

Walsall Council

Corporate Performance Management – Customer Care Team

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Summary

This report contains a summary of children's social care complaints received for the period April 2011 to March 2012.

In the period reported a total of 129 complaints were received about children's social care services. Many of these complaints identified more than one issue of concern which we recorded separately to ensure all aspects were addressed. In total 204 issues were raised within the 129 complaints received. The number of complaints has reduced from 140 last year to 129 for this period.

The majority of complaints were resolved at stage one of the complaints process. Ten complaints progressed to mediation and nine of these were resolved in mediation. One then progressed to an independent investigation. A further two complainants refused mediation and went on to be investigated independently at stage 2 of the statutory complaints process. Neither of these complaints progressed to stage 3.

10% of complaints were made directly by young people. The other 90% were made by others on behalf of young people.

11 complaints were submitted by the same person and related to dissatisfaction with staff.

The largest area of complaint related to issues about perceptions of staff conduct (40%).

A number of service improvements have been made as a result of learning from complaints. Examples of learning can be seen in section 6 of the report.

1 Background

- 1.1 The Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 (as amended by the Children Act 1989) requires the provision of an annual report on the statutory complaints and representations procedures. This was updated by the introduction of Statutory Instrument 1738 in September 2006. This includes complaints relating to the specific functions of the Children Act listed in sections 31, 33, 35, 43, 44, and under the Adoption and Children Act regulation 3 and 4.
- 1.2 The previous annual report was presented to Children's Performance Board and to Scrutiny Panel and made available via the council website. In this period 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012 there have been 129 complaints, 9 comments and 22 compliments.
- 1.3 The 2001 census concluded that Walsall had a population of 253,499, and 67,746 of this number were children and young people under the age of 18. At 31 March 2012 489 young people were looked after.

2010-2011 targets

Previous targets – From the 5 targets set last year 4 targets have been achieved, and 1 targets not achieved. Below is a list of the targets and explanation of achievements.

- i. The use of mediation to achieve customer satisfaction should continue. 100% of complainants, where the complaint is not satisfied with the outcome at stage 1 and it is appropriate, will be offered mediation as an Alternative Dispute Resolution. This offer is detailed in the covering letter sent with the complaint response letter.

ACHIEVED

In the last year mediation has been used to resolve 9 complaints.

- ii. The number of complaints received using formats other than letter and leaflet should be increased. Complaints received by email and text could improve the speed that complaints are acknowledged and processed. These methods are also linked strongly to 'working smarter' in saving resources and providing a prompt response to issues raised.

ACHIEVED

Over the last year the number of complaints sent by email has increased from 18% last year to 20% this year.

- iii. The learning from complaints process needs to be an integral part of the complaints process for all managers. The aim should be that all complaints are analysed for learning opportunities which can be implemented to improve service delivery to customers and reduce future complaints.

ACHIEVED

The number of learning from complaints forms returned to the Customer care Team is less than last year. This has been redressed through the use of follow up telephone calls.

- iv. Managers need to adhere more closely to the 20 working days' time scale to investigate and respond to complaint issues. This will improve customer satisfaction for young people and their advocates.

ACHIEVED

Over the last year there has been a marked improvement in the number of complaints being investigated and responded to within the 20 working days' time scale. Last year 50 % of complaints were investigated and responded to within time scale. In this period 72% of the total complaints were responded to within time scale. This is good progress towards meeting the target of 100%.

- v. Leaflets designed specifically for young people with disabilities need to be produced to assist in promoting the complaints process in an inclusive manner.

NOT ACHIEVED

A long term staff vacancy in the Customer Care Team has prevented this task being completed. However, a new flyer to promote the methods of making complaints has been produced. This contains symbols to convey the different methods available for submitting complaints. In the present period work has already begun to produce a new leaflet specifically for young people.

3 Complaints Training

In the last year a total of 13 training sessions have been provided in order to inform staff about the statutory complaints process. This has included specific training for foster cares and staff employed in children's residential services. Training has been well received and staff have embraced the practical discussion element of the training sessions.

4 Mediation

Mediation continues to be offered as a means of assisting complainants to achieve satisfactory outcomes to their complaints without the need to progress to stage 2. This is a quicker and more economical method of resolving complaints through face to face dialogue. In the last year there have been a total of 10 mediations. Only one of these sessions was unsuccessful. The other 9 resulted in resolution of the issues, and avoided complaints progression to stage 2 investigations.

