

Report to: **Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**
Date: **21 September 2009**
By: **Director of Children's Services**
Title of report: **Children's Services Complaints Procedure Annual Report**
Purpose of report: **To report on the functioning and effectiveness of the Complaints Procedure**

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee is recommended to note and comment on the Children's Services Complaints Procedure Annual Report for 2008/2009 and forward relevant issues to the Lead Member meeting.

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 The cost of responding to complaints in 2008/2009 was contained within the Department's budget.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 An annual report on the functioning and effectiveness of the complaints procedure is a requirement for social care services, as is submitting the report annually to an appropriate Committee. The Children's Services Complaints Team comprises of a complaints manager and assistant complaints officer responsible for the complaints service across the whole of Children's Services (**with the exception of schools**). The information contained in the report (Annual Report on Complaints, Representations and Compliments) is an overview of the complaint team's work and is attached at Appendix 1.

3. Complaints, Representations and Compliments

3.1 There is no significant change in the total number of complaints received in this business year and the previous one. Complaints from adults totalled **211** this year and amounted to **223** in the previous year. Complaints from young people totalled **26** this year and amounted to **22** in the previous year.

3.2 Councillor and MP enquiries made to the Director of Children's Services amounted to **73**. Again this is not a significant increase from the **67** enquiries made in the previous year. The Complaints team helps to co-ordinate responses to Councillors and MP's on the Director's behalf.

3.3 The Complaints team also receives other representations which cannot be recorded as complaints, however these involve a considerable amount of work in either providing the information being sought or resolving the query for the individual concerned. For example, we were contacted by another authority who had received a letter from an elderly resident of East Sussex. The letter was difficult to read but made reference to the writers concern for children who were being abused. The writer knew this because he holidayed in the other authority's area regularly. We were able to arrange for Adult Social Care to make a home visit to the writer and to then pass on the information they received to the other authority. In this year, **64** such enquiries were received, as opposed to **21** last year. This represents an increase of 205%.

3.4 The focus continues to be on resolution at the first stage of the procedure. Mediation was used following a formal investigation, mitigating the need for progression to a Complaints Review Panel. The number of formal investigations has remained static at **4** as was the case last year. 3 investigations have been completed. There were 24 elements of complaint across all three. Overall 1 complaint was upheld, whilst the other 2 were overall not upheld.

3.5 Again as was the case last year, there have been no complaints review panels this year.

3.6 The number of recorded Ombudsman enquiries have increased to **10** this year from **3** previously. This is the result of improved internal systems for information sharing and co-ordination. In one case, the Ombudsman found maladministration with injustice and requested that the Authority provided financial redress for the loss of suitable educational provision and for failure to provide respite care. The remaining enquiries were either no or insufficient evidence of mal administration, no action or not upheld.

3.7 Reporting of compliments continues to improve enormously, enabling us to record **371** compliments in this year as opposed to **142** in the previous year. This represents an increase of 161%.

4. Issues of Complaint

4.1 Young people complained about air conditioning not working in one of our residential homes, the conduct of staff and peers in a residential home, the delay in resolving issues about school placement, errors in a letter sent by Children's Services, requests for changes of placement.

4.2 Adults complained about lack of response to telephone calls, lack of respite care, the serving of a notice for school non attendance, the school provision for a child who has sensory needs, choice of school placement for children with special educational needs and the adoption process.

4.3 Some key themes that have arisen are dissatisfaction with school placements for families whose children have special educational needs, delay or lack of response to phone calls and letters and a lack of respect shown when talking with families, delays in assessments being carried out and lack of funding being agreed for a range of services.

5. Suggestions for Continuous Improvement

5.1 As a result of complaints managers were able to make suggestions for continuous improvement some of which are within their control and relate to practice within their area of service and others which have resource implications and so beyond their control.

6. Overview of the year & Future Developments

6.1 We have achieved the actions referred to in the last annual report which related to customer feedback surveys and developing a means of gathering equalities information from those accessing the service. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these developments.

6.2 The key focus for the coming year is to continue through staff training to emphasise the need for empathy, clarity and objectivity in responding to complaints, implementing the customer care standards and to develop the complaints peer mentor's project which involves training a group of young people to act as mentors to other young people wishing to raise concerns about Children's Services.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 requires the County Council to monitor the operation of the complaints procedure and that an annual report should be provided at the end of the each business year. This is the Annual Report for the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009.

MATT DUNKLEY

Director of Children's Services

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Local Members: All

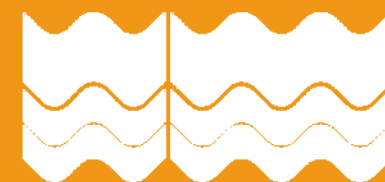
Background documents: Annual Report on Complaints, Representations and Compliments
April 2008 – March 2009

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Annual Report on Complaints, Representations and Compliments

April 2008- March 2009

East Sussex
County Council



Contents

1. Scope and Context of Report	3
2. Overview of Complaints, MP and Councillor Enquiries and Compliments by Team and Numbers	5
3. Other Representations	8
4. Stage 1 Accessing the Complaints Procedure	10
5. Stage 1 Complaints Issues	12
6. Stage 1 Response Times	16
7. Stage 1 Outcomes	16
8. Stage 2 Formal Investigation Numbers and Response Times	17
9. Stage 2 Formal Investigation Complaints Issues	18
10. Stage 3 Complaints Review Panel	18
11. Local Government Ombudsman	19
12. Councillor and MP Enquiries- Numbers and Issues	19
13. Suggestions for Continuous Improvement identified by Services	21
14. Survey	23
15. Review of Last Year's Development Targets	24
16. Future Development	24
17. Some Compliments	25

1. Scope & Context of Report

1.1 This report provides information about complaints received by Children's Services (with the exception of schools) from 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009 as required under the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.

