

# Annual Complaints & Representations Report

## Solihull Children's Services

### 1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018

#### 1 Introduction

This is the Annual Report of Solihull Council's Children's Services Complaints and Representations, covering the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

#### 1.1 Children's Social Work Services

Every Local Authority with a responsibility for Social Care Services is required to provide an Annual Report, outlining the workings of both their Adults and Children's complaints and representations procedures.

1.2 The procedure for dealing with children's Statutory complaints and representations is determined by the following legislation:

- The Children Act 1989, Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.
- The Children & Adoption Act 2002 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and
- the accompanying guidance 'Getting the Best from Complaints' (DfES July 2006)

1.3 The requirement contained in the Children Act 1989; Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006, is that every Local Authority with a responsibility for Children's Social Care Services is obliged to have in post a Complaints Manager, part of whose role is to provide an Annual Report into the workings of the complaints and representations procedures.

1.4 Legitimate complaints relating to Children's Services, that do not fall within the boundaries of the Statutory Social Care Complaints Process, are processed via the Council's Corporate Complaints Process.

1.5 Information on how to complain, comment or make a compliment about Solihull Council's Children's Services can be found on the Council's webpages at <http://www.solihull.gov.uk/About-the-Council/Complaints/childrenscomplaints>

1.6 Information specific to Children in Care can be found on the Internet at the following link; <https://getitsorted.me/2017/11/30/complaints/> Age specific, printable leaflets have also been designed and are available on this site which explain the complaints process, provide contact details for making a complaint and suggest other people who children can talk to about their concerns. This website and the leaflets also provide contact details for the Council's contracted advocacy service for young people (NYAS); should this be required.

## **2 The Statutory Complaints Procedure**

2.1 The Statutory Complaints and Representations procedure serves four main purposes:

- a. To provide a way for a child/young person, or a person acting on their behalf, to give their views of the service they have received.
- b. To enable Council services to learn from complaints and compliments and to change, review or maintain its services accordingly.
- c. To ensure that complaints are properly recorded and acted upon and that where necessary, things that have gone wrong are put right promptly.
- d. To ensure that staff and service users understand their rights and responsibilities within the complaints process.

2.2 The Children's Services and Skills Directorate, in conjunction with the Customer Relations Manager, has the discretion to refuse to consider a complaint which was not raised within twelve months of the incident/event occurring. In these cases, the Customer Relations Manager should write to advise the complainant that their complaint cannot be considered, explaining the reasons why they have adopted this position. Each complaint is considered on its' own merits and will be accepted beyond the twelve month timescale, where it is considered that a fair and transparent response can still be provided. This approach is outlined on the Council's complaints webpage (see 1.5 above).

2.3 The Statutory Complaints Procedure, used for complaints raised by, or on behalf children receiving a service from Children's Social Work Services, has three stages:

- Stage One - Local resolution.
- Stage Two - An independent complaint investigation.
- Stage Three - An independently chaired Review Panel.

### **2.4 Stage One – Local Resolution**

Stage 1 offers the relevant social work team, the first opportunity to consider the complaint and respond on behalf of the Directorate. In most cases and where possible, this involves the Team Manager/Assistant Team Manager making contact with the complainant in order to resolve complaints as early as possible. This gives us the opportunity to either apologise for any mistakes made and correct any resulting disadvantage (upholding the complaint); or establish that the work undertaken was correct and enables us to explain this to the complainant (not upholding the complaint). It is important that the response is informative, accurate, fair, timely and as helpful as it can be.

There is an initial statutory 10 working day timescale for responding to the complaint, with a possible extension to 20 working days with the agreement of the complainant, where complaints are complex or if time is needed to appoint an advocate.

## **2.5 Stage Two – Investigation**

Where a complainant is unhappy with the outcome of their Stage 1 complaint, they can request consideration of their complaints at Stage 2. All Stage 2 investigations are carried out by an Independent Investigating Officer, alongside an Independent Person, as required by the regulations. The Independent Investigating Officer and Independent Person, compile a report with findings, conclusions and recommendations. A relevant Head of Service then adjudicates the reports and provides a formal response to the complainant, along with an action plan to implement any recommendations or changes arising from the learning from the complaint.

The timescale for a Stage 2 investigation is 25 working days; however this can be extended to 65 working days, with the agreement of the complainant, if there is a significant amount of detail or there are complex issues to investigate.

## **2.6 Stage Three – Review Panel**

Where a complainant remains unhappy with the outcome of the Stage 2 investigation, they can request a Stage 3 Review Panel. The Panel is made up of three independent people and is administered by the Council's Democratic Services Team. The timescale for setting up the Panel is 30 working days. The Panel's remit is to review the investigation; however it cannot re-investigate a complaint. The Panel provides their findings in writing to the complainant within 5 working days; the Directorate then considers the Panel's findings and produces the Local Authority's response to the Panel's findings, which is sent to the complainant within 15 working days.

## **3 Complaints about other areas of Children's Services**

3.1 The procedure for dealing with complaints concerning other areas of Children's Services or non-child focussed complaints regarding Children's Social Work Services, is the Corporate Complaints Procedure, which is an internally determined procedure.

### **3.2 The Corporate Complaints Procedure**

This procedure is used to process complaints about issues such as:

- a service provided directly to family members (other than the child) involved with Children's Social Work Services
- services provided by the Council to foster carers
- complaints about services provided by the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Service
- complaints concerning any other aspect of Children's Services (unless an appeals process is already in place for this purpose).

3.2.1 The Corporate Complaints Procedure has two stages:

### **3.2.2 Stage One**

This stage is similar to Stage 1 of the Statutory Complaints Procedure and offers the relevant Team Manager, the first opportunity for considering the complaint and responding on behalf of the Directorate. It is good practice, where appropriate, for the Team Manager to make contact with the complainant in order to resolve complaints as early as possible. Complaints at this stage should be responded to within 20 days from the date that the detail of the complaint is agreed with the Performance and Complaints Team. This timeframe can be extended to 30 working days; however this should only be in exceptional circumstances and with the agreement of the complainant.

### **3.2.3 Stage Two**

If the customer is not satisfied that the investigator's response has answered all of the points raised/they are not happy with the resolution, then they can request to proceed to Stage 2 of the procedure.

A review of the Stage 1 complaint response at Stage 2 should be co-ordinated by or on behalf of the Head of Service and a final response sent to the complainant. This should be completed within 20 working days (where the Head of Service is involved in the complaint at Stage 1, another senior member of staff should review the complaint at Stage 2).

## **4 The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)**

If a complainant remains unhappy after exhausting all stages of a complaints process, they can take their complaint to the LGSCO. A complainant can access the LGSCO at any point during the complaint process; however the LGSCO normally allows the Local Authority the opportunity to process a complaint through every stage of the appropriate complaints procedure, before investigating it themselves. Complaints referred back to a Local Authority by the LGSCO to process are classed as 'premature' complaints.

## **5 The Performance and Complaints Team**

In Solihull during 2017-18, the responsibility for the management and day-to-day administration of the large majority of complaints for Children's Services, lay with the Performance and Complaints Team.

This includes the responsibility for processing complaints relating to services provided by the SEND 0-25 Service.

The Performance and Complaints Team is part of the Business Intelligence and Improvement Division within the Resources Directorate. The Performance and Complaints Team strive to ensure that:

- they achieve respectful dialogue with all complainants and work with investigating professionals to provide the best response in the most efficient timescales
- complaints are acknowledged within 3 working days
- complaints are responded to within the timescales determined by the appropriate complaints procedure, by working with the service area to achieve this
- complaints and compliments are accurately recorded, which leads to accurate performance data being produced
- when things have gone wrong, they are put right as quickly as possible
- both complainants and staff understand the relevant complaints procedure, how it relates to them and their rights and responsibilities within it
- any learning from complaints is acknowledged and that they work with the appropriate service area to ensure that the necessary changes are made to improve services provided
- internal or professional mediation is instigated, where appropriate
- high quality and timely performance reporting is provided to management teams, to ensure that they are aware of issues arising and can work with the Performance and Complaints Team and their staff, to resolve these and maintain a high quality service to service users.

## **6 How we received complaints for Solihull Children's Services**

6.1 The information provided on Solihull Council's Internet pages enables service users to make a complaint in differing ways, by e-mail, letter, telephone and leaflet and in 2017/18 the Performance and Complaints Team was contacted via all of these methods. Predictably, in a world of increasing technology, email is a very popular, convenient and efficient way for people to raise complaints and accounts for 55% of all initial contacts made to the Performance and Complaints Team. The number of initial contacts made by email has increased year on year for the past five years (see *fig 1* below).

Complainants with an email address, receive both acknowledgements and responses for their complaints, via the Council's secure e-mail system, unless otherwise requested. This is a very cost effective and efficient way for service users to communicate with the Council and the Council with them.

6.2 Information for children in and on the edge of care is provided on the Children in Care webpage (see 1.6 above), giving children and young people the information they need to be able to make a complaint. A direct link is also provided to the Complaints Team e-mail box at [candacomplaints@solihull.gov.uk](mailto:candacomplaints@solihull.gov.uk)

6.3 Further information is provided on the Children in Care webpage, so that should they wish, children and young people can contact an advocate directly for help to raise any concerns. This can be found at the following link:  
<https://getitsorted.me/2018/02/15/useful-links-contacts/>

6.4 Complaints leaflets specifically aimed at both younger and older children are now available on the Council's Internet page at <http://www.solihull.gov.uk/About-the-Council/Complaints/childrenscomplaints> as well as on the webpage for Looked After Children at <https://getitsorted.me/2017/11/30/complaints/>; and are in addition to the leaflet which is more appropriate for adults making their own complaints about

Children’s Services, or complaints on behalf of their children. These leaflets can then be printed and completed and sent in to the Performance & Complaints Team by complainants.

