

Report to:	Scrutiny Committee for Adult Social Care
Date:	15 November 2007
Title of Report:	Adult Social Care Complaints Procedure Annual Review 2006/2007
By:	Director of Adult Social Care
Purpose of Report:	To report on the functioning and effectiveness of the Complaints Procedure

RECOMMENDATION:

The Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee are recommended to note and comment on the Complaints Procedure Annual Review Report for 2006/2007 and forward any relevant issues to the next Adult Social Care Lead Member meeting.

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 The cost of responding to complaints in 2006/2007 was contained within the Department's budget.

2. Background and Supporting Information

2.1 It is a statutory requirement that a report on the operation and effectiveness of the Adult Social Care Complaints Procedure is compiled and submitted annually to an appropriate Committee. This report (Annual Review on Complaints, Compliments and Comments) is attached at Appendix 1 and provides information about the complaints received by Adult Social Care and related Finance and Business Support services.

2.2 The complaints procedure provides a mechanism for identifying problems, resolving issues and improving services. The analysis of information about complaints at each stage of the procedure gives the department an opportunity to reflect on the quality of the services it provides to the service users and consider how well it listens and responds to their needs. Compliments also provide valuable information about the quality of services we provide. In the preparation of the report, there was consultation with those who have used the procedure, or have an interest in its functioning.

2.3 The new Local Authorities Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2006 and guidance produced by the Department of Health (Learning from complaints) were implemented on 1 September 2006. Although there has been no formal impact assessment, the new arrangements have been received well by managers, as evidenced by this report.

3. Complaints and Compliments

3.1 The complaints unit recorded 360 complaints about Adult Social Care (ASC) and Finance and Business Support (FABS) during the year, compared with 509 last year. This represents a 30% decrease in complaints received in the previous year.

3.2 ASC recorded 295 stage 1 complaints, compared with 446 last year. This represents a 34% decrease in complaints received in the previous year. The decrease is mostly associated with the significant reduction in complaints about funding delay. This year we received 82 complaints related to funding issues compared with 199 last year.

3.3 185 (63%) of the complaints related to older people, compared to 354 (79%) last year. This significant decrease is again attributed to the issue of funding delay

3.4 Finance & business support services recorded 51 complaints; an 8% increase on last year. This could be attributed, in part, to the structural changes that these support services experienced this year.

3.5 97% of all complaints were resolved at local resolution - stage 1. As complaints are often complex and sensitive, this demonstrates the time, effort and commitment of staff in trying to resolve problems.

3.6 The Department responded to 51% of complaints within 10 working days and 25% received a response within our maximum 20 working day timescale. For complex issues, extensions to these statutory timescales were agreed and no complaints went to stage 2 because of delay in receiving a response. As timescales were reported differently last year, it is not possible to draw a comparison with last year.

3.7 Of the complaints that were not related to funding delay 29% were fully upheld, 33% were partially held, and 38% were not upheld. Of the 88 complaints received about funding issues, 66 (75%) were upheld. 9 complaints were not able to be satisfactorily resolved at the local resolution stage and moved into the formal investigation stage. This is a reduction of 3 on the previous year's figures. 6 complaints went on to a complaints review panel, 1 more than the previous year.

3.8 The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) received 11 complaints regarding Adult Social Care. Of the 7 complaints that the LGO decided, 3 were not upheld and four were referred back to us to be dealt with under our procedure. The LGO was encouraged to read in a report from the Commission for Social Care Inspection on services for older people that there is evidence of an effective and comprehensive complaints and comments system in the Council.

3.9 888 compliments were recorded, which is over double the amount recorded last year (430).

4. Themes & Learning from Complaints

4.1 Information from complaints is an important tool for indicating where services may need adjusting and assists in the planning, development and continuous improvement of the experiences of those eligible for and receiving our services. Like last year, the delay in releasing funding was dominant throughout the year and nearly all complainants referred to the stress and anxiety caused by these delays. Other themes included the quality of services falling below expectation and conduct of staff. Throughout most of these complaints ran an element that relates to communication with relatives and carers. The attached Annual Review Report gives further details about themes and learning from complaints.