1.2 Information will also be provided about compliments and other representations received during this period.

1.3 Although the procedure laid out in the above statute applies to social care complaints, the decision was made to apply this procedure across the whole of Children's Services.

1.4 The definition of a complaint, the stages within the complaints procedure and the operational instructions on Comments, compliments and complaints are defined by the above statute and Department of Education and Skills guidance ie "Getting the Best from Complaints" and "Get it Sorted".

1.5 A **complaint** is **defined** as "an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person which requires a response".

1.6 **Representations** may be **defined** as "positive remarks or ideas that require a response". These are normally comments and/or compliments.

1.7 The statute and guidance define who can complain and what can be complained about in relation to social care services. Generally however, where dissatisfaction is expressed, this is heard and responded to, without rigidly adhering to the guidance.

2. The complaints procedure has 3 internal stages:-

Stage 1 – Local Resolution – Local teams and contracted external providers are expected to respond to and resolve complaints as soon as possible or within 10 working days. This can be extended to 20 working days in certain circumstances ie the complexity of the complaint.

Stage 2 – Formal Investigation – This stage is instigated by the complainant if they remain dissatisfied with the response to their complaint at stage 1. The formal investigation may be conducted by an off line manager or an external investigating officer. For social care complaints, an independent person is also always appointed. An independent person is external to the Local Authority and quality assures the conduct of the investigation. Although independent persons are not generally used for complaints across the whole of Children's

Services, there may be occasions when it is appropriate to appoint one. At the end of an investigation, the Head of Service adjudicates on the findings of the investigation and responds to the complainant. The statutory timescale for the investigation is 25 to 65 working days.

Stage 3 – Complaints Review Panel – This stage is instigated by the complainant if they remain dissatisfied with the response to their complaint at stage 2. The complaints review panel is made up of 1 independent chair and 2 independent panellists. The panel considers the documentation to date and also hears from both the complainant and department before forming a view and making recommendations to the Director of Children’s Services. The statutory timescale for setting up a Complaints Review Panel is 30 working days, with the Director sending a response to the complainant within 20 working days of the date of the panel meeting.

Local Government Ombudsman – A complainant may refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman at any time, although the advice they are likely to be given is that they should exhaust the local authority procedure first. With the agreement of the complainant, complaints can be referred early (before completion of the statutory complaints procedure) to the Local Government Ombudsman in specific circumstances.

The Local Government Ombudsman will either make enquiries to satisfy themselves that the complaint has been appropriately dealt with or make a decision to investigate the actions of the Local Authority.

2. Overview of Compliments, Complaints & MP and Councillor Enquiries By Team & Numbers

Team	Stage 1 Complaints made by Adults	Stage 1 Complaints made by Young People	MP/ Councillor Enquiries	Stage2 Complaints	Stage 3 Complaints	Other Representa tions	Ombudsman's Enquiries	Total complaints and representations	Compliments
Admissions	13	0	8	0	0	1	6	28	0
Adoption & Permanence Team	4	0	1	0	0	4	0	9	46
Children's Centres	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40
Children with Disability Teams-Care Management	25	0	3	1 1	0	0	1	32	4
Children with Disability Teams- Residential	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9
Children with Sensory Needs	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Complaints Team	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Duty and Assessment Teams	22	0	5	0	0	5	0	32	0
Early Years Childcare and Extended Schools	5	0	1	0	0	4	0	10	74
East Sussex Music Service	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Education Welfare Team	12	0	3	0	0	3	1	19	4

Team	Stage 1 Complaints made by Adults	Stage 1 Complaints made by Young People	MP/Council for Enquiries	Stage2 Complaints	Stage 3 Complaints	Other Representations	Ombudsman's Enquiries	Total complaints and representations	Compliments
Emergency Duty Service	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Family Resource Centres	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	0
Family Support Teams	35	1	8	0	0	19	1	64	20
Flexible Learning and Education Support	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0
Fostering Teams	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	32
14-19 Team/Connexions	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Inclusion Support	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
KITES	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Looked after Children Teams	25	16	4	0	0	6	0	51	20
Management of school buildings	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	3	0
Parentlink	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	34
Planning and Performance	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Play Development Service	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Policy- re description of Hastings	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

Team	Stage 1 Complaints made by Adults	Stage 1 Complaints made by Young People	MP/Council or Enquiries	Stage 2 Complaints	Stage 3 Complaints	Other Representations	Ombudsman's Enquiries	Total Complaints and representations	Compliments
Reintegration & Behaviour Support	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	3	0
Safeguarding Team	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	2
Special Educational Needs	17	1	18	1	0	4	1	43	19
Substance Misuse Team	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
School Transport	5	0	9	0	0	0	0	14	3
Youth Development Service	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	2
Youth Offending Team	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	4	52
Youth Support Team	23	7	6	0	0	6	0	42	2
Other	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	7	0
TOTALS	211(223)	26(22)	73 (67)	4 (4)	0(0)	64(21)	10(3)	391(340)	371 (142)

*Figures in brackets above and in the remainder of the report denote previous year's figures

**Where figures are shown in colour this signifies a Stage 2 investigation or Ombudsman Enquiry spanning more than one team

2.1 Compliment reporting has improved considerably, enabling us to record an increase of 161%. Compliments are always welcome given the difficult discussions and decisions staff delivering services often have to manage with young people and their families, stretched resources in terms of services offered and staff time, the fact that much of Children's Services work has a statutory basis which is not always welcomed and also the negative stereotyping that adverse publicity has on the public perception of social workers in particular.

