

# Putting our Customers first

## Customer Feedback Report

# Complaints, compliments and suggestions

Year end  
2017/18

*Altogether better*



## **Background information**

1. Customer feedback is a valuable tool. It not only helps us understand what is important to service users and what we are doing well, it can also indicate any issues and offer us the opportunity to put things right and improve our services.
2. Covering a range of customer feedback, this report highlights the main themes throughout 2017/18 (1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018). As feedback can highlight opportunities for operational improvement, the report includes a selection of customer suggestions and their outcomes, an overview of comments relating to our decision making and a summary of customer satisfaction through compliments and surveys. It also summarises our performance in dealing with complaints, identifies any lessons learned and states what remedial action we have taken, or plan to take, to put things right and ensure similar mistakes are avoided in the future.

## **Customer Suggestions**

3. We believe suggestions are essential to the ongoing development and improvement of our services, and carefully consider all received. During 2017/18, we received 493 suggestions.
4. More than 60% of the suggestions received related to one of the following three frontline services; waste collection and disposal (183 suggestions), clean and green (61 suggestions) and highways (59 suggestions).
5. Although we consider every suggestion, not all of them can be implemented. For example, we regularly receive suggestions that propose changes to our road system. However, when looked at in the context of countywide traffic flows, many would have knock on effects to the traffic flows elsewhere if they were to be implemented.
6. A sample of suggestions received during 2017/18 and their outcomes is attached at Appendix 1.

## **Customer feedback relating to our policies and procedures**

7. Our service provision reflects our policies and procedures, and during 2017/18, we received 310 items of feedback as a direct consequence of carrying out actions in line with those policies and procedures. We use this feedback to inform our policies and procedures at their review.
8. Almost three quarters of this feedback can be attributed to our household waste policies and procedures. The most frequent topic (182 contacts, accounting for almost 60% of the contact relating to our policies and procedures) was dissatisfaction that we did not empty or we permanently removed a bin due to contamination. We are continuing our

educational programme, which includes waste awareness campaigns including Bin it Right, door knocking, roadshows and school educational sessions.

9. Other contacts relating to household waste policies and procedures covered a wide range of issues in small numbers. These included; only providing residents with an additional bin if the household has six or more people permanently living there; excluding hard plastics from the kerbside recycling scheme; not collecting side waste; only permanently removing wheeled bins which are empty; delays at Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) as a result of compacting waste; not collecting recycling in black bags; inability to purchase items directly from a HWRC; not allowing customers to dispose of another person's waste at our HWRCs; not being able to transfer a garden waste subscription to a new property and the requirement to leave bulky waste at the designated Bin Collection Point.
10. 35 residents used the complaints system to register dissatisfaction with our winter maintenance policy. The main issues were the customer's perceived lack of gritting (26) or being refused a permanent salt bin (eight).
11. We received 10 contacts about our revenues and benefits policies and procedures. The majority (seven) objected to subjecting unoccupied properties to 100% council tax for the first two years, and then 150% if they remain unfurnished, which is a slight decline (-2) on 2016/17.
12. Our Street Lighting Energy Reduction Project (SLERP), to upgrade 41,000 streetlights and remove up to 7,000, started in June 2013. During 2017/18, we received seven objections to these upgrades / removals.
13. The remaining contacts covered a range of areas including; application process for a postal vote; stray dogs; not taking children on term time holidays; highway maintenance; traffic management; speed management installations.

## **Customer feedback relating to decision making**

14. 227 contacts objected to decisions we had made. 91% related to operational decisions and 9% to strategic decisions.
15. Of the 206 objections to an operational decision, 88 instances (43%) related to our decision to suspend household waste collections due to inclement weather. A number of lessons were learned from this situation and the following actions are to be implemented:
  - Arrangements put in place to wherever possible reflect service disruption during shutdowns or out of hours on the main telephony messaging system.
  - Crews will undertake additional training and be reminded of the importance of recording missed addresses accurately.

- We will arrange, where appropriate, website messages in conjunction with social media messages. Where practicable, we will give advance warning to elected members if their ward is affected by any disruption to collections
  - System development work to provide better feedback for customers logging missed collections due to the weather via the self-service portal.
  - Consideration of the extension of the student app, which allows text alerts for weather disruption as well as reminders of collection day and materials that can be recycled, to be available to all households.
16. The remaining contacts related to various operational decisions including enforcement decisions (36 instances), decisions relating to highway works (24 instances), changes to an individual's service provision (nine), planning decisions (eight), provision of leisure services (six). 12 decisions related to the operational elements of an organised event, mainly Lumiere, e.g. traffic management, ticketing.
17. Of the 21 objections to a strategic decision, the most frequent topic related to an organised event (eight), mainly Lumiere or the Brass Festival. Other objections to strategic decisions included closing schools to use as polling stations during elections (three) and not having weekly collections (two).

## **Customer feedback relating to our fees and charges**

18. 45 contacts related to our fees and charges, which we review annually and allow us to provide local services that might not otherwise be possible.
19. Two-thirds (31 contacts) cited dissatisfaction with waste charges. The majority (18, which is 24 fewer than 2016/17) were unhappy with the £20 replacement bin charge. The remaining 13 contacts were objections to the garden waste charge and is broadly in line with the number received in 2016/17, even though the number of sign ups to the scheme has increased.
20. The remaining contacts related to library costs (photocopying / overdue book charge), transport /parking costs, bereavement costs, pest control charges and the level of Council Tax.

## **Compliments**

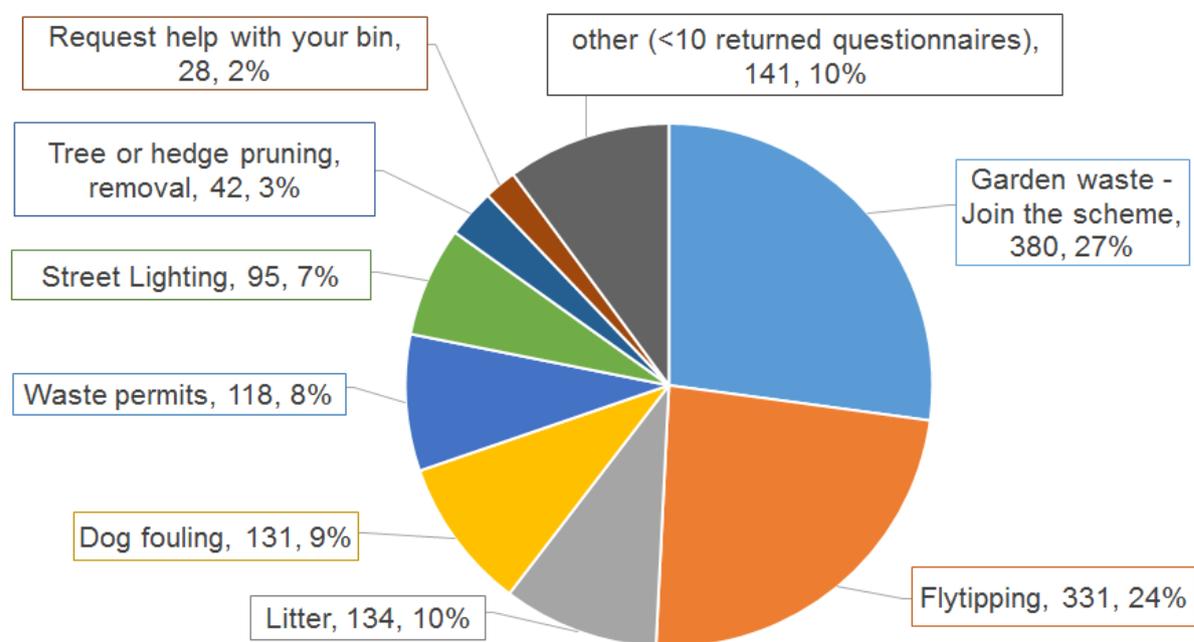
21. We also receive many positive comments about our staff and the services we provide, and we believe that understanding what is working well and valued is as important as knowing what is not working as well.
22. During 2017/18, we received 1,243 compliments, 360 in relation to social care services and 883 in relation to other services. These compliments recognise not only the

motivation, dedication and hard work of our staff but also the high standard and value of the services we provide. The majority of the compliments related to satisfaction with service provision but a number of compliments conveyed thanks to specific individuals.

23. Customers were particularly complimentary about our frontline staff and service provision, the most common themes being standard of work, prompt service and how polite, pleasant and helpful staff are.
24. Our Clean and Green Team received the most compliments (181) with customers appreciating our efforts to keep their local environment clean and tidy. We also received several compliments about our wildflower planting schemes.
25. During quarter 4, approximately one fifth of compliments (66 instances) were from customers appreciative of our efforts to keep people moving by ploughing / salting /gritting the highway during the inclement weather.
26. Other frontline services that received customer recognition were our refuse and recycling service, both the household collection service and the HWRCs, our Highway Maintenance Team, Customer Services, the Durham County Record Office and Care Connect.
27. Many of the compliments received were from customers who wished to express their gratitude where staff have gone the extra mile. As far as we are able, we have passed these thanks onto the individuals concerned.
28. A small sample of compliments received is attached at Appendix 2.

## **Customer Satisfaction (CRM)**

29. Our customers now have the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to both contact and service delivery as part of the closure process within the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. Since 31 October 2017, a satisfaction questionnaire has been applied to 23 service requests. A list of these service requests is attached at Appendix 3.
30. Between 31 October 2017 and 31 March 2018, we received 1,400 completed questionnaires through which customers answered a series of questions in relation to their experience. The following graph shows the split by service request.



31. Further analysis, by question, has been completed on the returned questionnaires and the results shown below:

% of respondents who..	
..found it easy to contact the right service in the council	94%
..were informed of the length of time it would take to resolve	52%
..were provided with clear information	89%
..were treated with dignity and respect	95%
..were informed of progress	82%
..felt their request was handled in a knowledgeable and effective manner	94%
..were satisfied with how their initial contact was handled	92%
..were satisfied with service delivery	85%
..were satisfied with the time taken to complete their request	88%

32. Although performance is positive, in order to drive further improvement we asked those customers who were dissatisfied the reasons why. Their comments included:

- Although we actioned the service request, we did not inform the customer of any enforcement action or what we intend to do to prevent the issue reoccurring
- Our processes were overly complicated
- We did not complete the task to the customer's satisfaction
- Difficulty hearing the messages on our telephone system
- Not being able to determine which service area to use
- Having to report an issue through our website when they've already reported through fixmystreet.com
- We did not deliver in line with our stated timescales and in some cases informed the customer we had completed the task when we hadn't

33. In order to further engage with customers over their appetite for online transactions, we asked customers who did not request service through our website the following question: You can request many of our services online through the council's website. Why did you choose another method?
34. We received 625 replies as shown in the following table;

Response	No. of responses	% of total responses
I thought it would be easier or quicker using another method	167	27%
I prefer to use a different method	148	24%
I tried online but had problems with the system	90	14%
I didn't know it was available online	81	13%
It was an urgent enquiry	57	9%
Difficulties accessing the internet	38	6%
Other	26	4%
It isn't available online	13	2%
I don't think my data will be handled securely	5	1%
<b>TOTAL RESPONSES</b>	<b>625</b>	

## Customer Satisfaction (Assisted Digital Support)

35. Where customers have needed additional support to progress their online claim for Universal Credit, through the Assisted Digital Support provided by Customer Services, staff have captured customer feedback through a short survey. The results from Phase 1 rollout in October 2017 to 31 March 2018 (284 customers) show:
- 89% were 'extremely satisfied' with the level of service they received
  - 33% of customers said they needed other help and were provided with advice on how to access the Welfare Assistance Scheme, Food Banks, Housing Solutions and the Money Advice Service.
  - 23% had heard about our service through Durham County Council channels (website/leaflets/CAPs) and 49% through their job centre work coach.
  - 25% gave additional comments on their experience – see examples below:
    - *Thank you so much for your help today - I would not have been able to make this claim without you.*
    - *All of the staff were very helpful and friendly. I could not have asked for any better service*
    - *Excellent help & support given. I was really pleased with the help I got.*
    - *Extremely satisfied with the level of service and help and support given. Excellent service. Thank you couldn't of done it alone.*

36. The survey has also enabled us to capture information about Universal Credit claimants needing digital assistance:
- The most popular electronic device used by claimants is a smartphone at 47%. 29% do not own an electronic device.
  - 50% do not have access to the internet at home
  - 71% are aware of the different locations where customers can access the internet or use self-serve devices
  - 88% did not require help with their personal budgeting

## **Customer complaints**

37. Within this document, there are two types of complaint. Statutory complaints that arise from our duties as a local social services authority and corporate complaints that cover all other complaints. As each complaint type is subject to its own processes and policy, they are reported separately.
38. The first stage in the corporate complaints process enables service areas to resolve the issue in the first instance, providing a service response. Should the customer remain dissatisfied with the service response they can escalate to the Customer Feedback Team, who will either progress with an independent investigation, or advise the service user to contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman). Independent investigation of statutory complaints is arranged by the statutory complaint teams.
39. Further detail of statutory complaints received during 2017/18 are included in the separate reports at Appendix 6.

