

# CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27 JULY 2015

## COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS ANNUAL REPORT APRIL 2014 TO MARCH 2015

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### **Summary**

The annual report provides information on the number, type and other information on children's social care complaints handled during the period 2014-2015. It also highlights some examples of the many positive things people have said about the provision of children's social care in Medway over the same period, and the service improvements we have made as a result. It also describes the improvements we have made to how we handle complaints and out plans for further improvement during the next year.

### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

- 1.1 The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 requires local authorities to have in place procedures for dealing with complaints relating to children's social care complaints from children, young people and others.
- 1.2 There is a further statutory requirement to produce and publish an annual report specifying the number of complaints received, the number of complaints which the Council decided were well-founded, and the number of complaints that the Council has been informed have been referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).
- 1.3 In accordance with the council's constitution, paragraph 22.2 (b)(v) of the Overview and Scrutiny rules, this committee is responsible for the review and scrutiny of all the functions and duties of the council under relevant legislation in force from time to time relating to the provision of services for children.

### **2. Background**

- 2.1 The Children Act 1989 defines the representations procedure as being for representations, including complaints, made by children and young people. It also applies to parents, foster carers and other adults making a complaint about services to a child or young person.

- 2.2 The guidance “Getting the Best from Complaints” describes a statutory procedure for a child or young person who is likely to want to make representations, including complaints, about the actions, decisions or apparent failings of a local authority’s children’s social services provision; and to allow any other appropriate person to act on behalf of the child or young person concerned or make a complaint in their own right.
- 2.3 The guidance is also about making sure that vulnerable children and young people get the help they need, when they need it, however large or small their complaint.
- 2.4 A complaint is defined in the guidance as an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response. Children and young people often express complaints as ‘problems not being sorted out’. A common theme amongst children and young people is the need for complaints procedures to be both timely and effective: complaints procedures should ‘get it sorted’ straight away. The focus of the complaints process should be on getting the best for both individuals and services; every complaint should be seen as an opportunity to improve services.
- 2.5 The local authority should ensure that it responds to the issues raised, setting out what action should be taken. Local authorities should make children and young people aware of how they may make representations to the local authority and that they do not have to be complaints. The child or young person has the same right to advocacy whether the representation is a complaint or not. When the representation is a concern but not a complaint and the local authority fails to respond to the child or young person’s satisfaction, he will then be entitled to make a complaint at Stage 1 about this failure.
- 2.6 Section 26(3) and section 24D of the Children Act, 1989 and section 3(1) of the Adoption and Children Act, 2002 require the responsible authority to consider representations including complaints made to it by:
- any child or young person (or a parent or someone who has parental responsibility ) who is being looked after by the local authority or is not looked after by them but is in need;
  - any local authority foster carer (including those caring for children placed through independent fostering agencies);
  - children leaving care;
  - Special Guardians; a child or young person (or parent of theirs) to whom a Special Guardian order is in force;
  - any person who has applied for an assessment under section 14F(3) or (4);
  - any child or young person who may be adopted, their parents and guardians;
  - persons wishing to adopt a child;
  - any other person whom arrangements for the provision of adoption services extend;
  - adopted persons, their parents, natural parents and former guardians;
  - and such other person as the local authority consider have a sufficient interest in the child or young person’s welfare to warrant his/her representations being considered by them.
- 2.7 Where a complaint is received from a representative acting on behalf of a child or young person, the local authority should normally confirm, where possible, that the child or young person is happy for this to happen and that the response to the complaint reflects his or her view.

2.8 Good complaint handling matters because it is an important way of ensuring that customers receive the service they are entitled to expect. They are a valuable source of feedback for the organisation; they provide an audit trail and can be an early warning of failures in service delivery.

### 3. Managing Complaints

3.1 Medway Council's complaint arrangements focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for those making a complaint. The aim is to give the service user answers or an explanation to help them to understand what happened and, where appropriate, an apology and a commitment to change the way things are done. The objective is to provide reassurance that when a complaint is upheld the errors made will not be replicated either to them, or to anyone else, and that the Council will take action to ensure this.

3.2 Our statutory complaints procedure has three stages.

- **Stage 1** – Any new complaint is first considered by staff at the point of service delivery with the aim of putting right any problem or mistake that may have occurred. Some complaints are complex and an advocate or interpreter may be required to make sure we understand all the aspects and in these cases it may take longer for us to respond. Wherever possible we try to respond within 10 working days, however if the complaint is more complex then the guidance allows us to respond within 20 working days. If the person complaining is unhappy with the outcome at this stage they may request that their complaint is considered at stage two of the complaints procedure. We aim to address, as far as possible, all concerns at this initial stage.
- **Stage 2** – At this stage an Independent Investigating Officer, who has not previously been involved in the case, and an Independent Person, who does not work for the council, undertake an investigation into the complaint. Both the Independent Person and the Independent Investigating Officer write separate reports, which are sent to the Assistant Director, Children's Social Care, who writes to the complainant, setting out the findings of the stage two investigation. The overall statutory timescale to reply to stage two complaints is 25-65 working days.
- **Stage 3** – If the complainant remains unhappy with the outcome of the stage two investigation they can request that their complaint is reviewed by a review panel. The panel consists of three independent people, who do not work for the council and who have not previously been involved in the complaint. The panel looks at how the complaint was handled and the conclusions reached. The panel presents its findings to the Director of Children and Adults Services, who then writes to the complainant setting out the panel's findings.

