

**DIRECTORATE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

**COMPLAINTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLIMENTS  
CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES  
ANNUAL REPORT**

**April 1<sup>st</sup> 2011 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012**

**Policy Performance & Resources Division**



Produced by Quality and Complaints Team June 2012

## **SECTION 1**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.2 This Report provides information relating to Children's Social Care Complaints Comments & Compliments, during the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012.
- 1.3 The procedures for Children's complaints, are determined by legislation, predominantly involving the: -
- Children Act 1989, Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.
  - The Children & Adoption Act 2002 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.
- 1.4 Every Local Authority with a responsibility for Children Social Care Services is Regulatory obliged to have in post a Complaint Manager, part of whose role it is to provide an Annual Report into the workings of the complaints and representations procedures. This requirement is contained in the Children Act 1989; Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.
- 1.5 The complaints procedure cannot operate without effective information; therefore, all service users and people who request a service are provided with information on how to complain, comment or make a compliment. Complaint information is displayed in all public reception areas.
- 1.6 The Directorate of Children's Services is committed to a positive and proactive approach to complaints handling; complaints are viewed as a mechanism for ensuring that the Directorate remains receptive to the need to make improvements to the quality of the services that it provides as well as a method of seeking resolutions to the individual's dissatisfaction wherever possible.

## **SECTION 2**

### **2. THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES**

- 2.1 The Complaints, Comments and Compliments procedures serve four principal purposes:
- Providing a way for a child/young person, or a person acting on their behalf, to give the Directorate their views of the service.
  - Enabling the Directorate to learn from complaints and compliments, and to change, review or maintain services accordingly.
  - Ensuring that complaints are properly recorded and acted upon, and that where necessary things that have gone wrong are put right promptly.

- Ensuring that staff and service users understand their rights, and responsibilities within the complaints process.

2.2 The complaints procedure for Children social care has three 3 stages;

- Stage One Problem solving and informal resolution.
- Stage Two Formal Complaint investigation.
- Stage Three Independently chaired Review Panel

### 2.3 **Stage One**

Offers the Team responsible for the relevant service the first opportunity of considering the complaint and responding on behalf of the Directorate as appropriate; most commonly this involves either apologising for any mistakes made and correcting any resulting disadvantage (upholding the complaint) or finding that the work that was undertaken was appropriate (not upholding the complaint). Looking into a complaint at Stage 1 should be a relatively short piece of work; however, it is important that the response is informative, accurate, fair and as helpful as it can be. It may also at this stage be helpful to the complainant and in achieving a resolution if there can be direct contact with them by the relevant Team Manager.

### 2.4 **Important points within Stage 1**

- The timescale at Stage 1 gives 10 working days to respond to children, or their carers who raise a complaint; however, this can be extended by a further 10 days if the complaint is complex or key staff are unavailable.
- Young people who complain on their own behalf must be offered the services of an advocate.
- A written response is provided by the relevant Manager to the young person or their representative.
- The Directorate has the discretion to refuse to consider a complaint, which was not raised within twelve months of the incident/event occurring.

### 2.5 **Stage Two**

Whilst Stage 1 complaints are responded to by those directly responsible for the service being disputed, should complaints progress to Stage 2 of the procedures, these are investigated by someone independent of that resource. This can be either a member of the Quality and Complaints Team, another Manager within the Directorate or an externally appointed person; the Local Authority has discretion over whom to appoint. Additionally, an Independent Person (not employed within the Local Authority, in line with legislation & guidance) must be appointed in each

case to oversee the investigation from the perspectives of thoroughness, fairness and objectivity. Again in accordance with legislation 25 working days up to a maximum of 65 working days are allowed for the investigation of the matter by the complaint investigator leading to the response by the Assistant Director for Children's Services. If an advocate has not been appointed previously the child/young person must again be offered advocacy services at this stage.

## 2.6 **Stage Three**

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after the Stage two process, then they can request that matters move to Stage 3. This process requires the Local Authority to convene a stage 3 Review Panel to hear the complaints within 30 working days of the request. The Review Panel involves three independent people, one of whom is appointed to chair the panel. Also in attendance will be the complainant and advocate, the complaint investigator, the independent person, a Senior Manager from Children's Specialist Services, Complaints Manager and other officers who support the complaints process. Essentially the Review Panel considers the management of the complaint and the responses made at Stages 1 and 2. The Review Panel after listening to the issues related to the complaint then has 5 working days to provide written recommendations to the Director of Children's Services, copied to the complainant. The Director then has 15 working days to respond to the complainant; this concludes the Local Authority's handling of the complaint.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied following the Stage 3 response they can; within twelve months of the panel hearing, approach the Local Government Ombudsman seeking further enquiries or investigation to be carried out into the complaints by that office. If the Ombudsman determines that the complaint has not been looked into fairly and correctly by the Directorate, or that the service user has suffered an injustice in the services he/she has received then the Ombudsman will reach a finding of maladministration; there were no findings of maladministration for Dudley Social Care Services during 2011/12.

## 2.7 **CORPORATE COMPLAINTS: -**

2.8 The Children's Directorate also has a duty to comply with general complaints which do not fall within the boundaries of the Statutory Children Social Care complaint process. Complaints in this category are called "Corporate Complaints" and are dealt with under the Council's Complaints and Representations procedure; although Corporate Complaints will be dealt with by many Divisions within the local Authority, 11 were recorded in 2011/12 which concerned Children's Specialist Services; an increase of 6 on the year before.

## 2.9 **OTHER COMPLAINTS**

- 2.10 In addition to complaints which concern social care services and the actions of the Directorate, we also sometimes receive complaints which concern other agencies such as the Primary Care Trust and Education. These are forwarded to the appropriate body, but are registered so that a record of our actions exists.

