

NAME OF COMMITTEE	Scrutiny Committee Gwynedd Council
DATE OF MEETING	14 November 2019
TITLE OF ITEM	Annual Report on dealing with complaints and information requests by the Children and Family Support Department for 2018/2019
PURPOSE	To give an overview of the complaints and information requests received during 2018/2019
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 In accordance with the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 that came into effect on 1 August 2014, the Director of Social Services is required to produce an annual report on how complaints are handled and investigated within the Children and Family Support Department. The report is produced by the Customer Care Officer on behalf of the Director of Social Services
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide information on the number of complaints received by the Children and Family Support Department during the year, the reasons for them and the solutions. The report also contains a summary of the lessons learnt and the actions taken on the complaints received. Details are also included about the number of information requests and freedom of information requests received during this period.

2. Context

- 2.1 The Customer Care Officer deals with complaints, information requests and freedom of information requests throughout the year for the Children and Family Support Department.
- 2.2 The Customer Care Officer for the Children and Family Support Department is managed by the Senior Safeguarding and Quality Manager within the Children and Family Support Department. Although the Officer is located within the Department, it is important to note that the Officer is independent to ensure that complaints are dealt with according to the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014. The Social Services Complaints Procedure specifically relates to individuals who receive a service from the Department or who have the right to represent a service user.

3. Access to the Complaints Procedure

- 3.1 Individuals contact the Customer Care Officer to express their dissatisfaction with the Department's service, and deciding to make a complaint is usually their last resort. The Officer concentrates on ensuring access to the Complaints Procedure so that complainants are aware of their right to be heard and have their complaint fully investigated.
- 3.2 Information about the Complaints Procedure receives considerable publicity and the information is available in a variety of formats e.g. leaflets, 'easy read' leaflets and on-line. All the information is available in English and Welsh so that the complainant can choose his/her preferred language. Alternative arrangements such as Braille or other languages are available upon request. In addition, advocacy or other support is available to the complainant in his/her chosen language in order to assist as the Complaints Procedure progresses. Information leaflets are continuously amended and updated

Complainants' chosen language when making an enquiry/complaint during 2018/2019			
	Welsh	English	Total Complaints
Stage 1	4	20	24
Stage 1		1	1
Ombudsman		2	2

4. Matters recorded as Enquires

- 4.1 The aim is to respond to every complaint with fairness, impartiality and respect so that the individual is confident that his/her complaint will be handled professionally and positively. Often, when the individual decides not to pursue the formal Complaints Procedure, the matter is dealt with as an enquiry or informal complaint. Another example of this would be a letter from a Member of Parliament or local Councillor who wishes to express dissatisfaction or wants a specific answer to a question.
- 4.2 By responding positively during these initial steps, some matters can be effectively resolved without the need for the formal Complaints Procedure as this is an opportunity to deal with any misunderstanding or to respond to enquiries. Without a doubt, this is the best result for everyone. One of the most prominent themes seen when dealing with enquiries and informal complaints is misunderstanding between individuals, such as lack of communication or clear communication.

TABLE 1. Enquires and Informal Complaints received 2018/2019	
	<i>Children and Family Support</i>
<i>Solicitors</i>	4
<i>Ombudsman</i>	
<i>Local Member</i>	1

<i>Members of Parliament or Assembly Members</i>	6
<i>Service Users</i>	1
<i>Relatives</i>	30
<i>Members of the Public</i>	3
<i>Foster Carers</i>	
<i>Other Agents e.g. advocacy service</i>	
<i>Other Counties</i>	
<i>Social Worker</i>	
<i>Information Commissioner</i>	
Total	45

5. Stage 1 - Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure - Local Resolution

- 5.1 Every effort is made to resolve complaints so that the complainant and the Department are satisfied. Clearly, a resolution is the best result for everyone and this can be achieved by investing time and effort early on. However, if the complainant decides to lodge a formal complaint, the usual procedure is to have a discussion over the telephone or face-to-face with the complainant or representative in order to attempt to resolve the matter. Over the years, the Customer Care Officer has successfully established close working relationships with the teams, managers, senior managers and legal service as a means of discussing and resolving matters, and this is reflected in the small amount of complaints that reach Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure.
- 5.2 It is fair to note that, since the implementation of the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014, there has been a clear trend over the past four years as, during this time, only two complaints have been escalated to Stage 2. This is due to the professionalism of the Team Managers and Senior Managers in dealing with complaints. They understand the importance of a local resolution and, when discussing directly with complainants, they are able to address issues as soon as possible. This ensures that the Department is able to continue working with the family for the benefit of the child/young person.
- 5.3 An analysis of the Stage 1 complaints dealt with in 2018/2019 can be found in **Appendix 1**.

6. Stage 2 - Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure - Formal Investigation

- 6.1 By following the principle of focusing on a successful early and local resolution, complaints do not, usually, need to be escalated to Stage 2 - Formal Investigation of the Complaints Procedure to resolve disputes / problems / issues. Compared with other Local Authorities in North Wales, the Children and Family Support Department at Gwynedd Council is extremely successful in dealing with Stage 1 complaints, whilst a higher proportion of complaints in other Authorities are escalated to Stage 2.

- 6.2 Should a complainant wish to escalate their complaint to Stage 2, they would have to provide a full record of the complaint along with any desired outcomes; this would then form the basis of what we call a Stage 2 Investigation. The investigation is conducted by two people who are independent to the Council, known as the Independent Investigating Officer and Independent Person. Their role is to meet with the complainant, interview relevant staff and read the social care file. They subsequently create a report of their findings along with any recommendations for the Department. The Department then prepares a response to these recommendation for the complainant. It is at the Department's discretion whether the Stage 2 Report prepared by the Investigating Officer is shared with the complainant.
- 6.3 During 2018/2019, one application to escalate a complaint to Stage 2 of the Social Services Complaints Procedure was received. The investigation was completed during Quarters 2 and 3, and an analysis of this complaint can be found in **Appendix 2**.
- 6.4 An application was made by another complainant during Quarter 3 for their complaint to be escalated to Stage 2 from the onset, and not to be processed under Stage 1 to begin with. However, it has not yet been possible to begin the Stage 2 investigation as the complainant has not agreed with the scope of the complaint to be investigated by the appointed Independent Investigator. The Department's efforts continue to try to work with the complainant to confirm the scope of the complaint in order to ensure that the complainant's complaint receives a full and fair investigation under Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure. It is envisaged that this complaint will be discussed in more detail in the 2019/2020 Annual Report if the Stage 2 investigation proceeds.

7. Complaint transferred to the Public Services Ombudsman

- 7.1 Every individual has the right to complain directly to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales at any time during the complaints procedure if they are unhappy with the service provided by the Department.
- 7.2 Usually, if the complaint has not already been dealt with under Stage 1 of the Social Services Complaints Procedure, the complaint will be referred back to the Department in an attempt to resolve the complaint locally. If the individual is still dissatisfied after that, they have the right to escalate the complaint to Stage 2 of the Social Services Complaints Procedure or return to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales or the Welsh Language Commissioner or the Equalities and Human Rights Commissioner, depending on the nature of the complaint, so that an enquiry can be held
- 7.3 Two new complaints were received from the Ombudsman against Gwynedd Council's Children and Family Support Department during 2018/2019.
- 7.4 A complaint was made by a complainant to the Ombudsman during Quarter 2 following an investigation under Stage 2 of the Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure which ended during 2017/2018. The complainant was

dissatisfied with the Department's response to this independent investigation amongst other matters. This Ombudsman investigation concluded in June 2019, therefore a detailed analysis will be included in the 2019/2020 Annual Report.

- 7.5 Another complaint was made to the Ombudsman during Quarter 4 by a complainant who was dissatisfied with the Department's decision not to re-investigate a complaint that had previously been fully investigated under Stage 1 of the Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure and concluded in 2017/2018. The Department was of the opinion that, in accordance with the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014, this complaint should not be re-opened as more than 12 months had passed since the original complaint had concluded. The Ombudsman was in agreement with the Department's decision, and no further investigation into the complaint was held by the Ombudsman. A detailed analysis can be seen in **Appendix 3**.
- 7.6 One Ombudsman investigation which originally began in 2016/2017 concluded during 2018/2019. The complainants contacted the Ombudsman as they were unhappy with the Department's response to their complaint which was investigated under Stage 1 along with the decision to refuse to escalate their concern to Stage 2 of the Social Services Complaints Procedure. A full explanation of the situation was provided to the Ombudsman along with documentation that was relevant to the complaint. The Ombudsman was in favour of the complainants' complaint and several recommendations were made to the Department. An analysis of this investigation can be found in **Appendix 3**.