2.2 There has been a small decrease in the number of complaints made by adults. Complaints made by young people and enquiries made by Councillors and MP have increased marginally.

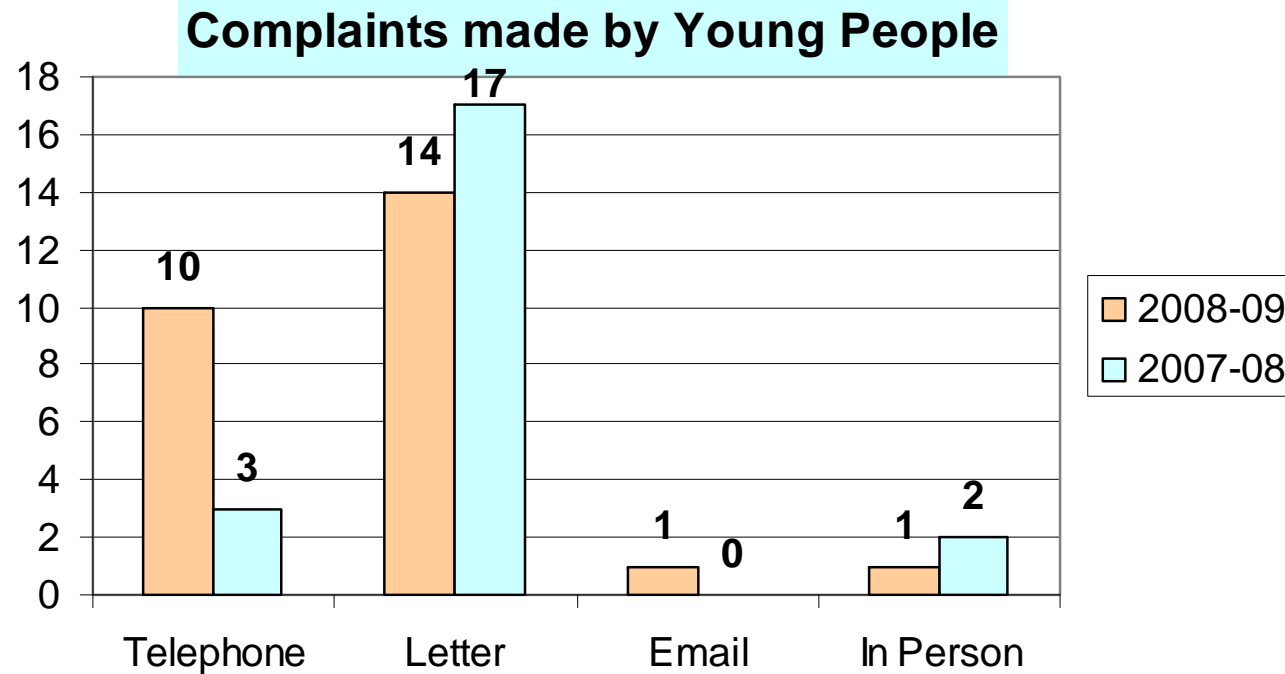
3. Other Representations

3.1 The complaints team also received 64 (21) further enquiries, which could not be classified as complaints and were not MP/Councillor Enquiries. Nevertheless many of these involve a considerable amount of work to either provide the information being sought or to resolve the query for the individuals concerned. This is an increase of 205%.

Team	No of Enquiries	Examples of Enquiries
Admissions	1	Non provision of educational maintenance allowance
Adoption & Permanence	4	Comments from members of public after adverse comments made by Judge about ESCC following adoption proceedings Lack of support for family with adopted children who did not wish for this to be recorded as a complaint
Re-integration & Behaviour Support	1	Concerns from school about Children's Services actions in relation to the welfare of two pupils
Duty and Assessment Teams	5	Concern on the letter sent following anonymous information received Help given to another LA after they received non legible letter from gentleman in East Sussex about possible child abuse Concerns re information held on records
Early Years	4	Closure of SKIL Withdrawal of funding
Education Welfare Service	3	Result of warning letters and penalty notices sent to parents in relation to children's absence –and lateness to school Comments about truancy being result of parents' need to take holidays
Emergency Duty Service	1	Enquiry about the normal length of time taken to respond to a call made to the Emergency Duty Service.
Family Support Teams	19	Comments from members of the public following media coverage of local case Issues around contact Requests for advice and support Insensitivity in approach
Fostering	1	Search for a child previously looked after by East Sussex