5. Scorecard

The scorecard continues to be used to report on local indicators. Quarterly reports and information are presented to the Children's

Performance Board concerning the issues complained about, linked with complaint resolution and performance in terms of timescales. The three indicators in use are: -

- CH7 – Number of complaints received in period
- CH8 – Number of complaints responded to within timescales
- CH13 – Number of complaints received from a child or young person

Particular attention is paid to complaint issues raised directly by young people, and how these can be resolved to the satisfaction of the young person.

Information on learning from complaints is also reported to the Performance Board. This relates to the return of learning from complaints forms, and the information this contains relating to improvements of practice resulting from learning gained through investigating complaints.

6. Learning from Complaints

Complaints are an integrated part of understanding where our services are not meeting the needs or expectations of services users, and where we can make improvements to the way we work, and the quality of services. By senior managers evaluating the learning gained from making improvements to service delivery complaint issues can be turned into positives outcomes for young people.

Learning from Complaint forms are routinely sent to all managers with complaint details when investigating complaints. It is expected that the procedure of returning this form to the Customer Care Team within 5 days of the response being completed is followed, even if this is a nil return.

The following provides some examples of learning from complaints as identified by managers-

'Admin to monitor the taxi company used for family contact, and any issues that arise as we have a contract with them. The issue will be discussed in my team meeting and I will be asking the team to report to me any issues that we have in relation to this taxi firm.'

'To ensure that in team meetings workers are made aware that all relevant and involved parties need to be aware of the plans and clear about them not just in letter form but through discussion face-to-face or on the telephone'

'When allocating new cases all efforts are now made not to allocate to staff who are on leave resulting in families being unsupported.'

'Proof reading of all documents to be undertaken by worker and manager to ensure quality and no grammatical errors. This issue will be addressed in team meetings.'

'Worker to ensure that full name is given when introducing themselves on the telephone.'

'Specialist advisers have been used to design a care plan for a child with sever autism.'

7. Monitoring and quality assurance

The improvements introduced to the complaints system in August 2010 continue to be implemented by the Customer Care Team in order to support managers in children's services and provide high quality customer service. This includes discussion with each complainant to confirm the complaint issues and desired outcomes. A complaint handling plan is then compiled to summarise the complaint issues. The Customer Care Team also quality assures the complaint response in order to ensure that all the issues have been addressed.

Where time allows complaint response letters are signed off by senior managers in Children's services before being sent to the complainants. These monitoring and quality systems have resulted in greater satisfaction for customers.

8. Independent Stage 2 investigations

In this period there has been 3 complaints progressing to independent investigations at stage 2. There were 21 requests for complainants to progress to stage 2 but after consideration it was concluded that most of these could not be resolved by independent investigation. Both of the stage 2 investigations contained a mixture of upheld and not upheld issues. As a result of both complaints investigations learning was identified and implemented by Children Services. None of these independent investigations escalated to stage 3 panels.

9. Local Government Ombudsman

All complainants are informed of their right to consult with the LGO if they are not satisfied with the response to their complaint. In this period the LGO have chosen to investigate a total of 8 complaints. Just two of these investigations resulted in a finding of maladministration.

APPENDIX 1

Who made the complaints?

The majority of complaints were made by relatives of young people.

| GROUP | NUMBER | PERCENT |
|---------------|--------|---------|
| Young person | 13 | 10% |
| Family member | 102 | 79% |
| Foster carer | 7 | 5% |
| staff | 2 | 2% |
| advocate | 1 | 1% |

| | | |
|-------|---|----|
| other | 4 | 3% |
|-------|---|----|

The most complaints made on behalf of young people continue to be received predominantly from relative of children and young people. Only one complaint was made directly by an advocate on behalf of a young person with a disability, but some of the young people who made complaints were supported by an advocate. The number of complaints made directly by young people is slightly less proportionately than last year.

APPENDIX 2

How the 129 complaints were received?

| METHOD OF RECEIPT | NUMBER | PERCENTAGE |
|--------------------|--------|------------|
| Complaints leaflet | 54 | 42% |
| letter | 31 | 24% |
| email | 27 | 20% |
| phone | 11 | 9% |
| In person | 5 | 4% |
| fax | 1 | 1% |

The complaints leaflet continues to be the favoured method of submitting a complaint, followed by letters. The number of complaints received by email through the Customer Care Mail box is similar to the last year. This is encouraging as we are able to acknowledge and process the complaint quicker than if they were sent by mail.