## SECTION 3

### 3. OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITY 20010/11

#### 3.1 SUMMARY

- i) Children's Services received **111** Children's Act complaints from 94 young people or their representatives during 2011/12. This compares to **104** complaints for 2010/11 representing an increase of nearly **7%**, but is a return to the figure of **111** in the year before. During the 2011-12 year Children's Services received 3100 new referrals and worked on 5715 cases throughout the period; complaints were received in 1.9% of the cases worked with.
- ii) Many of the complaints received were complex continuing the trend within Dudley and across neighbouring Authorities of multi layered complaints being presented as well as complaints which may be classed as informal, but which require careful management and time to prevent them from escalating into complaints about the way in which they have been handled.
- iii) It can be seen from the figures above that some young people may have made more than one complaint this year, this is not unusual; the disparity between the number of complaints received and the number of young people forwarding these can also be caused by complaints which concern more than one service and need to be counted as a separate complaint against each service.
- iiii) The majority i.e. **82** of the complaints relating to services provided to children were made or led by parents or other relatives; **24** complaints were made by children or their advocates. **5** complaints were brought forward by the independent Reviewing Officers for young people
- v) The guidance provides the opportunity of recording some adverse contacts as informal complaints; this is used for example in instances where a young person may wish to raise an issue without it being regarded as a complaint at that point.
- vi) Informal complaints are not necessarily minor issues; like complaints they need to be considered and responded to, not least because should the person who raises a comment be dissatisfied with the response they may then have the right to take the matter forward as a complaint. Very often informal complaints are registered where there is no statutory access to the complaints procedures; this happens particularly where Court or other proceedings are in place or are

about to commence. We must respond to the correspondence that we receive and it is not always possible to convince people that we cannot assist them without spending considerable time and effort on this.

- vii) **28** informal complaints were received in 2011/12. Compared to **45** in 2010/11. The combined number of complaints and informal complaints has totalled **139** this year, last year this figure was **149**.
- viii) **1** Stage 2 complaint investigation was concluded this year, having been registered at Stage 1 in the previous year. However, **No** complaint registered in this year has progressed to a Formal Stage 2 investigation. In 2010/11 **1** Children's Act and **1** Corporate complaint progressed to Stage 2 of the Corporate procedures, whilst in 2009/10 there were **4** Formal complaint investigations. Significant efforts go into resolving complaints before they proceed to formal investigation, this allows for a thorough but quicker response. The average cost of a Formal complaint investigation is around £3,500.
- viii) The Quality & Complaints Team has been contacted by the Local Government Ombudsman over a number of cases at the request of complainants; these contacts have not progressed past initial enquiries and responses.
- ix) The Quality and Complaints Team have also had sustained contacts with a number of adults, usually relatives of service users, who are either unable to use the complaints procedures further or who decline to progress through the procedures but who also continue to make contact. Such work is time consuming and often requires a greater degree of caution.
- x) **No** Stage 3 Review Panels have been requested this year as has been the case for a number of years.

3.2 Three complaints remain open and are being attended to appropriately. With the exception of the five complaints that were withdrawn, all other complaints have received a response at Stage 1 this year. Of these **39%** were dealt with within **10** working days, (compared with **35%** in the previous year) and a further **24%** within **20** working days compared with **17%** in the year before. Therefore **63%** were dealt with within the statutory timetable of **20** working days; this is a significant improvement on the figure of **52%** in 2010/2011.

**21.6%** of complaints took more than **31** working days to complete, compared with **30%** in the previous year. Many of those complaints were complex and the time taken was agreed with the complainant. It is of concern when complaints take longer than expected to resolve and we will seek to continue to improve on this figure for 2012/13.

3.3 There were **37** individual registered compliments for 2011/12 compared to **56** for 2009/10, a decrease of **21**.

3.4 Local **Government Ombudsman**: - As referred to previously there has been involvement with the Ombudsman on a number of complex cases,

in each of these the Ombudsman was satisfied that the workings of this team left no place for their involvement. This enabled us to close our involvement in two time consuming complaints where we believed we could not assist any further. Consistent with this, there were **no** reports issued against Children Services and **no** finding of Maladministration involving any of the complaints made.

- 3.5 **Advocacy:** - Government Regulations requires that all young people making a complaint in their own right are offered the assistance of an Advocate. 4 children/young people making a complaint chose to have the assistance and support of an advocate during the complaint process. Advocacy is now provided by the Children's Society.

## SECTION 4

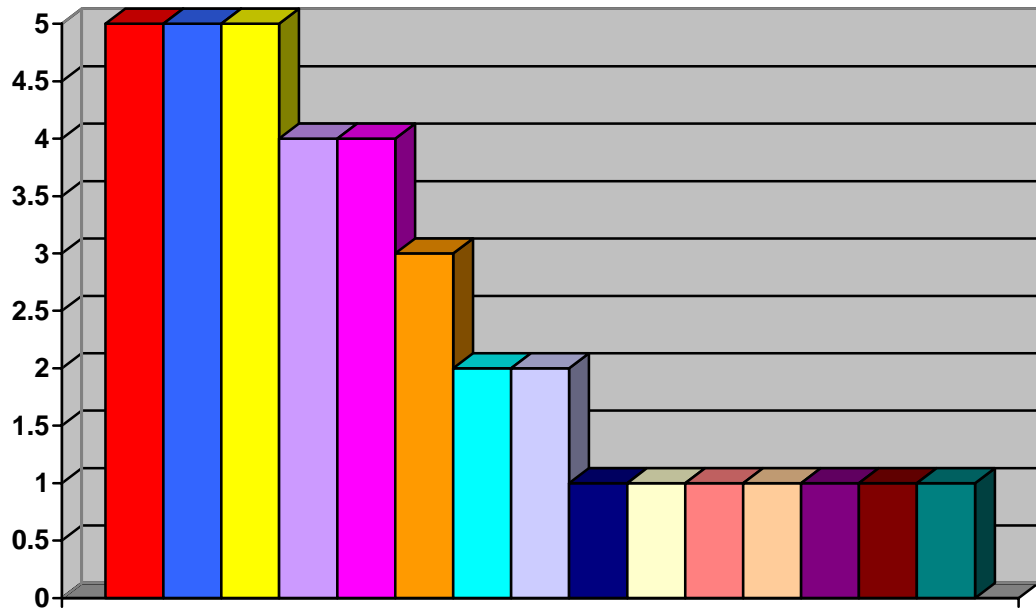
### 4. ACTIVITIES OF THE QUALITY & COMPLAINTS TEAM 2011/2012

- 4.1. Regular contact is carried out by the Team's Complaints Officer with residential Children's Homes across the Borough in order to monitor and assist access to the complaints procedures. Young People who raise a complaint are offered a visit from the Complaints Officer or Complaints Manager. This provides easy, fast and informal access for young people to the complaint process.
- 4.2 The majority (**63%**) of all complaints resolved at Stage 1 were acknowledged and concluded within the statutory timescale. The Quality & Complaints Team monitors each complaint and works closely with each Manager responding to a complaint to assist them as and where required.
- 4.3 Separate training for Managers, Social Workers and Foster Carers has been delivered during 2011/12 including: -
- A half-day course to inform front line staff/newly appointed staff of their responsibilities when a complaint is made.
  - A course for managers and other senior team members in responding to complaints at Stage 1 of the procedures.
  - A course for Managers and Senior Managers who may be required to undertake a Stage 2 complaint investigation.
  - A half day course for foster carers raising awareness and exploring their particular relationship to the complaints procedures.
- 4.4 The established complaints leaflet for children has been widely circulated and is well used.
- 4.5 The Team assisted in an event organised by young people who are looked after and in doing so were able to meet with a number of young people who had no previous contact with the procedures.
- 4.6 Protocols are in place with Health colleagues, and multi agency teams such as Flipside – a specialist multi agency fostering service.

