



**CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL
CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK –

**COMPLAINTS
COMPLIMENTS
COMMENTS**

**ANNUAL REPORT
2010/11**

INTRODUCTION

This report fulfills the statutory duty to produce an annual report for Children's Social Care. The report provides statistics on the number of complaints received; complaint outcomes (upheld/not upheld); performance; and learning and improvements resulting from complaints for 2010/11.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Children's Services Complaints Procedure

The procedure has three stages:

- Stage 1 Local resolution by Service Manager – 10 working days, up to 20 if the case is complex
- Stage 2 Investigation – 25 working days, up to 65 working days. Externally commissioned investigators are used if cases progress to independent investigation. Regulations require an independent person must also shadow the investigator.
- Stage 3 Independent Review – panel to be set up in 30 working days
- Alternative Dispute Resolution is also offered as an alternative to the complaints procedure. A complainant can opt back into the complaints process at any time. Conciliation meetings, Chaired by Customer Relations, are used to resolve complaints without the need for protracted investigations. The aim is to provide better outcomes for complainants with a focus on resolution over process.

The Customer Relations Team managed the procedures for Children's Services including social care complaints. Cases were inputted and tracked in the 'RESPOND' database system by the Customer Relations Team. Children's Services received weekly and quarterly reports on customer feedback based on their requirements for performance reporting.

Reflecting the groundwork in 2009/10, to ensure all complaints were logged, there were 79 new complaints received for the period 1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011 compared to 44 reported in 2009/10. 6 complaints were made by young people themselves about the services they received. The services most complained about were Family Support and Intake and Assessment services which also received the most compliments.

14 formal compliments were recorded compared to 11 the previous year.

8 Conciliation meetings were held which remedied 7 complaints without the need for independent investigation.

79 stage 1 complaints were dealt with at stage 1, 59 of them were resolved in 20 working days or less.

46 of the 79 stage 1 complaints dealt with were either upheld fully or in part. Whilst individual cases had specific remedies put in place, wider services improvements were also identified in a number of cases. These are detailed in Section 4.

1 SUMMARY STATISTICS

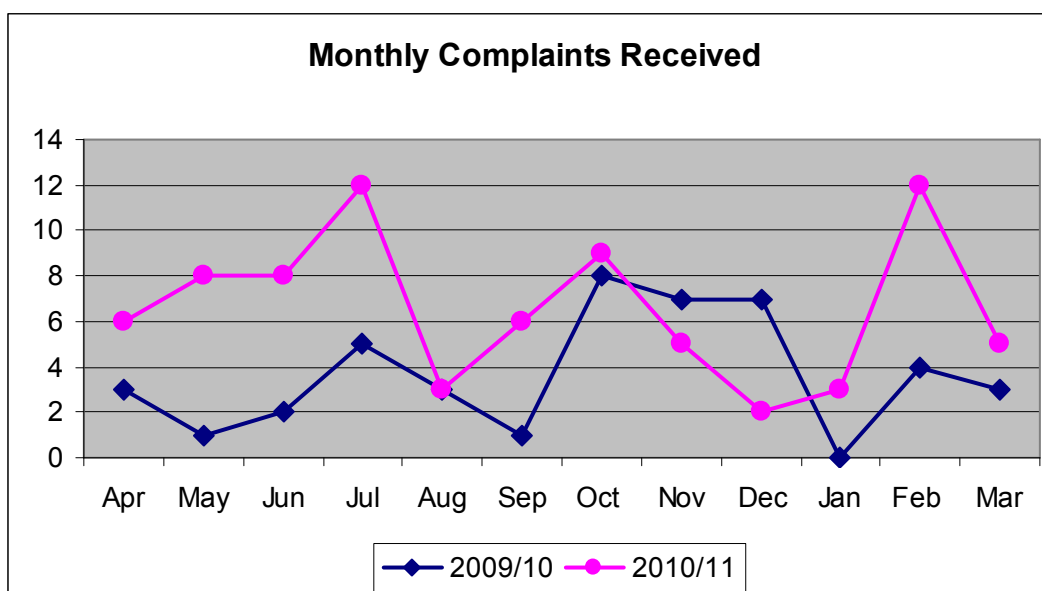
1.1 Headline Data for Customer Feedback

| New Cases Received 2010/11 | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Totals |
|----------------------------|----|----|----|----|--------|
| Complaints | 22 | 21 | 16 | 20 | 79 |
| Compliments | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 14 |

1.1.1 The total number of new complaints received rose from 44 last year to 79 for 2010/11. Last years report highlighted work undertaken to ensure services captured all complaints which resulted in an increase in the number of complaints recorded in the second half of that year. The good practice of recording was sustained this year.

