



**CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL
CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES**

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK:

**COMPLAINTS
COMPLIMENTS**

**ANNUAL REPORT
2011/12**

INTRODUCTION

This report fulfills the statutory duty to produce an annual report for Children's Social Care complaints. The report provides statistics for 2011/12 on the number of complaints received; complaint outcomes (upheld/not upheld); performance; and learning and improvements resulting from complaints.

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 for complex cases.
- Stage 2, Investigation – 25 working days, up to 65 working days. Externally commissioned investigators carry out investigations. Regulations require an independent person to shadow the investigator.
- Stage 3, Independent Review – panel to be set up in 30 working days
- Alternative Dispute Resolution is offered as an alternative to the complaints procedure. Conciliation meetings, Chaired by Customer Relations, are used to resolve complaints without the need for protracted investigations. A complainant can opt back into the complaints process at any time

There were 48 new complaints received for the period 1 April 2011 – 31 March 2012 compared to 79 reported in 2010/11. The services most complained about were Family Support and Intake & Assessment, they also received the most compliments.

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

4 conciliation meetings were held remedying complaints without the need for escalation to stage 2.

46 stage 1 complaints concluded, 30 of them were resolved in 20 working days or less.

34 of the 46 stage 1 complaints dealt with were either upheld fully or in part. Whilst individual cases had specific remedies put in place consideration was also given to wider service improvements. These are detailed in Section 4.

Following an Ofsted inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services in February 2012 inspectors commented on the low number of complaints but reported positively on the handling of complaints:

'The majority of complaints relate to communication and accuracy of information in individual cases. These are case specific rather than systemic issues, and are responded to appropriately.'

'The Central Bedfordshire complaints service effectively follows up issues arising from complaints with operational staff and identifies themes and learning which is used to improve service provision.'

'Complaints about children's services are routinely analysed and emerging themes and issues are reported to relevant teams to enable learning from these to improve practice'

1 SUMMARY STATISTICS

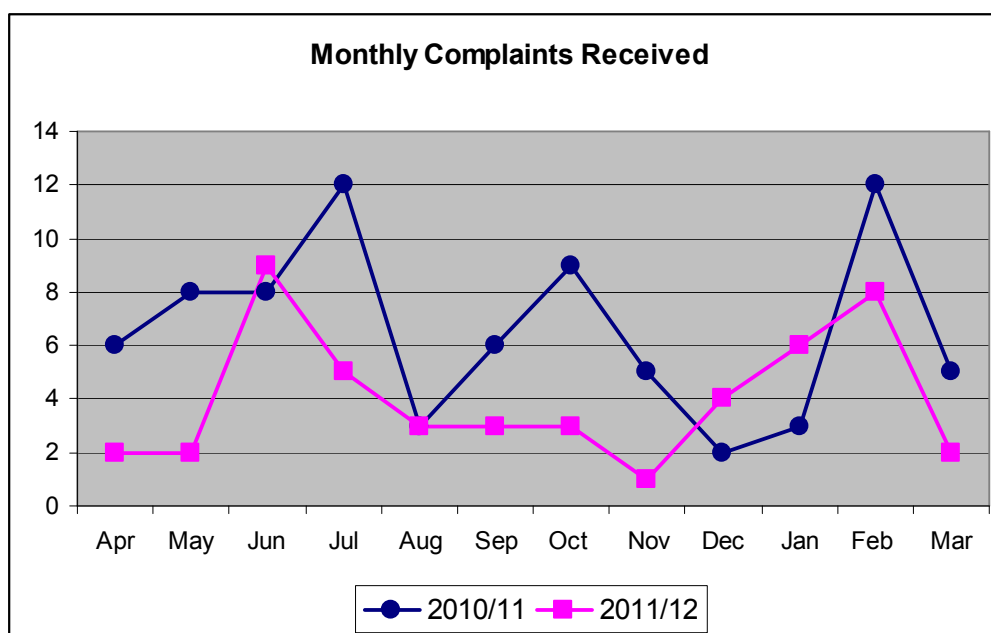
1.1 Headline Data for Customer Feedback

New Cases Received 2011/12	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Totals
Complaints	13	11	8	16	48
Compliments	3	2	4	4	13

