

# COMPLIMENTS, CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS REPORT

Children's social care: 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010



**PLYMOUTH**  
CITY COUNCIL

## Introduction

This annual report focuses on the compliments, concerns and complaints received within the Children's Social Care Department made between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010. The Complaints process for Children's Social Care stands outside the Plymouth City Council process because of additional legislative requirements. The complaints procedure operates in accordance with the statutory complaints procedure "Getting the Best from Complaints" issued by the (then) DFES in September 2006. Staff receive ongoing training in complaints handling through induction sessions and regular updates.

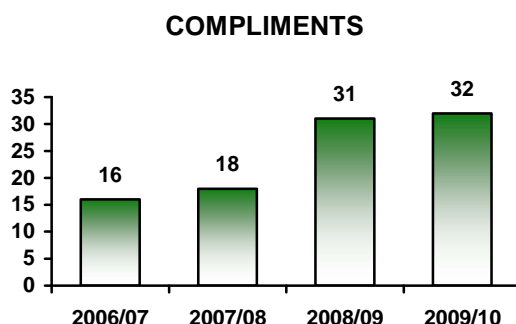
Customer feedback (including compliments, concerns, complaints or suggestions) is crucial for Children's Social Care to improve services, meet the needs of customers, continue good practice, identify trends and inform future service needs and provision. Examples of how people can communicate their feedback include: by phone using a dedicated free phone telephone number, by email direct to the complaints inbox, by letter or in writing by completing a complaints form or contact card. 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. Children's Social Care dealt with nearly five thousand children and families throughout the year 2009/10.

## 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 2009/10 thirty two compliments were reported to the Customer Relations Team. The chart below compares the number of compliments received over the past four years.



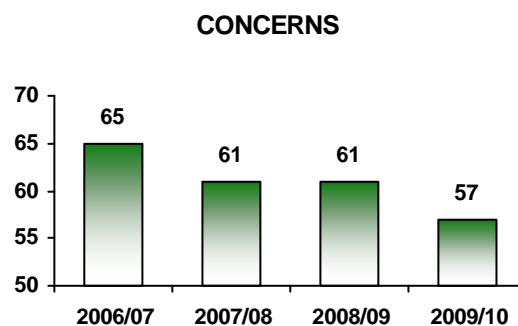
Here are some examples of the compliments received during the reporting year:

- Wanted both her Social Workers to know "how great they were in helping her with the problems and it was good to know they were only a phone call away".

- A couple who had spoken to a number of LA's said that "the person they spoke to in Plymouth was the most warm and positive person they had had dealings with".
- A judge said he "highly praised and commended the professional work of the Social Worker" and "her professionalism and excellent reports are a credit and have helped me to understand this case far easier".
- Expressed how supportive the Social Worker and staff had been over the last 14/15 months, the Social Worker had been "amazing" and the Team Manager "exceptionally helpful", support had been "second to none".
- Social Worker has always given her time and listened to her concerns, given invaluable advice, grateful for her kindness and support.

## **Concerns**

There are times when a problem or concern can be resolved without the need to enter the complaints process. Between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010 fifty seven concerns were resolved. The chart below shows the number of concerns that were resolved each year.



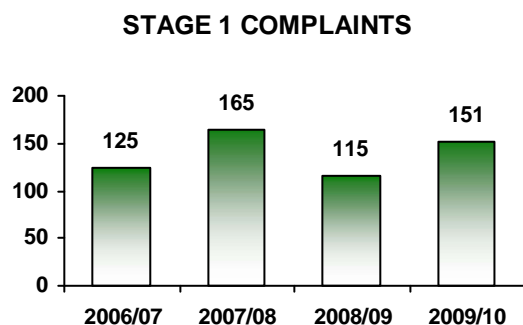
## **The complaints process**

When a complaint is received or where a concern was not resolved, this will then be addressed in accordance with the statutory complaints procedure. 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 1). The investigation is normally carried out by the Team Manager responsible for the area involved, and resolved with all parties agreeing a way forward. During 2009/10 151 complainants made a total of 159 complaints which were considered at Stage 1 of the procedure. 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 the number of Stage 1 complaints each year. There were 36 more complainants in 2009/10 compared to 2008/09 which is an increase of 31%.



