



Northamptonshire County Council
Annual Complaints & Compliments Report
Children, Families & Education
2015/16



**Northamptonshire
County Council**

Introduction

This is the Compliments and Complaints Annual Report for 2015/2016 summarising the customer feedback received in the Children, Families and Education directorate of Northamptonshire County Council.

We recognise that our customers have a range of experiences when contacting us, working with us and using our services. Some of these experiences are positive, and we want to recognise where good practice is evident, while others fall short of our standards, and it is essential that we learn from them. As an organisation, we provide people with a mechanism to feed back to us both positive and negative experiences and encourage a culture of learning, where the focus is on resolution and continual improvement. Where possible, we take immediate action to put things right at the first point of contact, and where this is not possible, we operate a robust complaints procedure.

We are supported in this by the Complaints and Compliments Team, whose core aims are to:

- Provide impartial support for both customers and staff
- Provide advice and guidance
- Identify advocacy needs
- Facilitate informal mediation
- Deliver briefings to all staff, managers and councillors
- Deliver bespoke training in effective complaints handling and delivering good customer service
- Carry out recruitment of investigators and independent persons
- Provide up to date performance information about representations, complaints, comments and compliments to help inform service improvements and help us to monitor our contracts more effectively
- Generate accurate and up to date performance information for managers to help them to monitor complaints, representations and comments in their specific area, identifying any potential 'hotspots' and enabling learning and staff performance management
- Implement a system to ensure that managers work to prescribed legislative timescales and comply with statutory procedures
- Monitor services to track the outcomes of complaints.

1. Why we publish a report?

The Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 (as amended by the Children Act 1989) requires that local authorities in charge of Children and Young People's Services produce and publish an annual report on the statutory complaints and representations procedures. This requirement was updated by the introduction of Statutory Instrument 1738 in September 2006.

The Children Act 1989 also places a duty on all Councils to establish and publicise a procedure for the consideration of representations and complaints made to them about the services provided under the Act. This has been strengthened by new Regulations issued in 2006.

2. What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet with the quality of a service or with a failure to provide a previously agreed service, or with the attitude or behaviour of a member of staff.

3. Who may complain?

In accordance with the Children Act, 1989 and Adoption and Children Act, 2002, as well as guidance in Getting the Best from Complaints, we consider representations and complaints brought to our attention by:

- any child or young person who is being looked after by the local authority or is not looked after by them but is in need
- the parent or the person with parental responsibility for him of a child in need or looked after by the authority
- any local authority foster carer including agency foster carers
- children leaving care
- a child or young person subject to a Special Guardianship Order
- Special Guardians
- any person who has applied for an assessment under section 14
- any child or young person who may be adopted, their parents and guardians
- persons wishing to adopt a child
- any other person engaged in the provision of the adoption process
- adopted persons, their parents, natural parents and former guardians
- any person with sufficient interest in the child's or young person's welfare and can represent their views.

When a complaint is made on behalf of a child or young person, we will seek whenever possible to establish if the child concerned is in agreement with the views represented. We have the discretion to decide if the complainant is suitable to represent the child or your person and if they act in their best interest.

In some circumstances, the Complaints Manager may consider that the representative does not have sufficient interest in the child's welfare, in which case the complainant will be notified in writing, explaining that no further action should be taken.

Sometimes we also receive complaints that relate to a child or young person but are not made on the child's behalf. The Children Act 1989 gives discretion to local authorities to decide in cases where eligibility is not automatic whether or not an individual has sufficient interest in the child's welfare to justify their own complaint

being considered. In reaching a decision, where possible, the local authority may wish to check with the child or young person that they are happy with the third party making a complaint.

We also accept complaints made anonymously where it is deemed that there is interest to the child/ children or there is value in investigating concerns. Such contacts are being judged on an individual basis by the Complaints Manager.

Where necessary, we coordinate with other partners or other local authorities to ensure the most accurate and comprehensive response is offered to a complaint.

4. The process:

In keeping with the statutory process, we operate a three stage complaints process in relation to children and young people.

Stage 1: We acknowledge the customer's complaint, received via phone, email, letter, on-line form etc, log details of this and allocate it to the responsible team manager for local resolution. The focus at this stage is on immediate contact being made with the customer and a resolution being offered. We acknowledge that most customers expect a high standard of customer service, someone to take accountability if standards haven't been met, and immediate remedial action whenever possible.

