

Learning from complaints
Annual Report on Complaints Activity
Children & Young People (social care)

For period 1st April 2010 – 31 March 2011

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Foreword by the Complaints Manager for Children & Young People service

The complaints process for social care services is very different to the complaints process used corporately, or processes used by business or other local partners. The biggest difference is that the Children Act complaints process is set out in detailed form in legislation. This requires every authority to have a Complaints Manager at a specific level of responsibility, and processes that meet the requirements, along with high profile information and easy access to the process.

The legislation sets out who can use the complaints process, and this includes children and young people, their parents and carers, foster carers, and a few others. These are known as 'eligible people'. If we receive a complaint from someone who is not 'eligible' we still deal with the complaint, but use the briefer corporate process instead.

The legislation also sets strict timescales, with allowances for extension due to complexity or the need to put advocacy support in place for a young person complaining. Complainants are advised at the beginning of any enquiry whenever it seems likely that timescales may be exceeded. In response complainants almost always indicate that they prefer to have thorough and complete enquiries carried out, rather than a quick investigation simply to meet the required timescales. We always keep complainants informed of the progress of the enquiries, and consult with them over any delays.

Some people prefer to make a Representation, rather than a Complaint. A Representation is simply a written communication which requires a response, and may be a query, a comment on service, or something which meets the criteria for a complaint, but the writer does not wish to formally complain. They also include written compliments, but these are all reported collectively as compliments in West Berkshire – see appendix 1.

Complaints and Representation should not be seen as a negative thing for an organisation, as they have great benefit for the service. They provide us with feedback from our customers about how it feels to use our services, thus offering opportunity to shape services to meet the public need, and to make improvements.

This reporting year saw a continuation of a lot of pressures put on staff as referrals to our services continued to increase, whilst at the same time there were pressures to reduce staffing, especially administrative support. This has inevitably led to staff having to prioritise their workloads, which at times does not fit with the client expectations, as each feels that their difficulties should be the priority. **This year saw a 48% increase in the number of complaints received, but a decrease in the total number that were found to be justified.** The concurrent very significant pressures on the Complaints and Access to Records Manager has caused considerable and unavoidable delay in the presentation of this report, as service to clients has taken priority.

Reporting to staff and Members

The Complaints Manager works closely with Service Managers to ensure that they are kept aware of complaints arising in their area of responsibility, and how these are progressing.

The Complaints Manager also attends Children's Services Management Team (CSMT) and in this forum advises colleagues where complaints and representations reveal any trends of service difficulties, and raises any issues around delay to timescales, use of advocacy support, learning points, information about any changes to process and management of the more complex complaints. This ensures managers are kept up to date with current events across the service, and that complaints remain in the forefront of team business and the shaping of services. Bulletins identifying any learning issues are also disseminated via CSMT to Team meetings.

The annual report is presented to CSMT, and then on to Corporate Board and to Members, as required by legislation. The report this year has been delayed, as it was last year, due to the extraordinary pressures on the Officer who deals with complaints, as concurrent with a rise in complaints there has been a very large increase in the number of people applying to view their records, and many of these have been complex and with very large case files. Both processes require adherence to timescales, so this is prioritised over production of the annual report. The Complaints and Access to Records Manager post is a part-time post working three days a week.

Brief outline of the process and timescales

Representations = a written query, or raising of matters that need a response – but not a complaint as such. Process and timescales similar to Stage 1.

Stage 1 = looking into issues/providing a response at the front line – usually by Team Manager.

- Children must be offered advocacy support
- 10 working days deadline
- Up to 10 extra working days may be agreed with the complainant if advocacy support is required, or if matters are complex.

Stage 2 = formal investigation, usually by an external person, with the provision of a written report.

- Must include use of an Independent Person to oversee the process,
- Both provide reports to the Head of Service
- Head of Service then formally responds to the complainant enclosing the reports – known as the Adjudication response.

- 25 working days from the date matters for investigation are agreed to the sending of the adjudication response, with a maximum of 65 working days by agreement.

Stage 3 = Appeal to a Panel of 3 Independent People, providing a report to the Director, who then responds to the complainant enclosing the panel report. There are defined timescales for all steps of this part of the process, which are not detailed here as we have had no Stage 3's for over six years.

Total complaints

NB: Throughout this report data reporting is by financial year, not by calendar year, and includes previous year's data for comparison.

In 2009 -10 there was a drop in the number of complaints and Representations received, but this reporting year saw a 48% rise in numbers of these received. Two Stage 2 complaints were launched in the previous reporting year, but completed in this one - so data is included here. Since these were concluded early in the reporting year, there have been no further Stage 2's. This is unusual and a first in the 13 year service of the Complaints Manager.

This picture is further complicated by changing patterns of demand for Children's Services. Whilst referrals to the service dropped by 22%, there were large increases in Child Protection activity. During the year Children's Social Care undertook a total of 411 Child Protection enquiries. This was a 93% increase on the previous year, leading to a 51% increase in Children subject to Child Protection Plans. Child Protection accounts for much of the more contentious work carried out by Children's services and may account for part or all of the increase in complaint activity. Over the same period numbers of Looked after children remained largely unchanged year on year.

Total number of complaints considered - statutory social care procedure

Year	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
2008 - 2009	86 (14 by children)	1(by a parent)	0
2009 – 2010	45 (9 by children)	1 (by a parent)	0
2010 – 2011	69 (7 by children)	2 (by parents)	0

Note – Representations are included in Stage 1 figures – 17 by adults, and 0 by young people.

