

# Children's Rights Service

**Children's Service  
Statutory Complaints Report 2015 - 2016**

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## 1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 All local authorities with Children's Social Care responsibilities are required to maintain and operate a Children's Act complaints process in line with statutory guidance. The management of this process should sit outside operational Children's Service's delivery and the responsible "complaints manager" should not report into Children's Service line management. The Authority must produce a statutory annual complaints report detailing complaints performance and activity.
- 1.2 In Surrey, the Children's Act Complaints Process is delivered by the Children's Rights Service. This service sits at arm's length from operational teams in the Commissioning and Prevention Division of the Children, Schools and Families Directorate.
- 1.3 The Children's Act Complaints Procedure considers complaints from and on behalf of children and young people, and their carers who are receiving a service under the Children's Act. Complaints can for example be made about the type or quality of service, the provision or lack of provision, and/or about staff interventions with users. Young people making or thinking of making a complaint are entitled to an advocate. The Children's Rights Service does, on occasion, receive complaints that are in reality concerns of a safeguarding nature and or not about Children's Act provision. Such concerns are referred to operational teams for action as appropriate and in accordance with the Safeguarding Board Procedures. These concerns are not considered under the Statutory Complaints procedure.
- 1.4 The procedure operates a three stage process. Stage one is local resolution, where the matter is responded to by the team working with the family or as close to the point of delivery as possible. These complaints may be made direct to the operational team via the contact centre or complaints team or Councillor or any other officer of the council. The statutory guidance expects that most complaints will be responded to within 10 working days at stage one or 20 working days for more complex cases. Stage one complaints are responded to by operational managers. At stage two the process is managed by the Children's Rights Service who can appoint an independent investigator and independent person to investigate the complaint and produce a report of their recommended findings. This stage can take between 1 to 6 months to complete. The third stage is a review panel hearing. The Panel, which is made up of independent people will hear representations from the complainant and the service. The Panel will then review the complaint and having reached recommended findings in relation to the complaint, will refer their findings to the Deputy Director Children's Services. The Deputy Director will then consider the Panel's recommendations and respond formally to the complainant on behalf of the Local Authority. Following stage three, if the complainant remains unhappy they can refer the complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) for their consideration. The LGO may investigate the complaint and can issue a public report of their findings.
- 1.5 Complainants are advised that they have the right to request their complaint is progressed through the procedure at the end of each stage should they remain dissatisfied.
- 1.6 Children's Service also respond to informal inquiries received from County Councillors and Members of Parliament where it is deemed that a response via the complaint process would not be appropriate. During 2015-16, the Children's Rights Service were asked to oversee and monitor managing enquiries from Members of Parliament and County Councillors. This procedure is managed by the Children's Rights Service which records the enquiries and manages the responses through the process. It is notable that the numbers of enquiries recorded has significantly increased since November 2015 when the process was introduced. During 2015-2016 a total of 77 enquiries were recorded, compared to 20 recorded enquiries in the previous 12 months. 25 enquiries were recorded in the period between April 2015 and October 2015 with 52 enquiries being recorded from November 2015 to 31 March 2016. Enquiries were recorded on the Customer Feedback Database. This is the database also used

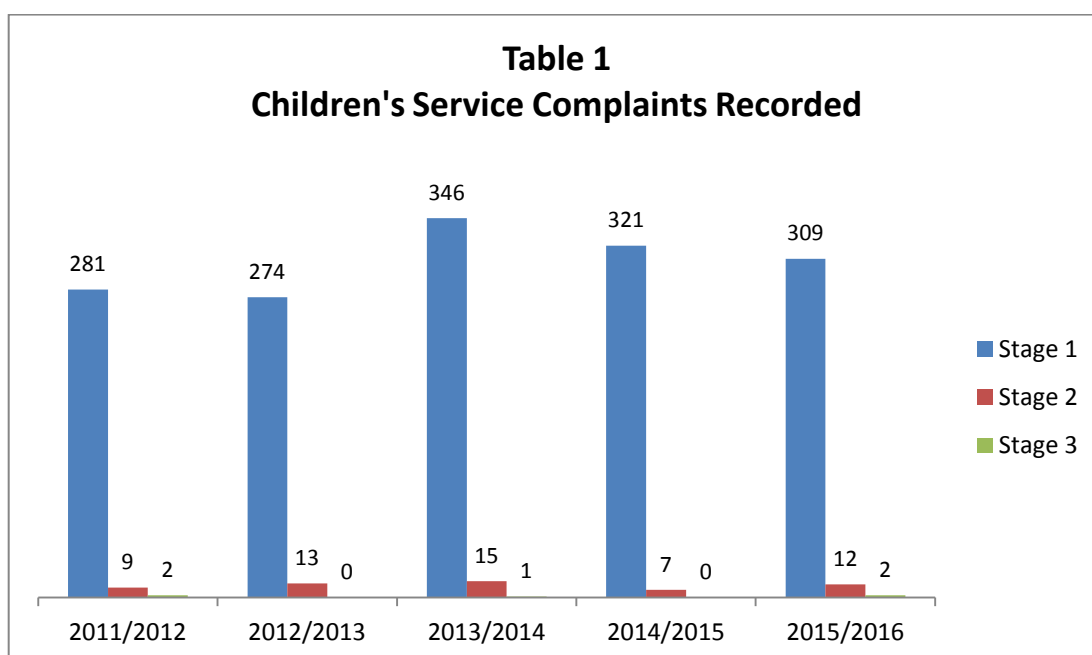
for recording complaints. The figures recorded are indicative of a more systematic approach that ties in with processes for recording and managing other forms of feedback such as complaints.

- 1.7 This new approach provides an opportunity to interrogate the nature of the enquiries received and use it to inform service delivery. It is interesting to note that of the 77 MP/Cllr enquiries, 20 were already known to the Children’s Rights Service as complainants whose complaints were being or had been addressed through the complaints process. Recording these types of enquiries on the database ensures that we are systematic in approach with a view to ensure that work is not duplicated and that responses are managed through the correct process.

