

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

TO: Social Work Committee	Subject: COMPLAINTS STATUS REPORT PERIOD 1 APRIL 1999 - 31 MARCH 2000
FROM: Jim Dickie Director of Social Work	
DATE OF COMMITTEE: 22 August 2000	
REPORT AUTHOR: Dennis O'Donnell	
REF:	

1 CONTENT AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This is annual report which outlines the Social Work Department's performance in the area of complaints. Within a wider service context there are few complaints, but those received are often emotive and complex. The appendices highlights a moderate increase in complaints over the past year but a fairly static position with regard to complaints upheld. There are wide variations in complaints levels noted between Area Teams. The most clearly defined pattern of complaints is about assessments for aids and adaptations, an issue currently subject to officer/member consideration. Whilst improvements are reported in arrangements for staff training and handling complaints, the need for further development is evidenced from findings.
- 1.2 The report is submitted for noting and for members consideration

2 SERVICE CONTEXT IN RELATION TO COMPLAINTS LEVELS

- 2.1 The Social Work Department provides a wide range of statutory and non-statutory services to the population of North Lanarkshire. In the year 1999/2000 approximately 24,003 cases were open. 18,656 of these were from community care groups, and 4,101 from services for children or their families.
- 2.2 A total of 144 formal complaints were received in the course of the year. 110 of these related to assessment and care management or services provided directly by the Social Work Department. The remaining 34 were complaints made in respect of nursing homes and independent sector residential services.
- 2.3 Complaints received in the current year represent less than 0.6% of the total number of people receiving a social work service.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Social Work Department operates its Complaints Procedure in line with guidance and directions set out in Scottish Office Circular SWSG 5/96.

- 3.2 The Social Work Department has devised a Complaints Procedure, in line with the Circular's requirements, which ensures measures are in place which enable the investigation and response to complaints to take place as close as possible to the point of service delivery, and for complaints to be addressed within defined time-scales. Internal procedures also include mechanisms to ensure that learning from complaints can be used to inform and improve operational practice.

4 IMPROVEMENTS IN HANDLING COMPLAINTS ABOUT DIRECTLY PROVIDED SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

- 4.1 Information on Complaints Handling is now included in Induction Training for all Social Work staff.
- 4.2 Further training/information for relevant staff is being prepared in relation to the processes for logging and dealing with Informal Complaints.
- 4.3 As previously reported to Committee on 5 October 1999, Action Plans are now being prepared by operational managers in relation to individual complaints at the point of conclusion. This allows for any local action to be taken at an early stage should this be required and provides an overview in relation to policy or procedural issues which may require to be addressed.
- 4.4 Informal Complaints Returns are submitted to the Principal Officer (Registration and Inspection) for central collation and analysis. This provides a further overview of service wide issues which may require to be addressed.

5 HANDLING OF COMPLAINTS REGARDING SERVICES PROVIDED ON BEHALF OF THE DEPARTMENT

- 5.1 For the purposes of the Complaints Procedure, services provided by third parties on behalf of the local authority remain the responsibility of the local authority. Monitoring and decisions on action arising from these complaints is co-ordinated and overseen by the Principal officer (Registration and Inspection).
- 5.2 Submission of quarterly complaints returns from third party providers of nursing and residential services continues to contribute to monitoring of practice within these services.
- 5.3 Currently complaints regarding nursing care establishments are passed to Lanarkshire Health Board, as the registering authority, for investigation.
- 5.4 Over the past year substantial work has been undertaken by officers from Board and North and South Lanarkshire Councils to devise an agreed protocol which, when implemented, will streamline and improve complaints handling in this area.

- 5.5 Formal complaints brought to the Department's attention regarding registered residential or day services, are investigated by officers from the Registration and Inspection Unit and dealt with under registration procedures.

6 COMPLAINTS FINDINGS

Complaints Review Committee

- 6.1 Where any complainer is dissatisfied with Departmental findings following the investigation of their complaint, the option of seeking a review by the Social Work (Complaints Review) Sub-Committee (CRC) is open to them.
- 6.2 Within the context of the 110 complaints received in the last year, one complainer requested a Complaints Review Committee in May 1999. The request was later withdrawn.