- 6.5 The Performance and Complaints Team will also, where requested, assist children and young people to acquire an advocate who will assist with their complaint, by contacting the advocacy service commissioned by Solihull (NYAS) directly, requesting them to make contact with the complainant.
- 6.6 Postcard style leaflets are available to social work staff who have contact with Children in Care so that these can be given to these children, signposting them to information about making a complaint or raising a compliment.
- 6.7 The Performance and Complaints Team correspond directly with all complainants/their advocates, whether their complaints are statutory or corporate, in order to properly understand their complaints and hence make it easier for both complainants and investigating managers.
- 6.8 Figure 1 (below) shows the ways that Solihull Children’s Services have received initial contacts about complaints since 2013/14.

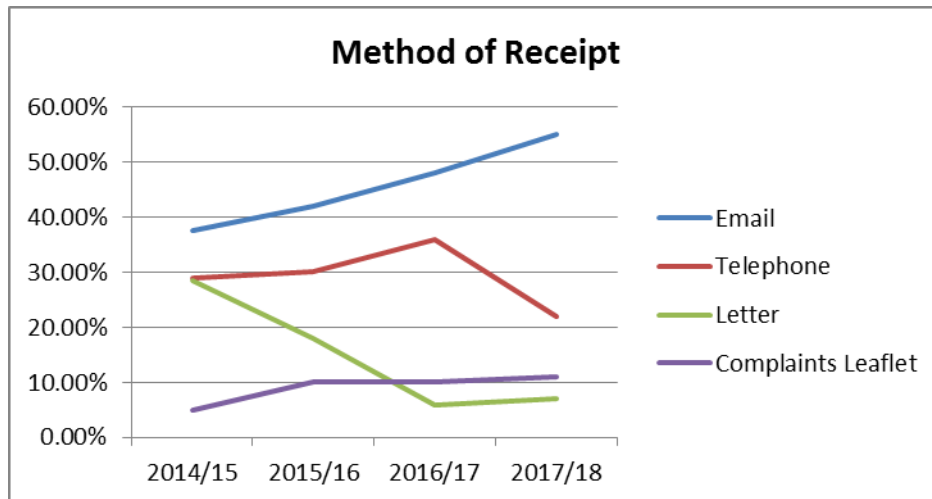
<b>Method</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
Email	34%	37.5%	42%	48%	55%
Telephone	30%	29%	30%	36%	22%
Letter	22%	28.5%	18%	6%	7%
Complaints Leaflet	14%	5%	10%	10%	11%

*Fig 1*

- 6.9 The percentage of initial contacts received by e-mail has gradually increased year on year which, in an age of increasing technology where more and more people are using computers, is to be expected. Initial contacts received by telephone have decreased; however this is still the second most popular method used by people to communicate their concerns.

Contact by letter decreased quite dramatically between 2014/15 and 2016/17 (28.5% to 6%), with a very slight increase in 2017/18 (7%) whilst the percentage of contacts using the complaints leaflet has remained consistent (this is shown in *fig 2* below).

The leaflet used for making a Children’s Social Work complaint was re-vamped in 2016/17 and is readily available in an on-line format (see 6.4 above). The leaflet guides the complainant through the type of information required to raise their concerns.



**Fig 2**

- 6.10 In 2017/18, the Performance and Complaints Team continued to invest important time speaking directly to prospective complainants, regardless of how the initial contact was made. This is always an important opportunity to build a trusting relationship with the complainant/service user, giving them a point of contact throughout the duration of their complaint. This is particularly important when dealing with more involved complaints, as it enables the Performance and Complaints Team to fully understand the concerns being raised and then to define them appropriately, which in turn helps investigating managers to provide clearer, more detailed responses to complainants, assisting their understanding of the outcomes reached.

The benefit of such responses is further endorsed by the fact that all but four new Statutory complaints received since 1<sup>st</sup> October 2013, have been resolved at Stage 1, without the need to progress to an independent investigation. The last Stage 2 investigation dates back to March 2015.

- 6.11 Talking to complainants also ensures that where it is appropriate and possible, that concerns are resolved, without the need to progress to the formal complaints process. This can prove to be a quicker and more beneficial means of resolution for all concerned. The Performance and Complaints Team have, in 2017/18, handled 52 such "duty" cases for Children's Social Work Services compared to 31 in 2016/17.

## **7 Who made complaints?**

- 7.1 Fifty four of the 59 new complaints made during 2017/18 were received from adults, making complaints either on behalf of their children or in relation to a service impacting them directly. Of the other 5 complaints; 4 were from a professional advocate acting on behalf of a child and 1 was made by the young person themselves who contacted the Council directly.
- 7.2 62% of new complaints were received from females and 33% from males, with 5% of complaints being made jointly by parents (compared to 62%, 31% and 7% respectively in 2016/17).

- 7.3 The complaint received directly from a young person in 2017/18 and this did not come from a looked after young person.

In 2017/18, 19% (4 out of 21) of new Statutory complaints raised were in relation to services to Looked After Children. This is a decrease when compared with 29% (11 out of 38) of complaints in 2016/17.

- 7.4 The report by Ofsted following their last inspection of Solihull Children's Services stated that "*Children know how to complain. When they do, their complaints are taken seriously.*"

- 7.5 The 3 main areas of complaint raised by or on behalf of Looked after Children, were in relation to Lack of Contact with Family, Delivery/Non Delivery of Service and Attitude or Behaviour of Staff.

Delivery / Non Delivery of Service and Attitude and Behaviour of Staff are consistent with the main issues being raised across all complaints. Within the reporting process these issues are broken down further, in order to provide further detail; enabling the Performance and Complaints Team to highlight any specific concerns to managers in Children's Social Work Services.

## **8. A summary of Children's Social Work complaints recorded for the 2017/18 financial year**

### **8.1 Unresolved complaints carried forward from 2016/17**

- 8.1.1 There were 7 live complaints carried forward from 2016/17 which were at the following stages: 6 at Stage 1 and 1 at Stage 2.

- 8.1.2 3 of the Stage 1 complaints had issues that were being investigated under both the Statutory process and the Corporate process and 3 were under the Corporate process only.

- 8.1.3 5 of the complaints carried forward at Stage 1 were resolved at Stage 1 during 2017/18 and one was escalated to Stage 2 of the Corporate process and resolved during Quarter 2.

- 8.1.4 The complaint brought forward at Stage 2 was a corporate complaint that was resolved during Quarter 1.

### **8.2 New complaints received for Children's Social Work Services during 2017/18**

- 8.2.1 During the financial year 2017/18, Solihull Council's Children's Social Work Services received 59 new complaints. 21 were Statutory complaints (those from children and young people or their representatives) and 38 were Corporate complaints which are usually complaints made by adults, in relation to the impact that a service provided by Children's Social Work Service has had upon them directly rather than their child. The number of new complaints for 2017/18 is one less than the 60 new complaints received in 2016/17.

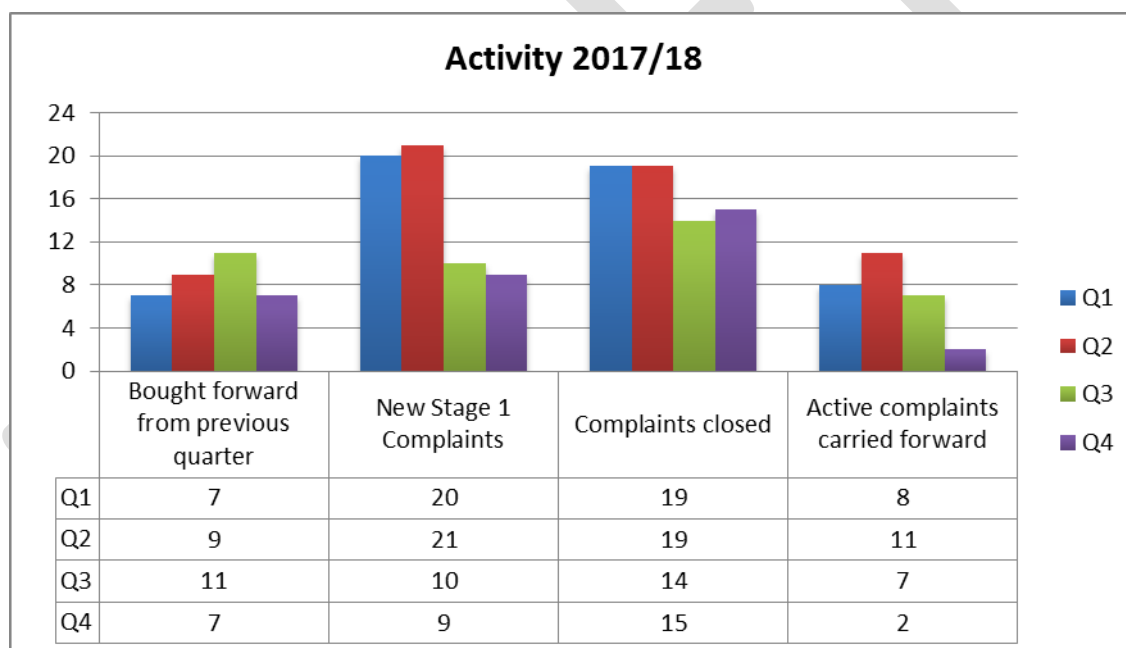
- 8.2.2 All of the new Statutory complaints received in 2017/18 were resolved at Stage 1.