Total number of complaints considered - corporate procedure

Year	Stage 1	Stage 2
2008 – 2009	3	0
2009 – 2010	3	0
2010 – 2011	2	0

One additional complaint was dealt with under the Child Protection resolution process for professionals protocol and is counted in the first table above.

The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) considers complaints once they have progressed through the three stages of the Council's statutory process. The legislation also permits early referral to the LGO of a complaint that has completed Stage 2, where it is clear that Stage 3 will have no demonstrably different outcome. No complaints necessitated LGO investigation during this reporting period.

Timescales

We are required to acknowledge receipt of complaints and representations within 3 working days. Some complaints, even at Stage 1, can be complex, and set amongst family crisis, ever changing and difficult to resolve straight away, but we still resolve most within the 10 working day timescale. We are permitted to extend a Stage 1 up to 20 working days if the matters are complex; and try to agree this right at the start to avoid unduly raising expectations. Should the matter take even longer the complainants are usually kept informed of progress.

Complaints at Stage 2 can take longer than the required 25 working days, and often take between six weeks and three months to investigate fully, depending on their complexity. This also seems to be the case in many other local authorities, and perhaps reflects the complainants need to raise all matters and have them adequately investigated. The law permits extension by agreement to a maximum of 65 working days.

Acknowledgement times

This year 97% of complaints were acknowledged within 3 days, a slight increase on last year's performance of 96.4%.

Time taken to respond

We are expected to respond to complaints and representations within 10 working days, although we can allow up to 10 more working days to embed advocacy or if the matter is complex. Performance has remained static in this year in regard to the bulk of complaints which are dealt with within 10 working days. There has been an increase in the number of complaints taking up to 20 working days, which is inevitable given the concurrent significant increase in service pressures and the increase in complex complaints. However, there has been a drop in the number of complaints responses which took significantly longer than 20 working days, due to staff responding to reminders and pressure to prioritise these complaints, especially those made by young people.

(figures include all complaints and representations – children and adults)	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11
Met ideal of 10 working days	85%	69%	69%
Exceeded 10 working days but met 20 working days **	10%	14%	18%
Exceeded 20 working days ***	5%	17%	13%

** (10 – 20 working days) Most of these were delayed either because of a need for a meeting or service input, including 9 where the delay was client related.

***(Over 20 working days) 11 complaints took over 20 working days to complete, but in each case the client was kept informed of progress.

Several of these were delayed due to the need to either arrange a meeting to progress matters, or to arrange service input to achieve resolution.

Some of the delayed complaint responses were caused by the complexities of the complaints themselves – this year we had several complaints raising multiple issues across more than two service areas, and one crossed into another Local Authority and was delayed as the responses needed to be provided together.

Sometimes a complaint issue requires some legal advice before it is dealt with, although this rarely causes significant delay now due to the ready access to legal surgeries provided by our specialist lawyers.

One complaint by young people was delayed for 70 days whilst staff worked tirelessly to acquire additional funding to provide what was needed to resolve their complaint since national funding had ceased.

One complaint was seriously delayed (157 days in total) due to staff feeling they had answered the complaint repeatedly when meeting face to face with the complainant, but she disputed this. Measures have been put in place to avoid this recurring.

It is also worth noting that 64% of the complaints delayed beyond the 20 working day timescale were allocated to two of the busiest service areas – Referral and Assessment and West & Central, with the majority of these being with West & Central. Staff work extremely hard to prioritise complaints, and during this reporting year R & A dealt with a large increase in Child Protection referrals – which have to take priority over responding to complaints. In West & Central they had an unusual number of cases going through Care Proceedings in this reporting year, which again had to take priority over responding to complaints. Where possible complainants were advised by the Complaints Manager of the delays, reasons, and likely response time.

Stage 1 – nature of complaint

People complain about various issues, and sometimes complain about several issues at the same time, so there are more issues listed here than the total number of complaints. The table over the page sets out the key issues, and details which of the complaints in each category were upheld or justified (U), not upheld (N), or partly upheld (P). Previous data is shown for comparison. There is a separate table for complaints made by young people.

Stage 1 - nature of complaint (adults)

Nature of complaint	2009/10	Upheld	Not upheld	Partly	2010/11	Upheld	Not upheld	Partly
Attitude/conduct of staff	12	1	10	1	5		5	
Cancelled visits/meetings	3		3		4	2	1	1
Care proceedings / reports in court	2	1	1		7	1	5	1
Communication	8	2	3	3	11		8	3
Confidentiality	4	1	3		8	1	6	1
Contact problems	10		8	2	7		7	
Delay – getting paperwork	0				10	8	2	
Delay – service provision	0				4		4	
Disagree – assessment	2		1	1	5	2	3	
Disagree – report content	0				7	1	5	1
Disagree - planned service	2		2		9		7	2
Dislike SW / want change of worker	0				4		3	1
Dispute over CP requirements	6	1	5		11		11	
Dispute over information on file	2		1	1	3		3	
Finance related issues	4		3	1	1		1	
Fostering – respite carers clearance	0				2		2	
Frequency of visits by SW	0				3	2	1	
Lack of input	1		1		5		4	1
Lack of support	0				4		3	1
Needs no longer met	0				1		1	
No SW allocated	0				3	1	2	
Other clients	0				2			2
Placement problems	0				5		3	2
Quality of service	5		4	1	0			
Totals	61	6	45	10	121	18	84	19

Stage 1 complaints by adults

The most obvious decrease in the table is the number of complaints about attitude/conduct of staff. Looking in detail at these – it is clear that the majority relate to situations where clients disliked staff being firm or insistent on progressing matters where children were perceived to be at risk. In each of the 5 sets of complaints about staff the complaint was not upheld because staff were only progressing matters in accordance with policy and procedures.

