



monmouthshire
sir fynwy

SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH

CUSTOMER RELATIONS

ANNUAL REPORT FOR CHILDREN'S SOCIAL SERVICES

APRIL 2014 – MARCH 2015

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Representation and complaints procedures in Social Services departments are a statutory requirement. They were introduced under the Children Act 1989 and the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003.

New complaints regulations came into force on 1 August 2014 – The Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Social Services Complaints Procedures (Wales) Regulations 2014.

- 1.2 All local authority social services are required to produce an annual report on its performance in the handling and investigation of complaints and representations.

This report looks at complaints, compliments and comments about our Children's social services.

2 Listening to our Service Users

- 2.1 Everyone who makes a complaint about social services has a right to be listened to properly and have their concerns resolved quickly and effectively.
- 2.2 Despite our best intentions, things can go wrong. We recognise this and the representation and complaints procedure provides the opportunity for people to voice their concerns when they are dissatisfied so that the issue can be sorted to their satisfaction wherever possible; make compliments and suggest improvements.

3 Social Services Complaints Procedure

- 3.1 The complaints procedure has two stages:

Stage 1 Local Resolution – The emphasis at this stage is to resolve the complaint locally wherever possible by means of discussion and problem solving.

This approach should allow for the quick and successful resolution of most complaints, to the satisfaction of the complainant. The emphasis is on achieving service user satisfaction rather than avoiding a formal investigation.

Stage 2 Formal Investigation - Where initial discussions have not achieved a resolution, complainants have the right to make a formal complaint. Investigations are undertaken and are subject to statutory time limits for completion of the investigation (25 working days). The

complainant receives a full response detailing findings, conclusions and recommendations.

If the complaint or representation is not resolved

If the complaint or representation is not resolved at the formal investigation stage, the complainant has the right to complain to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

3.2 The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

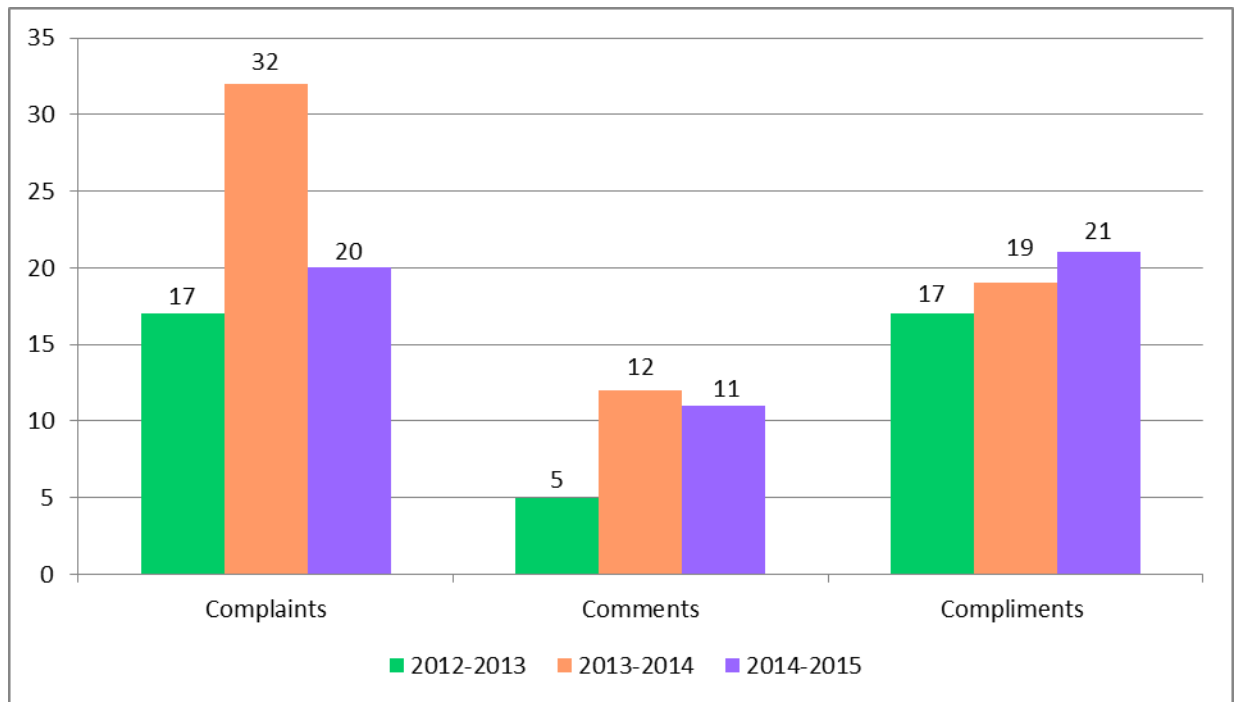
The Ombudsman provides an external independent service to consider complaints about all local authority services including social services. The Ombudsman is concerned with maladministration causing injustice and will normally require complainants to have used their local council's procedures before accepting a complaint for investigation.

