

Meeting of:	Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Tuesday, 12 October 2021
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Healthy Living and Social Care
Report Title:	Annual Social Services Representations and Complaints Report 2020/21
Purpose of Report:	To ensure that Scrutiny Members are provided with an overview of the activity, performance and achievements within this area of work
Report Owner:	Director of Social Services
Responsible Officer:	Head of Resource Management and Safeguarding
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Social Services Management Team; Strategic Leadership Team
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A report on complaints and compliments in Social Services is prepared annually. This provides oversight of the number of issues raised, the responsiveness of the service, and the learning opportunities from this valued feedback. • This report seeks to ensure effective scrutiny of performance in relation to complaints and compliments regarding social services and to provide evidence about the impact upon the lives of individuals and their families. 	

Recommendations

1. That Scrutiny Committee considers the content of this report.
2. Continues to receive an annual report in relation to complaints and compliments received by the Social Services Department.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To ensure effective scrutiny of performance in Social Services and to provide evidence about the effect upon the lives of individual service users and their families / carers.
2. To ensure that oversight of this important area is maintained.

1. Background

- 1.1 Handling complaints properly is a crucial part of the responsibilities undertaken by Social Services. An effective and correctly managed complaints and compliments system plays a key role in ensuring that users receive the right services for them. It enables the Directorate to:
 - acknowledge quickly when mistakes have been made;
 - put them right effectively and apologise, where appropriate;
 - ensure that we learn lessons from complaints and apply these lessons to improve services and performance.
- 1.2 The Directorate has sought to ensure that its systems for managing complaints are robust. Effective monitoring of complaints acts as a valuable source of feedback, highlighting aspects of service delivery which fall below the standard the Council aims to achieve. Handling complaints promptly, efficiently and responsively enhances the Directorate's reputation with all its stakeholders.
- 1.3 This is the sixth year since the revised complaints guidance from the Welsh Government – *A guide to handling complaints and representations by local authority social services* - came into effect. The guidance supports implementation of the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014.
- 1.4 The complaints procedure is a two-stage procedure as summarised below.

Stage 1 – Local resolution

- The local authority must offer to discuss (either face-to-face or over the telephone) the complaint or representation with the complainant in an attempt to resolve the matter. This discussion must take place within 10 working days of the date when the complaint was acknowledged. Where this approach leads to a mutually acceptable resolution of the matter, the local authority must write to the complainant within a further 5 working days.

Stage 2 – Formal Investigation

- A complaint or representation subject to a Formal Investigation must now be investigated by an Independent Investigator from outside the local authority. An Independent Person must also be involved where a representation is considered at the Formal Stage. The Investigating Officer will be required to produce an investigation report, which may include recommendations for the local authority to consider. This stage must be completed within 25 working days of the date the complaint is agreed with the complainant. If the local authority is not able to send a written response to the investigation report within 25 working days due to exceptional circumstances, it must write to the complainant explaining the reasons for the delay and when a response will be provided. The local authority's response must advise complainants that they have the right to complain to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales if they remain dissatisfied following this stage of the procedure.

- 1.5** This two-stage process is in line with the *Model Concerns and Complaints Policy and Guidance* issued by Welsh Government and the NHS Complaints procedure *Putting Things Right*.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** The Annual Social Services Representations and Complaints Annual Report 2020/21 is attached at Appendix 1. It contains a detailed account and some of the most significant aspects are set out below.
- 2.2** The Complaints Officer takes a proactive approach to preventing and mediating issues that have the potential to escalate into a complaint. For example, the Complaints Officer regularly contributes to the quality assurance processes especially where there is an emerging provider issue and the Escalating Concerns process is engaged. This enables the Complaints Officer to have an involvement at an early stage and to have a good grasp/knowledge of the issues affecting the service/individuals and how this could relate to potential complaints. For some people who contact Social Services, they may be unsure whether or not their concern equates to a formal complaint. In these cases, the Complaints Officer offers to meet with them to try and help clarify the issues and listen to their concerns. This approach has proved to be invaluable and an effective way of reaching an early resolution to many concerns. The Complaints Officer has found a number of ways of engaging with service users by visiting residential and day care settings, schools and advocacy providers. This approach also assists in disseminating information about the Complaints Procedure. During 2019/20 the Complaints Officer made 72 visits to Service users/families of service users, unfortunately this reporting year 2020/21 due to the COVID Pandemic, no face-to-face visits have taken place. We will re-establish these visits when it is safe to do so, and the complainants wish to meet face to face.
- 2.3** The Complaints Officer has used a variety of methods to engage with service users to discuss their complaints / enquiries and offer them advice, mainly over the telephone or by email or online teams meetings.

2.4 As at the 31st March 2021, 43 complaints were received, which is lower than the previous year where there were 52 complaints. Of these 43 complaints, 22 were for Adult Services, 17 were for Children and Young People Services and 4 related to our Resource Management and Safeguarding Division. Out of these 43 complaints 4 were investigated at both Stage 1 and then were also investigated at Stage 2. During this period, 5 complaints were referred onto the Ombudsman for investigation; out of these complaints, 2 complaints resulted in the Ombudsman deciding not to investigate any further, 2 complaints the Ombudsman decided that no further action was required and 1 complaint required Social Services to commission a Stage 2 investigation which was carried out.

2.5 Although the nature of complaints is increasingly becoming more complex, we continue to focus our efforts on improving the timeliness of our response to complaints within the designated timescales that are set out in guidance. As at 31st March 2021, 63% of Stage 1 Complaints were investigated within the designation timescales, and 55% of all complaints were resolved within the designated timescales. Meeting the designated timescales for complaints is increasingly more challenging because the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the complaint which can impact on our timeliness of response, particularly where legal advice is required. Although just over half of the complaints were resolved within designated timescales, it should be noted that every effort was made to make the complainant aware of the reason for the extension to the timescale. Although this is not taken into account as part of the statutory guidance. We pursue robust monitoring of our complaints, as on a weekly basis, the Complaints Officer circulates a report to all Senior Management to flag any potential complaints that require follow up and sends reminders to all team managers regarding complaints open to them. This has proved to be an effective escalation tool to remind managers of the importance of responding to complainants within the required timescales.

