

Children's Rights Service

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Children's Service
Statutory Complaints Report 2012 - 2013

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1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 To report statistical information to Members, Officers and the Public detailing Surrey County Council’s (SCC) Children’s Social Care complaints activity from 01/04/12 – 31/03/13 including developments and planned improvements.
- 1.2 To meet the regulation 18 (2) of Statutory Instrument 2006 No. 1681 Local Authority Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2006 and regulation 13 (3) of Statutory Instrument 2006 No. 1738 The Children Act (1989) Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.
- 1.3 For the current year the following Statutory Guidance remains relevant
 - Getting the best from Complaints 2006
 - Guidance on Social Care Complaint and Representations for Children, Young People and Others
- 1.4 This report provides analysis and comment for Children’s Service on all complaints including those managed under the statutory process as well as those managed under the County Process (i.e. those complains or individual who do not qualify under the statutory process).

2 POLICY CONTEXT

- 2.1 The Regulations require Local Authorities with Social Services responsibilities to set up and retain a complaints procedure and to operate that procedure with regard to specified timescales and methods of investigation and review. The guidance requires an Annual Report should provide a mechanism by which the local authority can be kept informed about the operation of its complaints procedure. Further, the report should be presented to staff and the relevant local authority committee, and should be made available to the regulator and the general public.
- 2.2 Surrey Children’s Service, in line with other council services, encourages and enables service users to comment about the services they receive. In line with statutory requirements, a 3-stage procedure is in place for those who qualify to make complaints and representations about Children’s Social Care Services.
- 2.3 All complaints made by non-qualifying individuals and complaints about non-social care functions are managed - the under the Council’s 2-stage corporate complaints procedure, operating to different timescales. The Children’s Rights Service (CRS) oversees all complaints about service delivered within the Directorate and distinctions between the processes are made at stage 2 only.
- 2.4 A low volume of recorded complaints can sometimes, although not always, indicate contentment with service provision. However, the organisation should never be complacent and complaints are welcomed particularly as they can reveal opportunities to improve practice, policies or procedures and potentially highlight safeguarding concerns. It is from these that the Service and those who work in it can learn and develop practice and service delivery.
- 2.5 The complaints process and feedback gained is an integral part of the quality assurance process, which feeds into the development and monitoring of services.

3 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 3.1 The County's Corporate Aims, to promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all are also reflected by the Complaints Procedures in securing the participation of service users and their representatives through consultation and communication.
- 3.2 The Children Act 2004 placed a duty on local authorities to include and involve children in planning and decision-making. The Children and Young Persons Bill, 2007, extended this by emphasising an increased focus on ensuring that the child's voice is heard when important decisions that affect their future are taken.
- 3.4 Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that:

"parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."

4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 4.1 The Complaints Procedures are a means of engaging service users and their representatives to provide feedback on services, as well as highlighting specific areas of concern. Complaints information is provided verbally to services users and leaflets on the procedure are distributed on request and also available in packs to service users, their parents, carers and representatives. Complaints information is also available via the County Council website.

5 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Statutory foundations for the Social Services Complaints Procedure are –
- The Local Authority Social Services Act (1970)
 - The Children's Act (1989)
 - The Children's Act (2001, 2004)
 - The Human Rights Act (1998)
 - The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
 - The Adoption and Children's Act (2002)
 - The Children's Act 1989 Representations Procedure (2006)

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Provision is included within the Service's budget for 2012/13 to cover the management of the complaints services. This includes:
- The sum of £41000 which is available to fund the use of External Investigators, Independent People (required for Children's Act complaints), and for Complaints panel hearings.
 - The sum of £5000 for issue based advocacy for young people.

6.2 Children's Service Complaints Spend – Family Rights & Participation Service

Spend	Total 2009/10	Total 2010/11	Total 2011/12	Total 2012/13
Independent Persons	£8,512.38	£4,068.00	£5,767.61	£4,783.89
Investigation Officers	£17,619.31	£14,325.06	£13,210.12	£18,046.33
Stage 3	£1,046.09	0	£2,654.21	0
Advocacy	Na	£5,515.00	£5,920.95	£4,817.92
Total	£27,177.78	£23,908.08	£27,552.89	£27,648.14

6.3 Other Service Spend excluding staff costs

Spend	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Provision of free phone line	£240.00	£240.00	£240.00
Advocacy training for IW's	£122.00	£176.92	0
Royal Mail Business Response			£103.11
Total	£362.00	£416.92	£343.11

Total service spend excluding staffing **£ 27,991.25**

6.4.1 A direct comparison of volume and level of cases with year on year expenditure is not necessarily the most accurate measure of performance due to the invoicing cycle of Independent Workers. More relevant are that the figures reflect that volume of complaints reviewed and investigated at stage 2 decreased with none of the complaints recorded in the period progressing to stage 3 (S3).

6.4.2 The Children's Rights Service (CRS) is confident that the budget reflects the volume of work undertaken given the increasing complexity of complaints. For example single complaints involving more than one area of social care or other agencies. This is a result of continuing to manage investigations more directly and ensuring that independent workers are clear on their remit and responsibilities. The overall increase in service spend can be said to reflect an observed increase in the complexity of complaint raised. For example, in one case the investigation required consultation with partner agencies such as Health and the local Borough Council as well as colleagues within Adult Services.

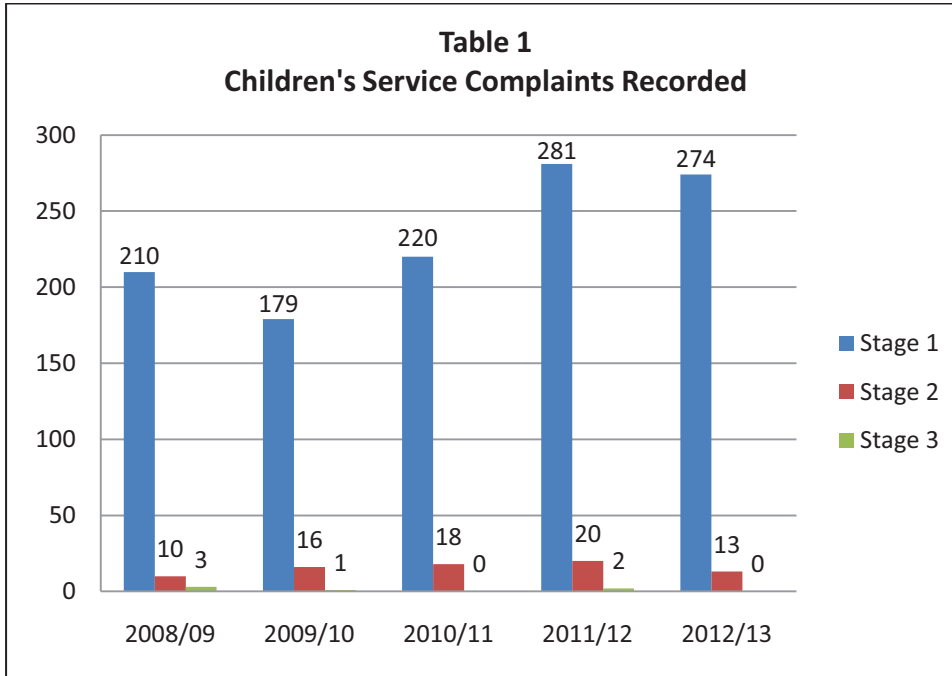
7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 Much of the information for this report is gleaned from individual complaint files, Surrey County Council Customer Feedback Database, previous year's complaint reports and CRS records. The data is also taken from monthly performance monitoring reports held by Children's Rights Service. Complaint files remain confidential, while as in previous years this report is anonymised and in the public domain.

