

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK:

COMPLAINTS COMPLIMENTS

ANNUAL REPORT 2013/14

INTRODUCTION

This report fulfills the statutory duty to monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure and produce an annual report for Children's Services Social Care complaints. The report will be presented to staff, the relevant local authority committee and will be made available on the Council's website.

The report provides statistics for 2013/14 on the number of complaints received including those considered by the Local Government Ombudsman; which customer groups made complaints including some analysis of statistical diversity data; complaint outcomes (upheld/not upheld); performance; and learning and improvements resulting from complaints.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Children's Services Complaints Procedure

The effectiveness of the complaints procedure is regularly monitored. Status reports are reviewed by senior managers to support timely resolution. Quarterly reports, on the number of complaints received, outcomes, learning and service improvements that result from complaints, are also reviewed by the senior management team.

The procedure has three stages:

- Stage 1, Local resolution by manager – 10 working days, up to 20 for complex cases.
- Stage 2, Investigation by someone outside of the service area complained about – 25 working days, up to 65 working days.
- Stage 3, Independent Review – panel to be set up in 30 working days
- Alternative Dispute Resolution - offered as an alternative to the complaints procedure. Conciliation meetings are used to resolve complaints without the need for protracted investigations. A complainant can opt back into the complaints process at any time.

Effectiveness of the Complaints Procedure

There were 104 new complaints received for the period 1 April 2013 – 31 March 2014 compared to 82 reported in 2012/13. The services most complained about were the Family Support Services and Intake & Assessment services.

84 stage 1 complaints concluded, 57 of them were resolved in 20 working days or less.

Six conciliation meetings were held remedying five complaints without the need for further escalation to stage 2. Two stage 1 cases progressed to stage 2 investigation. Therefore, whilst some cases took longer than the set timescales, the action taken and work to resolve cases meant 98% of new cases were resolved at local level.

Complaints were seen as important feedback and a means of identifying how practices may be changed for the better. Services were receptive to customers' views and complaints, with 78% of complaints 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.

There were also 28 formal compliments recorded compared to 12 the previous year. The activity in the period shows that the complaints procedure has been effective at resolving customer complaints at a local level. Learning from customer experience through complaints has led to improvements to practices. These are detailed in Section 4.

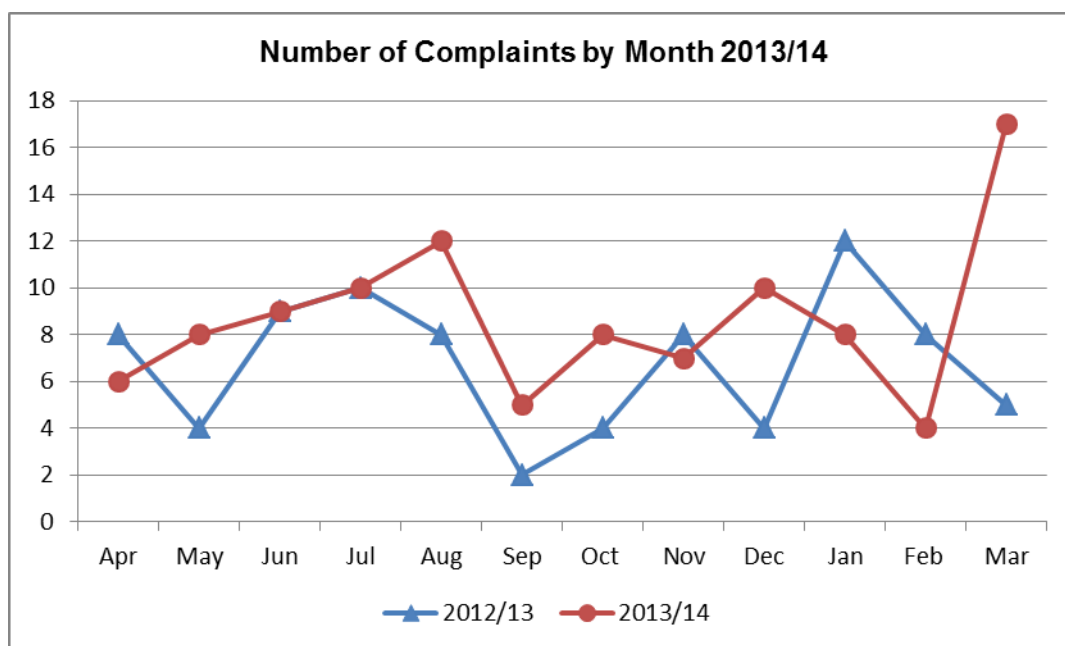
1 SUMMARY STATISTICS

1.1 Headline Data for Customer Feedback

New Cases Received 2013/14	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Totals
Complaints	23	27	25	29	104
Compliments	9	6	6	7	28

1.1.1 In 2013/14 there were 3513 records of children loaded for Children's Social Care Services. There were 104 new complaints received, seven of which were made by children and young people. Last year 82 new complaints were recorded.