General findings

- 6.3 The tables attached as Appendix 1 relate to the Department's performance in addressing complaints. These quantify the number, location and nature of complaints, whether these were upheld or not, or were addressed within prescribed time scales. Where complaints are upheld operational managers are expected to identify whether there is a need, locally or authority-wide, for remedial action to be taken.

Complaints patterns

- 6.4 **Figure 1** sets out the spread of complaints between Area Teams, Community Care (Hospitals/Merryston Care Base) and Criminal Justice services. This represents an increase in the overall total from 95 to 110 complaints. The spread of complaints is less even than found previously and two teams, Cumbernauld and Airdrie both show an increase and account for 49% of the total complaints received. In contrast complaints levels for Wishaw Area Team have reduced substantially. Factors behind wide variation in complaints levels need not reflect poor comparable service performance but may reflect efforts to develop the Complaints Procedure into an accessible tool for service users.

Locus of complaints

- 6.5 **Figure 2** sets out the main areas of service where complaints were raised. This pattern is broadly similar to the previous years findings with 35% of all complaints being about Area Team social work services and 19% relating to residential services. The highest percentage increase in complaints, from 5 to 14 comprising 12.7%, relates to equipment and adaptations services. This reflects already known levels of concerns over delays in assessment and in the provision of aids and adaptations.

- 6.6 **Figure 3** sets out the areas of complaints by care group. The same two areas again attract the majority of complaints: services for older people (36%) and for children (24%). Complaints regarding services for older people have increased in total from 25 to 40 in the past year. A significant proportion of these cross-reference to unacceptable delays concerning equipment and adaptations and to disputes in residential services arising from residents' conduct.

Nature of Complaints

- 6.7 Complaints frequently do not link to a single factor. In compiling **Figure 4** an attempt has been made to illustrate the primary reasons for complaints made. It is notable that concerns regarding staff conduct have reduced substantially in the past year from 24 to 15 and so are much reduced in the context of overall percentages. The largest proportion of complaints relate to unsatisfactory staff practice, (20% of total). Unacceptable delay is the primary reason for 18 complaints. These largely concerned equipment and adaptation services.

Outcomes

- 6.8 **Figure 5** illustrates the percentage of those complaints, where the outcome is known and whether these were either wholly or partially upheld, or not upheld. The percentage from the overall total of complaints either partially or wholly upheld at 55% has remained fairly static. It is worth noting that complaints are deemed to be partially upheld if any aspect of the complaint is found to be substantiated, even if this is not the main focus of the complaint.
- 6.9 **Figure 6** sets out the number of complaints upheld/partially upheld in relation to areas of client service and primary reason for complaint. Ten of these complaints concerned children and 25 older people's services. Examples of complaints Upheld/Partially Upheld in relation to Children and Families include failure to communicate effectively, and difficulties with the behaviour of another resident in a children's home. The relationship between Unacceptable Delay and equipment and adaptation services is illustrated in this figure. The most prevalent primary reasons for complaint related to Practice Issues and Unacceptable Delay which each received 11 complaints.

Response time-scales

- 6.10 **Figures 7 and 8** illustrate the Department's performance in responding to the target time scales for acknowledgement within 5 days and interim/final response within 28 days. These are broadly similar to the previous year. There is a wide variation in performance between individual teams. **Figure 9** shows the number of complaints totally concluded within 28 days. The proportion concluded outwith 28 days demonstrates the complexity of issues which require to be addressed in the context of social work services.
- 6.11 **Figure 10** sets out complaints received regarding independent sector residential establishments registered by the Local Authorities, and nursing homes registered by relevant Health Boards. Complaints received represent 2.3% of the total 1491 places funded by the Department in nursing and residential care homes.

- 6.12 Complaints received in relation to Residential Services has decreased from 14 last year to 11, and those received in relation to Nursing Homes have decreased from 33 to 23. Figures for the previous year were inflated by some 14 complaints received in relation to one problem nursing home.
- 6.13 Figures relating to other independent sector providers involved in Care at Home and Supported Living are now being logged and will form part of this report next year.