8 SCC CHILDREN'S SERVICES' COMPLAINTS ANALYSIS 2012 – 2013

8.1 VOLUME OF COMPLAINTS RECORDED

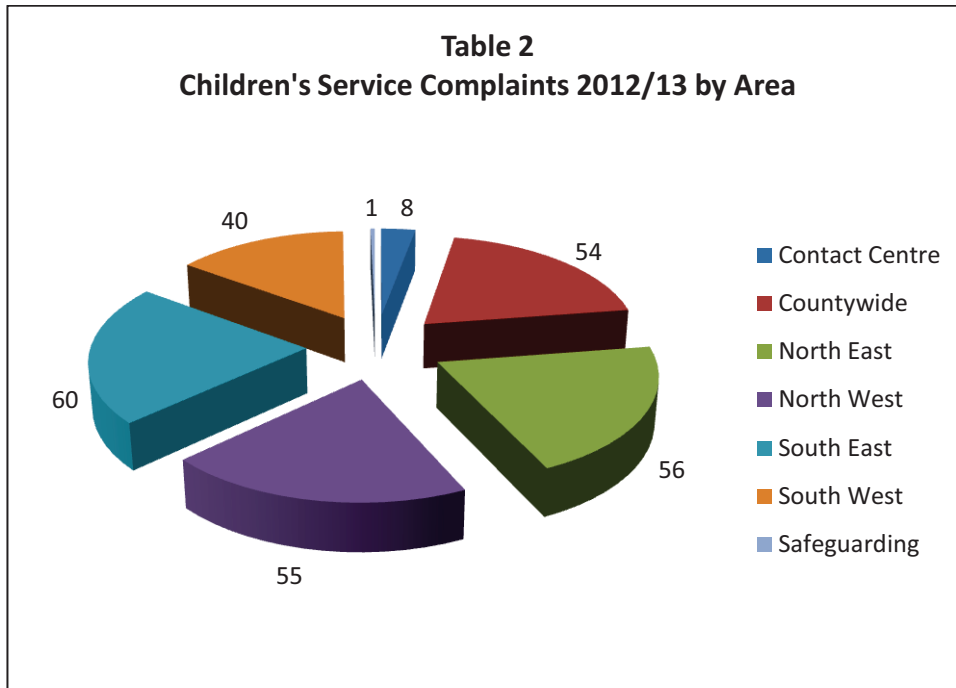
8.1.1 Table 1: Children's Service Complaints received 2012-2013



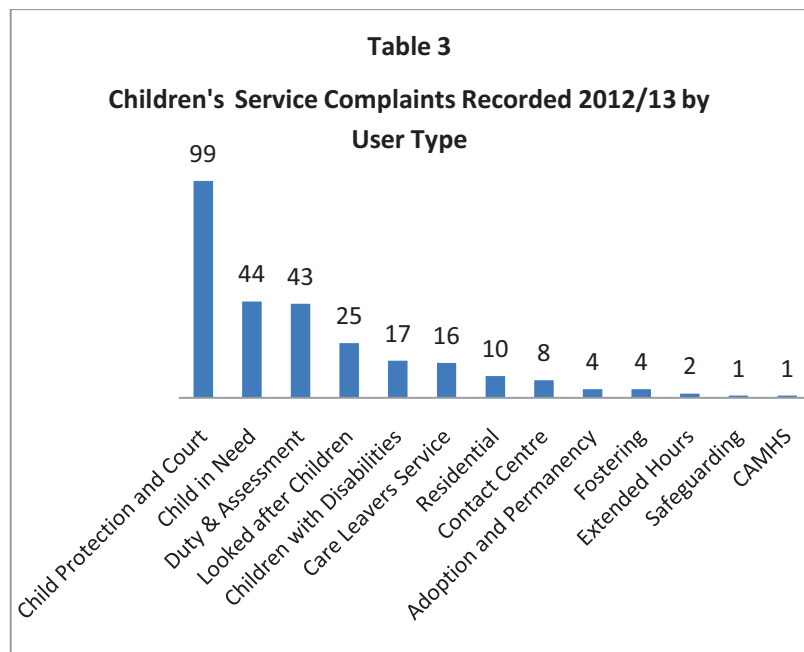
8.1.2 As illustrated in table 1 above, the total number of complaints received this year for Surrey Children's Service has decreased by 7 since last year. This decrease is also reflected in the number of complaints that escalated to full investigation at the second stage of the process. CRS is currently reviewing the complaint process at all stages, in line with the published guidance with a view to assisting operational teams in the identification and recording of complaints at an early stage. The focus of this review is around achieving early resolution for the individuals and families involved as opposed to focusing on the complaint process in its own right. The aim is to increase the use of alternative methods of resolution such as for example peer reviews in cases where there is disagreement over the content of a report or assessment. It is anticipated that this will lead to an improved understanding between social care professionals and the families, enabling them to continue to work together well and in the best interest of the child or young person.

8.1.3 Of the complaints recorded this year 13 progressed to S2 compared to 20 in the previous 12 months. Escalation of complaints is dealt with in more detail in section 8.5 of this report.

8.1.4 Table 2 below details Children's Service complaints by service area over the last year. These relate to complaints *about* these areas, rather than complaints received *by* these areas.

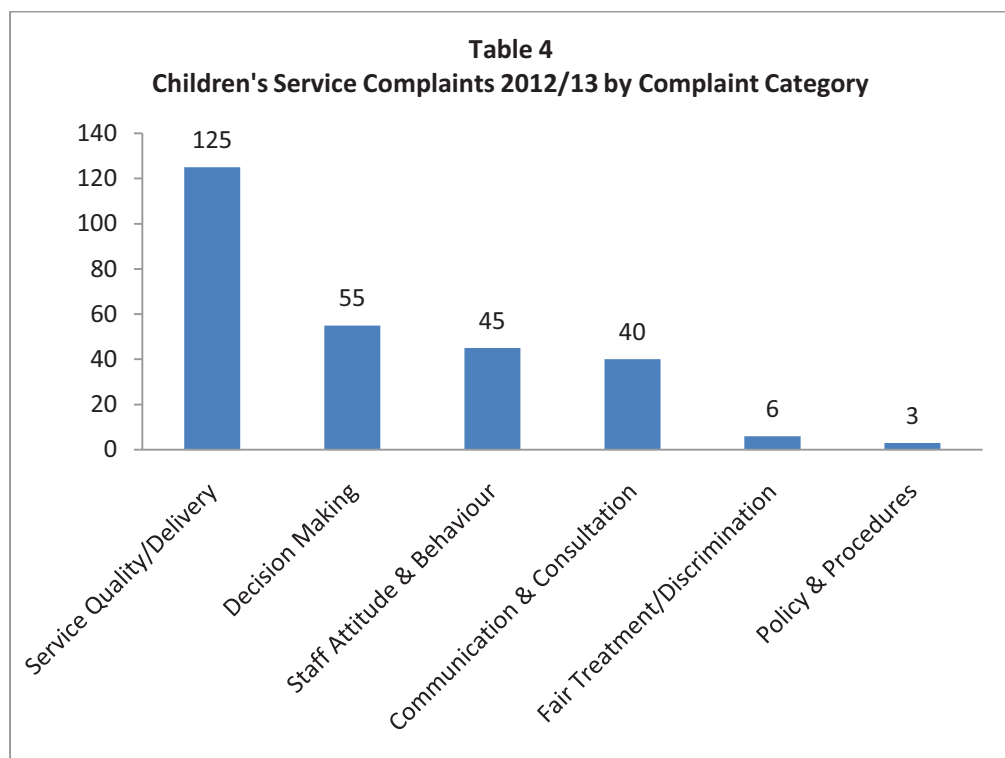


8.1.5 Table 3 below details number of complaints received by service user area. The data demonstrates that the majority of complaints received are from those receiving services from Child Protection and Court Proceedings Teams (CP &P) (99) which include complaints about the content of reports requested by the Court relative to private proceedings. Over 50% of complaints recorded by CP & P were not upheld. Further comment of complaint outcomes and resolutions can be found in Section 8.4. The table also demonstrates levels recorded by Children in Need Teams (44), Duty & Assessment Teams (43) and finally Looked after Children Teams (25). These 4 areas account for 77% of all complaints received in relation to Children's Service in Surrey.

