



Complaints & Compliments Annual Report 2020-21

SUMMARY

An overview of complaints, compliments, SARs activity and performance for the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

AUTHORS

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TO:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES & EDUCATION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	19 January 2022	AGENDA ITEM:	
TITLE:	BFFC ANNUAL CUSTOMER SERVICES REPORT 2020-21		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR TERRY	PORTFOLIO:	CHILDREN'S SERVICES
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Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of complaints, compliments, SARs activity and performance for the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Executive summary

This report outlines the work that Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC) and Reading Borough Council (RBC) has carried out to improve customer relations. This report's main focus is on complaints and compliments, although other aspects of customer relations, including subject access requests (SARs) are also covered.

Children's social care, early help, education and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services in Reading are delivered by Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC), the not-for-profit company wholly owned by, but independent of, Reading Borough Council. Through a Service Level Agreement, Reading Borough Council's Customer Relations team handles the administration for complaints, compliments and SARs.

Complaints, particularly in the emotive arena of children's services, are inevitable. The way that they are handled, however, can help reduce the number of escalating complaints and can improve parental and family understanding of the need for intervention by children's services and the positive outcomes for children and young people.

BFFC recognises that there will be occasions when the service provided to children, young people and their families has not been of a satisfactory standard or where the customer is unhappy with the service they have received.

Complaints are an important source of information to help the company understand where and why changes need to be made to improve the service provided.

During this period the service received 70 statutory complaints, which is a decrease of 22 (23.9%) against the 92 received in 2019/20.

Of the 70 complaints received:

- 13 were resolved through alternative dispute resolution (ADR) by the social care teams.
- The remaining 57 progressed to a formal investigation, although three of these were subsequently withdrawn by the complainant once the investigation had commenced.

During the same period, 11 complaints progressed to a Stage 2 investigation and one of these stage 2 complaints progressed to a Stage 3 investigation, although these were not all progressions of Stage 1 complaints received in the same period, as some related to Stage 1 and 2 investigations carried out in 2019/20.

Both the Customer Relations team, on BfFC's behalf, and BfFC's Communications & Marketing and HR/Training teams have continued to raise awareness of the complaints process for both staff and the public.

The 'Children's Social Care Complaints 2020/21 – Summary Report' attached at **Appendix A** provides an analysis of the data for statutory complaints; it explains how complaints are managed and how the learning is used to improve services. This will be made public through both Reading Borough Council's and Brighter Futures for Children's websites.

The Council and BfFC have worked closely to drive improvements in the services offered to children and young people and to signpost to information on advocacy, early resolution and the complaints procedures.

The 2020/21 report, which will be published as above, shows a marked improvement in the number of complaints received.

Nevertheless, BfFC recognises there is much room for improvement and is actively working to better the services offered to its customers.

Recommendations

Both BfFC's Board and the Adult Social Care, Children's Services & Education Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of the report and intended actions to further improve the management of representations, particularly complaints, in children's services in Reading.
- Note the continuing work to raise awareness of all conflict resolution processes, including the statutory complaints process and encourage appropriate use by children, young people and their families.

Context

The NHS & Community Care Act 1990, Children Act 1989, The Children Act 2004, Department of Health and Department for Education Guidance & Regulations require that the children's social care service sets up and maintains a complaints procedure. They also require that local authorities operate the procedure within specified timescales, methods of investigation and that a summary of statistical information on complaints and a review of the complaints process are included in an annual report.

Activity

Brighter Futures for Children operates a 3-stage procedure in respect of statutory complaints about children's social care made by 'qualifying individuals', as specified in the legislation. Qualifying individuals are defined in national guidance as the child or young person, their parent, carer or foster carer or 'anyone who could be seen to be acting in the best interests of the child'.

The timescale for responding to complaints at Stage 1 is 10 working days, which can be extended to 20 working days in certain circumstances. The RBC Customer Relations Manager, who is the designated complaints manager for BfFC, also has to be aware of all complaints as they are being dealt with. The Head of Communications & Marketing has overall oversight, as the BfFC lead on this Service Level Agreement.