2.6 The table below provides a breakdown of compliments, enquiries and complaints received during 2020/21:

Stage at which complaints were resolved	Adult Services	Children and Young People Services	Resources Management, Safeguarding & Performance
Stage 1 - Local Resolution	19	11	4
Stage 2 - Formal Consideration	3	6	0
Total	22	17	4

- 2.7** Stage 1 complaints where users or families of users were unhappy with the care provided were the most common during this reporting period in Adult Services, while in Resource Management and Safeguarding complaints regarding charges were the most common. In Children’s Services complaints relating to members of staff/quality or level of service were the most common. This is typical of previous years, partly because of the sensitive and sometimes contested nature of the work which staff undertake but also because the statutory basis for Social Services is very complex. A number of complaints arise in circumstances where staff have acted appropriately in delivering the Council’s policies and priorities but this is not acceptable to families.
- 2.8** Complaints by service users provide the Directorate with valuable information that can help us to further shape and improve how we deliver our services. We have developed clear processes for embedding these lessons learnt into practice. Stage 1 complaints often highlight any shortfalls in service delivery and formal action plans are developed from recommendations arising from Stage 2 complaint or complaints investigated by the Ombudsman. By looking at these issues collectively we are able to identify the key areas of focus going forward.
- 2.9** Compliments and praise provide a vital means through which we identify what we are doing well and to share this wider learning/experience with others. It is also central to recognising the efforts of our staff who are often delivering services at the front line under increasingly more challenging circumstances. We have put in place appropriate mechanisms to collate compliments that enable us to see areas where we are performing particularly well as well as helping us to further reinforce the positive attitudes and behaviours of our staff to further motivate and engage our workforce.
- 2.10** In terms of our priorities for improvement during 2021/22, we will focus on:
- The Complaints Officer will be retiring during 2021 after 20 years’ service, we will aim to carry out and support a hand over process to the new Complaints Officer.
 - Continuing to work with independent investigators to make an improvement in the time taken to complete Stage 2 investigations by reviewing the support offered to investigators.
 - Continuing to work with managers and staff to make an improvement in the time taken to complete Stage 1 complaints. This will involve further developing our weekly complaints monitoring to involve the Heads of Service where we are unlikely to not meet the designated timescales for response. We will also develop quarterly reports for Heads of Services and Operational Managers.
 - The Complaints Officer will also set up a procedure for contacting investigating officers to ensure they are on track with and are following the complaints process guidance. This will include requiring a monthly update on hours spent on the investigation.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** The Complaints Officer takes a proactive role in helping prevent the escalation of concerns raised becoming formal complaints by meeting with service users and their families to try and resolve matters by mediating at the earliest opportunity. The Complaints Officer works collaboratively with service users and their families at this point to ensure any information needed is provided and that individuals are signposted and/or referred for the correct support. This effective approach continues after Stage 1 has been completed to try and prevent escalation to stage 2 of the process.
- 3.2** Complaints provide an opportunity for the Directorate to learn from the experiences of service users and their families and are a valuable source of information on how to improve/shape services for the future. We have developed processes for embedding the lessons learned into practice. The outcomes from complaints often highlight shortfalls in service delivery and formal action plans are developed from recommendations made following stage 2 complaints investigation or complaints investigated by the Ombudsman. By looking at these issues collectively we are able to identify key areas of focus going forward. Key lessons learned are summarised in the Annual Report (Appendix 1) and will be shared with staff via a newsletter. Compliments are also a vital means through which we can identify what we are doing well and to share this wider learning/experience with others. We have put in place mechanisms to collate compliments that enables us to see areas where we are performing well.
- 3.3** The Complaints Officer also intends to consult with complainants to help evaluate the effectiveness of the service provided. This is in addition to the information already being gathered by the Policy and Quality Assurance Officer.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** Operating the Complaints Policy and procedure is a statutory responsibility and the work has to comply with the regulations. There are costs which accrue to the Directorate and officers often devote a considerable amount of time to resolving an individual complaint. However, the costs have been managed within the budget set for this area of work.

Employment

- 4.2** There are no employment issues as a result of this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.3** This report supports implementation of the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014.

5. Background Papers

Reports submitted to Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee on the following dates: 10.11.2020; 15.10.2019; 9.10.2018; 9.10.2017.

GWASANAETHAU CYMDEITHASOL



Social Services Representations and Complaints

ANNUAL REPORT

2020/2021

DATE:	
AUTHOR:	Sian Vowles
HEAD OF SERVICE	Amanda Phillips
APPROVAL DATE	
VERSION:	Draft

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide a review and statistical analysis of the complaints, comments and compliments received by Social Services during the period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021. As with other departments, this has been a particularly challenging year due to the Covid Pandemic, we have had to learn new ways of communicating with complainants as many of our complaints were dealt with face-to-face contact in previous years. It is a testament of the effort of the Managers dealing with the complaints, and also of the complainants of embracing the online meetings and new ways of working in order to report and resolve the complaints.

This report covers all three divisions within the Social Services Directorate: Adult Services, Children and Young People Services, and Resources Management and Safeguarding. This is the 10th combined report to be produced since a unified complaints service for the Directorate was introduced in early 2009 and the sixth to be produced following new complaints guidance (A guide to handling complaints and representations by local authority social services) which came into effect on August 1st 2014. The guidance supports the implementation of the *Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014* and the *Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014*.

The NHS and Community Care Act (1990), Children Act (1989 Part III) and the National Minimum Standards and Regulations (2002) for Fostering Services require local authorities to maintain a representations and complaints procedure for social services functions. The Welsh Government (WG) expects each local authority to report annually on its operation of the procedure.

The Social Services Directorate believes strongly that handling complaints well is a crucial part of its responsibilities. A good complaints handling system is a vital part of ensuring that our service users receive the service to which they are entitled. It enables the Directorate to:

- Acknowledge quickly when mistakes have been made;
- Put them right effectively and to apologise where appropriate;
- Ensure that we learn lessons from complaints.