TABLE 2 Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure 2018/2019	
	<i>Children and Family Support</i>
Stage 1	24
Stage 2	1
Ombudsman	2
Total	27

8. Adherence to the Statutory Complaints Procedure Response Timetable

- 8.1 The Local Authority has a duty to provide information on how it investigates and deals with complaints within the timetable noted in the Guidance and Regulations.

TABLE 3 Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure Response Performance 2018/2019						
Stage 1						
<i>Complaints received within 12 months of the incident</i>	<i>Complaints received 12 months after the incident</i>	<i>Acknowledged within 2 days</i>	<i>Discussion to resolve within 10 days</i>	<i>Decision announced within 5 days</i>	<i>Response time extended</i>	<i>Average number of days extended</i>
24	0	24	23	15	9	20

Stage 2				
<i>Total acknowledged within 5 days</i>	<i>Total of responses received within 25 working days</i>	<i>Total deferred under exceptional circumstances</i>		<i>Total completed within 6 months</i>
1	1	0		1

- 8.2 It is important to note that several complex complaints were made in 2018/2019 which had many different aspects to be resolved, as a result, there was a need to significantly extend the response time for three of these complaints. There was a need to extend the response time specifically for two complaints as one of them included 23 separate issues which needed to be addressed as part of the complaint, and the other included 12 issues which required multi-service input. There was a need to significantly extend the response time for another complaint as legal advice was sought before the response could be provided to the complainant, and it took nearly two months for the response to receive legal approval.

9. Learning Lessons and Identifying Trends - see Appendix 1

- 9.1 The Customer Care Officer prepares quarterly reports discussing the number of complaints received during the quarter along with the way they are dealt with. These reports are an opportunity to analyse and discuss every complaint received during the quarter and to learn in order to continuously improve the service the Department provides throughout the year. These quarterly reports are shared with the Head of the Children and Family Support Department.

Complaints Trends - Children and Family Support Department

- 9.2 The Children and Family Support Department works daily with a wide range of different families. Some families come to the Department's attention through a direct request for assistance, for example, if their child is disabled. Most families come to the Department's attention because of concerns for a child or young person's health and safety.
- 9.3 Unfortunately, because of the nature of social care work, tension or conflict with families is an unavoidable at times. Social Workers have to make very difficult decisions, and families are not always happy. The Department understands and accepts that families can be dissatisfied, which can then lead them to make a formal complaint against the Department.
- 9.4 It is fair to note that it is difficult to see whether there are definite trends or themes in the complaints received during 2018/2019, as each complaint tends to be unique to each case. In accordance with the Complaints Procedure, the Team Manager or Senior Manager will discuss the complaint with the complainant. By discussing the complaint, the Team Manager is able to respond to matters directly and most cases are resolved over the phone; it is clear that this way of dealing with complaints works. In the majority of cases, the complaint stems from a misunderstanding and miscommunication. Usually, once matters have been fully explained, the complainant will be satisfied.

- 9.5 It is also very important to note, on a number of occasions when a complainant initially contacts the Customer Care Officer, they are highly emotive - they could be angry or concerned about a decision or a misunderstanding. In most cases, the complainant will be satisfied once they have been given the opportunity to discuss their concern with the Customer Care Officer, first of all, and then with the relevant Team Manager, and are happy with the outcome of these discussions.

Unhappy with decisions made by the Department or the Court

- 9.6 Several complaints received over the last year related to family dissatisfaction with decisions made by the Department and also specifically by Judges during court proceedings involving their children. It is inevitable in difficult situations that the Department has to make decisions for the benefit of the children and young people we support, but unfortunately, their families do not always agree with these decisions. Several complaints have also been received following the Department's action on decisions made by Judges during court proceedings between the Department and the families. More often than not, in such cases, the relationship between the Department and the families is under considerable strain, and unfortunately the families decide to declare their dissatisfaction with the Court's decisions by making complaints against the Department. In addition, it is sometimes becomes apparent when investigating the complaints that the complainants have not received the best information or advice from their legal representatives, and therefore do not fully understand the decision made by the Judges during court proceedings.
- 9.7 In relation to this, there were several occasions during 2018/2019 where conflicting information was submitted by complainants as part of their complaints about decisions made by either the Department or the Court. In such cases, the evidence collected during the complaint investigation has clearly demonstrated that the Department has acted correctly in accordance with the decisions of the Court and protocol, and this is explained in full to complainants in the response provided. Such complaints also emphasise the importance of detailed records and a clear audit trail when working to support vulnerable children and young people and their families.
- 9.8 There were also examples of malicious complaints being made due to complainants' discontent about the necessary decisions made by the Department and by the Court. When such complaints are made, and particularly where these complaints are specifically aimed at individuals, it is important that a full and fair investigation is carried out and that the staff members who have been affected are also supported in order to continue working with the families for the benefit of the children and young people who are supported. Complaints such as these once again emphasise the importance of detailed records of the work which is undertaken and the reasons for making decisions.

Communication

- 9.9 During 2018/2019 there was again a tendency in complaints being made due to a lack of clear or consistent communication with families. It is clear that clear

and consistent communication is important; the way things are explained to families from the outset is critical in ensuring that they understand why the Department does what it does, what the Department is able to offer and why, in some cases, it is not possible to offer any service at all. It is also important to note that the expectations of families in receiving updates and responses to enquiries made by them to Social Workers is extremely high, and in many cases is unattainable. That is to say that families often expect an immediate response if they contact the Department, and can become annoyed if the relevant Social Worker is unable to respond to them within a few hours that day, even when the matters is not urgent.

Parent Expectation

- 9.10 This trend is seen annually in the complaints made against the Department. It can be difficult to respond to complaints by families that feel the Department should be doing more to support them, or who believe they should be receiving more services/contact/intervention, or who believe their children should be returned to their care. Parents' expectations of what the Department is able to offer is high, if they feel they have been failed in any way by the Department, they lodge a complaint.
- 9.11 When such complaints are made, full investigations will be carried out and in the majority of cases there will be clear evidence that the Department has acted appropriately and in accordance with a protocol.

10. Training and Staff Awareness

- 10.1 An important part of the Customer Care Officer's duty is to provide advice and training to the Department's officers about the Complaints Procedure so that staff members are fully aware of the procedure and are confident with their role.
- 10.2 The Customer Care Officer is always available to discuss any specific cases with the Department's officers and also to provide advice about the best way to deal with enquiries or complaints against the Department.
- 10.3 Specific training sessions on the Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure have been arranged for the beginning of 2019/2020 to improve staff awareness of the Complaints Procedure and the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014.
- 10.4 Welsh Government is also currently in consultation to create a new complaints procedure which better corresponds to the principles of the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014. Once the Government has approved the new guidance, further training will be arranged for all the Department's staff

11. Other Duties

- 11.1 The Children and Supporting Families Customer Care Officer also deals with information requests in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998 / Data Protection Act 2018. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018 were introduced on 25 May 2018, resulting in some changes to the procedures for dealing with information requests.
- 11.2 Access to information requests under the Data Protection Act 1998 / Data Protection Act 2018 are made by individuals, the Police, Solicitors, the Health Board and other Local Authorities. In accordance with the Act, there are specific timescales to adhere to, and the response timetable has become much more challenging since the introduction of the new Act in May 2018.
- 11.3 Determining what information is appropriate to be released is work that demands skill and can be emotionally challenging at times. The Officer who deals with information requests can spend long hours on some of the more complex requests the Department receives. This means that a great many hours are spent ensuring that the information requests are responded to within the specified time. During recent years, there has been an increase in the number of access to information received under the Data Protection Act 1998. Since the introduction of GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 during Quarter 1, although there has not been an increase in the number of requests received as anticipated, the size of the of access to information requests has increased considerably; i.e. the volume of information which needs to be processed for a number of different individual in order to respond to these requests has dramatically increased. Therefore, as a result, the amount of time spent responding to these requests has also dramatically increased. It is also fair to note that these access to information requests have also become more complex, particularly ensuring that the applicants have sufficient support available to them whilst reading the information they have received.
- 11.4 It is also the duty of the Customer Care Officer to co-ordinate responses to freedom of information requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The number of requests received has remained fairly constant for 2018/2019 compared to 2017/2018. However, once again, it is important to note that the size of these requests has increased and consequently more time has to be spent preparing the responses. The work of collecting and collating the necessary information is time consuming and is in addition to the normal day-to-day work of the Department's Officers. Unfortunately, more often than not, it cannot be seen that responding to these freedom of information requests brings any additional benefit or value to the Department. In addition to this, approximately 80% of the freedom of information requests received during the year have been responded to by one specific Senior Manager within the Department, and have therefore added more to their substantial workload. Unfortunately, it is anticipated that these trends will continue for the coming year.

