

Somerset County Council

Children's Social Care Customer Feedback Report

1st April 2016 – 31 March 2017



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Date: 01/09/2017

Version: FINAL v1.0

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Introduction

Somerset County Council is committed to encouraging children and families to register their feedback and to then use that learning to improve services and the customer experience.

This is the annual report of customer feedback received by Children's Social Care during the year 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017.

As well as this annual report, the Director of Children's Services and nominated deputies regularly reviews customer feedback data to ensure lessons are learned, insight is gained and improvements are made.

Context

Data used in this report is taken from the corporate iCasework system which, since September 2015, has been the single system for recording and managing customer feedback within the council. It should be noted that there has been a considerable increase in feedback recorded since the introduction of iCasework. This is thought to be a result of more consistent recording and better reporting. For this reason, at this stage in the life of the relatively new process, it would be unwise to draw too firm a conclusion regarding annual trends and the Customer Experience Team will continue to regularly monitor the volume of feedback received and provide regular updates to service leads.

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 may arise for a number of reasons, for example as a result of:

- The standard of service received
- Our response to a request for service
- Our actions or inactions
- The behaviour of a member of staff
- Perceived harassment, bias or unfair discrimination

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.

Customers are able to give feedback by telephone, internet, mail and in person and full details of the SCC complaints process is available on our website:

<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/have-your-say/complaints-comments-and-compliments/complaints-comments-compliments/>

Section 1 Executive Summary

1.1 Summary

Children's Social Care received 426 pieces of logged customer feedback during the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. This comprised 267 complaints, 124 compliments, 16 comments and 19 member enquiries.

Of those complaints received, virtually all were dealt with at the initial stage (Stage 1) with only four cases escalated into a formal or Local Government Ombudsman investigation.

More than half of the complaints were either withdrawn or not upheld at the initial stage, around one third were partially upheld and 9% were upheld.

The reasons for complaints being partially or totally upheld come in three main areas – communication, staff behaviour and service improvements.

The county council has set a target resolution timescale of 10 working days for initial complaints and children's social care complaints have been in excess of that target at an average of 26 days, previously this was 29 days.

In terms of compliments, the feedback was roughly in line with the previous annual report with 124 received and the largest number for the leaving care team.

The reasons for compliments were where services had made a difference, quality of information and advice and customer care. A break down by area is included in the report.

More detail on this summary can be found in the following analysis.

1.2 Learning & Improvement

Over half of the complaints received recorded primary causes as falling under the communication, service provision or attitude and behaviour of staff categories which is consistent with the previous 12 months. However, it is encouraging that complaints about the 'attitude and behaviour' of staff have fallen from 29% of the total to 15%, indicating a significant improvement in this area.

Complaints about communication have risen on the previous year from 17% of the total to 22% and represent the biggest single 'theme'. It is often the case that communication failure plays a part in customer dissatisfaction, sometimes during the management of a complaint, even where there primary cause of a complaint is not the communication in itself.

The experience of the Customer Experience Team is that complaints often escalate when communication with the customer is absent, infrequent, incomplete or unclear. This can lead to persistent contact, increased customer dissatisfaction (compounding the original 'mistakes'), unacceptable customer behaviour, the need for costly investigation, scrutiny from the Local Government Ombudsman and

potential for compensation payment. This is an area for improvement for Children’s Social Care and across other Somerset County Council services and is addressed in the recommendations below.

There have been a number of cases in the past year where customer behaviour has been viewed as unacceptable or unreasonably persistent. These handful of cases have demanded disproportionate levels of staff effort which has had an impact on the ability of services (CSC, Customer Experience Team and the Contact Centre) to support other customers. Consistent management of these customers is an area for improvement and is addressed in the recommendations below.

Below is a summary of recommendations resulting from this report. These recommendations will be taken forward by the Customer Experience Team for consideration by the appropriate services/managers.

