



# **Children's Social Care Complaints Concerns and Compliments**

**Annual Report  
2013 - 2014**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This annual report covers the period of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 through to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 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 / department.

## 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.

**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 a number of reasons, for example if a case is in court a complaint may not be progressed if it is felt that it may impact on the court judgement. In such cases the complaint is deferred until court proceedings are concluded. Once this has happened the Complainant may resubmit their complaint if appropriate.

## 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's 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, which has been taken into account in the Complaint Procedures published by the Local Authority.

## 2.3 Who may complain?

Anyone who is in receipt of a service or think they should be in receipt of a service.

Also their representative, known as a 'qualifying individual' who is deemed suitable to act on behalf of the child or young person or has sufficient interest in their welfare (the view of the child or young person will be sought wherever possible).

## 3.0 COMPLAINTS 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, this 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 allows 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 complaints made. As a rule, the 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 agreed / made.

### Stage Two: Independent Investigation

*(Recently updated) – see Point 9 on page 15 for further information.*

This is the next stage of the procedures; when a complaint has not been resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant at the conclusion of stage one. Stage two involves a full and formal investigation by an Investigating Officer (IO) who is generally commissioned from outside of Bracknell Forest Council. It is their task to further investigate the complaints already responded to at stage one, whilst reviewing the actions and practice of the Local Authority.

The final decision regarding the outcome of the complaint rests with the Chief Officer. Both the IO and the IP individually produce a report, which are submitted to the Chief Officer for their consideration in compiling their response. The Chief Officer will then write to the complainant, detailing clearly the conclusions reached and any decisions made; copies of the investigation reports will also be provided for the complainant's information.

### Stage Three: Review Panel

A review panel is convened when the complainant is dissatisfied with the stage two investigations, the response from the Chief Officer, or the outcome and decisions made.

The Panel will be made up of three people, all of whom must be independent of the Council.

### Final Stage: The Local Government Ombudsman

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

## **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 remains through the Complaints Manager.

### **Complaints process using the Corporate Procedure:**

#### Stage One

As with stage one of the Statutory procedures – although this can also be dealt with informally by a member of staff at the first point of contact.

#### Stage Two

Formal complaint to the appropriate manager or Chief Officer, who will initiate an investigation (independent to the department concerned) into the complaints made.

#### Stage Three

Formal complaint to the Director; any complaint based on discrimination, victimisation or harassment goes directly to this stage.

Stage Four

Chief Executive needs to consider whether the complaint has been dealt with appropriately - if not a review panel may be convened (at the Chief Executive's discretion).

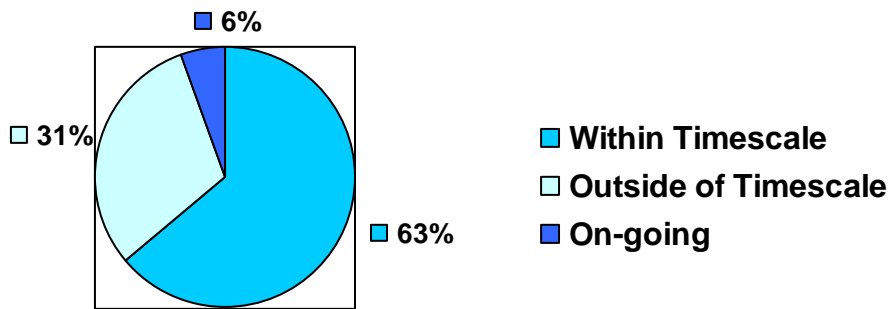
**3.3 Timescales**

Timescales for response to a complaint are clearly defined within both the Corporate and Statutory Complaint Processes. 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 always contact the complainant and seek their agreement.

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, sickness.
- ✧ In some cases a member of staff may have left the Council and it may take time to track them down and seek their involvement in the investigation.
- ✧ It may take time to secure the services of an Independent Investigator.

The following chart shows the breakdown of the complaints made throughout the period of April 2013 to March 2014 and whether timescales set in the Complaints Process were met. It shows that 63% have been met within timescale, 31% outside of timescales, with 6% still within the investigation stage during the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter at the time of recording.



**4.0 OVERVIEW OF COMPLAINTS**

The Complaints Manager maintains a list of on-going complaints that are currently under investigation. A report is sent to the Chief Officer and Heads of Service of the Children's Social Care department on a monthly basis to keep them updated on individual cases.