Team	No of Enquiries	Examples of Enquiries
Looked after Children Teams	6	Perceived difference in treatment received by foster carers and carers- claim of discrimination Delay in payment of invoice for Service Provider Concerns for safety and well being of adopted child from contracted worker Request from young person to see father's children Request for change of social worker
School building management	2	Use of mobile classrooms Condition of school boundary
Special Educational Needs	4	Lack of OT provision Lack of provision of speech and language therapy facilities for children Request for change of school
Youth Support Team	6	Request for Review Panel which was out of time Requests for support and contact from team
Other	7	General enquiries which were redirected internally or externally
Total	64	

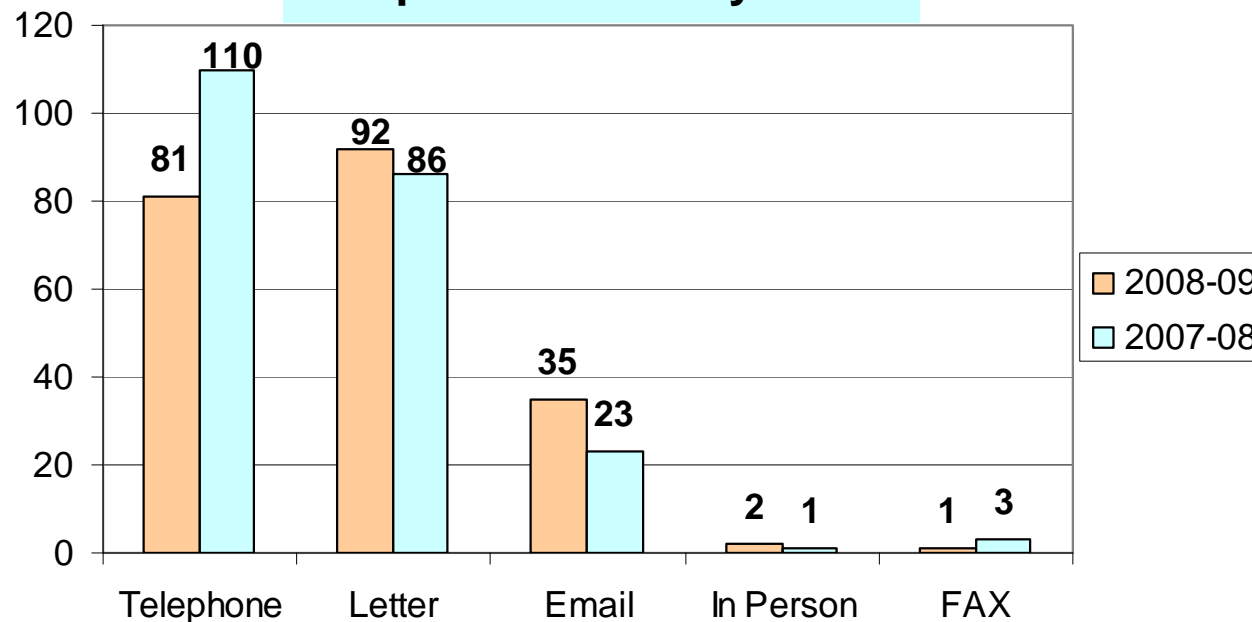
4. Stage 1 – Accessing the Complaints Procedure



4.1 Included in our public information on complaints, comments and compliments is a letter format and freepost envelope which continues to be the principal way in which young people access the complaints procedure.

4.2 Of the 26 complaints received from young people, 4(3) young people were from BME backgrounds, 14(8) were from girls and 12 (8) from boys. Ages ranged from 11(12) to 20 (17) years old.

Complaints made by Adults



4.3 Complaints made by adults about Children's Services come from a range of people:-parents, carers, extended family members, foster carers, solicitors.

4.4 The ethnicity of complainants is not always known. Of the information we do have 15 (50) complainants were white British and 1 (3) was of mixed ethnicity.

4.5 The complaints team started piloting a monitoring form to gather equalities information. In total 79 forms were sent out. Only 4 were returned.

