

Together for Children Customer Feedback Annual Report 2018-2019



1. PURPOSE OF THE ANNUAL REPORT

1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide information relating to all complaints and compliments received in the period April 2018 – March 2019.

2. COMPLAINTS PROCESS

- 2.1. The Complaints Process for Statutory Children's Services follows the statutory guidance. This is a 3-stage process as follows:
 - <u>Stage One</u> the initial stage of the process is investigated by the appropriate Team Manager. The service
 must respond within 10 working days, however an extension up to 20 working days can be requested for
 more complex cases.
 - <u>Stage Two</u> on receipt of the response to their stage one complaint, complainants have 20 working days to
 progress their complaint to stage two if they are unhappy with the initial outcome. At this stage, the
 complaint is dealt with by an investigating officer and can take up to 65 working days to complete.
 - <u>Stage Three</u> if the complainant remains unhappy with the outcome of the stage two complaint, they have 20 working days to progress their complaint to stage three. At stage three, a review panel will be appointed to review the complaint. This will consist of three independent people who will make recommendations to the Director of Children's Services.
- 2.2. If the Complainant remains unhappy, they can raise their complaint with the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 2.3. Any complaints that do not relate to Statutory Children's Services, are handled under the Non-Statutory Complaints Procedure.

3. COMPLAINTS SUMMARY

Pre-Complaints

3.1 Pre-complaints are where issues and/or concerns presented by individuals are dealt with through informal resolution. Whist customers are provided with information about the complaints process and their rights to complain, we aim to achieve informal resolution where appropriate and when in the best interests of customers. The table below shows the pre-complaint data for each quarter:

	Q1 (Apr – Jun)	Q2 (Jul – Sep)	Q3 (Oct – Dec)	Q4 (Jan – Mar)	Total
Number received of Precomplaints	24	16	37	21	98
Escalated to Stage 1	1	2	1	0	4

3.1. Through responding to issues or concerns at the outset, we have helped our customers to receive satisfactory resolutions informally with just four (4%) pre-complaints escalating to a formal stage one complaint.

Complaints Received

3.2. The table below shows the number of complaints received across each stage of the complaints process:

Complaint Stage	No Received Q1 (Apr – Jun)	No Received Q2 (Jul – Sep)	No Received Q3 (Oct – Dec)	No Received Q4 (Jan-Mar)	YTD
Stage One	71	59	42	54	226
Stage Two	5	2	6	7	20
Stage Three	3	2	0	3	8
Corporate (Non-Statutory)	1	0	2	3	6
Total	80	63	50	67	260

- 3.3. In 2018-19 there were 226 stage one complaints received compared with 177 in 2017-18. This shows a 27.7% increase from the previous year. Across the first three quarters the number of stage one complaints reduced however in quarter four the numbers increased. 20 stage two complaints were received in 2018-19 compared with 14 in 2017-18. This is an increase of 42.9%. Eight stage three complaints were received which is a decrease compared with ten in the previous year.
- 3.4. The table below shows the number of stage one complaints received by service area or team.

Service Area / Team	Qtr1	Qtr2	Qtr3	Qtr4	YTD
Assessment Teams	7	7	10	6	30
Children Looked After / Permanence Teams	8	4	4	6	22
Children with Disabilities	4	8	1	4	17
Child Protection Central 4	3	5	4	4	16
Child Protection Washington 2	3	7	3	2	15
Child Protection Central 1	5	1	3	5	14
SEND Team / EHCP	5	0	3	6	14
Child Protection Central 2	5	3	0	3	11
Child Protection Washington 1	4	2	0	4	10
Child Protection Coalfields 2	2	3	3	2	10
Next Steps	2	3	2	3	10
ICRT	3	4	1	1	9
Child Protection Central 3	4	1	2	2	9
Child Protection Coalfields 1	4	2	0	1	7
Child Protection North 1	2	1	0	4	7
Child Protection North 2	5	1	1	0	7
Interim Assessment Teams	0	2	3	1	6
Early Help Team	2	2	0	0	4
Interim Locality Team	0	3	0	0	3
Emergency Duty Team (Out of Hours)	1	0	1	0	2
Youth Offending	1	0	0	0	1
Fostering	1	0	0	0	1
Family Contact Service	1	0	0	0	1
IRO	0	0	1	0	1
Total	71	59	42	54	226

