Appendix A

Central Bedfordshire Council
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Children's Social Care Services

Customer Feedback – Compliments/Complaints Annual Report (1st April 2017 – 31 March 2018)

Not Protected

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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 2017/18 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 because of complaints; complaints considered by the Local Government and Social Care 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 and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSO). The LGSO is an independent body that can consider complaints about the Council.

Executive Summary

Children's Social Care

18 compliments were received in 2017/18 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 60 new complaints received, 42 of which were managed through the complaints procedure (10 from children and young people). The remaining issues related to matters which were not suitable for the children's statutory procedure i.e. matters relating to management or insurance processes; legal matters; no consent to act on behalf of the service user/person affected; not someone who may complain under the regulations; or where matters were not about the council. These cases were filtered out and where appropriate passed to alternative channels already in place to manage those issues.

38 stage 1 complaints were concluded. Complaints were important feedback for services and a means of considering how to improve. Managers listened to customers' views with 52% of stage 1 complaints either upheld fully or in part. The main reason for complaints this year related to complainants feeling that incorrect action had been taken in their case (i.e. not following procedure).

Performance in complaints handling has fallen since last year in that 69% (compared to 72%) of complaints received a stage 1 response within 20 working days or less. Individual cases had specific remedies put in place and most of the wider service improvements resulted in the complainant's experience being shared with staff to improve practice.

There was no stage 2 or stage 3 complaints.

The LGSO considered four complaints about Central Bedfordshire Council's children's social care services during the period. The LGSO decided not to investigate in three of those cases as the issues raised were outside of their jurisdiction. The remaining case progressed to investigation by the Ombudsman and was upheld. The Ombudsman made several recommendations for children's services to undertake to remedy the complaint, all of which have been complied with.

Effectiveness

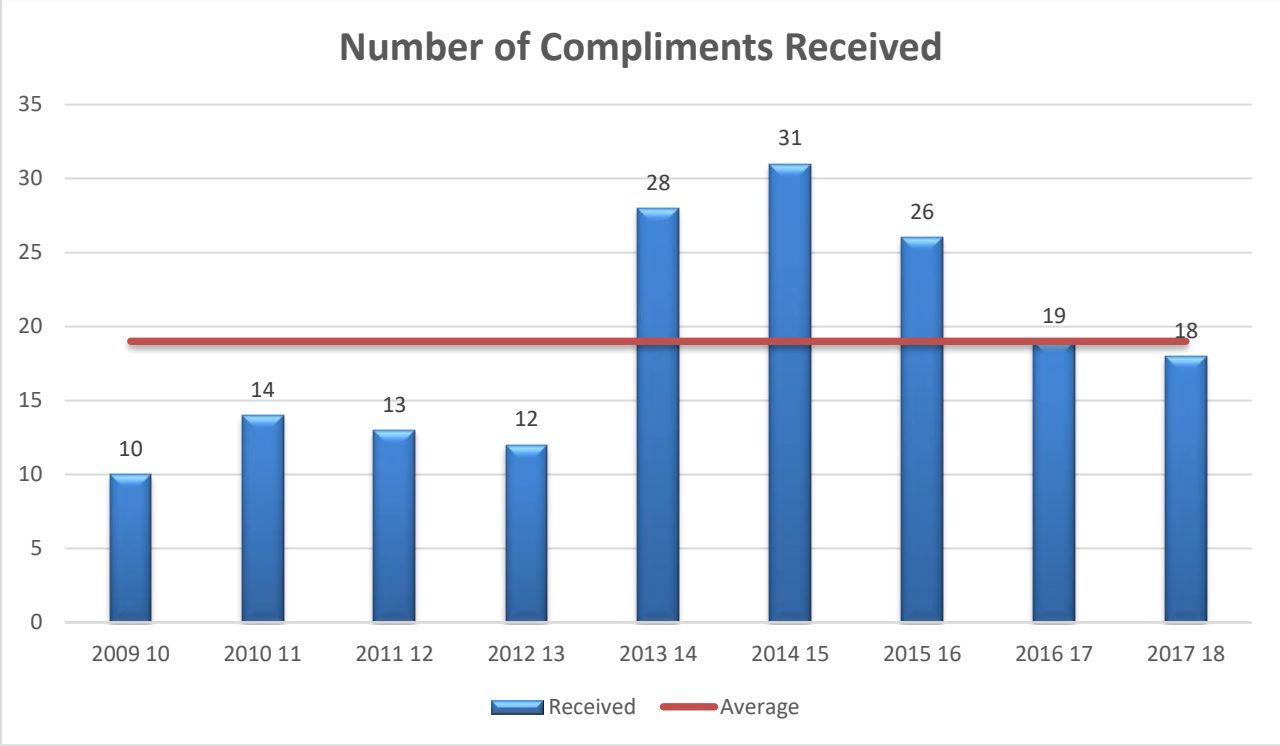
The activity for this reporting period shows the complaints procedure has been effective at resolving customer complaints at a local level. Learning from the customer experience through complaints has led to improvements to practices however there is some room for improvement in managing complaints to 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

Compliments from service users and/or their representatives about service delivery are recorded under the Customer Feedback Procedure. Whilst children's services may seek and receive positive feedback from families and professionals via other mechanisms, the Customer Feedback Procedure captures compliments where the service user and/or representative has gone out of their way to provide praise and appreciation for the service provided to them.

18 compliments were recorded across children's social care services relating to good customer care and the quality of support to children and their families.

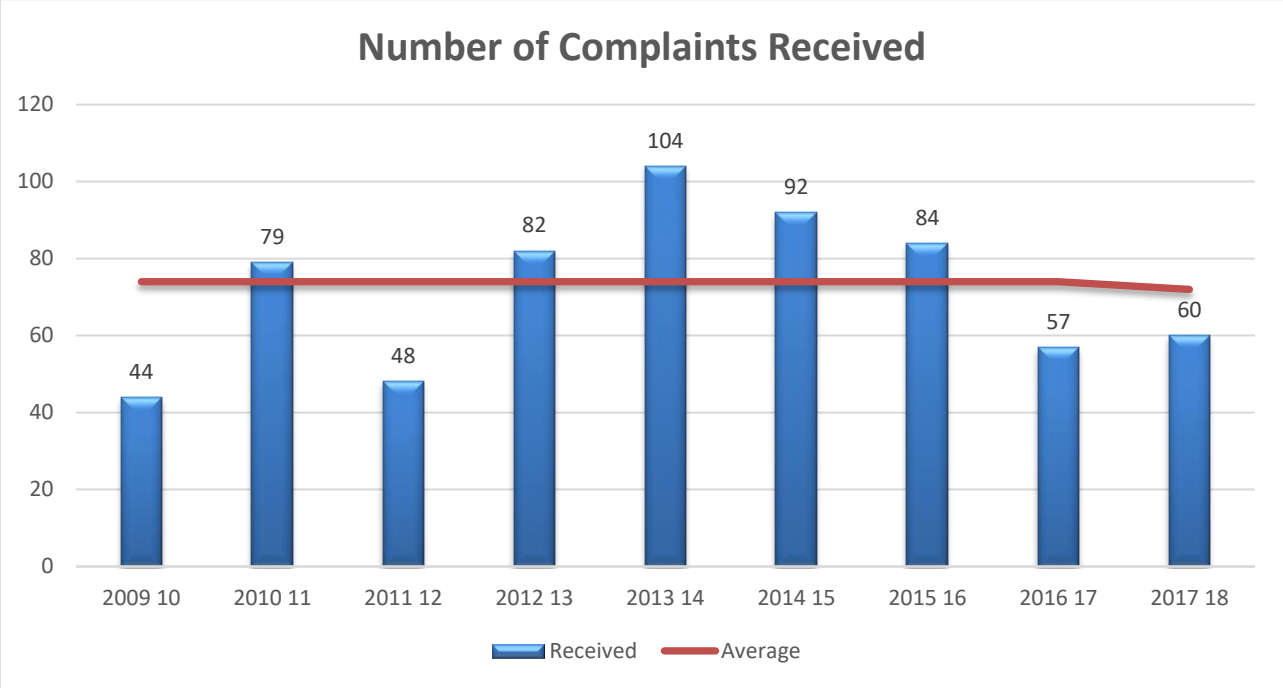


The number of compliments received in 2017/18 reduced by one, from the number received in 2016/17 (by 5%). The number received in this period is below the average number of compliments received across children's social care services in previous years.

