

**BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

**SOCIAL SERVICES
REPRESENTATIONS AND
COMPLAINTS**

**ANNUAL REPORT
2020 / 2021**

November 2021

**SOCIAL SERVICES
REPRESENTATIONS AND COMPLAINTS 2020/21**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report covers the period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021 and relates to representations and complaints received by the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate regarding services and support provided by Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care.

Social Services Authorities are required to maintain a procedure for considering complaints and representations (comments and compliments). Any member of the public, including a child who has received or was entitled to receive a service from social services may make a complaint. The purpose of this report is to provide a review and statistical analysis of the complaints, comments and compliments received by Social Services during the reporting period.

This Annual Report relates to representations and complaints received by the Directorate which have been handled in accordance with the revised Welsh Government Complaint Guidelines "A Guide to Handling Complaints and Representations by Local Authority Social Services" which came into effect on 1st August 2014. The guidance supports the implementation of the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014. The Regulations introduced a new two stage process which replaced the previous three stages and also brings the process for Social Services into line with the NHS Complaints Procedure.

2. SUMMARY OF THE STATUTORY COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

"A Guide to handling complaints and representations by local authority social services" (Welsh Government).

Stage 1 – Local Resolution: As with the previous guidelines, particular emphasis is placed upon swift resolution of the majority of complaints. An offer to discuss the complaint with the complainant must therefore be made to attempt to resolve matters. This discussion must take place within 10 working days of the date of acknowledgement of the complaint. Where this approach leads to mutually acceptable resolution, the local authority must write to the complainant with details of the terms of the resolution within 5 working days of the date on which the complaint or representation was resolved.

Stage 2 – Formal Investigation: Appointment of an Independent Investigator is made and, as with the previous guidelines an Independent Person must also be appointed to oversee the investigation process (children's complaints). Collaborative arrangements have now been established (on a reciprocal basis) with neighbouring Local Authorities to share staff to undertake investigations

The Investigation must be completed and a full written response issued to the complainant within 25 working days. Where this is not possible, the Authority must write to the complainant to explain the reason for the delay and ensure the response is issued as soon as possible and no later than 6 months from the date of receipt of the complaint.

3. THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES

Where complainants have exhausted the complaints procedure, the complainant has the right to refer their concern for consideration by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales provides an external independent service for the purpose of considering complaints made by members of the public in relation to all local authority services, including Social Services. The Public Services Ombudsman also has jurisdiction to examine and determine complaints of injustice as a result of maladministration on the part of the local authority.

The Ombudsman will normally require complainants to have sought redress, in the first instance, via the local authority's complaints procedure prior to accepting and investigating a complaint of maladministration on the part of the local authority.

During 2020/2021, nine complaints were received by the Public Services Ombudsman's Office, seven of which related to Children's Social Care, two in respect of Adult Social Care; none went to investigation.

4. MEMBER REFERRALS

The Representations and Complaints Procedure does not preclude the right of an individual to approach their Local Councillor, Assembly Member or Member of Parliament. They undertake an important role in handling concerns and queries that individual constituents may have. Collectively, these are called Member referrals and can range from comments and queries to complaints.

If an Elected Member considers it to be inappropriate to deal with a concern, the matter can be referred for consideration under the Complaints Procedure. With effect from 2017 only those referrals received from Elected Members have been recorded by Democratic Services. Cabinet Members may liaise with Assembly Members and Members of Parliament to complete referrals but this data is no longer recorded.