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 4.8)

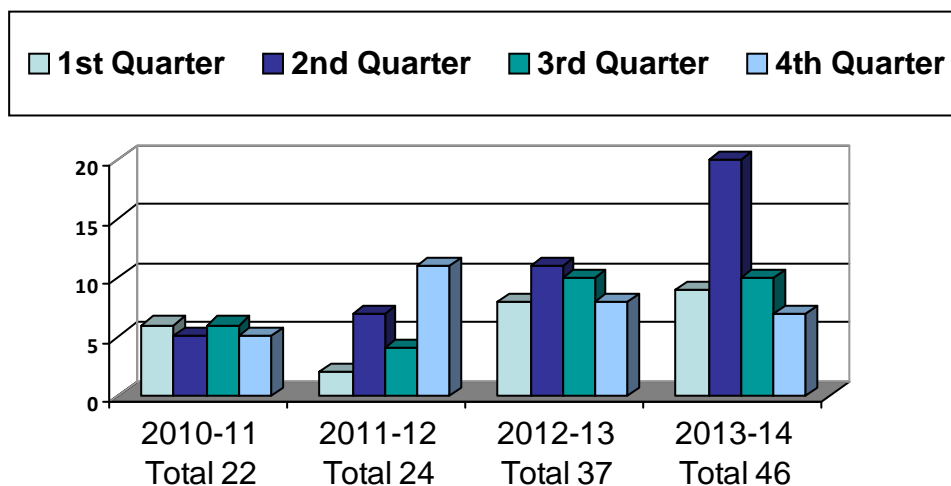
#### 4.1 Number of complaints received (Statutory and Corporate combined)

The following tables show the comparison figures of the total complaints received over the last 3 financial years and how they have been responded to. These show that there has been an increase in the number of complaints each year for the last four years.

At the end of March 2014 there were 775 open cases within Children's Social Care for Children and Young People (an open case is one where a referral has been made to Children's Social Care which has been followed up with an assessment which may lead to additional support being provided to the child or young person). All open cases are eligible and therefore have the potential, to complain to Bracknell Forest Council.

The table below shows the total number of complaints made over the last four years and shows that there has been a year on year increase in the number of complaints made.

#### Comparison Data:



#### Response to complaints in 2013 - 2014

Complaints Received in Total	Complaints Deferred	Investigated Under the Statutory Procedure	Investigated Under the Corporate Procedure
46	10	22	14

Out of the sum total of 46 complaints that were received this year, 10 complaints were deferred / declined, 22 were investigated under the Statutory procedure eligible for stages 1 through 3.

Under the Corporate procedure, 14 were investigated eligible for stages 1 through 4, thus giving a total of 36 complaints which were formally investigated (see point 4.3 for further breakdowns / outcomes / comparisons).

These figures are higher than those of 2012 – 13, where 37 complaints were received and 26 were formally investigated. The table below shows that based on open cases at the end of March 2014 there has been an increase in complaints of 1.25%.

Period	Open Cases	Complaints Received
2013-14	(as at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2014) = 775	46 (6.0% of open cases)
2012-13	(as at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2013) = 781	37 (4.74% of open cases)

The following table shows a breakdown of the outcomes reached at the conclusion of the individual investigations during 2013-14, which have been dealt with using either the Statutory, or the Local Authority's Corporate complaints procedure.

*Comparative figures for 2012 – 2013 are shown in brackets.*

Stage / Procedure Used	Number of Complaints
<b>Stage 1 – Statutory Procedure</b>	<b>20 (19)</b>
<b>Stage 2 – Statutory Procedure</b>	<b>1 (2)</b>
<b>Stage 3 – Statutory Procedure</b>	<b>1 (0)</b>
<b>Stage 1 – Corporate Procedure</b>	<b>13 (5) *</b>
<b>Stage 2 – Corporate Procedure</b>	<b>1 (0)</b>
<b>Complaints Deferred</b>	<b>10 (11)</b>

*\*There have been some changes since the beginning of this financial year in the recording of complaints. Stage 1 investigations using the corporate procedure are no longer recorded in the Council's collective general quarterly figures. However, all complaints received at stage one by the Children's Young People & Learning department are investigated just as thoroughly, irrelevant of which procedure is used; i.e., either the statutory procedure or the Local Authority's own corporate procedure; we have therefore 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 20 complaints received and investigated at stage one of the Statutory procedures, only one case progressed onto stages two and three. This reflects the good practices and swift responses of the staff involved.