The corporate complaints procedure gives an opportunity for those who are not 'qualifying individuals' under the social services legislation, to still be able to complain about children's services and this route is used for all corporate and education (incl SEND) complaints.

Contribution to strategic aims

Customer relations contribute to both BfFC and RBC's aims to enhance emotional wellbeing and deliver outstanding services for children in need and those needing protection in Reading. It does this by providing an impartial and supportive service to children and families who wish to complain or raise a concern and ensuring that there is learning from complaints.

RBC's Customer Relations Team and the Customer Relations Manager administer this service to Brighter Futures for Children, under The Service Level Agreement. BfFC provides oversight on service delivery and on actions relating to lessons learned, as part of the company's strategic aim to improve children's services in Reading.

Community engagement and information

Information about the complaints process is provided verbally to service users via BfFC's Children's Social Care teams and Independent Reviewing Officers, as well as by the Customer Relations team. Full information is also on the website www.brighterfuturesforchildren.org. Leaflets on the procedures are widely distributed and available in a variety of formats and languages on request to the Customer Relations team or through the use of BrowseAloud (now ReachDeck) on BfFC's website.

In all children looked after reviews and all child protection conferences, the chair always mentions the complaints process so that our most vulnerable children are reminded of their right to complain and a leaflet is provided. Service users are also able to register a complaint via the web, text, the Mind Of My Own App, email directly to the Customer Relations team, in person, by phone and in writing or via an advocate.

The Brighter Futures for Children website has a direct link to the complaints service and the Customer Relations team has published the details of the Customer Relations Manager and the BfFC advocacy provider, Reconstruct. The Customer Relations team also work closely with Healthwatch Reading and other organisations that offer a free help line support to children in care and carers who may wish to complain and require assistance.

Translation services are provided for complainants whose first language is not English and advocacy support is available for young people who wish to make a complaint.

Equality impact assessment

The Customer Relations Manager will ensure that the statutory complaints process is accessible to all customers regardless of their race, gender, disabilities, sexual orientation, age or religious belief.

The statutory complaints process is designed to ensure that any concern or issue faced by vulnerable children and their carers is addressed in a timely and impartial manner.

Legal implications

The statutory foundation for the children's social care services complaints procedures are the Local Authority Social Services Act (1970), The Children Act (1989), The Children Act (2004), The Human Rights Act (1998), The Adoption and Children Act (2002) and The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (2006).

It is a requirement of the Department of Health's standards and criteria for complaints management for children's social care that an annual report including complaints is presented to a public meeting.

Financial implications

There are no capital or revenue implications arising from this report. However, BfC has an obligation to ensure the service provided by RBC's Customer Relations team is value for money, that the SLA is regularly monitored and that all complaints are handled in a trauma informed, restorative and timely manner to minimise the likelihood of legal costs associated with escalation of complaints that could have been better resolved earlier.

Value for money

The overriding aim of both BfC and RBC is to work towards informal resolution wherever possible. BfC works to the principle of a restorative and trauma informed approach and is keen for complaints to be resolved to the complainant's satisfaction, at the earliest possible stage. The Customer Relations team works to this aim and ensures that most statutory complaints are resolved within the Stage 1 process so that expensive Stage 2 investigations and Stage 3 panels are minimised.

Risk assessment

There are no specific financial risks arising from this report.

Background papers

['Getting the Best from Complaints'](#) Government Publication, August 2006

Appendix A

Children's Social Care complaints for Brighter Futures for Children 2020/21

Summary report

Introduction

This is a summary report of the data for statutory complaints received by Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC) for the financial year 2020/21, when the number of complaints received has decreased slightly compared to the previous year. This report will also be made available to the public through the Reading Borough Council (RBC) and BFFC websites.

In addition to the quality of service provided, there are many factors that can affect the number of complaints received such as satisfaction, customer expectations, awareness of the complaints process, and the extent of promotional activity.

A high number of complaints should not be interpreted simply as meaning that Brighter Futures for Children is providing a poor service, while at the same time a low number of complaints should not be interpreted as meaning people are satisfied with the service.

