

Annual Report

Complaints, Concerns & Compliments for
Children, Young People & Learning Services

2015 - 2016



Point	Contents	Page
1.0	Introduction	3
2.0	Context	3
2.1	Definitions	3
2.2	Legislation	3
3.0	Complaints procedures	4
3.1	Statutory complaints procedure in Bracknell Forest	4
3.2	Local Authority complaints procedure (Corporate procedure)	5
3.3	What may be complained about?	6
3.4	What is exempt from the complaints procedure?	6
3.5	Timescales	6
4.0	Overview of Complaints	7
4.1	Number of complaints received	7
4.2	Cost of complaint investigations	9
4.3	Findings from complaints	10
4.4	Local Government Ombudsman referrals (LGO)	11
4.5	Complaints by areas of service provision	11
4.6	Nature of complaints received	12
4.7	Commentary on complaints received	12
4.8	Involvement of young people in the complaints process	13
4.9	Learning from complaints in 2014 – 2015	14
5.0	Feedback	14
6.0	Concerns	15
7.0	Compliments	16
7.1	Breakdown of compliments	16
7.2	Distribution of compliments across the services	16
7.3	Some examples of compliments received	17
8.0	Development of policies and procedures	17
8.1	Staff training in managing complaints	17
8.2	Networking and sharing policy and practice	17
9.0	Member of Parliament enquiries	18
10.0	Areas for future development	18
11.0	Conclusion	18

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This annual report covers the period from 1st April 2015 through to 31st March 2016 and reports on complaints, concerns or compliments made by, or on behalf of children and young people who receive support / services from Children's Social Care in Bracknell Forest. It is a statutory requirement to produce an annual report which will be published on the Council's website.

The Complaints Manager has the key responsibility for managing the statutory process for complaints from children and young people (or their representatives) about the quality of that service. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview and analysis of all complaints, concerns and compliments received and to summarise the issues that have arisen, providing a mechanism by which the Department can monitor the quality and effectiveness of services and of its complaints procedure.

The report will be approved by the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning, and will also be presented to the Children and Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Complaints about school provision and Special Needs are dealt with under a separate procedure and are not part of this report.

2.0 CONTEXT

2.1 Definitions

The Children Act 1989 defines the complaints procedure as being for 'representations (including complaints)'. A representation could also include a concern, a compliment or enquiry on the nature, delivery or availability of a service. Therefore for a clearer understanding, we have provided the following definitions for the purposes of this report which are used within our complaints procedures:

Complaint: A complaint may generally be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet.

Concern: There are many instances where minor concerns can be addressed without further recourse to the complaints procedure. These are generally handled locally within the team or handled informally by the complaints manager and resolved within a short space of time (see point 5, page 15 for further information).

Compliment: Something nice that you say to praise or to thank someone (many of those in receipt of a service wish to give a compliment).

Deferred Complaint: It may not be possible to respond to a complaint immediately, for example if a case is in, or about to begin Court proceedings; the Local Authority has discretion in deciding whether to consider the complaint, whereas to do so would prejudice any court decisions. In such cases the complaint is deferred until the court proceedings are concluded; upon conclusion, the complaint may be resubmitted for consideration.

Declined Complaint: The Local Authority has the discretion to decide whether or not the 'complainant' is appropriate to act on behalf of the child(ren) or young person in question. Complaints are of course acceptable from the young person themselves, a parent, carer, or an adult who has parental responsibility.

If a complaint is received from an individual who does not meet these criteria, then their complaint will be declined. An explanation will be provided to the author of the complaint.

(see point 3.4 page 6 for further examples)

2.2 Legislation

The arrangements for the statutory procedure and management of complaints from children and young people (or their representatives) are set out in *The Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006*.

The legislation requires Local Authorities to appoint a Complaints Manager with the responsibility for:

- ✧ Managing, developing and administering the complaints procedure
- ✧ Providing assistance and advice to those who wish to complain
- ✧ Overseeing the investigation of complaints that cannot be managed at source
- ✧ Supporting and training existing and new members of staff
- ✧ Monitoring and reporting on complaints activity and data

Legislation is supported by detailed guidance from the Department for Education entitled 'Getting the Best from Complaints' which has been taken into account in the Complaint Procedures published by the Local Authority.

3.0 COMPLAINT PROCEDURES

3.1 Statutory complaints procedure in Bracknell Forest

Responsibility for the service rests with the Director for Children, Young People and Learning. In order to provide independence from the line management of cases and the allocation of resources, the Complaints Manager's post is located in the Strategy, Resources and Early Intervention branch of the Department and reports to the Head of Performance Management and Governance.

