

Somerset County Council (SCC) Children's Social Care Customer Feedback Report 2015-2016



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1.0 Executive Summary

Key findings and highlights:

- The introduction of a new computer system in September 2015 has provided more reliable and accurate data and insight in to customer complaints.
- 303 complaints, 135 compliments and 9 comments were received in the year from 1st April 2015 to 31 March 2016. This is 64% more feedback than in previous years which provides valuable insight when used with other data and information on how we are doing and where we can improve.
- The vast majority of complaints were resolved at Stage 1 of the complaints process (over 96%) with very few escalating to Stage 2 and the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 62% of complaints were resolved within the statutory timescales of 20 days.
- Priority areas for improvement have been identified in service provision, communication and attitude and behaviour of staff which account for 70% of the reasons people have complained. There are a number of actions shown within the report, either planned or in progress, to address these areas.
- Analysis has identified gaps in our data in some areas. Opportunities have been identified to further improve the sufficiency and quality of data held which will be addressed through system training and process review.

2.0 Background

Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 (as amended by the Children Act 1989) requires that local authorities with the responsibility for children's services produce and publish an annual report on the statutory complaints and representations procedures. This requirement was updated by the introduction of Statutory Instrument 1738 in September 2006.

This report contains a summary of Children Social Care complaints, compliments, and comments (customer feedback) received for the period April 2015 to the end of March 2016. Customer Feedback for all other children's services is reported in the authorities' annual feedback report.

SCC implemented a new feedback system called iCasework, at the start of September 2015. This was introduced as part of improving processes for customer feedback and in particular for recording, tracking, monitoring and analysis of data. Feedback data prior to September 2015 was less accurate and complete due to inconsistent recording practice across services and teams and use of multiple systems for recording and tracking. From September 2015 iCasework has been used as the single system for managing SCC customer feedback. Given the steps taken to embed and support the use of the new system, there is a high degree of

confidence in the accuracy of feedback data from September 2015 onwards. In light of this, and for the purpose of a baseline for future years, we have provided an annual total for the full year but the detailed breakdown and analysis of the data is focussed on the period September 2015 to March 2016.

This report has been produced by SCC's Customer Experience Team, with input from the service, not only to meet its statutory requirement, but also to demonstrate that SCC is a transparent and accountable authority that listens to customers and invests in its learning.

The report has been approved by the Director of Children's Services and published on the Council's website.

2.1 SCC and Customer Feedback

SCC is committed to encouraging and using customer feedback. All customer feedback is viewed positively as an opportunity to learn and improve customer experience.

SCC defines customer feedback as follows:

Complaint: An expression of dissatisfaction, which isn't resolved immediately, with the actions or inactions of the Council or its agents, either by a member of the public directly affected or by someone acting on their behalf.

A complaint can be made about any of the functions provided by the local authority under the Children Act 1989. For example, a complaint may arise as a result of:

- An unwelcome or disputed decision;
- concern about the quality or appropriateness of a service;
- delay in decision making or provision of services;
- delivery or non-delivery of services including complaints procedures;
- quantity, frequency, change or cost of a service;
- attitude or behaviour of staff;
- application of eligibility and assessment criteria;
- the impact on a child or young person of the application of a local authority policy;
- assessment, care management and review.

Compliment: An unprompted expression of satisfaction or praise regarding the services or actions of the Council.

Comment: A positive or negative remark or statement about the Council's services, policies and practices. Comments might make

suggestions about the services being delivered or the way in which they have been delivered.

Information about the SCC feedback process can be provided in a number of formats and languages in order to ensure equity of access for all customers. Customers are able to provide feedback through the following:

- Internet (www.somerset.gov.uk)
 - The Council's website provides an easy-to-use online feedback form
 - Social media
- Telephone
 - The SCC's main telephone number 0300 123 2224 where staff have been trained to log feedback on behalf of customers.
- Face-to-face
 - Direct to a social worker or other member of Children's Social Care staff
 - To an Independent Reviewing Officer during or after a review
 - To a SCC Customer Service Assistant at a council office or Hub (staff assisting the customer to make a complaint online)
- Mail
 - Email
 - Letter
 - Fax
 - Children's complaints leaflet (form attached)

2.2 The Complaints Procedure

SCC complies with statute and adopts a three stage complaints process for Children's Social Care complaints. A summary is provided below and further information can be found on the website - <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/have-your-say/complaints-comments-and-compliments/complaints-comments-compliments/>

Stage 1 – Local Resolution

In the first instance, complaints are received by the service to which they relate. Resolution is sought locally and informally at this stage and the SCC complaints process requires conclusion within 10 working days of receipt. However, Children's Social Care complaints can be complex and therefore with the agreement of the complainant, resolution time can be extended to 20 working days (statutory maximum). Where a complaint is not satisfactorily resolved or if the

complainant requests it, the complaint can be formally escalated, within 20 working days, to Stage 2.