When interpreting the statutory complaints statistics, it is important to take into account not just the number received but the number and proportion that are upheld.

Brighter Futures for Children welcomes feedback through the complaints process. As well as providing opportunity to identify where services have not been provided as they should be, feedback can also provide customer insight and help identify any deficiency in practice, policies and procedures. It is from these that the service and those who work within it can continue to learn and improve practice and service delivery.

Statutory complaints procedure

Complaints dealt with through the statutory procedure involve three stages.

At Stage 1 complaints are investigated and responded to by a manager in the relevant service area.

If the complainant feels that the issues they have raised remain unresolved, they have the right to progress their complaint to Stage 2. Consideration of complaints at Stage 2 is normally achieved through an investigation conducted by an investigating officer and an independent person. The independent person is involved in all aspects of consideration of the complaint including any discussions in the authority about the action to be taken in relation to the child. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent person and the investigating officer prepare independent reports for adjudication by a senior manager (usually the Director of Children's Social Care).

When Stage 2 of the complaints procedure has been concluded and the complainant is still dissatisfied, they are eligible to request a review of the stage 2 investigation, by a review panel at Stage 3. The panel must consist of three independent people.

The statutory children's social care complaints process encourages the complainant and BFFC to consider Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) at every stage of the complaints process. This means resolving a complaint or concern informally through a face to face meeting or telephone discussion. Entering into ADR does not restrict the complainant's right to request a formal investigation at any

stage. It is the complainant's right to request the presence of a customer relations manager at any face-to-face meeting.

Summary of compliments and complaints activity, quality assurance & learning

There has been a 22% decrease in the number of complaints received compared to the previous year. The top three themes for complaints continue to be:

- Service provision
- Staff conduct and
- Communication

Examples of complaints recorded as **service provision** are where the parent or carer may disagree with the content of an assessment or care plan proposed for a child or young person, there has been concerns from parents or carers about contact arrangements with their child looked after or child or young person being unhappy about the move to a different placement.

Staff conduct complaints are recorded as such when complaints are received around specific individual members of social work staff.

Communication complaints are mainly about the customer/young person not being notified in advance of contact arrangements, staff not returning telephone calls or responding to emails.

This report details information for the year 2020/21, analysis of the data, quality assurance and information on service developments as a result of learning from complaints.

Under the current monitoring system, information about complaints received directly by teams is reported to the customer relations manager upon receipt. This is to ensure that the customer relations manager is aware of all current complaints in order to monitor their progress and highlight cases that can be resolved through alternate dispute resolution (ADR) to team managers and senior staff.

This SLA is overseen by BFFC's Head of Communications & Marketing.

Quality assurance

The Customer Relations team carry out checks of all complaint responses to ensure the quality of the response and that the language and terminology used is easy for the complainant to understand, particularly if the complaint is from a child or young person.

Statistics indicate 100% of responses were checked by the Customer Relations team before being sent out. The findings and recommendations are shared regularly with BFFC's Board, Senior Leadership Team and operational managers. The Customer Relations & Information Governance Manager and the Customer Relations team are also available to the complainant and the investigator for advice on best practice during the complaint investigation but remain impartial.

The Customer Relations & Information Governance Manager delivers training on investigating and responding to statutory Stage 1 complaints and also on the corporate complaints procedure to BFFC staff. The Customer Relations & Information Governance Manager also attends team meetings to provide training and advice to front line staff.

Training is now available online also; this can be accessed by all social care staff through BFFC's training department. Take up of this on-line training has been very low. Two face to face training

session for operational managers were arranged and completed in November 2020 and February 2021.

The complaints procedure is promoted to external groups, publicity material is available to staff, children and young people and close links with Healthwatch Reading. Parents or carers with learning difficulties or other needs will be signposted to local charitable advocacy providers.

Processes have been improved to ensure upcoming responses are discussed and monitored regularly. BFFC 's senior managers get regular updates on all complaints which are live and under investigation. BFFC staff are in more regular contact with the customer relations manager and the team and are aware of their processes, which has led to improved joint working for the benefit of the complainant.