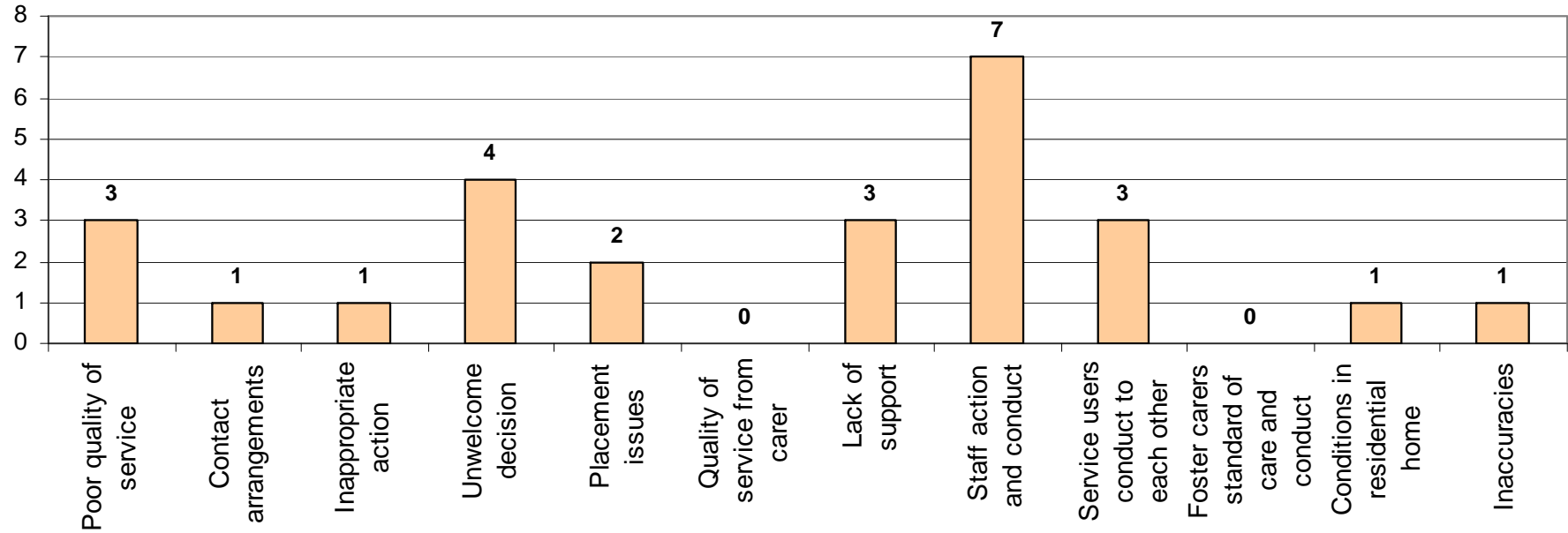
5. Stage 1 – Complaint Issues		
Stage 1 -Young People		
	2008-09	2007-08
Poor quality of service i.e. delays in school placements being sorted out and insufficient support during family breakdown	3	3
Contact arrangements	1	1
Inappropriate action	1	3
Unwelcome decision	4	3
Placement issues	2	1
Quality of service from carer	0	1
Lack of support	3	1
Staff action and conduct	7	5
Service users conduct to each other	3	2
Foster carers standard of care and conduct	0	2
Conditions in residential home	1	0
Inaccuracies	1	0

5.1 Some of the issues complained about were the air conditioning not working in a residential home, the conduct of staff and peers in a residential home, the delay in resolving issues about school placement, errors in a letter sent by Children’s Services, requests for changes of placement.

Twenty five of the complaints made by young people were about social care services and 1 was about special educational needs services.

5.2 Young people are always offered an advocate to support them through the process of making a complaint and those living within East Sussex residential homes have regular access to advocacy. Of those offered an advocate 5 took up this offer.

Stage 1 Complaint Issues by Young People 2008-09



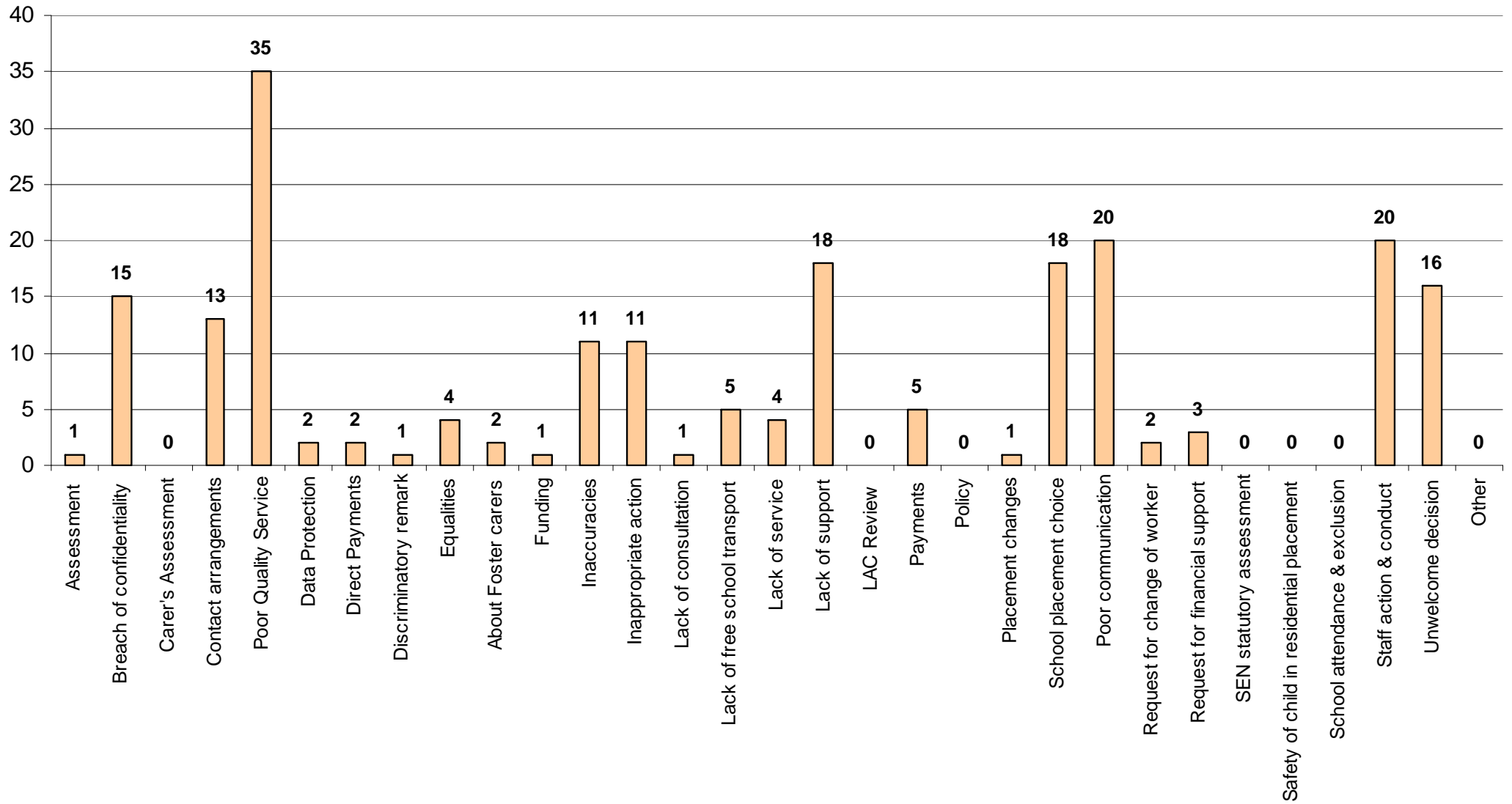
Stage 1 - Adults		
	2008-09	2007-08
Assessment	1	4
Breach of confidentiality	15	7
Carer's Assessment	0	2
Contact arrangements	13	3
Poor Quality Service	35	81
Data Protection	2	0
Direct Payments	2	1
Discriminatory remark	1	0
Equalities	4	2
About Foster carers	2	5
Funding	1	0