2. Why Do People complain?

The most common reasons reported for making a complaint include:

- Wanting to be heard;
- Ensuring that concerns are recognised, acknowledged and taken seriously;
- Ensuring that appropriate action is taken to remedy problems and avoid similar incidents in the future; and
- To receive an apology.

3. The Complaints Procedure.

The current complaints procedure came into effect on August 1st 2014. All complaints registered with the complaints officer after this date have been handled in line with the statutory regulations and guidance.

4. The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales provides an external independent service for the purpose of considering complaints made by members of the public in relation to all local authority services, including Social Services. The Public Services Ombudsman also has jurisdiction to examine and determine complaints of injustice as a result of maladministration on the part of the local authority. During 2020/21 the Ombudsman received 5 cases involving Social Services in the Vale of Glamorgan. The Local Authority fully complied with all the Ombudsman's decisions and agreed to:

2 complaints were considered by the Ombudsman which resulted in the Ombudsman deciding not to investigate any further.

2 complaints were considered by the Ombudsman and the findings of which were that the Local Authority complied fully with the findings/decision made, and no further action required from the Local Authority.

1 Ombudsman case required the Local Authority to commission a Stage 2 Investigation, which the Local Authority complied.

From August 1st 2014 if a complaint or representation is not resolved at the Formal Investigation Stage (Stage 2) the complainant must be advised that they have the right to complain to the Public Services Ombudsman. The Ombudsman's office will aim to complete all investigations within 12 months, but most are concluded sooner.

5. Member referrals

The Representations and Complaints Procedure does not preclude the right of an individual to approach their Local Councillor, Assembly Member or Member of Parliament. On behalf of their constituents, they undertake an important role in handling concerns and queries that individuals may have. These referrals can range from comments and queries, to complaints. If an Elected Member does not consider it to be appropriate for them to deal with a concern, the matter can be dealt with under the Complaints Procedure.

During 2020/21 Social Services received a total of 26 referrals from MPs and AMs relating to social care services. All the referrals received a response from the Cabinet Member for Social and Care Services.

6. Mediation

Some people who contact Social Services are not sure if they want to make a formal complaint. In these cases, the Complaints Officer offers to meet with them to try and help clarify the issues and listen to their concerns. Whilst time consuming, this approach has proved to be valuable and effective in terms of reaching an early resolution of concerns. This initiative is in keeping with the spirit of 'Listening and Learning' and acknowledges the extended duty placed on local authorities by the guidance to safeguard and promote the welfare of service users.

It involves the Complaints Officer using a variety of approaches, including discussion, supplying information and, in many cases, listening to the concerns raised and ensuring the relevant service area is notified. The Complaints Officer has also found ways of engaging with service users who have not made complaints, for example by

visiting residential and day care settings, schools and advocacy providers. This approach assists in disseminating information about the Complaints Procedure.

During 2019/20 the Complaints Officer made 72 visits to service users/families of service users during the reporting period. In the majority of cases, the Complaints Officer was able to alleviate the anxieties of individuals and signpost them onto other services where appropriate. However, during 2020/21 due to the Covid Pandemic no face to face visits were made.

Complainants are entitled to request a Stage 2 investigation if they are not happy with the response at Stage 1. As a positive means of resolution, Senior Managers in the Vale of Glamorgan offer to meet with the complainant for further discussion before progressing to Stage 2. This practice has continued in 2020/21.

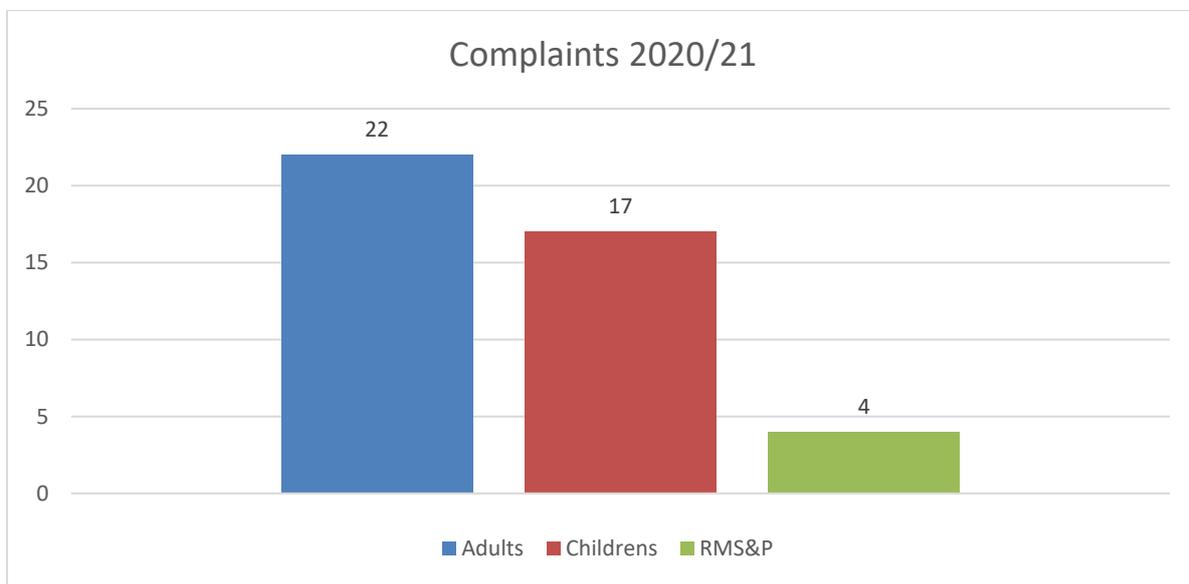
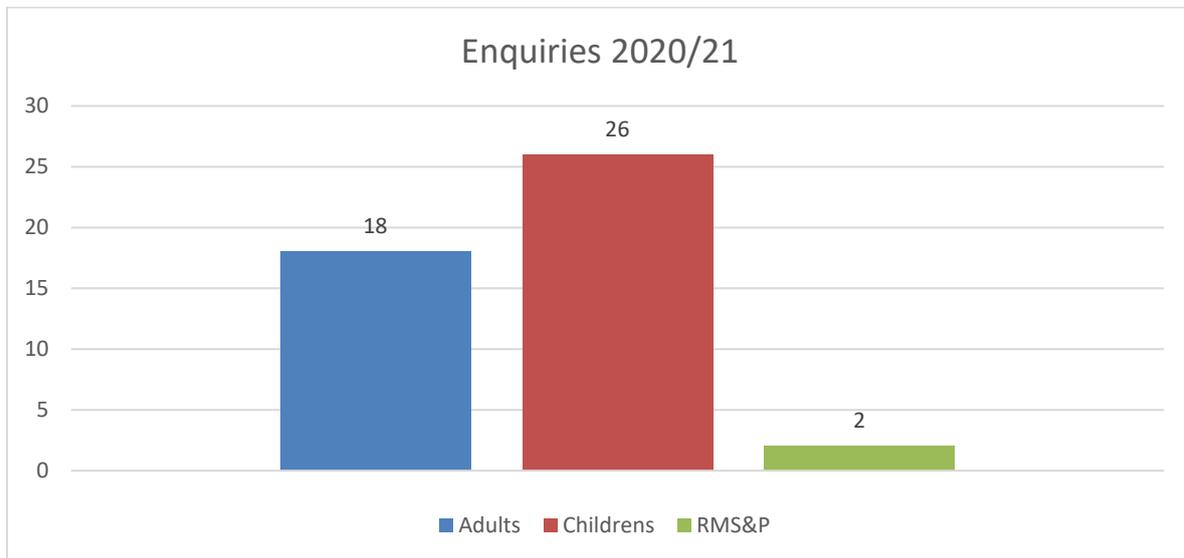
7. Statistical Information

