

**Together for Children
Customer Feedback Six Month Summary Report
April 2020- September 2020**



HIGHLIGHT SUMMARY

What are our key achievements?

- We have received 140 compliments and 67 messages of positive feedback so far this year from children, young people, families and professionals.
- We have successfully helped 53 customers to receive satisfactory resolutions to their issues or concerns informally, without having to initiate a complaint.
- Overall the number of complaints received so far this year has reduced by 43% with many of 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 63% when compared with the same period in the previous year.
- We have reduced compensation payments in relation to upheld complaints.
- The amount of compensation being paid out by TfC has reduced as a result of fewer upheld complaints and a reduction in the severity/impact of those upheld situations.

What are our areas of focus?

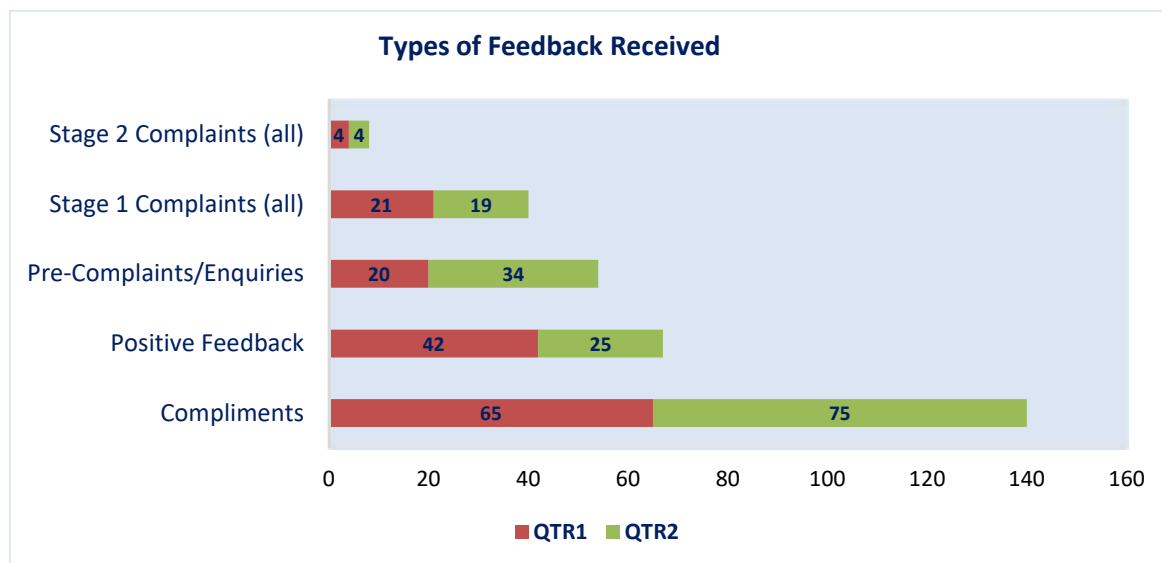
- Decreasing the number of non-statutory complaints.
- Continue to improve the timeliness of stage 1 responses to prevent complaints escalating to stage 2.
- Improving stage 2 investigation and adjudication timescales.
- Continue to address the causes of complaints relating to communication/contacts.
- Analysing in more detail, emerging complaint themes.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1. This report covers the period 1st April to 30th September 2020. Together for Children (TfC) welcomes all forms of feedback as a way of improving service delivery to children, young people and families. The report provides an overview of customer feedback received in the last six months, 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 quarters one and two.



3. COMPLIMENTS & POSITIVE FEEDBACK

- 3.1. We have received 140 compliments and 67 positive feedback comments in the last six months from children and young people, parents and other family members, foster carers, external professionals and staff within TfC. *(TfC define compliments as a comment that praises the actions of an individual or a team and positive feedback as comments that are more in depth, detailed or specific; relating to an activity or an event).*
- 3.2. Compliments are 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. Below are some examples of the compliments we have received in the last six months:

Business Support, Social Care

- “Just a quick email to say how wonderfully helpful our business support, XXX has been during the current situation we have found ourselves in with Covid 19. I have been under pressure to get court stuff in, cases transferred etc and she has went above and beyond, even keen to help on her days off. All too often we hear of when things haven’t went right, but XXX is an example of when people have went the extra mile and this has been a real support not only to me, but also the team”.