	2008-09	2007-08
Inaccuracies	11	0
Inappropriate action	11	25
Lack of consultation	1	5
Lack of free school transport	5	1
Lack of service	4	1
Lack of support	18	7
LAC Review	0	1
Payments	5	0
Policy	0	1
Placement changes	1	1
School placement choice	18	2
Poor communication	20	21
Request for change of worker	2	0
Request for financial support	3	0
SEN statutory assessment	0	1
Safety of child in residential placement	0	1
School attendance & exclusion	0	3
Staff action & conduct	20	16
Unwelcome decision	16	32
Other	0	0

5.3 Some examples of complaints made were lack of response to telephone calls, lack of respite care, the serving of a penalty notice for school non attendance, the school provision for a child who has sensory needs, choice of school placement for children with special educational needs and the adoption process.

5.4 Some key themes that have arisen are dissatisfaction with school placements for families whose children have special educational needs, delay or lack of response to phone calls and letters and a lack of respect shown when talking with families (contrary to the Customer Care Standards of the Local Authority) delays in assessments being carried out and lack of funding being agreed for a range of services.

Stage 1 Complaint Issues By Adults 2008-09



6. Stage 1 – Response Times

Young People					
Total no of complaints		Responded to between 0-10 working days		Responded to between 11-20 working days	
2008-09	2007-8	2008-09	2007-08	2008-09	2007-08
26	22	18 (69%)	14 (63%)	5 (19%)	6 (27%)

Adults					
Total no of complaints		Responded to between 0-10 working days		Responded to between 11-20 working days	
2008-09	2007-08	2008-09	2007-08	2008-09	2007-08
211	223	122 (57%)	138 (61%)	64(30%)	62 (27%)

6.1 3 (2) complaints made by young people and 17 (23) complaints made by adults took longer than 20 working days to respond to. The reasons for the delay in relation to complaints made by young people were related to the issues of complaint and the legitimate need for more time to gather information. The delays in response to complaints made by adults were generally due to work pressures on managers.

7. Stage 1 – Outcomes

Young People						
	Upheld		Partly Upheld		Not Upheld	
	2008-09	2007-08	2008-09	2007-08	2008-09	2007-08
Totals	7	6	7	4	11	12

Adults						
Complaint Type	Upheld		Partly Upheld		Not Upheld	
	2008-09	2007-08	2008-09	2007-08	2008-09	2007-08
Totals	38	40	59	57	100	125

8. Stage 2- Formal Investigation – Numbers & Response Times

Service Area	Number of formal investigations	Time taken to respond
Children with Disability Team - Care Management	1	54 working days
Children with Disability Team - Care Management and Safeguarding	1	60 working days
Youth Offending Team	1	88 working days
Children with Disability Team - Care Management and Special Educational Needs Team	1	Ongoing

8.1 The number of formal investigations in this business year and the previous year remain static and it is a credit to staff, managers and the work of the complaints team that the majority of complaints are dealt with at stage 1, with few proceeding to stage 2.

8.2 One investigation took longer than the statutory timescale. This was because the Investigating Officer was experiencing some personal difficulties which were unforeseen prior to engagement.

8.3 Where appropriate mediation is offered prior to proceeding to the next stage of the complaints procedure. Although offered in the case of one complaint, this was not accepted until the end of the formal investigation.

8.4 Formal investigations normally include a number of concerns, ranging in complexity and therefore, the likelihood is that some elements of complaint will be upheld and others not. Of the 3 completed formal investigations, overall 1 was upheld, whilst the other 2 were overall not upheld.

9. Stage 2 – Formal Investigation – Complaints Issues

9.1. The issues under investigation related to lack of respite care provision for a young person with complex needs, lack of support from the Children with Disabilities team, unreasonable action in placing children on the child protection register, failure to progress an Action Plan Order and to keep parents/carers informed of progress.