7.1 Number of complaints and representations received by the Directorate

Table 1

	Enquiries*	Complaints
Adult Services	18	22
Children and Young People Services	26	17
Resources Management, Safeguarding & Performance	2	4
Totals	46	43

*Enquiries are issues of concern to the service user, dealt with by the team, without escalation to a complaint.



We handled a total of 43 complaints during 2020/21, out of these 43 complaints 38 were investigated at Stage 1 and 4 went on to become investigated at Stage 2. 5 Complaints were investigated directly at Stage 2. The total number of complaints received during 2020/21 was slightly lower than in the previous year when there were 52 complaints.

7.2 Stages at which complaints were resolved

The table and charts below provide details regarding the stage at which complaints were resolved.

Table 2

Stage at which complaints were resolved	Adult Services	Children and Young People Services	Resources Management, Safeguarding & Performance
Stage 1 Local Resolution	19	11	4
Stage 2 Formal Consideration	3	6	0
Total	22	17	4

The number of complaints resolved at Stage 1 is due, in the main, to the commitment of team managers to resolve issues in respect of their service and the positive involvement of senior managers before escalation to Stage 2.

Complainants who remain dissatisfied following stage 2 of the complaints procedure can ask the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales to consider their complaint.

7.3 Timescales for completion of complaints

The timescale for completion of Stage 1 complaints is 10 working days (from the date of acknowledgement) for the authority to contact the complainant to discuss the complaint and a further 5 working days to confirm the outcome of the discussion in writing. It should be noted that often there are genuine reasons for not being able to meet the prescribed timescales. For example, some cases can take longer due to the complexity of the issues raised and the need to ensure that cases are thoroughly investigated.

In these cases, an extension to the timescale (of a further 10 working days) is normally agreed with the complainant, however this still takes the complaint out of the prescribed timeframe for the purposes of reporting.

The full range of timescales associated with Stage 1 complaints are:

Acknowledgement of complaint within 2 working days of receipt.

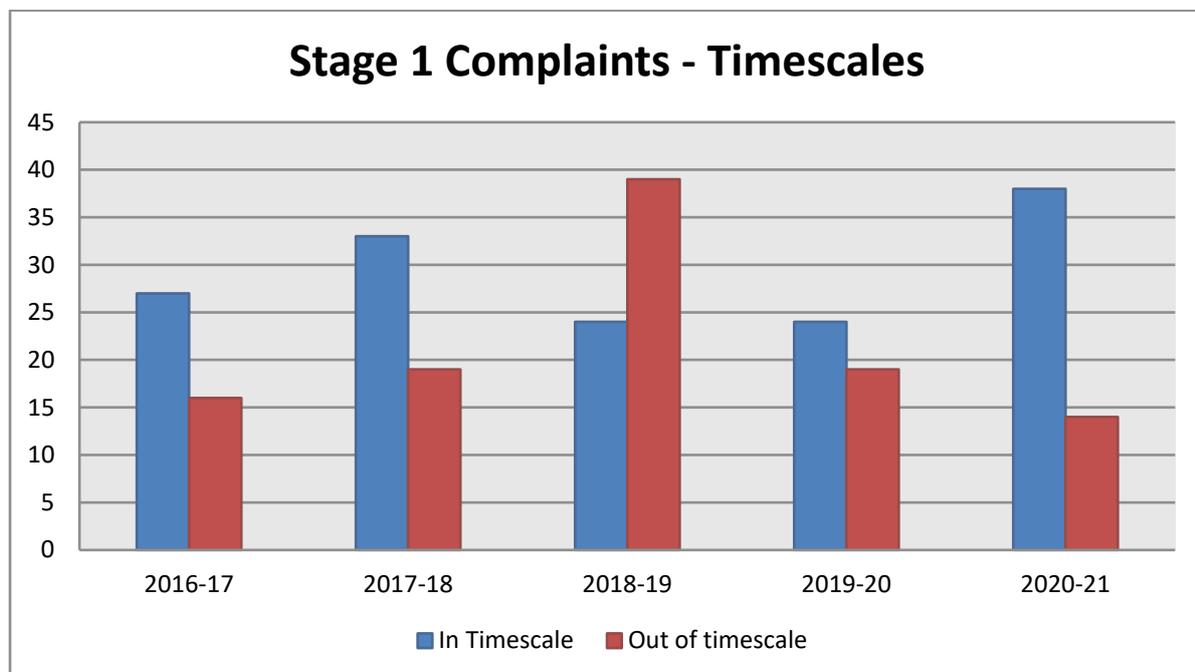
Complainant contacted and offered a meeting or discussion within 10 working days of acknowledgement date.