3.5. The highest numbers of complaints received in 2018-19 relate to the child protection teams, which equates to 106. This is to be expected as child protection is the largest service area covering ten teams and due to the

nature of work carried out within this service however there has been an increase in the number of complaints from 80 to 106 when compared with the previous year. The second-highest complaints received in 2018-19 relate to the Assessment Teams (30) which is comparable to the previous year. The number of complaints received in the Children Looked After/Permanence Teams has increased from 10 to 22 when compared with the previous year and SEND/EHCP complaints have also seen an increase from 3 to 14.

Themes

3.6. The main themes of the complaints received at Stage one in 2018-19 are shown in the table below:

Quarter One	Quarter Two	Quarter Three	Quarter Four
Top Three Themes:	Top Three Themes:	Top Three Themes:	Top Three Themes:
 Communication issues i.e. not being able to contact worker and/or worker not keeping appropriately informed (15) Social worker attitude (15) Contact issues i.e. missed contacts, too few contacts, etc (13) 	 Communication issues i.e. not being able to contact worker and/or worker not keeping appropriately informed (20) Lack of or delays in taking required action (including against referrals) (18) Contact issues i.e. missed contacts, too few contacts, etc (9) 	Communication issues i.e. not being able to contact worker and/or worker not keeping appropriately informed (10) Contact issues i.e. missed contacts, too few contacts, etc (10) Social worker attitude (9)	 Communication issues i.e. not being able to contact worker and/or worker not keeping appropriately informed (10) Lack of action / Inappropriate action / delays (16) Contact issues i.e. missed contacts, too few contacts, etc (11)
Other Themes:	Other Themes:	Other Themes:	Other Themes:
 Case management and decisions (8) Inappropriate actions of social worker (7) Inaccuracies or missing information in reports (7) Alleged lies or accusations by social worker (6) Lack of appropriate or timely action against referrals (4) Financial issues (4) Lack of social worker support (4) Lack of progression or appropriate action (4) EHCP issues (4) Delay in or problems with assessment (4) Alleged data breach (3) 	 Alleged social work lies, false allegations or assumptions (6) Alleged information / data breaches (5) Social worker attitude (4) Alleged parental bias (4) Disagreement with plan or actions (4) Inaccuracies in records and / or reports (4) Cancelled provision (3) Lack of support (3) 	 Alleged social work lies, false allegations or assumptions (7) Lack of or delayed case progression (7) Social worker actions / lack of action (6) Alleged parental bias (3) Inaccuracies in records and / or reports / assessments (4) Lack of support (3) Disagreement with plan or actions (3) 	 Social worker attitude / behaviour (9) EHCP issues (6) Lack of support (5) Social worker turnover (5) Inaccuracies in records and / or reports / assessments (4) Placement issues (4) Lack of appropriate or timely action against referrals (4) Parental bias (3) Exclusion from meetings (3)

- 3.7. From April 2018 March 2019 most complaints related to communication issues i.e. not being able to contact worker and/or worker not keeping families appropriately informed. This is consistent across all four quarters and in line with the top themes identified in the 2017-18 report. Complaints regarding contact issues have increased, becoming one of top three themes in each quarter during 2018-19 compared with two quarters in the previous year.
- 3.8. Although the overall themes are similar to previous years, some additional themes have emerged compared with the previous year. These are as follows:
 - · Case management and decisions
 - Alleged lies or accusations by social worker
 - Lack of appropriate or timely action against referrals