The 13 complaints accessing the Corporate procedures were successfully dealt with at stage one with the exception of one case (which progressed onto stage two). 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 stage 2.

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 2013 – 14**

The Complaints Manager works 15 hours a week and the annual salary costs are £16,150.

When a complaint proceeds to stage two under the statutory procedures, it is the practice in Bracknell Forest that an investigating officer is appointed. The cost of this varies depending on the length and complexity of the investigation. Similarly, if a complaint progresses to stage three of the statutory complaints procedure, an independent panel will need to be arranged, it may be necessary to commission appropriate members to attend.

This year it should be noted that there has been some extremely complex complaints, one of which progressed through all 3 stages of the statutory procedure.

The overall cost of the complaints function (excluding salary), which includes commissioning of investigators and panel members was £5,045. This is an increase from last year which was £2,500 in comparison.

We aim to minimise the costs of complaints investigation by accessing the services of experienced investigators within the Council, however the complex nature of the complaints this year has meant an increased use of external independent investigators due to the time involved in the complaint, and the complex nature of the complaint where an independent investigator was more appropriate.

#### **4.3 Findings from complaints**

The findings as shown on the following page were made in respect of the 46 complaints received that have reached conclusion (at the time of reporting, one had yet to be completed and therefore still under investigation)

*Breakdown of procedures / stages*

<b>At Stage 1 of the Statutory Procedures</b>	11	Complaints - <b>Not Upheld</b>
	6	Complaints - Partially Upheld
	3	Complaints - Upheld
	1	Complaint - Ongoing
<b>At Stage 3 of the Statutory Procedures</b>	1	Complaint – Not Upheld
<b>At Stage 1 of the Corporate Procedures</b>	9	Complaints - <b>Not Upheld</b>
	1	Complaint - Partially Upheld
	2	Complaints - Upheld
<b>Complaints Resolved Complaints Deferred (either procedure)</b>	2	Complaints - <b>Resolved</b>
	10	Complaints - Deferred

At times, we are able to resolve matters to the satisfaction of the complainant within the investigation stage and effectively shorten the complaints process. As shown in the table above, we had 2 such cases this year.

Similarly it may be necessary to defer a complaint. In these situations we will write to the complainant, explaining why their complaint has not been accepted, whilst informing them that they may have an opportunity to 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).

*\*It is important that a complaint does not impact on any court proceedings or judgements.*

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)**

Upon completion and having taken their complaint through all relevant stages of either the Statutory or Corporate procedures, the complainant may remain unhappy with the outcome and decisions made by the department. Under such circumstances the complainant may refer their complaint onto the LGO, who will decide whether to progress the matter further by carrying out their own impartial investigations.

An LGO information leaflet is always provided with the concluding letter to the complainant for this purpose.

LGO referrals received 2013 – 14

<b>Local Government Ombudsman</b>	<b>2</b>
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- (i) The first complainant to approach the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) during 2013 – 14 where their case was initially categorised as an early referral, the Ombudsman consequently deferred further involvement.

However, having taken the complaint through all three stages of the statutory procedure with the Council, the complainant re-presented their complaint to LGO, which was subsequently accepted.

Ultimately LGO decided not to continue with the investigation and provided the complainant with a detailed explanation as to how this decision was reached.

- (ii) The 2<sup>nd</sup> LGO referral received is an ongoing investigation.

#### 4.5 Complaints by areas of service provision

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

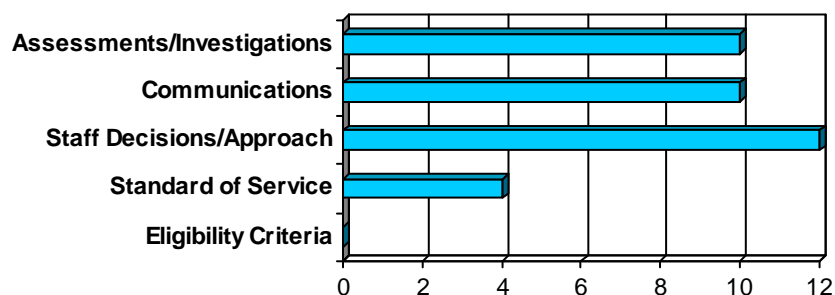
The area with the highest number of complaints received relates to the safeguarding team, which is to be expected given the nature of the work undertaken; as this often involves working with families who are unhappy to be receiving such services. Nevertheless they are required to do so to ensure effective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

<b>Service Area / Team</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>Learning Difficulties &amp; Disability</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Looked After Children</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Safeguarding</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Youth Offending Service</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Complaints Deferred</b>	<b>10</b>

#### 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 36 complaints investigated, these are shown on the following page:



#### 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:

##### Regarding assessments / investigations

- a) Family was unhappy with some of the content and accuracy used within the social workers report.