4 Making a complaint

- 4.1 We have a leaflet for children and young people called "Listen to me" which explains the procedure.
- 4.2 General advice about the procedure can be found in our complaints leaflet "How to be heard". Alternatively, people can contact the Customer Relations team for help and advice about how to make a complaint.
- 4.3 Translations of the representation and complaints procedure can be provided on request and we can also arrange interpretation services where required.
- 4.4 All children and young people are entitled to and offered an advocate.
- 4.5 Our aim is to secure a better service for people and we are:
 - Accessible and supportive to those with particular needs
 - Prompt and responsive with resolution at the earliest possible time
 - Operate without prejudice or discrimination

5 How many complaints / comments / compliments were made

Period 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015



5.1 Comments

11 comments were received about Children's Services.

Examples of Comments made:

- Initial assessment report had very minimal contents, lots of spelling and punctuation errors in it.
- Concerns about conduct of social worker.
- Concerns about the way the family had been treated by Social Services.
- Concerns about contact with grandchildren.
- Concerns that Social Services did not find out all the facts before making a decision.
- Experiences with Social Services have not been satisfactory.
- Transition process is very disappointing.
- Young person commented that she is not seeing her sister every week.
- Concern from parents that son was turned down for service.

5.2 Compliments

21 compliments were received that related to Children's Services.

Compliments about staff in Children's services were received with individual staff named for their support, help and professionalism. All staff were informed of the compliments received about them and a certificate given to them commending their efforts.

Some examples of compliments made:

"Thank you so much for putting up with my stressy emails for the last few months I couldn't wish for a better social worker for N, thank you."

"C has done a very detailed letter which summarises the history and supports the paternal family caring for A and highlights the potential risks from his mother. She really is an excellent social worker and all of us are very impressed with her work and her lovely manner. We are all so very grateful for the assistance that Monmouthshire are giving us."

"J had his last respite stay... Anyway, what I wanted to say was how much we appreciate the work done by J and I in looking after him in respite care."

"L is an absolute asset to the Department... she is warm to speak to and gives you confidence that something will happen/be done when you speak to her."

"J's mother said that she is very happy with the pictures and certificate J received today. She is also "over the moon" with the work you've done with him and the support you've shown."

"I wanted to say thanks for the invite to the tea and cakes get-together. I thought it was really good, very casual and relaxed and we were made to feel really welcome. Would you pass on my thanks to everyone please. Hopefully this will be a regular thing as not only did it mean that we could meet/catch up with the people involved in supporting us and our families (and get progress reports on various things) it also meant that we had the opportunity to meet some of the behind-the-scenes people such as finance, transport etc and chat about our families so that they know a little more about the people they only really knew as names on forms."

"N was fantastic and caring towards the children! She said that social services get a lot of flak and she thinks they're superb, and wanted to say thank you!"

"I just wanted to contact you to say what a fantastic job you've done with N's extension and adaptation. It really is amazing and one of the best I've ever seen - it rivals DIY SOS! I know that it was a huge team effort to get to the stage it's at and I just wanted to say that it's excellent and as you know is already making such a difference to N and his family."