During 2020/21, Member referrals were received as follows:-

Table A

2020/2021	Number of Referrals
Wellbeing: Adult Social Care and Wellbeing	166
Wellbeing: Children's Social Care	53
Total	219

5. ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK

In addition to receiving comments and compliments from service users and their relatives/carers, the Directorate also issues a range of feedback questionnaires from across service areas. A cross-section of the feedback generated from user/carer feedback surveys undertaken during 2020/2021 is set out below:-

Adult Social Care:

The Homecare survey is forwarded to all people who have accessed a Local Authority Domiciliary Care Service and have an active Care and Support Plan. **Between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021, 91 surveys were distributed, 23 were returned completed (25.3%).**

General comments provided include:-

<p>The home carers are very respectful and always leave appropriate notes to inform us as a family of any issues of concern. They have also telephoned us when they feel it is important. The team have got to know X very well and it's the little things that they notice that make all the difference. Without their ongoing support and commitment throughout Covid 19 we as a family would find it difficult alone. We are extremely grateful and thankful for all they do.</p>
<p>X would like her Steady back. I am concerned about the way X eats her food as she only has use of one hand and shakes a lot. Also I notice that when she has her food because she is left dessert she is pushing her dinner away and only eating the junk food. What she needs is breakfast, dinner (if she is given a dinner, no dessert), Tea (dessert for tea and something light) Something light for bedtime. I don't think she needs the ensure drinks as well.</p>
<p>My mother-in-law is bed confined, so if it wasn't for the care workers, we wouldn't be able to keep her at home. She also has dementia, she has 4 calls a day which gives myself a break. The carers are absolutely wonderful with her, and carers do not get the recognition they deserve, I am very thankful for the service we get and thank each one of them.</p>
<p>They usually come at the times allocated</p>
<p>The girls I have are fab, helpful, caring</p>
<p>The team caring for my mother have many exceptional talents. They are extremely professional, caring, compassionate, patient, kind and knowledgeable. The care plan file is very informative. I know exactly how my mother is each day in terms of wellbeing- diet- fluid intake and mood and the team link effortlessly between each visit using prior knowledge. The team leader has been very supportive and helpful and has linked with SALT and district nurses ensuring any changes in needs are met as soon as possible</p>
<p>Without my home care help I would no longer be able to support and care for X's needs :)</p>
<p>Only comment I have if they had more time with me</p>
<p>Do you know what it's like to be pulled off the toilet seat before you are ready when you say please stop. May I add I am able to wipe and clean myself as long as I am left to do so. May I say the more one gets things taken away then a person becomes disabled. Ticking a box cannot convey this.</p>
<p>I am prone to falls and use a Zimmer frame. I need help getting to the toilet and dressing. Whilst my husband is prone to depression and needs nurturing with eating as is underweight and reluctant to eat- all of which takes more time than</p>

the current time slot permits- so time is of the essence somewhat. However, we couldn't cope/ manage without external support and assistance

Carers are considerate on arrival. X needs help in preparing breakfast which at the moment he does not receive.

The carers I have are exceptional. I would like them to assist with putting the gel on my hips and back which I find difficult in the mornings.

I appreciate that it can be more difficult, as the carers are having to deal with both myself and my wife - at the same time - so time is at a premium- as my wife is very frail and prone to quite frequent falls and also has dementia.

The Bridgestart service provides short term (up to 6 weeks) personal care to service users in their homes.

Comments provided include:-

Please pass on my thanks to X and the team. They have been amazing

The Bridgeway service provides an enabling service for people with dementia and their families.

Comments include:-

A massive thank you for all involved with our mother's care. Myself and my sister can't express how grateful we are for your care and understanding for our mother and also ourselves.

Excellent service. Involved myself and my mum in all aspects of mum's care input. Would have liked to have continued with the input for a longer period. Shame that all services weren't as caring, compassionate and as professional as Bridgeway.

The team workers are unfailingly courteous and announced themselves on entry. The service cannot be faulted.

It is a pity that such quality of service is only offered for six weeks and not always evident in the private sector.

The Reablement Service provides support to service users following hospital admission or whilst living at home, and whose independent living skills are declining, to help them regain their independence to remain living in their own home.