1.2 Complaints Received

A complaint may be generally defined as an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response.

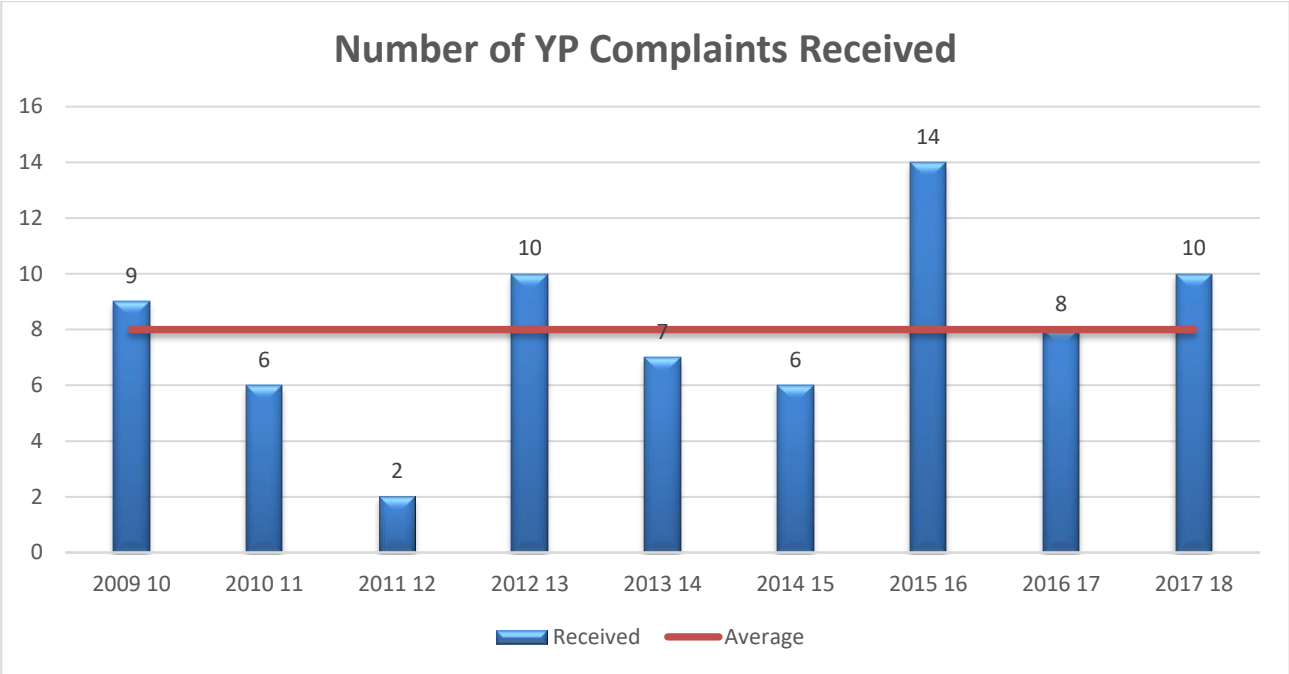
60 new complaints were received across children's social care services in 2017/18.



The number of new complaints received in 2017/18 has increased from the number received in 2016/17 (by 5%). The number received in 2017/18 remains below the average number of complaints received across children's social care services in previous years.

Of the 60 new complaints received, 42 were managed through the children's statutory complaints procedure at stage 1. The remaining complaints related to matters which were not suitable for the children's statutory complaints procedure i.e. matters relating to management or insurance processes; legal matters; no consent to act on behalf of the service user/person affected; not someone who may complain according to the regulations; or where matters were not about the council. These cases were filtered out and where appropriate they were passed to alternative channels already in place to manage those issues.

Of the 42 new complaints suitable for the children's statutory complaints procedure at stage 1, 10 were specifically about the service to a child/young person. Six were raised on behalf of the child/young person with their consent and four were received directly from child/young person.

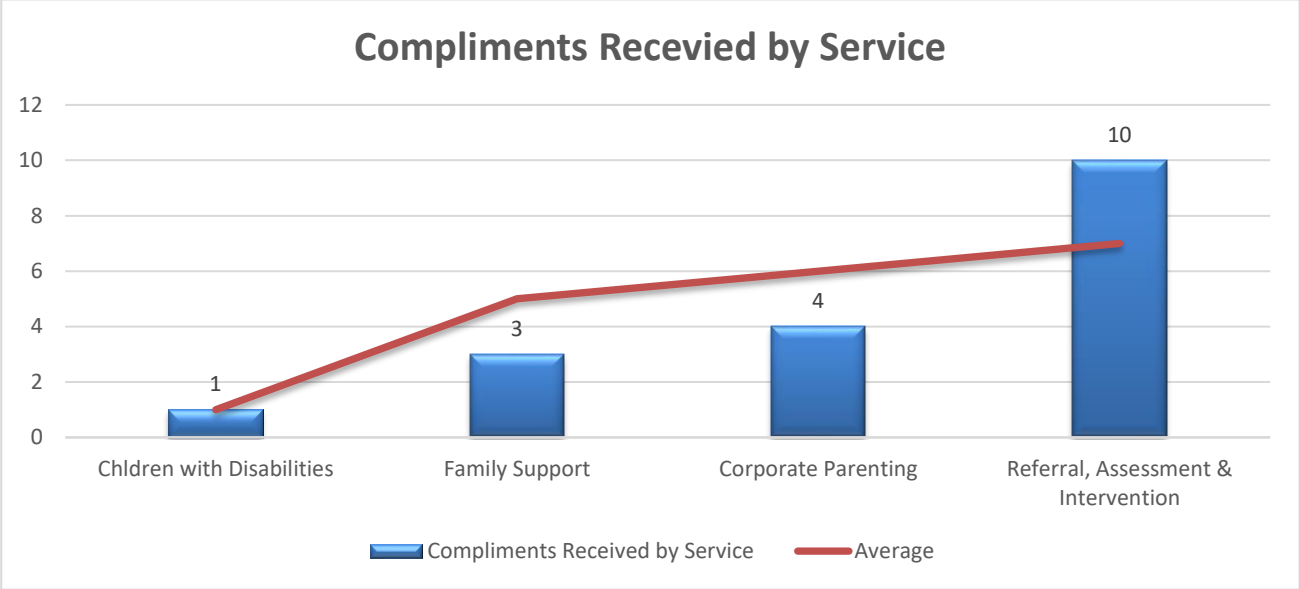


The number of complaints received in 2017/18 from children/young people has increased from those received in 2016/17 (by 20%). The number received in 2017/18 is above the average number of complaints received from children/young people across children's social care services in previous years.

