

To: HOUSING AND SOCIAL WORK SERVICES COMMITTEE		Subject: ANNUAL COMPLAINTS STATUS REPORT 1 APRIL 2009 TO 31 MARCH 2010
From: HEAD OF SOCIAL WORK DEVELOPMENT		
Date: 5 AUGUST 2010	Ref: DM/DOD	

### 1. Purpose of Report/Introduction

This report describes and analyses social work's performance in handling complaints from 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010.

### 2. Background

- 2.1. Social work provides a wide range of statutory and non-statutory services to the population of North Lanarkshire. In 2009/10 approximately 36,760 referrals were made to social work. In the same period 134 formal complaints (0.36% of referrals), 45 informal complaints and 189 compliments 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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008; there is now a 5-day timescale for acknowledgements and 14 days for responses to complaints.
- 2.3. Performance against the new acknowledgement and response standards is now reported on PerformNL under four corporate categories for complaints:- quality of service; failure of service; employee behaviour and service specific complaints. It is anticipated that during 2010 /11 the link with performNL will be automated so that the corporate reporting system will automatically pull the performance figures directly from social work data.
- 2.4. Compliments and comments have also been recorded during this year and 189 compliments have been recorded across the whole service. The compliments range in content from the donation of confectionery, flowers and plants to letters, cards.
- 2.5. There were 45 informal complaints recorded during the year and the majority of these were in services, such as residential or day services, where service users are regularly in direct contact with staff.

### 3. Findings for 2009/10

- 3.1. During last year (2009/10) 134 formal complaints were made about social work services. The level of complaints received has shown a marginal decrease during this year as against the previous four years, as illustrated below.

Total Number of Complaints Received	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
	143	151	140	154	134

- 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 14 days to provide interim response or to conclude) and the outcome of the investigation.
- 3.3 The percentage of compliance with acknowledgement and response within 14 days has again shown a marginal improvement during 2009/10. Performance for acknowledgement of formal complaints has improved in the last year from 94% to 97% in 2009/10 and response time has improved from 82% compliance to 89% compliance in 2009/10.
- 3.4 Appendix 2 shows the principal reasons for complaints.

#### **4. Organisational Learning**

- 4.1 As indicated at 2.1. above, the number of complaints received remains a very small proportion of the services provided. The value of the complaints system is not simply to seek to resolve individual issues, however, but also to inform continuous improvement.
- 4.2 During 2008/09 managers responsible for services were asked to consider actions and lessons learned from complaints to reduce recurrence. These actions inform social work's quality assurance and continuous improvement agenda. During 2009/10 an increased emphasis has been placed on early and direct contact with complainants, particularly, where possible, face to face. This earlier intervention has helped reduce tensions in complaints handling and avoided escalation of complaints to the second and third stages of the handling processes.
- 4.3 Communication remains a key theme – whether or not complaints are ultimately upheld. A higher profile has consequently been given to a range of communications issues both in the Staff Newsletter and in the context of Locality Continuous Improvement Plans.
- 4.4. The Children and Families service attracts a third of all complaints. Consequently lines of communication during the child protection process have been clarified to enable extended family members to have a better understanding of the practices and process involved in interventions for the protection of children.
- 4.5 Feedback to members of staff in relation to outcomes of complaints has been increased and placed on a more formalised footing.
- 4.6. Lessons and learning from complaints is now a set agenda item at quarterly performance meetings within teams as a means of picking up on themes or trends.
- 4.7. During 2009/10 only three complaints progressed to the third stage of the complaints handling process, a hearing by a Complaints Review Committee.

## **5. Independent Sector**

- 5.1 The majority of notifications to quality assurance regarding independent sector service provision are through care commission managers and locality staff submitting an internal notification form. These tend to be concerns as opposed to formal complaints, although they are investigated and analysed to the same standard.
- 5.2 Formal complaints were raised within one respite service, two care homes, two homecare services and one residential school.
- 5.3 Complaints information returns continue to be sought from all services as part of the quarterly monitoring returns and annual reports.

## **6. Recommendation**

- 6.1 Committee is asked to note the report.



**Duncan Mackay**  
**Head of Social Work Development**  
**18 June 2010**

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

Appendix 1

		Airdrie	Cumbernauld	Bellshill	Coatbridge	Motherwell	Wishaw	Justice Services	Children & Families	Younger Adults	Older Adults	SWES	Supported Employment
<b>2009/10</b>	<b>Service</b>												
<b>Apr-Jun</b>	37	4	10	6	3	6	7	1	0	0	0	0	0
<b>July-Sept</b>	41	6	5	4	2	8	13	1	1	0	1	0	0
<b>Oct-Dec</b>	25	1	5	2	6	3	7	1	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Jan-Mar</b>	31	8	7	5	3	2	4	0	1	1	0	0	0
<b>Total formal complaints</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>acknowledge within 5 days</b>	129	18	26	17	14	17	31	3	2	1	1	0	0
<b>% in 5 days</b>	97%	95%	96%	100%	100%	89%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%
<b>response or interim in 14 days</b>	118	19	23	17	13	14	27	3	1	1	1	0	0
<b>% in 14 days</b>	89%	100%	85%	100%	93%	74%	87%	100%	50%	100%	100%	0%	0%
<b>upheld</b>	25	5	8	4	1	2	4	0	0	0	1	0	0
<b>part upheld</b>	39	6	9	4	1	3	14	1	0	1	0	0	0
<b>not up held</b>	65	7	10	9	12	13	12	1	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Withdrawn</b>	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>132</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Unresolved @ this time</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

Year on Year comparison Reasons %	2007/08		2008/09		2009/10	
	nos.	%	nos.	%	nos.	%
Failure to provide agreed service	30	18%	13	6%	19	11%
Dispute invoices	14	7%	9	4%	5	3%
Delay in providing service	17	8%	26	12%	19	11%
Dispute service provided	22	11%	34	16%	9	5%
Disagree with assessment and service provided	8	4%	19	9%	16	10%
Disagree with content of report	5	2%	6	3%	7	4%
Lack of support or communication	25	12%	32	15%	34	20%
Behaviour of other service users	6	3%	1	0%	2	1%
Lack of notice re changes to service	6	3%	10	5%	15	9%
Staff attitude	14	7%	47	22%	30	18%
Dispute care arrangement re C&F service	17	8%	12	6%	11	7%
	164		209		*167	

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