



Complaints and Compliments

Annual Report for 2016/17

Covering the statutory complaints procedures for the Children and Young People's Service

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Analysis of representations dealt with under the statutory complaints procedure

1.0 Background

Every local authority with a responsibility for children's social care services is required to produce an annual report outlining the complaints activity for the service. This report covers the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. The statutory complaints function transferred from Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council (DMBC) to Doncaster Children's Services Trust on the 2 February 2015.

2.0 An outline of the statutory complaints procedure

The majority of representations that The Trust receives regarding the functions of Children's Social Care fall under the statutory complaints procedure. The procedure is defined in *The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006*. The statutory procedure allows for children and young people "to make representations, including complaints about the actions, decisions or apparent failings of a local authority's children's social services provision; and to allow any other appropriate person to act on behalf of the child or young person concerned or make a complaint in their own right" (Getting the Best from Complaints, DfE, 2006). Not all complaints regarding Children's Social Care fall under the statutory procedure, although the majority do.

The Customer Experience Manager confirms how a representation should be handled. If a contact does not meet the threshold to be dealt with as a Stage 1 complaint it is either dealt with as a "representation" or a "corporate complaint".

The statutory complaints procedure has three stages once a representation has been accepted as a statutory complaint.

2.1 Stage 1 - Local Resolution

The aim is to resolve as many complaints as possible by the local team at this early stage. The local Team Manager should discuss the complaint with the complainant and attempt to address the issues as quickly as possible. They should exchange information and thinking behind decisions and try to agree a way forward. This should take up to 10 working days, with a maximum extension of up to 20 working days for complex complaints or due to staff availability.

2.2 Stage 2 – Investigation

When a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 1, they may request a Stage 2 investigation. The investigation is conducted by an external Investigating Officer who is accompanied by an external Independent Person, whose role is to ensure that the investigation is open, transparent and fair. Both officers complete a report following the investigation which is passed onto a senior manager within The Trust (Adjudicating Officer) for the adjudication process.

The Adjudicating Officer then considers the reports and responds to the complainant on behalf of The Trust. The Stage 2 process should be completed within 25 working days, although this timescale can be extended to 65 working days for complex complaints.

2.3 Stage 3 – Review panel

Following a full Stage 2 investigation a complainant can request that their complaint is considered further by a review panel. The panel consists of two independent persons, plus an independent chair. Following a review meeting, the panel make recommendations to the Chief Operating Officer who then makes a decision on the complaint and any actions needed, and sends a final response to the complainant on behalf of The Trust. The review panel should be held within 30 working days of the request. Within 5 working days of the review panel meeting, the Independent Chair will send a letter to the Chief Operating Officer, outlining the panel's findings and recommendations and the Chief Operating Officer will then provide The Trust's final response within a further 15 working days. The whole process should take a maximum of 50 working days.

3.0 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

At the conclusion of the three stages of the complaints process the complainant has the right to escalate their concerns to the Local Government Ombudsman for consideration.

The Customer Experience Manager can make an early referral to the Local Government Ombudsman at any stage of the complaints procedure.

4.0 The Complaints Service

In September 2016 preparation began to form the Centre for Excellence and the Customer Experience Team moved into this area. The Centre for Excellence is located within the Safeguarding and Standards Unit. The Customer Experience Manager retained responsibility for statutory complaints as well as taking over line management for three new advocates who came into post by the 1 December 2016. The advocacy roles provide advocacy support to children and young people receiving a service from The Trust as well as undertaking statutory independent return home interviews for children in Doncaster who have been reported missing. The senior business support role which provided 0.5 FTE support to the complaints function increased to 1.0 FTE to ensure additional resources were in place due to the extra demands on the Customer Experience Manager.

One of the benefits of moving responsibility of the advocacy service to the Customer Experience Manager is that any young person requiring advocacy support in making a complaint has immediate access to this resource.

4.1 How Complaints have been received

The majority of complaints are received directly by The Trust (91%). Complaints have also been logged onto DMBC's on line services (9%). A breakdown of how contact has been made with The Trust is provided in Table 1 below.

The Customer Experience Manager has either met with complainants directly to capture their complaints (6%) or spoken to them on the telephone (45%). On occasion, the Customer Experience Manager and the Team Manager have met with the complainant in order to seek early resolution.

