

# Social Services

## Annual Complaints and Compliments Report 2020/21



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## 1. Introduction – the Social Services Complaints Process

This report covers Social Services complaints & compliments for the period 1st April 2020 to 31st December 2021. It is a statutory requirement under the following items of legislation for Local Authorities to have in place a Representations and Complaints Procedure for Social Services.

- ✓ Representation Procedure (Children) (Wales) Regulations 2014
- ✓ Social Services Complaint's Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014

This is in line with the Model Concerns and Complaints Policy and Guidance and the NHS Complaints procedure *Putting Things Right*.

Statutory complaints relate to the provision of social care and are handled in line with the national regulations referred to above. These statutory complaints follow the Council's Statutory Complaints Procedure for Social Services, the key stages of which are set out below: stage 1 - local resolution; stage 2 – formal investigation; stage 3 - referral to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. Very few complaints progress through all stages of the procedure, and we aim to provide thorough investigations and responses at stage 1.

Cardiff Council encourages children, parents, carers and others to give feedback and suggests that any concerns are raised with social workers, other members of council staff, teachers or a trustworthy adult. We aim to address any concerns as quickly as possible and provide support if a child or adult wishes to make a more formal complaint.

Complaints will be acknowledged within 2 working days of being received and we let the complainant know how their complaint will be handled.

**Stage 1** - The Statutory Complaints Officer will contact the appropriate team manager within Social Services and ask them to investigate the complaint. The aim of every formal investigation should be to “investigate once, investigate well”. The complainant will be provided with a written response within 15 working days (for statutory complaints). In some cases it may take longer this. On these occasions, the Complaints Officer will let the customer know if this extra time is needed and why. If a customer is unhappy with the response at Stage 1 they can request to go to Stage 2.

**Stage 2** - If a complaint is not resolved at Stage 1, and the complainant remains dissatisfied with the investigation or response, an external Independent Investigating Officer (and an external Independent Person if it is a Children's Services complaint) will be commissioned by Social Services to further investigate the complaint. The Investigating Officer and Independent Person will aim to produce a report within 25 working days. Once the reports have been finalised they are sent to the relevant Director who will, after careful consideration of the reports, provide the complainant with a written response to the complaint.

**Public Services Ombudsman for Wales** - Complaints that progress to the Ombudsman will have been thoroughly investigated by the service area. If a complainant remains dissatisfied, it is for the Ombudsman to assess whether there is any evidence of service failure or maladministration not identified by the Council or the Stage 2 investigation.



## 2. Executive Summary & Annual Comparison – Adult Services

A comparison with 2019/20 data highlights that, overall, the performance of Adult Services has remained relatively static.

### **Number of complaints – stayed the same**

64 complaints were recorded during 2020/21, exactly the same as the number of complaints recorded during 2019/20.

Despite there being no change in complaint numbers, there is some evidence to suggest that there may have been an increase in complaint complexity. Of the 64 complaints recorded during 2020/21, 13 (20.3%) were regarding ‘multiple’ issues. This is an increase from the year before when just 8 (12.5%) of complaints were regarding ‘multiple’ issues.

### **Number of compliments – small decrease**

There were 44 compliments recorded during 2020/21. This represents a small decrease compared to the 48 compliments recorded during 2019/20.

This decrease suggests that the good service provided every day by Adults Services is not being fully represented. The complaints team will continue to look at ways of updating our recording procedure to ensure our compliments are captured and that we are continuing to take on board what our customers want.

### **Nature of complaints – similar challenges**

When comparing the type of complaints made in the last 2 years, it is possible to see a change in some complaints but there have been similar challenges.

Similarly to 2019/20, ‘delay in providing service’, ‘dissatisfaction with care provided’, and ‘relationship with social worker’ were the dominant themes of complaints during 2020/21 and complaints for all categories have remained relatively static.

Notably, there were 3 complaints recorded during 2019/20 relating to ‘data protection / information sharing’ whereas there were 0 recorded during 2020/21. The implementation of GDPR in the UK through the Data Protection Act 2018 has received a lot of publicity Council-wide and it is pleasing to see that lessons have been learned within Adult Services.