## **Statutory Complaints: Children's Social Care Services**

40. During, 2017/18, Children's Social Care Services received 109 statutory complaints, 2% more (+2) than during 2016/17.
41. Just over half of these complaints related to Families First teams (56) with Child Protection teams being the second most complained about service area (31). The most common reason for complaint was staff attitude (25) closely followed by disagreement with an explanation or decision (23).
42. 106 complaints were responded to during 2017/18. Three investigations are ongoing at the time of writing this report. Of these 106 completed complaints, 65 were not upheld (61%), 15 were upheld (14%) and 26 partially upheld (25%).
43. During 2017/18, a number of actions were taken in response to complaints including;

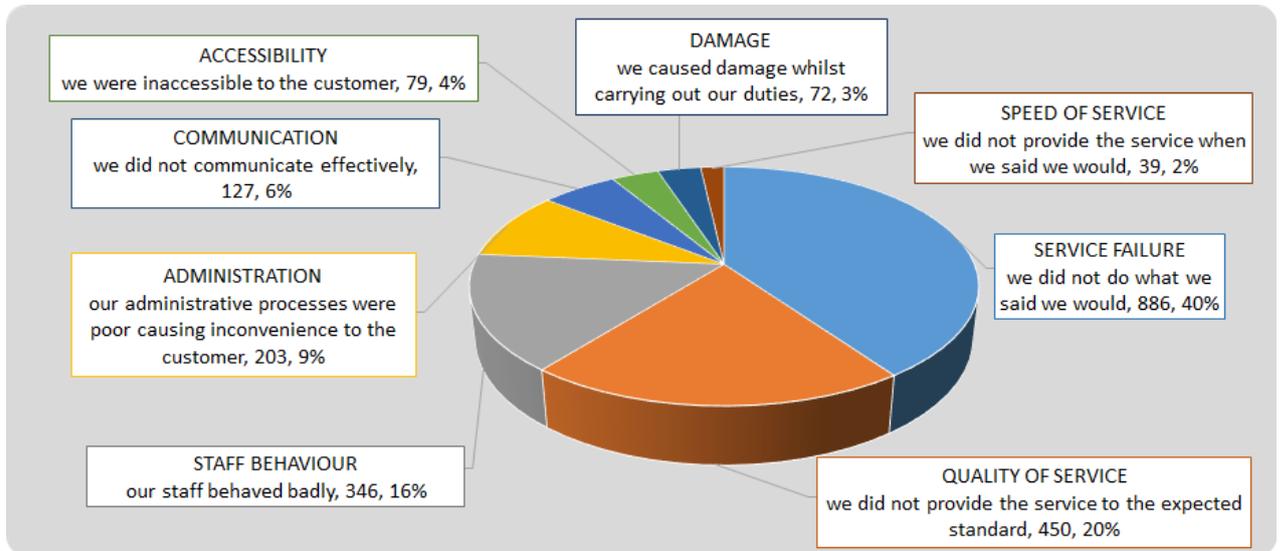
- Revising procedures relating to Special Guardianship Orders and scheduling staff training.
- Implementing a new model of social work practice “Signs of Safety” to support staff to build and maintain collaborative partnerships with parents and children. It is anticipated that this will improve relationships between staff and the children, young people and families they work with, and as a result will reduce dissatisfaction linked to communication and the conduct of staff.

## **Statutory Complaints: Adult Social Care Services**

44. During 2017, 18, Adult Care Services received 104 statutory complaints, 19% more (+17) than during 2016/17.
45. Just over half of these complaints related to Older People / Physical Disabilities / Sensory Impairment (53) with Learning Disabilities / Mental Health / Substance Misuse being the second most complained about service area (26). The most common reason for complaint was a disputed decision where a service user disagrees with an explanation or decision (30).
46. 101 complaints were responded to during 2017/18. Three investigations ongoing at the time of writing this report and only one failing to be responded to within the agreed timescale. Of these 101 complaints, 59 were not upheld (58%), 12 were upheld (12%) and 30 partially upheld (30%).
47. During 2017/18 a number of actions were taken in response to complaints including:
- Addressing issues with the Community Equipment Service to improve the provider’s performance and contract compliance.
  - Improving referral forms for the handyman service by including the urgency/priority level of the work that needs undertaking.
  - Implementing a change in work processes where DCC takes responsibility for managing a service user’s finances to ensure the smooth transfer of their direct debits.

## **Corporate Complaints: Key Messages**

48. During 2017/18, we received 2,202 corporate complaints, 276 more than during 2016/17. We have completed investigations into 2,069 of these complaints and 65% were upheld (fully or partially). This increase is partly due to a 30% increase in missed collections (+136) compared to 2016/17.
49. There were eight main reasons for complaint. The following graph shows the split by volume.



50. During 2017/18, our waste collection service completed more than 12 million refuse and recycling collections, 1.2 million garden waste collections and 32,000 bulky collections. It also received 1,370 complaints (46% of the total). It received 71% of all service failure complaints (mainly missed collections), a third of all staff behaviour (mainly altercations arising from access issues [parked cars, inappropriate road use] or not collecting bins due to contamination) and a third of all quality of service (mainly not returning bins to their collection points and spillages). It also received 17% of all communication complaints mainly from customers unhappy not to have received advance notification of a change to their bin collection days.
51. Across all services, the most frequent category of complaint was service failure. The vast majority (603 complaints), equating to almost 70% of the category and 30% of all corporate complaints, was due to missed collections. We have completed investigations into 586 of these complaints and 87% were upheld. The customer addresses of those upheld have since been flagged as 'priority' to prevent the issue reoccurring. Those missed collection complaints that were not upheld were mainly due to confusion over either the Bin Collection Point, which we have since clarified with customers, or policies, for example, not realising assisted collection does not automatically transfer to a new property.
52. The remaining service failure complaints related to either not actioning the customer's service request (164), for example repairing a faulty streetlight or delivering a replacement bin, or not providing an update or response to the customer's service request (38). During 2017/18, we received in the region of 300,000 service requests.
53. During quarter 3, we became aware that some customers received email confirmation that their request was complete prior to the task being carried out, leading the customer to believe we had not done what we said we would. This was caused by records being closed when the job was allocated rather than when the job was completed. Record closure triggers the automatic email confirmation. Teams have been reminded of the correct procedure and have undertaken additional training and awareness.

54. The second most frequent cause for complaint was quality of service. Of the 449 received, almost one-third (132 complaints) were due to staff practices, mainly due to refuse and recycling crews not returning the customer's bin to the Bin Collection Point (73). Other staff practices that resulted in customer dissatisfaction included staff making a mess whilst carrying out their duties (16), refuse and recycling crews leaving gates open (eight) or staff working in what the customer perceived as being a dangerous manner (eight).
55. A fifth of quality of service complaints (91 complaints) related to our maintenance activities. The majority of these complainants felt we were neglecting specific areas and / or allowing standards to deteriorate to an unacceptable level, and related to the general condition of council assets (31 complaints), for example, the condition of highways, car parks, cemeteries, playgrounds, and the condition of the customer's local environment (20 complaints), for example, cleanliness standard of streets, back alleys or areas of derelict land. A further 35 complainants felt that when we did carry out maintenance activities, for example, cutting the grass, repairing the highway, the standard of our work was inadequate.
56. The other main topics for quality of service were spillages (58 complaints) and not permanently resolving an issue (45 complaints). The vast majority relating to spillages occurred during household waste collection; mainly broken glass. We have reminded refuse and recycling crews to clean up any spillages that occur. Not permanently resolving an issue mainly involved enviro-crime, anti-social behaviour or parking. Although we responded to the request for service, we did not implement a long-term solution to prevent it re-occurring. Many of these complainants are asking for increased enforcement.
57. Staff behaviour (346 complaints) was the third most frequent cause for complaint and almost half of these complaints originated from our frontline services of refuse and recycling and highway services.
58. There were three broad areas of complaint. The two most frequent were received in equal numbers (104 complaints each). The first was that our staff were rude, unhelpful or dismissive of the customer's issue or query, for example, ignoring customers who approach them in the street, not appearing to listen properly to a customer query. The second was that our staff behaved in an aggressive or intimidating manner, for example, swearing or shouting at customers who approach them in the street. A third area, complaints that our staff were driving council vehicles in a dangerous manner, for example, speeding, tailgating, near miss, using a mobile phone, received 70 complaints. Following these complaints, some staff have undergone additional training.
59. 62% of administration complaints related to issues with either bills or payments (125 complaints), the majority (98 complaints) questioning our accuracy but we also received a small number relating to issues with direct debits (9 complaints) or receiving refunds (7 complaints).

60. 48 complaints concerned issues with correspondence, for example, addressing to the wrong person or sending to the wrong address (27 complaints), losing or misplacing documents (eight complaints) or asking for the same information multiple times (six complaints).
61. Of the administration complaints, 125 related to Council Tax, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction (CTR). However, these teams maintain a database of over 244,000 properties and process in the region of 23,000 new claims and 250,000 changes each year. Any errors identified were corrected as soon as the issues were raised. All staff involved have been made aware of the errors and reminded of the correct procedures. We also seek to minimise the risk of error by automating processes to reduce manual intervention and carrying out quality assurance interventions. We use any identified trends and patterns to further develop training plans and inform process reviews.
62. The introduction of Open Channel forms will help automate processes ensuring that customer contacts are managed efficiently and accurately and therefore should help to reduce complaints. These are customised web-based forms that collect information, which is then validated and used to automatically update Council Tax accounts, in real time. The forms will update when a customer moves into, out of or within the area and for single person discount. These forms have been rolled out to customers via the Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) to allow self-service.
63. 80% of communication issues were due to one of two issues. The first related to us giving advice that was inaccurate, misleading, confusing or caused upset (52 complaints). The second was not giving the customer advance warning of a change (49 complaints), almost half of which followed the change in bin collection days.

### **Corporate complaints subjected to independent investigation**

64. During 2017/18, 136 complainants requested that we escalate their complaint to the next stage. We agreed it would be appropriate that 98 of these be subject to an independent investigation by the Customer Feedback Team. This was based on the service response, remedy already offered and the reasons given by the customer for the escalation. We completed investigations into 93 complaints of which 10 were partially upheld, details of which are attached at Appendix 4.
65. During quarter 4, 2017/18, we received 25 requests for escalation. We completed investigations into 14 complaints of which 3 were partially upheld, as shown in the table below:

Complaint	Action to be taken
Lack of action taken to address parking issues surrounding the construction site on Vigo Lane, Chester-le-Street	We have apologised for the lack of response that occurred due to a breakdown in communication between parking services and strategic highways.
The removal of advertising banners without notice by the Enforcement Team	We have apologised for inaccurate correspondence. We will review our processes to ensure enforcement officers accurately document any actions they take and the justification for doing so.  Written guidance for staff will be produced regarding the removal of illegal advertising banners, in particular from private property
Dissatisfaction with the service provided by the drainage team	We have apologised for the lack of initial communication

## Complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman)

66. During 2017/18, the Ombudsman delivered decisions in relation to 75 complaints. Conclusions were reached based on details supplied by complainants and supplemented in some instances with contextual information from Council officers.
67. Of these complaints, four were found to be outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, one was referred back to the council to deal with under our complaints procedure, and in 55 cases, no further action was proposed. The Ombudsman upheld 15 complaints as detailed in Appendix 5.
68. During quarter 4, 2017/18, the Ombudsman delivered decisions in relation to 27 complaints. Of these complaints, no further action was proposed in 23 cases. The Ombudsman upheld four complaints as detailed in the following table:

Ombudsman's final decision	Action to be taken
There was fault in the way the Council communicated over the complainant's care needs.	The Council has apologised and agreed to take action to prevent similar faults from occurring.
The Council was at fault for failing to properly investigate safeguarding allegations against the complainant	The Council to apologise and pay £200 for the distress caused

Ombudsman's final decision	Action to be taken
The Council was at fault in how it handled a complaint about a children's service matter.	The Council will change its procedures so complainants are informed whether their complaint will be handled under statutory procedures, and if the complainant is dissatisfied with their stage 1 response, they will be given sufficient information to decide whether to request a stage 2 investigation.
There was fault in the actions of a social worker dealing with the complainant's family.	The Council to apologise and pay £500 to recognise the frustration the social worker's actions caused the complainant. Steps to be taken to prevent a repeat.