TABLE 5. Information requests during 2018/2019	
Requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000	64
Requests under the Data Protection Act 1998 / Data Protection Act 2018	125

12. Expressions of Gratitude - see Appendix 4

- 12.1 It is also important to recognise and record the expressions of gratitude that we have received from our service users and their families. A further analysis of these expressions of gratitude has been included in Appendix 4.

TABLE 6. Expressions of Gratitude during 2018/2019	31
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13. Action Plan for 2019/2020

- 13.1 During the upcoming year the Customer Care Officer will continue to respond to any enquires or complaints made against the Children and Family Support Department under the Complaints Procedure. When considering that there has been an increase in the number of complaints made against the Department in recent years, it is anticipated that this trend will continue. It must therefore be ensured that every enquiry or complaint received by the Department continues to be considered fully, and that the lessons to be learnt from every case also receive comprehensive attention in order to contribute and improve the service provided.
- 13.2 Work began during 2018/2019 i create a new information leaflet specifically for the Children and Family Support Department explaining the Complaints Procedure. This work will continue during the upcoming year, and consultation sessions and activities will also be held with young people in order to produce a comprehensive leaflet aimed at children and young people and their families. There is also an intention to create additional marketing material such as videos and posters to raise awareness of the Complaints Procedure.
- 13.3 Four training sessions have also been arranged for officers within the Children and Family Support Department for 2019/2020 in order to improve their awareness of the Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure together with ensuring that all staff within the Department are aware of the arrangements that need to be followed if a child, young person or their family shares a complaint with them.
- 13.4 It is also hoped to develop a vexatious complainants' policy specifically for the Children and Family Support Department. The Department currently follows the corporate vexatious complainants' policy. However, due to the unique nature of the complaint which are made against the Department, and the high volume of challenging and hostile correspondence and face-to-face contact that must be

dealt with when processing complaints, it is felt that it would be appropriate to have a policy specifically for vexatious complainants who come into contact with the Children and Family Support Department in order to ensure the health and well-being of all staff involved in the complaints process. It is also fair to note that such a policy would be in keeping with other Local Authorities across North Wales who are more willing to use their vexatious complainants' policy when dealing with challenging complainants.

- 13.5 Further work will also be completed to try to encourage officers across the Department to contact the Customer Care Officer to share any to share any compliments or positive comments they receive. There is a feeling at the moment that officers do not find it appropriate to share some compliments received, but the Customer Care Officer is keen to change this.

APPENDIX 1 - EXAMPLES OF COMPLAINTS AND OBSERVATIONS DURING 2018/2019

Ref	Short Description	Stage	Team	Response	Lessons to be learnt	Complaint Upheld / Not Upheld
GC/4644-18	A Mother contacted eager to make a complaint against a Social Worker specifically in regards to contact arrangements, lack of communication and restrictions imposed on her that she believed to be unfair. The mother felt that she was being excluded by the Department because of her children as she felt that she wasn't receiving enough updates.	Stage 1	Arfon Children's Team 2	The Mother decided not to continue with the complaint before the Team Manager had an opportunity to discuss her complaint further. Therefore the complaint was closed.	No specific lessons to be learnt as the complaint was retracted before a full investigation was undertaken.	It is not possible to state whether this complaint was upheld or not as the Mother decided not to continue with the complaint for the time being.
GC/4646-18	A complaint was received by a Service User open to the 16 Plus Team which included 23 matters to do with his time spent in foster care. Many of the issues raised bridged several periods of time living with foster carers, as well as several different services within the Children's Department.	Stage 1	16 Plus Team	A thorough and comprehensive investigation was undertaken by the Team Manager and Senior Manager to all the matters raised in the complaint, and a separate response was given to every one of the 23 matters raised. The Service User was not eager to meet to discuss his complaint, therefore a response letter was sent to him.	No specific lessons to be learnt as a result of this complaint, however, the importance of detailed records and an evidence trail is emphasised.	This complaint was not upheld, and the evidence collected whilst investigating the complaint confirmed this. However, the Service User was offered the opportunity for his complaint to be investigated under Stage 2 of the Statutory Complaints Procedure; this offer was declined.
GC/4659-18	A Mother made a complaint against a Social Worker who had recently completed an initial assessment on her family's situation. The Mother was unhappy with the contents and outcome of the assessment. In	Stage 1	Meirionnydd Children's Team	The Team Manager tried to contact the Mother several times to discuss her complaint further according to the statutory complaints procedure. However, the Mother attended the scheduled Core Group meeting	No lessons to be learnt as the Social Worker had acted appropriately.	This complaint was not upheld as there was no basis for the complaint as the Social Worker had acted appropriately. The Mother was unhappy with the correct procedure followed

	addition to this, the Mother was unhappy that report had been sent to her home addressed to her and her daughter as the Mother did not want her daughter to be included in the process to avoid causing her additional stress. As a result, the Mother stated that she would not attend an arranged Core Group.			and following further discussions at that meeting the Mother stated that she was happy to continue working with the Worker and did not wish to continue with the complaint. Therefore, the complaint was closed.		by the Social Worker and therefore was entitled to complain.
GC/4692-18	A Mother sent an e-mail to the Derwen Service to make a complaint about the experience she had had with the Service to date. In particular, the Mother was eager to complain about the failure of a worker to contact her back, and that she had subsequently tried to follow-up further steps herself, which caused great confusion to her and her family. The Mother felt let down by Service because of this.	Stage 1	Derwen	The Service Manager tried to contact the Mother in order to confirm her complaint, and subsequently arrange a meeting to try and resolve the complaint. Unfortunately, the Service Manager did not receive a response to these proposals, so it was decided to close the complaint for the time being.	Communication is vital in the day-to-day management of cases, particularly in complex cases where the family is keen to receive specific responses about the service they receive from the Department.	It is difficult to come to a definite conclusion as to whether or not this complaint was upheld. The Mother was given an initial response to her concerns, but the proposals to further discuss the complaint were not accepted in order to reach a firm conclusion.
GC/04735-18	A Mother contacted to state her frustration with the support she had been receiving from the Department in previous months. The Mother also believed that she was being treated unfairly as there had not been any obvious developments in her children's cases in recent months even	Stage 1	Meirionnydd Children's Team	The Senior Operational Manager had a telephone discussion with the Mother in order to confirm her complaint. Following the discussion, the Senior Operational Manager decided that a further investigation was required. Following a further investigation, a	There is a need to ensure that the Department communicates clearly and in a timely manner, particularly in situations where a Worker is away	This complaint was upheld.

	though she had achieved what had been asked of her. The Mother was also annoyed with the Social Worker as she wanted additional support when attending contact sessions with her children.			full response was provided to the Mother together with an apology that matters relating to her children's case had slipped due to her Social Worker being ill. The case was allocated to a new Worker for the time being, and a plan was put in place for the new Worker to further discuss the issues raised following the complaint with the mother.	from work due to illness. There is also a need to ensure that decisions are clearly explained to the parent and that they understand those decisions.	
GC/04758-18	A Mother stated during a Case Conference that she was unhappy with her Social Worker for several different reasons. These reasons were later confirmed during a telephone conversation with the Customer Care Officer. Specifically, the Mother felt that the way the Social Worker treated her was unacceptable as he was pressurising her and also telling her one thing and making promises, but would then completely contradict this during conferences. The Mother felt that she would no longer be able to work with the Social Worker, and she was eager for her case to be allocated to a new worker.	Stage 1	Dwyfor Children's Team	The Senior Operational Manager had a telephone discussion with the Mother in order to confirm her complaint. Due to the nature of the complaint, the Senior Operational Manager was eager for the complaint to be escalated to Stage 2 of the Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure. However, following discussing this with the Mother, she decided that she was not keen for her complaint to be investigated further under Stage 1 or Stage 2. Therefore, it was decided to close the complaint.	It was not possible to investigate this complaint fully as the Mother stated that she did not want to continue with the complaints process.	It was not possible to confirm whether or not this complaint was upheld or not as the Mother was not keen for the complaint to be investigated further.
GC/04967-18	A Grandfather made a complaint as he was of the opinion that personal information about his past had been shared by the	Stage 1	Derwen	The Team Manager conducted a thorough investigation into this complaint and discussed the complaint with the complainant,	No specific lessons to be learnt regarding the data protection	This complaint was not upheld as there was a need for the Social Worker to share the information about

