

Children's Social Care Compliments and Complaints

Annual Report 2019-2020



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1. Introduction

It is a requirement of The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 that the local authority publishes an Annual Report, to provide a mechanism by which the local authority can be kept informed of the operation of its complaints procedure for Children's Social Care (Regulation 13 (3)).

This Annual Report covers the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. It includes information about:

- the complaints procedure
- the number of complaints at each stage of the complaints procedure and any that were investigated by the Local Government Ombudsman
- the types of complaints that were made, the outcomes and compliance with timescales
- the compliments that were received
- the customer groups that provided feedback
- the learning and service improvements that have been implemented



2. The Complaints Procedure

Stage 1- Local Resolution

Complaints at Stage 1 can be made to a social worker directly or to the Customer Service Team. Complaints received about Children's Social Care are acknowledged within 3 days and responded to within 10 days or within an extended period of an additional 10 days.

Stage 2 – Independent Investigation

Complaints that have not been resolved at Stage 1 can be escalated to Stage 2. At Stage 2, an officer from outside of the Children's Social Care Service is appointed to investigate and respond to the complaint within 25 working days. For complex complaints this can be extended to 65 working days with the agreement of the person making the complaint.

An Independent Person who does not work for the Council will also be involved in all aspects of consideration of the Stage 2 Complaint including any discussions about the action to be taken in relation to the child.

If the complaint has not been resolved at Stage 2, the person making the complaint can ask for their complaint to be heard by a Stage 3 Independent Review Panel. This request should be made within 20 working days of the Stage 2 Response.

Stage 3 – Independent Review Panel

The Independent Review Panel is made up of three Independent People who do not work for the Council; their role is to review all of the information about the complaint and to make recommendations to resolve it. The person making the complaint will be able to make written or verbal statements to the panel and can bring someone with them for support if required.

The panel will inform the person making the complaint and the Corporate Director of their recommendations within 5 working days of the panel date. The service then has 15 days in which to respond. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

On completion of Stage 3 customers are advised of their right to approach the **Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, PO BOX 4771, Coventry, CV4 0EH** if they do not feel their complaint has been resolved.

3. The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) are a legal requirement – they have powers under Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 to refer cases to The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS). Their primary focus is to quality assure the care planning process for each looked after child, and to ensure that the child's current wishes and feelings are given full consideration. IROs also have a role in relation to complaints for looked after children.

In regards to complaints the IRO's responsibilities are as follows:

- To ensure that the child understands their right to make a complaint to the Local Authority and has the option of an advocate to provide support with the complaint.
- To give consideration to who is best able to instigate the complaint on behalf of the child, where the child does not have the ability or understanding to instigate their complaint. This could include the IRO (Section 26(3), 1989 Act).
- Where there is an outstanding complaint being addressed within the local authority's complaints procedure this should not prevent the IRO from continuing to work to resolve the matter, either informally or by using the formal local dispute resolution process.
- The IRO must be advised of any complaint brought by or on behalf of the child so that they may assist with resolving the problem.
- In all cases the welfare of the child is the primary concern. The IRO will need to make a judgement in consultation with their line manager about whether a problem raised as a complaint is sufficiently serious to make a referral to Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. Alternatively the IRO may consider that it would be more reasonable to await a resolution through the formal complaints procedure and/or the use of the formal local dispute resolution process.

4. Advocacy

Children and young people making a complaint are offered the support of an advocate who can support them to make a complaint, to ensure that they can express their concerns and that they are listened to. Advocacy for children and young people in Milton Keynes is provided by Coram Voice. They can be contacted by:

