COMPLAINTS REPORT

Introduction

This report presents information collected from April 2009 to January 2011. Part of the report is presented using bar charts (See appendix A).

Summary

Over the report period there have been 75 complaints. The majority 12 (16%) of these were related to issues being managed by the MCN team in Macclesfield. The second largest was CF3 11 (14%), based in Congleton. Fostering and Adoption East is 9 (12%); it should be noted that the data base reflects the old structure and does not reflect the current teams in the new structure. However, when you look at the way the teams were organised it appears that there were more complaints from the Macclesfield/Congleton area than the Crewe area. It should not be assumed that this reflects a lower quality of service across the Macclesfield/Congleton area.

There are several possible explanations including, people in that area having higher expectations, people being more assertive about their rights, teams giving out more complaints forms etc. It has also emerged that some teams have, in the past, dealt with complaints without having them formally logged as stage 1 complaints. Without further research only limited conclusions can be drawn from this data.

The chart showing complaints by month received (See Appendix 1, Graph 2), shows that there will be an increase over the last period from April 2011. This does not include appeals by parents against decisions to limit Direct Payments. These issues have been channelled through the management hierarchy and have been resolved outside of the complaints process. There have been a number of recent complaints around the issue of Short Breaks, partly reflecting the proposal to close Priors Hill Short Breaks resource. Other issues raised by complaints include, arrangements around contact, the content of assessments, the way in which an investigation was undertaken and the way in which decisions have been communicated.

Age and gender

The largest group involved children between the ages of 11 and 15. There were 23. The majority, 14, involved boys. (See Appendix 1, Graph 3).

Who complained

38 (50.7%) were parents. Few complaints were received from young people themselves. One of the aims for the Children's complaints manager is to make the complaints system more Child friendly. (See Appendix 1, Graph 4).

Stage 1

- 59 (78.7%) completed at Stage 1
- 32 (54.2%) completed within timescale
- 27 (45.8%) over timescale

We need to improve the response times to complaints at stage 1. Currently any complaint going over the timescale has the right to go straight to Stage 2. It has been agreed that Consultant Practitioners will, in future, undertake the investigation role at Stage 1 rather than the Group Managers, which is common at present. To facilitate this shift it has been considered that Consultant Practitioners should have training on this area.

The Department has now introduced the opportunity for the complainant to meet with a Senior Manager before moving to Stage 2. However, initial feedback would indicate that this meeting has not been successful in diverting complainants away from pursuing the complaint at Stage 2. Due to the small size of the sample only limited conclusions can be drawn, at this time. (See Appendix 1, Graph 5).

Complaints escalated to Stage 2

- 14 (18.7%) at Stage 2
- 7 (50%) resolved at Stage 2
- 3 ongoing
- 1 suspended
- 2 with CK for management response
- 1 going to stage 3

Most complaints were resolved at Stage 1. Out of those going to Stage 2 most were resolved without further escalation. It has been agreed that in future Group Managers will undertake the Investigation role in the Stage 2 process. Currently, this is undertaken by an "Independent Person" who is paid by the Department. To enable this transition there will need to be a programme of training for Group Managers. There may also be an issue about their capacity to do this work, which may have to be addressed.

The "Independent Person" role would be retained and continue to have to be commissioned independently. This is a legal requirement. (See Appendix 1, Graph 6).

Stage 3

1 at Stage 3
1 with the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).

A small number of complaints go on to Stage 3. In some areas the Stage 3 Panel is chaired by an Independent Person, but the 2 supporting members are volunteers.

Currently the Panel is made of 3, paid, Independent People. The volunteer member system could be introduced across Cheshire East. However, it would raise recruitment and training issues. (See Appendix 1, Graph 7).

