



People Directorate
Compliments and Complaints
Children's Social Care

Annual Report

1st April 2020 – 31st March 2021

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1. Background and Context

This report sets out information regarding compliments and complaints made by, or on behalf of children, young people and parents/carers who receive support or services from the Local Authority.

It is a statutory requirement to produce an annual report which will be published on the Council's website.

The current legislation requires local authorities to appoint a 'responsible person' with responsibility for ensuring compliance with the following arrangements:

- Managing, developing and administering the complaints procedure
- Providing assistance and advice to those who wish to complain
- Liaising with services regarding the investigation of complaints where appropriate
- Supporting and training existing and new members of staff
- Monitoring and reporting on complaints activity

Staff will always try to resolve problems or concerns before they escalate into complaints and this ensures that investigations are kept to a minimum.

Bracknell Forest Council has set procedures for resolving complaints to ensure that: -

- The views and experiences of people who use the services are heard
- Positive feedback is used to develop services and highlight good practice
- We continually learn as an organisation and resolve things
- We can sustain a quality focus on our customers

Our aims are to:

- Resolve complaints quickly and where possible using formal measures
- Offer early resolution of complaints
- Reduce escalations in turn addressing cost implications
- Learn lessons from complaints

2. Bracknell Forest Children's Statutory Complaints Procedure

The complaints process aims to be as accessible as possible. Complaints may be made by telephone, in writing, by email or using our online complaints form on the Bracknell Forest Council's public website.

Children's Statutory Complaints:

Bracknell Forest adopts a three-stage process for dealing with complaints which is in line with statutory guidance, '*Getting the Best from Complaints*' (2006) setting out the following stages: -

- Stage 1 – Informal/Local Resolution
- Stage 2 – Formal Independent Investigation
- Stage 3 – Independent Review Panel Hearing

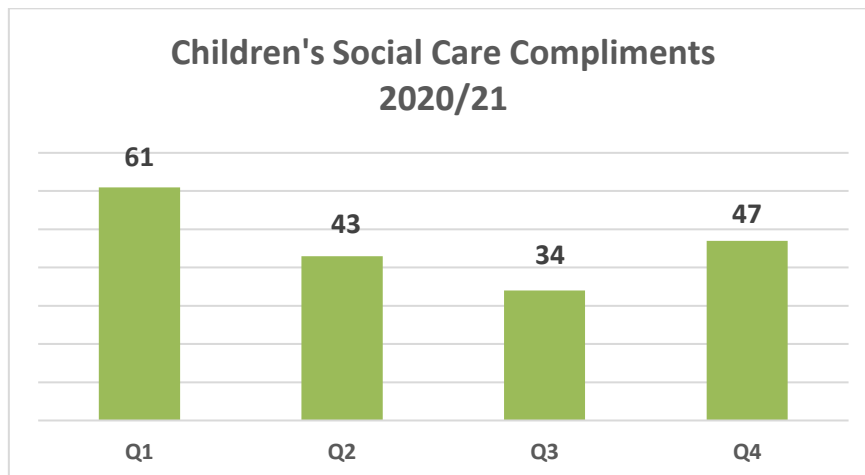
An independent advocate for children and young people is commissioned via Action for Children where required, to ensure effective representation to support early and prompt resolution of complaints.

If the complainant is not happy with the outcome of their complaint, they can refer the matter to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for consideration. Representations may be made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) at any stage and any member of the public is able to complain to the Ombudsman if they feel there has been maladministration or injustice, however, the LGSCO will not normally accept the complaint until the Council has had a chance to complete all stages of the complaints procedure.

Complaints not covered by this process will be dealt with under the Local Authority's Corporate Complaints Procedure. These can include complaints made by parents/carers about their own experiences and not that of their children or foster children.