Stage 2: Where a resolution could not be reached at stage 1, and the customer remains dissatisfied with either the response received or the actions taken, the complaint can be escalated to stage 2. Before agreeing this, we will always attempt to meet with the customer, with support from the Complaints and Compliments Team, to agree on a plan of action which would help us achieve the best possible outcome for the complainant. Where this is not possible, an independent investigation is initiated to assess whether the complaint is substantiated or not, and to make recommendations about the improvements the service could be making as a result of learning from the complaint.

Stage 3: Where the customer feels that the independent report is not satisfactory, or where recommendations made in the report are not implemented in a timely and effective manner, an escalation can be requested. Prior to this, we will always attempt to meet with the customer, so that a service manager can take ownership of the issue and work towards a resolution. Should this not be successful, and should it be considered that it is in the complainant's best interest to escalate the matter, an independent panel is set up to investigate the quality of the report and/ or the implementation of recommendations.

Once our statutory process is complete, the customer has recourse to the Local Government Ombudsman, who on occasion decide that an investigation is required. In certain circumstances, we can agree with the customer and the LGO that an early referral (prior to the completion of the statutory process) is beneficial.

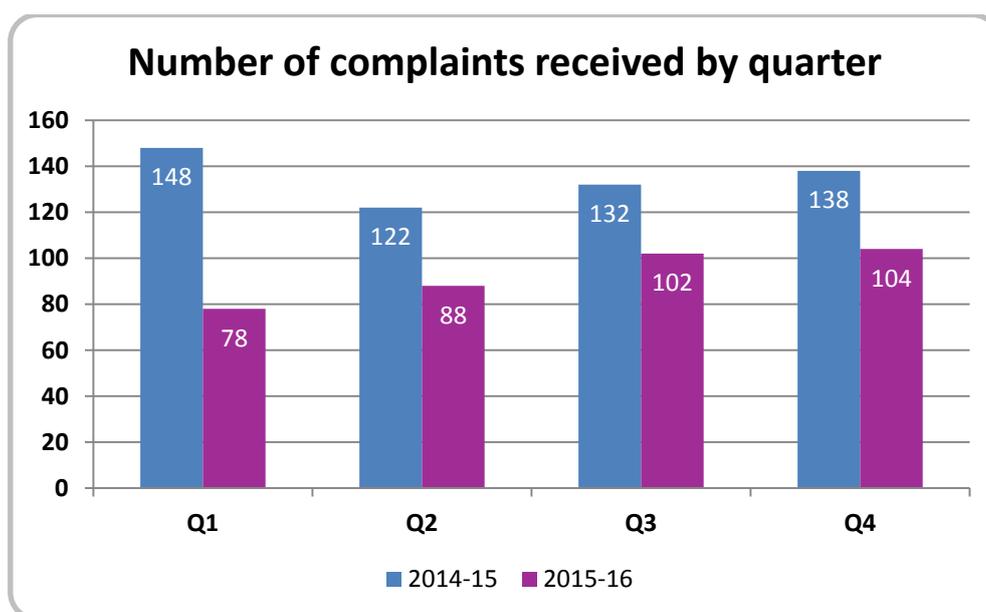
5. What is a compliment?

A compliment is an expression of praise for an interaction, a service or a product. We log compliments from members of the public and staff as they help us identify good practice, recognise those members of staff who provide a high quality service and learn from our customers' feedback.

6. Headline figures

Between April 2015 and March 2016, we have received a total of 372 new complaints, compared to 440 in the previous financial year. The decrease in complaints reflects the improvements made in social care practice throughout our improvement journey. This improvement was noted during the Ofsted inspection carried out during February 2016: 'The overall response to complaints has improved since the last inspection, although resolving them still takes too long. A relatively low number of complaints are received from children and young people and the annual complaints report does not distinguish between the issues adults and children are concerned about. This does not assist in the thematic analysis and prioritisation of issues. A recently developed 'lessons learned log', which includes information from complaints, helps managers to identify themes and areas for service improvement.'

https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/northamptonshire/054_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20and%20review%20of%20the%20LSCB.pdf



We have also seen a reduction in the numbers of complaints escalated to stage 2, 30 (compared to 65 in the previous year) through better case management and timely contact made with the customers. A focus on resolution at the earliest opportunity has led us to achieving better outcomes for people, a reduction in costs to the tax payer and improved social practice through timely feedback mechanisms into the service.