Free phone: 0808 800 5792

Text: 07758 670 369

Email: help@coramvoice.org.uk

Online: <http://www.coramvoice.org.uk/young-peoples-zone/getting-touch>

5. Summary Data 2019-20:

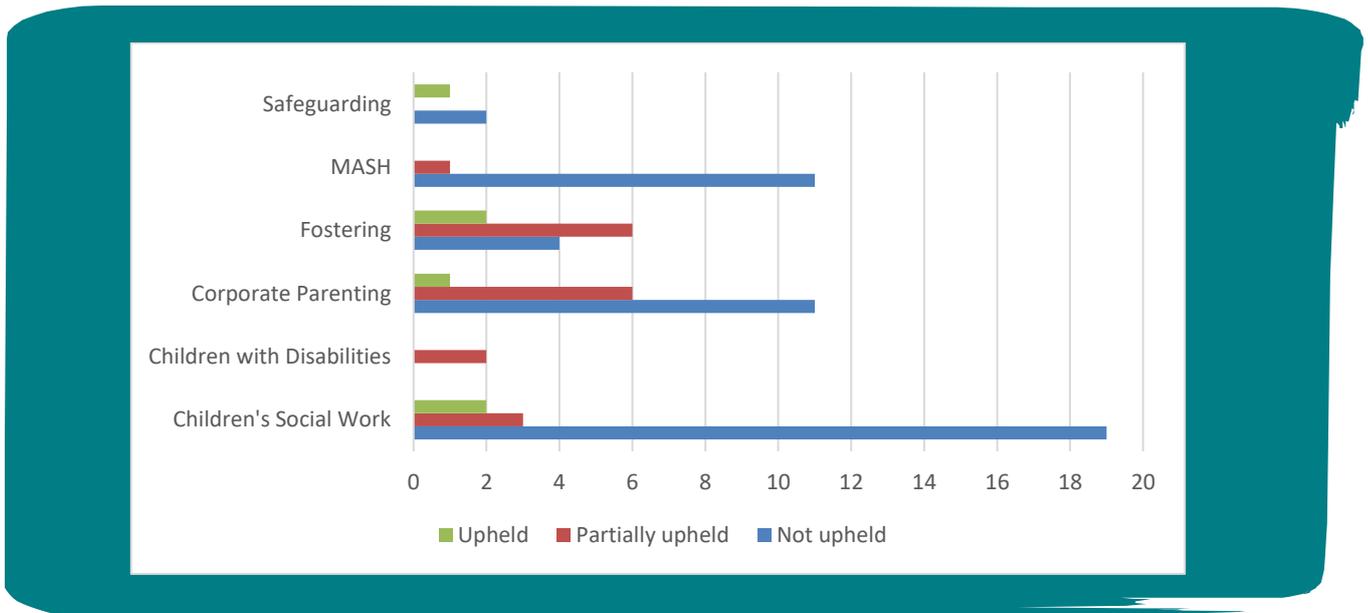
- Around 2,400 children were supported by our social care teams.
- 74 complaints were received, compared to 65 complaints in 2018-19.
- 97% of complaints were resolved at Stage 1 compared to 97% during 2018-19.
- 1 complaint was escalated to Stage 2 compared to 1 during 2018-19.
- 1 complaint was escalated to Stage 3 compared to none during 2018-19.
- 7 enquiries were made to Milton Keynes Council by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman. 6 decisions were received of which 1 was upheld, 3 were referred to us for local resolution and 2 were closed after initial enquiries. A number of cases will have been received and decided in different business years, this means that the number of enquiries received will not always match the number of decisions made.
- 43 compliments were received, compared to 47 recorded during 2018-19.



Outcomes

Of the complaints received: 64% were not upheld, 27% were partially upheld and 9% were upheld. We recognise the value of customer complaints and welcome them as an important source of feedback on our services. We use the information from complaints to learn from and drive forward improvements to respond positively to our customers' needs and expectations.

During 2019-20 the key areas of feedback received through complaints related to:



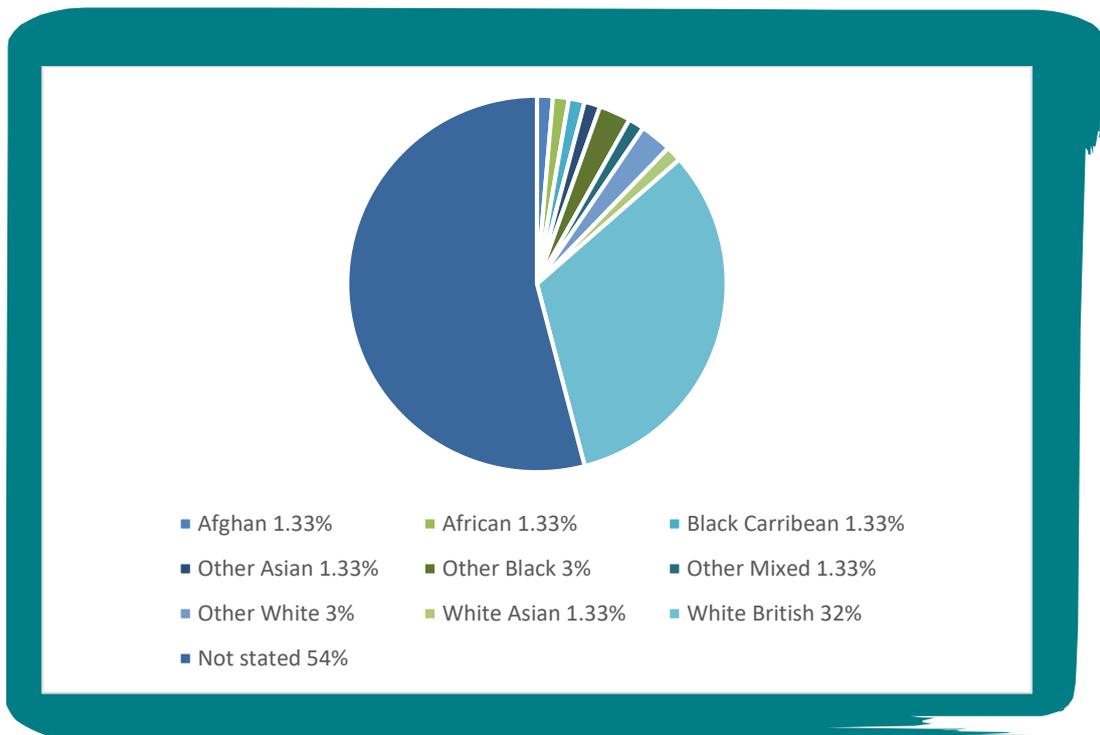
- 32% Professional decision making
(74% not upheld, 22% partially upheld, 4% upheld)
- 40% Service failure
(47% not upheld, 39% partially upheld, 14% upheld)
- 28% Staff conduct
(85% not upheld, 10% partially upheld, 5% upheld)

83% of complaints closed within 2019-20 were responded to within the response timescale, the complaints that were responded to outside of the timescale were due to additional time that was required for complex complaints or due to key staff being absent from work and service pressures which caused a delay in the investigation. In these cases the person making the complaint was contacted with an explanation for the delays.

6. Customer Data

We ask everyone to provide some optional personal information when making a complaint. This information is treated confidentially and helps us to monitor if everyone is able to give us feedback. This information also enables us to provide additional support where required, such as through providing an interpreter or providing information in braille or another format. The sections titled 'not disclosed' indicate that the person making the complaint chose not to give us this information.

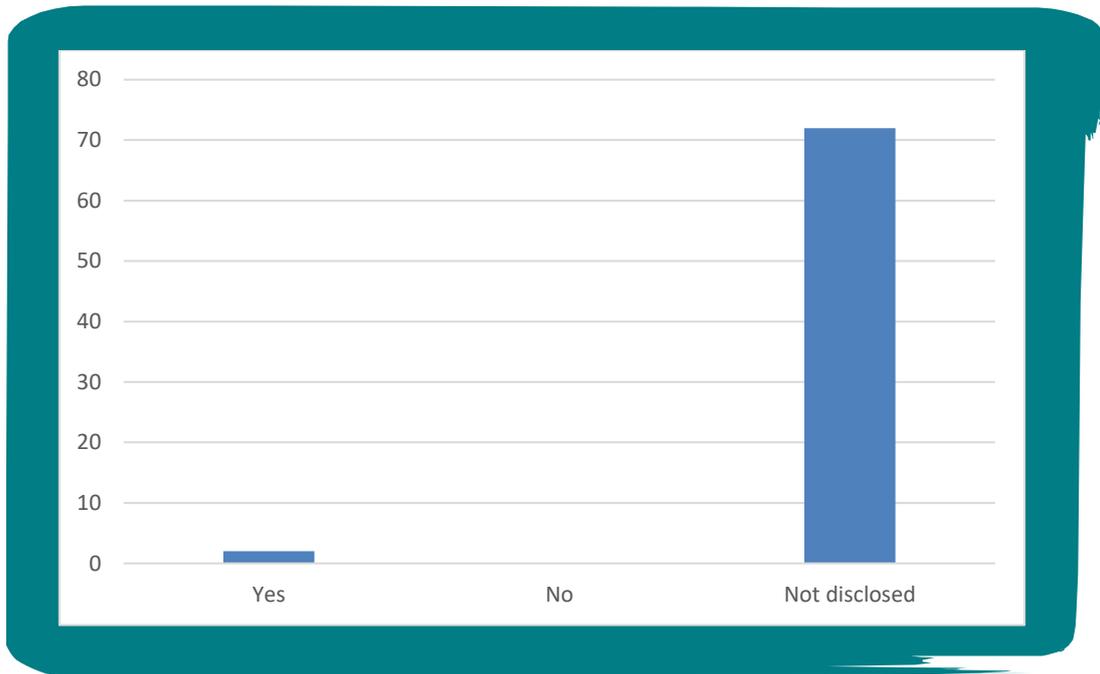
Ethnic Background:



The chart above shows that individuals who described themselves as White British made up a third of all complaints received by Children's Social Care during 2019-20. However, 40 customers chose not to disclose their ethnic background.