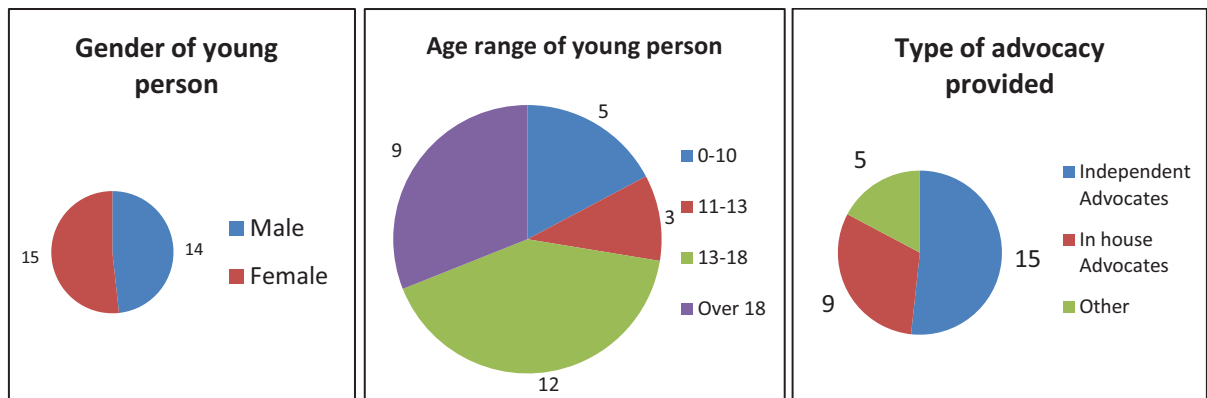
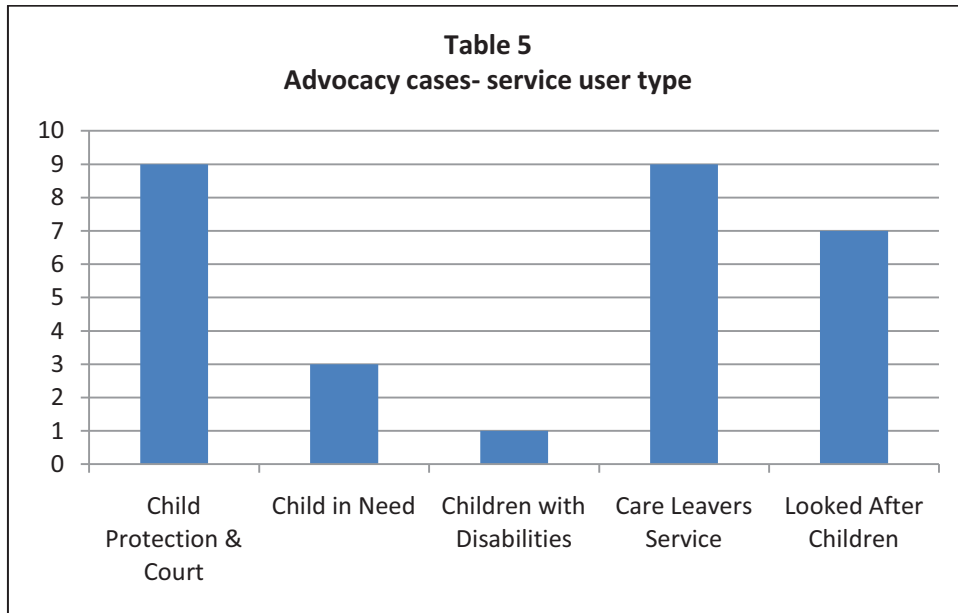


8.1.6 Table 4 below details the number of complaints received by category. The chart demonstrates that the majority of complaints are in regard to 'Quality of Service' provided. In the main, most complaints for this category relate to service user perceptions about the timeliness of service actions and similarly in regard to service user perceptions relative to adherence to established practice and guidance. It should be noted that only 19% of these complaints were upheld.

'Decision Making' is the next most common category of complaint. The main issues under this category relate to placement and funding decisions. For example, within this 12 month reporting period, the Children's Rights Manager (Complaints) has dealt with 3 requests to freeze placement decisions. This is in regard to young people seeking to remain in a current placement where the Service is not in favour of the placement continuing. In the main this relates to young people who are leaving care and hence the type of placement needs to be revised. These requests result in key conversations and consultation between the Children's Rights Manager and the Senior Operational Manager to agree the most appropriate course of action that takes account of the wishes and feelings of the young person balanced against best interest. The third most common complaint category is 'Staff Attitude & Behaviour'. In the main, this category relates to complaints about the content of assessments and reports where parents disagree with the social workers' professional opinion as expressed within the content of the assessment or report.



8.1.7 In 2012-2013, 39 complaints were received directly from children and young people. This is a decrease from the 48 complaints recorded in the previous 12 months. Whilst the number of formal complaints direct from young people has decreased, there has been an increase in contact from children and young people who are offered early problem resolution support or advocacy support. A key factor in this has been increased informal advocacy offered by Children's Rights staff which assists young people to have less formal discussions with operational managers, and resolving issues at an early stage. Of the 39 complaints recorded, 29 of the young people concerned received formal advocacy support.

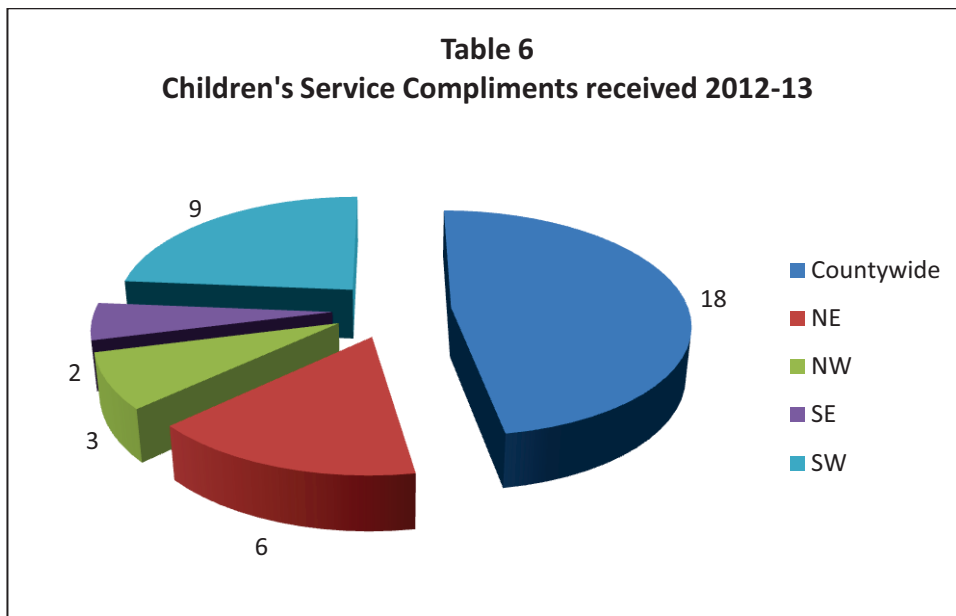


8.1.8 Table 5 above shows the breakdown of complaints advocacy cases by service type. The majority of advocacy support (55% of all advocacy provided) was provided to either looked after young people or those leaving care. . The Children’s Rights Advocacy Service commissioned independent advocates for 15 young people. A further 9 young people received support from Children’s Rights staff and 5 young people were supported by an advocate of their choosing, for example a family member or friend or other professional such as a teacher. 72% of young people receiving advocacy support were aged 13 and over.