Improvements made as a result of feedback

Throughout the year we have continued to focus on learning and practice improvement. Feedback from complaints and compliments has been used to drive changes to our policies and procedures, as well as development of appropriate and effective communication to staff and customers.

Linked to the main themes identified in the complaints and compliments received, we have captured the organisational learning and service improvements made in the section below.

1. The Voice of the Child:

Listening to children and young people, empowering and enabling them to speak out and ensuring their voices are heard and their lived experiences are understood is central to our services. Professionals ensure that the views of children and young people are captured and represented in our practice and decision making. Complaints and compliments from children and young people are a crucial part of the feedback we rely on, so it is important that we make it as easy as possible for them to raise concerns or comments. In order to facilitate this, the service and the Complaints and Compliments Team work very closely with the Children's Rights Team to ensure not only that children are aware of how to make a complaint, but also that they are supported throughout the process.

The themes of the complaints received from children and young people have covered post-18 support from the Leaving Care Team, financial issues (these include delay in receiving financial support), issues relating to entitlement and also impact of services not received.

- In response, we now have several ways of supporting and involving children and young people, such as the Daily Living Programme (a 12 week programme for young people to support them as they move into independence) along with all the programmes and groups for children and young people run within the Children's Rights Service which also include the Children in Care Forum (CICF) and The Mentor Project.
- We have also worked with children and young people to design a complaints leaflet which is informative, easy to understand and presented in a way which is attractive and engaging. This will clarify the process and provide details of all the channels which can be used to make a complaint.
- The Children's Rights Team meet monthly with the Compliment and Complaints Team to discuss themes and trends from the current complaints that are open and how the service can better support young people. This is in addition to weekly reports alerting the service to current complaints, allowing them to monitor progress against timescales on behalf of the young person supported.
- In order to improve the complaints process, we now have a way of flagging up complaints from children and young people so that if they require support from an advocate this can be offered from the start. This enables the children or young people to have a choice and ownership of whether they would like an advocate. The evidence shows that involvement from the Children's Rights Service has made the process smoother for the complainant.
- This offer is also made to children with a disability, and the team work with them to ensure their communication needs are met in the complaints handling process. Where a child's disabilities are severe, a

Best Interest Assessment may be appropriate, to offer reassurance that the compliant raised and its resolutions are in the best interest of the child, and that their views are captured and responded to.

- We have also improved the online process to include a drop down box in the on-line self-service form which informs the children and young people of our service and asks if they would like an advocate.
- The Children's Rights Service regularly visit the local authority children's homes to inform the children and young people of their rights, which includes an understanding of the complaints process and how they can make an official complaint if they wish to. Furthermore, the Complaints and Compliments Team and the Children's Rights Service have visited some of the local authority's children's residential homes within the county to explain the process of complaints. This enabled children and young people to meet members of the Complaints and Compliments Team in person, and build the trust in the team and process.
- In Early Help and Prevention, we have improved management oversight with regular checks at particular points to ensure that the voice of the child is not only captured but discernible in the intervention plan so that key issues are not missed.
- We have also introduced the use of a culturegram assessment to ensure that every child's heritage is understood and considered in the planning of interventions and that any complexity is given careful consideration.

The thought of making a complaint can feel a bit daunting but please do not worry there are people there to support you. An Advocate and the Complaints Team are there every step of the way.

Don't forget...

- Its your choice, you should be the one to decide if you want to make a complaint or not
- Its your Right, you have a right to complain if you are not happy with a service.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

Contacting the Children's Rights Service:
Contact us anyway that suits you; by phone, letter, email, text or through our website.
Tel: 01604 368051
Text: 07850 299921
Web: www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/childrens-rights
Email: childrensrights@northamptonshire.gov.uk
Address: Children's Rights Service
Northamptonshire County Council
Russell House
Rickyard Road
Northampton
NN3 3QZ

How to contact the Complaints and Representations Team:
Tel: 01604 363436
Web: www.northamptonshire.gov.uk
Email: customerfeedback@northamptonshire.gov.uk
Address: Complaints and Representations Service
Northamptonshire County Council
County Hall
Guildhall Road
Northampton
NN1 1DN

Children's Rights Service

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS. HAVE YOUR SAY...

