corporate Complaints Policy. Complaints directly about schools are not managed by the Council but by the Governors of the school affected, and therefore statistics relating to schools are not included in this section.

In 2020/21, 22 comments were managed outside of the Corporate Complaints Process. A further 28 complaints were received and responded to at Stage 1, the most commonly raised reason for complaint was **Quality of service**.

6 of the reasons related to ‘Errors or omissions in assessment / letter / minutes / statement’, 2 related to ‘Insensitive application of service by authority / team’, 9 related to ‘Policy / guidelines not being adhered to’, and 1 related to ‘Teams not communicating with each other / working together’.

An individual said their child had not received the provision specified in their EHCP. Another individual believed Article 8 of the Human Rights Act – namely the right to respect for one’s family, private life and home – had been breached.

11 of the 28 complaints were not upheld, 10 were partially upheld, 4 were fully upheld, 2 are not progressing and 1 was withdrawn.

Following request for escalation, 7 Stage 2 complaints were investigated by Heads of Service of which 1 was fully upheld, 3 were partly upheld and 3 were not upheld.

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

In 2020/21, the Council received 12 referrals regarding Children’s Social Care from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman. In the previous year, it received 21. Of the 12 referrals received, only 4 led to full investigations, and the table below sets out the decisions made in each case.

Of the 2 cases where the Ombudsman has yet to make a final decision, both are still being investigated.

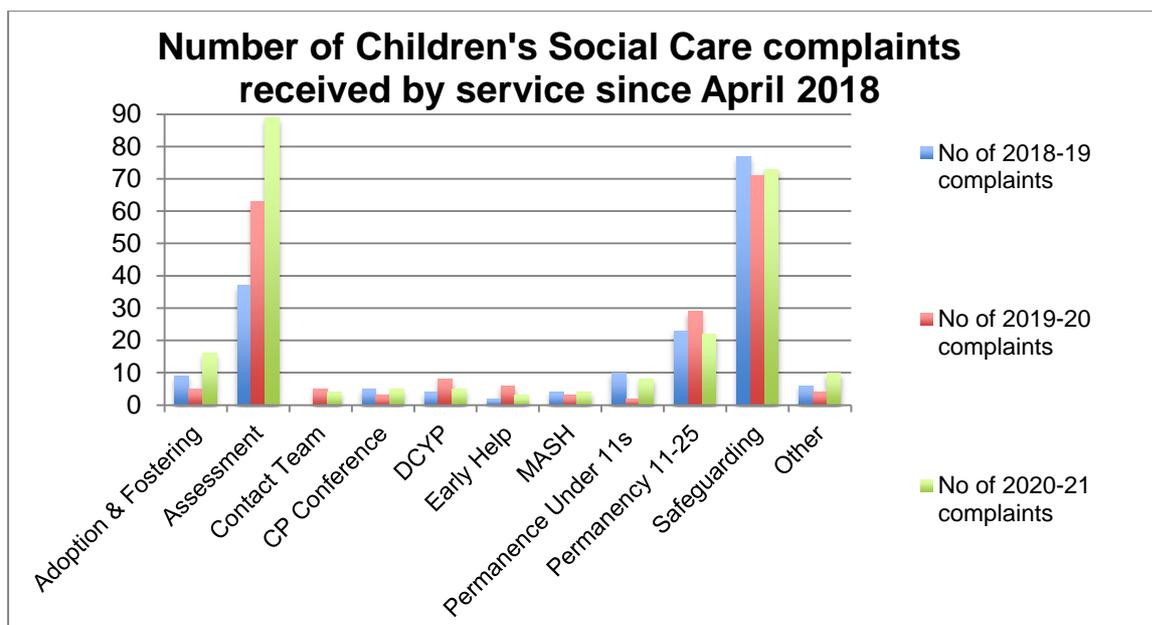
LG&SCO Decision received in year ending 31 March 2021				
Closed after initial inquiry	Premature	No fault	Fault/Injustice	No final decision made
4	4	0	2	2

Of the 2 cases where fault was found, the first resulted in the council making a remedy payment of £300 for the distress caused, and writing a letter of apology. In the second case, an apology letter was sent to remedy the complaint.

