



**Annual Report  
2012/13**

People Directorate

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# **Children's Social Care Services Comments, Compliments & Complaints**

**COMMENTS  
COMPLIMENTS  
& COMPLAINTS**

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## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Local Authorities are required by law (Children Act 1989) to have a system for receiving representations made by or on behalf of children who use the social care services they provide or commission. These include: social work services, residential care, fostering, adoption and the provision of support to families, children with disabilities and young people in trouble with the law. Representations are defined as comments, compliments and complaints.

On 1 September 2006, changes were made to the Local Authority Social Services Complaints Regulations (1990) as a result of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003. These changes aimed to improve the speed of response to representations, to enhance the level of independence in judgements made at Stages 2 and 3 of the procedure and to improve access to and learning from the representations process. The changes also required Local Authorities to appoint a Complaints Manager to oversee all aspects of the procedure. Other significant changes included extending the scope of the procedure to include services provided under other parts of the Children Act, certain Adoption Services and Special Guardianship Support Services. A time limit of one year for making representations was also introduced as were new timescales for responding to complaints at Stages 1 and 2.

Some complaints received do not meet the criteria to be dealt with under the statutory procedure. When this is the case, these are registered under the City Council's corporate complaints procedure. The arrangements for handling these complaints are different from the statutory process in terms of timescales and the independence of the people who investigate and review the complaints.

In Coventry, Children's Social Care has a nominated officer assigned to the management of representations from children and others who present feedback on Children's Social Care Services.

The purpose of the comments, compliments and complaints system is to ensure that:

- The views and experiences of people who use services are heard.
- Positive feedback is used to develop services and acknowledge good practice.
- Things that have gone wrong are put right.
- The organisation learns from both positive and negative feedback.
- The organisation sustains its customer focus.

As part of the Directorate's commitment to openness, quality assurance, service development and listening and learning from service users, this report provides summary information from comments, compliments and complaints received under the statutory and corporate procedures in relation to Children's Social Care Services, during the period 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2013.

Particular reference is made to:

- ***The range of representations received and responses to them.***
- ***Specific trends and issues that emerged in the reporting period.***

## SECTION 2: SUMMARY

During the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013, Children's Social Care Services dealt with 4657 referrals and at 31 March 2013 were providing services to 3085 children and young people.

The total number of complaints received about Children's Social Care Services in 2012/13 was 133. This represents a 15% increase in comparison to the previous year (116). By comparison there has been a 16% increase in the number of children receiving services. 126 compliments were also received, a 3% increase.

Almost half of the complaints (47.8%) were in relation to children and young people who were being looked after by the Local Authority.

The complaints received tended to refer to matters affecting the individual, rather than a number of complaints being received about the same issue or a specific service.

Nevertheless, three main themes could be identified as arising from the complaints by and on behalf of users in 2012/13.

- *Criticism of professional conduct and how users were treated by some staff.*
- *Concerns about standards of service provided.*
- *Issues regarding poor communication with users.*

Conversely, staff helpfulness and standards of service were the two main reasons for compliments in the year.

51% of complaints were either upheld or partially upheld by the officer that investigated the complaint. 44% were not upheld and 4% were withdrawn

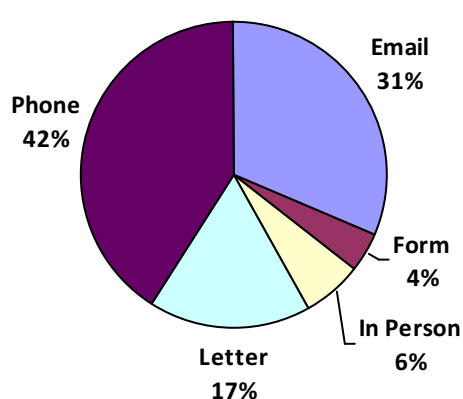
### SECTION 3: RESPONDING TO FEEDBACK

Comments, compliments and complaints can tell us a great deal about the service users' experiences of service delivery, professional practice and the outcome of management decisions. Children's Social Care Services welcome this feedback and encourages children, their advocates and anyone who uses the service or who is affected by it, to make their views known.

#### 3.1 Promoting Feedback

Accessibility to the system is of vital importance if the Directorate is to maximise the opportunities for individuals to make their views known. Contact can be made by letter, telephone, fax, e-mail, in person, in the corporate "Getting in Touch" leaflet, by the Council's free phone number or the web-site link.

Contact methods for complaints were as follows



42% of complainants chose to complain via telephone, with a further 6% requesting a face to face meeting. 4% chose to use the council's "Getting In Touch" leaflet.

Of particular importance is the need to inform children of their opportunity to make representations and to find methods that they can easily use. Accessibility for children is undergoing continuous development. Advocates from Barnardo's have also continued to make regular visits to the children's residential units in Coventry. For the last eight years a "texting" facility has also been available so that children and young people can make their views known.