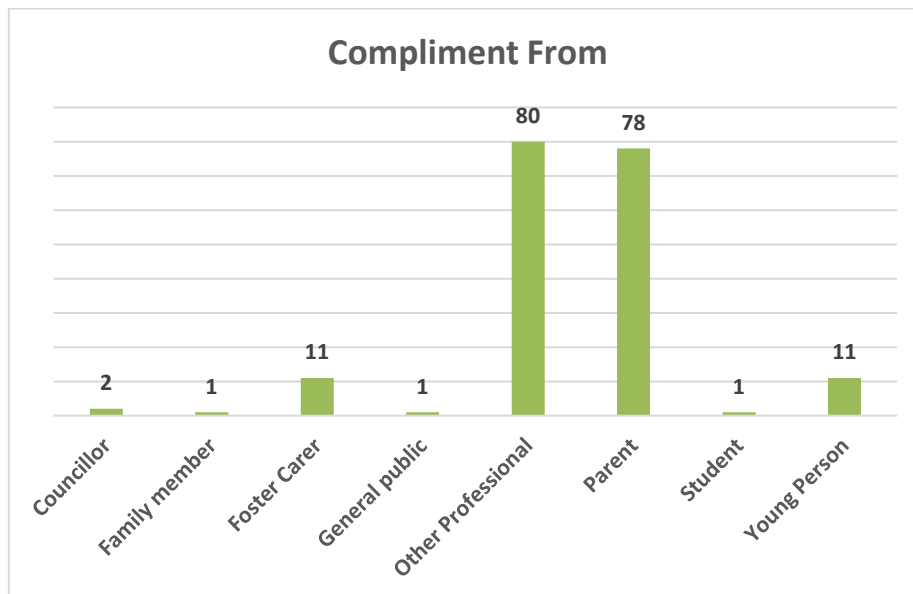
3. Children's Social Care Compliments

Compliments are received from a wide range of sources across the different services, through the use of surveys, activity feedback and direct consultation exercises. All compliments received from external sources and internal professionals/agencies are sent to the individual's line manager to support the appraisal process and personal development of employees.



Year	Number of compliments
2018/19	83
2019/20	173
2020/21	185

During 2020/21 there were 185 compliments received which is higher than the previous year 2019/20 when it was 173. This is an increase of 6.9%. In 2018/19 there were 83 compliments received. This reflects a year on year increase in compliments and suggests improved quality of service to our service users.

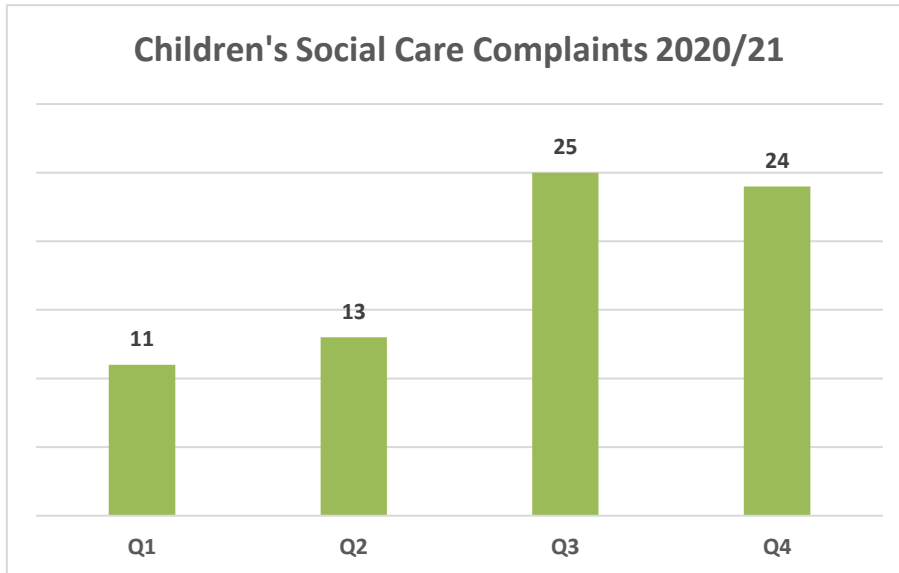


What are compliments saying?