A further 4 complaints were recorded by the Ombudsman for Education Services.

LG&SCO Decision received in year ending 31 March 2021				
Closed after initial inquiry	Premature	No fault	Fault/Injustice	No final decision made
1	1	1	1	0

In the case where fault was found a new school appeals panel was arranged to remedy the procedural fault.



Regarding the table above, in 2020/21, 'Other' encompasses the Allegations Management Service, Commissioning, the Independent Reviewing Team, Legal Services, and the Turn Around for Children Service. In 2019/20, 'Other' encompassed the Emergency Duty Team, the Independent Reviewing Team and the Social Work Academy. In 2018-19, 'Other' encompassed the Emergency Duty Team, the Forest of Dean Project Team, IRIS Casework, Operation Acorne, and the Team Around the Child Service (TACS).

4.0 Reasons and outcome of complaint by service

This section of the annual report analyses the reasons for complaints by service, and identifies trends and outcomes.

Adoption & Fostering

Within the 16 complaints received in 2020/21, the most commonly raised reason for complaint was **Quality of Service**.

3 of the reasons related to 'Errors or omissions in assessment / letter / minutes / statement', 3 related to 'Insensitive application of service by authority / team', and 1 related to 'Teams not communicating with each other / working together'.

A carer felt inaccurate information was being held on record and shared with other organisations, and a prospective carer felt the application process was administered insensitively.

5 of the 16 complaints were not upheld, 7 were partially upheld, 2 were fully upheld, 1 is not progressing and 1 was withdrawn.

Assessment

Within the 89 complaints received in 2020/21, the most commonly raised reason for complaint was **Quality of Service**.

21 of the reasons related to 'Errors or omissions in assessment / letter / minutes / statement', 9 related to 'Insensitive application of service by authority / team', 8 related to 'Not being sent documents / invited to meetings', 2 related to 'Policy / guidelines not being adhered to', 4 related to 'Sees no benefit from authority's involvement', 1 related to 'Teams not communicating with each other / working together', and 2 related to 'Too many changes of social worker / carer'.

One parent said they received a copy of a Single Assessment from the other, and another parent raised a concern that a Multi-Agency Resource Panel had to defer their decision because the Head of Service's authorisation had not been obtained.

38 of the 89 complaints were not upheld, 30 were partially upheld, 4 were fully upheld, 12 are not progressing and 5 were withdrawn.

Contact Team

Within the 4 complaints received in 2020/21, the most commonly raised reason for complaint was **Staff attitude**.

1 of the reasons related to 'Staff member displaying a lack of knowledge / competence', 1 related to 'Staff member displaying rude / aggressive behaviour', and 3 related to 'Staff member displaying a lack of empathy / being unhelpful'.

A parent believed their severe anxiety wasn't being taken into account with contact, and another felt they were being threatened with reduced contact because of cancelled sessions, when the sessions were cancelled for Covid-19 related reasons.

2 of the 4 complaints were not upheld and 2 were partially upheld.

CP Conference

Within the 5 complaints received in 2020/21, the most commonly raised reason for complaint was **Quality of Service**.

2 of the reasons related to 'Errors or omissions in assessment / letter / minutes / statement', and 1 related to 'Not being sent documents / invited to meetings'.

A parent said information about one of their children had been incorrectly attributed to another. A separate parent said they were not being sent meeting minutes.

1 of the 5 complaints was not upheld, 3 were partially upheld, and 1 was fully upheld.

Disabled Children & Young People (DCYP)

Within the 5 complaints received in 2020/21, the most commonly raised reason for complaint was **Unwelcome or disputed decision**.

1 of the reasons related to 'Unhappy with the outcome of an assessment', 1 related to 'Unhappy with the frequency / length / nature of contact', and 1 related to 'Unhappy with other decision made by social worker / authority' (in this case, the decision that the Assessment team could assess the complainant's child rather than the DCYP Service).

A parent felt the service had not done enough to enable her contact. A grandfather believed a report had been written with the intention of securing a Child Protection Plan, even though this was not in the child's best interests.

1 of the 5 complaints was not upheld, 1 was partially upheld, 1 was fully upheld, and 2 are not progressing.

