

CORPORATE SERVICES DIRECTORATE

COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK TEAM

Annual Report

Compliments, Complaints & Feedback

**For the period:
April 2019 – March 2020**

Introduction

This report from the Complaints and Feedback Team covers the financial year, April 2019 - March 2020.

Unfortunately, due to the timings of the committee it has not been possible to present a separate report for Q4 (January – March 2020) to the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee. Information regarding this quarter is incorporated into this annual report.

This report brings together all compliments and complaints received by the council.

Together for Children (TfC) provide a six-monthly report on complaints regarding Children's Services, which is presented to the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee for detailed analysis. To ensure the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee has a complete overview of complaints made about council services, it was agreed that the report from TfC would be appended to the Compliments, Complaints & Feedback report in Q2 and Q4/Annual Report.

Sunderland Care and Support's report regarding complaints received about its service will be appended to Compliments, Complaints & Feedback report on a quarterly basis.

Part A - of the report provides statistical data, presented in an updated, easy to view format.

Part B of the report provides information on the different Compliments and Complaints Procedures that are used by the council to handle customer feedback.

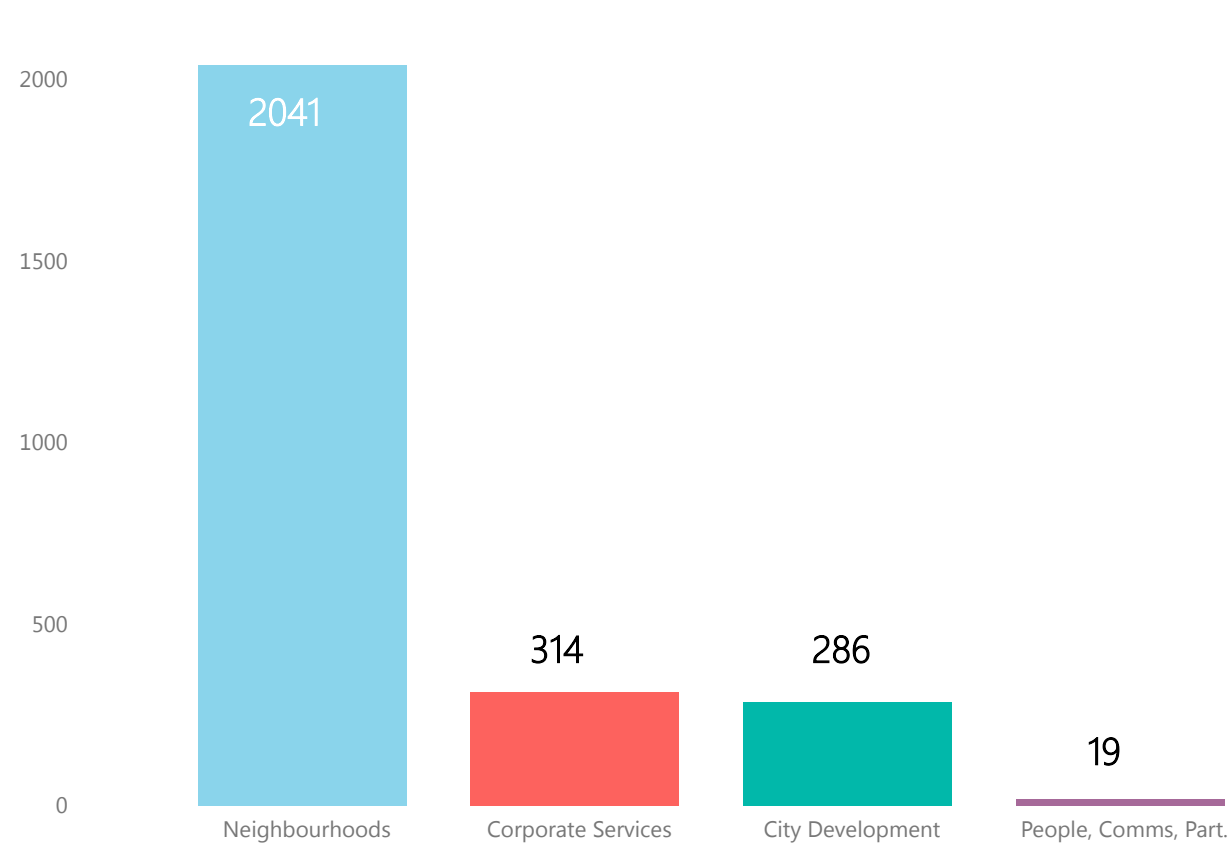
Part C includes the separate appendices

Appendix 1	-	Compliments
Appendix 2	-	Ombudsman complaints
Appendix 3	-	Corporate complaints
Appendix 4	-	Adult Statutory complaints
Appendix 5	-	Sunderland Care and Support complaints
Appendix 6	-	Together for Children