1.1.1 The total number of new complaints received decreased from 79 last year to 48. In 2011/12 3364 children were in contact with the Children's Social Care Services. Following the OFSTED inspection, February – March 2012, of safeguarding and looked after children services the inspector reported that although the numbers of complaints were low they had been handled well and:

'Managers take an active approach to responding to and learning from complaints with established systems to report and analyse service user feedback and complaints, with regular feedback into the relevant service areas.'

1.2 Spread of Complaints Received



1.2.1 There were few similarities in the number of monthly complaints received over the last 2 years. August saw the same number both years. June saw similar numbers when Family Support and Intake and Assessment Services received the majority of the complaints which in both years related to customer care and general case management.

1.3 Alternative Dispute Resolution

1.3.1 Customer Relations offered alternative dispute resolution to those who requested independent investigation of their complaints. 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.

4 complainants took up the offer and the cases were remedied in full. This resulted in better outcomes for complainants by resolving complaints without the need for protracted investigations.

1.4 Stage 2 & 3 Complaints

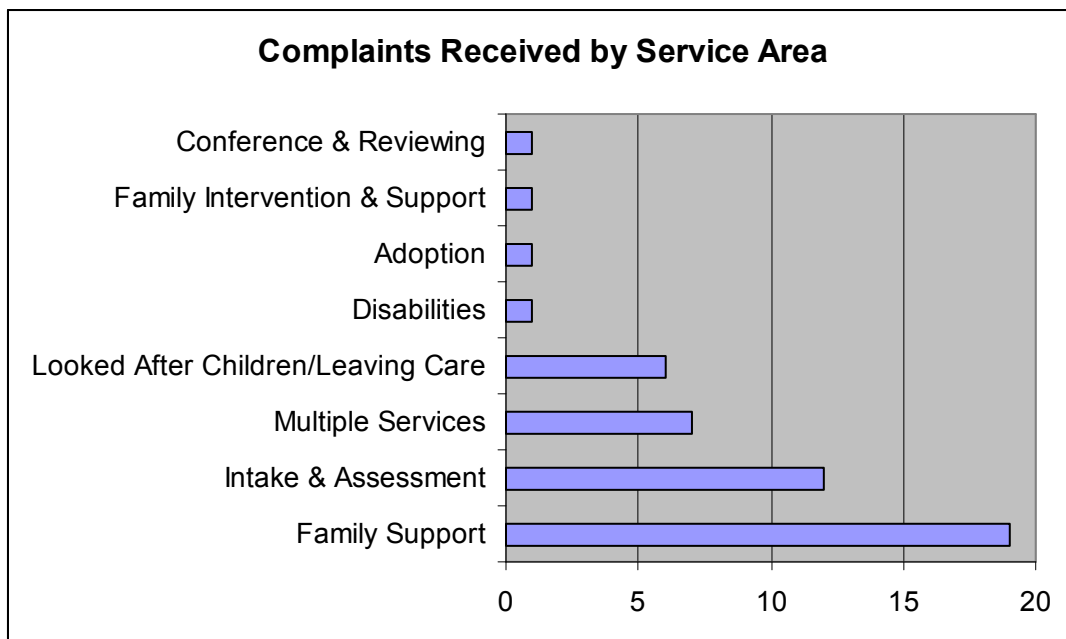
1.4.1 There were no new stage 2 or 3 complaints received in the year.

1.5 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Complaints

1.5.1 One complaint was considered by the Ombudsman relating to the attitude and approach of a social worker in an Intake and Assessment case. The Ombudsman discontinued the investigation into the complaint. The Council had already dealt with the complaint and offered an apology for the poor communication. The Ombudsman concluded there was no remaining significant injustice to the complainant.