The purpose of the statutory procedure is to enable the complainant to have access to independent consideration of matters raised.

Complaints process using the Statutory Procedure:

Stage One: Local Resolution

This initial stage provides Children's Social Care Services the opportunity to try and resolve issues of dissatisfaction at local level with managers and staff who have responsibility for the case.

The Department has 10 working days in which to respond to the complaint made. The Assistant Team Manager or Team Manager (of the service in question) will write to the complainant within this timescale, providing details of their investigations and any outcomes or decisions made.

Stage Two: Independent Investigation

Stage two involves a full and formal investigation; having received the response at the conclusion of stage one, the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome and has requested to progress onto the next stage.

The Complaints Manager will appoint an independent Investigating Officer (IO) to lead the investigation of the same complaint previously responded to at stage one of the procedures (this is not an opportunity to make additional complaints). An Independent Person (IP) must also be appointed who works alongside the IO and will be involved in all aspects of the investigation. The role of the IP (as identified in guidance) is to shadow and oversee the quality of the work of the Investigating Officer.

The Investigation should be completed and the response sent to the complainant within 25 working days. Where this is not possible, this may be extended to 65 days.

The Complaints Manager will maintain dialogue with the complainant if a response in the 25 working days is not feasible.

At the conclusion of the investigation, both the IO and the IP individually produce a report; the IP will comment on the findings outlined in the IO's – whether or not they are in agreement with the outcomes recommended.

Both reports are forwarded for the consideration of the Chief Officer Children Social Care (CSC) when they draft their stage 2 response.

The final decision regarding the outcome of the complaint rests with the Chief Officer, CSC, who will use the reports received from the IO & IP in reaching their conclusions which will be clearly detailed in the response. A copy of the IO's report will also be forwarded to the complainant for their information.

Stage Three: Review Panel

Where stage 2 has been concluded and the complainant remains dissatisfied, they will be eligible to request further consideration of the complaint by a Review Panel.

The Panel does not re-investigate the complaints, nor would it consider any new complaints that have not been first considered at stage two.

The Panel will be made up of three people, all of whom must be independent of the Council. The purpose of the Panel is to consider the complaint and wherever possible, work towards a resolution, which very often takes the form of recommendations made to the Director of CYP&L. The final decision rests with the Director, who will write to the complainant. Informing them of the outcome reached.

The complainant should be advised of their right to refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman if still dissatisfied.

Final Stage: The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

The LGO are impartial and investigate complaints of injustice arising from maladministration by the local authority; when they receive a complaint, they are on the side of neither the complainant nor the respondent authority.

Complainants are entitled to refer complaints onto the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) at any stage; however the LGO will not normally accept the complaint until the Council has had a chance to complete all stages of the complaints procedure.

This is the final stage that the complainant can take with their complaint, if they remain dissatisfied; their only recourse is through judicial proceedings.

3.2 Local Authority complaints procedure (Corporate Procedure)

Complaints not covered by the statutory procedure may be dealt with under the Local Authority's Corporate Procedure. These are often complaints made by parents, or carers regarding the impact of a service on them personally, liaison and co-ordination of these remain through the Complaints Manager.

Complaints process using the Corporate Procedure:

The Corporate procedure was updated in January 2015 and has changed to what was previously a four stage procedure to three stages, which are as follows:

Stage One

The corporate procedure aims to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity. Stage 1 is the 'informal complaint' stage - to a member of staff at the first point of contact.

However, within Children's Social Care, stage 1 complaints considered under the corporate procedure are investigated formally and just as thoroughly as those received under the statutory procedures.

Stage Two

Formal complaint to the Director, who will initiate an investigation (independent to the Department concerned) into the complaints made.

Stage Three

The Chief Executive needs to consider whether the complaint has been dealt with appropriately. The Chief Executive may personally investigate the complaint, or appoint the Director or a senior manager who has not previously been involved, to review the complaint.

Alternatively, the Chief Executive may decide to refer the complaint to a complaints review panel, although they have the option to suggest a solution rather than convene a panel.

3.3 What may be complained about?

Some examples are given below (this is not an exhaustive list and the Complaints Manager should seek legal advice as necessary):

- ✧ An unwelcome or disputed decision.
- ✧ Attitude or behaviour of staff.
- ✧ Poor / lack of communication.
- ✧ Application of eligibility and assessment criteria / assessment care management and review.
- ✧ Concern about the quality or appropriateness of a service.
- ✧ Delay in decision making or provision of services / delivery or non-delivery of services.