- **Young Person** – “Honestly thank you like you’ve helped me out so much couldn’t do it without you! Honestly, it’s gonna be hard having to say goodbye to you as much as I get annoyed, I haven’t had a better social worker than you”
- **Parent** – “Just wanted to say a big thank you to you and your team for the wonderful food parcels that you sent us. The kids were really excited, and it made my day. Thanks for bringing a bit of sunshine to us over this holiday it was greatly received. Please thank all those involved, especially the driver who delivered it”
- **Young Person** – “Thanks so much for all the help you’ve done for me I know it’s such a crazy time atm and everything’s taking long but honestly I couldn’t do this without you I promise I’ll make You proud one day and sort my life out and work hard. I can’t thank you enough for all your help”
- **Parent** – “What can I say only WOW and thank you all so much for such a brilliant resource and your hard work during this difficult time for all of us so once again massive thanks, take care”
- **Young Person** – “they were singing your praises as the best social worker they’ve ever had – saying that you always listened and got stuff done”
- **Foster Carer** – “Thank you very much for your lovely message and the clapping. And a huge thank you to all your team and the work you do every day. We really appreciate your continued support, constant guidance and the encouragement that you have had to do virtually over the last few months”

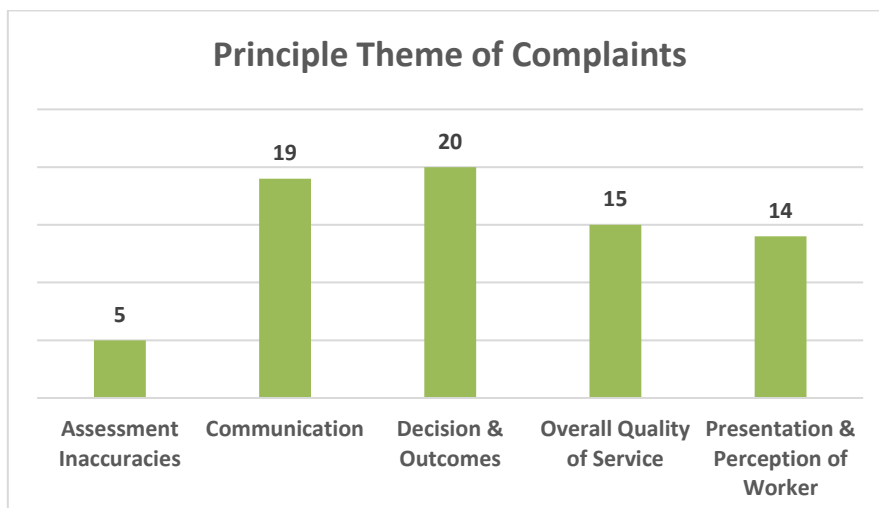
- **Parent** – “Just like to thank you for all your hard work you have done for me and my son I like to wish you all the best for the future”
- **Young Person** – “I just wanted to say thank you for being the best social worker I could have asked for”

4. Children’s Social Care Complaints



Year	Number of complaints
2018/19	107
2019/20	77
2020/21	73

During 2020/21 there were 73 complaints received compared to 77 received in 2019/20. This is a decrease of 5.1%. In 2018/19 there were 107 complaints. This reflects a decrease each year on complaints received.