1.2 Spread of Complaints Received



1.2.1 There were a few similarities in the number of monthly complaints received over the last two years. June, July and November had the same/similar number of complaints received.

1.2.2 There was a significant drop from August to September for both years. September has been one of the quieter months over the last three years.

December and March saw the largest difference in numbers received year on year. In the previous year both months saw below average numbers of complaints. There was no single cause for the rises this year with complaints spread across services.

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 are more likely to rebuild confidence and improve communications between the complainant and service. There are also significant cost savings by remedying cases without the need for externally commissioned investigators.

Six complainants took up the offer of conciliation in the period which led to five cases being actioned without escalation to the next stage. The recipe for success appeared to be; an apology; rebuilding a breakdown in communication; engaging in discussion about remedies; providing information and explanations. 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 two cases that progressed to stage 2 during the period. There were no stage 3 complaints.

1.5 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Complaints

1.5.1 The LGO referred ten new cases to the Council and concluded one case that had been raised in the previous reporting year:

4 cases - no further action was taken as they were outside of the jurisdiction of the LGO;

1 case was premature and concluded through the Council’s complaints procedure;

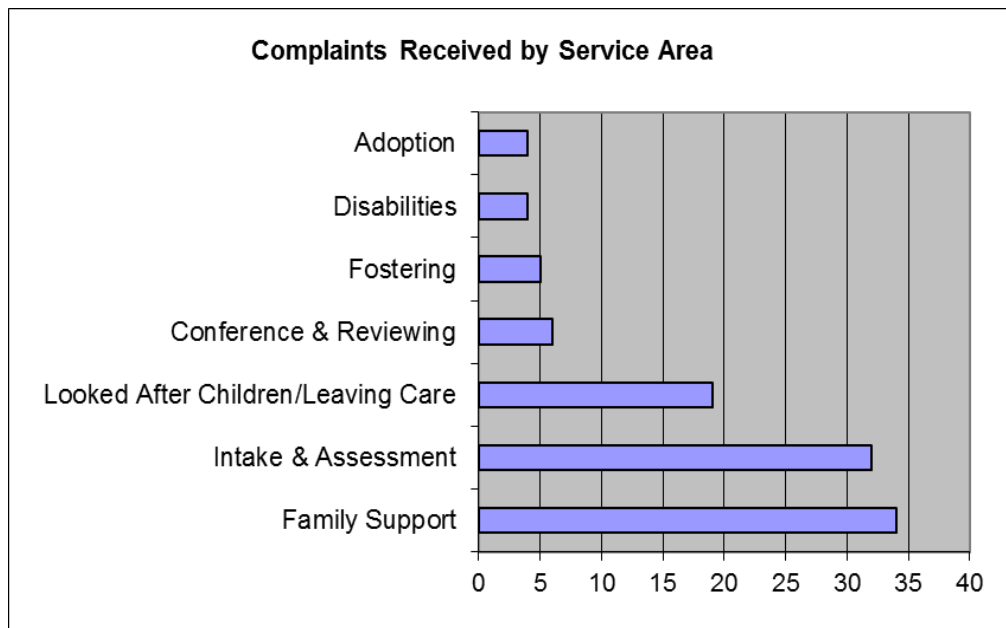
2 cases concluded as the LGO was satisfied with the Council’s complaint response;

2 cases were investigated and concluded that there was no fault on the part of the Council;

2 cases are pending decisions from the LGO.

1.6 Trends - Services Most Complained About

1.6.1 The area most complained about, receiving 34 of the 104 new complaints was the Family Support Services. The three top causes for complaint were alleged poor communication/poor customer care; the conduct/attitude/professionalism of staff; service not provided/ delay providing services.



