

CITY OF PLYMOUTH

Subject: Children's Social Care: Report of Complaints and Compliments for the period April 2008 – March 2009

Committee: Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 19 November 2009

Cabinet Member: Councillor Grant Monahan

CMT Member: Bronwen Lacey, Director of Services for Children & Young People

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Ref:

Part: Part 1

Executive Summary:

The Customer Relations Manager has a statutory requirement to present an annual report to the relevant local authority committee about the operation of its complaints procedure (Getting the Best from Complaints – Statutory Guidance issued by the DfES in September 2006). This report details last year's activity in relation to Children's Social Care.

Corporate Plan 2009-2012:

The Corporate Improvement Plan has identified improvement priorities with CIP 1 being Improving Customer Service. The learning identified from the content of the attached report will inform and contribute to this corporate priority, specifically in relation to the key milestone of "improving complaints handling council wide".

Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications: Including finance, human, IT and land

Whilst there are no immediate financial implications arising from this report, the cost of ensuring the Customer Relations Team meet statutory obligations will need to be considered. The financial implications will be costed and fed into the budget setting process for the coming year in order to provide a dedicated statutory service to both Adult Social Care and Services for Children and Young People.

Other Implications: e.g. Section 17 Community Safety, Health and Safety, Risk Management, Equalities Impact Assessment, etc.

None

Recommendations & Reasons for recommended action:

That the Complaints and Compliments report is accepted.

Alternative options considered and reasons for recommended action:

Background papers:

Children's Social Care Complaints and Compliments Report for the period:
1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009 attached

Children's Social Care: Report of Complaints and Compliments for the period April 2008 – March 2009

Introduction

This annual report focuses on the compliments, concerns and complaints received within the Children's Social Care Division between 1 April 2008 and 31 March 2009. The complaints procedure operates in accordance with the statutory complaints procedure "Getting the Best from Complaints" issued by the DfES in September 2006. Staff receive ongoing training in complaints handling through induction sessions and regular updates.

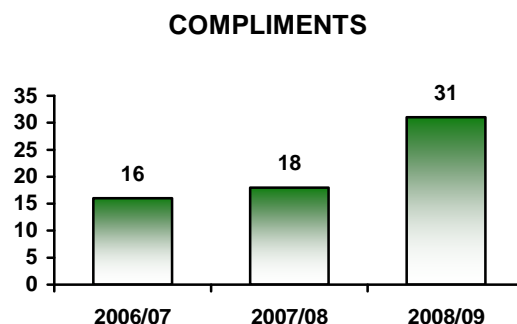
Customer feedback - whether it be compliments, concerns, complaints or suggestions - is crucial for Children's Social Care in improving our services, meeting the needs of our customers, continuing good practice, identifying trends and informing future service needs and provision. Examples of how people can communicate their feedback are: via the freephone telephone number, email into the complaints inbox, by complaints forms or by contact cards. Contact cards are pre-paid postcards specifically for Children in Care to voice their views and opinions quickly and easily to the department.

The report will firstly look at the compliments received during this period and then turn to concerns and complaints received during the same period. Where appropriate, comparator data from previous years will be used. Finally, it will consider and review proposals and changes made last year and those arising from this year.

Compliments

Due to the nature of Social Care business function, it is found that compliments from service users and their relatives or friends are fed back far less than complaints and concerns. However, all compliments and thanks received are celebrated and acknowledged within the business. This may include the staff member or service area that was complimented but can also be widely shared as good practice and in training of new staff.

The number of compliments received has consistently risen year on year and for 2008/09 has nearly doubled on the previous year. There were 31 compliments reported to the Customer Relations Team which is a significant increase from last year and very encouraging. The chart below compares the number of compliments received over the past three years.

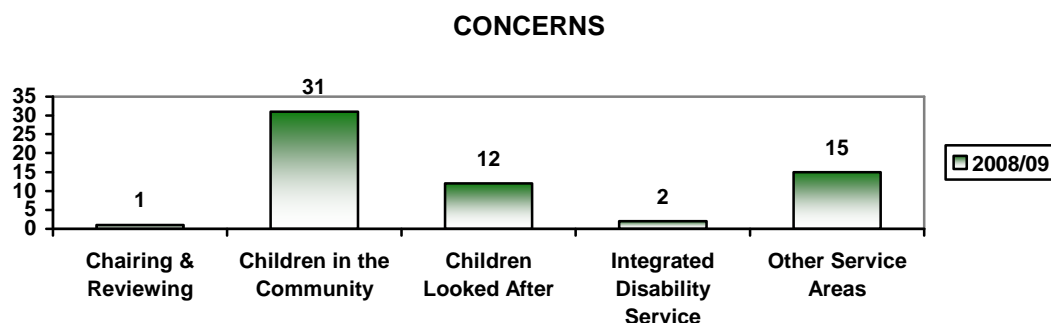


Here are some examples of the compliments received during the reporting year:

- Complimented on the work and dedication of the social worker in dealing with daughter. Seen as having gone beyond the call of duty in a very sensitive manner
- “Thanks for finding us a new Mummy and Daddy”
- Social worker was caring for the child and always able to be contacted for any questions
- “Worked over and above her position as an ‘Assistant Social Worker’. Remained approachable and always available
- Judge in the case commented on the Social Worker in his summing up by saying he was impressed with her intelligence and application of the facts and evidence and the family as a whole, she knew the case inside-out and her commitment was evident
- Thanks to the agency Social Worker, for the help provided in relation to her disabled daughter
- Social Worker is “bright, friendly, extremely efficient, the most helpful member of Social Services I have ever met”

Concerns

There are times when a problem or concern can be resolved without the need to enter the complaints process. Between 1 April 2008 and 31 March 2009 61 concerns were resolved. The chart below shows the number of concerns that were resolved for each service area.



For a comprehensive breakdown of the service areas and data in more detail see *Appendix 1*.

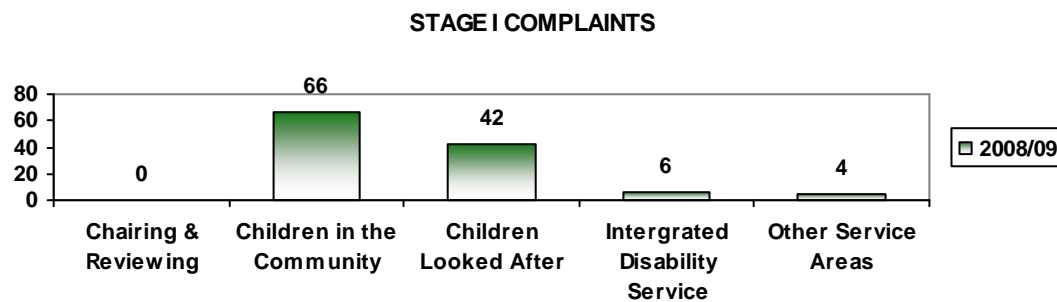
The complaints process

When a complaint is received or where a concern was not resolved, this will then be addressed in accordance with the statutory complaints process. There are three stages in this process and if there is still no resolution then the complainant can ask the Local Government Ombudsman to consider their complaints.

Stage 1 – Local Resolution

The majority of complaints are initially considered at a local level (Stage I). The investigation is normally carried out by the Team Manager responsible for the case involved, and resolved with all parties agreeing a way forward. During 2008/09 115 complainants made a total of 118 complaints which were considered at Stage 1. A single complaint can include issues about more than one service area which explains why there is a difference in the total figures.

The following chart shows a breakdown of the Stage 1 complaints for 2008/09 by service area.



The table below shows the complaints broken down by the person who made the complaint.

Complainant	Total	%
Birth Parents	53	46.1
Close Relatives – sibling/grandparent	23	20.0
Child (Service User)	10	8.7
Other Relatives/Friends	6	5.2
Advocate	6	5.2
Legal Representative	4	3.5
Adoptive Parents – current / potential	3	2.6
Foster Carer – In House	3	2.6
School/education provider	2	1.7
Councillor / MP	2	1.7
Medical provider – GP / nurse	1	0.9
Member of the public	1	0.9
Independent reviewing officer	1	0.9
Overall Total	115	100%

And finally, the table below shows the reason that the complainant made the complaint.

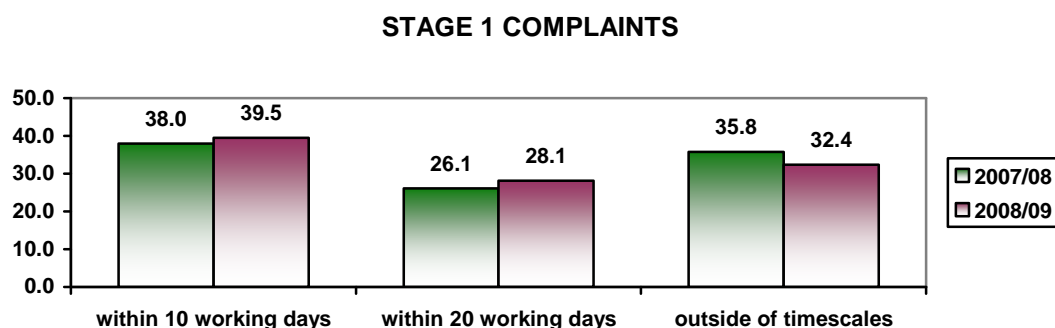
Reason	Total	% of Overall Total
Service – quality/appropriateness/lack of	25	21.2
Staff – attitude/behaviour/actions of	24	20.3
Communication/lack of info	20	16.9
Confidentiality/personal information	10	8.5
Decision/outcome – disputed or unwelcome	8	6.8
Funding/finance/payment/compensation	8	6.8
Delays	4	3.4
Cancellations/time-keeping/re-scheduling	4	3.4
Contact	4	3.4
Service provider	3	2.5
Accommodation	2	1.7
Child protection	2	1.7
Foster carer – quality of provision	2	1.7
Behaviour of service users	1	0.8
Assessment/review	1	0.8
Overall Total	118	100%

