



EAST RIDING

OF YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

Children's Services

Annual Feedback Report 2016 – 2017

Customer Relations Team

Contents

	Page
Introduction	3
Executive Summary	4
Compliments	6
Complaints	8
Children's Social Care	9
Corporate	17
Learning Lessons	21
Contacts	23
Local Government Ombudsman	24
School Complaints	25
Subject Access Requests	26
Freedom Of Information Requests	29

Introduction

It is a statutory requirement of the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 that the Local Authority publishes an annual report providing information regarding Children's Social Care complaints and representations. These are the 'Regulations' referred to throughout this report.

East Riding of Yorkshire Council Children's Services welcome complaints, compliments and comments as a way of improving service delivery to children, young people and their families.

This report provides information about complaints and representations made relating to Children's Social Care services under the Regulations during the twelve month period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. In addition the report includes information relating to Children's Services corporate complaints and representations, Subject Access Requests (SAR), and Freedom of Information Requests (FOI).

All timescales for complaints referred to within this report are in working days.

The customer relations team oversees the management of complaints and representations, SAR and FOI requests for children and adult services for the Local Authority, following Legislation / Regulations and Statutory Guidance: 'Getting the Best from Complaints' DfES 2006.

Executive Summary

Compliments

84 compliments received in 2016/17 in Children's Services a slight increase from 81 in 2015/16.

The number of compliments received continues to outnumber the number of complaints received overall.

The majority of compliments relate to quality of service provided and staff attitude and practice.

Children's Social Care Complaints

35 complaints were dealt with consisting of 24 new complaints and 11 ongoing from 2015/16.

There was a 30% increase in complaints dealt with, up from 27 in 2015/16.

The number of new complaints received was up only one from 23 in 2015/16.

24 complaints were resolved with 11 cases still in progress and transferred to 2017/18.

17 of the 24 resolved complaints (71%) were resolved at Stage 1 (63% in 2015/16, 65% in 2014/15)

Most complaints are made up of several parts:

- 54% of those resolved at Stage 1 were not upheld
- 77% of those that progressed to Stage 2 were not upheld
- 75% of those that progressed to Stage 3 were not upheld

The majority of complaints received (91%) relate to issues with level and quality of service provision received, which is also reflective of those concerns received where local resolution has been sought.

Corporate Complaints

There were 18 corporate complaints dealt with this year; 11 new complaints and 7 which were ongoing from 2015/16. 17 were resolved with one case transferring to 2017/18.

Nine of the completed complaints (53%) were successfully resolved at Stage 1.

Eight of the complaints dealt with progressed to Stage 2 (44%).

Local Government Ombudsman

There were six Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) cases dealt with this year; four new cases and two that were ongoing from 2015/16. Two of the six cases were not investigated by the LGO – one was a premature complaint, one received from a person without the appropriate parental responsibility.

Of the four cases the LGO investigated, one case is still under investigation and transferring to 2017/18. The three decisions received – fault was found with only one case.

Contacts

Of the 178 contacts received that did not progress to being a complaint, the majority of the concerns raised were resolved satisfactorily by the customer relations team or relevant team or service area.

Subject Access Requests (SAR)

Requests for records received have remained high again this year: 55 in 2016/17, 57 in 2015/16 and 23 in 2013/14.

SARs have continued in trend from the previous year being increasingly complex in nature and requiring a coordinated response across a number of services.

92% of SARs were processed within statutory timescales; a year on year improvement from 70% in 2015/16 and 56% in 2014/15.

In addition to the SARs, 66 requests for Children's Services records, (mainly Children's Social Care records), were dealt with as a Data Protection exemption.

Freedom of Information Requests (FOI)

The number of FOIs received remains consistently high – 195 this year, 207 in 2015/16 and 192 in 2014/15.

Completion rates continue to improve - 175 FOIs (90%) were completed within statutory timescales. The nature of the FOIs continues to increase in complexity.

Children's Social Care consistently receives the highest number of FOI requests in Children's Services each year.

Compliments

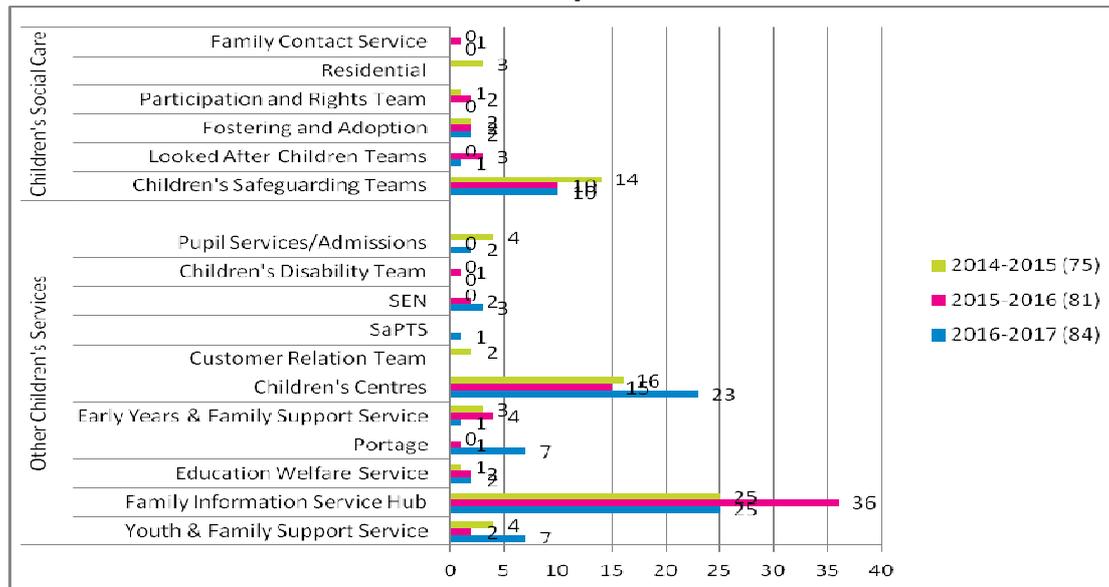
84 compliments were received in Children's Services compared to 81 in 2015/16, and 75 in 2014/15.

13 compliments were received for Children's Social Care compared to 18 in 2015/16 and 16 in 2014/15.

The number of compliments received across Children's Services consistently outnumbers the number of complaints received year on year.

The majority of compliments relate to staff attitude or approach and practice, and satisfaction with the quality of service provided.

Breakdown of Compliments Received



Compliments – Areas for Development

Aims 2016/17

Update and Aims / Priorities for 2017/18

Increase recording of compliments in Children's Services

- Opportunities taken to raise the profile of compliments through training, team meetings, supervision – however numbers captured are still low and do not reflect the level of positive feedback received
- New feedback software / system is still in development – this will enable

	<p>local authority staff to input and capture compliments directly when operational; giving a more accurate picture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Capturing positive feedback will remain an aim to improve for 2017/18
--	---

Complaints

What is a Complaint?

A complaint can be generally defined as an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet, which requires a response.

Complaints can be made in person, by telephone, letter or email, or through an advocate.

Children and Young People in East Riding of Yorkshire known to Children's Social Care services can be supported in making a complaint by officers from the Children's Rights and Participation Team, who can provide an advocacy service.

Officers from local authority Children's Services will always look for opportunities to resolve concerns raised, as a positive alternative for the service user to entering a formal complaints process.

Children's Social Care Complaints Procedure

The Social Care complaints procedure is a statutory process which allows service users or other people on their behalf, to make complaints about Children's Social Care. There are three stages to this process:

Stage 1 – This is the most important stage of the complaints procedure as it is an attempt to address the complaint as quickly and informally as possible at a local level. Complaints at Stage 1 should be responded to within 10 working days, with an extension of a further 10 days where necessary.