“I would like to say a massive thank you to L, B AND C, they have been fantastic in their efforts to make sure our little lodger will be coming on holiday with us. His passport will be here tomorrow after much wrangling and pleading. I will also add that L has been a tower of strength to us over the last few months and it is down to her that we are still fostering.”

“Just like to say thank you for all your help and support over the last couple of years and I am sure when A has matured a bit more he will be as well.”

At the court hearing, the mother and maternal grandparents via their solicitor expressed their appreciation of the actions of the Local Authority since M was born. They appreciated the efforts the LA had made to keep mother and baby together, particularly by agreeing to consider mother and baby placement. These comments were also echoed by Judge W who congratulated the LA in their sensitive management of the case.

“I just wanted to let you know that H has been absolutely brilliant with L. He has made so much difference and has clearly become an integral part of their lives. He comes up with new initiatives and takes the time to fill us in on any developments. He is a real pleasure to work with.”

5.3 Complaints

20 complaints were received about Children’s Services.

The majority of complaints were resolved locally. However, **4** complaints were referred to stage two of the Social Services complaints procedure for formal investigation.

6 **Stage 1 Complaints**

Of the 20 complaints received, **16** were resolved at Stage 1 the local resolution stage.

6.1 The most common aspects of services complained about were:

- Issues with staff eg, attitude / professional standards of workers
- Contact / communication with Children’s Social Services.

Some examples of complaints:

- Request for a new social worker as there had been no minutes to any of the meetings including the initial child protection meeting and every core meeting thereafter. Lack of support and communication and did not know the current status of the case.
- That complainant’s children have had different social workers over the last few years, and at times there has been no named social worker when there has been considerable sickness.

- Complainants would like to continue with the current arrangement of two hourly meetings four times each year but suggest that the formality may well be reduced, and the quality of the meeting improved, if only one social worker is present. Also would like young person to attend family events.
- Poor quality of contact reports.
- Issues with social worker and quality of reports written about family.
- Mum feeling pressurised by the department to accommodate her son who lived with his father.
- Not happy with actions of social worker.
- Not happy with lack of services for child with autism.
- Foster carers unhappy with lack of support in caring for young person.
- Parent not happy with amount of respite young person receives.
- Parent feeling threatened by department.
- Young person wants more contact with her siblings.
- Department not adhering to agreed course of action.
- Issues with a young person's reparation sessions.

7 Stage 2 Complaints

7.1 4 complaints went to stage 2 of the complaints procedure.

7.1.1 The first complaint concerned:

Not receiving information in a timely way as promised.
When it was received, the information was usually misleading.
Complainant had not received the promised, monthly updates on a regular basis.
The contact arrangements had not been followed as specified by the court.

None of the above complaints were upheld.

7.1.2 The second complaint concerned:

The attitude and practice of the social worker.
The Stage 1 complaint was not properly investigated.
Issues about Professional Strategy Meeting process.

Information being shared without consent.

There were a number of sub elements. 6 areas were not upheld, 7 were partially upheld and one was upheld.

7.1.3 The third complaint concerned:

The department's failure to provide the complainant with copies of the Initial and core assessments; case conference minutes, child protection plan and core group minutes. Also the conduct of the social worker at the core group meeting.

4 areas were partially upheld; 7 areas were upheld and 2 areas were not upheld.

7.1.4 The fourth complaint concerned:

General lack of recognition by the department of child's needs, the implications of these needs not being addressed, the challenges of the child's behaviour and the consequential distress suffered by the child's wider family.

Three areas of the complaint were upheld, one area of the complaint was partially upheld, 3 areas there were no findings; 2 areas of the complaint were not upheld

8 Ombudsman Complaints

We did not receive any requests for information from the Ombudsman during this period.

9 Complaints made by children and young people

Most complaints concerning Children's Services are from parents/carers. We received **two** complaints directly from young people.