## 2 SCC CHILDREN’S SERVICES’ COMPLAINTS ANALYSIS 2015 – 2016

### 2.1 VOLUME OF COMPLAINTS RECORDED

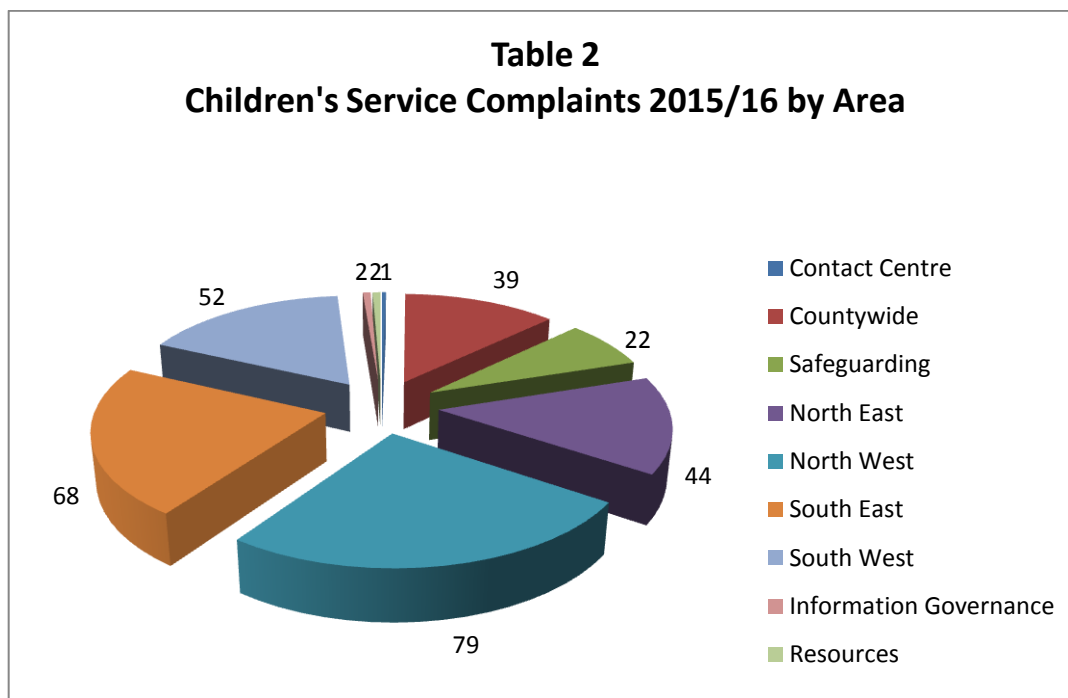
#### 2.1.1 Table 1: Children’s Service Complaints recorded 2015 -2016



- 2.1.2 As illustrated in Table 1, the total number of complaints recorded between April 2015 and March 2016 for Surrey Children’s Service has decreased by 12 when compared to the previous 12 months. As discussed later in this report, escalation through the process remains low although it has increased slightly when compared to the previous 12 months. This may reflect improved awareness from complainants of their right to seek escalation together with an increase in delay for responses at the first stage of the process. This aspect is considered in more detail later in this report. The Children’s Rights Service will continue to monitor recording levels and escalation rates through the process within the current fiscal year together with the learning arising from complaints to inform service delivery.

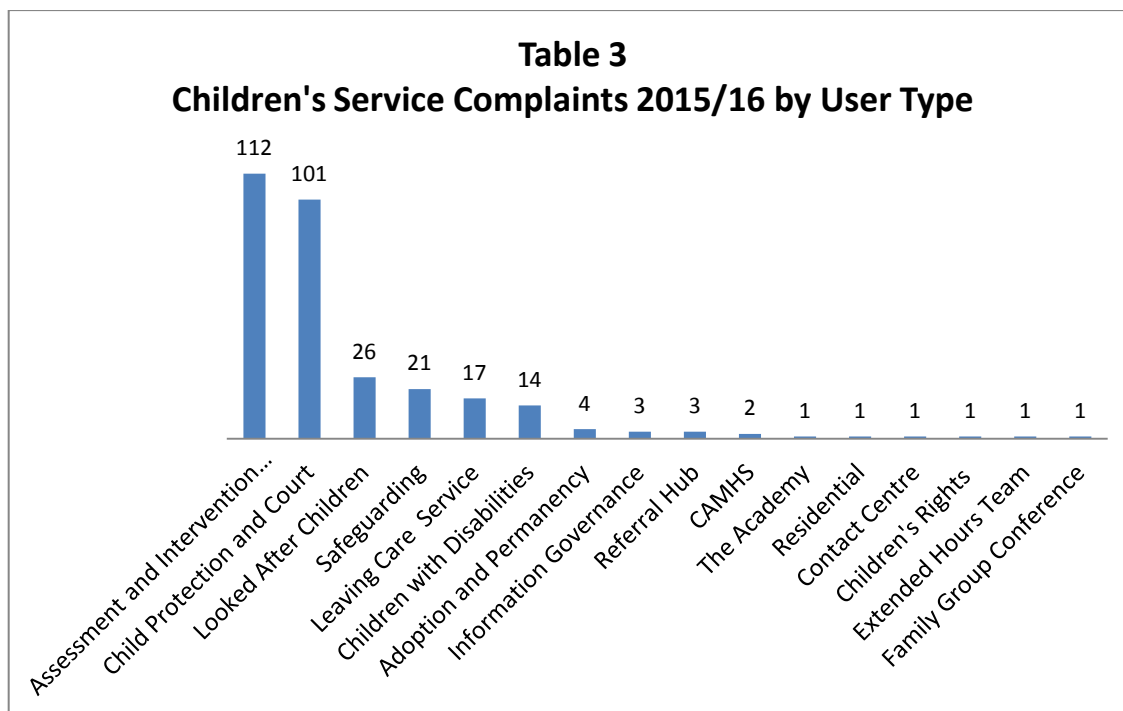
- 2.1.3 Table 2 details Children’s Service complaints by service area over the last year. These relate to complaints *about* these areas, rather than complaints received *by* these areas. The chart demonstrates that the majority of complaints are in the main directed at the operational social care teams, which is to be expected as it is these teams which interact the most closely with the families with whom the service intervenes. The chart indicates that as in the previous 12 months, the majority of complaints were recorded as being about the North West Area. Analysis of the recording data demonstrates that the majority of complaints within the North West Area relate to the Referral Intervention and Assessment Team which is not not unexpected given the

nature of the Team's work in assessing risks to and needs of the children within these families. The Children's Rights Service is also aware of the recruitment and retention difficulties being encountered across the Service but also specifically in the North West Area.