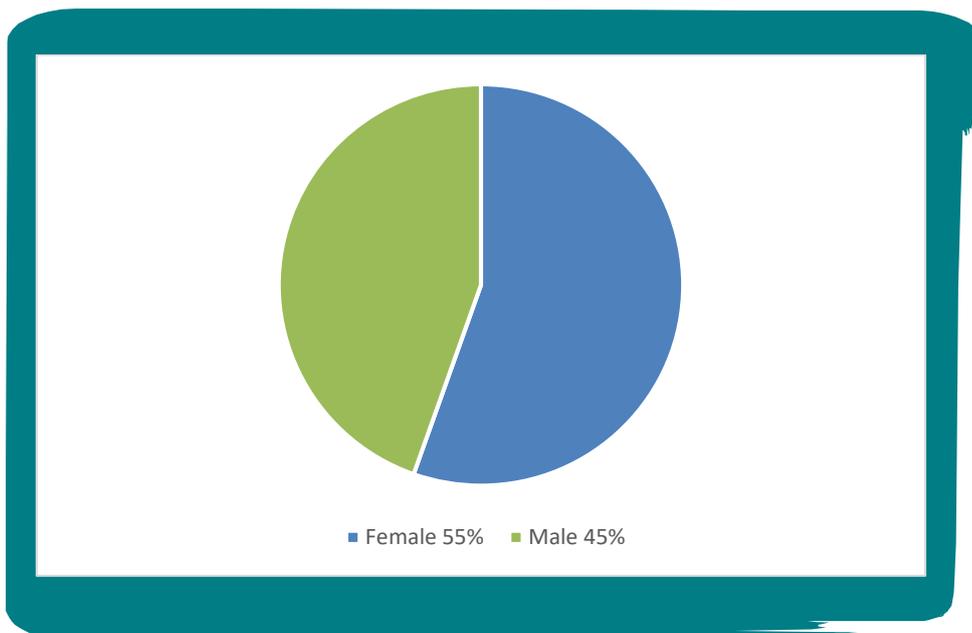
(The Ethnic Groups above comply with the Ethnic Groups recommended by the Office for National Statistics)

Disability:



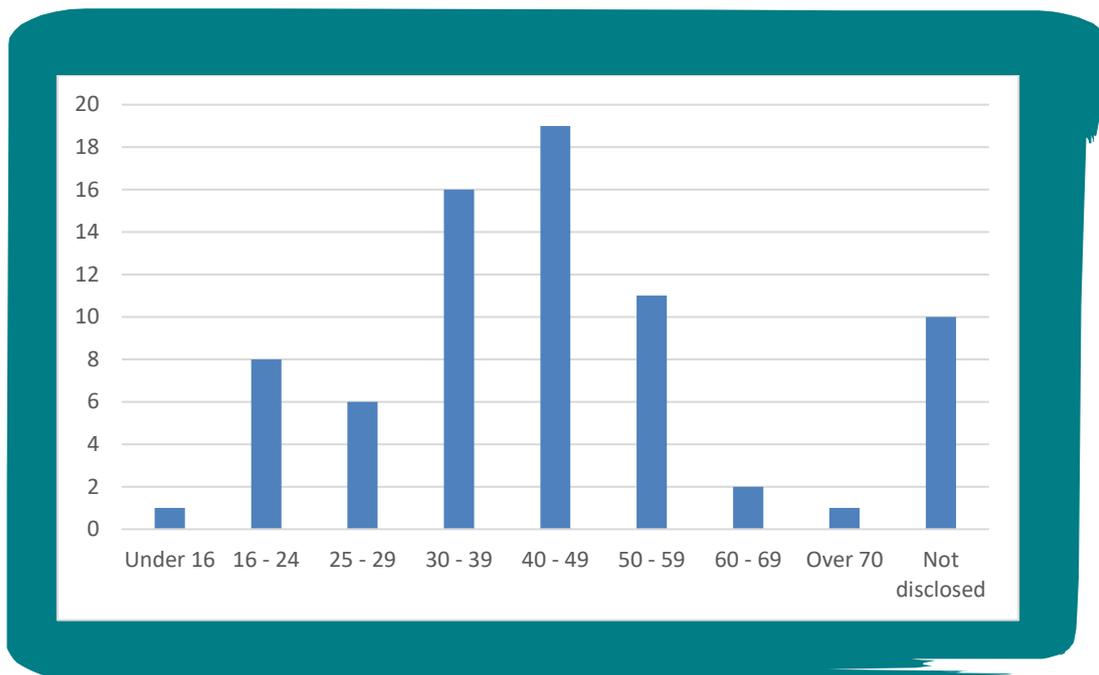
3% of customer’s stated that they had a disability and 97% chose not to disclose any additional needs or request any additional assistance with making their complaint.