- 1.6.2 The Intake and Assessment Service saw the most significant rise in complaints compared to last year and the second highest number of complaints by service. The service received 32 new complaints compared to 18 recorded the previous year. The three top causes for complaint were allegations of; poor communication and customer care; the accuracy of files/reports; and the conduct and professionalism of staff.
- 1.6.3 Managers of the Intake and Family support services received a refresh on the quality assurance aspect of complaint responses to support resolution. In order to ensure good customer care the service will work with the Customer Relations Team to develop guidance on risks and strategies for managing cases more effectively where staff experience difficult communications with customers.
- 1.6.4 Seven young people raised their own complaints. They were about the Family Support Services (4), the Looked After Children and Leaving Care Team (2), and the Children with Disabilities Service (1) and complained about;
- ~ not feeling listened to;
 - ~ having social care involved in their life;
 - ~ not allowing a parent to attend meetings;
 - ~ conduct of the social worker;
 - ~ not knowing who would be at a meeting;
 - ~ timing of support: and
 - ~ not enough social work visits

1.7 Outcomes from Concluded Complaints

- 1.7.1 92 complaints received at Stage 1 were concluded in the period. Eight were either withdrawn; put through another more suitable process; or not considered suitable for the complaints process. This left 84 cases to be responded to as stage 1 complaints.

20 stage 1 cases were upheld. A further 46 were partly upheld. This meant a total of 66 (78%) investigated stage 1 complaints were deemed to be well founded in full or in part.

- 1.7.2 Of the 84 stage 1 complaints investigated and concluded:

28* cases involved the Family Support Services. 21 of the 28 (75%) complaints had an upheld or partly upheld outcome.

21 cases involved the Intake and Assessment Services, 20 of the 23 (87%) complaints had an upheld or partly upheld outcome.

15* involved the Looked After and Leaving Care Services and 12 (80%) complaints had an upheld or partly upheld outcome.

**One case crossed the Family Support Services and the Looked After Children & Leaving Care Services.*

- 1.7.3 Three stage 2 complaints concluded in the period and two were partly upheld.
- 1.7.4 Remedies were put in place for individual complaint cases. Section 4 details the wider learning and improvements from complaints.

1.8 Compliments

1.8.1 28 compliments were recorded relating to good customer care and the quality of responses to children and families issues. Service users, including young people, thanked workers for their help and support and professionalism including; good communication; being helpful, thoughtful, focussed, passionate and nice. External professionals expressed thanks for clear, excellent information; and excellent practice.

1.8.2 The spread of compliments was:

15	Looked After Children & Leaving Care Service
7	Family Support Services
4	Intake & Assessment Service
1	Adoption
1	Conference & Review

2 PERFORMANCE IN COMPLAINTS HANDLING

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

2.2 One stage 1 case that had been closed in the previous period was reopened to consider a stage 3 request, a response was sent declining the request. 84 stage 1 cases were responded to, of these 57, (68%) were completed in 20 working days or less:

Timescale for Stage 1 Complaint Response				
Working Days to Respond	0 - 10	11 -20	21 - 30	30+
Number of Cases	27	30*	14	13

*included a case coordinated by Health. The social care information was provided to health in 16 days, but the overall response from Health took longer than 20 working days.

2.3 Of the 27 cases that went beyond 20 working days, four were subject to conciliation meetings following the initial response. Therefore, whilst the approach was successful the overall timescale to resolve these complaints took longer than the standard stage 1 timescale. A further case went overdue due to delays by the service.

The remaining cases involved complex or detailed issues that required more time to achieve resolution. For example issues relating to; legal matters; data protection; competing priorities for complainants; more issues being added part way through the investigation process.

3 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY MONITORING

3.1 Monitoring

3.1.1 The purpose of capturing data on the characteristics of service users 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 relates to their direct involvement with a service. A person may make more than one complaint in the period.

- 3.1.2 In 2013-14 there were 3513 child records in Children's Social Care Services. During the period 104 new complaints were registered.
- 3.1.3 There are 'unknowns' in the returns for complaints as data is collected at the first point of contact in a complaint. 66% of cases were received via letters and emails which does not generally contain monitoring data information. When data is not available the record in the complaint database is 'unknown'. Unknowns may mask representations from minority groups. Low or no representations from minority groups reduced the opportunity for reassurance that access to complaints about services was provided in an equitable manner.
- 3.1.4 In 2014/15 work will take place to set up an option for complainants, or their representatives, to log their own complaints online which will include the option to record details of a person's 'protected characteristics'. For example, age, race, sex. It is hoped that this will improve the capture of important data so that we can better understand who is able to access the complaints process and who is affected by complaints.