Early Help

Within the 3 complaints received in 2020/21, the most commonly raised reason for complaint was **Non-delivery**.

All 3 of the reasons related to 'Support not provided (e.g. help not given with achieving agreed outcomes, or requested therapy sessions not arranged)'.

A parent felt they had not received support with their child's behavior as the family support worker had focused on their allegations of domestic abuse. Another parent suggested that Lego therapy / counselling had been agreed but remained undelivered,

2 of the 3 complaints were not upheld, and 1 was partially upheld.

MASH

Within the 4 complaints received in 2020/21, the most commonly raised reasons for complaint were **Communication** and **Staff attitude**.

2 of the reasons related to 'Data breach / mishandling of information', 1 related to 'Staff member displaying rude / aggressive behaviour', and 1 related to 'Staff member displaying a lack of empathy / being unhelpful'.

One person believed they had been incorrectly identified as the origin of a referral, and a parent was unhappy a worker terminated a call because of their tone.

2 of the 4 complaints were not upheld, and 2 were partially upheld.

Permanence Under 11s

Within the 8 complaints received in 2020/21, the most commonly raised reasons for complaint were **Communication** and **Unwelcome or disputed decision**.

1 of the reasons related to 'Delay in provision of information / response / returned contact, 2 of the reasons related to 'Feel they are not being kept informed / involved, or are not being listened to', 1 related to 'Unhappy with other decision made by social worker / authority' (in this case that the worker arranged for a child not to attend school during the Covid-19 lockdown, even though they were 'looked after' and the child of a keyworker), and 2 related to 'Unhappy with the frequency / length / nature of contact'.

A parent said they had not been made aware of allegations made by their child at the time, and another was unhappy that the scheduled days for their phone calls / contact had changed.

2 of the complaints were not upheld, 4 were partially upheld, and 2 were fully upheld.

Permanency 11-25

Within the 22 complaints received in 2020/21, the most commonly raised reason for complaint was **Communication**.

4 of the reasons related to 'Delay in provision of information / response / returned contact', 3 related to 'Feel they are not being kept informed / involved, or are not being listened to', 1 related to 'Information, policy, plan, or rule has not been properly explained', and 1 related to 'Relevant staff not being available at time of contact'.

A young adult on a Pathway Plan said a worker's phone was not being picked up, and two carers felt the history of some young people placed with them had not been properly disclosed.

9 of the 22 complaints were not upheld, 6 were partially upheld, 4 were fully upheld, 2 are not progressing and 1 is the subject of a Stage 2 investigation and does not yet have an outcome.

Safeguarding

Within the 73 complaints received in 2020/21, the most commonly raised reason for complaint was **Communication**.

38 of the reasons related to 'Data breach / mishandling of information', 9 related to 'Delay in provision of information / response / returned contact', 14 related to 'Feel they are not being kept informed / involved, or are not being listened to', 5 related to 'Information, policy, plan, or rule has not been properly explained', 4 related to 'No / little notification being given of absence / cancellation / lateness', and 3 related to 'Relevant staff not being available at time of contact'.

A parent said their personal information had been discussed in front of their ex-partner's parent, who they consider to be a stranger. Another parent said that their children's social worker left without notification.

22 of the 73 complaints were not upheld, 24 were partially upheld, 3 were fully upheld, 22 are not progressing and 2 were withdrawn.

Other

Within the 10 complaints received in 2020/21, the most commonly raised reasons for complaint were **Communication** and **Quality of service**.

2 of the reasons related to 'Delay in provision of information / response / returned contact', 1 related to 'Information, policy, plan, or rule has not been properly explained', 1 related to 'Relevant staff not being available at time of contact', 1 related to 'Errors or omissions in assessment / letter / minutes / statement', 1 related to 'Item or service purchased not of sufficient quality', and 2 related to 'Policy / guidelines not being adhered to'.

A young adult on a Pathway Plan was unhappy with the property which had been arranged for them. A parent felt that there was insufficient provision in Gloucestershire for disabled children and young people.

3 of the 10 complaints were not upheld, 4 were partially upheld, 1 was fully upheld, and 2 are not progressing.

