

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

**Annual Report  
2014 - 2015**

<b>Point</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1.0</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1	Definitions	3
2.2	Legislation	3
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Complaints procedures</b>	<b>4</b>
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	7
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Overview of Complaints</b>	<b>7</b>
4.1	Number of complaints received	8
4.2	Cost of complaint investigations	10
4.3	Findings from complaints	10
4.4	Local Government Ombudsman referrals (LGO)	11
4.5	Complaints by areas of service provision	12
4.6	Nature of complaints received	12
4.7	Commentary on complaints received	13
4.8	Involvement of young people in the complaints process	14
4.9	Learning from complaints in 2014 - 2015	14
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Feedback</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Concerns</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>7.0</b>	<b>Compliments</b>	<b>17</b>
7.1	Breakdown of compliments	17
7.2	Distribution of compliments across the services	18
7.3	Some examples of compliments received	18
<b>8.0</b>	<b>Development of policies and procedures</b>	<b>18</b>
8.1	Staff training in managing complaints	19
8.2	Networking and sharing policy and practice	20
<b>9.0</b>	<b>Member of Parliament enquiries</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>10.0</b>	<b>Areas for future development</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>11.0</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>20</b>

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This annual report covers the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 through to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 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.

### 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. As a rule, 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 when they draft their stage 2 response.

The final decision regarding the outcome of the complaint rests with the Chief Officer, 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 coordination 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 new 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

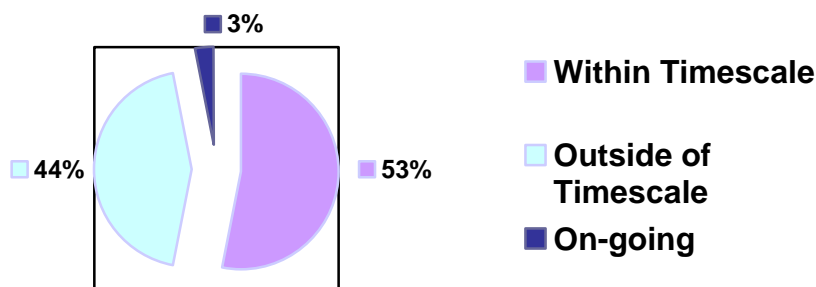
### 3.5 Timescales

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 2014 to March 2015 and whether timescales set in the Complaints Process were met. It shows that 53% have been met within timescale, 44% were outside of timescales (these were with the agreement of the complainant), with 3% still within the investigation stage at the time of recording during the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter.



### 4.0 OVERVIEW OF COMPLAINTS

The Complaints Manager maintains a list of on-going complaints that are currently under investigation and endeavours to send a report to the Chief Officer and Heads of Service for the Children's Social Care Department on a monthly basis; which keeps them informed 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 4.9*)

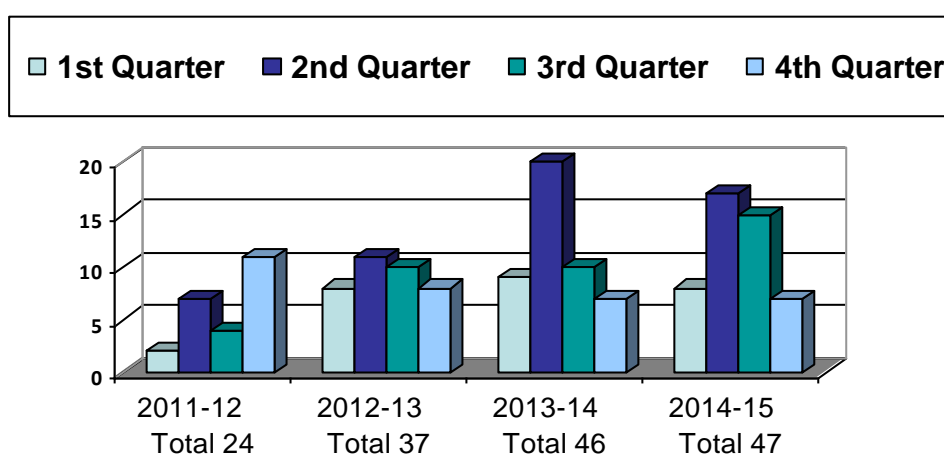
#### 4.1 Number of complaints received (Statutory and Corporate combined)

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 previous years, but they have remained virtually the same for 2013/14 and 2015/16.