3.3 The statutory timescales for the stage three process are:

- Review Panel is required to meet within 30 working days of a complainant's request to go to stage three.
- The panel is required to produce its findings within 5 working days of the meeting
- The Director of Children and Adults Services is required to write to the complainant within 15 working days of receiving the panel's decision

3.4 If the complainant is still unhappy after stage three, they can contact the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). The LGO will look at how we have dealt with the complaint and consider how reasonable and appropriate our decisions were.

**4. The role of the Role of the Local Government Ombudsman**

4.1 The Local Government Ombudsman’s role is to provide redress in cases of service failure, which has caused injustice to the public and seeks to resolve cases informally where it can, determining the reasonableness of decisions of bodies being complained about.

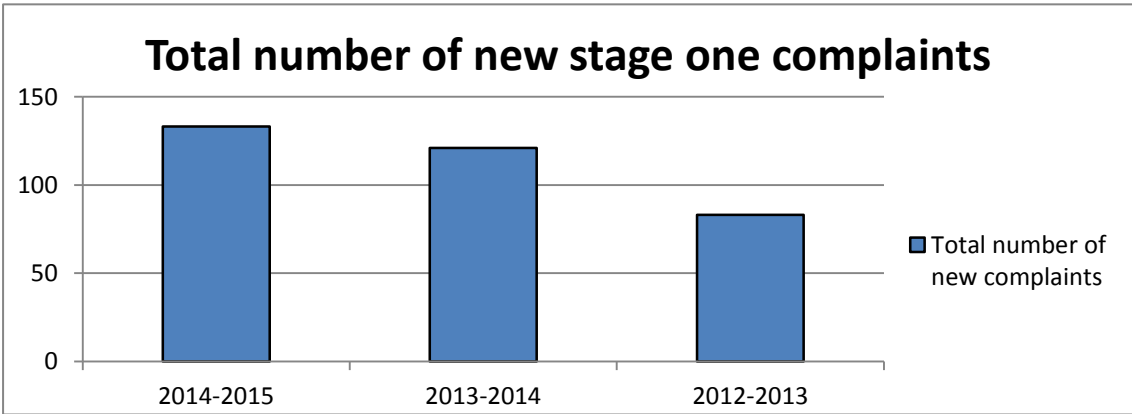
4.2 The Local Government Ombudsman’s recommendations aim to put complainants back in the position they were in before the maladministration occurred.

**5. Complaint Analysis: 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015**

5.1 The headline figures for Stage 1 complaints:

Complaints brought forward from 2013-2014	16
Complaints received	133
Complaints closed	117
Number of complaints withdrawn	4
Complaints dealt with within 10 days	13
Open complaints still waiting for a response	28
Stage Two complaints	4
Stage Three complaints	1

5.2 The total number of new complaints for 2014-2015 was 133, a 10% increase from the 121 complaints received in 2013-2014. In 2012-13 eighty-two new complaints were received.



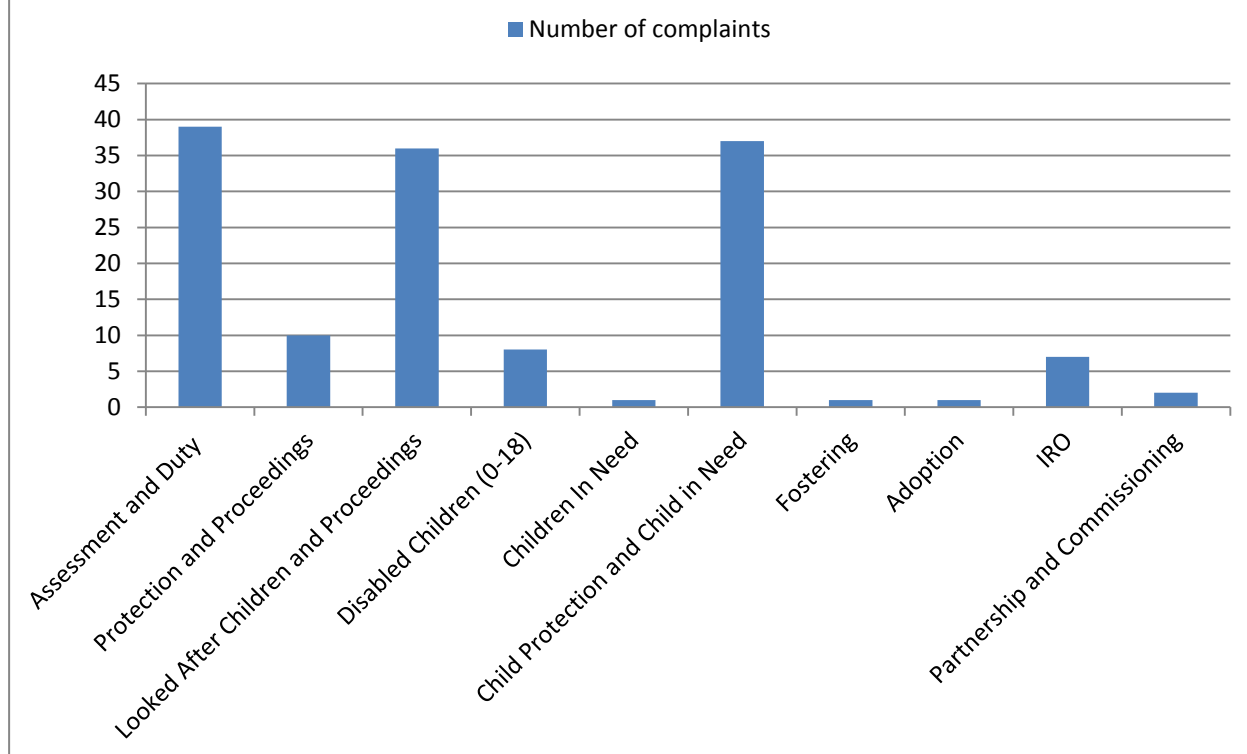
5.3 Some of the increase in the number of complaints will be accounted for by the improved publicity on the council’s website, the new children’s complaints