Complaints about contact problems have also decreased slightly , with none of these being warranted this year. Parents often find it difficult to have their

contact controlled or reduced, but this is usually due to requirements of a Child Protection Plan or court decisions, and is always in the best interests of the child.

Communication problems have increased from 8 to 11 this year, as there are still times when clients find it difficult to get the immediate response to their calls that they expect. Staff have to balance the need to get back to people alongside competing priorities. All three of the cases where the complaint was partially upheld were identified as cases where staff were mindful of the need to maintain confidentiality, and thus could not give the level of information/updates sought by various family members.

Last year saw a significant increase in complaints relating to our actions in investigating and dealing with child protection matters, and this has remained static this year. The national pressure to be even more diligent when there are concerns about the welfare of a child inevitably led to more situations where families felt the investigation of concerns was unwarranted or in too much depth, and in all 11 cases the finding was that actions were warranted and appropriate.

Complaints about perceived breach of confidentiality is also a recurrent issue, which has increased from 4 to 8 this year. Analysis shows that in 6 of the 8 cases no breach of confidentiality occurred. When someone reports a concern about a child's welfare, the nature of the information itself, and the nature of family dynamics often leads people to guess who made the contact with the service. Great care is taken not to divulge informant's details wherever possible, and given the high number of concerns we deal with, the complaints in this category are few. In one unusual case the worker had given a sibling of an adopted child photographs taken with her at the adoption hearing, and the sibling had put these on facebook without thinking of the risk of identification of the adoptive family this created. Fortunately she did co-operate and remove the photographs once the risk was explained to her, and in future any such photographs would be placed on the young person's file to have when he/she reaches 18.

Delay in service provision has appeared again in this reporting year after nil last year. All of these related to the need for certain services to be slotted into the timetable at a time that suited the wider plan for the young person, and thus none were upheld. This also accounts for a proportion of the rise in complaints disputing the planned service input.

What has increased significantly is the number of complaints about delay in receiving paperwork after a meeting. Staff work hard to meet the deadlines set for provision of paperwork/minutes of meetings, but with a decrease in the resource of administrative support for some teams, alongside an increasing workload, makes this an inevitable pressure. In almost all the cases the complaining parent had been present at the relevant meeting, and so knew of the matters discussed and dealt with. The two case that were partly upheld were

more significant as the parent had been absent and thus needed the paperwork more promptly, although in both cases they had been informed verbally.

Alongside this there has been an increase in the number of complaints about the content of reports, with complainants expressing the view that sometimes the social worker had not included everything that the complainant felt was valid or necessary. Social work reports, usually to court, need to be based on fact and evidence, but in two cases the report was adjusted to better clarify the dispute between parents over the circumstances being reported. There have been 7 further complaints relating directly to Care Proceedings, usually about delay but on occasion about reports about to be filed with the court. The timing of Court proceedings is out of the hands of the Local Authority, and courts have experienced a huge rise in cases alongside reductions in resources, but workers need to be very clear with parents about progress and delays. In one case some of the delay was attributable to the service, and in another there was delay in filing a report because of the need to incorporate what the complainant was saying.

Issues about contact with children continue to occur, although slightly less this year, but in all 7 cases the complaint was not upheld.

Stage 1 complaints by children and young people

The issues for young people are very different to those their parents or other adults raise - see the table below. Figures are not high enough to warrant detailed analysis, but it is worth making comment on a few of the figures.

Nature of complaint	2009 - 2010	Upheld	Not Upheld	Partly Upheld	2010 - 2011	Upheld	Not upheld	Partly upheld
Staff attitude or conduct	2		2		1		1	
Missing property	0				3	2	1	
Finance issues	1			1	7	2	5	
Felt treated differently (racially)	0				3		3	
Housing related	3		2	1	1		1	
Communication	0				1		1	
Placement issues	4	1	3		0			
Totals	10	1	7	2	16	4	12	0

There have been no contact issues for young people, and only one complaint about staff conduct, which investigation revealed was an unjustified allegation because the young person did not get his way about other matters.

In the past there have been complaints about missing property in foster placements and in particular on moving from placement to placement. Measures put in place by the Family placement Team ensured we had none of these complaints last year. This year saw three complaints about property again, but these were not related to foster placements but to accommodation where young unaccompanied minors were living. Two of these were upheld and the missing property was recompensed.

The finance issues were also in the main raised by this group of young people, who felt that the department should finance far more than it is able to do. One complaint, made jointly by brothers, was about provision of equipment to enable them to do their schoolwork; the funding for this provision had been external, and had ceased, but extraordinary efforts were made to find and secure funding to resolve their complaint, which was upheld.

The three issues about being treated differently were also from the group of young unaccompanied minors, and related to their view that there was disparity between how they were dealt with as compared with others from another ethnic background. On investigation this was clearly not the case and more of a cultural issue, and these causative factors were addressed.

The most obvious shift last year had been the number of complaints from young people relating to either their placement, or difficulties in getting re-housed. This year there was only one issue, and this was not upheld. Whilst the client felt the social worker was not doing enough to assist her – this was not justified as it is necessary to empower young people to take responsibility for some of the actions and tasks required to facilitate moving on, to maximise their independence and reduce their reliance on support as they approach adulthood.