Complaint by first (main) category

"Other" was the largest group followed by "Complaint about a Staff Member". One of the common themes appears to be around communication. Complainants feeling that they have not been listened to or not been treated with, what they would consider as the appropriate level of sensitivity. Further to this, the changes in structure have resulted in established workers moving around and Agency workers coming and going. From a User point of view this can lead to frustrations and a feeling of disempowerment. (See Appendix 1, Graph 8). To understand the 'other' category, further analysis would have to be undertaken.

Compliments

- Total 17
- 11 (64.7%) Poolswood Children with Disability Team

The Department receives more Children's complaints than it does compliments. However, in my experience, Users can make compliments, but the worker does not always pass them on to be recorded on the database. Interestingly, over the past couple of months I have noticed an improved response from some teams. Whilst I am sure the Department could improve the way it acknowledges the performance of workers receiving compliments, it should also be recognised that in challenging Child Care work, good work might not always result in a compliment. (See Appendix 1, Graph 9).

Conclusions

The Children's complaints system is a statutory requirement for all Children's Social Care services. It will be subject to OFSTED inspection to ensure it is meeting standards and requirements. Cheshire East has an established system, but there are areas for development and improvement. It is clear that there are issues for staff awareness and training. It also needs to be recognised that with the internet and other improved communication systems running alongside potential service changes, the Department should predict that the number of complaints received is likely to increase. On a more positive mote, an increase in complaints may reflect a growing awareness of the complaints process and increased accessibility. The feedback from complaints, comments and compliments, can be used constructively to make service improvements and inform strategic decisions. The Children's complaints manager attends the monthly senior management meeting (IDT) and the monthly Group Manager meeting. This should facilitate feedback of issues. Research indicates that high performing organisations value and encourage feedback from their customers/service users.