leaflets and greater awareness of all staff in children's services about ensuring that children and young people, and their parents, are aware of how to complain.

- 5.4 The total number of complaints handled in 2014-2015 was 149; this consisted of the 133 new complaints and sixteen complaints that were carried over from 2013-2014.
- 5.5 Twenty-eight complaints have been carried over to 2015-2016 as compared with sixteen last year.
- 5.6 Ten complaints were received from looked after children as compared with fifteen complaints in 2013-2014, ten in 2012-13 and five in 2011-2012. Children's services have taken several actions to ensure that children know how to complain and to ensure that they are referred to the advocacy service to support them in making a complaint. Two complaints were received from children in need.
- 5.7 One complaint was received from a foster carer, one from adoptive parents, two from relatives who had applied for special guardianship and one from a connected carer.
- 5.8 The other one hundred and twenty-six complaints were received from parents and concerned relatives.
- 5.9 Four stage two investigations were undertaken in 2014-15 as compared with two in 2013-14, one in 2012-13 and two in 2011-2012. One of the four stage two complaints proceeded to stage three of the complaints procedure.
- 5.10 Two complainants made three separate complaints and five complainants made two separate complaints.
- 5.11 Number of new stage 1 complaints received in 2014-2015, by service

Service	Number of complaints
Assessment and Duty service	39
Protection and Proceedings	10
Looked After Children and Proceedings	36
Disabled Children (0-18)	8
Child Protection and Child in Need	38
Fostering	1
Adoption	1
Independent Reviewing Service	7
Partnership and Commissioning	2
Total	142

## The number of complaints received by service area between 1 April 2014- 31 March 2015



5.12 The total of 142 is more than the 133 complaints received in 2014-2015 as one complaint can be about several issues, involving more than one team.

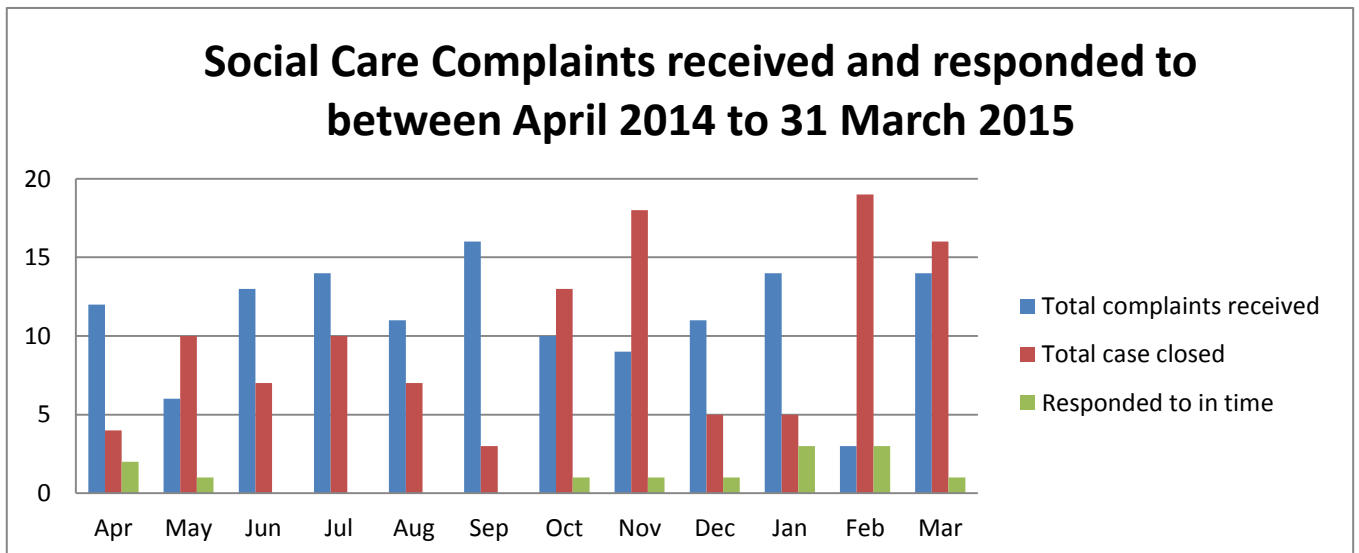
5.13 Due to a restructuring of children's services in 2014-2015 it is not possible to directly compare this year's figures with the figures from 2013-2014.