It is noted that this year a number of issues which have been problems in previous years have not recurred this year – namely information on files, wanting to come into care, and age assessments. Certainly some of these reductions are because learning was put in place to avoid repetition.

Stage 1 - outcomes

When people complete Stage 1 of the complaints process, they do have the right to request escalation to Stage 2 of the process if they remain dissatisfied, and are advised how to do this. Some people chose to do so, whilst others do not. Occasionally a complaint may leave the process to take another route such as court proceedings.

We count those that do not come back as satisfied, and this assumption is also confirmed by a degree of checking back with staff working with the family - but this is not formally confirmed by follow up contact at present. A customer satisfaction survey of those who use the complaints process has been developed, and was planned for the year 2009 -10, but has not yet been implemented due to time constraints on the service.

The issues in Stage 2 complaints

This year there were two Stage 2 complaints which launched at the end of last year, but were not complete enough to report on until this year's report. These were concurrent complaints by two separate people, with differing issues, but related to the same young person and services to him. It is difficult to relate the details and issues of this complaint without identifying the family.

The complaint concerned the way that the service was managing emotional abuse by separated parents, registration under child protection as emotional abuse by both parents, and major contact issues. Between them the complainants raised a total of 24 issues. Of these, 9 issues were not upheld, one issue was determined as "no finding", and the remaining 14 issues were upheld, although many of these decisions were qualified in some way by the investigator. An Action Plan was drawn up, and all actions were monitored through to completion, with the final issues being completed within 3 months.

Since April 2010 to the end of March 2011 there have been no other Stage 2 complaints launched, which is extremely unusual, although historically we have seen a pattern of reducing number of Stage 2 complaints for some years. This is attributable to a number of things, including concerted efforts by staff to provide effective written responses, and to a degree of mediation and follow up in those cases with the potential to escalate, to sort things out locally before Stage 2 is even a consideration for the complainant.

Extreme efforts have been made by both the Complaints Manager and other managers within Children's Services to meet with complainants who are considering Stage 2, to mediate, negotiate and achieve resolution without recourse to the very expensive process of Stage 2. Without this effort there would be a much higher number of Stage 2 complaints, with all the attendant stress for the family and the staff involved, and of course significant costs to the authority.

Time taken to complete Stage 2

The timescale begins once the issues to be investigated have been fully clarified and agreed with the complainant. We usually appoint an Investigating Officer and an Independent Person within two or three days of accepting the need for a Stage 2. The Stage 2 complaint this year took 5 working days to identify an

investigation team, as it was necessary to put in people experienced in difficult Child Protection matters. .

We also monitor the time it takes for a complainant to meet with the investigation team, and agree the statement of complaint – which is the point at which the investigation timescale itself formally begins. This was always a significant delaying factor in the old process when complaints timescales were counted from the date the investigation team was appointed. In this Stage 2 the complainants took 26 working days to agree the statement of complaint, due to the need to do this with two separate complainants, and delays caused by their availability to do so.

Once the statements were agreed, the investigation itself, and provision of the written adjudication response and reports, took 53 working days. The time taken fell within the upper limit of 65 days, and the complainants were kept informed of progress and reasons for delay. This was despite illness of the Investigating Officer for a period of two weeks and the complexity of managing two concurrent and related Stage 2 complaints.

Stage 3 – Review Panel – and beyond

If a complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage 2 – they have a right to a Review Panel. In West Berkshire we have a shared pool of external people from across Berkshire, and provide three external independent people to sit on a Review Panel. These people are fully trained by us to undertake the task. Portfolio Members are kept informed of Review Panels when they are occurring, and if the complainant agrees, may be invited to observe the process.

There have been no Stage 3 Panels since 2005 in Children's Services. I believe this is due to excellent quality work in the initial Stage 1 of the process, thorough and effective investigation at Stage 2, combined with efforts to follow up after each stage to ensure appropriate change and learning is recognised and progressed.

Since the new guidance was put in place in September 2006, the Ombudsman's office is now willing to look at complaints following the Stage 2 investigation if a Stage 3 Panel is deemed unlikely to move matters forward in any productive way.

No complainants approached the Ombudsman in this year, and they have not referred any complaints to us.

Mechanisms used to complain

There are two complaints leaflets, one written for adults, and another more suitable to young people. A version is also available in Makaton for young people with communication difficulties. All clients are given details of the

complaints process when they first engage with us, along with other core information.

People may complete a reply slip in the complaints leaflet, or use e mail, a letter or phone call to the Complaints Manager to lodge a complaint or representation, or they may raise matters using any of these tools direct with their worker or team manager. Although the Complaints Manager post is part-time, she is available to young people through her mobile phone and text facilities on any working day.

Young people are all provided with an information pack when they come into care, arranged with the Complaints Manager and the Family Placement Team. This includes information about complaints, raising issues generally, and advocacy support, as well as a wide range of other matters such as bullying, relationship problems, and contraception and substance abuse. Foster carers are proactive at encouraging young people to raise their problems, and the Reviewing process also ensures that young people are asked about issues they want to raise or have dealt with when they meet with their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The IRO and the Complaints Manager work closely together to ensure young people's voices are heard and dealt with swiftly, often resulting in issues being dealt with immediately without recourse to the complaints procedure.