##### Comments

The report was 'revisited' and it was determined that certain comments made could not be substantiated; the report was subsequently amended and reworded to the satisfaction of the family involved. Outcome of complaint – upheld.

##### Regarding communications

- a) Parents felt 'let down'; as they had contacted the department on a number of occasions regarding their concerns and "no one had responded".

##### Comments

Following investigation it was found that communications had been made by the allocated social worker on a regular basis, outcome for complaint - not upheld.

Nevertheless, an apology was given in good faith as the complainant had undoubtedly felt that contact received was below their expectations.

##### Regarding staff decisions / approach

- a) Complainant felt that they were prevented from contacting their children based on the complainant's presumption that their ex-partner had discredited them with the department.

##### Comments

The complainant was assured that Children's Social Care were not in a position to restrict contact arrangements when there are no court orders in place. Complaint was not upheld and recommendations were made to the complainant that they took their own legal advice relating to this dispute with their ex-partner.

### **Regarding standard of service**

- a) The complainant was living with her family in what they felt was 'unsuitable accommodation and was unhappy with the responses from the allocated social worker and general services received.

#### Comments

This complaint was resolved following a home visit from the Team Manager. They were satisfied with the manner in which their immediate concerns were addressed; ongoing work continues with the family.

### **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.

Laminated 'text' cards were first introduced during the period of 2011-12, developed with the support of the Child Participation Officer. They provide simple instructions on how to 'text' a complaint through to the Complaints Manager.

In some circumstances children and young people may require additional support to make a complaint. Help may be best provided by a relative or friend or by the provision of an advocate from an Advocacy Service who will be independent of the department. If this is required the Complaints Manager can approach the Child Participation Development Officer who will be able to provide advice about this and help secure a service where requested.

Records show that the majority of complaints are made by the parent / carer on behalf of the young person, but young people are encouraged to make their own complaints as well, and this has happened in previous years. When a young person does choose to complain they are offered the support of an advocate as described above.

During this year there have been no complaints made by a child or young person and therefore no requests for advocacy from a child or young person and this is an area we would wish to explore and develop further.

### **4.9 Learning from complaints in 2014**

At Bracknell Forest Council we recognise that 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 and we will use these experiences to:

- ✧ Identify service problems and make improvements
- ✧ Improve / adapt staff learning and enhance professional development.

To this aim, a 'learning from complaints' form has been devised, which is forwarded to the appropriate Manager or Head of Service for completion following the investigation and closure of a complaint.

Within this document, either the investigator or the manager can record any recommendations made. The Manager / Head of Service agree an action plan and nominate who will undertake the action and the outcome achieved will be logged. It is not signed off by the Senior Manager in Social Care until the action has been implemented.

Where a complaint has been difficult or complex, a 'learning from complaints' meeting is held with Senior Managers in Children's Social Care to ensure we are able 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.

We recently put together an information pack for independent investigators using the Statutory Procedure as a result of discussions held at one of these meetings. Within the pack is a template for the investigation report (promoting consistency), flowcharts and detailed guidance for carrying out thorough investigations.

**Key learning points and services improvements** (*taken directly from completed 'learning from complaints forms'*)

Implemented during 2013 – 2014 include:

- ✓ Social workers are asked to 'proof read' their own assessments before forwarding to their supervisor to authorise.
- ✓ Social workers are encouraged to conduct themselves in a professional manner and to avoid 'targeted phrasing' when describing an individual's personality or character, for example 'frosty'; whilst maintaining the importance of being open, honest and transparency.
- ✓ In a Team Meeting setting, encourage staff to give themselves 'permission' to set boundaries – underlining that there is not an expectation that abusive behaviour from members of the public should be tolerated.
- ✓ When required – 'face to face' discussions giving clear explanations of the difference between supervised and supported contact arrangements – and the legal context when there is a dispute relating to contact issues.
- ✓ Even if a case is open to a social worker, 'family workers' in the Team should contribute to 'contact keeping' with the family.
- ✓ Awareness of cultural diversity issues and reflect / discuss whether an interpreter should be used.
- ✓ Be vigilant of your surroundings – younger children may be able to overhear conversations between BFC staff and family members within the family home.
- ✓ Prioritising workload.