HAVE YOUR SAY!

YOUNG PEOPLE AND COMPLAINTS'

Children in Care Forum
Northamptonshire County Council

2. The Complaints Management Process:

Some of our customers have raised with us the fact that the process for complaining and the information we provide as part of this process is not always clear, helpful or conducive to a quick and satisfactory solution. As a result, we have reviewed our processes and communication with complainants, to assist them, as well as our reporting to the management team in Children's Services, to improve speedy resolution and learning.

- The Complaints and Compliments Team actively promote the benefit of having early and direct contact with customers when trying to resolve complaints, whether that is via a telephone call or a meeting. Direct contact with every customer who complains can often make a significant difference in improving timescales, providing a more meaningful response whereby the complaint has been fully understood and being able to de-escalate a complaint much sooner.
- Wherever possible, a response letter to the customer is only sent out following a direct conversation, to ensure any possible misunderstandings are avoided, and that there is agreement between the respondent and the customer on what can be achieved.
- As a direct result of a complainant's feedback, the template letters used to acknowledge complaints and update customers of the progress of their case have been amended, making it clear what the process is, what the customer can expect and when, and what their options are.
- Meetings are being offered as first course of action to all complainants requesting escalation to stage 2 or stage 3, to ensure that the complainant and the service have an opportunity to discuss and agree any remedial actions. Good and timely communication with the customers leads to better outcomes and quicker resolution of the complaint.
- A learning log has been created to capture examples of actions taken as a result of customer feedback, showing what the service can do across the board to improve experience and allowing managers to capture changes to practice made as a result of complaints.
- Weekly, monthly and quarterly reports are produced for the management team, highlighting the volumes of complaints received and resolved, escalating outstanding issues and sharing learning.
- Learning and findings are shared monthly at the Quality Assurance Management Board in conjunction with case audits, to ensure that learning from complaints is shared and implemented across the organisation.

3. Support to Foster Carers :

A number of actions have been taken following complaints from Foster Carers, in order to strengthen the service's support to foster carers and compliance with both regulations and National Minimum Standards for Fostering.

These Include:

- The development within the service of a centrally held register of all complaints made by carers, and allegations made against carers. This is reviewed on a weekly basis by the management team to ensure

oversight, prevent drift and ensure that learning is quickly absorbed into the service's day to day practice and processes.

- A self-assessment has been undertaken against all the Fostering National Minimum Standards and actions taken to address sufficiency and weaknesses.
- A learning event was held with all Safeguarding Service Managers to cascade the learning from complaints, and remind staff of the importance of full compliance with guidance and regulations.
- Setting a process in place whereby any cases of removal of children, against the carer's wishes or without their knowledge (this may be necessary in certain situations), are brought to the attention of the Senior Fostering Management Team.
- Throughout Safeguarding Children's Service, the standards for supervision (including quality and frequency) have been reviewed and are reported on, and monitored weekly, by the Service Management Team.
- The development of good practice guidance and training in relation to acceptable case recording and comprehensive audit to ensure adherence to standards will also assist in assuring that strong evidence is captured and recorded.
- More generally and in addition to the above, since April 2015 the fostering service has been on a comprehensive improvement programme. This program has seen a root and branch review which identified a number of weaknesses within the service. In order to overcome these, the service has been restructured and new systems put in place.

4. Support to Prospective Adopters and Adoptive Parents:

As a result of customer feedback, we have reviewed the adoption policies and procedures, such as the annual review of the adoption process. Information was shared in the adoption team meeting to reiterate the importance of effective preparation of adopters for matching, and continuous learning is built into the process. Work on better understanding placement disruption has been carried out, building on national research, and specific examples of disruption meetings. This has highlighted the specific reasons why placements fail (poor preparation of children pre-placement, changes in social worker support, poor or missing sibling assessments, poor preparation of adopters, the numbers of moves experienced by the child prior to placement etc.), as well as identifying those procedures and initiatives in Northamptonshire which can reduce the numbers of disruptions and lead to better support to children and their adoptive parents (fostering for adoption and concurrency, adopter-led matching and activity days bringing together prospective adopters and children, and life appreciation days).

