



Somerset County Council

Annual Customer Feedback Report

April 2013 – March 2014

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	Page No.
1. Introduction	2
2. Annual Feedback Data Summary	4
3. Detailed Annual Data Breakdown	5
4. Feedback from Children and Young People	6
5. Feedback from Adult social care	7
6. Feedback from ECI	8
7. Ombudsman Overview	8
8. Learning & Improvements	9
9. Changes in Feedback Management	9
10. Appendices and Links	10

1. Introduction

This report is the first Customer Feedback Annual Report since the centralisation of the customer experience function within Customers and Communities. Somerset County Council [SCC] has a statutory obligation to report on the operation of its complaints procedure in relation to adults and children’s social care. For the first time in one document, it summarises customer feedback across all services in the period from April 2013 – March 2014.

This report is for staff, Members, the relevant local authority committee and will be made available to the regulator and general public. It provides information about, learning and service improvements that have been made, details of any that have not been implemented and why and any matters of general importance arising from complaints or the way in which they were handled.

For the purposes of this report, the term feedback should be taken to mean complaints, compliments and comments.

SCC classifies a complaint as:

“An expression of dissatisfaction with the actions or inactions of the Council or its agents either by a member of the public directly affected or by someone acting on their behalf, which isn’t resolved immediately”.

The SCC complaint process begins when a complaint is received by the local authority.

Stage 1 is to seek local resolution within 10 working days

Where a complainant is not satisfied with the Stage 1 response, the customer can request a;

Stage 2 where the complaint is investigated by an independent officer from a different service area or external to the authority.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they can request a;

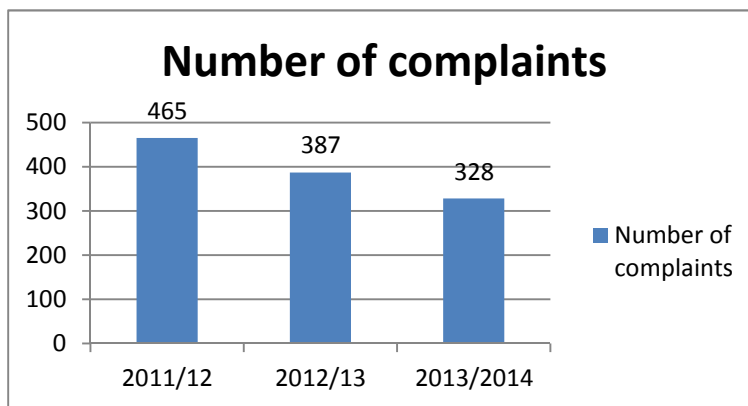
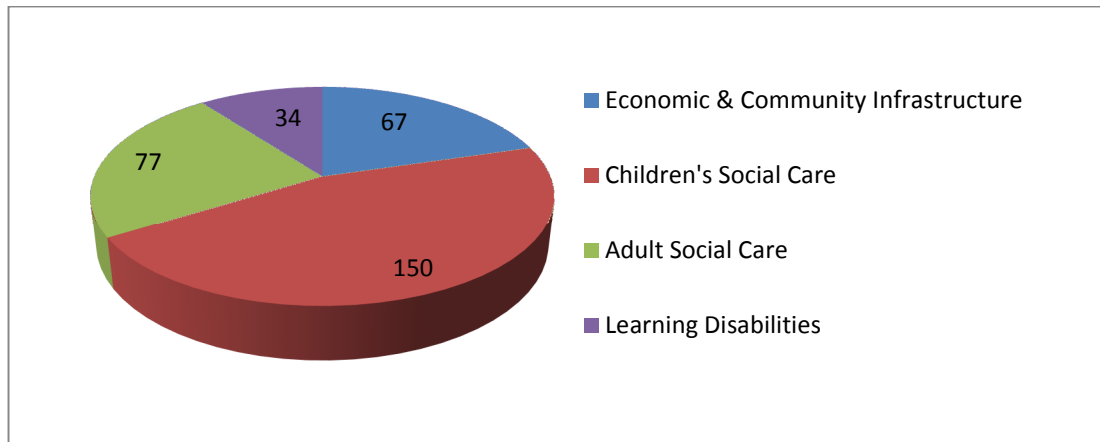
Stage 3 A panel hearing, to include the Chief Executive is convened to review the process and outcome reached. (only two stages are available in Adult social care)

If the various stages set out above fail to reach customer satisfaction , the Local Government Ombudsman (who is independent of the County Council), Will investigate the customers complaint.