8.1.9 Once again a number of complainants (175, equating to 64% identified themselves as white British, which is not unexpected given the demography of the County’s population. Other ethnic identifications included Asian and Black Caribbean. Generally, the breakdown is reflective of the local area and is therefore a good indication of the accessibility of the procedure.

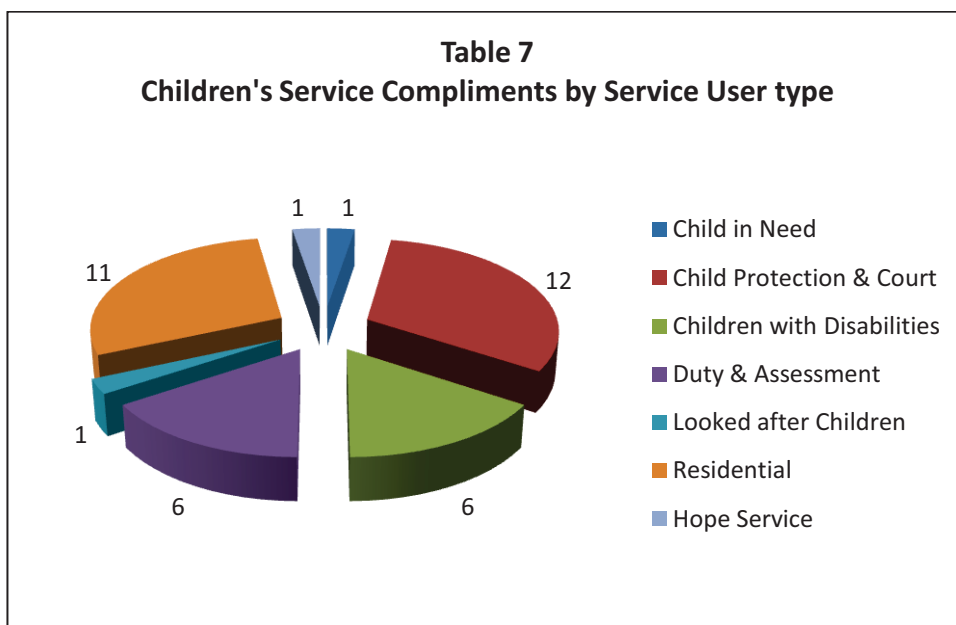
8.2 VOLUME OF COMPLIMENTS RECORDED

8.2.1 Table 6 : Children's Service Compliments received 2012-2013

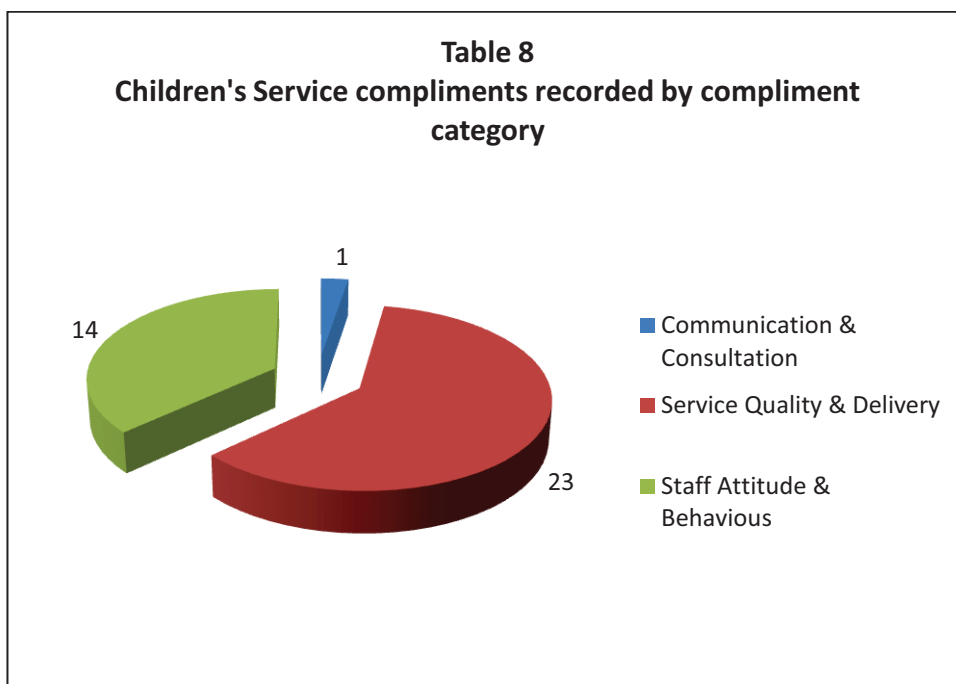


8.2.2 Table 6 above provides a breakdown of compliments recorded by geographical area. As detailed some areas are recording much higher volumes of compliments than others. Overall the numbers recorded remain fairly consistent when comparing this year to the previous 12 months. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the level of compliments recorded is accurate given the noted consistency in numbers. As with complaints, teams are responsible for recording compliments they receive. The CRS will continue to actively remind teams to record compliments as well as complaints in order to provide an accurate and balanced view. Low level recording of compliments could be reflective of the view that professionals are simply undertaking the duties and therefore not all compliments are recorded but are dealt with informally.

8.2.3 Table 7 below details compliments received by service user area. Interestingly it demonstrates that the majority of compliments are recorded by the Child Protection and Court Teams which as noted above are also the teams recording the majority of complaints.