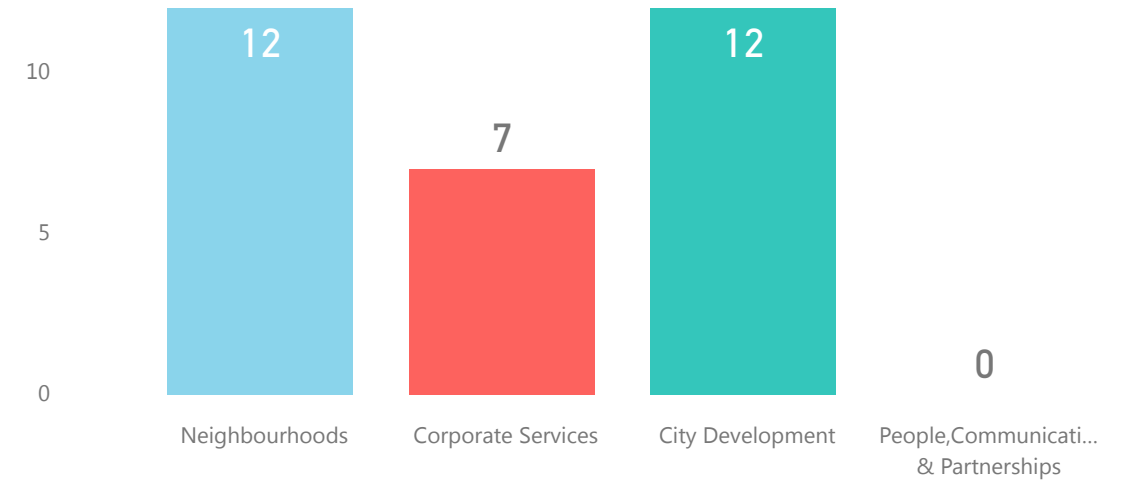
Complaint Overview



Corporate Stage One - 2660

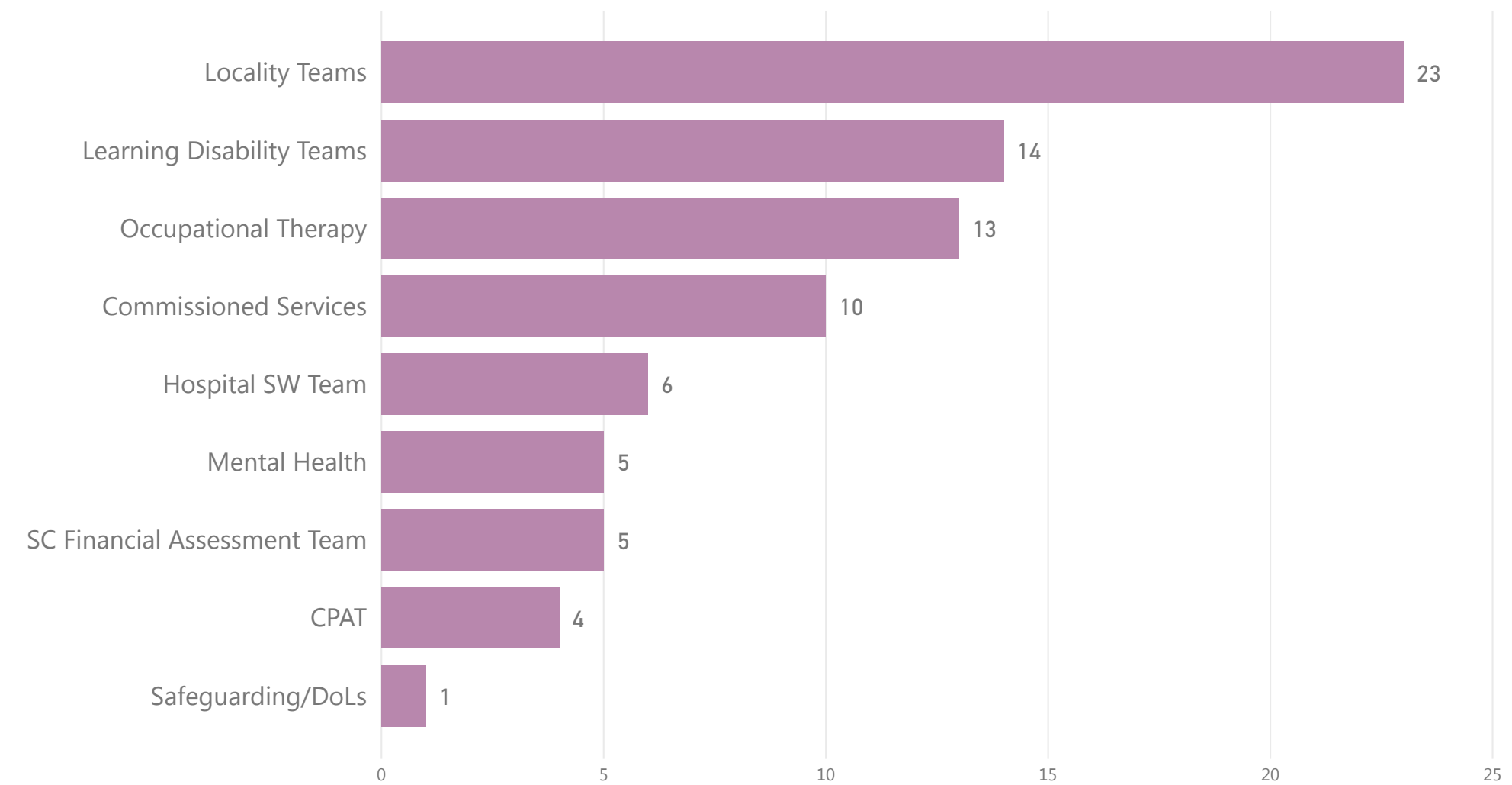


Corporate Stage Two - 31



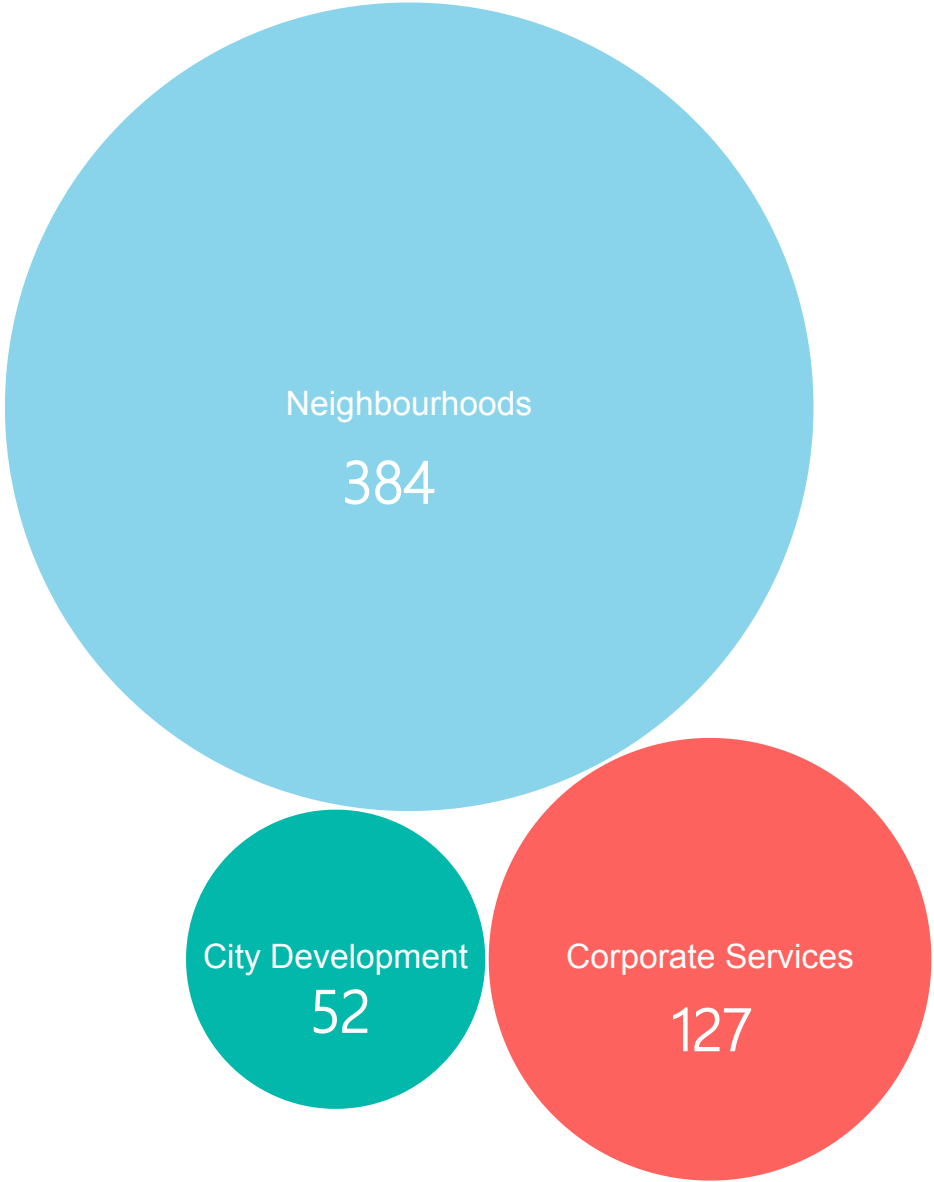
Complaint Overview

Neighbourhoods - Adult Statutory Social Care - 81



Compliments

Compliments - 563 (Without SCAS)



I have found the worker very helpful and proactive in sorting a problem with a piece of equipment. The worker was very thorough and went above and beyond to help. It was clear that the worker wanted the best for the customer.

Compliments to the council tax recovery team for helping to resolve a council tax issue. The customer stated they couldn't thank the member of staff who helped them enough

Customer rang to say thank you to the bin crew for been so helpful she said that they always help her on her bin collection.

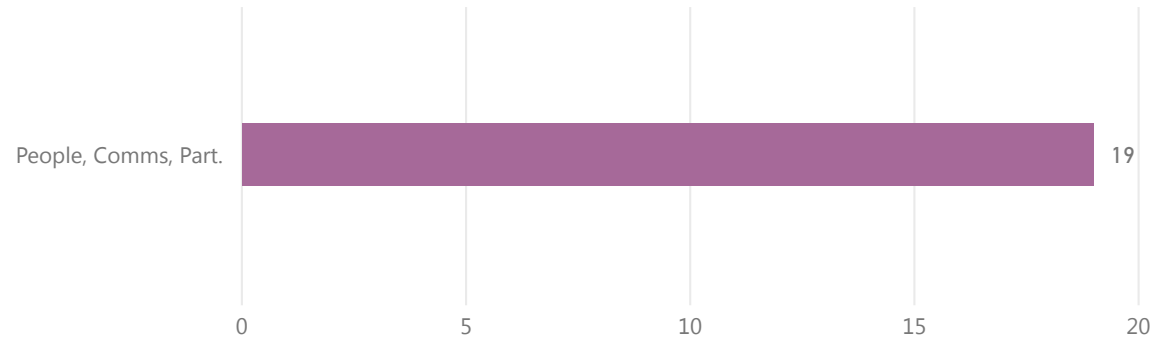
Thank you, Sunderland Council and Summer Streets, for a great local event! Attended this festival over the last few years and watched it grow! Cliffe Park this year was the best yet. Music, activities and a real family & friends' atmosphere! Well done!

The staff at the building planning section, have been incredibly helpful and cheerful. Thank you

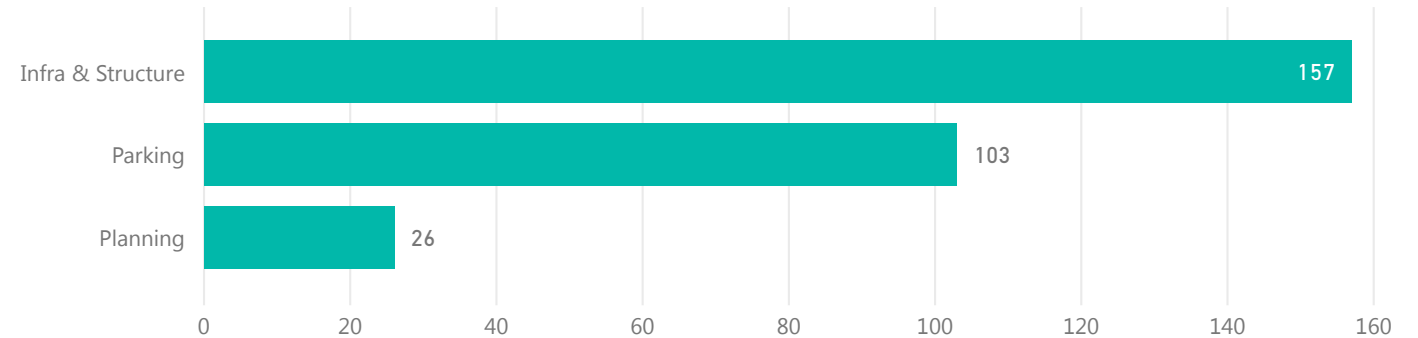
As part of Sunderland Libraries Literature Festival, the customer took the opportunity to attend the Local Studies Library for a taster session on Find My Past. The customer said the guide was welcoming, very knowledgeable and provided clear guidance including pctical tips on search strategies. She was very approachable, and nothing was too much trouble

Corporate Complaints Breakdown for Stage 1

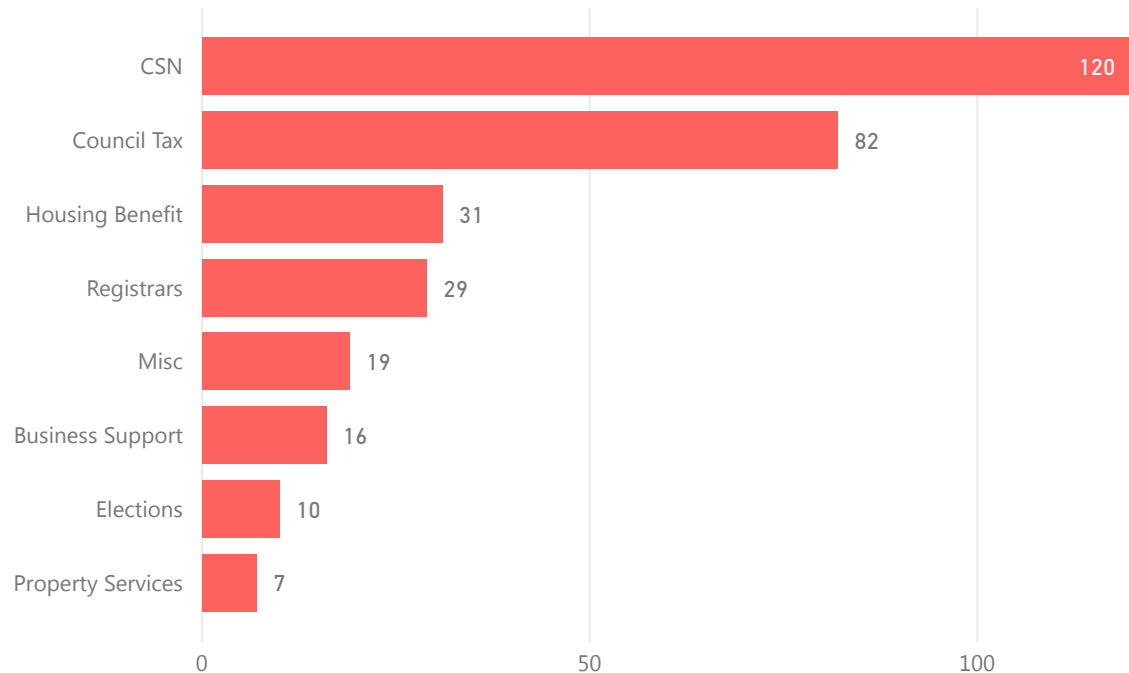
People, Communications and Partnerships - 19



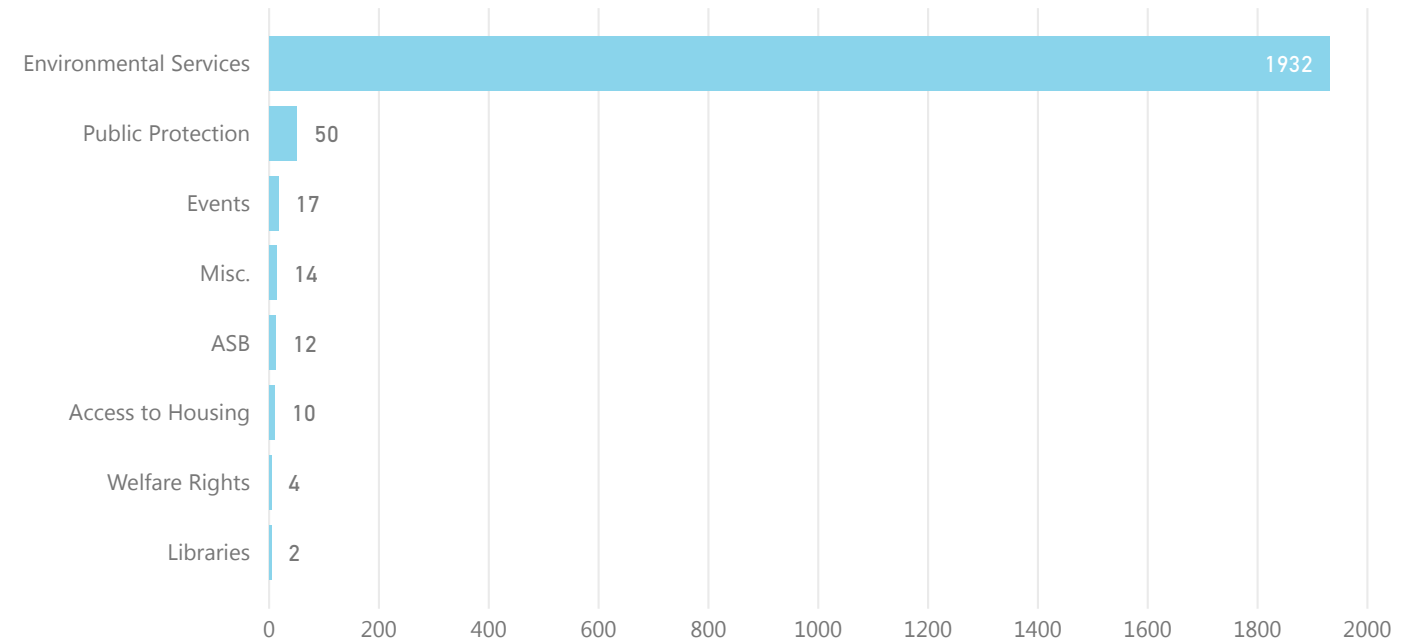
City Development - 286



Corporate Services - 314



Neighbourhoods - 2041



PART B

Compliments

Compliments tell us what people like best about the services they receive. They also allow us to use this information to build those features into our services where possible and this helps us to continually improve levels of customer satisfaction. Compliments are logged centrally through the Complaints and Feedback Team.

Information on compliments is attached as **Appendix 1**

Complaints made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Ombudsman has a statutory responsibility for investigating complaints of maladministration about local councils. The Ombudsman will usually only consider a complaint after it has been through the council's complaints procedure and the customer remains unhappy. Complaints from the Ombudsman are made against the council including those about Children's Services.

Information on Ombudsman complaints is attached as **Appendix 2**

Corporate Complaints Procedure

How the procedure works:

There are two stages to the council's Corporate Complaints Procedure;

Stage One: These are dealt with by the Directorate and should be completed within 25 working days. All responses advise the complainant that if they remain dissatisfied, they can refer their complaint to the Complaints and Feedback Team for review.