	Social Worker without his permission.			received legal advice regarding the General Data Protection Regulation and then provided a response to the complainant explaining the reasons why it was correct for the Social Worker to share the information about him.	issues. However, there is a need to ensure that sensitive issues are fully communicated and that the individuals concerned understand the next steps.	the Grandfather due to child protection matters.
GC/05017-18	An individual who had been in care in the past made a complaint as he believed that he had not received a Leaving Care Grant. The complainant had previously contacted the Department in 2017 about this matter, however he felt that he had not received a sufficient response to his enquiry about the Leaving Care Grant.	Stage 1	16 Plus Team	The Team Manager contacted the complainant to discuss his complaint and to establish exactly what his complaint was about. Following an investigation, it was discovered that the complainant had received the Leaving Care Grant that was owed to him, but no explanation had been given to the complainant that the money given to him for the purchase of goods a few years previously had in fact been taken from the Leaving Care Grant. The Team Manager was able to reach an agreement with the complainant that he would receive a further payment as this had not been adequately explained to him in the past.	Need to better communicate decisions and processes to care leavers specifically regarding the funding they receive from the Department.	This complaint was not upheld as the individual had received the money due to him, however this was not adequately explained to him at the time.
GC/05058-18	A Grandfather of two children who are currently open to the Department made a complaint on behalf of his daughter (the children's mother) about several	Stage 1	Dwyfor Children's Team and Derwen	This was a complex complaint as 12 separate complaints needed to be investigated as part of the complaint which spanned more than one team and service within	There are no specific lessons for the Department to learn from this complaint. This	The issues raised in this complaint were unfounded and the evidence considered proved this. Therefore this complaint

	different matters to do with the support she as a mother had received from the Department in addition to the behaviour of a Social Worker unrelated to the children's case. The complaint was composed on 12 individual complaints.			<p>the Department. An investigation was conducted into the complaints and a thorough written response was prepared by a Senior Manager in response to 10 of the 12 complaints submitted. No further communication was received from the complainant following the response letter.</p> <p>One of the complaints was resolved verbally during a discussion between the Social Worker and the complainant.</p> <p>The specific complaint against a Social Worker was investigated by another Senior Manager and a full written response was given to this complaint.</p>	<p>complaint was complex and it appeared that several parties were dissatisfied following decisions made by the Court, there was also a lot of tension between the family and the Department at the time.</p> <p>In relation to the complaint against a Social Worker, there are no lessons to be learned as this complaint could be interpreted as malicious against that Worker.</p>	<p>was not upheld. Unfortunately this complex complaint took up a lot of Officers' time and resources to investigate, and in the end it was of no benefit to the family's relationship with the Department.</p> <p>There was also no basis for the complaint against the Social Worker. A full investigation was undertaken in order to establish the facts, and it became apparent that this was a malicious unfounded complaint.</p>
GC/05145-18	A Mother made a complaint about a Flying Start Worker, specifically about her behaviour outside of the work place. The Mother was of the opinion that the Worker had behaved inappropriately towards her when they saw each other in a shop.	Stage 1	Flying Start	An investigation was carried out by the relevant Manager and internal arrangements were put in place. A letter was sent in response to the complainant explaining that, and the complainant has accepted that we cannot share more information about what will happen next.	No specific lessons for the Department to learn about this complaint as it relates to an employee's behaviour outside the workplace.	It is difficult to come to a definite conclusion as to whether or not this complaint was upheld or not on the fact that this was the word of one person against another. However, the Mother was informed that internal procedures would be followed following her complaint.

GC/05167-18	A complaint was made by a Grandmother about a ruling made during a court case to remove her granddaughter from her care. The complainant was also dissatisfied with the support that had been given to her and her Family by the Department when her granddaughter was still in her care before she was placed in foster care.	Stage 1	Arfon Children's Team 2	<p>A full investigation was carried out by the relevant Team Manager into all matters raised by the complainant. A written response was sent to the complainant.</p> <p>The Grandmother contacted the Customer Care Officer to state that she was not satisfied with the response to the complaint. A further letter was sent to the complainant asking her to confirm why she was not happy with the response in order to investigate further. No further correspondence was received, so the complaint was closed.</p>	<p>There are no specific lessons for the Department to learn from this complaint as sufficient support had been given to the family and sufficient information was also shared with the Grandmother's solicitor during the court case.</p>	<p>This complaint was not upheld as there was no basis for this complaint against the decision of the Court to remove the granddaughter from the Grandmother's care, and there was sufficient evidence to support the decision.</p> <p>The complaint about the lack of support provided to the Grandmother when her granddaughter was in her care was also not upheld, and, once again, there was evidence that the Department had adequately supported the family.</p>
GC/05175-18	A Mother wished to make a complaint about a number of matters about her daughter's case. The complaint was specifically about how Workers from the Out of Hours Team had treated her family during periods of crisis.	Stage 1	Out of Hours Team	The Team Manager conducted a full investigation into the complaints made against the Out of Hours Team Workers. The investigation found that there were inconsistencies in the information presented by the Mother in her complaint compared to the records kept on her daughter's case file. As a result, the response sought to correct these inconsistencies together with reassure the mother that the Team sought to act in her daughter's	<p>There were no specific lessons to be learnt from this complaint as it related to tensions between the family and the Department about the decisions made in this very complex case.</p>	<p>This complaint was not upheld as the information presented by the Mother in her complaint was inconsistent with the information recorded on her daughter's file. A full investigation was carried out and clear evidence showed that there was no basis for the complaints made against the Social Workers.</p>

				best interests during times of crisis with the information available to them.		
GC/05252-18	A Father made a complaint against the Children's Referral Team as he believed that the team were not taking his concerns about his children seriously. The Father had contacted the team several times over a number of months to share his concerns about the care his children were receiving from their mother.	Stage 1	Children's Referral Team	<p>A meeting was arranged between the Senior Manager and the Father to discuss his complaint further. During this meeting the father re-discussed and emphasised his reasons for making a complaint and that he was concerned about the safety of his children. However, following this meeting, a full investigation was undertaken, and a letter was sent to the Father by the Senior Manager noting that the Department did not agree with his complaint and that there was no basis for the complaint as full assessments had been carried out when he shared his concerns and that the Department was of the opinion that the children were not at risk.</p> <p>The Senior Manager tried to reassure the Father that the Department had taken his concerns about its children seriously during the meeting and the response letter sent. He was also referred on to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales if he was dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint</p>	There were no specific lessons for the Department to learn from this complaint as the Children's Referral Team had followed a protocol appropriately.	This complaint was not upheld; this was explained fully to the complainant during the meeting and also in the response letter. The Service followed a protocol when the Father shared his concerns with the Children's Referral Team, and several assessments were carried out. There was no concern about the care the children received from their Mother.

				investigation.		
GC/05255-18	A Mum contacted the Senior Operational Manager stating that she was keen to make a complaint against her daughter's Social Worker as she felt she was not receiving enough updates or general information about her daughter's case.	Stage 1	Arfon Children's Team 2	The Mother contacted the Senior Operational Manager and the complaint was then passed to the Customer Care Officer to make further inquiries. Several attempts were made to contact the Mother to discuss the complaint further and a letter was sent asking to her to contact the Customer Care Officer directly. No further correspondence or contact was received from the complainant and therefore the complaint was closed.	There were no lessons to learn as there was no further contact between the complainant and the Customer Care Officer in order to investigate the complaint further.	It was not possible to confirm whether this complaint was upheld or not, however, it is important to note that regular updates are given to the Mother about her daughter's case.
GC/05385-18	A Mother contacted a Team Manager to raise concerns about the behaviour of her new Social Worker at a meeting and then during a visit to her home. The Mother was of the opinion that the Worker had asked inappropriate questions during the visit and was also very critical of her.	Stage 1	Derwen	The Customer Care Officer met with the Mother to discuss her complaint, and she confirmed that she wanted her complaint to be investigated under Stage 1 of the Complaints Procedure. A comprehensive investigation was undertaken by the relevant Senior Manager, meetings were held with the Worker in question and the complaint was discussed further with the Mother over the telephone. A letter was written to the mother confirming the details of the investigation as discussed on the telephone. The mother was happy with the outcome of the investigation and the complaint was closed.	Specific lessons to be learned relating to the training of Social Workers specifically when transferring from one service to another within the Department.	Following a full investigation, it was agreed that the Mother's complaint about the Social Worker's behaviour was upheld. This was confirmed to the Mother and she was satisfied with the response to the complaint and also that the case had been transferred to another Worker.

