

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

ANNUAL REPORT ON THE CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE
COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS PROCEDURE
2013/2014



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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Children and Young People's Service is required to have a complaints and representations procedure by the Children Act 1989, Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006. The Local Authority functions covered include services provided under Parts III, IV and V of the Children Act 1989, for example:
- an unwelcome or disputed decision;
 - concern about the quality or appropriateness of a service;
 - delay in decision making or provision of services;
 - delivery or non-delivery of services;
 - quantity, frequency, change or cost of a service;
 - attitude or behaviour of staff;
 - application of eligibility and assessment criteria;
 - the impact on a child or young person of the application of a Local Authority policy; and
 - assessment, care management and review.
- 1.2 The statutory regulations require the Local Authority to produce and publish an annual report on complaints and compliments made by service users, carers and members of the public about children's social care services directly provided or commissioned by the Directorate.
- 1.3 This report provides information derived from an analysis of the number and type of complaints/representations and compliments received between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014; and the outcome of those complaints. Its purpose is to inform the citizens of Wolverhampton about the operation of Wolverhampton's Children, Young People and Families Services, based on the nature of the complaints and compliments received in respect of these services.
- 1.4 Children's Social Care Services comes under the leadership of the Community Directorate, which is committed to a positive and proactive approach of 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 the methods employed in seeking resolutions to the individual's dissatisfaction with the service they have received.
- 1.5 The Guidance accompanying the Regulations "Getting the Best from Complaints" makes particular reference to the importance of creating a listening culture among local service providers and their managers and dealing effectively and fairly with concerns at the earliest stage. By offering a genuine attempt at impartial resolution in this way, it is hoped that few cases will require more formal Stage 2 Investigation or Stage 3 Panels (see page 6 for details of the complaints procedure). The Directorate continues to make use of 'Independent Investigators' and an 'Independent Person' is also appointed for those cases that require a Stage 2 investigation to be carried out, in order to ensure best practice. When there is need to convene a Stage 3 Panel, all Panel members are independent of the Council.

- 1.6 The need to avoid delay in resolving issues where young people are concerned is widely recognised and acted upon by staff. However, when a complaint has to be dealt with using the formal complaints process, this can appear long winded and complicated to a young person. An Advocacy service is available for those children and young people in need and for those who are looked after, who need support to make their complaint. It is essential that young people should have confidence in their right to be heard.
- 1.7 The work undertaken by the Children's Early Help Services is not governed by the Children's Act 1989. Wolverhampton City Council The authority does, however, apply the same timescales and governance across all children's services with regard to complaint handling.
- 1.8 Children and young people are issued with leaflets about complaints; and Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Conference Chairs remind young people of their right to complain and where necessary ensure that they are able to use the procedure.
- 1.9 The Directorate's leaflets refer to Compliments, Comments and Complaints rather than simply complaints. This offers the opportunity for people to make suggestions or compliments about how they have experienced services. This feedback is used to build on good practice and to improve services and how they are provided.

The Monitoring of Community Complaints and Representations

- 1.10 All complaints are dealt with in accordance with the relevant procedures and legislation. They are recorded onto a database which enables more effective monitoring of performance reporting mechanisms and which enables managers to track complaints effectively. This, however, can only be fully effective when sufficient priority is given to dealing with complaints.
- 1.11 Informal complaints made directly to operational staff or their managers and resolved immediately do not fall within the scope of the Complaints Procedure. However, so that information about responses to services can be collated for analysis, Service Managers record these onto a CP1 form which is returned to the Safeguarding and Quality Service on a monthly basis.
- 1.12 During 2013/14 work has continued to focus on mediation and on making effective links where safeguarding concerns and complaints derive from services commissioned by the local authority. This involves adopting a person centred approach to clarify with the complainant what the nature of the complaint is and what they hope to see achieved before an investigation begins. Where appropriate this can involve mediation between the complainant and services to bring about a resolution.
- 1.13 The benefits of effective complaints handling is promoted by the complaints team maintaining contact with staff across all Children, Young People and Families Services; thus to raising awareness of the complaints procedure and their role in resolving complaints promptly where they arise in order to achieve an early resolution of problems.

- 1.14 The Community directorate received an encouraging number of compliments. This is an indication that the widespread distribution of the complaints and compliments leaflets ensures that the public have a high awareness that comments on services are welcomed.

2.0 Executive Summary

Overview of Activity

Volume:-

- In 2013/2014 saw an increase in the total number of complaints received from 149 in 2012/13 to 160 in the period covered by this report. This increase was anticipated due to work undertaken to make the complaints procedure more accessible to children, young people and their families. Complaints are now received from a number of methods including complaint forms, letters, telephone and email.
- In 2013/14 24 (14%) complaints received were from children and young people themselves. A further 6 (2%) children and young people complained using the services of an advocate.

Timeliness:-

- The total of complaints resolved within the statutory 20 day timescale was 78%. (This compares to 77% in the previous year).

Of this amount 43 % were closed within the initial 10 day statutory timescale.

- The average time taken to respond to a complaint was 16 days. (See page 17).

Outcomes:-

- There has been an increase in the number of complaints upheld or partially upheld compared to the previous financial year; of the 93 stage 1 complaints responded to:
 - 69 were substantiated compared to 61 in 2012/13
 - 24 were partially substantiated compared to 19 in 2012/13
 - During 2013/14 there was one complaint which could not be resolved at stage one of the complaints procedure and which required the appointment of an Independent Person to investigate further.

Key Issues:-

- In 2013/2014 20 complaints were received relating to conduct/attitude; as compared to 23 in the previous year.

- The most frequently complained about issue was communication/information.
- There has been a decrease complaints received that relate to Conduct/Attitude of staff, with complaints 20 having been received compared to 23 in 2012/13. This equates to 13% of the total number of complaints received, as compared to 15 % in the previous year.
- Regulations allow for statutory timescales for completion to be extended to 20 working days. This year 78% of cases were completed within this extended timescale.
- There was one complaint that could not be resolved at Stage 1 and which subsequently required progression to Stage 2 of the complaints procedure. This shows considerable testament to the thoroughness of investigations and mediation which has taken place earlier in the complaints process.

3.0 The Complaints Procedure

3.1 The Complaints and Representations Procedure is in four parts and closely follows the guidance issued by the Department for Education and Skills "Getting the Best from Complaints", September 2006.

3.2 In accordance with the Children's Act 1989, complaints can be made by:-

- any child or young any child or young person (or a parent of his or someone who has parental responsibility for him) who is being looked after by the local authority or is not looked after by them but is in need;
- any local authority foster carer (including those caring for children placed through independent fostering agencies);
- children leaving care;
- special Guardians;
- a child or young person (or parent of his) to whom a Special Guardian order is in force;
- any person who has applied for an assessment under section 14F(3) or (4);
- any child or young person who may be adopted, their parents and guardians;
- persons wishing to adopt a child;
- any other person whom arrangements for the provision of adoption services extend;
- adopted persons, their parents, natural parents and former guardians; and

- such other person as the local authority consider has sufficient interest in the child or young person's welfare to warrant his representations being considered by them.

Pre-Formal Stage

- 3.3 Informal complaints made directly to operational staff or their managers are usually dealt with at that point and resolved through local mediation.
- 3.4 Comments made by users about a service, whether they are favourable or unfavourable should be dealt with by either the front-line service provider or his or her line manager.
- 3.5 If the matter cannot be satisfactorily resolved, the service user should be advised of his or her right to make a formal complaint.
- 3.6 Such comments are termed "representations" and are not dealt with through the formal Complaints Procedure. However, it is important that such representations are recorded, by service teams to ensure this information is captured to be fed back to the central complaints function.
- 3.7 The Manager for each team, service or children's home has to keep a record of representations at the Pre-Formal stage, which should be forwarded on to the Safeguarding and Quality service on a monitoring form. This form should then be submitted at the end of each month for analysis of any emerging themes or trends in issues being raised.