### **Outcome of complaints – More complaints have been upheld**

In 2019/20, the percentage of complaints upheld was 21.9%; this has increased to 30.6% during 2020/21. The number of complaints that were partly upheld has also increased (20.3% in 2019/20 compared to 27.4% in 2020/21). Finally, 32.3% of Adult Services complaints were not upheld in 2020/21. This represents a decrease from 2019/20 when 45.3% of complaints were not upheld.



### **Complaints Progressing Beyond Stage 1 - decrease**

The number of complaints that have progressed beyond Stage 1 has remained the same for two successive years with just 2 Stage 2 investigations taking place during 2019/20 and 2020/21.



### 3. Customer Feedback – Adult Services 2020/21

During 2020/21, there have been 108 cases of feedback recorded for Adult Services

This comprises of:

- ✓ **64 complaints**
- ✓ **44 compliments**

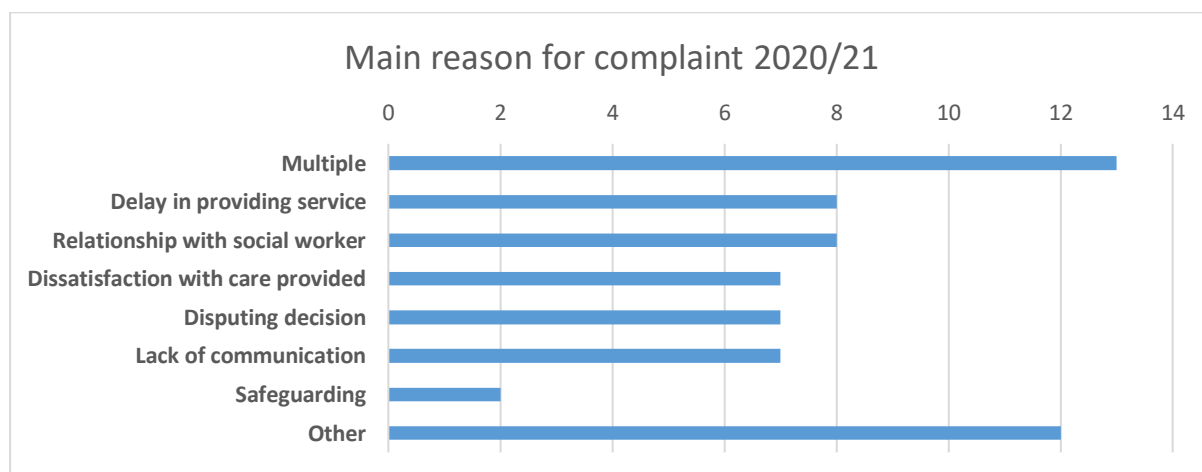
Just over half of the customer feedback recorded for Adult Services during 2020/21 has taken the form of complaints rather than compliments. Of all the customer feedback recorded, 59.2% of cases were complaints.

#### Complaint themes

When considering the themes of complaints made against Adult Services, there is some evidence to suggest that there may have been an increase in complaint complexity during 2020/21. Of the 64 complaints recorded during 2020/21, 13 (20.3%) were regarding ‘multiple’ issues. This is an increase from the year before when just 8 (12.5%) of complaints were regarding ‘multiple’ issues.

A complainant expressing concern at a delay in providing service (8 complaints) or their relationship with a social worker (8) were the most dominant themes within complaints made against Adult Services this year, both accounting for 12.5% of complaints received.