## 5.0 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 below shows concerns received and it is of note that these have increased in the year 2013/14 compared to the previous year (in brackets).

<b>Concerns Received</b>	<b>28 (20)</b>
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During the year there were 28 concerns raised which were dealt with by Children's Social Care Managers that did not progress onto formal procedures. 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 and time consuming.

## 6.0 FEEDBACK

When a case is closed in 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. These are a crucial element in the reviewing of the service delivery for Children's Social Care and contribute to ongoing 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 ongoing training and support of practitioners managing the complaints process.

*Some examples of the comments made are as follows:*

Examples of feedback received	2013-14
<p>"Sometimes the words used in the reports are difficult to understand and I needed the worker to explain them to me".</p> <p>"Would like to thank you for being so professional and making the situation easier for my family and myself."</p> <p>"I would like to have seen the assessment sooner".</p> <p>"The support and communication from Children's Social Care has been very good."</p>	

“I haven’t received any results after two months following my visit”

“The Social Worker was instrumental in brokering trust between the family and all the professionals involved, without which we wouldn’t have had such a positive result, if any at all.”

“You should listen to both parents”

**7.0 COMPLIMENTS**

Compliments provide valuable information about the quality of our services and help identify where they are working well.

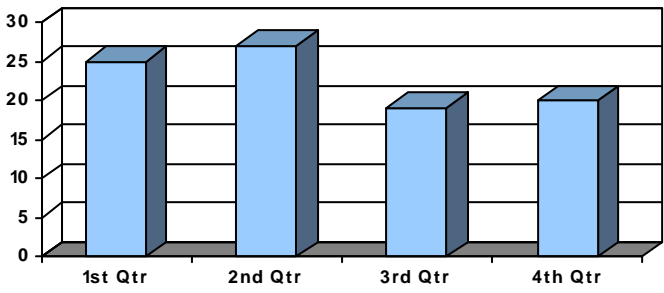
A large majority of the compliments are made by parents or users of the services, but they are also made by a range of independent professional colleagues who work with Children’s Social Care.

For the period of 2013 – 2014 the Department received 91 compliments, fewer than last year where 138 compliments were received. However this continues to demonstrate the high value that people receiving support place on the services they receive.

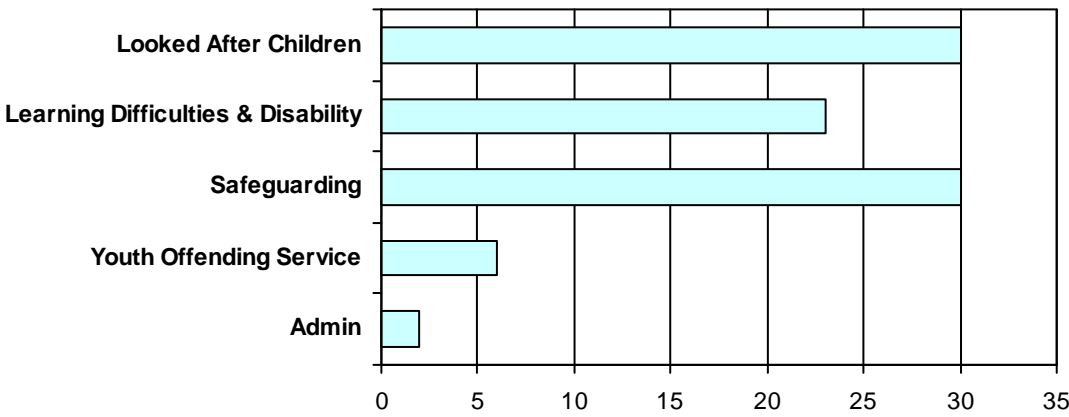
Although compliments amongst ‘the ranks’ within the department are many – these are not formally recorded.

The department welcomes the receipt of compliments and should always thank those who take the time and trouble to give them.