5.14 Children, young people and their parents and carers accessed the complaints procedure in several different ways:

- Forty- eight complaints were sent to the social care complaints manager by e-mail.
- Twenty-three complainants posted a letter to the social care complaints manager.
- Fifteen complainants wrote a letter which they sent to the social care complaints manager as an attachment.
- Fifteen complaints phoned the social care complaints manager
- Fourteen complainants came into Gun Wharf to see the social care complaints manager.
- Ten complainants e-mailed via the Council's website
- Five complainants completed the complaints form attached to the children's leaflet
- Two complainants used the automated voice-in system
- One complainant filled in the complaints form attached to the complaints leaflet and also sent in a letter.

5.15 Monthly breakdown of Stage 1 complaints received from /04/ 14 to 31/0315

	April	May	June	Q.1	July	Aug	Sep	Q.2	Oct	Nov	Dec	Q.3	Jan	Feb	Mar	Q4	Total
Complaints carried over from 2013-2014	16																
Total complaints received	12	6	13	31	14	11	16	41	10	9	11	30	14	3	14	31	133
Total complaints closed	4	10	7	21	10	7	3	20	13	18	5	36	5	19	16	40	117
Total number of complaints withdrawn									1		1	2	1	1		2	4
Total complaints dealt with within 10 days	2	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	3	3	3	1	7	13
% of complaints dealt with within 10 days	50%	10%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%	5%	20%	11%	60%	16%	6%	27%	11%
% of complaints acknowledged within 3 days	67%	100%	100%	89%	93%	20%	70.0%	62%	100%	88%	55%	81%	85%	100%	100%	95%	82%
Total number of complaints not responded to at end of 2013-2014				26				47				39				28	



### 5.16 Outcomes of complaints responded to at stage one

<b>Complaint type</b>	<b>Not Upheld</b>	<b>Partially Upheld</b>	<b>Upheld</b>	<b>Total</b>
Behaviour/attitude of staff	12	8	10	<b>30</b>
Lack of support	7	6	6	<b>19</b>
Contact arrangements	6	6	6	<b>18</b>
Delays in assessments/court reports		2	3	<b>5</b>
Delays in making decisions		2	2	<b>4</b>
Delays in providing a service			1	<b>1</b>
Not providing a service	3		2	<b>5</b>
Complaints about a service	7	1		<b>8</b>
Withdrawal of a service		2		<b>2</b>
Foster carer not being paid fostering plus		1		<b>1</b>
Looked after child not receiving savings from pocket money.			1	<b>1</b>
Complaints about foster carers	2	2	1	<b>4</b>
Lack of communication	8	8	20	<b>36</b>
Lack of information			1	<b>1</b>
Disagreeing with an assessment	6	4	6	<b>16</b>
Disagreeing with a decision	13	2		<b>15</b>
Number of changes of social worker			8	<b>8</b>
Request to change social worker	5	1		<b>6</b>
Breach of confidentiality	3			<b>3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>184*</b>

\*The totals below differ from the total number of 133 complaints as complainants may have more than one issue they wish to complain about.



## 6. Stage two investigations

6.1 Four stage two investigations were concluded in 2014-2015.

- i. Mr D complained that his concerns about his daughter Z were not taken seriously in 2006. He also complained that in 2007 that the mother was disqualified for drink driving after having a 'head on crash' with Z in the vehicle and that this was not taken seriously.

The first complaint about not following up the father's concerns was not upheld as there was evidence that the social worker had followed up on all the father's concerns.

In respect of the head-on crash the investigators had felt that a strategy discussion would have been appropriate to obtain a clearer picture of the home situation in 2007. This part of the complaint was only partially upheld as the matter was in court and the Judge was made aware of the incident and did not make any orders about where Z should live.

- ii. Mr and Mrs E complained about the lack of communication from the social worker following a section 47 investigation. Mr and Mrs E complained that the social worker missed appointments, did not answer their e-mails or return their phone calls. They complained that the social worker had missed visits and then demanded to see the children in the school holidays when they were busy. They were also very unhappy that Mr E had been asked to leave the family home while the social worker undertook an assessment. They complained about the length of time it took to complete the assessment.