Monthly reports of the Service Level Agreement are provided to the BFFC Contract Manager. Quarterly reports are prepared for the BFFC Board and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and for the Council's Management Team (CMT).

Support network

The Customer Relations & Information Governance Manager participates in the southern region Complaints Managers' Group and is the current vice chair of the group and also attends the National Complaints Managers' Group. Both groups continue to support customer relations and complaints managers in sharing good practice, both nationally and locally. Where cases are complex the Customer Relations & Information Governance Manager often seeks advice and guidance from legal services and the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's advice line.

Learning from complaints

In 2020/21 these were the learning improvements BFFC's services focused on children's social care:

- BFFC has agreed a Quality Strategy, which includes how we will engage with children and families and ensure their participation in planning and reviewing the support and services they receive
- BFFC has also developed a Quality Assurance Operational Framework which sets out among its activities how we will collect the views of children and families (for example, our quarterly quality audits and success reviews include direct feedback and views from young people and families)
- We are revising our Engagement and Participation Strategy, which will include how we use these views to shape provision and will evidence how service delivery is impactful and makes a sustainable difference to the lives of children and families
- Using language that is trauma informed, empathic, evidence-based and naming the source of information when assessments or written reports are produced
- Assessments to be co-produced with families; to reflect a parent and child's views and to be shared with them in a timely manner
- To ensure accurate. Unambiguous and timely recordings on a child's records
- To ensure complainants are spoken to and not only responded to in writing; this enables potential early resolution but also a deeper understanding of the complainant's issues raised
- Work now under way to improve communication and clarity of information with parent carers on the PCNA pathway.

In 2020/21 these were the learning improvements BFFC's services focused on the early help service:

Following a significant data breach, a range of improvements were implemented in both practice and processes to mitigate potential complaints. Changes included: specialist training from RBCs lead officer; a revised protocol for reporting incidents; an in-built delay into generic email accounts to ensure time available to check accuracy of contents and attachments and a re-branded, updated consent form clarifying how we will use data.

The One Reading Children and Young People's Partnership and BfFC Early Help transformation projects continued to embed a trauma informed, restorative approach. Early Help staff have delivered Restorative Practice training across BfFC and a Trauma Informed Practitioner has provided advice on challenging cases.

By working in this way, staff aim to problem solve with families and ensure our role is clear from the outset. Informal feedback from families suggests this has been well received. We delivered the December 2020 Trauma Informed Conference, with 317 places booked by 37 organisations. We are optimistic that this supports collaborative understanding and working across local organisations.

Although the majority of internal learning opportunities have been virtual, a number of staff in managerial roles have completed HR core skills training which included: Challenging Conversation & Managing Team Dynamics/Conflict. Diversity & Cultural Competence. They have also been able to attend the Managers' Communications toolkit training.

BfFC held a series of focused discussions in August 2020 to reflect on the challenges of working in a virtual environment and have used two Early Help virtual away days to share this learning and celebrate success.

In 2020/21 these were the learning improvements BfFC's services focused on the SEND Service:

- Establishment of a communications working group as part of the SEND strategy to identify and remedy poor communication and information for parent carers on the SEND processes and services available (led by the BfFC Head of Communications & Marketing)
- Publication of a comprehensive guide to SEND for parent carers
- Work now under way on EHCPs and provide clearer information for parent carers on the process and a separate guide for professionals on their roles and responsibilities
- Regular meetings between the BfFC SEND team and Reading IASS to understand each other's processes and roles/responsibilities (maintaining independence and impartiality in doing so)
- Review of processes and communication with social care, resulting in a planned training programme for social care colleagues and improvement in contributions to Education Health Care needs assessments
- Improved multi-agency auditing of Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs), which demonstrates significant improvements in quality of final plans
- Review of service standards and spot checks in place (re timeliness of responses to emails and calls) show improvements in communication
- All settings now have a named case officer and senior case officer – implemented pro-active check ins every term.

The DfE guidance asks for the council or its representative - in this case BfFC - to ensure that we report the learning and service improvements implemented as a result of complaints. Some learning was pertinent to individual workers and led to bespoke advice and training. Some learning was shared in reminder to all staff regarding good practice and some learning led to review of services and processes.