**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	91 in Total
<p>“The assessing Social Worker was great, a lovely person who put us at our ease, we learnt so much about adoption and enjoyed all aspects of the home study process” – <b>Prospective parents for adoption</b></p> <p>“Please let (name provided) know that she was one of the best workers that I have worked with!” – <b>Young person</b></p> <p>“Thank you for all your help and support. You managed to turn around what could have been a disaster into a well managed situation with a positive outcome” – <b>Foster parent</b></p> <p>“The report was excellent, I am really impressed at how perfectly you have determined and described our situation, and I really appreciate it” – <b>Parent</b></p> <p>“The Social Worker provided an excellent report for the conference today in respect of analysis, exploration and research. Also contributed very well to the discussion and made clear their concerns in a respectful, sensitive manner which enabled the mother to listen” – <b>Independent Chair</b></p> <p>“I want to thank (name provided) for all the hard work they has put into these sessions for me. They helped me to ‘stop’ to think about the consequences of my actions” – <b>Young person</b></p> <p>“Quality of the presentation was judged to be excellent. This is typical of (name) high standard of work” – <b>Adoption panel</b></p> <p>“(Name provided) was brilliant, they listened intently, was reflective, thoughtful and most importantly gave time to talk things through. Couldn't praise (name) enough and felt that (name) confidence and experience shone through and offered some really sound practical advice” – <b>Head Teacher</b></p> <p>“The support is amazing. The Social Worker has a very professional, friendly manner” – <b>Foster parent</b></p> <p>“Final evidence and analysis prepared by (name provided) was excellent – wished that every LA was of that standard” – <b>Guardian ad Litem</b></p> <p>“I was a small seed grown to a giant sunflower” – <b>Child</b></p> <p>“Wanted to personally thank the worker for the relationship and trust they have built with their child; this has not been replicated anywhere. There has been a huge impact on all of their lives” – <b>Parents</b></p> <p>“My Social Worker was not immediately available to speak to, so I spoke to an admin person who spoke to me at length and calmed down the situation. Ultimately the admin person is ‘a diamond’ and would like to thank them for being so helpful” – <b>Parent</b></p> <p>“Our Social Worker was very good and met the needs of my family; we are happy now” - <b>Parent</b></p> <p>“(name provided) always listened to me. You were always there when I needed help and always responded quickly. If there was a ‘Social Worker of the year award’ you would get it. A massive thank you to you and thanks for all the help over the years” - <b>Young person leaving care</b></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, in particular targeting new staff as they begin their employment.

The Complaints Manager held 5 separate training sessions last year, where 27 members of staff attended. It is preferable that attendance for each session should remain in small numbers, as this creates an informal atmosphere and encourages discussion within the group.

Bracknell Forest Council's Statutory Complaints Procedure for Children's Social Care was revised and updated last year, intentionally aiming for a 'jargon free' revision for use by the public. There is also a version specifically designed for staff use, which incorporates letter templates for stage one, two and three responses to complaints investigated under this procedure. This has played an important role within the training process.

### **8.2 Networking and sharing policy and practice**

It is important to continue to network, share practice and contribute to regional policy and practice. To this aim, the Complaints Manager attends the Southern Regional Complaints Managers Group (SRCMG) three times a year.

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. However, if it is established that the enquiry requires a formal complaint, we would recommend that the MP go back to their constituent and encourage them to forward the complaint directly to ourselves; thus enabling the appropriate complaints process to be used.

In view of this, enquiries from Members of Parliament are logged separately from statutory complaints. There were 5 enquiries made during the period of 2013-14 compared to 29 that were received last year.

## **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:

- ✧ Continue to deliver training to Social Workers and Managers to ensure the process is managed and understood.

- ✧ The introduction of an Independent Person (IP) to work alongside or 'shadow' the *Independent* Investigating Officer (IO) for stage two complaints under the Statutory Procedure. They will provide an independent, objective view of the investigation, paying particular attention to transparency and fairness.
- ✧ Now that the revised Statutory Complaints Procedure has been in place for 1 year – to revisit the procedure and update where appropriate, ensuring that this document is fit for purpose.
- ✧ Contribute to the ongoing development of the Quality Assurance Strategy which maintains an overview of the quality of services delivered and supports ongoing improvement and development.
- ✧ Further develop the systems in place to secure more Independent Investigators, and consider how to reduce the costs of investigations.
- ✧ Provide a quarterly report to Children's Social Care Management Team highlighting issues of good practice, and areas for development.
- ✧ Ensure that information about how to make a complaint is available for children and young people who are eligible and revise leaflets and information.

## **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, managed well and undertaken with great sensitivity by all staff involved.

Children's Social Care do not receive a high number of complaints, however the nature of those complaints that are received are often complex, and reflect the fact that families may be very distressed at the time of intervention.

Whilst a complaint may be distressing to the individuals affected, (which includes the staff involved) they are a valuable mechanism for ensuring the ongoing 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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015.

**Sue Horton**  
**Complaints Manager**  
**June 2014**