Stage 1 Complaints and Mediations

- 3.8 When complaints are received, they are initially passed to the relevant service or Team Manager to see if the problem can be resolved either by further investigation, a letter offering an apology or through a meeting with the complainant. This process should be completed within 10 working days or up to 20 working days when the issues are complex. The person who has complained can then ask for a formal independent investigation if they are not satisfied with the response at this stage.
- 3.9 It is good practice the Manager on receiving a Stage 1 complaint to contact the complainant at a very early stage, by telephone, to ascertain what he or she is unhappy about. An active reminder system is operated to ensure compliance with timescales is achieved wherever possible.

Stage 2 Investigations

- 3.10 These involve a thorough investigation by an appointed Investigating Officer, the production of an investigation report and a response by a senior officer as the "Adjudicating Officer". Under the Regulations, an Independent Person must also be appointed in all Stage 2 cases to work alongside the Investigating Officer and provide his or her own report on the conduct of the investigation.
- 3.11 This process should take 25 working days and up to 65 working days in

exceptional circumstances. This is a difficult standard to meet, often because of the availability of complainants as well as the pressures of other work for Investigating Officers and those service managers and front-line staff they need to interview. An active reminder system is operated to ensure compliance with timescales wherever possible.

Stage 3 Panel

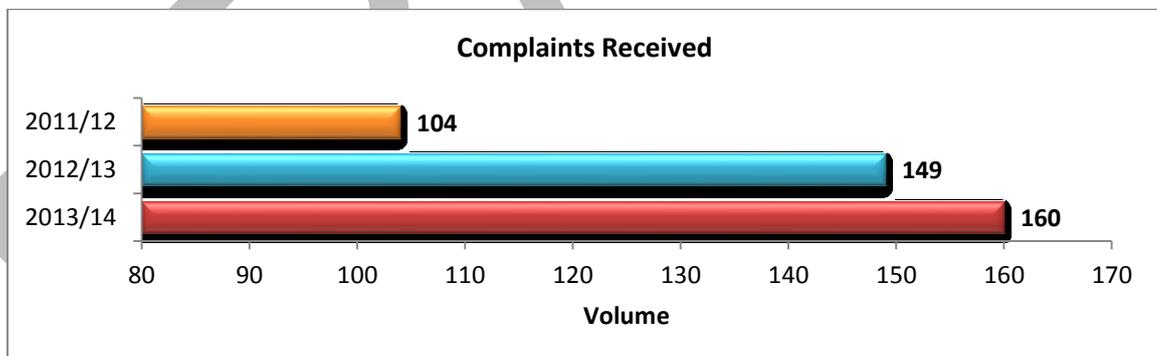
- 3.12 A Panel is set up if a complainant is not satisfied with the response received from the senior officer following the Stage 2 investigation. The complaint is considered by a panel of three people, all of whom must be independent of the Council. The Review Panel's report is sent to the Director of Children's Services and the person who has complained within 5 working days of the Hearing.
- 3.13 Within 15 working days of receiving the panel's recommendations, the local authority must, together with the independent person, determine how the authority will respond to them and what they propose to do in light of them.
- 3.14 The complaints procedure ends with the Independent Review Panel. If the matter still has not been dealt with to the satisfaction of the person complaining, then they can contact the Local Government Ombudsman. A complainant may take the matter up with the Ombudsman at any point in the process.
- 3.15 The plan arising from the findings of the panel is a live document, subject to periodic review and challenge, that either:
- actions a policy, or
 - enacts legislation
- 3.16 Actions included in the plan should be time limited with clear actions, outcome focused and task ownership. However, they can range from service specific to over-arching council, or even city-wide. They may have multiple work-streams feeding into them. Each strategy should have either a project or a programme associated with it.

4.0 Statistical Analysis of Complaints – Children's Social Care Complaints Activity

Number of Stage 1 Complaints and Mediations Received

- 4.1 Most successful organisations encourage service users to complain, and as such a high volume of complaints is often an indication of a healthy relationship with service users. Many adults do not proactively seek to have contact with children's social care, and this can influence their view of the service. Those who want help in caring for their child may feel they are not getting enough help, or the right sort. As our staff are their personal contact with the council over child welfare concerns they are often seen to be the cause of this shortfall. However, all complaints are taken seriously.

- 4.2 In Wolverhampton, there are 62,952 children and young people (0-19 years); who form 25.2% of the city's population (source: ONS Census 2011); with 48.8% of 0-19 year olds being female and 51.2% being male.
- 4.3 During 2013/14 Children's Services received 7128 referrals; and 613 children were subject to child protection plans. A total of 986 children were looked after at some time during the year. As at 31 March 2014; there were 783 children looked after by the local authority.
- 4.4 Therefore, and not unexpectedly the highest number of **stage 1** complaints are received in respect to the Children in Need/Child Protection teams and the Looked After Children teams. Given the volume and nature of Children's Services work, particularly where judgements and decisions are made about individuals and families, conflict and dissatisfaction is to be expected and complaints are therefore inevitable.
- 4.5 Complaints will often be made where it is felt that the Social Worker is not working in a way that the families would wish of them. The nature of the work of Children's Social Care is such that many families do not choose to engage and seek to divert or delay the intervention. Complaints are always investigated by the Consultant Social Worker and actions taken to work with the complainant to resolve their concerns.
- 4.6 The total number of complaints received in 2013/14 increased from 149 (2012/2013) to 160. This is equivalent to an increase in the number of complaints received against the previous year of 8%; as compared to the increase of 45% noted from 2011/12 to 2012/13.



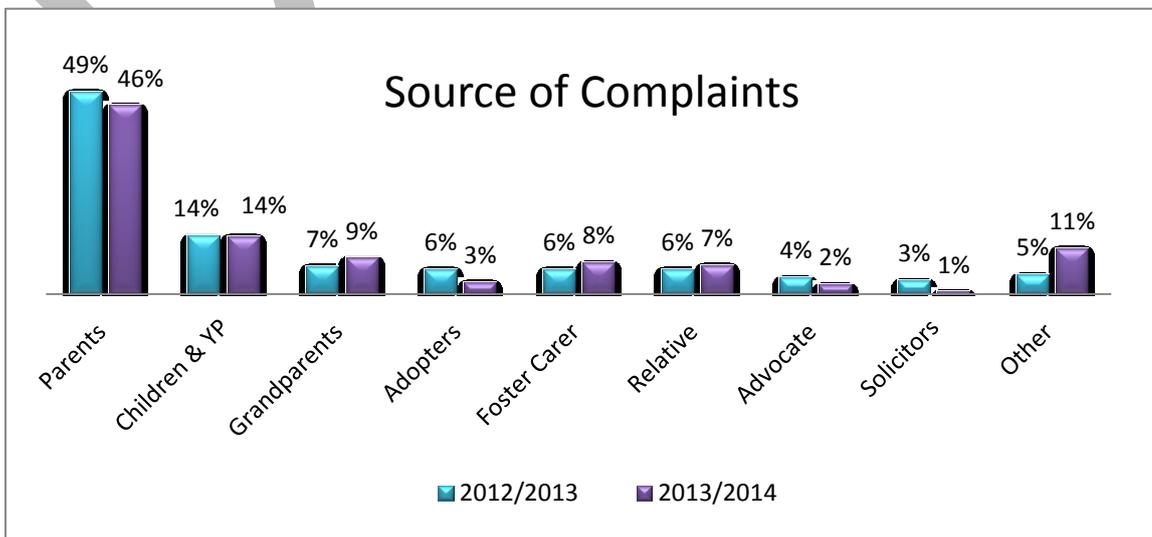
- 4.7 The numbers of complaints received does not necessarily correlate directly to the quality of services provided to children and young people by the local authority. Having an accessible complaints process and how complainants experience the complaints process relies on a positive organisational culture and leadership in relation to receiving and responding to negative feedback.