- Financial issues
- EHCP issues
- Alleged data breach
- Alleged parental bias
- Cancelled provision
- 3.9. There will always be an element of dissatisfaction from the families that Children's Social Care are working with due to the nature of the work and families not always seeing at first that working with social care is in the child's best interest. To counteract the above, Children's Social Care are creating a more open culture where families can raise concerns and managers will spend time looking at their concerns in the first instance reducing the number that escalate to a formal complaint.
- 3.10. The top three themes are reviewed regularly by Children's Social Care Senior Management Team to identify if there are areas for improvement or if complaints relate to the same teams monthly. Senior Managers within Children's Social Care have also spoken first hand to complaints listening and responding to their concerns where appropriate.
- 3.11. Although it is accepted that complaints are inevitable, Children's Social Care also understand that by having a more stable workforce across all teams in social care this will increase the likelihood of strong and trusting relationships to develop between families and their worker hopefully reducing the number of complaints regarding communication and lack of action. TfC are striving towards this currently and have a strong recruitment campaign in process.

Number of Complaints by Young People

3.12. The table below shows the number of complaints from young people received across 2018-19 each stage of the complaints process. There has been a 46% decrease in complaints made by young people compared to the period 2017-18 (26).

Complaint Stage	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD
Stage One	1	3	2	7	13
Stage Two	0	0	0	0	0
Stage Three	1	0	0	0	1
Total	2	3	2	7	14

Timeliness of Response

3.13. The response time to stage one complaints has increased in 2018-19 from 56.6% in 2017-2018 to 69.9%. With the highest increase of timeliness completed in timescale in Q4. This shows that the response time to complaints is improving.

Complaint Stage	% of stage	Direction				
Complaint Stage	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD	of Travel
Stage 1 Complaints (Timescale 10-20 working days)	59.4%	73.9%	66.7%	88.2%	69.9%	→

3.14. A quality assurance process was introduced in October 2018 which incorporates all stage one letters completed by team manager across the service being approved by their Service Managers before being sent to the complainant. This purpose is to ensure the quality of stage one response letters are of a high standard and answer all elements appropriately. However, we are yet to see if this process has been effective in reducing the escalation of stage 2 complaints.

putting the child first

Complaint Outcomes

3.15. The outcomes of complaint elements for the year are shown below. The numbers completed do not equate to the numbers received, as there were complaints open at the start of the year from 2017/18 and complaints that remain open moving into 2019-20. Stage 3 elements are based on the panel dates.

Complaint Stage	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Unsubstantiated /Withdrawn				
Quarter One								
Stage One	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected				
Stage Two	7	3	17	6				
Stage Three	3	2	7	0				
		Quarter Tv	vo					
Stage One	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected				
Stage Two	2	0	2	0				
Stage Three	4	0	3	1				
		Quarter Thi	ree					
Stage One	24	25	104	23				
Stage Two	10	8	22	4				
Stage Three	7	1	17	6				
Totals	41	34	143	33				
%	16%	14%	57%	13%				
		Quarter Fo	ur					
Stage One	20	25	52	8				
Stage Two	11	10	16	3				
Stage Three	12	2	10	6				
Totals	43	37	78	17				
%	25%	21%	45%	10%				

- 3.16. In October 2018, the Customer Feedback Team started to record the outcome of individual elements at stage one in addition to the overall outcome (this was previously recorded in stage one response letters). Since October 281 elements were identified in Stage one complaints, of which 44 of the 281 elements were upheld equating to 15.6% of the overall elements.
- 3.17. Since April 2018, 13 stage two investigations have concluded which incorporated 121 elements. 30 of the 121 elements were upheld equating 24.8% of the overall elements. Since April 2018, of the 69 elements that went to Stage 3 panels the following outcomes changed; Elements not upheld reduced by 3, elements partially upheld reduced by 10 and elements upheld increased by 12.
- 3.18. The main subject areas of elements upheld at stage two and three in the period of October 2018 March 2019 are as follows:
 - Lack of regular updates and disruption to regular updates (2)
 - Failure to investigate stage 1 appropriately (2)
 - Failure to adequately assess family support and provide copies of assessment (2)
 - Lack of communication (2)
 - Failure to facilitate indirect contact as per court order (1)
 - Lack of statutory multi-agency CIN meeting (1)
 - Failure to follow child protection procedures (1)
 - Lack of management oversight (1)
 - Failure to consider the wishes and needs of young person (1)
 - Errors in assessment record (1)sat
 - Cancellation of meeting without notice (1)
 - Social Workers not familiar with the case (1)