THE REASONS GIVEN FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMPLAINTS IN 2020/21

Communication	Accommodations not made around communication needs	3	127
	Data breach / mishandling of information	13	
	Delay in provision of information / response / returned contact	26	
	Feel they are not being kept informed / involved, or are not being listened to	57	
	Information, policy, plan or rule has not been properly explained	13	
	No / little communication being given of absence / cancellation / lateness	6	
	Relevant staff not being available at time of contact	9	
Cost	Inappropriate charge for service	0	18
	Not receiving payments or items that are due	17	
	Tax payers' money wasted	0	
	Unhappy with changes to financial support	1	
Delay in decision or provision of service	Decision not provided within given timescales	6	24
	Doesn't feel sufficient progress is being made	0	
	Service not provided within given timescales	18	
Discrimination	Discriminated against due to age	0	35
	Discriminated against due to class	0	
	Discriminated against due to gender / sex	6	
	Discriminated against due to mental / physical health or disabilities	5	
	Discriminated against due to race or nationality	3	
	Discriminated against due to religion	1	
	Discriminated against on a personal level	20	
	No / restricted access to payment or service (general)	3	

Eligibility	No / restricted access to payment or service (personal)	3	6
Non-delivery	Frequency of visits / meetings not at appropriate level	5	35
	Support not provided (e.g. help not given with achieving agreed outcomes, or requested therapy sessions not arranged)	30	
Quality of service	Errors made in assessment / letters / minutes / statement	44	125
	Insensitive application of service by authority / team	21	
	Item or service purchased not of sufficient quality	1	
	Not being sent documents / invited to meetings	20	
	Policy / guidelines not being adhered to	18	
	Sees no benefit from authority's involvement	6	
	Teams not communicating with each other / working together	5	
	Too many changes of social worker / carer	10	
	Website navigability / quality	0	
Staff attitude	Staff member displaying a lack of empathy / being unhelpful	32	80
	Staff member displaying a lack of honesty	5	
	Staff member displaying a lack of knowledge / competence	8	
	Staff member displaying rude / aggressive behaviour	35	
Unwelcome or disputed decision	Unhappy with a decision they feel puts the child(ren) involved / them at risk	9	70
	Unhappy with case being closed	1	
	Unhappy with escalation of concerns	7	
	Unhappy with other decision made by social worker / authority	24	
	Unhappy with the frequency of contact with child(ren)	22	
	Unhappy with outcome of assessment	7	

Of the 267 in total (social care and education) Stage 1 Children's Services complaints received in 2020/21, 116 of them were found to have some justification and were recorded as being fully or partially upheld. This represents 43.45% of the total, and is a decrease from the 52.04% which were fully or partially upheld in 2019/20, and the 48.06% of complaints which were found to have been justified in 2018/19.

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

5.0 How quickly are we responding to Stage 1 complaints?

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 respond to them within the given timescales. The statutory timescale for a 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. The timescale for a response under the Corporate Complaints Policy is 20 working days.

89.14% of Children's Services complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days in 2020/21. The reasons for delays in acknowledging complaints included:

- Complaints not being sent directly to the Complaints Team
- 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

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

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
% of Children's Services complaints responded to within agreed timescale	73.30%	73.76%	74.91%

Reasons for late responses include:

- The person investigating the complaint / involved staff members having other work commitments, delaying the investigation
- The detail and complexity of the complaint
- Annual leave and sick leave of key members of staff

Key Message – The Complaints service are working with Children's Services, as a whole, to improve the timeliness of responses, work which includes producing monthly reports on the status of complaints for Heads of Service, sending reminder e-mails as to when responses are due, and assisting with the drafting and checking of responses. This work is ongoing, and we continue to consider ways in which the process might be bettered, including regular complaints meetings with Heads of Service to discuss this work and approach.

6.0 Learning from complaints

Learning from complaints can contribute to practice development and service improvement.

The following table details examples of actions which have been taken by Children's Services as a result of concerns being raised.

Issue**Action**

That an alleged perpetrator of abuse was not informed of the specifics of allegations that had been made against them.

Director of Safeguarding and Care will remind the service of the requirement to inform alleged perpetrators of the details regarding the alleged abuse. The implementation of this will be monitored.

A "No Further Action" letter was sent to a parent, despite the case having been escalated to another service area.