5. Change

5.1 Recently the Department of Health published a consultation document 'Making Experience Count' setting out their ideas for developing a single, simple and consistent approach to the way that health and social care services respond to complaints. The consultation ended in October 2007 and the Government plan to introduce the new regulations in 2009.

6. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

6.1 The Local Authorities Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2006 state that Local Authorities are required to publish an Annual Report. The report should provide a mechanism by which the council can monitor the operation of the complaints procedure. This is the annual report for the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007.

Keith Hinkley
Director of Adult Social Care

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Local Members: All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: Annual Review on Complaints, Compliments and Comments
2005/06

Adult Social Care

Comments, Compliments and Complaints

Annual Report

2006 - 2007

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1. Context

This report provides information about complaints made during the twelve months between 1 April 2006 and 31 March 2007 under the complaints and representations procedure established through the Local Authority Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations, 2006.

Adult Social Care (ASC) works with and serves a large number of vulnerable people throughout the County. The Department provides and arranges a wide range of support services to enable people with care needs to stay in their own homes and, when this is not possible, will support residential or nursing care. The services provided relate to the personal care and confidential circumstances of individuals and their families, often at difficult times in their lives.

The complaints procedure provides us with a mechanism for identifying problems, resolving issues and improving services. The analysis of information about complaints at each stage of the procedure, gives ASC an opportunity to reflect on the quality of the services it provides to our service users and consider how well it listens and responds to their needs.

The numbers of compliments received by ASC provide valuable information regarding the quality of our services.

All timescales within this report are in working days.

1.1 What is a Complaint?

The Department of Health Guidance 'Learning from Complaints' (2006) define a complaint as: *"an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet about the actions, decisions or apparent failings of a local authority's adult social services provision which requires a response."*

1.2 Who can make a complaint?

A person is eligible to make a complaint where the local authority has a power or duty to provide, or to secure the provision of, a service for someone and their need or possible need for such a service has (by whatever means) come to our attention. This also applies to a person acting on behalf of someone else.

2 Stages of the Complaints Procedure

The complaints procedure has three stages.

Stage 1, Local Resolution This is the most important stage of the complaints procedure. We expect the department's teams and external contractors providing services on our behalf to resolve as many complaints at this initial point.

The complaints procedure requires complaints at stage 1 to be responded to within 10 working days up to a maximum of 20 working days.

Stage 2, Formal Investigation This stage is usually implemented where the complainant is dissatisfied with the findings at stage 1. Either an internal off-line manager or an external investigating officer conducts an investigation. Ordinarily the Head of Service for the team adjudicates on the findings.

The investigation aims to be completed within 25 working days but, in some instances, can be extended to 65 working days.

Stage 3, Review Panel If complainants are still not happy after their complaint is investigated at stage 2 we are required to establish a complaints Review Panel. The panel hears both the complainants and department's perspective and makes recommendations to the Director. The Director then makes a decision on the complaint and any action taken. Complaints Review Panellists are made up of three independent panellists, or two independent panellists and a Councillor.

A Review Panel should be set up within 30 working days and the Director should send their response within 20 working days of the date of the panel meeting.

The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) The LGO is empowered to investigate where it appears that our own complaints procedures have not resolved the complaint. Complainants can refer their complaint to the LGO at any time, although the LGO normally refers the complaint back to us if it has not been through our procedure first.

3 Who Complained?

The complaints procedure aims to be as accessible as possible. The Department publicises information about how to make a complaint in its leaflet 'Comments, Compliments and Complaints' and has a specific leaflet available for people with learning disabilities.

Complaints can be made in person, by telephone, in writing, by text or email, either directly to the team or to the Complaints Unit; whichever is easiest.

All service users, whatever their circumstances, should feel able to make a complaint.

Of the complaints made during the year, 59% of complaints were made on behalf of service users. The sons and daughters of service users made almost half of these complaints, but others include spouses, parents, advocates and other relations. In 6% of cases, the relationship to the person making the complaint was unknown.