At the end of March 2015 there were 776 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.

##### Comparison Data:



##### Response to complaints in 2014 - 2015

Complaints Received in Total	Complaints Deferred	Investigated Under the Statutory Procedure	Investigated Under the Corporate Procedure
<b>47 (46)</b>	15 (10)	11 (22)	21 (14)

*\*2013/14 figures in brackets*

Out of 47 complaints that were received this year, 15 complaints were deferred, 11 were investigated under the Statutory procedures; eligible for stages 1 through 3.

Under the Corporate procedure, 21 were investigated, eligible for stages 1 through 4 (which was the procedure used pre January 2015\*), thus giving a total of 32 complaints which were formally investigated (see point 4.3 for further breakdowns / outcomes / comparisons).

The complaints recorded show an increase of 1 to 47 in 2014/15, compared to 2013/14, where 46 complaints were received; however the figure of formal investigations for 2014/15 is slightly lower, 36 complaints were formally



investigated for 2013/ 14 in comparison to 32 in 2014/15. The table below shows that the figures for the number of children being supported by Children's Social Care for the past two years are very similar; the rate of complaints remains similar as well.

Period	Open Cases	Complaints Received
2013-14	(as at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2014) = 775	46 (6.0% of open cases)
2014-15	(as at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2015) = 776	47(6.1% of open cases)

The following table shows a breakdown of the outcomes reached at the conclusion of the individual investigations during 2014-15, which have been dealt with using either the Statutory, or the Local Authority's corporate complaints procedure.

*Comparative figures for 2013 – 2014 are shown in brackets.*

Stage / Procedure Used	Number of Complaints
<b>Stage 1 – Statutory Procedure</b>	<b>8 (20)</b>
<b>Stage 2 – Statutory Procedure</b>	<b>2 (1)</b>
<b>Stage 3 – Statutory Procedure</b>	<b>0 (1)</b>
<b>Stage 1 – Corporate Procedure</b>	<b>19 (13) *</b>
<b>Stage 2 – Corporate Procedure</b>	<b>1 (1)</b>
<b>Stage 3 – Corporate Procedure</b>	<b>1 (0)</b>
<b>Stage 4 – Corporate Procedure</b>	<b>1 (0)</b>
<b>Complaints Deferred</b>	<b>15 (10)</b>

*\*As with last year, 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; 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 27 complaints received and investigated at stage one of both the Statutory and Corporate procedures, only three cases progressed onto stage two, with only one 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 2014 – 2015**

The Complaints Manager works 15 hours a week and the annual salary costs are £15,147.

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 will need to be arranged, it may be necessary to commission appropriate members to attend.

In 2014/15 it should be noted that there have been some extremely complex complaints which tend to be costly in terms of the time of Officers involved in investigating and responding to the complaint and those who are interviewed as part of the investigation.

The overall cost of the complaint investigations, which covers the cost of commissioning the Independent Investigators and Independent Person, was £7,220. This shows an increase from the previous year which was £5,045 for complaint investigations.

We have aimed to minimise the costs of complaints investigation by accessing the services of experienced investigators within the Council, this year however, has involved an increased use of external independent investigators due to the complexities of the complaints received, where an independent investigator with relevant social care experience has been essential.