Stage 2 – Independent Investigation

Stage 2 involves an independent investigation in to the issues which remain unresolved following completion of Stage 1. SCC aim to complete Stage 2 investigations within 25 working days (although the statutory maximum can be extended to 65 working days with the agreement of the complainant). Investigations may be conducted by an internal investigator (independent of the service) or by an external investigator (with appropriate experience). In addition to the investigator, an ‘independent person’ will be identified to oversee the objectivity and fairness of the investigation and to ensure that the child’s interests are at the centre of the process.

Upon completion of a Stage 2 investigation, complainants can be offered an adjudication meeting. In the meeting, the appointed Director (in the role of Adjudicating Officer) will discuss the Investigators’ findings and recommendations with the complainant and inform them of the action the Local Authority is going to take to resolve the complaint.

Stage 3 - Review Panel

Where the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome reached at Stage 2, they can request that the complaint is reviewed by a panel. The panel consists of 3 independent members, external to the Local Authority, and appointed by the Complaints Manager. This panel should be arranged within 30 working days of the request for escalation. The panel considers the complaint investigation and can make recommendations for the consideration of the Director of Children’s Services. This is the end of the Council’s statutory process.

2.3 Local Government Ombudsman

Where the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome following the statutory process, they have the option to make a formal written complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman. The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) is independent and impartial and provides the service free of charge. Any member of the public can make a complaint or representation to the LGO if they feel they have been subject to maladministration or injustice by the Council. However, in most cases (but not all), the LGO will require that the customer has first been through the Council’s complaints process (as detailed above) before they will investigate the customer’s concerns.

2.4 Remedies

In the majority of cases, if a complaint is upheld or partially upheld, the complainant will receive an apology and an explanation as to the action

the Council will take to ensure that mistakes are not repeated for the customer and other/future service users. The apology will be given by the manager of the service to whom the complaint related and will include any actions to be taken and learning plans. It is rare for financial payment (reparation) to be made.

2.5 Specific Roles

In some cases, Independent Reviewing Officers and Advocates will be involved in the management of Children's Social Care complaints.

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). IROs have a specific role in relation to complaints for looked after children. 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. The SCC complaints manager should advise the IRO of any complaint brought by or on behalf of a child and may enlist the help of the IRO to resolve the problem.

Advocates

Children wishing to make a complaint are offered an advocate to help ensure that their views, wishes and concerns are expressed and heard.

3.0 Feedback Overview

3.1 Volumes

Total feedback (Comments, Compliments and Complaints) received:

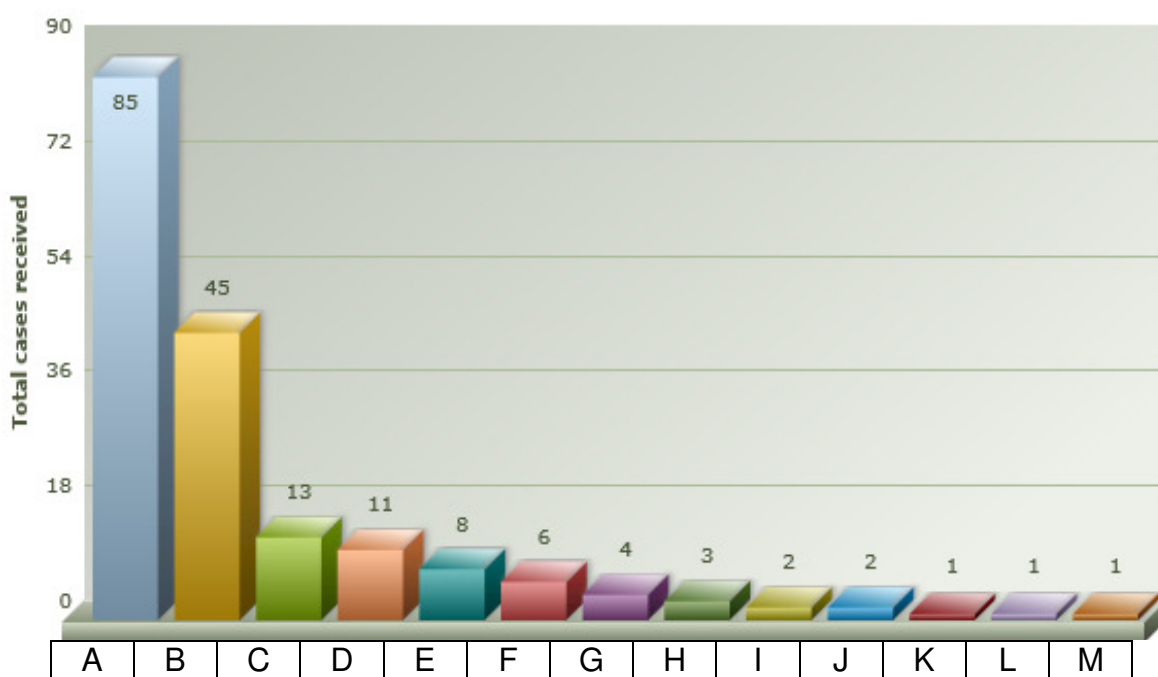
Feedback Type	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Apr – Aug 2015	Sep 2015 – Mar 2016
Complaints	150	273	303	121	182
Compliments	N/A	N/A	135	63	72
Comments	N/A	N/A	9	0	9
Totals	150	273	447	184	263
				447	

Feedback for the year 2015/16 has increased by 64% on the previous year. Evidence suggests that this increase is due to our re-focused effort on efficient recording of complaints and the work undertaken to promote the voice of the child and not necessarily that customers are generally more dissatisfied with our services.

3.2 Customer Profiles

For feedback generally and complaints specifically a significant number of cases are received from parents. The tables below show that the number of children raising complaints on their own behalf is low. 80 cases are recorded as 'other' and the Customer Experience Team are looking in to the reasons for this and how this can be improved, for example we may need more categories e.g. grandparents.

Complaints only by customer profile (September 2015 – March 2016):



Customer Profile		Total	%	Total	%
		All Feedback		Complaints Only	
A	Parent	103	39%	85	47%
B	Other	80	30%	45	25%
C	Foster parent	19	7%	13	7%
D	Resident	7	3%	11	6%
E	Child – leaving care	22	8%	8	4%
F	Child – in care	9	3%	6	3%
G	No data supplied	6	2%	4	2%
H	Carer	3	1%	3	1%
I	Advocate	2	1%	2	1%
J	Child – previously in care	3	1%	2	1%
K	Child – adopted	1	1%	1	1%
L	Guardian	4	2%	1	1%
M	ISRO*	4	2%	1	1%
Total		263	100%	182	100%

* Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer

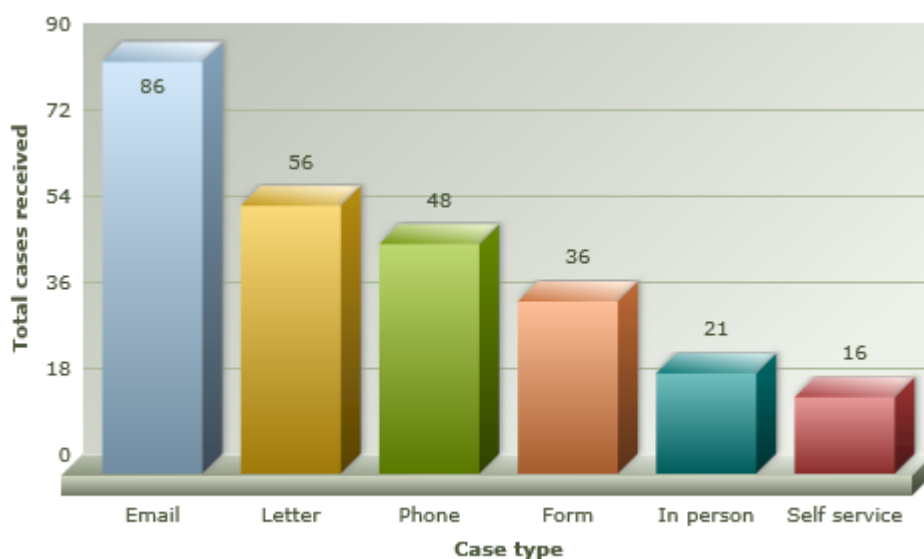
3.3 Ethnicity and Age

Data relating to the ethnicity and age of people making complaints has been analysed and clearly demonstrates that data supplied and/or recorded is very limited. Ethnicity data is recorded in only 13% of cases and confidence in accuracy is low. For age, data is recorded in only 20% of cases.