Recommendation 1
Work with Children’s Social Care to establish blocks and barriers experienced in the service to working effectively within the complaints process.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the existing complaints process, including stages, timescales and roles to establish blocks and barriers to effective complaints management. • Feed in to corporate review and options appraisal of complaints process.
Recommendation 2
Consider how the complaints process, the Customer Experience Team and the iCasework system can better support communication with the customer during the handling of complaints.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring customer communication is a key consideration in the complaints process options appraisal. • Making better use of iCasework to minimise delays & identify ‘inaction’ on cases. • Consider the addition of a ‘QA’ role to the process to ensure clear and comprehensive responses at Stage 1 (reduce escalation and avoidable contact). • Consider the structure of the iCasework system, how it can support a revised process and changes that can be made to encourage/enforce completeness in recording (e.g. equalities data etc).
Recommendation 3
Improve management of customers who display unacceptable behaviour and/or are unreasonably persistent.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revision of current policy to include impact assessment for restriction of access. • Consistent use of policy in all cases.

Section 2 High Level Analysis

2.1 Previous Year Comparison

Figures for 2016/17 show an overall decrease in total feedback received when compared with figures recorded in the 12 months prior:

Feedback Type	+/-	%
All Feedback	Decrease	4.7
Complaint	Decrease	11.8
Compliment	Decrease	8.1
Comment	Increase	77.7
Member Enquiries	Unknown	-

2.2 Escalation Overview

257 Children's Social Care complaints were resolved during the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. 253 cases (99%) were resolved at 'Stage 1' of the process. Two cases escalated and were resolved at Stage 2 with no cases investigated and closed at Stage 3 and 2 by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) during the year. This is a slight improvement on the previous period 12 month (96% resolved at Stage One).

2.3 Performance Overview

Somerset County Council's complaint procedure sets a target resolution timescale of 10 working days for Stage 1 complaints. The average resolution time for Children's Social Care complaints in 2016/17 has been 26 working days. This is a slight improvement on the previous year (29 days) but still exceeds the current policy target.

2.4 Outcomes Overview

Over half of the complaints resolved during the year (58%) were not upheld, withdrawn/rejected or resolved upon receipt. Just 9% of complaints were upheld and a further 33% partially upheld, therefore for 2016/17 some fault was found in 42% of cases which represents an increase on the previous year (32%).

2.5 Causes Overview

The majority of complaints (56%) result from three themes: communication, service improvement and attitude and behaviour of staff. This is in line with the results for the previous year though there has been a percentage decrease for complaints about the attitudes and behaviour of staff but an increase in complaints where the cause was identified as communication related.

Section 3 Detailed Analysis

3.1 Volumes and Comparisons

Feedback Type	1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015	1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016	1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017
CSC Complaints	273	303	267
CSC Compliments	Unknown	135	124
CSC Comments	Unknown	9	16
CSC Member Enquiries	Unknown	Unknown	19
Total Feedback	273	447	426

3.2 Resolution Stages and Times

The table below shows the number and percentage of complaints that were resolved at each stage of the process during the year. Previous year data is given for comparison.

Resolution Stage	1 st April 2015 – 31 st March 2016		1 st April 2016 – 31 st March 2017	
	No.	%	No.	%
Stage 1	291	96%	253	99%
Stage 2	10	3%	2	1%
Stage 3	0	0%	0	0
LGO	2	1%	2	0
	303	100%	257*	100%

* The number of resolved complaints for the year is not equal to the number received. This is because some complaints take longer to resolve and may span across two financial years.

The current SCC policy sets a target for resolution of Stage 1 complaints of 10 working days though this can be extended in agreement with the customer if it is not possible to complete the investigation in that timeframe. The table below shows the current average resolution times for Children's Social Care complaint cases.