Stage 2 – a complaint usually progresses to this stage if the complainant is dissatisfied with the findings of Stage 1. This is a more in depth investigation conducted by a senior officer and an external Independent Person. The findings of this investigation are adjudicated by a senior manager in Children's Services. Complaints at Stage 2 should be responded to within 25 working days, although in certain cases this can be extended up to 65 days if the complaint is more complex or there are unexpected delays.

Stage 3 – If the complainant remains dissatisfied then the complaint can progress to this stage, the Review Panel, made up of three Independent People. The Review Panel make recommendations to the Director of Children, Families and Schools who then makes a decision on the complaint and any action to be taken. The timescales for this stage are:

- Review Panel to be convened within 30 days
- The Panel's report to be produced within 5 days of the panel
- The Local Authority's response to be produced within 15 days of receiving the Panel's report

If the complainant remains dissatisfied then they can refer the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO), who is empowered to investigate where it would appear that the Local Authority's own investigations have not resolved the complaint. Complainants can refer their complaint to the LGO at any time, although the Ombudsman would normally refer the matter back to the Local Authority to be considered under the appropriate complaint procedure first before getting involved.

Children's Social Care Complaints

24 new complaints were dealt with in 2016/17, an increase of only one from 23 in 2015/16 (32 in 2014/15). One of the 24 went straight to Stage 2.

11 cases were ongoing and transferred from 2015/16 – three at Stage 1, seven at Stage 2 and one at Stage 3.

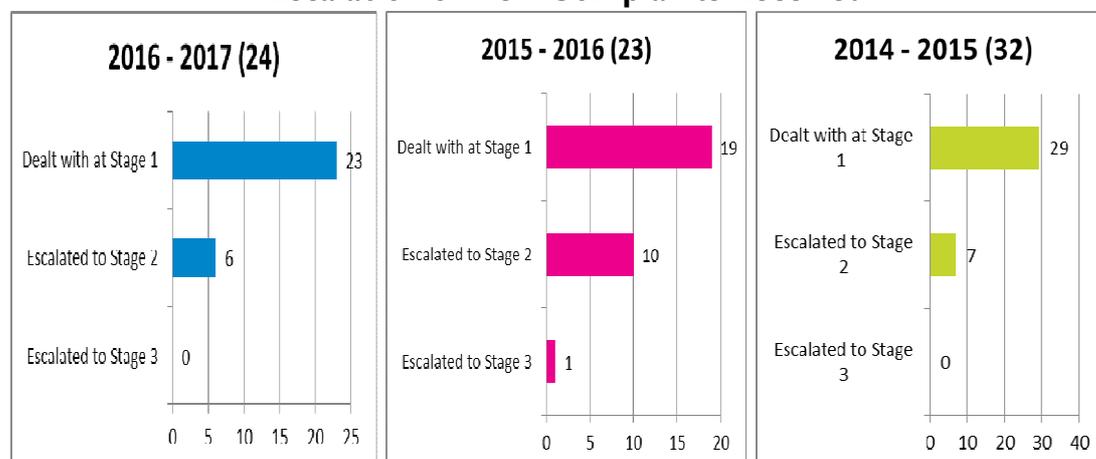
Of the 35 complaints dealt with, 24 were successfully resolved. Of those resolved:

- 17 complaints (71%) were successfully resolved at Stage 1; a significant improvement from 63% in 2015/16 (ten out of 16)
- Six complaints (25%) were successfully resolved at Stage 2, 31% in 2015/16 (five out of 16)
- One complaint was dealt with at a Stage 3 Independent Review Panel – the same as 2015/16

11 cases are ongoing and transfer to 2017/18 - four at Stage 1, six at Stage 2 and one at Stage 3.

Actively seeking alternate resolution or remedy when concerns are first raised, in agreement with the complainant, is continuing to be successful at resolving concerns at the earliest point. This successful practice was recognised by Ofsted in their 'Single inspection of LA children's services and review of the LSCB' published February 2017 - 'A new alternative resolution process has been introduced recently and, as a result, there was a reduction of 28% in the number of formal complaints in the last year.'

Escalation of New Complaints Received



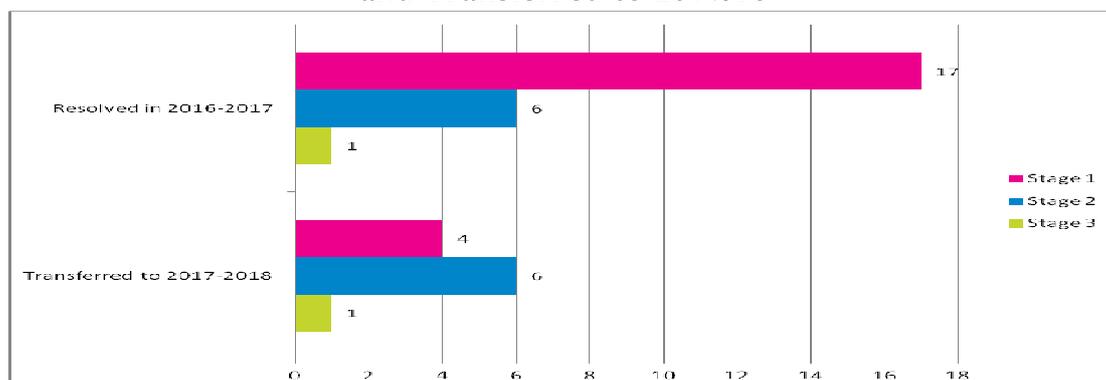
Year on Year Comparison

	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14
New complaints	24	23	32	66
Tf previous year	11	4	19	19
Total dealt with	35	27	51	85

Total resolved	24	16	47	66
Resolved at Stage 1	17 – 71%	10 – 63%	33 – 70%	52 – 79%
Resolved at Stage 2	6	5	9	8
Stage 3 Panel	1	1	5	2
Tf next year	11	11	4	19

Number and % those dealt with that progressed to Stage 2	13 – 37% (7 of these tf from 2015/16 at Stage 2 6 of the new complaints escalated to stage 2 and tf to 2017/18)	11 – 41% (2 of these tf from 2014/15 at Stage 2 7 of the new complaints escalated to Stage 2 and tf to 2016/17)	11 – 22% (4 of these tf from 2013/14 at Stage 2 and 2 of the new complaints escalated to Stage 2 and tf to 2015/16)	18 – 21% (7 of these tf from 2012/13 at Stage 2 and 4 of the new complaints escalated to Stage 2 and tf to 2014/15)
% of those dealt with that progressed to Stage 3	2 – 6% (1 of these tf from 2015/16 at Stage 3 – other case progressed to Stage 3 and tf to 2017/18)	2 – 7% (1 of these tf from 2014/15 at Stage 1 - other case progressed to Stage 3 and tf to 2016/17)	5 – 10% (all 5 were cases tf from 2013/14 at Stage 2)	2 – 2% (1 of these tf from 2012/13 at Stage 1 – other case progressed to Stage 3)

Children's Social Care Complaints Resolved at Each Stage in 2016/17 and Transferred to 2017/18



Children's Social Care Complaints in Context

Complaints ongoing brought forward from 2015/16	11
New complaints received during 2016/17	24
Complaints ongoing carried forward to 2017/18	11