Director of Safeguarding and Care will raise the matter with the Head of Service and cascaded to all staff.

A Social Worker informed a customer that her manager had told her not to speak to him.

Director of Safeguarding and Care to disseminate learning amongst staff Countywide in relation to effective communication. Managers will develop and implement communication strategies which ensure that customers receive relevant information whilst maintaining support to GCC staff.

Children's Social Services did not adequately explain the purpose and procedure of a Section 47 Investigation to a family.

Children's Social Care to develop a leaflet which explains the process of Section 47 and distribute this.

Parent denied the opportunity to contribute to an assessment which resulted in inaccurate information and a failure to contextualize.

Director of Safeguarding and Care to reiterate to service the importance of all involved parties being able to contribute, regardless of their relationship with the service.

New Social Worker was unaware that Father had Parental Responsibility which resulted in him not being invited to certain meetings and therefore not having his views heard.

Director of Safeguarding and Care to reiterate the importance of handover meetings between Social Workers. The service should ensure that basic information such as who holds Parent Responsibility is held on file.

A Single Assessment did not acknowledge that a parent had made a previous complaint which meant that certain contributions were not contextualised; such as one parent disengaging with the Service.

In future, the Service should acknowledge in assessments if a complaint has been made previously. Director of Safeguarding and Care to consult with GCC Complaints Team to review any outstanding complaints where this may be an issue and take remedial action if necessary.

The author of a Single Assessment was not correctly identified on a document which led to confusion.

Director of Safeguarding and Care to work with Children's Social Care to ensure that authors of single assessments are correctly

	recorded and that I.T. systems cannot accidentally overwrite the correct information.
Two children were placed on a Child Protection Plan without sufficient justification.	Director of Safeguarding and Care to work with service to ensure the correct procedures are followed when categorising children.
Family therapy was withdrawn from a family without clear explanation.	Director of Safeguarding and Care to reiterate the importance of communication within the professional network in order to avoid contradictory and / or undermining communications.
Carers did not fully understand the role and remit of the service offered by EDT.	Information sheet to be produced to show what EDT can do out of hours which will then provide a more realistic expectation to users.
Disruption to correctly following procedures and handling a case correctly as a result of too many individuals being involved and no 'Lead Professional' being allocated.	Director of Safeguarding and Care to work with Children's Services to implement an 'overarching' procedure. In future, the allocated Social Worker will act as the 'Lead Professional' and draw up a communication plan covering roles, responsibilities and expectations to confirm who is responsible for what. This means that key issues will be managed in a way that focuses on what is most important to meet the child's needs, risks and circumstances.
Meeting minutes and care plans were not distributed efficiently.	Director of Safeguarding and Care to reiterate the importance of efficient and effective distribution of minutes and plans within the service.
Response times from Service to carer were unreasonably slow.	Head of Quality Assurance and Safeguarding to work with Service to develop a Customer Charter which identifies communication response times.
Carers have said there is not enough guidance for parents / carers who wish to challenge an Initial Child Protection Conference decision.	Head of Quality Assurance and Safeguarding to work with Service to develop guidance for this. The procedural approach and available information for parents / carers should be shared and articulated in an open and accessible way.

A child in a foster home who was experiencing placement changes did not receive the necessary support. Not all complaints made by carers were logged with the complaints team, prior to their formal complaint.

Director of Safeguarding and Care to review current practice with the Service and where required, make changes to policies. Director of Safeguarding and Care to reiterate Countywide the importance of sharing any feedback received with the Corporate Complaints Team.

On multiple occasions, Stage 1 Complaints which were made were not adequately addressed by Children's Social Care.

The Complaints Team will monitor responses to ensure all aspects have received an appropriate response.

Pathway plans were not completed in a timely manner.

Director of Safeguarding and Care to work with Service to undertake an audit of the timely completion of Pathway Plans.

A young person in care did not have enough information about who was responsible for each aspect of his care.

Director of Safeguarding and Care to work with the Service to ensure that in the future, all relevant information is made available and accessible to those in care.

A child in care was not provided with Halal meat at school.

The Head of Education will remind all schools of their responsibility to have the correct provisions to meet the needs of their students.