Average Resolution Times		
Resolution Stage	1 st April 2015 – 31 st March 2016	1 st April 2016 – 31 st March 2017
Stage 1	29 working days	26 working days
Stage 2	N/A	114 working days
LGO	N/A	319 working days

3.3 Complaint Outcomes

The table below shows the outcome of the 257 cases that were closed during the year

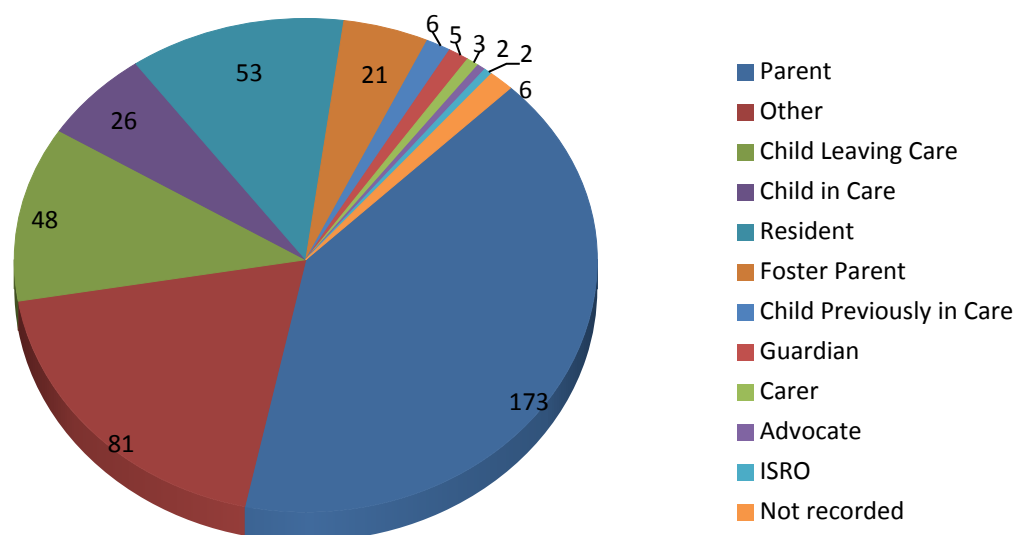
Outcomes	1 st April 2015 – 31 st March 2016	1 st April 2016 – 31 st March 2017		
		Cases	%	+/-
Upheld	10%	25	9%	-
Not Upheld	48%	89	35%	-

Partially Upheld	22%	85	33%	+
Resolved Upon Receipt	8%	20	8%	Neu
Case Withdrawn/Rejected	12%	38	15%	+
	100%	257	100%	

3.4 Customer Profiles

Children’s Social Care feedback comes in through a variety of sources. 47% of all feedback received in 2016/17 came from people identifying as parents, guardians, carers or foster parents. Feedback received directly from children (those in care, previously in care or leaving care) represents 19% of the total. Of the remaining 34%, 1% of feedback came from an advocate or Independent Safeguarding Reviewing Officer with the remaining 33% listed as ‘other’ or ‘resident’.

