



**Annual Report  
2014/15**

People Directorate

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

**COMMENTS  
COMPLIMENTS  
& COMPLAINTS**

## 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.

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 2014 to 31st March 2015.

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 2014 to 31 March 2015, Children's Social Care Services dealt with 8178 referrals, this represents a substantial increase from the previous year (6000). However, at 31 March 2015, Children's Social Care were providing services to 4135 children and young people, a 10% decrease when compared to 4637 at the end of the previous year.

The total number of complaints received about Children's Social Care Services in 2014/15 was 117, an increase of 7% from 102 in 2013/14. 66 compliments were received in the year, a substantial decrease compared with 85 in 2013/14.

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

Three main themes could be identified as arising from the complaints by and on behalf of users in 2014/15.

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

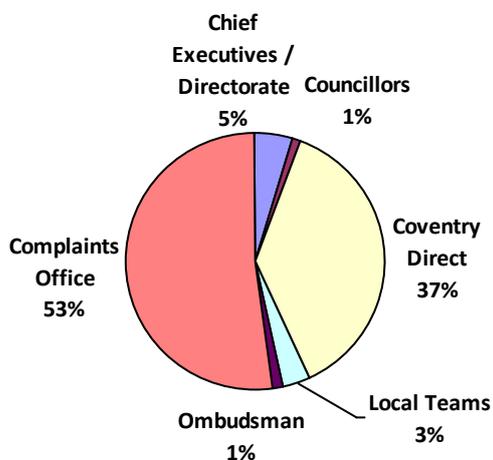
Themes from compliments were fairly evenly spread this year, the most prevalent theme being the standard of service received.

## 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. Complaints can be accepted via Coventry Direct processes (including online forms and the council's freephone number), or by complaining locally to the team that is providing them with a service. Sometimes complaints are made via Councillors, The Chief Executive's Office, or the Directorate. Complaints can also be referred to us from the Local Government Ombudsman. Complainants who contact the complaints team directly are encouraged to use the Coventry Direct processes to ensure that their complaint can be processed efficiently.



The majority of complainants (51%) choose to write to the complaints officer directly. A further 38% complain through the services provided by Coventry Direct. It is envisaged that more people will use the Coventry Direct functionalities as the council further establishes its online presence.

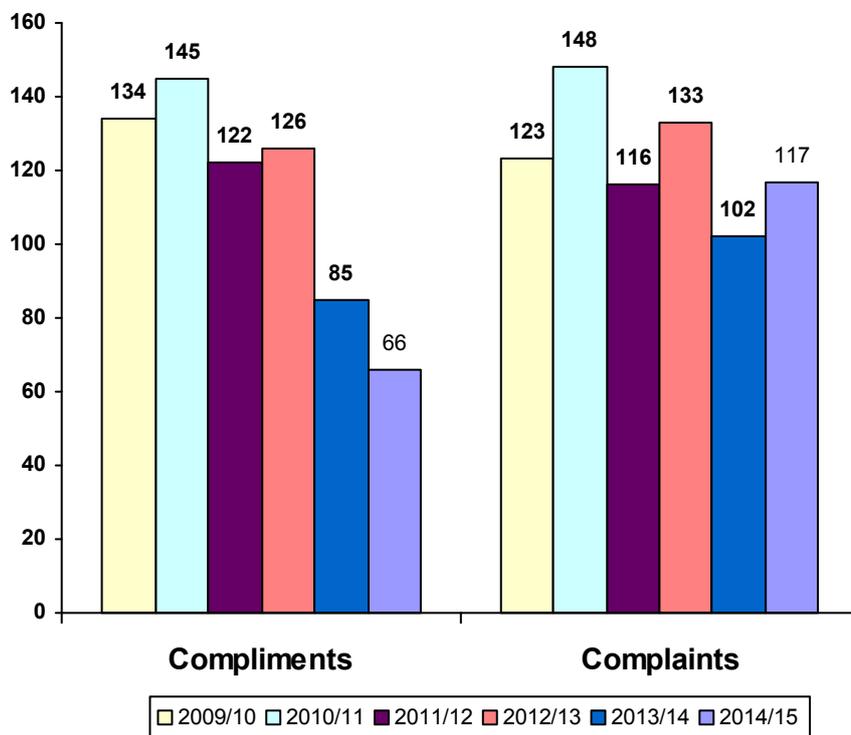
Of particular importance is the need to inform children of their opportunity to make representations and to find methods that they can easily use. There have been eleven complaints from children and young people themselves this year, which is almost twice as many as received last year (six). The majority of complaints from children and young people have been regarding care and aftercare arrangements. Work has taken place with Barnardo's advocacy service to ensure that more feedback is received from children and young people so this can be seen as a positive indicator of impact. More work will be undertaken to increase this number further in 2015/16.