2. Compliments Received Analysis

2.1 Compliments by Service Area

The below chart shows how the 18 compliments received across children's social care in 2017/18 were distributed by service area:



The compliments received by the Referral, Assessment & Intervention Team were above the average number they had received in previous years.

A breakdown of compliments received by service is detailed below along with a table which provides a general overview of the work each area undertakes.

Service Name	Description
Referral, Assessment & Intervention (10 compliments received)	Referral, Assessment & Intervention responds to all new referrals into children's services from professionals and the public where there are concerns around the welfare of children. If there is information to support the referral concerns the service will undertake a child & family assessment and immediate child protection enquiries if children are deemed at significant risk. The service can also provide specialist support to manage risk in children's lives.
Corporate Parenting (4 compliments received)	The Corporate Parenting Service provides services to looked after children and care leavers aged 0 to 25 years old. The aim is to ensure this group of children and young people achieve the best possible outcomes. The service recruits, assesses and supports adopters and foster carers; finds placements for looked after children coming into care or changing placements; supports

	children subject to care proceedings; supports children in long term foster care; and supports those who are leaving care into independence.
Family Support (3 compliments received)	Family Support provides advice, assistance and services to vulnerable children and families in need of support and protection. This can be provided within the home or within the local community. Family Support may need to protect children as part of child protection plans and may need to initiate legal proceedings if risks escalate to safeguard the child. Family Support also works with children who are privately fostered, those families who have no recourse to public funds and various other areas of need where statutory support is required.
Children with Disabilities (1 compliments received)	The Children with Disabilities Service provides support for children with a permanent or substantial disability from birth to age 18. The service operates a specialist referral process and offers a pathway from assessment to provision of service. The service promotes the welfare of disabled children and to enable parents to complete day to day tasks to keep their child living at home and included as a significant family member. The service also provides a range of support which offers disabled children the opportunity to aspire, develop and achieve in the different stages of their lives and transfer into adulthood.

Children with Disabilities

Thanks to social worker for fantastic support

Family Support

Caring social worker who listens and is thoughtful; praise for managing a difficult family dynamic to secure a good outcome for the child; amazing help and support for two years

Corporate Parenting

Praise following social event; praise for quality of training to foster carers; professional effective and reliable social workers

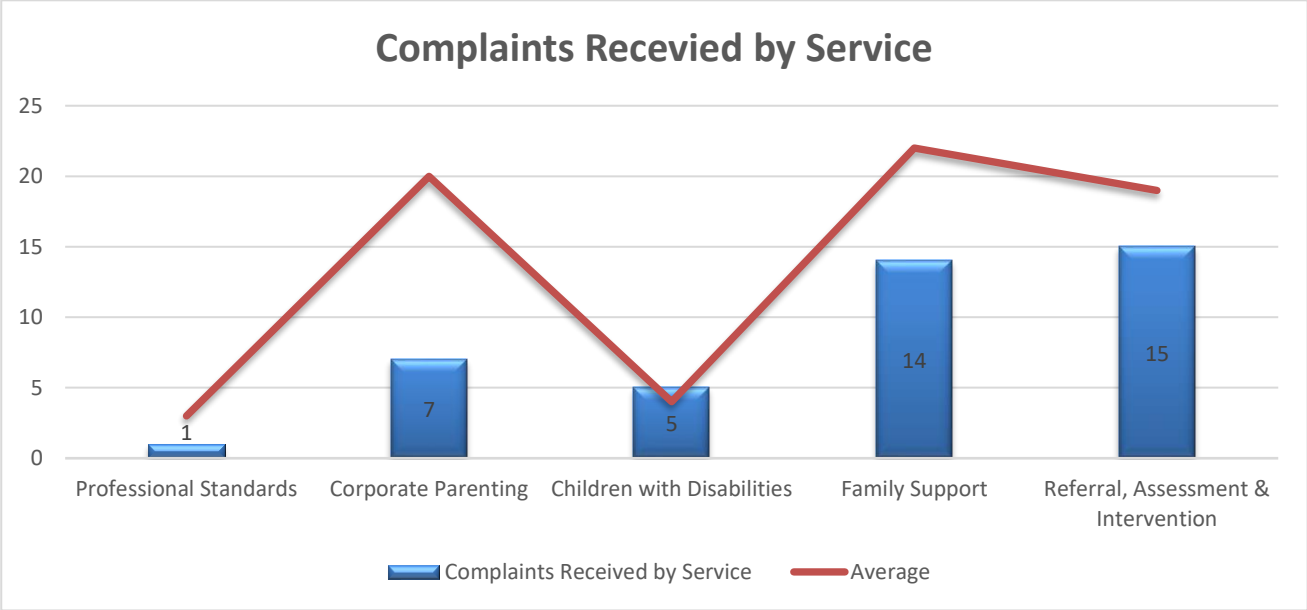
Referral, Assessment & Intervention

Thanks for support & advice; praise for support to children with ADHD & Asperger's; thanks for assistance in rehousing vulnerable family; shining example of what Children's Services is about; social worker going above and beyond; genuine; helpful and selfless;

3. Complaints Received Analysis

3.1 Complaints by Service Area

The below analysis on complaints received is based upon the 42 complaints accepted into the children's statutory complaints process at stage 1 during 2017/18. The below chart shows complaints accepted into the process by service area.



The number of complaints managed at stage 1 by the Children with Disabilities Service exceeded the average number of complaints accepted into the process in previous years. The number of complaints managed by other service areas were below the average number accepted into the process in previous years.

The below table provides a general overview of the work each area undertakes.

Service Name	Description
Referral, Assessment & Intervention (15 Complaints received)	Referral, Assessment & Intervention responds to all new referrals into children's services from professionals and the public where there are concerns around the welfare of children. If there is information to support the referral concerns the service will undertake a child & family assessment and immediate child protection enquiries if children are deemed at significant risk. The service can also provide specialist support to manage risk in children's lives.
Family Support (14 complaints received)	Family Support provides advice, assistance and services to vulnerable children and families in need of support and protection. This can be provided within the home or within the local community. Family Support