Stage Two (Review): Where customers remain dissatisfied with the response to their stage one complaint, they can request a review be undertaken by the Complaints and Feedback Team. Complainants are advised that, should they remain dissatisfied with the response at stage two, they can ask the Ombudsman to consider their complaint.

Information on Corporate complaints is attached as **Appendix 3**.

Statutory Procedures

Health and Social Care Complaints Procedure

Legislation & Regulations

The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 provides for a single complaints process for all health and local authority *adult social care services* in England.

How the procedure works:

There is one stage to the Health and Social Care Complaints Procedure.

One Stage (Local Resolution by the Council): local resolution is about the council trying to resolve complaints quickly and as close to the source as possible. We acknowledge complaints within three working days and make arrangements for an appropriate manager to consider the issues and provide a response to the complainant.

Most complaints can be dealt with and resolved satisfactorily at the local resolution stage, however, if this is not the case, any unresolved concerns can be referred to the Ombudsman.

Information on Adult Statutory complaints is attached as **Appendix 4**

Sunderland Care and Support

Sunderland Care and Support is a Local Authority Trading Company, formed in December 2013, wholly owned by Sunderland City Council. The company has a board of directors appointed by the council (as the shareholder of the holding company).

Sunderland Care and Support offers care and support 24/7 to more than 6,000 vulnerable customers across a wide range of services including: Supported Living schemes for people with a Learning disability, Mental Health needs; Autism or challenging behaviour; Day Services and Short Break care services; Intermediate Care and Reablement services; Sunderland Telecare; Community Equipment Service; and Home Improvement Agency.

How the procedure works:

Complaints are dealt with under the Health and Social Care Complaints Procedure. Some eligible complaints may fall outside this procedure and these complaints are considered as a corporate complaint.

A report from Sunderland Care and Support regarding all complaints received and handled by them in Q1 is attached as **Appendix 5**

Children's Services Statutory Complaints

Legislation & Regulations

Statutory regulations were introduced by the Department for Education in 2006 entitled '*Getting the Best from Complaints – Social Care Complaints and Representations Procedure for Children and Young People*' to deal with complaints and representations made to Children's Services by children and young people (the regulations and guidance cover complaints and representations made by children and young people).

On 1 April 2017 *Together for Children*, the new company responsible for Children's Services in Sunderland came into operation. The statutory duty to deliver services for children remains with the council, who commissions the company to deliver services.

How the procedure works:

There are three stages to Together for Children's Complaints Procedure;

Stage One: An emphasis is placed on local problem solving. Complaints are acknowledged within three working days and responded to within 10 working days (with a possible extension to 20 working days in total).

Stage Two: If dissatisfied a complainant can progress their complaint to stage two. An investigation is undertaken by an Investigating Officer who has not been involved with the case. An Independent Person must be appointed to oversee the investigation, and these are commissioned externally. Investigations should be completed within 25 working days, although an extension of up to 65 working days is allowed.

Stage Three: This is an Independent Review Panel, comprising of an independent chair and two independent panel members. A panel must take place within 30 working days of receiving the request from the complainant. If a complainant remains dissatisfied, they can request a further investigation by the Local Government Ombudsman.

The 6-monthly report from Together for Children is attached as **Appendix 6**

Appendix 1: Compliments

Compliments tell us what people like best about the services they receive. They also allow us to use this information to build those features into our services where possible and this helps us to continually improve levels of customer satisfaction.

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-2020	% change from same period last year
Q1 -Apr-Jun	137	126	152	+21%
Q2 - Jul-Sep	146	184	176	-4%
Q3 - Oct-Dec	134	170	120	-29%
Q4 - Jan-Mar	140	134	115	-14%
	557	614	563	-8%

Some examples of compliments received in Q4

Adult Services

I just wanted to formally thank you for the support, advice and guidance you have provided me and my family in helping my mam over recent months.

I just want to let you know I really appreciate the occupational therapist...who has been very supportive and helpful, she always goes above and beyond call of duty... so thank you very much

Council Tax

The worker was very helpful, and the customer was delighted in the service she received.

Customer Service Network

The officer who had been dealing with my query had been really helpful and I felt so much better now that everything had been resolved. The officer has been an Angel.

Customer spoke to officer regarding a council tax over-payment. The officer made enquiries and rang the customer back promptly to advise that this was a system error, and that the overpayment had been removed from his account. Customer felt that the staff member went the extra mile, and that she was a very brilliant and helpful advisor

Environmental Services

Customer rang to say thank for a speedy service as she ordered a bin and it was received this morning. The guy who delivered the bin was lovely and helpful and took the old bin away

Customer would like to say thank you for the quick delivery of her replacement caddy

Following a request for a grave to be topped up the customer said it was completed quickly and she was very pleased with the work carried out. She wanted to say thank you.

I am delighted to see the streets looking so much cleaner...My back lane has never been so clean

Events

I wanted to say thank you so much for all your help for Friday it went really well and the guests were really happy...Thank you to all the team for making us feel so welcome and for all your patience as well, it's greatly appreciated...We got some great feedback about the location from our team here as well...It was a pleasure to meet you and have a look around the Museum as well it looks amazing!'

Highways / Network Management

Thank you to the highways department for a speedy service to repair the pot hole reported recently.

Customer would like to thank the team that went out today to install disabled bay outside her home. She is very happy, this will help her a lot

Housing Options

Thanks for all your help with this matter. It makes life so much easier when you get a proactive case worker.

Parking Services

Thank you to wardens for their actions and time

Customer would like to thank parking services. The officer was in customers street for nearly an hour after 3pm keeping school traffic from parking on the zig zag lines.

Appendix 2

Complaints dealt with by the Ombudsman

The Ombudsman has a statutory responsibility for investigating complaints of maladministration about local councils. The Ombudsman will usually only consider a complaint after it has been through the council's complaints procedure and the customer remains unhappy.

Complaints Received at the Council

The Council received 38 complaints from the Ombudsman for the period 2019-20. This is an increase of 44% on the previous year. The tables below provide comparative data to previous quarters/years.

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Q1	6	6	5	6
Q2	4	6	10	11
Q3	18	8	6	6
Q4	11	11	6	15
Total	39	31	27	38

The table below shows the number of complaints received for each Directorate, how many of those complaints the Ombudsman chose to investigate; and from those investigations how many were upheld.

	Complaints made to the Ombudsman 2019-20	Number Investigated by Ombudsman	Number upheld by ombudsman	% upheld rate
City Development	9	0	0	
Corporate Services	6	0	0	
Neighbourhoods (Adult Social Care)	9	5	2	40%
Neighbourhoods (other)	5	0	0	
People, Communications & Partnerships	0	0	0	
Together for Children	9	6	5	83%
	38	11	7	64%

Detailed Investigations

Of the 11 detailed investigations, 7 were upheld, providing the outcome rate of 64%. This compares to 62% in 2018-19 and 64% in 2017-18.

Information on all complaints received from the Ombudsman is included throughout the year in the quarterly reports presented to the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee. Information on the 7 upheld complaints is set out below. This information includes the Ombudsman's reference and the full report can be found on their website; www.lgo.org.uk.

Complaints Upheld (7)

Adult Services (Sunderland City Council - 18 018 804)

A complaint about the council's refusal to issue a Concessionary Travel Pass.

Outcome: *The Ombudsman did not investigate the complaint as there was no unremedied injustice*

Adult Services – (Sunderland City Council 18 007 253)

Complaint about the level of care a relative received at a nursing home

Outcome: *The Council was asked to apologise and make a payment to reflect avoidable distress*

Together for Children – (Sunderland City Council 18 004 685)

Delay in transfer from a SEN to an EHCP; son has not received the support he is entitled to

Outcome: *The council has apologised for the delay and made a payment to the complainant for missed provision.*

Together for Children – (Sunderland City Council 19 002 360)

Disagreement with a decision made by TfC not to progress complaint to stage 2 of the complaint's procedure.

Outcome: *The council apologised and made immediate arrangements for the complaint to be considered at Stage 2.*

Together for Children – (Sunderland City Council 19 004 608)

A complaint that the Council had not properly considered a claim for compensation.

Outcome: *No further action required as the Ombudsman considered the injustice had already been remedied.*

Together for Children – (Sunderland City Council 18 017 487)

Complaint about how the Council had handled contact issues regarding her grandchildren

Outcome: *The Council apologised for a lack of communication and not keeping the complainant informed.*

Together for Children – (Sunderland City Council 19 002 550)

A complaint about the Council's actions regarding its involvement with his child and a delay in implementing recommendations.

Outcome: *The Council apologised for the lengthy complaint's procedure, and delay in providing copies of minutes. An offer of compensation was made to acknowledge time, trouble and avoidable distress.*

Appendix 3 – Corporate Complaints

CORPORATE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Stage One

These are dealt with by the Directorate and should be completed within 25 working days. All responses advise the complainant that if they remain dissatisfied, they can refer their complaint to the Complaints and Feedback Team for review. Below is a table showing corporate complaint numbers for Stage One complaints.

	<i>Number of complaints 2017-18</i>	<i>Number of complaints 2018-19</i>	<i>Number of complaints 2019-20</i>	% change from same period last year	% responded to within timescale
Q1	3,315	1,951	704	-64%	92%
Q2	2,415	1,389	770	-44%	96%
Q3	1,496	592	684	+16%	95%
Q4	1,231	499	502	+0.5%	91%
	8,457	4,431	2660	-40%	90%

The 502 complaints received during 2019/20 are broken down into Directorates in the table below;

Directorate	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	%
City Development	47	75	89	75	286	11%
Corporate Services	91	74	59	90	314	12%
Neighbourhood's	560	612	532	337	2041	76%
People, Communication & Partnerships	6	9	4	0	19	1%
Total	704	770	684	502	2660	100%

Neighbourhoods

Service Area	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Environmental Services	537	574	510	311	1932
Libraries	2	0	0	0	2
Access to Housing	2	3	2	3	10
Anti-social Behaviour	1	5	4	2	12
Welfare Rights	0	2	1	1	4
Public Protection	11	15	6	18	50
Events	1	11	5	0	17
Misc.	6	2	4	2	14
Total	560	612	532	337	2041

Complaints in respect of Environmental Services make up 95% of the complaints made against the Neighbourhoods Directorate.

The table below provides a breakdown of the service areas within Environmental Services for 2019/20.

Total	Place Management Service/Team Area	Issues of Complaint
1583	Refuse	<i>Non/late delivery of bins & caddies/missed bins</i>
31	Bereavement	<i>Maintenance of cemeteries/ crematorium</i>
215	Street Cleaning	<i>Fly tipping/dog bins/grass cutting/litter collections; pruning/removal shrubs & bushes; public toilets.</i>
57	Trees, fixed play, trade waste	<i>Grass cutting/ tree pruning</i>
16	Enforcement	<i>Fly tipping/littering/dog fouling</i>
30	Waste Management	<i>Beach Street Depot – staff attitude/permits</i>
1932		

Refuse Complaints

Of the 1932 complaints received for Environmental Services, 1583 (82%) were about issues to do with refuse collection.

This should be viewed in context; in any quarter the council will service approximately 1.6 million containers, therefore this number of complaints represents approximately 0.02% of activity for this service area.

The table below contains a breakdown of complaints about refuse.

Refuse Complaints	Number of Complaints for 2018/19	Number of Complaints for 2019/20	% change from previous year
Q1	1,606	433	-73%
Q2	1,012	464	-54%
Q3	358	454	+27%
Q4	253	232	-8%
Total	3,229	1583	-51%

There has been a 49% decrease in numbers from Q3 to Q4. A similar drop was noticed in the previous year, which also saw Q4 record the lowest number of complaints.

Overall there has been a year on year reduction amounting to -51%

City Development

Service Area	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Planning & Property	4	7	6	9	26
Infrastructure & Transport	21	51	43	42	157
Parking	22	17	40	24	103
Total	47	75	89	75	286

Infrastructure & Transport

Complaints about this service area were regarding road resurfacing, footway repairs, traffic calming/restrictions and potholes.

Corporate Services

Service Area	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Council Tax	22	19	17	24	82
Customer Service Network	38	26	23	33	120
Benefits	8	7	6	10	31
Property Services	3	2	0	2	7
Business Support Services	2	7	5	2	16
Registrars	9	9	5	6	29
Electoral Services	5	2	1	2	10
Misc.	4	2	2	11	19
Total	91	74	59	90	314

Complaints regarding the Customer Service Network (CSN) make up 38% of complaints made about Corporate Services. Viewing the complaints in context the CSN handled just over 1.4 million contacts in the financial year 2019/20. 120 complaints represents a dissatisfaction rate of 0.008%

Stage Two - Review

Where customers remain dissatisfied with the response to their stage one complaint, they can request a review be undertaken by the Complaints and Feedback Team. Complainants are advised in the final response that, should they remain dissatisfied, they can ask the Ombudsman to look into their complaint.