Source of Complaints

- 4.8 Last year saw the introduction of new leaflets which were designed specifically for the use of children and young people, however as most complainants are relatives of the child and are predominantly parents, this year saw the

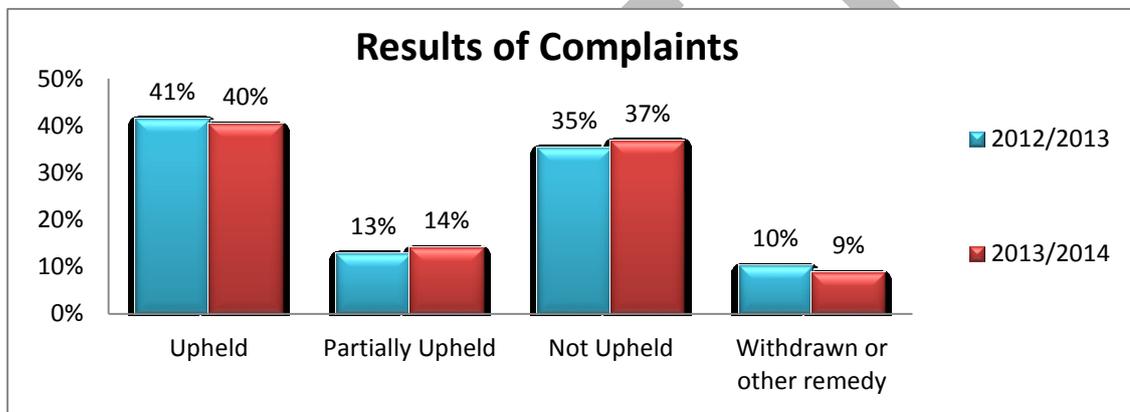
introduction of a new complaints leaflet designed specifically for parents and carers.

- 4.9 Leaflets are displayed in local offices and given to young people at the point of initial contact and when they become subject to child protection plans. Information about how to make a complaint is also included in the Information Booklet given to young people when they come into the care of the Local Authority.
- 4.10 Information is also available on the local authority website and should be given to young people by all staff working in Children’s Services and providing services to children and young people.
- 4.11 Providing appropriate mechanisms for all children and young people to complain is fundamental in ensuring that they have a voice, however the authority recognises that it is important to ensure that the parents and extended family members are also given the opportunity to complain.
- 4.12 In 2013/14 a total of 24 complaints were made by the children or young person direct without the use of an advocate, and a further 4 complaints were received with the use of an advocate.
- 4.13 Young people are offered an advocate at the point of making a complaint. This is in line with statutory guidance for social care complaints. Children’s Services has a contract for provision of advocacy with the Children’s Society Black Country Advocacy Service.
- 4.14 The main causes of complaint related to the relationship with the child’s social worker (not visiting enough, not getting on) and contact with family.
- 4.15 This year there has been a considerable increase in complaints being made by groups of other people who are all categorised as ‘others’ for complaint reporting. Whilst some of these complaints have been by made by neighbours, the majority have been by professionals such as head teachers, play workers, and school welfare officers.



Complaint Outcomes

- 4.16 The following charts represent those complaints dealt with at the mediation and stage 1 level by Consultant Social Worker, Senior Consultant Social Worker, or Head of Service, and by the Safeguarding and Quality Service. This means that the majority of complaints are dealt with at this stage to the satisfaction of the person making the complaint.
- 4.17 During 2013/14 there was an increase in the number of complaints upheld or partially upheld compared to the previous financial year, and of the 80 stage 1 complaints received 61 were substantiated and 19 were partially substantiated, as compared to 36 and 22 respectively the previous year.
- 4.18 A key principle of the complaints procedure is to inform service users of the outcome of their complaints.



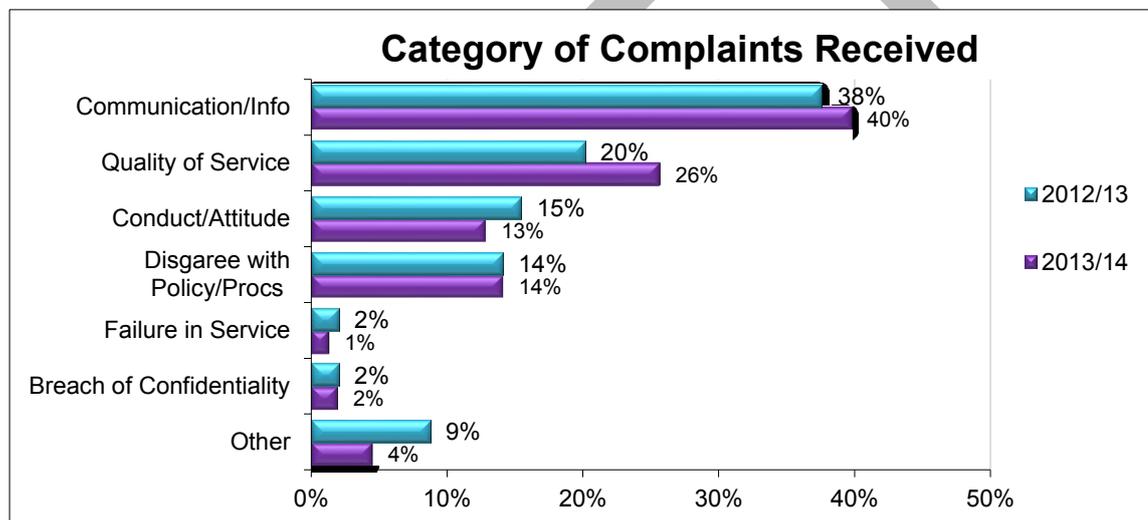
Statutory Stage 2 and 3 Complaints and Corporate Stage 2 Complaints

- 4.19 During 2013/2014 there was one complaint that could not be resolved at Stage 1 and which subsequently required progression to Stage 2 of the complaints procedure.
- 4.20 Before the completion of a Stage 2 investigation, the complainant however went to the Local Government Ombudsman who undertook an investigation. (See page 19).
- 4.21 The small volume of cases which require progression shows considerable testament to the thoroughness of investigations and mediation which has taken place earlier in the complaints process.
- 4.22 Investigating Officers have received training in effective complaints handling and are aware of the financial implications should a complaint progress to Stage 2 or Stage 3.
- 4.23 Some complaints relating to services provided by children's social care do not fall under the stipulated regulations of the children's act and therefore are dealt with in accordance with the corporate complaints procedure. This year there

were three complaints which were progressed to stage 2 of the corporate procedure.

Categories of complaints received

- 4.24 The table below details the nature of complaints received. These are grouped in broadly based categories.
- 4.25 Communication; and staff conduct and attitude continue to feature largely in complaints. This is not unusual in service sectors, particularly in social care; as conflict between parents or carers and social workers may be unavoidable where children need to be protected. A total of 40% of complaints received relate to communication and/or information; this has increased over the past couple of years; whilst the number of complaints received in relation to staff conduct/attitude has decreased.



Communication/Information

- 4.26 By far the most frequently complained about issue was communication/information with 62 complaints of this nature being received. This represents 40% of the total number of complaints received.
- 4.27 In terms of emerging themes it is evident that complaints are being made by relatives/carer's regarding issues around contact arrangements that are made for children / young people who become looked after. A large number of this type of complaint also include issues around a lack of communication and/or support from social services.
- 4.28 Many of the complaints received are from complainants who have been unable to speak to their allocated social worker. Frequently complainants advise that they have left several telephone messages for the social worker to return their calls but for this to not have happened.