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

Complainant	2008/09		2009/10	
	Total	%	Total	%
Parents – Birth	53	46	81	54
Child (Client)	10	9	21	14
Relative – Sibling/grandparent	23	20	17	11
Relative – other/friend/partner/'step	6	5	10	7
Foster Carer – In house	3	3	7	5
Other	20	17	15	9
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>100%</b>

The highest numbers of complaints are received from Birth parents, which is the same as for the previous year. The number of complaints received directly from children has doubled in 2009/10 to 21 and it is encouraging to see that Children and Young People feel empowered and confident enough to make a complaint.

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

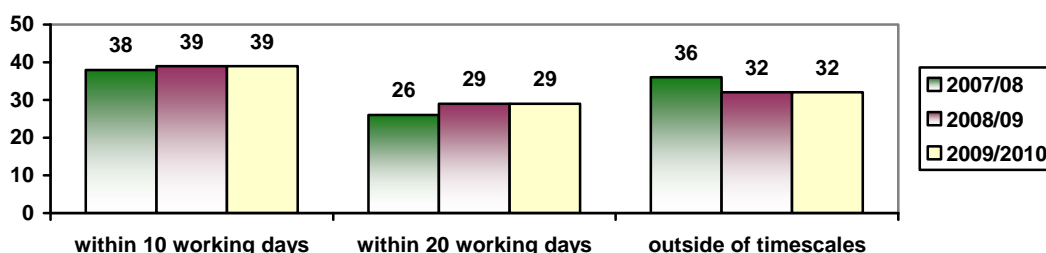
Five most common reasons for complaint	2008/09		2009/10	
	Total	% of Overall Total	Total	% of Overall Total
Staff – attitude/behaviour/actions of	24	20	33	21
Communication/lack of info	20	17	29	18
Confidentiality/personal information	10	9	21	13
Service – quality/appropriateness/lack of	25	21	16	10
Decision/outcome – disputed or unwelcome	8	7	14	9
Other	31	26	46	29
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>100%</b>

### ***Compliance with timescales at Stage 1***

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 2009/10 there were 159 Stage 1 complaints. Of which, 39% were responded to within 10 working days, 29% within 20 working days and 32% being responded to outside of timescales. There has been a slight improvement in the percentage of responses within 10 and 20 working days. The biggest factor behind the delay in responding to complaints is workload; there has been a substantial increase in complaints year on year. However, timescales for response are regularly reviewed alongside senior managers with a continual drive to maintain good performance. The chart below shows the percentages for each timescale when compared to the previous two years.

**STAGE 1 COMPLAINTS**

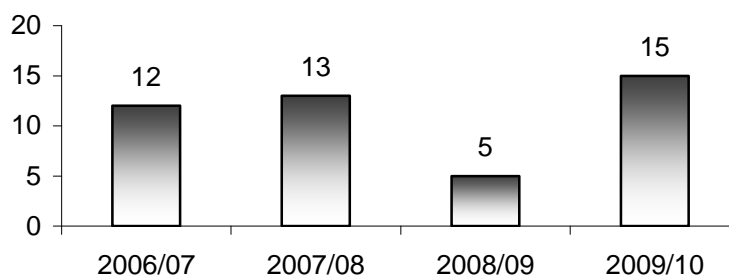


**Stage II – Formal Complaint Investigation**

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’. Fifteen Stage II complaints were registered during 2009/10 which shows an upward trend.

The Customer Relations Manager is investigating this further to check whether this is in line with national trends or if there are patterns for concern.

Stage II Investigations



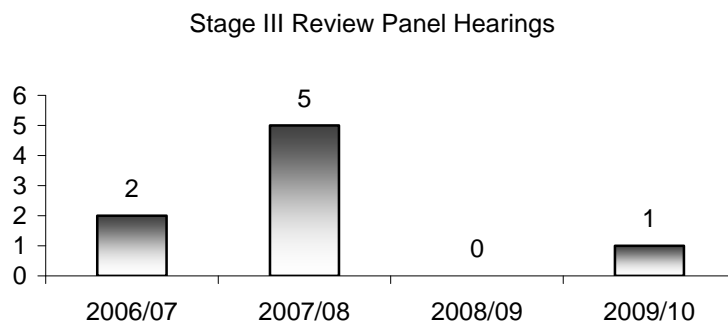
**Compliance with timescales at Stage II**

Stage II complaints require external investigation and are often very complex. Of the fifteen Stage II complaints registered in the period, two were not pursued by the complainant, four are still under investigation and the remaining nine were completed outside of timescales, which is in line with other Authorities. In every case the complainants are kept informed about the progress of the investigation on a regular basis and were advised that it may not be possible to carry out a rigorous and through

investigation within the statutory timescales. Each of the complainants agreed to the extended timescales expressing a preference for quality over speed of response.