Compliance with timescales at Stage I

Timescales for responding to complaints are detailed within guidance issued by the DfES 'Getting the Best from Complaints' implemented in September 2006. The timescales for attempting to resolve complaints as soon as reasonably practicable are 10 working days with a further 10 days for more complex complaints.

Some complaints have many elements and in order to provide a thorough response, involvement may take more than 20 working days. If this is the case, agreement is sought from the complainant about the extended timescale. During 2008/09 there were 118 Stage 1 complaints. Of which, 39.5% were responded to within 10 working days, 28.1% within 20 working days and 32.4% being responded to outside of timescales. There has been a slight improvement in the percentage of responses within 10 and 20 working days. There has been a decrease in the amount of responses being outside of timescales.

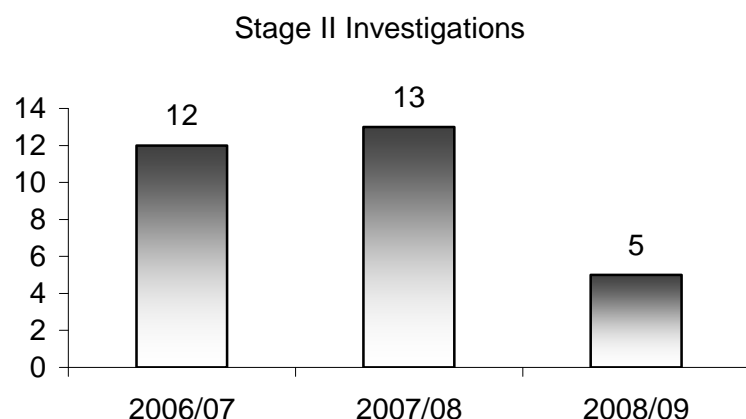
The chart below shows the percentages for each timescale for 2007/08 and 2008/09.



Stage II – Formal Complaint Investigation

A stage II formal complaint investigation can be carried out if resolution was not possible at stage I or if either party requests to move to Stage II. It could also have been decided by the relevant Head of Service at the point the complaint was lodged that it would move directly to Stage II. The investigation is conducted by an External Investigating Officer, who will be accompanied by an Independent Person as required by the 'Children Act 1989'.

Five Stage II complaints were registered during 2008/09 with one still being under investigation. The chart below shows a significant reduction in the number of Stage II investigations over the last year.



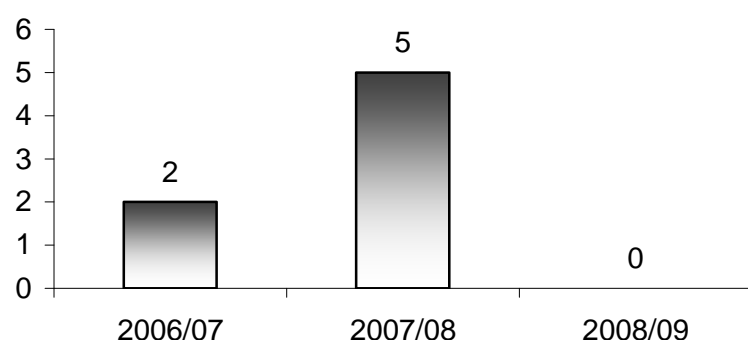
Compliance with timescales at Stage II

Of the five Stage II complaints registered in the period, one is still under investigation and the four that were completed were outside of timescales. All of them were very complex complaints and the complainants were advised that it would not be possible to carry out a comprehensive investigation within the statutory timescales. The complainants were kept informed of progress at all points during the investigation and agreed to the extended timescales.

Stage III – Review Panel Hearings

If the complainant is still dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation at Stage II they can request further consideration by a review panel. There were no requests within the recording period for Review Panel Hearings to be held.