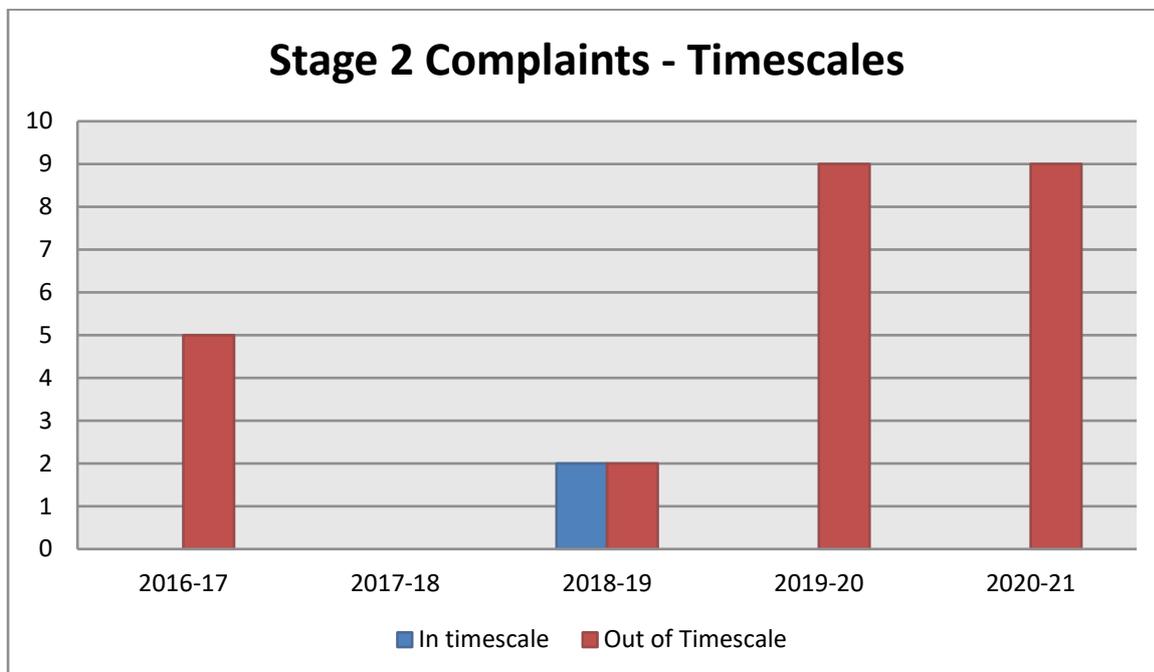
Written outcome of discussion provided to complainant within 5 working days of meeting/ discussion.

The nature of the complaints that we receive are becoming increasingly more complex, we endeavour to focus our efforts on ensuring that these complaints are dealt with within the set timeframes, this year the Covid Pandemic has resulted in complaints being dealt with outside of timeframes, this was due to having difficulties reaching the

complainants or the availability of our staff to discuss the complaints with due to being busy dealing with front line issues or not in work due to self-isolating periods / symptoms of Covid. Out of the 43 complaints we received during 2020/21 24 were responded to in the required timeframes, this is 55% of all complaints. It is pleasing to note however, out of the 38 Stage 1 complaints that were investigated, 63% of these were completed within the required timeframes. This is an improved figure on last year, despite the pressures staff have been under. Out of the 9 Stage 2 complaints that were undertaken, none of these were completed within the timeframes.

Meeting the designated timescales for complaints is increasingly more challenging because the complexity and multi-faceted nature complaints which can impact on our timeliness of response, particularly where legal advice is required. Over a half of the complaints received were resolved within designated timescales and it should be noted that in all instances the complainants were made aware of the reason for the extension to the timescales and mutually agreed to an extension. Although this is not taken into account as part of the statutory guidance, we pursue robust monitoring of our complaints, as on a weekly basis the Complaints Officer circulates a report to all Senior Management to flag any potential complaints that require follow up. This will be an objective going into 2021/22.





7.4 How complaints were resolved

A variety of methods were used to resolve complaints. Each complaint was considered separately and the most appropriate method of resolution applied.

Methods included:

- provision of explanation (written) as to reasons for decisions;
- provision of an apology (written), where appropriate;
- mediation;
- senior managers meeting with complainants to discuss their concerns;
- independent investigation;
- action taken to change a decision.

All complainants received a written response offering an explanation, outlining recommendations and/or identifying corrective action.