Comments include:-

I have been with the CRT since end July. The teams have been of a high standard with some individuals being exceptional. They offered very useful comments and helped me very much in my life and offered in a polite, constructive and useful way. The result is that I go on in a much better physical and mental state. Many many thanks for your efforts not forgetting the 'back office staff'! Now I am done! Go forward and help the new ones as you helped me. Thank you all.

Client X daughter wanted to pass on her gratitude and compliments to everyone who has had anything to do with her mother's care. She said that she cannot speak highly enough of the team and has told everyone about the amazing support her mother has received. She doesn't think there is any service like this in Cardiff and said the team is responsible for letting her mother stay at home an extra 2 years. She said her mother has rung with inappropriate requests (e.g.

referral for a plumber) but her mother has been dealt with in the most kind and caring manner.

Telecare/Mobile Response: Provides a support service within the home (also in emergency situations), via use of wireless technology and sensors/pendant buttons. The Early Response Service links into the 24/7 mobile personal care service provided as part of the Telecare service and provides emergency assistance to service users in their home.

Comments received about the service include:-

Everyone involved with mum have been very kind

Thanks to the telecare department ... for their support with equipment for X at such short notice. It was very kind of them to move the jobs around and myself and family are grateful. It prevented a potential placement for readmission to hospital.

Adult Social Care - Advocacy Arrangements

Statutory Independent Professional Advocacy (IPA) is provided under the Bridgend Voice & Choice (BVC) service. This is delivered by 3 x independent providers: ProMo-Cymru, who operate the BVC Advocacy Hub (contact centre); MHM Wales, who operate 2 x contracts for client-specific IPA; and People First Bridgend, who operate statutory IPA for clients with a learning disability or autism.

To March 2021 the BVC Advocacy Hub received 258 contacts with 212 contacts connected and supported. This was a drop from 246 contacts connected in the previous year; the drop was mainly due to the impacts of the covid-19 pandemic.

The BVC Advocacy Hub is able to provide initial information and advice, signpost to other IAA services, support individuals to self-advocate, or make referrals to informal or formal advocacy. For 2020/21, 38 referrals were passed to statutory advocacy services via the Hub, a drop from the 50 statutory referrals made in the previous year which again is attributed to the effects of the pandemic. However, as in previous years, the significant majority of contacts were supported with either direct information and advice, referral or signposting for the most appropriate type of support, or a referral to a non-statutory advocacy service.

The statutory IPA services operated by MHM Wales and PFB are able to receive referrals via the Hub or from referring social work teams, other referring agencies, or directly from clients themselves. In this period the number of IPA referrals accepted was:

MHM: 36 new unique individuals referred to the service; 164 individuals supported in total, supported with 225 advocacy case issues.

PFB: 16 new unique individuals referred to the service; 75 individuals supported in total, supported with 125 advocacy case issues.

The total of 52 new referrals is a drop against the previous year (which saw 92 new referrals); again, a drop largely due to the pandemic. Despite this, the IPA providers maintained their support for a high number of ongoing open cases during the year. So while new referrals may have slowed, the case load for advocates remained high

throughout the period, with significant demand on services coming from: a) parent carers involved in child protection cases; b) Parc Prison cases, where significant additional time is required from advocates in accessing the prison setting and obtaining information from prison support services and from the client themselves. Both IPA providers indicated that their advocates were working to capacity, and for some of the period a short waiting list was put in place to manage the in-flow of new cases.

In addition to the statutory IPA services, both PFB and MHM Wales operate additional and complementary non-statutory advocacy services. These include community advocacy and support for peer advocacy groups.

Children’s Social Care – Advocacy Arrangements

Advocacy for children and young people in Bridgend is provided through a regional contract to deliver the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy, as prescribed by Welsh Government. The contract for Bridgend transferred from the Western Bay region into the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region on 1st May 2019. The service provider in Bridgend remained in place, namely Tros Gynnal Plant.