They were resolved at stage one. Both complaints were resolved by providing information or an explanation and where appropriate an apology.

As with previous years, complaints from children and young people are low in number and there is no pattern or emerging trends in the provision of services or quality of care. The low number of complaints received is consistent with other local authorities across Wales who meet to share good practice and research in relation to children and young people's complaints.

Summary of complaints concerned:

- More contact with siblings
- Issues with reparation sessions

10 Analysis of Complaints

The number of complaints received has decreased this year. The main theme running through stage 1 complaints continue to be lack of communication and information.

Year	Number of complaints	Number of Stage 2's	Number of Stage 3's
2014-2015	20	4	-
2013-2014	32	3	1
2012-2013	17	2	Nil
2011-2012	28	1	Nil
2010-2011	28	2	Nil

10.2 Response Timescales

There are statutory requirements established in respect of the timescales for responding to complaints. A full response should be provided within 17 working days for stage 1 complaints and for stage 2 complaints, a full response is required within 25 working days. Where we need to exceed these limits, we will get the service user/carer's agreement.

This table shows the length of time it has taken to respond to complaints:

Social Services Timescales	2013/14		2014-31/07/2015*	
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1	Stage 2
Up to 10 working days	14		5	
11 – 25 working days	7	1		
25+ working days	8	2	1	1
Total	29	3	6	1
			01/08/2014-31/03/2015*	
			Stage 1	Stage 2
Up to 17 working days			8	
18 - 25 working days			3	
26+ working days			1	3
Total			12	3

*please note new statutory process and timescales started 1st August 2014

Complaints, in the main, have been dealt with, in the timescales. Where stage 2 complaints have exceeded the timescales, this is partly due to staffing issues and also to the complexity of the matter under investigation and the need to consult with others (who may not be available) before concluding matters. Complainants were kept informed of any delays.

11 Learning from and responding to complaints and comments made

Information collected during the handling of individual complaints provides feedback on performance management and operational matters. This information helps us to recognise where we need to focus our attention.

People do not always want to complain through a formal channel, however they may want to comment about aspects of the service they receive. We ensure that comments are noted and responded to.

The following are some examples of appropriate action taken on issues raised as a result of a complaint.

- Service users need to be advised as soon as possible if any appointments are due to be cancelled. Where contact between family members are cancelled, alternative provision needs to be arranged.
- Outcome of investigations shared and reflected upon with staff through supervision to identify any learning needs.
- The closure process reviewed. It is good practice to ensure that closure letters are sent to all services users when their involvement with the department comes to an end.
- The department reviews its procedure on the transfer of cases, consider whether it is of a good standard and consider methods to ascertain whether it is being implemented.
- Early consideration be given to transitional planning.
- Apologies given where appropriate
- Services reviewed

The most commonly mentioned reasons for making a complaint are that:

- A genuine grievance is recognised and acknowledged
- An apology is provided
- Practical action to remedy an injustice is undertaken
- Where it has been identified as having failed, departmental policy, procedure and practice is reviewed
- Action is pursued against staff and managers

12 Commentary

12.1 The Welsh Government has issued new guidance and regulations to underpin a new social services complaints and representation process. The new regulations came into force on 1 August 2014.

The focus on the new complaints and representations process is on early local resolution stage and on tackling issues quickly and effectively. If they are not, there is a formal stage and if issues are still not resolved there is recourse to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

- 12.2 Issues with communication is still causing problems and resulting in people complaining. We have to encourage our staff to put more effort into improving communication with our customers. Early intervention is so important in order that matters are dealt with quickly and effectively. Delays can result in complainants exercising their right to go to the Formal investigation stage if they feel their complaints are not being dealt with in a timely manner.
- 12.3 Action plans are prepared after every formal investigation to ensure that recommendations arising from them are acted upon and lessons learned where appropriate.
- 12.4 The head of Children's Social Services and myself meet on a monthly basis to discuss complaints received. Issues are then discussed at the Children's Services leadership team and also in her 1:1 meetings with managers.

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