- 4.29 In such circumstances, in an attempt at first point resolution, the complaints team will make immediate contact where possible, with the social worker, and request that they telephone the complainant back. In some circumstances the complainant is happy with this immediate resolution.

Disagree with Policy/Procedure

- 4.30 The number of complaints relating to this category have remained relatively static with 22 being received in this reporting period, as compared to 21 in 2012/13.

These tend to relate to parents/carers disagreeing with decisions made by Children's Social Care and could be closely linked with the lack of communication or ensuring that clear information is relayed to those affected.

Conduct and Attitude

- 4.31 There has been a decrease in those received relating to Conduct/Attitude, where 20 were received compared to last year's figure of 23. This represented 13 % of the total number of complaints received, compared to 15 % last year.
- 4.32 It must be noted here however that 45% (9 cases) of these were unsubstantiated, 50% (10 cases) were substantiated and a further 5% (1 case) was partially substantiated.
- 4.33 Unfortunately statistics do not provide qualitative information which would assist in identifying which complaints have arisen from insensitivity and rudeness and which have arisen as a result of parents being given clear and unequivocal messages about their parenting and/or parental behaviours.
- 4.34 The Complaints team works closely with Senior Consultant Social Workers to decide when Social Workers and/or Consultant Social Workers cross the line from directness or rudeness, in order that issues may be taken up in supervision when necessary. It is critical that learning from complaints of this nature is embedded in staff supervision and feedback mechanisms.

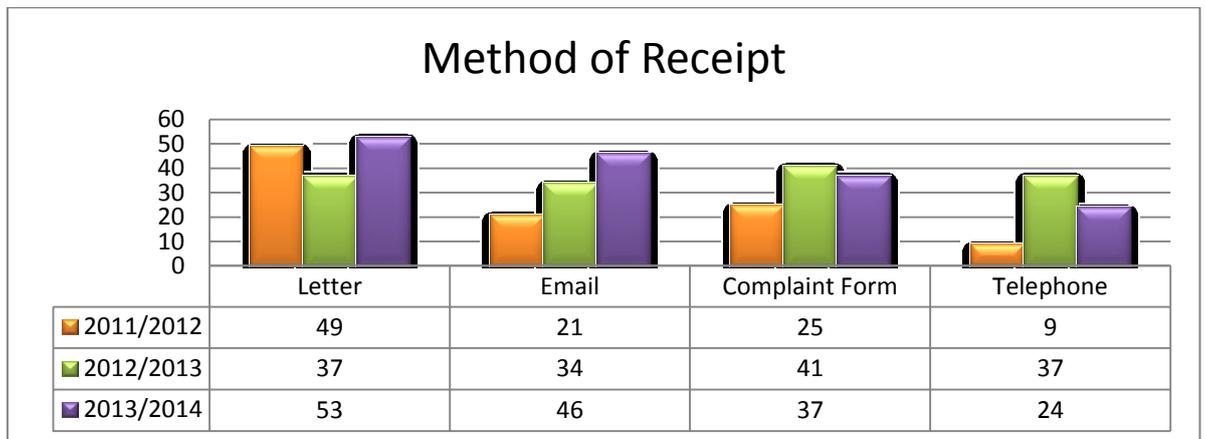
Failure in Service

- 4.35 In 2012/2013; 3 complaints were received relating to failure in service; and this has reduced to 2 this reporting period. Generally service users felt that whilst they received the service, it was a lack of effective communication/information which led them to complain.

Method of Receipt

- 4.36 This year there has been an increase in complaints received by letter and email, (representing 62 % of all complaints received) with a decline in those complaining by telephone and slight decline by those complainants who preferred the use of a complaint form.

- 4.37 Parents and carers appeared to favour making a complaint by email, expecting a speedier resolution to their complaint whilst children and young people favoured the completion of the complaints form.



Complaints by Service Area

- 4.38 Complaints are regularly reported to the Senior Management Team and Managers receive weekly updates and statistics on their service area. The majority of complaints have been received in respect to the following teams:

- North East Locality (22 cases),
- Looked after Team 2 (17 cases),
- South East Locality (16 cases),
- Duty and Assessment (14 cases).

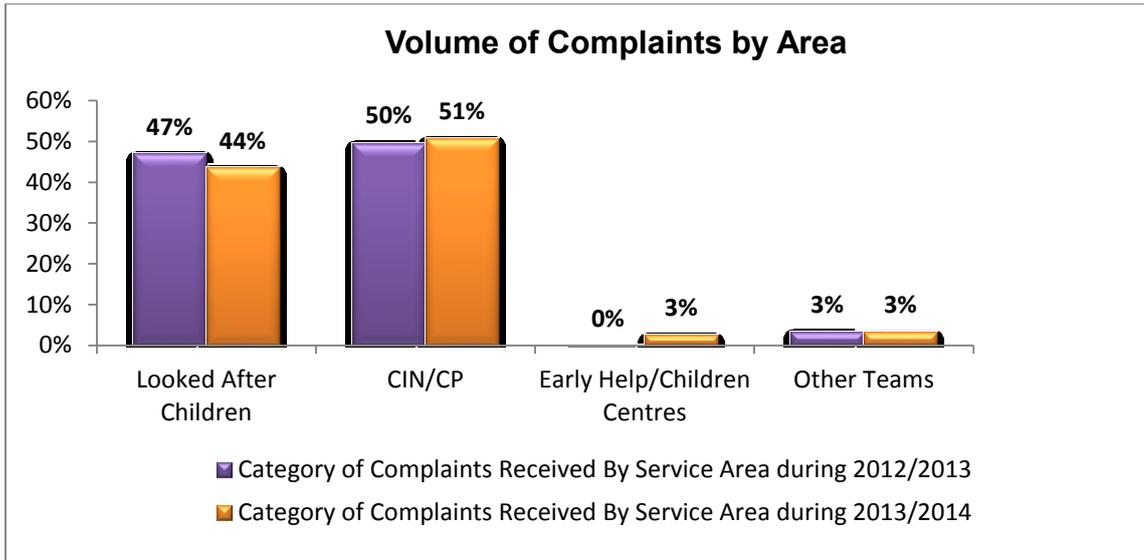
A full detailed list of complaints by service area can be found in **Appendix 1**.

- 4.39 Some teams experienced considerable increases when compared to last year and these were the North East Locality Team where the number of complaints rose from 13 to 22, Fostering from 6 cases to 13, and the Gem Centre where there was 1 case last year compared to 8 this year.

- 4.40 During 2013/14 a number of teams received fewer complaints than during the previous year:

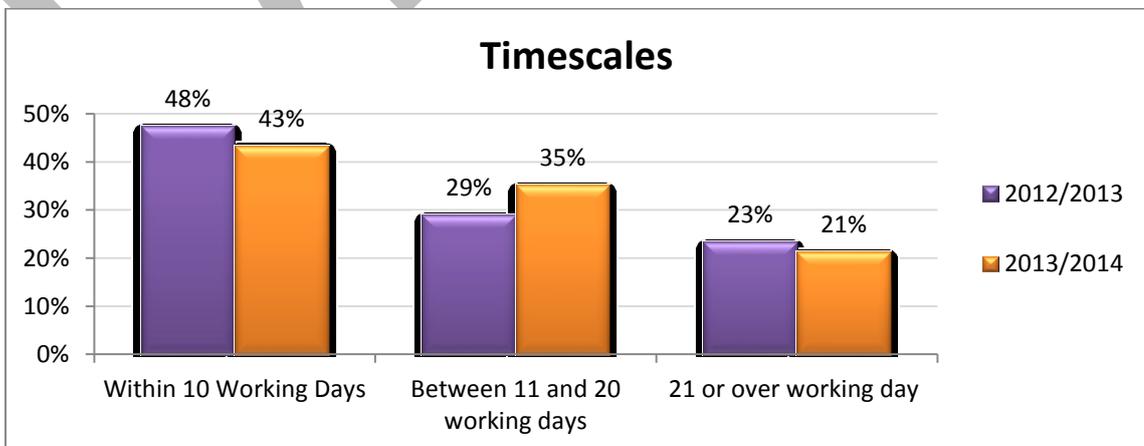
- South East Locality - reduced from 28 to 16
- Looked After Children's Team 1 - reduced from 15 to 10.

