

Milton Keynes Council

Children's Social Care Compliments and Complaints

Annual Report 2017-2018



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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 2017 to 31 March 2018. 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 Ombudsman 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 2017-18:

- Around 2,000 Children were supported by our social care teams.
- 89 complaints were received, compared to 82 complaints in 2016-17.
- 97% of complaints were resolved at Stage 1 compared to 98% during 2016-17.
- 3 complaints were escalated to Stage 2 compared to 2 during 2016-17.
- No complaints were escalated to Stage 3 this year or last year.
- 3 enquiries were made to Milton Keynes Council by the Local Government Ombudsman. 3 decisions were received of which 1 was upheld and 2 were not investigated.
- 46 compliments were received, compared to 45 recorded during 2016-17.

Outcomes

Of the complaints received: 52% were not upheld, 37% were partially upheld and 11% were upheld. We recognise the value of customer complaints and welcome them as an important form of feedback on our services. We will use the information from complaints to learn from and drive forward improvements to respond positively to our customers' needs and expectations.

During 2017-18 the key areas of feedback received through complaints related to:

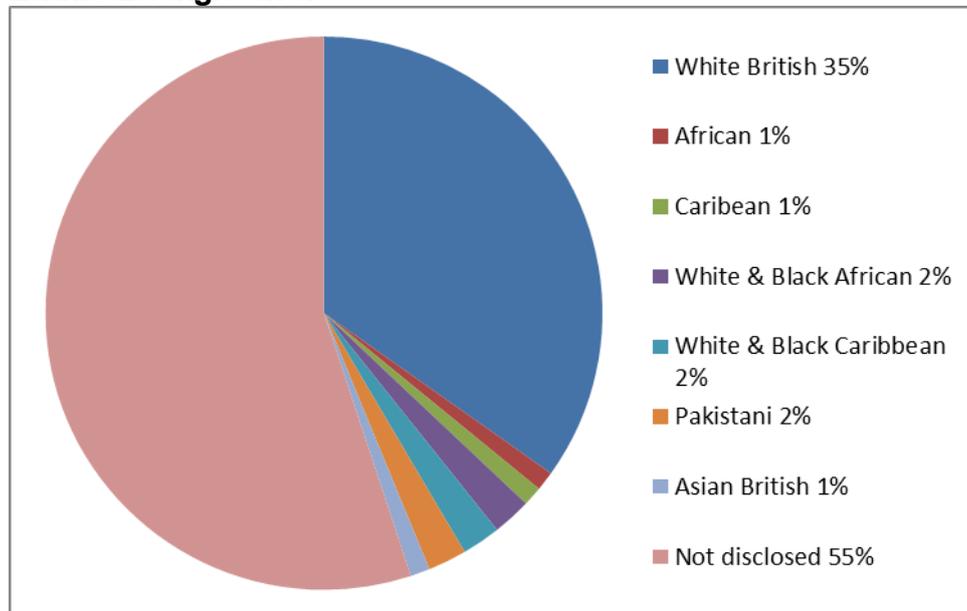
- 49% Professional decision making
(52% not upheld, 34% partially upheld, 14% upheld)
- 30% Staff conduct
(48% not upheld, 41% partially upheld, 11% upheld)
- 20% Service failure
(55.5% not upheld, 39% partially upheld, 5.5% upheld)

Of the 89 complaints received, 82% 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.

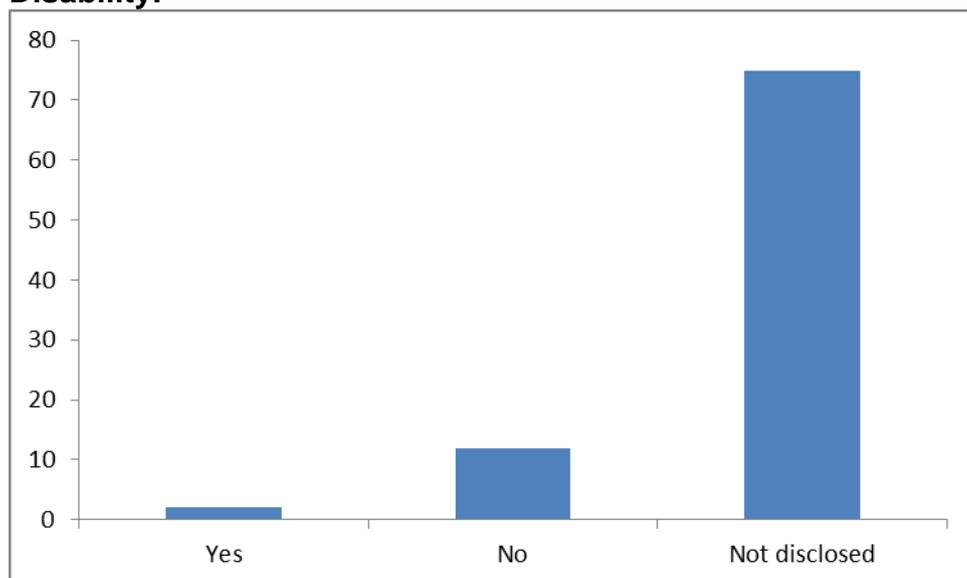
Ethnic Background:



The chart above shows that White British individuals made up just over a third of all complaints received by Children's Social Care during 2017-18. However 49 customers chose not to disclose their ethnic background.

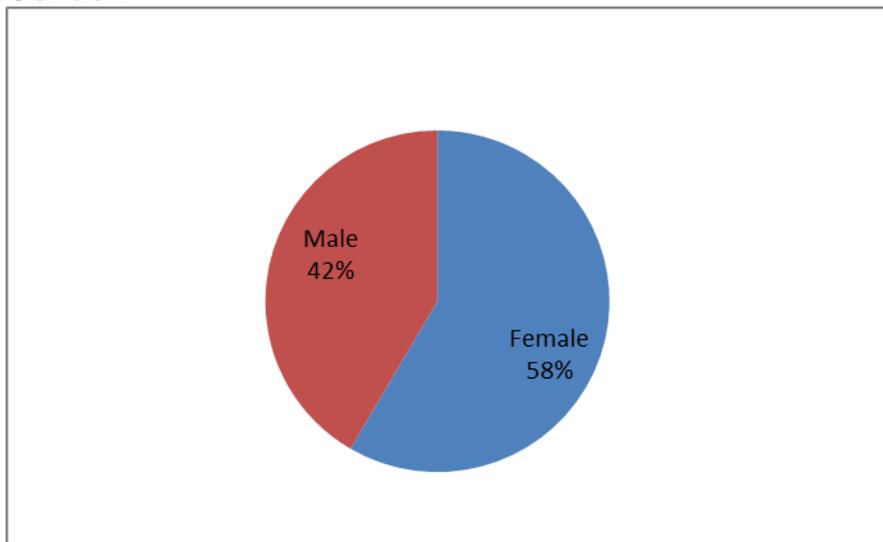
(The Ethnic Groups above comply with the Ethnic Groups recommended by the Office for National Statistics)

Disability:



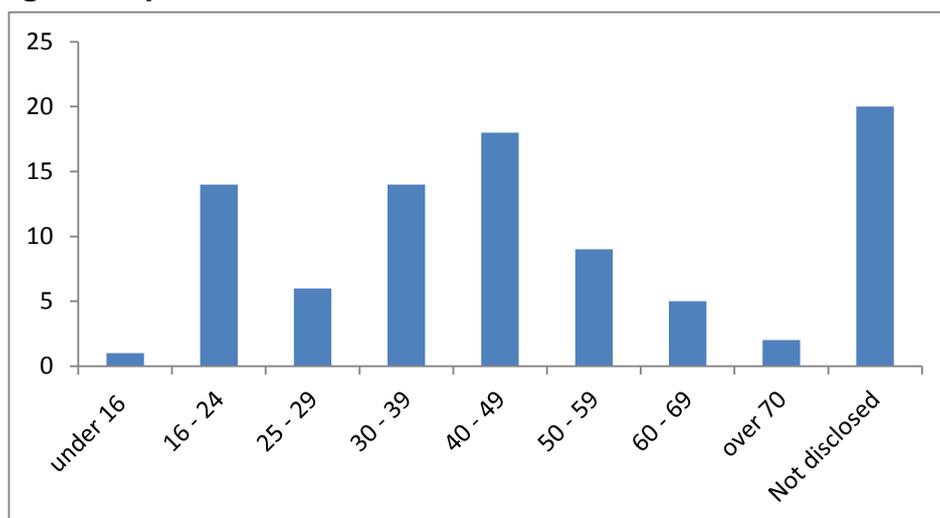
2% of customer's stated that they had a disability and 84% chose not to disclose any additional needs or request any additional assistance with making their complaint.

Gender:



There were 52 complaints from females and 37 from males during 2017-18.