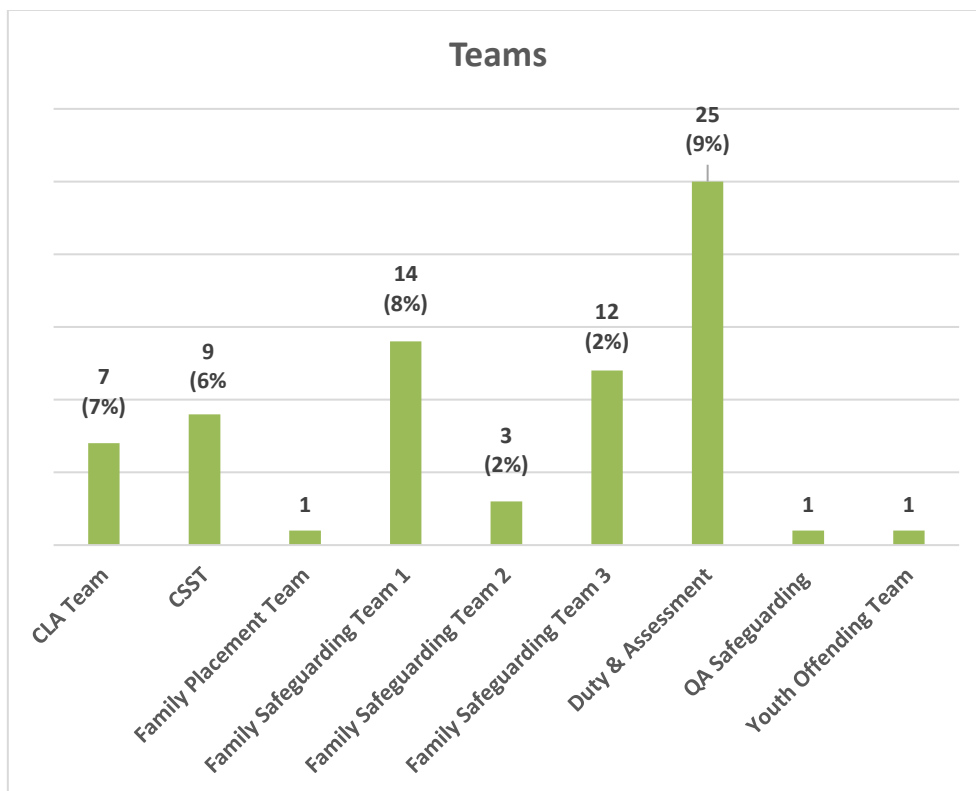


In 2020/21, Decision and Outcomes was still the most common complaint, this was the same main theme as in 2019/20.

In Children’s Social Care workers have to make decisions on behalf of families taking into account the risks posed for children, this is not always what parents/carers wish as the outcome, but the safety of children is at the forefront of the work undertaken within Children’s Social Care.

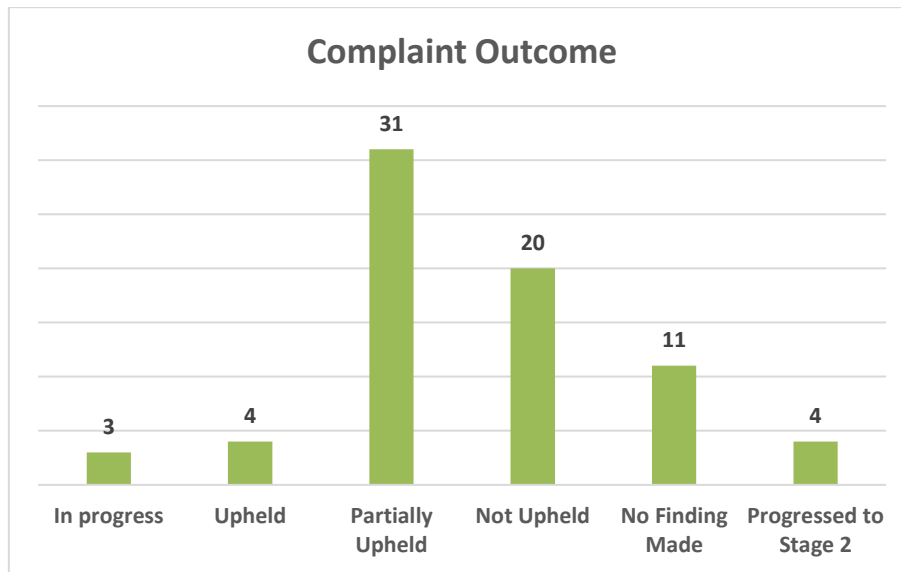
Whilst these decisions sometimes lead to complaints the council ensures that we always investigate them objectively in order to identify learning and ensure the quality of practice of our social workers.

During the past year in which there was a global pandemic this impacted significantly on the way that children’s social care works. This included the need to change the way that services operated at short notice, and meant that teams and services were operating beyond their normal capacity. This could be the cause of complaints regarding communication, staff working at home and no face to face contacts can cause delays in communication.