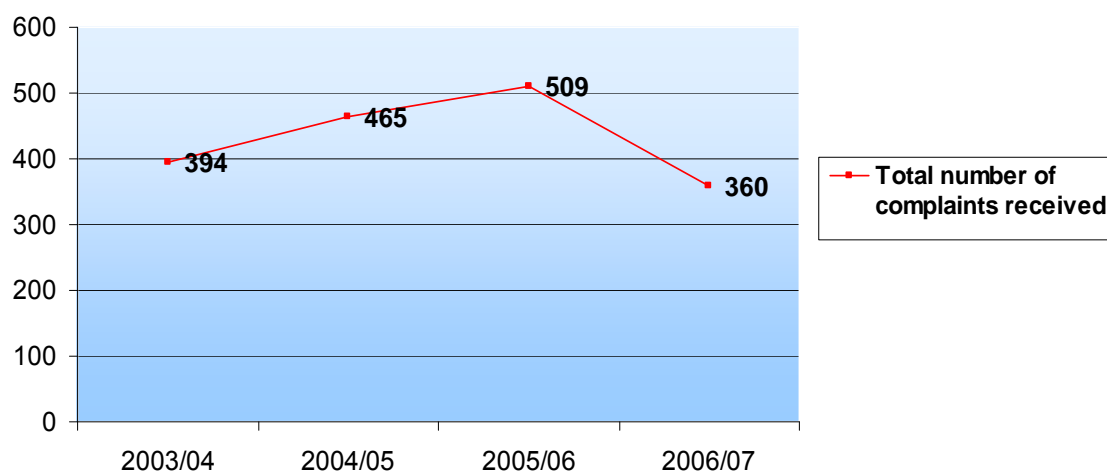
Independent advocacy providers were recorded as assisting 7 service users to make a complaint. Advocacy services however, are not necessarily in direct contact with the department about complaints but they do provide information, guidance and support to service users to assist them to exercise their right to comment or complain about local authority services.

Information about the service users' ethnicity was known in 258 cases. Almost all complaints were made about service users who were White British. We need to undertake further work with advocacy or voluntary agencies that represent minority

groups to ensure that these groups have access to and feel confident to use the complaints procedure.

4. Overview of Complaints

The complaints unit recorded 360 complaints during the year, compared with 509 last year. This figure is the total number of complaints that the complaints unit handled. As some of these complaints are still live (having entered our monitoring system before 31 March 2007 and not yet concluded) they will be included in the next business year's set of figures.



4.1 Complaints broken down by stages

Service	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Adult Social Care	295 (446)	7 (11)	6 (5)
Finance and Business Support	51 (47)	1 (0)	0 (0)

(Last year's figures are in brackets)

4.2 Comparison with the preceding year

This indicates a 30% decrease in complaints last year within the department.

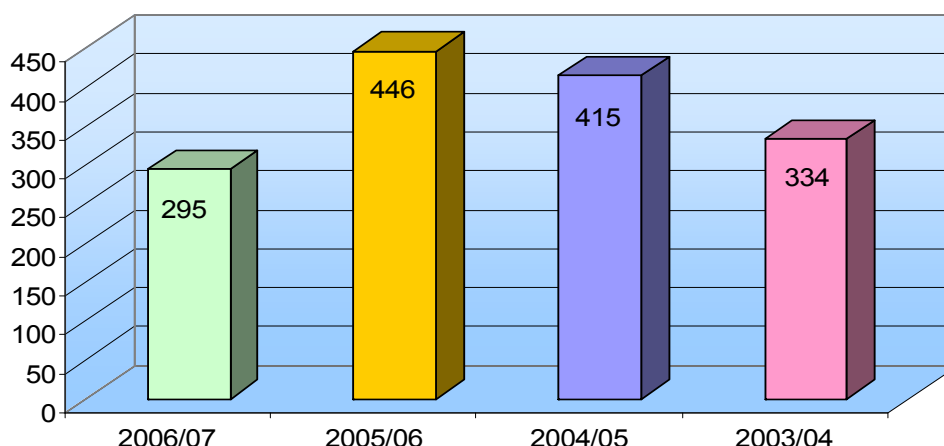
The decrease is mostly associated with the significant reduction in complaints about funding delay. This year we received 82 complaints related to funding issues compared with 199 last year, 59% less.

Such a significant decrease could have also arisen through ASC staff not identifying customer concerns as complaints. This would therefore indicate the possibility of under-recording. The complaints unit have followed this up with operational managers.