9.2 Across all 3 completed investigations there were 24 elements of complaint. 9 elements were upheld and 5 were partly upheld. The remainder were either not upheld or there was no finding.

9.3 Recommendations included:-

- reviewing child protection procedures in relation to frequency and nature of visiting when a child is on a child protection plan
- a reminder to staff that reports for child protection initial conferences must be shared with parents/carers at least 3 working days before a conference takes place
- a reminder to staff to be aware of the style of communication as well as the content

9.4 A mediation session followed a stage 2 investigation and was helpful in defining future relationships between the department and the complainants.

10. Stage 3 - Complaints Review Panels

10.1 There was one request for a Stage 3 Complaints Review Panel. This was discussed further with the complainant and agreement was reached for there to be an early referral to the Ombudsman.

10.2 The outcome of the complaint that was referred to the Ombudsman early was that there was insufficient evidence of maladministration for the Ombudsman to conduct an investigation.

11. Local Government Ombudsman

Teams	Nos	Issues
Admissions	6	Free school transport Admission process
SEN	1	Statutory assessment request
SEN and Family Support	1	Lack of respite care Failure to provide full time education
Education Welfare Service	1	Objection to warning letter being sent
Children with Disability Services - Care Management and Safeguarding	1	Premature referral – referred back to the Local Authority for formal investigation

11.1 The above number is not representative of all enquiries and investigations made by the Ombudsman. They represent only those known to the complaints team.

11.2 The Ombudsman investigated in one case and found maladministration with injustice. The authority was asked to provide financial redress for loss of suitable educational provision and to make a payment for failure to provide respite care for a period of time.

11.3 The remaining were either no or insufficient evidence of maladministration, no action or not upheld.

12. Councillor and MP Enquiries- Numbers and Issues

Team	No of Enquiries	Issues
Admissions	8	Unhappy with school placement allocated to child. Enquiry about Admissions Appeal process
Adoption & Permanence	1	Provision of schooling for previously LAC now adopted
Re-integration & Behaviour Support	2	Request for objective audit of reintegration process

Team	No of Enquiries	Issues
Children with Disabilities Care Management	2	Direct payments provision Housing needs for child with disabilities
Data Protection	1	Unhappy with Council's decision to claim exemption
Duty and Assessment Teams	5	Delay in OT assessment Request for assessment of family
Early Years	1	Enquiry about a child minder following concerns expressed
Education Welfare Service	3	Concerns about the education provision for a child not attending school
Family Support Teams	8	Request for support for family member Contact arrangements Concerns for well being of grandchildren
Flexible Learning Education Support Service	2	Lack of home tuition
Looked after Children Teams	4	Contact arrangements Lack of support for parents
Management of school buildings	1	Use of mobile school classrooms
Special Educational Needs	18	Requests for children to be assessed for statement of SEN Unhappy with school placement Requesting change of school placement Request for information about SEN Tribunals
Transport	9	Unhappy with non provision of free school transport
Youth Offending Team	2	Lack of appropriate support for young people
Youth Support Team	6	Concerns about availability of services families with young people.

12.1 The complaints team co-ordinates the Director's responses to these enquiries, when they involve young people and their families. Internal procedures have been reviewed to facilitate improved notification of such enquiries, as they are also a valuable source of information and customer feedback. The above figures by no means represent all the enquiries made, only the ones known to the complaints team.

13. Suggestions for Continuous Improvement identified by Services

Team	Suggestions for Continuous Improvement
Adoption	When commissioning an outside agency to undertake a piece of work, the Service Level Agreement should be more focused around the need for communication with the Local Authority manager
Children with Disabilities	<p>Clearer explanations need to be given about the technicalities of adaptations and timescales to minimise anxiety and distress to families.</p> <p>Staff are reminded that children with special needs who staff are aware can be unpredictable must be closely supervised.</p> <p>There are minimal community services for children with autistic spectrum disorder. There is still a need for respite care provision for this group of children</p> <p>Young people with disabilities would benefit from more focussed services to support them in developing independence</p> <p>Many young people with autistic spectrum disorder do not meet the eligibility criteria for the children with disability service. Some parents/carers do not feel that the generic social care services have the understanding, nor the services to meet the needs of their children, hence they have complained about this</p> <p>There have been requests for Children's Services eligibility criteria, particularly when parents/carers are trying to establish their entitlement to services. Greater clarity overall would be helpful</p> <p>Knowledge about our responsibilities in relation to carer's assessments and direct payments is variable across Children's Services</p>
Duty and Assessment Team	Staff should be reminded to visit and interview all children when conducting an assessment, in line with a recommendation from the Laming Enquiry
Early Years & Personnel	<p>A help sheet will be produced by the Personnel Support Unit (PSU) to increase awareness of how to word recruitment advertisements in a non discriminatory way</p> <p>Age and Disability Regulations training is currently provided to all new staff. Refresher training will be introduced for existing employees</p> <p>Working with managers to develop a central bank of job descriptions and person specifications is being considered. This will help with consistent and appropriate wording in such documents across the service</p>
Educational Welfare	<p>To minimise parents' concerns about being invited to attendance panels, procedures are being altered to ensure schools raise issues and concerns directly with parents before involving the Education Welfare Service. These procedures will be altered in September.</p> <p>In future contact details of the officer/manager will be given to parents/carers who are stopped as a result of 'attendance swoops'</p>