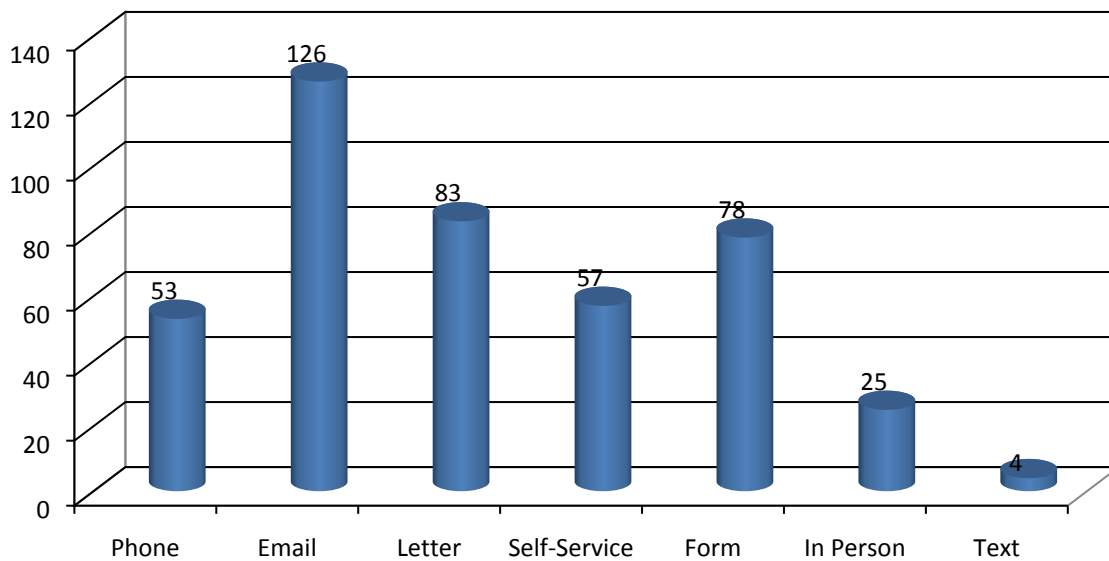
Complaints Source



Whilst the iCasework system is able to record ethnicity and age data in relation to customer feedback, it is evident from the data that this is not consistently happening. In 97% of cases, ethnicity is not recorded or recorded as ‘prefer not to say’. In terms of age, again there was no data recorded in 54% of cases, 39% were aged over 18 and 6% under. 1% of customers preferred not to supply age data.

Customers are able to provide feedback through a number of channels. The chart below shows that email continues to be the preferred channel for feedback (30%) followed by letter (20%) and form (18%). Figures suggest that there is a small shift towards digital self-service and away from telephony in comparison to the previous 12 months.