An asylum seeker was disadvantaged and isolated and not provided with enough support.

Director of Safeguarding and Care to prepare practice guidance and to consult with the department's Commissioner to ensure that sufficient and appropriate interpreting resources are available to staff.

The Virtual School's role was not clear to professionals / foster carers.

The Head of Education Outcomes will oversee the development of a leaflet which will be used for professionals at Personal Education Plan meetings. This leaflet will also be shared via foster carer training with Gloucestershire's in-house foster carers.

Children's Services did not work flexibly with guidelines in order to meet a young person's needs.

Director of Safeguarding and Care to discuss the following with Service: alongside the requirements of professional guidance and legislation, the Service needs to consider what is required to meet individual young people's needs and circumstances. When appropriate, some reasonable adjustments can, and should be made to respond to any

<p>There was a lack of clarity between Children's Services and Adult's Services regarding the transition planning and support for a young person in care.</p>	<p>additional needs.</p> <p>Director of Safeguarding and Care to work with both services to ensure they understand how each other work. This should allow for a much smoother transition between services.</p>
<p>There was an unacceptable delay in dealing with a Stage 1 complaint.</p>	<p>The Complaints Manager will work with investigating managers at Stage 1 of the complaints process to ensure the opportunity to talk with complainants early in the process is not missed, especially with complaints which are complex.</p>
<p>Multiple documents were not signed which caused delays in the progression of a case.</p>	<p>Director of Safeguarding and Care will work with the Service to ensure correct training is in place and staff know procedures.</p>
<p>There was an unacceptable delay in responding to a parent's request to see a safety plan/risk assessment.</p>	<p>Director of Safeguarding and Care to work with Service to review and improve processes.</p>
<p>A deadline was changed which meant that professionals did not have the opportunity to contribute important evidence / information to a panel.</p>	<p>Director of Safeguarding and Care to reiterate the importance of sticking to deadlines and allowing all parties the opportunity to contribute.</p>
<p>A young person in care was refused the right to attend a Child in Need meeting about them and their care.</p>	<p>Director of Safeguarding and Care to work with Children's Services who should strive to involve young people as much as possible. The importance of being sensitive to the emotions of those involved will be reiterated.</p>
<p>A parent felt intimidated and bullied by a Social worker, due to their manner.</p>	<p>Director of Safeguarding and Care to reiterate the importance of providing responses which show empathy for any users of the service.</p>
<p>An assessment sent to parents was in very small font and was therefore very difficult to read.</p>	<p>Director of Safeguarding and Care to work with the Service to provide clear guidance to staff on what should be used as a minimum font size. The need to adapt to individual needs will also be reiterated.</p>
<p>A young person in care was not provided with</p>	<p>Director of Safeguarding and Care to work with the Service to develop better processes</p>

enough funding or PA support to meet his needs due to an assessment not being undertaken.

in relation to communication and efficiency.

Learning was not taken from a Stage 1 Complaint.

Director of Safeguarding and Care and the Complaints Team to enhance the process for disseminating learning and robustly monitoring outcomes from complaints.

Parents did not understand the difference between a Care Plan and a Single Assessment.

The Service should take the time to explain different documents to parents / carers.

A drafted document was sent without being clearly labelled as a draft and the version of this document was not clear.

Director of Safeguarding and Care will reiterate to all staff the importance of labelling draft documents to allow for transparency and of clearly adding the version of a document to the front to avoid confusion.

Parents felt that the difference between the Social worker team and Early Help Pathways team was not clear.

Director of Safeguarding and Care to work with service and consult with parent groups to find ways to improve processes.

One case saw 6 different social workers being allocated to a case within 4 months.

Director of Safeguarding and Care to consult with Heads of Service and develop ways of improving staff retention rates.

7.0 Who is using the complaints procedure?

This section looks at who is raising issues, complaints or concerns in regard to Children's Services, and offers some analysis of the equalities and diversity data which has been returned to us.