Some individual and staff learning included:

1. Complaint (upheld)

The complaint details that the father was not contacted in the earlier stages of intervention. The first 3 earlier assessments completed in October 2018, January 2019 and May 2019 without his input.

Learning

- Accept that more effort should have been made at the time to find alternative methods to contact father regarding BfFC's involvement with the children.
- Ensure the above is shared with the service in order to improve practice in this area, about making sure both parents are actively sought and included in assessments.

2. Complaint (upheld)

Complaint about the content of the assessment taken from the EHCP.

Learning

- All staff are currently accessing training sessions, the FIT service will review Assisting Team Manager and Team Manager sign off processes for Care Plans and SEN Team has been reviewing the updated standard operating procedures to ensure that such incidences do not occur again.

3. Complaint (partially upheld)

The manner in which social care staff treated and spoke to the family.

Learning

- A team workshop identified in order to look at the intervention process carried out between children's social care and families, and the potential impact of this upon families. This will include language used, tone, level of understanding.
- BfFC will also continue to work to reinforce the importance of working in partnership with families. This will be addressed with all staff during team meetings and morning briefings.
- A meeting offered to the family with Team Manager in order for BfFC to discuss any further concerns the family had.

Complaints and concerns provide essential and valuable feedback from our customers. Listening to customers and reflecting on examples of where we have not got it right can reveal or highlight opportunities for improvement (for example, a deficiency in practice, communication or service delivery). Even if a complaint is not upheld, lessons can be learnt from that complaint with service developments and improvements as a result. The complaints process and the feedback gained is an integral part of the quality assurance process, which feeds into the development and monitoring of services.

Once a complaint is investigated, the Investigating Officer (IO) will complete a Learning Action Plan for complaints which have been upheld or partially upheld and which may have recommendations to the services about improving services; these are collated by the customer relations team for reporting purposes and shared with BfFC senior managers.

BfFC recognises the need to improve the timescales for responding to complaints. Fortnightly reports have been provided to the head of communications & marketing who shares this with other senior managers and highlights deadlines and responses needed. This has allowed for better tracking of the timeliness of complaints. This remains a priority area to be improved.

Complaints activity statistics

In the year 2020/21, children’s social care received 70 statutory complaints, which is a decrease of 22 (23.9%) compared to the 92 received in 2019/20.

To give this some context, in 2020/21, 2,384 children in total were referred to children’s social care, so the number of statutory complaints represents 2.9%.

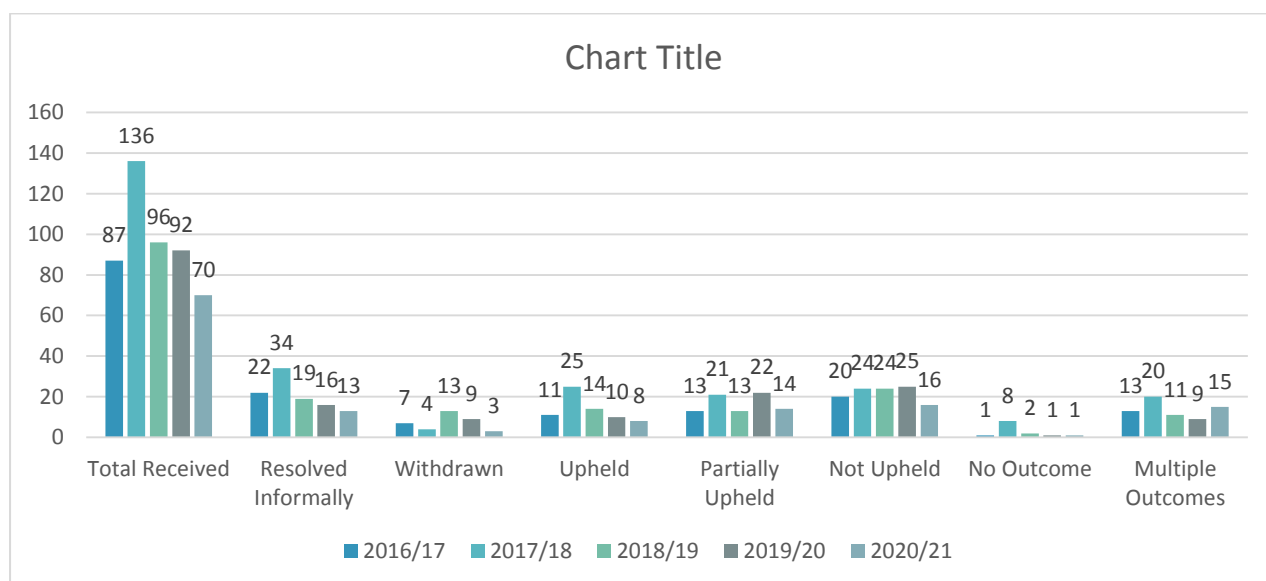
There were 11 requests for a complaint to be progressed to Stage 2 during this period, and one of these has to be progressed to Stage 3. These complaints are not included in the reporting statistics for this report, as they are deemed to be duplicates of the Stage 1 complaint for reporting purposes.