Contact Chanel

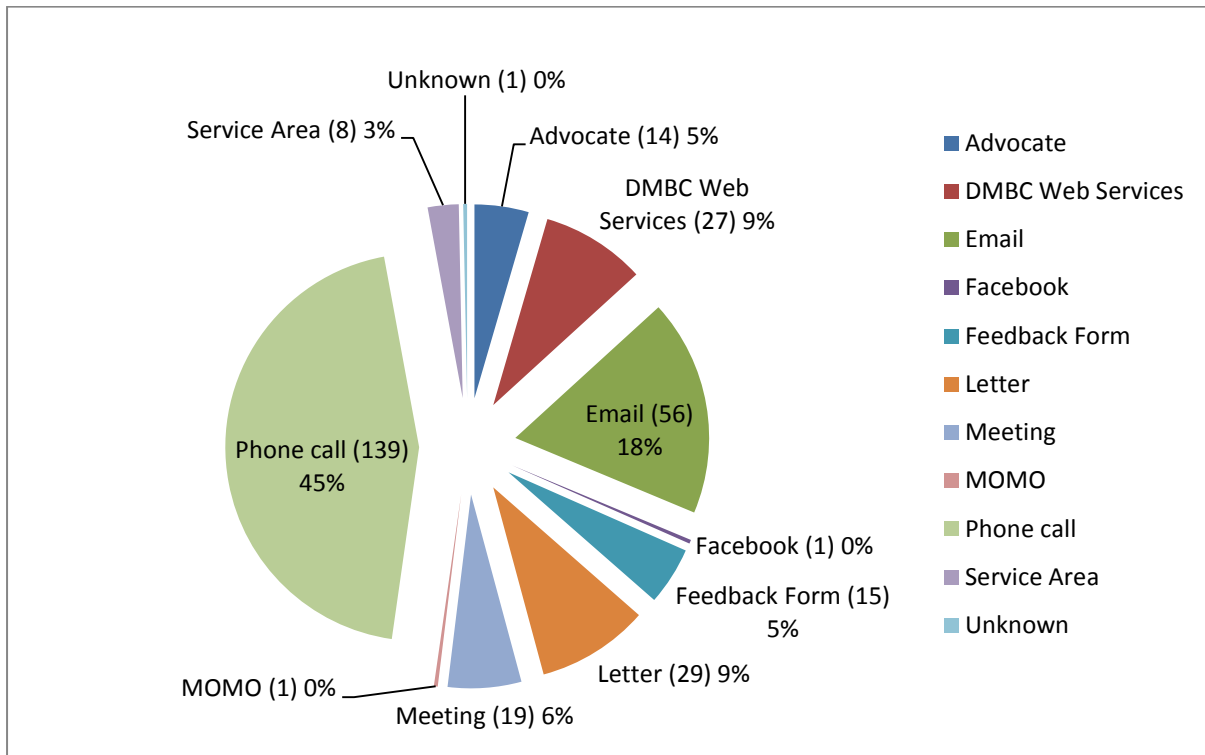


Table 1 – Contact Channel

4.2 Total number of individual complaints received

During the reporting year, 310 contacts were logged received from 228 different complainants. These were handled as follows:

- 187 accepted as Stage 1 complaints (60%)
- 65 were dealt with as representations (informally) (21%)
- 44 were withdrawn (14%)
- 14 corporate complaints (5%)

In 2015/16 it was reported that 149 contacts were logged as received. However, as robust recording practices were not in place until the 4th quarter of 2015/16 it is felt that the 2016/17 figure of 310 is a more accurate reflection of contacts made. Reporting in 2017/18 will enable the first full year of year on year comparison.