- 4.41 The Looked After Children's teams combined have seen a reduction in the number of complaints received, where 27 were received this year compared to 34 the previous year.



Timescales for Investigation of Complaints

- 4.42 Mediations and Stage 1 Complaints – 78% of cases were resolved within the statutory 20 day timescale and 43 % of cases were resolved within 10 working days.
- 4.43 Email reminders are sent to managers to remind them a week before a response to a complaint is due. In addition, Senior Officers are informed of any overdue responses and are thus able to ensure that delays are kept to a minimum. However, any process can only be fully effective if managers are able to give sufficient priority to dealing with complaints. Some delays are unavoidable, where the complaint is complex and the time taken for the investigation is subject to the availability of any front line staff that may need to be interviewed as part of an investigation.
- 4.44 The time taken by managers to investigate the circumstances of some of these complaints can exacerbate the situation and can lead to it becoming a secondary complaint in its own right.

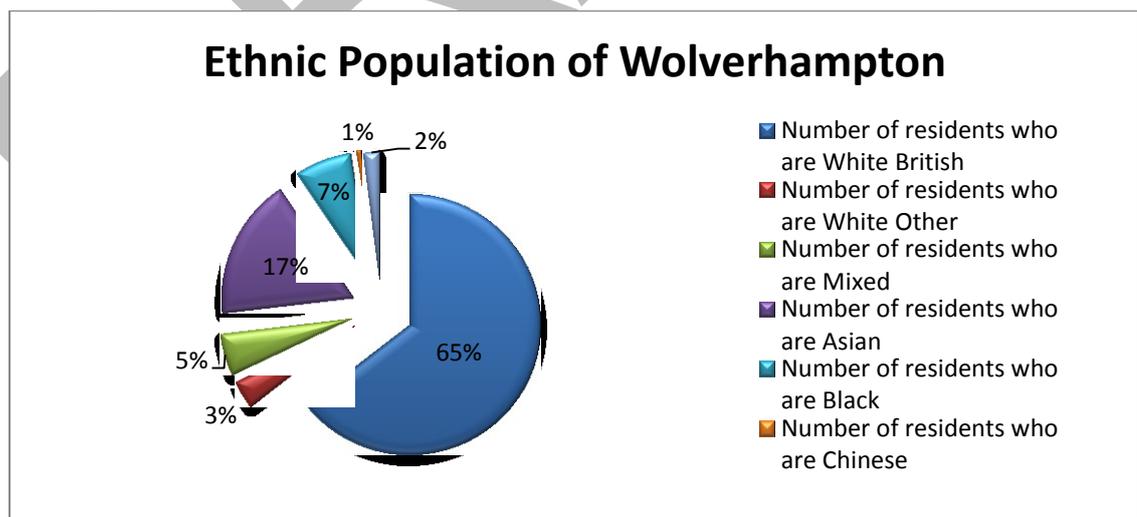


- 4.45 The average time taken to respond to a complaint has increased from 14 days to 16 days.

- 4.46 A weekly report is prepared for Assistant Directors and Service Heads to inform them of any overdue responses and a more proactive approach is being taken to ensure the timescale for responding to complaints is adhered to and any unavoidable delays are kept to a minimum.

Equality Monitoring of Complaints

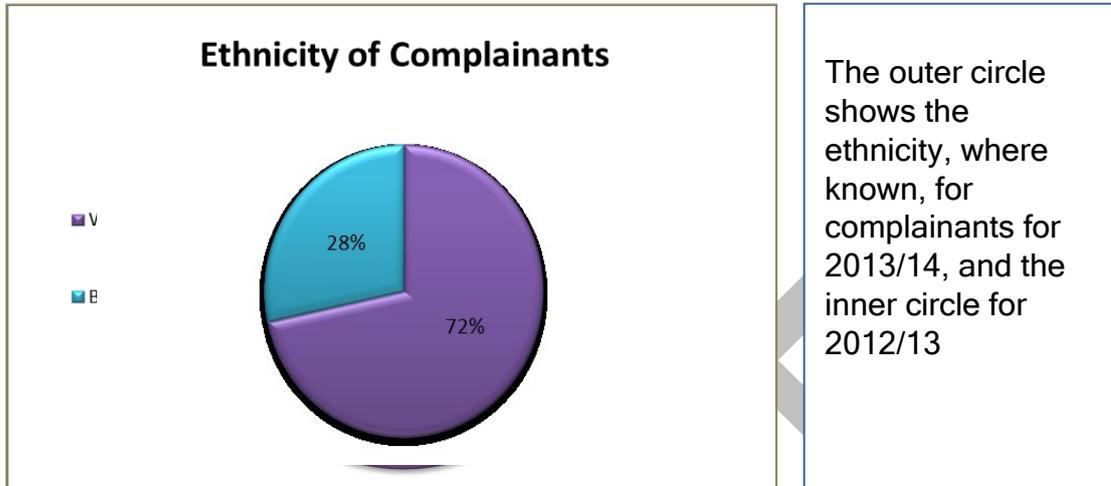
- 4.47 The figures set out in the chart below are collated from the complaints' monitoring information completed by complainants. The matrix used by complainants to determine their ethnic origin is a self-defined ethnicity matrix which mirrors the national census criteria, and is in the format required by the Home Office for statistical returns.
- 4.48 Diversity monitoring forms are sent to people when complaints are acknowledged; however, very few are returned. Despite efforts to capture this information, some people prefer not to provide it, which means there is a high number of 'unknowns' in most categories.
- 4.49 The level of complaints received where complainants have chosen not to provide specific monitoring information about their ethnic origin continues to make up the largest proportion of the complaints received. Therefore, the number that fall into the unknown category makes it difficult to be able to state with any confidence, that there is an under representation of complaints from the minority ethnic communities.
- 4.50 Posters in the main minority languages are displayed in service areas giving information about how to obtain assistance to make a complaint and an interpretation service is available if requested. The more targeted approach is in accordance with the directorate guidance about the language needs of people where English is not their preferred language.



Ethnic Groups statistics taken from the 2011 Census

- 4.51 Of the 160 complaints received, most complainants gave some details in relation to their gender/age/disability. From those identifiable, it was also noted that 58 % of complaints were from female complainants. There has been an increase

in the number of complainants who have chosen not to state their ethnicity; 83 compared to 75 in the previous year.



- 4.52 Whilst Wolverhampton had 65% of its population, as at 2011, who identified themselves as White British, the percentage of complaints which were received from this group represented 71% of the total number of those whose ethnic group were able to be identified from complaints made.
- 4.53 The chart shows that there has been a slight increase in complaints from complainants who identified themselves as having Black, Minority or Ethnic origins (29 % compared to 28 % the previous year).
- 4.54 The number of complaints for the Asian group represents 18% (compared to 12% the previous year) of complaints made from a group which represents 17% of the City's overall population. Similarly from a population of 5% black residents, 10% of complaints were representative from this group.

5.0 Local Government Ombudsman

- 5.1 The Ombudsman will not usually investigate a complaint until the Department has exhausted its complaints procedure. However, people can seek the advice of the Ombudsman at any stage if they are not satisfied with the way that the Children's Service has managed their complaint.
- 5.2 If the complainant remains dissatisfied following the Stage 3 response they have received, they can, within twelve months of the panel hearing, approach the Local Government Ombudsman seeking further enquiries or investigation to be carried out in the complaint by that office.
- 5.3 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.