Life Appreciation Days have been introduced as a way of making the child's story real to their prospective adopters and to reduce the occurrence of placement disruption, both pre- and post-order. The Life Appreciation Days work well because the adopters are often able to then accept the child as they are and to have their

behaviours explained. Their expectations become more realistic, and they are better prepared to support the child and adapt to their individual needs.

5. Data Protection:

Secure storage and sharing of personal information is a key consideration of our work. However, sometimes accidental disclosures happen, and they can have a negative impact on our customers' wellbeing and the trust they have in us. As the team managing the largest volume of contacts with customers, the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) team do sometimes receive complaints about information being shared inappropriately (letters sent to the wrong address, for example)

In response to feedback from customers, the following changes have been made in the service:

- A clearer induction programme for new staff is in place, which covers data protection. All members of staff have to undertake the Information Management training, and also the yearly refresh of this in order to maintain awareness of data protection at the forefront of their practice.
- All CAFCASS checks are now quality assured by a practice manager before being sent out, to ensure that the information included is accurate and appropriate.
- A sizeable sample of calls handled by the team are monitored and used for training and quality improvement.

6. Working with Non-Resident Parents:

As a result of complaints received from non-resident fathers whose views were not captured in assessments, or who weren't clearly represented and involved in the process, several changes to practice have been made:

- In Early Help and Prevention, the completion of a genogram in every case ensures that fathers, absent or otherwise, are included in all assessments and intervention plans.
- Similarly, the genogram ensures any significant adults involved in the care of a child are contacted and included in our work, e.g. Grandparents, absent parents or siblings living elsewhere.
- In addition, guidance for staff was developed and rolled out across the directorate to set the standard of what is expected from workers when dealing with cases where one parent is non-resident - the [Getting it right practice standards: Working with Non-Resident Parents](#).
- Safeguarding and Children's Services recognise the need for all non-resident parents to feel actively engaged in all aspects of the assessment process, and are committed to adapting the assessment process to suit the needs of both parents of the child(ren), without alienating either the mother or the father or moving away from child-focused practice.
- Our Practice Standard has its roots in Child Development and its aim is to constantly ensure that both mothers and fathers are positively kept on the agenda when assessments are being completed, professionals are being spoken to, meetings being arranged and during ongoing social work reflections.

7. Information in regards to the Step-Down Procedures:

The service is focused on offering the right support at the right time. When interventions are successful, there is a need for support to be reduced. This is a step down process and a positive move. However, at times customers have felt that they have been left with no information or a poor understanding of what will happen next. This has led to expressions of dissatisfaction. As a result, Step Down Guidance and pathways have been developed, explaining to parents what the process means, what will happen next and also supporting the workers to communicate their decisions more effectively.

8. Support to Care Leavers:

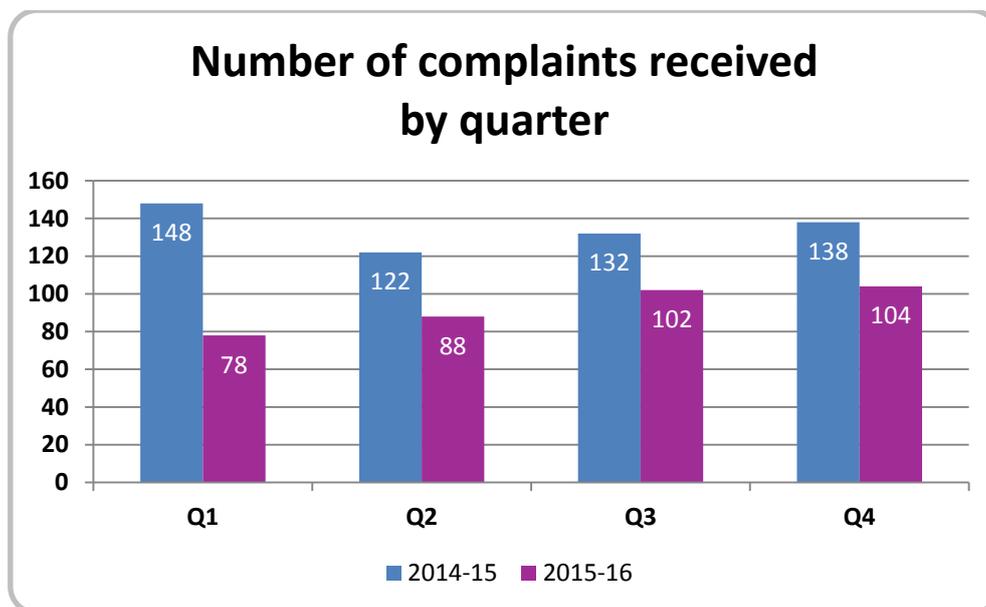
A number of complaints from care leavers, questioning the support received, in particular the financial support, highlighted the need for detailed and accessible information on the process and the expectations that care leavers can have of the service.