Cared for Children Service

- “I have been working with social worker, XXX since December 2019 with the E/H family. I would like to pass on some positive feedback for XXX. XXX has been a pleasure to work with and my work with her is exactly how joined up working should be. She shares information timely and is always contactable, this has ensured

this family have the support they need. I have observed XXX to have built positive working relationships with both XXXX (mum) and I know from their feedback that they have appreciated all of her hard work”.

Child Protection Service

- “We first met XXX on the (date) when the children were placed with us, she has always been available for advice, help and as we entered this uncertain times her help has been invaluable. She has kept in touch to check on the children and has gone by far above and beyond what anyone could expect. We wanted to contact you, cause at this time we are thanking nhs workers and felt we had to say a huge Thank you, for having someone doing her job in such a caring way. Both me and XXXX come from a corporate background and always found only time anyone contacted us was to complain. I worked in payroll for a large company for 16 years and had two "thank yous". Sometimes that's all we get in our job, so we wanted to email you to say how much XXX has helped us. The kids have an amazing amazing social worker!! “.

Fostering Service

- “I am completing the above FCR paperwork and currently going through my notes. I just wanted to share with you both that they were VERY complimentary of TfC. They reported a very good professional working relationship with XXX and the children’s current SW which they feel is very important for positive outcomes. They feel TfC has gone from strength to strength and are particularly enjoying the varied training on offer, XXX was very impressed with the Solihull training reporting that XXXX and XXXXX were amazing. Just thought it would be nice to share. 😊“.

Children’s Independent Reviewing Team

- “Hi (Team Manager) it is a little late and I should have sent you this before the lock down. I was in a ICPC meeting with XXX who was the Chair and it was one of the best Signs of safety meeting I had attended. It was quick, efficient and also extremely well managed. I hope you are well and hope you don't mind me emailing you but it is so good to attend meetings that are well managed. Keep well and safe”.

Early Help

- “Just wanted to drop a quick email to let you know of a conversation I had today with the mum of the above children, EH worker is XXX. It was such a refreshing call to hear how positive the mum is finding the support she is receiving from XXX. We frequently hear from families how professionals from an array of agencies, including social services, are not listening or supporting them. This was the complete opposite with XXX, she was described as, ‘absolutely brilliant,’ and the mum feels she can tell XXX anything”.

Children’s Homes

- “Just want to say a big thank you for all your support throughout the time XXX has been in the care of (Children’s Home). He has returned to his father’s care with the support of all the staff behind him through these very difficult times. He is doing really well and is so happy. Once again just a big thank you for your continued support with everything”.

Anti-Social Behaviour Service

- “I would like to thank you and XXX on behalf of Sunderland Home Grown CIC and the community which has benefited from XXX volunteering with us. He has provided a delivery service to the local community in Sunderland which without him being on site we would have found very difficult to do. As we work with predominantly with adults with disabilities and the more older community most of our customers have been given 12 weeks isolation. The opportunity to do deliveries has been greatly appreciated from all involved. This has made a huge contribution to many peoples good mental health in this very trying times. We have maintained all health and safety requirements throughout this period and continually monitor the current situation with Government guidelines. XXX continues to make a great contribution while we have lock down for the most vulnerable in the community. Thank you so much and I understand you will want him back at some point. I look forward to when everything is back to normal and you can visit us again, kettle will be on”.

SEND Service

- “Hi there.. Just wanted to say Thank you for your help in gaining the ehcp for XXX. It is much appreciated the time and effort that was put in by yourself and colleagues during this testing time. I am grateful and excited about what lies ahead for XXX and his chances to achieve and prosper and thrive within the school setting”.

Connexions Service

- “The work XXX has been doing to support the careers provision here at Washington Academy has been outstanding. As a new Careers Leader her input has been invaluable. XXX has been in constant contact with our targeted students which has enabled me complete our intended destinations quickly despite the current pandemic. I am certain that XXX has gone above and beyond her usual job role and hours to make sure we have everything we need”.

Children with Disabilities Service

- “To XXX, You have made such a difference in our lives. We will always be grateful. Your support & help kept our heads above water. Good luck for the future, Love XXXX and XXXXX”.