Completed Stage 2 Reviews				
	<i>Number of Reviews 2017-18</i>	<i>Number of Reviews 2018-19</i>	Number of Reviews 2019/20	% responded to within 25-day timescale
Q1	5	4	5	100%
Q2	7	8	7	86%
Q3	3	6	8	63%
Q4	8	6	11	82%
Total	23	24	31	81%

The Complaints and Feedback Team undertake most Stage 2 Reviews and aim to do this within 25 working days. There are times when more complex cases require further time to complete and the aim is to complete these within 65 working days.

6 Reviews (19%) took longer than 25 working days to conclude. 3 were completed within 30 working days; 2 within 40 working days and 1 took 57 working days.

Each of these reviews had a higher level of complexity requiring a more comprehensive consideration. The Review which took 57 days was also subject to extra delay due to the time of the year (Christmas) where planned holidays and also officer sickness had an impact.

Outcome of Stage 2 Reviews

Directorate	Total	Upheld in full	Upheld in part	Not upheld	Other
City Development	12	1	0	9	2
Corporate Services	7	0	4	3	0
Neighbourhoods	12	2	6	4	0
People, Communications & Partnerships	0	0	0	0	0
Total	31	3	10	16	2
		10%	32%	52%	6%

Details on the Stage 2 Reviews have been included in the quarterly reports provided to the Scrutiny Committee. Information is included below on the three reviews that were upheld.

Information on those Reviews that were upheld are included below for information.

Reviews Upheld (3)

Cleansing & Ground Maintenance - *customer unhappy that his pet, which had been knocked over, had not been stored correctly by the council and procedures for returning the animal had not been followed.*

The council fully accepted that correct procedure had not been followed on this occasion. The service area reviewed its processes and staff were reminded of the correct procedure. Apologies and compensation were offered to the complainant for the distress and inconvenience caused.

Bereavement Services - *A grave excavated in the wrong section of a cemetery.*

An administration error resulted in the family's request not being actioned appropriately. The Council did respond quickly to remedy the situation and offered sincere apologies and paid the funeral invoice. Internal procedures have been revised to prevent similar errors occurring.

Parking Services - *Delay in providing a response to a request for service regarding parking spaces outside their property.*

The request should have been forwarded to Parking Services for consideration but due to an oversight this did not happen. Whilst the actual request was outside of the scope of the council's remit, the customer should have been advised of this in a timely manner. The council apologised for the unacceptable delay.

Appendix 4: Adult Social Care

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

Adult Social Care

Below is a table showing complaint numbers for this year together with some comparative data for the previous two years.

	<i>Number of complaints 2017-18</i>	<i>Number of complaints 2018-19</i>	<i>Number of complaints 2019-20</i>	<i>% change from same period last year</i>	<i>% responded to within timescale</i>
Apr-Jun	30	14	24	+71%	69%
Jul-Sep	33	38	21	-45%	69%
Oct-Dec	32	18	20	+11%	66%
Jan-Mar	42	23	16	-30%	31%
Total	137	93	81	-13%	59%

81 complaints were received in the year 2019-20 regarding adult social care services. This is down (-13%) on last year's figure of 93.

The nature of complaints

Below is a table showing the nature of the complaints received, together with some comparative data for the previous two years.

Nature of Complaint	<i>Number of complaints 2017-18</i>	<i>Number of complaints 2018-19</i>	<i>Number of complaints 2019-20</i>	
Actions of worker	45	22	21	26%
Assessment Disagreement	18	10	10	12%
Breach of Confidentiality	0	1	0	
Care Practice Issues	0	1	1	1%
Communication	15	11	11	14%
Delay	24	13	6	7%
Equipment Issues	1	1	2	3%
Finance	12	17	13	16%
Lack of choice	4	0	5	6%
Quality Issues	16	14	9	11%
Actions of residents	1	0	2	3%
Lack of help/support	1	3	1	1%
	137	93	81	100%

Outcome of complaints

Complaint Outcomes	Number of complaints 2017-18	Number of complaints 2018-19	Number of complaints 2019-20	
Upheld in full	33	27	11	13%
Upheld in part	23	18	20	25%
Not Upheld	44	32	41	51%
NE/WD/OTH**	37	16	5	6%
Ongoing	0	0	4	5%
	137	93	81	100%

**not eligible/withdrawn/other

31 complaints (38%) had some element upheld.

46 complaints (57%) were either; not upheld, withdrawn, not eligible or classified as 'other'.

Ongoing complaints

There are 4 complaints (5%) ongoing with outcomes not yet known. Unfortunately, the impact of Covid-19 has meant we have not been able to conclude responses to some complaints. In these instances, customers have been advised of the situation and the delay. The Complaints and Feedback Team review the situation on a regular basis. Responses will be provided as soon as it is possible to do so.

Detailed Investigations

Whilst under the Health and Social Care Complaints Procedure there are no defined stages, there are still those complaints that have a high level of complexity requiring a more comprehensive consideration.

2 detailed investigations were completed during the period 2019-20 which equates to 2.5% of all complaints received. This compares to 5 investigations in 2018-19 and 2 investigations in 2017-18.

The internal target for completing detailed investigations is 90 working days, although due to the nature of the investigations this is only a guideline as it is important that the investigations are given due consideration. One investigation was completed in 114 working days with the other investigation taking 136 working days. Both investigations were carried out by independent investigators and the longer timescales reflect the complex nature of the complaints being investigated and the involvement of third-party agencies/care providers.

The two investigations had a total of 15 separate elements of complaint and the outcomes of these elements are included in the table below:

Outcomes	Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not Upheld	Other	Total
No. of elements	6	2	6	1	15
%	40%	13%	40%	7%	100%

Information on both investigations has been included in the quarterly reports provided to the Scrutiny Committee. In all cases where a complaint has been upheld or partly upheld the council has offered its apologies and provided an explanation as to how the issue had occurred.

Themes and trends arising from all complaints are analysed and used to identify any staff training needs which can ultimately lead to an improvement in service delivery. Below is a summary of the learning outcomes from these investigations:

Complaint Investigation 1

A complaint that a care home had not provided adequate care for a relative and had continued to charge fees for the period after the relative gave notice to end the placement; the following learning outcomes were achieved:

- The care home reviewed all staff levels of training in respect of dementia and all staff will receive yearly refresher training in dementia.
- The care home has adapted a problem solving and decision-making process tool. Staff have received supervision sessions regarding this to help them develop their skills. An escalation process is also now place.
- A new computer system is now in place which allows staff to work to individual daily targets.
- The care home has reiterated to staff the importance of following the protocols of updating appropriate documentation.
- The care home introduced a process to ensure that any irregular medication administered by the District Nurse is documented to include information on the date last administered; amount in stock; and the date it is next due.

Complaint Investigation 2

The complaint was about a failure to follow proper procedure and practice in the assessment, calculation and notification in determining the financial contribution to a care support package.

The Investigating Officer found no evidence to suggest any incorrect procedure or practice; but did find that key information had not been provided to the family in either a timely, accurate or acceptably professional way at certain points in the process.

The investigating officer noted that a previous response from the Council to the complainant had addressed this point and had also offered a suitable remedy at the time.

The following outcomes were achieved:

- The Council reiterated its apology for any confusion or inconvenience
- To offer clarity, the family were provided with a further written breakdown of how the care support costs been calculated, and confirmation of the final arrears sum.
- The family were offered the option of paying the outstanding arrears in monthly instalments rather than a single payment.

Appendix 5:



REPORT TO SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL'S SCRUTINY COORDINATING COMMITTEE

SUNDERLAND CARE AND SUPPORT LIMITED (SCAS)

COMPLIMENTS & COMPLAINTS Q4 2019-20 (JANUARY-MARCH 2020) UPDATE

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update to Sunderland City Council's Scrutiny Coordinating Committee on recent performance activity in relation to SCAS compliments and complaints.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Council's Scrutiny Coordinating Committee are requested to note the contents of the report.

3 OUR APPROACH

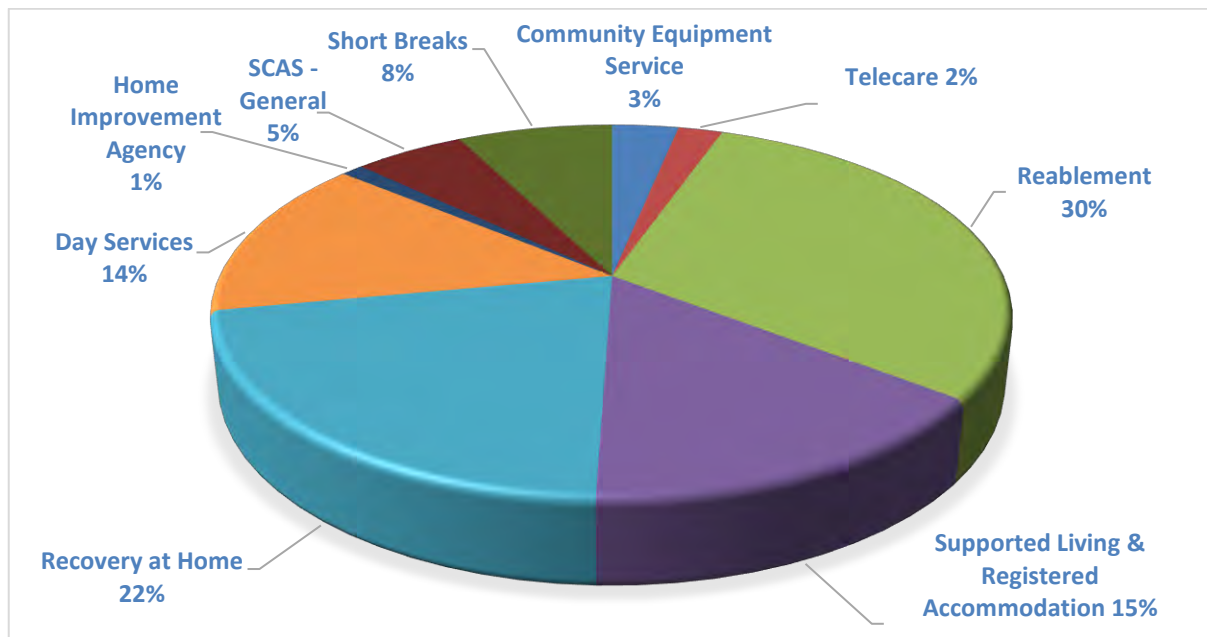
- 3.1 Sunderland Care and Support Limited takes pride in the high-quality services we provide our customers.
- 3.2 We pro-actively welcome both positive and negative feedback from all of our customers and view this as our opportunity to learn and to improve; and recognise that such feedback helps us to corroborate the standard of service our customers receive.
- 3.3 This reporting period has been quite extraordinary given that it covers both the end of the winter when SCAS characteristically expect to see an increase in demand, it also captures the start of the Global Covid-19 Pandemic. But despite this unprecedented scenario, the Company has continued to deliver within what have been extremely challenging circumstances, using creative means to ensure that we have supported our customers both in the community and in an out of hospital pathway.

4 COMPLIMENTS

- 4.1 It is of note, that despite this report covering the beginning of the Pandemic, a total of **93** compliments were received by the Company from **1st January** to **31st March 2020**, representing only 7 (7%) less than had been recorded over the previous period.