5. Local Resolution (Stage 1)

Adult Social Care

5.1 Number of complaints received at stage 1



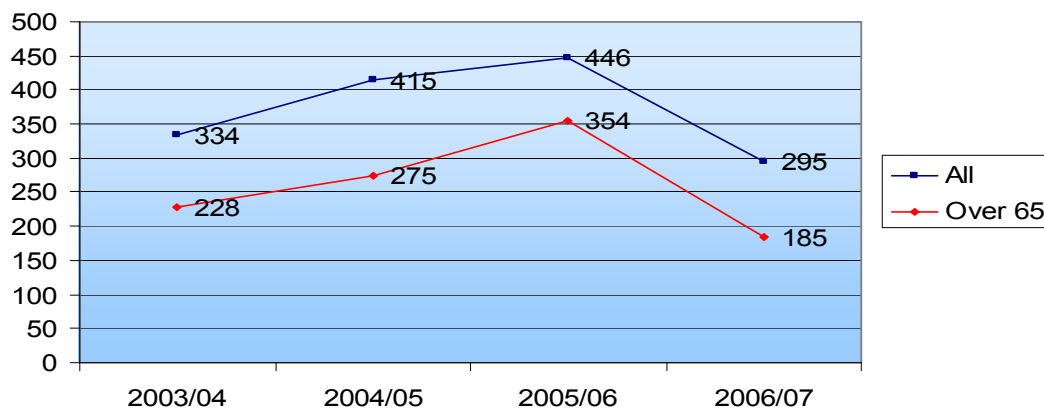
The complaints unit received 295 complaints about Adult Social Care services during the year. This presents a 34% decrease in the complaints received at stage 1, over those received last year.

Of these, 97% were resolved locally. This reflects the Department's commitment to achieve resolution as quickly and as close to service delivery as possible.

It is important to acknowledge that the emphasis that we place on this part of the process involves time and effort, particularly as complaints are often complex and sensitive. However, it is clear that the high level of input required of staff and their

managers, does generally result in far more satisfactory outcomes for the complainant and the Department.

5.2 How many complaints were about services for people who are over 65 years?



Of the 295 complaints received, 185 (63%) of complaints made were in relation to older people, compared with 354 (79%) last year.

5.3 How many complaints about ASC were upheld?

Out of the 213 complaints that were not related to funding, 50 (24%) of the complaints were upheld, 77 (36%) were partially upheld and 86 (40%) were not upheld.

Of the 88 complaints received about funding issues, 66 (75%) were upheld.

5.4 How long did it take to reply to complaints?

The target time for responding to complaints at the Local Resolution stage is 20 working days or 10 days where possible.

54% of complaints received a response within 10 working days.

24% of complaints received a response within 20 working days.

22% did not receive a response within the timescales, although in most cases this was by agreement with the complainant.

5.5 Complaints by service

The table below sets out the number of complaints recorded for each service.

Adult Social Care Services	Number of complaints	
Adult Protection	5	(0)
Assessment and Care Management Teams	69	(110)
Blue Car Badges	10	(3)
Duty and Assessment Teams	0	(6)
Day Care (directly provided service)	5	(8)
Emergency Duty Service	0	(3)
Home Care (directly provided service)	8	(6)
Home Care (independent providers)	6	(6)
Hospitals Assessment & Care Management	58	(147)
Learning Disability Assessment and Care Management	24	(7)
Learning Disability Day Care	2	(6)
Learning Disability Community Support; Residential Respite	19	(21)
Living at Home Programme	1	(1)
Mental Health (working age adults)	21	(27)
Mental Health (over 65 years)	29	(51)
Occupational Therapy	14	(17)
Residential (directly provided service)	7	(14)
Residential (independent providers)	1	(1)
Respite (directly provided service)	5	(5)
Sensory Locality Services	4	(2)
Social Care Direct	5	(5)
Supported Accommodation Team	2	(0)
Total	295	(446)

(Last year's figures are in brackets)

5.5.1 What were the complaints about?

The main themes of complaints recorded for this year were:

- Delay in funding services
- Quality of services provided
- Staff conduct

Types of Complaints	No. of complaints 2006 - 07
Funding related	88 (204)
Service Provision (assessment and outcome; eligibility, review, insufficient)	76 (78)
Service Delivery (quality, delay, loss of items, unwelcome decision, communication)	82 (117)
Staff Response (inappropriate action and conduct, communication)	34 (24)
Behaviour of others	1 (2)
Independent providers (quality, missed calls, communication)	12 (12)
Equalities	0 (2)
Policy (general)	2 (7)

(Last year's figures are in brackets)

5.5.2 Delay in releasing funding for services

Regrettably, like last year, the demand for funding for services has been greater than available resources. Of the 295 complaints received for ASC 88 related to funding issues, of which 72 were specifically regarding delay in releasing funding.

However, this is 59% less than last year, when 199 complaints related to funding delay.

This is reflected in the significant decrease in complaints received by the Assessment and Care Management Teams, Hospital Teams and Older Peoples Community Mental Health Teams. These teams are responsible for identifying and organising services and this includes the funding application process.

Funding complaints received by Assessment and Care Management Services

Team		Complaints Funding Delays		% of actual complaints received	
Hospital Teams		36	(117)	62%	(80%)
Assessment & Care Management Teams		15	(52)	28%	(47%)
LD Services		3	(2)	12%	(37%)
MH Services	under 65	3	(1)	14%	(5%)
	over 65	15	(27)	52%	(53%)
Total		72	(199)	24%	(45%)

(Last year's figures are in brackets)

These complaints were mainly about the delay in transfers from hospital and the time spent by service users waiting in residential respite units or community hospitals for a care package or a move to a permanent residential/nursing home placement. Delay in receiving funding for direct payments for services was also an issue for some people.

This reflects one of the key challenges faced by Adult Social Care in terms of rising demand for services set against the limited availability of resources.

5.5.3 Other themes

Other issues for the assessment and care and management teams related to frustration with delays in undertaking an assessment and users' perception of the assessment process. For example, people did not receive the outcome that they wished for, this included their choice of service or they felt that the amount of support provided was insufficient.

Complaints about service delivery presented a decrease of 30% over last year. The reasons for a decrease in the level of complaints include both improved service delivery. Yet, it also could have arisen through possible under-reporting of complaints. As mentioned previously the complaints unit are currently investigating this issue.

A range of issues were identified within the complaints received. However, most of the complaints related to the quality of services provided falling below expectation or feelings that staff were not providing adequate care or information.

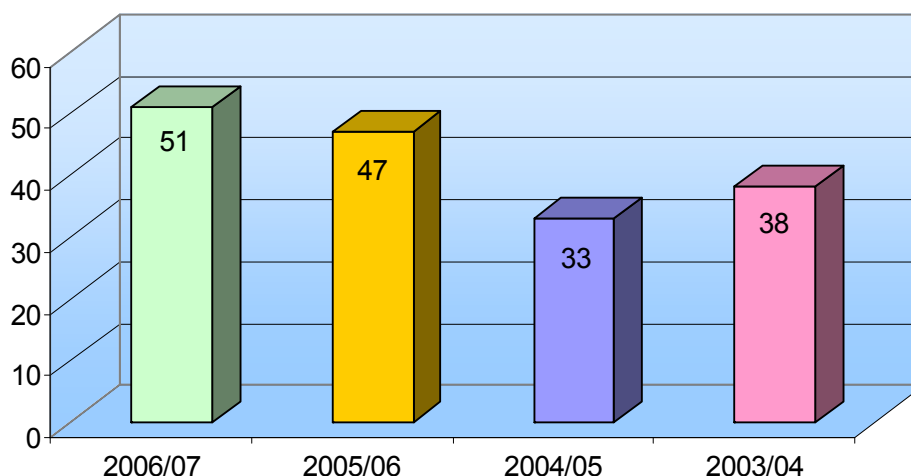
Overall, communication issues featured in many service users and carer's dissatisfaction with services. For example, when people were unhappy and frustrated with the delays in getting services in place, they wanted to know how long they would be expected to wait and to be kept up to date with the situation. Some service users and carers were unhappy with the attitude of staff and felt that they had not been listened to properly or their views had been ignored.