Eighteen issues were investigated. Seven issues were upheld, most of these were about a lack of communication, five issues were partially upheld and six were not upheld. The lack of communication resulted in a breakdown of the relationship between the social worker and the parents who then refused to allow the social worker to speak to the children.

The lessons learnt from this stage two investigation are:

- The assessment process should be explained to the family; had the parents been aware that the social worker needed to visit the parents and speak to the children on a regular basis while the assessment was being completed this might have lead to better co-operation from the parents.
  - The risk assessment should be completed as quickly as possible.
  - If a parent or child requests a change of social worker and this request is declined the team manager should explain their reasons for refusing such a request.
- iii. Mr and Mrs B complained about the length of time it took for their application for a special guardianship order in respect of their niece to be finalised. Due to numerous changes of social workers and their managers there had been a very long delay in getting into court to obtain the order. This complaint was upheld as there had been drift in decision making in this case.

The lessons learnt included:

- Procedures have been put in place to ensure better tracking of cases discussed at legal meetings as well as more focused supervision and monitoring of decisions made at looked after meetings
  - The connected carers' policy is being updated and training will be provided in respect of assessments of connected carers.
  - Ensuring that the necessary checks on connected carers are undertaken as a matter of urgency as soon as a child is placed with a connected carer.
- iv. Adopters complained that prior to X being placed in their care they were not informed that X had any special needs. They stated that they were informed that X was developing appropriately, was sociable and was meeting all his milestones which encouraged them to proceed with adopting X. They believed that the Child's Permanence Report (CPR) contained false and misleading information. The adopters listed 19 issues they wanted investigated at stage two. Nine of these were upheld and ten were not upheld.

The recommendations following the stage two investigations were as follows:

- The Child's Permanence Report should include details of the child's development so that the prospective adopters have a very clear picture of the child's development to date. This should include social communication and speech and language as well as physical milestones.
- Any possible health concerns should be referred to a health professional.
- Social workers and foster carer's should have training on child development especially on social communication developmental milestones. Social workers should provide a report for an adoption medical and include any concerning behaviours in their report.

The complainants were still unhappy with their response to their stage two complaint and requested that a stage 3 panel reviewed their complaint.

## **7. Stage three review panel**

- 7.1 Following a review by a panel of three independent people the conclusion was that five complaints that had not been upheld at stage two were upheld.
- 7.2 The panel concluded that with the exception of an agency worker, whose contract was terminated by Medway Council, no one person was responsible for the breakdown of the adoption placement. The panel also suggested that the Council should look at the financial expenses incurred by the complainants and consider some financial compensation.

7.3 As a result of this complaint the following actions have been completed:

- Two training courses have been delivered on writing effective Child Permanence Reports (CPRs), two more are organised for July and August 2015
- The issues raised in the complaint have been considered by the adoption panel and the panel liaison meeting and the lessons learnt were included in the agenda for an adoption panel training day.
- All foster carers are undertaking training on completing foster carers logs and on completing reports for professional forums.
- The fostering social worker will sign off all foster carers logs and reports and address any issues of poor quality.
- All CPRs will be updated for matching panels.
- Training has been commissioned for all social workers on early recognition of developmental disorders.

## **8. Local Government Ombudsman**

8.1 There were two referrals to the Local Government Ombudsman between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015.

8.2 The one referral was the adoptive couple who were still not happy with the outcome of the complaint. The Local Government Ombudsman is still investigating their complaint.

8.3 One complainant referred his complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman prematurely as he had not gone through the children's complaints procedure.

## **9. Advocacy Support**

9.1 During 2014-2015 the Young Lives Foundation provided advocacy support to a total of 44 young people in Medway, of which 38 were new referrals.

9.2 Of the 38 cases concluded during this reporting period approximately 24 were considered to have achieved a satisfactory outcome for the young person. In 14 cases it was not possible to record the outcome of the advocacy intervention due to the young person either losing contact or disengaging with the service. Of the 38 new referrals received 6 remain ongoing.

9.3 The children gave the following feedback:

- 100% of the young people who returned feedback forms to the advocacy service said they found their advocate really helpful and friendly and easily contactable.
- 100% of those who returned feedback forms also said that they would recommend having an advocate to a friend.  
*'My advocate listened to me, she was taking notes and when she sent an email it included everything I said'*  
*'My advocate explained what was happening all the time and I understood'*

## 10. Timeliness of Response

- 10.1 The statutory timescales in working days for the procedures are set out in paragraph 3.2 above.
- 10.2 The Council aims to deal with complaints as quickly and as comprehensively as possible. Sometimes the Council is not able to issue responses to the complainant as quickly as required because the complaint is complicated or may need dialogue across multiple service areas. Service users have advised the Council that the most important thing to them is to be kept informed about what is what is happening, therefore the Council always makes contact, usually in writing, to explain the reason for the delay and confirm when they will receive a response.
- 10.3 The following table sets out the time taken to answer stage one complaints during 2014-2015.