Feedback by channel type

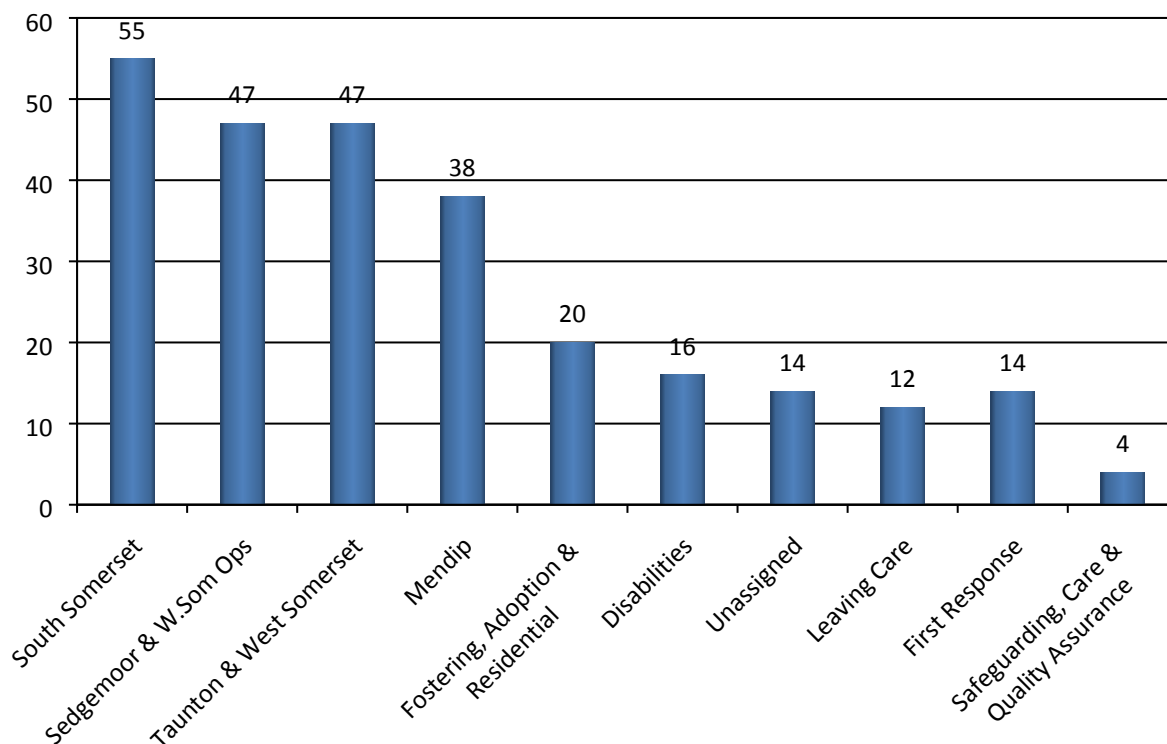


Contact Channel Used	1 Apr 2015 – 31 Mar 2016	1 Apr 2016 – 31 Mar 2017	+/-
Phone	18%	12%	-6%
Email	33%	30%	-3%
Letter	21%	20%	-1%
Self-Service	6%	13%	+7%
Form	14%	18%	+4%
In Person	8%	6%	-2%
Text	0%	1%	+1%

3.5 Complaints by Service/Team/Area

The chart below shows that the majority of complaints – 70% - are assigned to the geographical teams, with the percentages ranging between 20% and 14% of the total across the four areas. Of the other services, Fostering, Adoption & Residential receive the highest number of complaints with around 7.5% of the total.

Complaints by Service Area



The table below shows the average resolution times across service areas for Stage One complaints resolved during the period to 31 March 2017:

Service Area	Average Resolution Time (working days)
First Response	54
Fostering, Adoption & Residential	49
Unassigned	38
Safeguarding, Care & Quality Assurance	35
Disabilities	31
Taunton & West Somerset	27
Sedgemoor	25
Leaving Care	24
Mendip	22
South Somerset	20

3.6 Reasons for Complaints

The table below shows a breakdown of the primary causes which have been recorded against each complaint made in the year. The second table and chart groups those causes by theme. The three largest themes for causes of complaints remain the same as the previous 12 months: communication, service provision and attitude and behaviour of staff. That said, complaints about attitude and behaviour of staff have fallen from 29% of the total to 15%. The share of complaints relating to communication has risen from 17% to 22%, being the biggest single theme. The top three account for more than half

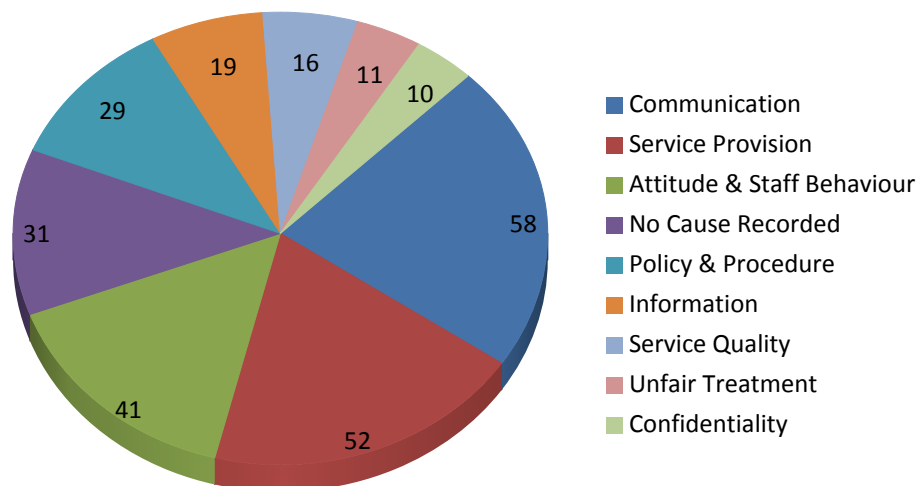
the complaints received (56%). 11 complaints were categorised under the theme of unfair treatment (bullying & harassment, discrimination) this year whereas none were recorded under this theme at all in the last period.