2. 2013/14 Annual Feedback Data Summary

Complaints

SCC recorded 328 stage one complaints during the period 1 April 2013 – 31 March 2014. The chart below shows the distribution across service areas.



Total complaints recorded in 2013/14 show a reduction on the previous year of approximately 15%.

Stage two complaints

Of the 328 stage one complaints only a small number escalated to stage two of the process. These stage two complaints have again fallen in 2013/14 with only 8 cases compared with 14 in 2012/13 and 28 in 2011/12. This is a pleasing trend considering the time consuming nature of stage 2 investigations and the associated costs when an external investigator is employed (average £2000 per case).

Stage three complaints

No complaints were escalated to stage 3 of the process during the reporting period.

Local Government Ombudsman

15 cases were investigated. 9 were not upheld 6 were upheld. (Please refer to section 7 Local Government Ombudsman)

Compliments & Comments

Compliments and comments are not consistently recorded across the organisation. However some data does exist for Economic & Community Infrastructure (ECI) who recorded 174 compliments in the reporting period and Adult Social Care who recorded 99. Work is planned to improve recording of all feedback in all service areas (see 'Changes in Feedback Management' section – page 9).

MP enquiries

There are occasions when the authority receives correspondence from an MP regarding a constituent issue. These are treated as an MP enquiry and recorded as such. This means we will respond directly to the MP regarding the concern unless requested otherwise. The MP may advise their constituent of the complaints procedure which they can follow.

Somerset County Council recorded 182 MP enquiries during the 2013/14 reporting period.

3. Detailed Annual Data Breakdown

The following table shows the annual comparisons for total complaints across service areas. You will note an increase in Children's Social Care complaints of approximately 10% and reductions in all other areas, most notably Learning Disabilities where the number recorded has reduced by approximately 50%. Unfortunately it is not possible to provide further insight in to these trends due to the system and data quality issues.

Stage one complaints breakdown			
Service Area	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Children's Social Care	126	136	150
Adult Social Care	59	79	77
Learning Disabilities	10	69	34
Economic & Community Infrastructure	270	103	67

The following table shows the annual comparisons for stage 2 complaints across service areas. Due to the small numbers involved, the detailed data is not of significant importance but the general downwards trend is pleasing given the associated costs and the preventative work that has taken place.

Stage two complaints breakdown			
Service Area	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Children's Social Care	9	2	2
Adult Social Care	9	5	4
Learning Disabilities	1	3	1
Economic & Community Infrastructure	9	4	1

4. Feedback from Children & Young People

32 stage one complaints were received between 1 October 2013 to 9 September 2014. Four complainants (three of whom are siblings) have requested that their complaint proceed to Stage 2 as it has not been managed in a timely way. Stage 2 complaints are managed centrally.

The ages of children making complaints are:

Age	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Total
Number	2	4	2	1	6	6	3	5	3	32

The following table shows the length of time taken to resolve complaints. The first 3 rows of data relate to cases that are still open at the time of writing. The next 3 rows reflect the time taken to resolve cases that have been closed during the period in question.

Working days	Number	Comment
Open under 10 days	3	
Open under 20 days	5	
Open over 20 days	11	18 working days to 7 months
Resolved under 10 days	5	
Resolved under 20 days	3	
Resolved over 20 days	5	25 – 80 working days
Total	32	

The table below shows the reasons for complaints by children and young people.

Reason	Number
Change of social worker	1
Complaint about previous foster carer	1
Complaint about current foster carer	1
Complaint about in house children's home	2
Complaint about independent children's home staff	1
Complaint about another child in the same placement (includes bullying)	4
Does not want a placement move	5
Does not want to go home	1
Complaint against their family	1
Complaint about contact	5
Wish to be fostered with siblings	3 (now at stage 2)
Possessions left at a previous placement	1
Complaint that previous complaint has not been resolved	4
Complaint about social worker	1
Unknown	1
	32

5. Feedback from Adult's Social Care Learning and Learning Disability

Complaint Breakdown

Complaint Type	Total
Local Response Care Management	77
LD In-house Service Provision	34
Total	111

Method Complaints received by:

Contact Method	Total
Paper	58
Telephone	35
Visit/in person	6
Email	12
Total	111

Complaint Outcomes	Total
Complaint Response-Upheld	12
Complaint Response- Not upheld	22
Complaint Response- Unable to reach a decision	4
Complaint outcome unknown/ not recorded	71
Complaint withdrawn/not pursued by complainant	2
Total	111

Lessons Learned by category	Total
Communication	15
Quality of Care	3
Process	10
Training	3
No lessons learned	3
Subtotal	34
Lessons Learned not recorded	77
Total	111

Analysis of the 2013/14 ASC complaints raises four main areas for improvement:

- (a) Recording- it is noticeable that fewer complaints are being recorded on the current complaint management system and where they are recorded the data is often incomplete. This has necessitated a degree of manual effort to collate data for this report and affects our ability to effectively manage and learn from the complaints.