7 CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 The context within which Social Work operates, particularly in areas where there are statutory responsibilities, means that some service users may experience a sense of frustration in their dealings with the Department. This is particularly true of child care cases where contact can be of a personal and sensitive nature. The relationship between complaints relating to older people's services and equipment and adaptation services has already been noted. A working group comprising Members and Officers from relevant departments has been set up with a view to resolving this issue.
- 7.2 The 110 formal complaints received should be considered in the context of the 24,000 open cases within the Department during the relevant period.
- 7.3 Arrangements for receiving and addressing complaints will continue to be kept under review. Staff training, further developments in the operation of the informal complaints system and the provision and implementation of actions plans will also continue to contribute to improvements in practice in the coming year.
- 7.4 The Department's continuing commitment to raising standards through improving services and performance should, over the longer term, achieve a reduction in the level of complaints. Measures described above should assist in identifying areas which require to be addressed and in the development of the complaints procedure as a quality assurance tool.

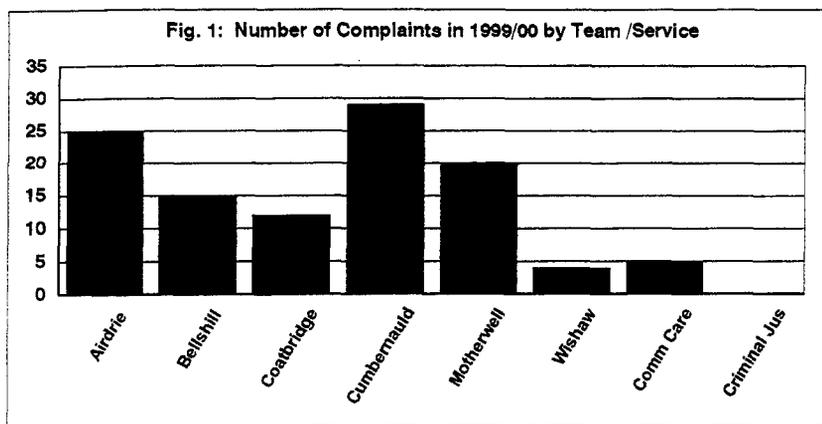
8 RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

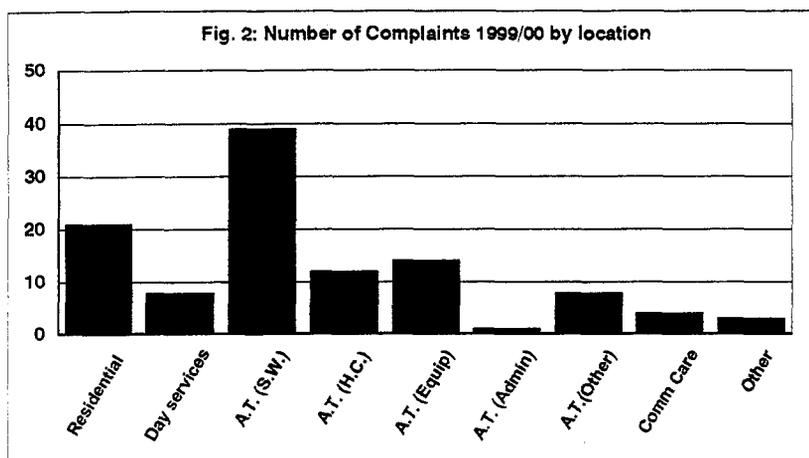


Jim Dickie
Director of Social Work
10 August 2000

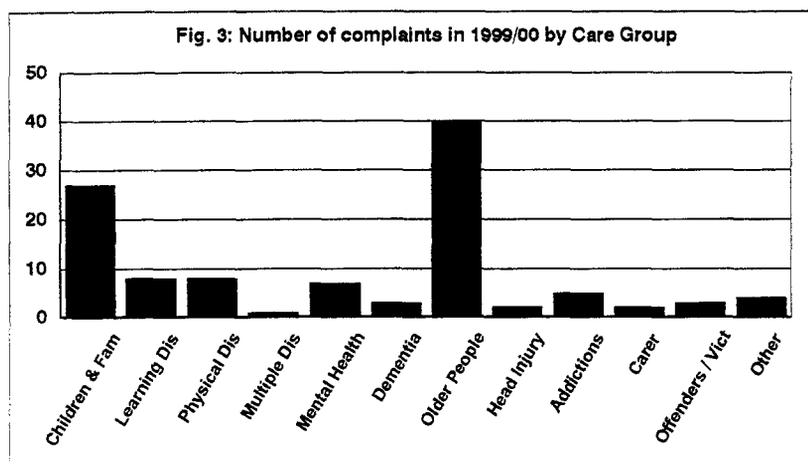
*For further information on this report please contact Dennis O'Donnell, Principal Officer (Registration and Inspection)
 (Tel: 01698 332058).*