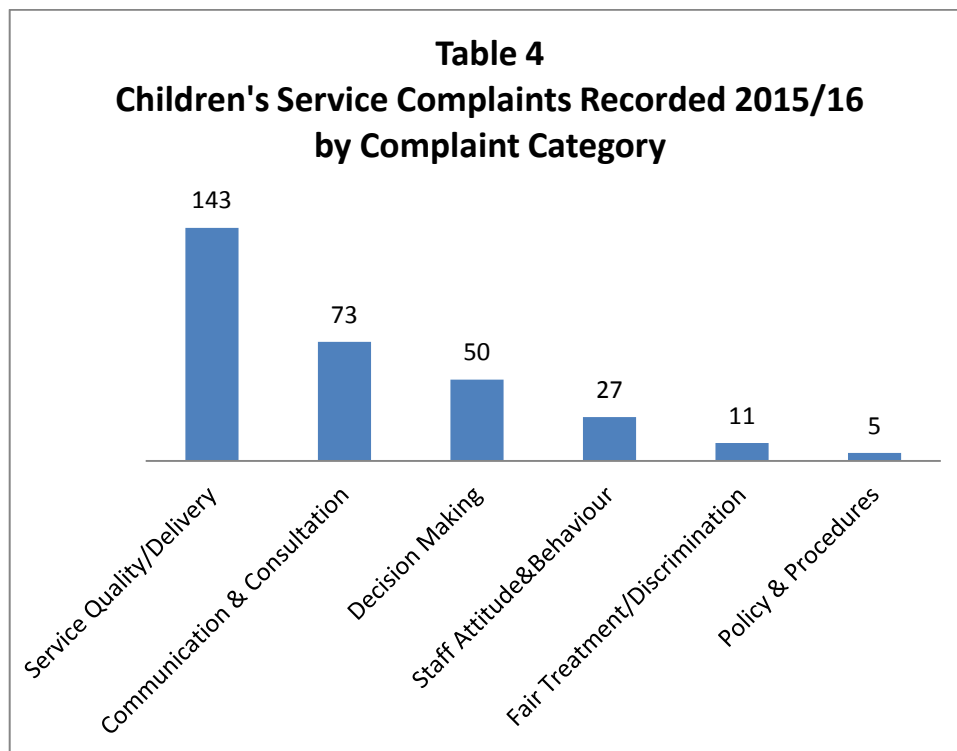
2.1.4 Table 3 details number of complaints received by service area. The data demonstrates that the majority of complaints received are from those receiving services from the Referral Assessment and Intervention Teams (112) followed closely by complaints about the Child Protection and Court Proceedings Teams (101). Although in general terms this is out of step when compared with recording levels in the previous 12 months where the majority of complaints were about the Child Protection and Court Proceedings Teams and then the Referral Assessment and Interventions Teams, the data collected does, as with previous years, demonstrated that these include complaints about the content of reports requested by the Court in private proceedings. These reports can be completed by both the Referral Assessment and Intervention Teams and the Child Protection and Court Proceedings Teams. Parents have also been known to use Child and Family Assessments as part of evidence presented in Private Court Proceedings even though these assessments are not written for the Court and the decision to share the content rests with family members and not Children's Services. Consistent with data collected in previous years, parents continue to indicate that they are self representing in Private Legal Proceedings. The financial consequences of austerity measures continue to be felt by the families with whom Children's Services interacts and it is therefore not unexpected that parents involved in Private Legal Proceedings will make complaints about matters that are more appropriately addressed within the legal system. The expectation in these cases is that the concerns will be discussed as part of the ongoing legal proceedings and not addressed via the complaint process.

2.1.5 The table also shows that levels recorded by the Referral Assessment and Intervention Teams (112) Child Protection and Court Proceedings Teams (101), account for 69% of all complaints received in relation to Children's Service in Surrey. This is not unexpected given that it is in the main these teams that are involved following contact from the families involved or referrals for intervention received from either partner agencies such as Health or the Police. Intervention is difficult at best and the data collected as part of learning from complaints suggests that the Service needs to improve how it communicates with families in these situations. This is not just in regard to frequency and nature of communication but also in the detail that is shared within the explanations given for intervention in the first instance.



- 2.1.6 Table 4 details the number of complaints received by category (type of complaint). The chart demonstrates that the majority of complaints are in regard to 'Quality of Service' provided. As indicated earlier in this report, the majority of complaints recorded are in relation to service provision by the Referral Assessment and Intervention Service and the Child Protection and Court Proceedings Teams. It is therefore not unexpected that in the main complaints about Quality of Service relate to customers perceptions of the service and what it may be able to offer. This can also include misunderstandings by families about the role of Surrey Children's Services in private legal proceedings. The majority of these complaints are resolved by providing more robust or detailed explanations around the decisions and actions taken by the Service. It is not unexpected therefore that Communication and Consultation is the next most common category of complaint. This in turn emphasises the need to ensure that timely and full explanations are provided when decisions and actions are taken.
- 2.1.7 As indicated above, 'Communication and Consultation' is the next most common category of complaint. An example will relate to families' expectations around what constitutes regular or frequent communication from the allocated social worker. This highlights the need to ensure that families' expectations around frequency and detail of communication from social care professionals is carefully managed. The data suggests that parents would welcome a more proactive approach where they get regular updates on progress without feeling like they need to constantly chase social workers for information. A more proactive approach should reduce the volumes of complaints about this area and enable the service to be in control of communication rather than reacting to constant contact from parents.
- 2.1.8 As with previous reporting years, the third most common complaint category is 'Decision Making'. Complaints in this category continue to relate in the main, to the outcome of assessments or reports where parents/young people disagree with the social workers' professional opinion as expressed within the content of the assessment or report. For example, where there is disagreement with the outcomes arising from an assessment or report, this disagreement is expressed as a complaint suggesting that the outcome is flawed. During 2015-2016, 8 management reviews of assessments and reports were undertaken at the second stage of the process. Whilst the reviews supported the complainants' view that the reports and assessments were not always as detailed or robust as they could have been, the management reviews noted that the outcomes of the assessments were not affected by this and remained unchanged.

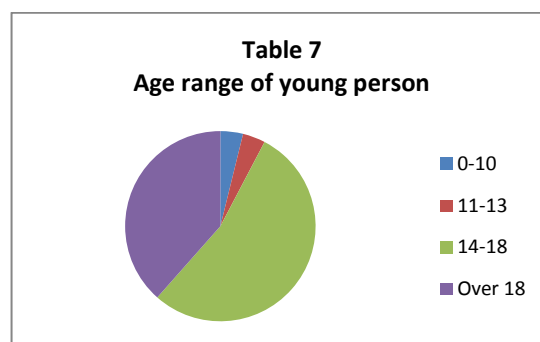
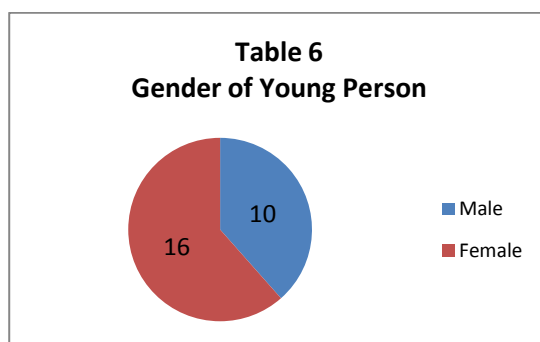
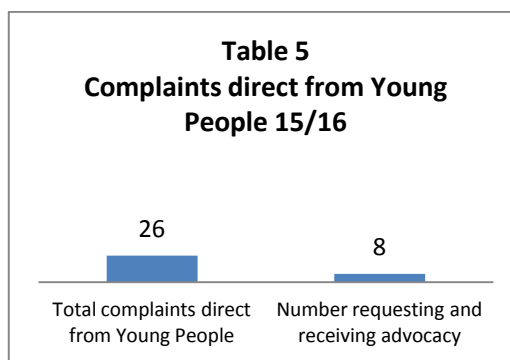
2.1.9 The top three categories of complaints this year indicate the need for improved communication with families. As part of actions arising from complaints, the Complaints Manager has been working with both Area Managers and Quality Assurance Teams to look for specific actions to address gaps in effective communication. Changes in the way that Performance Reporting is managed in regard to complaints have already been made as a result of this and includes comment on the effect of changes made within Service Delivery due to learning arising from complaints and the impact this can have on Service Delivery.