Five out of the eight young people who complained raised their issues direct with the Complaints Manager, using the phone (2), a letter (1), or the reply slip (2). The remaining three complaints came in via the case worker after a face-to-face discussion. Three complainants did not have good grasp of English, and were provided with both advocacy and an interpreter to ensure their issues were fully detailed and dealt with.

Adults tend to write in (21) or use e mail (17) – addressing these variously to the Complaints Manager, their case worker, or occasionally a senior manager. Nine of them telephoned or texted the Complaints Manager, and 13 used the reply slip in the complaints leaflet. The remainder (3) made their complaint face-to-face to their social worker. Often a meeting is arranged to glean detail and examples of the matters being complained about, to ensure the response is clear and appropriate.

Advocacy support to children and young people

The authority is required to offer independent advocacy support to any child indicating a wish to complain or make a representation as soon as possible.

We have a contract with Action for Children "Here4me" service to provide advocacy support for young people wishing to make complaints and representations, as well as advocacy for other aspects of service. Every young person under 18, and those still receiving support under the Children Leaving

Care Act, are offered this support. If a translator is required, advocacy support is still offered, as a translator is not there to advocate under the rules.

Whenever the young person has indicated a desire for advocacy support, Here4me has been able to respond immediately to every request. Some young people choose not to take it up, or to use a friend or person they already know. Such people are provided with written advice about the role – to ensure they are a voice for the child. Some young people have chosen to use their foster carer as their advocate.

Advocacy support has the potential to delay progression of a complaint whilst a rapport is established, and extra time can be permitted for this if needed. Addition of an advocate has not added to timescales in any of the cases this reporting period.

The advocacy service also reports that advocates continue to support young people to raise a number of issues, which are resolved without formal recourse to the complaints process, and are thus not included in this data. (Usually dealt with direct with the case worker or with the IRO). Feedback indicates that young people really appreciate this support, and it is admirable that our young people have such ready access to this support to resolve issues early on.

All children and young people entitled to advocacy support were offered it, and all but two took it up. Advocates also supported some young person alongside the services of a translator. Advocacy input really helps the young person understand the process and the findings, and often contributes to the resolution at this stage.

Ethnicity of complainants

This information is requested from complainants, but some decline to give the information or leave the section blank. Sometimes the data is collected from other sources – if the complainant is also a client it is recorded in the client system for example. As planned, a concerted effort was made this year to collect this information, making contact with complainants where necessary.

Ethnicity code/detail	No of complainants 2009 – 2010	No of complainants 2010 – 11
A1 White British	43	71
A3 any other white background	1	3
B1 White/black Caribbean	0	0
B4 Any other mixed race	3	3
C4 Any other Asian background	1	3
D3 Any other black background	1	0
NG Not given	9	1

Of the total complaints and representations this year, there were 10 complaints from people from ethnic minority backgrounds (14%) – which is appropriate given the current ethnicity profile of our community (5%), and indicates that the process is accessible to those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The complaints leaflet for young people is translated into the most common languages amongst unaccompanied children, and information about the Here4me and Independent Visitors services are available in the two most common languages spoken in the district. Correspondence and responses can also be provided translated into a complainant's first language where required.

Age range of complainants

We only actively collect data about the ages of children and young people complaining at present, as this data is recorded on the electronic client file. These ranged from age 11 through to 20 years old. No adult completed the age range fields on the complaints reply slip, but looking through a sample of complaints it is clear there were complaints from grandparents and older relatives as well as from parents of all ages.

Gender of complainants

Five of the children and young people were male, and two were female. The split in adults complaining showed that the trend that females complain more than males continues – probably because a high proportion of our clients are from single parent families, with children predominantly remaining with their mothers. 56% of these being female, 20% being male, and the remaining 24% being couples.

Disciplinary interface

No complaints in this year led directly to disciplinary., although one or two required specific advice or training input to individuals.

Learning from complaints

Complaints provide an essential mechanism for shaping services to meet the needs of our customers. Much of the learning is by individuals – learning how to better their individual practice, communications skills, and build on the experience of complaints. This is usually covered in supervision with staff, but is also shared in wider terms within teams at team meetings and development/training days where the learning is likely to be applicable more widely.

Sometimes a complaint may identify specific service development needs – and examples of learning and service shaping to date are listed overleaf:

- A review of the allegations against staff procedure was undertaken to ensure it had clear communication built in and clear instructions as regards who should be interviewed as a matter of course.
- Staff were reminded that where a parent refused to engage with any procedure, especially Section 47 enquiries, that this should be clearly recorded on the records.
- Staff were reminded that when a child was caught between very acrimonious parents, consideration should be given to appointing an advocate early on to ensure the child's views were clearly visible.
- A clear checklist of what should be included in Section 47 reports was updated, including checking any purported relevant health issues.
- Training to Headteachers as regards Child Protection procedures reinforced the route they should take when they have issues to raise.
- A review of Child Protection procedures was checked to ensure it had already addressed recommendations from a complaint – which it already had.
- Changes were made in Family Group Conferencing to ensure staff who had previously been involved with a family did not take on advocacy or support in a new consideration. Changes were also made to the supervision lines to ensure the advocates and the co-ordinator for a case were not supervised by the same officer to avoid any risk of potential compromise.
- A number of additions were made to the Child Protection Plan at review to reflect concerns the parents wanted included.
- Instructions to staff as regards ensuring any questions posed by a client's solicitor were dealt with by Joint legal Team employers were reinforced.
- Where there was significant involvement with other service areas such as Educational Welfare, social work records indicated the existence of additional records.
- A reminder to staff to use Webrisk to record allegations against them in the course of their duty was issued.
- Social workers were reminded that when a child moved to live with a different parent, consideration should be given to review the core Assessment, or to update it.
- A few complaints revealed that clearer back up public information would have assisted, and work has continued to ensure that our public information is reviewed and adjusted to in line with learning from complaints.
- Where there have been shortages of administrative support in teams due to specific peaks in pressures, staff have been encouraged to provide their drafted responses directly to the Complaints Manager, who is then able to prioritise finalising the letter and getting it sent out utilising the 10 hours administrative support provided to her.
- 2010 – 11 has been an extremely busy year for both the Complaints and Access to Records Manager, and front line staff alike. Routine training

sessions for staff have been difficult to fit in, so a staff guide has been produced and included in the induction process for all new staff.