Gender:



There were 41 complaints from females and 33 from males during 2019-20.

Age Groups:



The chart above shows that complaints were received from a range of age groups during 2019-20. We received 9 complaints from children and young people under the age of 25. We continue to work with our advocacy service, Participation Youth Worker and Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure that children and young people's feedback is received and acted on.

7. Positive Feedback

We received 43 compliments during 2019-20. Here are some examples of those compliments:

From a mother working with MASH and the Children & Family Practice Team: “I wanted to say a huge thank you to Jo as she was the first person I spoke to and she was really helpful. I was going through a really tough time, but things are on the mend now.”

I also wanted to say a huge thank you to Claire, she is a wonderful lady with a nice warm personality. There was a time when I was really angry, but Claire was patient and listened to me and helped me massively.”

From a family being supported by FAST: “I want to pass on my thanks to the team, I don’t think I would have got through the process without the support of the contact workers. David in particular was so approachable and supportive. I will miss the contact team.”

From a Judge after a court hearing about a Social Worker in our Children’s Social Work Team: “This has been an extremely impressive piece of social work where the social worker has worked intelligently and collaboratively with parents who have obviously been consumed with anxiety about their child.”

From a young person being supported by our Children’s Disability Team: “Caroline is very good guy, she did change our family life, she the best social worker ever I had.”

From a family who is supported by our Corporate Parenting Teams: “Your team have restored my faith and trust in social services which I once lost many years ago. You are a credit to your team(s). For the first time in a long time I am proud of myself and the girls and know the true meaning of family and the power of love, respect and trust can achieve the impossible.

I just wanted to say a big thank you for all you have done for our family. All your hard work and support and faith in us has paid off we wouldn’t be the family we are today if it wasn’t for you and your team. So a massive thank you.

From a Foster Carer and the children in her care: “I just wanted to give you some feedback from yesterday’s event held at Safari MK. I honestly thought it was amazing and so grateful that MKC took the time to show the children how great they are. The boys felt so proud of themselves and loved every minute of it and I watched the other children especially the older ones and you could really see what a boost it gave them.”

Compliments are an essential part of the feedback that we receive in helping us to improve our service as they enable us to recognise and build on our strengths.

8. What we have learnt from your feedback

The feedback that we have received has made a difference to the service by enabling us to introduce a range of service improvements including:

You said: the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) showed a lack of independence and challenge to senior management when proposals were made that would affect your son's placement.

We did: ensure processes are in place to enable IRO's to seek independent advice and feel empowered to do so when required. Awareness training was undertaken on dispute resolution and access to independent legal advice and our Independent Reviewing Service is clear as to this expectation.

You said: you were unhappy with the way you had been supported by MKC as foster carers, specifically around the allegations made against you and the way in which this was managed.

We did: confirm the Managing Allegations process has been reviewed; changes have been made and these have been embedded. This has been done in collaboration with our Independent Chair and Fostering Panel Advisor who have both been appointed to help challenge the service when any practice falls below the expected standard.

You said: that some of the details are incorrect within the Children and Families Assessment undertaken by the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

We did: apologise for this and details on our system have since been amended and a case note added stating these changes.

9. Monitoring for 2020-21

Action	Owner	Deadline for completion
Review of quarterly customer feedback and development of quarterly action plan.	Corporate Customer Feedback Manager	Quarter 1 - July 2020 Quarter 2 - October 2020 Quarter 3 - January 2021 Quarter 4 - April 2021

For more information please visit our website

www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/complaints