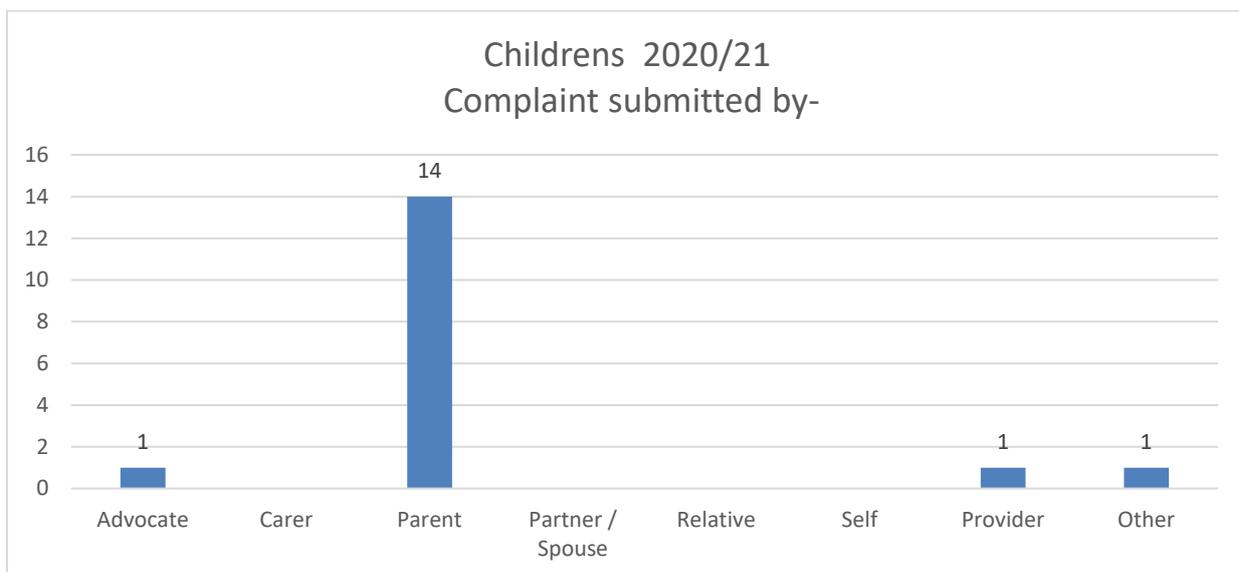
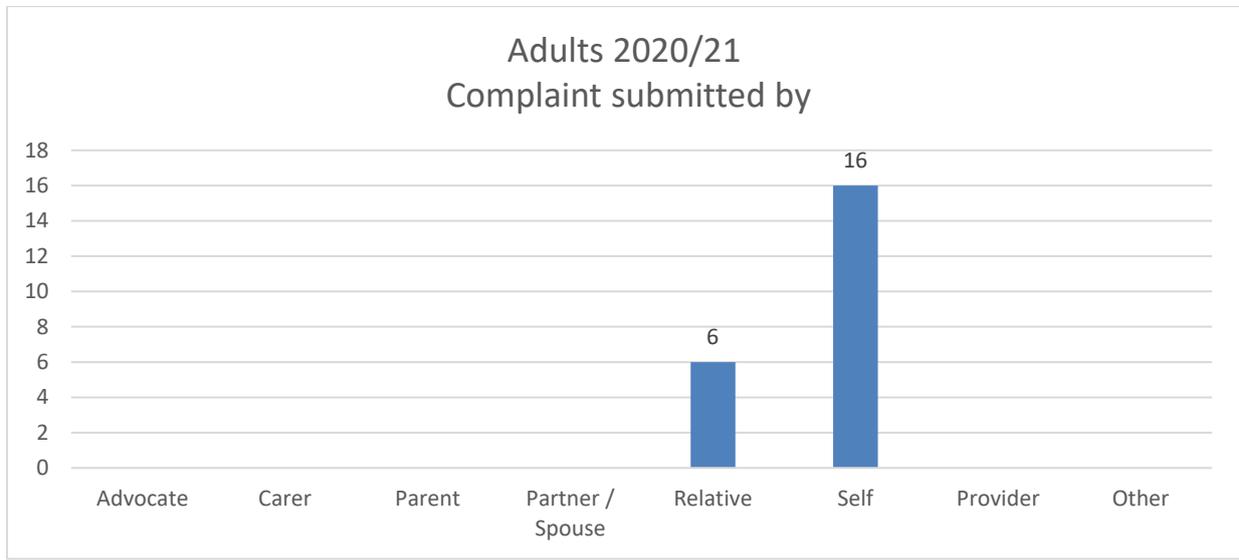
7.5 Who made complaints?

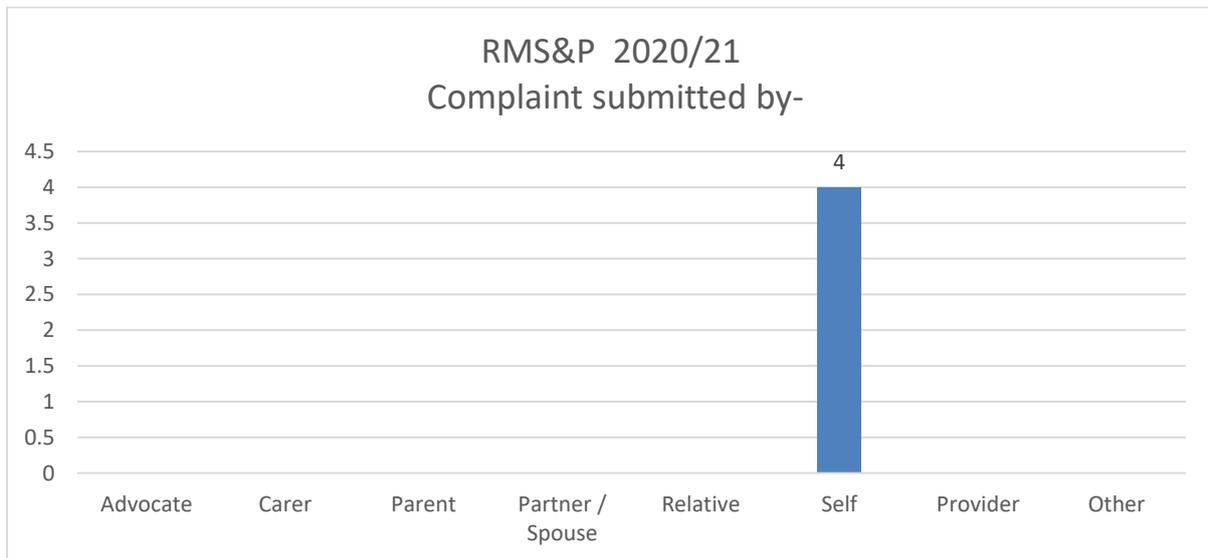
Legislation requires the authority to establish a procedure for considering representations, including complaints, made to it by a range of people.