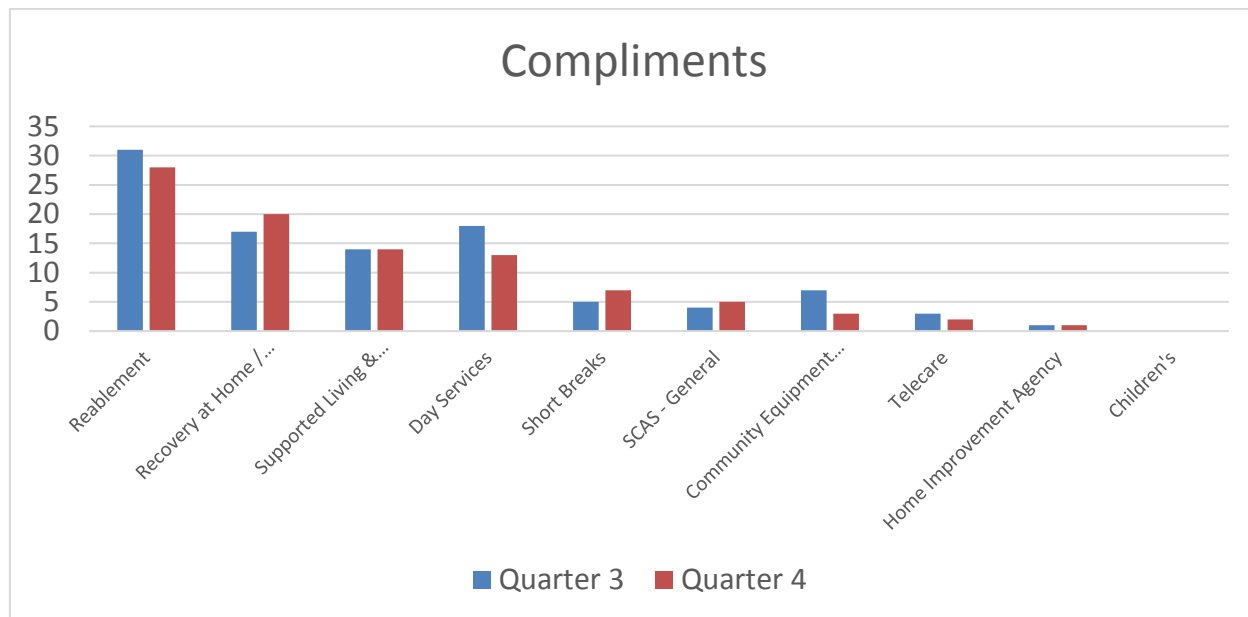
Q4 Compliments Breakdown - Distribution

4.2 Compliments received during Quarter 4 were distributed across the following service areas:



- **Reablement:** 28 (30%) - **three less than the previous quarter**
- **Recovery at Home / Farmborough Court:** 20 (22%) - **three more than the previous quarter**
- **Supported Living & Registered Accommodation:** 14 (15%) - **no change from the previous quarter**
- **Day Services:** 13 (14%) - **five less than the previous quarter**
- **Short Breaks:** 7 (8%) - **two more than the previous quarter**
- **SCAS - General:** 5 (5%) - **one more than the previous quarter**
- **Community Equipment Service:** 3 (3%) - **four less than the previous quarter**
- **Telecare:** 2 (2%) - **one less than the previous quarter**
- **Home Improvement Agency:** 1 (1%) - **no change from the previous quarter**
- **Children's:** zero - **no change from the previous quarter**

4.3 Q4 Compliments Breakdown - Previous Quarter Comparison



4.4 It is of note that around 60% of Service Areas services saw an increase or equivalent number of compliments received in the quarter with the remainder seeing a small reduction, however it should also be noted that during the final four weeks of the quarter the City was experiencing the impact of the Pandemic therefore we wouldn't have expected to see as many customers taking the time to offer feedback.

4.5 Q4 Compliments Breakdown - Synopsis

4.6 Praise during the quarter was extensive, a few highlights of which include:

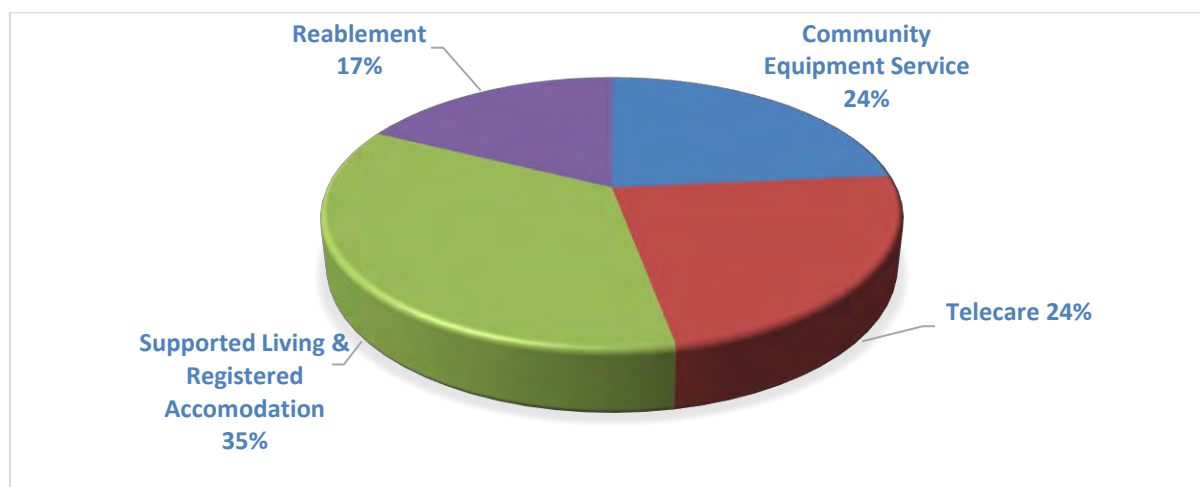
- Letter of thanks in recognition of the £9800 raised by SCAS from their 2019 chosen charities Sunderland City Hospital's Integrated Care Unit (ICCU) and the Sunderland RNLI
- Letter of thanks in recognition of the regular donations made by SCAS to Sunderland Foodbank
- Short Break Care – thanks for the 'outstanding care' provided
- Community Equipment Service – thanks for the 'fabulous' service provided
- Farmborough Court – thanks for the "patient and gentle care" from staff who are "walking angels and a huge credit"
- Reablement – appreciation of the 'wonderful' service provided by 'proactive, positive and hard-working' staff
- Member of the public observing SCAS staff supporting customers in the community – 'showed care and compassion rarely seen to this standard'

5 COMPLAINTS

5.1 It is of note, that despite this report covering the beginning of the Pandemic, a total of **17** complaints were received by the Company from **1st January to 31st March 2020**, representing **12 (29%) less** than had been recorded over the previous period.

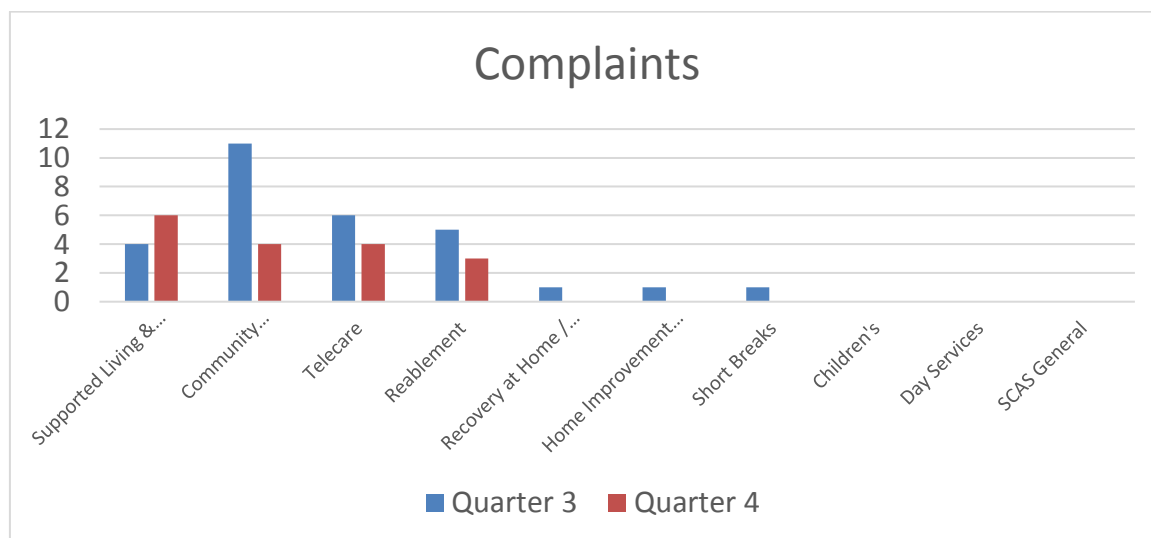
5.2 Q4 Complaints Breakdown – Distribution

5.3 Complaints received during Quarter 4 were distributed across the following service areas:



- **Supported Living & Registered Accommodation:** 6 (35%) - two more than the previous quarter
- **Community Equipment Service:** 4 (24%) - seven less than the previous quarter
- **Telecare:** 4 (24%) - two less than the previous quarter
- **Reablement:** 3 (17%) - two less than the previous quarter
- **Recovery at Home:** zero - one less than the previous quarter
- **Home Improvement Agency:** zero - one less than the previous quarter
- **Short Break:** zero - one less than the previous quarter
- **Children's:** zero - no change from the previous quarter
- **Day Services:** zero - no change from the previous quarter
- **SCAS - General:** zero - no change from the previous quarter

5.4 Q4 Complaints Breakdown - Previous Quarter Comparison



- 5.5 It is of note that 60% of Service Areas saw **zero** complaints during Quarter 4.
- 5.6 It is also of note that around 90% of Service Areas received zero complaints or significantly less complaints than seen during the previous quarter, with only one Service Area noting a slight increase for the period, however it should also be noted that during the final four weeks of the quarter the city was experiencing the impact of the pandemic therefore we wouldn't have expected to see as many customers taking the time to offer feedback.

Of particular interest was that the **Community Equipment Service** saw a **63% decrease** in complaints when compared with figures for the previous quarter - and an **88% reduction** when compared against complaints received by the Service during the first quarter of 2019/20.

5.7 **Q4 Complaints Breakdown - Resolution**

- 5.7 Of the complaints received during the period, 15 (88%) were to be resolved locally utilising the Company's Step 1 - Local Resolution complaints procedures and 1 (6%) to be resolved formally using the Company's Step 2 - Formal Resolution complaints procedure. One other complaint was noted as to be resolved under the Company's Step 3 – External Resolution complaints procedure.

6 **COVID-19 REPORTING**

- 6.1 Throughout the reporting period the company have continued to operate within the scope of our Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy and Procedures, despite the temporary suspension of complaints clinics at the peak of the pandemic.
- 6.2 Complaints clinics are now being reinitiated using MS Teams in order to ensure social distancing is observed.

7 **OTHER RECENT DEVELOPMENTS**

- 7.1 Just prior to the pandemic the Company successfully completed a thorough review of our Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy and Procedures.
- 7.2 The review of our Whistleblowing Policy, originally scheduled for Quarter 1 of 2020/2021 but delayed due to the Pandemic, is expected to be completed during the next reporting period, at which time it is planned that the company will relaunch both Policy documents across the Company
- 7.3 It is of note that during the reporting period Sunderland City Council's Complaints Team had supported SCAS to access Complaints Management training, led by the LGO, that would, but for the Pandemic, have been delivered during the Quarter. It is hoped that this opportunity will be made available again in the future.

Together for Children Customer Feedback Annual Report 2019-2020



HIGHLIGHT SUMMARY 2019/20

What are our key achievements?

- We have received 301 compliments/positive feedback this year from children, young people, families and professionals.
- We successfully helped 120 customers to receive satisfactory resolutions to their issues or concerns informally, without having to initiate a complaint.
- Overall the number of complaints received has reduced by 34% with almost all our services seeing a decrease in the number of complaints.
- The number of complaints relating to our largest service area, child protection has decreased by 23% when compared with the previous year.
- We have reduced compensation payments in relation to upheld complaints.

What are our areas of focus for 2020/21?