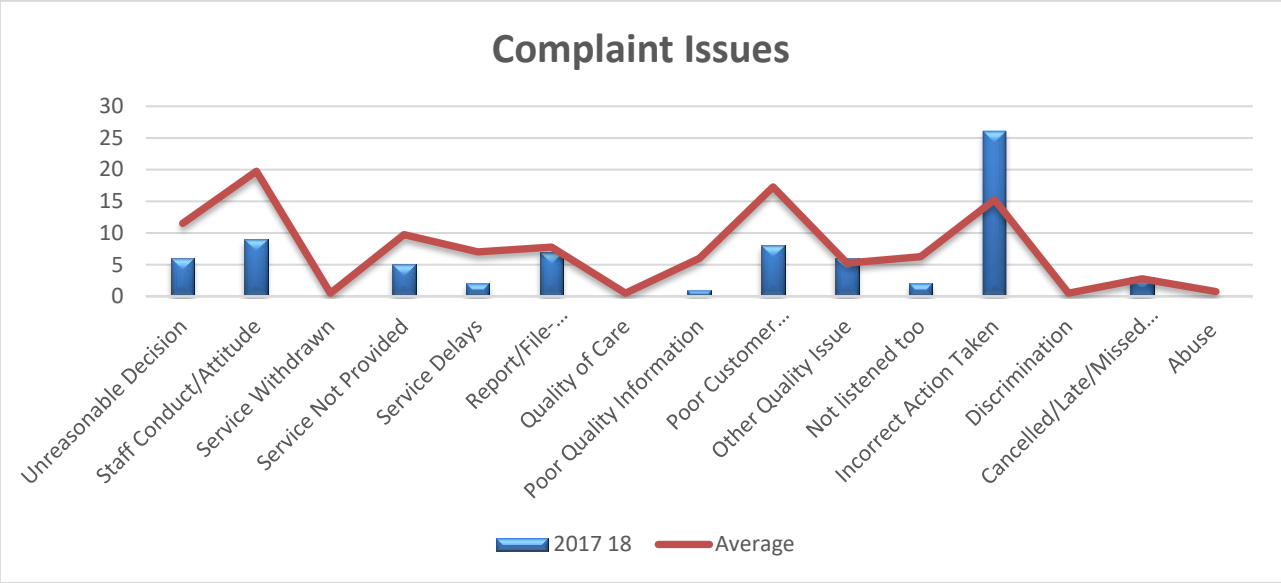
	may need to protect children as part of child protection plans and may need to initiate legal proceedings to safeguard a child if risks escalate. Family Support also works with children who are privately fostered, those families who have no recourse to public funds and various other areas of need where statutory support is required.
Children with Disabilities (5 complaints received)	The Children with Disabilities Service provides support for children with a permanent or substantial disability from birth to age 18. The service operates a specialist referral process and offers a pathway from assessment to provision of service. The service promotes the welfare of disabled children and to enable parents to complete day to day tasks to keep their child living at home and included as a significant family member. The service also provides a range of support which offers disabled children the opportunity to aspire, develop and achieve in the different stages of their lives and transfer into adulthood.
Corporate Parenting (7 complaints received)	The Corporate Parenting Service provides services to looked after children and care leavers aged 0 to 25 years old. The aim is to ensure this group of children and young people achieve the best possible outcomes. The service recruits, assesses and supports adopters and foster carers; finds placements for looked after children coming into care or changing placements; supports children subject to care proceedings; supports children in long term foster care; and supports those who are leaving care into independence.
Professional Standards (1 complaint received)	The Professional Standards service chairs child protection conferences; chairs statutory reviews for looked after children; is responsible for undertaking quality assurance activity to support continuous service improvement; ensures that the voice of looked after children is effectively represented; provides independent advice to parents in respect of the education of children with special needs; and is responsible for the effective administration of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

Of the 10 complaints received from children and young people in 2017/18, three were for the Referral, Assessment & Intervention Service; one was for the Family Support Service;

two were for the Children with Disabilities Service; and four were for the Corporate Parenting Service.

3.2 Stage 1 – Complaint Issues

The below chart indicates the types of complaint issues received over the year at stage 1 during 2017/18. Each complaint received can have several aspects, so one complaint may cover several the types of complaint issues set out in the chart below.



The top complaint issue in 2017/18 was in relation to complainant feeling that incorrect action had been taken in their case (i.e. procedure not followed).

In 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 poor customer care/communication and staff conduct were the top reasons for complaint. The above chart shows that there has been some improvement in these areas during 2017/18 and that complaints about these issues are below the average received over previous years.

Of the 10 complaints received from children and young people, the common type of complaint issue was around incorrect action being taken. Complaints also reflected unreasonable decisions; staff conduct/attitude; service not being provided; poor customer care/communication; cancelled/late/missed appointment; and other quality issues.

The breakdown of complaints received overall is detailed in the below table:

Complaint Causes	Breakdown of issues raised
Unreasonable Decision	Unreasonable to not share safeguarding information; decision around contact arrangements is inconvenient; decision made to end placement was not in care plan and not agreed at a looked after child review; unreasonable to stop funding for sessions with therapist; unreasonable questioning of parents care of child due to false allegations; young person feels at risk and disagrees with placement move
Staff Conduct/Attitude	Verbally attacked by workers at a child protection

	conference; reluctant to allow parents back to the family home following child protection investigations; threatened parent with contacting the Police if they did not provide consent for social care involvement; phoned parent and then hung up; accused parent of abuse and spoke to child about inappropriate issues; rude; did not acknowledge parent when visiting; sent intimidating text messages; lied about a parent's refusal to make contact and meet; young person was made to feel silly and that claims and requests for assistance were invalid; lack of empathy; unhelpful advice; lack of sensitivity to mental health issues; creating tension; prejudice; bias; unprofessional behaviour
Service Not Provided	Referral assessment process is inadequate; no urgent provision available from the Family Intervention Service without completion of a child and family assessment; no support provided to 5-year-old child with disabled mother; lack of support/carers provided following child having spinal surgery; agreed tutoring was inadequate and funding was removed; Special Guardian not supported to furnish property; classes and counselling not provide to manage challenging behaviour
Service Delays	Delay in providing new social worker; five months taken to file a Section 37 Report with the Court
Report/File/Invoice/Integrity	Failure to ensure accurate information was gathered for assessments and reports for a child protection conference; incorrect information held; information provided to another local authority without checking details with parent; assessment report full of spelling mistakes and incorrect information; working agreement not held on file for new social worker to review; inaccurate recording of child protection abuse category; child's address shared when asked not to; child protection plan incorrect in terms of what support is required
Poor Quality Information	Failure to provide information on the child protection process and decision to move to a child protection conference
Poor Customer Care/Communication	No contact with parents before visiting; contact details not provided; no response to emails; subject access request not responded to on time; not told contact had been cancelled; not told about change in social worker; not informed of meeting dates
Other Quality Issue	Introduced to irrelevant workers; not prepared for support worker leaving; social worker only works part time so cannot assist appropriately; lack of support for young person moving from children's home to independent living; promised actions not followed through; not supported with mental health issues; not supported with contact; inadequate supervision of student social worker
Not Listened Too	Ignoring request to take child into foster care after absconding to stay with another young person who is a bad influence; concerns over child welfare ignored

Incorrect Action Taken	Parents prevented from living with children following a referral of child protection; supervision unfairly implemented; step parent with parental responsibility not included in initial child protection discussions; told social care involvement may affect employment; not told child should be seen every 28 days; not taking correct action when concerns are raised by father; lack of clarity about referral information and sharing of concerns with other bodies; unqualified social worker contacted children at school without parental consent; failure to undertake assessment; information collected without parental consent; failure to take responsibility for young person who needed care/place to live; lack of support to find accommodation for a homeless young person; unsuitable handover and poor transition between teams; failure to challenge NHS re referrals/bullying/cooperation; not told about CSM being held; baby transported without proper car seat; young person did not receive a leaving care grant; increase in medication suggested; withdrawal of care provision suggested; diagnosis not documented; lack of education provision/tutor not provided; failure to act on reported breach of a working agreement; failure to follow up on task in child protection plan and failure to seek wishes and views of child; failure to safeguard children following concerns around money transfers; lack of financial support; emergency contact card for child does not include father's details; excluded from core group meetings; not supporting shared parenting and contact; not supporting child's needs; told to provide expenses to a child staying at friend's house in the knowledge the parent is on a low income; Family Intervention Service not invited to Core Group Meetings; change to child protection plan without consultation; only one parent required to do parenting assessment; pressured to take children whilst mother was in hospital; looked after child review minutes not provided
Cancelled/Late/Missed Appt	Follow up meeting not arranged; arriving on wrong dated to see child; failure to attend meetings; late for meetings

4. 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. For example; 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.