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 quarters one and two:

Pre-Complaints & Enquiries	Q1 (Apr – Jun)	Q2 (Jul – Sep)	Total	
Number Received	20	34	54	↓
Percentage resolved as Pre-Complaint or Enquiry	95%	100%	98.1%	↑
Percentage Escalated to Stage 1	5%	0%	1.9%	↑

- 4.2. We received 54 pre-complaints in the last six months. Through responding to issues or concerns at the outset, we have helped 53 of our customers to receive satisfactory resolutions informally with just 1 (1.9%) escalating to a formal stage one complaint. Overall, the number of customers contacting the service with pre-complaint enquires has decreased by 23 when compared to the first six months of the previous year and the percentage of those customers who have received a satisfactory response through the pre-complaints process has increased by almost 5%.

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 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)	Total	
Statutory:				
Stage One	18	10	28	↓
Stage Two	4	2	6	↓
Stage Three	1	2	3	↑
Non-Statutory:				
Stage One	3	9	12	↑
Stage Two	0	2	2	↑
Total	26	25	51	↓

- 6.2. Overall in the first six months of the year we received 51 complaints compared with 90 in the first six months of 2019-20 which shows a decrease of 43.3%. 37 were statutory complaints and 14 were non-statutory.
- 6.3. We received 40 stage one complaints compared with 72 in the same period of 2019-20 which shows a decrease of 44.4%.
- 6.4. 16 stage two complaints were received in the first six months of 2019-20 compared with eight this year which shows a decrease of 50%. Two statutory complaints progressed to stage three in 2019-20 compared with three this year.

Number of Complaints by Young People:

- 6.5. The table below shows the number of complaints from young people received in the first six months of 2020/21 at each stage of the complaints process. There were two complaints received in total which is five less than the same period in the previous year.

Complaint Stage	Q1	Q2	Total	
Stage One (all)	1	1	2	↓
Stage Two (all)	0	0	0	↓
Stage Three	0	0	0	→
Total	1	1	2	↓

7. STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS

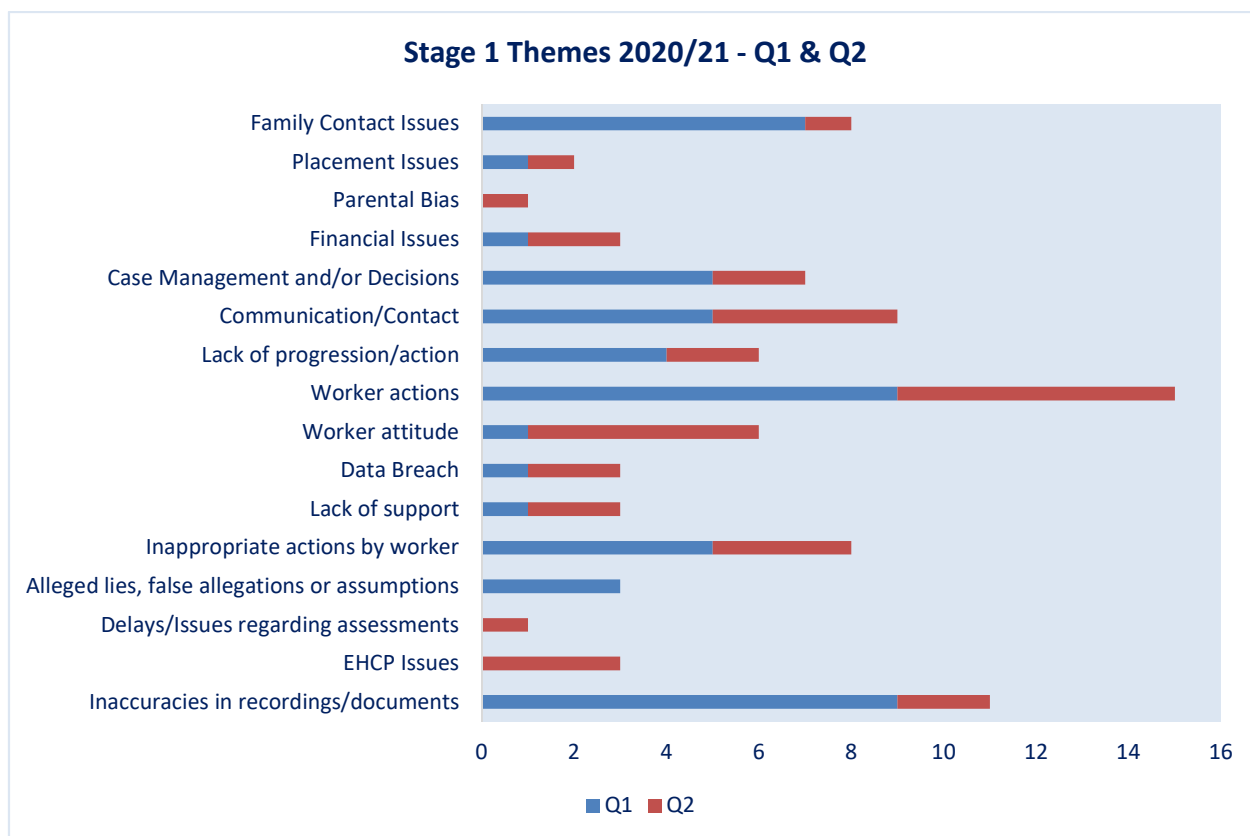
7.1. The table below shows the number of stage one complaints received by service area.