1.1.2 3472 people accessed children’s social care in the period.

1.2 Spread of Complaints Received



1.2.1 The number of complaints for August remained the same this year compared to last suggesting a seasonal low over the main part of the summer school holiday period. The peaks in 2010/11 were July and February which did not mirror the peaks in the previous year of October and December. There were no seasonal peaks for complaints year on year; however, numbers for October were similar in both years.

1.3 Alternative Dispute Resolution

1.3.1 With a focus on resolution over process Customer Relations offered alternative dispute resolution to those who requested independent investigation of their complaints. 8 complainants took up the offer and 7 of the 8 cases were remedied in full. This resulted in better outcomes for complainants resolving complaints without the need for protracted investigations. Conciliation meetings rebuild confidence and improve communications between the complainant and service. There are significant cost savings by remedying cases without the need for externally commissioned investigators.

In one case the complainant remained unhappy and progressed to a stage 2 investigation.

1.4 Stage 2 & 3 Complaints

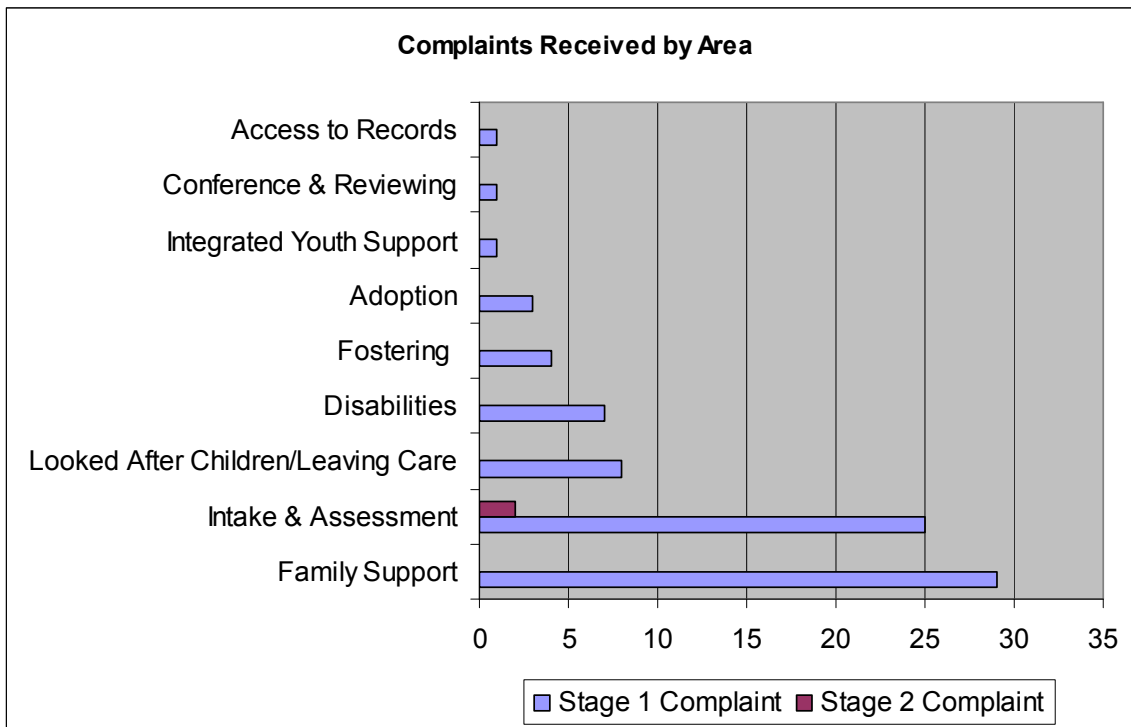
1.4.1 Two complaints received in the year, relating to Intake and Assessment, were progressed to stage 2 of the complaints procedure. One stage 1 case received in 2009/10 also progressed to stage 2 in 2010/11. No cases progressed to stage 3.