Recommendations

- Training for all workers across Children's Social Care in handling complaints.
- Training for Consultant Practitioners on Stage 1 investigations
- Training for Group Managers around undertaking stage 2 investigations
- Development of complaints information for young people.
- Updating of the complaints data base so it reflects the current structure and requirements.
- Recruitment and training of volunteers to sit on stage 3 panels
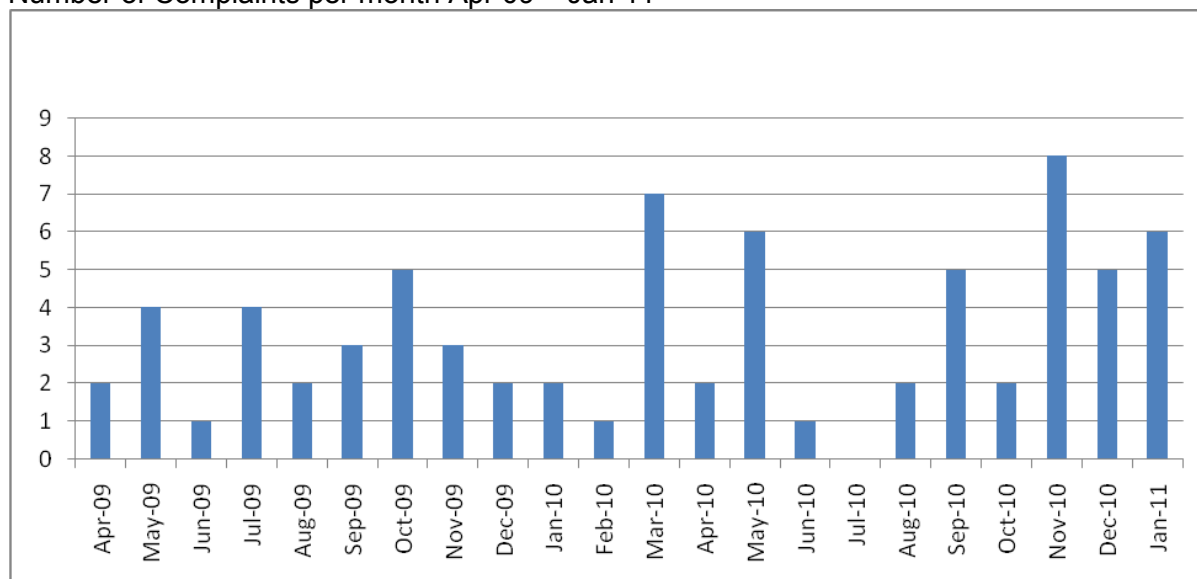
Appendix 1
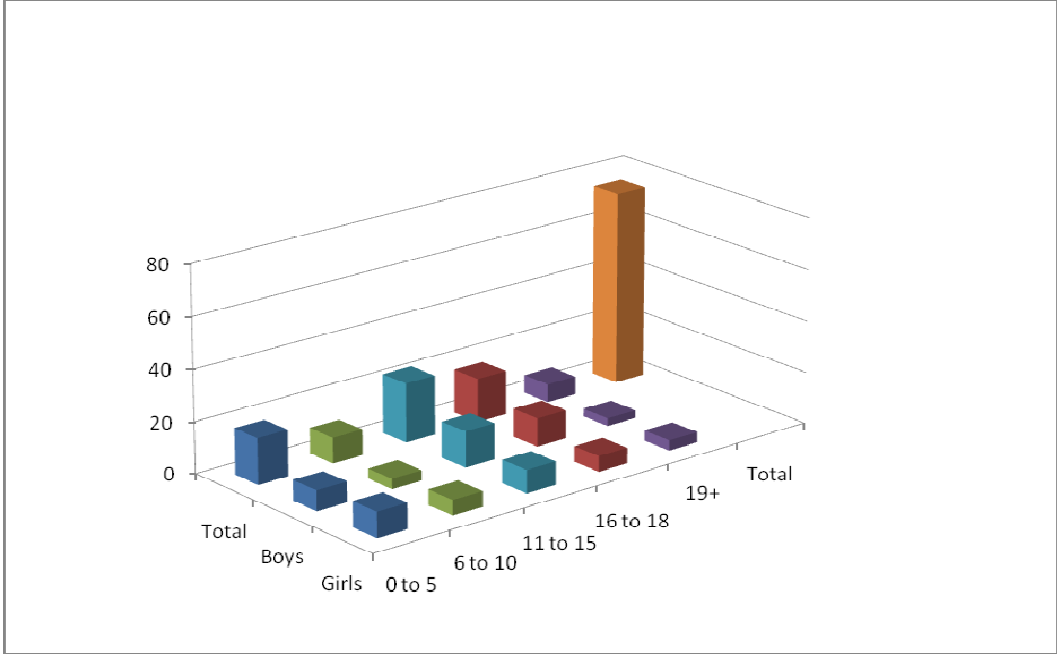
Graph 1
Complaints by Team (Total 75 Complaints)
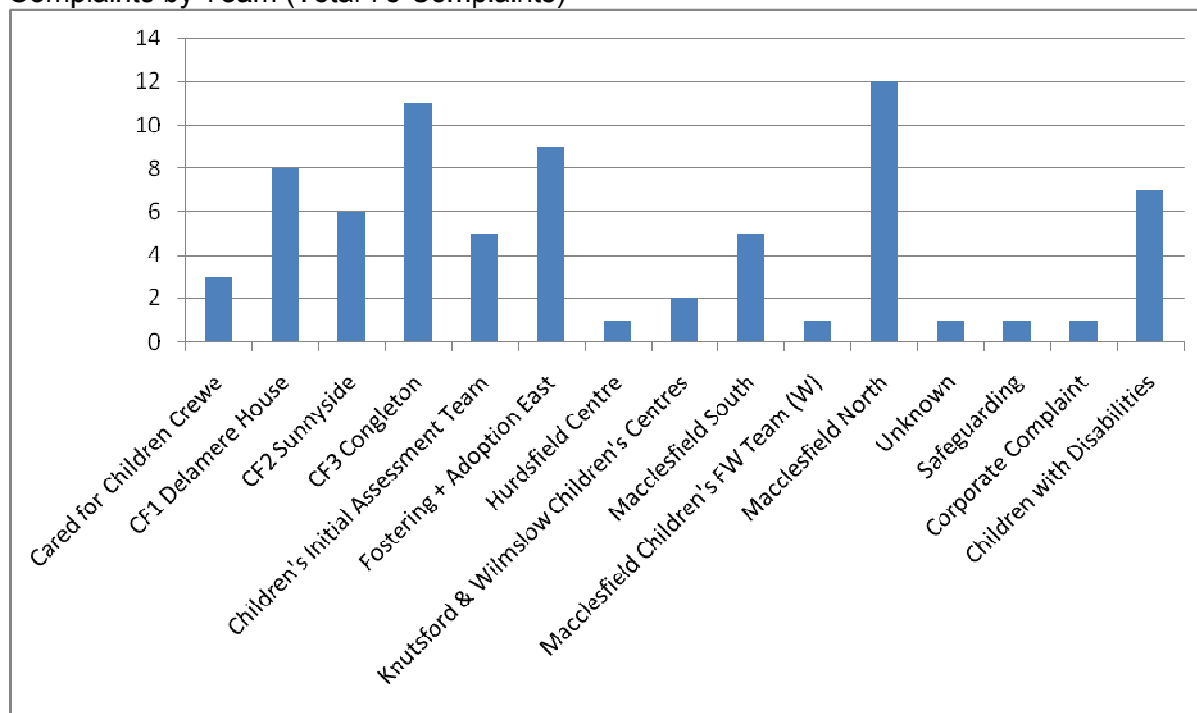
Graph 2
Number of Complaints per month Apr 09 – Jan 11
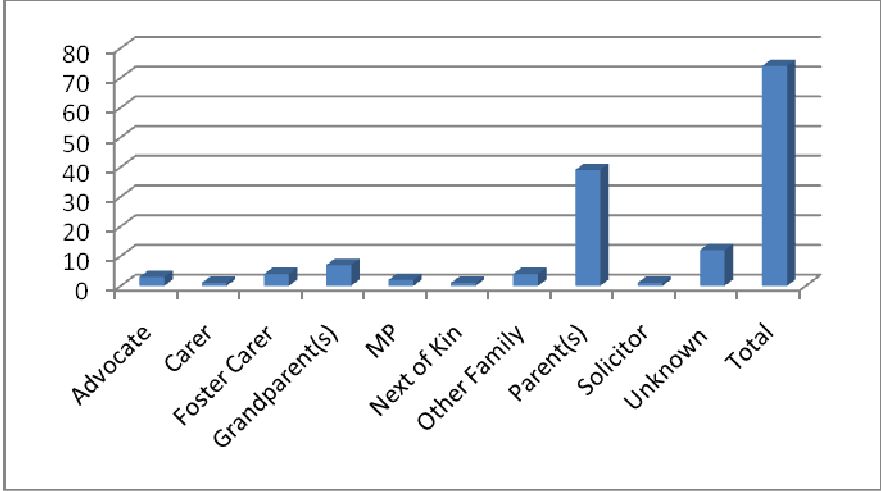
Graph 3