TEAM	Qtr1	Qtr2	Total	
Supported Lodgings	0	1	1	↑ (+1)
Connected Carers	1	0	1	↑ (+1)
Adoption Service	0	1	1	↑ (+1)
Assessment Service	6	5	11	↑ (+1)
Child Protection Service	6	6	12	↓ (-20)
Early Help Service	2	1	3	↑ (+2)
ICRT Service	2	0	2	↓ (-1)
Cared for and Permanence Service	1	0	1	↓ (-11)
Next Steps Service	1	1	2	↓ (-3)
SEND Service	1	2	3	↓ (-3)
Assessment Service and IRO Service	0	1	1	↑ (+1)
Assessment Service, Child Protection Service and ICRT	1	0	1	↑ (+1)
Early Help Service & Education	0	1	1	↑ (+1)
Children with Disabilities Service	0	0	0	↓ (-2)
Fostering Service	0	0	0	↓ (-2)
TOTAL	21	19	40	↓ (-32)

- 7.2. 30% of stage one complaints received in the first six months of this year 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 62.5% decrease in the number of complaints relating to this service from 32 to 12 when compared with the same period in the previous year.
- 7.3. 27.5% of complaints received in the first six months relate to the assessment service equating to 11 which is an increase of one compared with the previous year. The number of complaints received in the Cared for & Permanence service has significantly decreased from 12 to 1 (91.7% decrease) when compared with the previous year and SEND (non-statutory) complaints have halved from six to three.

Themes:

7.4. The main themes of the complaints received at Stage one in 2020-21 are shown in the table below:



- 7.5. Complaints relating to worker actions, inaccuracies in recordings, and communication issues make up the top three themes across the first two quarters of 2020-21. This shows a slight difference when compared to the top three themes in the previous year (communication, lack of progression or action and actions taken by workers).
- 7.6. The number of complaints relating to worker actions are in line with number received the previous year, showing a slight increase from 14 to 15. This has now become the top theme at stage 1. The number of complaints relating to inaccuracies in recordings has increased from 8 to 11 when compared with the first six months of the previous year and this now appears in the top three themes, in position two.
- 7.7. Complaints relating to communication issues has shifted from being the top theme in the previous year to the third highest theme so far in 2020/21. The number of complaints regarding communication issues has reduced significantly with an 81% decrease. Complaints relating to lack of progression or action has also seen a significant decrease of 77.8% and has slipped out of the top three themes.
- 7.8. The reduction in the number of complaints overall together with a notable shift in the top three themes demonstrates the positive impact of learning from complaints and proactivity addressing emerging themes. In addition, having a stable workforce across all teams is allowing stronger and more trusting relationships to develop between families and their workers which is contributing to an overall reduction in complaint numbers.

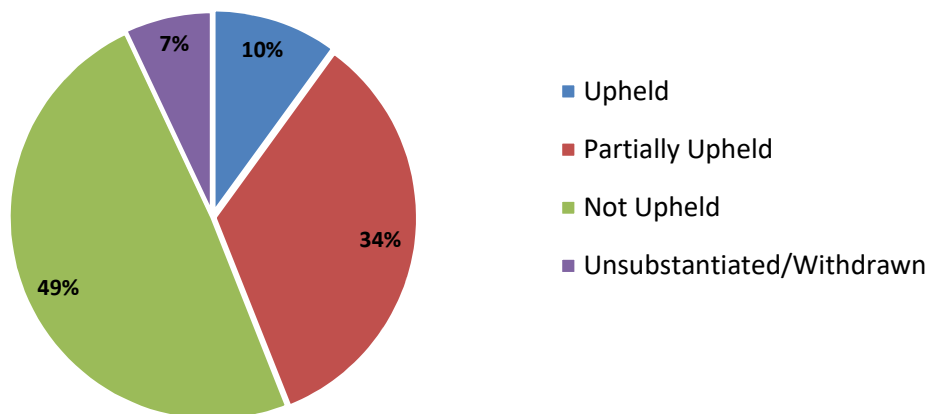
Timeliness of Response to Stage One Complaints:

- 7.9. In the first six months of 2019-20, the response time to statutory stage one complaints has increased to 54.8% responded to in timescale from 46.8% when compared to the same period in the previous year. The response time to non-statutory complaints in timescale has increased from 0% to 55.6% when compared to last year.
- 7.10. Quarter one saw the largest increase with statutory response times increasing by almost 17% and non-statutory increasing by 100%. Quarter two however has seen a reduction in timeliness to 38.5% for statutory complaints.

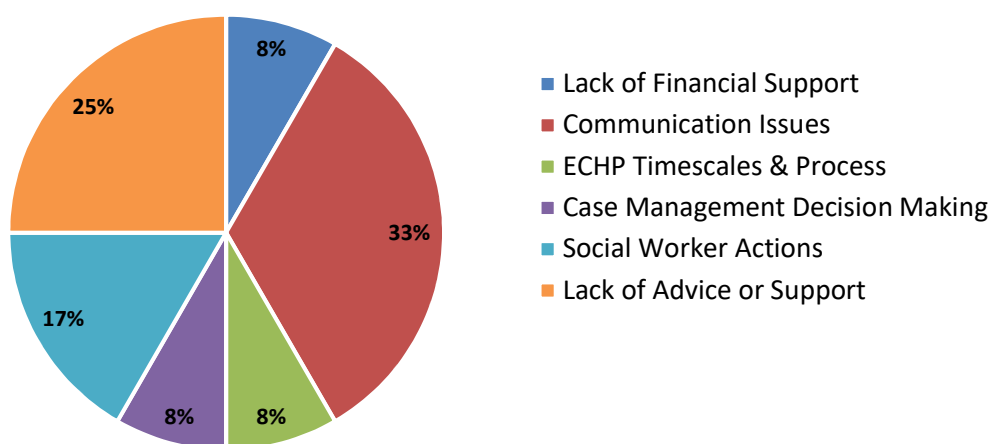
Complaint Stage	% of stage 1 complaints responded to in timescale		
	Q1	Q2	YTD
Statutory stage 1 complaints (Timescale 10-20 working days)	66.7% ↑	38.5% ↓	54.8% ↑
Non-statutory stage 1 complaints (Timescale 10-20 working days)	100% ↑	50% ↑	55.6% ↑

Stage One Complaint Outcomes:

7.11. There were 117 elements of complaint identified within stage one complaints that have concluded in the first six months of 2020-21. The outcomes of those stage one complaint elements are shown below.



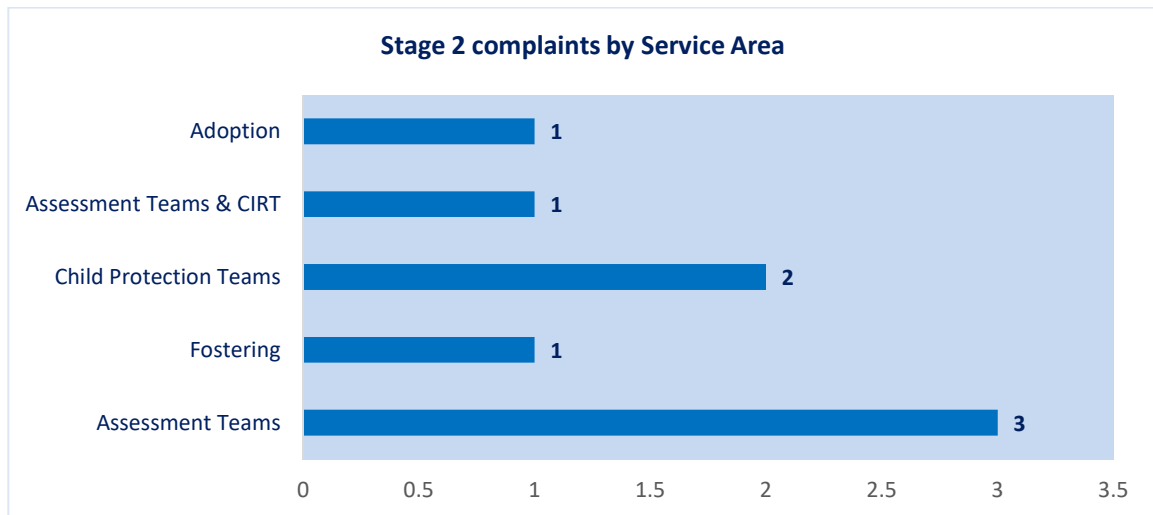
7.12. Most complaint elements equating to 49% were not upheld and a further 7% were unsubstantiated or withdrawn. 34% of elements were partially upheld and 10% were upheld. The chart below shows the main reasons for complaint elements that were upheld.