3.4 What is exempt from the complaints procedure?

Some examples are given below (this is not an exhaustive list and the Complaints Manager should seek legal advice as necessary):

- ✧ The person wishing to complain does not meet the requirements of 'a qualifying individual'. *A person is a 'qualifying individual' if social services have a power or a duty to provide a service to her/him. A representative can complain on behalf of the child, but there must be a direct connection, for example, have parental responsibility.*
- ✧ The same complaint has already been dealt with at all stages of the procedure.
- ✧ The complaint does not concern the actions or decisions of the local authority (or any body acting on its behalf).
- ✧ Regulation 8, as set out in the *Children's Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006* provides the local authority with discretion in deciding whether to consider complaints, where to do so would prejudice any of the following:
 - (i) Court proceedings
 - (ii) Tribunals
 - (iii) Disciplinary proceedings or
 - (iv) Criminal proceedings
 - (v) Grievance proceedings

3.5 Timescales

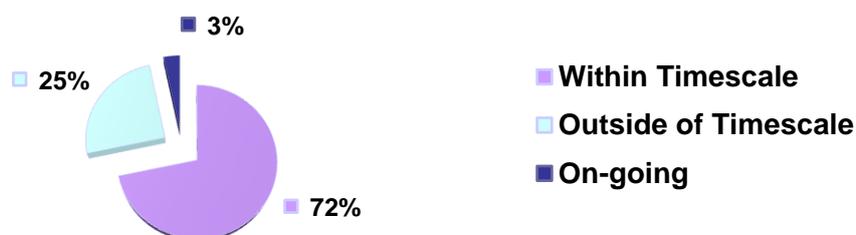
Timescales for response to a complaint are clearly defined within both the Corporate and Statutory Complaint Processes (which also includes progressing through stages 1 to 3). We always aim to resolve complaints within defined timescales, however occasionally there are challenges in keeping within deadlines and it is sometimes necessary to re-negotiate these

with the Complainant; allowing more time if required for the investigation and response. When this occurs the Complaints Manager will contact the complainant and update them of the situation and seek agreement for an extended period of investigation.

Some of the reasons why the complaint may go out of timescales include:

- ✧ A more complex complaint may require additional time for a thorough investigation to take place.
- ✧ Those who need to be interviewed (either professionals or complainant) could be unavailable within timescales due to annual leave or sickness.
- ✧ In some cases a member of staff may have left the Council and it may take time to contact them and seek their agreement / involvement in the investigation.
- ✧ It may take time to secure the services of an Investigating Officer and an Independent Person.

The following chart shows the breakdown of the complaints made throughout the period of April 2015 to March 2016 and whether timescales set in the Complaints Process were met. It shows that 72% have been met within timescale, 25% were outside of timescales, with 3% still within the investigation stage at the time of recording during the 4th quarter.



4.0 OVERVIEW OF COMPLAINTS

The Complaints Manager maintains a list of on-going complaints that are currently under investigation. Liaison meetings are held on more complex cases, particularly if any recommendations have been made or any 'learning' can be gained from the complaint / investigation experience (see point 4.9)

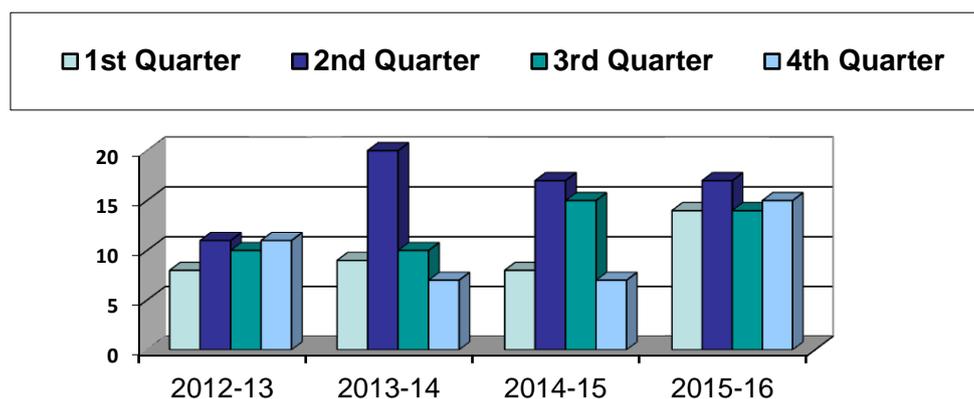
4.1 Number of complaints received (Statutory and Corporate combined)

The following tables show the comparison figures of the total complaints received over the last 4 financial years. These show that there has been an increase in the number of complaints in 2015/16.

At the end of March 2016 there were 1600 throughput cases within Children's Social Care for children and young people ('throughput' cases include Child Protection and Looked after Children which have been opened/closed during the course of the year). All of these cases have the potential to complain to Bracknell Forest Council.