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

The findings as shown on the following page were made in respect of the 47 complaints received that have reached conclusion (at the time of reporting, one had yet to be completed and therefore is still under investigation)

*Breakdown of procedures / stages*

At Stage 1 of the Statutory Procedures	5	Complaints - <b>Not Upheld</b>
	2	Complaints - Partially Upheld
	1	Complaints - Upheld
At Stage 2 of the Statutory Procedures	2	Complaints – <b>Not Upheld</b>
At Stage 1 of the Corporate Procedures	9	Complaints - <b>Not Upheld</b>
	5	Complaint - Partially Upheld
	3	Complaints - Upheld
At Stage 2 of the Corporate Procedures	1	Complaint - On-going
At Stage 3 of the Corporate Procedures	1	Complaint - <b>Not Upheld</b>
At Stage 4 of the Corporate Procedures	1	Complaint – <b>Not Upheld</b>
Complaints Resolved Complaints Deferred (either procedure)	2	Complaints - <b>Resolved</b>
	15	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 were able to resolve 2 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 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).

*\*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.

<b>Local Government Ombudsman</b>	<b>2</b>
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- (i) The first complainant to approach the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) during 2014 – 15; was due to their complaint having been declined by Bracknell Forest Council (on the grounds that the complainant did not have parental responsibility). The LGO consequently declined to investigate as there was no evidence of fault.
- (ii) The 2<sup>nd</sup> LGO referral received is an on-going 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.

It should be noted that there are fewer complaints made in relation to safeguarding this year, and there has been a slight increase in complaints regarding Looked after Children.

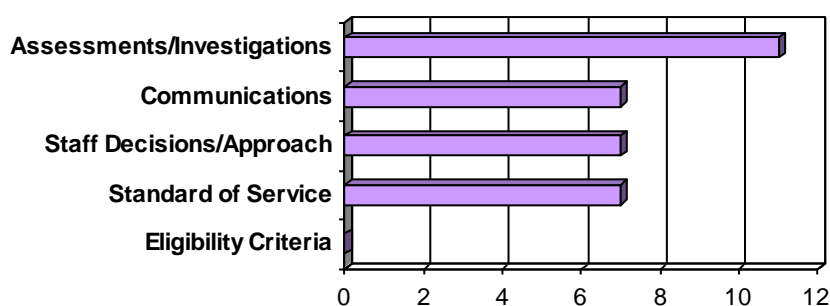
*Comparative figures for 2013 – 2014 are shown in brackets.*

<b>Service Area / Team</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>Specialist Support Team</b>	<b>6 (6)</b>
<b>Looked After Children</b>	<b>10 (7)</b>
<b>Safeguarding</b>	<b>16 (22)</b>
<b>Youth Offending Service</b>	<b>0 (1)</b>
<b>Complaints Deferred</b>	<b>15 (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 32 complaints investigated, these are shown below:



Areas where complaints have decreased in the last year are in communications and staff decisions and approach, areas of complaints that have increased include assessment and investigations and standard of service. In the last two 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:

##### **Regarding assessments / investigations**

Family felt that the assessment carried out by the Social Worker was one sided.

##### Comments

The Investigator identified during the investigation at stage one of the complaints process that the assessment in question was thorough and well balanced, evidencing and taking into account the views of both of the parents, as well as those of the Social Worker. Outcome of complaint – not upheld.

##### **Regarding communications**

A parent was concerned that they were not provided with enough information / or 'notice', as to when their access visits would occur.

##### Comments

It was identified during the investigation that appropriate information had been provided. Outcome of complaint – not upheld.

##### **Regarding staff decisions / approach**

The complainant sensed that they were being 'doubted' by the allocated Social Worker, and felt that their past was 'continually being brought up' and used against them.

##### Comments

In this particular case, a 'Written Agreement' was in place (a 'statement of commitment / a joint set of goals and targets to promote the welfare of a child'). The signing of a Written Agreement provides the Department with evidence of commitment on the part of the parents.

The complainant was informed that the allocated worker had to prioritise this task in a situation where there may be conflicting views from parents. The complainant's views had been heard and taken on board; however the welfare and wellbeing of the child would always be paramount. Outcome of complaint – not upheld.

##### **Regarding standard of service**

The complainant felt that their family had received a poor service, and there had been a number of Social Workers allocated to their case.