## Appendix 1: Sample of suggestions received during 2017/18

You said	We did
Introduce a process across Refuse and Recycling services to inform customers when we plan to do something, e.g. repair a bin (so customer can put the bin out), return for a missed collection (so bin is not left out for days and those on assisted collection can unlock gates etc.) or pick up a bulky collection (thereby limiting the time the goods are left out).	Plans are in place, as part of the CRM/Bartec project work, to implement these suggestions
Introduce a collection and recycling service for food waste	We are reviewing whether this would be both feasible and cost effective. We are working on this project with a national organisation called WRAP (Waste Resources Action Programme) which is the national advisory body on waste and recycling and is providing the funding for this research. The final WRAP report has been produced and initial findings will be reported to REAL Management Team May 2018.
Allow waste permits to be printed at home to ensure fast delivery and save postage costs	To be considered as part of the digitisation project.  NB: we request the detailed waste description to ensure the customer does not have a wasted journey as not all HWRCs accept all waste types.
Increase the number of waste permits customers can request in each application from the current three.	
Remove the requirement to list all items to be disposed of when applying for a waste permit as it is too cumbersome.	
Open the online booking portal for the following week's leisure centre activities earlier	The portal has been re-configured. The 'too soon to book' restriction for the following week has been removed and bookings for the following week can be made at any time during the day.
Advertise changes to the public swim timetable more widely	All swimming galas and lane closures are now advertised as soon as the booking is confirmed via notices at several locations throughout the building, not just the customer information board, in addition to our website. Reception staff and duty staff are fully informed well in advance and have the information readily to hand
Be able to report nuisance bonfires causing public health issues via the website	Our web form has been updated

You said	Reason for non-implementation
Use wheeled bins for glass collection rather than recycling boxes which tend to disappear in windy conditions.	Our wheeled bins are 240 litres in size and if filled with glass, they would be too heavy for the lifting mechanism on our vehicles
Increase the number of skips available for use at each HWRC to allow more cars to access the site and make it easier and quicker for residents to dispose of their waste.	The sites are managed to ensure that as many skips as physically possible are placed on site and the compaction and emptying of skips is as efficient as possible. We have processes in place which allow skips to be compacted safely within a cordoned off area whilst customers are on site, this has helped manage traffic congestion and ease the time for residents to dispose of their waste.
Remove the bus lane on the A690 towards Gilesgate to prevent traffic delays experienced in the current single lane arrangement	The length of the current two-lane section ensures that the maximum volume of traffic can enter the junction from the A690 whenever a green signal is given. Therefore, even if we removed the entire bus lane, the time taken for motorists to travel from the A1(M) into the city would remain unchanged
Round up Council Tax payments for those who can afford slightly more in order to support council services that might otherwise be cut.	As Council Tax is governed by legislation, it is not possible to implement this suggestion
Do not follow up a sticker on a contaminated bin with a letter if it's the first occurrence	The processes associated with recording contamination, including letters, have been reviewed. A first stage letter is required to provide recycling advice to the resident.

## Appendix 2: sample of compliments received during quarter 4, 2017/18

Customer's Comments
<p>I just wanted to compliment your gardens department on the wildflower beds that have been appearing around our area. I meant to do it a year or so ago. It's great to know the council and gardeners are considering our wildlife whilst providing residents with a pretty display of natural wild flower meadows. Keep up the great work!</p>
<p>Members of the public have praised an employee who works in Consett Town Centre cleaning the streets. He goes that "extra mile" to keep the area clear, and is knowledgeable about the town centre, and very polite in his dealings with the public</p>
<p>I just wanted to compliment the staff at your Tudhoe recycling centre. They are brilliant ! I'm unable to lift heavy objects at the moment and your staff willingly helped my wife to tip quite heavy garden waste - thank you so much for your help, here's one Council Tax payer who really appreciates the service you give.</p>
<p>Customer wishing to thank recycling/refuse crew for their hard work over the Christmas period. Bins have been emptied on time with excess waste being collected without any problems. Customer says crew are always courteous and hardworking throughout the year as whole.</p>
<p>Customer would like to say thank you to the Clean and Green Team for clearing up all the mess and paint spilled all over the pavement that he reported to us on 21st December and said they did a fantastic job and deserved a good pat on the back and it was that clean and tidy you can eat you dinner up off the pavement!</p>
<p>Would like to commend the agent who dealt with his case for good service and getting the job done</p>
<p>Thanks to Care Connect who attended her parents home on 27 Dec when her mother collapsed. Wants us to thank him as he was super in supporting both her parents. Unsung community heros!!</p>
<p>Customer has been in to the CAP for support with her Universal Credit application over the last few days and has finally got everything set up and her application submitted. She wanted to say how grateful she was for our guidance and patience as she would never have managed to submit an application on her own without this help.</p>
<p>May i add my massive thanks to EVERYONE who worked to keep the road and footpath networks clear and working</p>
<p>Customer tel to pass her compliments on regarding the recent 'your guide to Council Services 2018'. Customer advised, she was very impressed with the booklet.</p>
<p>I would like to compliment your officer in Sacriston library she is very polite, helpful and always smiling she has made a massive positive impact on the library it feels so much more vibrant and fresh and most importantly welcoming.</p>
<p>Customer would like to pass on her thanks to the highways team for fixing the pothole she reported yesterday. She advised that she called quite late in the day and she is absolutely delighted that this has already been repaired. She would like to ensure the team get the recognition they deserve for their efficient work and making the road safe again.</p>
<p>Customer wanted to say a massive thank you to our officer for all the help she has given him over the last months, even when she has hit a brick walk she has never given up trying to help and he wanted her to know that he thinks she is an amazing person</p>

### **Appendix 3: satisfaction questionnaires are applied to the following service requests**

- Abandoned shopping trolleys
- Bin – request help with your bin
- Bonfires
- Bus stop and shelters
- Dead animal removal
- Dog bins and litter Bins
- Dog fouling
- Flyposting
- Fly tipping
- Garden Waste
- Graffiti
- Grass cutting, shrubs and flower beds
- Litter
- Needles and drug paraphernalia
- Roads or footpath obstruction – vehicular
- Roadworks
- Rubbish in gardens and yards
- Seating and Benches
- Spilt Rubbish
- Street lighting
- Traffic lights and crossings
- Tree or hedge pruning, removal
- Waste permits

**Appendix 4: Corporate complaints subjected to independent investigation during 2017/18 that were upheld (note – all complaints were partially upheld)**

Complaint	Action to be taken
The complainant was not included in a consultation process regarding tree felling.	We have implemented a new practice, which involves an updated consultation list and handover record to the case officer, which will make internal policy more robust and reduce the likelihood of further consultation errors.  Council has apologised for the error.
The complainant was not included in a planning consultation process	A change from a paper-based system to an electronic system resulted in this oversight. However, this objection would not have affected the planning officer's final decision.  Council has apologised for the error.
We did not collect a bulky collection from the back garden as agreed. We did not return telephone calls from the customer who was trying to resolve the issue.	We apologised and returned to collect the bulky waste.  We have also revised the customer's Bin Collection Point.
The customer checked My Durham to see if they would be affected by the change in bin collection days but no collection information existed for their property.	The information on My Durham has been updated
Dissatisfaction with our live Twitter feed, specific to the Teaching Assistant report considered by County Council.	Although the twitter feed was a factual representation of what occurred at the meeting, it did not present alternative views.  We are reviewing our methods of communication and considering alternatives such as live streaming. This would eradicate any perceived perceptions that the Council does not reporting impartially.
No response to the customer's service request to clear a cycle lane	The work requested, whilst partially completed, did not appear on the Clean and Green maintenance schedule.  We are now checking that all cycle paths are included within our internal systems so are suitably maintained.
Time taken to secure an appropriate lease on a DCC property.	We needed to prioritise tasks due to resources. Consequently, the premises in question were not occupied sooner.
Lack of action taken to address parking issues surrounding the construction site on Vigo Lane, Chester-le-Street	We have apologised for the lack of response that occurred due to a breakdown in communication between parking services and strategic highways.

Complaint	Action to be taken
The removal of advertising banners without notice by the Enforcement Team	<p>We have apologised for inaccurate correspondence.</p> <p>We will review our processes to ensure enforcement officers accurately document any actions they take and the justification for doing so.</p> <p>Written guidance for staff will be produced regarding the removal of illegal advertising banners, in particular from private property</p>
Dissatisfaction with the service provided by the drainage team	We have apologised for the lack of initial communication

## Appendix 5: Complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman during 2017/18 that involved maladministration and injustice

Ombudsman's final decision	Action to be taken
<p>The Council delayed processing a disabled facilities grant, which resulted in the complainant not having appropriate home adaptations.</p>	<p>The Council is to apologise and pay £2,750 in recognition of the injustice suffered due to the delay and £100 redecoration costs.</p> <p>The Council is to review procedures relating to Disabled Facilities Grants to avoid other people being similarly affected.</p>
<p>The Council was not at fault when it stopped the complainant's Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP). But it unduly delayed recognising their health and care needs could justify further DHPs. This caused financial hardship.</p>	<p>The Council had already taken action to remedy the issues before the Ombudsman's decision and to the Ombudsman's satisfaction.</p> <p>The Council corrected the DHP error within five days and revised its original decision in relation to the complainant's health conditions.</p>
<p>The Council failed to give the complainant enough information about how to proceed with a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) or the process. This caused delay and confusion.</p>	<p>The Council is to apologise for the delay and a lack of clear, written information about the DFG process, pay £500 for the frustration and uncertainty caused, explain the process to the complainant and immediately progress any application made by the complainant.</p> <p>The Council is to make its DFG policy, procedures and processes publically available. This should include all stages and timescales, the use of panels, appeal mechanisms and detail of when an enquiry becomes an application (for meeting the legislative timescale of six months).</p>
<p>The Council was at fault due to significant delays in investigating a noise complaint</p>	<p>The Council to apologise for the delay and pay the complainant £150 to acknowledge the frustration and uncertainty caused.</p>
<p>The Council delayed carrying out transition assessments and then withdrew weekly overnight respite sessions for almost three months.</p>	<p>The Council is to apologise for the fault found and pay the complainant £1,000 (£750 for the lost respite care and £250 for time and trouble).</p> <p>The Council is to review its policies and procedures for responding to requests for transition assessments to ensure they comply fully with statutory guidance.</p>
<p>The Council failed to stop debt recovery letters in a timely manner.</p>	<p>The Council to apologise for the fault and the distress caused.</p>
<p>The Council was wrong to include the value of the joint home the complainant shares with her daughter and son-in-law in its assessment of the contributions she would need to pay if admitted to a care home.</p>	<p>The Council has now revised that decision, agreed to apologise, review its procedures and pay the family £500 for the distress at the prospect of having to sell their home.</p>

Ombudsman's final decision	Action to be taken
<p>The Council was not at fault when it made the complainant's wife the sole liable person for Council Tax after she moved into the complainant's rented property.</p> <p>The Council was at fault for not discussing the account with the complainant when the matter escalated to court action against his wife for the unpaid bill.</p>	<p>The Council has agreed to pay £100.</p>
<p>The Council was at fault because Care Connect did not have a proper process in place for accessing the property of the complainant's mother.</p> <p>There was a delay in contacting the emergency services and the operator placed the complainant's mother on hold without telling her why.</p> <p>Care Connect also failed to update the complainant's contact details.</p>	<p>The Council has agreed to pay the complainant £350 in recognition of the distress caused and a further £350 in recognition of the uncertainty caused.</p> <p>The Council has also changed some of its procedures.</p>
<p>There was fault in the way the Council communicated decisions regarding changes to the care service provided to the complainant's son.</p> <p>Although the Council was entitled to decide that service provision should change, it should have discussed this significant change before implementing it.</p>	<p>The Council has agreed to pay the complainant £150 in recognition of the shock and distress caused.</p> <p>The Council will offer to meet with the complainant and his son to discuss the change to service provision and determine whether a different configuration would be more appropriate to their needs.</p>
<p>The Council assessed the social needs of the complainant's father each time he was discharged from hospital. It also considered the professional judgement of those involved with his medical care when planning his social care.</p> <p>However, there is no evidence to show the Council explained residential care charges to the complainant, who made an uninformed decision and incurred avoidable top-up fees.</p>	<p>The Council has agreed to apologise, remind officers of the importance of providing notice to families and service users about meetings and to reimburse the top up fees incurred.</p> <p>The Council has also agreed to inform the Ombudsman of the measures it has in place – or intends to put in place – to ensure service users and their families are given clear advice about social care funding to enable them to make well informed decisions.</p>

<b>Ombudsman's final decision</b>	<b>Action to be taken</b>
There was fault in the way the Council communicated over the complainant's care needs.	The Council has apologised and agreed to take action to prevent similar faults from occurring.
The Council was at fault for failing to properly investigate safeguarding allegations against the complainant	The Council to apologise and pay £200 for the distress caused
The Council was at fault in how it handled a complaint about a children's service matter.	The Council will change its procedures so complainants are informed whether their complaint will be handled under statutory procedures, and if the complainant is dissatisfied with their stage 1 response, they will be given sufficient information to decide whether to request a stage 2 investigation.
There was fault in the actions of a social worker dealing with the complainant's family.	The Council to apologise and pay £500 to recognise the frustration the social worker's actions caused the complainant. Steps to be taken to prevent a repeat.



# Annual Statutory Representations Report

Children's Social Care Services  
2017-2018

**Children and Young People's Services**



# Annual Statutory Representations Report

## Children's Social Care Services 2017-2018

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# Introduction

Welcome to Durham County Council's (DCC) Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) Annual Report which details representations (complaints and compliments) made in relation to children's social care services. It is a legal requirement for every local authority to produce an annual report about the complaints it has received throughout the year. This report covers the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

Durham County Council want every child, young person and family to be able to achieve better outcomes. When they are facing problems the Council want to support them well to overcome those problems. We listen to children, young people and families to help us understand their experiences of the service, and we use this feedback to help make changes when appropriate. Having an effective process for managing complaints and compliments helps us to ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard.