Primary Cause	Total	%
Professionalism	39	15
Quality of communication	32	12
Not recorded	31	12
Timeliness of communication	24	9
Plan	21	8
Accuracy of Information	19	7
Contact arrangements	15	6
Result of assessment	11	4
Arrangements for daily diving	10	4
Procedures	10	4
Implementation of procedures	8	3
Confidentiality	7	2
Bullying & Harassment	6	2
Implementation of policies	6	2
Timeliness of service provision	6	2
Discrimination	5	2
Privacy & Confidentiality	3	1
Service availability	3	1
Decision	2	1
Policies	2	1
Communication by the Service	2	1
Other policy/procedure cause	1	<1
Failure to deliver a service	1	<1
Refusal to do something	1	<1
Other service Failure Cause	1	<1
Failure to do something	1	<1
	267	

Category	Number	%
Communication		
• Quality of communication	58	22
• Timeliness of communication		
• Communication by the service		
Service Provision		
• Result of assessment	52	19
• Contact arrangements		
• Plan		
• Failure to deliver a service		
• Service availability		
• Other service failure cause		
Attitude & Behaviour of Staff		
• Professionalism	41	15
• Refusal/failure to do something		
No cause recorded	31	12

Policy and Procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision • Implementation of procedures • Implementation of policies • Policies Procedures	29	11
Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accuracy of information 	19	7
Service Quality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrangements for daily living • Timeliness of service provision 	16	6
Unfair Treatment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bullying & Harassment • Discrimination 	11	4
Confidentiality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breach of confidentiality • Privacy & Confidentiality 	10	4
Total	267	

Complaint Cause Themes



3.7 Stage Two Investigations

2 Stage Two investigations were concluded during the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017 in relation to Children's Social Care (one Mendip and one Sedgemoor). Of the 2 cases, 1 was partially upheld and 1 upheld.

The root causes associated with the upheld elements of the partially upheld case were as follows:

- Result of assessment
- Professionalism
- Quality of communication

For the upheld case, the root causes are shown as follows:

- Implementation of procedures
- Implementation of policies

For the investigation of the upheld complaint, an external investigating officer and independent person were employed at a total cost of £9,551.

3.8 Local Government Ombudsman Investigations

Two Children's Social Care investigations were concluded by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) within the year. Both cases were upheld.

In the first case, the Ombudsman found that the Council had mishandled its CSC involvement with the family. The Council accepted this decision and paid recommended costs. A recommendation was also made that some documentation be provided to the customer and the Council were found at fault later in the year for delay in supplying this information. A review of the case was undertaken with appropriate managers. Whilst the LGO decision on this case came during the 2016/17 year, the incidents on which it centred related back to late 2013.

In the second case, the Ombudsman found that the council were at fault in their involvement in the complainant's wife leaving the country with his children, without his knowledge. It was recommended that the council pay costs involved in returning the children to the UK and a payment in respect of the distress of the complainant. A public notice was issued in regards to this case. Whilst the LGO decision on this case came during the 2016/17 year, the incidents on which it centred related back to late 2012.

The Local Government Ombudsman (now the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman) produces an annual review for each council and the Somerset County Council 2017 review can be found at <http://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/councils-performance/council/Somerset%20County%20Council>