##### Comments

It was agreed by the Investigator that there had indeed been a 'turnover' of workers. During the investigation it was demonstrated that the changes implemented had been completely unavoidable. Appropriate apologies were made to the complainant. Outcome of complaint – not 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.

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 will approach the Child Participation Development Officer who is able to provide advice and help in securing a service where requested.

Although our records show that the majority of complaints were made by the parent / carer; during this period there were three complaints made by a child or young person, one involved the use of an Advocate, which was arranged by our in-house Participation Development Officer.

The complaint made by a young person with the use of an Advocate was a very positive process and managed well between the Investigating Officer, Independent Person, the Advocate and the young person. It demonstrated sensitivity to the needs of the young person and was undertaken in a flexible way to accommodate the young person's emotional capacity to participate in the process. Whilst the outcome was that the complaint was not upheld, the young person was able to access a fair and transparent process and have their views heard with the support of an independent Advocate.

#### **4.9 Learning from complaints in 2014-15**

At Bracknell Forest 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.

An information pack for independent investigators using the Statutory Procedure was developed 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' as follows:*

- ✓ Social Workers are asked to provide their direct email addresses to the families they work with – so that they have an alternative means of contact.
- ✓ Social Workers are encouraged to update the 'child or young person' they are working with at every step of the process involved.
- ✓ Templates should be used to ensure consistencies of process and documentation.
- ✓ It is important that considerations and decisions need to be clearly recorded on the case recording system.
- ✓ Increased monitoring of social work visits undertaken by the manager in supervision.
- ✓ Manager to ensure that Social Worker undertakes statutory visits to timescales.
- ✓ Manager proof read assessments before they are sent out to the family
- ✓ Appointments for LAC reviews to be sent by letter (not by telephone unless completely unavoidable)

## **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	2014-15
<p>"I thought the children had grown out of play, but through observing the SW, I realised I still can".</p> <p>"In my case, the SW couldn't do enough, I am more than satisfied"</p> <p>"The initial experience was very traumatic, and we had little support, but things have improved".</p> <p>"Excellent communication between all parties, my child's needs were taken into consideration at all times"</p> <p>"The involvement of CSC is having a positive effect on my mental health"</p> <p>"During our time with CSC, there was a high level of staff change, more consistency would be helpful in establishing relationships with the SW"</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 below shows concerns received and it is of note that these have increased slightly in the year 2014/15 compared to the previous year (in brackets).

Concerns Received	31 (28)
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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.

However, these can be time consuming for the Complaints Manager who must ensure that correct processes have been adhered to and that the person raising the concern is satisfied with the response. If they are not, then it may be necessary to investigate formally at stage one of the complaints procedure.



## 7.0 COMPLIMENTS

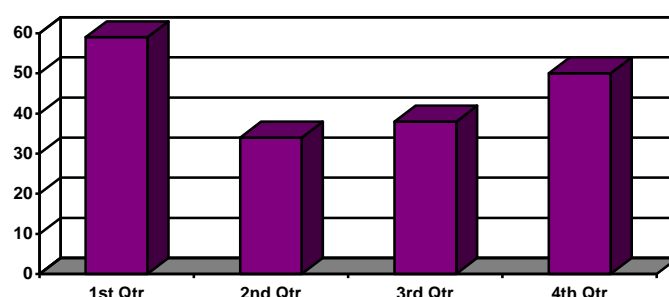
Compliments provide a valuable source of information regarding the quality of our services and help identify where they are working well. The compliments received this year (181) outnumber the complaints received (47) by a ratio of 3.9 to 1.

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.