Reply sent	Within 10 days	11 to 20 days	21 to 25 days	26 to 65 days	More than 65 days	Total
Stage 1	13	28	16	29	31	117

## 11. Listening to children

- 11.1 Looked after children told us what they want
- To tell their story once
  - Us to listen and take seriously what they say
  - Understanding that it's not easy to complain
  - To be kept in touch with what is happening
  - Their issues to be dealt with quickly but thoroughly
- 11.2 Medway Council commissions an advocacy service from Young Lives Foundation, who provides a service to assist children and young people in making complaints or to resolve concerns that they might have.
- 11.3 Types of issues complained about and outcomes of children's complaints
- Ten looked after children and two children in need complained in 2014-2015, four sent in their own response, two were supported by their foster carer, six had an advocate to complain on their behalf.
- A looked after child, supported by an advocate, complained that she did not want to move from her current residential placement where she was very settled and happy. An updated assessment was undertaken and that her wishes and feelings were taken into account regarding where she lived, resulting in her remaining in the placement.
  - Two looked after children complained that their social worker (they both had the same social worker) missed their appointments and had not applied for the one young person's passport. They requested a change of social worker. They were supported to make their complaints by their foster carer. They received an apology from the senior practitioner and the social worker.

After a discussion with the senior practitioner they decided not to change social workers. The passport was applied for and obtained.

- Another looked after young person complained about the way his looked after review was organised, that no invitations had been sent out and it had been arranged on a day his social worker did not work. He also complained about the way he was addressed by the IRO; that he felt belittled and put down. He requested a different IRO. The response offered him an apology about how he was made to feel and he was introduced to a new IRO.
- A care leaver was allocated to a social work student. He was very happy with the way she had supported him. However when she left he was allocated his previous social worker. His complaint was that the social worker had not kept appointments and did not apply for his passport. He had previously complained about this social worker. He was allocated another social worker.
- A seventeen year-old looked after child complained about her foster carers; several issues were investigated by Medway Partnership Commissioning, as well as the independent fostering agency. The concerns arising from the complaint were discussed at the agency's fostering panel.
- A sixteen year old, who had been placed in foster care under police protection, complained that her wishes and views were not listened to when her foster placement was ended and she was told to return home to her parents, who lived in another local authority. She applied to Medway Housing for accommodation. Following her complaint she was re-accommodated by Medway Council.
- A care leaver complained that she had not received her savings when she left care. She said that the foster carer had saved £5 a week for her and that this amount had not been transferred to her next placement. As a result of her complaint she received a cheque for savings made for her by both placements.
- A care leaver complained that he had not received any savings when he left care. He had been accommodated in two different residential placements. The result is that the savings from the one placement have been identified and will be transferred to the young person's bank account. A policy regarding savings for looked after children is being written.
- A care leaver complained that his social worker is often off sick and that since she moved into semi-independence she had had some really bad times, with no support. He requested a new social worker, which was arranged.
- A disabled young person complained about the fact that he was seen by a social worker at his school. He was asked about how things were going at home. He replied "not so good." This was quoted in an assessment and caused a lot of upset at home. He had asked to see the assessment as he could not remember exactly what he said and explained that "If what I said is causing Mum and Dad distress I should know what I said." He had not been shown the assessment despite asking to see it. He also wanted the social worker to understand how he felt in the interview. As a result of the

complaint the social worker explained the went through the assessment with him.

- A seventeen year mother, who had suffered domestic violence and was subject to a child protection plan, complained that she did not like the accommodation she was placed in. The outcome was to help her move to live with her grandmother.

## **12. Learning from Complaints**

- That they were not included in the assessment process; that section 7 reports, requested in civil court cases, were biased; that contact with their children had not been arranged, that social workers did not listen to their concerns and that there was a lack of communication from the social worker. These issues were addressed at team meetings and through supervision and resulted in a marked reduction in the number of fathers complaining in the last quarter of 2014-2015.
- The learning from the complaint from a disabled child was that someone with autism might not understand an assessment process. It is important to be very clear with children about the purpose of an interview and to explain the assessment process. They should also receive feedback when the assessment is completed.
- Lessons can also be learnt from complaints regarding staff behaviour and attitudes. The quarterly reports have been used to inform the children's services training plan for 2015-16 to ensure that social workers are able to establish effective relationships with the parents and children they work with.
- The importance of positive relationships was also highlighted when parents and children complained that they had been allocated a different social worker. Lessons have been learnt about the importance of good transfers when a social worker leaves Medway Council or a case is transferred to another team.
- Following two complaints from looked after children Medway Council is writing a policy in respect of how looked after children can be encouraged to save some of their pocket money and where that money will be saved.

## **13. Compliments**

13.1 The Council is proud to receive compliments and thanks from people who are satisfied with Council services and happy about the way in which the Council works with them. Twenty-two compliments about children's social care were received in 2014-2015. Lessons can be learnt from what works well as they provide feedback as to which services and practices are effective.