Team / Service	Complaints
Airdrie	25
Bellshill	15
Coatbridge	12
Cumbernauld	29
Motherwell	20
Wishaw	4
Comm Care	5
Criminal Jus	-
Total	110

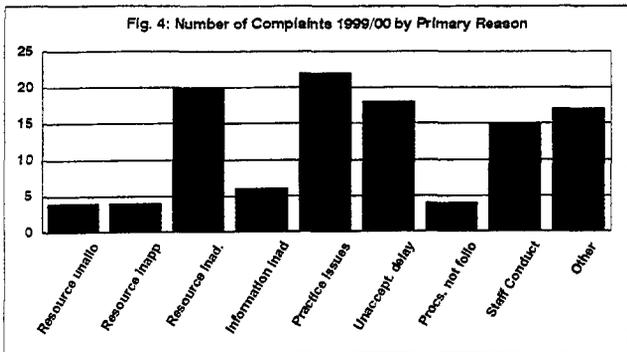


Location	Complaints
Residential	21
Day services	8
A.T. (S.W.)	39
A.T. (H.C.)	12
A.T. (Equip)	14
A.T. (Admin)	1
A.T. (Other)	8
Comm Care	4
Other	3
Total	110



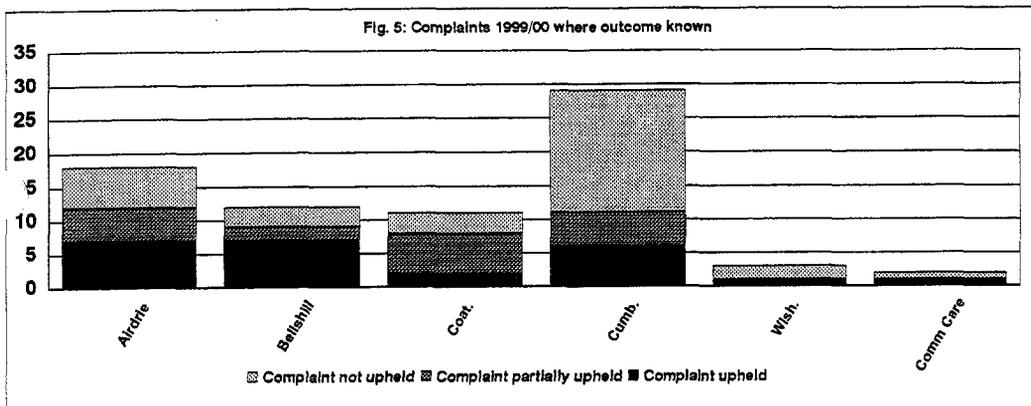
Care Group	Complaints
Children & Fam	27
Learning Dis	8
Physical Dis	8
Multiple Dis	1
Mental Health	7
Dementia	3
Older People	40
Head Injury	2
Addictions	5
Carer	2
Offenders / Victims	3
Other	4
Total	110

Fig. 4: Number of Complaints 1999/00 by Primary Reason



Primary Reason	Complaints
Resource unallo.	4
Resource inapprop.	4
Resource inad.	20
Information inad.	6
Practice Issues	22
Unaccept. delay	18
Procs. not followed	4
Staff Conduct	15
Other	17
Total	110