## What is a complaint?

The Children Act 1989 states that a "complaint may be generally defined as an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response."

Guidance produced by the Department for Education called "Getting the Best from Complaints" was published in 2006 and helps local authorities to implement the Children Act 1989 complaints procedures with a clear emphasis on resolving problems quickly and effectively and learning from them.

The guidance explains that complaints can arise as a result of many matters relating to statutory social services functions including:

- An unwelcome or disputed decision;
- Concern about the quality or appropriateness of a service;
- Delay in decision making or provision of services;
- Delivery or non-delivery of services including complaints procedures;
- Quantity, frequency, change or cost of a service;
- Attitude or behaviour of staff;
- Application of eligibility and assessment criteria;
- The impact on a child or young person of the application of a local authority policy;
- Assessment, care management and review;
- Control of parental contact with children in care.

# How does the complaints process work?

“Getting the Best from Complaints” outlines 3 stages which every local authority should have in place for the consideration of complaints. These are as follows:

## **Stage 1 – Local Resolution**

The DfE guidance emphasises resolving problems quickly and effectively. Stage 1 of the process provides children’s services managers with the opportunity to try and resolve complaints locally with the complainant.

## **Stage 2 – Investigation**

Stage 2 involves a full and formal investigation. In accordance with the regulations the investigation is undertaken by an independent Investigating Officer. An ‘Independent Person’ must also be appointed to oversee the investigation and report on the timeliness and transparency of the Investigating Officer’s investigation. Both the Investigating Officer and Independent Person produce reports, which are considered by a senior manager within Children’s Services in making the Council’s response to the complainant.

## **Stage 3 – Review Panel**

Where a complainant is dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response, then a review panel is brought together at Stage 3 to consider the complaint. The panel consists of an independent chairperson and two panel members. All 3 members must be independent of the Council.

## **The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman**

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) is an independent and impartial organisation which acts as the final stage for complaints. The LGSCO will normally expect that a complaint has been investigated by the Council at all 3 stages of the complaints process before agreeing to investigate. If the LGSCO investigates and finds that the Council has been at fault they can ask the Council to put things right. This could include making an apology, making changes to procedures, or making a payment in compensation.

## **Complaint Recording and Resolution in Children’s Residential Facilities**

All children’s residential homes have their own “in-house” complaints process to resolve ‘low level’ complaints. Residential staff work with the young person and allow them to try to identify for themselves how their issues can be resolved to their satisfaction. Information about these low level complaints is retained within the individual facilities and is available in the event of OFSTED inspections. If a young person wishes to access the more formal process (involving the stages detailed above), they can be assisted to do so with the help of staff or an advocate.

# Support during the complaints process

To ensure that all children and young people have appropriate support should they need to make a complaint, the Council has a contract with Advocacy Services to support them during the complaints process.

## **Advocacy for children and young people**

Durham County Council has a contract with the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) to provide free advocacy services to children and young people who are looked after. Children or young people who would like an advocate can contact NYAS directly. If a child or young person makes a complaint to the Council, the complaints officer will provide them with information and advice about the advocacy service provided and where appropriate will contact NYAS on a complainant's behalf.

A child or young person making a complaint about a young carer's assessments can access a free advocate through an organisation named Rethink.

## **Advocacy for Adults**

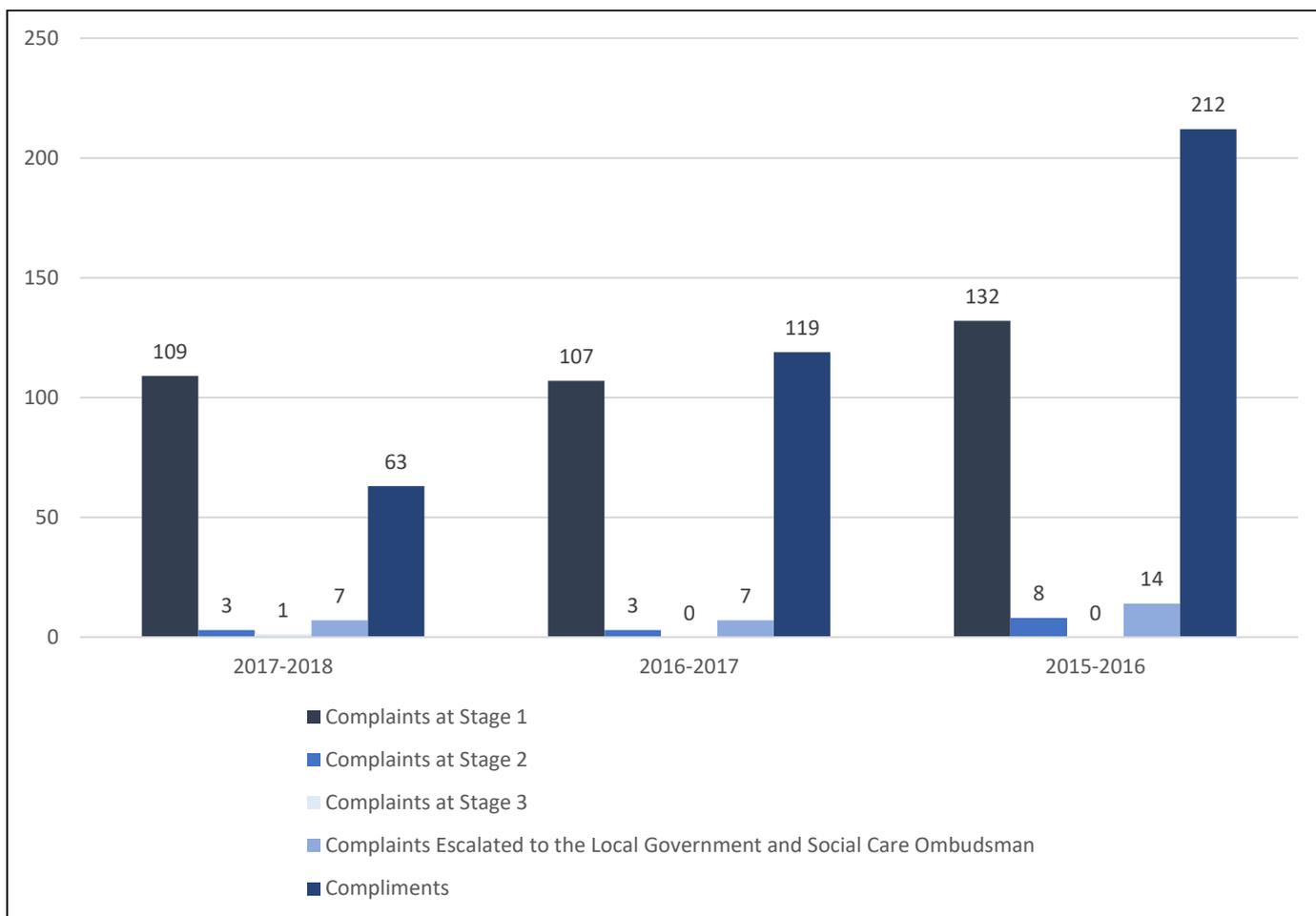
There are a range of advocacy services available to adults who are social care service users. During 2017-2018 these services were provided through three organisations, Skills for People, the Citizens Advice Bureau and Rethink.

# Overview of representations in 2017-2018

Chart 1 (below) provides an overview of complaints and compliments received between 2015-16 and 2017-2018. The chart shows that the vast majority of complaints in all 3 years have been dealt with at Stage 1. Only a very small number progress to stages 2 and 3, or are escalated to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. This pattern is in line with the DfE guidance “Getting the Best from Complaints”, which places an emphasis on speedy and effective resolution.

The number of compliments is lower than in previous years, and this is explained in more detail later in this report (see page 11).

Chart 1: 3 year trend in complaints and compliments



## Who made complaints?

The local authority is able to consider complaints from anyone who has sufficient interest in the child or young person’s welfare to warrant their representations being considered by them. However, if the complainant does not hold legal Parental Responsibility the complaint can be investigated but a full response which would include detailed case information cannot be given to the complainant.

Chart 2 (below) shows that in 2017-2018 the largest number of complaints (61.5%) were made by parents on behalf of their children. This is a similar trend to the previous 2 years.

The number of complaints from “relatives” which includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, and adult siblings has increased to 23.9% in 2017-2018 from 16.9% in 2016-2017.

Over the last three years, only a small proportion of complaints have been received directly from Children. In 2017-2018, there were no complaints received directly from a child or young person. However, the number of complaints made by children or young people through an advocate has increased slightly to 6.4% in 2017-2018 from 5.6% in 2016-2017.

Appendix 1 (page 15) provides statistical data about the profile of children and young people on whose behalf complaints were made in 2017-2018.

Chart 2: Who made complaints? - 3 year trend

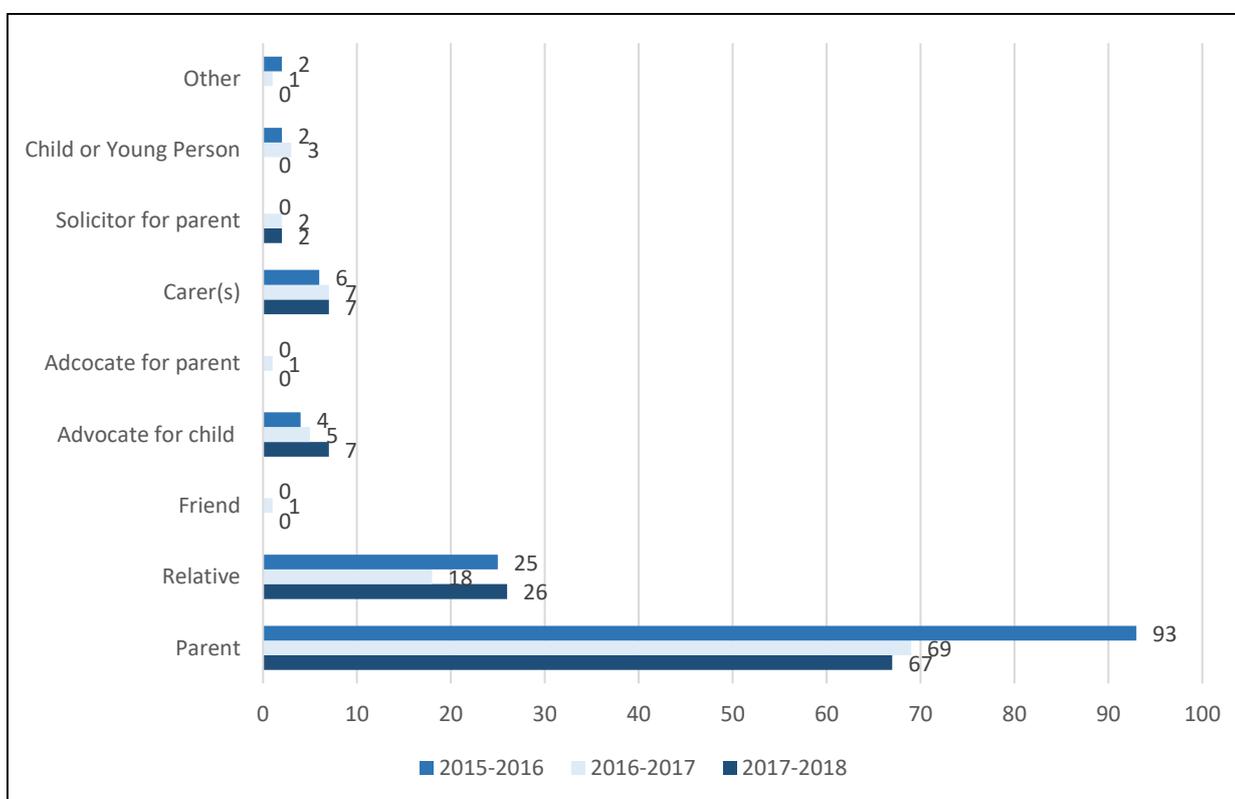
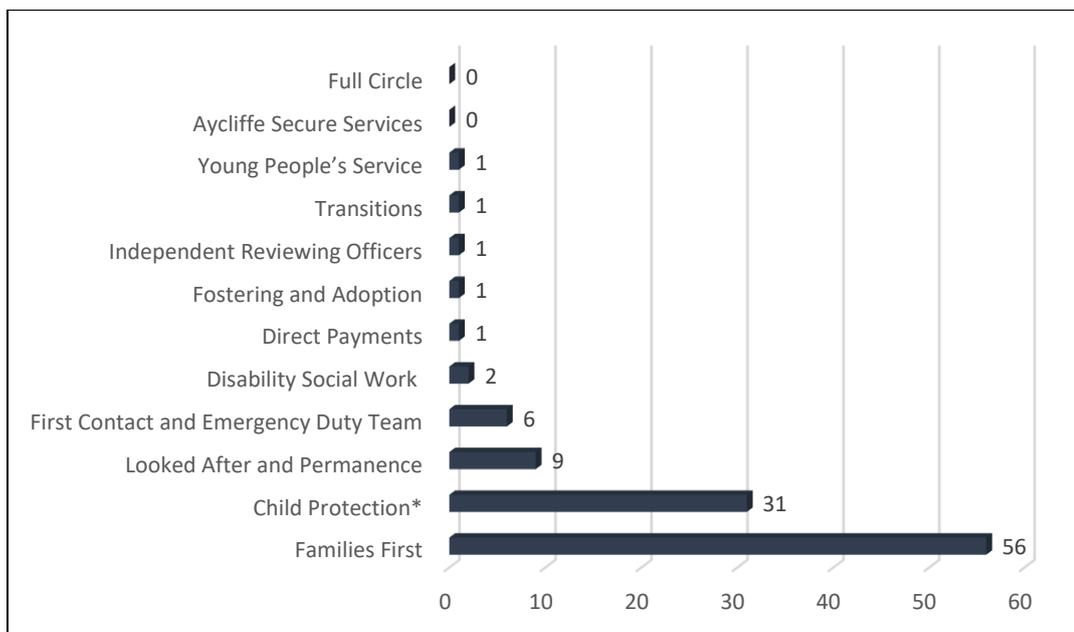


Chart 3 (overleaf) shows that in 2017-2018 the largest number of complaints (51%) were made about Families First teams, and the second largest number of complaints (28%) were made about Child Protection teams. From February 2018, the functions of both these teams have now been integrated into single teams to provide greater efficiency and consistency in ways of working and better outcomes for children and young people.