1.6 Trends - Services Most Complained About

1.6.1 The area most complained about, receiving 19 of the 48 new complaints plus a further 3 that also crossed other service areas, was the Family Support Service. The main causes for complaint for this service were alleged poor communication or information and general dissatisfaction with the overall quality of intervention which encompassed social worker attitude, quality of reports, delays.



1.6.2 The Intake and Assessment Team received 12 of the 48 new complaints plus a further 4 that also crossed other service areas. The main causes for complaint were alleged poor quality of assessment reports, poor communication or information and the professionalism of staff

1.7 Outcomes from Concluded Complaints

1.7.1 46 stage 1 complaints were concluded in the period. 8 were upheld. A further 26 were partly upheld. This meant a total of 34 (74%) of concluded complaints were deemed to be well founded in full or in part.

1.7.2 Of the 46 complaints concluded 33 involved the Family Support and Intake and Assessment Services. 19 of the 33 (58%) complaints had an upheld or partly upheld outcome.

1.7.3 Whilst case specific remedies were put in place for individuals Section 4 details the wider learning and improvements from complaints.

1.8 Compliments

1.8.1 13 compliments were recorded. Service users thanked workers for their professionalism, good advice, effective communication and accessibility and friendliness. External professionals expressed thanks for the quality of a training event and awards evening and the positive handling of a case.

1.8.2 The spread of compliments was:

4 Intake & Assessment
4 Family Support
2 Looked After Children and Leaving Care
2 Fostering
1 Local Children's Safeguarding Board

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 it the complaint is complex.

2.2 One complaint was withdrawn. 45 stage 1 cases were responded to. 30 out of the 45 (67%) were completed in 20 working days or less:

Timescale for Sending Stage 1 Complaint Response				
Working Days to Respond	0 - 10	11 -20	21 - 30	30+
Number of Cases	11	19	7	8

2.3 Cases that took the longest to resolve were subject to delay due to a variety of reasons: some delays were due to drift due to managers capacity; some took longer because complainants wanted further investigation into their complaints and further negotiations were held to resolve matters; in one case a complainant wanted to add further information and took time to collate the information.

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.

- 3.1.2 3364 children were in contact with the Children's Social Care Services. 48 new complaints were registered. The relatively low number of complaints has resulted in difficulty in drawing conclusions in relation to equality and diversity monitoring. Low or no representations from minority groups reduced the opportunity for reassurance that access to complaints about services was provided in an equitable manner.
- 3.1.3 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'. Unknowns may mask representations from minority groups.

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. Young people can have the support of an advocate to make complaints.

48 new complaints were received:

42% by letter	20% by telephone	2% personal visit
29% by email	6% by complaint form	

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 48 complaints made about the service were from adults complaining about their interactions and experience or on behalf of children. 2 young people raised complaints in their own right about issues affecting them. The complaints were raised during face to face discussions with workers who referred them on to relevant managers.