Fig. 5: Complaints 1999/00 where outcome known

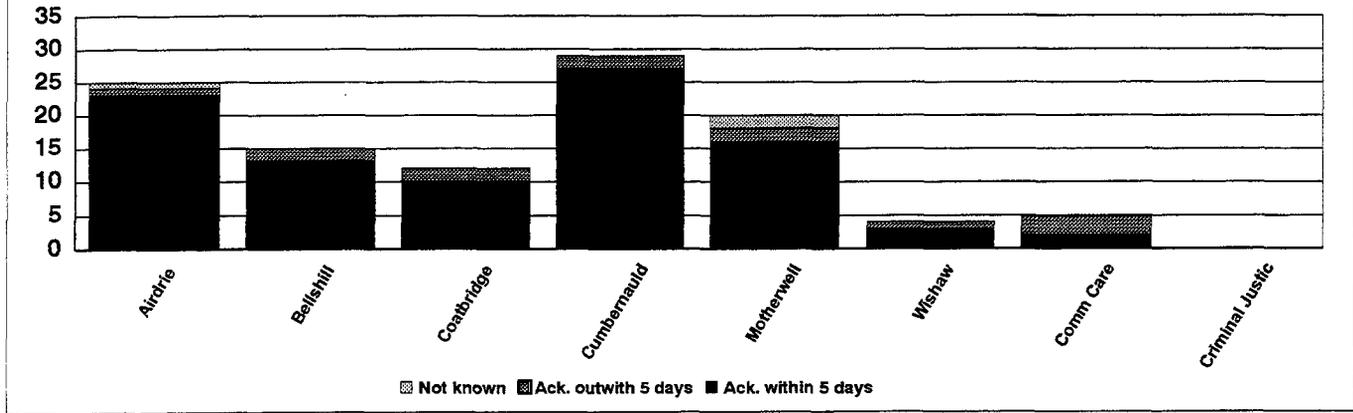


	Airdrie	Bellshill	Coat.	Cumb.	Wish.	Comm Care
Complaint upheld	7	7	2	6	1	1
Complaint partially upheld	5	2	6	5	-	-
Complaint not upheld	6	3	3	18	2	1

Figure 6: Upheld / Partially Upheld complaints by Service and Primary Reason

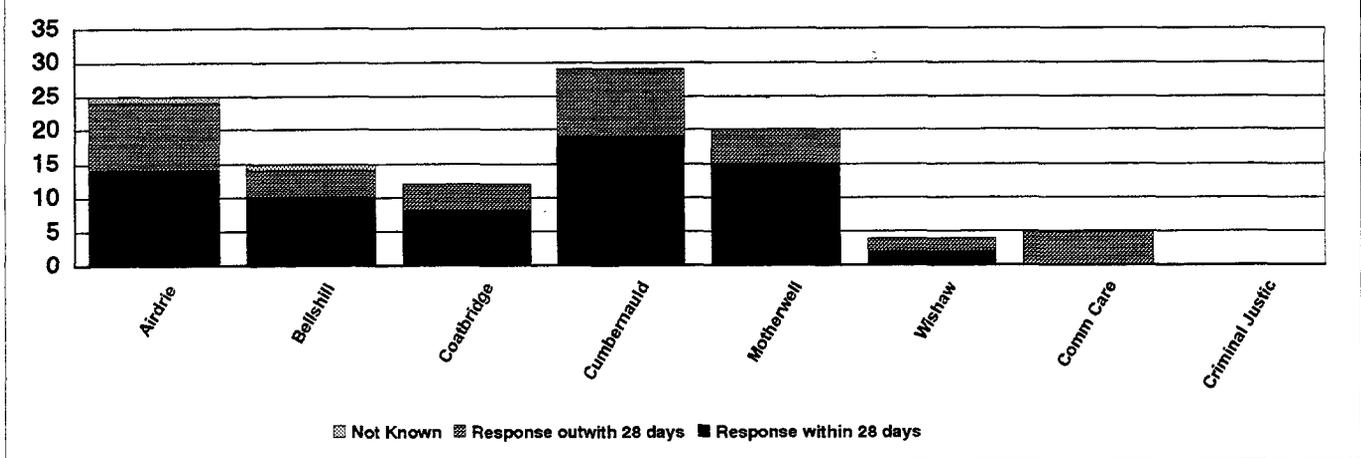
	Resource Unallocated	Resource Inappropriate	Resource Inadequate	Information Inadequate	Practice Issues	Unacceptable Delay	Procedures not Followed	Staff Attitude	Other	Total upheld / partially upheld	Total where outcome known
	number	number	number	number	number	number	number	number	number	number	number
Children & Families	-	-	3	1	5	-	-	1	-	10	24
Learning Disability	-	-	-	1	1	-	2	-	-	4	7
Physical Disability	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	5
Multiple Disability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mental Health	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	1	3	4
Dementia	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	2
Progressive Illness	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Older People's Services	1	2	1	-	2	11	2	3	3	25	39
Head Injury	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	2	2
Children with special needs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Addictions	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	5
Carer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Vulnerable Homelessness	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Offenders / Victims	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Other	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	3	4
Total upheld/part upheld	2	3	6	4	11	11	4	7	4	52	94