GC/05445-18	A Father wished to make a complaint against his daughter's Social Worker. The Father was dissatisfied with a statement that the Worker had made to the court and was of the opinion that this statement was incorrect.	Stage 1	Arfon Children's Team 2	<p>The Team Manager offered to meet with the Father to discuss his concerns further as well as providing him with an update on his daughter's case. As this case was extremely complex, the Team Manager was of the opinion that it would not be possible or appropriate to respond to the father's concerns by letter only. However, the father refused to meet with the Team Manager.</p> <p>A number of letters were sent over a period of several months, and all the issues raised by the Father were responded to. The statement made by the Social Worker in court was not considered to be incorrect, as the Father believed, and this was expressed to him.</p> <p>There were also concerns about this complaint in particular if the father himself was making the complaint, or if he was sending the letters of complaint on behalf of someone else.</p>	There were no lessons to be learnt from this complaint as the Social Worker's statement to Court was correct.	This complaint was not upheld as the statement made by the Social Worker during the court case was correct.
GC/05596-18	A Mother contacted to make a complaint against a Social Worker. There were two parts to her complaint; the Worker's general conduct towards her especially when carrying out	Stage 1	Dwyfor Children's Team	A thorough investigation was undertaken by the Team Manager and discussions were had with the complainant, the Social Worker and the Health Visitor who had attended the Core Group meeting.	It is important to ensure that the Department communicates effectively with parents and	The first part of the complaint about the conversation between the Social Worker and the Mother during an unannounced visit was

	unannounced visits, and then the conduct of the Worker during a Core Group meeting where her Health Visitor was also present. The mother thought that the Worker had acted unprofessionally towards her.			The case was transferred to a new Social Worker. A letter was written to the complainant confirming the outcome of the investigation into the complaint.	ensure that they have a full understanding of our rationale for making decisions and that they are regularly updated. It is also important that Workers are aware of their influence in a professional role and the impact their involvement has on the families with whom they come into contact.	partially upheld. It was not possible to come to a definite conclusion as this was the word of one person against the other. The second part of the complaint about the Social Worker's behaviour during a Core Group meeting was upheld.
GC/05725-18	A Grandmother contacted the Customer Care Officer eager to make a complaint against her granddaughter's Social Worker and the Team Manager as she felt that she had been treated unfairly following a viability assessment, and she was keen to receive an apology. She also felt that they had made incorrect statements during the court case	Stage 1	Arfon Children's Team 1	A full investigation was carried out by the Senior Manager into the issues raised by the Grandmother. She was offered a further explanation by the Senior Manager as to why her viability assessment was not successful and that the Court had made a decision following this assessment. The Grandmother had also received appropriate advice and support from the Department and had also advised her to discuss further with her legal representative during the court	There are no specific lessons for the Department to learn from this complaint as the decisions about the care of her granddaughter were made by the Court following completion of a viability assessment.	This complaint was not upheld and there was no basis for the complaint as the decisions had been made by the Court, in addition to the fact that the Senior Manager found an inconsistency in the information presented by the Grandmother about the court case.

				<p>case.</p> <p>The Senior Manager also found that there was inconsistency in the information presented by the Grandmother as part of her complaint, specifically about the court case and about the statements made by the Team Manager and the Social Worker.</p>		
GC/05806-18	<p>A letter was received from Mother stating a complaint against the Department about the lack of support she had received after she raised concerns about her daughter's behaviour that caused her great concern when was in her care. The Mother also disagreed with the decision to remove her children from her care because of her ability as a parent, and the subsequent contact arrangements in place.</p>	Stage 1	Arfon Children's Team 2	<p>The relevant Senior Manager met with the Mother to discuss her complaint further. During this meeting the Senior Manager discussed the Mother's complaint along with other operational issues.</p> <p>Following a detailed investigation, the Senior Manager was of the opinion that the Mother had received adequate support from the Department and that decisions regarding the care of the children and contact arrangements had been made by a Judge during court proceedings following receipt of evidence from the Department.</p> <p>A number of the mother's concerns also related to the alleged behaviors of a specific Social Worker who no longer</p>	<p>No specific lessons for the Department to learn from this complaint as several aspects of the complaint related to the alleged behaviours of a Social Worker which were lower than that expected of a Social Worker.</p>	<p>It is difficult to ascertain whether this complaint was upheld or not. There was certainly no basis for the operational issues raised as appropriate support had been given to the Mother. In addition, decisions about the care of the children and the contact arrangements had been made by a Judge during the court proceedings. However, the complaints made against the alleged behaviour of the Social Worker are likely to have grounds, and are therefore upheld.</p>

				works for Gwynedd Council. It was explained to the Mother that the Department was investigating her concerns and that internal arrangements were now in place.		
GC/06035-18	A Mother wanted to make a complaint about the advice she was receiving from Social Workers, specifically about issues relating to contact with her children. The Mother had received contradicting advice from three Social Workers working on her children's cases, but she was not sure whose advice was correct.	Stage 1	Dwyfor Children's Team and Derwen	<p>During the investigation into the Mother's complaint, it became apparent that the court case relating to the care of her children was still ongoing. As a result, in accordance with the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014, it was not possible to investigate the complaint further. This was explained fully to Mother, and she was informed that she was entitled to resubmit her complaint within six months of the conclusion of the court case.</p> <p>The relevant Team Manager discussed her concerns about contacting her children separately.</p>	No lessons to be learnt as the complaint was not fully investigated as a result of the ongoing court case.	It was not possible to confirm whether this complaint was upheld or not as it was not possible to investigate the complaint further de to the ongoing court case.
GC/06085-18	A Father contacted eager to make a complaint about the terms of the Flying Start Childcare claim. The Father had been told that his son, who would be turning two during the Easter school holidays would be eligible to start free Flying Start Childcare sessions, and would receive individual support from a Speech and Language Therapist	Stage 1	Flying Start	A full investigation was undertaken and it was discovered that the term dates for the Flying Start Childcare claim were different to the school term dates; the Flying Start summer term had started several weeks before the school Easter holiday period. As a result, children who had celebrated their birthdays over the school holidays	There is a need to ensure that information about the dates of the Flying Start Childcare claim is shared accurately with families and that all officers of the Flying Start area Teams are	This complaint was partially upheld as incorrect information about the Flying Start term dates was shared with the Father. However, it is important to note that the Flying Start term dates are set by Welsh Government, and not Gwynedd Council, therefore the Service had in

	after the Easter school holidays. However, he had been informed later that he would not be eligible to attend the sessions until the new term, which was the Autumn term after the summer holidays.			<p>would not be eligible to attend the free sessions until the next new term, namely the Autumn term.</p> <p>The relevant Manager contacted the Father to discuss his complaint further. Following their discussion, it was arranged that his son would attend two early intervention sessions a week for free during the current term before the summer holidays and also that the Flying Start Speech and Language Therapist would offer him a home session. The Father was happy with this solution.</p>	aware of the correct dates.	fact followed the correct eligibility criteria when confirming that his son would not qualify for the free Flying Start Childcare sessions until the next school term, which was in fact the autumn term.
GC/06115-18	A Mum contacted the Customer Care Officer eager to make a complaint about a number of issues relating to her children's case, specifically matters relating to her Social Worker. The Mother was not happy with the way her children's cases were managed, and was keen to get answers about certain issues.	Stage 1	Dwyfor Children's Team	The relevant Senior Manager met with the Mother to discuss her complaint further, but during the meeting it became apparent that the court case relating to safeguarding her children was still ongoing. Consequently, in accordance with the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014, it was not possible to investigate the complaint further. This was fully explained to Mother, and it was explained that she could re-submit her complaint within six months of the conclusion of the court case.	No lessons to be learnt as the complaint was not fully investigated as a result of the ongoing court case.	It was not possible to confirm whether this complaint was upheld or not as it was not possible to investigate the complaint further due to the ongoing court case.
GC/06139-18	A Mother contacted the Team Manager keen to make a	Stage 1	Dwyfor Children's Team	A full investigation was undertaken by the relevant Team Manager,	No specific lessons for the Department to	It is difficult to come to a definitive conclusion as to

