



**Annual Report  
2013/14**

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.

The People Directorate 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 procedures in relation to Children's Social Care Services, during the period 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014.

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 2013 to 31 March 2014, Children's Social Care Services dealt with 6000 referrals, this represents a substantial increase from the previous year (4657). At 31 March 2014, Children's Social Care provided services to 4637 children and young people, compared with 3085 at the end of the previous year.

The total number of complaints received about Children's Social Care Services in 2013/14 was 102, a decrease from 133 in 2012/13. 85 compliments were received in the year, a substantial decrease compared with 126 in 2012/13.

A small number of complaints (six) were from children and young people themselves or from an advocate, the remainder were from adults.

Given the increase in social care activity in the year, it would be expected that complaints and compliments would increase by a similar factor. The fact that these have dropped year on year against a rise in activity suggests that customers are not fully aware of how to complain or compliment and we need to work on this in the coming year.

Three main themes could be identified as arising from the complaints by and on behalf of users in 2013/14.

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

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

35% of complaints were fully or partially substantiated in 2013/14, compared with 52% in 2012/13.

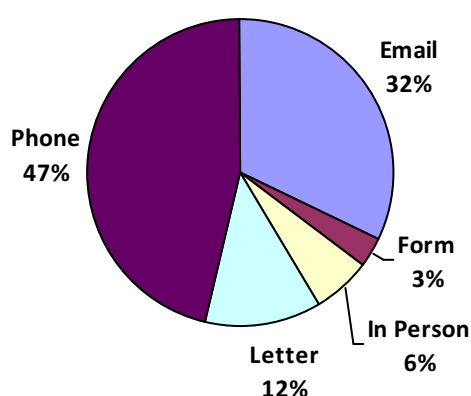
## SECTION 3: RESPONDING TO FEEDBACK

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

It is vitally important that the comments, complaints and compliments system is easily accessible. This maximises 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



47% of complainants chose to complain via telephone, with a further 6% requesting a face to face meeting. 3% chose to use the council's "Getting In Touch" leaflet, while 44% chose to put their complaint in writing in their own format via letter or email.

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

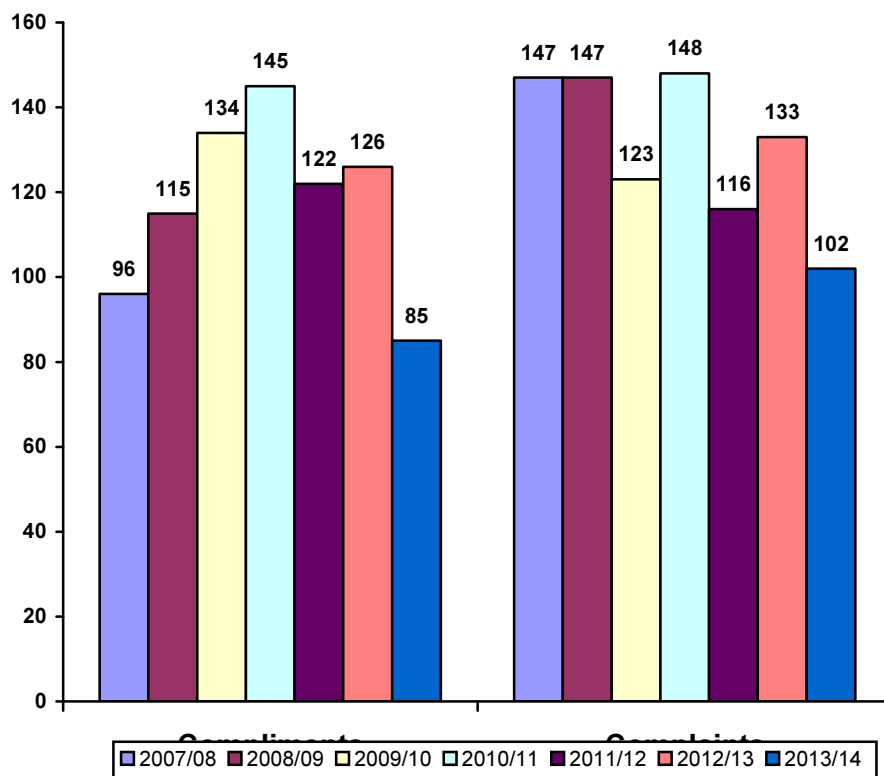
Having said this, there has been very little representation from children and young people themselves this year (six complaints and six compliments). This is lower than last year where there were 21 complaints and ten compliments. Children tended to submit their representation through the participation team or through an advocate. The Complaints Officer will liaise with the Local Authority's "Children's Champion" and the advocacy service over the next year in order to address the reduction in complaints from young people and to ensure that their voice can be heard.

