

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

To: HOUSING AND SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE		Subject: ANNUAL COMPLAINTS STATUS REPORT 1 st APRIL 2007 TO 31 st MARCH 2008	
From: HEAD OF SOCIAL WORK DEVELOPMENT			
Date: 18 AUGUST 2008	Ref: DMack/DoD		

1. Purpose of Report/Introduction

This report describes and analyses social work's performance in handling complaints from 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008.

2. Background

- 2.1. Social work provides a wide range of statutory and non-statutory services to the population of North Lanarkshire. In 2007/08 approximately 23,461 referrals were made to social work. In the same period 140 formal complaints were received.
- 2.2. In April 2008 the council adopted a single corporate complaints system to include all services. New timescales for acknowledging and responding to complaints were introduced on 1st April 2008. The revised complaints leaflets and posters were distributed to frontline services during June 2008.
- 2.3. There were 32 informal complaints recorded during the year covering diverse issues such as a door entry system fault; quality of meals and the volume of the Alert system. Compliments were received across the range of services, usually in the form of correspondence and cards. The new corporate complaints system has a feature that will better quantify and record compliments about service, as these have not been captured systematically in the past.

3. Findings for 2007/8

- 3.1. During year 2007/08 140 complaints were made about social work services. The level of complaints received has remained relatively constant over the past 5 years, as illustrated below.

Total Number of Complaints Received	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
	141	128	143	151	140

- 3.2. Appendix 1 shows the number of formal complaints investigated by each service or locality; the performance in relation to the management of timescales (5 days to acknowledge and 28 days to conclude); and the outcome of the investigation.

- 3.3 The percentage of compliance with acknowledgement and providing a response within 28 days improved in the fourth quarter of 2007/8 following changes in the monitoring and handling of complaints reported to Committee in October 2007. For that period 88% were acknowledged within 5 days and 86% concluded within 28 days.
- 3.4 The result of investigation of complaints received in 2007/8 is: 29% upheld; 30% part upheld and 41% not upheld.
- 3.5 Appendix 2 shows the principal reasons for complaints and the outcomes from complaints received during 2007/08.

4. Organisational Learning

- 4.1 Whilst the number of complaints received remains a very small proportion of the services provided, the value of such a system is not simply to seek to resolve individual issues, but also to inform continuous improvement.
- 4.2 The most common reason for complaints relates to failure to provide the service agreed with the service user or carer. This accounts for 18% of the reasons given for all complaints and represents the highest proportion of upheld complaints. Of the 30 complaints, 26 related to home care, by far the highest volume service provided, and one that delivers 44,000 hours of care a week.
- 4.3 The issue of reliability is central to a well managed and provided service and the work successfully undertaken in homecare by Vanguard in Coatbridge to minimise service failings, has now been extended to four locations with two other localities scheduled. A Best Value Review of home care is currently exploring the experience of service users and how it can be improved.
- 4.4 The second most common reason for complaint was lack of support and communication in relation to service delivery. This covers such areas as failure to return phone calls and follow up initial contacts/queries. In light of this, steps have been taken to reinforce the importance of good communication. Further, staff have been reminded of the communication standards outlined in the Guide to Social Work Services, which is routinely made available to people using social work services.
- 4.5 Related to this is the third most common reason for complaint- disputes about the nature of the service to be provided. Whilst over half of complaints in both these categories were not upheld, the importance of clear, timely, written communication about services to be provided has been stressed to staff.
- 4.6 A recent trend has seen more complaints about the care or arrangements made for children. There has been an increase in the number of grandparents raising concerns in this respect, there being 7 such complaints out of the 17 recorded this year. This trend reflects the increased involvement of extended family members where childcare situations break down associated with factors such as parental addiction etc. It can also reflect disputes between different family members and dissatisfaction on one side or other with the resolution of that by social work. The service seeks to involve independent advocates or may take independent advice in certain circumstances.

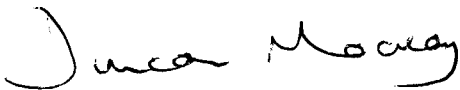
- 4.7 Managers responsible for services are asked to consider actions and lessons learned from complaints to reduce recurrence. These actions inform social work's quality assurance and continuous improvement agenda. In recent months an increased emphasis has been placed on early and direct contact with complainants. It is envisaged that that this will lead to more effective resolutions at an earlier stage in the process.
- 4.8 Three Complaints Review Committees were held in the past year in relation to home care service and childcare. In all three instances social work's stance has been upheld by Committee and any recommendations made duly considered.

5. Independent sector

- 5.1 Members will recall a monitoring report submitted to the May 2008 Committee reporting monitoring of the 86 independent sector organisations commissioned to provide services on behalf of social work. The majority of these services are regulated by the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care. Service users and their families have the options of raising complaints with the provider, the regulator or social work.
- 5.2 Through its monitoring arrangements social work seeks to maintain an overview of complaints handled from all three sources and these contribute to the monitoring findings and overall service evaluations. The overall performance of the independent sector is regarded as satisfactory with 71 of 85 providers monitored were found to comply fully with the service requirements set out by social work. As reported to the previous Committee, 14 organisations were, at some stage, subject to enhanced monitoring.

6. Recommendation

- 6.1 Committee is asked to note the report.



Duncan Mackay
Head of Social Work Development
7th August 2008

For further information on this report please contact Dennis O'Donnell, Manager, Quality Assurance tel: 01698 332084

Appendix 1

	Social Work Service	Airdrie	Cumbernauld	Bellshill	Coatbridge	Motherwell	Wishaw	Children & Families	Older Adults	Younger Adults	Justice Service
Number of Complaints	140	23	25	5	15	24	29	6	11	2	0
Acknowledged in 5 days	115	20	20	5	12	18	21	6	11	2	0
not in 5 days	25	3	5	0	3	6	8	0	0	0	0
% in 5 days	82%	87%	80%	100%	80%	75%	72%	100%	100%	100%	
Response in 28 days	95	15	19	3	9	14	19	4	10	2	0
Not in 28 days	45	8	6	2	6	10	10	2	1	0	0
% in 28 days	68%	65%	76%	60%	60%	58%	66%	67%	91%	100%	
Upheld	40	10	4	1	4	7	8	1	4	1	0
Part upheld	42	3	9	1	3	8	10	3	4	1	0
Not upheld	58	10	12	3	8	9	11	2	3	0	0

	*Reasons	Numbers	Upheld	Part Upheld	Not Upheld
1	Failure to provide agreed service	30	24	6	0
2	Disputed invoices	14	4	2	8
3	Delay in providing service	17	6	6	5
4	Dispute service package that is delivered	23	4	7	12
5	Disagreement with assessment and resultant service	8	0	3	5
6	Disagreement with report findings	5	0	1	4
7	Lack of support/ communication	24	4	8	12
8	Behaviour of other service users	6	1	3	2
9	Lack of notice re service changes	5	0	3	2
10	Staff attitude / behaviour	12	2	5	5
11	Dispute care / access arrangements for children	16	2	6	8

* Note there can be multiple reasons for complaints therefore the totals of outcomes do not exactly match the totals on previous tables.