The table overleaf shows the total number of complaints made over the last four years showing a year on year increase. It should be noted that there has been an increase in referrals into social care resulting in a greater number of cases which may be a contributing factor to the gradual increase in complaints.

Comparison



Response to complaints in 2015 - 2016

Complaints Received in Total	Complaints Deferred or Declined	Investigated Under the Statutory Procedure	Investigated Under the Corporate Procedure
61 (47)	18 (15)	27 (11)	16 (21)

(2014-15 figures in brackets)

Out of 61 complaints that were received this year, 11 complaints were deferred as a result of ongoing court proceedings, and 7 complaints were declined; which means that 43 were formally investigated using either the Statutory or Corporate complaints procedure culminating with a written response to the complainant (One stage 2 investigation was frozen at the request of the complainant and has been on hold awaiting further instructions at the time of this report). It is noted that the complaints which have been deferred may be reinstated following the conclusion of proceedings. This is being monitored in consultation with Children Social Care.

The complaints recorded show an increase of 8.5%, based on 61 complaints received in 2015-16, compared to 2014-15 where 47 complaints were received. The figure of formal investigations figure of 43 for 2015-16 is also higher, in comparison to 32 complaints being formally investigated in 2014-15 and 36 in 2013-14.

The table below shows that the figures for the number of children being supported by Children's Social Care for the past two years have risen by 9%.

Period	Open Cases	Complaints Received
2014-15	(as at 31 st March 2015) = 1467	47 (3.2% of throughput cases)
2015-16	(as at 31 st March 2016) = 1600	61 (3.8% of throughput cases)

A breakdown has been provided on the next page regarding both the procedures used and the outcomes reached at the conclusion of the individual investigations during 2015-16.

Stage / Procedure Used	Number of Complaints
Stage 1 – Statutory Procedure	25 (8)
Stage 2 – Statutory Procedure	2 (2)
Stage 3 – Statutory Procedure	0 (0)
Stage 1 – Corporate Procedure	9 (19) *
Stage 2 – Corporate Procedure	3 (1)
Stage 3 – Corporate Procedure	3 (1)
Stage 4 – Corporate Procedure	1 (1)
Complaints Deferred	11 (15)
Complaints Declined	7 (6)

Comparative figures for 2014 – 2015 are shown in brackets.

****Stage 1 investigations using the corporate procedure are not recorded in the Council’s collective general quarterly figures. However, all complaints received at stage one by the Children, Young People & Learning Department are investigated just as thoroughly, irrelevant of which procedure is used; this being the case, we have elected to continue to log these separately for our own monitoring purposes whilst at the same time continuing to provide a valuable source of information on services, experiences and practices followed.***

All Managers within Children’s Social Care make an effort to resolve problems or concerns before they escalate into formal complaints. This ensures that wherever possible, complaints are promptly dealt with or whenever possible, resolved within stage one of the complaints process.

It is notable that there has been a positive increase in dealing successfully with complaints at this stage. Out of the 34 complaints received and investigated at stage one of both the Statutory and Corporate procedures, only 5 cases progressed onto stage two (one of which has been frozen), with only 4 progressing onto stage three and four of the Corporate Procedure. This reflects the good practices and swift responses of the staff involved.

It is clear from the aforementioned data that by putting in the time and effort into the early stages of the complaints process of either procedure will reduce the number of complaints progressing onto the next stage.

This leads to better outcomes for the complainant and more time for the practitioners to focus on delivery of services.

4.2 Cost of complaint service and investigations for 2015 – 2016

The Complaints Manager works 15 hours a week.

When a complaint proceeds to stage two under the statutory procedures, it is a requirement that an Investigating Officer and an Independent Person be appointed (see point 3.1). The cost of this varies depending on the length of time involved and complexity of the investigation. Similarly, if a complaint progresses onto stage three of the statutory complaints procedure, an independent panel needs to be arranged, where it is necessary to commission appropriate members to attend. The budget allocated for investigations is £4,500 per annum.

In 2015 -16 we saw an increase in the number of the complaints which have proceeded to stage 2 and the need for investigators with relevant social care experience, there has been an increase in costs due to the time spent of the Investigating Officers, who ensure that the complaint is properly investigated, appropriately and fairly. As part of their investigation they have access to all records and can interview all staff they feel appropriate.

The overall cost of the complaint investigations (which covers the cost of the Independent Investigators and Independent Person’s commissioned), was £8,500.

This shows an increase in costs from the previous year of £1240 which was £7,220 for complaint investigations (£5,045 for 2013/14).

Where possible, experienced investigators within the Council have been utilised.