1.5 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Complaints

1.5.1 One case relating to social care was referred to the Council as a premature case for the council to consider. It was responded to, not upheld and closed.

1.6 Trends - Services Most Complained About

1.6.1 The area most complained about, receiving 29 of the 79 new complaints, was the Family Support Service. The main causes for complaint for this service were alleged poor communication or conduct of staff, e.g. attitude, failure to return calls or provide information; and failure to follow up on concerns e.g. not addressing child's behaviours, not providing a placement.



1.6.2 The Intake and Assessment Team received 25 of the 79 new complaints and the main causes for complaint were the quality of the assessment and investigation process and reports; and poor communication, conduct of staff.

1.6.3 Of the 3 cases that progressed to stage 2 investigation in the period 2 related to the Intake and Assessment Service. One related to the quality of an assessment and the other to how an investigation process was carried out. The third stage 2 was from a child and related to her views that the Looked After Children Service was taking too long to make decisions and not listening to her.

1.7 Outcomes from Concluded Complaints

- 1.7.1 79 stage 1 complaints were concluded in the period. 10 were upheld. A further 36 were partly upheld. This meant a total of 46 (58%) of initial complaints were deemed to be well founded in full or in part.
- 1.7.2 Family Support and Intake and Assessment Services received 54 (68%) of the total 79 complaints received in the period and accounted for the majority of complaints with an upheld/partly upheld outcome, 29 (63%) of the 46 upheld/partly upheld cases.
- 1.7.3 Two stage 2 cases concluded in the period. A case relating to Looked After Children Service was not upheld and a case about the Intake and Assessment Service was partially upheld relating to the accuracy of a core assessment.
- 1.7.4 Whilst case specific remedies were put in place for individuals Section 4 details the wider actions and improvements resulting from complaints.

1.8 Compliments

- 1.8.1 14 compliments were recorded relating to thanks for helpful, supportive, efficient, caring and timely social work intervention; the quality of social work in legal proceedings; professionals' positive comments about the focus of Central Bedfordshire on the needs of children.

- 1.8.2 The spread of compliments was:

- 5 Family Support
- 5 Intake & Assessment
- 4 Looked After Children and Leaving Care

Whilst Family Support and the Intake and Assessment Services received the most complaints they also received the most compliments.

2 PERFORMANCE IN COMPLAINTS HANDLING

- 2.1 The procedure allows for 10 working days to resolve a stage 1 complaint, up to 20 working days if the complaint is complex.

The timescale for Stage 2 complaints is 25 up to 65 working days.

- 2.2 79 stage 1 cases were responded to. 59 out of the 79 (75%) were completed in 20 working days or less:

| Timescale for Responding to Complaints | | | | |
|---|---------------|---------------|----------------|------------|
| Working Days to Respond | 0 - 10 | 11 -20 | 21 - 30 | 30+ |
| Number of Cases | 35 | 24 | 15 | 5 |

- 2.3 Of the 5 cases that took the longest to resolve:

- 1 case was subject to a conciliation meeting with the complainants following the initial response to the complaint
- 1 case was delayed but the complainant was sent a holding letter advising of the need for further time to respond
- 3 cases were delayed due to the capacity of the manager dealing with the case

- 2.4 2 Stage 2 complaints concluded.

- 1 case concluded in 37 working days.
- 1 case took a total of 83 working days to conclude. The investigation reports were sent to the complainant within 49 working days. The complainant wanted to meet a senior manager to hear the department's response to the investigation. The availability of senior managers meant the meeting date took place beyond the 65 working day timescale.

3 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY MONITORING

3.1 Monitoring

- 3.1.1 The purpose of capturing data is to monitor access to the complaints procedure; to ensure services are appropriate for all service user groups; and to check whether any issues relating to discrimination have been raised. Customer Relations record data about the **service user** for complaints. In complaints the service user can also be a parent who is engaged with social care services where the complaint issue has no direct impact on the child. A service user may make more than one complaint over the period reported on.
- 3.1.2 There are some 'unknowns' in the returns as data is collected at the first point of contact in a complaint. Cases received in writing are researched in the client database for information – if the data is not available via this route it is recorded as 'unknown'. Appendix A provides more detailed findings.
- 3.1.3 The 'RESPOND' system used for Children's Services complaints has the facility to capture the service user's gender, age, ethnicity and whether the service user describes themselves as having a disability or not.
- 3.1.4 79 new complaints were registered. 3472 people accessed children's social care in the period.