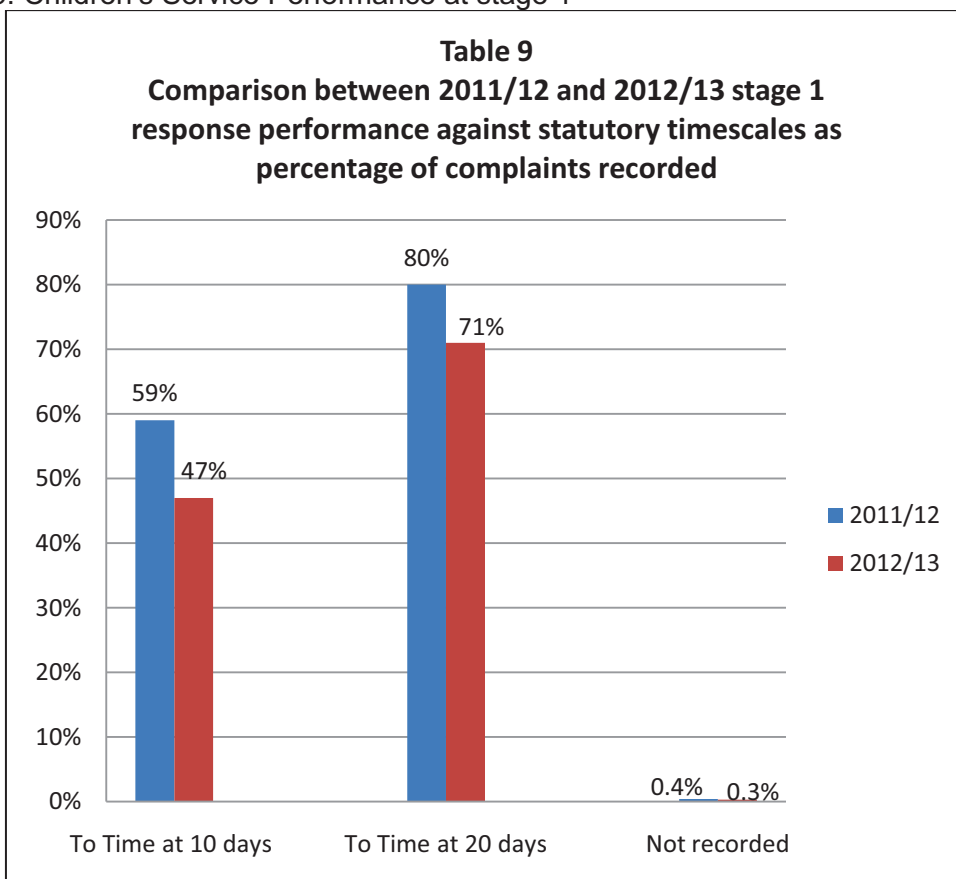


8.2.4 Table 8 below details compliments received by type. Interestingly the majority of compliments recorded are for the same category as the majority of complaints recorded. CRS will be analysing data in more detail over the next 12 months to establish if there are any underlying trends in best practice that can be shared throughout the Service.



8.3 PERFORMANCE AGAINST TIMESCALES: HOW RESPONSIVE HAVE WE BEEN?

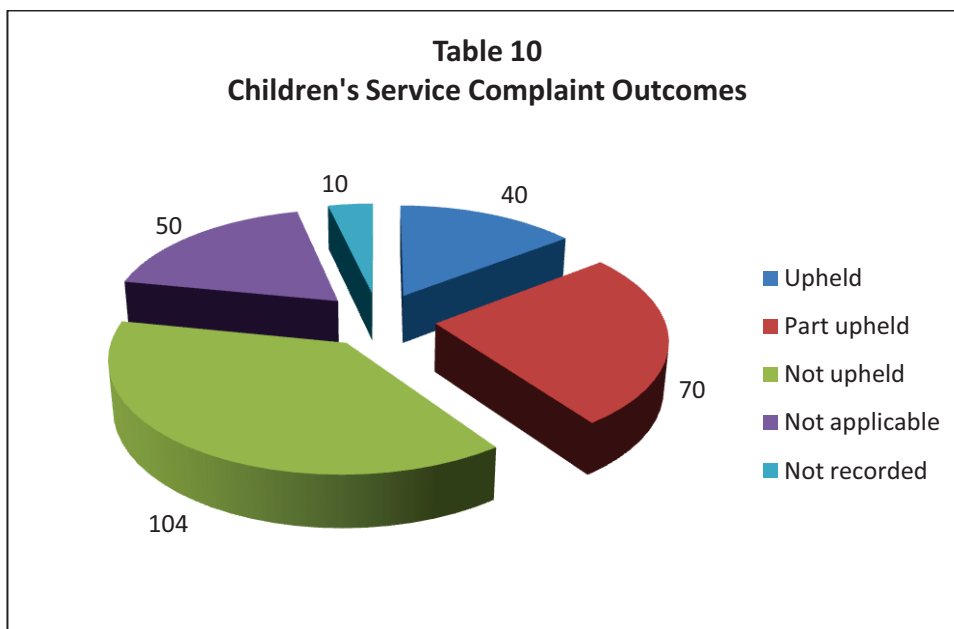
8.3.1 Table 9: Children's Service Performance at stage 1



- 8.3.2 Table 9 above shows the detail of time taken to respond to complaints at S1, (local resolution) providing a comparison between the current reporting year and the previous one. The table shows performance for responses at both the 10 and 20 day statutory timescales. The table demonstrates that there was 47% compliance to the statutory timescales of 10 working days this year, representing a decrease on last year's 59%. Although performance to the 10 day timescale has decreased, it should also be noted that the average time taken to respond to a complaint at the first stage of the process is 17.5 days which is well within the 20 day timescale. It is acknowledged and accepted that there will, in some circumstances, be cases which cannot be responded to within the 10-day timescale but the expectation is that these will remain in the minority. These cases can be classed as meeting criteria for 'justifiable delay' for example, complaints direct from Young People requiring formal advocacy support, requests to freeze placement decisions and complaints that stretched across more than one team or service such as Children with Disabilities and Special Education Needs. During this reporting period there were 36 complaints that were deemed to meet the criteria for justifiable delay. These reflect 25% of the complaints that did not meet the 10 day response target. The decrease in performance at the 10 day response target is disappointing and CRS will be focusing on working with the Service to identify and address barriers to meeting these performance targets. However, this should be considered against the reduction in escalation to the second stage of the procedure this year and in the context of no complaints being referred to stage 3.
- 8.3.3 71% were responded to within 20-day timescale, which is a decrease when compared to last year's 80%. However, performance is just below target and can be said to reflect the complexities of social care complaints as reflected in the criteria for justifiable delay referred to above. It is however pleasing to note that the number of cases with missing information (not recorded) has continued to decrease from 0.4% in the previous year to 0.3%. This demonstrates greater awareness of the importance of recording accurate data for reporting purposes and also reflects the work undertaken by CRS to ensure data quality.
- 8.3.4 Children's Rights staff have continued to spend a significant amount of time interrogating the data and chasing responses. Operational teams are routinely reminded of their responsibilities to log complaints and update records. This is a priority, especially as the figures within the database are used to report on performance throughout the county. As indicated above there are instances where complaints are said to meet the criteria for justifiable delay and this will impact on the performance of the operational teams relative to complaint response times. Additionally there are occasions such as for example, managers being called away to attend to another priority, key staff being on leave or away due to ill health that can impact on the timeliness of the complaint response. CRS is working with managers to establish what other barriers may be contributing not only to the timeliness of responses but also the accuracy of data recording such as when a complaint response has been sent. This is because if data recording is not accurate the performance reporting can be affected by what is in effect incomplete data. For example if a complaint record is not updated to reflect the date a response is sent, it cannot be counted as within target.