- Parenting assessment not discussed with parents (1)
- Failure to support family through court process (referrals and advocates) (1)
- Incorrect recording of information (1)
- Failure to provide suitable support (1)
- Failure to follow procedures in relation to preparing and sharing ICPC report (1)
- Missed indirect contacts (1)
- No receipt of minutes (1)
- Lack of child's views in placement (1)
- 3.19. Comparing upheld elements with the previous year, there are a small number of themes that are reoccurring such as communication, lack of updates from workers, limited offer/use of advocacy services and adequacy of assessment. However due to the individualised nature of complaints it is difficult to say if the reasons for reoccurring themes are due to limited impact of recommendations or if it is due to other reasons. To assist with the analysis of themes, the upheld elements identified in both stage two investigations and stage three panels are reviewed quarterly by Children's Social Care Senior Management Team. The Customer Feedback Team identifies any reoccurring complaint elements and feeds this back at the quarterly meetings.

Ombudsman Referrals

3.20. Eight complaints were highlighted to the Customer Feedback Team in 2018-2019 by the Local Government Ombudsman. The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) is still making enquiries on two of the complaints. With regards to remaining six, the LGO concluded for three of the cases there was no further action required by TfC. The LGO did recommend for one case that a change in procedure was required and for the remaining two recommended that a stage 2 investigations should be carried out.

Lessons Learned

- 3.21. An action plan is maintained by the Customer Feedback Team which includes actions and recommendations from stage two investigations and stage three panels. The action plan is closely monitored by the team. Reminders are sent to managers with responsibility for the recommendations each month and reported into Senior Management Team meetings to ensure that the learning is shared across the whole service.
- 3.22. Below are some key actions that Together for Children is delivering, taking account of lessons learned.
 - Together for Children are currently reviewing their training offer to staff which will include mental capacity training.
 - Together for Children's legal team are in the process of implementing a process whereby duty solicitors will be asked to confirm legal advice given verbally with a follow up email, this can be added to the child's file which can assist when queries are received.
 - Although it is not a requirement to inform parents/carers on the outcome of a strategy meeting, Together for Children feel it should be a practice requirement and included in Together for Children's Practice Standards. This will be included in the next update and will extended to include a written outcome.
 - When a new referral is received, and an assessment has been requested, if the child has lived in a different area, workers are to ensure that all background information is requested including archived information.
 - Together for Children have recognised the need to develop more robust commissioning processes for disabled children's short break provision and have reflected this in our Sufficiency Strategy 2017-2020. To ensure six monthly reviews for short breaks are in place where it has been assessed that short breaks are necessary to meet the needs of a disabled child and their family.
 - To provide further training for Team Managers in authorising assessments, and in implementing a robust checking system to ensure accuracy of reports and discrepancies are rectified accordingly and that parents receive a copy of completed assessments.



