

# Adult Social Care

## Complaints and Feedback

### Annual Report

### 2015 – 2016

**If you have any comments about the content of this report please contact us:**

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## 1. Context

This report provides information about complaints made about or in relation to Adult Social Care during the twelve months between **1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016**. Our complaints process follows the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations, 2009.

Adult Social Care works with large numbers of people throughout the County. This year, we supported over 18,400 working age adults and older people through the provision of services. We also provided services to 6,395 carers, including the provision of information / advice and signposting.

The department has lead responsibility for safeguarding adults at risk of harm by others. We received and responded to over 4,000 reports of concerns or allegations of adult abuse during the year.

This year we introduced the key duties of the Care Act (2014), which brought together both new and existing care and support legislation into one new act. The principles of the act are built around people's wellbeing, needs and goals. It was the biggest reform of care and support in a long time. For example, for the first time it set out a national eligibility criteria for care and support services. It also made safeguarding more personal and it put carers on the same footing as those they care for.

We were also in the last year of our three year programme to save £27.8 million. As well as continuing to working closely with health colleagues on East Sussex Better Together and Connecting4you to transform health and social care services.

We always want to provide high quality services that meet the needs and circumstances of individuals and their carers. Sometimes things go wrong and because of the personal and complex nature of our services we take all complaints seriously. We aim to identify problems and resolve issues if things do go wrong or fall below expectation. We try to sort things out quickly and

fairly. We want to learn from our mistakes and will make changes to improve our services.

Analysis of information about the complaints received during **2015 -16** means we can reflect on the quality of the services that are delivered to our clients and their carers. This includes considering how well we listened and responded to people's needs and monitoring the impact of having less money to spend on support and care.

We also report the compliments we receive because they provide us with rich and valuable insight about the quality of our services and what works well for people.

All timescales within this report are in working days.

### **1.1 What is a Complaint?**

The Department of Health Guidance 'Learning from Complaints' (2006) defines 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 and how?**

Anyone who receives a service under the Care Act 2014, or anyone who believes they have been unfairly refused a service. Another person can make a complaint on someone else's behalf, if they have the permission or authority to do this.

We publicise information about how to make a complaint in our leaflet "How to make a comment, complaint or compliment" and have an easy read leaflet available called "Are you unhappy about something?"

Complaints can be made in person, by telephone, in writing, by text or email. Complaints can be made directly to the relevant team or to the Complaints and Feedback Team; whichever is easiest.

## 2. The Complaints Process

When you contact the Complaints and Feedback Team with your concerns, we will:

- acknowledge your complaint within 3 working days
- ask you at the outset what you would like to put things right
- agree with you how we plan to respond to your complaint
- arrange for a manager to make enquiries and provide you with a response suitable to your requirements, usually within 10 – 20 working days
- oversee a response that will include a summary of findings and any service improvements, and
- co-ordinate the process by keeping you updated and being your point of contact

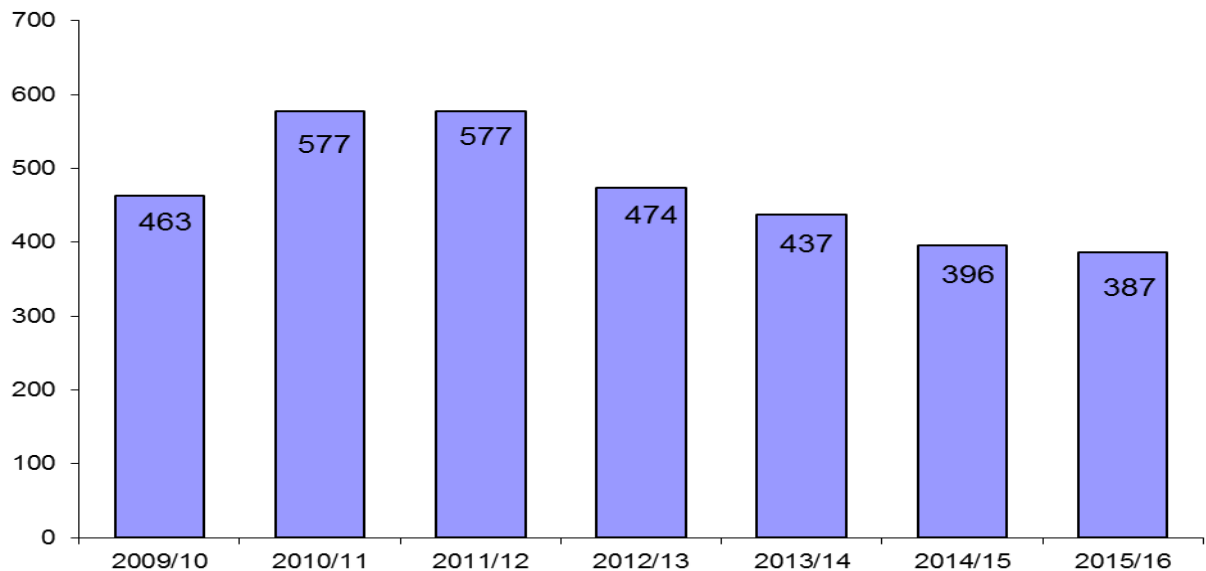
If you are not happy with our final decision or how we have handled your concerns, you can contact the Local Government Ombudsman.