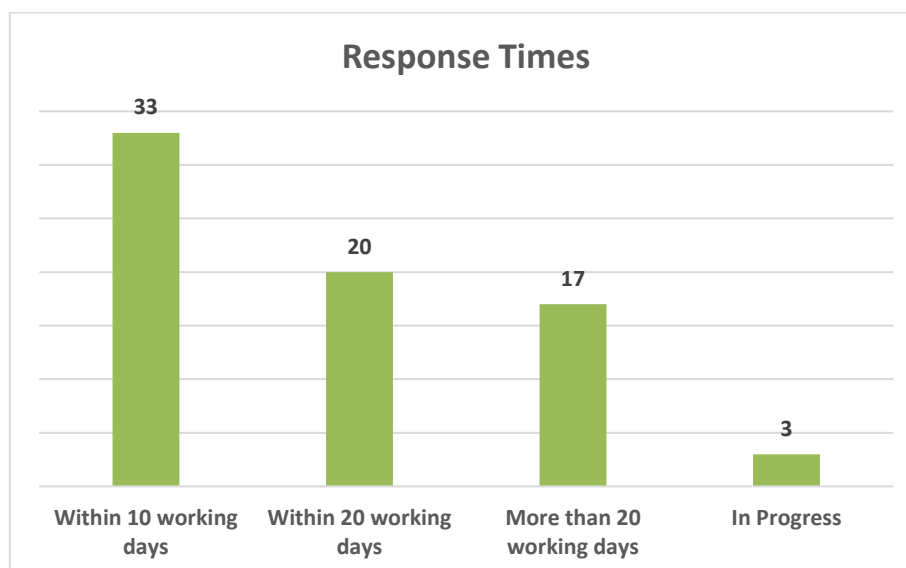
If we compare the number of open cases at year end 31/03/2021 compared to the number of complaints received for each team during this time the % is as above

5. Analysis of Complaints



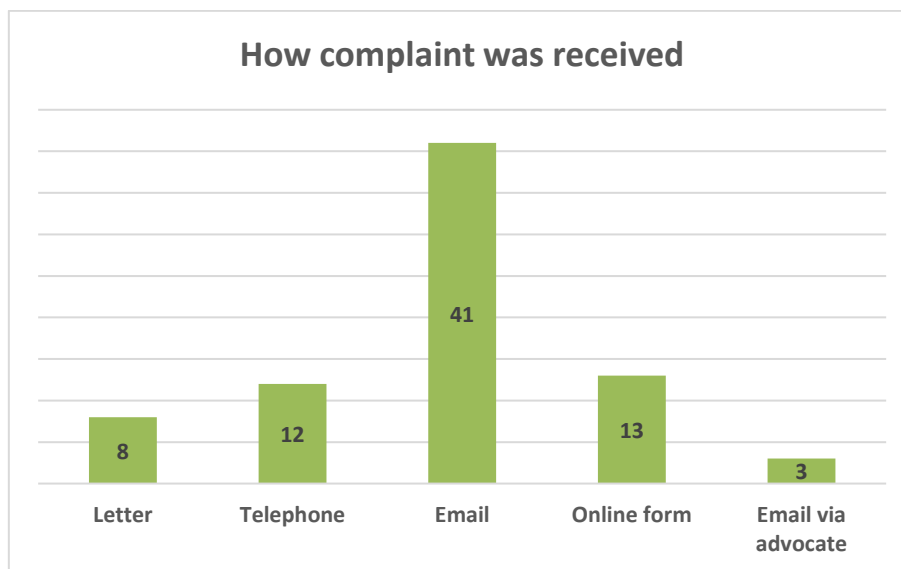
During 2020/21 in total 8% (4) of complaints were upheld compared to 1% (1) during 2019/20. However, a further 40% (31) of complaints were partially upheld compared to 43% (33) during 2019/20. 28% (20) of complaints received were not upheld compared to the 42% (32) in 2019/20.