Complaints received by the Unit about independent sector providers remained consistent. In relation to home care agencies, user feedback forms have indicated that there are still concerns about missed calls, timekeeping and inconsistency of care workers. The Contracts and Purchasing Unit is involved in taking up the issues with the appropriate provider both on an individual level and by the regular monitoring of contractual arrangements.

6. Local Resolution (Stage 1)

Finance and Business Support (FABS)

Finance and Business Support (FABS) recorded 51 Complaints this year, an increase of 8% from last year. This could be attributed to, in part, structural changes to these support services.



How many complaints about FABS were upheld?

Of the 51 complaints received for FABS, 25 (49%) were upheld, 11 (22%) were partially upheld and 15 (29%) were not upheld.

6.1 How long did it take to reply to complaints about FABS?

38% of complaints received a response within 10 working days.

30% of complaints received a response within 20 working days.

32% of complaints did not receive a response within the statutory timescales.

6.2 What were the complaints about?

Types of Complaints	No. of complaints 2006/07
Invoicing (query, error or arrangements)	9 (9)
Poor quality service	13 (5)
Delay	6 (8)
Assessment (outcome and quality)	1 (2)
Agreements/procedures not followed	1 (0)
Poor communication	3 (3)
Inappropriate action	1 (7)
Unwelcome decision	1 (6)
Charges	9 (8)
Information/records inaccurate	1 (1)
Staff conduct	4 (0)
Transfer to independent sector	2 (0)

(Last year's figures are in brackets)

The key theme for FABS complaints was in respect of the quality of the service falling below expectation. In most instances complainants felt that they were given inadequate or incorrect information about charges for services. Some complaints were about delays in receiving information about the outcome of service users' financial assessments.

7. Formal Investigation (Stage 2)

There were 8 formal investigations this year, compared to 12 last year.

External independent investigating Officers undertook all of the stage 2 complaint investigations. 2 investigations were overseen by Independent People. Whilst this is not a requirement of the procedure, in instances where the service user is vulnerable and/or there are complex issues, we consider it good practice that an Independent Person monitor the investigation to ensure that it is fair and thorough.

Service Area	Broad Complaint Area	Days To Respond
Contracts & Purchasing	Home Care Independent Provider	24
Learning Disability	Assessment & Care Management	63
Learning Disability	Assessment & Care Management	83
Learning Disability	Assessment & Care Management	37
Learning Disability	Transition to Adult Services	83
Social Care	Hospital Discharge	42
Social Care	Hospital Discharge	114
Social Care	Assessment & Care Management	207

The mean average time to produce a formal response at stage 2 was 82 days. However, there were two particularly lengthy and complex complaints received in this year. If these are discounted the mean average time is 55 days.

At this stage of the procedure, most of the complaints were complex, covering a range of issues.

The main themes were:

- Poor communication with service users and carers
- Conduct and attitude of staff
- Transparency and openness of hospital discharge decision making processes
- Carer's views being taken into account
- Non provision of requested service
- Quality of social care assessments
- The conduct and timing of review meetings
- Communication and understanding between ASC and health partners regarding continuing health care funding
- Complaints handling at stage 1 at all levels of the department and by independent providers

- Quality, non-attendance of carer support and inadequate emergency cover of some independent home care agency providers
- Timeliness of information being sent and requested in relation to charges for residential care

In all instances, the external investigator made recommendations to the Department in order to achieve service improvements. Examples of the changes and learning from formal investigations are:

- In hospital discharge decision making processes a policy has been developed where, if there is disagreement between the multi-agency assessment team, service users and carers about decisions taken by the service user and or/or carers, these views and risks are clearly recorded and signed up to by all parties.
- When there are apparent difficulties in communicating with service users and/or their carers the department needs to be proactive in identifying and agreeing, where possible, a clear communication strategy.
- Reinforcement of the need for accurate and comprehensive case file recording
- All letters of complaint regarding service users received by the Director are passed to the complaints unit to ensure the Complaints Procedure is applied effectively.
- An Independent Care Manager/Case Co-ordinator is appointed to work with service users and their families when it is clear that there is a breakdown in trust between them, the department and other partner agencies.
- A review is undertaken of the protocols and understanding of continuing health care funding in learning disability services.

8. Complaints Review Panels (Stage 3)

There were 6 Review Panels this year, 1 more than last year.

