



**Annual Report
2015/16**

People Directorate

Children's Social Care Services Comments, Compliments & Complaints

**COMMENTS
& COMPLAINTS**

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Local Authorities are required by law (Children Act 1989) to have a system for receiving representations made by or on behalf of children who use the social care services they provide or commission. These include: social work services, residential care, fostering, adoption and the provision of support to families, children with disabilities and young people in trouble with the law.

Representations are defined as comments, compliments and complaints.

On 1 September 2006, changes were made to the Local Authority Social Services Complaints Regulations (1990) as a result of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003. These changes aimed to improve the speed of response to representations, to enhance the level of independence in judgements made at Stages 2 and 3 of the procedure and to improve access to and learning from the representations process. The changes also required Local Authorities to appoint a Complaints Manager to oversee all aspects of the procedure.

Some complaints received do not meet the criteria to be dealt with under the statutory procedure. When this is the case, these are registered under the City Council's corporate complaints procedure. The arrangements for handling these complaints are different from the statutory process in terms of timescales and the independence of the people who investigate and review the complaints.

The People Directorate has a nominated officer assigned to the management of representations from children and others who present feedback on Children's Social Care Services.

The purpose of the comments, compliments and complaints system is to ensure that:

- The views and experiences of people who use services are heard.
- Positive feedback is used to develop services and acknowledge good practice.
- Things that have gone wrong are put right.
- The organisation learns from both positive and negative feedback.
- The organisation sustains its customer focus.

As part of the Directorate's commitment to openness, quality assurance, service development and listening and learning from service users, this report provides summary information from comments, compliments and complaints received under the statutory procedures in relation to Children's Social Care Services, during the period 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016.

Particular reference is made to:

- *The range of representations received and responses to them.*
- *Specific trends and issues that emerged in the reporting period.*

SECTION 2: SUMMARY

During the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016, Children's Social Care Services dealt with **7,987** referrals, this represents a substantial decrease from the previous year (**8,226**). However, at 31 March 2016, Children's Social Care were providing services to **3,645** children and young people, a **6% decrease** when compared to **3,879** at the end of the previous year.

The total number of complaints received about Children's Social Care Services in 2015/16 was 133, an increase of 23% from 102 in 2014/15. 68 compliments were received in the year compared with 66 in 2014/15.

A small number of complaints (17) were from children and young people themselves or from an advocate, the remainder were from adults. There has been an increase of children and young people using an advocate compared to last year (11).

Two main themes could be identified as arising from the complaints by and on behalf of users in 2015/16.

- *Issues regarding poor communication with users.*
- *Concerns about standards of service provided.*

Themes from compliments were predominantly around the good standard of practice received from individual social workers and the overall standard of service received from teams.

SECTION 3: RESPONDING TO FEEDBACK

Comments, compliments and complaints can tell us a great deal about the service users' experiences of service delivery, professional practice and the outcome of management decisions. Children's Social Care Services welcome this feedback and encourages children, their advocates and anyone who uses the service or who is affected by it, to make their views known.

3.1 Promoting Feedback

It is vitally important that the comments, complaints and compliments system is easily accessible. This maximises the opportunities for individuals to make their views known. Complaints can be accepted via Coventry Direct processes (including online forms and the council's Freephone number), or by complaining locally to the team that is providing them with a service. Sometimes complaints are made via Councillors, The Chief Executive's Office, or the Directorate. Complaints can also be referred to us from the Local Government Ombudsman. Complainants who contact the complaints team directly are encouraged to use the Coventry Direct processes to ensure that their complaint can be processed efficiently.

The majority of complainants chose to make a complaint through Coventry Direct; statistics have shown that this has been an increase on the previous year. There are still improvements to be made on alternative methods of making the complaints process more adaptable for complainants such as an online form.