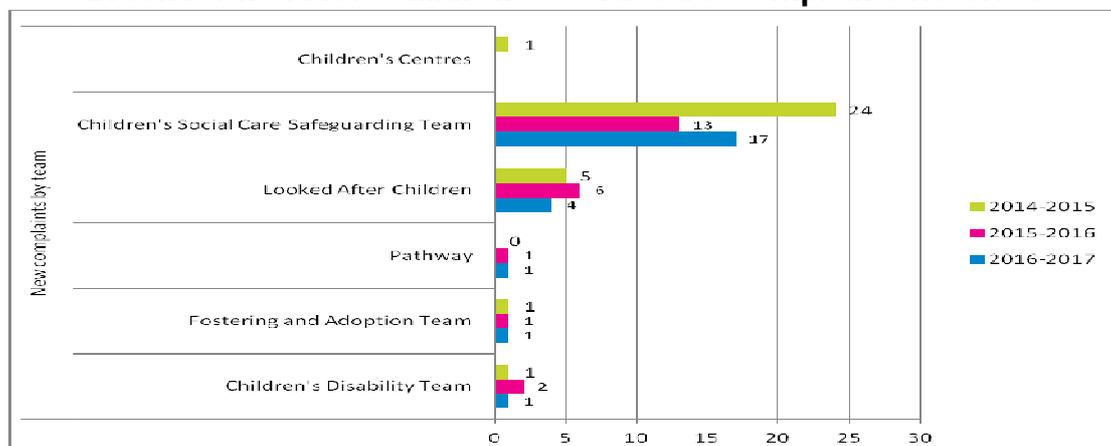
Complaints handled during 2016/17	Resolved in 2016/17	% Resolved 2016/17	Transferred to 2017/18
Stage 1	24	71	4
Stage 2	9	25	6
Stage 3	2	4	1
Total	35	100	11

Under 18 year olds in East Riding of Yorkshire (Source: Population Census)	June 2015	62718
Total number of open Children's Social Care Cases	31/3/2017	1168
Total Number of Looked After Children	31/3/2017	290
Total Number of Child Protection Cases	31/3/2017	214

Total number of complaints dealt with in 2016/17	35
% of complaints to CSC Cases	3%

Number of complaints dealt with from Under 18 year olds	5	14%
Number of complaints dealt with from Looked After Children	6	17%

Breakdown of New Children's Social Care Complaints Received



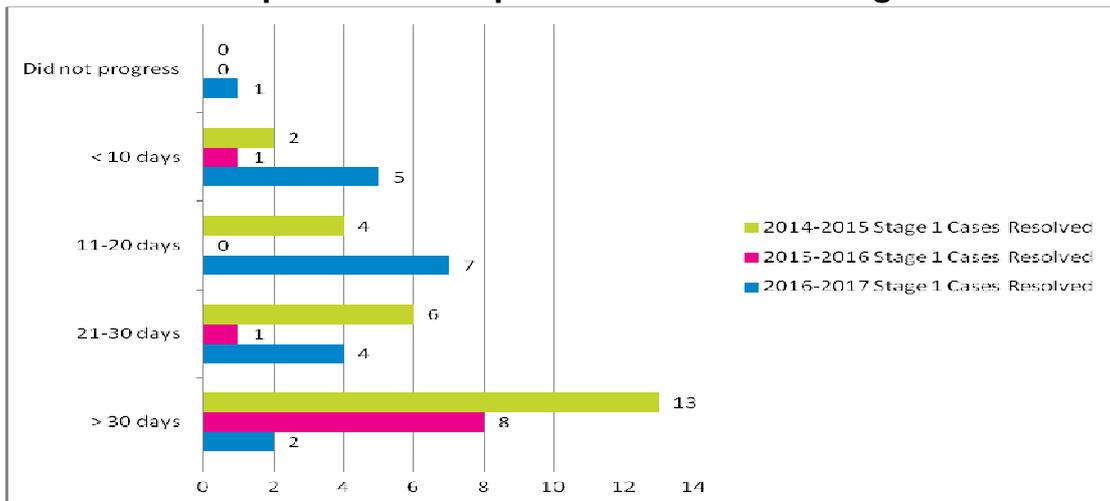
Completion Timescales for Children’s Social Care Complaints

At Stage 1, 12 out of the 19 complaints were completed within statutory timescales; six out of the seven Stage 2 Children’s Social Care complaints were not completed within statutory timescales.

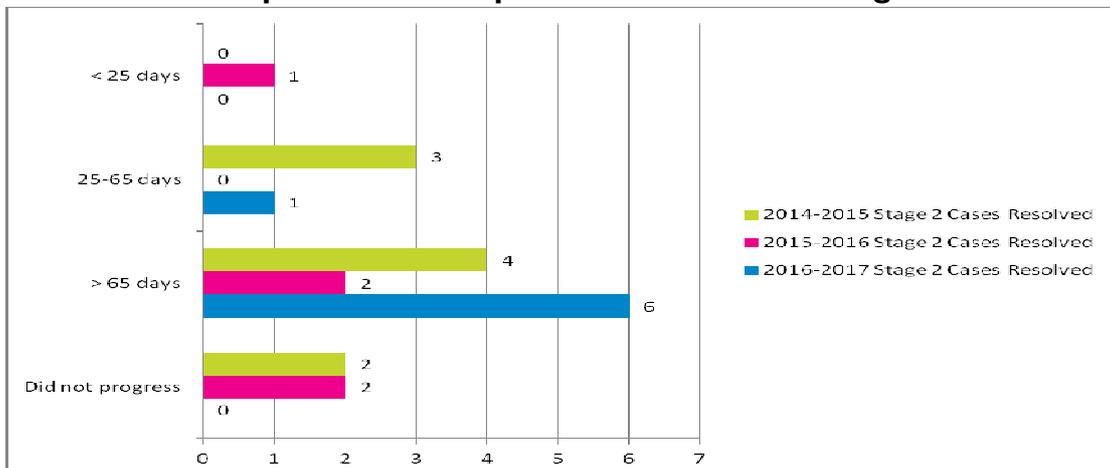
Completion Rates – Stage 1	Cases
Completed in less than 10 days	5
Completed between 11 and 20 days	7
Completed between 21 and 30 days	4
Completed in more than 30 days	2
Did not progress as a complaint – alternatively resolved	1
Total	19

Completion Rates – Stage 2	Cases
Completed in less than 25 days	0
Completed between 26 and 65 days	1
Completed in more than 65 days	6
Total	7

Comparison of Completion Timescales at Stage 1



Comparison of Completion Timescales at Stage 2



There has been a year on year improvement in completion of Stage 1 complaint investigations within statutory timescales. However it is recognised that an unacceptable number of Stage 2 complaints are not completed within statutory timescales, although it is acknowledged that these cases are complex requiring in depth investigations.

Increasing capacity to deal with statutory complaints will continue to remain an area for development in 2017/18 as it is recognised as a contributing factor to improving completion rates and successful dispute resolution. Improving the consistent quality of investigator's reports will also remain an area for development in 2017/18.

Outcomes of Children's Social Care Complaints Completed

The 17 complaints that were resolved at Stage 1 contained 108 parts.

The six complaints that were resolved at Stage 2 contained 120 parts (only those not upheld at Stage 1 were investigated at Stage 2).

The one complaint resolved at Stage 3 contained 12 parts.