4.7 Quarterly monitoring reports are presented to Senior Managers concerning complaints in their areas and across the Directorate.

## SECTION 5

### 5.1 COMPLIMENTS DATA 2011/12



■ Care Management South (5)	■ Assessment North (5)
■ Permanent Placements (5)	■ Children with Disabilities (4)
■ Assessment South (4)	■ Care Management North (3)
■ Children's Home 2 (2)	■ Fostering (2)
■ Children's Home 3 (1)	■ Family Support (1)
■ Review Unit (1)	■ Children's Transport (1)
■ Occupational Therapy (1)	■ Contact Team (1)
■ 16+ Team (1)	

5.2 The table above shows the numbers of compliments received from service users, and other professionals, such as Judges, solicitors and Court Guardians for the Directorate's staff.

5.3 Although we have a statutory responsibility to register complaints and ensure that they receive a response, we also believe that there is much to be learnt by the way of good practice by proactively gathering and reporting on compliments received across the Directorate.

5.4 The above graph shows an decrease in compliments to **37** from last year's figure of **56**; this is the second successive year after four years of increase that registered compliments have fallen, having reached **83** two years ago. This does not mean that work is not being appreciated or that compliments are not being received; more likely, compliments are not being forwarded for registration.



5.5 It will be noted that the Residential Homes have numbers; this is to withhold the identity of the home for security reasons; last year each of the five homes was allocated a number for the Annual Report and these numbers have been kept to their respective home next year so that any trends can still be identified.

5.5 **Examples of compliments received: -**

An Occupational Therapist received a compliment from the parents of a child for whom he had secured a grant to provide necessary facilities; "life as a family is much improved and we cannot thank him enough for his help".

The Director was approached in a professional setting by a Head Teacher who had themselves recently adopted and reported that they believed Dudley's Adoption Services to be the best that they had come across professionally.

Adoptions received praise from other adoptive parents whom the workers had assisted.

Home 2 was thanked for its assistance in a social pedagogy research project, which is described by the lead researcher as

a system of theory, practice and training that focuses on children's 'education' in the broadest sense of the word. The government has committed to explore the effectiveness of social pedagogy in children's residential care. This model is currently being piloted between 2009 and 2011 in children's homes in England and the aim of this research is to evaluate the implementation and impact of the pilot programme.

A worker in Assessment South received these comments from a parent "I was a bit worried about having a social worker and did not know what to expect, but once I met her she put my worries to rest. .... Without her help I would still be in a very dark place.

A worker from Care Management South was commended for their work for a child in proceedings including getting the plans for the child ratified by Panel.

In another matter Care Management South were complimented by a Judge for their work which enabled care proceedings to be concluded without unnecessary delay.

Another worker in Care Management South was complimented by carers, fostering for the first time, for the support and advice that they had given.

A worker from Assessment South received a similar compliment from foster carers in complex child protection case.

A worker in Care Management South was complimented by a solicitor in a case where a care order was revoked for the positive professional relationship she had established with the family, which had led to good progress being made.

A worker in Care Management North was praised by a Judge who said that she wanted to have the worker cloned and hoped that she never retired.

An adoptive parent thanked the admin workers of the Adoption team for their assistance with a matter.

A worker in the Family Support Team was thanked for their efforts in undertaking life story work with a child who had moved from an unsatisfactory placement, but who had now, because of the work, settled into his new placement.

Prospective adoptive parents thanked a worker from the adoptions team for their support in a meeting with the birth parent of the child placed with them. They described the meeting as positive but were reassured by the worker's presence.

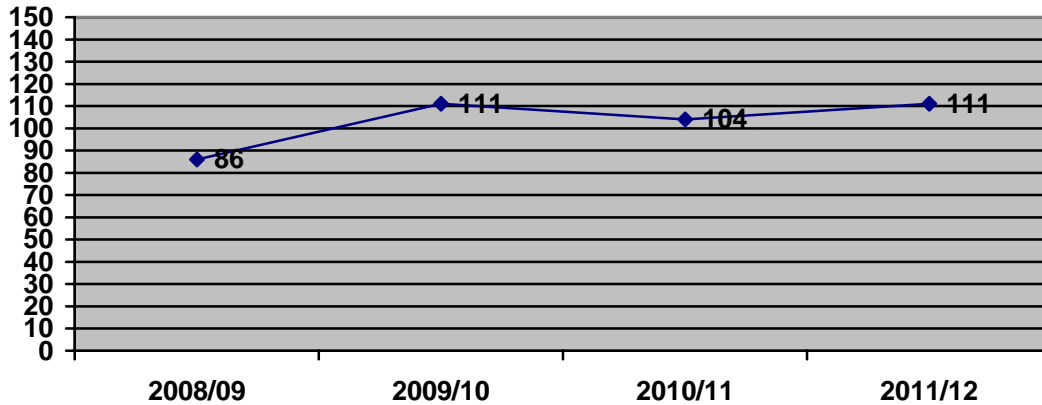
We received a letter from a father expressing thanks to workers in the Contact Team for their work during contact with his daughter. This man pointed out in his letter that he appreciated that he has acquired a reputation that might make working with him difficult; however, he said that the workers had been friendly and professional towards him.

A worker in Assessment South was complimented for providing an excellent placement for a social work student.

A foster carer singled out a taxi driver and an escort for praise for their work with a child in his care.

A Guardian praised a Reviewing Officer for the structure of their reviews which enabled "everything" to be covered.