3.2 Accessibility to Complaints

3.2.1 Receipt Method for Complaints

By having a range of contact options for complainants to make their complaints the Council aims to meet the needs of its service users in accessing the complaints procedure. People can make complaints in person; face to face or via telephone (including a direct line to Customer Relations), in writing; via email, letter, or complaint form. A complaint form specifically designed for young people is also available.

79 new complaints were received:

| | | |
|------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 49% by letter | 4% by complaint form | 1% personal visit |
| 28% by telephone | 18% by email | |

3.2.2 Young People

Children's Services Social Care delivers services to address the needs of children and young people. The majority of the 79 complaints made about the service were from adults complaining about their interactions and experience or on behalf of children. However, 6 young people raised complaints in their own right about issues affecting them. Young people making complaints are offered the support of an independent advocate. 4 young people used an advocate to support them through the complaints process.

3.3 Gender

- 3.3.1 In order to make comparisons data gathered for new complaint cases received in 2010/11 has been considered alongside the provisional data on the gender of people who were referred to children's social care throughout the year.
- 3.3.2 For complaints we recorded the gender of the child in most cases.

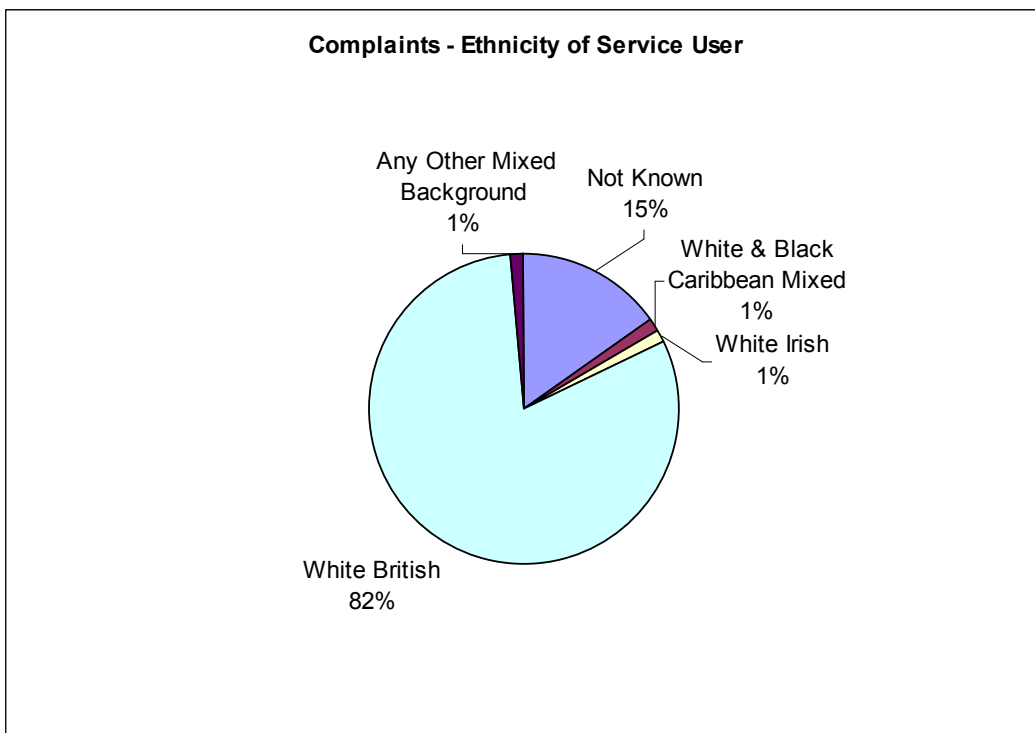
Where a complaint is made by an adult about their own experience of intervention where the issue did not directly impact on the child the adult's gender was recorded. This gives us the gender of complainants affected by complaints.

| | Male | Female | Not known |
|-------------------------------------|------|--------|-----------|
| Service user affected by complaints | 47% | 49% | 4% |
| People accessing the service | 52% | 47% | 1% |

3.3.3 Research into gender usually indicates that girls are more likely than boys to articulate issues that affect them. The data reflects this thinking.

3.3.4 Service users of both genders are represented in the complaints procedure and there appears to be no significant difference in the issues they raise.