3.3 Gender

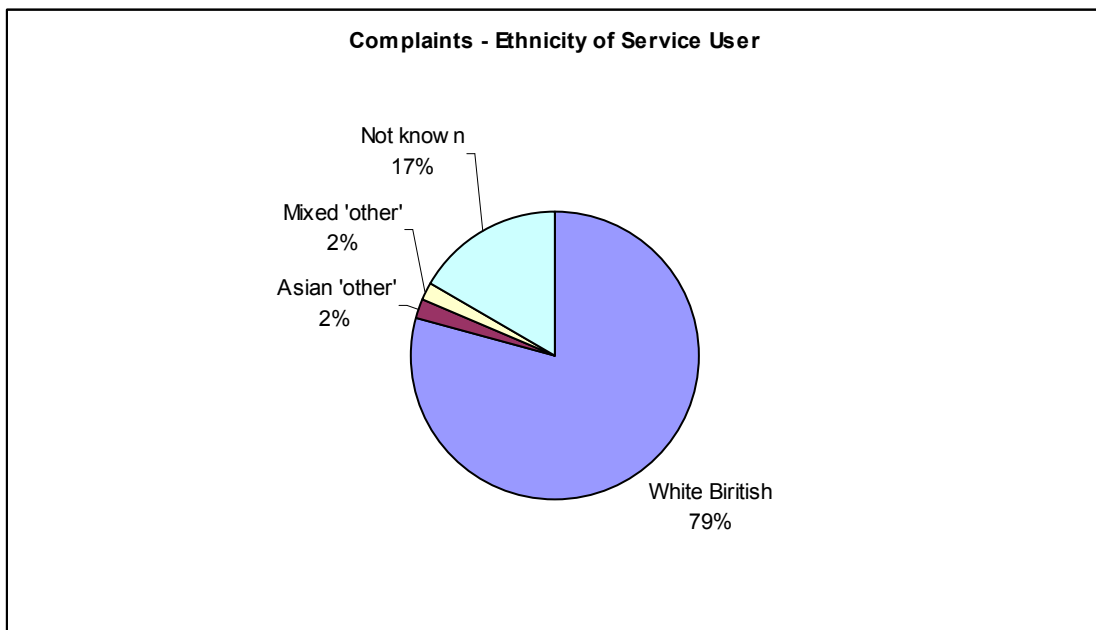
- 3.3.1 In order to make comparisons data gathered for new complaint cases received in 2010/11 has been considered alongside the provisional data on the gender of people who were referred to children's social care throughout the year.
- 3.3.2 For complaints we recorded the gender of the child in most 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	65%	35%	0%
People accessing the service	53%	47%	0.6%

- 3.3.3 More males were affected by complaints than females. There were more males accessing social care services than females.
- 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 raised.
- 3.3.5 The two areas that received the highest number of stage 1 complaints, Family Support and Intake & Assessment received issues of complaint that affected 26 male service users compared to 13 females. Both genders were affected by similar issues. The adults making the complaints were predominantly female (25). Females generally complained about more aspects of the service in one complaint than males.

3.4 Ethnicity



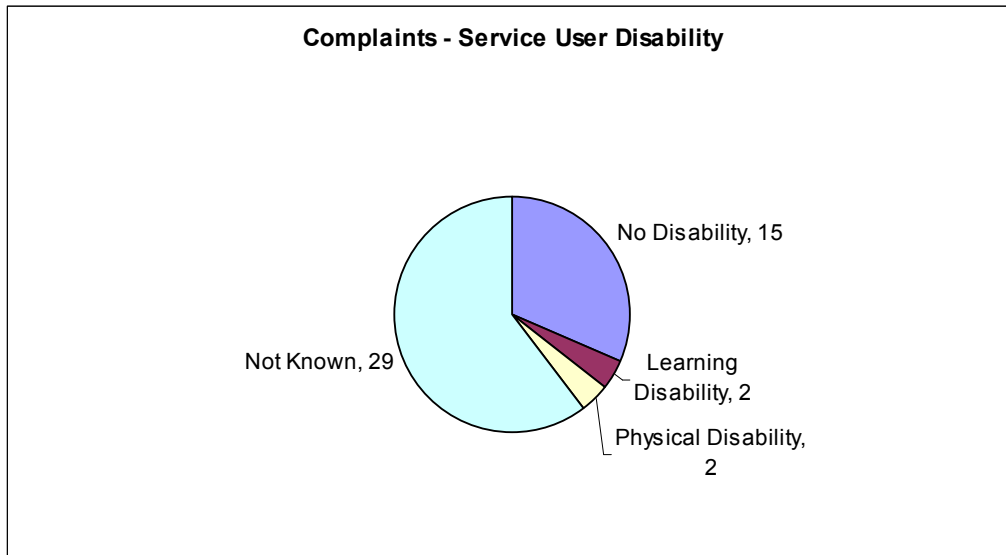
- 3.4.1 79 % of service users affected by new complaints and also accessing social care services were recorded as 'White British'. The issues covered a broad range of complaints. People with a minority ethnic background were also represented in complaints. However, there were no complaints registered in relation to service users described as 'black' compared to 2% of service users registered with this background. With 17% of cases with 'unknown' ethnicity it is possible that complainants with other ethnic backgrounds 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.