### **13.2 Compliments about foster carers:**

- A social worker complimented foster carers on their excellent work with a looked after child; their hard work and dedication had helped the child to move successfully to an adoption placement.

- The Legal Gateway Panel commended a foster carer for her excellent work with a looked after child.
- A social worker complimented a foster carer and her family on their good work with a severely disabled young person. The foster carer has developed positive links with the birth family and all professionals involved with the looked after child. The foster carer's ability and skill in establishing positive links and relationships has really benefited the looked after child.
- A social worker complimented a foster carer about her commitment to transporting the children from the coast to schools in Medway. The boys have been transformed since they were placed with the foster carer.

### 13.3 Compliments about social workers

- Seven compliments were received from Independent Reviewing Officers about social workers good communication with parents, their good relationships with the children, their hard work in achieving positive outcomes for children, their professionalism, high standard of reports, good assessments of risk, excellent records and care planning.
- The mother said that the social worker was supportive and helpful. She stated that she is delighted with her child's placement and she can go to bed at night knowing that her son is safe and well cared for.
- A foster carer complimented a social worker who had achieved a great deal for the children since the case was allocated to her. In a short period the social worker had arranged counselling for the children, developed good care plans and the permanency panel had agreed that the foster carers should apply for special guardianship.
- An inclusions manager e-mailed a social worker to say how impressed she was with the social worker's hard work and dedication, which resulted in a very successful transition from a foster placement to an adoption placement.
- A couple who are adopting a child e-mailed to say how supportive their adoption worker had been throughout their journey to adoption.
- A compliment was received from Families First (Troubled Families) thanking the social worker and the team manager for their prompt response to ensure that a child was returned home. They said it was a pleasure working with them.
- A residential school were impressed with a social worker's outstanding commitment and dedication to a family. There was good communication and the social worker had worked in partnership with the school.
- Adoptive parents sent the following text to the social worker after the conclusion of the adoption process. *"Thank you for all your superb help, without you we wouldn't be in this position today. Thanks for caring so much for the kids and making such a positive difference to their lives. We feel so privileged to have Y and feel very fortunate to have had you involved in the*

*process. Thank you so much for everything. You've been the best support ever and we can't thank you enough."*

- A Leaving Care Personal Advisor complimented a social worker for her professionalism and clear communication within a recent meeting regarding a potentially volatile young person and for her very good joint working.
- A Health Visitor complimented a team manager and a social worker.  
*"I have found that both of you demonstrate a commitment to joint working and communication. This is not always apparent with other professionals. I have had very positive feedback from the parents about both of you and your communication with me has always been timely and appropriate. Thank you for adopting this approach to joint working. I look forward to working with you again"*
- A mother told the IRO at a LAC review that E is the best social worker her children have had. The mother stated that the social worker had helped her children. The mother commented that she trusts E, who listens, says what needs to be said, answers phone calls. All this enabled Ms A to accept her input and work with E.
- The chair of the legal gateway panel (LGW) sent the following compliment to a social worker:  
*"Just wanted to thank you for your case presentation at LGW panel this week, it was quite clear you really knew this child and the family history plus you had assessed risk so well that your presentation was very good. This is above the standard I would expect for a worker who has only just completed the social work degree, but you presented with confidence and ability that it was both easy for me as chair and the legal advisor to reach a threshold decision."*
- A staff member from an independent fostering agency complimented a social worker for the support provided to two looked after children. The social worker was very efficient and was excellent at keeping the agency fully informed about anything concerning the boys. She kept in regular contact. She is quick to respond to any communication either by phone or email and has been very supportive.
- A solicitor complimented a social worker on a very good statement for court.
- A barrister complimented a family worker on the way she gave evidence in court; her evidence was impressive and spot on. The Medway Council legal representative said the family worker had a rare gift for giving evidence. He added that it is only through such clear evidence that we can protect children.

#### 13.4 Compliment from a looked after child

- A looked after child wrote to the team manager thanking her for funding his Mid-Kent College trip to France. He said the trip helped him to let go of his troubles and to focus more on his college course. He wrote, "I don't know what I'd have done without you. I know everything isn't all sorted yet, but I'm



in a much better position than I would have”.

- A looked after child thanked his social worker for all her help with his move to university. “I appreciate everything you've done for me since you became my social worker. Thank you very much.”

## **14. Improving Complaints Management**

14.1 In managing complaints we are guided by the following principles of good complaint handling:

- Getting it right first time
- Providing clear information about how to complain
- Providing support to the complainant
- Being customer focused
- Listening to customers
- Being open and accountable
- Acting fairly and proportionately
- Recording complaints
- Responding in a timely way
- Putting things right if a mistake was made
- Learning from complaints and seeking continuous improvement

14.2 A qualified social worker was appointed, in April 2013, as the Social Care Complaints Manager in the Customer Relations Team. She risk assesses the children’s complaints and undertakes the role of independent officer in stage two investigations.

14.3 Quarterly reports were presented to the Children and Adults Management Team in 2014-2015 providing information on the number of complaints, types of complaints and learning from complaints as well recommendations to improve services if this was appropriate.