Of the 70 complaints received:

- 13 (18.6%) were resolved as representations informally through alternative dispute resolution (ADR) (Stage 0) by the social care teams.
- 3 (5.3%) of the remaining 57 complaints were withdrawn by the complainant following a resolution with the service after the investigation had commenced, leaving 54 which were investigated at Stage 1 to an outcome.

Of the 54, 15 (27.8%) were responded to within timescale, with the remaining 39 (72.2%) complaints responded to over timescale.

Of the 54 complaints investigated to an outcome, 8 (14.8%) were recorded as fully upheld, 14 (25.9%) as partially upheld, 16 (29.6%) as not upheld, and one (1.9%) as having no recordable outcome. The remaining 15 (27.8%) were complaints with multiple strands where several outcomes were recorded.



Total number of Stage 1 complaints (including those resolved by alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and eventually withdrawn) received in the last five years.

Year	Number of complaints received	% Increase against previous year	Number of cases referred to Children's Services	% of complaints against referrals
*2016/17	132	51.7%	3,169	4.16%
*2017/18	136	3.03%	2,717	5.01%
*2018/19	96	-29.4%	2,765	3.47%
2019/20	92	-4.17%	2,564	3.6%
2020/21	70	-23.9%	2,384	2.9%

*Pre-Brighter Futures for Children, which became operational on 3 December 2018.

Outcomes for those investigated to a completion (excluding those resolved via ADR and those eventually withdrawn)

Outcome	Number	% of Total
Upheld	8	14.8%
Partially upheld	14	25.98%
Not upheld	16	29.6.3%
No outcome	1	1.9%
Multiple outcomes	15	27.8%
Total	64	100

Timescales

Total Investigated to an Outcome	In Timescale	% of Total	Over Timescale	% of Total
54	15	27.8%	39	72.2%

Total Resolved Informally	In timescale	% of Total	Over Timescale	% of Total
13	5	38.5%	8	61.5%

Main theme of all complaints received during 2020/21

(NOTE: This includes all complaints received and resolved informally, withdrawn, and investigated to an outcome at Stage 1, but does not include complaints investigated at Stages 2 & 3, as these themes are duplicates of Stage 1)

Theme of complaint	Number	% of Total
Communication	2	2.9%
Data breach	1	1.1%
Quality of service provided	54	77%
Staff conduct	13	18.5%
Total	70	100

Who the complaint was received from

Who made the complaint	Number	% of Total
Advocate	3	5.4%
Foster Carer	5	3.3%
Child / Young Person	5	5.4%
Extended Family (Grandparents / Aunts & Uncles, Etc)	8	12%
Professional/Agency	1	
Parent (Incl. Adopted Parents)	48	71.7%
Total	70	100

The majority of complaints are from the birth parents who disagree with social care involvement and outcomes from assessments, care plans and wish to challenge a professional decision. Of the 48 complaints received from parents, 20 of them were from fathers who felt excluded from the processes. Complaints of this nature are inevitable, however high-quality record keeping, clear communication with a clear distinction between fact and opinion reduces the opportunity for dispute.