For the period April 2020/March 2021, the advocacy service delivered the following:

	2019/20	2020/21
Active Offers made:	68	41
Of which Active Offers accepted:	59	33
Issue-based Advocacy cases opened:	204	192
Of which cases were closed:	186	150

The level of issue-based advocacy being provided in Bridgend remains consistently high despite the limitations placed on the service due to the pandemic. However, the increasing number of Active Offers delivered in the previous year dropped off in the 2020/21 reporting period. The provider, in discussions with regional service stakeholders, is working with BCBC staff to address this with new Active Offer referral channels being developed for 2021 onwards.

Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014 - National Performance Framework:

In previous years as part of the National Performance Framework Local Authorities have collected qualitative information annually about people who use their Social Care Services. However, the National Survey was not sent out for 2020/21 as Welsh Government were continuing to review the Performance Management Framework, and Local Authorities were advised by Welsh Government that the survey was no longer to be undertaken in its current format.

Number of Representations Received and Timescales

Table 1

No. Representations Received Statutory Complaints Procedure – April 2020 to March 2021		
	Complaints	Compliments/Comments
Adult Social Care	34	163
Children’s Social Care	84	37
	Total Complaints: 123	
Breakdown *see table 2 for informal breakdown	Business Support /Finance	3 *informal
	Commissioned	2 *informal
	Stage 1	16
	Stage 2	9
		Total Compliments: 206

Timescales: 100% Stage 1 complaints were resolved within the prescribed timescale of 10 working days.

Timescales: 100% Stage 1 complaints were acknowledged in writing within 2 working days of the date of their receipt. 100% were resolved within the prescribed timescale of 10 working days and written responses provided within 5 working days of the date of resolution. There were no complaints received outside the 12-month time limit for investigation.

The total number of social services complaints received in 2020/21 - 123, has reduced compared to previous years, and the total number of compliments received - 206 has increased: -

- In 2019/21 - 233 social services complaints, and 96 compliments were received.
- In 2018/19 - 275 social services complaints, and 183 compliments were received.

Complaints Resolved Informally (pre-Complaints Procedure Stage 1)

Bridgend County Borough Council complaints processes have, for a number of years, involved successful early resolution of complaints wherever possible. Recently, the new Complaint Guidelines emphasise that the complaints process will provide for a more straightforward and citizen centred approach. Swift and effective complaints handling is also encouraged with an expectation that the majority of complaints and representations should be resolved by Local Resolution.

Complaints staff therefore undertake a significant amount of work liaising with managers to identify and agree swift resolutions to the satisfaction of the complainant (by the end of the working day following the day on which the complaint was made).

Table 2

No. Complaints Resolved prior to invoking the formal Complaints Procedure(s) 2020/2021	
	Number
Adult Social Care	24
Children's Social Care	69
Business/Finance Support	3
Commissioned Services	2
Total:	98

Statistics reflect that the Directorate has continued to achieve a high level of early resolution for complainants. **Although the number of early resolutions for 2020/21 are lower than that in previous years, they continue to represent a high percentage; 80%, of the total number of complaints received in that reporting period.**

The number of complaints resolved by this approach in previous years are:

- 201 in 2019/20
- 234 in 2018/19
- 198 in 2017/18
- 187 in 2016/17

Some of the feedback comments received in relation to Complaint staff's involvement with complainants in terms of discussion to understand the nature of complaints and potential early resolution is as follows: -

thank you for all your help today many thanks
...he's been a great support over the past few months. He's always cheerful, ready to advise and help where needed and proactive

Corporate Complaints Procedure

There are instances whereby aspects of a complaint do not fall within the remit of the Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedure and, in these instances, the Authority's Corporate Complaints Procedure is utilised; 16 complaints were received which were deemed appropriate to be addressed in accordance with the Corporate Complaints Procedure during 2020/21; 5 related to Adult Social Care (2 at stage 1 and 3 at stage 2), 11 to Children's Social Care (7 at stage 1, and 4 at stage 2), and 0 related to Business/Finance Support.