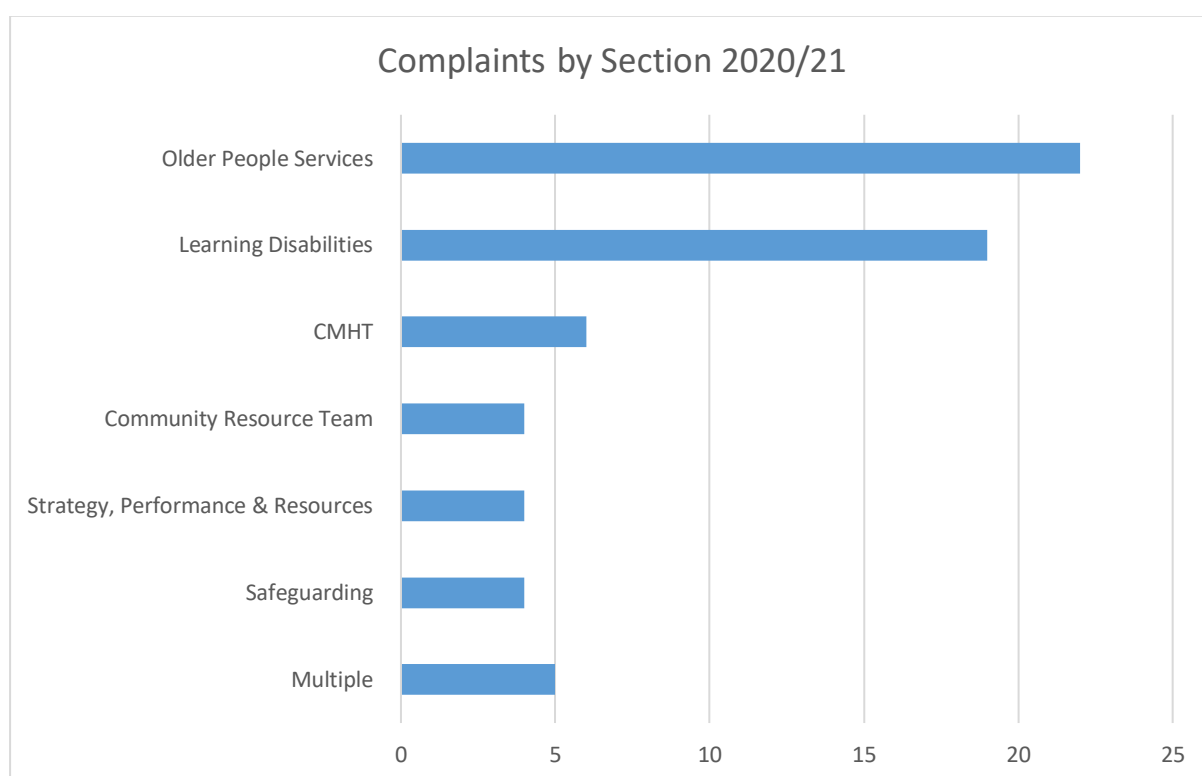
Complainants expressing dissatisfaction with a care package provided, disputing a decision made by the Local Authority or alleging a lack of communication were the other dominant themes within the complaints made (7 complaints each, 10.9%)



## Complaints by section

Complaints analysis highlights that complaints are spread across sections within Adult Services, although some types of service are more likely to result in feedback than others. These figures also need to be considered in context of rising demand. For example, there were 4,055 assessments completed during 2020/21 and so the number of complaints received is very minimal.

During 2020/21, Older People Services received the most complaints, accounting for just over a third (34.4%) of the complaints received during the year. They were closely followed by Learning Disabilities who were responsible for 29.7% of complaints. Other teams responsible for complaints included the Community Mental Health Team (9.4%), Community Resource Team (6.3%) and Strategy, Performance & Resource (6.3%).