3.4 Ethnicity



3.4.1 82 % of service users affected by new complaints were recorded as 'White British'. The issues covered a broad range of complaints. 80% of people accessing social care services in the period were described as White. People with a minority ethnic background were also represented in complaints.

3.4.2 The issues raised by service users with minority ethnic backgrounds were also raised by those with the majority ethnic background in complaints.

With 15% of cases with 'unknown' ethnicity it is possible that complainants with other ethnic backgrounds were also represented in complaints.

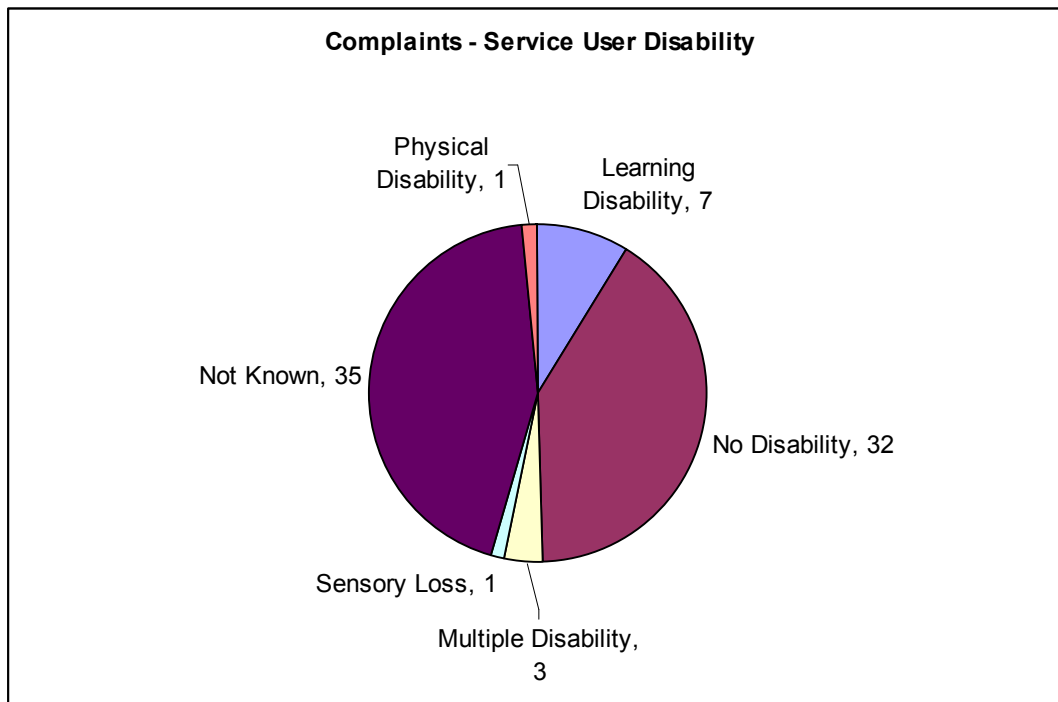
3.5 Age

3.5.1 Of the 79 new Stage 1 complaints;

68 affected people under the age of 18
6 affected people 19 – 64
5 cases age unknown

This meant that people of all ages were able to access the complaints procedure either directly or through a representative. The majority of complaints affected children and young people but were made by adults and crossed all services.

3.6 Disability



3.6.1 35 complaints were recorded as 'not known' in relation to disability.

3.6.2 In 32 cases service users were not described as having any disability.

3.6.3 The figures demonstrate that people with disabilities were represented in the complaints procedure. The issues of complaint reflected similar issues to those where the service user had no disability with the exception of concerns about support in transition from children's to adult services.

4 SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS RESULTING FROM CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

Where a service agreed with (upheld/partly upheld) a complaint, as well as putting in place case specific remedies, they considered what they could do to improve the service. The service improvements are detailed below:

| 4.1 Intake and Assessment | |
|--|--|
| Top 2 issues found in agreed complaints : Assessments: explanation of process, quality, timeliness and Conduct of Staff | |
| YOU SAID | THE SERVICE DID: |
| Complaint about disagreement over the assessment findings. | Teams and assessing partners were reminded in writing that completed assessments must be shared with those people being assessed (unless this would put children at risk). If there is disagreement about the findings the assessment should be amended, or where the assessors do not agree, a note made on file showing the areas of disagreement. |
| Inadequate communication between social services and family throughout the child protection investigation. | An information leaflet for parents explaining the process for child protection enquiries will be developed. |
| Customer left waiting in reception without being seen for an unreasonable length of time | Manager put into immediate effect a new procedure for the team. If a customer without an appointment waits longer than 45 minutes to see a worker a manager will be interrupted to help them. |
| Communication fell short when only verbal information was provided in the heat of the moment so the family did not retain what was said which left them unclear about the plans for the child. | Managers agreed that where it will be helpful, information will be given to parents/carers in writing to ensure they have something to refer back to and are not reliant on retaining verbal information. |
| Complaints about the Core Assessment process | <p>The Deputy Team Leader communicated to team members a reminder of the importance of explaining the reason for visits and the process of assessment to children, young people and their families; good communication; and appropriate endings.</p> <p>Brief Initial Assessments in order to progress the case to a core assessment with family agreement, or due to child protection, will be sent to parents.</p> <p>A communication was sent to all team members to remind them of the importance of recognising strengths and highlighting positives as well as areas for development in assessments.</p> |

| 4.2 Family Support | |
|--|---|
| Top 2 issues found in agreed complaints: Quality of support/ case management Communication- not getting information | |
| YOU SAID | THE SERVICE DID: |
| Minutes were not provided. | System put in place to ensure minutes are sent to parents. Staff reminded of the importance of the timeliness of providing meeting minutes. |
| Phone calls not returned | Managers raised with staff the importance of both ensuring all contacts are recorded and the importance of good communication. |

| 4.3 Adoption (Shared Service with Bedford Borough Council) | |
|--|--|
| Main issues found in agreed complaints : Delay in Funding and Assessment Process | |
| YOU SAID | THE SERVICE DID: |
| There were delays in funding for a top up of a grant to provide improvements to accommodation. | Established a process for dealing with these issues with colleagues in Legal Services, Bedford Borough Council and in relation to the Disabled Facilities Grant. Established principals on how we deal with these cases in the future and learnt that we need to establish early on which authority is legally responsible. |
| The council discriminated against an applicant on the grounds of race and turned their application down. | Whilst the complaint was not upheld, the service considered if improvements could be made. In the future where there are a disproportionate number of families with a particular ethnic link, compared to children waiting, the service will seek to explore an applicants' abilities to meet the identity needs of other children. In addition all prospective adopters who have attended an information evening and request an initial interview will be offered a face to face meeting. |

| 4.4 Looked After Children | |
|--|--|
| Main issues found in agreed complaints: Contact and Payments | |
| YOU SAID | THE SERVICE DID: |
| There were delays in setting up contact arrangements | Contact arrangements are to be reviewed regularly as part of case supervision |
| Pre-agreed board payment not provided due to a change in social worker | Any financial matters at the time of transfer between social workers are to be written clearly in the case transfer summary. |

4.5 Children with Disability

Main issue in agreed complaints : Support with transition from children's to adult services

| YOU SAID | THE SERVICE DID: |
|--|--|
| Transition planning for young people moving from children's to adult services fell short, including delays in finding alternative accommodation. | Senior Transition Officer post put in place from 1st June 2010. The post, joint funded between children and adult services, will ensure that the transformation programmes in both adults and children's services are reflected in future provision and practice including making relevant links with housing to plan for the transition of young people. Senior Transition Officer to attend the Housing group meetings regularly to raise the issues identified thus far in the transition of young people requiring accommodation in adulthood. |

4.6 Access to Records (1 Complaint)

| YOU SAID | THE SERVICE DID: |
|--|---|
| Confidential information about a third party was provided to a young person following an access to records request | Prior to release files will be checked by another officer, the entire process is to be documented so a robust audit trail is in place, a different colour folder is to be used for the information to be disclosed and the information to be withheld so they are clearly visible and will ensure the correct file is handed to the client. |

Appendix A

Additional Data on Equality & Diversity of Complainants

1 Accessibility to Complaints

- 1.1 The majority of people preferred to put their complaints in writing.

Adults complaining preferred to write letters to tell us about their complaints. This was the same last year.

6 young people made their own complaints. 4 used advocates who sent the complaint in by letter. 1 young person telephoned the service with her complaint and 1 young person emailed the complaint to the service.