Complaints were received from the following groups of people during 2020/21

Table 3

Complaint submitted by:	Adult Services	Children & Young People Services	Resources Management, Safeguarding & Performance
Advocate		1	
Carer			
Parent		14	
Partner / Spouse			
Relative	6		
Self	16		4
Provider		1	
Other		1	
Total	22	17	4





7.6 Nature/range of complaints

The most common reasons for complaints received for Stage 1 complaints during 2020/21 were as follows:

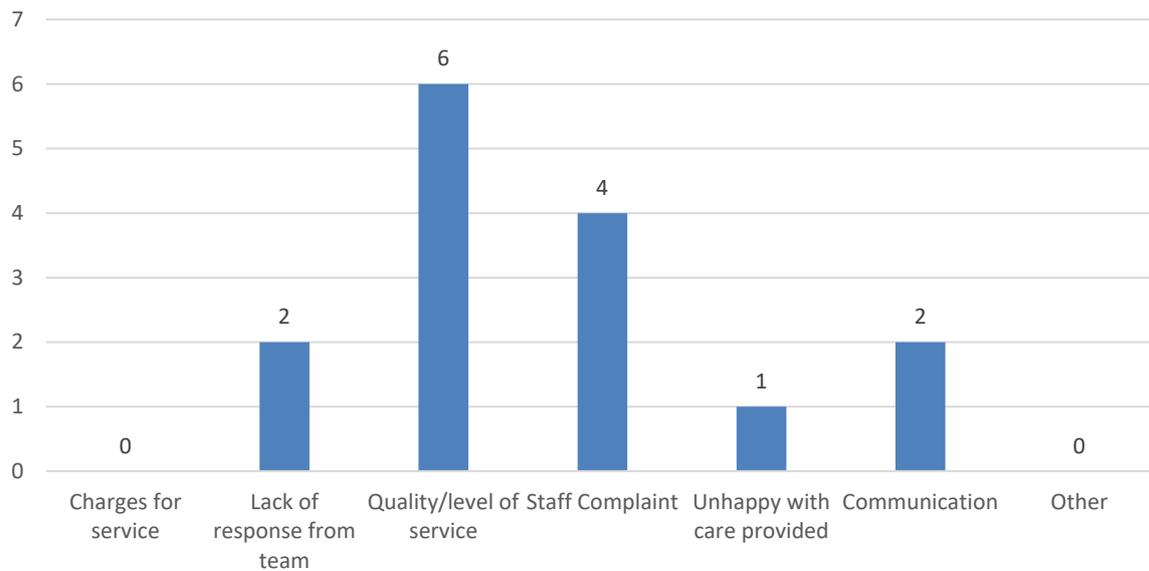
Table 5

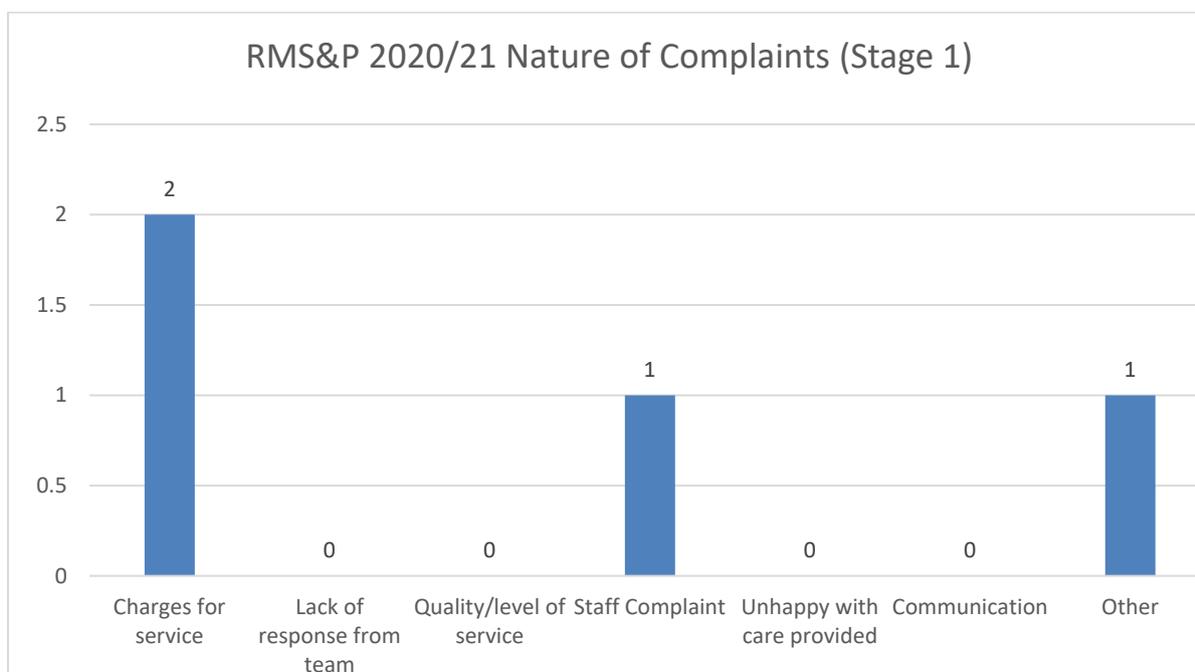
Most common complaints received	Adult Services	Children & Young People Services	Resources Management, Safeguarding & Performance
Charges for service	2	0	2
Lack of response from team	3	2	0
Quality/level of service	3	6	0
Staff Complaint	3	4	1
Unhappy with care provided	5	1	0
Communication	2	2	0
Other	1	0	1

Adults 2020/21 Nature of Complaints (Stage 1)



Childrens 2020/21 Nature of Complaints (Stage 1)





Stage 1 Complaints relating to the quality or level of service were the most common during this reporting period, this is not uncommon with previous years. Within Adult Services more of the complaints were from Users who were unhappy with the care that had been provided, whilst in Children and Young People Services most complaints related to the Quality/Level of Service and Staff Complaints, again this is typical of previous years, partly because of the sensitive and sometimes contested nature of the work which staff undertake but also because the statutory basis for Social Services is very complex.

It is often possible to demonstrate that staff have made reasonable decisions, based on all relevant considerations, and acted fairly. Where staff have acted inappropriately or without sufficient sensitivity, managers remain committed to taking effective action in response and to insist on the highest standards of practice in all cases, especially in treating people with respect for their dignity. Similarly, where the Directorate has not kept to its commitments or failed to meet service standards, we are quick to apologise and to rectify matters. In seeking continuous improvement, complaints are used to ascertain the need for reviewing policies and procedures.

7.7 Compliments

Compliments are also regarded as important information that can be used to identify good practice. Compliments are recorded and reported monthly to managers.