Total Representations Received 2020/21

The total number of representations received in relation to Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care is as follows:-

Table 3

2020/21 - Total No. Representations Handled via:	
Complaints Resolved at pre-Complaints stage	98
Statutory Social Services Complaints (St 1 & St 2)	25
Corporate Complaints	16
Ombudsman	9
Total:	148

The total number of complaints (Stage 1 and Stage 2) received and addressed in accordance with the **Statutory Complaints Procedure by Social Services during 2020/2021 was 25, compared with 32 in 2019/20, and 41 in 2018/19**; again, evidencing a reduction in numbers of complaints progressing through to the Statutory process.

The number of people receiving a service from Adult Social Care during the reporting period 2020/21 was 3298, and 1235 from Children's Social Care.

Complaint Outcomes (Statutory)

Complaint outcomes are identified within the categories; Upheld, Partially Upheld and Not Upheld. Outcomes for each service area have been recorded during 2020/21 as follows: -

Table 4 – Complaint Outcomes (St. 1 – Statutory Complaints Procedure)

2020/21	Adult Social Care	Children's Social Care	Business/Finance Support	
Not Upheld	4	5	-	9
Partially Upheld	0	0	-	0
Upheld	0	6	-	6

NATURE OF COMPLAINTS

The nature of complaints received varied and included:-

Table 5

2020/21 – Most Common Complaints Received
Quality / Level of Service / Standard of Care
Lack of / Poor Communication
Disagreement with Assessment / Care Plan
Unacceptable Delays
Poor advice / misinformation
Staff attitude / conduct
Policy / Procedure Non-compliance
Missed / Late Appointments / Times of Visits
Charges for Care Services
Disagreement with Policy / Procedure

7. HOW COMPLAINTS WERE RESOLVED, and LESSONS LEARNED

A variety of methods were used to resolve complaints, including:-

- Liaison by complaints officers with senior managers to identify/agree immediate/informal resolution;
- Meetings by senior officers with complainants to discuss/resolve their concerns.
- Liaison with other Local Authorities ensuring coordinated and cohesive responses.
- Provision of explanation of reasons for decisions (verbal and/or written);
- Provision of an apology (written), where appropriate;
- Corrective actions, e.g. change of decisions, review of procedures;
- Reassessment (independent);
- Advocacy services/support;
- Independent investigation;
- Staff training (eLearning).

Key lessons learned during 2020/21 were as follows: -

Table 6

Service Area	Lessons Learned/Actions Implemented
Adult Social Care: Third Party Referrals	Detailed written guidance provided to staff focussed on the need to keep people using Council services fully informed in relation to request for service/referrals and support them to be advised as to decisions that follow those requests/referrals.
Adult Social Care: DFG - Accessible Documentation	Developing a set of easy read documents. Documents being produced by People First and will include leaflets about rights and entitlements, service feedback comments and complaints and fairer charging.
Children's Social Care: Case Management	Review of systems to ensure clarity within teams as to whether a case is open or closed to ensure that communications with someone who has made a referral are timely and accurate.
Complaints: Complaint Wording Agreement	Process developed and implemented for dealing with Stage 2 complaint wording where the complainant's preferred method of communication is via post.

Welsh Language Standards

There have been no complaints received during this reporting period that have been communicated via the medium of Welsh.

To ensure compliance with the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards all complaints publicity material, including leaflets and the complaints website have been translated and are readily available in the medium of Welsh.