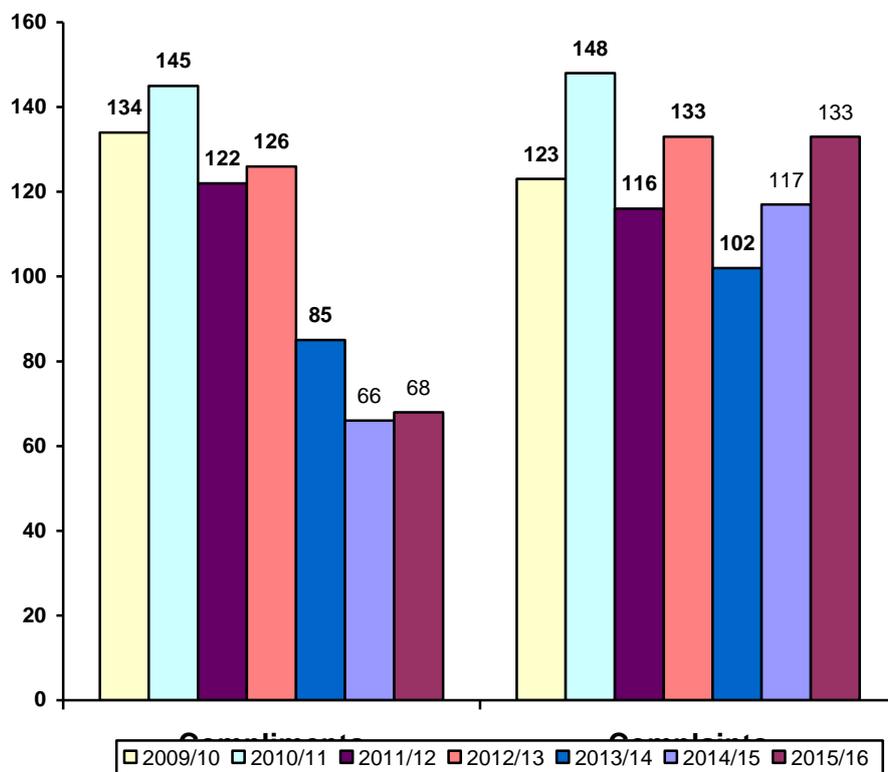
Of particular importance is the need to inform children of their opportunity to make representations and to find methods they can easily use. There have been 17 complaints from children and young people themselves this year, which is an increase on last year (11). Work has taken place with Barnardo's advocacy service to ensure that more feedback is received from children and young people. More work will be undertaken to improve this number further in 2016.

3.2 Advocacy

Since 1 April 2004, the Advocacy Services and Representations Regulations 2004, have required Local Authorities to make arrangements for the provision of advocacy to children and young people making representations under the Children Act 1989. Of the 17 children and young people making complaints during the year all 17 used an advocate to support them in making their complaint. Since April 2006, the advocacy service has been commissioned from Barnardo's.

3.3 Representations Received 2015/16

Comments	Compliments	Complaints
0	68	133



The total number of complaints received about Children's Social Care Services in 2015/16 was 133, an increase from 117 in 2014/15.

68 compliments were received in the year.

3.4 Compliments

Compliments tell us what people appreciate about services and the way they are provided. Positive feedback also encourages and motivates staff and enables them to celebrate their good performance. Every compliment received is shared with the individual or team to whom it refers and copied to the relevant managers.

3.5 Complaints

Listening to service users' complaints helps managers and individual workers to focus on service improvement and customer care. This helps to identify changes that are required. The statutory procedures offer a 3 stage process, and the corporate procedures offer a 2 stage process, both of which aim to provide a satisfactory resolution to any complaint brought to the Directorate, preferably as quickly as possible. The lessons learned from complaints form the basis for improving services.

There is a small increase in complaints. The decrease in referrals may be due to closer working relationships with Barnardos, enabling children and young people to raise complaints and be heard. It may also be that the new complaints leaflet was issued to all new children and young people upon referral and all Neighbourhood offices now display them in their reception areas.

3.5.1 Stage 1 - Local Resolution

The Directorate's aim for complaints is to resolve problems, whenever possible, at Stage 1. At this stage, the allocated manager (usually the manager responsible for the service being complained about) will try to identify what's needed so that the complainant feels able to continue to work with the service. Examples of the types of resolutions offered can be found later in this report.

89% of complaints were resolved at stage 1 of the complaints process, the same percentage as the previous year. More emphasis on local resolution will be introduced in 2016/17 in order to improve the percentage resolved at stage one of the process.

3.5.2 Stage 2 - Formal Investigation/Senior Management Review

In certain circumstances a formal investigation of the circumstances leading to a complaint is a more appropriate response, although this tends to be a lengthier process. This may be required when complainants remain dissatisfied with the conclusion reached at Stage 1 or when the complaint is particularly complex or involves a number of service areas. These investigations are always conducted by someone outside the direct line management of the service and the person about whom the complaint is being made.