2.1.10 In 2015-2016 a total of 26 formal complaints were received directly from children and young people. This is a significant decrease compared to the 42 complaints recorded in the previous 12 months. However, there were 53 contacts direct from children and young people either seeking support to achieve informal resolution of problems and concerns or communicating their wishes & feelings in relation to specific concerns. This is a significant increase compared to the 24 direct contacts recorded in the previous 12 months. Added together, this year's contacts and complaints direct from young people have increased compared to last year. This demonstrates that the process is accessible. Further that increasing numbers of young people are making use of both the formal process and increasingly, the informal advocacy led approach of the Children's Rights Service Advocacy Helpdesk.

2.1.11 Tables 6 & 7 below show that 92% of young people making a formal complaint were aged between 14 and 18 and over, which is a slight increase compared to the 90% in the previous 12 months. Complaints recorded as being from females were higher than those recorded from males which is consistent with prior years. What is of particular significance is the number of complaints recorded as being from unaccompanied asylum seeking (UAS) children under the age of 18; in 2015-16, 6 complaints were recorded as being from UAS children demonstrating the accessibility of the process.

2.1.12 Table 5 below shows that of the 26 formal complaints recorded, 8 of the children requested and received advocacy support. Of the 8 who received advocacy support, 5 were supported by an 'independent advocate' while the others elected to either receive support from the Children's Rights Service (3) or from an advocate of their choosing (1), for example a family member or friend or other professional.

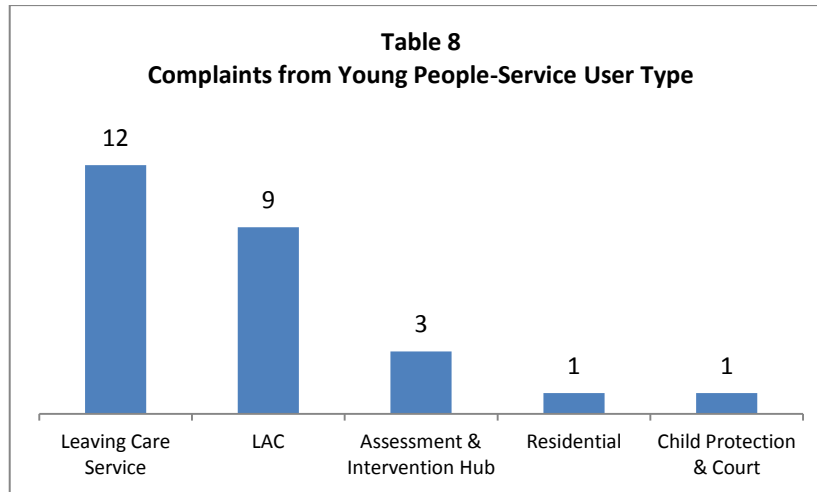


2.1.12 Table 8 shows the breakdown of complaints recorded (direct from young people) by service type. The majority of these (81%) were received from either looked after children or those leaving care. Care Leavers' main concerns are around financial support and support to find safe accommodation. For looked after children, concerns are around contact with family and concerns relating to placements. The three complaints about the Referral and Assessment Hub included concerns about a decision not to share information regarding the source of a referral to Children's Services as well as concerns about younger siblings included in the assessment process. The single complaint about residential services was in regard to lack of support in securing independent accommodation and the single complaint about the Child Protection Team was about poor communication and not feeling informed by Children's Services. Complaint topics from UAS children include concerns about communication such as, use of translators or translation services, as well as placements and ongoing support with education.

2.1.13 The data collected is consistent with the findings from the Big Survey commissioned by the Corporate Parenting Board to inform on the wishes and feelings of young people. This years findings corroborate the complaint data in that:

- the majority of completed and returned surveys were from the 13 to 18 age group
- concerns raised related to, financial support, moving to independent living and change of placements
- the majority of young people who completed the survey identified themselves as white british

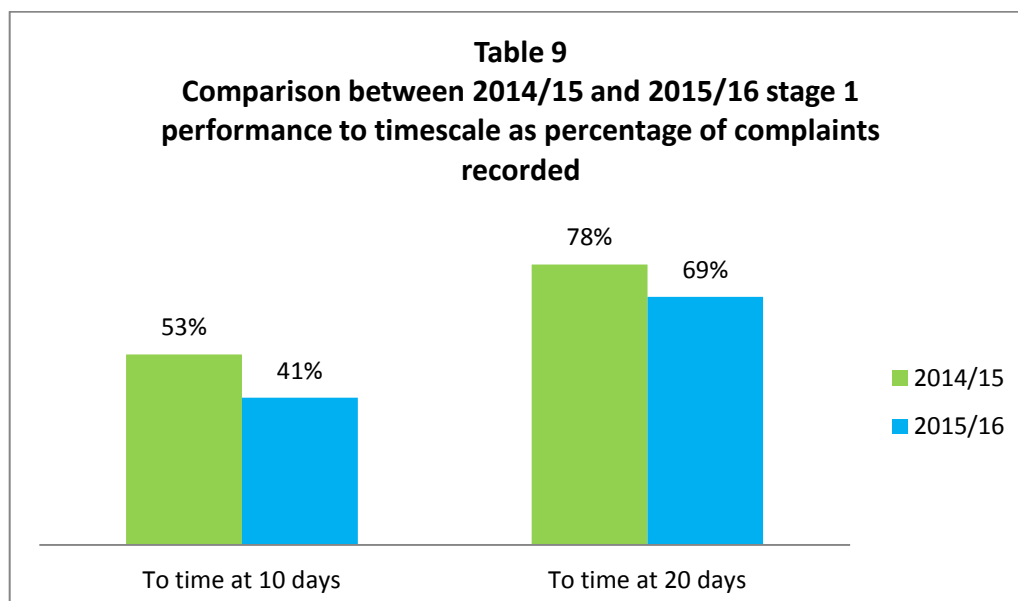




2.1.15 Once again a majority of complainants, 196, equating to 63%, identified themselves as White British. This is not unexpected given the demography of the County's population. This figure does not differ significantly on a proportional basis when compared to the previous 12 months where 68% of complainants also identified themselves as White British. Other ethnic identifications included Asian, Chinese and Black Caribbean. Generally, the breakdown is reflective of the local area and is therefore a good indication of the accessibility of the procedure.