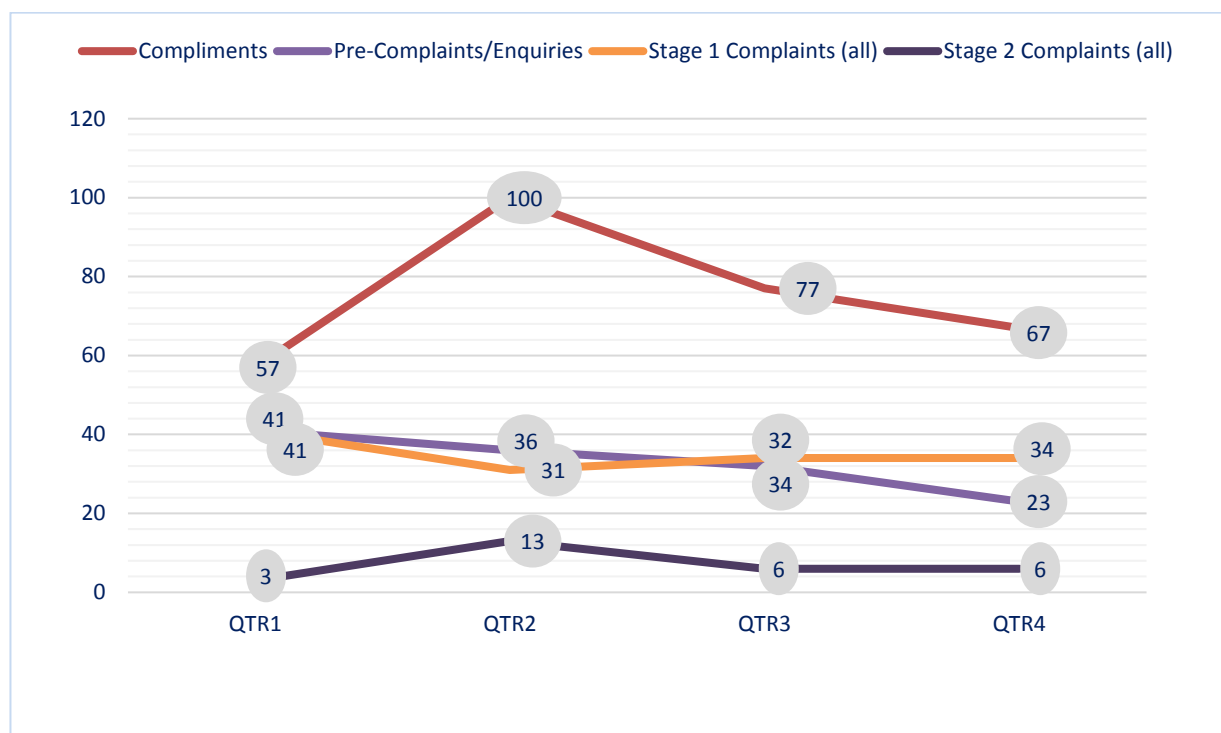
- Reducing the number of non-statutory complaints.
- Improving the timeliness of stage 1 responses to prevent complaints escalating to stage 2.
- Improving stage 2 investigation and adjudication timescales.
- Addressing the causes of communication/contact complaints.

1. PURPOSE OF THE ANNUAL REPORT

- 1.1. This report covers the period 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020. Together for Children (TfC) welcomes all forms feedback as a way of improving service delivery to children, young people and families. The report provides an overview of customer feedback received throughout the year, identifying topics and trends in relation to complaints information and areas of organisational learning that have taken place in response to feedback received.

2. SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

- 2.1. The Customer Feedback Team are responsible for receiving, recording and responding to feedback received from children, young people and families regarding services delivered by Together for Children. The following graph shows the different types of feedback received in each quarter in 2019/20.



3. COMPLIMENTS & POSITIVE FEEDBACK

- 3.1. In 2019/20, we received 301 compliments from children and young people, parents and other family members, foster carers, external professionals and staff within TfC.
- 3.2. Positive feedback is communicated to workers and management structures of the relevant teams and is used to congratulate workers and teams and to inform service developments and best practice. Compliments are also shared more widely with the Senior Management Team and the TfC Communications Manager, so all staff can be recognised for their dedication and hard work.
- 3.3. There has been an increase of 22 compliments compared with the previous year which is a 7.9% increase in recognition of good practice. The table below shows the breakdown of compliments received by each team in each quarter. The highest number of compliments were received in relation to Early Help Services and Child Protection Teams with CLA & Permanence Teams, Next Steps Teams, children's homes, the IRO Service, and Fostering Team receiving high numbers.

Team	Qtr1	Qtr2	Qtr3	Qtr4	Total 2019/20
Assessment Teams	3	4	1	2	10
Children with Disabilities Team	2	4	4	3	13
Children's Homes	7	1	5	5	18
Commissioning Team	0	1	0	0	1
Communications Team	0	2	3	0	5
Connexions Service	0	0	1	0	1
Child Protection Teams	9	16	15	12	52
Customer Feedback Team	1	1	0	0	2
Early Help Service	12	40	6	14	72
Emergency Duty Team (Out of Hours)	1	0	0	0	1
Family Time Service	0	0	2	0	2
Fostering Service	4	4	4	5	17
Human Resources Service	0	2	2	0	4
ICRT	0	0	1	0	1
IRO Service	2	7	3	4	16
CLA and Permanence Teams	8	9	11	2	30
Legal Service	0	0	0	2	2
Next Steps Teams	1	6	7	5	19
Participation and Engagement Service	0	2	5	0	7
Performance Team	0	0	1	1	2
SEND Team	1	1	1	3	6
Youth Offending Service	1	0	3	6	10
TOTAL	57	100	77	67	301

3.4. Below are some examples of compliments we received in 2019-2020:

Early Help Service

- “I am writing to thank you and your amazing team, for the excellent support shown to our daughter, our three grandchildren and my husband and I, through the most difficult time we have ever had. Without your support I don't think we would be where we are today. Our daughter is a year alcohol free and in a much brighter place. xx, who was our daughter's support worker is an absolute credit to your team, always there to listen and help and advice, her support comes second to none.”

SEND Team:

- “I just thought I had to e-mail you to express my gratitude for the utmost professionalism you exhibited during our meeting today. You were actively listening to my concerns, were 100% non-judgemental of my views and demonstrated a genuine interest to reach a solution so thank you. I hope you have a nice weekend”.

Emergency Duty Team:

- “Good morning; last night we needed access to your duty social worker with regard to a friend of my son's. I wasn't sure who to turn to with the child's problem being quite complex, calls to ChildLine and NSPCC eventually led to referral through to yourselves. A lovely duty social worker called X came out to our house promptly and dealt with the child involved in a fantastic manner, bearing in mind the difficulties that he was facing in terms of the child's care. He also dealt with myself, husband and son very well, assuring us all that we had done the correct thing in contacting yourselves. Working in the NHS myself I know the difficulties and challenges that can be faced on a daily basis, and I would like this

message to get to X please commending him on his work last night, as he really is a credit to your service going above and beyond the line of duty”.

IRO Service:

- “Morning X. I was at a conference meeting last Wednesday.. XX was the chair/IRO. I had to let you know what a brilliant meeting it was.. XX was fantastic... She put us all at ease and made the meeting. My daughter.. Who's children are involved... Said that it was brilliant meeting.. Better than the last one. She walked out in tears during that one. People are quick enough to complain about things.. But not that quick to praise or compliment... So I just wanted you to know what a brilliant chair XX was/is...and to pass on our thoughts..... The new approach in the meeting was fab too...the professional also thought so...gives the families their chance too put their views 1st”.

Children's Homes:

- “I've been supported by staff at the children's home I lived in for many years, from my leaving care worker, and from my extended family. I'm sure they would all be pretty rich if they were given a pound for every time I rang saying I was quitting.”

Fostering Service:

- “I would like to let you know that during the worst time of our lives X was collecting the information needed about our grandchildren, she was indeed a true professional, very supportive from the word go. X was friendly and put us at ease the moment she entered our house, she is a credit to the service and was a pleasure to meet at such a difficult time.

CLA & Permanence Teams:

- “To a truly great social worker, you was hard to find difficult to part with and hard to forget (precious). Thank you for all you have done for our lads I cannot thank you enough. The lads say thank you and love you lots; the X family”.

Assessment Teams:

- Just a quick email to X and XX moved into XXX this afternoon. I just wanted to say thank you on behalf of them both and myself for all of your help whilst they have been at XXXX. You've been really supportive and helped get them through a difficult time. You've also kept us in the loop which we are grateful for.

Children with Disabilities Team:

- “X was allocated as a key worker for our daughter, XX. Since her initial contact with XX and our family, we have been very impressed by her professionalism. X has demonstrated excellent interpersonal skills. She is able to communicate appropriately with XX, who has severe learning difficulties and cerebral palsy. She always puts us at our ease and has a great positive outlook on matters. X always attends her appointments on time and takes it upon herself to follow up the visit with a phone call to update us with progress. She recently identified that XX, and ourselves, were in need of increased respite. She pursued the matter to a positive outcome. While we appreciate the workload and pressures faced by staff, X never lets us down and is a refreshing change. We believe that shortfalls should be identified in services, but, as importantly, good practices should be highlighted. The latter is definitely the case with the service we have received from X, who is a credit to the department.”

Child Protection Teams

- “I just wanted to say thank you and well done for all of your hard work on the X case. This was a complex case having regard to XX difficulties and, I was pleased to hear that the Judge complimented you at the conclusion of the proceedings. The final statement was extremely detailed and pulled together an abundance of information, received from XXX and XXXX. The court would have been greatly assisted with that document, making it clear what support we had implemented having regard to the XXXX Assessment and on that basis why X was unable to care for the child in the long-term. The LA was able to demonstrate to the Court that all efforts in supporting X had been exhausted and, at the end of the proceedings X accepted our final threshold. Thank you”.

Next Steps Teams:

- “My experience with next steps has been very positive for me. X has helped and guided me through anything I was concerned about or just general life questions. She has made sure I have full re-assurance in things (complaints) and over-all has been a pleasure letting her into my home. X has supported me very much and with her the vulnerable people of Sunderland city council will be safe with her”.

4. PRE-COMPLAINTS & ENQUIRIES

- 4.1. Pre-complaints are where enquiries, issues and or concerns presented by individuals are dealt with through informal resolution. Whilst 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:

4.2.

Pre-Complaints & Enquiries	Q1 (Apr – Jun)	Q2 (Jul – Sep)	Q3 (Oct – Dec)	Q4 (Jan – Mar)	Total 2019/20	
Number Received	41	36	32	23	132	↑
Number Escalated to Stage 1	2	3	6	1	12	9%

- 4.3. In 2019/20 we received 132 pre-complaints. Through responding to issues or concerns at the outset, we have helped 120 of our customers to receive satisfactory resolutions informally with just 12 (9%) pre-complaints escalating to a formal stage one complaint. Overall, the number of customers who have received a satisfactory response through the pre-complaints process has increased by 27.7% compared with the previous year.

5. COMPLAINTS PROCESS

- 5.1. The Complaints Process for Statutory Children’s Services follows the statutory guidance. This is a 3-stage process as follows:

- **Stage One** – 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.
- **Stage Two** – on receipt of the response to their stage one complaint, complainants have 20 working days to request their complaint is progressed to stage two if they are unhappy with the initial outcome. At this stage, an Investigating Officer will be appointed to investigate the complaint and it can take up to 65 working days to complete.
- **Stage Three** – if the complainant remains unhappy with the outcome of the stage two complaint, they have 20 working days to request their complaint is progresses to stage three. The review should take place within 30 days of the request. 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.

- 5.2. If the Complainant remains unhappy, they can raise their complaint with the Local Government Ombudsman.

- 5.3. Any complaints that do not relate to Statutory Children’s Services, are handled under the Non-Statutory Complaints Procedure which consists of two formal stages. Non-statutory complaint figures are included in this report.

6. COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

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

Complaints Stage	Q1 (Apr – Jun)	Q2 (Jul – Sep)	Q3 (Oct – Dec)	Q4 (Jan-Mar)	Total 2019/20	
Statutory:						
Stage One	39	30	28	28	125	↓
Stage Two	3	12	6	4	25	↑
Stage Three	2	0	2	0	4	↓
Non-Statutory:						
Stage One	2	1	6	6	15	↑
Stage Two	0	1	0	2	3	↑
Total	46	44	42	40	172	↓

6.2. Overall in 2019-20 we received 172 complaints compared with 260 in 2018-19 which shows a decrease of 33.8%. 154 were statutory complaints and 18 were non-statutory. In 2019-20 we received 125 statutory stage one complaints compared with 226 in 2018-19 which shows a decrease of 44.6% compared with the previous year.

6.3. 25 stage two complaints were received in 2019-20 compared with 20 in 2018-19 which shows an increase of 25% compared with the previous year. Four complaints progressed to stage three in 2019-20 compared with eight in 2018-19. We also received 15 non-statutory stage one complaints compared with six in 2018-19. Three progressed to stage two.

Number of Complaints by Young People:

6.4. The table below shows the number of complaints from young people received across 2019-20 each stage of the complaints process. There were 14 complaints received in total which is consistent with the previous year.