During the year there were 7 investigations carried out at Stage 2, compared with 13 in 2014/15. At the time of reporting, 4 complaints have been successfully resolved, 2 are still ongoing, and 1 may potentially progress to Stage 3 of the process.

All 7 investigations were undertaken by external investigators. At the conclusion of all Stage 2 investigations the Investigating Officers' reports are read by senior managers for them to consider and act upon before a response is sent to the complainant.

3.5.3 Stage 3 - Review Panel/Corporate Review

Within the **statutory** complaints procedure, where complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of a formal investigation at Stage 2, they can request that a review panel of three independent people be convened to examine the investigation. Review panels can make recommendations to the Director if they conclude that the complaint is justified, or that more could be done to resolve the matter, or if they feel the Directorate should take action to prevent similar situations arising in the future. 3 complaints were considered by a Review Panel this year. The panel upheld the findings of the Stage 2 investigations and no

further action was required. A single complaint, considered at Stage 2 during the reporting period, may be considered by a panel if the complainant makes a final decision to move to a Stage 3 review.

There is no stage three under the **corporate** procedure.

3.6 Time-scales

The legislation and corporate procedures set out timescales for dealing with complaints at each stage of the process. The timescales are:

	Legislation	Corporate
Stage 1	10 working days (can be extended to 20 working days)	10 working days
Stage 2	25 working days (can be extended to 65 working days)	20 working days
Stage 3	Within 30 working days of complainant's request	Not Applicable

However, the complexity of social care issues means that complaint resolution can sometimes be protracted and achievement of the time-scales can suffer as a result.

The Complaints Officer, therefore, undertakes rigorous monitoring of progress in relation to responding to complaints.

The average time in days to complete Stage 1 complaints was 39 working days in 2014/15 to 30 days in 2015/16. Adherence to timescales had previously been a challenge so weekly meetings were introduced with the Heads of Service in order to ensure complaint timescales were adhered to. In Q4 the average time to respond to Stage 1 complaints had improved to 19 working days. Further work will be undertaken in 2016/17 to streamline the process and ensure that complaints are resolved more quickly.

Investigations of Stage 2 complaints under the statutory procedure often need to be extended beyond the 25 working days timescale due to the complexity of the issues being considered. In these situations the importance of keeping the complainant informed and securing their agreement to an extension of the time-scale, is recognised and addressed. However, there were significant delays in completing Stage 2 complaints with the average time in days to complete Stage 2 complaints being 148 working days

The Independent Review Panels that considered the Stage 3 complaints were convened in accordance with the timescales and the Directorate's response to their recommendations were also completed within time.

3.7 The Local Government Ombudsman

If the complainant remains unhappy following the outcome of the City Council's process, they have the option of taking their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

In 2015/16 2 representations were considered and upheld by the Local Government Ombudsman, compared to 1 in 2014/15.

SECTION 4: IDENTIFIED ISSUES AND RESOLUTIONS

4.1 Compliments and Complaints by Category

(Please note that compliments and complaints cover more than one category)

Compliments	Total	Complaints	Total
Standards Of Service	18	Standards Of Service	78
Standard Of Practice (SW)	38	Poor Communication	34
Good Partnership Working	5	Staff Conduct	4
Good Communication	2	Child Protection Issues	7
Good Child Focus	5	Standard of Environment	1
Specific Provision	0	Damage to Property	1

4.2 Resolutions

All staff dealing with complaints are encouraged to make any reasonable effort to ensure that the complaint is resolved. Common resolutions this year were:

- A full explanation of why decisions were made.
- Apologies for mistakes made and any distress caused.
- A change in Social Worker, where this could be managed in the best interests of the child.
- The opportunity for complainants to ensure their view is recorded on the social care file.
- Additional monitoring of the case through the usual supervision route.
- Provision of advocacy to ensure child's voice could be heard.

- For some complaints more specific interventions were needed in order to resolve the complaint. These included a £5,200 payment for loss of earnings and a £1,500 payment for distress caused.