Complaints by Age and Gender

Complaints by Gender:	
Boys	40
Girls	35

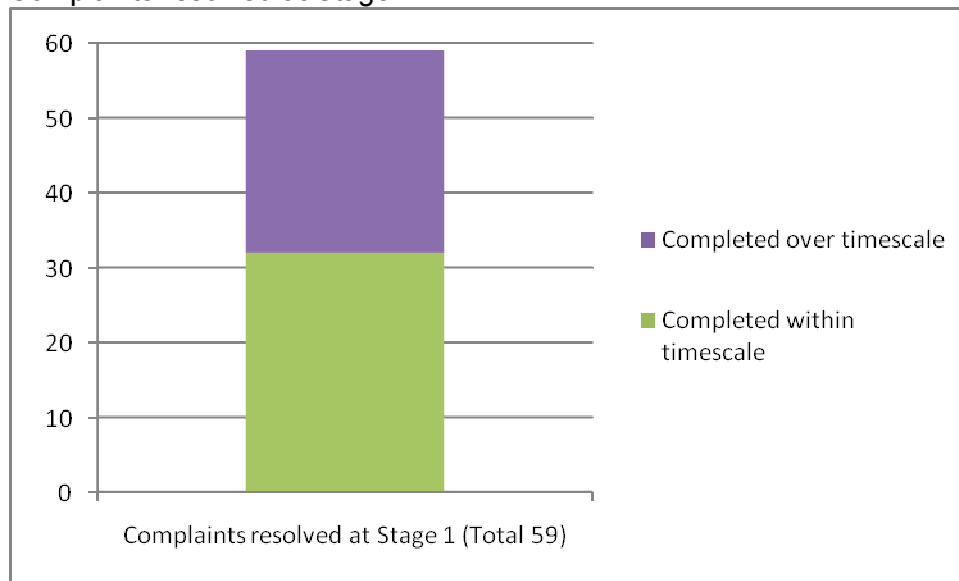| Complaints by Age Group:						
0 to 5	18	of which	8	boys	10	girls
6 to 10	10	of which	4	boys	6	girls
11 to 15	23	of which	14	boys	9	girls
16 to 18	17	of which	11	boys	6	girls
19+	7	of which	3	boys	4	girls
Total	75					

Graph 4

Complaints by who complained

Graph 5
Complaints resolved at Stage 1

Complaints resolved at Stage 1 (Total 59)

Legend:
- Completed over timescale
- Completed within timescale

Graph 6
Escalated to Stage 2

Complaints Escalated to Stage 2 (Total 14)