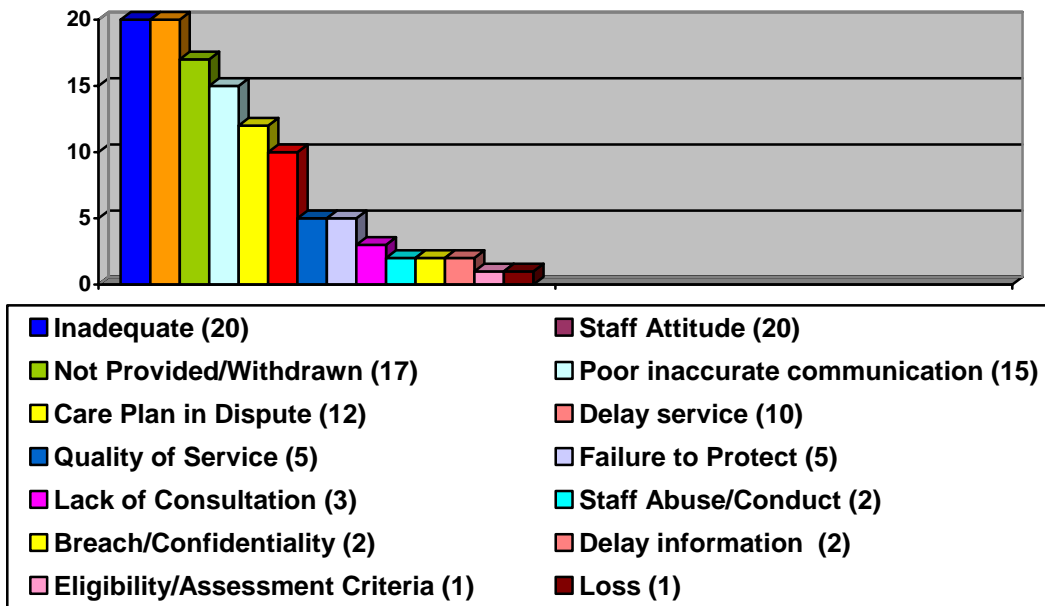
## Comparison of Complaints Over The Past Four Years.



6.1 2011/12 saw a slight increase in complaints received up from **104** to **111**; continuing the trend away from the unusually low figures seen in 2007/08 and 2008/09 (85 and 86 respectively). Complaint activity in the first eleven weeks of this year appears to be high and we may see a further increase in the annual figure by the end of the year.

6.2 If we combine the **28** informal complaints received with the **111** Complaints and **11** Corporate Complaints, the number of adverse contacts rises to **150**, a minor increase on **149** in the year before.

### 6.3 COMPLAINT ISSUES:-



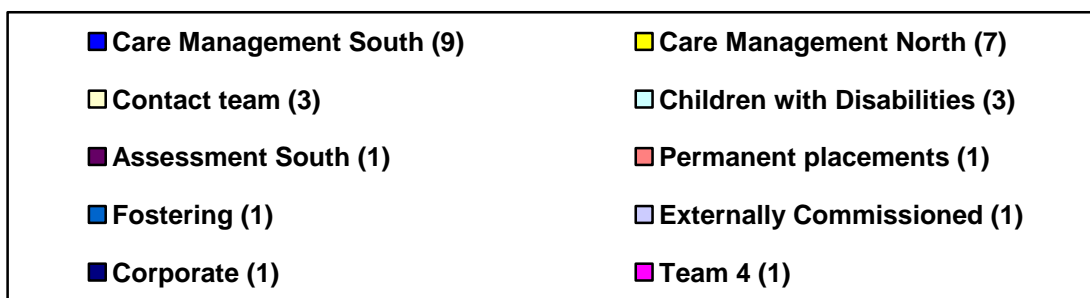
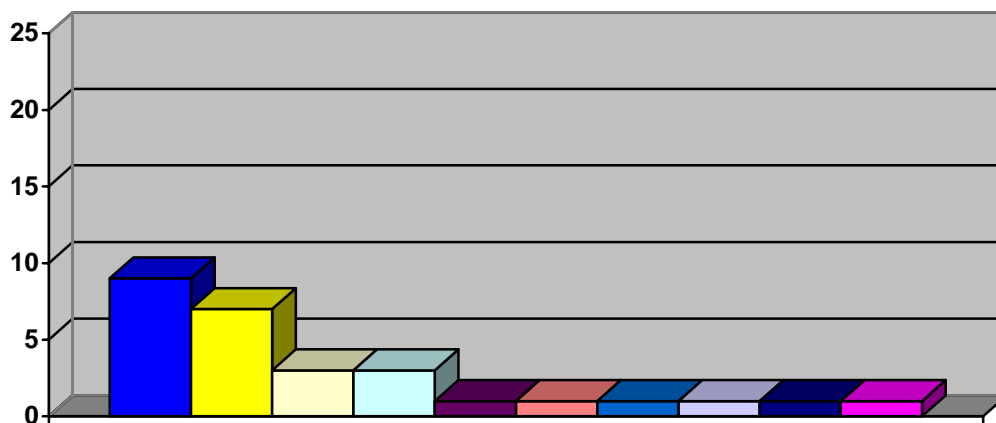
6.4 It is possible for a complaint to concern more than one issue; in total 115 issues were the subject of complaints this year. Four issues figure prominently as those most complained about and inadequate service and staff attitude may stand out as too heavily represented. These are, however, likely to figure prominently when it is considered that the Directorate will be engaged making decisions that people disagree with

or being appropriately involved in difficult and complex situations. Each complaint offers opportunities for learning for the service as a whole or the individual worker concerned with the aim that improvements can be made where difficulties have been identified.

- 6.5 The figures above should be viewed in the context of the total number of services being provided, as well as the need to prioritise vital pieces of work which can result in complaints elsewhere
- 6.6 Complaints which were placed within the 'inadequate Service' category include concerns about frequent changes of worker resulting in a lack of consistency and progress, the level of contact and quality of work from an allocated worker, punctuality of support workers and complaints about the quality of contact arrangements.
- 6.7 Complaints about 'staff attitude' concerned comments made by staff and the attitudes presented in their work; these concerns are addressed and, if necessary, challenged when they arise.
- 6.8 Some of the remaining issues complained about involved: -
  - Complaints that the Local Authority have sided in disputes within families.
  - A complaints that children have needed to be moved from their placement because necessary checks on numbers were not completed first.
  - A complaint that a young person did not have sufficient savings.
  - Complaints that parents have not been involved in statutory processes.
  - Complaints about moves of placement.
  - Complaints from people whom the Local Authority has concerns about joining families and has intervened to provide advice.
  - Complaints about delays in completing important work.
  - A complaint from a parent whose contact has been altered after they had been overheard talking about absconding with their child from a specified contact.
  - Complaints from young people who are moving towards independence and who would wish their current arrangements to continue.