5% (4) of complaints escalated to the next stage of the Childrens Statutory Complaints procedure compared to 6% (5) in 2019/20. Overall, this shows a broadly similar pattern to previous years in that approximately half of all complaints made are either upheld or partially upheld (meaning that some rather than all aspects of the complaint were upheld).



Whilst it is the aim to respond to most complaints within 10 working days, 20 working days are allowed for more complex complaints. The aim is to work within these timescales, but sometimes the response can go over 20 working days if this involves meeting with complainants or further investigations are required.

During the past year there were 17 complaints that took longer than 20 days. This is an average of 29 days to respond. This compares to 11 complaints in the previous year sent out of timescales which took an average of 32 days to respond. This reflects improved performance this year. Response timeliness is addressed through Management meetings and general reminder to all team managers and assistant team managers of the timescales expected.



6. Cost of Complaints Service & Investigations

Children's Social Care has had six Stage 2 investigations completed this year, two of which were carried forward from the previous year. There has been one Stage 3 completed this year using the Corporate Complaints process because it did not meet the criteria for the children's statutory complaints procedures.

The cost of the seven investigations was £21,943.72 (average cost £3.1k) compared to the cost of £13,208.00 (average cost £4.4k) during 2019/20 where there were only three investigations completed. The costs of each investigation have been reduced due to alternative methods of working due to Covid-19. This has meant that all interviews and hearings have been held via Microsoft teams saving the Council travelling and mileage costs to the Investigating Officer and Independent Person. We will reflect on the learning from this for future years and consider how we will permanently adapt our processes.

7. Learning from Complaints

For all complaints that progress to Stage 2 or Stage 3, reflective/learning meetings are held so that staff can reflect and learn from the complaints received. On a wider scale, learning from complaints is a feature of twice yearly, Learning Events across Children’s Social Care. The Complaints Manager works with our Principal Social Worker to ensure that learning contributes to the ongoing development of our social care workforce.

The Complaints Manager is always at hand to offer advice and explain the policy and procedures to all members of staff.

The Complaints Manager and other members of the Quality Assurance and Safeguarding team hold quarterly induction training for all new staff. During the past year these have been held via Microsoft teams.

What’s gone well?	What can be done better?	What are we doing about it? What have we done?
Reflective/learning group meetings with practitioners involved in the complaint	Strengthen the mechanisms to evidence the learning	Complaints discussed within Supervision with staff involved – evidenced in audit findings;
Increase in compliments and decrease in complaints	Increase the frequency of briefings on ‘how to respond to complaints’; Response times within 10 working days in line with our procedure	Planning additional briefing sessions; individual discussions with practitioners to inform effective responses; Stage 1 learning from complaints being sent monthly to AD, TM & ATM’s; Quarterly reports to be sent to AD, TM & ATM’s; Action tracker; dip sampling to check actions progressed
Learning Events across Children’s Social Care	Support staff learning through use of anonymised live case examples	Being included in next Learning Event; Articles in QA newsletter; compliments and complaints poster
Induction training for all new staff	Support 1:1 learning when new staff receive their first complaint and to reduce likelihood of re-occurrence	Link in with PSW to support learning at this level

8. Recommendations

1. Continued training for all involved in the complaints process to support effective responses to complaints
2. Complaints manager will work closely with the Children's Principal Social Worker to capture the learning points into workforce improvement activities.
3. Contribute to the development of a Quality Assurance Board that will include learning from complaints across the People Directorate and maintain oversight of agreed action plans and complaints trends
4. Continue to hold reflective/learning meetings following Stage 2 investigations & Stage 3 panel hearings
5. Provide monthly report to the CSC Assistant Director, Heads of Service, Team Managers and Assistant Team Managers of Stage 1 complaints received to gather the learning to discuss with Social Workers and all staff
6. Provide quarterly reports to Assistant Director, Head of Service, Team Managers, Assistant Team Managers during the year ahead
7. Undertake further analysis, reporting and engagement to ensure that we reduce the number of Stage 1 complaints that are responded to out of timescale