Family Support Team	<p>Need to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of people who request this is respected</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Admin staff have been asked to pass invoices straight to Practice Manager if they arrive by post, so they can be dealt with expediently --</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Where employees are also receiving services, it is essential to maintain professional and personal boundaries by using home addresses and not their work address</p>
14-19 Development Team	Referral form has been altered to better capture information that schools give about students before they come on placement
Finance	Ensure alternative phone cover is set up when someone is on long term leave
Fostering	Social workers must inform parents without delay of incidents of concern relating to their children. Staff should understand that where we share parental responsibility, it is our responsibility to inform parents and not the young person's
Looked after Children (Residential Homes)	<p>Young people should be involved in discussions about staff moves between our residential homes and their views considered before decisions are made</p> <p>-----</p> <p>To speed up the process of repairs when the air conditioning system doesn't work, back up parts have been purchased</p> <p>-----</p> <p>When children are placed residentially from another Local Authority, we need to ensure that the placing Local Authority's requirements in terms of a young person's care are explicit</p>
Looked after Children Teams	<p>When staff make changes to the agreed contact arrangements, they should contact the relevant parties and confirm their decision making both verbally and in writing</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Ensure staff are aware of the importance of good, clear, respectful and honest communication with service users and their families</p>
Service for Children with Sensory Needs	<p>The response time could have been shorter and communication between professionals could have been more effective</p> <p>Procedural shortcomings have been identified in relation to school refusers and the service will be alert to these in the future</p>
Transport	The need to give more information in writing and to keep parents better informed about why certain actions are taken was recognised

14. Surveys

In 2008-09 71 surveys were sent to people who had made a complaint. 19 were returned. The key results were as follows:-

- 15 respondents said they did not receive written information about how to make a complaint

This was an experimental year as we had intended to provide the young people's leaflet to all and until latterly we did not provide a separate leaflet for adults. We did have fact sheets that could be given to adults wishing to make complaints by services. We have since produced leaflets to be given to adults making complaints about Children's Services

- 13 respondents said they found it easy or reasonably easy to make a complaint
- 18 respondents said they were informed of the process of complaint
- 15 respondents said staff were either helpful, polite or informative
- 6 respondents made supplementary comments about services lacking empathy, failing to apologise when things have gone wrong, failing to think creatively about issues, failing to look into issues objectively

These comments echo some of the themes identified earlier in the report about lack of response to phone calls, lack of respect when talking to families and a recommendation made following a formal investigation about reminding staff to be aware of the style of communication as well as the content, supporting the need to work in line with the County Council's Customer Care Standards.

15. Review of Last Year's Development Targets

15.1 Last year we planned to review the surveys we send out to complainants, to improve our data collection relating to minority groups and to increase consistency and a customer focused approach to responding to complaints across Children's Services through team training for non social care teams. A course for managers on writing responses to complaints was also provided.

15.2 Surveys have been reviewed and changes made. It is too early to assess whether the changes will result in higher returns. We have also developed monitoring forms to gather equalities information. Again it is too early to assess whether this is an effective way of collecting data although the low rate of returns to date is not encouraging. Team training has been provided and needs to be built on.

16. Future Development

16.1 Given the above, senior managers will need to continue to model a positive approach to listening and responding to the concerns raised by those in contact with services. Staff training in complaints will focus more explicitly on the 6 principles of good complaints handling identified by the Parliamentary and Health Ombudsman, so that continued emphasis is placed on listening and responding to concerns objectively and with clarity and empathy.

These principles are:-

- Getting it right
- Being customer focused
- Being open and accountable
- Acting fairly and proportionately
- Putting things right
- Seeking continuous improvement

16.2 A new initiative to be further developed in the coming business year is the peer mentoring project for young people making complaints. A group of 3 young volunteers will receive training and guidance to act as peer mentors. It is hoped that the project will be up and running within the year and may improve access to the complaints procedure.

16.3 Continue to explore effective ways in which to gather equalities information.

17. Some Compliments

Adoption

“Thank you for being X and Y’s Guardian Angel for these past few years. We know how hard you worked to ensure the children had a happy and secure future. You have shown them, and us, such amazing care and support through challenging times.....It is a testament to your professional dedication that our family is now complete and has a very bright future ahead.”

Inclusion Support

(Re the ASD Support Services of Early Years Teaching and Support Services.)

“To feel despair but be met with a positive attitude and for someone just to say it’s OK we can help with that, makes the impossible seem possible....The services you provide in this comparatively small area of the country are something to enhance, develop and be proud of....Thank you for everything you have done, it may be your job and something you face each day, but I feel it is done professionally and with sensitivity and has ensured I have reached some important goals for E and myself.”

LAC- Residential

“All I wish to say is that Lansdowne gave me back my daughter and made her a better person. I can’t thank them all enough for the help and support they have given us both.”

Special Educational Needs

“I am writing to say thank you for your telephone call...I was genuinely speechless and so would now like to express my thanks properly...That you have taken these actions brings so much relief to the whole family. Thank you once again for all of your efforts.”

Youth Offending Team

“X popped in today with his baby, 6 months old, and said he was really grateful for all we have done for him and he could not be where he is today i.e. with partner and baby and not in prison, without our help”