## 7. INFORMAL COMPLAINTS

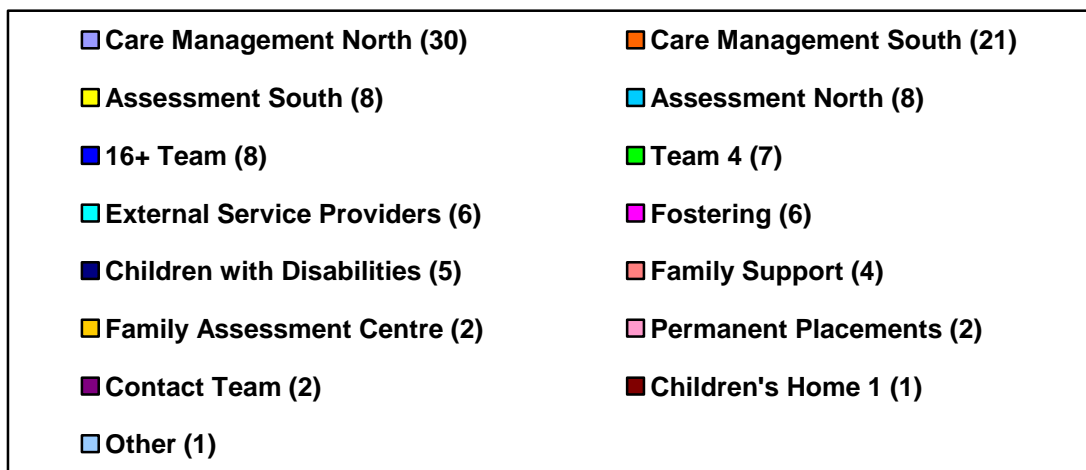
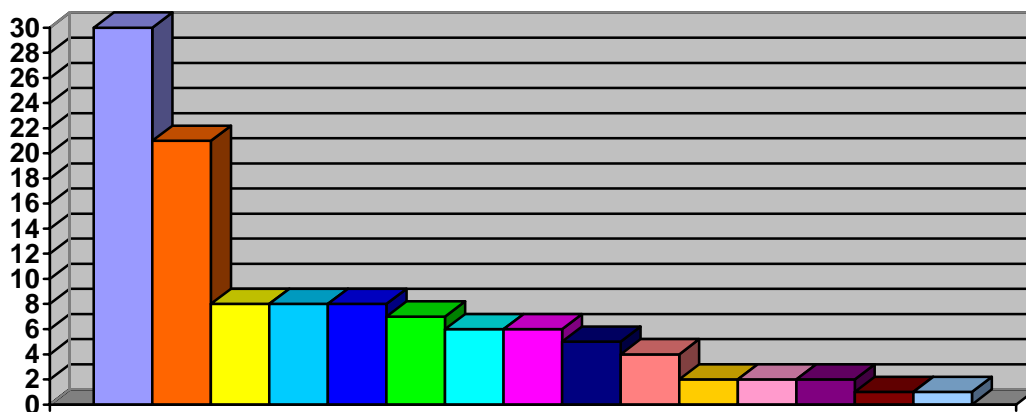
The number of informal complaints received has dropped from **45** last year, to **28** in this. Informal complaints received across the Directorate are shown in the chart below.



Examples of informal complaints received

- Unhappiness that the Local Authority has not followed a specific course of action.
- Extended family members seeking to make complaints on behalf of children and parents without submitting any evidence that the relevant person agrees with this action. These are considered on a case by case basis to determine what responses can be offered.
- Complaints which have been presented previously.
- Matters which are either before the Court or which could be resolved in the Courts.
- Disputes within families where it may be advantageous to one party to involve the Local Authority, but where the Local Authority believes it has no grounds to intervene.
- Complaints which seek to dissuade the Local Authority from completing its statutory duties.
- Complaints about incidents where the Local Authority has no control or prior involvement.
- Complaints which are in fact requests for a service that are being considered and sometimes have not been previously presented.
- Sometimes people are very clear that they do not want to make a complaint yet, but do want their issue resolved.
- Sometimes people do not give any contact details for a response to be provided.

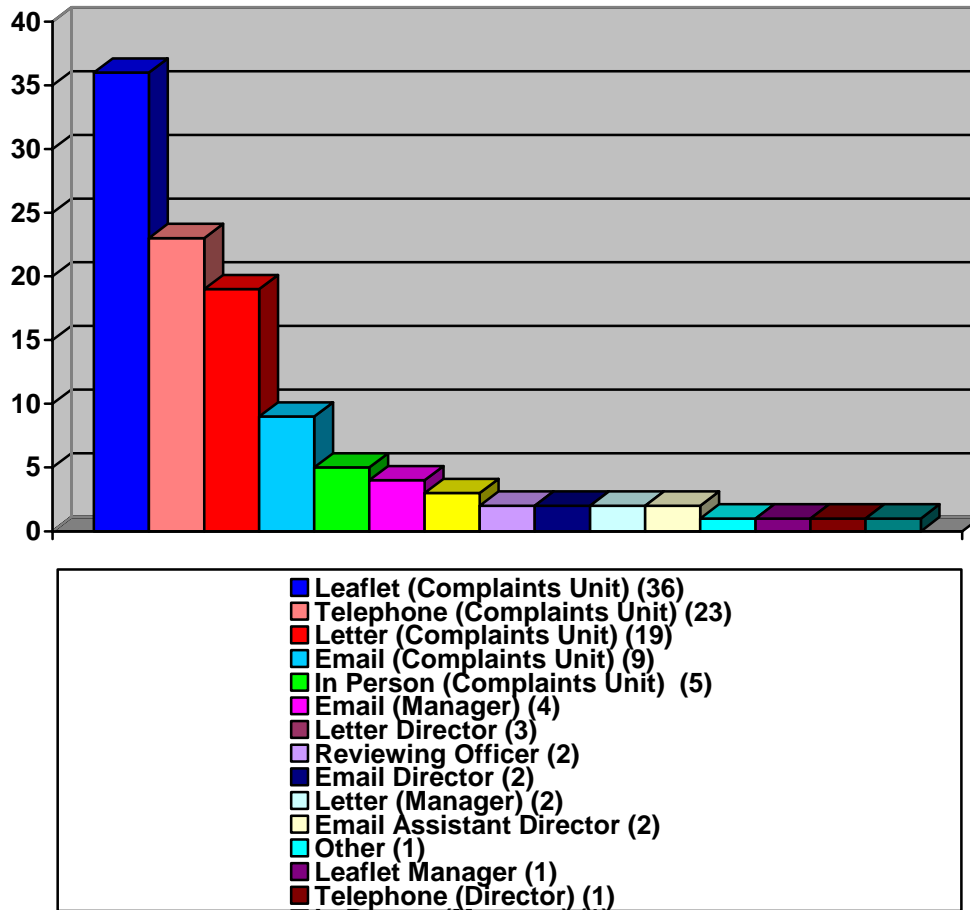
## **8. COMPLAINTS RECEIVED ACROSS THE DIRECTORATE.**