	complaint against a Social Worker's approach and behaviour during a visit to her home. The Mother felt that the Worker had behaved inappropriately and made disrespectful comments. The Mother wanted to have a new Social Worker.			and it became apparent that it was very difficult to come to a firm conclusion about this complaint as it was the word of one person against the other. It was decided that the case would be transferred to a new Social Worker. The Mother was written to about the outcome of the investigation and she was provided with a full apology. However, the Mother was not satisfied with the response given. Arrangements were made for the Senior Manager to look at this complaint and discuss further with the Mother. The Senior Manager tried to phone the mother several times, but unfortunately there was no response and therefore the complaint was closed.	learn from this complaint, but it is important that Social Workers are aware of their influence in a professional role and the impact their involvement has on the families they come into contact with.	whether this complaint was upheld or not as this was one person's word against the other. However, it is important to recognize the complainant's feelings and that they have a right to make a complaint if they have had a negative experience when dealing with the Department.
GC/06187-18	Parents contacted the Short Breaks Team Manager to say that they were unhappy that their son had been sent home from Hafan y Sêr over the weekend because he was ill. The parents were of the opinion that their son was not ill and should have stayed at Hafan y Sêr for the whole period of his stay.	Stage 1	Hafan y Sêr	<p>A full investigation was carried out by the Hafan y Sêr Manager to the complaint, and the Manager telephoned the parents to discuss further. The parents were very unhappy with the explanation given that guidelines note that a child must be sent home if they are ill.</p> <p>It was agreed that their son would be able to come for an additional stay later in the month.</p>	There is a need to ensure that discussions and negotiations take place with parents over the telephone before coming to any decision that a child is ill enough to be sent home.	On the whole, this complaint was not upheld as the members of staff had followed the correct protocol when a child is taken ill during their stay at Hafan y Sêr.

APPENDIX 2 - EXAMPLES OF STAGE 2 COMPLAINTS DURING 2018/2019

Ref	Short Description	Stage	Team	Response	Lessons to be learnt	Complaint Upheld / Not Upheld
GC/04875-18	<p>A Stage 1 complaint was made by a Grandmother in 2017 as she was very dissatisfied with the attitude of her granddaughter's Social Worker. She felt that the Social Worker's attitude was terrible, he was liar, played tricks and was a bully. Her granddaughter was afraid of him. Following the completion of the Stage 1 investigation, a new worker began working with the family.</p> <p>However, the Grandmother contacted the Customer Care Officer during Quarter 1 2018/2019 noting that she was dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response and that she was eager for the complaint to be re-investigated by an independent person to the Council.</p>	Stage 2	Dwyfor Children's Team	<p>An Independent Investigator and Independent Person were appointed to investigate the complaint. The investigation looked at six specific complaints relating to the operation and conduct of the Social Worker.</p> <p>The Investigator was of the opinion that it was not possible to reach a firm conclusion on whether four of the complaints were upheld or not, and that two of the other complaints were partially upheld. This was due to the fact that many of the complainant's complaints related to information shared with the Grandmother by a third party and that the Social Worker then stated that this information was not correct; it was word of one person against the other. As a result, it was not possible for the Investigator to come to a definitive conclusion as to what exactly had been said and done which provided the basis for the grandmother's complaints.</p> <p>The investigation was completed within the 25 working day timeframe as required by the Act.</p>	<p>In regards to the complaints which were upheld by the Investigator, it is important that decisions are clearly communicated, particularly in complex situations such as this where there were several contributing parties.</p> <p>There were no specific lessons for the Department to learn in terms of complaints where it was not possible to reach a firm conclusion.</p>	<p>Following the conclusion investigation, the Investigator decided that it was not possible to reach a conclusion on whether four of the complaints were upheld or not, and that two of the complaints had were partially upheld.</p> <p>When considering both complaints which were upheld, the Investigator was of the opinion that the Social Worker had not adequately explained issues to the family in relation to contact arrangements. This had caused considerable confusion and also resentment between the family and the Social Worker.</p>

				<p>Following the completion of investigation and sending the response to the complainant, the Senior Manager for Safeguarding and Quality and the Customer Care Officer met with the complainant to explain the contents of the Stage 2 Investigation Report and discuss any concerns she had about its contents. A further response to these concerns was sent to the complainant.</p>		
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APPENDIX 3 – EXAMPLES OF COMPLAINT TRANSFERRED TO THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN DURING 2018/2019

Ref	Short Description	Response	Lessons to be learnt
GC/3257-15	<p>A complaint was originally received from parents during Quarter 1 of 2016/2017 following a long period of communication with the Department. This original complaint related to several issues including the provision of the service offered to their 15 year old son and the behaviour and attitude of the Social Workers who had been working with the family.</p> <p>The complainants requested that their complaint be escalated immediately to be investigated under Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure. However, as the complaint had not yet been investigated under Stage 1 arrangements, the Department was of the opinion that it would not be appropriate to escalate the complaint for the time being. Following a further period of communication over e-mail, the complainants agreed for their complaint to be investigated under Stage 1 and confirmed their complaint and their desired outcomes. A full response was provided during Quarter 2 of 2016/2017, however, the complainants were still eager for the complaint to be escalated to Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure. This further request was carefully considered, but as the complainants' desired outcomes for their nine complaints were mainly about internal disciplinary issues, the Department remained of the same view that it would not be</p>	<p>Following the Ombudsman's decision to reverse their first judgment not to investigate the complainants' complaint, the Ombudsman decided to investigate further. The Department provided a copy of the full complaints file and answered the Ombudsman's further questions. A response was received from the Ombudsman to the complainants' complaint against the Department during Quarter 1 of 2018/2019; over a year since its investigation began.</p> <p>The Ombudsman upheld the complainants' complaint against the Department stating that the Department had failed to properly assess the complainants' son's needs and therefore he was not receiving adequate services to support his additional needs. The Ombudsman was also of the opinion that the Department had implemented the Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure incorrectly, and consequently the decision not to escalate the complainants' complaint to Stage 2 was unreasonable and incorrect.</p> <p>The Ombudsman made six recommendations to the Department, including providing the complainants with an apology and financial compensation and also to provide the complainants' son with a comprehensive assessment of his needs to ensure that</p>	<p>There are several lessons for the Department to learn from the Ombudsman's investigation, and they are noted below:</p> <p>1. Derwen's Access Criteria</p> <p>One aspect of the complainants' complaint related to the fact that their son was not eligible for support from the Derwen Service. The Service has recognised that there were gaps in the services available, particularly for individuals with Autism. The Derwen Management Team has now merged with the Anglesey Management Team, and this new Management Team has recently reviewed the access policy. In addition to this, the Neuroscience Service is now leading on the provision of services and signposting children and young people with autism to services and support available beyond Derwen Services. The North Wales Autism Service is now also in existence and operates across North Wales.</p> <p>Certainly, there is a lesson to be learnt in terms of promoting the use of new services available to those with autism, and especially to children and young people who do not meet the eligibility criteria for services from Derwen, to</p>