4.3 Findings from complaints

The outcomes shown in the following table are made in respect of the 43 complaints accepted into the complaint procedures (at the time of reporting, two had yet to be completed and therefore logged as ‘ongoing’ as still under investigation).

Breakdown of procedures / stages

At Stage 1 of the Statutory Procedures	14	Complaints - Not Upheld
	5	Complaints - Partially Upheld
	0	Complaints - Upheld
	4	Complaints - Resolved
	2	Complaints - Ongoing
At Stage 2 of the Statutory Procedures	2	1 Complaint - Not Upheld <i>1 complaint frozen until further notice</i>
At Stage 1 of the Corporate Procedures	5	Complaints - Not Upheld
	1	Complaint - Partially Upheld
	2	Complaints - Upheld

	1	Complaint - Resolved
At Stage 2 of the Corporate Procedures	1	Complaint – Not Upheld
	1	Complaint - Partially Upheld
	1	Complaint - Upheld
At Stage 3 of the Corporate Procedures	2	Complaint – Not Upheld
	1	Complaint – Partially
At Stage 4 of the Corporate Procedures	1	Complaints – Not Upheld

Where the department is able to resolve matters to the satisfaction of the complainant the process is shortened considerably. As shown in the tables above, we were able to resolve a total of 5 cases this year.

Similarly it may be necessary to defer a complaint (a total of 11 complaints were deferred this year). In these situations we will write to the complainant, explaining why their complaint cannot be investigated at this particular juncture and advise that they may re-submit their complaint for consideration at a later date.

Some examples for this:

- ✧ The Department may be in the process of applying for a Court order*.
- ✧ The complainant wants to make an appeal against a Court order (they should take the legal route in such cases, as the complaints procedure cannot be used to overturn a Court decision).

** This is to ensure that the legal process can be concluded without prejudice.*

Dissatisfaction about a Local Authority's management or handling of a child's case, even where related to a Court order may be appropriately considered, for example; conduct of social work staff involved in Court procedures. It is for the Complaints Manager to identify whether these may be considered (whilst gaining the advice from the Council's Legal Team).

4.4 Local Government Ombudsman referrals (LGO)

The complainant can contact the LGO at any time during the process; however, it is usual practice for the LGO to inform the complainant that the Council will generally need to complete all stages of their procedure before they will consider their complaint.

When a complaint has gone through all of the stages (from either the Statutory or Corporate procedures) and the complainant remains unhappy; he/she can then refer the complaint onto the LGO. They will decide whether to progress the matter further by carrying out their own impartial investigations.

LGO contact details are always provided with the concluding letter to the complainant for this purpose (at stage 3 of the procedures).

- (i) For the 1st LGO referral, the LGO made the decision not to investigate as Bracknell Forest Council had admitted there were things that could have been done differently and taken proper steps to resolve the complaint.
- (ii) For the 2nd LGO referral, Bracknell Forest Council is currently awaiting the decision of LGO.
- (iii) For the 3rd, this was a premature complaint made by the complainant who had received a response from Bracknell Forest Council at stage 1 of the procedures only. The LGO instructed the complainant to return to the Local Authority so that they would have the opportunity to respond at the next stage of the Council's complaint procedures.

4.5 Complaints by areas of service provision

The following table shows the service areas where complaints have been made.

The area with the highest number of complaints received relates to the safeguarding team, which is to be expected given the nature of the work undertaken; as this often involves working with families who are unhappy to be receiving such services.

You will note that there has been an increase in complaints across the board this year

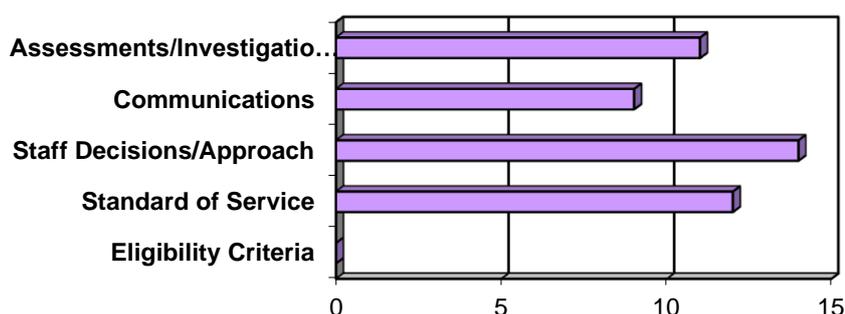
Comparative figures for 2014 – 2015 are shown in brackets.