- 8.2.3 Seven, Stage 1 Corporate complaints progressed to Stage 2 during 2017/18 and all were responded to and closed in the year.
- 8.2.4 All but 4 of the new Statutory complaints received since 1<sup>st</sup> October 2013 have been resolved either through mediation or via investigation at Stage 1 of the complaints process, or through a combination of both. Most complainants therefore appear to have been satisfied with the responses that they have received at Stage 1, choosing not to request progression of their complaint to the next stage.

### 8.3 Children’s Social Work complaints carried forward into 2018/19

- 8.3.1 At the end of the 2017/18 financial year, the number of live complaints carried forward to 2017/18 remained low, at 2. This is five less than the previous year and both of these had been received at the very end of the 2017/18 financial year and hence the timescales for investigation would mean they were expected to carry forward to 2018/19.
- 8.3.2 Of the 2 carried forward to 2018/19, one was at Stage 1 of the statutory process and one at Stage 1 of the corporate process.



**Fig 3**

- 8.3.3 From Quarter 2 onwards, the number of new complaints received for Children’s Social Work Services in 2017/18 have decreased quarter on quarter and the number of complaints carried forward at the end of each quarter has, as a consequence, also decreased.

## 9. Timescales for responding to complaints in Children’s Social Work Services

In 2017/18 the Performance and Complaints Team have continued to provide accurate data concerning response timescales for complaints processed under both the Statutory and Corporate complaints processes. Timescales for each process are described below.

## 9.1 Statutory Complaint timescales

The timescale for processing Stage 1 complaints within the Children's Statutory Complaints Process is 10 working days, (extended to 20 working days for complex cases and as agreed with the complainant).

- 9.1.1 Children's Social Work Services aim to respond to as many Stage 1 Statutory complaints within the initial 10 day timescale, as possible; whilst at the same time ensuring an appropriate level of detail and accuracy, so that the complaint can be resolved as quickly as possible; this being positive for all concerned.

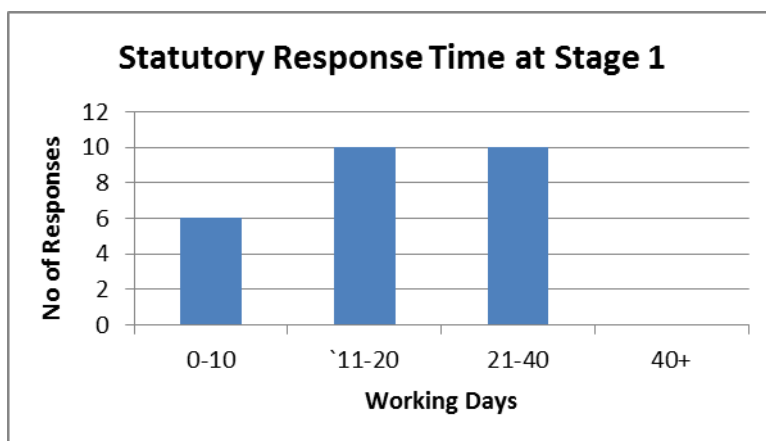


Fig 4

- 9.1.2 Figure 4 above, shows the timescale in which complaints were responded to, under Stage 1 of the Statutory process in 2017/18. 6/26 (23%) of complaints were responded to within 10 days (the initial response timescale), compared to 24% in 2016/17.

- 9.1.3 A further 10 (38%) were responded to within 11 – 20 days, giving an overall total of 16 (61.5%), complaints being responded to within 20 days (the extended timescale), compared to 47% and 71% respectively in 2016/17.

- 9.1.4 10 (38%) of Stage 1 Statutory complaints, were resolved between 21 and 40 days and none took longer than 40 days to respond to. This is an improvement when compared with 2016/17, when 3% of Statutory complaints took longer than 40 days to respond to.

- 9.1.5 The Performance and Complaints Team will continue, in 2018/19, to work with investigating managers in Children's Social Work Services, to try and reduce the numbers of Stage 1 Statutory complaints that take more than 20 days to respond to, with an additional aim to respond to more complaints within the initial 10 working day timescale.

- 9.1.6 The number of Stage 1 Statutory complaints responded to within 20 working days has slightly decreased in 2017/18. Reasons for this can be attributed to the level of detail included in Stage 1 responses, which reassures complainants that their complaints have been properly looked into and addressed.

9.1.7 Despite some of the complaint responses being outside of the 20 working day timescale, the responses appear to be resolving complaints at a local level, without complainants feeling the need to progress their complaint to the LGSCO (see 9.2.4 below). This can only be positive for both the complainant and the Local Authority.

## 9.2 Corporate complaint timescales

The timescale for processing complaints within Solihull Council's Corporate Complaint Process is 20 working days (extended to 30 working days for complex cases) at Stage 1 and 20 working days at Stage 2; where the Head of Service responds to the escalation of the complaint.

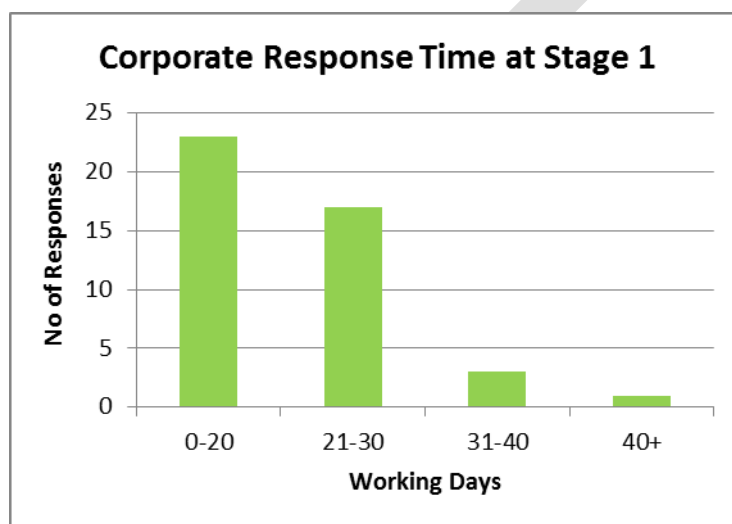


Fig 5

9.2.1 In 2017/18, the Performance and Complaints Team investigated and responded to 44 Corporate complaints for Solihull Children's Social Work Services. Figure 5 above, shows that 23 (52%) Stage 1 complaints were responded to within 20 days, compared to 48% in 2016/17, whilst 17 (38%) took 21 – 30 days, meaning that 40/44 (91%) complaints were resolved within the extended 30 working day timescale. This is an increase when compared with 86% in 2016/17.

9.2.2 Four (9%) Stage 1 Corporate complaints took longer than the 30 working day timescale to respond to compared to 14% in 2016/17.

9.2.3 Only 7 (16%) of Stage 1 Corporate complaints progressed to Stage 2 during 2017/18, compared to 19% in 2016/17. 2 of the Stage 2 complaints received were responded to within the maximum 20 working days allowed at Stage 2 compared to none in 2016/17; 2 complaints were responded to within 21-30 days, 2 within 31-40 days and 1 response took above 40 days. This is an indication that response times at Stage 2 of the Corporate procedure are improving.

9.2.4 Only 2 complaints were received from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman in relation to Children's Social Work Services in 2017/18 and the LGO declined to investigate both. As outlined at 9.1.6 above, the level of detail which continues to be included in complaint responses from investigating managers, is a significant contributor to this. This can sometimes have an impact on response times, but does appear to reassure the complainant that their complaints have been

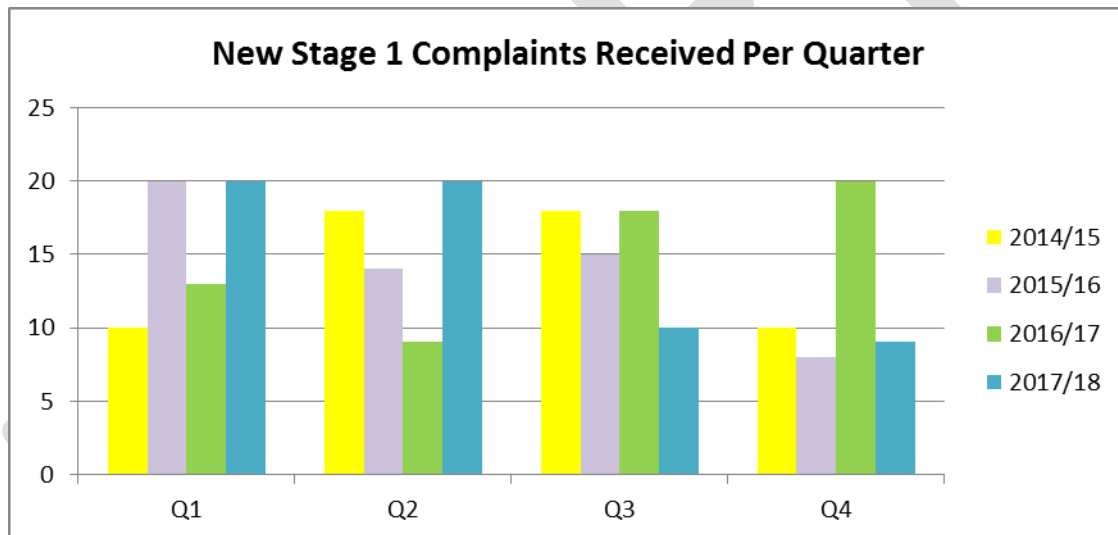
properly investigated and responded to and resolves their complaint without the need to refer to the LGSCO. The Performance & Complaints Team keep lines of communication open with all complainants regarding the response times for their complaint.