Fig. 7: Number of Complaints 199/00 by Area Team and Acknowledgement Time Scale

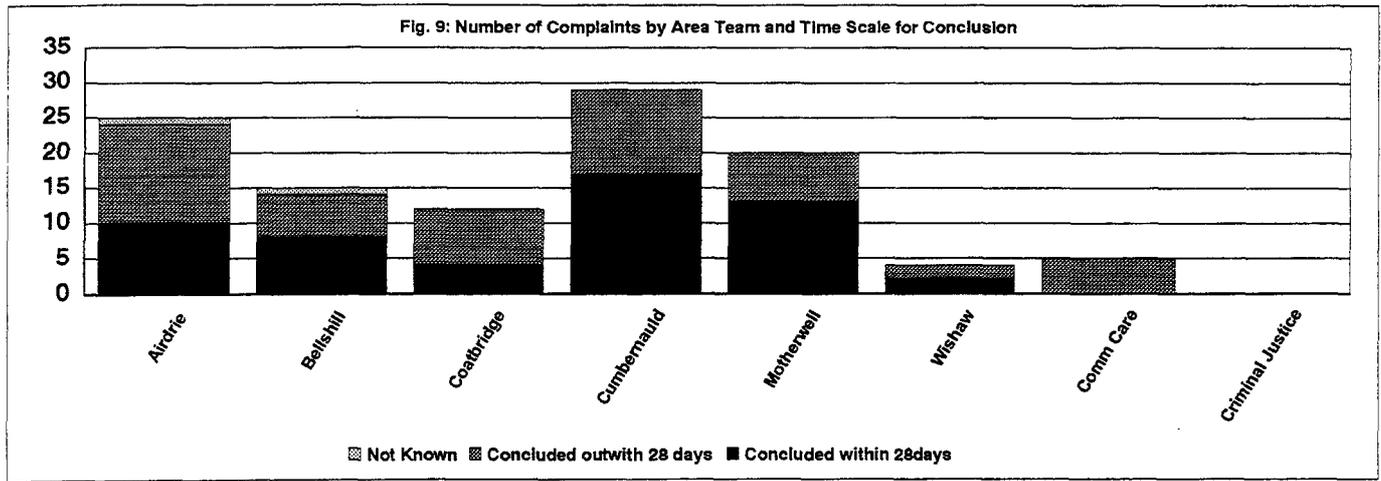


	Airdrie	Bellshill	Coatbridge	Cumbernauld	Motherwell	Wishaw	Comm Care	Criminal Justice	Total
Ack. within 5 days	23	13	10	27	16	3	2	-	94
Ack. outwith 5 days	1	2	2	2	2	1	3	-	13
Not known	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	3
Total	25	15	12	29	20	4	5	-	110
% within 5 days	95.8%	86.7%	83.3%	93.1%	88.9%	75.0%	40.0%	-	87.9%

Fig 8: Number of complaints 1999/00 by Area Team and Interim / Final Responset Time Scale



	Airdrie	Bellshill	Coatbridge	Cumbernauld	Motherwell	Wishaw	Comm Care	Criminal Justice	Total
Response within 28 days	14	10	8	19	15	2	-	-	68
Response outwith 28 days	10	4	4	10	5	2	5	-	40
Not Known	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Total	25	15	12	29	20	4	5	-	110
% within 28 days	58.3%	71.4%	66.7%	65.5%	75.0%	50.0%	0%	-	63.0%



	Airdrie	Bellshill	Coatbridge	Cumbernauld	Motherwell	Wishaw	Comm Care	Criminal Justice	Total
Concluded within 28 days	10	8	4	17	13	2	-	-	54
Concluded outwith 28 days	14	6	8	12	7	2	5	-	54
Not Known	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Total	24	14	12	29	20	4	5	-	108
within 28 days where outcome known	41.7%	57.1%	33.3%	58.6%	65.0%	50.0%	0%	-	50.0%

FIGURE 10
INDEPENDENT SECTOR

	1999/2000		1998/1999	
	Number	%	Number	%
Residential	11	32.4%	14	29.8%
Nursing Home	23	67.6%	33	70.2%
Total	34	100.0%	47	100.0%