## 2.2 PERFORMANCE AGAINST TIMESCALES:

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



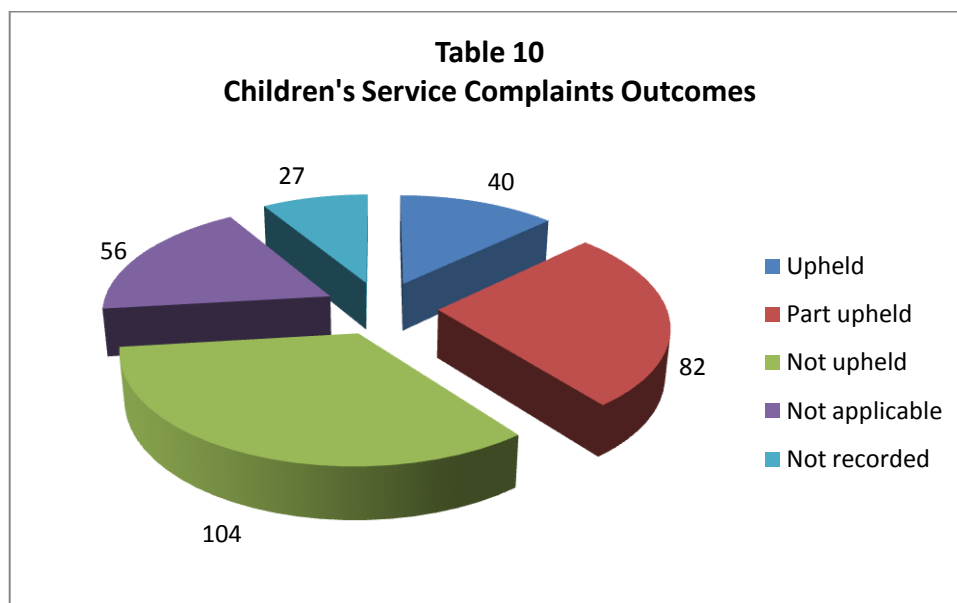
2.2.2 Table 9 shows the detail of time taken to respond to complaints at Stage1, (local resolution) providing a comparison between the current reporting year and the previous one. The table shows performance for responses at both the 10 and 20 day statutory timescales. The table demonstrates that 42% of complaint responses met the statutory timescales of 10 working days and that there was 69% compliance at 20 days. Whilst this is disappointing, given the low numbers of complaints escalating through the process it can be said that this reflects time taken to ensure that responses at the first stage of the process are detailed and robust. These figures remain constant for the ten day timescale when considering specifically complaints direct from young people where 42% were responded to within timescale. Performance at the 20 day timescale is lower with 62% of complaints direct from young people being responded to within

timescale. However, it should also be noted that the average time taken to respond to a complaint at the first stage of the process is **18** days. Whilst performance against timescales is important, it is promising to note that the percentage of complaints progressing to full independent investigation at the second stage of the process remains low at 4% of the complaints requiring a response in the period. Together with improved responses at the first stage of the process, this also reflects an increase in the use of alternative resolution such as mediation which was used on 4 occasions and case reviews, which reflect 8 of the cases progressed through the process. This has a positive financial impact for the Service due to the reduction in commissioning services from external consultants.

2.2.3 The Children’s Rights Service has continued to spend a significant amount of time interrogating the data and chasing responses. We routinely reminded operational teams of their responsibilities to log complaints and update records. Changes to the Database include changes in the recording of generic as well as specific learning arising from complaints. These changes will support the analysis of the ‘learning actions’ data to inform service delivery within Surrey Children’s Services and will be monitored as part of Performance Reporting in the coming year.

### 2.3 COMPLAINTS OUTCOMES & RESOLUTION

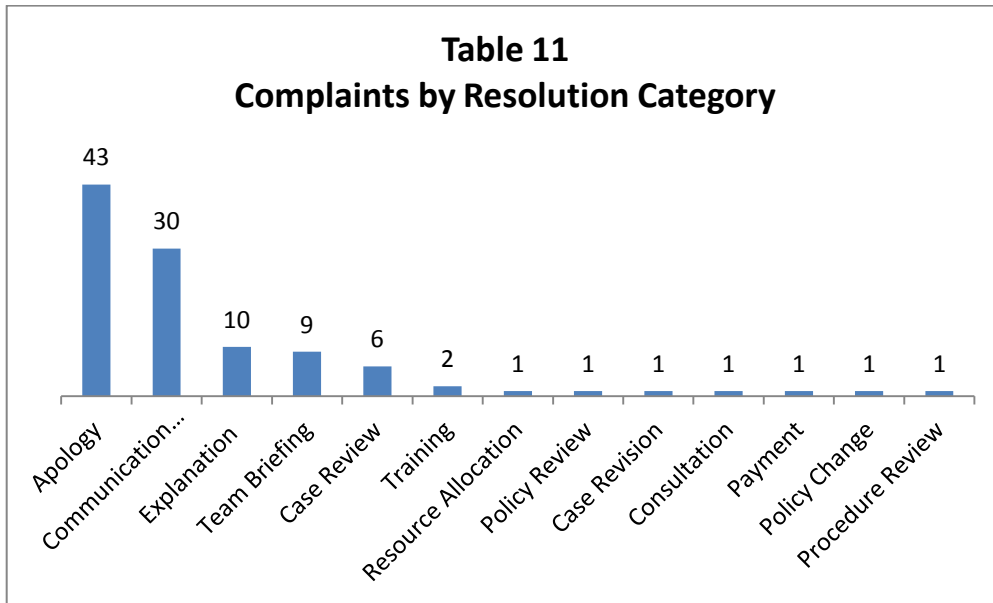
2.3.1 Table 10: Children’s Service complaints recorded by outcome.