## 10 Trend Data for Children’s Social Work complaints

10.1 The 59 new complaints received in 2017/18, represents a 2% decrease when compared to the 60 complaints received in 2016/17. which was an increase of 5% from 2015/16 when there were 57 new complaints.

During 2017/18 Children’s Social Work Services provided a service to 3859 service users, which was an increase of 5.4%, when compared with the 3663 service users in 2016/17; despite an increase in service users, complaints decreased.

10.2 Detailed in the chart below (*Figure 6*) is a comparison of the number of complaints received per quarter during 2014/15, 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18.



**Fig 6**

10.3 Figure 6 above, shows that a high majority of complaints in 2017/18, were received in Quarters 1 and 2 (April to September), with a smaller amount of complaints received in Quarters 3 and 4, compared to recent years.

10.4 Further research did not uncover any particular trend for the abnormally high level of complaints received in Quarters 1 and 2 for 2017/18. These complaints were spread across teams and no trend or particular reason could be found, other than a general upward trend in complaints for Childrens Social Work Services for these two quarters.

10.5 In 2017/18, the number of new complaints received in Quarter 3 (October to December) appears to have gone against the usual trend of attracting a consistently higher level of complaint and the number of complaints received in Quarter 4 was also low. This may indicate the start of a general downward trend in complaints for Children's Social Work Services.

10.6 Having mapped the quarterly trends for receiving new complaints over 4 years, it demonstrates the difficulty of pre-empting numbers of new complaints and hence planning workload.

## 11. An Overview of Complaints and Issues for Children’s Social Work Services by Team

11.1 Figure 7 below, shows a breakdown of the numbers of new complaints (both Statutory and Corporate) received during 2017/18 along with the number of corresponding issues for each of Solihull’s Children’s Social Work teams. During 2017/18, 1 of the new complaints (6 issues) received and investigated, related to a team from the historical Social Work team structure.

New Stage 1 Complaints & Issues Per Team	Total Issues	Total Statutory Complaints	Total Corporate Complaints
Chelmsley Wood (Historical)	6	1	
Adoption Team	9	1	1
Assisant Director	1		1
Child Asylum & 16+ Team	10	1	1
Child Protection & Court Team	90	6	18
Child Protection Unit	4		3
Children In Need Team	54	4	3
Children's Assessment Team	32	3	7
Children's Disability Team	37	4	
Emergency Duty Team	1		1
Fostering Team	10		2
Looked After Children	24	2	6
MASH Team	7	2	3
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>46</b>

**Fig 7**

*Please note - the shaded blue area shows data for a team in existence prior to the existing Children’s Social Work Service structure (which became effective on 1/1/15) but for which a complaint was still received & investigated.*

11.2 In 2017/18, the highest number of complaints were received in relation to the Child Protection & Court Team and totalled 20 (fig 7 above, appears to show 24; however 4 complaints were from the same complainant and crossed both procedures). Numbers of new complaints for this team have fallen considerably in quarters 3 and 4 (see fig 8 below). This coincided with a new manager coming into the team, who has been pro-active in communicating with those people who raise concerns about a service provided by this team.

NEW COMPLAINTS RECEIVED	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Child Protection & Court Team	7	8	2	3

**Fig 8**

- 11.3 The type of intervention required by this team, involving children that are being monitored under Child Protection procedures or subject to Court proceedings make it more likely that they will receive complaints by families trying to contest the action being taken by them. The complaints process cannot however investigate issues which have been, or are currently being dealt with via the Court process.
- 11.4 After the Child Protection & Court Team, the teams receiving the highest number of new complaints were the Children’s Assessment Team (CAT) with 10 and the Looked After Children Team who received 8. The numbers of complaints for these teams have also decreased in quarters 3 and 4.

<b>NEW COMPLAINTS RECEIVED</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>
Children’s Assessment Team (CAT)	3	3	2	2
Looked After Children’s Team	2	4	1	1

**Fig 9**

- 11.5 In 2017/18 the majority of complaint issues for the Children’s Assessment Team related to attitude/behaviour of staff and unsatisfactory communication, although many of these were not upheld and numbers of these issues, along with the numbers of new complaints fell for this team during the year. Learning has been identified and implemented following each complaint and this should assist with keeping the numbers of new issues low for this team, in 2018/19.
- 11.6 In 2017/18 the numbers of complaint issues related to attitude/behaviour of staff and unsatisfactory communication received by the Looked After Children’s Team were low and numbers of complaints have fallen during quarters 3 and 4 (as shown in fig 9 above).

## **12 Categories of Issues Raised within Complaints**

- 12.1 Defining complaint issues, the detail within these and what this tells us, is something that is regularly reviewed by the Performance and Complaints Team, in liaison with senior managers in Children’s Services. This enables a depth and accuracy of performance reporting, both via monthly live complaints reports to heads of service and the Assistant Director and quarterly reporting to the Senior Management Team and Directorate Leadership Team; in order to ensure that any areas of concern are highlighted and dealt with efficiently.
- 12.2 The Performance and Complaints Team supply within reporting to senior managers, a further breakdown under the categories of issues which show the higher number of complaints, so that they are more easily able to define any potential areas of concern and use this along with the learning highlighted from complaints to improve practice/review procedures.
- 12.3 The accurate definition of complaints by the Performance and Complaints Team means that several issues are often identified within each complaint. This assists investigating managers to respond efficiently and accurately to each part of the complaint.

Within the 59 new complaints received during 2017/18, there were a total of 286 separate issues defined (as detailed in fig 10 below). This is comparable to the total of 289 in 2016/17.

<b>New Issues per Quarter</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>	<b>Total</b>
Attitude or behaviour of Staff	49	22	5	11	87
Breach of confidentiality	1	2	2	2	7
Child safety issues (non safeguarding)				1	1
Decision Making	3	4	2	1	10
<b>Delivery / Non Delivery of Service</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>67</b>
Child Protection Plan not followed				1	
Correct process / procedure not followed		6	1	8	
Delay in agreeing permanency			2		
Delay in carrying out background checks		1			
Delay in providing report/documentation	1	4		1	
Delay in providing support		2		1	
Delay in undertaking assessment	3	1		2	
Disatisfaction with Placement	10				
Documentation not provided			6		
Inappropriate care provision			1		
Life story work not done			2		
Support not provided by Social Worker	3	2	2	7	
<b>Contact Issues</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>
Lack of contact			3		
No contact arranged		2	1		
No feedback from contact sessions		1			
Not contacted in a timely manner		1			
No reivew of contact arrangements		1			
Impact of LA policy on service user		1	4		5
Involvement in Statutory Review Process	3		2		5
Change of Social Worker / Family Support Worker				3	3
Quality / Accuracy of care plan/s			4	1	5
Quality of Assessment/s			8	5	13
Quality of Review/s	1				1
Quality of Social Work reports	3	3			6
Recording of Information	1	1			2
Unsatisfactory communication	24	25	8	8	65
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>286</b>

**Fig 10**

12.4 During 2017/18, the Performance and Complaints Team have broken down the issues relating to delivery/non delivery of service and contact into sub categories, in order to provide a better understanding to managers regarding the specific reasons for complaint (see fig 10 above). This enables managers to focus, where required, on any area that receives repeat or higher levels of complaints, looking at possible reasons for this, so that learning can be focussed in these areas and implemented in order to improve practice. Moving forwards into 2018/19 this approach will also

be taken for issues raised in relation to unsatisfactory communication and attitude/behaviour of staff.

- 12.5 As in previous years, unsatisfactory communication, attitude/behaviour of staff and delivery/non-delivery of service were the top three areas of complaint (see fig 10 above). The number of issues in these areas was, on the whole, at its highest in Quarters 1 and 2, the quarters in which most new complaints were received (see fig 1 above at 8.3.2).
- 12.6 The number of new issues received in relation to unsatisfactory communication, attitude/behaviour of staff have decreased during 2017/18 when compared with 2016/17 (as shown in fig 11 below) which indicates that the learning implemented for these areas of complaint is having an impact.

Issue	No of issues 2014/15	No of issues 2015/16	No of issues 2016/17	No of issues 2017/18
Unsatisfactory communication	102	53	82	65
Attitude/behaviour of staff	68	54	98	87
Delivery/non-delivery of service	58	32	26	67

*Fig 11*

New issues relating to delivery/non-delivery of service have increased significantly in 2017/18; however the number of new complaints within which these issues fall have only increased by 6 (17 to 24). This indicates that complaints being received are more complex in nature and have more individual issues within them. This may be explained by the level of access to information that service users now have, for example via issues raised on television, via social media and on the Internet, which assists their awareness and ability to raise concerns.

- 12.7 During quarters 3 and 4 issues were raised concerning the quality of assessments and care plans, however the majority of these were not upheld.

Issue	Total	Inconclusive	Not upheld	Partly upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn
Quality of assessments	13	3	6	3	1	0
Quality of care plans	5	0	4	0	0	1

Only 1 of the 13 issues raised regarding the quality of an assessment were upheld; whilst 3 were partly upheld. None of the issues regarding the quality of care plans were upheld.