Contacts Received – 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017

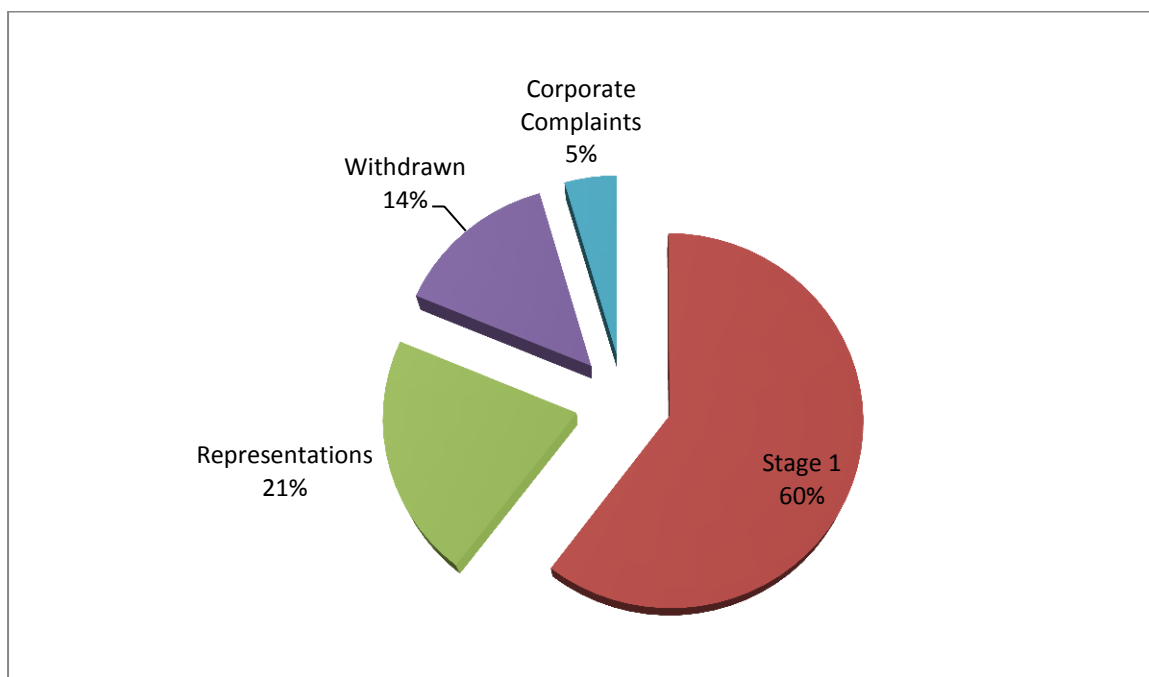


Table 2 – Breakdown of contacts received

4.3 Who made complaints?

A large majority of the complaints recorded were made by adults who were expressing their dissatisfaction with the service provided by children’s social care.

Contacts with The Trust came from 228 different complainants.

There were 28 contacts received from young people and these are broken down as follows:

| Route | Children in Care | Leaving Care |
|---|------------------|--------------|
| Advocate | 10 | 1 |
| Telephone call with Customer Experience Manager | 7 | |
| Feedback Form | 5 | |
| Letter | 2 | |
| Meeting with Customer Experience Manager | 1 | |
| DMBC Website | 1 | |
| Shared by service area | | 1 |
| Total | 26 | 2 |

Table 3 – Route for complaints from children and young people

Whilst children and young people who are supported by the Trust by virtue of being children in need or subject to child protection plans should be informed by their social worker of their right to complain about the services they receive it is noteworthy that no such children have made complaints.

The Trust has developed a new information pack which includes better information for children and young people about how they can complain. This will encourage young people to complain when they are unhappy about the service they receive. This will be monitored through 2017/18.

4.4 Breakdown of Stage 1 Complaints by Area

Below is a breakdown of the Stage 1 complaints received by service area:

Complaints by Service Area

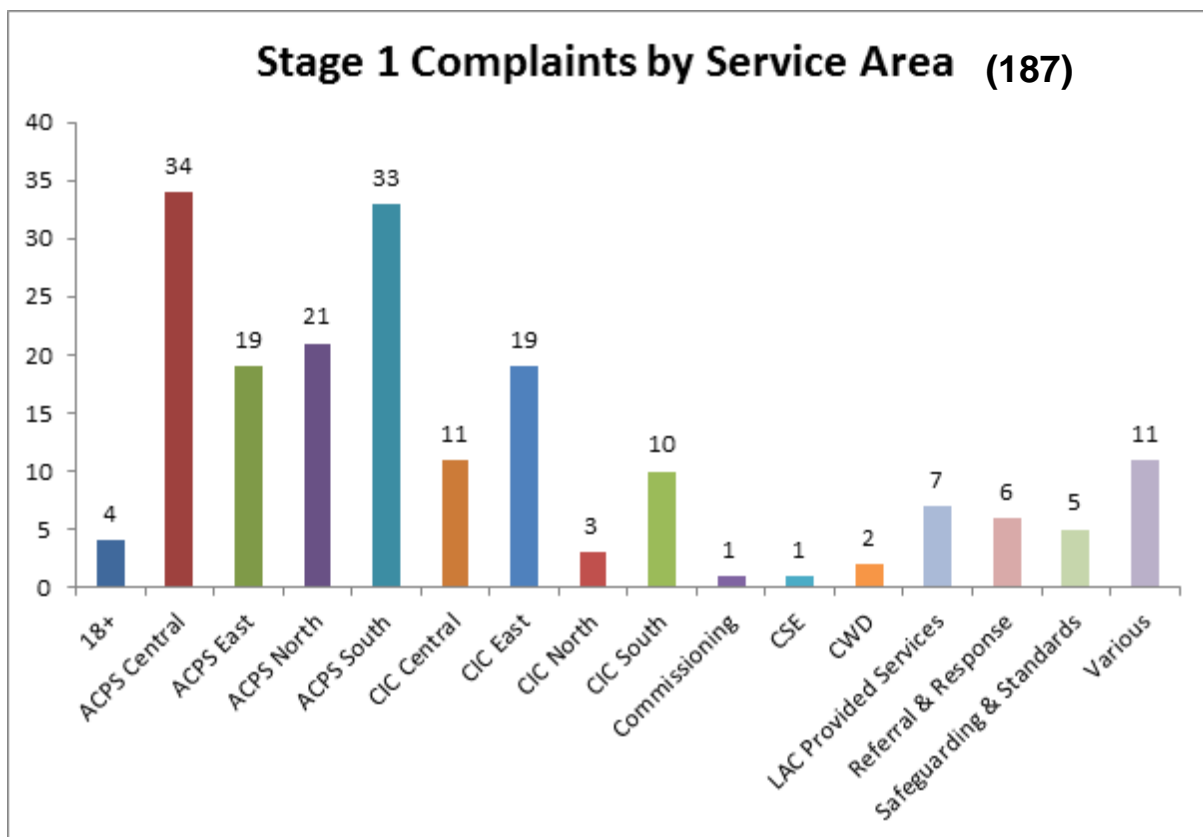


Table 4 – Complaints by service area

There were a number of people who made a number of complaints:

| No. of Complaints | No. of people who raised this amount of complaints |
|-------------------|--|
| 3 | 4 |
| 4 | 6 |
| 5 | 2 |
| 6 | 1 |
| 7 | 2 |
| 18 | 1 |

Table 5 – Repeat complainants

4.5 Compliance with timescales - Stage 1

Below is a breakdown of the timescales to deal with the 187 Stage 1 complaints received between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017:

- Within 10 working days – 71 (38%)
- Within 20 working days – 54 (29%)
- Over 20 working days – 62 (33%)

Stage 1 complaints dealt with within statutory timescales – 67%

Breakdown of timescale to respond to Stage 1 complaints

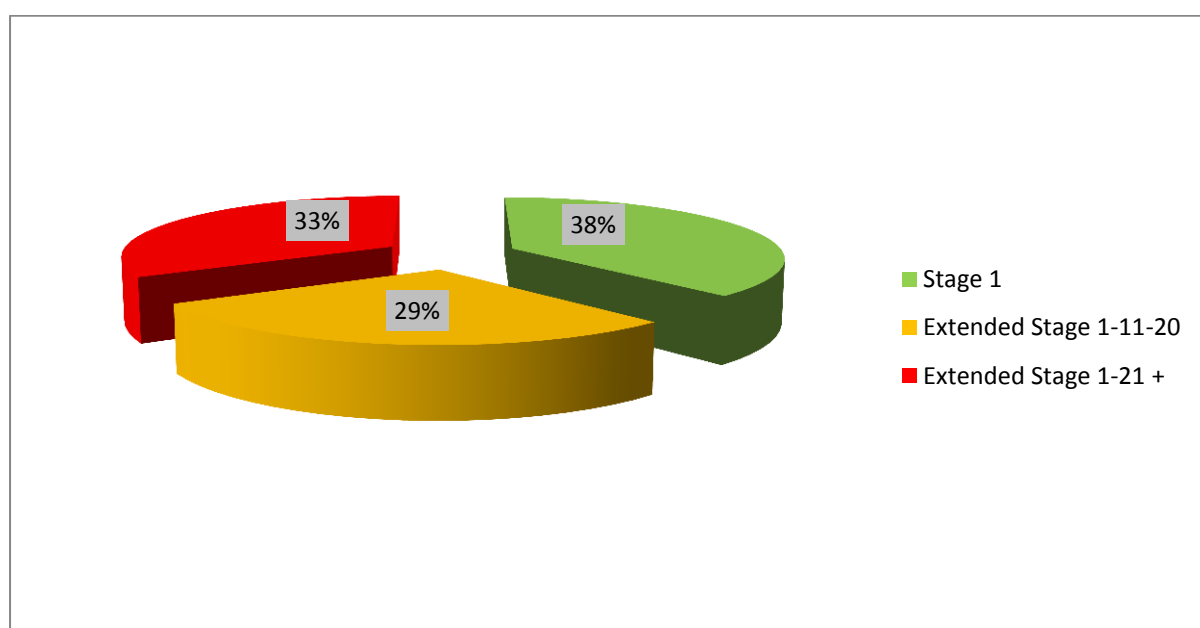


Table 6 – Breakdown of timescale to respond to Stage 1 complaints

4.6 Compliance with timescales, Stage 2

Five (2.7%) of the Stage 1 complaints received during the whole of the reporting period were escalated to Stage 2.