	<p>appropriate to escalate the complaint to Stage 2.</p> <p>It is also fair to note that there was a substantial amount of correspondence between the complainants and the Department discussing these matters at the time. A number of Officers, Managers, Senior Managers and the Head of the Children and Family Support Department endeavoured tirelessly to try to resolve the complainants' original complaint. However, due to the fact that all the contact between the complainants and the Department to discuss their concerns took place over e-mail, and the complainants' reluctance to accept the Department's invitations to a meeting to discuss their complaint, the situation became complicated for all involved.</p> <p>During Quarter 3 of 2016/2017 the complainants contacted the Ombudsman to make a complaint about the Department's decision not to escalate their complaint to Stage 2 as they considered that their complaint had not been correctly processed. The Ombudsman contacted the Department and requested all relevant evidence that would assist them in their investigation. A response was received shortly after this from the Ombudsman stating that they would not investigate the complaint further as they were of the opinion that the Department had correctly implemented the Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure in relation to</p>	<p>adequate measures were put in place to meet any needs identified by the assessment.</p>	<p>ensure that they are receiving support from services beyond Gwynedd Council. There is also a need to raise awareness of these services across the Department, not only within the Derwen Service.</p> <p>2. Autism Training</p> <p>It is not a requirement for Social Workers to have any expertise in autism. Neither are they required to undertake autism training. Autism training is currently available to Derwen Service staff, but it is not open to the rest of the Department's officers. There was a strong view in the Ombudsman's final report that there was a need to raise awareness amongst all of the Department's remaining officers, and therefore another lesson would be to ensure that autism training is available to all within the Children and Supporting Families Department.</p> <p>3. Conduct discussions with complainants when processing complaints under the Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure</p> <p>There were several hindrances during this complaint process when trying to discuss the complaint with the complainants, particularly as all discussions about the complaint took place over e-mail. In cases of complaints that have the potential of becoming</p>
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	<p>not escalating the complaint to Stage 2 and that a comprehensive response had been provided to complainants in accordance with Stage 1 arrangements</p> <p>However, during Quarter 4 of 2016/2017, the Department received further correspondence from the Ombudsman requesting that the complainant's complaint be escalated to Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure. The Department's position had not changed, and the Ombudsman therefore decided to revoke their original decision and conduct a further investigation into the complainants' complaint against the Department.</p>		<p>complicated, it is beneficial to the Department and to the complainants that a meeting be held to discuss matters face-to-face. This can also contribute to building effective relationships between all those involved in the complaint in order to move forward to work together for the benefit of the children and young people of Gwynedd.</p> <p>4. The Voice of the Child / Young Person</p> <p>When the Department receives a complaint from parents on behalf of their children, it is important that, if appropriate, the child or young person concerned has the opportunity to contribute fully to the complaints process and that their views are fully considered. It is also important to ensure that the child or young person has the option of receiving support from an advocate to support them through the process.</p> <p>5. Complaints Training</p> <p>In their final complaint report, the Ombudsman recommended that all staff within the Children and Family Support Department received training on the Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure. No training has been provided to the Department's officers since the introduction of the Regulations in 2014, and there have been no</p>
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			changes to the Complaints Procedure since then. However, training sessions will be held to ensure that all of the Department's officers are aware of their duties if they identify an individual who wishes to complain.
GC/06099-18	<p>A complainant contacted the Department in February 2019 with a request to re-investigate a complaint which was originally made in late 2016 about events dating back to 2014. A very detailed Stage 1 investigation had been undertaken and concluded in August 2017, and as no further correspondence had been received from the complainant at the time, the Department was of the opinion that the complaint had been closed. However, in February 2019 an e-mail was sent from the complainant stating that he was dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation and the response he had received to his complaint in August 2017. The complainant requested for his complaint to be re-investigated or escalated to Stage 2.</p> <p>The Department carefully considered the complainant's request, but it was determined in accordance with the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 that the complaint would not be re-investigated or escalated to Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure as too much time had passed since the conclusion of the original complaint investigation. The Regulations clearly state that a complaint must be made</p>	<p>The Ombudsman contacted the Department to state that they had received a complaint and that they were considering whether to conduct a full investigation. A request was made for a copy of the entire complaints file dating back to 2016 and any other evidence which may be of use to the Ombudsman's initial investigation. The Department shared all relevant documents and correspondence with the Ombudsman.</p> <p>Following completing their initial investigation and having considered the documentation provided by the Department, the Ombudsman determined that they would not conduct a further investigation of the complainant's complaint as the Ombudsman was of the opinion that the Department had acted in accordance with the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014.</p>	<p>There were no lessons to be learnt from this complaint. The complainant had received a clear instruction at the end of the original complaint investigation about how to contact the Department if he was dissatisfied with the outcome of the original complaint investigation. The Ombudsman also agreed with the Department's position not to re-investigate the complainant's complaint, and as a result no further investigation was undertaken.</p>

	<p>no later than 12 months after the date on which the matter which is the subject of the complaint came to the notice of the complainant, which was in 2016 in this case. Therefore it would not have been reasonable for the Department to conduct a further fair and detailed investigation into the issues dating back to 2014 during 2018/2019.</p> <p>In addition, no correspondence was received from the complainant between the end of the complaint investigation in August 2017 and February 2019. The Department was therefore of the opinion that the complainant had been given sufficient opportunity to contact the Department before February 2019 expressing his dissatisfaction with the outcome of the original investigation into his complaint.</p> <p>After receiving a full response from the Department, the complainant contacted the Ombudsman asking them to investigate his complaint against the Department and also against the Department's decision not to re-investigate his complaint.</p>		
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APPENDIX 4 - EXAMPLES OF APPRECIATION DURING 2018/2019			
Ref	Short Description	Category	Unit / Team
GC/4580-18	Chris Evans, Social Worker received a card from a young person he had been working with for a period. The card thanked him for his work and support.	Gratitude	Dwyfor Children's Team
GC/4680-18	<p>"I am writing to you to say what a fantastic job Julie Bragan [Social Worker] has been doing and continues to do with a child in our care XXXXX.</p> <p>"Julie has formed a fantastic bond with XXXXX which far exceeds her job description, creating a trust and level of relaxed relationship XXXXX has not felt with any Social Worker in the past.</p> <p>"Julie has been exemplary in her support with us in her professionalism and tireless efforts to achieve the best possible outcome in any situation that arises with XXXXX.</p> <p>"We cannot express strongly enough the respect and gratitude we have for Julie and hope she will continue as XXXXX Social Worker as long as he needs her. We have been XXXXX Foster Carers for over five years and Julies support and problem solving has made caring for XXXXX much easier."</p>	Gratitude	Derwen
GC/005KH-18	<p>"I am just writing to let you know that XXXXX, XXXXX, and the children have moved into their new home yesterday-which is a big weight off everybody's shoulders.</p> <p>"The boys have already made friends there, and it was lovely to see them outside playing in the sun all day. They are looking forward to their new school too.</p> <p>"I can't than you enough for helping them get away from here, and giving them that helping hand."</p>	Gratitude	Arfon Children's Team 2
GC/04756-18	Georgina Carty, Social Worker received an afternoon cream tea delivered to the office from a child she had been working with and her Foster Parents.	Gratitude	Meirionnydd Children's Team

GC/04779-18	<p>Email from Sian Wilson, Family Court Advisor Cafcass Cymru:</p> <p>“...I would wish to bring to their attention the good practice of one of their Social Workers, Lyann Owen-Leeds. Throughout the case, Lyann has ensured that I as children’s guardian have been updated as to any significant changes and developments as the case has progressed and she has contacted me to share the outcomes of meetings I have been unable to attend.</p> <p>“The PAM’s assessment Lyann undertook, was comprehensive, balanced and in my opinion, fair. Within the assessment she has highlighted and praised the mother for the many positive changes she has demonstrated in terms of her lifestyle and parenting, but balanced this against areas that remain addressing and which require ongoing support and services from a variety of agencies alongside children’s services. It is my professional opinion that the assessment was analytical and evidenced the need for ongoing support, services and monitoring...</p> <p>“Could you please ensure that my comments are shared with the appropriate managers in Gwynedd Children’s Services to highlight the good practice of Lyann. People, including Children’s Guardian are quick to criticise, or raise concerning practice and it would be nice to know that Lyann is given the credit she deserves.”</p>	Gratitude	Meirionnydd Children’s Team
GC/04988-18	Nia Wyn Jones, Social Worker received a card and gift from a family she had been working with for a period thanking her for her work and support.	Gratitude	Dwyfor Children's Team
GC/05117-18	<p>“...From that moment the Children's Disability Team Derwen were fantastic in offering support in all they areas that we had problems, from sleep to diet to PACT. We had a Family Support Officer and anyone from the team who was involved with his care made themselves available and all we ever had to do was pick up the phone to any of them. After the diagnosis we were offered a social worker through Derwen, Music therapy and a pack explaining Autism and providing details of support groups and contact numbers. Our Social Worker has been great. She regularly visits us and makes referrals for whatever we need. Any professional involved with Derwen always calls us back pretty quickly... No complaints from me really. Can't thank them enough for what they have done.”</p>	Gratitude	Derwen