For this reason, breakdown and analysis has not been provided in this report. The Customer Experience Team will investigate potential ethnicity data quality issues with their systems supplier and consider what might be done to improve the capture of data in the future e.g. training, compulsory recording of data.

3.3 Channel Preference

Customers are able to provide feedback in a number of different ways. The table below shows the preferred methods for submitting feedback in 2015/16. The majority of feedback is email, letters and paper forms combined. This may in part explain why ethnicity and age data has not been provided, as these methods will allow customers to provide as much or as little information as they want. This will be investigated further by the Customer Experience Team.



4.0 Complaints Analysis

4.1 Resolution Stages

As in previous years, Children's Social Care continues to resolve the vast majority of complaints at Stage 1. The number of cases which

escalate to Stage 2 remains very low and in the months September – March this is less than 2% of the total complaints received. The Customer Experience Team will continue to work with the service to mediate at Stage 1 where it is likely to help resolution at this stage rather than escalation to stage 2.

Complaints broken down by resolutions stage:

Complaint Stage	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Apr – Aug 2015	Sep 2015 – Mar 2016
Stage One	150	273	291	114	177
Stage Two	2	8	10	7	3
Stage Three	0	0	0	0	0
Ombudsman	0	0	2	0	2
Totals	152	281	303	121	182
				303	

4.2 Complaint Response Times

Stage one complaint response times (1 September 2015 – 31 March 2016):

Response times	Number of complaints
Complaints resolved within the 10 day Somerset timescale	64
Complaints resolved with 20 day statutory timescale	46
Complaints resolved outside of the 20 day statutory timescale	67
Total complaints closed at Stage One (Sep 15 – Mar 16)	177
Complaints escalated to Stage 2 or LGO	5
Total Complaints (Sept 2015 – Mar 2016)	182

The above table demonstrates that 36% of Stage 1 complaints were managed within the SCC 10 day response time with a further 26% within the statutory 20 days limit (62% are resolved within statutory limit overall). 38% exceeded the 20 day statutory limit. For these cases, resolution times ranged between 21 days and 246 days. Further investigation of these figures through a sample check indicates that some of the longer resolutions times were due to staff not completing the closure information even though the complaint had been finalised. Further work will be undertaken by the Customer Experience Team to establish a complete picture and awareness raising and training will be provided where necessary.

4.3 Complaint Outcomes

Complaints may be upheld, partially upheld or not upheld and in some cases may be resolved without the need for a formal outcome. The outcomes can be defined as follows:

- **Upheld** – the view of the customer is upheld, it is supported by evidence and the service provided did not reach the standard they could reasonably expect.
- **Partially upheld** – some but not all of the issues raised by the customer are supported by evidence and in those matters the service provided did not reach the standard they could reasonably expect.
- **Not upheld** – the views of the customer are not upheld and evidence suggests that the service provided did reach the standard they could reasonably expect.
- **Resolved** – the complaint was able to be swiftly addressed by the service the customer was satisfied without the need for a formal outcome.

Stage One Complaint Outcomes (1 September 2015 – 31 March 2016):

Outcome	Number of complaints
Upheld	17
Not Upheld	86
Partially Upheld	39
Resolved at first point of contact/upon receipt	14
No outcome recorded (case withdrawn/rejected)	21
Total Stage 1 complaints (Sept 2015 – Mar 2016)	177

Approximately 68% of all Stage One complaints received between September 2015 and March 2016 were not upheld or were resolved. Of the remaining cases only a small percentage (<10%) were entirely upheld. It is encouraging that, in most cases, fault was not found. Regardless of the outcome, all cases have been included in the analysis of reasons for complaints below as it is important that we consider learning from all feedback, whether fault is found or not.