Timescales have been significantly reduced for Stage 2 investigations during this reporting period in comparison to 2015/16. This was as a result of preparatory work undertaken by the Customer Experience Manager with the complainant to identify which complaints would be escalated to Stage 2. The Customer Experience Manager also changed the provider for Investigating Officers and Independent People. This resulted in a significant improvement in the timescales taken to undertake the investigation itself and the associated costs (see Table 7 below).

4.7 Cost of Stage 2 investigations

Due to the tighter control on Stage 1 complaints escalating to Stage 2 and the performance of the Investigating Officer and Independent Person there has been a decrease in the number of and costs associated with Stage 2 investigations in 2016/17. The number of Stage 2 investigations has decreased by 14% whilst the unit cost per investigation has reduced by 33% from £6053 to £4017. This has however not been at the expense of the quality of investigations. There is for example no evidence that Stage 2 complaints are being escalated to Stage 3.

Table 7 below shows the costs for Stage 2 investigations in 2015/16 in comparison to costs in 2016/17.

The focus of the Customer Experience Manager is to ensure that complaints are resolved at Stage 1 in order to ensure both resolution and efficiency.

Stage 2 - Timescale and Cost – 2015/16

| STAGE 2 - BY AREA | Complainant | Date TOR Signed | Date of Adjudication | Date Closed | No. of Working Days | Cost |
|-----------------------|-------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| East Area | Person A | 25/05/2015 | 31/03/2016 | 06/05/2016 | 249 | £13,428.23 |
| East Area | Person B | 14/12/2015 | 05/07/2016 | 11/07/2016 | 150 | £14,913.16 |
| South Area | Person C* | 22/01/2016 | 01/04/2016 | 15/04/2016 | 60 | £2,871.98 |
| LAC Provided Services | Person D | 03/02/2016 | 24/07/2016 | 07/07/2016 | 99 | £8,656.39 |
| North Area | Person E | 24/02/2016 | 27/06/2016 | 14/07/2016 | 101 | £10,363.02 |
| Central Area | Person F* | 31/03/2016 | 27/06/2016 | 05/07/2016 | 66 | £2,504.45 |
| Total | | | | | | £42,374.21 |

* These Stage 2 investigations were completed by the new provider.

Stage 2 - Timescale and Cost – 2016/17

| STAGE 2 - BY AREA | Complainant | Date TOR Signed | Date of Adjudication | Date Closed | No. of Working Days | Cost |
|---------------------|-------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| East Area | Person 1 | 19/05/2016 | 26/08/2016 | 04/10/2016 | 97 | £4,531.40 |
| South Area | Person 2 | 23/05/2016 | 26/08/2016 | 08/09/2016 | 77 | £3,960.10 |
| North Area | Person 3 | 19/09/2016 | 22/11/2016 | 28/11/2016 | 51 | £5,606.78 |
| Central Area | Person 4 | 04/11/2016 | 23/12/2016 | 16/01/2017 | 49 | £1,927.00 |
| East and South Area | Person 5 | 20/02/2017 | 29/03/2017 | 18/04/2017 | 39 | £4,064.63 |
| Total | | | | | | £20,089.91 |

There were 20 requests received by the Customer Experience Manager for complaints to be escalated to Stage 2 during the reporting period which were denied. The complainants were advised of their right to contact the Local Government Ombudsman if they were unhappy with this decision. One person raised nine requests and another person raised three with the Local Government Ombudsman.

4.8 Stage 3 Complaints

There was one Stage 3 panel review during this reporting period. This related to a complaint that was raised in 2015/16. The Stage 2 escalated to Stage 3 as a result of the Adjudicating Officer not reaching the same conclusion as the Independent Investigating Officer. The Stage 3 panel agreed with the findings of the Adjudicating Officer on six complaints and the Investigating Officer on one complaint. The Stage 3 Panel reached a different conclusion to the Adjudicating Officer and Investigating Officer on two complaints and was unable to reach a conclusion on two complaints.

The Stage 3 complied with statutory timescales.

There were two requests received by the Customer Experience Manager for complaints to be escalated to Stage 3 during the reporting period which were denied. The complainants were advised of their right to contact the Local Government Ombudsman if they were unhappy with this decision.