### 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 eleven children and young people making complaints during the year, four 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 2014/15

| Comments | Compliments | Complaints |
|----------|-------------|------------|
| 0        | 66          | 117        |



The total number of complaints received about Children's Social Care Services in 2014/15 was 117, an increase from 102 in 2013/14. 66 compliments were received in the year, a substantial decrease compared with 85 in 2013/14. Work to increase feedback, including the introduction of new complaints leaflets, will take place in 2015/16.

### 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 of this nature have been received since April 2012.

### 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.

Far fewer compliments have been received in the past two years. 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. See the action plan at the end of this document for details of how this will be addressed.

## **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.

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

The Directorate's aim for complaints is to resolve problems, whenever possible, at Stage 1. At this stage, the allocated manager (usually the manager responsible for the service being complained about) will try to identify what's needed so that the complainant feels able to continue to work with the service. Examples of the types of resolutions offered can be found later in this report.

89% of complaints were resolved at stage one of the complaints process, compared with 87% in the previous year. The remaining 11% progressed to stage two. More emphasis on local resolution will be introduced in 2015/16 in order to improve the percentage resolved at stage one of the process. See the action plan at the end of this document for details as to how this will be addressed.

### **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 thirteen investigations carried out at Stage 2, compared with ten in 2013/14. At the time of reporting (30/09/2015), five complaints have been successfully resolved, six are still ongoing, and two have progressed to stage three of the process.

Ten out of thirteen 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 and no further action was required. A second complaint, considered at stage two during the reporting period, will also be considered by a panel once the complainant is available to attend.

### 3.7 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 2014/15, the median average time to complete stage one complaints was 39 working days, compared to 16 working days in 2013/14. 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. The process for stage one complaints was further streamlined on 01/09/2015 in order to ensure that complaints are resolved more quickly.

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.

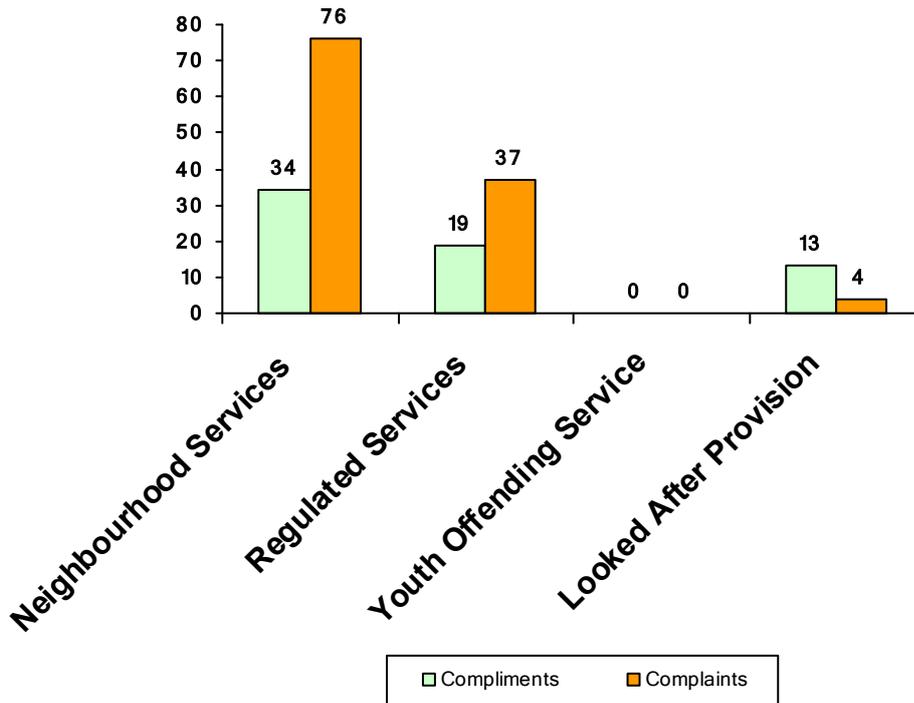
### 3.8 The Local Government Ombudsman

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 2014/15 just one representation was considered by the Local Government Ombudsman, compared to three in 2013/14. This is an improvement. The ombudsman partially upheld the complaint, finding some fault in the council's process.

## 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. Regulated Services include the Looked After Children's Service, Route 21, and the All Age Disability Service. Looked After Provision refers to compliments and complaints regarding foster carers or residential provision. More compliments were received than complaints for Looked After Provision.