The high percentage of complaints received by these teams reflects the size of the staff group, which is much larger than other Children’s services teams. It also reflects that these teams are more likely to be working with children, young people and families who may not all want social workers involved in their lives.

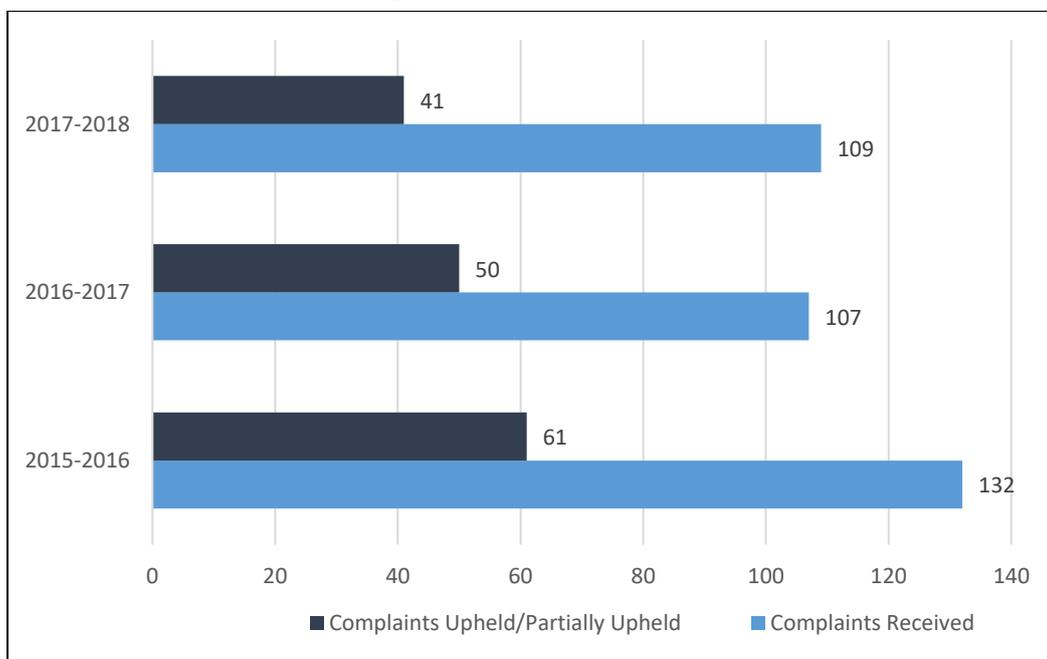
Chart 3: Which services were complaints about?



## Complaints at stage 1

Durham County Council received a total of 109 complaints about children's social care at stage 1 during 2017-2018. Chart 4 (below) shows that the total number of complaints received has remained relatively stable over the last 2 years, having decreased from 2015-2016. However, the number of complaints upheld or partially upheld has reduced steadily over the last 3 years.

Chart 4: 3 year trend in stage 1 complaints



Note: There are 3 stage 1 complaints from 2017-2018 ongoing at the time of publishing this report

Table 1 (below) shows the number of upheld and partially upheld complaints at stage 1 by category over the last 3 years. This information shows that in 2017-2018 where complaints are upheld they are most often linked to the following categories:

- Lack of communication (19 complaints linked);
- Professional conduct of staff (14 complaints linked);
- Application of service guidance/procedures (14 complaints linked).

The above pattern is consistent with 2016-2017.

Please note that a single complaint can have up to 3 categories of complaint, but does not always cover a number of categories.

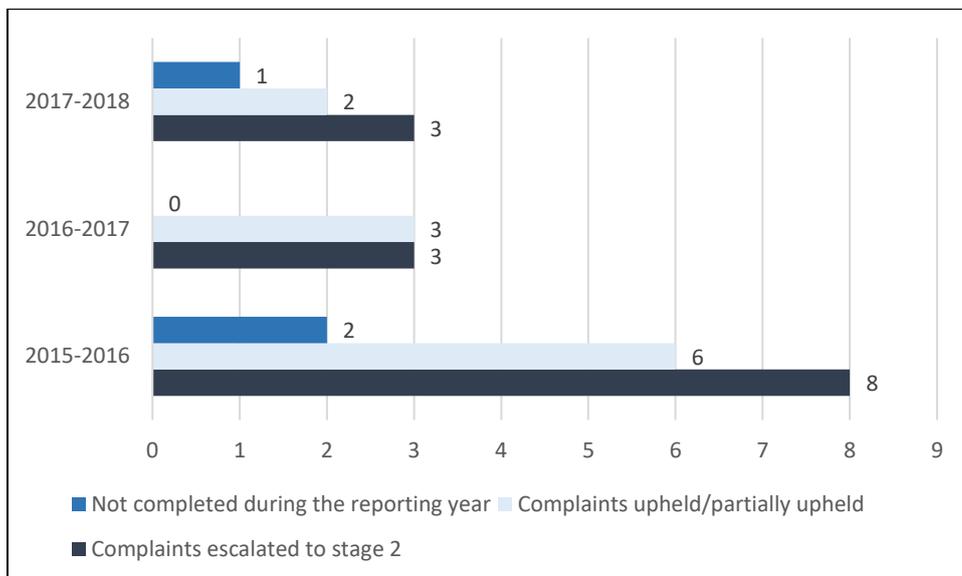
Table 1: Number of upheld and partially upheld complaints by category

Category of Complaint	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Application of service guidance/procedures	2		
Confidentiality		5	2
Disputed Decision	3	16	7
Finance - Assessment	2		
Lack of Communication	19	30	24
Lack of Service – change to clients service		1	
Lack of Service – contacts/visits	3	4	11
Lack of Service – denied service		3	2
Lack of service – referral of concern not actioned		2	
Provision of Service - assessment	1	2	6
Provision of Services – Placement Provision			1
Provision of Service – foster care		1	
Quality of Service – report writing	1	3	
Quality of Service – transport		1	2
Standard of Care			1
Speed of Service	3	7	11
Staff Attitude	5	6	4
Professional Conduct of Staff	14	17	28
Application of Service Guidance/Procedures	14	17	3
Discrimination			1
Safeguarding			2
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>105</b>

## Complaints at stage 2

A total of 3 complaints were escalated to stage 2 during 2017-2018. Chart 5 (overleaf) shows that the total number of complaints escalated to stage 2 has remained relatively stable over the last 2 years, having decreased from 2015-2016.

Chart 5: 3 year trend in stage 2 complaints



## Complaints at Stage 3

It is rare that complaints reach stage 3 of the Complaints Process. In 2017-2018, only 1 complaint was escalated to review panel. The complaint received in 2017-2018 was upheld.

## Compliance with Timescales

“Getting the Best from Complaints” sets out timescales for completion of each stage of the complaints process, and every local authority is expected to ensure that each complaint is dealt with as quickly as possible.

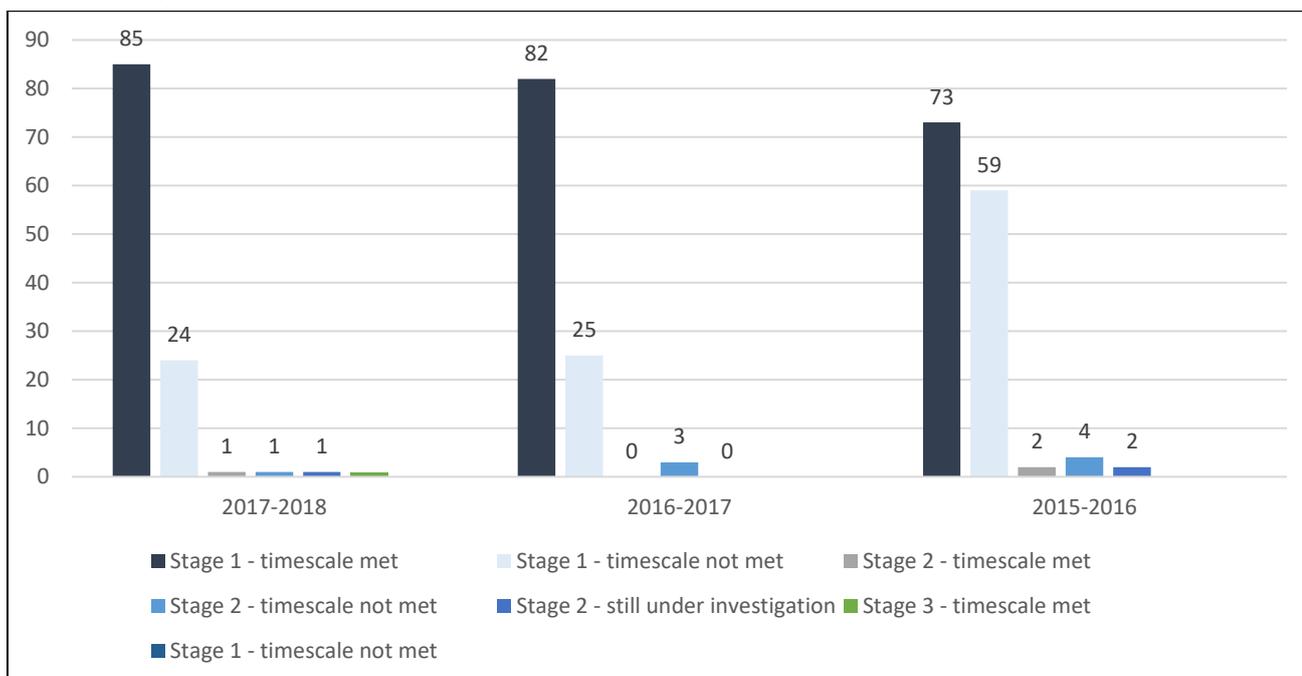
The timescales in working days are:

- **At stage 1:** 10 days, with a further 10 days for more complex complaints or additional time if an advocate is required.
- **At stage 2:** 25 days with maximum extension to 65 days.
- **At stage 3:** 20 days for the complainant to request a review panel, 30 days to convene and hold the review panel, 5 days for the panel to issue its findings, and 15 days for the local authority to respond to the findings.

Chart 6 (overleaf) identifies that the majority of complaints were actioned within the set timescales over the last 3 years. In 2017-2018, there has been a slight decrease in the number of complaints actioned within timescale at stage 1, and an increase in those actioned within timescale at stage 2.

The Council aims to meet timescales wherever possible. Where a timescale is likely to overrun, complainants are kept informed, provided with a reason and advised of the revised timescale.

Chart 6: 3 year trend in number of complaints actioned within timescales



## Complaints considered by the Ombudsman

Where a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint heard under the regulations, they can refer outstanding issues to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) who will determine a course of action dependent on the issues presented within the complaint. This can be done at any point of the process.

The LGSCO usually asks the Council what action has been taken and requests copies of any correspondence and reports. The LGSCO then issues a Draft Decision Notice, which the Council and complainant are invited to comment upon, before the LGSCO issues a Final Decision.

During 2017-2018, the LGSCO contacted the Council in relation to 7 children’s social care cases that had been referred to them. This was the same number as in 2016-2017, and a reduction from the 14 cases during 2015-2016. Table 2 (below) shows the outcome of complaints referred to the LGSCO over the last 3 years.

Table 2: Outcome of complaints referred to the LGSCO

Outcome	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
The Council was at fault (financial remedy recommended)	1	1	1
The Council was at fault (improvements recommended)	1		
Premature (the Council was asked to further investigate)	1	2	1
The Council was not at fault	1		3
Ombudsman closed the complaint without taking action		3	6
Ombudsman declined the complaint	3	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>

## Compensatory redress

In 2017-2018 the LGSCO considered 1 case, which had been through stages 1, 2 and 3 of the complaints process. The LGSCO agreed with the findings of the review panel at stage 3 and recommended a further action “for the significant frustration the social worker’s actions caused him”. A monetary amount was recommended and offered to the complainant. The complainant did not accept the offer and has taken the complaint to the Health Care Professionals Council (HCPC).