Complaints received by team

Team	No of complaints
Access & Assessment Team	22 (31.4%)
Children Looked After Teams	7 (10%)
Children & Young Persons' Disability Team	3 (4.3%)
Children's Single Point of Access Team	3 (4.3%)
Adoption/Family Placement	1 (1.4%)
Family Intervention Teams	26 (37.2%)
Fostering Team	3 (4.3%)
Leaving Care Team	3 (4.3%)
Specialist Youth Team	1 (1.4%)
LADO	1 (1.4%)
Total	70

The three areas which received the highest number of complaints were the Access & Assessment teams with 22 (31.48%), the Family Intervention teams with 26 (37.2%) and the Children Looked After teams with 7 (10%), This can mainly be attributed to the challenging circumstances in which these particular services work in and the volume of their direct contact with the customers.

Methods used to make a complaint

Method	Number	% of Total
E-mail	44	62.8%
Complaint Leaflet	1	1.1%
Letter	13	18.6%
Telephone	6	8.6%%
Webform	6	8.6%%
Total	92	100

The above demonstrates that the complainants have a number of methods they can use to contact the Customer Relations team with their complaints.

Demographic Information

Ethnicity	Number of complaints received	% of Total
Mixed Black African & White/Asian	4	5.7%
Not Stated	6	8.57%
White British	45	64.28%
White Other	5	7.1%
Asian	4	5.7%
Black Carribean/African	10	14.28%
Total	70	100

For equality monitoring purposes, staff have been encouraged to seek personal demographic information from people who make a complaint to help assess if there are groups of people who are proportionally complaining more or less and to explore the possible reasons. We have found that people who complain do not always wish to state their ethnicity.

The offer of the translation service and easy read versions of complaint responses are made available by the customer relations & information governance manager to those complainants who need these.

Complaints from young people Involving advocates

Between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, only 2 young people complained about the service, one of whom complained on three occasions of his own accord, the other young person complained via the advocacy provider.

The Customer Relations Information Governance Manager also meets BFfC teams and managers to reinforce the importance of capturing verbal complaints. Staff are encouraged to record and analyse comments or concerns, as many children's and young people's issues are resolved this way rather

than using the complaints process. If the young person is unhappy but does not wish to make a formal complaint, the Customer Relations team also offers to try to resolve matters informally.

Local Government And Social Care Ombudsman

Between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO) received five representations from dissatisfied service users for issues relating to BFFC. This is the same as the previous year. Of the five cases, the Ombudsman investigated two cases. One case was upheld and one case was not upheld. The other case had either not progressed through the complaints procedures or deemed as not within the Ombudsman’s jurisdiction to investigate so was rejected by the Ombudsman as premature.

In respect of the upheld complaint, the Ombudsman asked the Council to apologise and provided financial redress.

The Ombudsman did not issue any formal reports finding maladministration by BFFC.

Benchmarking

Attempts to collate information from our statistical neighbouring authorities have proven to be difficult over the years. However, through the Southern Regional Complaints Managers Group which the Customer Relations Manager is a member of, she has obtained the following information.

This should not be used as a direct comparison as the size of the authority and the number of referrals to children’s services would differ to that of Reading. It is also worth noting that each authority records their data and report in different formats and Slough Borough Council/Slough Children’s Services Trust (now Slough Children First) is not part of the southern regional complaints managers group.

Statutory complaints investigated & outcomes for other neighbouring authorities:

Local Authority (or company)	Number of complaints investigated	Number of Complaints fully upheld (%)
West Berkshire	154	6%
Bracknell Forrest Council	73	6%
Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead	14	0%
Wokingham Borough Council	Requested but not available	
Slough Children’s Services Trust	23	8.7%

Subject Access Requests (SARs)

The Customer Relations team processes all SARs requests for BfFC. These are open and closed children's social care cases (historical cases where paper and microfiche files are held at the records centre) and Special Education Needs (SEN) cases.

In 2020/21, the Customer Relations team received 66 requests for records 10 less than the 76 requests received in 2019/20 relating to BfFC.