The following key points can be identified in regard to the people using our complaints processes, and who answered our equalities monitoring questions:

- There were 7 complaints received from children and young people directly or via an advocate. This made up 2.62% of the total received
- 189 complaints were raised by parents, either directly or via an MP, councilor or legal representative. This amounted to 70.79% of the total
- Foster carers and Special Guardians put in 23 complaints, representing 8.61% of complaints made
- Where it was stated, 80.95% of complainants identified as White British

- Where it was stated, 34.92% of complainants identified as male, 63.49% as female, with 1.59% choosing not to say
- Where it was stated, 17.46% of complainants identified as having a disability

8.0 How are children and young people being supported to raise concerns?

Barnardo's continues to provide an advocacy service, which supports young people in complaining about the actions of Children's Services. Their advocates are familiar with the Council's complaints processes, and information about the service is included on the Children's Services complaints page of the Council's website.

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.

Of the 11 young people who raised comments and complaints this year, 7 were supported by advocates in making their complaints.

3 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.

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.

9.0 Children's Services Compliments - an overview

This section looks at compliments received. The table below compares the number of compliments received in 2020/21 with the number received in previous years.

Children's Services compliments received by year	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
	166	147	237

10 of the compliments we have logged were put in by children and young people, 43 professionals took the time to put their praise of staff on record, and 130 compliments were 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 those teams.

All of the frontline Social Care team types received compliments.

What positive things are people saying?

Some examples of the positive comments made by service users are:

- One child said: *'hiya XXX, thankyou for letting me know. it's been amazing being one of our kids to work with, ill not forget the memories like always playing my songs in the car whilst we are dancing🥰thankyou for everything you've done for me & i hope to be back in Gloucester soon as'*

- One parent said: *'Thank you, XXX. What a fantastic job you have done, we are so grateful to you for your hard work. It is going to be life changing for XXX and put him on an entirely new and positive path.'*
- One carer said: *'My name is XXX and I have had XXX living with me the last few weeks and her social worker is XXX. I am writing this email to you to let you know how amazing XXX has been for all of us. She is so supportive and not only supportive anyway but just even more supportive through this awful time we are going through. XXX has gone above and beyond for all of us and I can not thank her enough. Amazing social worker and person.'*
- One professional said: *'Thank you so much for your kind words and warm wishes. I do believe that it took the whole community to rally together to turn things around and I feel so proud to be part of that community. I am very grateful for the support your team provides and I hope this continues so that together we can achieve better outcomes for our families and the wider community.'*
- One child said: *'Dear XXX, I am sorry to hear that you won't be working with me anymore. Thank you so much for the help and support that you have given me throughout my time in XXX which has made a huge difference to my education. I thoroughly enjoyed our talks in school and wish you well for the future.'*
- One parent said: *'Just want to say thank you for what you have done for me and XXX wouldn't have been here were I am today if it wasn't for your help and we are very grateful I'm so so happy how the outcome came but at the same time am sad for you to leave as you was a big part of XXX.'*
- One Independent Reviewing Officer said: *'To all those who were in attendance / involved in XXX's review today I wanted to take a few moments to put in writing how struck I am by the quality of service afforded by all of you to XXX. In my opinion your work together as a multi-agency team demonstrates some of the highest levels of practice I have seen since being an IRO in Gloucestershire. I observe the great importance placed by all of you on the value of joint working and the time you have all clearly taken in building relationships not just directly with XXX but with each other as a whole team supporting her. In turn I observe the evidence of how your multi-agency views have been shared and considered with each other, how XXX's needs are exceptionally well understood and how she is afforded clear planning and a very well matched and very well supported therapeutic placement. It was really pleasing to hear the progress that XXX is making and how she recognises you all as the significant people around her. We all know there is a long road ahead for XXX and many difficulties to face. In review you all set out a clear pathway of support for XXX and I am confident that she is being tightly held by you all as the support team around her. I am rarely struck, as I have been today, by the high standard of practice that has been evident to me in todays review and as such I wished to confirm my views in writing to you.'*
- One parent said: *'We got your assessment yesterday and I just want to thank you from the bottom of my heart..... It was very emotional to read as you really "get" and captured us as a family and our strengths and struggles. I will be forever grateful to you for helping us to move forward and change our lives'*

and enable us to support our children in the life they deserve to have and in helping XXX and I to be able to get back up, breath, survive and grow stronger’.