### 13 Outcomes of resolved complaints by issue for Children’s Social Work Services

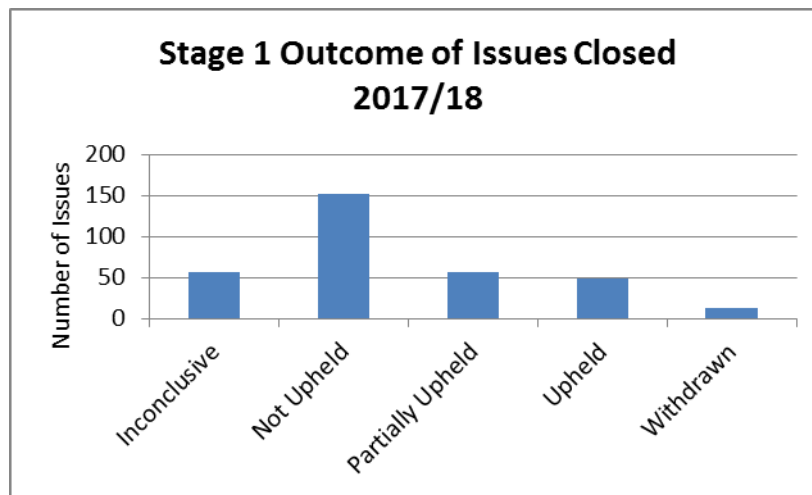
The table below shows the percentage of issues that have been upheld/partially upheld for the top 3 areas of complaint between 2014/15 and 2017/18.

Type of issue	% upheld & partially upheld 2014/15	% upheld & partially upheld 2015/16	% upheld & partially upheld 2016/17	% upheld & partially upheld 2017/18
Unsatisfactory communication	50%	44%	51%	44%
Delivery / non delivery of service	43%	50%	56%	34%
Attitude or behaviour of Staff	29%	32%	23%	7%

**Fig 12**

- 13.1 The number of complaint issues upheld/partially upheld have decreased in 2017/18 for all 3 main areas of complaint (see fig 12 above). The total number of new complaints being received on a quarterly basis has also fallen (see fig 3 above) which would therefore not raise any concern about the decrease in these types of outcome being found by investigating managers. Only 7% of issues raised in relation to attitude or behaviour of staff were upheld/partially upheld and a large number of complaints relating to attitude/behaviour of staff are found to be inconclusive. This is due to a lack of evidence from both the complainant and the Council; however these complaints are monitored and appropriate is action taken by the Council when required.
- 13.2 Following the completion of the investigations for these complaints, the investigating managers have looked in detail at the learning issues that have been highlighted and learning actions have been outlined and put into place, to try to ensure that the same issues do not reoccur, (see learning from complaints in Section 18 below).
- 13.3 A total of 70 complaints (312 issues) were responded to during 2017/18 and the outcome of each issue within these complaints is recorded and reported to senior managers by the Performance and Complaints Team (see fig 13 below).
- 13.4 The outcomes for all complaint issues closed in 2017/18 were as follows: 49 (16%) were upheld, 56 (18%) were partially upheld, 151 (48%) were not upheld and 56 (18%) were found to be inconclusive. In addition, 15 issues were withdrawn, (either by the complainant, or where evidence came to light and they were unable to be investigated within the confines of the complaints process). 13 issues were still being investigated at the end of the year.

These outcomes are shown in Figure 13 below.



**Fig 13**

13.5 Upheld or partially upheld issues constituted 34% of all issues responded to in 2017/18, compared with 35% in 2016/17. This demonstrates a consistency of approach by investigating managers and as the total number of new complaints being received on a quarterly basis has fallen (outlined at 13.1 above), it would not raise any concern about the types of outcome being found by investigating managers.

13.6 Learning from these issues was identified and progressed as described in Section 18 below.

#### **14. Complaints for other areas of Children, Young People & Families Services**

14.1 During 2017/18 there were no formal complaints received for Solihull Council's Youth Offending Service and one formal complaint for the Council's Early Help Services which was partially upheld.

#### **15. Complaints relating to services provided by the SEND 0 - 25 Service**

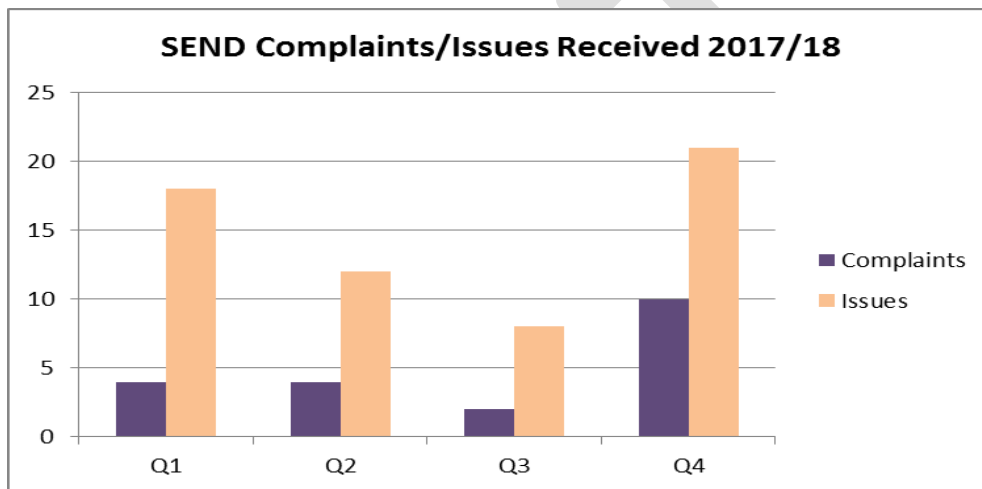
15.1 Complaints made in relation to services provided by Solihull Council's START Team are processed via the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

15.2 During 2017/18, 19 formal complaints relating to the START Team were received, compared to 11 in 2016/17, which is a 73% increase in new complaints. In addition, 5 Duty cases (those cases where concerns are raised and resolved, but do not progress to a formal complaint) were also received.

15.3 Of the 19 formal complaints received during 2017/18, only 3 (16%) progressed to Stage 2 of the Corporate process. Reasons for this can be attributed to the level of detail included in Stage 1 responses, which reassures complainants that their complaints have been properly looked into and addressed.

15.4 Fifteen complaint investigations were completed and responded to during 2017/18, 14 at Stage 1 and 1 at Stage 2.

- 15.5 Six complaints for the START Team were carried forward to 2017/18 (4 at Stage 1 and 2 at Stage 2).
- 15.6 One new complaint was received in respect of the SISS (Specialist Inclusion & Support) Team during 2017/18 and was responded to at Stage 1 within the 20 working day timescale. The complainant did not request to progress the complaint any further.
- 15.7 Figure 14 below shows that the 20 new complaints detailed above were received relatively consistently throughout Quarters 1 – 3 however the number of new complaints increased sharply in Quarter 4 (9/10 of these were for the START Team). The number of new issues followed the same pattern.



**Fig 14**

- 15.8 In 2017/18, a total of 59 issues were received within the 20 new complaints outlined above. The 2 main issues raised concerned EHCP's (Education, Health & Care plans) not being completed within timescales, and unsatisfactory communication (see fig 15 below).

SEND Issues	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Attitude / Behaviour of Staff	1				1
Breach of Confidentiality			1		1
Delay in finding school				1	1
Delay in providing EP report				4	4
Delay in request for assessment				1	1
ECHP not completed within timescales	3	2	5	6	16
EHCP plan not reviewed	1				1
EHCP process not followed		4			4
Freedom of information request	3				3
Impact of LA policy on service user				1	1
Inaccurate information provided	2		1		3
Inappropriate transition plan	2				2
Lack of support to parent		3		1	4
No review of provision provided				2	2
Quality of EHCP	2	3			5
Unsatisfactory Communication	4		1	5	10
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>59</b>

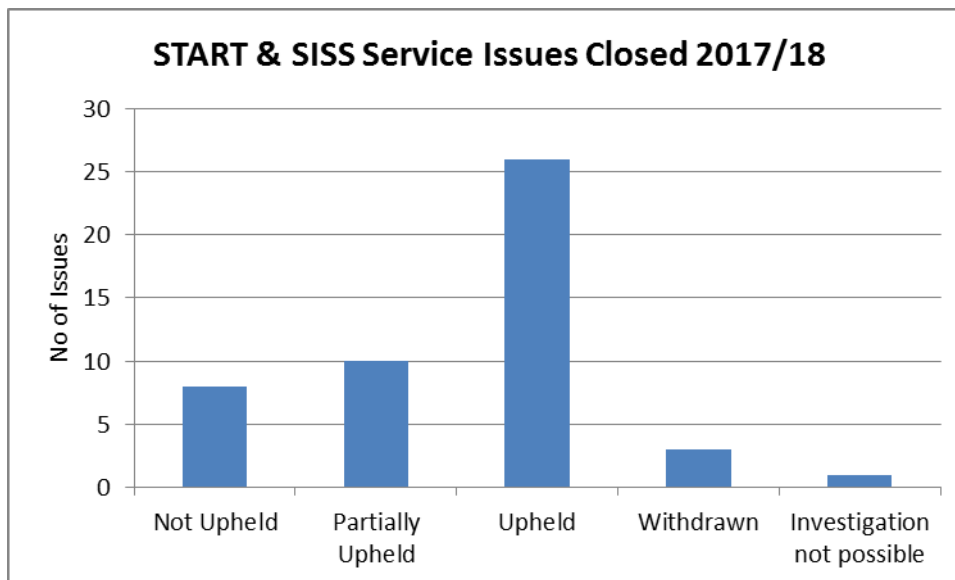
*Fig 15*

- 15.9 Two out of fourteen (23%) complaints responded to by the START Team at Stage 1 were responded to within the 20 working day timeframe and a further 9 (43%) received a Stage 1 response within the extended 30 working day timeframe. This means that a total of 64% of the complaints responded to at Stage 1, were completed within 30 working days. Three complaints exceeded the 30 working day timeframe allowed at Stage 1.