Stage 1

	Parts	%
Not upheld	58	54
Upheld	31	29
Partially upheld	10	9
No finding	9	8
Total	108	

Stage 2

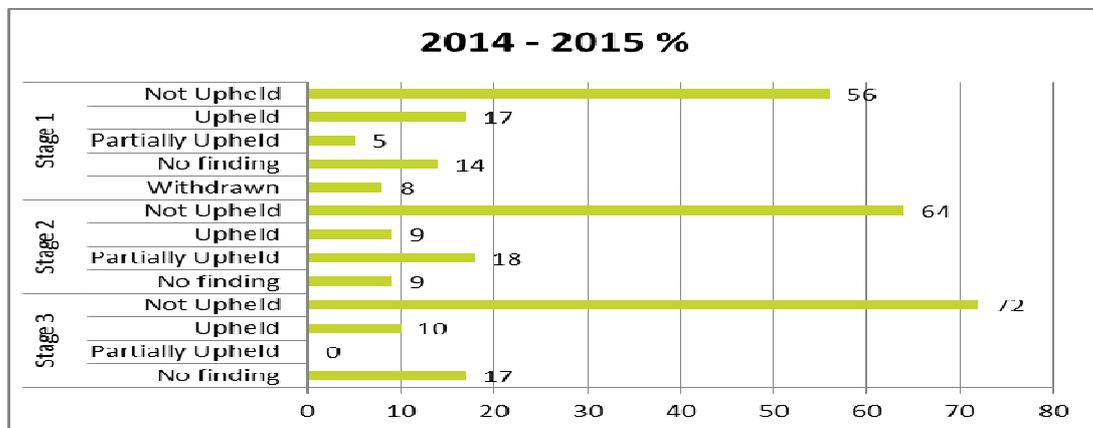
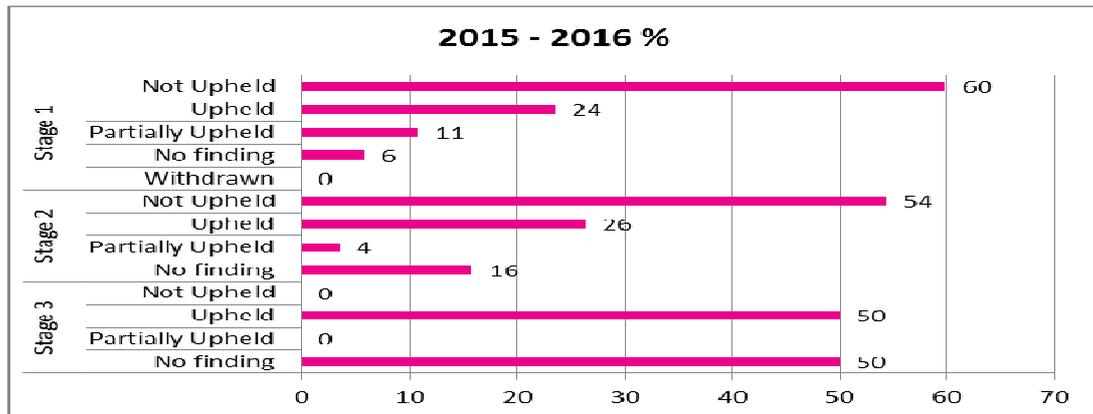
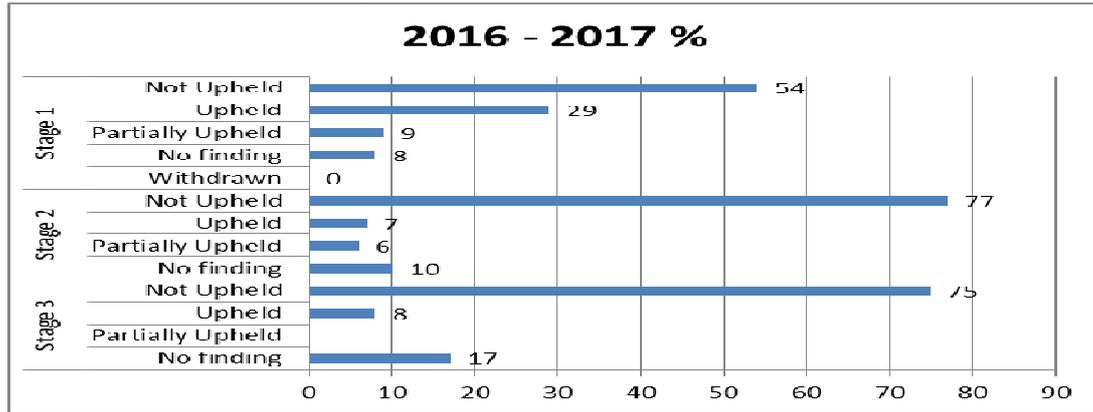
	Parts	%
Not upheld	92	77
Upheld	9	7
Partially upheld	7	6
No finding	12	10
Total	120	

Stage 3

	Parts	%
Not upheld	9	75
Upheld	1	8
Partially upheld	0	0
No finding	2	17
Total	12	

A significant high percentage of complaints investigated were not upheld at each stage of the complaints process, with a very low percentage of concerns raised upheld. This data shows that complaint investigations found service decision making was appropriate and consistently sound in the majority of cases investigated.

Comparison of Investigation Findings



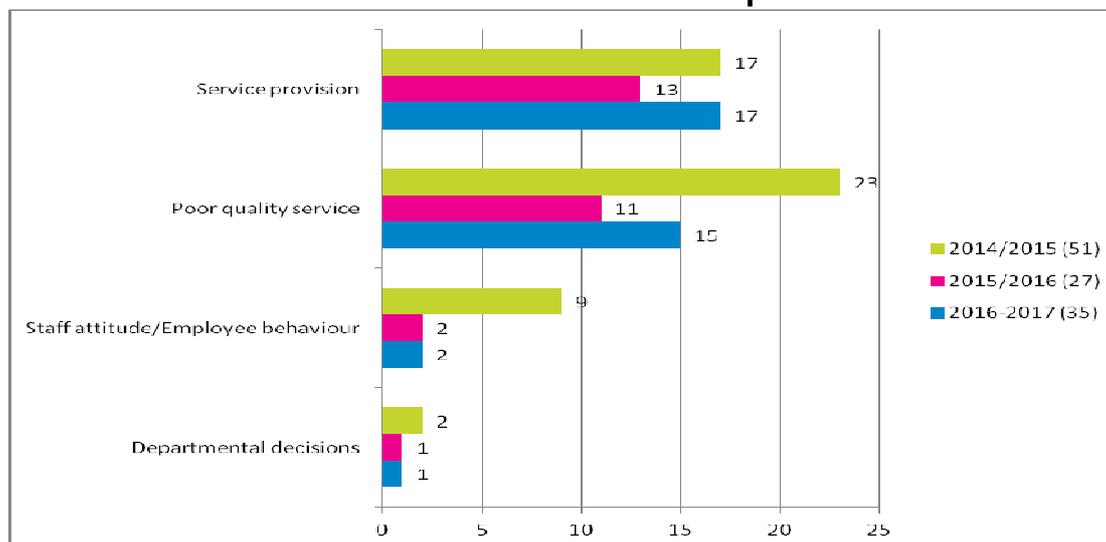
Reasons for Children's Social Care Complaints

For the 35 complaints dealt with this year, these were the underlying themes and reasons for the complaints being raised, with a comparison to the previous years:

	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Departmental decisions	3%	4%	4%
Staff attitude/Employee behaviour	6%	7%	18%
Poor quality of service	42%	41%	45%
Service provision	49%	48%	33%

The majority of complaints relate to issues and dissatisfaction with level and quality of service provision, with concerns raised regarding staff attitude and behaviour remaining low.