Stage 2 complaint outcomes (1 September 2015 – 31 March 2016):

Three cases were escalated to Stage 2 within the year. Two cases have been partially upheld and closed with the third case still active with mediation involvement. The reasons for the Stage 2 complaints were:

- Service Provision and Quality
- Policy and Procedures
- Confidentiality

LGO complaint outcomes (1 September 2015 – 31 March 2016):

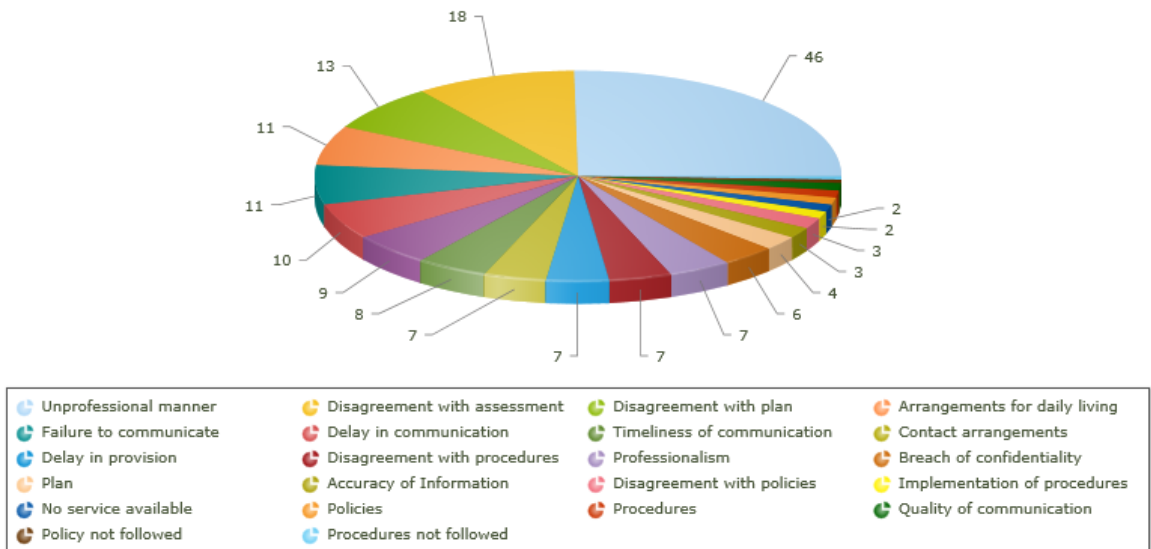
Two cases were investigated by the LGO during the year and both were upheld (fault found). Financial reparation was ordered and paid in one of these cases. The reasons for the complaints were:

- Policy and Procedures
- Service Provision

4.4 Reasons for Complaints

The chart below shows the primary reason registered against each complaint made (though some complex cases may raise a number of issues with a number of reasons).

Complaints by primary cause (1 Sept 2015 – 31 March 2016):



Primary Reasons	Total	%
Unprofessional manner	46	25%
Disagreement with assessment	18	10%
Disagreement with plan	13	7%
Arrangements for daily living	11	6%
Failure to communicate	11	6%
Delay in communication	10	5%
No cause provided	9	5%
Timeliness of communication	8	4%
Contract arrangements	7	4%
Delay in provision	7	4%
Disagreement with procedures	7	4%
Professionalism	7	4%
Breach of confidentiality	6	3%

Plan	4	2%
Accuracy of information	3	2%
Disagreement with policies	3	2%
Implementation of procedures	2	1%
No service available	2	1%
Policies	2	1%
Procedures	2	1%
Quality of communication	2	1%
Policy not followed	1	1%
Procedures not followed	1	1%
Total	182	100%