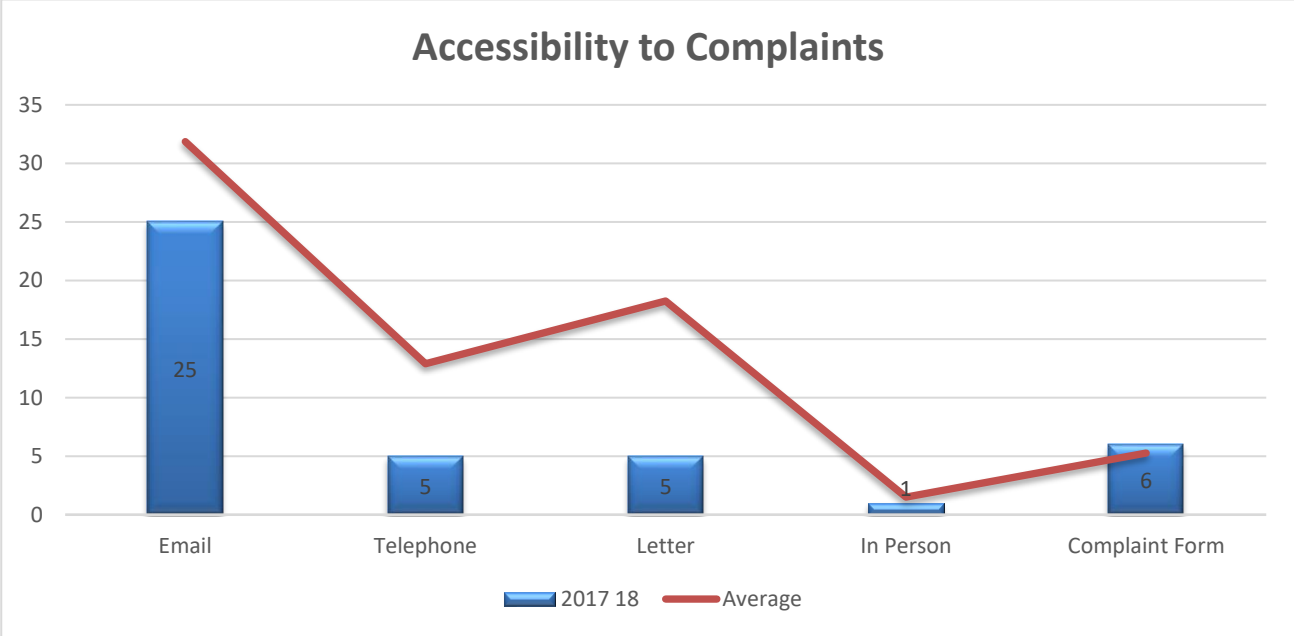
Whilst information is not always provided by a complainant the system used for complaints has the facility to capture the service user's gender, ethnicity, age group and whether the service user describes themselves as having a disability or not.

The below analysis on complaints received is based upon the 42 complaints accepted into the children's statutory complaints process at stage 1.

4.1 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 below chart shows which method of communication the 42 complainants used to contact the Council in 2017/18.



Email was the preferred choice for customers to contact the council in 2017/18 in relation to making complaints, with over half being received via this method. The averages detailed in the above chart show that email has consistently been the preferred option over previous years. 2017/18 also saw a higher than average number of complaints being received by complaint form.

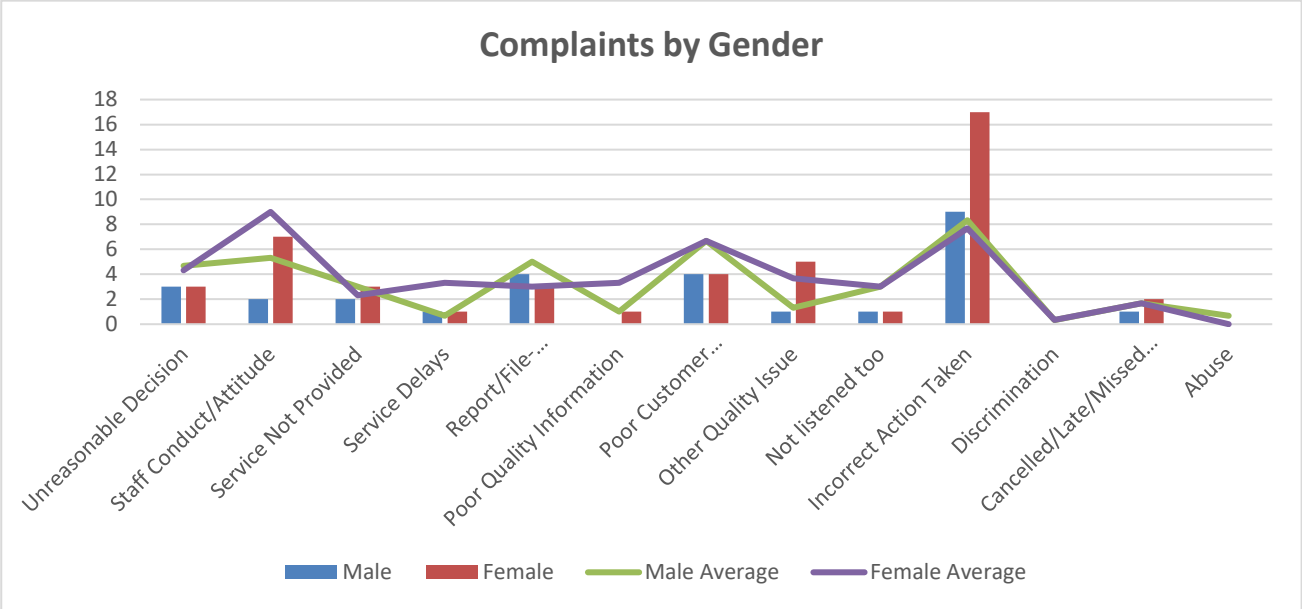
4.2 Social Care Complaints – Gender

In 2017/18 there were 2967 child records loaded by children's social care services. Of those records 52% were male, 47% were female and 1% were unborn/unknown.

Of the 42 new complaints suitable for the complaints procedure in 2017/18, 10 were received from children/young people. Of those 10, 40% were male and 60% were female.

The remaining 32 complaints were raised by adults about their own experience (usually parents or carers). Of those 32, 37.5% were male and 62.5% were female.

The below chart shows that the top area of complaint for both males and females in 2017/18 was incorrect action being taken.



Incorrect action was also the top cause of complaint for males in 2016/17. For females in 2016/17, it was staff conduct/attitude. In 2017/18 complaints about incorrect action being taken, was higher than the average received about this cause for complaint over previous years for both males and females.