3.5 Age

- 3.5.1 Of the 48 new Stage 1 complaints;
 - 42 affected people under the age of 18
 - 3 affected people 19 – 64
 - 3 cases age unknown
 This meant that people of all ages were able to access the complaints procedure either directly or through a representative.

3.5.2 The majority of complaints affected children and young people but were made by adults and crossed all services. Two young people made their own complaints and one was unhappy with the support from social workers when she was looked after and did not feel listened to, the other was unhappy with the support he received to live independently.

3.6 Disability



3.6.1 29 complaints were recorded as 'not known' in relation to disability. In 15 cases service users were not described as having any disability.

3.6.2 The figures demonstrate that people with disabilities were represented in the complaints procedure. The issues of complaint from parents of children who had a disability related to dissatisfaction with the level of support. These issues were also raised by parents of children without a disability.

4 SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS RESULTING FROM CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

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

4.1 Family Support	
Top 2 issues found in agreed complaints: Poor communication, lack of support.	
YOU SAID	THE SERVICE DID:
A referral to another agency that had been agreed by a social care panel was not followed up. The social work team should have ensured that the referral had been made and actioned.	The manager committed to a new approach to practice for staff: Once a referral has been made by Panel to another agency, the social worker will follow it up with a phone call to the relevant agency to make sure it has been received and actioned.
Social care did not fully explain why they were involved leaving the family unclear.	The practice going forward will be to actively respond to any requests for clarification of social care plans by providing explanations in the child in need meetings or in writing.
A social worker had shared her negative views of another professional with the young person being looked after. These views were then expressed by the young person to the solicitor.	The team manager upheld that the practice was inappropriate and addressed it with the worker.
Social worker's approach left parent feeling uncomfortable. Parent was not advised information would be shared with other agency.	Practice issues were addressed with the individual worker
4.2 Intake and Assessment	
Top 2 issues found in agreed complaints: Poor Communication and accuracy/ quality of assessment reports.	
YOU SAID	THE SERVICE DID:
There had been poor communication out of hours regarding support services available.	The out of hours service received the feedback and a reminder to provide information about support services as well as the need to notify other local authorities in cases were children cross borders.
The quality and accuracy of information in assessment reports was sometimes not good enough.	Staff teams were reminded; to reflect sources of information within assessments; to obtain updates on health and well-being of parents/carers; to proof read assessments and pay attention to details. A new information system was implemented in March '12 and improved flexibility to edit work. It includes a spellchecker.
Grandparents felt that their views were not listened to when they raised concerns about their grandchildren	The manager sent a communication to the team confirming that grandparents can play an important role in a child's life and workers should ensure their views are listened to.
A parent complained that there was little communication following an initial contact relating to child protection issues until an invitation to a meeting was received two months later.	The team manager upheld that communication was poor and reminded the team of the importance of keeping families updated during the child protection process.

4.3 Adoption (Shared Service with Bedford Borough Council)

There were no repeat issues raised in complaints.

YOU SAID	THE SERVICE DID:
Letters were not being passed on and photographs were unfairly blocked from being forwarded.	The actions taken in the case were felt to be reasonable. Consideration was given to how the process could be improved. Guidance for positive letterbox contact was drawn up so that all staff are aware of what guidance birth parents should receive. Where birth parents letters are changed agreement is received from the birth parent before letters are sent.

4.4 Looked After Children

There were no repeat issues raised in complaints.

YOU SAID	THE SERVICE DID:
A young person complained about her time in care when she felt workers did not insist on seeing her alone when visiting the placement which limited her opportunity to raise concerns.	Team managers and review managers were reminded to carry out checks to see if social workers are seeing looked after children on their own and ensure that workers understand why this is so important.
Taxi was late collecting looked after young person from school.	Complaint made to the taxi company and a new provider put in place.