## Compliments

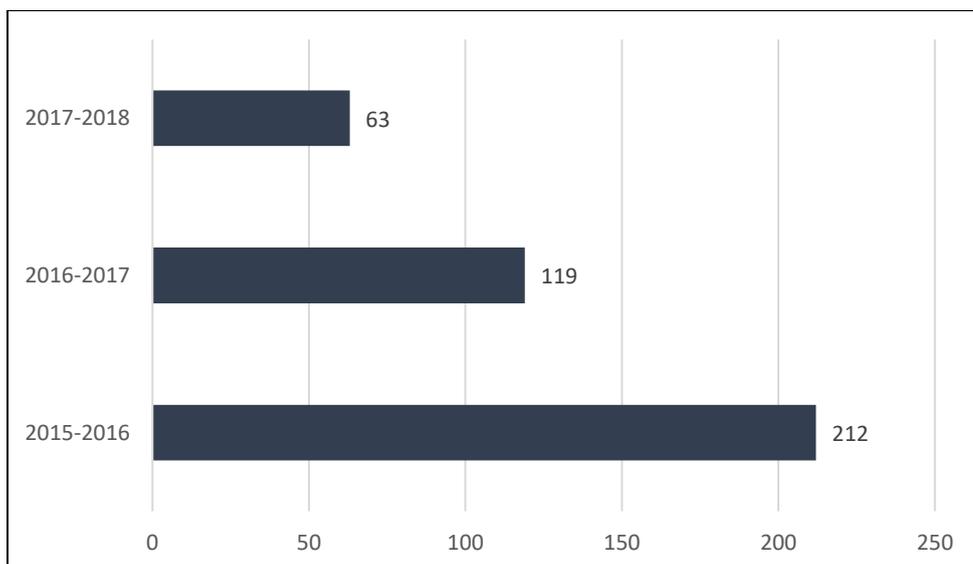
Compliments provide the Council with another valuable source of information about the experiences of children, young people and families. They can help us to understand the elements of services which are valued most and why this is the case.

From 2016-2017, a revised definition of a children’s services compliment was agreed. Since that point a compliment has been defined as “a positive statement from a service user, that had not been actively sought (for example by feedback form, questionnaire etc.). It can be verbal if it is recorded (for example in case notes) or in writing (for example in an e-mail, letter, thank-you card or text message).”

Chart 7 (below) provides an overview of the number of compliments received over the last 3 years.

The chart shows a significant reduction in recorded compliments since 2015-2016 which is due primarily to the revised definition of a compliment (no longer including feedback received via questionnaires or feedback forms). There has not been an increase in the number of complaints received over the same period.

Chart 7: 3 year trend in number of compliments



Compliments during 2017-2018 have highlighted that children and young people have appreciated:

- Feeling respected, listened to and supported,
- Having decisions explained to them,
- Being kept informed,
- Having issues explained in a way a child, young person or family understand,
- Experiencing professional, caring and committed staff,
- Being able to contact staff easily.

Some examples of compliments received during the year can be found in Appendix 2 (page 16).

## Learning and Service Improvement

Complaints give the Council a valued opportunity to learn and improve. Many of the complaints received are linked to the practice of an individual worker rather than a service wide issue. As a result learning is most often effectively carried out at an individual level and within local teams, where there are opportunities for staff to reflect and learn.

However, in some cases complaints can also indicate that there is need for much wider learning or service improvement. This has included improvements such as changes to the training programme, or the improvement of a policy, procedure, or way of working. This section of the report focuses on those larger improvements as follows:

### Training and staff briefings

Complaints have led to a range of training and staff briefings being carried out in 2017-2018. This has included:

- A complaint about poor case management which resulted in delays for the family and was used in an anonymised way as part of a training session for a social work team.
- A complaint about the completion of assessment forms, understanding of the life of a family, and contact made with a family led to briefings for fostering social workers.
- A complaint about a social worker being 'very assertive' when working with vulnerable parents led to briefings for child protection social workers.
- A complaint which identified insufficient oversight of cases led to briefings for operations managers and team managers.

### Changes to policies and procedures:

In 2017-2018 complaints have directly led to, or contributed to the decision to review and update policies and procedures. This has included:

- A complaint about timeliness of sharing meeting minutes with families led to the introduction of a new process for recording Team Around the Family (TAF) meetings.

- A complaint about the process for transferring cases between social workers and teams led to a review of processes to mitigate any adverse effects of case transfer.
- Following a complaint about the administration of Special Guardianship payments, the Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) procedures have been substantially revised and training is scheduled to take place in June 2018.

### Service wide change

Earlier in the report, it was identified that the number of upheld and partially upheld complaints at stage 1 are most often linked to “lack of communication”, “professional conduct of staff” and the “application of service guidance or procedures”. There are two planned service wide changes taking place in 2018-2019 which will help to address these issues:

- Children and Young People’s Services has begun to implement a new model of social work practice named “Signs of Safety”. One of the expected benefits is that it will further enhance the work of staff in building and maintaining collaborative partnerships with parents and children. Whilst this will take time to embed across the whole service, it is anticipated that it will help to build more effective relationships between staff and the children, young people and families.
- To help improve the transparency of decisions made by Children and Young People Services, a new publicly available web based system will be introduced in 2017-2018 to the host policies and procedures for children’s social care in Durham. This will enable staff and children and families to have easy access to the latest policies and procedures relevant to their situation.

In addition, the report also highlighted the following which will be the subject of further development in 2018-2019, as follows:

- This report has highlighted that there were no complaints made directly by children or young people in 2017-2018, and very few in the previous year. Numbers of complaints from children or young people with an advocate are also low. In 2018-2019 there will be work undertaken to ensure that children and young people get information about the complaints process when their circumstances change, as well as when they first come into contact with the Service. In addition the complaints officer will work with Investing in Children to review the “child friendly” information about making a complaint and to determine if there are any further actions we should take to support children and young people to make complaints independently or through an advocate.

# Effectiveness of the complaints procedure

The effectiveness of the complaints procedure is reviewed every year as part as the annual report. This section of the report outlines the improvements to the process made during in 2017-2018.

## Changes made in 2017-2018

### **The role of the complaints officer**

A dedicated full time complaints officer was appointed to deal with all statutory complaints received about Children's Social Care. This had previously been a joint arrangement with Adult Social Care complaints.

### **Change to the complaints process**

As a result of a complaint which was escalated to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2017-2018, The Council was provided with a number of recommendations to improve communication with complainants. The following changes were introduced in February 2018:

- Within a week of making a complaint, complainants will now receive an explanatory letter and factsheet explaining the process which is being used to manage their complaint.
- When the Council responds to a complaint, it is explicitly stated whether the complaint and its constituent parts are upheld, partially upheld, not upheld, or otherwise.
- Where a complainants remains dissatisfied after the Council has responded to their complaint at stage 1, then a template letter is forwarded to the complainant. This letter asks whether they seek an investigation at stage 2 of the process, and explains the process, so the complainant can make an informed decision.

## Appendix 1: Statistical Data

“Getting the Best from Complaints” requires that local authorities include a summary of statistical data about the age, gender, disability, sexual orientation and ethnicity of complainants in the annual report.

The complainant is always the child or young person, not the parent, family member or advocate who makes a complaint on their behalf. This data is recorded and reported using the details of the eldest child or young person (if there are more than one children in the family who are receiving the service being complained about), or specific child or young person (for example, a disabled child within the family) making the complaint, or on whose behalf the complaint is made.

Table 3: Age of complainants

Age	Number	Percentage
Pre-Birth	10	9%
1-6	45	41%
7-12	28	26%
13-18	22	20%
Unknown	4	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	

Table 4: Gender of complainants

Gender	Number	Percentage
Boy	58	53%
Girl	51	47%
Transgender	0	0%
Other	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	

Table 5: Disability of complainants

Disability	Number	Percentage
Disability Recorded	2	<b>1.8%</b>
Disability not Recorded	107	<b>98.2%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	

### Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is not recorded unless it is of relevance to the child or young person’s complaint. In 2017-2018 there were no complaints where sexual orientation was an issue.

Table 6: Disability of complainants

Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
White British	103	94.5%
Mixed Race African	1	0.9%
Mixed Race Asian	1	0.9%
White/Other Background	1	0.9%
Any Other Ethnic Group	0	0.0%
Ethnicity Not Recorded	3	2.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	

## **Appendix 2: Examples of Compliments**

“I have huge respect for your experience and expertise. Your help, support and kindness has been very much appreciated.”

### **Looked After and Permanence 3**

“Thank you so much for your support with me and my children and helping me get my family back together and not judging me”

### **Families First, Newton Aycliffe**

“Social Workers get a lot of negative press, however [Social Worker] was always fair with myself, effectively communicated and was very professional.”

### **Child Protection Stanley team**

“Without you I wouldn't have been able to move to [city]. I'm so excited for the future so thank you for helping me to believe in myself.”

### **Young People's Service South**

“Thank you [Social Worker] for everything you have done for me and my brother, we will miss you very much.”

### **Families First, Durham Central**

“...the Contact Supervisors have been hugely supportive....I would like to praise and thank them for their time and efforts and care they showed...”

### **Supervised Contact Service**

“Foster Carers said it had been lovely working with both children's Social Workers, they always felt fully informed and updated, valued and if they ever needed to make contact, their calls were always responded to and any concerns addressed....”

### **Families First, Chester-le-Street**

“The support has been fantastic and has benefitted [child] in so many ways and us as a family. It's allowed [child] to go out, try and enjoy many new experiences helping him gain and develop confidence and encourage independence”

### **Disabled Children and Families**



Adult and Health Services

**Annual Statutory Representations Report**  
Adult Social Care Services 2017/18

# Annual Statutory Representations Report

Adult and Health Services 2017/18

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## Part One - Introduction

Welcome to Durham County Council's (DCC) Adult and Health Services (AHS) Annual Report which details representations made in relation to adult social care services. The report covers the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

The report is published under the provisions and requirements of the relevant regulations: the *National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009*. This is a single joint complaints process for both social care and health services where there are no fixed timescales for managing a complaint with a greater focus on local resolution. If all proportionate resolution mechanisms have been exhausted and if the complaint remains unresolved, the complainant can refer outstanding issues to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). The regulations also introduced a duty for health and social care services to cooperate, should this be required, in complaints investigations.

This process aims to:

- Make it as easy and accessible as possible for service users or their nominated representatives to raise complaints;
- Foster an organisational culture in which complaints are accepted, owned and resolved as efficiently as possible;
- Ensure high levels of customer satisfaction with complaints handling;
- Resolve individual issues when they arise and reduce the number of complaints referred to the Ombudsman; and
- Enable the Council to identify topics and trends in relation to adult social care complaints and improve services as a result.

In recording and reporting upon the Council's performance in relation to the above, the Local Authority has a statutory duty to produce an annual report under Regulation 18 of the statutory instrument detailed above.

Other key features of the Regulations include:

- the requirement for local authorities to appoint a Complaints Manager; and
- a 12 month time limit to make complaints.

During 2017/18 the Development and Learning Manager fulfilled the role of 'Complaints Manager' in accordance with the requirements of the regulations, with a Complaints Officer allocated to undertake the day-to-day supervision of the complaints function, both being independent of social care services' operational line management, thus ensuring a high level of independence in the way social care complaints are managed within the Council.

## Part Two - Summary of key messages

The key headlines from this report are as follows:

- There has been an increase in complaints investigated, from 87 in 2016/17 to 104 in 2017/18.
- Two complaints were received during 2017/18 which were declined by the Local Authority, a reduction from 5 that were declined in each of the previous 2 performance years.
- There was only one complaint to Health Services where AHS were asked to contribute information to the joint investigation to inform the response.
- DCC AHS received 4 complaints where the contribution of colleagues from Health were needed to inform upon the Council's response; the Council led in these investigations and responded on behalf of all involved organisations in line with joint protocols.
- Older People/Physical Disabilities/Sensory Impairment received 51% of the overall complaints about adult social care services.
- A 'disputed decision' where a service user disagrees within an explanation or decision was the most common reason for making a complaint (14.4%).
- The LGSCO reached a decision on 25 adult social care complaints during 2017/18.
- The service received 297 compliments about adult social care services during 2017/18, an increase from 183 in 2016/17, many of these compliments coming from the Reablement teams within County Durham Care and Support.
- Complaints continue to provide invaluable information and learning from which adult social care services can improve. Some examples of which are detailed below:
  - Issues with the Community Equipment Service were addressed in order to improve the provider's performance and contract compliance.
  - A briefing note was issued to social work staff regarding the handyman service and referral forms were improved linked to the work that needed undertaking and the urgency/priority level.
  - A change in work processes was implemented to be used in cases where DCC take over responsibility for managing a service user's finances to ensure the smooth transfer of their direct debits.

### **Part Three- The adult social care complaints process**

When a complaint is received, it is risk-assessed to ensure that there are no safeguarding or other procedural issues that might supersede the complaints procedure and that it is within the 12 month limitation period. Consent must be obtained to confirm that someone making a complaint on another's behalf has been given the authority to do so.