5.0 Analysis in relation to the reasons for complaints being made is as follows:

Complaints have been received relating to a number of different areas as follows:

Breakdown of Complaint Themes

| Subject of Complaint | No. Received | No. Upheld/ Partly Upheld |
|--------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| Actions of Social Worker | 50 | 14 |
| Poor communication | 46 | 36 |
| Delays in receiving services | 23 | 16 |
| Accuracy of Assessment/Reports | 18 | 11 |
| Decision making | 14 | 0 |
| Financial assistance | 11 | 8 |
| Family time arrangements | 9 | 5 |
| Unhappy with placement | 9 | 3 |
| Changes in Social Worker | 7 | 4 |
| Total | 187 | 97 |

Table 7 – Breakdown of complaint themes

Actions of Social Worker

This covered a range of topics about social worker behaviour from allegations about the way a social worker spoke to the complainant, feeling that a social worker was bias against them, had lied, had hung up the telephone on them, not attended meetings and that they had acted unprofessionally.

There were a number of requests for social workers to be changed because of these alleged behaviours or because the complainant disliked the social worker.

In the majority of cases there was no evidence to support these allegations. There were a few occasions that apologies were offered in relation to tone of voice and an acknowledgement of the need to ensure that families clearly understood information. Managers confirmed that suitable guidance would be given and that the social worker would reflect on their practice going forward. On a few occasions the worker was no longer employed by The Trust and the complainant was given advice on how they could take this complaint forward if they wanted to.

Poor Communication

Complaints were received about telephone calls not being returned, reports for meetings being received late, meetings being moved at short notice and allocated workers being difficult to contact. From the information available there was evidence that, on occasion, communication was poor and this was accepted by the Team Manager and addressed with individual workers. On some occasions, problems had been caused by unplanned absences of staff.

Delays in receiving services

A number of complaints were received regarding delays in receiving services from social care. This included assessments not being completed in timescale, undertaking pieces of work that had been agreed or sharing items such as photographs.

In some cases these complaints came from third parties so they did not always have a full picture of what had not happened. As it was not possible to share the findings with a third party the manager provided the evidence to the Customer Experience Manager. On other occasions timescales were driven by court proceedings.

Accuracy of assessments/reports

A number of complaints were received regarding the quality of information contained within reports. On occasion, complainants also felt that these reports were biased against them or information was inaccurate. In one instance, this was in relation to a trans gender person and the recording had not been sensitive to their circumstances. As a result of this complaint the Customer Experience Manager and a Practice Development Social Worker attended Trans Gender Awareness training. Lessons learnt from this training were shared with staff across The Trust.

There were also occasions where information that informed referrals and assessments were provided by a third party. On these occasions, it was not possible to change the original information provided but the complainant was able to respond to information as part of the assessment process.

Where complaints were upheld, one of the resolutions offered was to attach a case note advising of the error or the parents view on the matter. Guidance was given to staff on the use of language and the need to clearly explain statements where this complaint was accepted.

Decision Making

Complaints were received about decisions to undertake assessments, requests for new partners to be assessed before staying in the family home overnight and case closure. On occasion, complaints related to decisions that had been made by the court and the complainant was advised that they would need to return to court. One young person was unhappy that they were unable to have devices to access the internet. This was because of safeguarding concerns.

Financial arrangements

Complaints have been upheld where financial arrangements have not been put in place or the correct amounts have not been paid. Where family arrangements have been made without the involvement of The Trust this has been explained to the complainant.

Family time arrangements

Complaints have been made regarding family time not going ahead as planned or delays in being arranged. On some occasions, this has been as a result of unplanned staff absence or when the foster carer has made arrangements and not communicated them with all concerned. On other occasions, family time is not within the responsibility of The Trust but families have not understood this. The opportunity has been taken to remind carers of the importance of family arrangements and to explain to families the role that social care is currently playing and what authority it has.

Unhappy with placement

The majority of these complaints came from young people. On some occasions the young people were unhappy to be placed away from Doncaster. The opportunity was taken to advise the young person again why this decision had been made. One person was unhappy to be in secure accommodation due to concerns for their safety. . A young person complained about the room that they moved into was dirty. This was upheld and the service provider advised of lessons learnt from this. On two occasions, it was necessary to move young people from placements due to concerns about the carers. On two occasions, the young people were unhappy that education had not been sorted out quickly enough in their new placements and this was upheld.