APPENDIX 3

Which service area did the complaint relate to?

| SERVICE AREA | NUMBER | PERCENTAGE |
|------------------------|--------|------------|
| Vulnerable Children | 66 | 50% |
| Looked After Children | 30 | 23% |
| Children's residential | 14 | 10% |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|---|----|
| Family Placements | 7 | 5% |
| Transition and leaving care | 5 | 4% |
| Independent reviewing Officers | 3 | 2% |
| Other | 8 | 6% |

Four complaints related to more than one service area. As in the previous year the greatest number of complaints relate to vulnerable children’s service area. It should be noted that 11 of the complaints about vulnerable children services relate to the same young person. This is 8.5% of the total number of complaints, and 16.6% of the complaint received relating to the Vulnerable children’s service.

APPENDIX 4

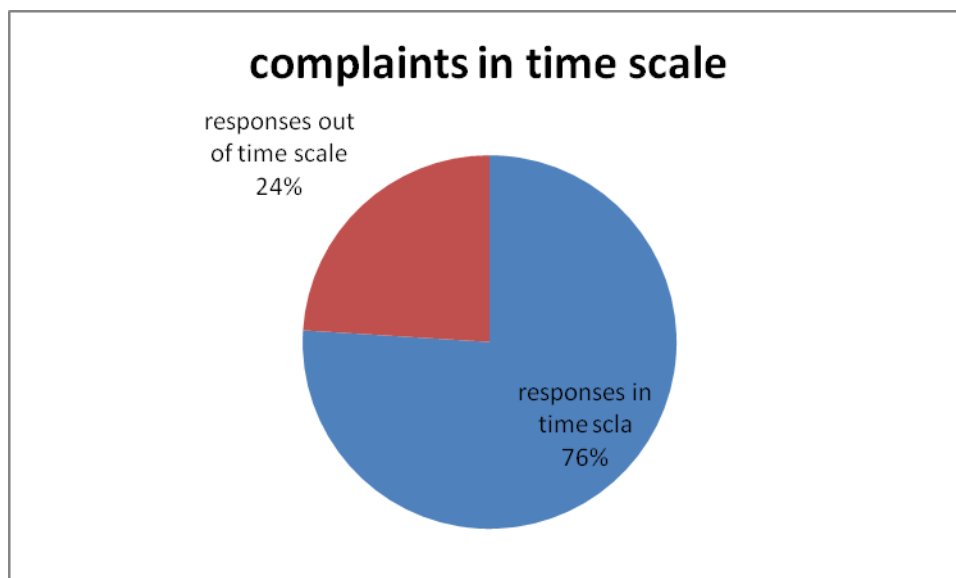
How long did stage 1 complaints take to resolve?

| WORKING DAYS | NUMBER | PERCENT |
|--------------------|--------|---------|
| 0-10 working days | 51 | 40% |
| 11-20 working days | 42 | 32% |
| 21-40 working days | 22 | 17% |
| 41+ | 8 | 6% |
| withdrawn | 6 | 5% |

The stage 1 complaint should be responded to within 10 working days extending to a maximum of 20 working days. There has been some significant progress in the time managers have taken to respond to complaints at stage 1, but there is still room for improvement. Last year 50% of complaints were responded to within 20 working days. This year this has increased to 72%.

APPENDIX 5

How many complaints were within time scale? (Excluding withdrawn complaints)



Complaints resolved in statutory time scale is 76% (excluding withdrawn complaints)