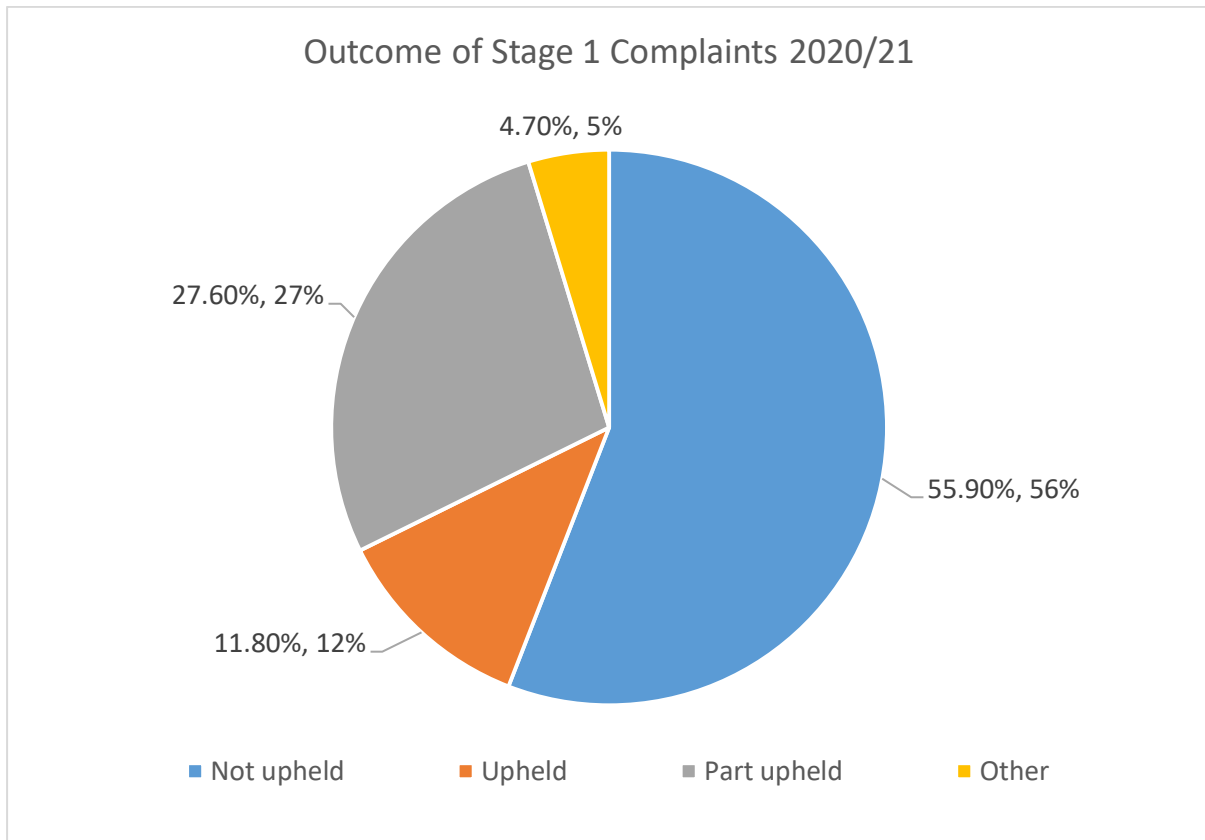
## Complaint Outcomes

At the time of publication, 62 of the 64 complaints received for Adult Services were closed. From March 2020 onwards, the COVID-19 pandemic has unfortunately had an impact on the service's ability to respond to complaints within statutory timescales as all Council officers have been concentrating on making sure that vital services are available to those residents who need them the most. However, complainants receive regular updates on the status of their complaint if, for any reason, we are unable to respond to a complaint within our statutory timescales.

Of those complaints that were completed, just 30.6% were upheld and 27.4% were partly upheld.



**32.3% of Adult Services complaints were not upheld.** A small number of complaints were closed after being withdrawn by the complainant.



### Stage 2 Complaints

In addition to understanding the outcome of stage 1 complaints, it is important to consider how many complaints progress beyond stage 1. During 2020/21, just 2 complaint cases have progressed beyond stage 1 and this was also the case during 2019/20. This suggests effective handling of our complaints at stage 1.





## 4. Examples of compliments – Adult Services

Adults Services received 44 compliments during 2020/21. Examples of the compliments recorded are shown below.

From a partner organisation: I just wanted to make you aware of the excellent support we have had from the supported living team over the last few weeks. They have supported us well with some difficult situations which has resulted in some great partnership working developing and positive outcomes for people supported. We have had laughter and frustrations along the way but the stand out is the supportive partnership approach. At this time I think it's really important that we share our thoughts and recognition for those that have gone above and beyond and I really feel (the team) have done this through a really difficult period.

“This lady’s son said...he and his partner were eternally helpful for the help we have given him and his mother. He said the fact we have kept in regular contact with them has helped immensely. He said he feels we have gone above and beyond to help them and cannot thank us enough. He said the two of you are absolutely brilliant, he can’t thank us enough for the time and dedication we have shown.”