2.3.2 Table 10 shows that 104 complaints responded to at Stage one of the process were ‘not upheld’ (no fault found), another 82 were ‘part upheld’ (some fault found) and a further 40 complaints were recorded as fully ‘upheld’ (fault found). 56 complaint outcomes are recorded as ‘not applicable’ this reflects cases where alternative methods of resolution were available or the complainant withdrew the complaint. The records for the remaining 27 complaints are incomplete and do not record that a response has been sent and therefore the outcome remains unknown. Some of these complaints did not require a response within this reporting year as they were recorded toward the end of the year. The Complaints Manager will continue to work with operational managers and seek to identify and address any barriers to maintaining accurate complaints records.

2.3.3 As indicated in the paragraph above, during the year, complaints about matters that could not be considered via the complaints process, for example those where there are ongoing private legal proceedings, account for 58 of the complaints recorded. In all these cases the complainants have been advised of alternative routes that may be available to them or to seek independent legal advice.

2.3.4 Table 11 details complaints recorded by resolution category



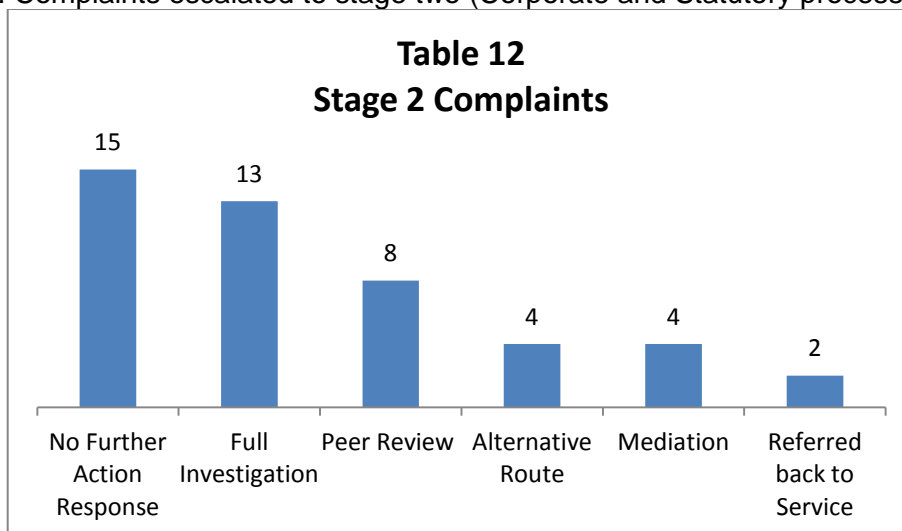
2.3.5 Analysis of the data shows that we need to improve the quality of communication between Children’s Services and families. This is supported by the fact that a significant number of complaints are resolved by explanation, communication and an apology. The Safer Surrey approach, recently introduced as part of the Improvement Programme should contribute to improving communication, in that this approach should ensure that:

- Parents understand what is expected of them
- Everyone uses the same shared language
- Support is targeted and relevant
- Decision making is open and transparent
- There are more specific details about concerns for children
- Evidence is clear and easy to understand
- There is close collaboration between all parties

2.3.6 The Children’s Rights Service also routinely receives requests from both the Service and service users asking for support in managing communication and resolving issues. As a Service, we have become much more involved in leading on learning from complaints and will continue to provide management information on this to inform service delivery

**2.4 ESCALATION OF COMPLAINTS**

2.4.1 Table 12: Complaints escalated to stage two (Corporate and Statutory processes)



2.4.2 During 2015-16, a total of 46 requests were received for complaints to be escalated to the second stage of the process. Of these 46, 25 have been responded to at the second stage of the process. Of these 25, 13 complaints (4% of all the complaints recorded) progressed to full investigation under the statutory process, one of these was a complaint that came direct from a young unaccompanied asylum seeker. 8 complaints have been responded to via Management Reviews and four via Independent Mediation.

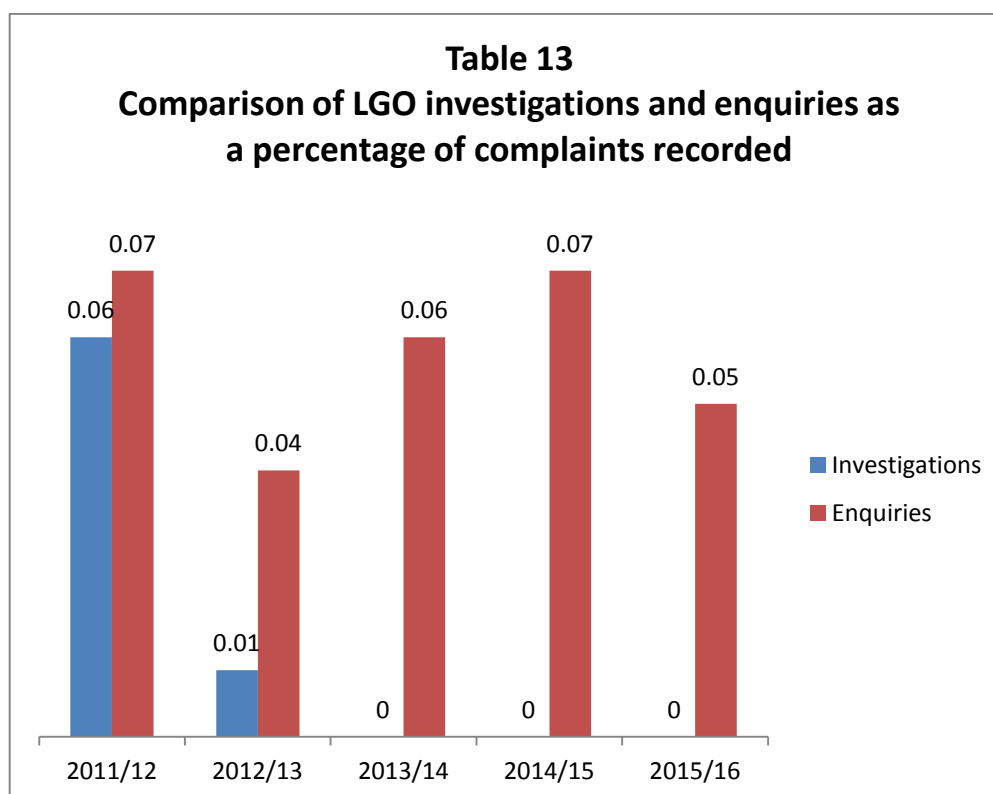
Of the remaining 21 escalation requests:

- 19 did not progress as either an alternative more appropriate route was available to the complainant e.g. seeking independent legal advice, or the complaint was withdrawn
- 2 were referred back to the service for an additional and more detailed response

2.4.3 During 2015-16 two complaints escalated to the third stage of the process. One complaint related to Adoption and Permanency and the other was about support around contact with a grandchild.