Reasons for a Children’s Social Care Complaint Dealt With



Complaints – Areas for Development

Aims 2016/17	Update and Aims / Priorities for 2017/18
Increase the number of investigating / adjudicating officers available to deal with complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roll out of the training for managers has been delayed due to unforeseen circumstances and will remain a priority for 2017/18
Improvement in complaint investigations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time and support available for managers carrying out complaint investigations has increased – both from the customer relations manager and the senior customer relations officer. Improving the quality of investigations and reports will remain a priority in 2017/18 The percentage of complaints resolved at the first stage has improved, however there is still room for improvement so will remain a priority for 2017/18 Improving timescales will remain a priority for 2017/18 as this continues to be a challenge to address The practice of seeking alternate dispute resolution has developed further this year and was recognised as a success by Ofsted inspectors. The senior customer relations officer has been significant in this achievement. This will continue as an area for further development in 2017/18

	<p>along with improvement in case recording on the child's electronic case records</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of the responses sent to the LGO have continued to improve further this year – with positive feedback from the LGO received in respect of the information they have received from the local authority. This will remain a priority for 2017/18
Improved use of action plans and lessons learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action plans and adjudication responses have continued to improve in quality and timeliness – with the senior customer relations officer taking responsibility to oversee action plans • Learning from complaints will remain a priority for 2017/18 – with closer liaison with the principal social worker planned
Smarter use of performance data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer relations team performance data has continued to develop in 2016/17 and will remain a priority for 2017/18 as there is scope to develop further the quality and range of information available
Develop new methods of making a complaint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The roll out of the new local authority 'digital' feedback system has not gone to plan in 2016/17 due to challenges the local authority have experienced with the provider who is developing the new system • Non-social care complaints will transfer to the new system in 2017/18 – however due to the complexity of incorporating stages of the social care complaints into this new system, this has been deferred until a later date; probably 2018/19 • The council website content has been updated this year in respect of how to make a complaint online • The customer relations team will continue to actively promote and seek ways of using social media in line with corporate developments in 2017/18 • Customer relations team procedures will be updated in line with new processes in 2017/18

Corporate Complaints

Complaints made about Children's Services other than under the Children's Social Care statutory procedure are dealt with under the Local Authority Feedback Policy - the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

Stage 1 – This is the most important stage of the complaints procedure as it is an attempt to address the complaint as quickly and informally as possible at a local level. Complaints at Stage 1 should be responded to within 10 working days, with an extension of a further 10 days where necessary.

Stage 2 – if the complainant is dissatisfied with the findings of Stage 1 then a request for the matter to be considered by the Director of Children, Families and Schools can be made, who will then provide a response within 10 working days.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied then the matter can be referred to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Activity

18 corporate complaints were dealt with comprising of 11 new cases and 7 ongoing cases transferred from 2015/16 – five cases at Stage 1 and two cases at Stage 2. The number of new corporate complaints received decreased 46% from 16 the previous year. One of the new complaints in 2016/17 went straight to Stage 2.

Of the 18 cases dealt with in 2016/17, 17 were resolved and one case carried forward to 2017/18 - at the first stage.

Nine of the cases were resolved successfully at Stage 1 (53%); seven cases were investigated, one was resolved locally so withdrawn, and one withdrawn as the complainant chose not to proceed. In 2015/16 there were six cases resolved at Stage 1, although only three were investigated and three were withdrawn.

Eight of the 18 corporate complaints this year were dealt with at Stage 2 (44%); six of the new complaints received progressed to Stage 2 (55%). There is a year on year increase in corporate complaints progressing to the second stage: an increase in progression from 31% in 2015/16 (five out of the 16 corporate complaints progressed), and 29% in 2014/15 (five out of the 17 corporate complaints progressed). However the overall number of corporate complaints dealt with remains similar year on year.

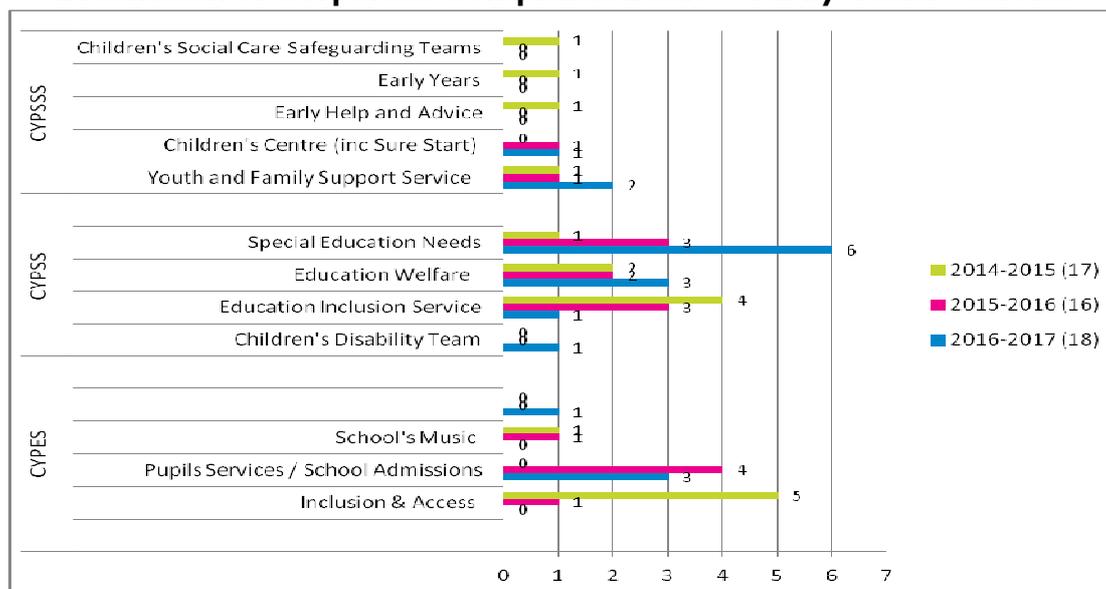
One corporate complaint progressed to the Local Government Ombudsman in 2016/17 – this case transferred to 2017/18 as being investigated.

Cases dealt with at Stage 1

Case dealt with at Stage 2

Tf from 2015/16	5	Tf from 2015/16	2
New dealt with at Stage 1	10	Progressed to Stage 2	6
Still in progress tf to 2017/18	1	Still in progress tf to 2017/18	0

Breakdown of Corporate Complaints Dealt With by Team / Service



Time Taken to Complete Corporate Complaints

Days taken	Stage 1	Stage 2
Withdrawn	2	0
<10	4	3
10 - 20	7	2
20 +	1	3
Total	14	8

Completing corporate complaints within required timescales will be a priority for 2017/18

Outcome of corporate complaints resolved in 2016/17

There were nine complaints successfully resolved at Stage 1. There were 50 parts to the 12 investigated Stage 1 complaints (two were withdrawn).

Of the eight complaints resolved at Stage 2, there were 24 parts (only those parts not upheld at Stage 1 were investigated at Stage 2).

Stage 1

	Number	%
Not upheld	22	44
No finding	2	4
Withdrawn	0	0
Partially upheld	3	6
Upheld	23	46
Total	50	

Stage 2

	Number	%
Not upheld	20	83
No finding	0	0
Withdrawn	0	0
Partially upheld	1	4
Upheld	3	13
Total	24	

52% of complaints were upheld or partially upheld at Stage 1; 44% of the complaints made at Stage 1 were not upheld.