As a result 31 representations were received from children themselves this year (21 complaints and 10 compliments). This is consistent with the number received last year (31), although the breakdown is significantly different (30 complaints and 1 compliment in 2011/12). Children tended to present their feedback by letter or in person.

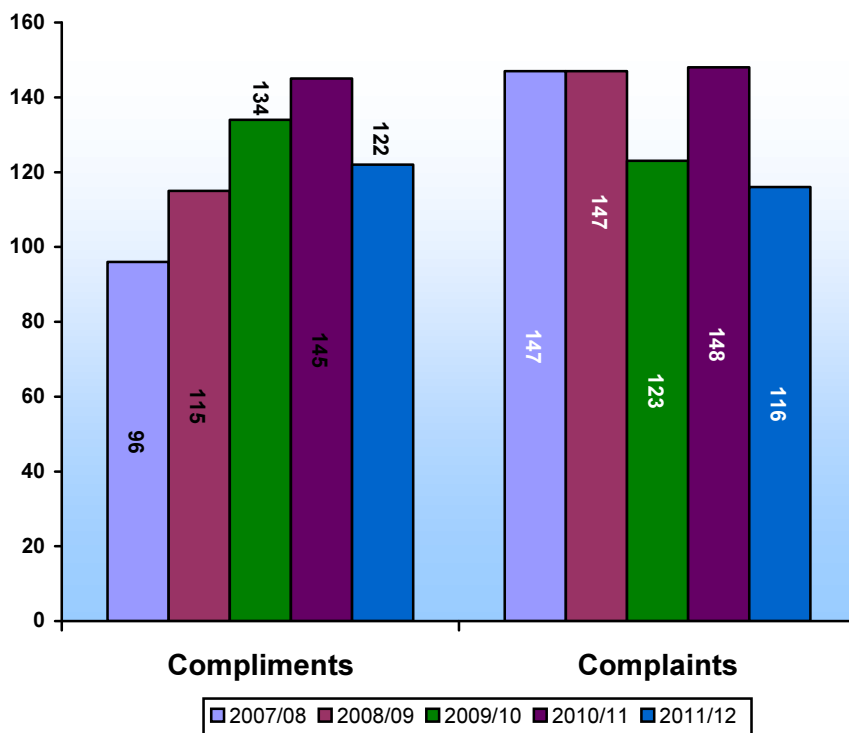
#### 3.2 Advocacy

Since 1 April 2004, the Advocacy Services and Representations Regulations 2004, have required Local Authorities to make arrangements for the provision of advocacy to children and young people making representations under the Children Act 1989. Of the 21 children and young people making complaints during the year, four decided to have an advocate to support them in making their complaint.

Prior to the implementation of the Regulations, the Directorate already had a well-established arrangement for the provision of advocacy services to children and young people through the NCH Children's Rights Project. Since April 2006, this service has been commissioned from Barnardo's.

### 3.3 Representations Received 2012/13

Comments	Compliments	Complaints
0	126	133



The total number of complaints received about Children's Social Care Services in 2012/13 was 133. This represents a 15% increase in comparison to the previous year (116). By comparison there has been a 16% increase in the number of children receiving services. 126 compliments were also received, a 3% increase.

### 3.4 Comments

Relatively few comments are received in comparison to the number of complaints and compliments in any year. They usually take the form of suggestions or criticisms and as such they can encourage action to improve quality of services. No comments were received this year.

### 3.5 Compliments

Compliments provide a perspective on satisfaction and they tell us what people appreciate about services and the way they are provided. Positive feedback also encourages and motivates staff and enables them to celebrate their good performance. Every compliment received is shared with the individual or team to whom it refers and copied to the relevant managers.

### 3.6 Complaints

Listening to service users' complaints helps managers to focus on service improvement and customer care, increasing the Directorate's capacity for identifying changes that are required. The statutory procedures offer a three-stage process, and the corporate procedures offer a two stage process, both of which aim to provide a satisfactory resolution to any complaint brought to the Directorate, preferably as quickly as possible. The lessons learned from complaints form the basis for improving services.

### 3.6.1 Stage 1 - Local Resolution

The Directorate's aim within both the statutory and corporate procedures is to resolve problems, whenever possible, informally at Stage 1. At this stage, the complaint will usually be dealt with by the local manager who is responsible for the service provided. This is because local managers are in the best position to sort problems out quickly.

When things have gone wrong, an apology, an explanation and an indication of the action to be taken to put things right, has been provided in most cases. The majority, (98%) of complaints were resolved at this stage including all of the complaints brought by children and young people themselves.