Compliments

Compliments are regarded as important information which can be used to identify good practice. All compliments are therefore recorded centrally and details provided in management reports. As mentioned above, 206 compliments were recorded during 2020/21, a selection of which are set out below:-

Table 7

Compliments - Adult Social Care:
Thank you! Am sure we will speak again soon...you are very approachable and helpful...much appreciated at this difficult time.
Thank you for all your help, we were very impressed by support and care we got from the local authority.
please accept our gratitude for your outstanding commitment and assistance ... and processing the arrangements for her care at home through Radis, who have been exceptional
Thank you so much for facilitating yesterdays meeting and your very accurate report. Means world to me that your helping me live as normal as someone being erroded by ms
...extend my sincere gratitude to you for providing your social work expertise to my father and mother whilst my father has been in hospital
thank you for your help and support since becoming my mother's social worker and especially during lockdown the weekly phone calls were a lifeline
"brilliant", supportive and has done everything she said she was going to do.
We will always be eternally grateful for the assistance you personally provided in ensuring my mother's wish to die in her own home was respected. You guided us carefully, tactfully, with kind and compassionate support throughout the care process provided by Bridgend County Borough Council Adult Social Care.
Compliments – Children Social Care:
I would like to raise how impressed I have been with the way that X has been working with the family, and how well she has engaged the children and identified the right support to reduce the risks
...been very impressed with both the level of support you have provided to the young people and your engagement with them...your communication, both with them and the young people has been consistently of an excellent standard
You have done an amazing job with this family and they are lucky to have you to care so much about them
Firstly a BIG thank you for all this work you've undertaken with X. I am remarked by the detail and content of these sessions that must have taken you some time to pull together so WELL DONE

what was most impressive was the openness to frank and honest challenge in respect to the plan that was being put forward, and the acceptance that the risks involved required further consideration.
the social worker has created very thoughtful care plans and has shown excellent ability and dedication
thank you so much for being an amazing social worker and for all you're understanding and hard work. You are very much appreciated and one of the best social workers I've met for X
I've just got off the phone with disability children team and I've got to say whoever I spoke to was amazing

8. CUSTOMER FEEDBACK – THEIR EXPERIENCE OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The rate of return by complainants of completed questionnaires has been very poor over a number of years, with those making comments tending to focus upon the outcome of their complaint, as opposed to their experience of using the complaints procedure. Questionnaires were not despatched during this reporting period.

9. ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2020/2021

- Complaints staff have encouraged and worked closely with managers/staff to aim to resolve complaints locally and as swiftly as possible. This is reflected in the high number of complaints resolved at the pre-complaints stage (**Table 2**) of 98.
- There was a reduction from 27 to 16 in the number of Stage 1 formal complaints handled in the period compared to 2019/20, however there was an increase in the number of Stage 2 complaints from 5 to 9. Overall there was a reduction in all complaints from 233 to 123 this period compared to 2019/20.

10. OBJECTIVES FOR 2021/2022

- Continue to encourage and work with managers/staff to aim to resolve complaints locally and as swiftly as possible;
- Considering the slight increase in the number of cases progressing to Stage 2 of the complaints process and the request from the Ombudsman to progress all requests for a stage 2 to an independent investigation, there will be a need to further increase the cohort of available and appropriately skilled independent investigators.
- Work with ICT to continue to develop the use of the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) to report on complaints; initial work has begun in this area and this will continue into 2021/2022 with the transfer of the WCCIS system onto the new CRM Platform.
- Work with ICT to consider the integration of the compliments data onto the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS); and

- The Complaints Awareness e-learning module developed in 2015/16 (aimed at new and existing staff employed by the Directorate) has had a low staff take-up. Consideration will therefore be given to inclusion of this Module to be a mandatory element within the Social Services Induction Programme to ensure that all new starters complete it and the guidelines for managers to manage complaints updated and re-issued across Social Services.

11. EQUALITIES

A screening for equality impact has been carried out in relation to the representation and complaints procedure. There is no negative impact on the protected equality characteristics.

There have been no complaints in relation to equality impacts received during the reporting period in relation to the Social Services Representations and Complaints Procedure.

**Report prepared for Claire Marchant
Statutory Director of Social Services
By the Complaints & Quality Manager & Business Support Officer**