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.

104 complaints were received.

41% by email	17 % by telephone	2 % personal visit
25% by letter	14 % by complaint form	

%age numbers total 99% due to rounding.

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 104 complaints made about the service were from adults complaining about their interactions and experience, or on behalf of children. Seven young people raised complaints in their own right about issues affecting them; their complaints were received via complaint form (5), telephone (1) and a meeting with a social worker (1).

3.3 Gender

- 3.3.1 In order to make some broad comparisons data gathered for new complaint cases received in 2013/14 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 the adult's gender was recorded. This gives us the gender of complainants affected by complaints. Figures do not total 100% due to rounding.

	Male	Female	Not known
Service user affected by complaints	36%	47%	18%
Gender in Children's Records loaded by the social care service	51%	48%	1%

- 3.3.3 Service users of both genders are represented in the complaints procedure. Where information was known in complaints, more females were affected by complaints than males. Fewer females accessed social care services than males.
- 3.3.4 Whilst there were some 'unknowns' for the service receiving the highest number of complaints (Family Support Service), issues of complaint affected 20 female service users compared to 11 males. The issues affecting males also affected females. Complaints affecting female service users but not males included not feeling listened to: and the support in a case of domestic violence.
- 3.3.5 Broadly, both genders were affected by similar issues. However, adult females were more likely to raise complaints about Adoption Services (three out of the four complaints).

3.4 Ethnicity

- 3.4.1 In most complaints the ethnicity of the complainant was recorded as not known. Where information was recorded service users affected by new complaints were recorded as 'White British'. 81% of service users accessing social care services were 'White'. The last census on population by ethnic origin (2011) showed that 89.7% of the population of Central Bedfordshire were 'White British' and 10.3% classified as 'Other'.
- 3.4.2 With most cases with 'unknown' ethnicity it is likely that complainants with other ethnic backgrounds were also represented in complaints. However, it is not possible to identify the issues affecting service users with minority backgrounds.

3.5 Age

- 3.5.1 Of the 104 complaints;
- 61 affected people under the age of 18
 - 7 affected people 19 – 64
 - 30 cases age unknown
 - 6 no service user was identified

This meant that whilst the service users affected were all children/young, 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. The main trends for complaint are set out in Section 1.6.
- 3.5.3 Seven young people made their own complaints which related to a range of services. Six young people raised more than one issue in their complaint.

The complaints were about; not feeling listened to (3); not wanting social care involved; unacceptable language or remarks used by a social worker; not seeing a social worker for some time; completing a plan during exam period; not being told unknown people would be at a meeting; and errors in a report;. Adults also raised complaints about errors in reports. Young people making their own complaints were offered the support of an advocate

3.6 Disability

3.6.1 The majority of complaints were recorded as 'not known' in relation to disability.

3.6.2 There were six complaints related to children with disabilities services. The issues of complaint from parents of children who had a disability ranged from dissatisfaction with the standard of care; delay assessing needs; poor engagement with the child; disagreement with closure of the case; standard of driving. A young person supported by children with disabilities complained about not feeling listened to. Children without disabilities also raised this as an issue.

4 SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS RESULTING FROM CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

Where a service identified a fault from a complaint (upheld/partly upheld), case specific remedies were put in place. Managers also considered what they could do to improve the service generally and the actions taken are detailed below:

4.1 Family Support Services	
YOU SAID	THE SERVICE DID:
There was delay progressing a child protection plan. A referral for input to another agency was not prioritised by them as they were unaware children were subject to child protection plans.	Future referrals to outside agencies will be clear on the status of the case and any need to prioritise support.
Too short notice for child protection meeting.	The team were reminded of the importance of sending out invite lists to the conference and reviewing service more promptly. The aim is to enable participation of partner agencies and ensure all partners are consulted and are aware of the dates and venues of meetings.
A Child in Need (CIN) Meeting went ahead without the parent in attendance.	Workers notified to ensure parents attendance at CIN Meetings, and where parents are not able to attend, meetings should only go ahead with parental consent.
4.2 Intake and Assessment	
YOU SAID	THE SERVICE DID:
Communication fell short when a worker went off sick and the family were not informed.	The Head of Service sent a communication to set out clear expectations for the service that families should be kept informed if a worker has unplanned absence or leaves the organisation.
Actions and timescales in the child protection plan were not met.	Staff were reminded: - to meet child protection timescales & plans, and if they cannot be met reasons should be recorded in the Core Group Meeting minutes.
Working agreement was not put in place as agreed	- about the importance of completing tasks that have been agreed with families, or to be explicitly clear if a decision has been made resulting in a change in case direction where a working agreement is no longer required.
Poor response to referral from a parent – the service conducted follow up enquires but the parent was not kept informed.	Staff were reminded of the importance of maintaining contact with families in these circumstances.
Accuracy and quality of assessments was challenged in a number of complaints.	Reminder sent to staff to proof read reports. The manager of the service commented that she would ensure reports are checked more thoroughly.
Delay in case being allocated	Social workers make contact with families within a day and a decision as to whether an assessment will be undertaken is made within 24 hours. With the implementation of new Assessment Teams and the Access and Referral Hub, social workers will now have an opportunity to make appointments and meet with families and children more quickly than they did before.