Only complaints not upheld at the first stage can be considered at the second stage; not all parts of not upheld complaints progressed to the second stage. The 24 parts of the eight complaints investigated at stage 2 were made up of:

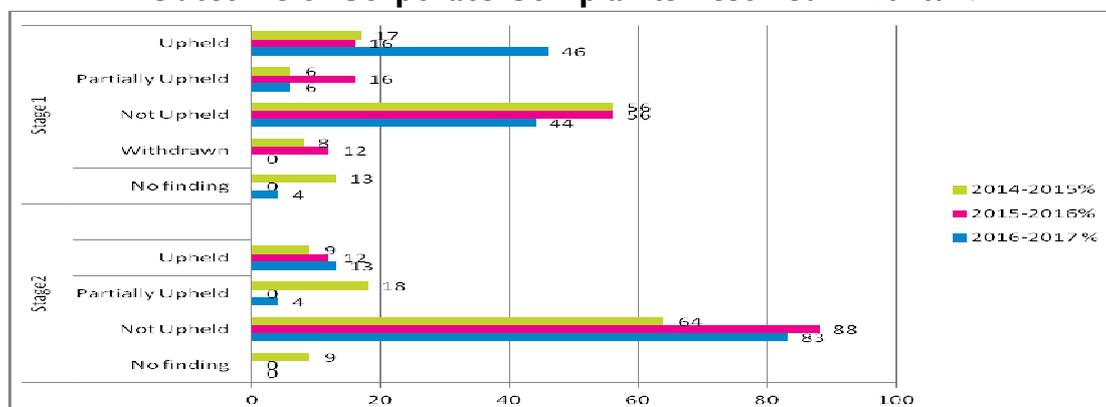
	Parts
Complaints carried forward at Stage 1 from 2015/16 that progressed to Stage 2 in 2016/17	6
Complaints that progressed from Stage 1 to Stage 2 in 2016/17	9
Complaints that carried forward at Stage 2 from 2015/16	6
Complaint that went straight to Stage 2 in 2016/17	3

Of the 15 not upheld parts of the complaints that progressed from Stage 1 to Stage 2 in 2016/17 – 11 remained not upheld, 3 were overturned to upheld and one to partly upheld.

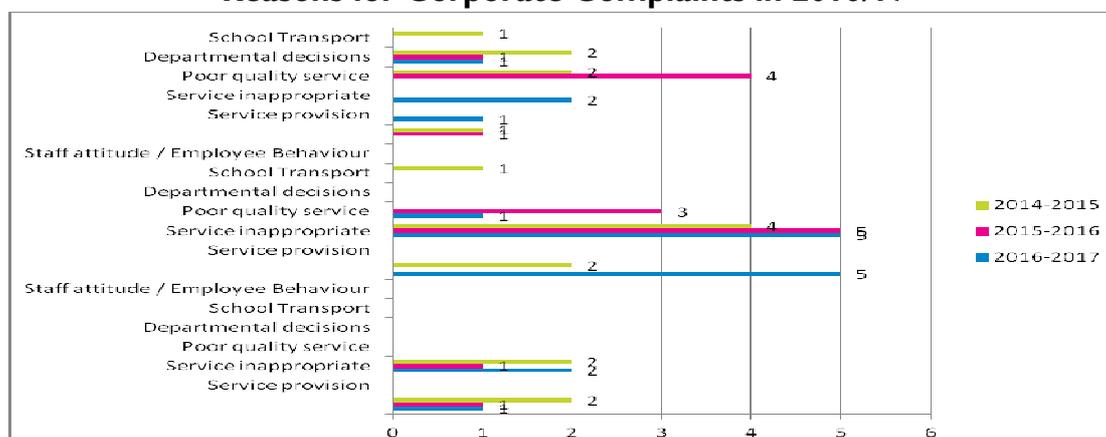
At Stage 2 83% (20 of 24 parts) were not upheld, with a low number upheld – 3 parts, 13%.

The above information and data show thoroughness and quality of Stage 1 investigations and confirmation of appropriate service decision making.

Outcome of Corporate Complaints Resolved in 2016/17



Reasons for Corporate Complaints in 2016/17



Corporate Complaints – Areas for Development

Aims 2016/17	Update and Aims / Priorities for 2017/18
Smarter use of performance data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer relations team performance data has continued to develop in 2016/17 and will remain a priority for 2017/18 as there is scope to develop further the quality and range of information available
Develop new methods of making a complaint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The roll out of the new local authority ‘digital’ feedback system has not gone to plan in 2016/17 due to challenges the local authority have experienced with the provider who is developing the new system • Non-social care complaints will transfer to the new system in 2017/18 – however due to the complexity of incorporating stages of the social care complaints into this new system, this has been deferred until a later date; probably 2018/19 • The council website content has been updated this year in respect of how to make a complaint online • The customer relations team will continue to actively promote and seek ways of using social media in line with corporate developments in 2017/18 • Customer relations team procedures will be updated in line with new processes in 2017/18
Timeliness of complaint investigations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting required timescales for completing a complaint investigation and responding to the complainant will be an area for improvement in 2017/18
Complaint investigation training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll out of the training for managers has been delayed due to unforeseen circumstances and will remain a priority for 2017/18

Learning Lessons

The statutory guidance **Children Social Care: getting the best from complaints**, issued by the Department for Education and Skills in 2006 tells us that *'Local Authorities should develop a listening and learning culture where learning is fed back to children, young people and their families who use their services – and fed into internal systems for driving improvement'*, and also *'it should give children and young people opportunities to tell the Local Authority about both their good and bad experiences of the service'*.

Complaints are a way of providing service managers with useful information in respect to how services are delivered, and can inform changes in future practice, policy and procedure. Feedback is gathered from the Investigating Officer/s and reviewed along with the recommendations and findings of the investigation reports.

The recommendations are monitored through Action Plans; these Action Plans contain details of the recommendations, and include the nominated officer / service area responsible for each action and the timescale to be completed.

Some examples of learning from Children's Social Care complaints in 2016/17:

- *The sharing of assessments and other reports with families in a timely manner to be addressed within group, and individual case management / supervision – the social worker will have responsibility to communicate with the family the timescales for sharing such records*
- *A review of training available for staff in respect of direct payments was required – to ensure that families receive an appropriate level of service. Procedures for the use and assessment of direct payments also reviewed*
- *Placement plans for looked after children to include how information is to be shared with family members, how often and by whom*
- *All staff responsible for organising and supervising contact to ensure rules and expectations are explained to families and recorded*
- *Guidance provided to foster carers to ensure the importance of children and young people looked after have adequate resources / equipment to transport their belongings – e.g suitcases*
- *Contract arrangements with private providers (foster care) to be reviewed to include the process they should follow if they receive notification of any lapse in professional registration of staff (HCPC)*
- *Review of the use and understanding of the term 'danger statement', (Signs of Safety framework), where there are no child protection concerns*

Some examples of learning from Children's Corporate complaints in 2016/17:

- *New process introduced to ensure that decisions made at the local authority Special Education Needs Panel are always communicated in writing to avoid confusion and misunderstanding*
- *Guidance for parents / carers to be developed to help clarify the evidence needed to support a request for a personal budget*
- *The 'Home Tuition' leaflet to be sent to parents / carers when they contact the service in addition to providing a verbal response to requests for information, to ensure that they are fully aware of the criteria for accessing home tuition support*
- *Parental consent to always be gained for any educational psychologist involvement with a child or young person.*
- *A review of the Specialist Resource Panel processes was required to ensure that communication with parents and professionals is timely following panel decisions being made, and that actions are followed through and evidenced in case records. In addition guidance for clinicians was to be developed to clarify their roles and responsibilities in regard to this panel*
- *A checklist and 'peer to peer' proof reading has been introduced to ensure the quality and accuracy of children and young people's Education Health Care Plans (EHCP)*
- *Review of the role of the EHCP coordinator for complex cases – these cases to be prioritised by EHCP coordinators; cases to be reallocated in a timely manner if a staff member is not at work. The EHCP coordinator to attend reviews, along with the Educational Psychologist for those cases where provision is at risk, and present the case at panel, providing feedback on the outcome to parents / carers*
- *A review of the content of the local offer website took place to ensure that it contains up to date policies and outdated content removed*

Contacts

There were 178 contacts received that did not progress to a formal complaint – this is a 13% increase from 158 in 2015/16, and 82 in 2014/15.