**The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)** has the authority to investigate when it appears that our own complaints process has not resolved your concerns. People can refer their complaint to the LGO at any time, although the LGO will generally refer all complaints back to us if we have not looked at it in our process first.

## 3. Overview of Complaints

This year we recorded **387 complaints**, compared with 396 last year. This figure is the total number of complaints that we received. Some of these complaints are still live, because they entered our monitoring system before 31 March 2016 and are not yet concluded. Any learning from these complaints will be included in next year's report.

### 3.1 Number of complaints received over the past 7 years



Complaints have consistently fallen in numbers over the past few years. We know working closely with people throughout their contact with us is an important part to achieving successful outcomes for people.

### 3.2 Who Complained?

Of the 387 complaints recorded:

- 66 (17%) were reported by clients themselves, this compares to 80 (20%) of complaints in 2014/15 being reported by clients.
- 321 (83%) complaints were made on behalf of clients, compared to 316 (80%) of complaints in 2014/15 being made on behalf of clients. Adult sons and daughters of clients made the majority of complaints on behalf of their parents; others included spouses, parents, advocates, and other relations. Independent advocacy providers assisted 11 clients to make a complaint directly to us; compared to 10 in 2014/15.

We are not quite sure why there are fewer people making complaints directly. We do know that we have worked closely with people to identify their care and support needs and people have used the appeals processes to problem solve (see page 9). Informally however, we have heard that some people feel afraid their service will be affected, or do not think complaining will make a

difference, and some feel they will not be taken seriously. We have considered this at length and have improved our information about how to complain. We have also continued to review how we help people feel more confident about letting us know when something is not right.

### 3.3 Complaints received by service areas

Adult Social Care (ASC) has different service areas and these are broken down as follows:

- **Adult Social Care Operations** – all the teams that provide and deliver support, including the financial assessment team.
- **Strategy, Commissioning and Supply Management** –interprets national policy locally, commission’s services and oversees the contracts and quality monitoring of purchased services.
- **Planning, Performance and Engagement** –provides support across the organisation including staff and public information, complaints, training, consultations, equality impact assessments and performance data.
- **External Independent Providers** – independent home care agencies, residential or nursing homes and other organisations who provide care.
- **Corporate related complaints** – debt recovery and invoicing of ASC clients.

Service	Number of complaints	Upheld and partly upheld	Average time to respond
Adult Social Care Operations	311 (327)	113 = 36% (35%)	19 days (17 days)
Strategy Commissioning and Supply Management	30 (21)	18 = 60% (33%)	11 days (13 days)
Planning, Performance and Engagement	5 (6)	2 = 40% (17%)	12 days (16 days)
Independent Providers – home care agencies, residential and nursing homes	22 (25)	10 = 45% (48%)	19 days (29 days)
Corporate complaints related to invoicing and debt recovery	19 (17)	12 = 64% (71%)	18 days (22 days)



<b>Total</b>	<b>387</b> <b>(396)</b>	<b>155 = 40%</b> <b>(37%)</b>	<b>18 days</b> <b>(17 days)</b>
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(Last year's figures are in brackets)

### 3.4 Target response times

351 complaints had an outcome recorded. The target time for responding to complaints is 10 to 20 working days, where possible. This year:

- 126 (36%) of complaints received a response within 10 working days.
- 124 (35%) of complaints received a response within 20 working days.
- 101 (29%) did not receive a response within the timescales; although in almost all cases people were aware that it may take longer to respond.

250 (71%) of these complaints received a response within our target times.

This is an indicator of the commitment of our managers to try to resolve issues as soon as possible.

### 3.5 Comparison with the preceding year

Overall there has been a 2.3% decrease in complaints received regarding Adult Social Care (including external independent providers and corporate related complaints), compared to last year. This represents a decrease of 9 complaints.

We know that our Appeals Processes for our Care and Support Assessments, Financial Assessments and Blue Badge Assessments have had an impact on the number of complaints received. All three appeals processes provide an 'off line' review of decisions, usually supported by more information and discussion with practitioners.

Looking at the previous year's report it's noticeable that:

- Adult Social Care Operations saw an overall decrease of 5% in complaints. This was mainly because of a 75% decrease in complaints about the Financial Assessment and Benefits Team who received 52 complaints less than in 2014/15. We believe this is mostly because of the changes made following a review of the financial assessment process.

- The Neighbourhood Support Teams had a 14% increase in complaints (equating to 13 complaints). One of the themes for the year was communication of information about charges for services, where people felt that they had not been told that there would be a charge for all our non-intermediate care services.
- The Blue Badge Service also had an increase of 13 complaints about eligibility, which is an 87% increase compared to last year.
- A 43% increase was recorded for Strategy, Commissioning and Supply Management. This equated to 10 more complaints received than in 2014/15 in relation to Service Placement and Service Procurement. This reflected the national and local challenges facing home care providers. Work continues at all levels to increase capacity to meet the demand for services.
- There has been a 12% decrease in the number of complaints reported directly to us about independent home and residential care providers. This in part might be because the providers have stronger complaints processes in place.
- 155 (40%) complaints were upheld in full or in part. This represents a 5% increase compared to last year, when 148 (37%) complaints found some fault. Where there was fault we tried to make sure that we apologised for whatever went wrong and put things right.
- It took us 18 days on average to respond to complaints; this is one working day more than the average of 17 working days achieved last year.
- The Local Government Ombudsman received 51 complaints and enquiries about ASC compared to 65 the previous year. This represents a 22% decrease in contacts. It is important to acknowledge that resolving complaints involves time and effort, particularly as complaints are increasingly complex and sensitive. The majority of complaints are resolved and we know that the high level of input by practitioners and their

managers pays off and results in far more satisfactory outcomes for the complainant and the department.