Service Area / Team	Number
Safeguarding	20 (16)
Looked After Children	13 (10)
Specialist Support Team	9 (6)
Performance & Governance	1 (0)
Complaints Declined / Deferred	18 (15)

4.6 Nature of complaints received

Complaints received are often complex and can cover a variety of issues.

For the purpose of this report the primary issue has been identified in relation to the 43 complaints investigated, these are shown below:



Areas where complaints have decreased in the last year are in relation to assessment and investigations; communications remain about the same. Areas of complaints that have increased include staff decisions / approach and standard of service. In the last three years there have been no complaints regarding eligibility criteria.

4.7 Commentary on complaints received

The following are examples of complaints received regarding some of the primary issues identified – as shown in the table above:

Communications

The father felt that following interviews that had been carried out with his family by the social worker and police, that he was not kept adequately informed and there was insufficient contact / information provided by the social worker.

Comments

The Investigator identified during the investigation at stage one of the complaints process that attempts were made to discuss the situation by telephone. Concerns were raised that the father was not engaging with the assessment process. It was agreed to put future requests for communication in writing.

Outcome of complaint – not upheld.

Assessment / investigations

A father was concerned for the welfare of his child (who lived with his mother). He felt that inadequate assessment processes / investigations had taken place.

Comments

The investigation concluded that the Social Worker was aware of all the issues and that adequate safeguarding steps had been put in place. Nevertheless, it was understood why this parent voiced their concerns and appropriate assurances were provided and accepted.

Outcome of complaint – not upheld.

Staff decisions / approach

Complaint that the allocated Social Worker had been 'telling lies' to an estranged partner which was causing tension and anxiety. It was also stated that the parent's child did not like the allocated Social Worker.

Comments

The investigation considered that the relationship between the Social Worker and the family had irretrievably broken down and that it would be best for all concerned to allocate another worker. It was considered that the relationship between the parents was a difficult one and the Social Worker should have taken this more into consideration. Another worker was allocated to the case.

Outcome of the complaint was partially upheld.

Standard of service

This complaint was made by a 'looked after' young person. There were various concerns raised which included the current placement, workers involved, communications, pocket money, meetings/reviews. The young person also had an Advocate to help them through the process.

Comments

This was quite a complex situation surrounding family dynamics which also included the young person absconding from the placement. A thorough investigation and response was provided and appropriate apologies were made to the complainant where required.

Outcome of complaint – partially upheld.

4.8 Involvement of young people in the complaint process

Children and young people are informed on how to make a complaint when they first become 'looked after' and receive a child friendly leaflet which explains clearly what to do if they are unhappy. Information is also provided on how to contact the Complaints Manager within the 'Children's and Young Person's Consultation Booklet', which they receive before every LAC review. In addition, they may bring complaints to the attention of the Independent Reviewing Officer.

In some circumstances children and young people may require additional support to make a complaint. This is best provided by a relative or friend, if this is not possible however, then we can arrange for the provision of an Advocate from an Advocacy Service (who will be independent of the Department). If this is required the Complaints Manager will approach the Child Participation Development Officer who is able to provide advice and help in securing a service where requested.

The records for 2015 -16 shows that the majority of complaints were made by the parent / carer during this period.

However, there were seven complaints made by a child or young person; the majority involved the use of an Advocate, which was arranged by our in-house Participation Development Officer.

4.9 Learning from complaints in 2015-16

The aim of the formal complaint investigation process is not to 'find fault' but to look at the practices followed in relation to the complaint issues at hand. This also provides a valuable source of information to identify service problems, make improvements and enhance departmental learning and practice.

A 'learning from complaints' pro forma is sent to an appropriate Manager or Head of Service for completion following the investigation and closure of a complaint. This is used to record an agreed action plan, identifying staff involved, timescales and how progress will be monitored.

Where a complaint has been difficult or complex, a 'learning from complaints' meeting is held with Senior Managers in Children's Social Care and usually 'chaired' by the Head of Service for Performance and Governance. This meeting has been introduced to reflect and learn from the situation and put in place measures to reduce the risk of issues arising in the future. There have been two such meetings during the year.

As a result of these meetings, an information pack was developed for independent investigators. The pack contains a template for the investigation report, flowcharts and detailed guidance for carrying out thorough investigations. The aim of the pack is to ensure a consistent approach and standard in independent investigations.

Key learning points and services improvements 2015 - 2016

- ✓ Parents should be updated following the meeting of professionals (in relation to their case) and Section 47 assessments where appropriate.

- ✓ During the course of an investigation, that the Complaints Manager writes to the complainant to elaborate on any likely actions that need to be undertaken before the next contact.
- ✓ Regular checks made that information provided on the website is up-to-date and correct.
- ✓ Relevant medical documentation is provided to the foster carers in a timely manner.
- ✓ When a 'looked after child' placement is coming to an end, identify quickly what needs to be transferred / actioned, i.e., mobile phone contracts, NHS documentation, NI number.
- ✓ Provide carers / parents with adequate notice when arranging meetings.