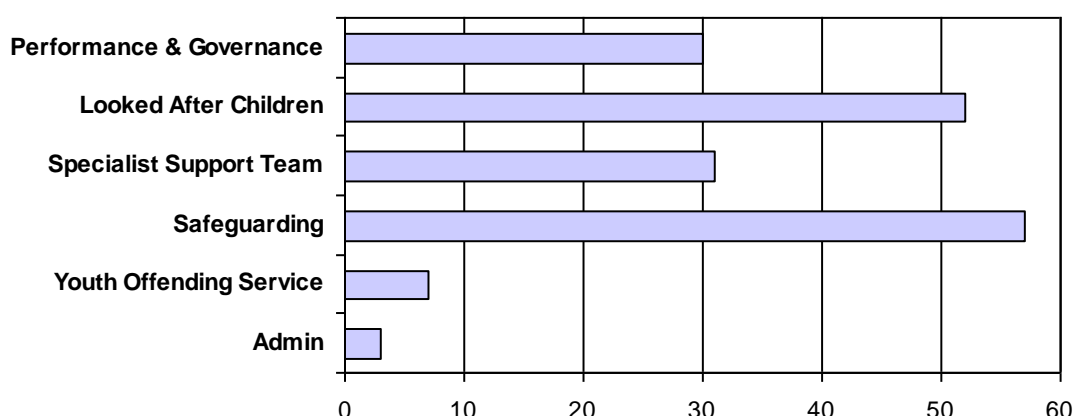
The figure of 181 compliments received by the Department is almost double to those obtained last year where 91 compliments were received. This demonstrates the high value that people receiving support place on the services they receive.

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



*The 'keen eyed' will notice that there are only 180 compliments logged in the previous table, the last was received from BFC members, who complimented the Department as a whole for a job well done.*

### 7.3 Some examples of compliments received

Some examples of compliments received	181 in Total
<p>"We are so grateful for all the hard work you do to support my husband and I cope with the added pressure of parenting a child with learning disabilities, it is truly appreciated and we are so pleased that we live under Bracknell Forest Council and receive so much" – <b>Parents of a disabled child</b></p> <p>"I felt that the Social Worker listened to me; she has been fantastic and very understanding, caring and always wanted to see both sides" - <b>Parent</b></p> <p>"Thank you; you all do such a great job and we benefit loads from what you do" – <b>Parents</b></p> <p>"A breath of fresh air, efficient and understand" – <b>Parents</b></p> <p>"The Section 7 report was exceptional for it's 'explicit clarity'" - <b>Judge</b></p> <p>"The Social Worker arrived early, good report, excellent presentation, a good rapport with the family while being clear about the concerns" – <b>Indep. Chair</b></p> <p>"Your outstanding Social Worker helped me move out of a bad situation and has improved me and my daughter's lives. I can't thank you enough" – <b>Parent</b></p> <p>"Our granddaughter's future is now secure as a result of your support and guidance" – <b>Grandparents</b></p> <p>"Brilliant, thank you so much! Have we ever told you that I think you are brilliant at your job? I can see that the parents know that too. They really value you!" – <b>Community Church</b></p> <p>"The service you provide is excellent and the adopters in this area are very lucky to have you and your team! – <b>Prospective Adopters</b></p> <p>"(Name) and his team worked so hard with pure professionalism and always with a 'child centred' approach (even though they had been working for many hours into the night!)" – <b>Emergency Duty Service</b></p> <p>"Things have improved in our household since your intervention" – <b>Young Parents</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 and in particular targeting new staff as they begin their employment.

The Complaints Manager held 4 separate training sessions over the last year, with 15 members of staff attending. It is hoped this number will increase in 2015/16.

## **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 further this aim, the Complaints Manager attends the Southern Regional Complaints Managers Group (SRCMG).

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).

However, 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 15 MP enquiries made during the period of 2014-15 compared to 5 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 care staff and Managers to ensure the process is managed and understood – to consider elevating training sessions to be 'mandatory attendance'.
- ✧ Now that the revised Statutory Complaints Procedure has been in place for 2 years – to revisit the procedure and update where appropriate, ensuring that this document continues to be fit for purpose.
- ✧ 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.
- ✧ 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.
- ✧ Continue to promote information about how to make a complaint and ensure it is available for children and young people who are eligible.
- ✧ 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.

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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016.

**Sue Horton**  
**Complaints Manager**  
**June 2015**