From service user – ‘Hiya, Me and X will truly miss working with you! I will never forget the day I told you I don’t have much faith in social workers and you said you wanted to prove me wrong and you did you have delivered everything we asked of you and more. We will never forget the fight you put up for the funding for sense we can’t thank you enough! Go make a difference to the other wonderful children, they don’t know it yet but they will be lucky to work with you. Once again a massive thank you!! for all that you did for us. Keep making a difference :-)’

We just wanted to say thank you very much for all the work you put into helping discharge our mum from hospital over Christmas and New Year. Thanks to your efforts she did not spend her last few days in hospital. She was comfortable and really well cared for. You behaved professionally throughout your involvement. You kept us well-informed and you were tenacious in ensuring you found the placement that could best meet mum’s needs in extremely difficult circumstances – and you succeeded. Well done. We will be forever in your debt – we wish you well for your future career in social work – you will go far Thank you so much’





## 5. Executive Summary & Annual Comparison – Children’s Services

A comparison with 2019/20 data highlights that, overall, performance for Children’s Services has improved.

### Number of compliments – large increase

There were 178 compliments recorded for Children’s Services in 2020/21 compared to 91 compliments in 2019/20.

This is an extremely positive result and the complaints team will continue to look at ways of updating our recording procedure to ensure our compliments are captured and that the good service provided every day by Children’s Services is being represented.

### Number of complaints – small decrease

140 complaints have been recorded during 2020/21 compared to 146 in 2019/20.

Again, this decrease is a positive reflection on the service, particularly when considering the sizeable challenges faced during 2020/21.

### Nature of complaints – similar challenges

‘Relationship with social worker’ has remained the dominant theme with Children’s Services complaints for a third successive year though we have seen a clear decrease during that time from 36.8% (2018/19) to 32.2% (2019/20) to 21.1% in 2020/21. It needs to be considered that Children’s Services social workers are often intervening in people’s lives and making decisions that they may not agree with.

‘Disputing a decision’ accounted for 15.0% of complaints in 2020/21 compared to 15.6% in 2019/20. The most notable decrease was for the complaint category ‘Delay in providing service’ which accounted for 15.1% of complaints in 2019/20 and decreased to just 7.1% of complaints in 2020/21.

As with Adult Services, there is considerable evidence to suggest that there may have been an increase in complaint complexity during 2020/21. Of the 140 complaints recorded during 2020/21, 28 (20.0%) were regarding ‘multiple’ issues. This is an increase from the year before when just 5 (3.4%) of complaints were regarding ‘multiple’ issues.

### Outcome of complaints – Fewer complaints have been upheld

In 2019/20, the percentage of complaints upheld was 17.8%, this has decreased slightly to 11.8% in 2020/21. The number of complaints that were partly upheld has remained relatively static (23.3% in 2019/20 compared to 27.6% in 2020/21). Finally, over half (55.9%) of Children’s Services complaints were not upheld in 2020/21. This compares favourably to 2019/20 when 46.6% of complaints were not upheld.



### **Complaints Progressing Beyond Stage 1 – slight increase**

The number of complaints that have proceeded to Stage 2 has remained static when comparing 2019/20 and 2020/21 as just 10 complaints have proceeded to Stage 2 in both financial years. That just 10 complaints have proceeded to Stage 2 suggests good complaints handling at Stage 1



## 6. Customer Feedback – Children’s Services 2019/20

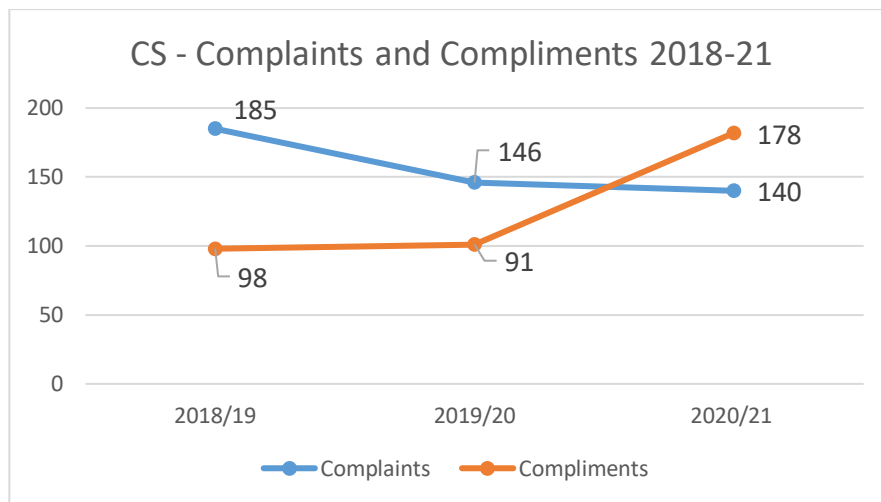
During 2020/2021, there have been 318 cases of feedback recorded for Children’s Services. These 318 cases consist of:

- ✓ **140 complaints**
- ✓ **178 compliments**

The majority of customer feedback recorded takes the form of compliments rather than complaints. Of all the customer feedback recorded, 55.9% of cases were compliments.

**Children’s Services have received fewer complaints for 2020/21 (140)** compared to 2019/20 when 146 complaints were received. It should also be noted that complaints for Children’s Services have decreased for two consecutive years in a row (185 in 2018/19, 146 in 2019/20 to 140 in 2020/21). This ongoing decrease is a positive reflection on the service, particularly when considering the ongoing challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Compliments have also increased** with 178 compliments received during 2020/21, an 95.6% increase compared to 2019/20 when 91 compliments were received.

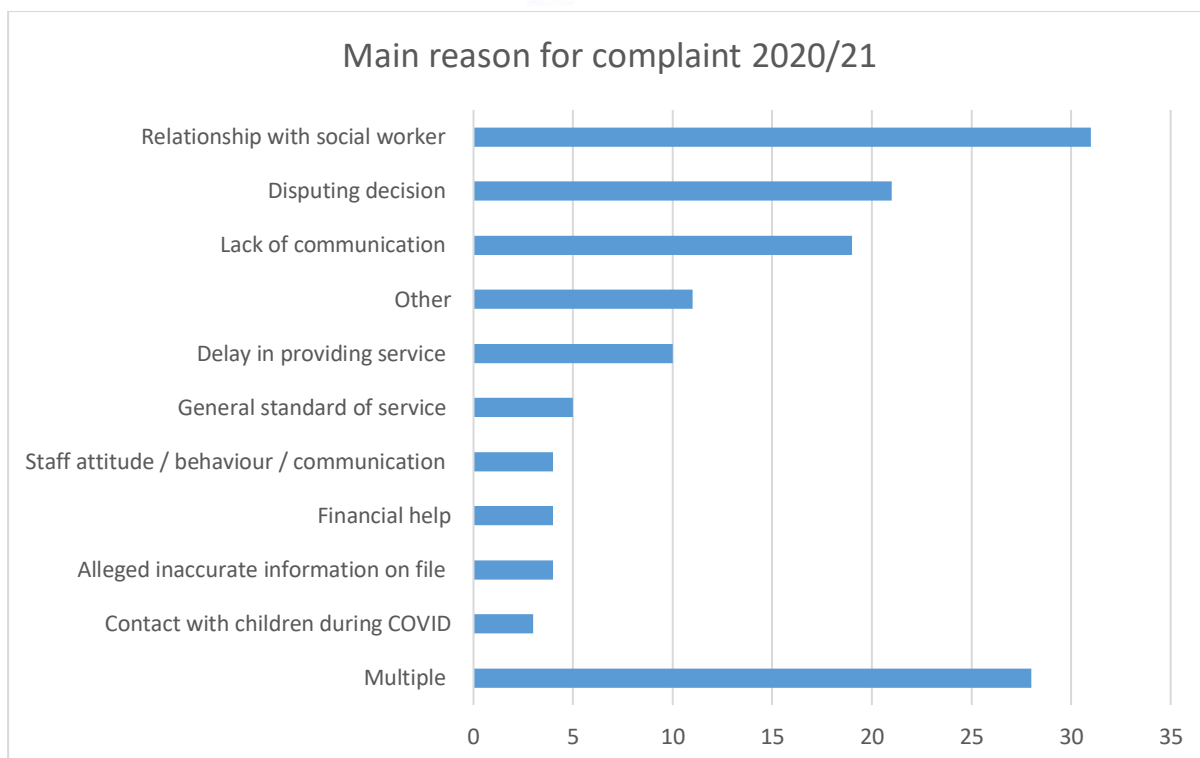


### Complaint themes

A complainant alleging a poor relationship with their social worker has been the most dominant theme within complaints and has accounted for just under a quarter (21.1%) of complaints made during 2020/21. A complainant ‘disputing a decision’ made by the Local Authority (for example, the outcome of an assessment or child placement) has accounted for 15.0% of complaints.