The number of Stage 1 Statutory complaints responded to within 20 working days appears low in 2017/18; however the level of detail included in Stage 1 responses, appears to reassure complainants that their complaints have been properly looked into and addressed and hence a only a small number of complainants requested a Stage 2 investigation. This is also evidenced by the small number of SEND (education related) complaints progressing to the LGSCO in 2017/18 (see section 16 below).

In 2017/18 the Performance and Complaints Team will work with the SEND Service to try and increase the numbers of Stage 1 complaints responded to within the initial 20 working day timescale.

- 15.10 Of the three complaints escalated to Stage 2, one received a response within the 20 working day timeframe at Stage 2 and the other 2 were still being investigated at the end of 2017/18.



**Fig 16**

15.11 Of the 43 issues which were responded to at Stage 1 by the START Team, 26 (61%) were upheld, 10 (23%) were partially upheld, 7 (16%) were not upheld and none were inconclusive ( as shown at fig 16 above).

The Stage 2 complaint that was responded to during 2017/18 had 8 issues (5 were upheld, 2 were partially upheld and 1 was not upheld).

15.12 The Children’s Disabilities Team (CDT) which is a Social Work Team, also falls within the SEND 0-25 Service and details of the complaints for this team are included within the detail of sections 11,12 and 13 above.

**16. Complaints for other areas of Children’s Learning, Skills & Progression**

16.1 There was one formal complaint received for Children’s Planning, Performance & Commissioning which was withdrawn.

16.2 The Performance and Complaints Team received 3 new complaints in relation to School Transport One; was withdrawn, one partially upheld and one was not upheld.

16.3 The Performance and Complaints Team also received 3 new complaints in relation to School Admissions; one was partially upheld and 2 were not upheld.

**17 Complaints considered by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman**

17.1 During 2017/18 there were 6 new complaints referred from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) for Solihull Children’s Services (compared with none in 2016/17).

17.2 Fig 17 below shows the outcomes for each of the 6 LGO complaints that were both received and closed by the LGSCO in 2017/18:

Outcome	Children's Services Team
Declined to investigate	SEND
Premature complaint	SEND
Declined to investigate	Children In Need
Declined to investigate	Child Protection & Court Team
Declined to investigate	SEND
Fault Found - £2,800 plus review of processes	SEND

**Fig 17**

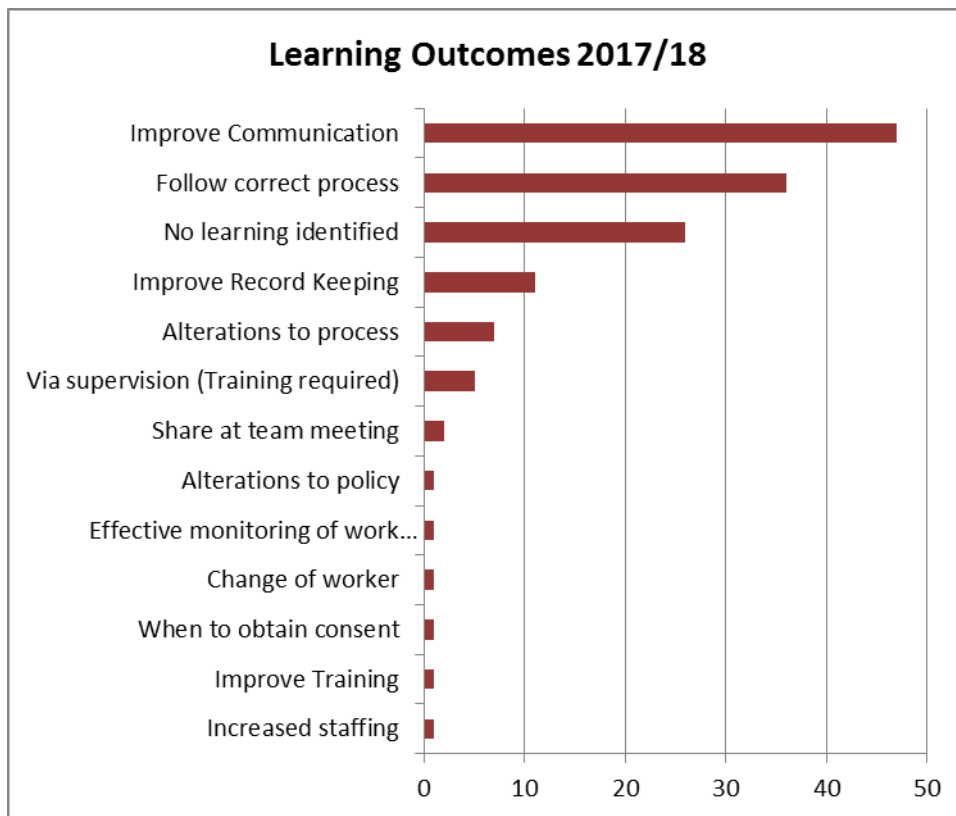
- 17.3 Referrals to the LGSCO in relation to Solihull Council's Children's Services, increased from 0 in 2016/17 to 6 in 2017/18, which is a considerably lower increase than that at a national level. As shown above at fig 17, the LGSCO chose to investigate only 1 of the 6 referrals made to them.

The level of detail provided in the responses from Children's Services appears to be having a direct link to the numbers of complaints referred to and investigated by the LGO (see also 9.1.8 and 15.9 above).

**18 Areas for Learning and Improvement highlighted by team managers and heads of service for Children's Services**

**18.1 Learning for Children's Social Work Services**

During 2017/18, the Performance and Complaints Team has continued to send learning forms to investigating managers for each complaint responded to and to liaise with those managers through to the implementation of learning. 84% (54 out of 64) of the learning forms sent to managers during 2017/18 have now been completed and returned and learning outcomes have been categorised, which are shown in figure 16 below. The Performance & Complaints Team will continue to follow up the outstanding forms until all of them have been returned and any learning is highlighted and implemented.



**Fig 18**

- 18.1.1 As shown above, the main area highlighted for improvement has been to improve communication, which unsurprisingly relates directly to a high number of complaints raised concerning unsatisfactory communication, (see sections 12.4 and 12.5 and 12.6 above). The learning highlighted in this area appears to be improving practice as the number of new issues received concerning unsatisfactory communication, has significantly decreased in quarters 3 and 4 during 2017/18.
- 18.1.2 Other areas highlighted for improvement are: to follow the correct process, to improve record keeping and to carry out alterations to process, although there were only a small numbers of learning issues arising for the latter two, they either already have or will be addressed efficiently and mapped by the Performance and Complaints Team, through to implementation.
- 18.1.3 Some examples of the types of learning that have been identified and put into place and hence used to inform service improvements are demonstrated below:
- *Following a complaint received from a parent unhappy with the way a referral had been dealt with:*
    - Changes have been put in place to ensure that we have consent when completing assessments or checks on children, unless this relates to Child Protection enquiries
    - The relevant Social Worker has reflected on the concerns that were raised and has already started to evidence in their practice that case records are accurately recorded on the database.

- *Guardians raised a complaint about the late cancelling of a LAC Review and a Social Worker who they complained did not know the case:*
  - Learning for the Independent Reviewing Officer was to focus on clarifying the expectations relating to respectful practice, keeping an accurate diary, and exploring the impact his error had upon the complainant directly
  - The Social Worker met with the complainant to share the contents of her report to the Looked After Children Review, so that they were fully aware of the child's current needs and Care Plan
  - Learning for the team included a discussion and review of the arrangements for ensuring that meetings are booked correctly into calendars and for ensuring that where meetings are postponed, participants are advised at the earliest opportunity
  - Social workers were reminded of the importance of reading case files records prior to attending any meeting relevant to the children allocated to them
  
- *Following a complaint from a parent unhappy with the lack of communication by the social workers and the contact arrangements with her children:*
  - All social workers involved in supporting and facilitating contact were spoken to, in order to ensure that: a. All relevant contact notes are made available to parents in a timely way; and b. Requests from parents are being followed up
  - Social workers were reminded to ensure that minutes of meetings, including Core Group meetings are sent in a timely way
  - A review regarding the way contact times and dates are communicated with parents was carried out, to ensure that any changes in circumstances are shared with all parties involved
  - A review took place with all contact supervisors and family support workers regarding their roles and responsibilities around the supervision of contact
  
- *Following a complaint from an advocate on behalf of a young person who was not happy with the support he received from his Social Worker:*

The Social Worker was reminded:

  - to ensure that young people are aware of the triple planning process from an early stage so that they understand the statutory requirement to consider a possible return to country of origin as a durable solution,
  - to explain clearly role of the Social Worker and how information is shared with different agencies and for what purpose and to
  - clearly explain the reason for undertaking age assessments, which need to be completed in a timely manner.