## 2.5 LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN ENQUIRIES

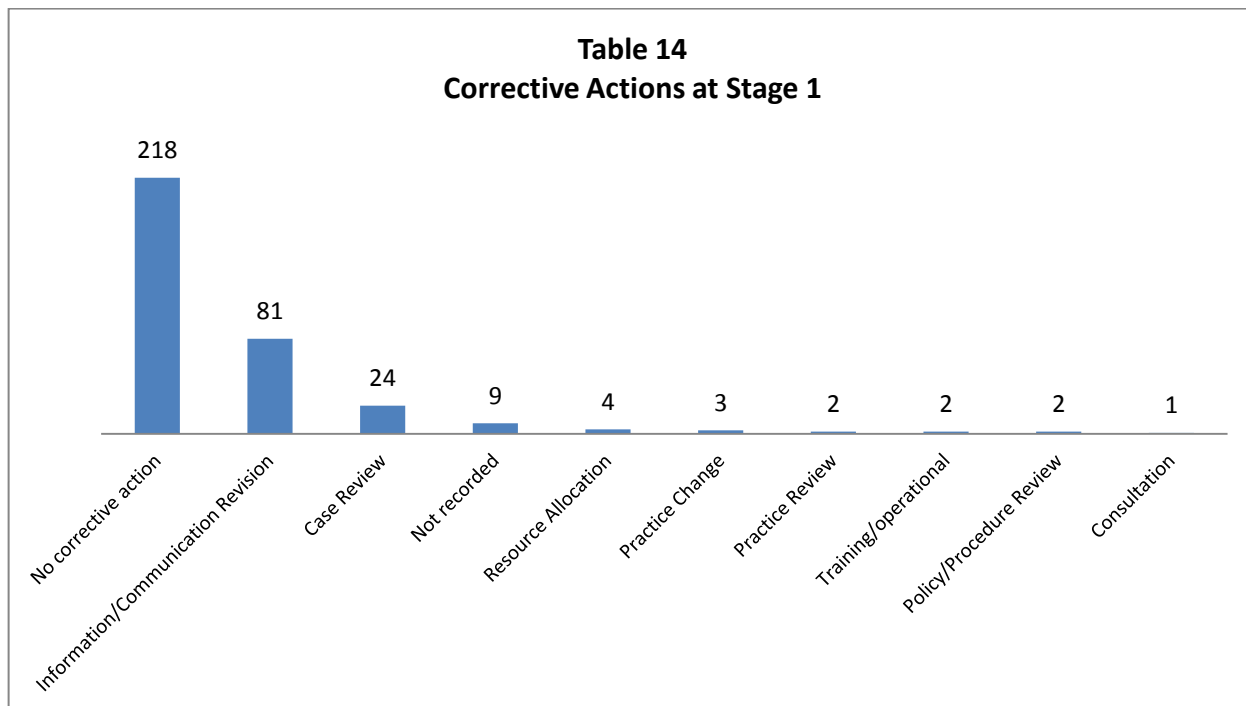
2.5.1 Table 13 shows the total LGO enquiries and investigations received compared to the previous 4 years. Not all enquiries from the LGO progress to full investigation. In the main this is because following initial enquiries we are able to demonstrate that the Council has taken reasonable steps to resolve the complaint. This is reflected in the table below which demonstrates that for a third year in succession there have not been any formal investigations undertaken by the LGO. This follows the trend over the past five years which, as demonstrated in Table 13 below, is that the proportion of enquiries from the LGO has remained relatively stable.



2.5.2 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 continue to be appropriately dealt with by the local authority.

## 2.6 LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

### 2.6.1 Table 14: Corrective actions identified at stage 1



2.6.2 Table 14 shows that 119 complaints resulted in corrective actions being identified. This is similar to the 132 identified in the previous 12 months. 218 complaints were explicitly recorded as not leading to any corrective action. This is an increase when compared to the previous reporting year. Next year we will be working with the Service to ensure all stage one complaints have learning attached. Robust responses at stage 1 of the process that clearly set out and uphold acknowledged errors and omissions contribute significantly. Similarly responses that acknowledge the impact on a family even where fault has not been found and the complaint not upheld, provide an opportunity for agreement and relationship building for the future.

2.6.3 None of the stage 1 responses that were dealt with as reviews by peer managers during the year escalated to the second stage of the process. This is consistent with the previous year. These peer manager reviews continue to be completed to establish whether or not, in the light of changed or new information received from the complainant, the outcome of court reports or statutory assessments would have resulted in a different or changed decision. Whilst peer manager reviews have resulted in some corrective action although no changes in outcome have been identified, there has been one review that resulted in a further assessment to enable more robust consideration of new information that was then received from the complainant. The corrective actions identified include additional training for newly qualified social workers together with clear differentiation between information received from third parties and the professional opinion of the social worker completing the assessment.

2.6.4 At the close of the second stage of the process or enquiries received from the LGO the Children's Rights Service develops and circulates corrective action plans (CAPs) to managers who are responsible for carrying out the actions and sharing these within their service area. This is in the process of being reviewed as recent experience demonstrates that sharing learning by way of a team debrief is a preferred alternative by the teams, as it enables discussion and ownership of the actions identified.

2.6.5 The corrective action plans drawn up and circulated across Children's Service, following consideration at the second stage of the process, list between them, a total of 71 separate

actions. These actions were identified by the Service and need to be completed in order to improve delivery and put matters right. Key learning themes are discussed in the sections below. These themes reflect matters of significance as opposed to the numbers of complaints recorded.

2.6.6 Despite changes made to the Customer Feedback Database to enable the operational teams to record their own learning and actions arising at the first stage of the process, the records do not demonstrate that a substantial number have been completed. Therefore the Complaints Manager will now routinely arrange team debriefs following consideration of complaints at the latter stages of the process to ensure that learning is clearly identified and acted upon. The Complaints Manager will also routinely attend service wide meetings to enable discussion around generic learning arising from complaints that can be used to inform service delivery.

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

- Service/Team Briefing (19 complaints)
- Apology (8 complaints)

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

- 1- Managing difficult conversations with parents where their relationship with older children has contributed to the decision that the threshold for intervention has been met.
- 2- Clear and detailed communication with prospective adopters about the reasons for not progressing an application to become adopters.
- 3- Ensuring that actions are taken to maintain the confidentiality of families, such as discreet return labels on printed letters and ensuring that confidential material is always held securely and is not at risk of loss or theft.

2.6.9 Specific examples of learning from complaints identified by operational and Children's Rights Service staff are listed below:

1. Review of SCC guidance regarding spent convictions when completing DBS disclosure applications as prospective adopters.
2. Review of the Care Leavers Finance Policy and Procedures
3. Changed content of return labels for written letters sent by Royal Mail so that correspondence received from the Child Protection Unit is discreetly managed.