14.4 The service invited young people from the Children in Care Council and the Care Leaver’s Group, as well as young people who had made a complaint, to a task and finish focus group on 14 November 2014. The feedback from this group of twelve young people was:

- There was a lack of information about how to complain.
- They did not know about the advocacy service.
- They did not want to leave a message on a voice mail when they phoned the social care complaints telephone number.
- The current complaints leaflet was not clear about the three stages in the complaints procedure.
- When they made a complaint they were left not knowing what was happening regarding their complaint and did not know who to contact to find out what was happening.
- They want the independent reviewing officer to hand out a complaints leaflet at the first looked after child review.
- They also want the independent reviewing officer to check at every subsequent looked after review that the child or young person knew how to complain.
- They want a young person to be their buddy throughout the complaints process.

14.5 The following actions have been taken in response:

- The young people designed a very colorful complaints leaflet which provides clarity about the three stages of the complaints process as well as how to complaint to the Local Ombudsman. It also has information about the advocacy service. The Independent Reviewing Officers are handing the complaints leaflet out at every initial looked after child review.
- Every looked after child, who is 12 years and older, was sent the new complaints leaflet.
- The customer relations team are aware that wherever possible phones should be forwarded to someone who can take a call rather than using voice mail if they are out of the office. They will always receive a call back in response to any voice mail message left if they are already busy on the phone.
- The leaflet explains the various ways a young person can make a complaint. The social care complaints manager is ensuring that children's social care teams are aware of how complaints can be made, by including the information in the induction pack for social workers, through ongoing communication at children's social care team meetings as well raising awareness with other teams such as Customer Contact.
- All complainants receive a letter acknowledging their complaint and explaining how to contact the social care complaints manager. When an advocate has sent in a complaint on behalf of a child or young person, the letter of acknowledgement is sent to the advocate. The advocates are aware that they need to ask the child or the young person making the complaint if they want a copy of any correspondence that is sent to the advocate.
- The customer relations team chase up all complaints that have not been replied to within ten days.
- A young person has been appointed to be a buddy to young people making a complaint. This person will work with the Consultation and Engagement Team to raise children and young people's awareness of their right to complain and to make sure they know how to complain and who to contact if they have not received a response within the time limit.
- A feedback form was sent out to every young person who had made a complaint between 1 April and 30 November 2014. Unfortunately, no one replied. This may have been because half of the young people who were sent a feedback form participated in the group mentioned above. The customer relations team now routinely sends out a feedback form to children or young people after they have received a response to their complaint. So far no forms have been returned and we are now looking at different ways to receive feedback from young people.

14.6 Information on how to make a children's social care complaint has been updated on the Medway Council website. This includes the child friendly complaints leaflet.

- 14.7 Training on complaint handling was provided in 2014-15 for all team managers. The social care manager will continue to ensure that children's social care teams are aware of how children and their carers can complain. The quarterly complaints reports are presented to Children and Adults Directorate Team meetings, ensuring that lessons are learnt from complaints. The social care manager attends the Children's Social Care Senior management team every three months to discuss the quarterly complaints and any lessons that can be learnt from complaints.
- 14.8 The social care complaints manager also attends the Quality Assurance and Performance Groups which look at what is working well, concerns and what needs to happen in respect of complaints.

## 15. Risk management

- 15.1 Risk management is an integral part of good governance. The Council has a responsibility to identify and manage threats and risks to achieve its strategic objectives and enhance the value of services it provides to the community.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
Not handling complaints properly and more importantly not learning from complaints could put a child at risk.	Good complaint handling, including the identification of improvement opportunities from complaints received, helps ensure that the services are provided in a complete and timely way, minimising the possibility of a vulnerable child being put at risk.	Improved management and control of complaint procedures, learning from complaint analysis, helps to identify and minimise potential risk or impact of risk to children

## 16. Equalities Data

- 16.1 The Council is committed to achieving equality of opportunity, access and outcomes for all, through the delivery and commissioning of high-quality services that are accessible, fair, and mainstreaming equality and diversity across all service delivery activities. All new services commissioned are subject to a diversity impact assessment that compels service providers to think carefully about its target audience and demonstrate how it intends to serve their needs. This gives the Council a better measure of the impact the services are having on the community.
- 16.2 Our service users come from many different ethnic backgrounds and many have disabilities. We will refer all looked after children to the advocacy service. If a complainant is not able to send in a written complaint we will see the complainant at a venue that is convenient and assessable for them. We will organise a translator if required. We actively look at ways of improving equality and diversity monitoring to ensure we are providing services fairly to service users who come from different ethnic groups and religious backgrounds, and to understand which groups need more help to be able to tell us their views and concerns.

## **17 Financial and Legal issues**

17.1 Local authorities must publish an annual report under the Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.

17.2 There are no financial issues arising directly from this report.

## **18. Recommendations**

18.1 That the committee note the report.

### **Contact:**

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### **Appendices:**

None

### **Background papers:**

None