4.3 Social Care Complaints – Ethnicity

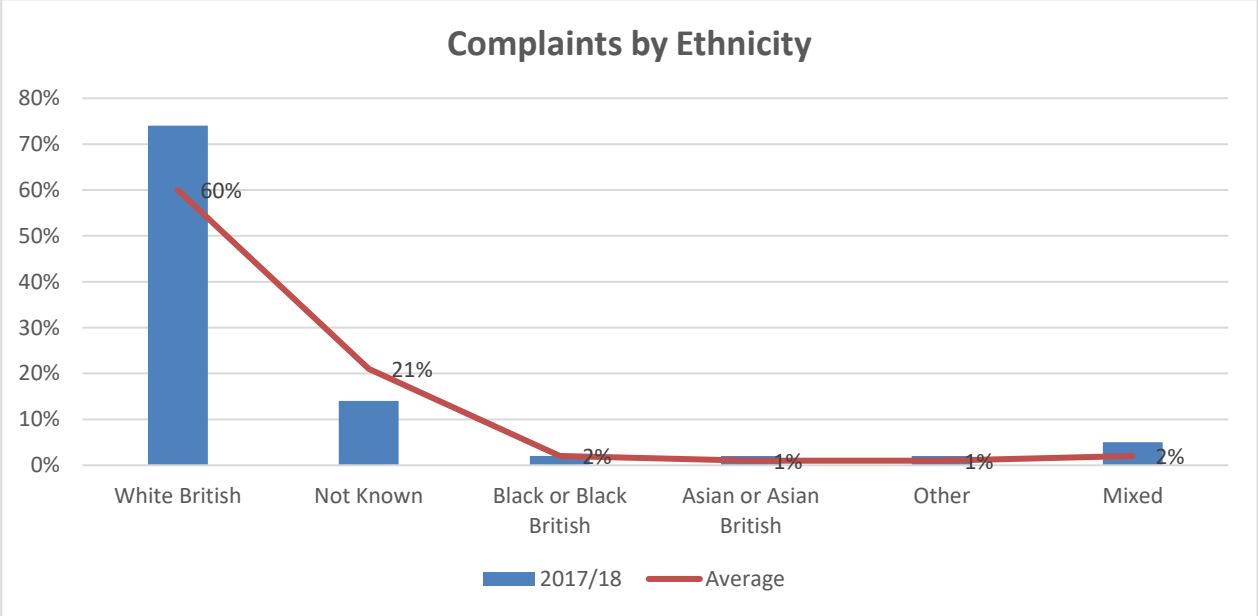
The last census on population by ethnic origin (2011) showed that 89.7% of the population in Central Bedfordshire were 'White British' and 10.3% were classified as 'Other'.

Of the 2967 child records loaded by children's social care services 81% were classified as 'White'; 8% were classified as 'Mixed'; 4% were classified as 'Black'; 2% were classified as Asian; 2% were classified as 'Other'; and the remainder were unrecorded.

The below table provides a breakdown of how ethnicity groups were represented in complaints made by young people; complaints made by adults and the total number of complaints made (young people and adults combined) during 2017/18.

Ethnicity Group	Complaints from young people (10)	Complaints from adults (32)	Total number of complaints (42)
White	70%	75%	74%
Mixed	20%	0%	5%
Black	0%	3%	2%
Other	0%	3%	2%
Asian	0%	3%	2%
Unrecorded	10%	16%	14%

Most of the complaints received in 2017/18 were raised by young people and adults who are of 'White British' ethnicity. This is to be expected as the population of Central Bedfordshire and the number of cases loaded by children's services are predominantly represented by those of 'White British' ethnicity.



The above chart demonstrates that in 2017/18 complaints from 'White British' and 'Mixed' ethnic backgrounds were above average compared to complaints received over previous years.

The issues affecting service users with a minority ethnic background were wide ranging but were like those raised by service users with a 'White British' background. There was no significant difference in themes.

4.4 Social Care Complaints – Age

The below table provides a breakdown of how age groups were represented in respect of complaints made by young people; complaints made by adults and the total number of complaints made (young people and adults combined) during 2017/18.

Age Group	Complaints from young people (10)	Complaints from adults (32)	Total number of complaints (42)
Under 18	70%	0%	17%
18 - 21	30%	3%	9%
22 - 64	0%	88%	67%
Not Known	0%	9%	7%

Most of the complaints were made by adults affected by the actions taken by children's social care services however, 10 young people did pursue their own complaints. As leaving care services can continue into early adult life, the term 'young people' refers to those still in receipt of social care services. Of the 10 complaints raised by young people, 7 were under the age of 18; and 3 were between the ages of 18 and 21.

During 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. This is currently provided by the council's Family Meeting and Advocacy Service. Of the 10 complaints made directly by young people, 1 chose to be supported by an advocate.

4.5 Social Care Complaints – Disability

Of the 2967 child records loaded by children's social care services in 2017/18, 10% of service users were described as having one or more disability.

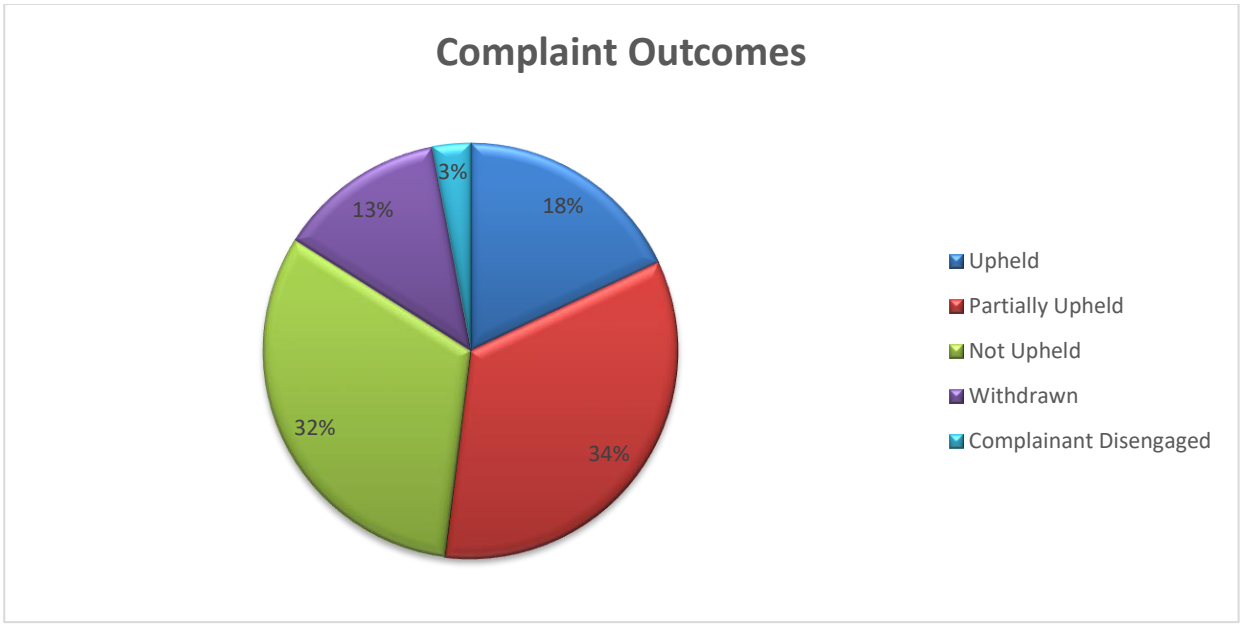
A significant proportion of complaints (81%) were recorded as 'unknown' in relation to disability of the service user. Where data was captured 10% of service users did not have a disability; 7% of service users were described as having multiple disabilities and 2% were described as having a long-standing illness or health condition.

There were five complaints related to the Children with Disabilities Service. The issues raised were like those raised in other areas of social care. There was no significant difference in themes.