5.0 FEEDBACK

When a case is closed to Children's Social Care, a feedback form is sent to the parent / carer to provide an opportunity for them to express their views of how they feel they have been supported by the Department.

These are a crucial element in the reviewing of the service delivery for Children's Social Care and contribute to service improvements.

The Complaints Manager receives a copy of these forms in order to provide some wider contextual information about the experiences of families, which can be incorporated into on-going training and support of practitioners managing the complaints process.

Some examples of the comments made are as follows:

Examples of feedback received	2015-16
<p>"The SW working with my family was very professional, empathetic and informative. I was very impressed".</p> <p>"I felt slightly intimidated over my parenting and didn't feel supported".</p> <p>"I didn't get a call from anyone in weeks, then was informed by our NHS contact that the SW had left"</p> <p>"Due to the police involvement, we didn't have a choice whether or not social services were involved as well!"</p> <p>"I was very happy with your help and advice received"</p> <p>"Answer your calls or call back sooner"</p> <p>"Your support in the background was a safe feeling to have!"</p>	

6.0 CONCERNS

There are occasions where the Complaints Manager is contacted by members of the public with:

- ✧ a concern
- ✧ wanting to have a general discussion regarding 'something' they are apprehensive about, or
- ✧ may just wish to comment on services received from Children's Social Care

If such matters do not merit a formal investigation and progression onto the formal complaints processes of either the Statutory or Corporate procedures, then these are logged as a 'concern'.

The table on the next page shows concerns received which have decreased in the year 2015/16 compared to the previous year (in brackets).

Concerns Received	16 (31)
--------------------------	----------------

Dealing positively with concerns at this stage is a productive and proactive action that can negate the need to progress to more formal procedures which can be more costly.

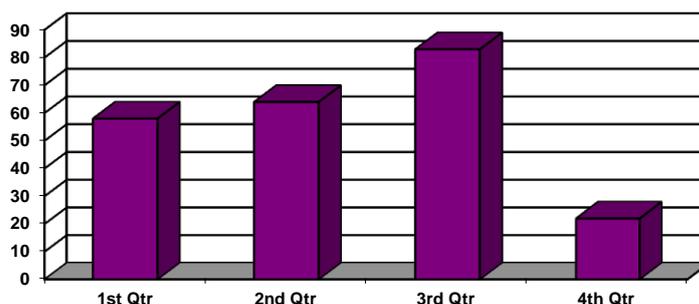
7.0 COMPLIMENTS

Compliments provide a valuable source of information regarding the quality of our services and help identify where they are working well. The compliments received this year (227) outnumber the complaints received last year (181) an increase of 46.

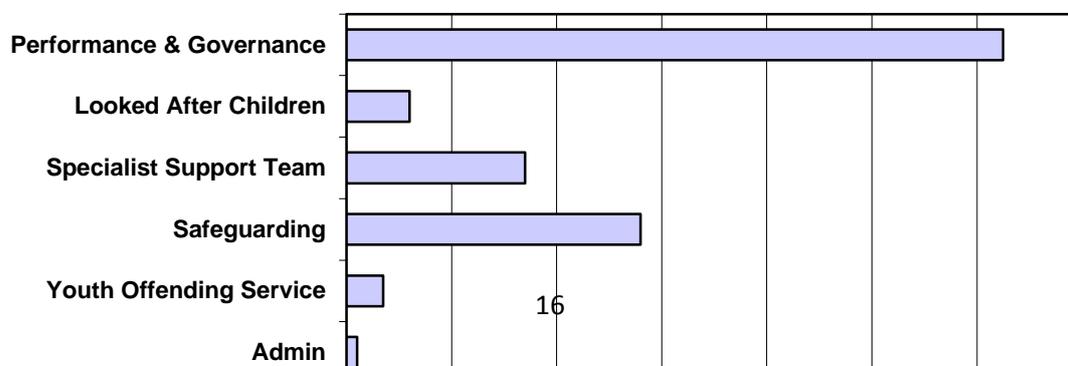
A large majority of the compliments are made by parents or users of the services, but they are also made by a range of independent professional colleagues who work with Children’s Social Care. Although compliments across different professionals in the Department are many – these are not formally recorded.

The figure of 227 compliments received by the Department demonstrates the high value that people receiving support place on the services they receive.