- *Following a complaint from a father who was unhappy with the lack of communication with the Social Worker, learning highlighted that:*
  - the birth father should have been notified that the Social Worker was off sick. He should have been advised that he could speak to a Duty Worker or the manager in the absence of his son's Social Worker,
  - the Manager should ensure that the worker understands the importance of keeping parents informed,
  - the Social Worker should ensure that they contact parents as soon as they are allocated the case
  - Social workers were to be reminded of the importance of improving communication with family throughout Children's Services involvement

18.1.4 Learning from complaints is discussed by investigating managers with both individuals (where appropriate) and their teams and is also shared with the relevant service area by heads of service through wider management meetings, so that all areas of Children's Social Work Services can learn from the issues arising.

Where applicable, these issues are also shared with the Workforce Development Team in order that, where necessary, they can be mapped and addressed through staff training and supervision.

18.1.5 The Performance and Complaints Team produces a separate learning report for implemented learning each quarter which is circulated to the Assistant Director, heads of service and managers, listing the learning under each team. This provides an overview of all learning for Children's Social Work Services for which team managers are required to highlight the difference the learning has made in practice.

18.1.6 The report by Ofsted following their last inspection of Solihull Children's Services stated that "*Learning from complaints is used well to improve practice,*" and "*Strong on complaints, the Local Authority acts on the learning from each one, using a spreadsheet to track the response and identify emerging themes.*"

## **18.2 Learning for the SEND 0-25 Service**

During 2017/18, the Performance and Complaints Team has sent learning forms to the investigating managers in the SEND 0-25 Service for each complaint responded to. The following is an example of some of the learning highlighted:

- *Following a complaint about the quality of an EHCP the learning highlighted the need to:*
  - Increase staffing
  - Develop good practice guidance
  - Provide additional training
  - Develop a quality assurance process at draft and final stage
- *Following a complaint about the delay in completing an EHCP, the learning highlighted the need to:*
  - Develop systems to ensure EHCP progression is within appropriate timescales
  - Agree an embedded pathway to be progressed
  - Develop a quality assurance process
  - Ensure all information is gathered to contribute to the assessment

## 19 Compliments for Children's Services

19.1 91 compliments were received for Children's Services during 2017/18 (compared to 63 in 2016/17); this is a 44% increase in compliments received. These included 46 professional and 45 service user compliments as shown in the tables below:

Social Work Team	Professional	Service User	Grand Total
Adoption Team	2	1	3
Child Asylum & 16+ Team		3	3
Child Protection & Court Team	9	1	10
Child Protection Unit	3	1	4
Children In Need Team	4	5	9
Children's Assessment Team		1	1
Children's Disability Team	2	3	5
Early Help	14	21	35
Emergency Duty Team		1	1
Looked After Children		1	1
Principal Social Worker	1	1	2
Youth Offending Team	3	2	5
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>79</b>
Learning Skills & Progress Service	Professional	Service User	Grand Total
SEND Team	1	3	4
Employment & Skills		1	1
Planning, Performance & Commissioning	5		5
Commissioning	2		2
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>

Fig 19

19.2 Below are some examples of compliments received in the year:

### 19.2.1 Service User compliments

#### To the Adoption Team

*I have been meaning to contact you for quite a while but life just gallops by. I do not know if you can recall but towards the end of 2014 you helped trace my adoption file. Unfortunately, there was not much content in the file so you provided me with a leaflet of a company that helps to trace parents. Anyway, the company was very successful and they did trace my biological mother, who now lives in x. It turns out I also have two biological brothers! Mom and I had an instant connection and I see her twice a year when she comes to visit England, I have attached a photo. I would like to thank you so much for your help, you were very thorough with tracing my adoption file as well as being supportive throughout.*

### **Child Asylum & 16+ Team**

*It is my graduation on Thursday (thank you for the card). I wanted to also say a massive huge enormous gigantic thank you to you and anyone who supported you whilst I was under your care, being advised, 'looked after' and whatever else. Without all that help you and X a gave me I would never have got to where I am now I don't think (the little X voice just popped into my head and said, 'but it was also you Q, you worked hard'). Even if it was just lending an ear through the stress and moaning or staying calm and being super professional when I had an ugly crying face on or couldn't handle my life's crazy challenges, I am just really grateful. X made the right decision or had the right idea when someone decided you were going to get stuck with me, your calming presence and understanding was exactly what I needed at that point in my life. Words aren't really enough to put across how much I genuinely appreciated everything and anything you have ever done for me..*

### **Child Protection Unit**

*It was good to see you earlier today. Mom felt you were very child friendly and explained things to her throughout the process. I must also say you were very child focussed throughout the meeting.*

### **Children in Need Team**

*Further to my family's recent involvement with Children's Services, I feel compelled to write to you to let you know how grateful and thankful not only myself but my family are, of the amazing support we received from X. X got involved towards the later part of the case and I have to be extremely honest that I'm sorry it wasn't sooner! X came through my front door with a big huge welcoming smile and a firm handshake and, they say you never get a second chance to make first impression. X certainly made an impression. She had only been inside my home five minutes and not only myself but my children G and J did too! And trust me that's no mean feat as my eldest son is autistic and G is being assessed for being on the spectrum but has defiantly negative feelings towards Social Services for one reason or another. X smiled and laughed her way into our lives and turned all the negativity into positivity. G had not had contact with his dad for some time and with X's input this quickly was resolved for G and his dad. X helped and supported me emotionally and encourage me to re take up in education to retrain for a new career path. I want make you fully aware of what a great positive professional member of your team X is!.*

### **Early Help**

*I felt I need to write to you and tell you how impressed I have been with X on her professional approach to the work she does. I consider myself to be a fairly good judge of character and from the moment my partner and myself met with X I said to her that I felt at ease and comfortable with her coming to our house and discussing the help needed in the case she was assigned too, even if we have to met at her office she would still have made us feel relaxed and comfortable. In all the professional people that have been involved with our family on various things X has been the only one to turn up and see us and listen and give us help and advice on matters. X must be a credit to your work force and its a shame there are not a lot more of her to help people out there.*

### **Looked After Children Team**

*I was at the Celebration event last week for Looked After Children and Care Leavers running a 'stall' inviting children and young people to describe their ideal social worker. Unprompted, one of the children who were there, instead of telling me what their ideal social worker was, told me what they liked about you. That happened with one other person as well, and it was really lovely to note that when asked what qualities they thought their ideal social worker should have, that they described what was ideal about their current social worker. The young person described XX as 'Friendly and Helpful' ... And his brother talked about how he liked YY taking time to play. It's really great to hear young people talking about the difference our workers are making. I'm a very proud PSW right now. Well done both.*

### **START Team**

*I recently received an email from a parent. Part of the email was saying that she spoke to yourself during a telephone call recently and although you weren't able to answer her questions you agreed to forward her concerns to the relevant person and this parent commented saying you were a 'lovely lady'. I thought I would share the compliment with you as its important that our 'front' door offers a professional and empathetic service, especially when some of our parents are going through difficult situations. Well done.*

### **Employment & Skills Team**

*Your service needs to be promoted more as people I've spoken to have not heard that you and your services that you offer could be so beneficial to so many other kids like L that have had a rough time and need a boost. I cannot praise you enough for your help and support keep up the good work X and thank you for all your advice.*

## **19.2.2 Professional compliments**

### **Child Protection & Court Team**

*Having worked with many social workers for a considerable period of time, it would be remiss of me not to mention X's dedication, competence and professionalism. X possesses skills that are absolutely essential and key in order for me to function effectively as a foster carer. She demonstrates abundant empathic understanding and relational depth. Her communication skills, efficiency and her manner are second to none. If you have not considered her for higher level promotion, as her line manager, I would hope that you would do so swiftly as she is what I would call the epitome of all what the perfect social worker should model. I respect X and I absolutely love working with her.*

### **Child Protection & Review Unit**

*For the past (mostly happy) 26 years, I have been a foster carer for Solihull M.B.C. I have looked after more than 120 children and will continue, hopefully to foster for Solihull for many more years to come. I have worked with XX now, over a number of years, five I think.. and at the end of every single one of the L.A.C. meetings she has chaired, I've had the thought 'I am so impressed, I must send an email to her line manager to express my views about her'. Then, life has taken me over again.. and I have forgotten! In my opinion, XX is one of the best I have ever had the pleasure to work with. Don't get me wrong, I've always had good relationships with all the I.R.Os that I've come across but somehow, XX manages, every single time,*

*to cut through to the important issues and identify what is needed and what isn't. She is always professional, clear and extremely empathetic and without fail, she manages to leave me and my family, feeling valued and empowered to carry on doing what we all hope and believe is in the best interests of the children. Over the years I've come to trust that if XX is involved then the correct actions can, and will be actioned.. absolutely marvellous, she is so insightful and wise and I totally value and respect her views. My job is quite challenging at the best of times, but with such clear thinking and properly considered guidance from her, I know that my children's outcomes will be the best that we can achieve.. at least whilst she is in their world. Thank you ... sorry that this is five years late.. but the feedback remains the same!*

### **Children In Need Team**

*As I said at the time during the initial CIN meeting with Mum I felt that you had a firm but fair manner. You addressed the issues sensitively but supportively and you also delivered and supported some difficult messages regarding the actions that the family needed to take. You were proactive in enabling Mum to take her next steps in a supportive but again firm manner. School works with a range of other professionals and I felt on this occasion that school was well informed of which attendees to expect at the CIN meeting, you were courteous to telephone in advance to explain you were running late, and the meeting was well prepared for and run. Thank you.*

### **Children's Disability Team**

*I just wanted to share that the considerable amount of work XX has put in to this case was acknowledged during the meeting. She has made considerable efforts to support D and advocate on his behalf, which hasn't gone unnoticed. In addition, her level of communication with other professionals, in keeping them up to date and informed of current issues has been a credit to herself and your team. XX's effective partnership working and communication has made managing this case that bit easier. I just wanted to highlight this as great practice and to express my sincere thanks.*

### **Early Help**

*I have looked at your summary contact sheet and was really impressed with the work you completed with the family. You completed a number of direct work session with the family in a timely manner. The use of SOS made the work you completed easy to follow and it was clear what was happening throughout your involvement. It appears T has made some positive changes and L feels happier and safer at home. Thanks so much for your fantastic work on this case!*

- 19.3 Learning from compliments, as well as complaints is something that Children's Services can use, in order to share good practice and highlight what has worked well for staff involved. This can then be considered and used appropriately by other Children's Services staff to enhance service provision.