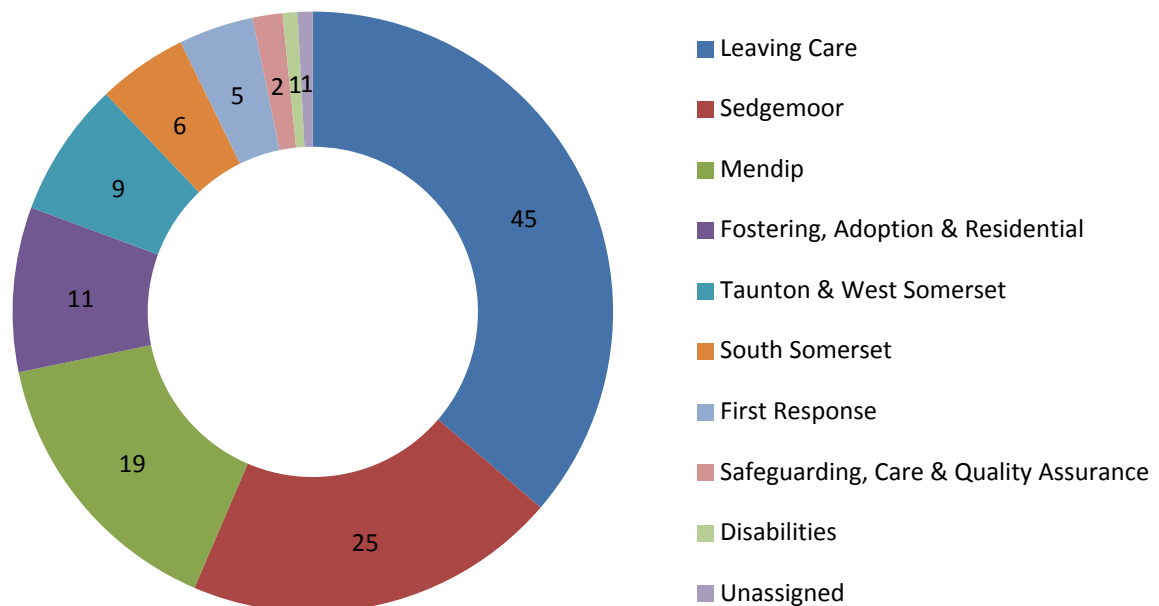
Section 4 Compliments

Children's Social Care received 124 compliments during the year to 31 March 2017. This represents a minor reduction when compared with the previous period (135).

The table below shows the spread of compliments across service areas and teams and the chart shows the split by function.

Service Area/Team	No. of Compliments	%
Leaving Care	45	36
Sedgemoor	25	20
Mendip	19	15
Fostering, Adoption & Residential	11	9
Taunton & West Somerset	9	7
South Somerset	6	5
First Response	5	4
Safeguarding, Care & Quality Assurance	2	2
Unassigned	1	1
Disabilities	1	1
	124	100%

Compliments received



The recorded reasons for compliments given are shown below:

Service	Cause of satisfaction	No.	%
Leaving Care	Service made a difference	25	36
	Quality of service	11	
	Customer care	5	
	Quality of information and advice	3	
	Not given	1	
Sedgemoor	Quality of information and advice	15	20
	Service made a difference	4	
	Staff Knowledge	3	
	Quality of service	2	
	Prompt Communication	1	
Mendip	Quality of service	7	15
	Service made a difference	6	
	Customer care	3	
	Staff conduct other	2	
	Service quality other	1	
Fostering, Adoption & Residential	Quality of service	6	9
	Service made a difference	4	
	Quality of information and advice	1	
Taunton & West Somerset	Service made a difference	3	7
	Customer care	2	
	Quality of service	1	
	Staff conduct other	1	
	Staff knowledge	1	
	Not given	1	
South Somerset	Quality of service	4	5
	Quality of information and advice	1	
	Availability of service	1	
First Response	Quality of information and advice	4	4
	Quality of service	1	
Safeguarding, Care & Quality	Service quality other	2	2
Disabilities	Quality of information and advice	1	1
Unassigned	Not given	1	1
		124	

Section 5 Comments

16 comments were recorded in relation to Children's Social Care during the year 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017.

A number of the comments made were incorrectly classified and should have been recorded as a compliment or for another service. Of the correctly recorded comments, the following themes were included:

- Suggestion not to send out booklets/magazines to children in care (the customer felt it was an unwelcome reminder that they are in care and feels very sensitive about their situation).
- Comment suggesting that there was insufficient support for adopters.
- Concerns regarding the nature of a first visit for fostering. Felt that some of the rules and regulations that were spelled out were off putting and would deter people from pursuing. The strict nature of the rules discussed would prevent a family from providing 'normality' for a child.
- Anonymous expression of dissatisfaction of being in foster care.
- Comment by a former leaving care customer that the support received was good but that keeping in touch was sometimes difficult.

Section 6 | Member Enquiries

19 member enquiries were received in connection with Children's Social Care cases during the year. The table below shows the areas and services these enquiries related to and the average response times. The breakdown is as follows:

Service	Number	Ave. Response (Working days)
Disabilities	2	12
Fostering, Adoption & Residential	5	18
Mendip	2	8
Sedgemoor	4	15
Taunton & West Somerset	6	9
	19	13