Changes in social worker

Complaints about changes in social worker related to either the number of social workers a young person has had or how a change in social worker has been handled. When social workers have left The Trust this has been out of the managers control. Decisions were made by managers to allocate a permanent member of staff to young people who had a number of social workers to reduce the risk in changes.

6.0 Compliments

Throughout the year staff in The Trust have been encouraged to acknowledge and celebrate good practice. As a result of this culture, staff share the compliments they have received. Staff have responded positively to this public acknowledgement of their hard work and dedication to improving outcomes for children and young people within The Trust. Everyone recognises the importance of each individual and the role that they play in improving services.

During the report year, 145 compliments were gathered from across The Trust from service users, external professionals and internal professionals. The Trust wishes to not only learn from feedback in relation to complaints but also recognises, celebrates and learns from good practice.

Sources of Compliments

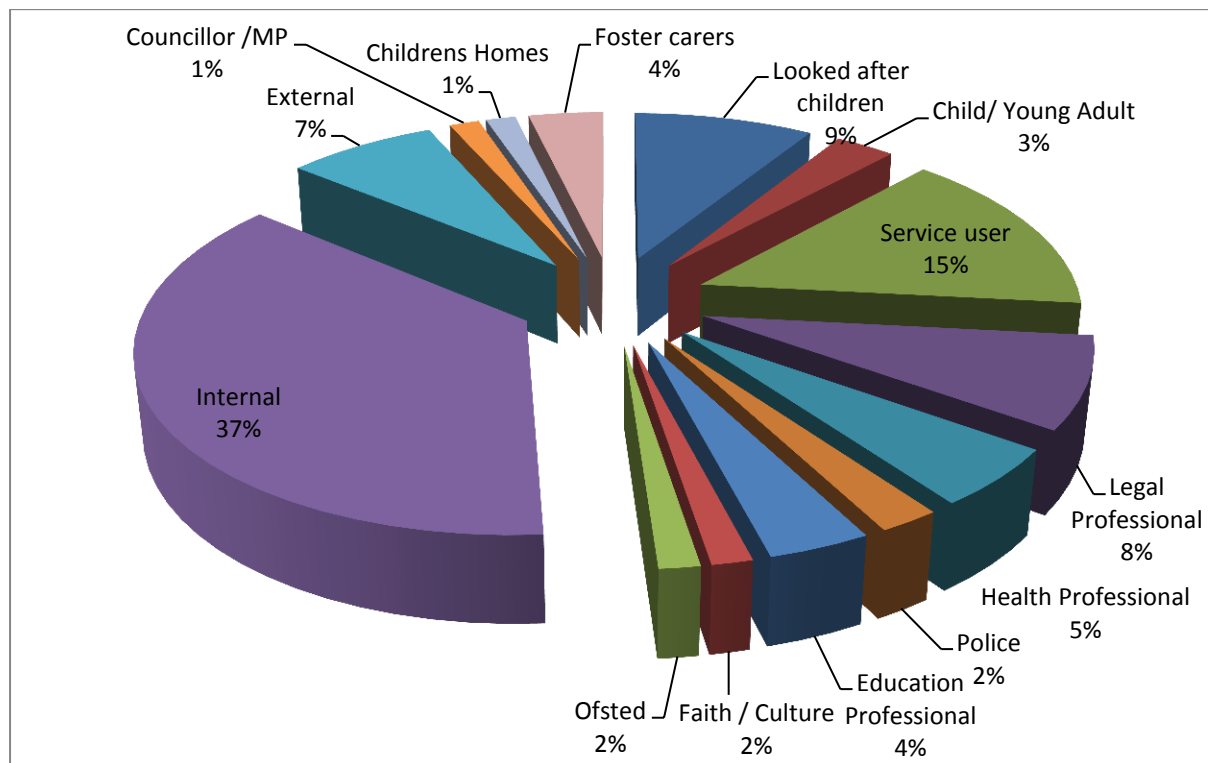


Table 8 – Sources of compliments

Compliments by Area

| | Internal | External |
|--|-----------|-----------|
| Central Area | 12 | 26 |
| North Area | 4 | 3 |
| South Area | 3 | 7 |
| East Area | 11 | 6 |
| LAC Provided Services | 12 | 8 |
| Targetted Youth Support | 2 | 7 |
| Safeguarding & Standards | 14 | 14 |
| Performance Management & Business Intelligence | 2 | |
| HR, Comms & Executive Office | 3 | 1 |
| Commissioning | 2 | |
| Total | 72 | 65 |

6.1 Examples of external compliments received

Below are some examples of the 65 compliments received from outside The Trust.