#### 4. Complaints about Adult Social Care Services and Teams

<b>Adult Social Care Services</b>	<b>Number of complaints 2015-16</b>	<b>Number of complaints 2014-15</b>
Corporate related complaints	19	17
Contact and Assessment Team	8	3
Discretionary East Sussex Support Scheme (DESSS)	3	2
Blue Badge Team	28	15
Continuing Health Care Team	3	5
County Wide Reviewing Team	1	1
Emergency Duty Service	2	5
Financial Assessment and Benefits Team	17	69
Hospital Assessment and Care Management Teams	33	31
Intermediate Care	0	1
Integrated Community Equipment Service	1	4
Integrated Night Service	0	0
Integrated Community Access Point (ICAP)	9	0
Joint Community Rehabilitation Service	2	3
Learning Disability - Assessment and Care Management	14	21
Learning Disability Directly Provided Services	12	11
Mental Health Recovery Team (working age adults)	14	8
Mental Health Older Peoples Team (over 65 years)	13	13
Neighbourhood Support Teams	109	96
Occupational Therapy Reablement Services	20	15
Older Peoples Directly Provided Services	2	5
Planning, Performance and Engagement	5	6
Safeguarding Development Team	0	1
Sensory Impairment Reablement Services	5	3
Service Procurement Team	6	3
Service Placement Team	8	1
Social Care Direct	5	1
Strategic Commissioning	16	17
Substance Misuse Service	1	2
Supported Accommodation Team / SAILS	3	3
Supporting People	0	0
Transition Team	6	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>371</b>

#### 4.1 What were the complaints about? *(Last year's figures are in brackets)*

Complaint Type	Number of complaints	% of total
Allocation of funding/grants	22 (17)	6.2% (4.6%)
Assessment – Blue Badge	14 (10)	3.8% (2.7%)
Assessment – Social Care	57 (87)	15.6% (23.5%)
Assessment - Financial	14 (55)	3.8% (14.8%)
Care Plan	15 (12)	4.1% (3.2%)
Carers Assessment	2 (0)	0.5% (0.0%)
Carers Services	7 (3)	1.9% (0.8%)
Contracts	8 (7)	2.2% (1.9%)
Data Protection	1 (0)	0.3% (0.0%)
Direct Payments	5 (7)	1.4% (1.9%)
Employee Enquiries	1 (1)	0.3% (0.3%)
Engagement	1 (1)	0.3% (0.3%)
Equipment - Adaptations	6 (3)	1.6% (0.8%)
Equipment – Daily Living	6 (7)	1.6% (1.9%)
Hospital Discharge	19 (14)	5.2% (3.8%)
Information Provision	29 (23)	7.9% (6.2%)
Initial Contact	3 (3)	0.8% (0.8%)
Invoicing	21 (15)	5.8% (4.0%)
Local Policy	7 (4)	1.9% (1.1%)
National Policy	4 (0)	1.1% (0.0%)
Other	5 (9)	1.4% (2.4%)
Provision of Service	46 (29)	12.6% (7.8%)
Review	3 (5)	0.8% (1.3%)
Safeguarding	15 (13)	4.1% (3.5%)
Service Environment	2 (0)	0.5% (0.0%)
Service User Behaviour	1 (0)	0.3% (0.0%)
Staff Actions/Behaviour	49 (43)	13.4% (11.6%)
Workmanship	1 (0)	0.3% (0.0%)
Transition Assessment	0 (1)	0.0% (0.3%)
Not assigned	1 (2)	0.0% (0.5%)

## 4.2 Themes of complaints

### 4.2a Assessment

Complaint Type	Number of complaints	% of total
Assessment – Blue Badge	14 (10)	3.8% (2.7%)
Assessment – Social Care	57 (87)	15.6% (23.5%)
Assessment - Financial	14 (55)	3.8% (14.8%)

*(Last year's figures are in brackets)*

The biggest area of complaints related to assessment, which is 23.2% of all complaints received (85 complaints). Our assessment functions include eligibility assessments for social care support including the value of a personal budget, Occupational Therapy assessments for adaptations and equipment and assessments for the provision of a Blue Badge. Financial Assessments identify how much someone will pay towards their support.

Although still the biggest area of complaints, complaints in relation to assessment have decreased by 44% (67 complaints) from 2014/15. Complaints relating to financial assessment have decreased by 75% (41 complaints), and those relating to Social Care have decreased by 34% (30 complaints)

Overall, 47 (55%) of complaints about assessments were disputing the decision or outcome of these assessments.