Complainants alleging a lack of communication (13.6%) and a delay in providing service (7.1%) were the other dominant themes within the complaints made.





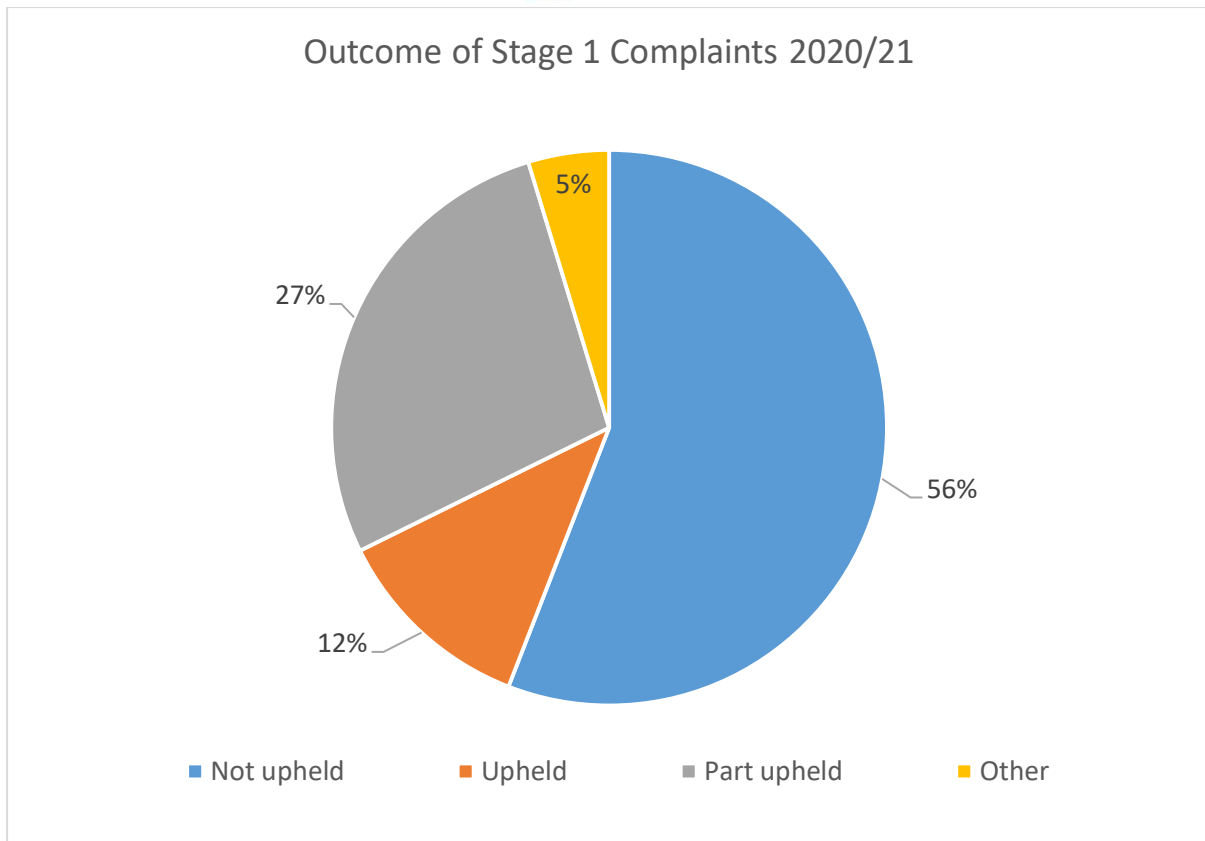
### Complaint outcomes

At the time of publication, 137 of the 140 complaints received for Children’s Services during 2020/21 were closed. From March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has unfortunately had an impact on the service’s ability to respond to complaints within statutory timescales as all Council officers have been concentrating on making sure that vital services are available to those residents who need them the most.