- Additionally a “hints and tips” guide for those dealing with Stage 1 complaints is widely available and used by staff to guide their dealings with complainants and their written responses.
- The Complaints Manager is also available to go through draft responses to suggest improvements to make the response more effective and appropriate to the complainant.
- Training sessions within teams have been provided to increase awareness of information sharing and the limitations on this, with a handout available to keep this information accessible to staff.
- Audits and reviews of case recording continue, with a focus on any points identified through Complaints or Access to Records, with findings feeding into training, system development and individual development.
- Staff continue to be reminded about evidencing their professional opinions in assessments and reports.
- Staff have been reminded to ensure that assessments are formally shared with parents as appropriate, and that this is recorded on RAISE. Staff are encouraged to send paperwork out with a covering letter or e mail to evidence that this has been done.
- Where a client has disputed the information recorded, or the content of an assessment, their view has been placed on file or incorporated into assessment paperwork.
- Closer liaison with Reviewing Officers has ensured that young people are reminded and encouraged to raise issues identified during preparation for their Review.
- Reviewing Officers are now notified of complaints from young people to meet new requirements and to provide opportunity for them to assist and support during consideration and resolution where appropriate.
- New information packs for Children Looked After, which include updated information about complaints and representations, and accessing advocacy and other sources of help and support are in routine use and continue to be issued at every new placement.

Recommendations /Areas for improvement and development

Key areas for continued improvement and development over the next year include:

1. 2010 - 2011 will see further training for staff to continue to raise awareness of the complaints process, as well as briefing sessions at Team Meetings.
2. Work on additional guidance sheets for staff being interviewed during Stage 2 investigations, which was not completed in this reporting year, will be completed.

3. Guidance on the process continues to be available on the intranet for staff, and in induction packs, and will continue to be reviewed and updated in line with learning.
4. Staff will continue to be encouraged to utilise the handout on response writing to improve resolution at the earliest stage of the process.
5. Reporting at CSMT will occur as required, as this does maintain adherence to timescales, and learning across the various service areas.
6. Surveying of people using the process will take place in 2011 – 12.
7. Written procedures for the Complaints Manager function will be updated and consolidated this year, to ensure the work can be covered by another in the event of the absence from work of the current Complaints Manager.
8. Links will continue to be maintained to ensure that where relevant public information is produced, learning from complaints continues to ensure this reflects information for parents and carers to provide clarity about processes and procedures that they may experience.

Data from complaints management will be increasingly used by the regulators to measure client satisfaction and the authority's ability to listen to and respond to clients, and will feed into the rating of the authority. Thus proactive complaints management and development will continue to be a high priority as a performance management function.

Appendix 1 – Compliments 1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011

Each year we collate and report on compliments paid to the service, as this does give us a good indication of the qualities and services that are most appreciated by our clients and partner agencies.

A collation of the range of these comments and compliments for the year 2009 – 2010 appears in the table below. It is not an exhaustive list of all compliments received.

Compliments re social care teams Annual Complaints Report 2010 - 11

R & A	CAIU officers advise they look forward to working with WBC officers – always ready and prepared for meetings – and good relationships with the R & A. Meetings are timely and efficient, and SW's are open to challenge. Other proff 6/9/2010
	JJ (sw) dealt with my son and me so professionally and compassionately in spite of limited resources – helped keep the family together. – parent 18/8/2010
	We find the managers approachable and we are able to escalate concerns from practitioners re a child with ease. HV and school nurses routinely invited to Strategy meetings. At CP conferences Sw's put a lot of work into assessments in some very complex and challenging cases – contributes enormously to the professionals at conference making an informed decision re level of risk to the child. – Berks West PCT 12/10/2010
	You did a brilliant job at CP – a good outcome – the relief on those children's faces was amazing – impressed with how the whole meeting and decision was handled – a difficult job handled extremely well. School 1/6/2010
	You did a good investigation on all aspects of our life as a family. EN - Parent - 28/4/2010
	A pleasure working with you on this case – a lot of emotions flying around on that day – we got to the central place of the emotions with family members expressing their innermost feelings in a safe and controlled environment. FGC co-ordinator 27/4/2010
	Following some excellent work by the SW GA and the team of multi agency professionals the girls developed enough trust to disclose the full extent of the physical and emotional abuse they were being subjected to by mum – now with dad on RO – CP Plan now reduced to a CIN plan – girls report they are “happy and feel safe” and clear reduction in anxiety related behaviours. From CP Chair reporting back to CX re