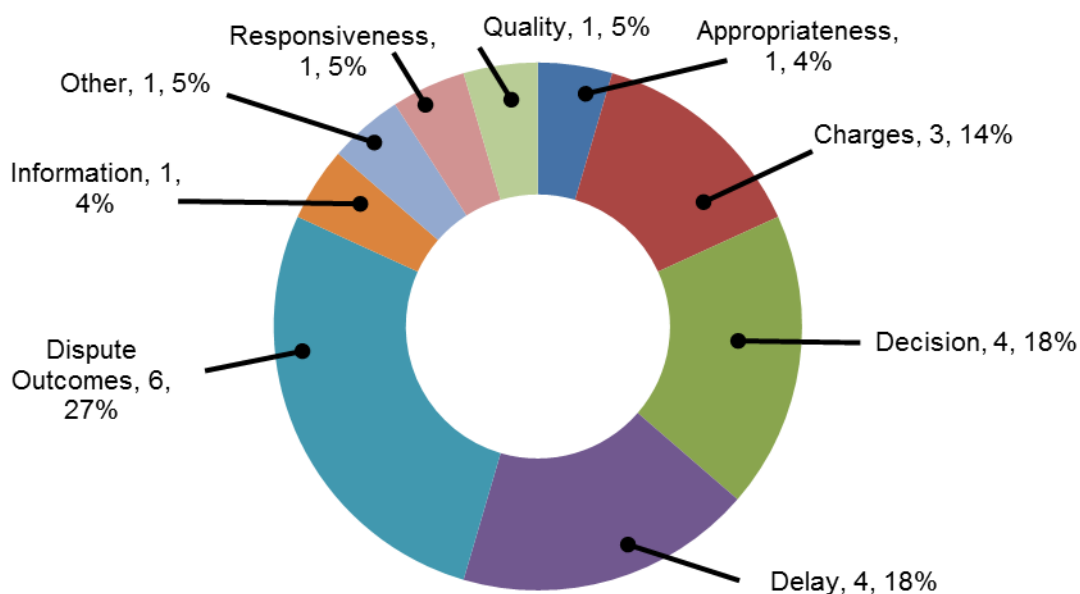
27 complaints (32%) were upheld or partially upheld in relation to assessment.

Of the 27 complaints upheld in full or in part:

- 22 complaints were regarding the social care assessment process. Of these the largest proportion (45%) were disputing the decision or outcome of the assessment. The next largest proportion (18%) were in relation to a delay in the process.

- 5 of these were in relation the financial assessment process. Of these the largest proportion (60%), were about a delay in the process.

The range of issues that were upheld in full or part are shown in the chart below



#### 4.2b Staff actions / behaviour

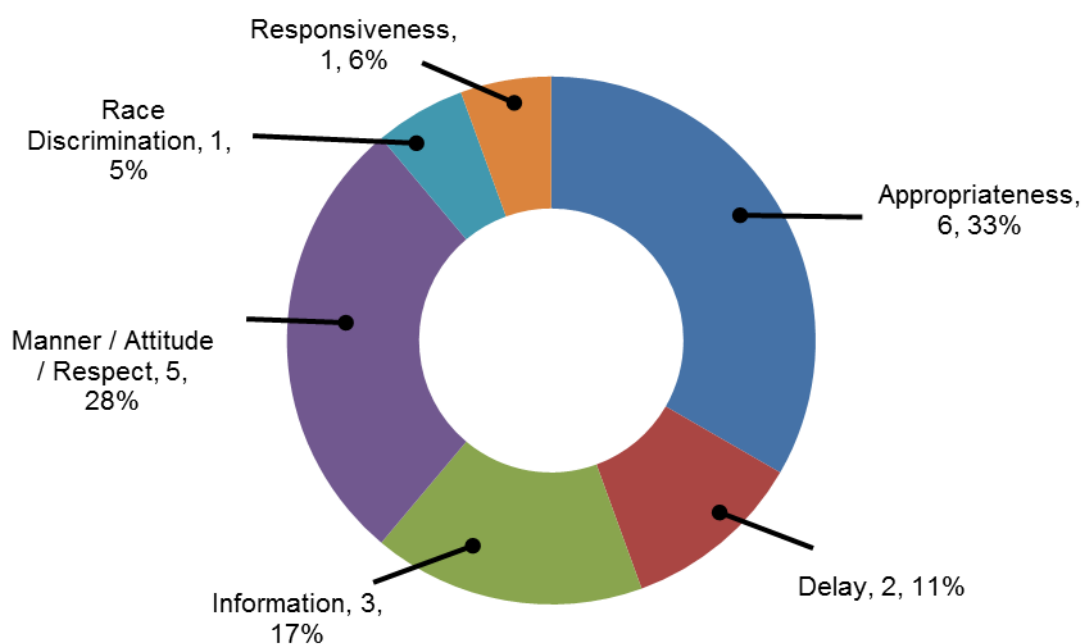
Complaint Type	Number of complaints	% of total
Staff Actions/Behaviour	49 (43)	13.4% (11.6%)

The second biggest area of complaints related to staff actions / behaviour, which equated to 13.4% of all complaints received (49 complaints). The highest numbers of complaints received were regarding the manner / attitude and respect of staff (20 complaints), the next highest number were regarding appropriateness of staff (19 complaints). Within both categories many people felt their circumstances and views had not been heard as they would have liked them to have been.

18 (37%) of the complaints about staff actions and behaviour were upheld or partially upheld.

