

REPORT OF LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

OUTCOMES FROM THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS - APRIL 2012 TO MARCH 2013

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to present a summary of complaints made to the County Council and resulting outcomes between 1 April 2012 and 31 March 2013. The report also gives information about the complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) in the same period.

Background

2. Complaints are an excellent way for customer concerns to be brought to the attention of the council. They are a way of examining the processes and procedures employed by the council and a mechanism by which the council can learn from any mistakes that have been made and make changes to improve the services it provides.

3. The Council has three complaints processes – two are statutory processes – namely children's and adults social care and one is a voluntary process which covers those services not covered by the statutory processes referred to as corporate complaints.

4. All 3 complaints processes categorise and record complaints under four broad areas; assessment, communication, service provision, staffing. A decision has recently been made to add a new category breach of confidentiality so that in future these complaints can be identified separately rather than being included in the communication category.

- **Assessment/Decision:** this category covers issues regarding application of eligibility and assessment criteria; assessment/case management review; an unwelcome or disputed decision
- **Communication:** this category relates to issues to do with; failure to communicate; inaccurate advice; misleading communication or poor/unsatisfactory response

- **Service Provision:** this relates to non delivery or delay; quality or appropriateness; quantity/frequency/change/cost and withdrawal of service
- **Staffing:** this relates to issues specifically regarding staff attitude, behaviour or conduct

Children's Social Care

5. It is important to understand complaints in the context of whole service provision. Children's Social Care dealt with 7,337 referrals in the period covered by this report. At the end of March 2013 there were 788 children on child protection plans, and 892 Looked After Children.
6. The table below highlights there has been a small decrease in the number of complaints received. It should be noted that the service reorganised during the year, which means that although the total figures are correct, the figures for service areas are not directly comparable year by year. The relative high number of complaints for social work services south reflects the fact that the assessment team is included in that area of business.

Children's Social Care Complaints by Service Area	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Access to Resources	8	10	6
Social Work Services North	37	51	65
Social Work Services South	127	169	151
Children's Disability Service	18	18	17
Safeguarding & Independent Review	1	4	10
	191	252	249

7. A break down of the last three years categories of complaints in Children's Social Care are detailed in the table below.

Category of Complaint	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Assessment / Decision	33	69	84
Communication	46	77	61
Service Provision	62	42	33
Staffing	50	64	71
Total	191	252	249

8. The children's social care complaints process contains three stages and it is encouraging to note that 220 complaints were concluded at the first stage of the process. Clearly the earlier a complaint can be resolved the better the outcome and the more cost effective the process.
9. The nature of the work in children's social care means that complaints are often specific to an individual family's circumstances; however issues arising from complaints have been regularly discussed at both management and team meetings. Common themes identified have included communication, alleged inaccuracies in reports, and the sharing the content of reports with families immediately prior to conferences etc, thus leaving the family little time to prepare.
10. In addition to actions taken to resolve specific issues highlighted in individual cases, some of the actions taken as a result of complaints include a revision of the escalation policy for Child Protection Coordinators to express concerns; issues identified in complaints were taken into account in a piece of work already underway to reviewing the process for managing allegations about foster carers; worker have also been reminded about the importance of case recording the rationale for decisions, including decisions not to take action.

Adult Social Care

11. Adult Social Care dealt with 33,140 referrals in 2012/13 and provided services to 11,066 older adults (65+) and to 4,817 younger adults. The support services to older adults include: help with mental health problems (2,452); help to people with physical disabilities (8,352); and support to other vulnerable adults (262). The support for younger adults includes: learning disability (2,261); physical disability (1,790) and remainder support to younger adults with mental health and other vulnerabilities (766).
12. Overall the number of complaints relating to Adult Social Care has decreased and it is particularly pleasing to note the decrease in numbers within the Joint Commissioning Quality & Business Change group which is attributable to the a reduction in numbers of complaints relating to Adult Care Financial Services. This reflects the work done in that area with an officer specifically working on improving communications and customer service.

Adult Social Care Complaints by Service Area	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Joint Commissioning Quality & Business Change	50	62	46
Personal Care & Support Older Adults	145	105	98
Personal Care & Support Younger Adults	58	51	53
Promoting Independence	2	31	21
Total	255	249	218

Complaints are categorised as outlined in paragraph 4 of this report – the break down of those received for Adult Social Care are detailed in the table below:

Category of Complaint	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Assessment / Decision	64	88	66
Communication	59	45	49
Service Provision	97	84	70
Staffing	35	32	33
Total	255	249	218

Corporate Complaints

13. The number of corporate complaints has increased in the past year primarily as a result of an increased number of complaints in Highways. There were 273 complaints in the period about Highways issues; however it is important to put the figures in the context of the number of enquiries dealt with by the Highways team and for the same period that was 63,682. Within this context it can be seen that the number of complaints is very small. It is interesting to note that in the previous year there were 41,818 enquiries dealt with by Highways staff.

Complaints received by Department	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Environment & Resources	207	280	426
Children Families & Cultural Services (excluding Children's Social Care)	50	54	67
Policy Planning & Corporate Services	21	18	11
Public Protection	4	15	10
Adult Social Care & Health	0	0	10
Total	282	367	524

14. The table below details the categories of corporate complaints received.

Category of Complaint	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Assessment / Decisions	86	87	84
Communication	34	72	100
Service Provision	96	133	238

Staffing	66	75	102
Total	282	367	524

15. As a result of complaints the Customer Services Centre are reviewing with Highways colleagues the escalation process for fault reporting. Highways managers are also ensuring that more detailed information is published on the Council's website and are actively seeking ways to manage public expectation about what is reasonable provision of service. During the past year all Highways staff have completed customer service training, and all the "standard" letters used have been reviewed and amended.

Statutory and Policy Implications

16. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, the public sector equality duty, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) Policy Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

**Councillor Alan Rhodes
Leader of the Council**

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Jo Kirkby, Team Manager Complaints and Information Team, 9772821

Constitutional Comments (SLB 06/09/2013)

This report is for noting only.

Financial Comments (SEM 27/08/13)

There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All