Age Groups:



The chart above shows that complaints were received from a range of age groups during 2017-18. We recognise that only 1% of complaints received were from children and young people under the age of 16. 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 46 compliments during 2017-18. Here are some examples of those compliments:

From a family being supported by the Children and Families Practice (CFP): “Pat came to us via a police referral when we were at breaking point as a family. From her first phone call she was upbeat, unjudgemental and friendly. She dispelled any concerns I had about a stranger coming in to our home and critiquing our parenting skills. She was so warm and understanding we immediately felt able to confide and be honest about the issues we were having with our children, bad health, education and challenges of having kids with disabilities. She has supported us fully, always at the end of the phone to offer advice and to liaise between us and the authorities involved with our family. We'd like to say that the service has been invaluable to us and we're so glad to have met Pat, she's made a real positive impact on our lives.”

From a grandparent working with MASH: “I wanted to call to thank Kate for her recent support, she has always made herself available for our family and although this is a difficult process I have always trusted that we all had my grandson's safety at the forefront. Kate has always listened to us, and been professional in her involvement.”

From a young person who is supported by the Corporate Parenting Team: “Ashley is the first social worker I have ever got on with, even though I have said horrible things to him in the past I am glad he is my social worker, as he always listens to me. When I decided to come back into care, I liked how Ashley talked to me about my choices, he supported me to make the decision for myself and I was pleased I was able to take control.”

From a Children's Guardian after a court hearing: “I just wanted to pass on my compliments about the work of the social worker Abi. She provided a comprehensive and well thought through initial statement for Court, which helped inform the Judges decisions. I thought the Local Authority's plan was child-centred in wanting the siblings to be placed together and taking the risks into account. But most of all I wanted to compliment Abi for the way she so professionally dealt with the situation at Court. She was able to think in a measured and child-focused way to put together a Christmas contact plan and she calmly got on with arranging all of the practicalities of moving the two younger children to the maternal grandmother's home. She clearly had everything in hand, I'm sure she is an asset to your team.”

From a young care leaver to Children's Services: “We all have one life, people like you who came into my life have made such a difference. People don't realise the effort social workers put in to ensure a good future for young people like me. I know its one heck of a hard job, and testing, but you guys made me who I am now. I suffered emotional and domestic abuse with a family that neglected me when I was young, but you taught me that you can always get to the other side, no matter how tough things get, you don't let the hard stuff hold you back, and I learnt that. I can finally put myself first for once; I've got people around me who care, so thank you.”

Compliments are just as useful as complaints 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 enabled us to introduce a range of service improvements including:

You said:

I don't feel my Social Worker followed my wishes and feelings by seeing me alone when she came to visit me with another professional.

We did:

Apologise that you were not offered the opportunity to be seen alone by your Social Worker in accordance with statutory regulations. Since this was brought to our attention we have clarified the expectations of Social Workers when conducting Statutory visits with Looked after Children. The electronic system now allows managers to monitor this to ensure this requirement has been met.

You said:

I feel that during my pregnancy and mother and baby placement I was not given enough support to understand what was happening and what this meant for me and my baby.

We did:

Recognise that young people who are parents in a similar situation; where they are going through care proceedings in relation to their child must have access to an advocate either prior to or at the start of the care proceedings in order to receive impartial advice, support and assistance in this process.

You said:

I am worried that information is missing from the Children and Families Assessment and therefore your decision about the level of risk may be flawed and measures may not have been put in place to ensure my children's wellbeing.

We did:

Ensure that all members of staff are aware of our Recording and Retention Policy and the requirement for them to comply with this including the completion of templated assessment forms and Case notes. Team Managers and Deputy Team Managers were also reminded of our responsibility to ensure that all necessary information is included and considered when assessments are undertaken.

You said:

I understand that Social Services feel I need to move from my current placement, a children's home, now that I am 16 but, I am not happy with the choice of foster family made for me, I don't want to go to this placement.

We did:

Visit you and talked about why you were unhappy and agreed that the placement offered wasn't suitable for you. We worked with you to look at other provisions available to help you move towards independence.

You said:

We failed to assess your circumstances properly when you began caring for your nephews and you raised this with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

We did:

Carry out an assessment three months after you had started to look after your nephews and decided to pay you a friends and family fostering allowance. We accepted that if we had assessed you properly from the start it is likely we would have made the same decision earlier. Therefore we agreed to the Ombudsman's recommendation to pay you a sum to make up for the allowance you missed out on.

9. Monitoring for 2018-19

Action	Owner	Deadline for completion
Review of quarterly customer feedback and development of quarterly action plan.	Corporate Customer Feedback Manager	Quarter 1 - 16 July 2018 Quarter 2 - 15 October 2018 Quarter 3 - 21 January 2019 Quarter 4 - 15 April 2019

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www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/children-young-people-families/children-s-social-carefamilies/children-s-social-care



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