- Together for Children are in the process of developing a leaflet for families, to include guidance around the process of Section 20 ensuring families have a clearer understanding of processes and the need for them to seek their own legal advice and representation.
- Together for Children are introducing a new way or working with children and families called Signs of Safety, forging and maintaining strong working relationships with families is fundamental to this approach. All managers and practice leaders will have completed mandatory training by 12th April 2019.
- 3.23. Some of the key actions achieved over the last year include:
 - Together for Children provide timely training to staff in relation to foster carer roles, and how to address any concerns in respect of their professionalism through the correct channels.
 - Social Workers have been reminded of the availability of advocacy services for young people to ensure their voices are properly heard in circumstances such as those reflected within this complaint.
 - During Stage two complaint investigations, where there is a change to the signed statement, these changes are to be formalised in writing and signatures obtained to signify approval.
 - Managers of the Children with Disabilities Team provide appropriate support and resources to ensure that all practitioners are fully aware of and understand the process for use of direct payments and short breaks.
 - Management liaise with procurement services regarding agency social workers and their accountability in the event of complaint investigations, as per the HCPC Standards of conduct, performance and ethics
 - Contact with children's other family members is considered, promoted and supported.
 - Staff have been reminded of good record keeping and the importance of timely information to parents and carers.
 - Together for Children Practice Standards have been reviewed and strengthened in relation to gaining
 consent and ensuring parental involvement and understanding. The revised standards will be relaunched
 in May 2019.
 - The full inclusion and involvement of fathers in assessments and care planning has been recognised as an area of practice which requires further development and is included as a priority in our most recent draft Improvement Action Plan.
 - Together for children are ensuring that families with disabled children have a choice of quality short break provision which meets their child's identified needs and supports them to remain together within the family home.

Cost of Complaints

3.24. The total cost of investigating claims in all four quarters is £57,886.76 compared with £147.909.80 for the same period in 2017/18. However, the decrease is largely due to the recruitment of two full time Investigating Officers within the Customer Feedback Team which provides greater flexibility and allows the team to deal with peaks in demand. The table below shows the compensation costs paid in relation to upheld complaints. Overall £5,200 compensation costs were issued compared with £16,231 in the previous year.

	Q1 (Apr – Jun)	Q2 (Jul – Sep)	Q3 (Oct – Dec)	Q4 (Jan – Mar)	YTD
Compensation costs	£900.00	£1,600	£2,300	£400.00	£5,200

Compliments

3.25. It is important to recognise positive feedback to inform service developments and best practice. 279 compliments were received in 2018-19 compared with 144 in 2017-2018 which is a 94% increase in recognition of good practice.



Team	Qtr1	Qtr2	Qtr3	Qtr4	YTD
Assessment Team	2	9	10	11	32
Children's Homes	4	8	3	5	20
CP Central 3	1	7	6	6	20
IRO	4	6	8	2	20
Early Help	3	0	6	8	17
LAC and Permanence	4	4	6	3	17
CP Washington 2	5	4	5	2	16
Fostering Team	2	4	5	5	16
Youth Offending Team	4	5	5	0	14
Next Steps	9	1	1	1	12
CP Washington 1	2	3	2	2	9
CP Coalfields 2	1	2	3	2	8
CP North 2	0	4	3	1	8
Children with Disabilities	2	0	1	4	7
CP Central 1	2	2	1	2	7
CP Central 2	0	1	1	5	7
Adoption	0	0	6	0	6
CP Central 4	0	3	2	1	6
Customer Feedback Team	1	2	0	1	4
CP North 1	1	2	0	0	3
Performance Team	0	2	0	1	3
Business Support	0	0	2	0	2
Commissioning	0	0	0	2	2
CP West 2	2	0	0	0	2
Director of Education	0	1	1	0	2
Early Intervention Team	1	0	1	0	2
Family Contact Service	0	1	1	0	2
HR	0	0	0	2	2
YDAP	0	0	2	0	2
Attendance Team	1	0	0	0	1
Contact Team	0	0	0	1	1
CP Coalfields 1	0	1	0	0	1
Emergency Duty Team	0	1	0	0	1
Family Group Conference	0	0	1	0	1
Finance	0	0	1	0	1
ICRT	1	0	0	0	1
Participation Team	0	0	1	0	1
Quality Assurance	0	0	1	0	1
Quest	0	0	1	0	1
SEN	1	0	0	0	1
CP East 1	0	0	0	0	0
CP East 2	0	0	0	0	0
CP West 1	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	55	73	86	67	279



3.26. The highest number of compliments were received in relation to the Assessment teams with children's homes, Child Protection Team 3, the IRO Service, Early Help and the LAC and Permanence Team receiving high numbers. Below are some examples of complements received in 2018-2019:

Assessment Team

• "X was amazing while working with our family, such a lovely lady she had a brilliant connection with XXX even though he was going through a really hard time. We as a family will always be grateful for the help and support and amazing work she did. Referrals, support, advice and overall being so fantastic at the work she did"

Next Steps

• "Ya probs won't get this til ya wake up haha but a just wanna say how amaze you've been and how much of an amazing you are! Sounds cringe but like it's just madness how much you've actually done for me over the past like 2-3 month and you've also got like 15 other kids. I really really really really do hope that that ya actually stay as me social worker coz a canny be dealing with new ones slinging the wait about all owa Easington lane like to be honest av always hated social workers and I'll tell ya now not many people actually do like them but your totally different am actually hoping to god ya can be me social worker until am not in care so tell Frankenstein if ya not I'll be having words and they won't be good words either hahah"

Early Help

• "X recently worked with our family through Early Help. She was a pleasure to work with, very easy to talk to and instantly made a connection with our son XXX. She always maintained the highest degree of professionalism while working with us, and was extremely helpful when it came to making suggestions about ways we could improve our relationship with our son, and supplying us with charts etc. to carry out the plans we agreed to put in place. Because of the excellent experience we had with X as our worker, I would recommend Early Help to any parent who is experiencing difficulties with their child. We would like to thank X for all the help she has given us in the past few months, and for helping us discover better ways to cope with our son's difficult behaviour."

IRO Service

• "Please can I take the opportunity to highlight some positive feedback/practice in respect of IRO X. X moved her diary around to attend the meeting and despite only being IRO for the young person for the last 18 months, was a linch pin, in providing up to date context and advocating in the best interest of the young person in what was otherwise a very difficult meeting. X had insight in respect of patterns of behaviour, historical case knowledge and information relevant to previous behaviours demonstrated and interventions attempted historically. both IRO and care taking Social Worker demonstrated unwavering commitment to the best interest of this YP. It was evident X had her finger on the pulse in respect of the circumstances leading up to the meeting being called. Thank you for both flexibility and co-ordinated joint working/risk management in respect of the case".

Child Protection Team

• I know that Together for Children has been through difficult times of its own, and that when things don't go well people are very ready to criticise and to complain. So, I think it's important that when things go right, people also take the time to say so too. It's been a very distressing period for us, and we welcomed the involvement and support of your services, which helped us get through it when at times we thought that as a family, we might not. While we have found the wider agency involvement very supportive, I'd like to pay tribute to their social worker, we literally could not have hoped for more from her. At a time when she would not talk to anyone, she would talk to, and listen to, X. She was empathetic and supportive to her, but at the same time set clear boundaries and was firm when needed. But we also felt supported as a wider family, and at times when we were at our lowest she was there to help us get through it, and keep the family together. I do want to share with you that one of the teachers from F school observed that over the years he had dealt with many social workers, but none that had come close to X for competence, empathy and professionalism. I know she'll have a busy case load: those families are lucky to have her.



3.36 Moving forward compliments will be shared more widely with the Senior Management Team and via the Communications Manager to all staff to recognise the dedication staff within TfC are showing.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Together for Children are committed to getting it right for the families in Sunderland. To do this we will continue to drive improvement from learning from the complaints and compliments raised. To develop a robust system in 2019- 2020 we will;
 - Arrange individual workshops to discuss the following emerging themes arising from the Annual Report and develop relevant action plans from the workshops:
 - Contact issues i.e. missed contacts, too few contacts etc
 - EHCP issues
 - Communication and worker actions
 - Alleged data breach's
 - Increased numbers of complaints in Children looked After/Permanence Teams and Child Protection Teams.
 - O Customer Feedback Team to undertake a review of complaint elements that have changed at stage 3 panels to understand the reasons for this and if any action is to be taken.
 - o Undertake a focussed piece of work around communication to increase the coverage of compliments within TfC HR newsletters and via other communication channels.