There are two main reasons for this significant increase. The first is that there has continued to be an improvement in the recording and performance management system used by the customer relations team in respect of capturing details of these contacts. The second reason is the increased early involvement of the customer relations team with relevant managers to resolve issues locally rather than progressing to a formal complaint. The majority of these were resolved by the relevant team or service area to the complainant's satisfaction.

Of the 178 contacts only six went on to progress to a formal complaint, which is only 3%.

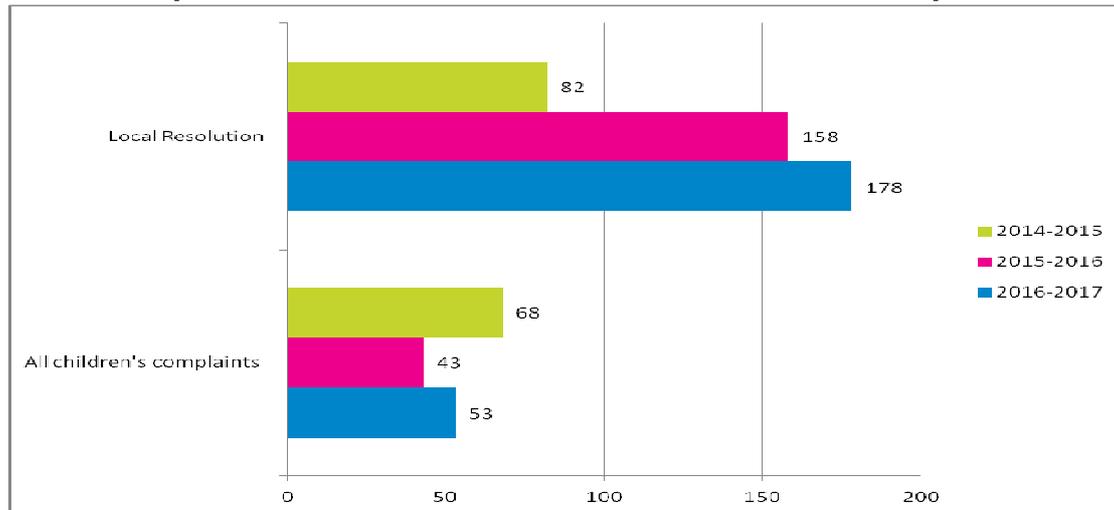
The majority the contacts received by the customer relations team related to concerns about poor service provision or quality of service received. Further analysis showed that there were a number of contributing factors / recurring themes that resulted in dissatisfaction with the service experienced or received:

- Lack of, or poor communication by professionals – workers not returning calls
- Issues with transparency - workers not being clear or ensuring there is mutual understanding
- Complainants not agreeing with professional judgements made within Assessments and Child In Need plans
- Timeliness of assessing the needs of the family / not meeting the deadline for completing assessments
- Staff not sharing assessment / reports with absent parents
- Complainants who do not have parental responsibility feeling that safeguarding services are not taking any notice of the safeguarding concerns they have
- Perceptions of staff conduct – disagreement with decision making
- Complainants that are in the process of private matters and have been advised that children's social care will not become involved
- Complainants that are in the process of private matters and do not agree with the professional judgements made within section 7 or section 37 reports

Other reasons for not progressing to a complaint included:

- legal proceedings / police investigations taking place
- complainant did not meet the criteria under the Regulations to make a complaint
- no response / confirmation of complaints received, despite follow up from the customer relations team

Comparison of Number of Contacts Received and Complaints



Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

The council have continued to improve the quality and details of the responses sent to the LGO this year in respect of requests for information for their complaint investigations. It is usual practice that the LGO makes several requests for information for the same case before issuing a draft / final decision. Preparing these requests for information continues to be a challenge in terms of manager's capacity to prepare the response and provide supporting documentation, however this overall has been seen as a positive as it has provided the LGO with a fuller picture of the background to a complaint and resulted in little fault found with local authority practice.

In addition, the customer relations manager has remained involved in supporting managers to prepare their response to an LGO enquiry or investigation; improving the quality and depth of information sent.

The LGO considered six cases this year; two of these cases were ongoing from 2015/16 and four were new cases. Two of the six cases were not investigated by the LGO – one was a premature complaint, one received from a person without the appropriate parental responsibility.

Of the four cases the LGO investigated, one case is still under investigation and transferring to 2017/18. There were three LGO decisions received – fault was found with only one case.

School Complaints

The council does not investigate school complaints; however the customer relations team have continued to support schools and complainants by providing advice and guidance.

The school related performance data collated by the customer relations team is included in the annual review of local authority schools and provides a fuller picture when establishing those schools causing concern, and equally identifies those schools that have effective procedures and processes in place to respond to concerns raised.

There were 34 contacts to the customer relations team made by parents, head teachers or school governors seeking advice regarding complaints they had, or were dealing with, about schools in 2016/17. This is an increase from 28 in 2015/16.

School Complaints – Areas for Development	
Aims 2016/17	Update and Aims / Priorities for 2017/18
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop advice and guidance for schools and parent / carers• Further development of recording and monitoring systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Further update of the advice and guidance available on the council's website took place, improving information available for those parent/carers and schools with school related concerns• Improvement in the quality of the data recorded in respect of school related enquiries to better contribute to the annual review of schools. This will remain a priority for 2017/18.

Subject Access Requests

The local authority responds to requests for copies of a person's records it holds under the Data Protection Act 1998, as a Subject Access Request (SAR). The number of SARs received for children's records was 55 this year, remaining at a similar number to 2015/16 (57).

Of the 55 SARs received eight of the requests did not progress; either withdrawn or did not complete the formalities, or the local authority did not hold any records. These eight still involved senior customer relations officer and a manager's time prior to not progressing. Six of these eight were requests were for Children's Social Care records.

Requests for Children's Services records received	55
Made up of:	
Did not progress	8
SARs completed	37
Requests for further records	5
Still in progress transferred to 2017/18	5

42 SARs were dealt this year (5 of these are still in progress and transfer to 2017/18); 35 of these were requests for Children's Social Care records.

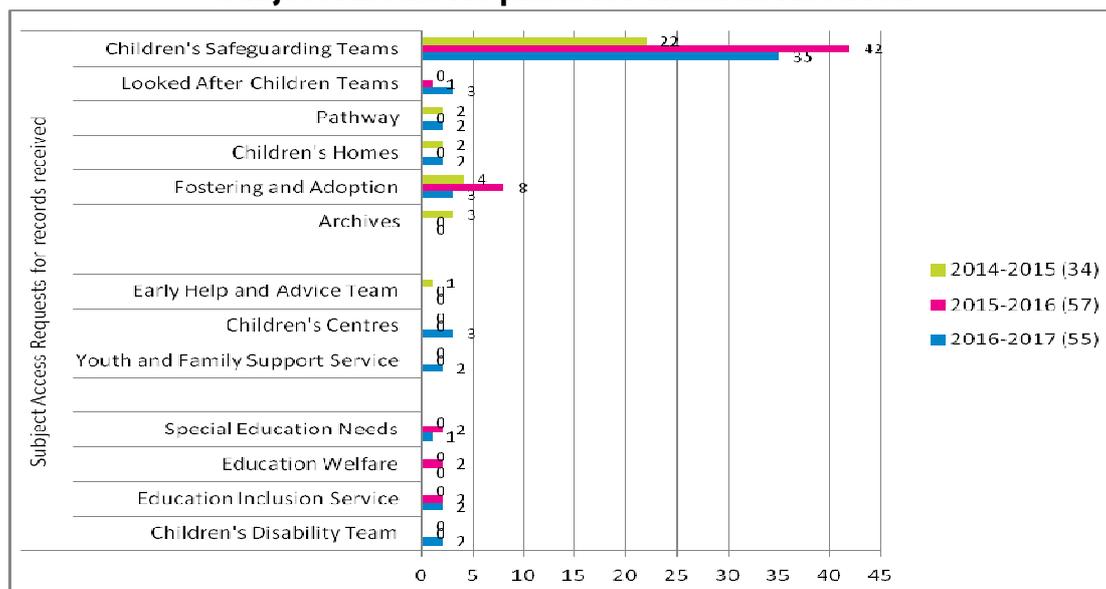
34 (92%) of the 37 completed SARs in 2016/17 were completed within the statutory 40 days. This is a significant improvement from 70% in 2015/16 and 56% in 2014/15.