- 1.2 The Central Bedfordshire's Children in Care Council. (CiCC) have been developing an information pack for looked after children. Two members met with the customer relations manager to agree how the information on complaints and compliments should be presented in the packs. This will include a freepost form for giving feedback.

- 1.3 The outcome from consultation with young people in the previous period was that they wanted improved electronic access to information. The Council regularly tweet and post messages on the council's facebook page about how to make a complaint, compliment or comment about the council. The council currently has 249 followers on facebook and 438 followers on twitter, however the Council's facebook page in particular is monitored by a local group with over 4,000 followers and they regularly repost Council messages on their own site so the reach is much wider than the council's direct followers.

The CiCC are considering how to develop specific web pages to meet the needs of looked after children. Customer Relations will maintain a link with the Council to consider how to meet the needs of young people for complaints information in any future web presence.

2 Gender

- 2.1 The two areas that received the highest number of stage 1 complaints, Family Support and Intake & Assessment, affected both male and female service users equally and the same complaint issues were raised in both services.

- 2.2 The areas of Fostering and Adoption saw 5 complaints that affected female service users compared to 2 affecting male service users. The issues affecting males related to alleged conduct of a carer and poor communication about professional concerns. Complaints relating to females were about alleged poor attitude of staff, delay in permanency, lack of support and alleged discrimination in decision making.

- 2.3 Complaints affecting male service users more than female related to Looked After Children and Leaving Care Services, where 5 out of the 8 cases affected males. Males were affected by alleged poor communication, failure to pay allowances, lack of support to find suitable housing, contact arrangements, missed appointment and inappropriate action taken. Females raised the same issues as males in 2 of the cases. In 1 case the issues related to historical issues about alleged delays in the case including taking action to address concerns about a placement.

- 2.4 Of the 6 complaints made directly by young people, 4 were made by male service users and 2 by female service users.

Males complained about alleged poor transition from children's to adult services; not getting enough information from the social worker (2 cases, brothers); lack of support to find housing.

One females alleged lack of support to find housing and also queried the level of care leaver's grant. In the other case the complaints related to alleged delays in the case including taking action to address concerns about a placement.

3 Ethnicity

- 3.1 The 2 service users with mixed ethnic backgrounds complained about the Looked After Children and Leaving Care Service. 1 case related to the failed appointment of a social worker and the other to alleged lack of support to find suitable housing.
- 3.2 The service user with a 'White Irish' background complained about the actions of a foster carer.
- 3.3 The service user with 'Any other Mixed Background' complained that the Family Support Service failed to respond to requests for support.

4 Age

- 4.1 The 6 complaints affecting people 19 – 64 years of age related to;
- care leavers both unhappy with the level of support to find housing, and one disagreed over a leaving care grant about lack of support; the adoption assessment process; Family Support; poor communication (2), and unprofessional behaviour
- 4.2 Complaints made by young people themselves related to:
- Leaving Care (2) support for housing and financial grant; Family Support (2) poor communication from social worker; Looked After Children (1) alleged delays in the case including taking action to address concerns about a placement; Children with Disabilities (1) poor planning and support in transition from children's to adults services.
- 4.3 The 2 youngest service users who made their own complaints did so via an advocate. A complaint from a young person with a disability was made via an advocate. The older a young person was the more likely they were to raise concerns without the need for an advocate.
- 4.4 In 7 complaints service users were described as having a learning disability. The issue of placements and plans not meeting the needs of the service user and communication featured in the complaints:

3 cases related to Children with Disability Services, complaints alleged poor communication; not risk assessing a resource fully; and a care plan not meeting the needs of the service user.

2 complaints related to Fostering Services' attitude of staff in a meeting; 1 complaint to Family Support Service about failure to follow up on concerns and poor customer care; and 1 complaint about the Family and Adolescent Team related to the quality of a placement and poor communication.

Where complaints were upheld case specific remedies were put in place.

- 4.5 3 Service users were described as having multiple disabilities in complaints about the Children with Disabilities Service. Complaints related to poor support in transition from children's to adult services; delay providing care and equipment not meeting the needs of the child. Complaints about care and transition were upheld and Section 4 details the service actions to improve.
- 4.6 A complaint where the service user was described as having a sensory loss disability related to the Family Support Service failing to advise of a meeting.
- 4.7 The 1 complaint where the service user was described as having a physical disability related to the Intake and Assessment Service poor tone of letter.