Complaint Stage	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total 2019/20
Stage One (all)	1	4	2	3	10
Stage Two (all)	0	2	1	1	4
Stage Three	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1	6	3	4	14 →

7. STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS

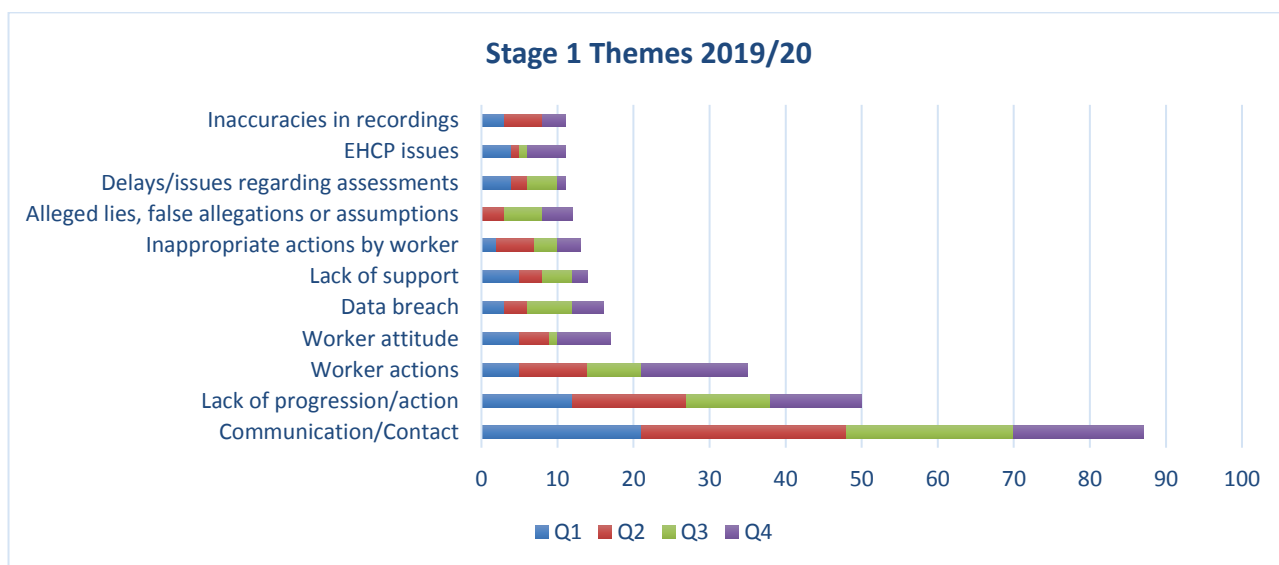
7.1. The table below shows the number of stage one complaints received by service area.

TEAM	Qtr1	Qtr2	Qtr3	Qtr4	Total 2019/20
Assessment Service	6	4	8	6	24
Children with Disabilities Service	1	1	3	2	7
Child Protection Service	19	13	15	15	62
Early Help Service	0	1	0	2	3
Fostering Service	0	1	0	1	2
ICRT Service	2	1	0	0	3
LAC and Permanence Service	6	6	1	5	18
Next Steps Service	2	3	0	0	5
SEND Service	5	1	5	3	14
Assessment Service and IRO Service	0	0	1	0	1
Child Protection Service and IRO Service	0	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	41	31	34	34	140 ↓

- 7.2. 44.2% of stage one complaints received in 2019-20 relate to the child protection services. This is to be expected as child protection is the largest service area and due to the nature of work carried out within this service. There has however been a decrease in the number of complaints relating to this service from 80 to 62 when compared with the previous year.
- 7.3. The second-highest area of complaints received in 2019-20 relate to the assessment service equating to 24 which shows a decrease compared with 30 in the previous year. The number of complaints received in the Children Looked After/Permanence Teams has also decreased from 22 to 18 when compared with the previous year and SEND (non-statutory) complaints have remained stable at 14.
- 7.4. Overall 91% of services listed in the above table saw a decrease in the number of complaints with only one team showing a slight increase (of one complaint) when compared with the previous year.

Themes:

- 7.5. The main themes of the complaints received at Stage one in 2019-20 are shown in the table below:



- 7.6. From April 2019 – March 2020 most complaints related to communication issues i.e. not being able to contact worker and/or worker not keeping families appropriately informed. Complaints regarding lack of progression or action together with complaints regarding the actions that have been taken by workers make up the top three themes across all four quarters which is in line with the top themes identified in the 2018-19 report.
- 7.7. 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. 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 regularly relate to the same teams. Senior Managers have also spoken first hand to complaints listening and responding to their concerns where appropriate.
- 7.8. Although it is accepted that complaints are inevitable, Children's Social Care also understand that by having a stable workforce across all teams in social care is allowing stronger and more trusting relationships to develop between families and their workers which is contributing to an overall reduction in complaint numbers and is reducing the number of complaints regarding communication, contact and lack of progression or action.

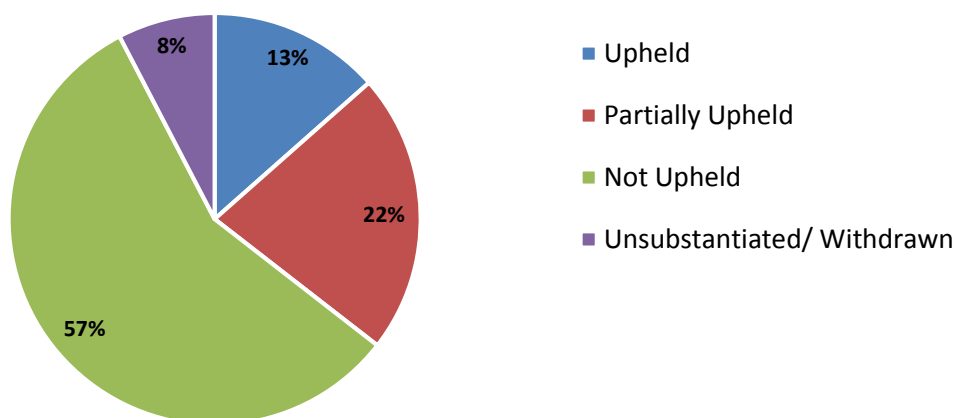
Timeliness of Response to Stage One Complaints:

- 7.9. In 2019-20, the response time to statutory stage one complaints decreased from 69.9% to 45.5% when compared to the previous year. 42.9% of non-statutory stage one complaints were responded to in timescale with the highest increase of timeliness completed in timescale in Q4, showing that the response time is improving.

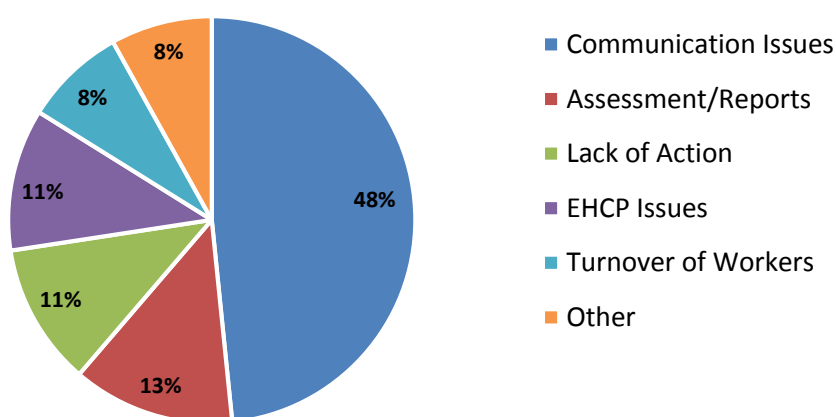
Complaint Stage	% of stage 1 complaints responded to in timescale				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD
Statutory stage 1 complaints (Timescale 10-20 working days)	50%	42.9%	50.0%	39.4%	45.5% ↓
Non-statutory stage 1 complaints (Timescale 10-20 working days)	0%	0%	20%	71.4%	42.9%

Stage One Complaint Outcomes:

- 7.10. There were 445 elements of complaint identified within stage one complaints that concluded in 2019-20. The outcomes of all stage one complaint elements for the year are shown below.



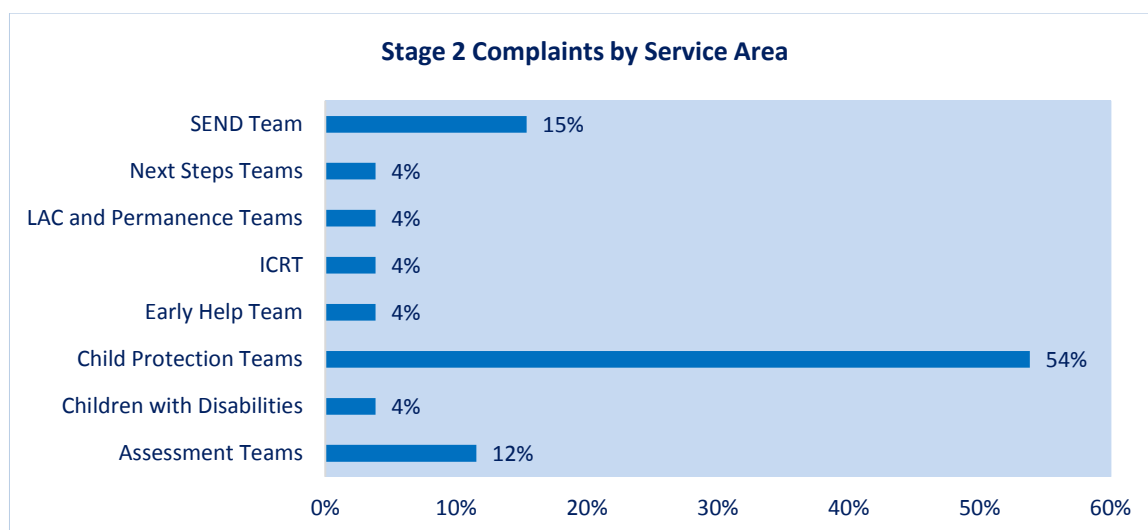
- 7.11. The majority of complaint elements equating to 57% were not upheld and a further 8% were unsubstantiated or withdrawn. 22% of elements were partially upheld and 13% were upheld. The chart below shows the main reasons for complaint elements that were upheld.



- 7.12. Of the 60 elements that were upheld, 48% related to lack of/poor communication between the service and family. Other themes included accuracy of reports or assessments (13%), lack of action by service (11%), EHCP plans (11%) and changes in workers (8%). The remaining 8% related to other issues that were individual to each complaint.

8. STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS AND STAGE THREE REVIEWS

8.1. The table below shows the number of all stage two complaints received by service area.

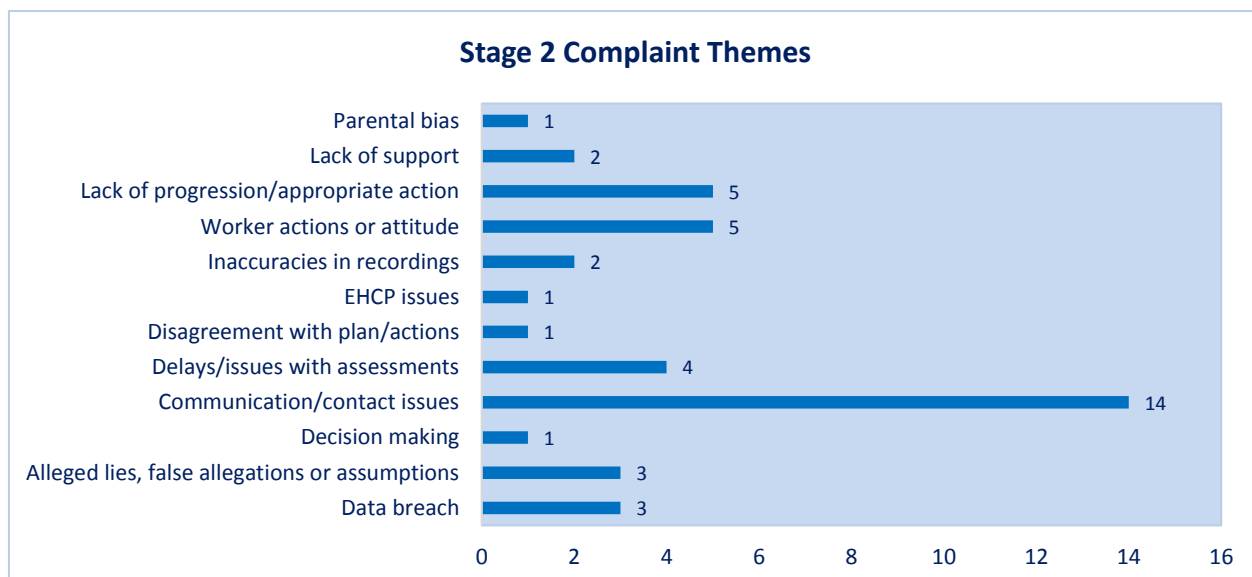


8.2. The majority of stage two complaints received in 2019-20 relate to child protection services. Similarly, to stage one complaints, this is to be expected given the size of the service and nature of its work. The second-highest area of stage two complaints received in 2019-20 relate to the SEND team equating to 15% and then the Assessment Service equating to 12%.

