

CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 20 JULY 2021

PERFORMANCE MONITORING OF COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

Summary

1. The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel has requested an update on the performance of Stage 2 Children's Social Care complaints completed inside 65 days and Stage 2 Corporate complaints in 25 days.
2. This Report gives an overview of the current position of the Consumer Relations Unit (CRU), together with recent and proposed changes. The plans in place to improve performance are included in this report for Members consideration.
3. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication and the Complaints Manager have been invited to the meeting.

Background

4. The Panel has previously received a detailed report setting out the 3 different representation procedures that Worcestershire County Council (the Council) follows for Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care and Corporate (which includes all other Council services).
5. In addition to these 3 procedures, the Council is also subject to the complaints process of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) service.
6. The Panel also monitors several Performance Indicators in respect of Stage 2 investigations for Corporate and Children's Social Care complaints.

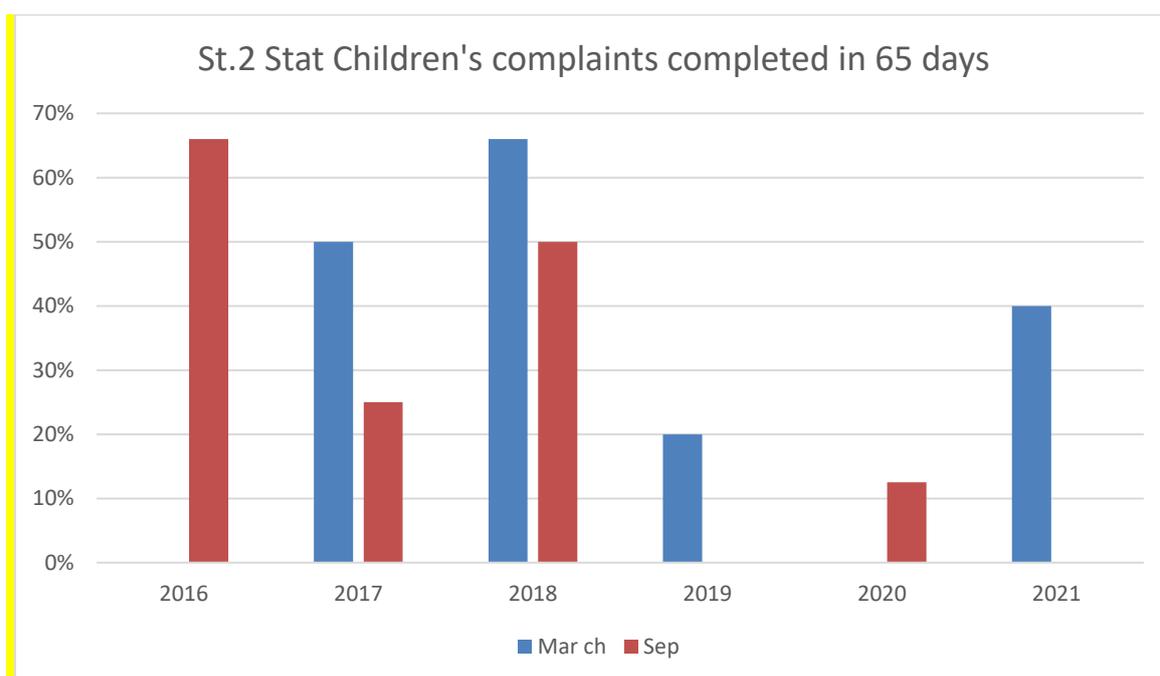
2020/21 Statistics

7. The Annual Reports for Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care and Corporate Representations for 2020/2021 will not be available until the autumn but preliminary analysis of the figures, compared to 2019/20 indicates:
 - a reduction in all categories for Corporate representations (complaints down from 630 to 420, comments down from 64 to 14 and compliments down from 29 to 23)
 - an increase in most of the categories for Statutory Children's Social Care representations (complaints up from 68 to 82 and compliments up from 162 to 176 with comments down from 17 to 8)

- an increase in most of the categories for Statutory Adult Social Care representations (complaints up from 117 to 12 and compliments up from 156 to 197 whilst comments are down from 9 to 8).

Quarterly Performance Monitoring

8. The Panel receives a quarterly performance monitoring report which includes performance indicators (PI's) for Compliments received, Stage 2 Children's Social Care complaints completed inside 65 days and Stage 2 Corporate complaints in 25 days. The PI's relating to the time taken to complete Stage 2 complaint investigations under the Statutory Children's Social Care process and those under the Corporate process where complaints consistently show an underperformance. The figures are as follows:



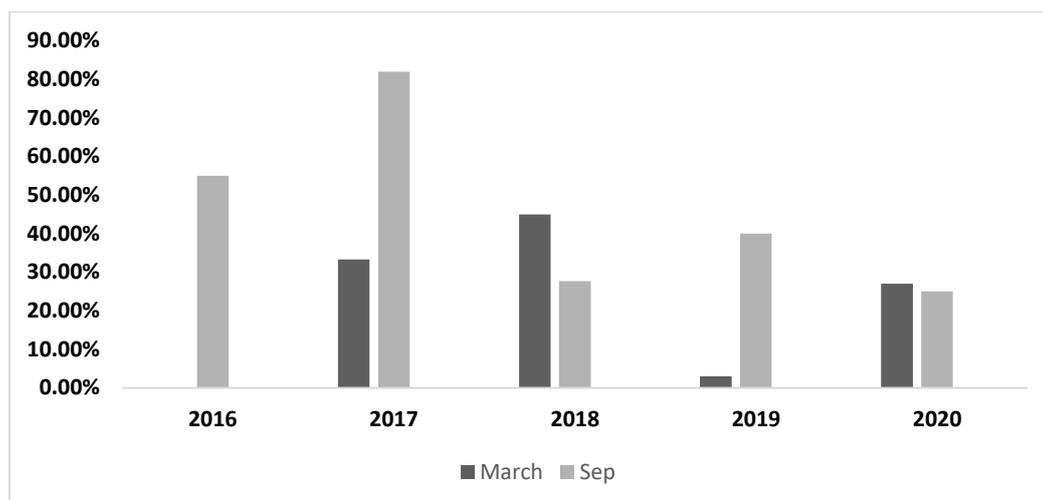
NB. At September 2019 and March 2020 none of the Stage 2 complaints were completed in 65 days.

Stage 2 Statutory Children's Complaints Performance

9. The 65 working days to complete a Stage 2 investigation is set by the legislation. It was acknowledged on introduction that this was a tight timescale and the Council is aware that most authorities struggle to meet it. However, the situation in Worcestershire is improving with 33% of Stage 2 investigations completed in the timescale in the 3rd quarter of 20/21 and 50% in timescale in the 4th quarter of the year.

10. Although the Regulations do specify that a local authority must keep a record of whether there was compliance with the time limits, in practice very few authorities make this widely available. Inquiries show that a few are meeting the timescale 100% but they tend to be those with very few cases – 1 or 2 only a year. Others vary from 57% to 82% with one West Midlands authority not completing any in timescale. The Consumer Relations Unit will continue to seek comparator data on this activity.

Stage 2 Corporate Complaints



11. The 25 working days to complete a Stage 2 investigation is a timescale set by the Council.

12. As the timescale varies between local authorities it makes comparison difficult, but compliance varies between 50% and 86% of those County Council's who have supplied data.

Compliments

13. Compliments are an important element of the representations process; they give the necessary balance to the feedback on service provision and enable good practice to be shared and appreciated. A compliment is logged if it is more than just a thank you, it must identify exceptional service. Therefore, the Directorate may have more examples that they share with their staff. The CRU records all compliments received from external sources and individuals independent of the authority. Compliments are logged and the individual congratulated on their good practice. Social Care service users are particularly encouraged to offer positive feedback, as well as negative. Compliments are less driven by policy decisions and service changes than complaints are; they are almost always prompted by an individual's performance.

14. Over a 6-year period overall corporate compliments continue to decrease. Children's Social Care compliments are steadily increasing, and Adult Social Care compliments have shown a more significant increase.

Action being taken to improve performance

15. At its last meeting, the Panel asked for an Action Plan setting out measures for improving performance in dealing with Stage 2 complaints. This is attached as Appendix 1.

2020/21 Annual Letter from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO)

16. The Ombudsman's Annual Letter for 2020/21 will not be made available to the Council until after this Panel has met and will therefore be reported to a subsequent meeting.

Purpose of the Meeting

17. The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

- Consider the information provided in the report
- Determine any comments the Panel would wish to make to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication
- Agree whether any further Scrutiny is required at this stage.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 - Action Plan setting out measures for improving performance in dealing with Stage 2 complaints.

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Agendas and Minutes of the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 11 March 2021, 24 January 2020 and 10 December 2019 - [weblink to agendas and minutes for the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel](#)

Appendix 1

Action Plan for Improvement of Stage 2 Complaint Investigation Timescales

Action Required	Progress	Result
Increase pool of Independent Investigators and Independent Persons	Advert ran widely in June/early July. Shortlisting completed early July. Arrangements in hand for induction/training session for new investigators and IP's in July/Aug	Approximately 12 additional investigators and IP's recruited to pool
Maternity Cover for CRO (Children's)	Recruitment undertaken in March	Post-holder took up position early May 21 until Feb 22
Direct access to Liquid Logic for Independent Investigators and Independent Persons	Permission granted in June for investigators and IP's to access County Hall for secure file reading	Investigators and IP's now undertaking own file reads at County Hall. In addition, the CRU team have returned, on a rota basis, to work at County Hall, in advance of other staff groups to meet operational demand.
5 working day limit for agreeing interview notes	All investigators instructed to apply automatic 5 working day limit to interview notes in June	Too early to see the impact but it is expected to reduce the time taken to complete investigations
Promote use of Conflict Resolution Meetings	Process agreed with People Directorate as a trial to see what impact they have on reducing the number of complaints that go to a formal investigation	If they prove successful in People Directorate we will actively promote this across other services
Explore benchmarking with other local authorities	We have joined the Local Government Association Inform Corporate Benchmarking Club and have approached West Midlands Complaints Officers Group on sharing data	The LGA Club are currently only benchmarking on the total number of complaints received but are actively considering expanding the fields. 12 Local Authorities are active in the West Midlands Group. Completion of Children's Statutory Stage 2 complaints average between 37 and 148 working days. Corporate Stage 2 complaints average between 24 and 49 working days.
Develop complaints tracker for non-social care WCF complaints	Tracker developed and made available on shared drive	Tracker has been in use since April