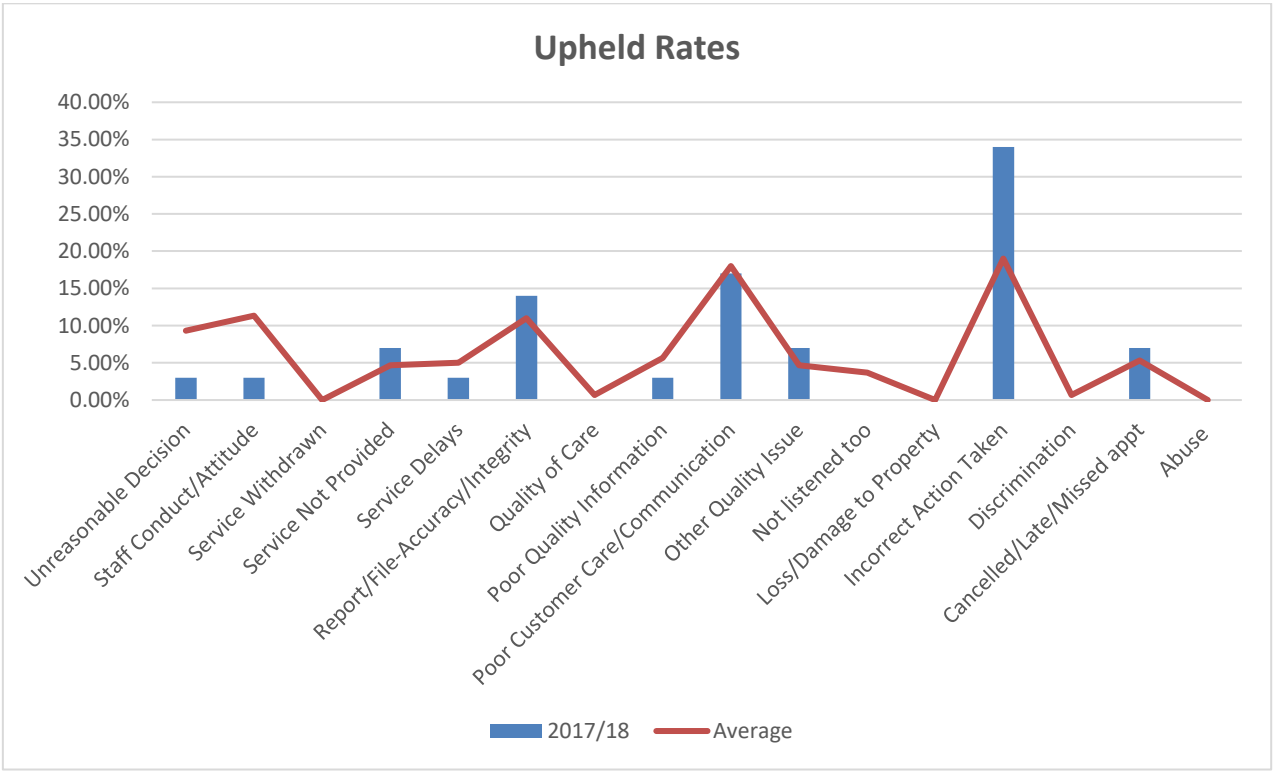
5. Outcomes from Concluded Complaints

There were 38 stage 1 complaints concluded in the period.

The below chart indicates the outcomes from complaints at stage 1 in 2017/18. 18% of complaints were upheld in full and 34% were upheld in part. In total 52% of complaints were well founded either in full or in part.



The below chart indicates that the upheld rates in 2017/18 were impacted predominantly by incorrect action taken.



The above chart also demonstrates that upheld rates were above average compared to previous years in relation to services not being provided; report/file accuracy/integrity; other quality issues; and cancelled/late/missed appointments. In 2015/16 and 2016/17, poor customer care/communication was a top issue of complaint. This year sees some improvement in this area with complaints being just below the average being received over previous years.

6. Performance in Complaint Handling

6.1 Stage 1 Compliance

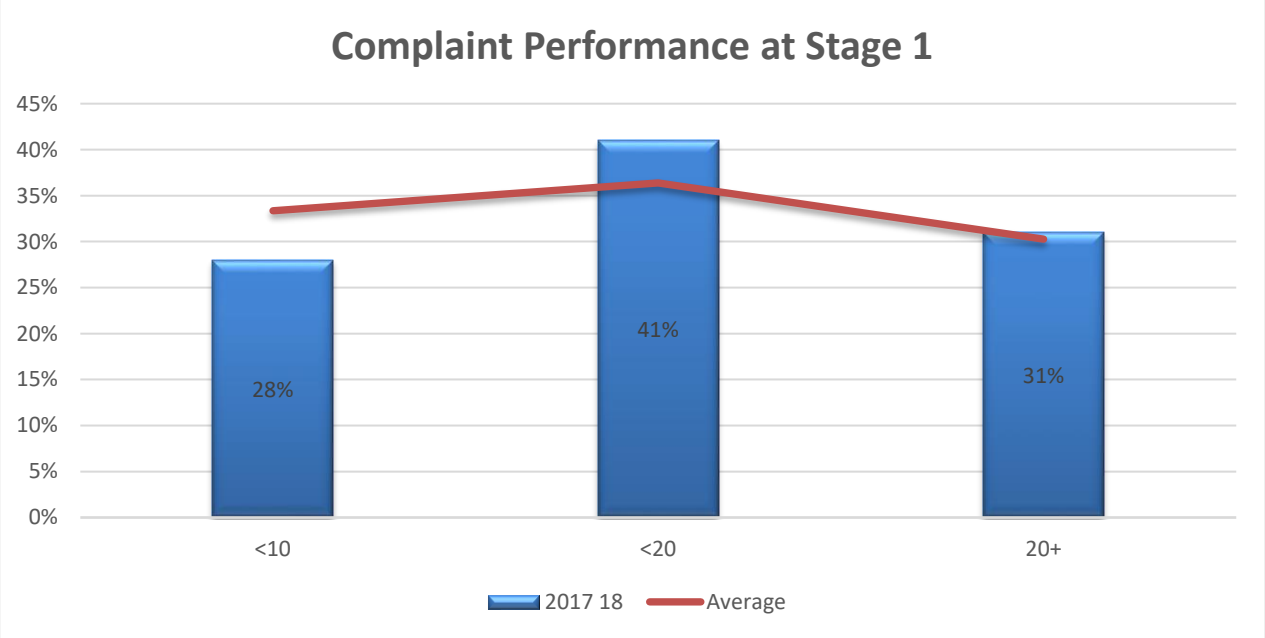
38 complaints were concluded at stage 1 in 2017/18.

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 if an advocate is required.

Of those 38 complaints concluded at stage 1, five were withdrawn and in one complaint the complainant disengaged with the process. Of the remaining 32 complaints:

- 9 were completed within 10 working days
- 13 were completed within 20 working days
- 10 exceeded 20 working days.

The below chart indicates the performance in handling complaints at stage 1 during 2017/18 in comparison to the average performance in handling complaints at stage 1 in previous years.



In 2017/18, 69% of the complaints concluded at stage 1 were done so within 10 or 20 working days. The number of complaints that took longer than the statutory 20 working days was slightly above the average number of complaints that have exceeded 20 working days over previous years, by 1%.

The below table indicates the reasons why complaints took more than 20 working days to conclude, in comparison to the previous two years. Extensions being agreed with the complainant was the top reason in 2017/18 compared to service delays and availability of key personnel in 2016/17; and complaints being detailed or complex in 2015/16.

Performance Delay Reasons	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16
Service Delay	3	4	1
Availability of Key Personnel	0	4	1
Complainant's Delay	0	2	1
Extension agreed	4	2	2
Detailed/Historical/Complex	2	1	3
Eligibility Query	1	0	2

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

Whilst there are three stages to the complaints procedure the Customer Relations Team provides support and guidance to Children's Social Care Services to ensure responses at stage 1 are as robust as possible. Any requests for escalation under the complaints process will be assessed by the Customer Relations Team.

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. However, entering ADR should not restrict the complainant's right to escalate their complaint.