8.4 COMPLAINTS OUTCOMES & RESOLUTION

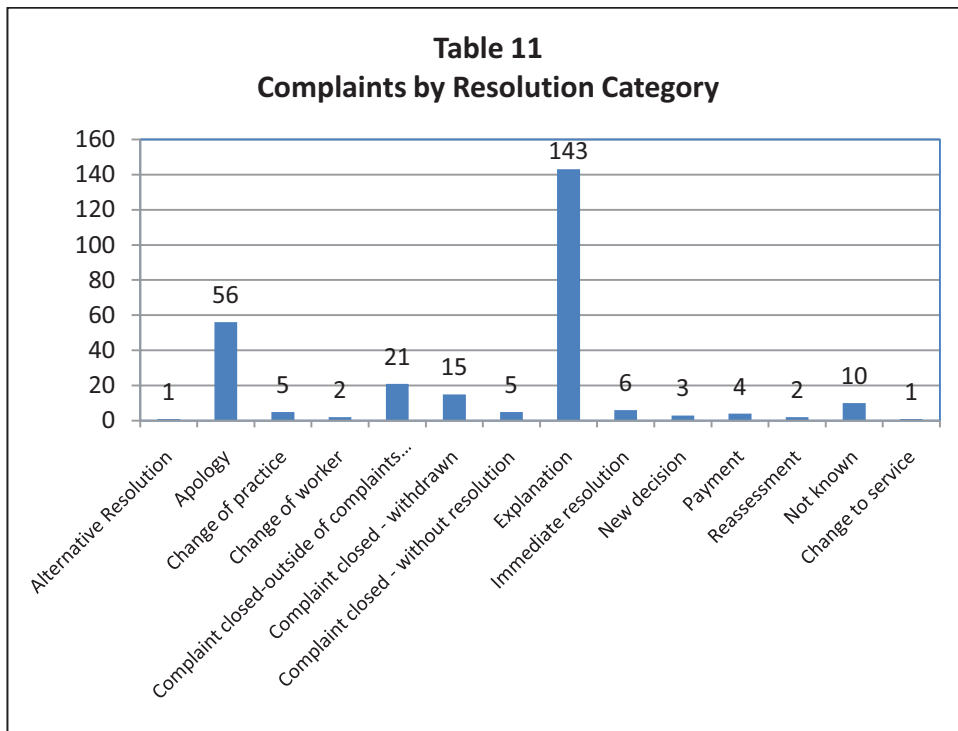
8.4.1 Table 10: Children's Service complaints recorded by outcome.



8.4.2 Table 10 above shows that a majority (104) of complaints responded to at S1 of the process were 'not upheld', (no fault accepted) another 70 were 'part upheld' (some fault accepted) and a further 40 of complaints were recorded as fully 'upheld' (fault accepted). During the year, complaints about matters that could not be considered via the complaints process, for example those about decisions reached in Court, show an outcome of 'not applicable'. These account for 50 of the complaints recorded. CRS will continue to liaise with the Service with a view to improving service delivery in terms of learning arising from complaints with a focus on complaints that were either 'upheld' or 'part upheld'.

8.4.3 The fact that only 40 of complaints are recorded as fully 'upheld' does not necessarily mean that complaints received are not reasonable or have no value and that is because it is always important to listen to what we are being told about our service in order to put matters right at the earliest opportunity, and to learn and improve.

8.4.4 Table 11 details complaints recorded by resolution category

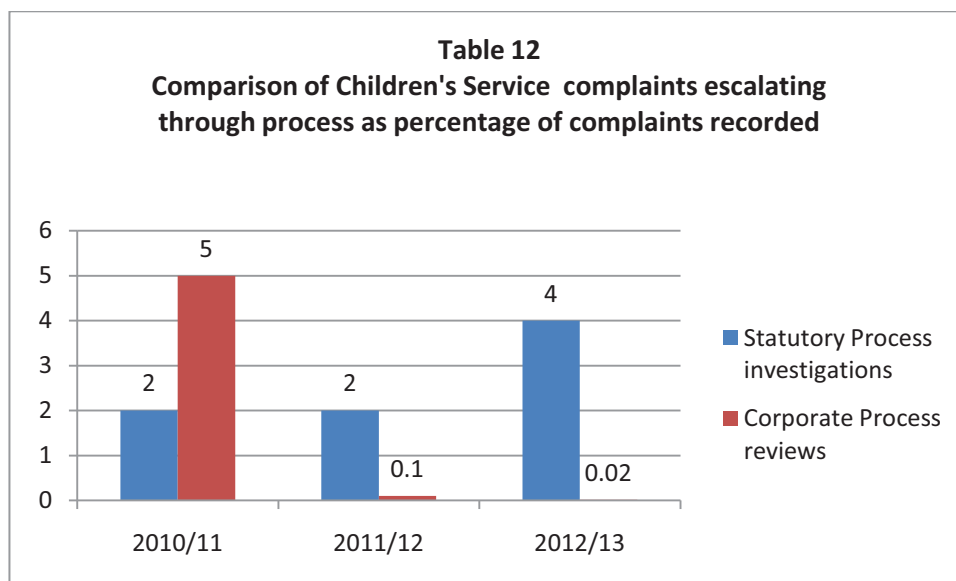


8.4.5 Given that 104 complaints recorded were 'not upheld' and a further 70 were 'part upheld', and 143 of the 274 (52%) of complaints recorded were resolved by 'explanation', it can be argued that the quality and effectiveness of communication with families continues to fuel most dissatisfaction. As indicated earlier in this report, CRS will continue to work with the Service to learn from complaints in order to improve the quality of communication. CRS aims to achieve this in part through careful monitoring and analysis of cases recorded as 'not requiring any corrective actions' with a view to challenging the records on a case by case basis and asking what could have been done differently? One example of this is a case where a parent challenged the content of report prepared for the Court on the basis that the Court was misinformed because certain information was omitted from the report, The parent was of the view that the recommendations to the Court would have been different had the information not been omitted. The service, in reviewing the report agreed that it should have been made clear to the Court that the service had considered all information including that which was omitted from the actual report content and that the omission did not have a material impact on the recommendations and outcomes. This would have resulted in the parent having a greater understanding of the reasons underpinning the recommendation and hence it is reasonable to assume that the complaint would then not been made.

8.4.6 Further, CRS routinely receives requests from both the Service and service users asking for support in managing communication and resolving issues. As a result, CRS have become much more involved in leading learning from complaints and will continue to provide management information on this. (See also section 10.)

8.5 ESCALATION OF COMPLAINTS

8.5.1 Table 12: Complaints escalated to stage 2 (Corporate and Statutory processes)



8.5.2 During 2012-13, a total of 42 requests were received for complaints to be escalated to S2 of the process. Of these 42, 13 escalated to the second stage. Of these, 12 complaints (4% of all the complaints recorded) progressed to full investigation under the statutory process. One of these was investigated under the corporate complaint process.

Of the remaining 29 escalation requests:

- Three were declined as the complainant displayed persistently unreasonable behaviour and had confirmed that he intended to follow the judicial route. The Complaints Managers decision was ultimately supported by the Local Government Ombudsman in all three cases
- Six were about matters already being considered in Court and were therefore outside of the complaint process
- One was addressed via a mediated meeting
- Eight were declined because they had either been upheld at stage 1 of the process or the desired outcomes could not realistically be achieved via the complaint process, this included parents wishing contact arrangements being revised where Contact Orders were in place
- One was withdrawn
- Ten were resolved via alternate means including management reviews of the case and/or assessment concerned. Two of these were later considered by the LGO who endorsed the view taken by the Council and did not investigate the matter further.