8.3. Overall the number of stage two complaints has increased from 20 to 25 when compared with the previous year but only four progressed to a stage three review which is 50% less than the previous year.

Themes:

8.4. The main themes of the complaint received at Stage two in 2019-20 are shown in the table below (*note one complaint can have multiple themes*):



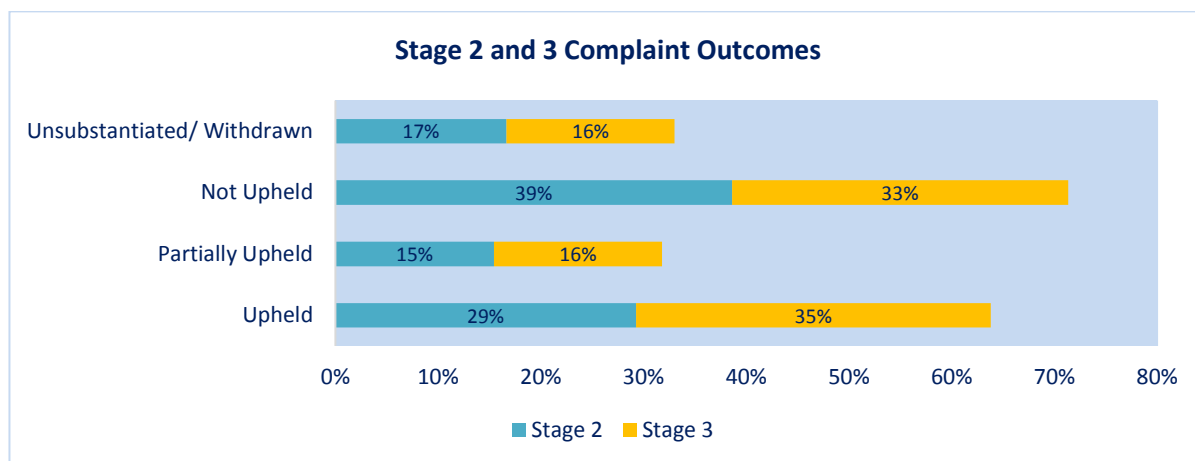
8.5. From April 2019 – March 2020 most stage two complaints related to communication and contact issues. Complaints regarding lack of progression or action together with complaints regarding the actions or attitudes by workers make up the top three themes which is consistent with the stage one complaints.

Timeliness of Response to Stage Two Complaints:

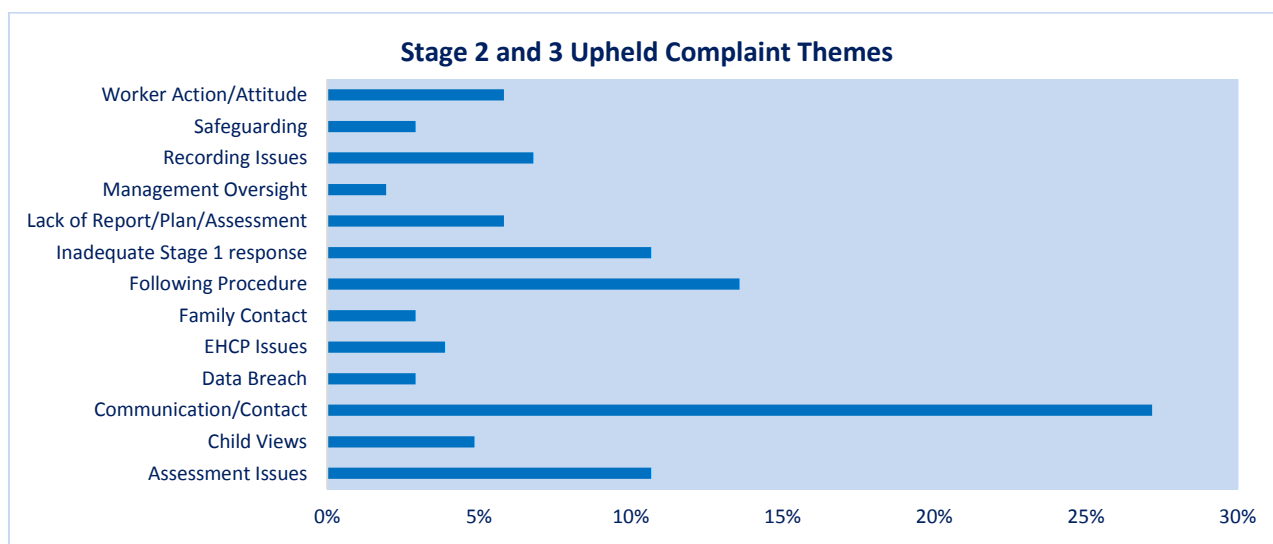
- 8.6. In 2019-20, 23 statutory stage two complaints were concluded together with one non-statutory complaint (*figures differ to numbers received, as there were complaints open at the start of the year from 2018/19 and complaints that remain open moving into 2020-21*). None of the stage two complaints were completed within timescale. The average days taken for investigation and adjudication of the 23 complaints was 139 days against a target of 65 days. The average number of days for investigating complaints was 103 and the average days for adjudication was 37.

Stage Two and Three Complaint Outcomes

- 8.7. There were 246 elements of complaint identified within all stage two complaints that concluded in 2019-20 and 55 elements concluded at stage three (statutory). The outcomes of stage two and three complaint elements for the year are shown below.



- 8.8. At stage two, the majority of complaint elements equating to 39% were not upheld and a further 17% were unsubstantiated or withdrawn. 15% of elements were partially upheld and 29% were upheld.
- 8.9. At stage three a higher majority of elements were upheld equating to 35% with a further 16% partially upheld. 33% were not upheld and 16% were unsubstantiated or withdrawn.
- 8.10. Since April 2019, of the 55 elements that went to Stage three panels the following outcomes changed; four of the elements that were partially upheld were changed to upheld; two elements classed as 'other' were also changed to upheld.
- 8.11. The main subject areas of elements upheld at stage two and three are as follows:



- 8.12. Comparing upheld elements with the previous year, there are several themes that are reoccurring such as communication, assessment issues and worker actions or attitude. 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. Inadequate response to stage one complaints and following procedure are new themes when compared with the previous year. 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.

9. OMBUDSMAN REFERRALS

- 9.1. Eleven complaints were highlighted to the Customer Feedback Team in 2019-2020 by the Local Government Ombudsman. The LGO concluded:
- 4 cases - no further action investigation not required
 - 3 cases - considered premature as the complaint was still being investigated
 - 1 case – upheld due to delay in complaint process (recommended £600 awarded to complainant)
 - 1 case – upheld due to delay in complaints process (recommended stage 2 investigation)
 - 1 case – upheld due to delay in complaint process (recommended date for adjudication to be completed)
 - 1 case upheld but no further action as already remedied

10. LESSONS LEARNED

- 10.1. 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.
- 10.2. Below are some key actions that Together for Children is delivering, taking account of lessons learned.
- Together for Children has commissioned an independent SEND consultant to review all current processes and support the redesign of services including communication and information sharing strategies.
 - The importance of the Together for Children workforce splitting meetings to safeguard parents and family's members who are victims of domestic violence from the perpetrators is being reiterated to management and staff and this message will also be included in any relevant training delivered to the Together for Children workforce.
 - The complaints process in relation in documents that have been considered in court will be reviewed, with due diligence to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman guidance. The outcomes of the review will be captured and provided to Investigating Officers.
 - We will remind Social Workers within team briefings of the need to ensure all parents are aware of the services available to support their engagement with Children's Services via other agencies. We will look to develop a parental information guide with reference to support available to parents and for this to be routinely provide to all parents.
 - TfC staff will receive updated training from DFE from April 2020 to ensure annual reviews of EHCP are undertaken in accordance with current guidelines. With the aim of ensuring compliance and effective service delivery. An additional review officer has been recruited to provide improved coordination of this service.

- Additional training for SEND team, school SENDCOs and wider professionals is to be delivered from April 2020 to improve multiagency planning and cooperation.
- The SEND commissioning team are currently undertaking a review of the TfC commissioning strategy with the view to improving the quality of monitoring of equipment and resources.
- Communications to be sent out to all the social work teams and commissioning to make clear that when we are commissioning a service for a child the worker fully understands the service provision and that the provision can meet the child's needs. Communications will remind workers that it is their responsibility to share full information before the child accesses the provision.
- The outcomes and learning from an investigation will be shared with all frontline social workers. To ensure there is consistency in recording meetings which are held as well as those cancelled, this will be discussed within the Senior Service Managers meeting and will be cascaded to Team Managers within a full manager meeting. Team managers will share this within their team meetings on a regular basis to reinforce the importance.
- TfC will endeavour to ensure that record keeping will be addressed with all employees. we are developing training and improvement actions to ensure that all staff are appropriately skilled in this regard.

10.3. Some of the key actions achieved over the last year include:

- Together for Children's Practice Standards have been reviewed and strengthened in relation to gaining consent and ensuring parental involvement and understanding. The revised Practice Standards were relaunched and made available to all social workers via the Practice Hub at the beginning of May 2019.
- Together for Children has introduced a new Care and Legal Gateway Panel that is chaired by the Director of Children Social Care or a Head of Service. The panel oversees decisions for children to become looked after. The panel is also attended by a TfC legal adviser to ensure that the correct legal framework is applied.
- Mental Health First Aid training was rolled out to social work staff in 2019, with a number of workers receiving mental health training from Sunderland City Council. Plans are in place for 2020 training to incorporate Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- Together for Children's legal team has implemented a process whereby duty solicitors confirm legal advice given verbally with a follow up email, that can be added to the child's file to 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 have included it in Together for Children's Practice Standards.
- Together for Children have recognised the need to develop more robust commissioning processes for disabled children's short break provision and reflected this in our Sufficiency Strategy 2017-2020.
- 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.
- Further training provided to Team Managers regarding authorising assessments and 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 have developed 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 have introduced a new model of social care practice called Signs of Safety. Forging and maintaining strong working relationships with families is fundamental to this approach.
- Business Managers circulate a calendar of important dates for diverse religions and cultures to all social care staff and Team Managers remind staff to avoid such dates wherever possible when arranging meetings with families (however the safeguarding and welfare of children take priority, as enshrined within the Children's Act, and as such the earliest date possible will always be the primary consideration for the Children's Social Care when arranging urgent court dates).

11. COST OF COMPLAINTS

11.1. The total cost of investigating claims in all four quarters is £87,874.74 compared with £57,886.76 for the same period in 2018/19. The increase is largely due to the rise in stage two complaints and the time taken to undertake the investigations. The table below shows the compensation costs paid in relation to upheld complaints. Overall £3,625 compensation costs were issued compared with £5,200 in the previous year.

	Q1 (Apr – Jun)	Q2 (Jul – Sep)	Q3 (Oct – Dec)	Q4 (Jan – Mar)	YTD
Compensation costs	£1,800	£925	£300	£600	£3,625

12. ABUSIVE, UNREASONABLE PERSISTENT OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINANTS

12.1. There were no recorded Abusive, Unreasonable Persistent or Vexatious Complainants in 2019/20.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1. 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 2020- 2021 we will;

- Arrange workshops to discuss the following emerging themes arising from the Annual Report and develop relevant action plans from the workshops:
 - Increase in non-statutory complaints and statutory stage two complaints
 - Timeliness of stage one responses
 - Timeliness of complaints investigated at stage two
 - Top three themes for upheld elements at stages one and two
- Review complaint elements that have changed at stage 3 panels to understand the reasons for this and if any action is to be taken.