Legend:
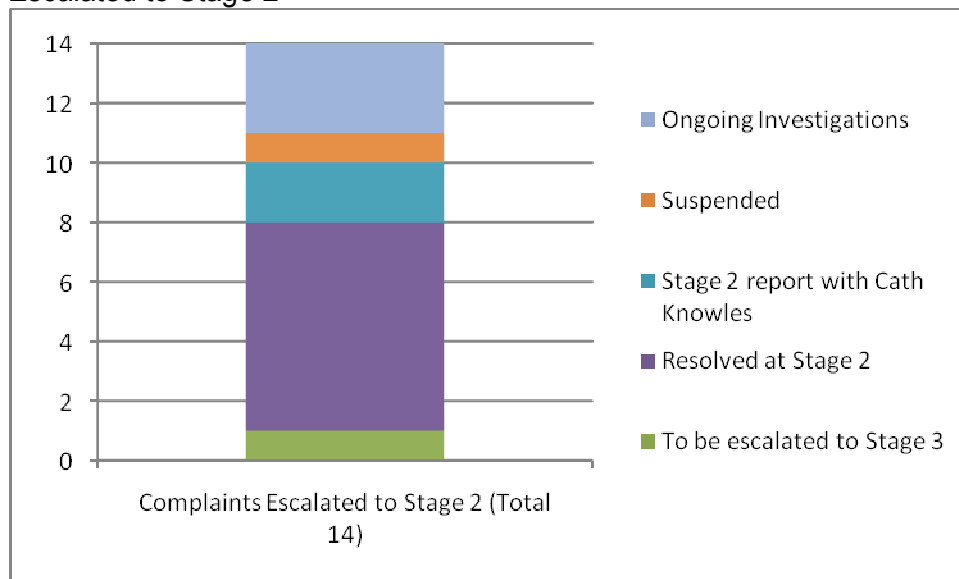- Ongoing Investigations
- Suspended
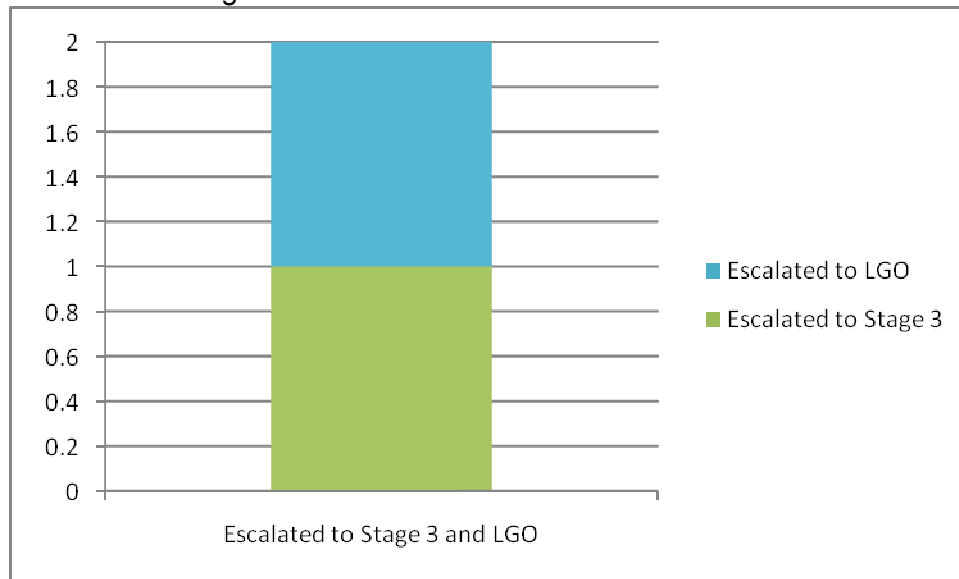- Stage 2 report with Cath Knowles
- Resolved at Stage 2
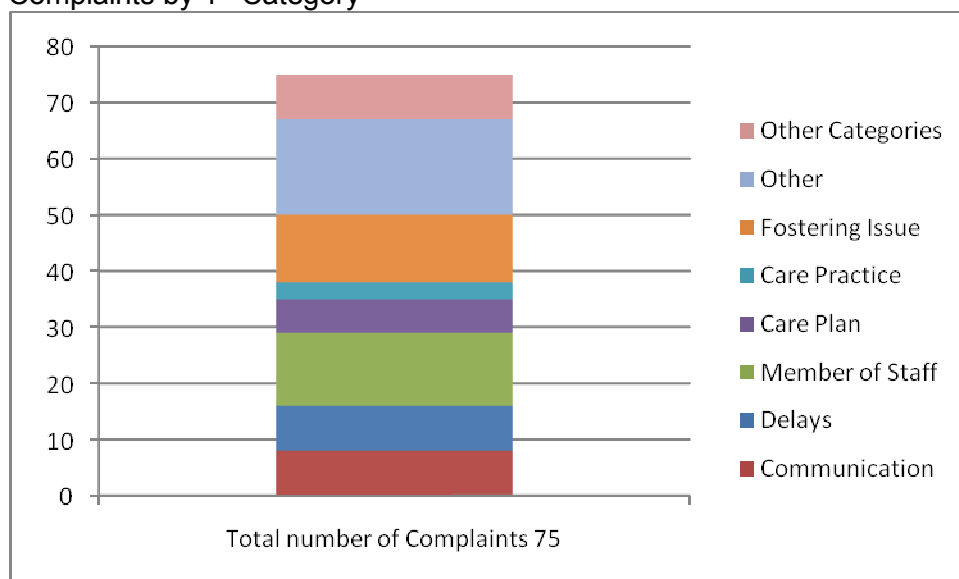- To be escalated to Stage 3

Graph 7
Escalated to Stage 3 and LGO

Graph 8
Complaints by 1st Category

Graph 9

Compliments were from:

A bar chart titled "Compliments were from:" with a vertical axis from 0 to 6. The bars (Series2) show: Social Worker = 2, Parent(s) = 5, Other = 3, Unknown = 5, Foster Carer = 1, Grandparent = 1.