Where complaints are unsubstantiated, managers will usually respond with an explanation of the Directorate's policy or procedures and this alone can provide a satisfactory resolution in many cases. When complainants remain unhappy, they can take their complaint to the next stage of the Complaint Procedure.

### 3.6.2 Stage 2 - Formal Investigation/Senior Management Review

In certain circumstances a formal investigation of the circumstances leading to a complaint is a more appropriate response, although this tends to be a lengthier process. This may be required when complainants remain dissatisfied with the conclusion reached at Stage 1 or when the complaint is particularly complex or involves a number of service areas. These investigations are always conducted by someone outside the direct line management of the service and the person about whom the complaint is being made. During the year there were six investigations carried out at Stage 2. All the investigations were undertaken by external investigators. Two were successfully resolved and four complainants requested progression to Stage 3. At the conclusion of all Stage 2 investigations and after the response has been made to the complainant, the Investigating Officers' reports are read by senior managers for them to consider and act upon.

### 3.6.3 Stage 3 - Review Panel/Corporate Review

Within the **statutory** complaints procedure, where complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of a formal investigation at Stage 2, they can request that a review panel of three independent people be convened to examine the investigation. Review panels can make recommendations to the Director if they conclude that the complaint is justified, or that more could be done to resolve the matter, or if they feel the Directorate should take action to prevent similar situations arising in the future. Four complaints were considered by a Review Panel this year. All four panels upheld the findings of the stage two investigations.

There is no stage three under the **corporate** procedure.

## 3.7 Outcomes

All of the complaints received this year had been responded to by the time this report was prepared. 17% of complaints were fully substantiated, 35% of complaints were partially substantiated and 44% of complaints were not upheld. 4% of complaints were withdrawn by the complainants after being received.

As a comparison, in 2011/12, 15% of complaints were fully substantiated, 37% were partially substantiated and 41% were not upheld.

### 3.8 Time-scales

The legislation and corporate procedures set out timescales for dealing with complaints at each stage of the process. From 1 September 2006 these became:

	Legislation	Corporate
Stage 1	10 working days (can be extended to 20 working days)	10 working days
Stage 2	25 working days (can be extended to 65 working days)	20 working days
Stage 3	Within 30 working days of complainant's request	Not Applicable

However, the complexity of social care issues means that complaint resolution can sometimes be protracted and achievement of the time-scales can suffer as a result.

The Children's Complaints Officer, therefore, undertakes rigorous monitoring of progress in relation to responding to complaints.

In 2012/13, just 49% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to on time, compared to 77% in the previous year.

Investigations of Stage 2 complaints under the statutory procedure often need to be extended beyond the 25 working days timescale due to the complexity of the issues being considered. In these situations the importance of keeping the complainant informed and securing their agreement to an extension of the time-scale, is recognised and addressed. As a result, all complaints dealt with at Stage 2 were all completed within a timescale agreed with the complainant and within 65 working days

The Independent Review Panels that considered the Stage 3 complaints were convened in accordance with the timescales and the Directorate's response to their recommendations were also completed within time.

### 3.9 Satisfaction with Complaints Handling

Satisfaction with how complaints are managed is measured by sending evaluation questionnaires to complainants about their experience of the process. This year, 22 questionnaires were sent to complainants but only 5 were returned. This low number of returns gives an unreliable perception of the quality of the service. Nevertheless, the way in which complaints are dealt with will be reviewed and further consideration given to how to measure satisfaction levels to better evaluate performance in complaints handling.

### 3.10 The Local Government Ombudsman

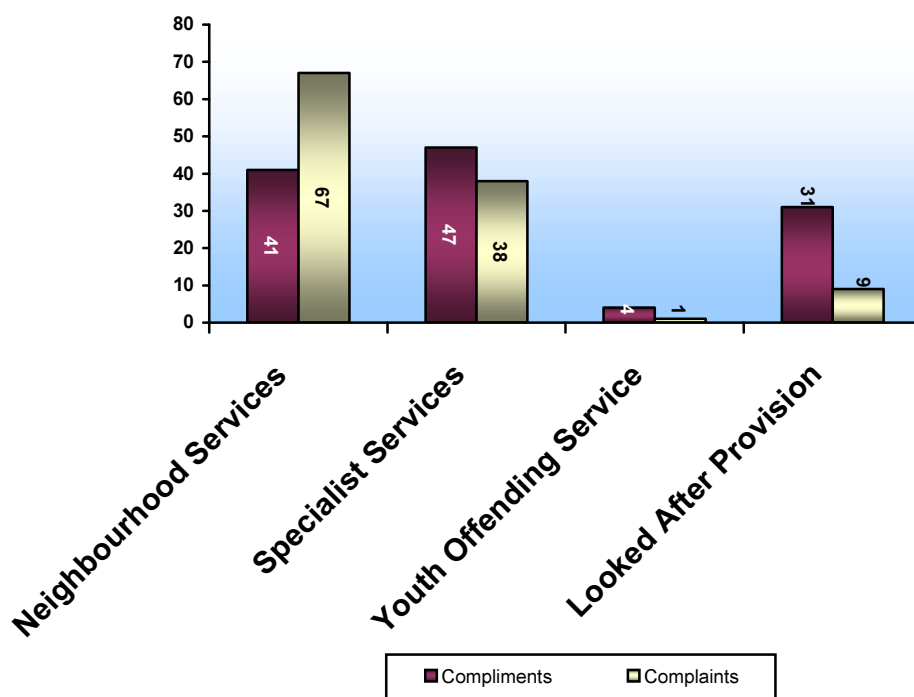
If the complainant remains unhappy following the outcome of the City Council's process, they have the option of taking their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