During 2020/21, we received a total of 56 compliments across Adult, Children and Young People Services and Resource Management and Safeguarding Divisions. This is an increase on the previous year where we received 28 compliments.

All of the compliments were about the excellent service or support the service user had received and often named specific staff that the individual felt had provided over and above the expected service. It is acknowledged that certain service areas may be better placed than others to receive compliments and some teams are more effective at recording/reporting compliments than others.

Here are some examples of the compliments that we received;

A huge thank you to X. I am totally impressed by your professionalism and your kindness. I've been telling all my family and friends how brilliant you and Social Services have been at a time when we really need help. You helped us hugely and I will be eternally grateful, you are a brilliant professional

Grateful thanks to all who assisted, they were helpful, cheerful and respectful. They are a credit to the service

X gave thanks to all the support workers who have visited her during the past few weeks. The support has been fantastic, and I am dreading the day the service stops!

X is lucky to have such a fantastic social worker, you are doing an amazing job.

They have been nothing short of exemplary, offering a shoulder at an incredibly difficult time for us all.

Thanks for getting me back on my feet, I couldn't have done it without you.

X wanted to give a huge thank you to the team, they were truly excellent.

Praise for X for their confidence and encouragement and for providing a most excellent service.

Thank you for the way you have helped me, you are very good at your job.

Thank you to X for the hard work in supplying the PPE.

Compliment to X for the quality of her social work report.

Daughter of X was really impressed of the very caring staff.

8. Customer Feedback Their Experience Of The Complaints Procedure

Historically customer feedback has been collated and reported corporately. Following discussions with the Corporate Complaints Officer regarding customer feedback it was decided that Social Services would no longer be part of the survey as it has been found that complaints feedback is subjective and influenced by the outcome of the complaint, i.e. if the complainant was happy with the outcome of their complaint they were happy with the way their complaint had been dealt with and vice versa. For this reason, some local authorities do not specifically survey complainants. Current departmental questionnaires contain a section specifically on complaints and compliments and the Policy and Assurance Officer reports on this feedback in her annual report.

9. Lessons Learned

It is crucial that there is learning from these complaints at all stages of the procedure, resulting in improved services and service delivery wherever this is possible. The complaints that we receive from Service users provide the Directorate with valuable information on how we can improve our services.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council Social Services adopts a positive attitude towards the Complaints, and we continue to learn and use this as a valuable form of feedback, which assists in the development and the improvement of Services. They also provide us with the opinions of our customers and also provide opportunities to learn lessons where a Service has fallen short of expected standards.

We create formal action plans from recommendations in investigations, however, by looking at all complaints we are able to identify key areas of focus going forward and look to embed these into Service areas as normal practice.

During 2020/21 a summary of Social Services key lessons learnt include:

- The importance of effective communication with families/service users.
- The importance of responding in a timely manner to requests for information/enquiries/complaints.
- The importance of managing the expectations of families/service users, specifically in relation to timescales for providing care and the limitations on what can be provided.
- Ensure that all factual information in reports is correct and explain how a service user/family can challenge the content of reports if appropriate.
- Remind staff of the importance of being aware of how we speak to families/services users at all times.
- Ensure that any changes to levels of care are fully explained to families/services users and are conveyed in a timely manner.

10. Achievements In 2020/2021

As with all departments within the Local Authority, this has been a challenging year for dealing with complaints during the Covid Pandemic as we have had to stop face to face contact with complainants. As a result, much of the contact with the complainants has been via email, online Teams meetings or telephone discussions. We have attempted to provide continued support to service users and their families to prevent as many issues of concern escalating into formal complaints.

The current Complaints Officer has successfully supported the newly appointed Complaints Officer through an induction process and continues to provide support and advice as needed.

The weekly update sent to senior managers and heads of service has been reviewed and amended.

The complaints spreadsheet has also been reviewed and streamlined to make it more user friendly.

Mediation with service users and their families has continued to prevent the majority of complaints from escalating to Stage 2 of the process. Most meetings have been held remotely but as restrictions ease, face to face meetings have been reintroduced where complainants are comfortable with doing so.

The Complaints Officer has provided technical support to Independent Investigators to facilitate virtual meetings with staff and complainants.

Effective liaison with the FOI unit providing all information requested within timescales. Briefings provided to staff, internal process for Children and Young People Services reviewed.

The number of Independent investigators and Independent Persons has been increased so that when a stage 2 investigation is agreed we have a growing pool of suitably qualified and experienced investigators to call upon. This can reduce delays and provides greater choice.

Continued sharing of information with the Quality Assurance Provider Performance Group provides an opportunity to increase awareness of the standard of service provided and gives different perspectives on the provider.

Continued contribution to Corporate Complaints Reports and quarterly reports to the PSOW.

The weekly meeting with a CYPs team manager has been re-established via an online meeting, the aim of this is to improve communication between departments to improve response times to complaints.

11. Objectives For 2021/22

The Complaints Officer will be retiring during 2020/21 after 20 years of Service, we will aim to provide the new Complaints Officer with ongoing support during the handover process.

Continue working with independent investigators to make an improvement in the time taken to complete Stage 2 investigations by reviewing the support offered and the management of the investigation.

Set up a process requiring investigators to submit regular invoices showing hours spent on an investigation.

Continue working with managers and staff to make an improvement in the time taken to complete Stage 1 complaints. Reporting process will be reviewed; the weekly complaints monitoring reports will continue to red flag complaints to the Heads of Service that have or are unlikely to meet the designated timescale for response, we will also introduce quarterly monitoring reports for Heads of Service and Operational Managers. The Complaints Officer will contact investigating officers to ensure they are on track and are clear regarding the process.

To develop and circulate a quarterly newsletter to staff to raise awareness of the complaints role, highlighting good practice and lessons learned.

To develop online complaints training for induction training for new starters to Social Services, together with refresher training on the complaints process for existing staff.

To develop a tracking system for lessons learnt and monitoring how these improvements to the service areas are embedded into existing routines/policies.

References: (If applicable)

Name of report author: Sian Vowles

Name of Service Manager: Natasha James