### 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 six children and young people making complaints during the year, two decided to have an advocate to support them in making their complaint. Since April 2006, the advocacy service has been commissioned from Barnardo's.

### 3.3 Representations Received 2013/14

Comments	Compliments	Complaints
0	85	102



The total number of complaints received about Children's Social Care Services in 2013/14 was 102, a decrease from 133 in 2012/13. 85 compliments were received in the year, a substantial decrease compared with 126 in 2012/13.

### 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 in 2012/13 or in 2013/14.

### 3.5 Compliments

Compliments 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.

The reduction in total feedback this year has meant that fewer compliments have been received. There is a clear need to do more to promote the ability for service users to compliment workers, and for staff to share these compliments with the complaints officer when they are received.

## **3.6 Complaints**

Listening to service users' complaints helps managers and individual workers to focus on service improvement and customer care. This helps to identify 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.

The reduction in complaints received this year cannot be seen as an improvement as we would have expected numbers to remain constant given the increase in activity. This therefore suggests there is more work to be done to ensure that individuals know how to complain.

### **3.6.1 Stage 1 - Local Resolution**

The Directorate's aim within both the statutory and corporate procedures is to resolve problems, whenever possible, 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 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.

A lower percentage (87%) of complaints were resolved at stage 1 of the complaints procedure in 2013/14 compared with 2012/13 (98%). The complaints process will be reviewed in 2014/15 in order to address this.

### **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 ten investigations carried out at Stage 2, compared with six in 2012/13. However, a higher proportion of these (70% in 2013/14 compared with 33% in 2012/13) were successfully resolved at this level. Three of the ten complainants were unhappy with the findings of the stage 2 investigation, two of which then requested a Stage three panel.

All the stage two investigations were undertaken by external investigators. At the conclusion of all Stage 2 investigations the Investigating Officers' reports are read by senior managers for them to consider and act upon before a response is sent to the complainant.

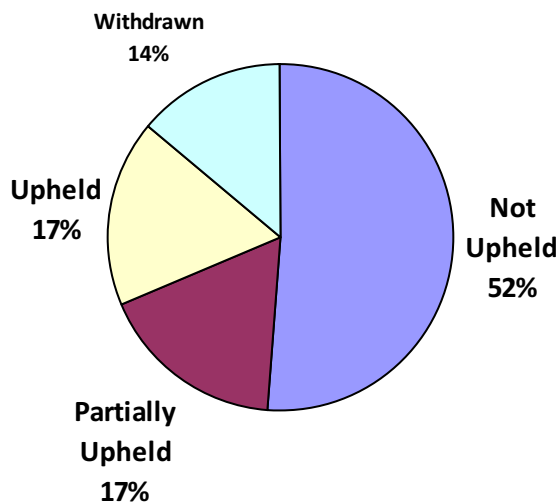
### 3.6.3 Stage 3 - Review Panel/Corporate Review

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. One complaint was considered by a Review Panel this year. The panel upheld the findings of the stage two investigations (the second review which went to stage 3 during the year has not been completed at the time of this report).

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

### 3.7 Outcomes

#### Of all the complaints:



17% of complaints were fully substantiated, 17% of complaints were partially substantiated and 52% of complaints were not upheld. 14% of complaints were either formally withdrawn by the complainants after being received or ended by the complaints officer due to lack of further contact from the complainant.

The same percentage of complaints were upheld in 2012/13, however the percentage of complaints that were partially upheld has halved, from 35% in 2012/13 to 17% in 2013/14



### 3.8 Time-scales

The legislation and corporate procedures set out timescales for dealing with complaints at each stage of the process. The timescales are:

	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 Complaints Officer, therefore, undertakes rigorous monitoring of progress in relation to responding to complaints.

In 2013/14, the median average time to complete stage one complaints was 15 working days, compared to 16 working days in 2012/13. Adherence to timescales has been a challenge and so weekly meetings have now been introduced with the Assistant Director in order to ensure complaint timescales are adhered to.

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.