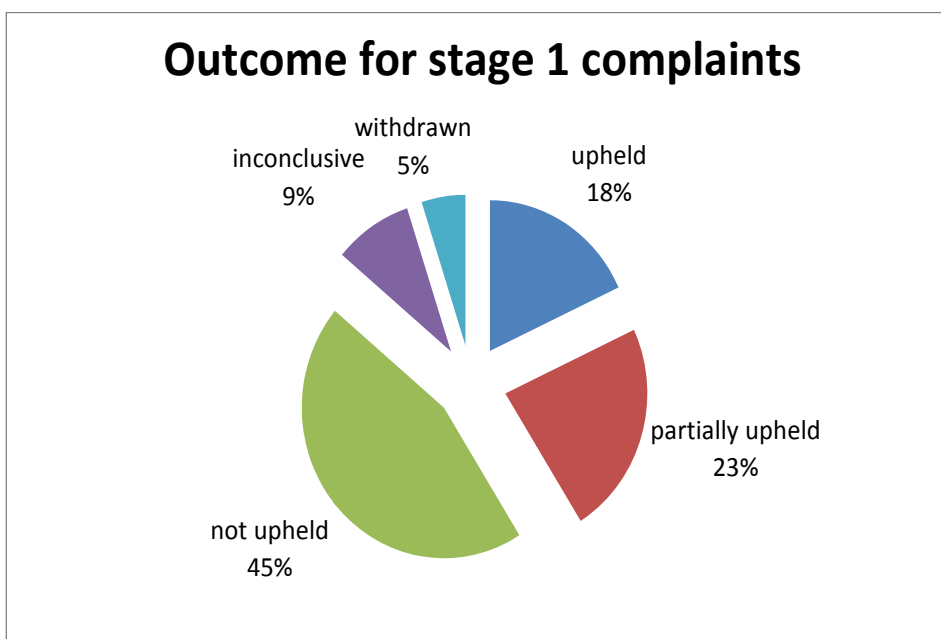
Complaints out of time scale is 24% (excluding withdrawn complaints)

APPENDIX 6

What was the outcome for stage 1 complaints?

| OUTCOME | NUMBER | PERCENT |
|------------------|--------|---------|
| upheld | 23 | 18% |
| Partially upheld | 31 | 23% |
| Not upheld | 58 | 45% |
| inconclusive | 11 | 9% |
| withdrawn | 6 | 5% |

Complaints are classified as partially upheld when they have multiple issues which have elements that are both upheld and not upheld. The complaints classified as inconclusive are those where there is no evidence available in order to justify a firm conclusion.



Nearly half of complaints investigated were resolved as not upheld.

APPENDIX 7

What type of issues were complained about?

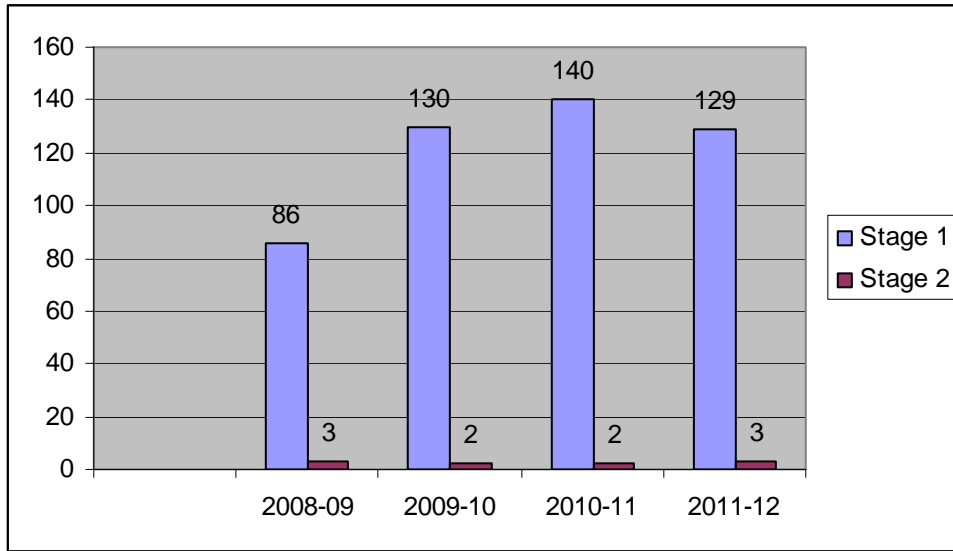
| ISSUE | NUMBER | PERCENT |
|------------------------|--------|---------|
| Staff conduct | 82 | 40% |
| Lack of services | 49 | 24% |
| Lack of information | 26 | 13% |
| Communication problems | 20 | 10% |
| finance | 8 | 4% |
| other | 19 | 9% |

Complaints made in 2011/12 under the statutory procedures were varied in nature. In the report period 43 complaints contained a number of issues that related to more than one complaint. This resulted in a total of 204 issues over the year. It is worth noting that 10 of the complaints issues under the staff heading with from the same complainant, and were found to be not upheld.

APPENDIX 8

How many complaints progressed to stage 2?

In this period 3 complaints progressed to stage 2, compared to 2 in the last period.



It is encouraging that the number of complaints has reduced over the last year, although the complexity of these complaints has generally increased.

It is pleasing to note that compared to last year there has been a significant reduction in the number of complaints about change or lack of social worker.

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