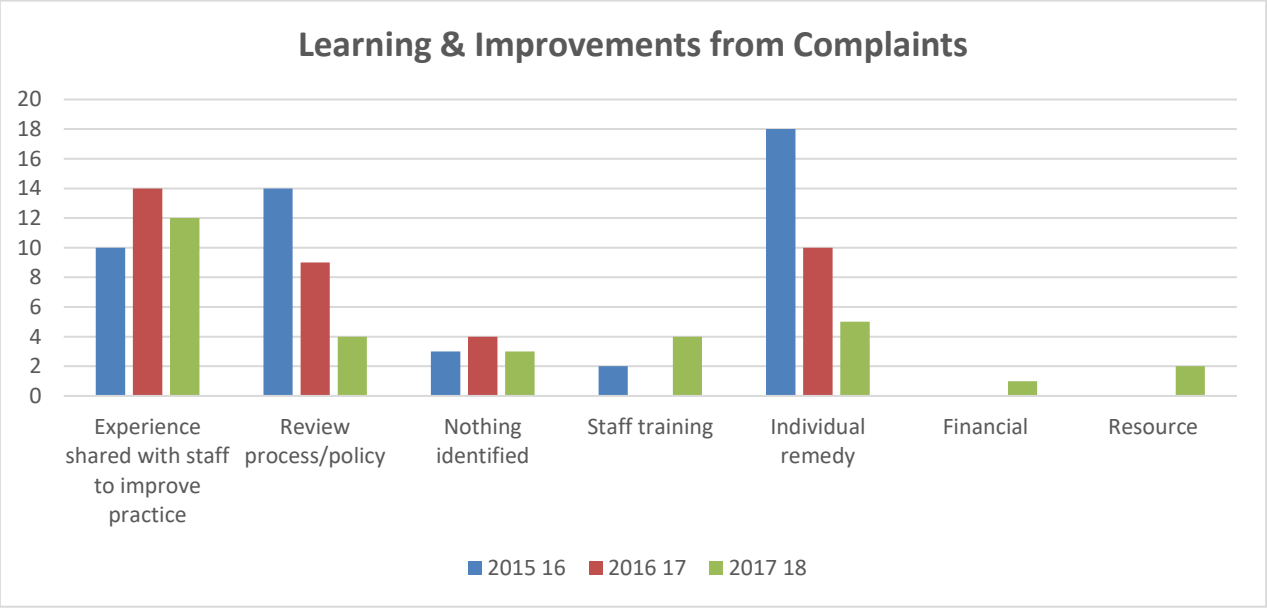
Of the 42 new complaints accepted into the process in 2017/18, six complainants sought to escalate their complaints. In one case, the Customer Relations Team facilitated a conciliation meeting between the service and the complainant. This approach successfully resolved that complaint. In the remaining five cases, the Customer Relations Team undertook an assessment and concluded the investigation process had been exhausted. A copy of the assessment was provided to the complainants to demonstrate why the complaint would not be investigated further and they were also advised of their right to refer the matter to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

As a result of the actions taken to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity, there were no stage 2 complaint investigations or stage 3 reviews during 2017/18.

7. Learning and Improvements from Complaints

Where complaints are upheld either fully or in part 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 2017/18 compared to those identified in the last two previous years.



The above chart shows that much of the improvements identified in 2017/18 resulted in the complainant's experience being shared with staff to improve practice. This was also the case in 2016/17 however in 2015/16 much of the improvements resulted in individual remedies for complainants.

Key improvements to Children's Services included:

- Training for staff in relation to considering the law and balancing that with making decisions necessary to safeguard children in emergency situations
- Staff reminded of the importance of not assuming whether an adult holds parental responsibility and to always ensure checks are made
- Written information about timescales of visits put into place and provided to families at the first visit
- Refresher training for staff in the Access & Referral Hub regarding the role of the father in the work Children's Services undertake
- Research undertaken on the matter of safeguarding children with chronic fatigue syndrome to establish a stronger baseline for checks and balances
- A review of the way parents are communicated with about panel making decisions and the commissioning process will be reviewed
- A new commissioning framework put into place to open up the pool of agencies available to support children with disabilities

- Virtual School to undertake a review of how tutors are recruited
- Children's addresses to be cross referenced by three separate people before documents are distributed

8. Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSO)

6.1 Complaints Received and Decision Notices

The LGSO annual statistics show that they received 17,452 complaints and enquiries about local authorities in 2017/18. In comparison, the LGSO considered four complaints about Central Bedfordshire Council's Children's Social Care Services.

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

Complaint	Ombudsman Decision
The council failed to: • Follow proper procedures and properly manage the transition and departure of a foster child to adopting parents preventing the foster family from saying goodbye; • Properly consider complaints about the handling of the transition, record keeping and the actions of social workers involved; • Follow through with promises of a letter box for the foster family to say goodbye to the baby	The council acted with fault when managing the transfer of a foster child between foster parents and in its response to a proposal to adopt the child. The Ombudsman recommended the following to remedy the complaint: • Apologise for the failings identified • Pay £500 in recognition of the distress caused and the time and inconvenience expended in taking up the issues with the Council • Follow up offer of family counselling • Invite the complainant to consider mediation funded by the Council to see if there is a way back for them to continue their careers as foster carers
The complainant complains that the council has systematically shown bias in favour of his children's mother when considering matters relating to his children's welfare	The Ombudsman will not investigate the complainant's complaint that the council has shown favouritism to his children's mother. An investigation would not achieve anything significant for the complainant and the part of his complaint which related to evidence given at court is outside jurisdiction.
The complainant says that his children were unfairly taken into care seven years ago; and that the council has refused to consider what the complainant considered to be new evidence regarding his medical issues at the time.	The Ombudsman cannot investigate this complaint about the decision to take the complainant's children into care. This is because the decision was taken by a court and is out of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.
The complainant says that social workers involved in care proceedings for her daughter were untruthful in court.	The Ombudsman cannot investigate this complaint about the actions of the council's social services department. This is because the actions were in preparation for, and during, court proceedings and are therefore out of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.

Two LGSO cases reported as received in a previous year received decision notices in this period:

- A court is currently considering the care arrangements for the complainant's child. The Ombudsman will not investigate his complaint about the council's involvement in his child's care as it is too inextricably linked to be separable from the court's consideration.
- The council has correctly identified certain shortcomings in the way a social worker carried out an assessment into the circumstances and welfare of a child. The council has provided appropriate remedies to put right fault.

9. Monitoring and Quality Assurance

9.1 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 and Social Care 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 2017/18 with there being no stage 2 investigations or stage 3 reviews.

Four complaints were considered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman this year. The Ombudsman decided not to investigate in three of those cases as the issues raised were outside of their jurisdiction. The remaining case progressed to investigation by the Ombudsman and was upheld. The Ombudsman made several recommendations for children's services to undertake, all of which have been complied with.

Complaints were 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.

9.2 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, 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 always 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 and Social Care 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. 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 2017/18:

Reasons for Cost	2016/17 Spend
Stage 2	£0.00
Stage 3	£0.00
Financial Redress	£570.00 (£70 through CBC process & £500 through LGSO recommendation)
TOTAL	**£570.00**

10. 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 2018/19 the Customer Relations Team will focus on a number of initiatives:

- ➢ Continue to ensure the complaints procedure is accessible (particularly to young people) and introduce an online complaint form for customers
- ➢ Continue to promote the Customer Relations root-cause analysis tool to help managers with identifying systemic improvements
- ➢ Continue to 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 and Social Care Ombudsman and where the LGSO finds fault
- ➢ Introduce a performance scorecard for complaints to improve visibility of complaints and their outcomes
- ➢ Introduce a rolling programme of staff briefing sessions on good complaint handling

Central Bedfordshire

A great place to live and work

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