

Report to: **Cabinet**

Date: **18 October 2005**

Title of Report: **Annual Report on Complaints, Compliments and Comments, 2004-05**

By: **Director of Children's Services**

Purpose of Report: **To report on the functioning and effectiveness of the complaints procedure**

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**RECOMMENDATION: The Cabinet is recommended to note the complaints procedure annual review report for 2004/2005**

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## **1. Financial Appraisal**

1.1 The cost of responding to complaints in 2004/2005 was contained within the Department's budget.

## **2. Supporting Information**

2.1 A report on the Social Services complaints procedure is a statutory requirement and submitted annually to the Cabinet. The report (Annual Report on Complaints, Compliments and Comments, attached at Appendix 1) provides information about the complaints made by young people and adults about the social care element of Children's Services.

2.2 The complaints procedure is a means to identify problems and consider action necessary to address these and so improve services. Complaints make a positive contribution, with the complaints unit being instrumental in monitoring and informing learning.

2.3 Compliments also provide valuable information about the quality of services.

2.4 A range of agencies were surveyed because of their interest in the procedure and their involvement in supporting people to use it. Those using the procedure have also contributed.

## **3. Complaints and Compliments**

3.1 181 complaints were made by young people and adults, representing an overall decrease of 16% from the previous year. Significantly, complaints from young people themselves have not diminished. 32 young people made complaints, in comparison to 31 complaints in the previous year.

3.2 The key areas of complaint for young people were about unwelcome decisions (34%) and some services being insufficient (18%). The former includes issues about frequent changes in social workers and placement choice. The latter includes feeling they were less well supported from the age of 15. The key areas of complaint for adults were unwelcome decisions (18%) and poor communication (16%). An example of the former is the decision to stop outreach services and, of the latter, feelings of not being listened to.

3.3 98% of all complaints were resolved at the local resolution stage. This demonstrates the time, effort and commitment of staff in trying to resolve problems.

3.4 Response times for young people amounted to an average number of 7 days and, for adults, the average number of days was 15.

3.5 40% of complaints from young people were upheld and 40% partly upheld. 22% of complaints from adults were upheld and 24% partly upheld.

3.6 Only 4 complaints moved to the formal investigation stage, a reduction of 25% on the previous year's figure.

3.7 1 complaint proceeded to a complaints review panel. This is one less than the previous year.

3.8 The Ombudsman received 4 enquiries. Of these, 1 was referred to the insurers, 1 referred back to the authority for further investigation and the remaining 2 required no action.

3.9 69 compliments were recorded, as compared with 79 compliments in the previous year. The complementary reduction in complaints would account for the reduction in compliments.

#### **4. Themes and Learning from Complaints**

4.1 Information from complaints enables “trouble spots” to be identified, so aiding planning, development and continuous improvement in services.

4.2 Respite care placements for children with disabilities is one of the “trouble spots” identified through complaints, as are issues raised by young people about placement changes. Such examples should inform service planning.

4.3 Learning from complaints can occur at a number of levels, individual, team and organisational, and at all stages of the complaints procedures (see the report at Appendix 1 for further information).

#### **5. Consultation and Commission for Social Care Inspection**

5.1 Comments from people using the complaints procedure indicate they are well informed about the procedure and find staff helpful, polite and courteous.

5.2 A total of 51 responses were received. Positive comments were received about how the process worked, the management of complaints review panels and the assistance provided by the complaints unit to staff in trying to resolve complaints.

5.3 Areas for further development were identified. These include improving access to the procedure by people from black and ethnic minority groups and ensuring that young people continue to access the procedure and experience it positively.

5.4 The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) identified the complaints system as a strength within Children’s Services, at their inspection of Children’s Services.

#### **6. National Developments**

6.1 Consultation documents reviewing complaints procedures were produced by the CSCI, the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills. Overall these documents focused on making complaints procedures more robust, transferring the review panel stage to CSCI, the role of complaints personnel being stronger and developing a positive culture of listening to users. The implementation of these changes has now been deferred.

#### **7. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation**

7.1 The Complaints Procedure Directions 1990 state that the Council will monitor the operation of the complaints procedure. The Representations Procedure guidance states that an annual report dealing with the operation of the complaints procedure should be compiled and presented to an appropriate committee. This is the annual report for the period 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2005.

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