7.13. Of the 12 elements that were upheld, 33% related to lack of/poor communication between the service and family, 25% related to lack of advice or support whilst 17% related to social worker actions.

8. STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS AND STAGE THREE REVIEWS

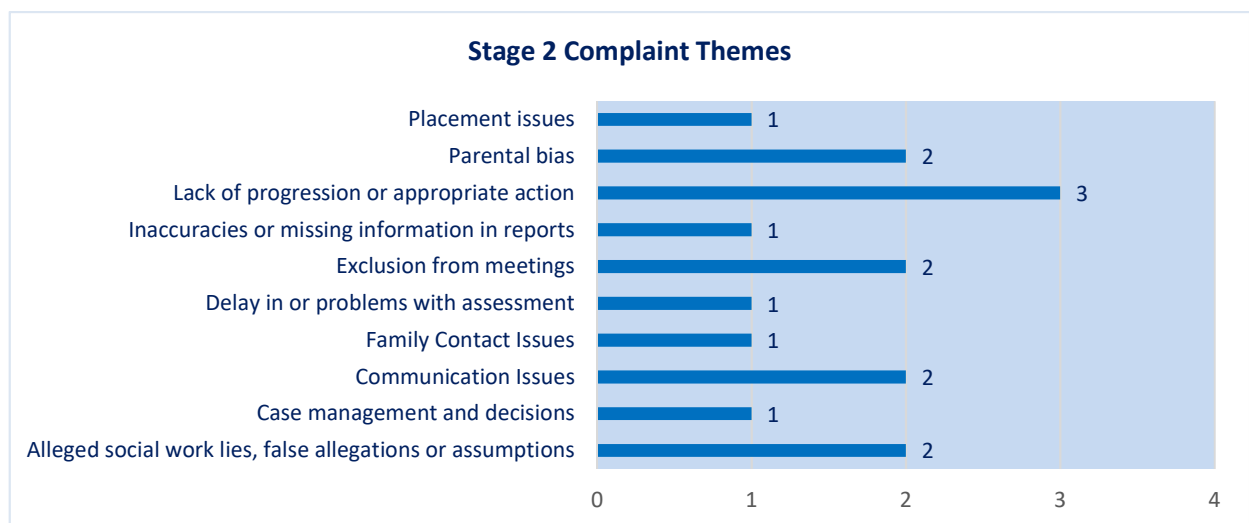
8.1. The table below shows the number of all stage two complaints received by service area in the first six months of 2020-21.



- 8.2. The majority of stage two complaints received so far in 2020-21 relate to the Assessment and child protection services. The two non-statutory stage 2 complaints relate to the Adoption Service and the Child Protection Service. Overall, we have received 50% fewer stage 2 complaints when compared with the previous year.

Themes:

- 8.3. The main themes of the complaints received at Stage two so far in 2020-21 are shown in the table below (*note one complaint can have multiple themes*):