- *One professional said: ‘I would like to thank you and your social worker XXX, for the help she has given me over the last few months. XXX has been the allocated worker for a resident of our Refuge who has historically had a very negative experience with social workers. XXX has managed t build a good relationship with the client, which has been made even more difficult with the current social distancing restrictions. The client has in fact said to me that she has had lots of contact with social workers but this is the first time she actually trusts one. She feels that XXX has offered support to her but has always been completely honest when explaining her concerns. In my contact with XXX, it has been refreshing that she is always available to speak to or if not, responds to messages left. I have found her extremely professional in all my contact with her, and feel that in a case that could be seen to be very negative, a positive multi agency working relationship has been established to achieve the best possible outcome’.*
- *One child said: ‘My social worker is XXX. I like XXX because she always is funny and always tells us the truth. She never makes me feel like I can't tell her anything and always listens to me. Having XXX makes me feel safer because I know she tells Dad what we are thinking and protects us. XXX listens to my worries and always tells me what she has done to make things better. I was worried about having a social worker at first but now I am fine with it. I like that I have someone to go to with my worries’.*

10.0 The complaints process explained

This report provides information about complaints which were made between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, and handled under the complaints and representations procedures established through the Representations Procedure (Children) Regulations 2006 and the council’s Corporate Complaints Policy.

All timescales contained within this report are in working days. Text within inverted commas indicates direct citations from the 2006 Regulations or Guidance, unless otherwise specified.

What is a complaint?

‘An expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response’.

Who can make a complaint?

The child or young person receiving or eligible to receive services from the council or their representative (e.g. a parent, relative, advocate, special guardian or foster carer).

‘The local authority has the discretion to decide whether or not the representative is suitable to act in this capacity or has sufficient interest in the child’s welfare’.

Stages of the complaints procedure

The statutory complaints procedure has three stages:

Stage 1: This is the most important stage of the complaints procedure, and the one at which service areas / external contractors providing services on our behalf are expected to resolve as many complaints as possible.

The Corporate Complaints Policy requires response at Stage 1 within 20 working days. The statutory complaints procedure requires response to complaints at Stage 1 within 10 working days (though the response time may be extended to 20 working days, where necessary).

Stage 2: This stage is implemented when the complainant is dissatisfied with the findings from Stage 1. Stage 2 of the statutory complaints procedure involves an investigation being conducted by an Investigating Officer, with oversight being provided by an Independent Person. Both of these people are external and independent, and an internal senior manager adjudicates on their findings and recommendations. Under the Regulations, the aim is to provide the Stage 2 response within 25 days of the complaint being agreed, though this can be extended to 65 days, where necessary.

Under the Corporate Complaints Policy, an internal senior manager reinvestigates the complaint, taking into account the response already provided. Arrangements might be made for an independent person to review and investigate the complaint instead, if this is considered necessary. The aim is to provide the Stage 2 response within 25 days of the request for a Stage 2 investigation being accepted. There is no statutory duty, with the Corporate Complaints Policy, to progress complaints to Stage 2.

Stage 3: There is no Stage 3 under the Corporate Complaints Policy. The third stage of the statutory complaints procedure, however, is consideration by a Review Panel made up of three independent people. It is not within the Panel's remit to reinvestigate complaints.

Where complainants wish to proceed with complaints about statutory Children's Social Care functions, the council is required to establish a Complaint Review Panel. The Panel makes recommendations to the Director of Children's Services, who then sets out what action will be taken in response.

Timescales in regard to Stage 3 complaints include:

- setting up the Panel within 30 working days;
- producing the Panel's report within a further 5 working days; and
- producing the council's response within 15 working days

For more details please click on, <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/complaints-and-feedback/>

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman is an independent government body, empowered to investigate complaints about councils when the council's own

investigations have not provided resolution. They offer a free service, and can both offer advice and '*investigate complaints in a fair and independent way*' (Source - <https://www.lgo.org.uk>).

Complainants retain the right to approach the Ombudsman at any time, though the Ombudsman will typically expect complainants to have completed the council's complaints process before they investigate matters themselves.

For more details please click on,
<https://www.lgo.org.uk/>

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Emma-Jayne Harvey (Customer Feedback Officer)
Colin Davies (Complaints Manager)

September 2021