4.4 Service Improvements

Upon completion of the complaint investigation, officers are asked to identify specific service improvements as a result of the complaint. On the completion of Stage 2 upheld complaints, Heads of Service have provided Action Plans that detail recommendations across all services to improve services. These are regularly monitored by the Complaints Officer and are forwarded to the Senior Leadership meetings for regular review.

Examples of some of these improvements are:-

- Re-emphasising to social workers the importance of keeping data safe and records are stored in compliance with data protection
- Improvement to quality of social workers assessment and analysis
- Reduce drift and delay in care planning and assessments are up to date
- Children with disability to be assessed as a CIN
- CAF process and robustness of the process to be reviewed
- Reduce timeframe for responding to complaints
 - Support to front line managers to respond to complaints at Stage 1
 - Reinforce need to return calls in accordance with corporate timescales.

SECTION 5: PROGRESS ON ACTIONS FOR 15/16

A number of actions were identified in last year's report. Progress on these actions is as follows.

5.1 Distribution of new leaflets.

Newly designed complaint leaflets, explaining the process for children and young people were distributed to all service areas and service users

5.2 Further revision of the Stage 1 process.

Resolution at Stage 1 of the process was still too slow. The appointment of a full time Complaints Officer in January 2016 enabled all Stage 1 complaints to be monitored and managed more effectively. For the first 3 quarters of the year the average time in days to complete Stage 1 complaints was 30 working days, compared to 19 working days in quarter 4. Further work has been undertaken in 2016/17 to streamline the process and ensure that complaints are resolved more quickly.

5.3 Further revision of the Stage 2 process.

Investigations of Stage 2 complaints often need to be extended beyond the 25 working days timescale due to the complexity of the issues being considered. However, there were significant delays in completing Stage 2 complaints in 2015/16 with the average time in days to completing being 148 working days. Further work has been undertaken in 2016/17 to streamline the process and ensure that complaints are resolved more quickly.

5.4 Complaints Scorecard and Bulletins

A complaints scorecard and bulletin was introduced in 2015/16 in order to provide a monthly report on complaints and timeliness. This has not been completed on a regular basis but has been reviewed and will recommence on a quarterly basis in 2016/17.

SECTION 6: ACTIONS FOR 2016/17

6.1 Close working with Barnardo's and the Children's Champion to ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard.

The complaints officer is now working more closely with Barnardo's and meets with them on a regular basis to review cases. Work is to be done with the Children's Champion to

gain more feedback from children and young people, including ways to improve the way children and young people can make complaints, compliments and representations. The Complaints Officer will attend Voices of Care and Childrens Planning Groups to gain feedback on improvements that could be made.

6.2 Review on ease of access to complaints process

There will be a review on how children and young people can access the complaints process. The Complaints Officer will work directly with children and young people in conjunction with the Childrens Champion to ensure we have a process that is accessible and a complaint is easy to process.

6.3 Further revision of the Stage 1 process.

There has already been an improvement in the average time in days to complete Stage 1 complaints (from 30 to 19 working days). In 2016/17 the Complaints Officer will meet with all teams on a regular basis to ensure complaints are monitored and dealt within statutory guidelines. Review of all Stage 1 complaints at the point of contact will also take place to attempt to resolve complaints informally where possible.

6.4 Further revision of the Stage 2 process.

There were significant delays in completing Stage 2 complaints in 2015/16 with the average time in days to completion being 148 working days, instead of the 25 working days statutory guidelines. The Complaints Officer will meet with Service Managers on a regular basis to monitor and manage the complaints to ensure they are completed in a timely manner. A complaints report will also be provided to the Senior Leadership Team.

6.5 RAG report and Action Plans

A RAG report was introduced in Q4 to ensure Service Managers were able to have an overview of complaints in their area. It enabled current complaints to be monitored and discussed at Management Team Meetings, allowing joint working and responses. This has to continue into 2016/17 as it has been effective in monitoring complaints.

Stage 2 Complaint Action Plans were also introduced in Q4 and are recommended resolutions from upheld complaints to be completed for all service areas. This is monitored by the Complaints Officer. The Complaints Officer will link with workforce development as and when required to recommend any training provision.

6.6 Training for Team and Service Managers on Complaint Processes

Complaints Officer to provide training sessions on all aspects of complaint processes. Feedback sessions will be provided on positive and negative areas of categories of complaints.