- (b) Communication - Lack of communication and support was the most common reason for a complaint being made. Complainants often felt that the communication to aid them in understanding information about the care and support the Council were able to provide them was not clear.
- (c) Training – a number of training issues/requirements have been identified:
 - a. Specific issues arising from complaint investigation around safeguarding to be discussed in staff team meetings as a point of learning.
 - b. Review safeguarding guidance concerning input of carers and a person’s best interests.
 - c. Refresh training for management and staff teams on appropriate use of Mental Capacity Act.
- (d) Process - Review arrangements with partners and providers to set in place mechanisms for better communication between them and customers.

6. Economic & Community Infrastructure Learning and Areas for Improvement

ECI receive a large proportion of SCC feedback they include feedback from: Highways planning, potholes and flooding. On the whole the service works hard on stage one resolution. Only one complaint escalated to stage two.

There is still learning and improvement to be made for example recommendations were made by the LGO regarding timing and better communication in relation to a Highways Planning case on which they adjudicated. As a result, Highways staff were retrained by the Customer Experience Team on the complaints process. The team now communicate with the customer to reach an understanding of the desired outcomes of the complaint. The complaint reply is collated and answered by one staff member (instead of multiple replies) in the correct timescale.

7. Ombudsman Overview

58 enquiries were received by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO), 15 of the 58 were investigated. 9 were not upheld, 6 complaints were and include::

- Disabled Facilities Grant (1 complaint)
SCC failed to deal with assessment properly and also to answer complaint within a reasonable timescale.
- Occupational Therapy (1 complaint)
Financial consequences arising from inaccurate information provided to customer necessitating payment of £5k compensation.
- Highway Planning (3 complaints)
Complaints relating to delays in taking action and/or providing advice and guidance leading to a total compensation payments of £20,275.
- Transporting Somerset (1 complaint)
Poor and confusing communication leading to compensation payment of £50.

The Somerset County Council LGO report can be seen in the appendices of this report.

8. Learning & Improvements

When taking complaints as a whole, analysis of 2013/14 data shows that the main reasons why people complain are:

- Poor communication
- Delay in communicating a response
- Disagreement with assessment of eligibility to service
- Behaviour of social worker
- Contact arrangements
- Delay in service provision
- Quality of care/support – residential
- Behaviour of other young person/people
- Accuracy of record
- Quality of care/support – day service

During 2013/14 both general and specific improvements have been made within feedback management. To support this the feedback function has been centralised and reviewed and a new management process is now in place (see 'Changes in Feedback Management'). Specifically, processes relating to the engagement of parents and children highlighted by Ofsted have been made.

The Customer Experience Team is now working closely with services to address the following areas:

- Encouraging more feedback from service users
- Implementing a new system for recording, monitoring and managing feedback
- Improving timeliness of response to complaints
- Supporting front line managers to deal effectively with first stage complaints
- Building an infrastructure to ensure learning from complaints is captured and acted upon
- Producing feedback leaflets encouraging adults and children to engage with SCC on providing us with feedback.

9. Changes in Feedback Management

As mentioned earlier in this report, the current feedback system is not fit for purpose for the new centralised operation. Work has been undertaken to identify and procure a suitable replacement, iCasework, which is specifically designed to manage customer feedback. Installation of the test system is expected in December 2014 with final sign-off scheduled for March 2015.

The new system will enable us to:

- Embed a consistent approach to the recording of customer feedback.
- Monitor performance against service standards.
- Identify learning outcomes from customer feedback
- Produce consistent and reliable management information

- Enable channel shift by improving the experience of registering feedback through the web.
- Streamline business processes and manage change easily

In addition to the system change, the customer Experience Team have identified Customer Feedback Coordinators in every service area. Their role will be to ensure that feedback is logged, monitored and handled in accordance with SCC policy.

10. Appendices and Links

Local Government Ombudsman report



Somerset Local
Government Ombudsman

Somerset County Council customer feedback web link

<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/have-your-say/complaints-comments-and-compliments/complaints-comments-compliments/>