Child in Need

“She is one of the most kindest SW I have ever met. She seemed to actually care. Not just doing her job.”

“I think my social worker has done right by listening to me and giving advice on what to do and what not to do in situations.”

Child in Care

“You have time for children”

“Treats me with respect”

“... whenever I phone up everyone is willing to listen to me and are really nice and try to help me out, you are the only people I can truly trust”

“I would like you to know that my social worker is a brilliant social worker and that she is very good at her job. Thank you”

“.....it is a better home and it is a warm and nice food. And I like my family and my bedroom and my pets.....”

“I feel safe, loved and trusted. I DON'T want anything to change”

Adopted Child

"I would like to say thank you. You have always been there for me when I have needed someone to talk to and support me. When I am older I wish to be like you because you have changed my life, in a good way."

Parents

"He said that he has not stolen in a while and he thinks this is due to completing the Core thinking course. He said this has helped him to think about consequences before he does anything. He said he now has a good relationship with his mum and earned back her trust and would not want to do anything to spoil it."

".....made me feel for the first time that I wasn't going mad. Things started to make sense. She is a fantastic social worker someone who we trusted as a family."

"I can't have asked for a better social worker".

"Thank you so much for working with us and helping us as a family. You are a top social worker and it has been a pleasure working with you. A bit sad to say Goodbye but here is to a new chapter in my life."

"Thank you for turning my life around so that I could become a better mummy you helped us all build something new together."

Prospective Adopters

"We have had fantastic support from Child A's social worker and family finder, we feel very lucky!"

CAHMS Worker

"..... I think you have done a brilliant job with the family as this is evidenced by it being kept away from social care for as long as it has well done."

Forensic Psychologist

"I am impressed with the work that has been completed with Child B and his family. it is so nice to see services putting all possible provisions in place to help young people."

Solicitors

"I would like to take this opportunity to say that your social workers on this case were excellent, not only in their dealings with the matters regarding Child C, but also in the professional but compassionate way they dealt with the mother. I was extremely impressed with them and felt that it would be helpful to commit the same to writing."

Judge

“Assessment is thorough fair- knew her papers inside out.....Consider Social Worker evidence unwavering.”

Children’s Guardian

“During the final hearing for the children yesterday the Guardian made a point of informing the Judge of how instrumental and supportive the Independent Reviewing Officer had been in supporting the management of the case. The Judge advised that he was heartened to hear of this.”

Head teacher

“..... supported one of our pupils during a very sad and tragic time, it was an immense relief to know that such a personalised service was available. From the beginning they provided exceptional guidance for myself and my colleagues, this was invaluable as events were totally outside my experience. I know that the service provided has been beneficial for the bereaved child I believe that such a service is vital for Doncaster, I would have been uncertain where to access support, especially of such a high standard.”

7.0 Summary

The development work started by The Trust in the last quarter of 2015/16, which continued into 2016/17, has ensured that systems and processes have embedded. Lessons continue to be learnt from complaints and compliments and support staff development.

A copy of all final complaint responses are now shared with Heads of Services so they have an overview of the issues causing complaints in their area and to assist in developing service delivery. Where a response advises that an action will be taken, for example with the worker, the team or a change in working practice a “Complaints Monitoring and Learning Form” is sent to the responding manager to complete. This evidence is returned to the Customer Experience Team. This addresses one of the lessons learnt from a Stage 2 investigation in relation to ensuring that any resolution offered at Stage 1 is implemented.

In order to address the complaints that The Trust receives in relation to poor communication the opportunity was taken to inform a suite of documents being produced through The Voice Project for parents/carers and young people. These documents form part of an introductory pack which provides families with information about the service they are current receiving from The Trust. The pack includes guidance on reports/assessments being shared in a timely way, opportunities to respond to information contained within documents, availability of social workers and who to contact when they are not available. This is an example of taking lessons learnt from complaints to influence service delivery.

There is some concern that complaints from children in need or subject of a child protection plan have not been received but it is envisaged that the introduction of the new information pack will encourage where appropriate children and young people to complain.

The move of the advocacy service into the Customer Experience Team saw the start of improved access to advocacy support. The advocates have started to build open and honest relationships with young people to support them in getting their voice heard and impact on planning for their future.

The focus for 2017/18 will be to continue to develop an efficient and cost effective service that responds well to service user need. This will be alongside further enhancing the use of learning from the complaints the Trust receives. As such as well as developing staff in response to this learning it will shape services to better reflect the needs of service users. By doing so the number of complaints that are upheld or partly upheld will continue to fall.

Dawn Jones
Customer Experience Manager