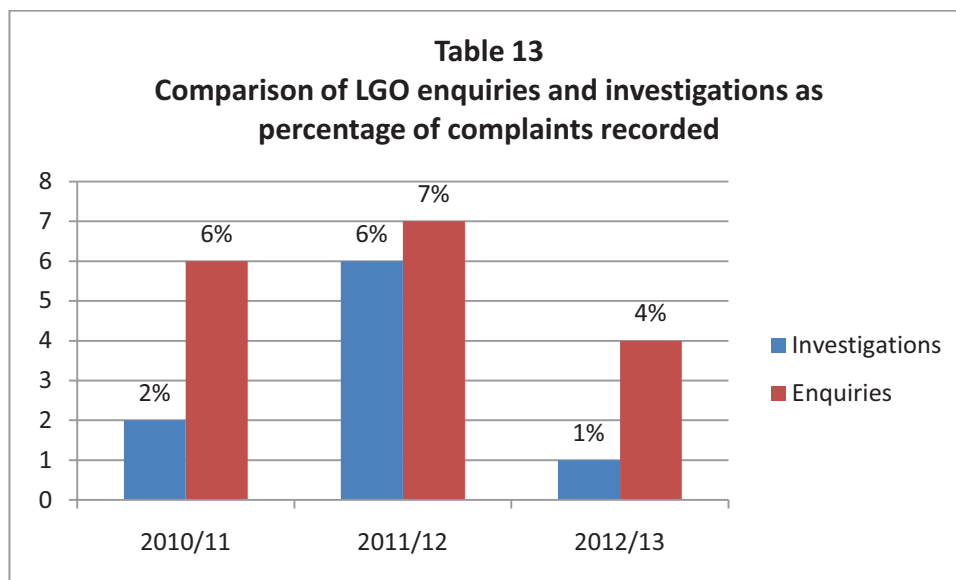
8.5.3 A total of 12 of the S1 complaints recorded this year progressed to full independent investigation at S2 of the statutory process. As explained above, this has been a result of the increased use of alternative resolution at the second stage of the process by the CRS. It has not however been possible to compare this data with the previous 12 months as requests for escalation were not recorded in a similar way during the preceding fiscal year.

8.5.4 The majority of S2 complaints were recorded under the category of 'Service quality/delivery'.

8.5.4 There were no complaints progressing to stage 3 of the statutory process during the current reporting year 2012/13. Overall this is indicative of improved responses at S2 of the process.

8.6 LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN ENQUIRIES

8.6.1 Table 13: Total LGO enquiries and investigations received compared to previous years. Not all enquiries from the LGO progress to full investigations. In the main this is because following initial enquiries the CRS is able to demonstrate that the Council has taken reasonable steps to resolve the complaint. On some occasions the CRS is also able to agree a way forward with the LGO and agreement from the complainant that resolves the complaint satisfactorily for all parties without the need for a full and formal investigation. Not all investigations result in findings of maladministration (evidence of fault on the part of the Council) and this is reflected in Table 13 below.



8.6.2 The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) made a total of 13 enquiries about Surrey Children’s Service in 2012/13. This equates to 5% of the 274 complaints recorded in the year. Of these enquiries, 3 (i.e. 1%) have resulted in full investigations. Of these 3 investigations, 2 were resolved via local settlement, and the third was determined as no maladministration found.

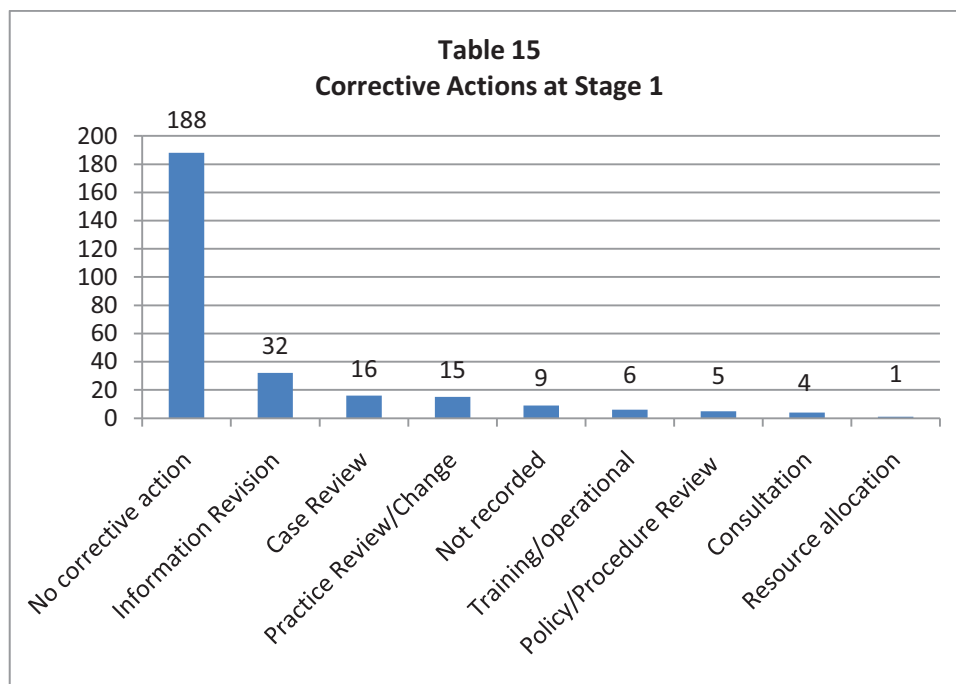
8.6.3 The LGO issued no public reports in relation to Children’s Service during this period. This is a positive result and shows that not only do we have a low rate of escalation to the LGO but that under external scrutiny the majority of complaints have been properly dealt with by the local authority.

8.6.4 The 2 cases that were settled locally included concerns in regard to a historical case containing elements of allegations that a young child was left unsafe due to the alleged inaction on the part of the Local Authority and another case pertaining to decisions taken during safeguarding proceedings. CRS was successful in negotiating with the LGO to reach an agreed settlement with the complainant that included remedies such as: appropriate apologies, an agreed financial settlement, revisions to formal records and information shared with partnership agencies relative to the revisions made to formal records

Table 14: Outcome of LGO investigations	
‘Local settlement – no report’	2
‘No maladministration – no report’	1

8.7 LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

8.7.1 Table 15: Corrective actions identified at stage 1



8.7.2 Table 15 above shows that 79 complaints resulted in corrective actions being identified while 188 (of 276 complaints due a response) were explicitly recorded as not leading to any corrective action. Although we need to continue to improve on the number of complaints resulting in specific identified learning, we note that there has been an increase of 10%, when comparing 22% of cases recording a specified learning during 2011/12 to 32% during 2012/13. CRS has noted an increase in the depth and detail of complaint investigations at S1 of the process. Within section 8.5 above there is comment regarding the escalation of complaints through the process. Robust responses at stage 1 of the process contribute significantly when considering whether or not a complaint should be escalated. For example, a robust response at the initial stage of the process that clearly sets out and upholds acknowledged errors and omissions may provide the opportunity for agreement for an acceptable remedy as opposed to a full investigation at the second stage of the process which could otherwise delay resolution for the complainants.

8.7.3 Table 15 also shows that 9 out of the 276 complaints are missing corrective action information altogether. This reflects a decrease in missing information when compared to the previous 12 months. This missing information can be explained partially by incomplete recording due to technical changes to the database made during the course of the reporting year. CRS continues to monitor completeness and quality of complaints data and to work with the service to improve identification of learning (see also section 10.9). CRS routinely individually reminds the operational managers of the need to ensure that records are updated in a timely fashion, with a view to minimising the number of incomplete records at year end.

8.7.4 At the close of a S2 or LGO complaint CRS develops and circulates corrective action plans (CAPs) to managers who are responsible for carrying out the actions and sharing these within their service area.

8.7.5 During this reporting period, the corrective action plans drawn up and circulated across Children's Service list, between them, a total of 40 separate corrective actions. The actions have been identified by the Service and need to be completed in order to improve services and put matters right.