## 4.2 Compliments and Complaints by Category

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

| Compliments              | Total |
|--------------------------|-------|
| Standards Of Service     | 22    |
| Staff Helpfulness        | 17    |
| Good Partnership Working | 16    |
| Good Communication       | 15    |
| Good Child Focus         | 14    |
| Specific Provision       | 13    |

Standards of Service are the most prevalent theme for both compliments and complaints. There has been an increase in compliments regarding good partnership working this year.

| Complaints              | Total |
|-------------------------|-------|
| Standards Of Service    | 101   |
| Poor Communication      | 64    |
| Staff Conduct           | 33    |
| Financial Issues        | 13    |
| Confidentiality         | 7     |
| Child Protection Issues | 6     |
| Management Decisions    | 3     |
| Standard of Environment | 3     |
| Damage to Property      | 2     |

## 4.3 Resolutions

All staff dealing with complaints are encouraged to make any reasonable effort to ensure that the complaint is resolved. Common resolutions this year were:

- Apologies for mistakes made and any distress caused.
- A change in Social Worker, where this could be managed in the best interests of the child.
- A full explanation of why decisions were made.
- The opportunity for complainants to ensure their views are recorded on the social care file.
- Additional monitoring of the case through the usual supervision route.
- Provision of advocacy to ensure child's voice could be heard.

For some complaints more specific interventions were needed in order to resolve the complaint. These included:

- An Independent review of support offered to a case assessed as "low risk".
- A £500 good-will payment.
- Additional support provided by Children and Family's First Team.

## 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:-

- Re-emphasising the importance of keeping data safe.
- Emphasising with staff the importance of holding LAC Reviews and including foster carer views in instances of placement disruption.
- Exploring Online training regarding Domestic Violence.
- Ensuring Service Users are notified of important events in writing if they are uncontactable by phone.
- Reinforced need to return calls in accordance with corporate timescales.

More can be done to embed the learning obtained from complaints. This will be addressed by a more formal process in 2015/16.

## SECTION 5: PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AND NEW ACTIONS FOR THE COMING YEAR

A number of actions were identified in last year's report. Progress on these actions is as follows.

### 1) The Complaints process will be reviewed at regular intervals in 2014/15

The complaints process was revised significantly and relaunched in October 2014 across the directorate. New administrative support was put in place in order to chase complaint resolution with teams and new response templates were designed. The new process made very little impact on improving timescales, and added a further burden by ensuring complaints were checked by a head of service (see item 5, below). The process was therefore reviewed again in September 2015.

### 2) The Introduction of a full time Complaints Officer post for the People Directorate

The full time complaints officer began in post on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014. This has allowed a single post to co-ordinate all complaints for adult and children's social care.

### 3) Close working with Barnardo's and the Children's Champion to ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard.

The complaints officer is now working more closely with Barnardo's and has met with them to identify how the two services can work together. This has resulted in Barnardo's understanding the process more and asking insightful questions from children and young people at the point where they are making their complaint. It has also resulted in an increase in complaints from children and young people. More work can be done with the Children's Champion to gain more feedback from children and young people.

### 4) Weekly complaint update meetings with the Assistant Director to highlight any issues with process or timescales.

Fortnightly meetings took place between the Assistant Director - Children's Social Care and Early Intervention Service and the Complaints Officer in order to identify cases that need further assistance. Since then, the directorate structure has been revised. Under the new structure, regular meetings will take place with the Heads of Service for Regulated Services and Social Care and Family Intervention.

## **5) Complaints at Stage One to be checked and signed off by a Head of Service before they are sent to complainants.**

This process was implemented but led to significant delays as heads of service were not available to quickly sign off complaints. It has now been agreed to remove the requirement for heads of service to approve complaint responses.

## **6) Regular meetings with teams to encourage engagement with the complaints and compliments process.**

Teams were consulted in August and September to make them aware of the changes in process. The complaints officer has also attended team meetings when this was useful. All teams are now familiar with the complaints process.

## **7) Better communications with service users in order to increase awareness of the complaints and compliments procedures.**

New leaflets have been designed and the website updated with more up to date information so that service users know how to give feedback. The leaflets will be distributed to all service users in 2015/16 and it is expected that this will result in an increase in feedback.

### **Further Actions for the coming year**

#### **1) Further revision of the stage one process.**

Resolution at stage one of the process is still too slow. The process will once again be revised in 2015/16 in order to focus more on resolution, freeing up time that was spent conducting investigations. This is in line with statutory guidance. Heads of Service will no longer be asked to sign off complaints. This will be implemented from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015 and will be launched through team meetings. We expect the impact of this to be an improvement in complaint timescales at stage one.

#### **2) Complaints Scorecard**

A complaints scorecard will be introduced in 2015/16 in order to provide a monthly report on complaints and timeliness. This will be produced every quarter to show progress on complaints resolution and timescales.

#### **3) Distribution of new leaflets.**

Newly designed complaint leaflets, explaining the process for children and young people will be printed in 2015/16. The leaflets will be distributed to all service users in 2015/16 and it is expected that this will result in an increase in feedback.

#### **4) Complaints Bulletins**

Further information, such as themes from complaints and appropriate learning will be shared in regular "Complaints Bulletins". These will be produced every quarter to share learning from complaints and compliments. They will also be used to remind workers of how to encourage children and young people to send a compliment or a complaint.

#### **5) Further embedding of learning from complaints.**

The complaints process will be further embedded into the Quality Assurance framework in order to ensure more formal learning and action from Children's Social Care complaints.