Once the above determinations have been made, complainants are engaged in planning how their complaint is to be addressed and the timescales for doing so, along with what they hope to see happen as a result of making a complaint in the form of desired outcomes. A Complaints Resolution Plan (CRP) is produced which summarises this information along with the specific elements of complaint for investigation and the complainant is encouraged to suggest any changes to this document so it accurately reflects the issues they wish to be examined.

The Council's focus is always on the resolution of the complaint and engagement with the complainant in order to resolve matters to their satisfaction. Where resolution is not achieved, the complainant remains dissatisfied and the Council's complaints procedure is deemed to have been exhausted, the complainant is invited to raise any outstanding issues with the LGSCO.

Whilst a complainant can refer their complaints to the LGSCO from the outset, the Ombudsman will not usually investigate a complaint until the Council has conducted its own investigation and provided a response. In some circumstances where there has been a joint investigation with Health Services, progression may involve the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO).

### **Part Four- Complaints made to the Local Authority (AHS)**

We received 104 complaints during 2017/18, an increase from 87 in 2016/17.

In addition to this number, two complaints were declined. One, as it was submitted by a third party who did not have the service user's permission to make a complaint about the services received. The other was because the issues within the complaint had already been discussed and addressed at a multi-agency risk enablement panel meeting that the service user had attended.

A further complaint was received for which the Tees, Esk and Wear Valley (TEWV) NHS Foundation Trust took lead responsibility in accordance with joint protocol arrangements. As the majority of the complaint issues were for the Trust to resolve, AHS contributed information on the Council's actions and decision making. This complaint will be reported accordingly by TEWV.

AHS led on a further 4 complaints investigations that incorporated contributions from our partners in Health to include TEWV, County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) and the North of England Commissioning Support Unit (NECS) on behalf of the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). These 4 complaints are include in the figures presented in this report.

## Number of complaints received by service area 2017/18

Service Area	Number of Complaints 2017/18	Number of Complaints 2016/17	% of Total Complaints 2017/18	% of Total Complaints 2016/17
Older People/ Physical Disabilities/Sensory Impairment	53	43	51%	49.5%
Learning Disability/Mental Health/Carers/Substance Misuse	26	26	25%	29.9%
Commissioning	6	8	5.8%	9.2%
County Durham Care and Support	3	0	2.9%	0%
Safeguarding, Practice Development & Access	4	2	3.8%	2.3%
Finance*	12	7	11.5%	8%
Emergency Duty Team/Social Care Direct	0	1	0%	1.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Finance is no longer part of AHS but the complaints were regarding statutory adult social care services

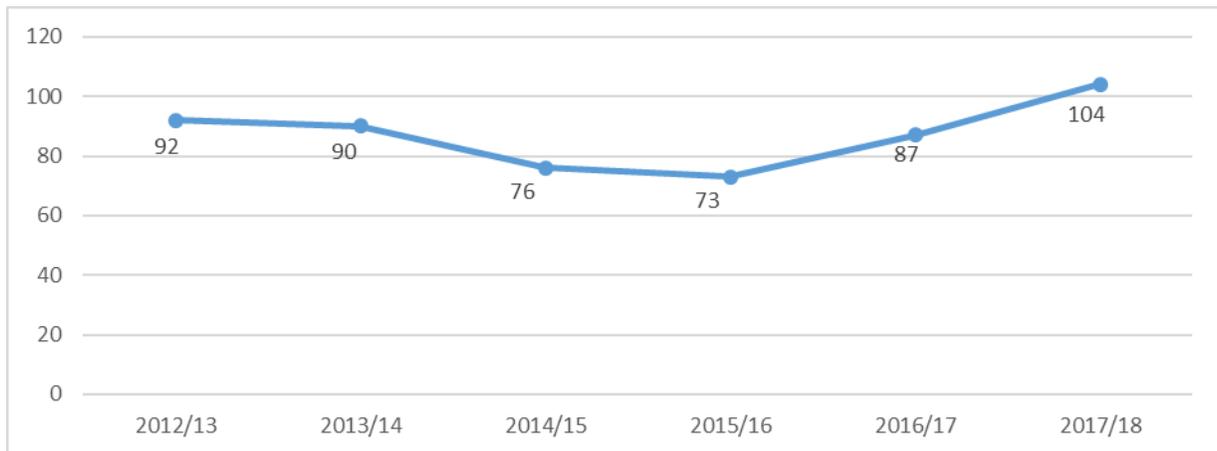
As in previous years, the service receiving the greatest number of complaints was Older People/Physical Disabilities/Sensory Impairment, followed by the Learning Disabilities/Mental Health/ Substance Misuse service area.

The graph below shows the number of complaints received by adult social care services over the last 6 years which illustrates that after a trend towards a reduction in complaints, submissions are on the increase. In the last two years year there has been a 42.5% increase in complaints. This increase is primarily linked to Learning Disability/Mental Health/Carers/Substance Misuse where there was a 73.3% increase from 15 complaints in 2015/16 to 26 complaints in each of the last two years. Older People/ Physical Disabilities/Sensory Impairment complaints rose by 62.5% from 32 to 52 in the same two year period.

These increases are closely linked to assessments and decision making where service users were unhappy with:

- the assessment of their needs;
- the decisions taken in meeting their needs; or
- the explanations they have received.

## Year on year trend - adult social care complaints 2012 – 2018



### Complaints completed within timescales

Complaints Resolution Plans (CRPs) were completed in all of the 104 complaints received in the year. The CRPs included a projected timescale for a response which was initially calculated based upon the perceived complexity of the case. In 17 complaints investigations (16%), AHS needed more time to fully complete their enquiries for a variety of reasons such as the availability of staff for interview, unforeseen complexity, further information required from the Complainant and the need to seek legal advice. In each case, the complainant was updated and fully informed of developments along with the new projected response date. Of the 104 complaints received, 101 had been responded to at the time of writing this report with 3 ongoing but within timescales. Only one complaint was not responded to within the projected timescale due to an IT oversight by the Investigating Officer.

## Categories of complaints received and findings in 2017/18

When complaints are received they are recorded and categorised according to the subject matter of the issues raised. Detailed below is the outcomes of complaints in 2017/18 in the associated categories (the highest three totals are shown in bold):

Complaint Category / Issue	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Total
Application of Service Guidance/Procedures	-	1	3	4
Confidentiality	-	1	1	2
Disputed Decision – disagreement with an action	1	4	6	11
<b>Disputed Decision – disagrees within an assessment</b>	-	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Disputed Decision – disagrees within an explanation or decision</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>30</b>
Finance – Assessment	1	1	1	3
Finance – Charging policy	1	7	5	13
Lack of Communication – no information received	1	2	7	10
Lack of Communication – not informed of meeting details/change	1	1	-	2
Lack of Communication – not updated about case	1	1	1	3
Lack of Communication – unreturned phone calls/texts	-	2	2	4
Lack of Communication – other	1	5	4	10
Lack of Explanation / Explanation not understood	-	1	3	4
Lack of Service – change to clients service	-	1	5	6
Lack of Service – denied service	1	3	5	9
Lack of service – referral of concern not actioned	-	1	1	2
Lack of service – restricted choices of current services	-	-	1	1
Provision of Service – assessment	-	1	1	2
Provision of Service – equipment	1	1	1	3
Provision of Service – handling of complaint	-	2	-	2
Provision of Service – placement provision	-	1	-	1
Quality of Service – personal care	-	1	-	1
Quality of Service – personal financial issues	2	-	1	3
Quality of Service – work of other agencies	-	2	1	3
Safeguarding	-	1	4	5
Speed of Service	3	2	7	12
<b>Staff Attitude</b>	-	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>15</b>
Staff being or seeming to be untruthful	-	-	4	4
Staff not acting in best interest of service user	1	7	6	14
Staff being or seeming to be biased	-	1	-	1
Staff being or seeming to be untruthful	1	3	-	4
Standard of care	-	3	7	10

The above categories were expanded in 2016/17 to more accurately reflect the different types of issues that are raised through complaints. It should be noted that a complaint can have more than one category assigned to it and during the year.

Of the top three reasons for a complaint, a *disputed decision- disagrees within an explanation or decision* was the most common reason 30, (14.4%). As an example, a service user may have a reduction in their services as a result of an assessment and wishes to challenge this. This was also the most common reason for making a complaint in the previous performance year.

*Disputed decision - disagrees within an assessment* 15, (7.2%) is new to the top three reasons. *Staff attitude* 15, (7.2%), where a service user perceives a member of staff to have been rude or disrespectful, was the joint second most common reason for making a complaint, this was the third highest reason in the previous year.

Staff not acting in the best interests of the service user 14 (6.7%) which was in the top three reasons for making a complaint last year has dropped to the fourth highest reason for complaints.

These complaint reasons are consistent with previous years where the 'old' categories of *disputed decision* and *professional conduct of staff* which were the most common reasons for making a complaint.

### Outcome of complaints by service area 2017/18

Service Area	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Ongoing	Total	Not Upheld as a % of Total	Upheld/Partially Upheld as a % of Total
Older People/ Physical Disability & Sensory Impairment	6	19	28	0	53	26.9%	24%
Learning Disability/ Mental Health / Substance Misuse	2	5	18	1	26	17.3%	6.7%
Safeguarding, Practice Development & Access	0	0	4	0	4	3.9%	-
Commissioning	1	3	2	0	6	1.9%	3.9%
County Durham Care and Support	0	1	2	0	3	1.9%	1%
Finance	3	2	5	2	12	4.8%	4.8%
<b>Total</b>	12	30	59	3	104	56.7%	40.4%

(2.9% ongoing)

In 2017/18, more than half the complaints received were not upheld, meaning that although the complainant was dissatisfied in some way, the service had acted appropriately. Of the 104 complaints, only 11.5% of complaints were fully upheld.

Complaints that are upheld or partially upheld are of particular interest to adult social care services. In these cases the service actively looks to identify what it could have done better and what action it can take with the aim of resolving matters to the complainant's satisfaction.

These complaints give the service the opportunity for learning, on an individual level for example, where a Social Worker can be supported by management to improve their personal performance and sometimes across the whole service, where a policy or procedure is improved as a result of a complaint. Further examples of learning and service improvement as a consequence of complaints received are outlined in Part Six of this report.

## Part Five - The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

Where a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint they can refer any outstanding issues to the LGSCO who will determine what action to take after considering the presenting issues.

### Complaints considered by the LGSCO 2017/18

Service Area	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Declined/ No Action	Ongoing	Total
Older People/ Physical Disability & Sensory Impairment	4	-	3	5	1	13
Learning Disability/ Mental Health / Substance Misuse	1	-	3	2	-	6
Safeguarding, Practice Development & Access	-	-	1	-	-	1
Commissioning	-	-	-	1	-	1
County Durham Care and Support	-	-	-	1	-	1
Finance	1	-	1	2	-	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>26</b>

During 2017/18, the Ombudsman liaised with the Council in relation to 26 adult social care cases that had been referred to them as complaints and came to a finding in 25 of these of cases.

Of the 11 cases declined or no action:

- In three cases, the LGSCO referred the complainant to the Council, as they had not raised their issues with the Local Authority, closing the complaint as premature.
- The LGSCO closed eight complaints after making initial enquiries as the submission was either out of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, they had decided that a further investigation would be unlikely to produce a different outcome to the investigation already conducted by the Council or there was insufficient evidence of fault to warrant further detailed enquiries.

Of the 6 cases upheld:

- The Ombudsman identified that a service user had been correctly charged for the first four weeks of their home care and whilst arrangements had already been made with the Council to repay any arrears, they then received a final reminder letter which should not have been issued. The Council apologised for this error and for any personal upset or distress this may have caused upon receipt. It was communicated to staff that reminder letters should not be issued in circumstances where repayment arrangements have been agreed, with further guidance being given on the 'holding' steps within the Council's debt recovery system to prevent such reminders being issued in future.
- The LGSCO found that the Council was wrong to include the value of the joint home, which a service user shared with a relative, in its assessment of the contributions that they would need to pay if they were admitted to a care home. The Council revised its original decision, apologised, reviewed its procedures

and paid the family £500 for the distress at the prospect of having to sell their home, which the Ombudsman considered a suitable remedy for the injustice the family experienced.

- The LGSCO found the Council was at fault for not fully investigating safeguarding concerns so that the risks to a service user were not comprehensively considered. The Council apologised for this error, paid the two complainants £100 each and undertook a process review, using this case and the complainants' experiences to improve services.
- The Ombudsman identified that the Council had assessed a service user's social care needs each time he was discharged from hospital and also considered the professional judgement of those involved with their medical care when planning their social care. However, maladministration and injustice were identified because there was no evidence to show the Council explained residential care charges to the service user's son, who made an uninformed decision and incurred avoidable top-up fees. As a result the Council reimbursed the top-up fees and confirmed to the LGSCO what measures it had in place to ensure that service users and their families are given clear advice about social care funding to enable them to make well informed decisions.
- There was fault in the way decisions were communicated regarding changes to a service user's provision and the Council agreed to the LGSCO's remedy, paying the service user £150 and meeting with them to further discuss changes to provision to identify whether a different configuration would more appropriately meet their needs.
- A Council investigation had already identified faults in the way it had communicated with a service user and their family about care needs, with an apology being offered for this failing and action taken to prevent similar faults from occurring. The LGSCO, whilst confirming that there was fault causing injustice, was satisfied that the action already taken by the Council was enough to remedy the injustice caused.