12 (67%) of the complaints upheld in full or part were in relation to the assessment and care management function.

The range of issues that were upheld in full or part are shown in the chart below



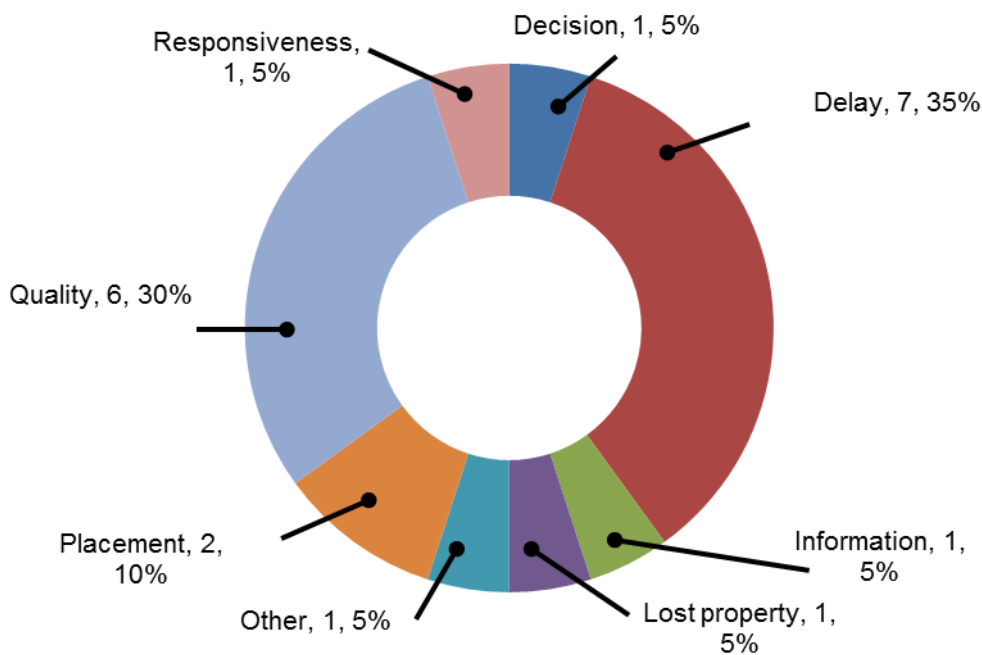
#### 4.2c Provision of service

Complaint Type	Number of complaints	% of total
Provision of Service	46 (29)	12.6% (7.8%)

The third biggest area of complaints related to provision of service, which equated to 12.6% of all complaints received (46 complaints). The highest numbers of complaints received were regarding a delay in the provision of service (15 complaints). The next biggest proportion were in relation to the quality of service (12 complaints), a quarter of these were about our directly provided services; which include some day services, community support services and residential respite for both our Learning Disability Services and Older Peoples Services.

20 (43%) of the complaints about provision of service were upheld or partially upheld.

7 of the complaints upheld in full or part were in relation to a delay in the provision of service, and 6 were in relation to the quality of the service falling below expectation. The full ranges of issues are set out in the pie chart below.



## 5. Complaints about external providers

Personal budgets are used to pay for support from a range of different external provider organisations, such as home care agencies, day services or for employing a personal assistant. We have a range of information to help people arrange their support directly from these providers. Our Support with Confidence Scheme also offers an accreditation scheme where providers have satisfied both Adult Social Care and trading standards requirements.

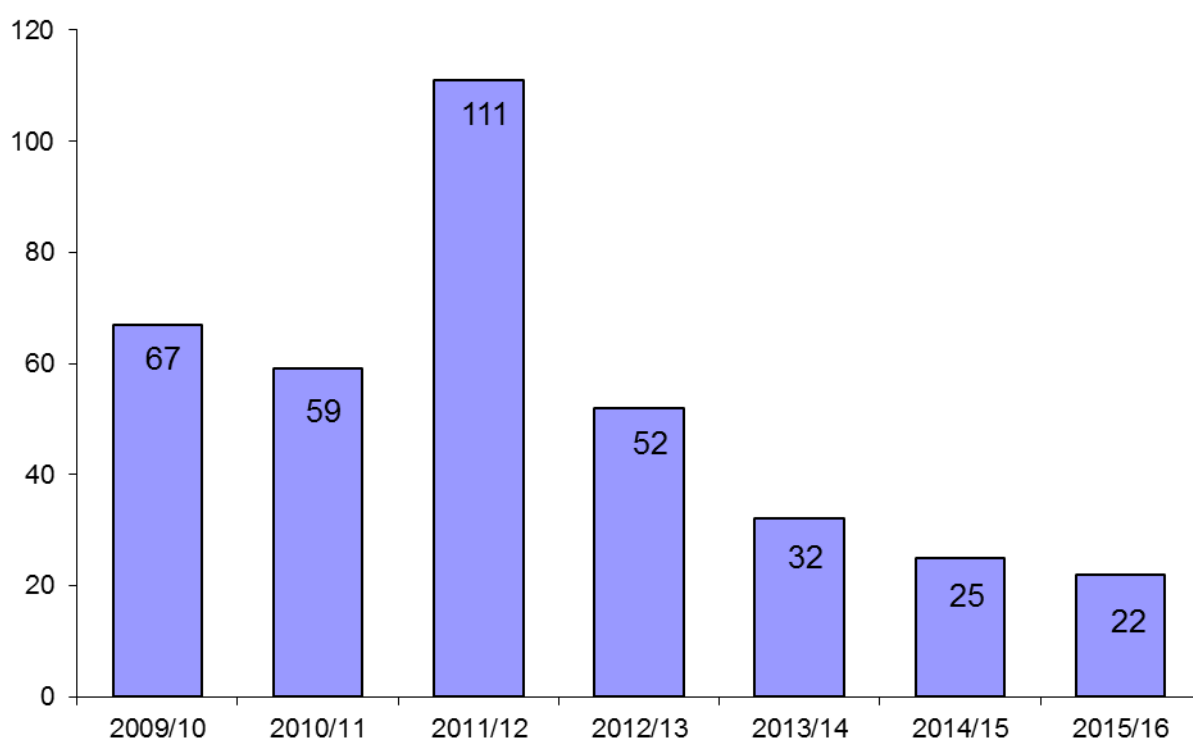
In recent years, external care providers have faced a lot of public scrutiny and some high profile cases have caused national concern about the quality of care services provided. People need to feel confident about when and how to access the complaints process if an external contracted service falls below expectation.