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 The Local Government Ombudsman

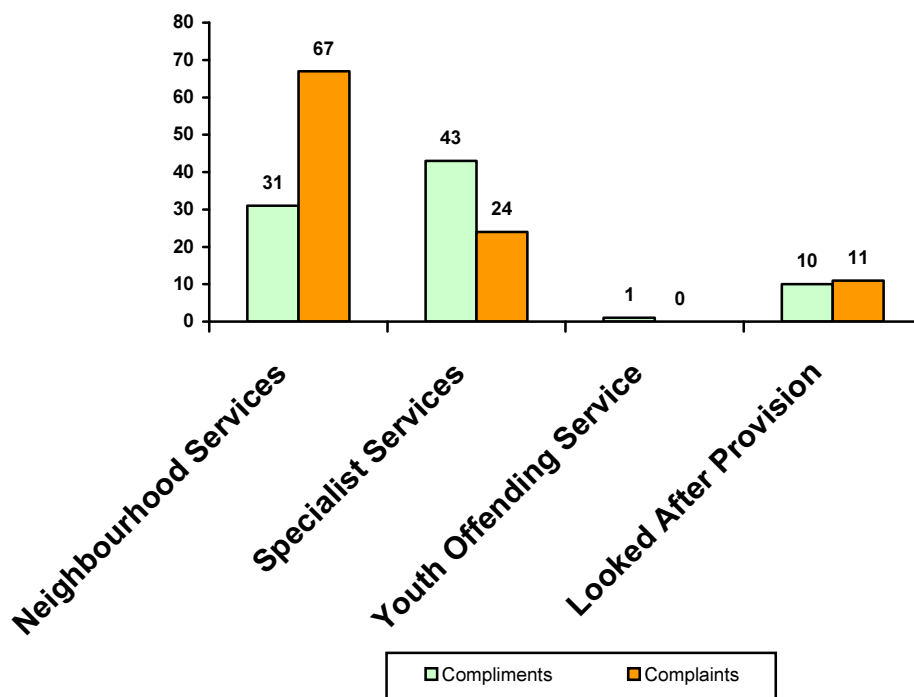
If the complainant remains unhappy following the outcome of the City Council's process, they have the option of taking their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

In 2012/13 just one representation was made to the ombudsman, however this was a small number compared to previous years.

Complainants made more use of the ombudsman's services in 2013/14 with twelve representations made during the year. The ombudsman considered that no further investigation was needed for nine complaints (75%). Three complaints were investigated and upheld by the ombudsman (25%).

## 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 (65%). This is similar to previous years. More compliments were received than complaints for Specialist Services (e.g Looked After and Disability Social Care teams), and Youth Offending. There were no formal complaints in 2013/14 regarding the Youth Offending Team. Complaints and compliments about specific provision to looked after children (for example foster carers or residential care homes) are recorded separately under “Looked After Provision”.

### 4.2 Compliments and Complaints by Category

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

Compliments	Total
Good Communication	35
Standards Of Service	32
Staff Helpfulness	22
Good Child Focus	17
Specific Provision	16
Good Partnership Working	11

Complaints	Total
Poor Communication	49
Standards Of Service	44
Staff Conduct	35
Financial Issues	8
Management Decisions	7
Confidentiality	4
Child Protection Issues	4
Discrimination	1

Communication and Standards of Service are the largest themes for both compliments and complaints.

### 4.3 Resolutions

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

	Total
Explanation	74
Apology	30
Improved Communication	4
Information Provided	12
Change of Worker	4
Compensation	2
Additional Monitoring Of Performance	3
Re-Assessment / Change of Decision	2
Change of Service Provider	1
Replacement of items	1

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

### 4.4 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:-

- Further agency cover to prevent interruptions in case management across the team.
- Discussions with the teams regarding impact of too many Social Worker changes
- Reinforcement of Information Governance procedures
- A greater emphasis on ensuring service users know how their information will be shared.
- Work to improve timeliness of Care Plans and avoid drift
- Additional support to Foster Carers working outside of their usual age range.
- Ensuring stakeholders are involved at all levels.
- Teams to ensure better record keeping.
- More timely communication with respect to significant incidents.

## **SECTION 5: RESULTANT ACTIONS FOR THE COMING YEAR**

This report shows the clear need to improve the feedback processes for those receiving services for Children and Young People in Coventry. The Complaints process will be reviewed at regular intervals in 2013/14 in order to address the issues raised. Actions will include:

- The Introduction of a full time Complaints Officer post for the People Directorate
- Closer working with Barnardos and the Children's Champion to ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard.
- Weekly complaint update meetings with the Assistant Director to highlight any issues with process or timescales.
- Complaints at Stage One to be checked and signed off by a head of service before they are sent to complainants.
- Regular meetings with teams to encourage engagement with the complaints and compliments process.
- Better communications with service users in order to increase awareness of the complaints and compliments procedures.