The complexity of the nature of the SAR requests continues to increase; with records requested from a wider range of Children's Services. In addition following receipt of records, there have been five requests for further records received – which is the equivalent of completing another SAR. This has meant increased workload and capacity pressures for managers, often requiring a coordinated response across a number of services / teams.

Improvement in SAR completion timescales will continue to be an area for development for 2017/18, along with how to increase manager capacity to complete SARs.

A review of the SAR process has been completed this year with new practices and processes introduced to further improve how these requests for records are carried out. The quality of the redacted records released to the applicant has continued to improve, with greater use of the electronic redaction software and improved scrutiny of the records released to the applicant. Senior customer relations officer's time has been available to offer a more personal, individual sharing of the records in recognition of the often sensitive nature, or this being a difficult process for the applicant.

Subject Access Requests for Records Received

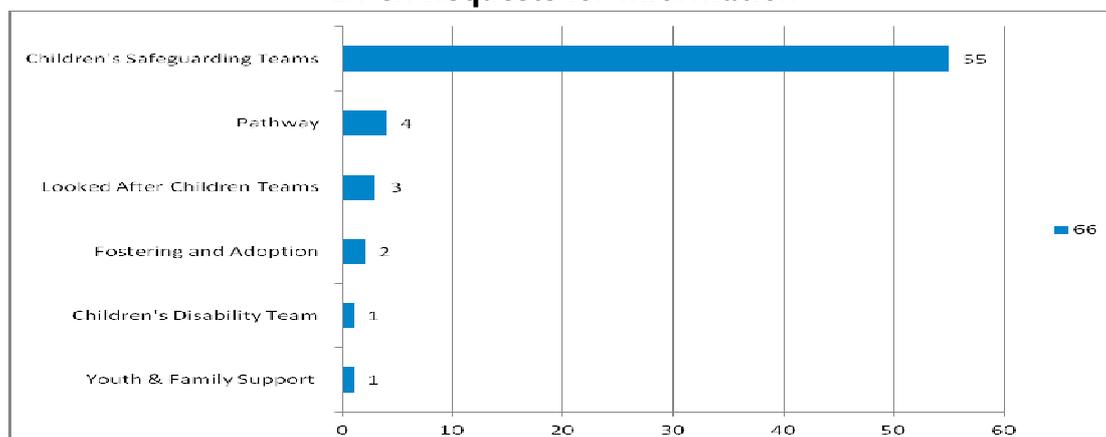


Data Protection Exemptions (DPex)

There are times when a request for a copy of the records a local authority holds is made by someone other than the individual concerned; for example, made by the police to inform their criminal investigations. These are dealt with as a data protection exemption under the Data Protection Act 1998. The responsibility to respond to these has transferred to the customer relations team this year, and is carried out by the senior customer relations officer with legal services. Each request is the equivalent of a SAR. New processes have been introduced to respond to these effectively; these will be improved further in 2017/18 and procedures updated accordingly.

There have been 66 requests for Children's Services records this year, (mainly Children's Social Care records), that were dealt with as a Data Protection exemption. These were mainly from the police, although two were received from the Disclosure and Barring Service to inform their decision making in respect of their assessment of individuals they are considering placing on the 'Barring List', (those individuals that will be prevented from working with children, young people and vulnerable adults).

DPex Requests for Information



Subject Access Requests – Areas for Development

Aims 2016/17	Update and Aims / Priorities for 2017/18
Meeting SAR statutory timescales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers and complexity of requests have continued to increase in 2016/17. Senior customer relations officer responsibility to deal with social care requests for records has been successful in improving quality of records released and in meeting statutory timescales • Adding capacity to deal with the increased number of requests for non social care records and DPex requests will be a priority for 2017/18 • Increased use of redaction software has improved the quality of records released to the applicant • Greater oversight and scrutiny of records to be released is taking place • Reporting to local authority senior management to monitor performance has been successful and will continue in 2017/18
Updating procedures and processes for handling SAR requests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of the SAR process has been completed this year – new processes have been introduced to further improve how these requests are dealt with. This will continue as an area for development in 2017/18 • Senior customer relations officer’s capacity to offer a personal sharing of records has continued and will remain a priority in 2017/18 • CRT SAR procedures to be reviewed and updated further in 2017/18 • Good practice and successful model / framework for responding to SAR / DPex to be replicated and implemented across other children’s and local authority services

Freedom of Information Requests (FOI)

The number of new FOIs received for Children’s Services remains consistently high: 195 this year, 207 in 2015/16 and 192 in 2014/15.

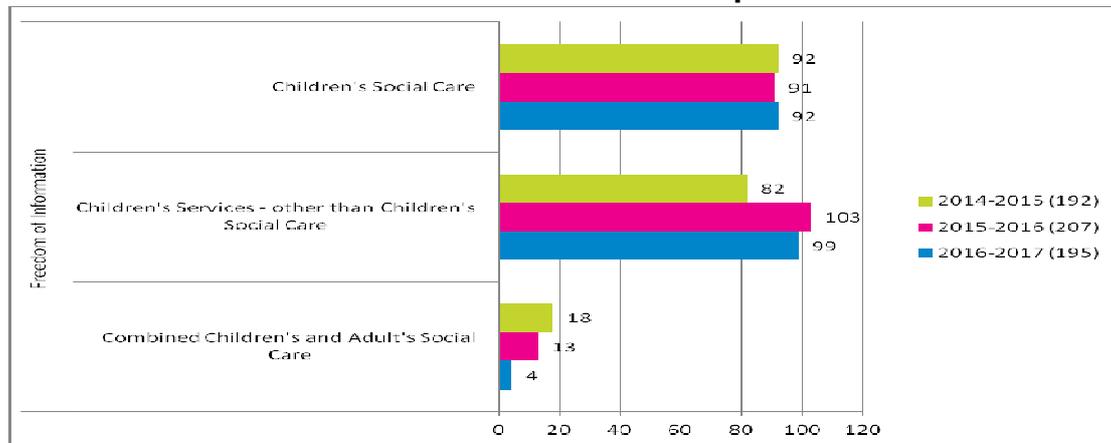
175 FOIs (90%) were completed within statutory timescales; an improvement on 82% in 2015/16 and 79% in 2014/15. This will remain an area for improvement in 2017/18.

The introduction of closer monitoring of completion rates, and approval sign off by senior managers, along with increased support provided by customer relations officers to managers preparing an FOI response, has improved performance in 2016/17.

Children’s Social Care consistently receives the highest number of FOI requests in Children’s Services each year.

The trend of increased complexity to FOI requests across all Children’s / Adult Services has continued.

Freedom of Information Requests



Freedom Of Information Requests – Areas for Development

Aims 2016/17	Update and Aims / Priorities for 2017/18
<p>Improve response rates</p> <p>Improve quality of response</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closer scrutiny and oversight to continue to monitor and improve performance • Support / critical challenge from customer relations officers to managers completing FOIs to continue • Improving timescales and quality of response will continue as an area for development in 2017/18

Angela Potter
customer relations manager June 2017