In response, a very detailed guide was put together, available online, and addressing the various aspects of a young person's move towards living independently, from legal entitlements to practical advice:

http://www3.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/children-families-education/young-northants/children-in-care/Documents/Leaving_Care_Guide.pdf

Complaints Activity

Number of complaints received during 2015-16



During 2015/16 we have received significantly less complaints than in the previous financial year. The busiest period was quarter 4, Jan-March 2016, with slightly more complaints received than in the previous quarter.

Improvements made in social care practice and a focus on effective communication with customers have led to a reduction in the numbers of customers wanting to complain.

How have we received complaints?

The majority of customers contact us by telephone, followed by completion of our online form. We want to offer people as many channels as possible by which they can get in touch, and the use of email and web forms means that customers have a communication channel open at all hours.

Telephone call	123
Complaint form	94
Email	91
Letter	54
Web forms	29
In person	6

Complaints Activity

How we categorise complaints:

Poor/ inadequate communication	No or delayed contact from Social Worker Late call Missed call Unable to contact Social Worker or appropriate team
Professional Decision Making	Failure to consider relevant matters in coming to a decision, or with action taken in implementing that decision
General staff conduct/ attitude	Inappropriate behaviour of a Council employee or someone acting on the council's behalf
Policy/ Procedure	Failure to follow agreed council procedure, policy, rules or standards of service Council failure to fulfil statutory responsibilities
Bias/ Unfair discrimination	Discriminatory practice Harassment Malice/ bias when making a decision
Confidentiality/ Data Protection	Breach of confidentiality Breach of data protection
Standard of Service Provided	Staff inefficiency Service provided did not meet expectation Level of support did not meet expectation Delays in provision of service
Financial Issues	Delays in payments No/ Missed payments Invoicing issues Adoption allowance, Fostering payments

When customers express dissatisfaction or disagreement with the Council's policy or procedure, we record this as a negative comment, unless the customer chooses to appeal, where appropriate.

What are our complaints about?

The recurring themes of complaints last year have included the following types of issues:

- Challenging professional decisions of social workers and staff;
- Complaints about the social worker's conduct or actions;
- Inaccuracies in the information captured in assessments;
- Delayed or no response to requests or complaints;
- Feelings of not being listened to or ignored;

- Failure to provide further advice after ‘tough’ decisions have been communicated;
- Not following up or delivering on promises or commitments;
- Lack of support and specifically of financial support or payments;
- Data breaches or inappropriate sharing of information.

Top 5 reasons for complaints:



Complaints by Service Area

Our frontline services across the Children, Families and Education Services naturally carry the weight of complaints, given that they have the most direct contact and interactions with customers. By its nature, some Social Care practice and decision making can be seen as intrusive and difficult for families to accept, which leads to complaints. To give some context, in the financial year to end of March 2016, Northamptonshire County Council’s Safeguarding Teams have dealt with over 25,000 cases. Less than 1.5% of these have led to a complaint being raised.

Service:	Number of Complaints:
Early Help & Prevention	10
Education & School Admissions	12
Looked After Children, Corporate Parenting, Fostering and Adoptions	71
Safeguarding	252
Social Work Academy	5
Transitions	3
Safeguarding & Quality Assurance Service	7

Complaint Outcomes:

This data relates to all complaints that were pursued and closed within the financial year 2015/16, therefore some of those cases may have been received and recorded outside of this period. Occasionally, a customer may choose not to pursue a complaint and or we are not able to establish the necessary consent/ permissions to allow an investigation

to be pursued. It may also be necessary to decline or suspend a case that is already involved in another process, such as Court proceedings or where a Police investigation is underway, in order not to prejudice those proceedings.