4 Panels were convened within 30 working days and for the other 2 Panels we agreed extensions to the timescale with the complainants.

5 reports of the recommendations of the Panel were received within 5 days of the Panel meeting.

4 complainants received the Directors response within 20 working days of the Panel meeting.

The Director agreed all the recommendations made by the Review Panels.

These included:

- Using mediation as a means to try to build a constructive and positive relationship between the complainants and the Department.
- In relation to another case, we need to accept that if a complainant declines to engage in alternative dispute resolution, such as mediation, the complaints procedure is applied without undue delay.
- Identifying an advocate to ensure that service user views are included within the social care assessment and review process; combined with a Person Centred Planning approach, as outlined in Valuing People Guidance.
- All decisions regarding charges for services, including third party contributions are clearly recorded in diary sheets. Any written information that we share with people is also recorded.
- The protocols between NHS partners and ASC are rigorously reviewed to ensure agencies collaborate positively in assisting individuals with complex health and social care needs and their families. Particularly in relation to continuing health care funding.

- A Management Review of the Departments failure to institute adult protection procedures to investigate allegations of physical harm and financial abuse.

9. Local Government Ombudsman

The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) received 11 complaints regarding Adult Social Care. Of the 7 complaints that the LGO decided, 3 were not upheld and four were referred back to us to be dealt with under our procedure. There were no Ombudsman investigations during this period.

In their annual letter to the Council, the LGO referred to the report from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) on services for older people, and were encouraged to read that there was evidence of an effective and comprehensive complaints and comments system in ASC.

10. What did the Department learn from complaints?

It is crucial that there is learning from complaints at all stages of the procedure, resulting in improved services and delivery, wherever possible. Here are some further examples of learning and changes at all levels of the department.

At an organisational level, an example of learning was:

- Following a complaint about the quality of information in our leaflet IL06 “Choosing a care home” regarding the entitlement to a 12 week disregard when someone first enters residential care. This leaflet is being revised to take out financial information and instead, signposting people to the more detailed leaflet IL12 “Paying for services” which gives more comprehensive information.

Learning at a team level has included:

- The importance of clear communication with service users and particularly their carers, examples are:

- Prior to admission to residential services, staff to agree with carers what information they want and how they want it communicated if issues should arise during the service users stay.
- Carers and family members are now offered a meeting on discharge to discuss any issues and concerns and this is recorded on discharge notes
- information that is communicated to service users that is given over the phone is followed up in writing

Other examples of team learning include:

- The Community Support Service reviewed guidance to Community Support Workers about preparation with people when supporting them at meetings with other professionals.
- Refresher training for staff in our respite units, including:
 - customer care
 - promoting independence
 - enabling people within their limitations, service planning
 - risk assessments
- Policy change for Accommodation Officers in Mental Health Services – no recommendations or details of removal companies are to be provided. Service users are now signposted to local directories.
- The Supporting People Team introduced a reminder/bring forward system to reduce delays in processing applications for supporting people rent subsidy.
- Adult Protection Investigations – need to ensure that parties with a legitimate need to know are kept appropriately informed of progress and of the decisions made.

Learning at an individual level has included:

- reminding staff about confidentiality. and the need to maintain a respectful approach to service users all times,
- the need to be sensitive to individual service users lifestyles,
- Care needs to be taken to ensure that service users and carers are aware of the purpose of review meetings.

11. Compliments

Compliments provide valuable information about the quality of our services and identify where they are working well.

Teams	No. of compliments 2006/07
Hospital Teams	25 (29)
Assessment & Care Management Teams	77 (62)
Learning Disability Services	60 (14)
Mental Health	44 (13)
Occupational Therapy	28 (24)
Sensory Impairment	39 (11)
Older People Services	388 (156)
Home Care	161 (58)
FABS	58 (63)
Supported Accommodation Team	6 (0)
Strategy and Commissioning/Carers	2 (0)
Total	888 (430)

(Last year's figures are in brackets)

The number of compliments recorded was over double, compared to last year.

The following are examples of some of the compliments received:

"Thank you for everything you are doing to get the best service for our daughter. We really appreciate this. Thanks again."