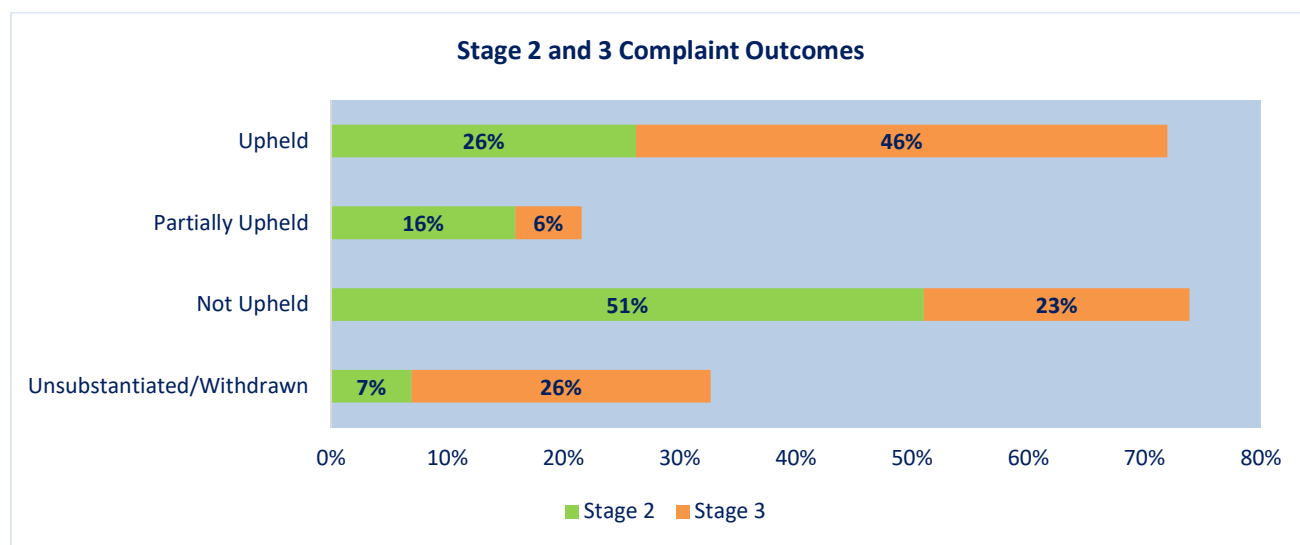
- 8.4. The majority of stage 2 themes identified relate to lack of progression or action, parental bias, exclusion from meetings, communication and alleged social work lies, false allegation or assumptions. It is worth noting that five of the eight stage 2 complaints are still being investigated by Independent Investigating Officers and for that reason the Customer Feedback service will not receive the finalised themes until the complaint's reports have been completed.

Timeliness of Response to Stage Two Complaints:

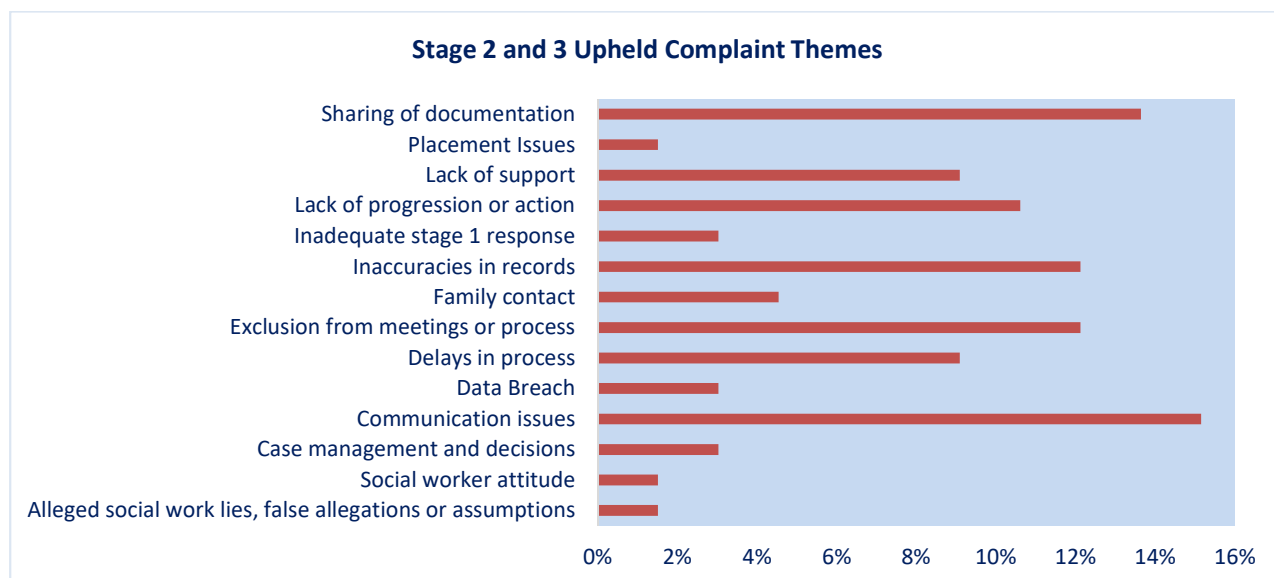
- 8.5. In the first six months of 2020-21, 12 statutory stage two complaints were concluded together with three non-statutory complaints (*figures differ to numbers received, as there were complaints open at the start of the year from 2019/20 and complaints that remain open moving into 2020-21*). One of the stage two complaints was completed within the 65-day timescale. The average days taken for investigation and adjudication of the 15 complaints was 129 days against a target of 65 days. The average number of days for investigating complaints was 75 and the average days for adjudication was 42.