Outcome	2014/2015	2015/16
Fully Substantiated	113	75
Partially Substantiated	72	86
Not Substantiated	142	124

Complaints Performance

Complaint Timescales:

This data relates to the volume of complaints that were closed/ resolved within the period 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016, therefore some cases may have been received outside of this period (before 1st April 2015).

The statutory timescale for responding to complaints at Stage 1 is **10 working days**. Working days means 'days that the Council offices are open' i.e. Mon to Fri (not Inc. Public Holidays). A maximum of 20 working days may be allowed, but the expectation is that any extension is agreed with the person making the complaint upfront. Any complaints that exceed the 10 working day timescale without an agreed extension in place are recorded as 'out of timescale'.



Increased caseloads and staffing pressures continue to impact on the ability to keep to timescales across the Directorate despite a significant improvement on the previous year's performance.

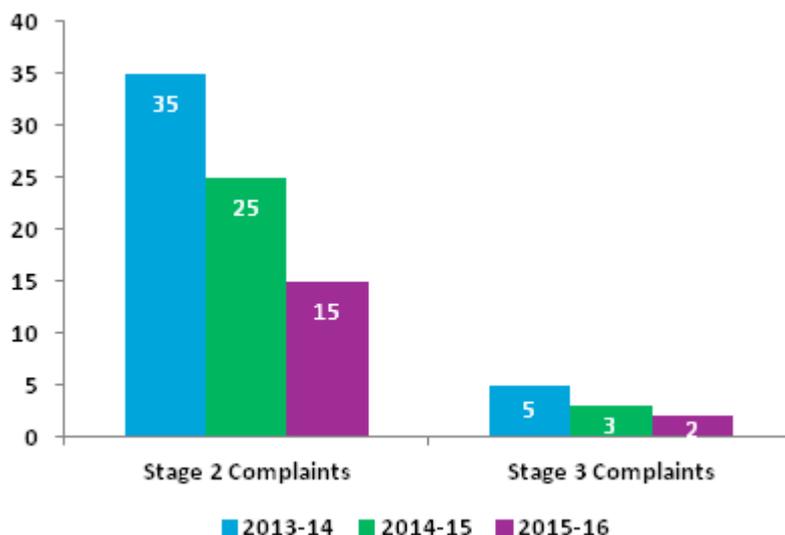
2014/15:

478 Stage 1 complaints were resolved in 2014/15. Of these, 71 (15%) were resolved within the optimum 10 working day timescale. 90 (19%) were resolved within the extended 20 day timescales and 317 or 66% took longer than 20 days to resolve.



Complaint Escalations (Stage 2 and Stage 3)

We have recorded significantly less Stage Two and Stage Three complaints within this financial year. This is due to a concerted effort to improve the quality of response at Stage One of the complaints procedure. Senior Management have endorsed the need to ensure that everyone who complains has early contact from the responding Manager be it via a telephone call or a face to face meeting, to ensure that the issues have been



fully understood and any immediate actions required to help remedy the complaint have been considered. If a customer remains unhappy with the response they receive at Stage One, then they are automatically offered a meeting with a more senior member of staff, which has helped to de-escalate a number of complaints.

LGO Investigations and Decisions

The Local Government Ombudsman Service is the regulator for Local Authority complaints in England & Wales.

Further information about the Ombudsman Service may be found on their website: www.lgo.org.uk

In the period ending 31st March 2016, the Local Government Ombudsman Service recorded a total of 73 Complaints and Enquiries in relation to Northamptonshire County Council's Children, Families & Educations Services. Of these, 66 were pursued, and the outcomes are detailed below:

- 34 were referred back for local resolution
- 11 were closed after initial enquiries
- 1 was closed with advice given
- 4 were incomplete or invalid
- 5 were not upheld
- 11 were upheld.

In these 11 cases, the LGO recommended that a remedy was offered, be it in the form of an apology, financial remedy or procedural change.

Each year the Local Government Ombudsman produces a letter for each local authority to detail their performance.