## **2.7 SUMMARY: WHAT HAVE WE DONE WELL AND WHERE CAN WE IMPROVE?**

2.7.1 What we are doing well?

- Average response times for initial stage of the process remain within timescale
- Maintained low levels of complaints escalating through the process
- Maintained low levels of complaints investigated by the Local Government Ombudsman

2.7.2 What do we need to improve?

- Clear messages for parents regarding the reasons for assessments to be completed
- Clear messages for families regarding the reasons for the threshold for intervention being met
- Improved management of policies and procedures for Care Leavers

As of the current financial year, the CRS will regularly attend Children's Service Service Wide meetings to enable discussion around the nature of complaints received and the learning arising from complaints with a view to informing service delivery at a countywide level, in line with the Safer Surrey approach mentioned earlier in this report. The approach marks a new way of working across the Children, Schools and Families Directorate and relies on each and every member of staff sharing the same understanding of values, the way the Service works with families and what constitutes needs and risk.

Safer Surrey has its roots in solution-focused brief therapy and creates a common language used by all professionals. The different language used to describe difficulties and struggles allows us to begin to see opportunities, hope and solutions.

### **3. ADVOCACY SUPPORT**

- 3.1 Advocacy Services have been delivered by the Children's Rights Service since 2010. The service provides the statutory complaint related advocacy support for children and young people in line with the requirements of the advocacy guidance 'Get it Sorted' 2004. In order to do so, the Service manages a pool of self-employed independent advocates and commissions independent advocacy support when requested by a child or young person. In other cases, the advocacy service provides advocacy support and advice to children and young people assisting them to resolve their complaints and concerns or supporting them to advocate for themselves.
- 3.2 Surrey complaints information, both online and paper based, is systematically circulated and promoted within Children's Services. Advocacy provision continues to be promoted with a particular focus on reaching Looked After Children or Care Leavers and the staff that work with them.
- 3.3 This year the advocacy service has maintained and developed its role as the 'go to' children's rights and advocacy advice and helpline for Surrey young people and staff. This is evidenced by a notable increase in contacts from young people seeking support from us to achieve informal resolution of problems and concerns but also in number of contacts from staff seeking advice and guidance. The number of contacts from or about young people increased from 50 last year to 77 this year. The advocacy advice helpline provides more flexible support options based on discussions and assessment with those making contact. In line with its ambition, the advocacy helpline supports young people to take a lead on their complaints : each interaction promoting choice and encouraging young people to make informed decisions about how they wish their complaint or enquiry to be dealt with, and to experiment with problem solving strategies.
- 3.4 Over the past year the advocacy service continued in its efforts to nurture and develop social workers' natural advocacy role. To achieve this, the Advocacy Service did two things. . First of all, we designed and delivered five Advocacy Skills workshops to Surrey Children's Residential Home workers. The workshops were very well attended and feedback has demonstrated a positive impact of these workshops on workers' perception of their role. Secondly the Children's Rights Service launched the 'Golden Megaphone Award'; an internal award aimed at celebrating and cheering the advocacy role played by staff who work directly with children and young people. Workers have submitted stories demonstrating their advocacy skills at work. 'GMA Heroes' were selected and celebrated at our Annual Skills Fest.
- 3.5 The advocacy service continues to collaborate with the social enterprise Sixteen25 in the ongoing development and internal promotion of the self-advocay app MOMO (Mind Of My Own). Our collaboration was celebrated at this year's MOMO Conference where we received the 'Partnership working' award The MOMO app is available for free download on smart phones or

computers by children and young people in Surrey to use in communicating concerns to services. In the past year we have seen a notable increase in number of children and young people using this to communicate their wishes and feelings mainly in preparation for key meetings with professionals. Development plans for the next year include a version of the app that is designed to meet the communication needs of children with a learning disability, and those under the age of 11.

#### **4 MONITORING THE PROCESS**

- 4.1 The Children's Rights Service support Children's Service 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).
- 4.1.1 We now arrange Stage 2 complaints debriefing sessions for all staff involved in each investigation, review or mediated meeting. This provides the opportunity to discuss the process of the case, learning outcomes and how the experience was for staff involved.
- 4.1.2 As well as holding informal debriefing discussions with operational managers we have provided support to individual staff members involved in such cases as well as support in the form of facilitation of meetings with complainants. Over 18 workshops have now either taken place or are planned for the coming months with individual coaching continuing on a case by case basis as appropriate.
- 4.1.3 Actions arising from complaints are now routinely recorded on the customer feedback database at all stages of the complaint process. This has increased the identification of learning but further development is needed to ensure that the actions are not just completed but that the impact of these is assessed at a later stage. The Complaints Manager is working with Area Managers within Children's Services to agree a methodology to address this in the coming year.
- 4.1.4 The Service provides complaints performance data for inclusion in the Children's Service Report Card.
- 4.2 During 2016-2017 the Children's Rights Service will continue to focus on:
- *Where appropriate, increase the use of methods alternative to independent investigation to address complaints at the second stage of the process.*
  - *Working with operational managers to support the identification and dissemination of learning at the initial stage of the process*
  - *Working closely with staff to increase the number of children and young people enabled to speak up for themselves whether in the context of formal complaints or informal resolution of problems.*

#### **5 FINAL COMMENTS**

- 5.1 Overall this has been another positive year for complaints management across the services. Stronger working relationships continue to be developed between operational services and the Rights and Participation Service resulting in effective resolution of complaints at the earliest stage. Examples of this include:
- Consultation from operational teams where there are indications that an alternate and more appropriate route, may be available to the complainant



- Consultation from operational teams where complainants are displaying 'persistent and unreasonable behaviour' and supporting appropriate decisions regarding restricting access to the complaint process accordingly
  - Continuing discussions with operational where complaints relate to services across the Directorate; to promote a single response as appropriate, for example between the Safeguarding Children Unit and the Children's Team.
  - Improved recording of and responses to enquiries received from MP's and Cllrs about families open to support from Children's Services.
- 5.2 We will continue to work with operational services on improving recording and updating complaints information as well as focusing on learning as a continued priority in the coming year.
- 5.3 As identified earlier in this report, we have noted improvements in the quality of responses at Stage1 of the process which have resulted in:
- Early resolution and identification of learning to inform service delivery
  - Low numbers of complaints escalating through the complaint process

This follows the continuing use of individual coaching for operational managers. The coaching includes discussions in meetings and over the telephone, both generic and case specific depending on individual cases and circumstances. Informal case by case discussions have been held between operational managers and the Complaints Manager generally around written response content and structure. These activities continue to nurture closer working relationships between us and operational managers.

Jessica Brooke/Mona Saad/Kate Sandow  
**Children's Rights Managers**

14 July 2016

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