- 5.4 During 2013/14 two Local Government Ombudsman enquiries were received. The Ombudsman chose not to undertake an investigation for either case as both related to circumstances of more than 12 months ago.
- 5.5 The Local Government Ombudsman did however undertake a full investigation for one complaint which was escalated to them prematurely without having progressed through the full complaints procedure. The findings of the investigation showed that the complainant suffered no injustice however improvements have been made to processes following recommendations by the LGO.

6.0 Development of Policies and Procedures

Staff Training in Managing Complaints

- 6.1 Those staff with which customers have direct contact should be a key part of the process of facilitating representations. The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) code of practice requires the directorate to ensure that its staff are properly trained and supported to meet their professional obligations; these include a duty to promote service user rights. It would be good practice to ensure that this includes keeping service users fully informed of the complaints procedure and to assist service users with access.
- 6.2 Formal complaints training is regularly considered and delivered, where appropriate, which, at times, is delivered by the Local Government Ombudsman in the area of "Effective Complaints Handling - Investigating and Resolving Complaints" or more informally by the provision of advice and support to Managers and staff with regards to complaints handling.
- This was done via one to one work with managers on specific complaints through to general presentations to whole teams on Wolverhampton City Council's Community compliments, comments and complaints procedures.
- 6.3 Complaint investigations can be costly and time consuming. An on-going commitment to staff training and development in this area is necessary within the context of increasing budgetary pressures and future cuts.
- 6.4 Effective complaints resolution at Stage 1 of the complaints procedure negates the need for expensive and protracted investigations at Stage 2, particularly in the area of Children's Social Care complaints, where there is a statutory requirement for an Independent Investigating Officer and Independent Person.
- 6.5 The availability of trained staff with the ability to investigate complaints thoroughly at Stage 1 will reduce the need to engage expensive external Independent Investigators and will hopefully produce financial savings.
- 6.6 Regular training is available to all staff in children's and family services and this will continue to be provided, in particular through regular attendance at manager's meetings, individual training sessions and mediating with managers and complainants.

Networking and Sharing Policy and Practice

- 6.7 It is important to continue to network, share practice and contribute to Regional policy and practice. The West Midlands Complaint Managers Group is attended on a quarterly basis and this group is represented at both regional and national forums.
- 6.8 The West Midlands Complaint Officers Forum is attended by social care complaints managers, and those from the NHS.

Both networks aim to raise standards for complaints management across the region to promote consistency of best practice and to provide a source of mutual support.

7.0 Learning From Complaints

- 7.1 'Learning from complaints' is an increasingly important part of the authority's philosophy and managers responding to complaints/representations are encouraged to identify any shortcomings within the service.
- 7.2 In a service striving for excellence there is no room for complacency and where there is an open culture of reflective learning, complaints can at best be used in the design, delivery and improvement of services, as well as highlighting concerns for the safety and welfare of children, young people and families.
- 7.3 Effective complaints procedures can help the whole authority improve the delivery of services by highlighting where change is needed.
- 7.4 The Complaints Team ensures that lessons learned from complaints are highlighted and fed back to improve service delivery. For example complaints investigations have highlighted the need to review policy guidance.

Lessons learned from complaints investigations are also fed back to staff in supervision to enable practice to be improved; and are reported upon quarterly to the Community Directorate Management Team.

- 7.5 The complaints investigation and review processes have resulted in a number of proposed improvements:
- One complaint was from a young adult placed with foster carers and who was engaging in work with Children or Adolescent Mental Health Services. When moving out of the city there was no further involvement with them. This highlighted the need for a procedure for making referral to out of borough support providers to ensure consistency of provision until suitable alternative is available.
 - One complaint about unacceptable delays in letter box contact resulted in the reassignment of workloads, the delivery of training of admin staff and to consider a new electronic system for mail box contact, thus to minimise delays for recipients.

- The Adoption team recently raised and brought forward issue of confidentiality and governance of information to the forefront of team meetings and staff training following a complaint about access to pre-adoptive records.
- One complaint relating to delays in progressing through process of becoming foster carers for family member. This highlighted that there was a need for an information leaflet to inform family and friends carers of the process and to ensure that they are kept informed at all times by the fostering support worker, particularly for those who live outside of the city.

8.0 Compliments

8.1 The Department receives compliments from people who wish to record their appreciation of the efforts made by staff in dealing with them or their relatives. It is important that people have a means of letting the Department know when they have had a positive experience.

Some of these are recorded on CP1 forms, so it is important that all teams submit them on a monthly basis for analysis.

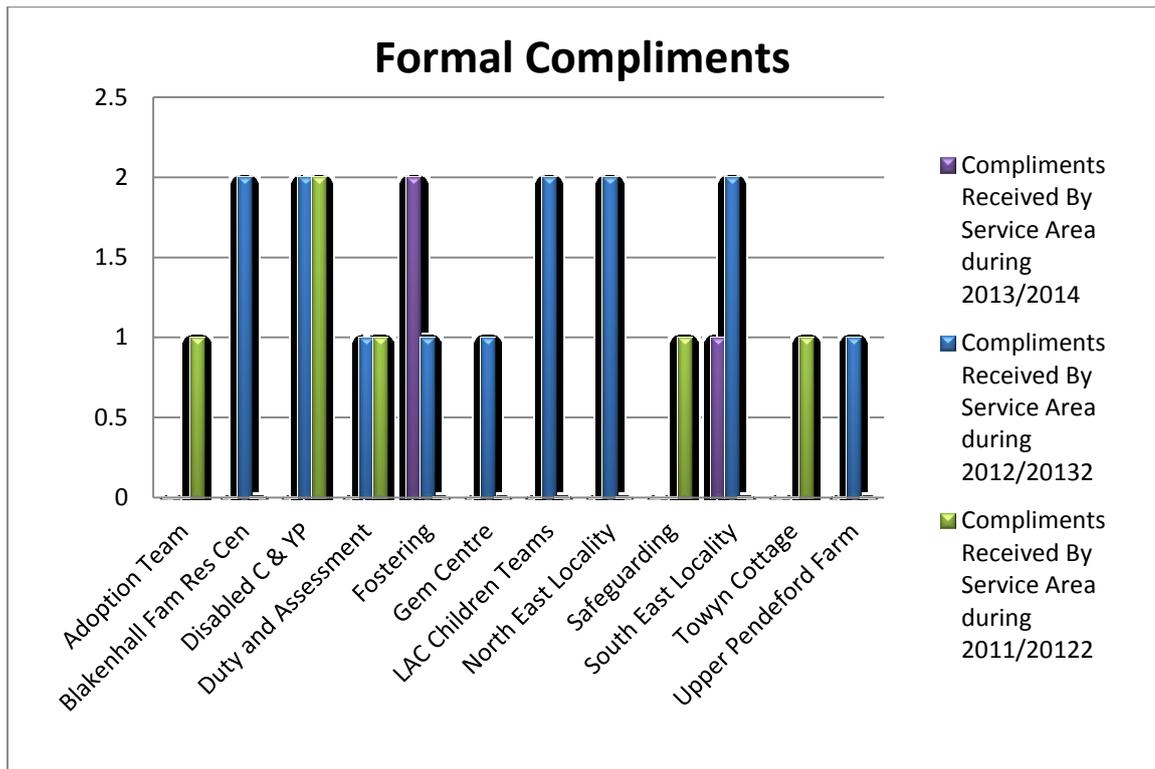
8.2 All customer feedback is taken seriously and used to improve current services, helping to make the relationship between the Council and its customers a positive one.