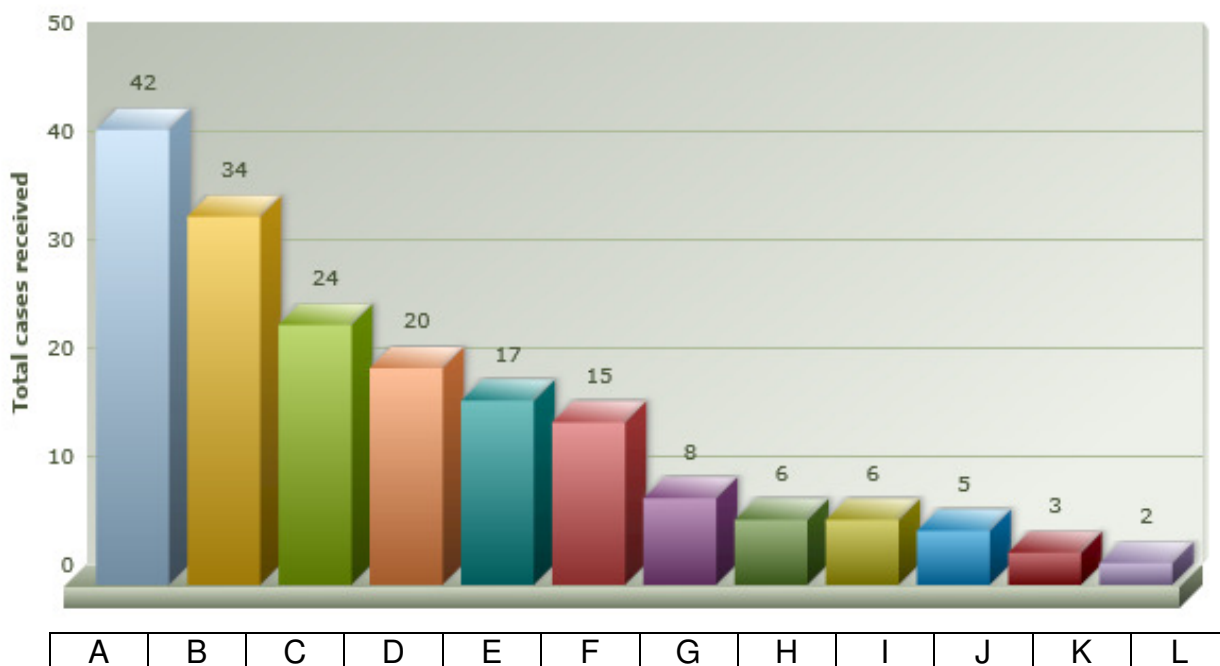
The reasons shown in the table above can be grouped in the following categories:

Category	Number	%
Attitude & Behaviour of Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unprofessional Manner • Professionalism 	53	29%
Service Provision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disagreement with assessment • Disagreement with plan • Contract arrangements • Plan • No service available 	44	24%
Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to communicate • Delay in communication • Timeliness of communication • Quality of communication 	31	17%
Service Quality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrangements for daily living • Delay in provision 	18	10%
Policy and Procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disagreement with procedures • Disagreement with policies • Implementation of procedures • Policies • Procedures • Policy not followed • Procedures not followed 	18	10%
Confidentiality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breach of confidentiality 	6	3%
Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accuracy of information 	3	2%
No cause recorded	9	5%
Totals	182	

4.5 Complaints by Service Area

The chart and table below show the spread of complaints across services.

Breakdown of complaints by service area (September 2015 – March 2016):