In most cases, people made their complaint directly to their provider. Then, if they were still unhappy about how the provider handled matters, they approached us for support. They did this through a range of avenues,



including: their allocated worker, the review process, the Quality Monitoring Team or directly to the Complaints and Feedback Team. In some instances, reports of concerns or issues were looked at under our safeguarding adults at risk procedures and the complaints procedure was suspended until the safeguarding enquiry was finished.

We have recorded 22 complaints this year, which is a 12% decrease compared to last year (25). The graph below shows the total number of complaints about external providers over the past 7 years. The number of complaints recorded is the lowest number for 7 years.



Of the complaints recorded this year:

- 13 related to independent home care providers
- 9 were about residential care providers

### **5.1 How many complaints about external providers were upheld?**

Out of the 22 complaints received for Independent Providers, 4 (18%) of the complaints were upheld in full, 6 (27%) were upheld in part and 5 (23%) were not upheld. 7 (32%) had a recorded outcome of 'other'. This tended to be a service change or the complaint was withdrawn following discussion and action by the provider.

## **5.2 Response times**

- (29%) complaints received a response within 10 working days
- (29%) complaints received a response within 20 working days
- (42%) exceeded the 10-20 working day timescale

The higher number of complaints responded to outside of our 10 -20 working day target is generally because it can take a little longer to gather and examine the information from the provider.

## **5.3 Types of complaints about external providers**

Of the 10 complaints upheld or partially upheld, almost all were about multiple issues, including:

- the delivery of care falling below expectation
- competency and conduct of staff
- late or erratic calls
- timing of calls and
- lack of communication

The Quality Monitoring Team recorded, supported and monitored the implementation of changes to services or processes.

## **6. What did the department learn from complaints and feedback?**

It is crucial that there is learning from complaints and feedback. Learning can result in improved services and delivery, wherever possible. We have recorded the following learning outcomes:

- 251 for individual staff members
- 192 for the teams
- 105 for the organisation

Here are some examples of actions that were taken as a result of learning from complaints:

- In Learning Disability Services the Panel Chair now checks all letters that are sent to clients to let them know the decision of the funding panel.
- The Accounts Receivable Team has apologised and re-credited people monies when a second payment was taken in error. IT issues were rectified to stop invoices being generated after payment had been made.
- The department has reviewed its policy on the assessment of beneficial interest when a property is jointly owned.
- The Financial Assessment Team with support from the Sensory Impairment Team reviewed the financial assessment process to ensure that people with sensory impairments can understand and engage fully in the process.
- Health and Social Care Connect (HSCC) recommended changes to the urgent referral process to ensure the priority of a referral was picked up appropriately.
- Procedures in HSCC were reviewed to ensure that all staff contacted referrers when a referral was declined.
- The Service Placement Team changed their process to ensure that change in contract requests (novation requests) were not delayed in the event of unexpected staff absence.
- Practice Guidance about Hoarding – Managing Clearances was published for staff.
- Milton Grange made improvements to their laundry service following the reported loss of a residents clothes
- Information for health staff in Hospitals about charges for community and residential services was developed.
- Information about charges for respite was developed for clients who are no longer eligible for an Intermediate Care bed but who remain in the residential respite unit

## **7. Local Government Ombudsman**

The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) investigates complaints of injustice caused by maladministration or service failure. The LGO does not question whether a council's decision is right or wrong simply because the complainant disagrees with it. The Ombudsman must consider whether there was fault in the way the decision was reached.

The LGO writes to the local authority every year with an annual summary of statistics on the complaints made to them about East Sussex County Council. This year's annual letter reported that 97 complaints and enquiries were received about East Sussex County Council in total. Of these, 51 (52%) were about Adult Social Care. The LGO recognise that the total number of complaints made to them will not in itself provide a clear picture of our response to complaints or the quality of services. Higher numbers of contacts can indicate good signposting within a transparent process.