"I was impressed by their care, understanding and professionalism. I cannot speak highly enough of every member of your team. I cannot emphasise enough what a wonderful job your team do, I would like to thank all of your staff for the care and attention they gave us."

"I want to thank your team for your excellent care and work. 'J' visited me and was very attentive and helpful. Once more my sincere thanks."

"Thank you all for looking after 'D'."

"A big thank you for everything that you have done and still do for me."

“The help given was perfect and everyone was most courteous.”

“Many thanks for all your kindness and support for which I am very grateful.”
“A big thank you for looking after my wife.”

“Thanks for all your support and for going the extra mile. We couldn’t have done it without you. Many thanks.”

“Thank you for having me at the coffee morning.”

“I would like to thank everyone at East Sussex Social Services for all the support over the years.”

“Thank you all for your help in getting me back on my feet again.”

“It’s nice to know there are people who are thoughtful. Thank you for all your help.”

“Thank you for all your help and support. I will never forget your kindness.”

“The level of service and kindness of staff has always been 100%, but recently the staff have raised that level higher.”

“I’m not sure how I would have managed with out you. Thank you.”

“I had no idea that Social Services could be such a great asset and comfort.”

“Thank you for all the help you have given me. Social Services often seem to get criticised for things that go wrong, but I have nothing but praise for the way you dealt with the situation.”

12. Consultation

People who use the complaints procedure are routinely asked about their views about the complaints procedure. Whilst not all survey questions were answered, the comments received indicate that most people feel well informed about the procedure and have found staff helpful and responsive in dealing with their concerns, although at times they found the process took too long. Generally, complainants wanted their experience to inform and improve service delivery. Some people expressed concern about the vulnerability of people who had nobody to act on their behalf.

Preparation for the report included consultation with those who have an interest in promoting or supporting service users to access the procedure. This included a

wide range of voluntary organisations, Independent People, external Investigating Officers, those involved in Complaints Review Panels.

30 responses were received, in total. From these it was evident that the complaints procedure was well known and regarded as a positive mechanism for resolving issues and promoting change. The support provided by the Complaints Unit, at all stages of the procedure, was considered helpful and customer focused.

An organisation supporting carers' expressed concern about our understanding of carers' roles and our general communication with individual carers and them as an organisation that supports carers. This provided some helpful feedback and the complaints unit will take this forward as a priority.

13. Single Complaints Regulations for Adult Social Care and NHS

Although outside the reporting year, it is important to note that in June 2007, the Department of Health published a consultation document 'Making Experience Count'. This document set out their ideas for developing a single, simple and consistent approach to the way that health and social care services respond to complaints. The consultation ended in October 2007 and implementation of the new procedures is expected in 2009.

14. Future Developments

The focus for the coming year will be on:

- developing information about advocacy services for complainants,
- developing a range of tools to support managers to investigate and respond to complaints positively
- delivering a range of training to support managers and staff to handle complaints positively
- develop our mechanisms for reporting and monitoring changes and learning from complaints
- develop relationships with carers organisations

- establish effective ways of working with voluntary sector groups to ensure that the complaints procedure is accessible to all of our service users.

15. Conclusion

It is important to have in place effective and accessible means for service users' comments and complaints to be heard, and responses to be made. The complaints procedure provides this opportunity.

Regrettably, things can and do go wrong and with resources stretched and prioritised to meet the needs of the most vulnerable, complaints will be made. However, this year's report shows how comments, complaints and compliments can influence service development and improve services.

Feedback Form

Adult Social Care Comments, Compliments and Complaints

Annual Report 2006-2007

Please take a few minutes to fill in this feedback form which will help us find out whether or not this report has been effective in informing you about how we listen and respond to comments, compliments and complaints.

Please return it to Contact Officer:

Janette Lyman, Complaints Manager, Adults Social Care
County Hall
St Annes Crescent
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1. Did the report contain the content you wanted?

- Yes
No

If the answer is no, what further information would you like to see included in the report?

2. Is the document easy to understand?

- Yes
No

3. Is the format of the document easy to follow?

- Yes
No

4. Is there anything you think we could do to improve (i.e. Report, Format)

Name (Optional): _____

Date: _____

Thank you for taking time to fill in this form.