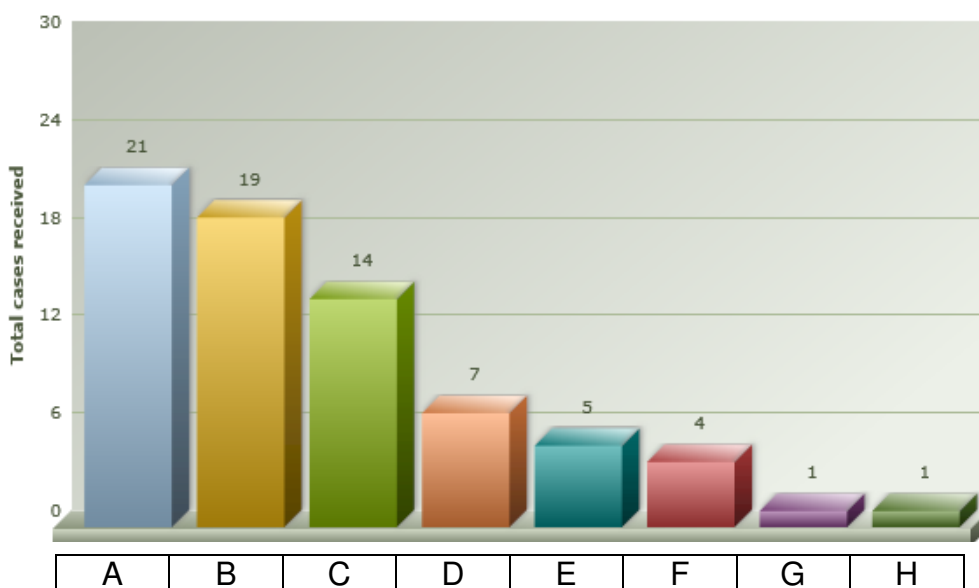


	Service Area	Total	%
A	Sedgemoor	42	23%
B	South Somerset	34	19%
C	Taunton & West Somerset	24	13%
D	Fostering, Adoption & Residential	20	11%
E	Mendip	17	9%
F	First Response	15	8%
G	Disabilities	8	5%
H	Customer Experience	6	3%
I	Unallocated Casework	6	3%
J	Safeguarding, Care & Quality Assurance	5	3%
K	Leaving Care	3	2%
L	Confidential	2	1%
	Total	182	100%

5.0 Compliments Analysis

With the implementation of iCasework, we are now recording compliments on a central system. Previous practice has been inconsistent and it has therefore not been possible to get full data on the number of compliments received across the service. The ratio of compliments to complaints recorded this year is 1 to 2.5 (approximately). It is planned to use these compliments to support in identifying good practice to be shared across the service.

Breakdown of compliments by service area (September 2015 – March 2016):



	Service Area	Total	%
A	Leaving Care	21	29%
B	Sedgemoor	19	26%
C	South Somerset	14	20%
D	Fostering, Adoption & Residential	7	10%
E	Mendip	5	7%
F	First Response	4	6%
G	Safeguarding, Care & Quality Assurance	1	1%
H	Taunton & West Somerset	1	1%
	Total	72	100%

6.0 Learning and Improvement

One of the key drivers in securing the new iCasework system was to provide more accurate and timely data through feedback that can support improvement in service delivery to our customers.

From the 7 months of data analysed in iCasework, 70% of complaints were as a result of issues in the areas:

- Attitude and Behaviour of Staff
- Service Provision
- Communication

There may be multiple reasons for a single complaint. All analysis here has been provided on the primary reason. Experience and discussions with staff suggest that communication deficiencies are frequently a contributory factor in many complaints, even where this is not the primary reason.

There are a number of actions that are being planned or currently in progress within Children’s Social Care to address these areas which include:

Root Cause Category	Actions
Staff Attitude & Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New practice standards which clearly state the need to ensure that everyone is treated with respect and that diversity and difference is celebrated and individuality is promoted. • Increased oversight of cases by managers who ensure the worker stands back from the case to reflect on the child’s experience
Service Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of Signs of Safety methodology (a strengths based approach) to support partnership working with families using clear language to explain to families <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What we are worried about ○ What is working well ○ What needs to happen • New practice standards which reinforce that the views of the child and family must be listened to and taken in to account in any assessment and plan. • Programme of case auditing in place which reviews the child’s record and contact is made with the family to ask their views on progress and the difference the service is making.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caseloads have been reduced for social workers to allow more time for each case. • New practice standards which clearly state children’s views will be listened to, respected and recorded.

In addition, the following actions/activities will support in addressing issues raised from feedback and reduce the chances of the same problems occurring again in the future:

- Quality Assurance Framework - this has been refreshed to ensure that learning from feedback is central to service development. The Customer Experience Team are developing a closer working relationship with the service and will use data and analysis from iCasework to support in service and improvement planning.
- Increased focus on participation including:
 - Development of a participation strategy to include all vulnerable children.
 - Developing use of social media to engage children and young people about individual work with them and to capture their views on service planning.
 - Work with active groups such as Somerset In Care Council (SICC) and Somerset Care Leavers Council (SLCC) who hold SCC to account to deliver the Pledge.
- Attendance by the Customer Experience Manager at quarterly Children's Performance Group Meetings.
- Complaint Learning Panels and detailed learning reviews for all escalated and selected complex Stage 1 complaints.
- Specific actions that will be progressed by the Customer Experience Team over the next year:
 - Support the improved management of customer feedback to include the further development of iCasework
 - Ensure increased accuracy and consistent recording of customer feedback
 - Identify where resolution targets are not being met
 - Understand the trends for customer complaints e.g. reasons, and how SCC use this data alongside other data and information to gain a better insight to inform service and improvement planning.