R & A continued	a Conference he observed.
	The presentation of a case at ICPC today was very professional and well done – proff
	Congratulations on a difficult but creative piece of joint working – his resultant FGC plan was very thorough, taking a completely holistic approach – young person is over the moon with the outcome and his new placement. – proff
	Big thankyou for the very skilful way you dealt with x case this week – Reports from our Legal and the Police Area commander say you had an excellent knowledge of the case, were clear about the risks involved, and written work and evidence was of a very high standard – complex case with exceptionally good outcomes for the child – hard work contributed greatly to the positive outcome in court. – proff
	Members were very impressed by the identified strengths and areas of practice which met requirements, ...on behalf of LSCB would like to congratulate you on this very successful inspection. LSCB was also pleased to note the action plan which has been put in place to address the few areas identified for development. LSCB Chair 14/2/2011
	Many thanks for your help and advice recently regarding... child protection procedures..... developed a procedure for use with historical disclosures....thanks for your help in this matter. Provider of residential services May 2011
	I wanted you to know how brilliantly I feel you've dealt with this matter at every single point you have reassured me and gone out of your way to aid..... I couldn't have asked for a nicer person to deal with it.
	Thanks on behalf of DCT for all your help and support with the emergency on Friday – much appreciated. DCT 11/4/11
	Really delighted with the work done by R & A – parent 11/4/2011
West & Central	Young person and mum brought flowers and a card for worker – would not have got through the past few days without you!
	Social worker is very good at her job and always keeps the YOT workers updated about what is happening with her cases. YOT 19.1.2011
	(and East) Think Family sessions were well attended – useful insights – clearly an appetite to look to reducing removals at birth – interesting dialogue between services. Excellent – proff
East	A pleasure to read and present final evidence on S children for court – very high standard, analytical and well considered. Joint Legal 13/10/2010
	Thank you very much for coming to talk to me – I feel so

East continued	much better knowing I have talked to someone about it – you arte both really nice. CC - young person.
	(sent a lovely happy photo) children are content and are achieving well – the photo shows two very happy boys. Foster carer 11/5/2010
	Lovely thank you card - You've helped me through so much emotionally and financially. I am so grateful to have a great social worker like you – you're a great person to talk to and just an all round lovely person to be with – thanks. SW – young person
	Young person told YOT worker how nice he and his family found his Sw from East – they genuinely feel she cares about the family and wants to help – really appreciate the support. (YOT report this as a very difficult case.) young person DL 4.11.2010
	You had to produce your evidence within a very short space of time and it is your first set of proceedings – an exceptionally good statement – you are a rising star! Legal 22.10.2010
	Thank you so much for moving the meeting to suit me – I know it wasn't easy and I would appreciate you thanking those involved – mum Sept 2010
	Positive changes – more understanding of effects on him and the family – thanks for the help and support – mum Nov 2010
	Well done to East team in holding this case whilst Sw off – great to see the positive relationships between worker, carer and mum. IRO 5/4/11
FPT	Big thank you for organising Lasham family day – so many new experiences – lovely people – friendly, patient with the children. Owen – Adoptive family 11/11/2010 similar from Park family.
	Long letter re Lasham Activity day – indicated very successful day especially at getting children to take great steps in bravery and confidence – and carers too! J & R – adoptive parents
	Big thank you for the workshop – very helpful re learning ways to help children with low self esteem and negative thinking due to loss or bereavement or being told they're not good in the past. Mine of useful info – recommend the workshop to anyone with children – not just adopters. Mr and Mrs A 28/6/2010
	Newbury team were there for us emotionally and practically in a way our friends and family may never be able to as without being at the centre of adoption issues it is nigh on impossible to understand the complexities of the issues.

FPT continued	Provided many learning opportunities. MT - Adoptive parent June 2010
	Impressed with the report produced re a particular assessment of carers as kinship carers/potential adopters – very thorough and professional piece of work which will be of great assistance. IRO 18/8/2010
	We appreciated all the hard work you did for this child – thank you. S & BH – foster carers 20/5/2010
	Thanks for all your efforts with promoting this Ofsted survey and enabling young people looked after by your LA to have their say – Ofsted 24.1.2011
Life chances	My award certificate and gift card ... really beightened my day. I am really blessed to have had so many great contributions like yours in my journey that have helped me come this far. Job is going well – used to it now – attending a local church and getting to know the community and being part of it – which is exciting. E S – young person
CWD	We would like to thank H for her continuing input – worked especially hard to help with charity funding during out build last year and worked with the builders to achieve what was needed. PA – parent
	Thank you H – really appreciate your incredibly efficient support KM – parent
	Thank you for making B (young person) feel so comfortable with the meeting. NG – parent
	Shower is wonderful – K coping extremely well and completely independent in bathroom – so pleased he can do this for the 1 st time ever. Mrs S – parent
	We are more than happy with the aims and actions – and want to thank HP for all help and support. NC – parent
	We would like to thank you for all the hard work and support – down to your hard work that we have been so successful with him. Parent
	Very informative insight into SS CWT – did very well to take a difficult subject matter and make it an enjoyable session; Came across as a united, caring and supportive team; positive impression of SW and OT – a feeling of comradeship; greater empathy for the role of SW; plus other similar comments – feedback from parents 2/9/2010
Family Group conferencing	Want to say how much help the FGC meetings have been and in terms of cost effectiveness, if they can help keep a child out of going into the care system and staying with their mum, financially huge and emotionally without measure. Gran to a client – 27/7/2010
Castlegate	Thanks to everyone for fun packed weekend our son had on