8.7.6 90% of the corrective actions identified were reported as completed by the Service. This is a decrease on last year's completion rate of 100%. The status of the remaining 10% is 'unknown'

at the time of reporting. CRS will continue to seek to ensure that records are maintained accurately.

8.7.7 At stages 2 and beyond, the top 2 types of corrective actions taken as a result of escalated complaints are:

- **Service Briefing** (13 out of 40)
- **Apology** (7 out of 40)

8.7.8 The key learning themes identified at Stages 2 and beyond relate to:

- 1- Inconsistent recording of case activity impacting on ability to fully audit case history.
- 2- Delays in handling complaints at S1 leading to 'time and trouble' payments at S2.

Examples of specific actions

8.7.9 Specific examples of learning from complaints identified by operational and CRS staff are listed below:

1. Review of Local Authority's Contractual arrangements with Transport Providers.
2. Eligibility criteria for Children's Disability services clarified and made accessible on website.
3. Kinship Care leaflet revised to ensure information about finance options is clear to carers.
4. Guidance to be developed to ensure contact arrangements between children or young people and their families respect cultural and religious needs.

8.8 SUMMARY: WHAT HAVE WE DONE WELL AND WHERE CAN WE IMPROVE?

8.8.1 What we are doing well?

- Significant increase in the numbers of complaints being made directly by young people that are supported by advocacy provision.
- Decrease in escalation to S2 and S3 of the process
- Decrease in numbers of complaints investigated by the Local Government Ombudsman
- Higher level of identification of learning at stages 2 and beyond
- CRS and Children's Services continue to work in partnership, building on the relationship established in earlier years and the improvements in service delivery identified through closer working and common goals.

8.8.2 What do we need to improve?

- Accurate recording of complaints at the first stage of the process
- Performance in terms of response timescales at 10 workdays at S1
- Identification of learning from complaints at S1
- Service wide dissemination of S2 corrective active plans.

CRS will continue to work closely with operational teams in regard to the 4 points identified above. This will include CRM's having regular slots at Area Management Meetings as well as the individual support already in place for Team and Assistant Team Managers in addressing responses at the first stage of the process.

9. ADVOCACY SUPPORT

- 9.1. Advocacy and Participation Services have now been successfully delivered by the Children's Rights Service for over 3 years. The advocacy service provides the statutory complaint related advocacy support for children and young people in line with the requirements of 'Get it Sorted'. In order to do so, the Service manages a pool of self-employed independent advocates and commissions the advocacy support when requested by a child or young person. Complaint Information Leaflets for children and young people are systematically circulated within Children's Services and advocacy provision continues to be promoted with a particular focus on reaching looked after children and the staff that work with them.
- 9.2 The advocacy service has this year dealt with an increased number of contacts from or about young people. It continues to provide early problem solving support in sometimes complex cases and to offer advice or signposting where appropriate.
- 9.3 The advocacy service's ambition for the next year is to enable children and young people to be more able and confident to self advocate whether in the context of complaints or in other contexts. The service aims to provide more opportunities and avenues for young people to self-advocate and help them increase their self advocacy skills. The Service plans to achieve this aim through several means such as self-advocacy skills coaching and training for children and young people; advising and coaching staff on how to promote these skills in the young people they work with; promoting existing paper-based self-advocacy tools as well as collaborating on the development of a self-advocacy electronic application called Mind of My own (MoMo).

10 MONITORING THE PROCESS

- 10.1 CRS support Children's services to manage and learn from complaints. The key services offered are: complaints advice and support, quality assuring of responses, mediation, complaint case debrief sessions, production of performance reports, liaising with Local Government Ombudsman, Complaints Visiting Workshops, 1-2-1 complaints handling coaching for operational managers, and development and monitoring of corrective action plans (CAPs).
- 10.1.1 CRS staff offer S2 complaints debriefing sessions to staff involved in complex S1. This provides the opportunity to discuss the process of the case, learning outcomes and how experience was for staff involved. No formal debriefing sessions took place this reporting year as in consultation with the operational managers this was not deemed necessary. However as well as holding informal debriefing discussions with operational managers CRS has provided both support to individual staff members involved in such cases as well as support in the form of facilitation of meetings with complainants.
- 10.1.2 CRS continues to draw up corrective action plans following the outcome of complaints at stages 2 and 3 of the process. Plans are agreed and signed off by the senior operational manager who is responsible for taking actions forward. As already mentioned earlier in the report, this year's completion rate demonstrates the success of the monitoring mechanism agreed with the Assistant Director for Children's Services and managed by CRS. This does not detract from the need to focus on developing the identification of learning at the early stage and on ensuring the dissemination of learning across the service. CRS routinely prepares Corrective/Actions arising plans following escalation of complaints through the process and these will continue to highlight areas of best practice or changes in delivery that should be addressed and disseminated at a county wide level. These plans are agreed with Senior operational managers and will include comment on how this is to be achieved for each area of improvement that is identified. This may include changes in practice as well as service wide briefings.
- 10.1.3 CRS produce monthly reports for the Directorate Leadership Team in line with the Rights and Participation Service Delivery Plan. CRS also produces reports and summaries when requested for discussion at Children's Service Management Team and for inclusion in the Children's Service Report Card.

10.2 During 2013-2014 CRS will focus on:

- *Improving services planning and delivery through identifying learning from complaints and with the service develop actions in response.* The CRS will assist Team Managers to consider what learning has arisen out of a complaint and prepare plans/targets to ensure that the lessons are learnt and similar pitfalls are avoided in the future. This will be achieved in part through additional detailed analysis of complaint responses.
- *Increasing numbers of complaints recorded at Stage 1(S1) especially from Children and Young People direct*
- *Reducing escalation rates through the process by improving quality of responses at S1 with an emphasis on improved consideration and use of alternative resolution at an early stage in the process.*

11 FINAL COMMENTS

11.1 Overall this has been another positive year for complaints management across the services. Stronger working relationships continue to be developed between services and the CRS resulting in effective resolution of complaints at the earliest stage. Examples of this include:

- Consultation in addressing concerns about the content of reports and assessments by way of peer review to consider whether or not outcomes to said reports or assessments should be reviewed
- Consultation with operational teams where there is concern that addressing the complaint may not be in the best interest of the child, particularly if there are safeguarding concerns
- Specific and open communication with operational managers in cases where a young person has asked that a change of placement decision is frozen
- Operational managers seeking advice from CRS as to whether or not a matter that has not been raised formally as a complaint should in fact be addressed through the process.
- Social care professionals actively seeking support relative to potential advocacy requests from young people wishing to make a complaint

This can be said to demonstrate low escalation rates through the process.

11.2 The CRS will continue to work with services on improving recording and updating complaints information as well as focusing on learning as a continued priority in the coming year.

11.3 As identified earlier in this report, CRS has noted improvements in the quality of responses at S1 of the process which in turn have resulted in early resolution and identification of learning to inform noted improvements in service delivery. This follows the increased use of individual coaching for operational managers as provided by CRS. The coaching includes discussions in meetings and over the telephone, both generic and case specific depending on individual cases and circumstances. During 2012/13 a total of 32 coaching sessions were delivered either to individuals or groups of managers. In turn this has contributed to closer working relationships between CRS and operational managers that continue into the current fiscal year.

11.4 CRS notes that Senior Managers within Children's Service occasionally respond to informal inquiries received from Members and MPs where it is deemed that a response via the complaint process would not be appropriate.