During 2012/13, the Local Government Ombudsman began to investigate one complaint regarding Children's Social Care Services in Coventry. However the investigation was discontinued after the complaint was remedied by the Social Care Team.



## SECTION 4: IDENTIFIED ISSUES AND RESOLUTIONS

### 4.1 Compliments and Complaints by Service Type



The majority of complaints received about Children’s Social Care are about the Neighbourhood Social Care Teams. More compliments were received than complaints for Specialist Services (e.g Looked after and disability teams), Youth Offending, and Looked After Provision (e.g Foster carers and children’s residential placements.).

### 4.2 Compliments By Category

(Please note that compliments can cover more than one category)

	Total
Staff Helpfulness	57
Standards Of Service	48
Good Communication	21
Good Child Focus	14
Specific Provision	11
Good Partnership Working	7

The large majority of compliments were regarding Staff Conduct and Standards of Service.

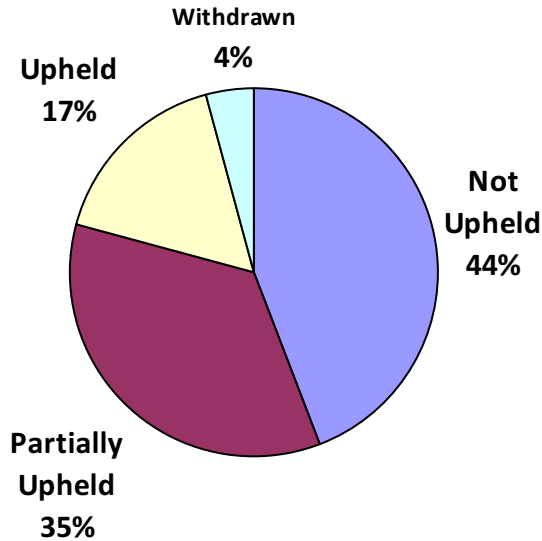
### 4.3 Complaints By Category

(Please note that complaints can cover more than one category)

	Total
Staff Conduct	59
Standards Of Service	35
Poor Communication	26
Management Decisions	7
Confidentiality	4
Financial Issues	4
Environment/Property	2
Child Protection Issues	1

The large majority of complaints were regarding Staff Conduct, Standard of Service, or Poor Communication.

### 4.4 Complaint Outcomes



51% of complaints were either upheld or partially upheld by the officer that investigated the complaint. 44% were not upheld and 4% were withdrawn

## 4.5 Resolutions

(Please note that complaints can have more than one resolution)

	Total
Explanation	95
Apology	42
Improved Communication	30
Information Provided	23
Change of Worker	8
Financial Support	5
Additional Monitoring Of Performance	4
Re-Assessment	4
Provision of Expert Service	3
Change Of Decision	2
Other	14

Even if a complaint is not upheld, there may still be resolution possible. For example further information can be provided or an explanation given.

Other resolutions include amendments to records or changes in external provision.

## 4.6 Service Improvements

Upon completion of the complaint investigation, officers are asked to identify specific service improvements as a result of the complaint. Examples of some of these improvements are:-

- Better transitions to adult services
- Improvements in Case Recording
- Improved communication to staff regarding correct use systems.
- Ensure quicker decision making
- Revise systems in respect of booking short break activities
- Advise staff of need to ensure they are not vulnerable to allegations from residents.
- Reissuing of guidance and training regarding working at home
- Amendments to Protocol Social Care Recording System
- Greater attempts to contact family members for cases in court.
- Ensure that purpose of visits are explained to families beforehand and in writing
- Ensure that families are aware of what checks will be undertaken on them
- Ensure that court reports assessments are shared with relevant people prior to filing
- Ensure that parents are involved in decision making for children who are looked after especially in relation to health and education.
- Memo to all staff reinforcing expectation of communicating effectively with parents
- Advice given to Foster Carers about dealing with stressful situations
- Fathers of children to be involved in any assessment even when they are not living in the family home.