- 8.1 The number of complaints registered on the statutory procedures this year has risen by 7 this year. The highest number of complaints received was in respect of the Care Management Teams, these have fallen as a proportion of the total, but still dominate the figures. The five Care Management Teams (including Team 4) will hold cases for the greatest lengths of time and will deal with many people who are going through extremely difficult and painful transitions. Not all complaints are upheld, but all require careful consideration to ensure that they have been responded to appropriately and any lessons that can be learnt are taken forward.
- 8.2 Complaints for the Children's homes have fallen this year by four; however the number of complaints against externally commissioned services, and four of which concerned children's homes, has risen relatively sharply suggesting greater awareness of the procedures amongst the young people within these establishments.
- 8.3 Complaints activity is monitored throughout the year, not least to detect where a specific service area might be struggling in the manner in which the service is delivered. An increase within a specific area or in the total service should not necessarily be seen as negative; it can be an indicator that people have been given greater awareness and access to the complaint process, and particularly for young people this is crucial in that they need to feel secure and confident in being able to complain and see legitimate processes as applying to them.

8.4 Six complaints were received in respect of externally commissioned agencies; the Local Authority remains responsible for complaints received concerning these and for ensuring that a response is offered to the complainant.

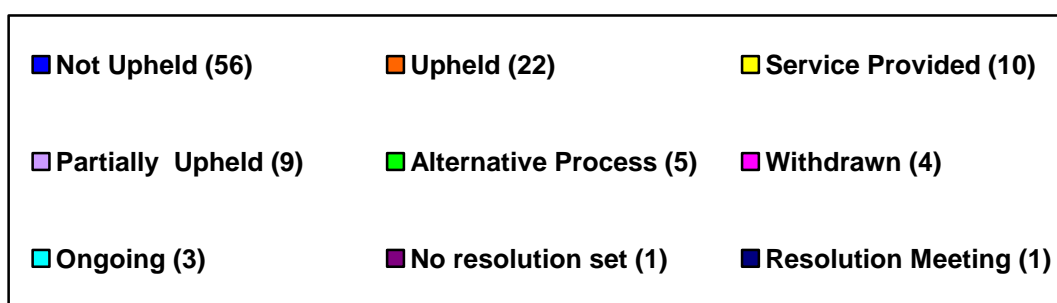
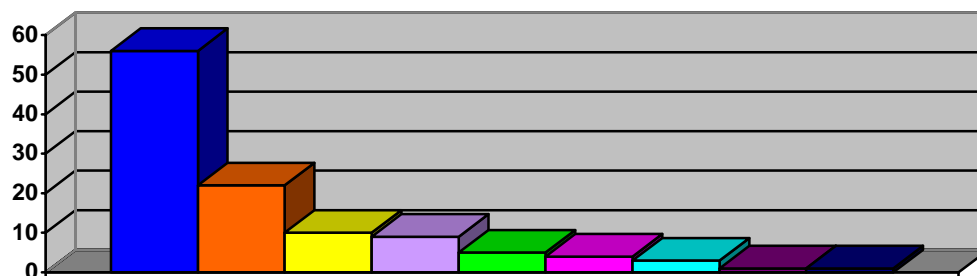
### 8.5 HOW COMPLAINTS WERE RECEIVED



8.6 Completing a complaints leaflet remains the most common way of communicating complaints, followed by telephone calls and letters to the Quality and Complaints Team; contacting the Complaints team directly accounted for **92** of the **111** complaints received this year.