7.1 Breakdown of compliments *(table below shows the distribution of compliments each quarter over the past year)*



7.2 Distribution of compliments across the services



7.3 Some examples of compliments received

Some examples of compliments received	227 in Total
<p>“The SW has consistently worked very hard to ensure that the children’s best interests are kept central to all decisions made. She has carefully and sensitively handled the children, their mum and the foster carers during this time of agreed change” - Court</p> <p>“Fabulous support and advice received” – Parent</p> <p>“I just wanted to say a big thank you for your support. It’s been a steep learning curve, but I have really enjoyed my placement with you” – Student SW</p> <p>“Our situation has improved since the involvement of Children’s Social Care” – Parent</p> <p>“The SW who visited us was fantastic and very insightful and on the ball!”</p> <p>“Out of all the authorities I deal with, BFC in particular always ensures consistency and positive contributions and agreed tasks are always completed within timescales” – an Independent Professional</p> <p>“Nothing needs improvement, I am very happy with the service” – Parent</p> <p>“Excellent comprehensive assessment” – Judge</p> <p>“Your involvement was always friendly and the staff were always nice” - Parent</p> <p>“Our SW is like a breath of fresh air” – Parent</p> <p>“I was helped from my first phone call” – Parent</p> <p>“Evidence was good and clear and the judge commented on the SW being a careful witness” – Solicitor</p> <p>“(SW named) is a miracle worker, she has the right combination of tact and charm to elicit communication with my children” – Parent</p> <p>“A huge thank you especially to (SW name) but also to the rest of the team, who have supported my child. Can’t put in words how much we appreciate it” - Parent</p>	

8.0 DEVELOPMENT OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

8.1 Staff training in managing complaints

Training is provided by the Complaints Manager on a quarterly basis and is available to all staff in Children’s Social Care; this will continue to be provided and in particular targeting new staff as they begin their employment.

The Complaints Manager held 3 separate training sessions over the last year, with 19 members of staff attending. The sessions are designed to better suit smaller groups, so that questions/answers can be discussed for specific cases / individuals if need be

8.2 Networking and sharing policy and practice

It is important to continue to network, share practice and contribute to regional policy and practice. Attendance to the Southern Regional Complaints Managers Group (SRCMG) (held at hosting LA on a rota basis) will take place to support this end. The network aims to raise

standards for complaints management across the South East, to promote consistency of practice and excels in providing a source of mutual support.

9.0 MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT ENQUIRIES

MPs cannot make a complaint using the statutory complaints procedure on behalf of their constituent – although they are able to make a generic enquiry on their behalf (these enquiries are dealt with via the Chief Executive's office).

If it is established that the enquiry requires a formal investigation, we would recommend that the MP goes back to their constituent and encourages them to forward their complaint directly, thus enabling the appropriate complaints process to be used. In view of this, enquiries from Members of Parliament are logged separately from statutory complaints.

For information purposes, there were 29 MP enquiries made during the period of 2015-16 compared to 15 that were received 2014 - 15.

10.0 AREAS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Complaints provide an opportunity to consider practice and identify ways to improve on areas identified. In the coming year the Complaints Service will focus on the following areas for development:

- ✧ To contribute to the continuing development of the Quality Assurance Strategy which maintains an overview of the quality of services delivered and supports on-going improvement and development.
- ✧ To deliver awareness raising workshops as part of multi-agency learning from audit/complaint events to increase knowledge base
- ✧ To continue to deliver training to social care staff and Managers to ensure the process is managed and understood alongside delivery of refresher sessions for all social care staff/managers in line with personal development plans.
- ✧ To further develop the systems in place to secure more Independent Investigators, and consider how to reduce the costs of investigations through a fixed fee arrangement.
- ✧ To provide a monthly exception and quarterly update report to Children's Social Care Management Team highlighting issues of good practice, and areas for development.
- ✧ To continue to promote information about how to make a complaint and ensure it is available for children and young people who are eligible.
- ✧ To revise leaflets and information to ensure it continues to be clear and accessible.

11.0 CONCLUSION

The complaints function for Children's Social Care has met the requirements of the relevant guidance and regulations. Overall management of complaints in this Department is robust, concerns and complaints are managed well and the process of investigating complaints is undertaken with great sensitivity by all staff involved.

Comparatively speaking, Children's Social Care do not receive a high number of complaints, however the nature of those complaints that are received are often complex.

Whilst a complaint may be distressing to the individuals affected, (which includes the staff involved) they are a valuable mechanism for ensuring the on-going quality of our work. Thus ensuring policies and procedures are followed appropriately and children, young people and

families receive the best possible services in what can be difficult and challenging circumstances.

The next report will cover the period from 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017.

Sue Horton
Complaints Manager

(July 2016)