Complainants receive regular updates on the status of their complaint if, for any reason, we are unable to respond to a complaint within our statutory timescales.

Of those complaints that were completed, just 11.8% were upheld and 27.6% were partly upheld. **Over half (55.9%) of Children’s Services complaints were not upheld.** A small number of complaints were closed after it was found they were regarding issues that had already been considered in the court arena or were shortly going to be heard in court.





### Stage 2 Complaints

In addition to understanding the outcome of stage 1 complaints, it is important to consider how many complaints progress beyond stage 1. The number of complaints that have proceeded to Stage 2 has remained static when comparing 2019/20 and 2020/21 as just 10 complaints have proceeded to Stage 2 in both financial years. That just 10 complaints have proceeded to Stage 2 suggests good complaints handling at Stage 1.



## 7. Examples of compliments – Children’s Services

Cardiff Council Children’s Services received 178 compliments in 2020/21. Examples of the compliments recorded are shown below.

From a young person ‘Great news from the University, I finally received my results for my Master’s degree in Cyber Security. So after another tough year, I’m now a master in Cyber Security. I got 4 MERITS and 3 PASS, I think overall 2:1 still waiting for overall certificate. I will never forget what you did to me. I will never forget. Thank you very very very much for everything again and again.’

From a parent ‘X is assisting us with our son to help us improve his behaviour. She is excellent, understanding, perceptive, kind, really listens, takes responsibility & remembers things some people would ignore. We’re most grateful for her continued assistance.

From a care leaver ‘Just a quick one, just wanted to say how much I appreciated you speaking up for me in the meeting you really helped me get my point across and to be honest I’m very much thankful’

From a young person and family ‘couldn’t praise you enough for the work you did with them. She told me she doesn’t think she’d be coping now with the 4 kids if it wasn’t for the help you put in with her. She described how you were really good at listening and you seemed to understand exactly where she was coming from which made it easy for her to accept the advice you gave. She also said the changes you helped make are long lasting and mum literally described the work you did as changing their lives for the better.

To a social worker from a mother of three children that the social worker had worked with...

“Thank you for everything you have done for me and the kids I’d hate to think where we would be if you never came along and helped to make me realise and change our lives I am so grateful that u believed in me and never gave up at my lowest points”.



## 9. Priorities for 2021/22

The complaints team will continue to review the service provided by Social Services and we will make any necessary changes to ensure that our complaints process remains customer-focused and that the Council is providing the best service possible. Below are some of our priorities this coming year so that we can achieve these goals.

- ✓ Improved complaints reporting – Complaints reporting council-wide is currently sporadic. The implementation of a quarterly report will help to identify any trends promptly but also place increased emphasis on what the Council is learning from complaints. Complaints performance is currently reported to Cabinet once a year with the Annual Complaints Report and a second report is to be introduced. This report will be presented to Informal Cabinet and will give the Council the opportunity to ‘take stock’ at the six-month period.
- ✓ Improved complaints resolution - There are occasions where a problem can be resolved without the need to enter the complaints process. Anecdotal evidence, alongside the time taken to conclude complaint investigations suggests that some complaints are resulting in further correspondence. Where staff members recognise that progress is not being made, it is recommended that local resolution meetings are organised. This communication often allows a better understanding on both sides and a more immediate resolution.
- ✓ Improved complaint responses – Relatively few complaints proceed to Stage 2 of the Council’s Social Services complaints process and this reflects well on how we manage complaints at Stage 1. We hope to see continued progress on this front and the complaints team will be working with officers to improve the overall quality of our complaint responses.
- ✓ Improved customer satisfaction – Though compliments have increased, there is a concern that the good service provided every day by officers within Social Services is not being represented. The complaints team will look at ways of updating our recording procedure to ensure our compliments are captured and that we are continuing to take on board what our customers want. Staff are to be reminded that it is important to report compliments as well as complaints. Compliments also provide very helpful feedback and really give a flavour of what works well and what people using Social Services really value. A team receiving larger numbers of complaints can appear to be a concern until a consideration of compliments highlights that there is a more balanced view of the service overall.