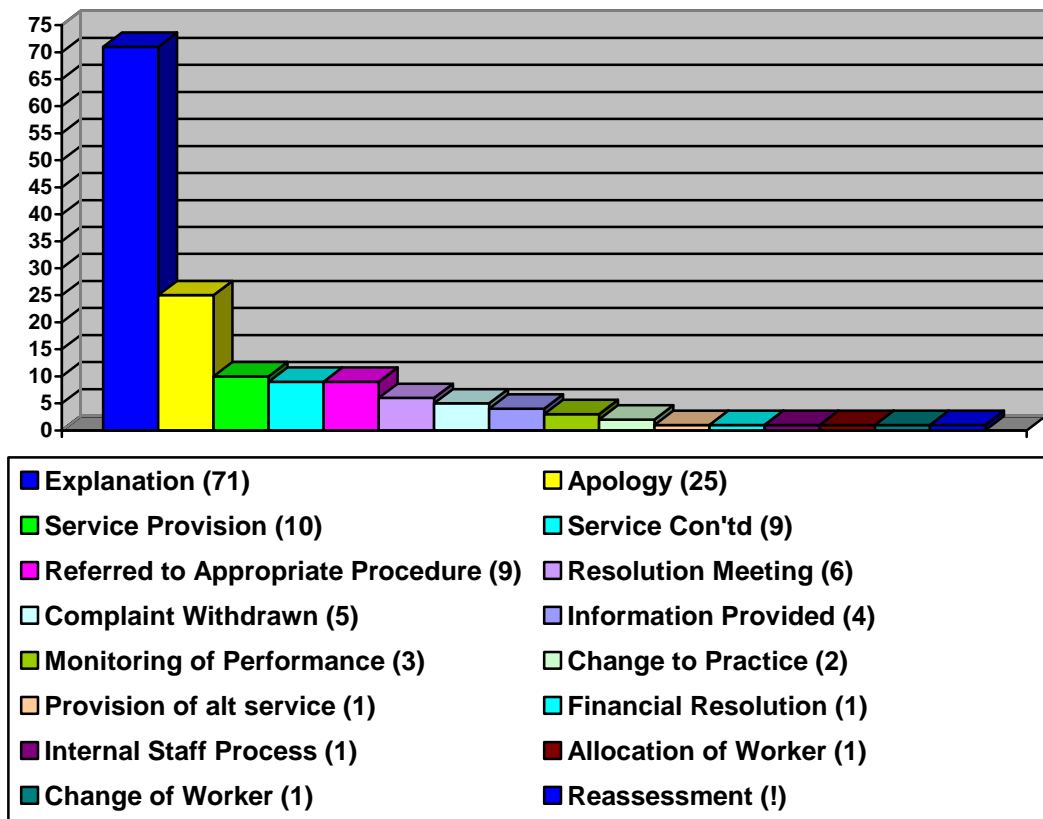
## 9. OUTCOMES OF COMPLAINTS



- 9.1 The majority of complaints result in a finding, whether this be a finding of 'Upheld', 'Partially Upheld' or 'Service Provided' where the view would be that the complaint is justified to a greater or lesser extent, or 'Not Upheld' where the case for the complaint cannot be found
- 9.2 Of those complaints which reached a conclusion at Stage 1, **41** were upheld to some extent, compared to the **56** that were not upheld.
- 9.3 It will be noted that there is a category of "Resolution Meeting Offered" in the table above; this can assist in resolving complaints where a direct meeting would be useful or where time and care needs to be taken to ensure that all avenues have been explored, particularly where the Local Authority believes that it has responded appropriately, but the complainant believes otherwise.
- 9.4 No complaints moved to Stage 2 this year, but as previously stated one complaint at Stage 2 from a previous year has been completed.
- 9.5 Five complaints were classed as withdrawn; in each of these the person who was making the complaint had been asked to contact the Quality and Complaints Team to give further details as it was believed the information that had been submitted had not been sufficient.

We do sometimes need to ask for additional information if we are uncertain about the issues that are being complained about, which may include the team that have been involved. In most cases complainants will make contact and provide good information, but where they do not a further letter is sent advising that the complaint will be closed, but to contact this team again if they are unhappy with this action.

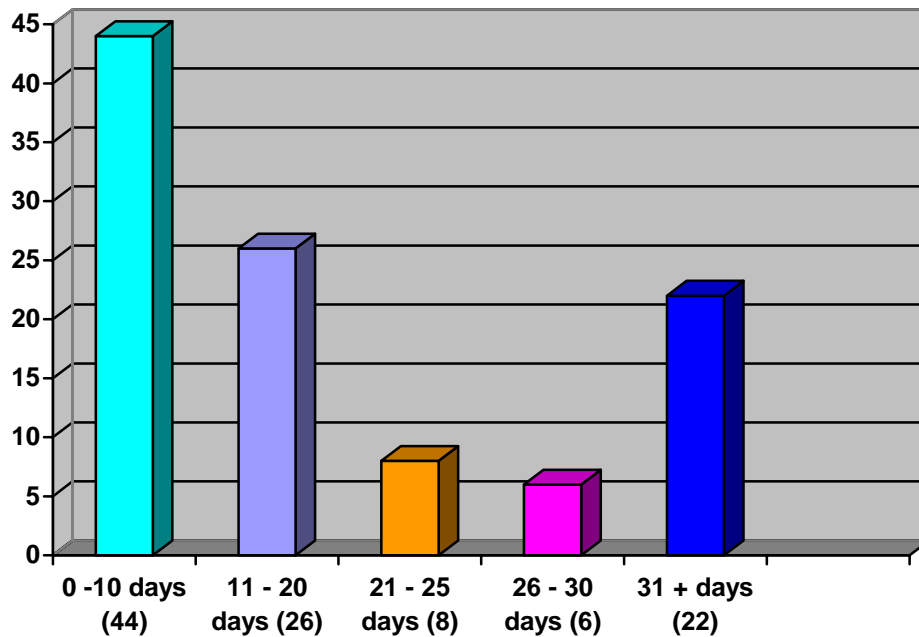
## 9.6 HOW COMPLAINTS WERE RESOLVED IN 2011/12



9.6 It will be noted that the chart above shows more resolutions (**150**) than complaints (**111**) and it needs to be noted that the above figures do not include the three complaints which remain ongoing and which do not have remedies as yet. This is due to some complaints requiring more than one action if they are to be satisfactorily resolved, illustrating the complexity of many of the complaints received. It is also good practice to provide an apology for all upheld complaints, in addition to any other remedy proposed.

9.7 As has been the case for the past two years, the majority of complaints were resolved by providing an explanation; quite often this will be detailed following a thorough examination of records and discussions with relevant members of staff. Explanations are provided particularly where it is felt that the complaint is not upheld. A number of complainants will receive several outcomes for example an explanation together with an apology and, where required, new service provision.

## 10 TIMESCALES



10.1 The figures above do not include the five complaints that were withdrawn; excluding this

- **44.1%** were resolved (**35%** last year) within **10** working days
- **23.4%** were resolved (**17%**) within **11 and 20** working days.
- **7.2%** were resolved (**7%** last year) between **21 and 25 working** days
- **5.4%** were resolved (**9.6%**) between **26 and 30** working days.
- **19.8%** (compared with **30%** last year) of complaints took more than **31** working days to complete.

10.2 There has been a significant improvement in the numbers of complaints being dealt with within twenty working days (**67.5%** compared with **52%** last year) as well as a sizeable reduction in the numbers of complaints taking longer than thirty one working days to resolve.