8.3 When a compliment is received, it is acknowledged by the Customer Relations and Complaints Manager and passed to the member of staff of the service being complimented.

8.4 In addition, a copy is sent to the manager of that person or service. This offers a valuable monitoring and learning tool to use to influence the way in which services are provided and delivered.

Number of Compliments Received by Service

8.5 Much activity carried out by staff is of a statutory nature which makes it difficult to obtain positive feedback. The following table details which service areas recorded compliments received.

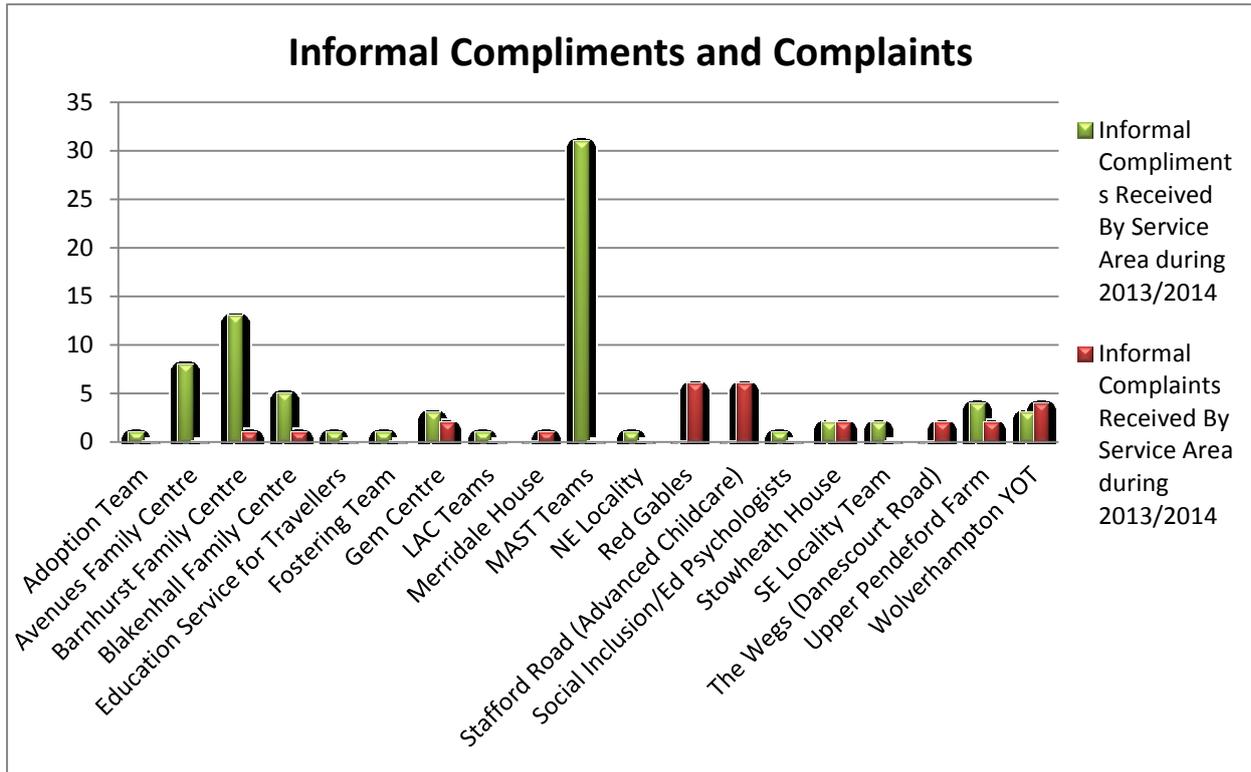


Equality Monitoring of Compliments

- 8.6 Insufficient information was provided by customers making compliments to enable any meaningful analysis of data to be used. The importance of dialogue with minority ethnic communities about the Department's services is recognised.
- 8.7 The activity referred to under the section Ethnic Monitoring of Complaints is intended to encourage compliments as well as complaints about the Department's services. This is in order to ensure that services continue to develop in ways that are sensitive to the needs and aspirations of these groups.

Monthly monitoring Informal Complaints and Compliments

- 8.8 The only services/teams to return a completed monthly monitoring form are detailed in the table below. However, this level of returns received may represent an under reporting of informal complaints and compliments received by front line staff.
- 8.9 Staff are reminded and encouraged to record any compliments the service receives and also the number of informal complaints raised by service users and/or their representatives that they were able to resolve without recourse to the formal complaints procedure.
- 8.10 The significant increase of informal complaints in one service area could be attributed to the closer monitoring and resolution of complaints by the newly appointed Customer Relations and Complaints Officer based at that location.



Early Help Services

8.11 Staff in Early Help services includes Psychologists, Specialist Teachers, Behaviour and Mental Health Support Officers, Education Welfare Officers, Parent Support Advisers, and Social Workers. Most of them work together with colleagues from other children and young people’s services, in eight Multi Agency Support Teams (MASTs).

Early Help services work together but each groups has particular skills and responsibilities; including assessing and advising children with learning and behaviour difficulties, preventing exclusion from school and arranging alternative provision and help for those with serious behaviour and mental health difficulties, and helping schools improve attendance and achievement. Staff work closely with those in schools and with parents to address these and a range of family and social issues.

8.12 Helpfulness questionnaires are used as part of the case closure process to obtain the views of children and young people, their parents and carers, and whoever referred them (often schools) about how helpful MAST staff have been, how much things have improved and what could have been done to make the service even more effective.

8.13 Three thousand four hundred and eight two helpfulness questionnaires have been returned from parent/carers, referrers and young people since April 2013. The majority of questionnaires have been returned from parents/carers.

- 8.14 Respondents were asked how much they thought the situation had improved with MAST intervention and how helpful MAST professionals had been; with 90 % of all respondents giving an Improvement score of 'Quite a lot' or 'A lot' and 97% of all respondents gave a Helpfulness score of 'Quite helpful' or 'Very helpful'. Early Help Services will continue to evaluate the results of questionnaires to improve service delivery.

9.0 Achievements/Looking ahead

- 9.1 This year the local authority internal audit team undertook an audit of the Community Directorate complaint handling and processes.
- 9.2 Following a detailed analysis of the procedures, processes and case management, the audit report assessed the current service provision as substantial. This is the highest level of assurance given.
- 9.3 Considerable work has already been undertaken to explore how the organisation can further explore the learning from complaints and also how complaint handling can be incorporated into a performance management quality assurance framework.
- 9.4 As part of this phased integration into the performance management quality assurance framework, this year has seen the introduction of a comprehensive escalation plan to ensure timeliness of complaint handling and implementation plan to capture learning.
- 9.5 This work will continue further into the new financial year to ensure that all complaints handling processes will ensure compliance with a quality assurance framework.
- 9.6 In addition to this further consideration will also be given to how the use of social media may provide a further opportunity to access the complaints procedure.