The table below sets out the findings for complaints about Adult Social Care:

Findings	Investigations		Closed after initial enquiries	Invalid incomplete	Referred back	Total
	Upheld	Not upheld				
ASC	19 (15)	14 (22)	13 (7)	5 (1)	15 (13)	66 (58)

(last year's numbers are in brackets)

The reason for the difference between the complaints received and the decisions recorded is because 15 of the investigation decisions related to complaints received by the LGO during 2014 -15. These were recorded in last year's report.

10 (53%) of the investigations upheld were in relation to financial assessments, including:

- 4 (40%) complaints decisions identified fault in the way we assessed the market value for jointly owned properties. This led to a review of the policy and some financial redress for the distress caused
- 5 (50%) related to delay and inadequate communication
- 1 (10%) fault in the application of a Deferred Payment

2 (11%) of the complaints were jointly investigated by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman and LGO. Both findings identified shortfalls in the our communication with the client (and family) when being discharged from hospital

Others covered a range of issues including poor service from home care providers and shortfalls in telling people they would pay a financial contribution to their service. Apologies were given in all complaints upheld, with some people receiving financial redress for any distress caused.

## **8. Other observations**

Nationally there remained a media focus on the quality of Adult Social Care and National Health Services. Concerns about shortfalls in provision and how this affects peoples' choice and wellbeing are reported almost on a weekly basis, with constant reference to the financial challenges facing Local Authorities.

At the beginning of the year we believed it was essential to review our complaints process to ensure that we met the 5 main outcomes identified in the report 'My expectations for raising concerns and complaints' published by the Parliamentary and Health Ombudsman, Healthwatch England and Local Government Ombudsman (2014). These outcomes are:

- I felt confident to speak up
- I felt that making my complaint was simple
- I felt listened to and understood
- I felt that my complaint made a difference
- I would feel confident making a complaint in the future

We found that we needed to really make sure that we placed our clients, their carers and their families at the centre of our process. In a practical way this included always saying sorry if things had gone wrong and trying to achieve an agreed way forward wherever possible. We aimed to provide clear explanations and other alternatives when people's expectations were not met but no fault was found. We improved our information leaflet and are updating practice guidance to help our practitioners achieve resolution where possible, at the same time as being fair and proportionate.

## 9. Compliments

This year we received **2498** compliments; more than ever before.

Compliments provide valuable information about the quality of our services and identify where they are working well. The sincere expressions of gratitude received show how much our services are valued by the people who use them and their families and friends.

<b>Service areas</b>	<b>Total for 2015-16</b>
Blue Badges	29
Carers Services	564
Complaints Unit	3
Contact and Assessment Teams	210
Countywide Reviewing Team	8
Discretionary East Sussex Support Scheme	3
Emergency Duty Service	1
Finance and Benefits Assessment Team	30
Hospital Assessment and Care Management Teams	93
Joint Community Rehabilitation Service	243
Learning Disability – Assessment and Care Management	26
Learning Disability – Directly Provided Services	323
Mental Health (over 65 years) and DOLS	21
Mental Health (working age adults)	16
Neighbourhood Support Teams	275
Occupational Therapy Reablement Services	76
Older People - Directly Provided Services	29
Planning, Performance and Engagement	5
Procurement, Payments and Billing	2
Quality Monitoring Team	39
Safeguarding	0
Sensory Impairment Reablement Services	60
Service Placement Team	1
Social Care Direct	75
Strategy and Commissioning	0
Supported Accommodation Team/SAILS	132
Substance Misuse Service	7
Transitions Team	16
Other	0
External Contracted Providers – Community Services	19
External Contracted Providers – Residential	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2498</b>

## **9.1 Examples of some of the compliments received**

### **Neighbourhood Support Team**

*"Thank you so much for the amazing level of support you have given G and ourselves. Your kind compassionate attention and the speed with which you worked for G was unbelievable. We can't thank you enough for the very human but professional manner in which you helped and dealt with us."*

### **Sensory Impairment Reablement Service**

*"I would like to thank all the team for making my move a very comfortable experience for myself and my family. I am very appreciative of all your help to make my new home very comfortable and all your assistance to help with the lighting within my apartment."*

### **Joint Community Rehabilitation Service**

*"Thank you for all the excellent care that you gave me. You were all kind and supportive and you helped me to achieve the goals set for managing on my own."*

### **Transitions Team**

*"I'm aware that in your jobs, often you may be at the 'sharp end' of trying to balance the needs of vulnerable young people and the expectations of parents, against a really tight financial background. And as a mum, I can be the first to voice any concerns etc. that I may have (as some of you know!). So, I really feel its right to also voice appreciation for jobs well done and brilliant outcomes.*

*Thanks to each of you, R is living in his own supported living home, with wonderful staff. His transport to his new college is funded and up and running. All of which means he is happy, safe and in experienced hands- which in turn is a weight lifted from myself and our family.*

*So I would like to say a Very Big Thank you, for the will to make it happen and the work that has gone in to creating the perfect package for him, it is much appreciated."*

### **Social Care Direct**

*"Thank you to D for being so calm and considerate when I called about my friend".*

### **Occupational Therapy**

*"K was exceptional and a lovely gentleman. He was caring, empathetic, communicated so well throughout his involvement and was always honest but said things in a nice way.*

*We could not have asked for a nicer person."*

### **Finance and Benefits Assessment Team**

*"I'd just like to take the opportunity to highlight that R was extremely professional and helpful in getting this matter resolved and is a credit to your team – I would like to extend my thanks to him."*