Stage Two and Three Complaint Outcomes

- 8.6. There were 202 elements of complaint identified within all stage two complaints that concluded in the first six months of 2020-21 and 35 elements concluded at stage three (statutory). The outcomes of those stage two and three complaint elements are shown below.



- 8.7. At stage two, the majority of complaint elements equating to 51% were not upheld and a further 7% were unsubstantiated or withdrawn. 16% of elements were partially upheld and 26% were upheld.
- 8.8. At stage three a higher majority of elements were upheld equating to 46% with a further 6% partially upheld. 23% were not upheld and 26% were unsubstantiated or withdrawn.
- 8.9. Since April 2020, of the 35 elements that went to Stage three panels only one outcome was changed by the panel. The main subject areas of elements upheld at stage two and three are as follows:



- 8.10. Comparing upheld elements with the previous year, there are several themes that are reoccurring such as communication, inaccuracies in records and lack of progression or action. 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. Sharing of documentation and exclusion from meetings or process 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 regularly by

Children's Social Care Senior Management Team. The Customer Feedback Team identifies any reoccurring complaint elements and feeds this back to the relevant services.

9. OMBUDSMAN REFERRALS

- 9.1. There have been no complaints highlighted to the Customer Feedback Team by the Local Government Ombudsman so far this year.

10. COST OF COMPLAINTS

- 10.1. The total cost of investigating claims in the first two quarters of 2020-21 is £41,182 compared with £18,850 for the same period in 2019/20. The variance is due to a change in process whereby we request invoices for external Investigations at an earlier stage rather than waiting for the investigation to end before receiving an invoice. This change takes account of the investigations that could potentially continue for several months and will provide a more accurate financial position. Taking account of this change the overall expenditure for the year is expected to be on par with 2019/20.
- 10.2. So far this year the compensation costs paid in relation to upheld complaints has totalled £350 compared to £2,725 for the same period in the previous year as a result of fewer upheld complaints and a reduction in the severity/impact of those upheld situations.

11. ABUSIVE, UNREASONABLE PERSISTENT OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINANTS

- 11.1. There have been no recorded Abusive, Unreasonable Persistent or Vexatious Complainants in the first six months of 2020-21 although two customers have received letters regarding the content and frequency of their communications to our services.

12. LEARNING & IMPROVEMENT

- 12.1. Together for Children are committed to getting it right for the families in Sunderland. To do this we continue to drive improvement from learning from the complaints and compliments raised. 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.
- 12.2. In the last six months we have been making progress to address the recommendations in the 2019/20 Annual Customer Feedback Report. So far workshops have taken place with children's social care management to identify ways of improving the timeliness of responses to complaints at stages 1 and 2 and to address the top three themes for upheld complaints.
- 12.3. As a result of the first workshop we have started a pilot relating to the management of stage 1 responses whereby all stage 1 complaints will be managed by the Customer Feedback Team rather than individual services. We will be able to determine from the pilot if this change will improve the timeliness, quality and consistency of stage 1 responses. The pilot started towards the end of September and we be able to assess the impact of the change within the next few months.
- 12.4. Although the pilot is in its infancy, by discussing some of the challenges in relation to timeliness and sharing ideas regarding learning and improvement, we have seen in the first six months of this year a significant decrease in the number of complaints, particularly within individual teams. We have also seen a significant decrease in the top three themes at stage 1. We have further work to do to improve timeliness at stage 2 although there has been a slight improvement to date.

- 12.5. We will continue to work through the remaining recommendations set out in the Annual Report to identify further improvement activity and to explore more possibilities. From analysing the themes in the first six months of this year, it is apparent that some new themes are emerging. The Customer Feedback Service will proactively work with services to analyse these themes to identify learning and improvement opportunities.