## **20. Maintaining high standards in Children's complaints processing**

- 20.1 During 2017/18, the Performance and Complaints Team have continued to work hard to ensure that any improvements made to the administration of complaints in previous years are maintained and have continue to do all that they can to ensure that the processing of Children's Services complaints is of the highest standard.
- 20.2 Detailed conversations with prospective complainants both by telephone and e-mail and which continue, where required, throughout the complaint, ensure that customers feel listened to and reassured that their concerns will be dealt with. This approach is consistent with the report from the LGSCO in June 2016, entitled *"Running a complaints system,"* which highlights that *"Features of an effective complaints procedure includes early direct contact with the person making the complaint and continued contact through the complaints process."*
- 20.3 An increasing number of concerns have been resolved outside of the formal complaints process with the agreement of the complainant. The Performance and Complaints Team have handled 52 such cases for Children's Social Work Services in 2017/18, helping to ensure that concerns are resolved as quickly as possible; whilst all but 9 formal complaints received during 2016/17 have been resolved at Stage 1 of either the Statutory or Corporate process. This is an indication that high standards and continued customer liaison, have a positive impact on the quality of responses provided to complainants, aided significantly by the quality checking process provided by the Performance and Complaints Team. This has also had a positive impact on the number of requests by complainants to progress to the next stage in the complaints process.
- 20.4 When it is apparent to complainants that their complaint has been taken seriously and thoroughly investigated, with apologies made where appropriate and where the response is sufficiently thorough for them to understand how the outcome has been reached and that Children's Services has taken any appropriate learning from the complaint; then it is much more likely that complainants will be satisfied with the response they have received and less likely to request an escalation of their complaint. This is substantiated by the small number of complaint investigations by the Local Government Ombudsman for Solihull Children's Services in 2017/18.
- 20.5 The Performance and Complaints Team have maintained positive relationships with existing Children's Services staff and also built new and positive relationships with relevant staff taking up new positions in the Children's Services & Skills Directorate.
- 20.6 Careful analysis of complaints made in relation to Children's Social Work Services ensures that complaints continue to be investigated through the correct complaints procedure and that during 2017/18, 64% of the complaints made have been processed via the Corporate rather than the Statutory Complaints Process. This system of analysing Children's Social Work Services complaints was endorsed in the Local Government Ombudsman publication, *"Are we getting the best from children's social care complaints?"* published in March 2015.
- 20.7 The efficient records management system used by the Performance and Complaints Team to record complaint details ensures swift responses to complainants, Children's Services staff and the Local Government Ombudsman. It also ensures that any member of the Performance and Complaints Team can, at

any time, establish the current status of a complaint along with the detail of any correspondence that has taken place in relation to that complaint. This ensures an excellent level of customer service.

20.8 Customer feedback is sought following each complaint via an on-line questionnaire (also available on request in printed format) which has been developed and published on the Survey Monkey website, into which complainants/their representatives are invited to feedback their comments concerning their experience of the Complaints Procedure. This in turn, will feed into the learning and improvement process.

20.9 The Complaints Team have received the following compliments:

### **20.9.1 Compliments from complainants**

- *I wanted to say thank you to you and your team for the way my complaint was handled. The depth of the response also impressed me and showed that the Council considered every aspect of my dissatisfaction. As you well know it is disappointing to reach the complaint process without an earlier resolution. I wanted to make clear that the way the item was resolved has left me with a very favourable view of the Council that was tarnished before the complaint. I am not saying this as the outcome was in my favour but for the fact that you saw the complaint from my point of view and not just the Council's.*

This compliment succinctly outlines the service that complainants seek when they make a formal complaint and reinforces the statements made above, relating to the impact of a sufficiently detailed complaint response (see 9.1.6 and 15.3).

### **20.9.2 Compliments from internal staff**

- *Many thanks for responding to my request so quickly. This is really appreciated and extremely helpful.*
- *Thanks again. You have been very helpful and supportive.*
- *As ever, thank you for all your help in dealing with the complaint to reach this stage.*
- *X complimented the team on the diplomatic way that she has heard them deal with difficult customers*
- *X complimented the team on the positive feedback he has received from other parts of the Council on the work the team does and that we do not receive complaints about the Complaints Team.*
- *Thank you – and again, your support and attention to detail in preparing the response made this outcome possible.*

## **21 Reporting on Complaints**

21.1 The reporting process to senior management is an important part of the complaints process in Solihull. This is essential if the issues raised in complaints and the learning from them, is to have a positive impact on practice. Any improvements which are identified, however minor, are built into the process and an example of this is the further breakdown of complaints issues as outlined at 12.4 above. This

assists senior staff to easily identify if there is a common issue being raised by complainants, so that it can be reviewed and dealt with appropriately, in order to improve the service where required and prevent further complaints.

- 21.2 The Respond database used for recording complaints is an essential tool when providing accurate performance reporting. The Performance and Complaints Team provides in-depth reporting to management at all levels, including percentages of complaints received under each process (at which stage and for which teams), issue type and numbers, investigation timescales and outcomes and the number of learning forms that have been distributed, completed and returned and whether the learning has been implemented. The benefits of this have been outlined throughout this report.
- 21.3 Detailed reports for heads of service and the Directorate Leadership Team are produced on time and at regular intervals (both monthly and quarterly). These highlight areas needing attention and have been an integral part of the complaints service provided by the Performance and Complaints Team. Accurate recording on the Respond database also enables one-off reports to be produced efficiently and as requested by managers, where complaint processing and monitoring suggests that there are issues that need attention in specific areas of Children's Services.
- 21.4 Heads of service and the assistant directors receive monthly reports of live complaints, enabling them to track performance against timescales and intervene if there is a risk that a complaint will not be dealt with within the desired time limit.
- 21.5 Directorate Leadership and Senior Management teams receive quarterly complaints reports, detailing activity and performance, categories of complaint and learning and outcomes by service area and team, which highlight any emerging trends. This ensures that managers can identify trends and again intervene early if a problem is highlighted.
- 21.6 Ombudsman activity / responses are also reported to DLT on a monthly basis and any new complaints referred from the LGSCO are reported immediately to the Director/ appropriate Assistant Director. The Link Officer role is now situated within the Complaints Team and hence the team have a role in the collation of information and oversight of responses to ensure that responses to the Ombudsman are within the timescale requested by the Ombudsman.

## **22 Looking ahead to 2018/19**

- 22.1 A training session will be organised in 2018/19 for staff new to Solihull who respond to complaints. In addition, one-to-one training is always available to investigating managers and the Performance and Complaints Team are always happy to assist and provide advice and guidance to managers on an on-going basis.
- 22.2 During 2018/19, the Performance and Complaints Team will complete a review of the Council's procedure for dealing with Statutory Complaints relating to Children's Social Work Services, in order to ensure that current senior members of staff have the opportunity to feed into and shape this.



## 23 Conclusion

- 23.1 During 2017/18 the Performance and Complaints Team have continued to work closely with Children's Services staff to ensure that as many responses as possible meet the appropriate timescales and that complaint responses are of a high quality.
- 23.2 Complaint responses have continued to have a positive impact on the requests for escalation and hence the numbers of complaints investigated by the LGSCO.
- 23.3 Detailed and quality reporting to senior management has continued with the Performance and Complaints Team providing a very detailed breakdown of some of the issues complained about, so that learning and subsequent actions taken, can be even more focussed and hence have a bigger impact on service improvement. This detailed breakdown will in 2018/19, extend across other types of complaint issues, so that all issues arising are noted in detail, via the reporting system and senior staff can take action as quickly as possible.
- 23.4 The numbers of learning forms being returned in 2017/18 is high at 84%. Learning data from 2017/18 has been formatted into spreadsheets and distributed to senior staff and the appropriate team managers, highlighting learning and implementation dates, both on a service wide and team-by-team basis, so that managers can comment on the differences that learning has made to practice. The evidence is then collated by the Performance and Complaints Team and is available to inform the inspection process.
- 23.5 Ofsted have labelled the complaints process in Solihull as being "strong" and one where "*Children know how to complain*" and "*When they do, their complaints are taken seriously.*"
- 23.6 During 2018/19, as in previous years, the Performance and Complaints Team will constantly review its practice in accordance with feedback from both complainants and Children's Services and will then work with managers and staff to make any changes that are essential, to enhance overall performance.

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