## **Part Six - Learning and service improvement**

Complaints provide invaluable information from which the service learns how to improve. Complaints also act as a prompt to ensure all staff work consistently to policies and procedures. Even where complaints are not upheld, full explanations, further information and often apologies are given. Some of the learning outcomes and remedies for resolution in the reporting year are as follows:

- Further medical information should have been obtained by an Occupational Therapist to inform upon their assessment before making recommendations as to the most appropriate long term solution for the service user. The practice issues highlighted were addressed with the worker through the supervisory process and all Occupational Therapy staff were reminded of the need to obtain medical information to inform upon the clinical decision making before making recommendations.

- A service user had to wait more than 8 weeks for a specialist piece of equipment from the Community Equipment Service when the terms of the contract specified that items should be supplied within 7 days unless there were exceptional circumstances. The service provider was reminded of their obligations in the strongest possible terms and the consortium of partners involved in the commissioning and use of this contract were advised of this issue at a subsequent Board meeting with a view to improve the provider's performance and contract compliance.
- A copy of an assessment and care plan had not been sent out to a service user in a timely manner. A team meeting was used to remind all Social Workers of the importance of sharing assessments and care plans in a timely manner so that copies are distributed promptly for the attention of service users, with staff being advised to notify the Team Manager/Principal Social Worker if they are struggling to complete on tasks so that assistance can be provided from elsewhere within the team.
- The request for a key box to be fitted to a service user's home was not actioned promptly and the alternatives presented were unworkable, leaving them without the recommended method for allowing carers to enter their property for 3 days after they were discharged from hospital. A briefing note was prepared and issued to staff across the service area reminding them of the referral process with particular reference to the cut off time for referrals to the handy person scheme, to ensure referrals are submitted by 4pm to allow them to be actioned the next working day. Referral forms for this scheme were also modified to add clarity and make the priority level for a referral much clearer.
- The Council was contacted due to concerns about its valuation of a property as part of a financial assessment when compared with the actual sale price and failed to respond promptly, only doing so some four months later. The Council apologised for the delay in responding promptly and used the complaint as an anonymous example with staff from this area of the service so that they could take some learning from the Complainant's experiences, using this to illustrate and reinforce the need for effective and timely communication with service users and/or their representatives.
- A service user experienced delays in DCC arranging the transfer of direct debits from their personal bank account to an account managed on their behalf by the Council. A change in work processes was implemented so that when companies are asked to change existing direct debit arrangements to accounts for service users now managed by the Council, any subsequent response from these companies immediately goes direct to the team member that requested these changes upon receipt.
- The Council received a complaint about the standards of care and facilities at a care home from a service user who had had their placement commissioned by the Council. The Commissioning Service was due to undertake a Quality Based Assessment (QBA) of the home and conducted the complaints investigation in conjunction with this assessment, producing a full written report and action plan, subsequently working with the home to improve standards.

- A service user was unhappy at not being allocated a property within a housing development owned and managed by DCC with the complaints investigation identifying that there was no formal written procedure relating to the allocation of accommodation. An appropriate procedure was developed and approved by the Adult Care Management Team with a copy sent to the service user for their information, along with an assurance that their name remained on the waiting list and when a suitable property became available, their request would be considered in line with the new procedural requirement.

Compensatory payments were made where failures constituted maladministration and/or injustice as defined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. These are detailed within the LGSCO section in Part Five of the report. It should be noted that compensatory redress was only considered (and agreed in line with the Council's Scheme of Delegation) where there was strong evidence of shortcomings.

It is recognised that where adult social care services is responsible for service failures that have caused losses and significant emotional distress, there is clearly the duty for this to be acknowledged and further distress to the complainant be avoided. In each of the complaints responses issued, full explanations and where appropriate, apologies were offered.

## Part Seven - Compliments

There is no statutory requirement to publish data on compliments for the period in question; these are included in this report in order to provide a more holistic view of what service users and their nominated representatives think about the services they receive and to understand what elements of the service that are valued.

There were 297 recorded compliments during 2017/18, an increase from 183 in 2016/17.

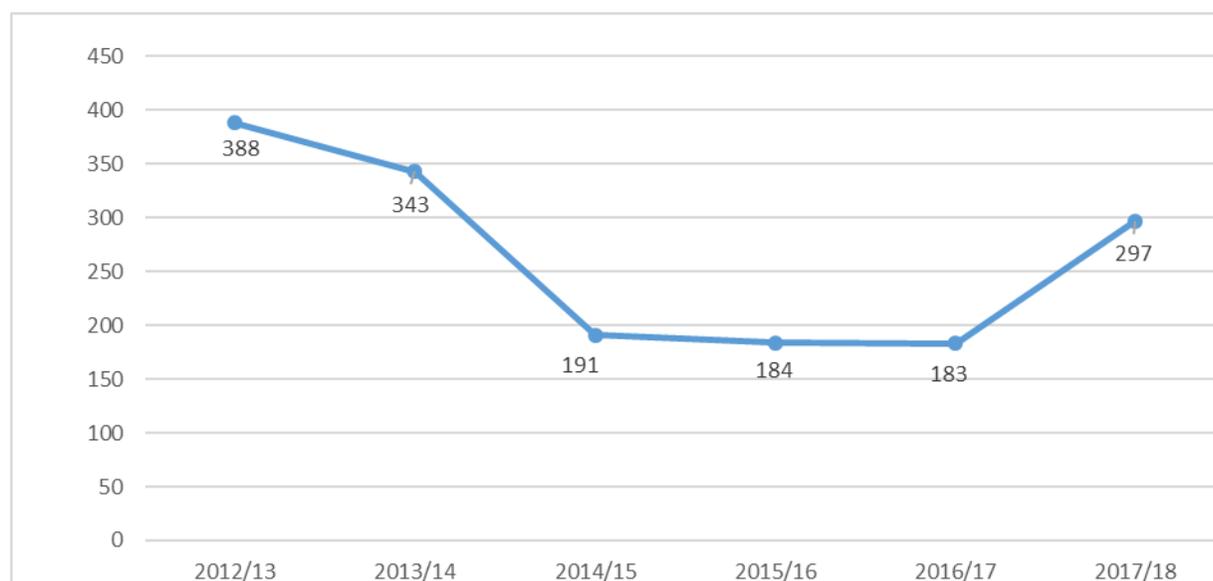
As shown in the table below, the majority of the compliments in both 2015/16 and 2016/17 were for County Durham Care and Support (CDCS), the in-house provider services.

### Total number of compliments by service area 2017/18

Service	Total Compliments 2017/18	Total Compliments 2016/17	% of Total Compliments 2017/18
Older People/ Physical Disabilities/ Sensory Impairment	59	85	19.9%
Learning Disability/Mental Health/ Carers/Substance Misuse	2	6	0.7%
County Durham Care and Support	233	92	78.4%
Safeguarding, Practice Development & Access	3	0	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Prior to the 2017/18 performance year there has previously been a reduction in the number of compliments received year on year which appeared to have levelled out after a sharp fall in 2014. This decline was considered at the time and it was determined to be associated with changes in the types of provision provided by County Durham Care and Support (CDCS).

### Year on year trend - adult social care compliments 2012 - 2018



It is noted that during 2017/18 there has been a concerted effort by the Reablement teams within CDCS to capture all positive feedback to the extent that 248 compliments were for this particular area of the service. Compliments for reporting purposes must meet specific criteria. Managers are encouraged to ensure that all compliments in the form of positive comments, letters, emails and cards are captured and shared with their staff and teams to re-inforce their value.

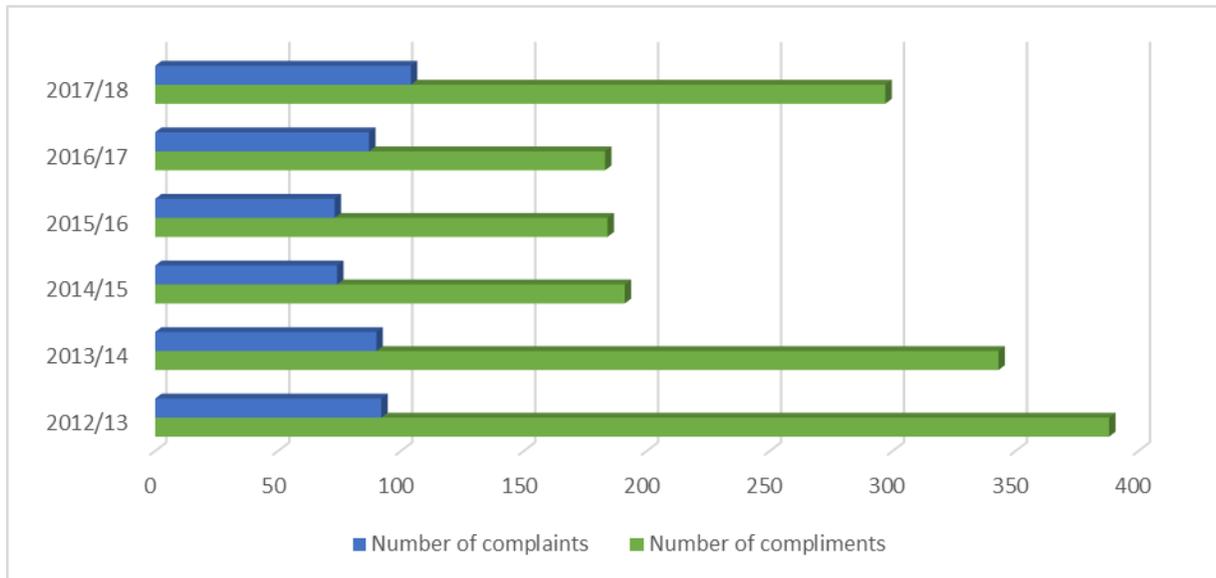
Compliments highlight that service users have appreciated the following:

- Feeling respected, listened to and supported.
- Having decisions explained to them.
- Being kept informed.
- Staff explaining issues in a way the client understood.
- Professionalism, care and commitment of staff.
- Being able to contact staff easily.

The ratio of compliments to complaints received across AHS is 2.8:1. This means that for every complaint received, there were more than 2 compliments. This represents an increase on the previous year when the ratio of compliments to complaints was 2.1:1.

The number of compliments received consistently outweighs the percentage of complaints received and this is shown in the graph below:

## The ratio of compliments to complaints 2011 – 2017



## Part Eight – Developments and Conclusion

### Developments

Whilst the Local Authority has a statutory duty to operate and administer a system for dealing with and reporting upon adult social care complaints, DCC AHS does not simply meet that duty but continuously strives to achieve and maintain a high level of service in relation to the management of complaints. With this aim in mind, a number of developments have been undertaken during 2017/18 to include:

- The continuous improvement of tracking and monitoring systems to ensure actions and learning outcomes arising from complaints are implemented in a timely and effective way and fully embedded.
- Further development of the escalation process with the progress of complaints investigations actively monitored, closer liaison with Strategic Managers to ensure momentum in complaints investigations and more effective feedback to complainants in order to update them and manage their expectations.
- The development of a consistency in approach for complainants who are persistent and/or vexatious, linking in with the corporate centre and making better use of the Council's policies and procedures in this area.
- The change in complaints governance arrangements introduced in 2017/18 has been imbedded and has provided continuity for AHS colleagues i.e. one dedicated Complaints Officer managing all AHS complaints, with the role of 'Complaints Manager' being undertaken by the AHS Development and Learning Manager, reporting to AHS Operational Support Manager, who in turn reported directly to the Head of Commissioning.

## Reporting

Complaints information is reported on a quarterly basis to senior management teams, for cascading to managers and staff. The information in this report is therefore a year-end summary of information, which has previously been shared.

## Conclusion

The complaints function is a statutory requirement for social care services and it plays a vital role in contributing to quality improvement across adult social care as it provides an understanding of the service users' experiences. Acting upon the learning arising from complaints provides the opportunity to change practice and improve service delivery with transparency and accountability.

A collaborative approach is continually promoted during the management of complaints, where the complainant is central to the process and resolution is proactively sought and encouraged.

Further information regarding anything in this report is available by contacting:

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## Appendix 1 - Glossary of abbreviations

<b>AHS</b>	Adult and Health Services
<b>CCG</b>	Clinical Commissioning Group
<b>CDCS</b>	County Durham Care and Support
<b>CDDFT</b>	County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust
<b>CRP</b>	Complaints Resolution Plan
<b>DCC</b>	Durham County Council
<b>LGSCO</b>	Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
<b>NECS</b>	North of England Commissioning Support Unit
<b>PHSO</b>	Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman
<b>TEWV</b>	Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust

Adult and Health Services

**Annual Statutory Representations Report**  
Adult Social Care Services 2017/18

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