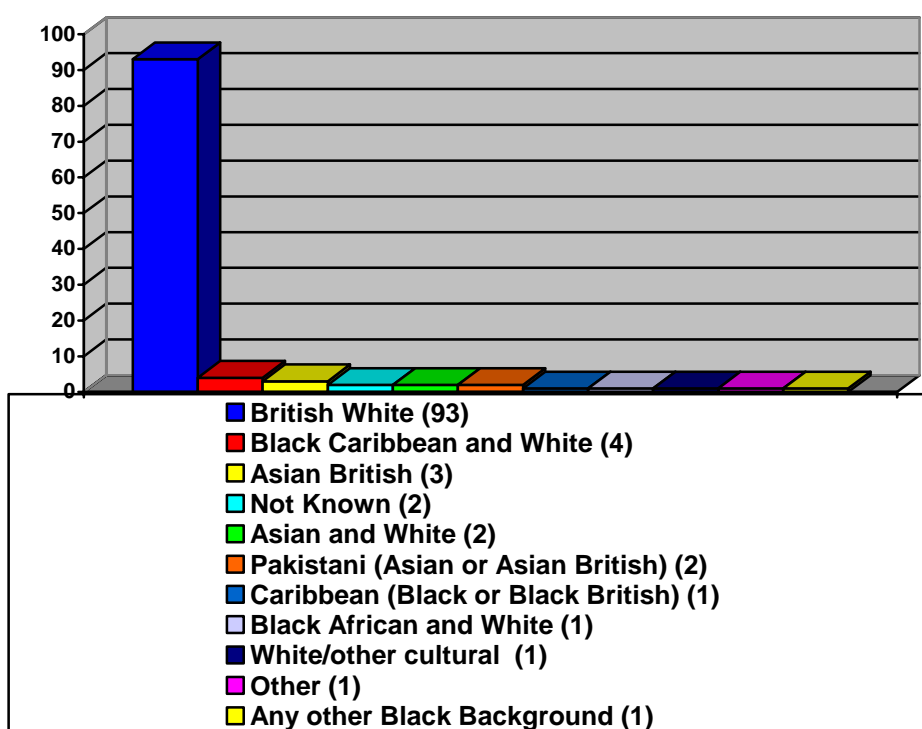
10.3 **Reasons for Delays:** - The following are not put forward as justification for delay instead they are presented as part and parcel of the difficulties in concluding all complaints in good time. Very similar to last year, complaints where delay occurred during 2011/12 involved: -

- Complex issues concerning more than one team where a joint response is required and issues are not clear.
- Initial complaints which contain few details, requiring requests to be made for further information. Additional complaints being presented on the same issues whilst the original was being enquired into.
- Arranging appropriate redress for a young person or their carers.
- Complaints that concern cases which are before the Courts and which can be considered, but efforts must be made to ensure that Court matters are kept separate.

- Ensuring that the service user supports the complaint that is made on their behalf (this applies to older children and parents of children).
- Other procedures needing to be completed before the Complaints procedure can become involved.

## 11. ETHNICITY

11.1 Every effort is made to record a complainant's ethnicity. However, it needs to be noted that a number of people prefer not to describe their ethnicity or it is simply not known to the complainant. The recorded figures for 2011/12 are as follows: -



11.2 As in previous years the majority of people who used the complaint process are British/White. The Quality & Complaints Team will continue to try to raise awareness and improve accessibility to the complaint process for all children in receipt of a service during 2011 /12.

Good arrangements exist with the Local Authority's interpreters and community development workers to ensure that any issues that they become aware of can be brought forward.

## Section 7

### 12. HOW WE ENSURE THAT COMPLAINTS ARE GENUINELY RESOLVED?

- 12.1 Responses that are offered at Stage 1 of the procedures must contain details about how the complainant can pursue matters further if they remain dissatisfied.
- 12.2 The early acknowledgement of complaints by the team is believed to promote a level of confidence that will encourage complainants to raise any issues that they are unhappy with.
- 12.3 Some people will bring different complaints to us in successive years suggesting a level of confidence that a satisfactory resolution will be found.
- 12.4 We keep monitoring the complaint to its conclusion together with the actions needed to resolve it.
- 12.5 We send a questionnaire out to all complainants after the case is closed, allowing the complainant this further opportunity to comment on whether matters are concluded for them.
- 12.6 Efforts are made to work with team managers in ensuring that the response addresses the complaint and that good detail is given in the response.

### **Examples of Areas of Work for the Complaints Service 2011/12**

- Emphasis on learning from complaints to ensure that lessons learned can be shared within the Directorate and are not kept local to the team concerned. The proposals mentioned in last year's annual report, to develop a system to progress and report on learning from complaints went live in April of this year, which will enable better reporting in future reports.
- Maintain Quarterly meetings between the complaints service and the Assistant Director for Children's Specialist Services; this ensures good communication and to pursue learning from complaints as appropriate.
- Continued monitoring of timescales and response by Managers, the intention being to improve timescales and raise standards.

### **TRAINING AND RAISING AWARENESS**

- Awareness training for front line staff has been delivered along with training for Managers/Seniors in responding to Stage 1 complaints.
- Continuation of training for Managers and Senior Managers in addressing stage 2 complaints.
- Delivery of training to foster carers and exploration of including this as a component of training for fostering applicants.

- Promotion of the Complaint Comments and Compliments leaflets amongst teams and service users.
- Refreshed guidance to staff about how to respond positively and helpfully to comments made by service users and carers.
- Maintain contact with Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure that they are aware of complaints made by young people; this also assists Reviewing Officers in bringing concerns to our attention.
- Continued close liaison with the advocacy service provided by the Children's Society to share learning and knowledge.

## **SECTION 8**

### **14. EXAMPLES OF LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS: 2011/2012**

- In a number of individual complaints new or reviewed Services were provided where this was appropriate, for example where contact for a child with their family has been missed, this has been addressed by enabling the contact at another time.
  - Revision of care plans for children when information has been presented to the Quality and Complaints Team; in these instances discussion will take place between the complaints Team, the social worker and their Manager and the Reviewing Officer. Decisions remain the preserve of the District Team.
  - For some young people there has been a revision of their contact arrangements following their complaint.
  - Where there are a number of workers involved with a family, complaints can emphasise the need to coordinate and communicate effectively.
  - Where professional visits have been late or have not taken place, use of the complaints procedures has helped to identify difficulties for management to correct.
  - Use of the complaints procedures can sometimes identify where particularly strong feelings are held about a particular worker and where the worker may be at risk, enabling appropriate precautions to be taken.
- 14.1 The new system will enable close liaison with Teams, Divisional Managers and with the Assistant Director to enable increased learning from complaints.

**Quality & Complaints Team July 2012.**