GC/05216-18	<p>"My son XXXXX is under Derwen we had such a lovely time at Glan Llyn the other weekend thanks to your funding. It was nice to meet up and talk with other parents too. As a way of saying thank you my boys would like to do a sponsored walk to raise some money for Derwen."</p>	Gratitude	Derwen
GC/05245-18	<p>"It's helped loads. I use all the information and tips every day. It's really helpful. My family supporter is the best. Wenna [Aindow, Family Support Officer], thank you so much to her for any help. Best worker ever."</p> <p>Feedback from a parent who had reviewed one-to-one support.</p>	Gratitude	Flying Start
GC/05246-18	<p>"My child has improved in terms of speech and behaviour and has settled very well in school. Thanks to Wenna [Aindow, Family Support Officer] for all her advice and help we would have been lost without her!"</p> <p>Feedback from a parent who had received one-to-one support.</p>	Gratitude	Flying Start
GC/05247-18	<p>"Gives parents the confidence they need to know they are good enough parents and that there is help out there."</p> <p>Feedback from a parent who had received one-to-one support.</p>	Gratitude	Flying Start
GC/05248-18	<p>"It has helped me as a parent finally feel like I am in control. I now have a good relationship with my child and I'm able to have fun with my child. I now know I am a good enough parent"</p> <p>Feedback from a parent who had received one-to-one support.</p>	Gratitude	Flying Start
GC/05249-18	<p>"Family life is much easier after my husband and I completed the course. XXXXX listens more. I find it easier to deal with XXXXX. XXXXX is much happier. The tools I learnt ensure that I don't lose my patients. There's no shouting, throwing, or hitting anymore and no dummy. Lowri [Lloyd Williams, Family Support Officer] has been fantastic and supporting and without any judgement."</p>	Gratitude	Flying Start

	Feedback from a parent who had received one-to-one support.		
GC/05515-18	Georgina Carty, Social Worker received a card and a box of chocolates from a child she had been working with to thank her for her work with his family.	Gratitude	Meirionnydd Children's Team
GC/05527-18	A letter from Jo-Anne Daniels, Director - Communities and Tackling Poverty: "As one of the original seven local authorities working with us to develop and deliver the offer [30 hours Childcare Offer] I wanted to take the opportunity at this point to write to thank you personally for the efforts you have made to successfully deliver the childcare offer across Gwynedd and Anglesey over the past year. I would like to pay particular thanks to Rachel Jones [Gwynedd and Anglesey Strategic Childcare Officer] and team. I do not underestimate the challenges of delivering this complex programme at pace. Local authority colleagues have shown a high level of commitment to the delivery of the offer and, in addition, have been open to supporting other local authorities with their implementation."	Gratitude	Flying Start
GC/05530-18	"We completed at XXXXX today with a Care Order. Judge complimented me [Heidi Rylance, Team Manager] on my assessments and care planning in court. He then asked me to stay behind after and again gave praise for what he considered a difficult case given I had to take over as Social Worker."	Gratitude	Dwyfor Children's Team
GC/05662-18	Georgina Carty, Social Worker received a Christmas present from a Foster Carer to thank her for her support during the year.	Gratitude	Meirionnydd Children's Team
GC/05846-18	Hayley Campbell, Social Worker was twice complemented by a Judge during a court case for preparing a child-centred thorough report.	Gratitude	Arfon Children's Team 2
GC/05866-18	A letter received by Dilwyn Williams, Chief Executive praising Sara Williams, Adoption Social Worker for her work: "We have received exceptional care and support from Ms Sara Gwilym Williams, Adoption Social Worker. Sara has played a key role in our journey to adopting a child, and Sara's support has been invaluable to us as a family during this period... "Sara has a warm and friendly personality and she is a professional and respectful worker. Sara's support has been of great help to us, and we have been carefully	Gratitude	Adoption

	<p>guided through the complex processes of assessment, pairing, introductions and legal by a sensitive and very skilled person.</p> <p>“Sara is intelligent and empathetic and advised and supported us to make difficult decisions. She is completely reliable and punctual, she didn’t miss one appointment with us throughout the four years of support...</p> <p>“Sara was always there to support us, and gave us confidence to continue along the journey when, at times, doubts and uncertainties arose. We are extremely grateful to Sara for her support, and we will forever be thankful to her for her for her invaluable contribution to us as a couple and to our little girl.</p> <p>“The Council is very fortunate to have Sara as a member of staff, and others who are going through the adoption process are very fortunate to have her support.”</p>		
GC/05877-18	<p>Sara Pozzi, Social Worker and Nia Evans, Social Worker were praised by the Court during a court case for their reports and care plans. The parties were also in agreement that their assessments were of an extremely high standard, and that their care plan was very thorough. The fathers also complimented their hard work to ensure the children’s wellbeing whilst in their care.</p>	Gratitude	Arfon Children’s Team 1
GC/06119-18	<p>“Great, touch wood he loves coming here [to Hafan y Sêr] and has fun. We’re not at all worried, he knows you all well and is being well cared for. [The Service] helps me to keep going.”</p> <p>Feedback from a parent who’s child has been staying at Hafan y Sêr for a period of respite.</p>	Gratitude	Hafan y Sêr
GC/06120-18	<p>“[Hafan y Sêr] Gives me a break, and more time with others, and I know she's happy at the same time.”</p> <p>Feedback from a parent who’s child has been staying at Hafan y Sêr for a period of respite.</p>	Gratitude	Hafan y Sêr

GC/06121-18	<p>“XXXXX is delighted, and excites when she hears the name Hafan y Sêr. It’s somewhere different; chill. XXXXX can go out to different places, she has a holiday and I can plan ahead. I can do things with the others, they really appreciate Hafan y Sêr.”</p> <p>Feedback from a parent who’s child has been staying at Hafan y Sêr for a period of respite.</p>	Gratitude	Hafan y Sêr
GC/06122-18	<p>“XXXXX seems to be happy, and feedback would say he’s enjoying. He can do different things that XXXX wouldn’t enjoy. A big help. I can plan short breaks.”</p> <p>Feedback from a parent who’s child has been staying at Hafan y Sêr for a period of respite.</p>	Gratitude	Hafan y Sêr
GC/06123-18	<p>“XXXXX is happy – he doesn’t look at me when he’s leaving. We couldn’t do without it [Hafan y Sêr] – we can have time with XXXXX. We hadn’t realised how much we as parents needed a break – I can completely relax with confidence in the care that he’s receiving.”</p> <p>Feedback from a parent who’s child has been staying at Hafan y Sêr for a period of respite.</p>	Gratitude	Hafan y Sêr
GC/06125-18	<p>“XXXXX is happy, there a difference! XXXXX looks forwards and goes to get his case. There been a big difference in him. I’m confident I can go further now; we’ve been to Liverpool and I’m 100% happy as he’s happy; there were many things we couldn’t do before, shopping, go out for food... it’s hard work and I’m refreshed when he returns.”</p> <p>Feedback from a parent who’s child has been staying at Hafan y Sêr for a period of respite.</p>	Gratitude	Hafan y Sêr
GC/06126-18	<p>“Yes, XXXXX is happy, he loves it. XXXXX has been settling very well and speaks more now... I have no idea how I would cope without it [Hafan y Sêr] by now – it’s a shame that it wasn’t available sooner.”</p>	Gratitude	Hafan y Sêr

	Feedback from a parent who's child has been staying at Hafan y Sêr for a period of respite.		
GC/06127-18	<p>"XXXXX is massively happy 100%, it's his 2nd home. The service is invaluable, worth its weight in gold. I would be lost without the service."</p> <p>Feedback from a parent who's child has been staying at Hafan y Sêr for a period of respite.</p>	Gratitude	Hafan y Sêr
GC/06128-18	<p>"As it's only the second time XXXX has been to Hafan y Sêr, it's new for him but he is happy. When he's there it's the getting used to sleeping over. But we are very happy with the care he has. And staff have been fantastic putting us as parents at ease with the situation and phoning us letting us know how he's doing and the diary is a brilliant idea to let us know what he's been up to in Hafan y Sêr. Thank you to all the staff."</p> <p>Feedback from a parent who's child has been staying at Hafan y Sêr for a period of respite.</p>	Gratitude	Hafan y Sêr
GC/06129-18	<p>"XXXXX and I are very thankful and very happy with everything and all the staff are so kind and thoughtful. I'm happy for my daughter to be in your care. Thank you very much."</p> <p>Feedback from a parent who's child has been staying at Hafan y Sêr for a period of respite.</p>	Gratitude	Hafan y Sêr
GC/06130-18	<p>"My child was very happy when I picked him up and is asking every day to go again. He cannot wait for his next visit. Very very happy with how things went for him. He loves the staff so we as parents feel much happier and cannot wait til his next visit."</p> <p>Feedback from a parent who's child has been staying at Hafan y Sêr for a period of respite.</p>	Gratitude	Hafan y Sêr