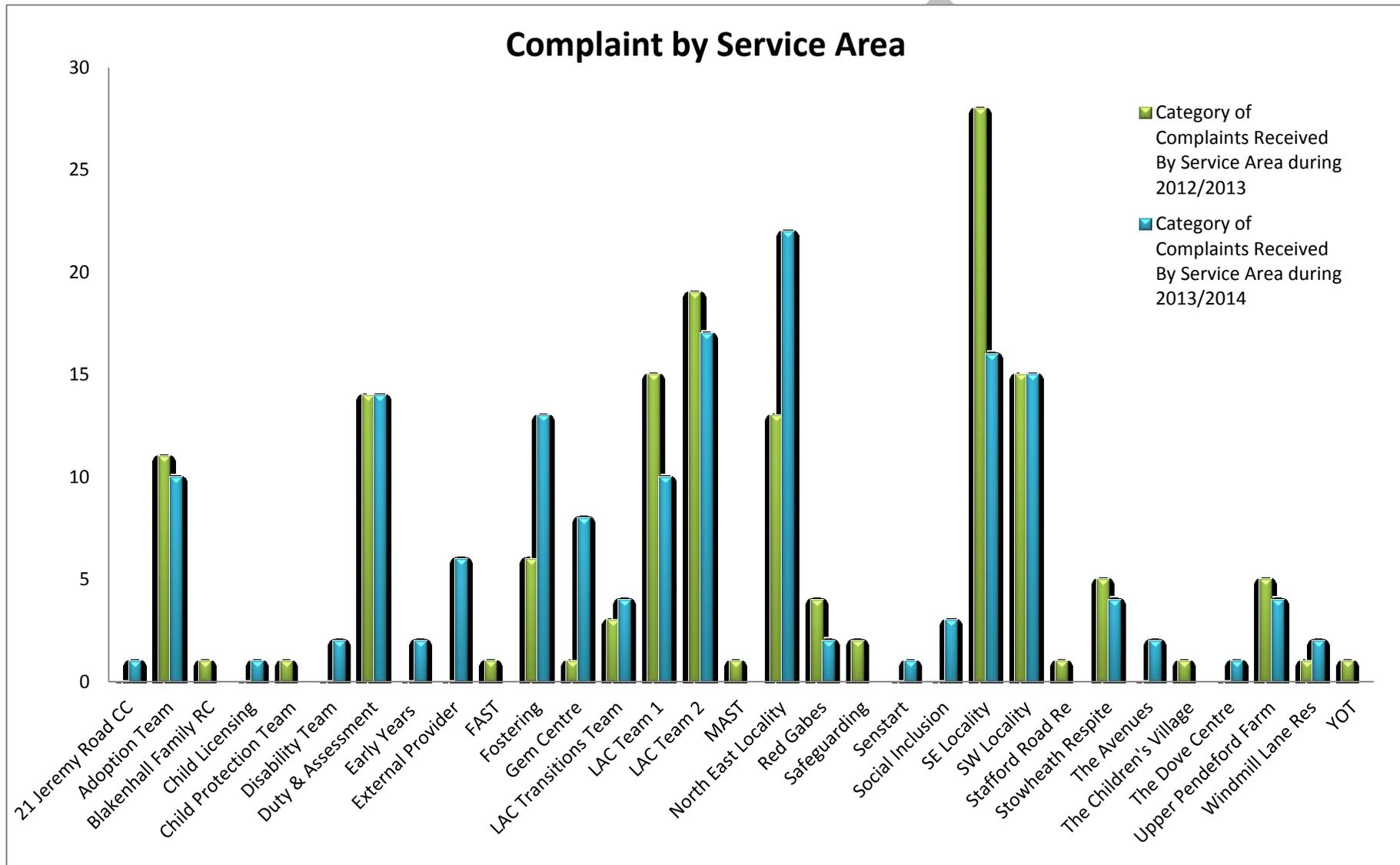
10.0 Conclusion

- 10.1 The authority will always aim to minimise, wherever possible, circumstances which lead people to complain. When things do go wrong, we welcome feedback in the form of complaints.
- 10.2 With the implementation of an escalation procedure for non-compliance with statutory timescales together with an implementation plan for service improvements it is hoped will ensure that the authority do take complaints seriously and drive forward to embrace continuous improvement.
- 10.3 Working directly with investigating officers and managers ensures that a personalised approach is delivered to complainants who, remain at the heart of the services we provide.
- 10.4 This work will continue further into the new financial year to ensure that all complaints handling processes will ensure compliance with a quality assurance framework.

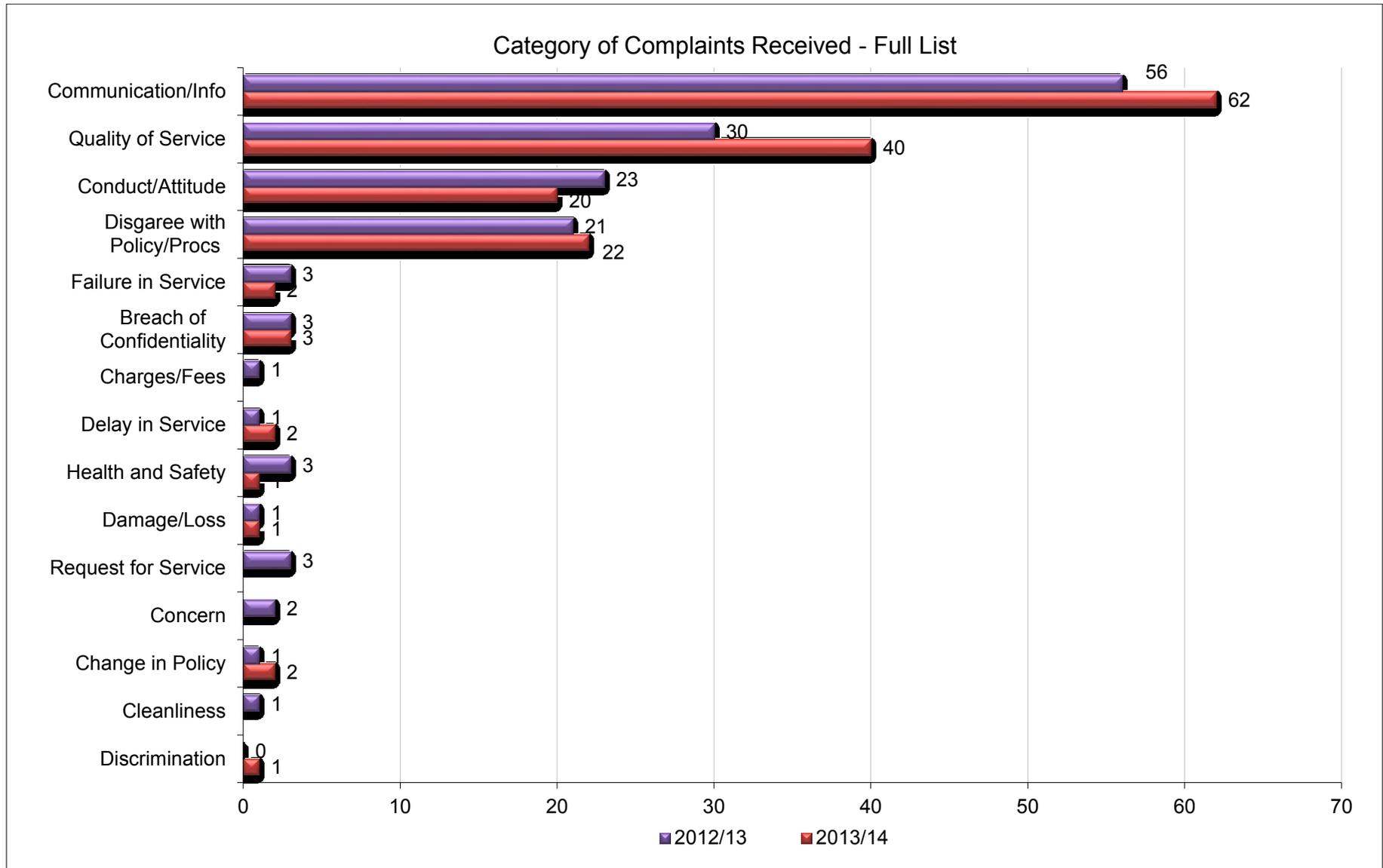
- 10.5 For a second consecutive year, the proportion of complaints escalating through the later stages of the complaints procedure continues to be small in number, whilst compliments continue to increase.

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Appendix 1: Complaints by Service Area and Comparison with Preceding Year



Appendix 2: Category of Complaints Received – Full List



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