Failure to respond to; customer enquiries to an email admin account; letters; and a complaint.	Staff monitoring the email inbox will load any enquiries into the case record which will then alert the worker automatically. Customer Charter distributed to staff. Head of Service discussed with her managers the importance of responding to customer letters in a timely manner.
Service user commented that the report for conference did not include strengths, just negatives	The Head of Service reported that managers are now more aware of how important it is to identify family strengths as well as needs, and are working with their teams to implement this.
Assessment completed without involving the children, in part due to a change of worker part way through the assessment process.	Team structures have been changed and three teams with a core purpose of assessment have been developed. This should mean a reduction on the need to reallocate work, and therefore for children and their families to experience fewer changes of Social Worker.
Information was shared with a family regarding the content of a referral. The referrer believed the way the information was shared allowed the family to identify them as the source.	Social Workers were advised to tell informants that the concerns will, in most cases, be shared with the family in full, and some of the detail may mean they know who has complained to social care. Also social workers have been advised on the approach to take when discussing the details with families to avoid directly identifying an anonymous caller.

4.3 Conference & Review Services

YOU SAID	THE SERVICE DID:
Delay sending out review minutes	The service has reviewed the process to reduce delays and ensure greater efficiency. A new electronic data recording system is in place which includes monitoring timescales for completion. An agreed escalation process has been introduced for cases where problems arise.
Parent travelled some distance with their 'supporter' to attend a child protection conference. They were advised on the day that the 'supporter' could not attend the meeting. This conflicted with the information in the leaflet for parents.	The service redesigned the information for parents to better inform them of the role of the Conference Chair and the importance of the communication between family members and the service in advance of a conference regarding planned attendance by family members and supporters.
Parent telephoned to speak with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) but was unable to as Customer Services were unable to access contact details.	The Head of Service sent a statement re LADO role to the manager of Customer Services for distribution to staff and contact details have been put on the Council's web pages.

4.4 Looked After Children & Leaving Care Services

YOU SAID	THE SERVICE DID:
Foster parents shared concerns that the impact a Special Guardianship Order would have on them was not considered.	The service will take forward learning both in terms of explanations provided to potential carers regarding the process, and sharing of reports prior to submission.
Young person complained about lack of support and visits, and the timing of pathway planning.	The service held group supervision to share the learning from the complaint on pathway plans which included refreshing responsibilities. The team operate a tracking sheet for frequency of visits monitored weekly by managers.

Wider family member was not considered as a potential carer.	Learning from this complaint was shared in a team meeting. Practice was refreshed with a reminder to staff to consider family members that had previously been excluded when circumstances in the case change.
Letter to parent about future plans for her son was insensitive and suggested a decision had been made regarding adoption when this was not the case	The template decision letter regarding plans around adoption was reviewed and improved to make it clearer for parents.
Concerns raised by foster carer about a disclosure of her personal details to the birth family.	Legal Services have provided assurances that they will scrutinise documents prior to circulation. All social workers within the service were reminded of the importance of any breaches regarding Data Protection and subsequent impact.
Transition discussions were held in front of a child causing distress.	Social workers were advised that children should not be present during meetings regarding transitions.

4.5 Fostering	
YOU SAID	THE SERVICE DID:
Carers did not receive timely and open communication in respect of the completion and the outcome of the assessment.	A letter will now be sent out to applicants to inform them of the outcome of the recommendation of the Head of Service regarding the Regulation 24 assessment.
4.6 Children with Disabilities Services	
YOU SAID	THE SERVICE DID:
Driver of minibus caused another driver to brake heavily and this caused distress.	Officer advised of the complaint and the expected standards and behaviours whilst driving.