### **Stage III – Review Panel Hearings**

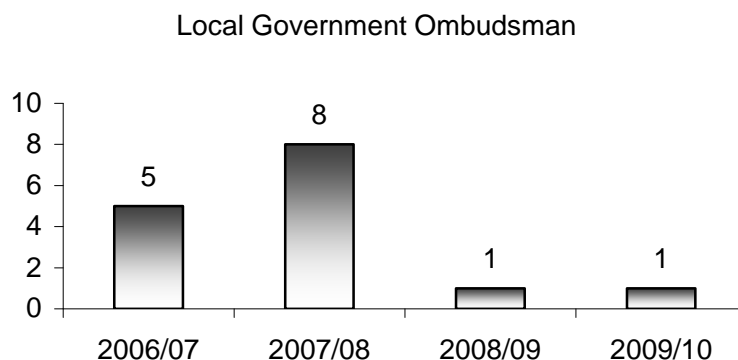
If the complainant is still dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation at Stage II they can request further consideration by a review panel. One Review Panel Hearing was held within the recording period.



### **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 2009/10. The findings from the Local Government Ombudsman was “no or insufficient evidence of maladministration (without report)”.



### **Advocacy Services**

Advocacy services are now available through Barnardo’s and the services of an advocate are offered to all children and young people wishing to make a complaint in accordance with the requirements of “Get it sorted”. Barnardo’s report on a quarterly basis to the commissioning team and this includes data about complaints

### **Quality Assurance Process and Learning**

Ofsted reviewed our complaints process as part of the announced inspection earlier this year. They reported that most children in care who completed their survey knew how to complain and where complaints had been made they were satisfied that their complaints had been dealt with fairly. Overall, service responsiveness including complaints was rated as good.

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 normally attends these meetings in order to consider any changes necessary to our learning and development programme. Appendix 1 shows recent examples of learning from complaints

A number of improvements to the complaints procedure have been made during the reporting period.

- Following attendance at last years scrutiny the Customer Relations Manager has begun work on undertaking a benchmarking exercise with neighbouring authorities.
- Work has begun on working together with the Listen and Care Council with a view to making the complaints procedure more “YP friendly” and revising the complaints literature available to YP.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Examples of Learning from Complaints**

#### **Example A**

A complaint was received from a parent regarding services being received from an external service by their disabled son. The stage 1 Complaint found that the service provided was not appropriate in that staff were not available during the Easter holidays and the management of the staff rota was not sufficient. As a result of the complaint that Manager took the following action:

#### **Action Taken**

- The Children's Disability Team met with the external provider to discuss the issues which led to a plan to improve the contingency arrangements for young people and their families in the event of staff sickness or availability

#### **Example B**

A Complaint was received from a parent regarding personal information relating to their daughter being disclosed to another family. The Stage I complaint found that some limited personal information of their daughter was contained in a report that was disclosed to the family at their previous address. This breach of confidentiality was due to an error on the database and was not picked up prior to sending. As a result of this complaint the Manager took the following action:

#### **Action Taken**

- A review of the database by the CareFirst Team took place to see whether this could be rectified
- A communication was sent to all staff within Services for Children and Young People to advise them that when inputting information onto the database a pattern has emerged where the details of people who used to live at an address are being pulled through into new assessments for unrelated children by mistake. The communication outlines how staff can avoid this happening in future.

## Appendix 2

<b>Stage I Complaints by Service</b>		
<b>Integrated Disability Service</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5.7%</b>
<b>Family Support</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6.3%</b>
<b>Chairing &amp; Reviewing Team</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.3%</b>
<b>Youth Offending Team</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.6%</b>
<b>Children in the Community</b>		
Advice & Assessment	51	32.1%
Children in Need	27	17.0%
Out of Hours	1	0.6%
<b>Total for Children in the Community</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>49.7</b>
<b>Children In Care</b>		
Adoption	1	0.6%
Fostering	8	5.0%
16+ Service	16	10.1%
Children in Care	26	16.4%
<b>Total for Children in Care</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>32.4</b>
<b>Other Service Areas</b>		
Policy & Performance	2	1.3%
Other PCC	5	3.1%
<b>Total for Other Service Areas</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4.4%</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>100%</b>