Stage III Review Panel Hearings

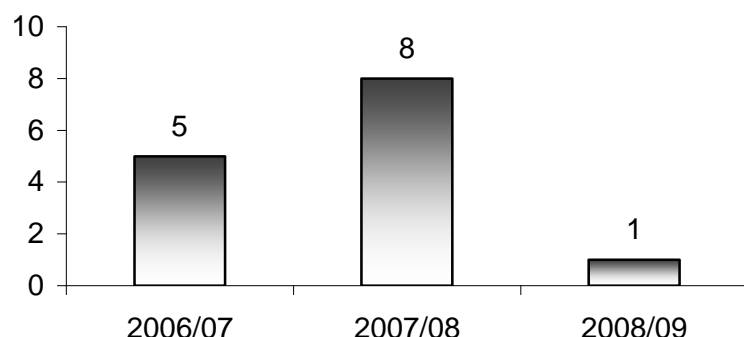


Local Government Ombudsman

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman at any point in the complaints procedure. However, the Ombudsman will normally require that the Local Authority has had an opportunity to investigate and resolve the complaint before they become involved

There was one Ombudsman complaint received during 2008/09. The findings from the Local Government Ombudsman was “no or insufficient evidence of maladministration (without report)”.

Local Government Ombudsman



Advocacy Services

Advocacy services are available through “The Zone” and this service is available to all children and young people wishing to make a complaint in accordance with the requirements of “*Get it sorted*”.

Quality Assurance Process and Learning

Heads of Service and Service Managers are routinely involved in complaints at all stages of the procedure and receive regular feedback from the Customer Relations Team. Complaints are a standing item on Supervision agendas for staff involved in responding to complaints. Following Stage II complaints a “service improvement meeting” is held which identifies the learning for the organisation. Heads of Service identify the staff members that need to attend in order to ensure that the learning is disseminated in the most effective way. The Workforce Development Manager always attends these meetings in order to consider any changes to our learning and development programme.

The Customer Relations Team is responsive to feedback on the complaints process. Complainants were confused about what happened when the complaint was investigated as a Stage II Formal Complaint; as a result the Customer Relations Team developed a comprehensive information sheet that is given to complainants at the beginning of the investigation. This includes information on who will investigate the complaint, how it will be investigated and how the complainant can effectively contribute to the investigation. This was very positively received and has now been developed for the Stage III Review Panel Process.

Examples of Learning from Complaints

A complaint was received from a service user alleging breach of confidentiality by the Social Worker. The Stage I complaint investigation found that the Social Worker was not responsible for the breach and the complaint was not upheld. However there was a service improvement identified from the investigation of the complaint and as a result the Service Manager took the following action - an email was sent to all staff in the service which included:

- the link to the relevant PCC guidance;
- the link to the relevant section of “Every child Matters”;
- a précis of the key points to remember when dealing with confidential issues;
- general advice for future practice.

A complaint was received from an adoptive parent residing in another County who was concerned about the communication between Health, their GP and the Adoption Team. The Stage I complaint investigation found that the processes were muddled and there was no clear accountability for “who did what” at each stage of the adoption process. As a result of the complaint the Service Manager took the following action:

- Arranged a series of meetings with Health to establish clear accountability regarding amendment of health records;
- Revision of the Adoption Post Approval Manual issued to Adoptive parents to reflect the updated information;
- Information provided regarding removal of details on the electoral roll to prevent public access.

A complaint was received regarding changes to a child’s care plan made without consultation with the foster carers. The Stage II Investigation found that there were shortcomings in this case that may have an effect on other cases. As a result of the complaint the Head of Service took the following action:

- Discussed with the relevant Service Manager resulting in changes being put in place to ensure that future care planning was in line with PCC Policies.

APPENDIX 1

Stage I Complaints by Service

Service	Number	%
Chairing & Reviewing	0	0%
Children In The Community		
• Advice & Assessment		
○ AAS1	6	5.1%
○ AAS2	5	4.2%
○ AAS3	11	9.3%
○ AAS4	10	8.5%
○ AAS5	6	5.1%
• Children in Need		
○ Team 3	9	7.6%
○ Team 5	8	6.8%
○ Team 6	4	3.4%
○ Team 7	7	5.9%
Children Looked After		
• Adoption	5	4.2%
• Fostering	5	4.2%
• 16 + Service	12	10.2%
• Children in Care		
○ Team 1	4	3.4%
○ Team 2	5	9.3%
○ Team 4	11	4.2%
Integrated Disability Service		
• Children's Disability Team	6	5.1%
Other Service Areas		
• Family Support	2	1.7%
• Policy & Performance		
○ Subject Access	1	0.8%
• Youth Offending Service	1	0.8%
TOTAL	118	100.0%