Castlegate continued	his last visit – really made a difference to u – less guilty for leaving him and didn't feel we had to make it up to him when he returned home. He was very chatty, relaxed and settled when he got back. Parent
	Thanks to you all for the good and hard work. Parent
	Thanks for all your help this week – really don't know how we would have managed without you. Parent
	I definitely feel my child's needs are being met. Parent
	They are doing a very good job of keeping me informed of everything they do with my son. Parent
	Thanks and gratitude re my son's time at Castlegate. Parent
	Our opinion of the service is "very good". Parent
	All the interventions you put in place are working well and X is now sleeping in his own room and not with mum, is out of pads at night, and managing his obsessions well. Mrs J – parent 3/9/2010
	Local MP commented to a member of Outreach staff that WB had been recognised in Parliament for their good early intervention and CAMH's service – said "WB was noted to be a flagship of good practice".
Leaving Care	Thanks for being the best Sw anyone can ask for – will always remember what you have done for me – you helped change my life and I am thankful. Young Person by text 29/9/2010
	Deeply impressed with the meeting – you were cool as a cucumber despite other folk being late – what really impressed me was your genuine caring relationship with all the YP – took tips from you. Assessor at Reading Uni – 5/9/2010
	Just to say thank you for help and support – extremely grateful for the hard work and time you spent on my wellbeing. SZ – unaccompanied minor sent cards to all SW's involved with him 21/9/2010
	Pleasure working with you – felt very supported – big thumbs up to your LA – they are lucky to have you in their team – child fortunate to have such a dedicated SW always looking out for him. Carer 27/7/2010
	Your work with him has been absolutely outstanding – managed to turn an institutionalised young boy into a worldwide ready young man. Support and care you gave put him on the right path towards adulthood in the real world. Carer 27/7/2010
	Muchas gracias – thank you for everything. Care leaver June 2010
	Thank u so much for finding the DJ session for me – it was fantastic – care leaver April 2010 (UASC)

Leaving care continued	Thanks for everything – you were so good and lovely – I’m sure I’m going to be missing you a lot – care leaver (UASC) Nov 2010
	Gift and card from young person to thank his Sw for all her efforts with him – care leaver UASC Jan 2011
Child Protection conferencing	An excellent chair – potentially difficult ICPC with large number of professionals handled beautifully with good/safe outcomes and good engagement from mum and yp. (other proff)
	Excellent conference – clear information sharing (proff)
	Meeting was focussed – really like how chair manages the meeting. (proff)
	Very supportive of the newly qualified Sw – thanks. (proff)
	Well chaired and well balanced meeting. (other proff)
	Comfortable and open meeting – really well managed by the chair thank you. (other proff)
	Went very well and all explained clearly to me – thanks (parent)
	Excellent CPC – chaired well keeping focus on aims of the meeting (other proff)
	Well managed especially as this was a very difficult conference to manage – thanks (other proff)
YOT	Really impressed with this service – (education support) – Deputy Head 6/4/11
	Magistrates commented that the report was “terrific” and that they had rarely seen so many professionals working together to effect change. Parent also commented in court that the support from YOT worker had been very helpful in a difficult time. Court 1/4/11
	M has had positive changes More understanding on how it has affected him and his family also how the courts have to deal with young lads, who is involved and how much it costs. Thanks to the worker for all this help and support. Parent
	I am really pleased with the work he is doing with YOT.. he is achieving positive steps forward. He feels he can openly talk to (worker) and together with finding him the school he needs and other support this will continue. Parent
	This mentor support has been invaluable to J.. helped him to settle into the school routine and supported him with homework tasks which otherwise may not have been completed – local school
	J has really enjoyed having a mentor especially as he is male and keen on sport – a wonderful role model. Local school
	The mentoring service has been invaluable to A and a great

YOT continued	source of support thanks to all concerned she is now doing extremely well They also do it on her terms which helps greatly – local school
	I have worked with 5 other YOTs throughout the country – this is my preferred team Due to how the whole team works as a team, valuing every member. Team meetings are the most valuable and supportive I have attended, training is very good...team goes one step further for the young people which inspires me to implement that within my own practice. Agency worker
	H was a great YOT worker – we are very grateful for the work she did – parent and son
	During this 5 month period d has completely turned his life around and is more aware of the consequences of his actions – parent
	Would like to say thank you to the panel who were very supportive to us as a family - parent
	O has been very helpful – always been on the other side of the line whenever I needed to talk to her – many thanks – parent
	With great communications between all 3 of us we have managed to sort N out – R was a fantastic advisor to son and to myself – parent
General	Great, well received training session – presentation was excellent – had everyone engaged throughout – proff
Access to Records and Complaints	So good you can provide this service and even talk me through my history – I understand so much more now and feel easier about my past.(DAR applicant – historical files re abandonment)
	Thank you for listening – just talking to you helps me feel things aren't so bad after all – I understand the process better now. (child)
	Wow – what a service – thank you (SAR applicant re us finding the right authority for her to apply to)
	Such a difficult thing to do – so thanks for being so sensitive and helpful. (DPA SAR applicant – old records of abuse)
	Thank you for making me feel less angry about complaining – I think you are right that it will get sorted. (parent)
	Thanks for keeping me updated – I don't mind the delay when there is a good reason. (parent)
	I was so angry to begin with, and I now feel calmer and able to deal with this without getting so angry and nasty. (parent)
	I still think grandparents should have more rights, but thanks for helping me find sources of information to assist my situation (grandparent.)

(proff = WBC staff feedback) (other proff = Multi Agency feedback)