### **Older People's Mental Health Team**

*"Thank you for taking the time to give me a detailed update, and thank you so much for communicating it so sensitively."*

### **Quality Monitoring Team**

*"Our experience of the audit by S was extremely positive. S is clearly very skilled and experienced as both a practitioner and an auditor. As a result she was able to offer both reassurance and good ideas to staff at all levels of the organisation. We appreciated S's professional and flexible approach. For us, this was an opportunity to reflect and develop further, which is a continuous focus for us all."*

### **Sensory Impairment Team**

*"I would like to thank you very much for organising the Room Loop in my home. It is amazing. I can at last enjoy TV again. I had given up on TV and now I am already marking in the TV magazine what I would like to watch. We enjoyed Doc Martin last night so much and I could hear it all without any interference.*

*My smoke alarm, telephone and door alert are all now in great order so I am a new independent woman."*

### **Hospital Team**

*"On behalf of us all I want to thank you for all you have done for C. I know it is your job but you do it with such grace, compassion and humility that you have made a very difficult situation so much easier for us to deal with. Thank you."*

### **Blue Badge Service**

*"I just wanted to write a short note to thank you all for processing my parents Blue Badge so speedily.*

*Also I want you to know just how much this little thing will affect their lives.*

*They will now no longer have the stress of worrying about how to park close to the places they need to get to and this will really help them relax about going out. They both suffer a great deal of pain and just to be able to "pop" out without worry will bring a little bit of quality back to their lives.*

*It is a massive relief to them and we are all so grateful."*

### **Joint Community Rehabilitation Service**

*"Amazing and so patient with my Mother, she would not have recovered so well without your care and encouragement."*

### **Learning Disability Directly Provided Services**

*"Thank you to all of you for giving L a great time when she is in your care. She loves being with you all and we know she is being looked after."*

### **Community Learning Disability Team**

*"Can I just say thank you for all the support that you and your colleagues have given both L and us over the last few years. The service we have received has been excellent."*

### **Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards Team**

*"Many thanks for your diligent work in all of this. I greatly appreciate your attention to detail and your caring role. It's quite something. Anyhow, just*



wanted to say thanks to you for your work in looking out for vulnerable people.”

### **Occupational Therapy Team**

*“I wish to commend H, one of your Occupational Therapy Assistants, whose work in connection with my problem of getting in and out of the bath has resulted in a perfect solution without the need for expensive lifting devices. H showed a complete understanding of my problem and took great care in accurately positioning the necessary grab rails. Please pass on my heartfelt thanks to her.”*

### **LASAR Team**

*“We just wanted to express how valuable E’s visit to us was, what a good service.*

*B and myself have been at the end of our tether so to speak for some weeks now with looking after and caring for my son.*

*We were so impressed with E, apart from being a very pleasant and agreeable young man we found his listening skills and his integrity outstanding and we felt he gave us time to explain the things that were troubling us.*

*He grasped, understood and addressed the problems we were encountering fully and gave good information and advice.*

*He was sensitive and fully conversant with the techniques and methods of helping us to deal with my son and the situation and was excellent in demonstrating the information graphically in his notebook which made it so clear.*

*We will be attending the carers group and other services he informed us about, we just wanted to say a big thank you for your service and especially to E for his caring professionalism.”*

### **Contact and Assessment Team**

*“I was very impressed with how thorough you were and your telephone manner put me at ease and made me feel comfortable talking to you about the issues I was having, which were sensitive. Thank you, it was my birthday yesterday and speaking to you had put me in a good mood for it.”*

### **Older Peoples Directly Provided Services**

*“A big thank you for all your kindness and patience, as well as the care, the happy atmosphere and laughter that see you through the bad times and get give you the confidence to get back home.”*

### **Supported Accommodation Team/SAILS**

*“I am very happy living with B and family. They look after me very well and help me in my everyday life, for personal, social and emotional development. I am part of the family and live happily. I intend to stay with my family for ever.”*

### **Carers Services**

*“J from Carers Breaks was very helpful and supportive, going out of her way to help us. I asked about supper clubs and when Mum returns I will visit with my Mum. I wanted to thank J for all her helpful advice.”*

## **10. Conclusion**

We know it is crucial to have in place an effective, accessible and fair means for clients and carers comments and complaints to be heard and resolved wherever possible. Our complaints process provides this opportunity and is integral to the statutory function of the department.

Regrettably, things do go wrong and with increasingly limited resources prioritised to meet the needs of the most vulnerable, complaints will be made. We are seeing a rise in the complexity of complaints and, at times, have less options to meet the desired outcome for the complainant. We have considered the impact this has on clients, their representatives, staff, operational managers and the council as a whole.

There is no easy solution, particularly given the grave financial challenges. We do know however that in these times it becomes increasingly important to support and promote the customer service principles of being fair, open, and timely and to demonstrate clear and compassionate decision making. We are working closely with partners to make sure we handle complaints well and people feel confident to express their concerns. Our learning from complaints also enables us to examine how we can improve our services.

During next year, we will also need to review and monitor the process closely to ensure we are able to meet the challenges that will arise with our East Sussex Better Together and Connecting 4 You programmes.