Of the 66 requests received 32 requests were completed.

34 SARs are outstanding at the time of writing this report. The main reasons for the backlog are as a result of the Customer Relations team's functions being suspended between March 2020 and July 2020 which caused back log of requests being processed, along with the following:

- Restrictions posed by the pandemic meant records could not be retrieved from the archive for scanning.
- The move of paper records from Darwin Close to Bennet Road in early 2021 and restricted access to the storage area.
- The lack of resource to redact files which range from a few hundred pages to over 3500 pages per file.
- Paper files need to be copied from microfiche and scanned before redactions can be completed. In SEND cases, information is held on the EMS (Education) system as well as shared files and emails. These have to be searched, converted to PDF and redacted before the file can be shared with the requestor.
- In all cases the Customer Relations team and the Information Governance team has kept in regular contact with the requestor to ensure they were kept up to date on the progress of their request.

Extra BfFC resource has been deployed to help the Customer Relations team to clear backlogs. The Council is also exploring new technology for scanning and redaction work.

Compliments

In the year 2020/21, 68 compliments were received and logged for BfFC. This is a decrease of six from the previous year when 74 were received. They were received by the following teams:

- Multiple teams within children's services - 5
- Safeguarding - 2
- Children Looked After team - 2
- Fostering - 7
- South Area team - 1
- Early Years team – 2
- Early Help team - 6
- Access & Assessment team - 6
- Foster Carers - 4
- Participation and Engagement Team - 1
- CSPoA - 3
- Communications & Marketing - 1
- Family Intervention team - 8
- CYPDT - 8

- West Area team - 1
- Specialist Youth team - 1
- SEND team - 3
- SGO - 1
- School Admissions team - 1
- The Lodge Day Nursery - 1
- Unknown teams - 4

The following are some examples of compliments received:

Family Intervention team – ‘We would like to start by saying a massive thank you. We really appreciate the time you spent with us and we’re grateful for the achievements and progress that was made. It’s very rare to find a social worker that actually listens, show empathy and supports the family the way you did. You are a social worker that makes a difference in a positive way.

‘She goes above and beyond, and I know she works over her hours as she is a committed person. This is not just a job to her, she is passionate about the care children receive. I would like this to be noted as what she has done in the past 2 weeks is more than any social worker has ever done to help me and my children, this has also been recognised by my son’s teachers who have also said the same to her. She is a valuable asset to your service and I thank her for everything she has done.’

Children Looked After team – ‘There have been lots of balls to juggle and some complex issues and she had not only kept all the balls in the air but has built good relationships with the children and their carer and be clear around moving the care plans forward. Most Excellent job.’

Access and Assessment team – ‘At first I was scared as I have never had social services involved in my life, but u reassured me that you was involved for the best interest of me and my children, you made me feel Positive in moving forward with my life you also gave me options to better mine an my children’s life, An my outlook on life. I felt at ease to talk and be truthful.’

CYPDT team – ‘He obviously really cares about the children he works with and has gone above and beyond to seek positive outcomes for this family.’

Appendix B

Contact information: How to make a complaint

Some complaints can be sorted out by discussing your problem with your social worker or a manager. If you want to make a complaint, you can contact the Customer Relations team, phone, letter, in person or by email. Telephone the Customer Relations & Information Governance Manager (Complaints & Representations) on 0118 937 2905 or email: socialcare.complaints@reading.gov.uk.

If you wish to make your complaint to us in writing, our address is:

Customer Relations Team
Reading Borough Council
Floor 2 North Front
Civic Offices
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

You can also text us with your complaint, type SPKUP & your message to 81722. Your complaint will be recorded and if we can't sort out the problem immediately it will be passed for further investigation and action.

The Customer Relations team can take your complaint over the telephone and explain the complaints procedure in more detail or send you a leaflet explaining how to complain. The leaflet is also available in council buildings or via the Brighter Futures for Children's website (www.brighterfuturesforchildren.org). You can also use these contact details to tell us if you have a concern (but do not want to make a complaint) or if you want to make a compliment about a service.