A copy of our Annual Letter may be found on the Ombudsman's website: <http://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/lgo-annual-reports>

There are 4 types of Ombudsman Enquiry:

- **Initial Assessment** - Enquiries to understand if the Local Authority are already aware and dealing with a case
- **Premature Complaints** – Complaints that are in the Council's complaints process and are returned to the Council to address
- **Detailed Investigations** – Usually complaints that have completed the Council's complaints procedure and require further investigation and/or are deemed to be in the public interest
- **Reports** – Public Reports issues by the Ombudsman's office following an investigation, normally where significant fault or injustice has been identified that is deemed to be in the public interest

Northamptonshire County Council was recognised as recording the 3rd highest number of complaints against Children, Families & Education Services out of 29 Local Authorities nationally. In addition, the LGO have noticed a high level of upheld complaints (62% compared to the 51% national average) and also a higher proportion of complaints related to Children's Services of the total complaints logged. They did however also noted progress made in reducing escalations.

Compliments Activity

There were 95 compliments recorded for the directorate during 2015-16.

Service area	Nos.
Safeguarding and Care Planning	48
Corporate parenting, Fostering, LAC and Leaving Care	30
Adoptions	6
MASH	3
Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	3
Early Help	1
Education	1
Raven House	1
Transitions	1
UASC	1

The majority of these compliments refer to individuals who have provided excellent service, demonstrate a high level of professional aptitude and were perceived to have gone above and beyond expectations.

Compliments are shared with senior managers and staff, in the same way as complaints, so that good practice can be recognised and celebrated, and also to feed into learning.

Complaints from Young People

Children and Young People who wish to complain are offered the option of an advocate who can work with them and support them through the process. This is to ensure that their voice is captured and that the process is managed in as smooth a way as possible.

During the year we have received 35 complaints from children and young people. These were either made by them directly, either through an advocate on their behalf.

Most of these (10) related to involvement with the Safeguarding and Care Planning part of the directorate, which carries the weight of the caseload, followed by Looked after Children Teams and Leaving Care, with 9 each.

Fostering Services and Social Work Academy had 2 complaints each, whilst Early Help and Prevention, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance and the MASH recorded 1 complaint each.

In regards to themes, the most common category of complaints relates to lack of support or poor level of support received, including financial support (16 complaints, or 46%), followed by lack of contact or poor communication (7, 20%). There were 4 complaints related to Social Worker attitude or behaviour, and 3 specifically around lack of follow up on actions or delays in implementing these. Two complaints related to inaccuracies in reports, whilst one complaint was logged against placements, changes to social workers and decision making each.

Moving Forward

Our focus for the coming year will be on:

- Recruiting to the Complaints and Compliments Team, with a second Senior Complaints Practitioner post to continue to focus on de-escalation meetings with the complainants and the service
- Improving the quality of the Complaints and Compliments information in the public domain, i.e. website links and forms
- Improving the feedback loop for monitoring our performance in relation to effective complaints handling – i.e. Customer Satisfaction Survey/ Consultation/ User Group feedback session
- Continuing to work on data collection and quality recording to ensure effective and accurate reporting to management
- Continuing to develop methods of recording the organisational learning from complaints to ensure that we can evidence organisational learning and improvement with support from the Quality Assurance and Monitoring Board - to include celebrating compliments and learning from areas of good practice
- Continuing work with the Children’s Rights Service to improve accessibility to the Complaints Procedure for Children and Young People, particularly Looked After Children
- continuing to work with our Commissioned Services/ Partners to ensure they have effective complaints handling arrangements in place and provide us with important data to allow for effective contract monitoring
- Continuing to develop our internal training package for new and existing staff to include a revised induction package and a revised procedures and guidance library
- Continuing to work directly with services, developing our fieldwork offer to support managers in coordinating response, thinking more proactively about remedies and local resolutions and improve timescales
- Bolstering the presence of customer feedback and lessons learnt at the Quality Assurance Management Board
- Continuing to provide the Directorate Management Team with visibility, challenge and reviews of lessons learnt
- Including quality assurance and customer feedback in the corporate performance dashboards, to give complaints and compliments equal weighing as performance and activity data
- Developing clear guidance for staff to be covered as part of induction
- Feeding into the training programme of the Social Work Academy
- Encouraging closer working between the corporate complaints and compliments team and the service by developing a rota system for team and service managers to collocate with the team.