

Listening to learn

Annual report

Feedback about our services
from April 2010 to March 2011



as long as it takes



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Our customer service promise

1. Introduction

Action for Children is committed to helping the most vulnerable and neglected children and young people break through injustice, deprivation and inequality, so they can achieve their full potential. We want everyone who has contact with our organisation to have a positive experience of what we do. This means that:

- ▶ people know what to expect from our services
- ▶ people find our services effective and efficient
- ▶ people are encouraged to comment on the service they receive
- ▶ we handle any complaints fairly and consistently
- ▶ we use feedback to learn and improve

If you are someone who uses our projects, we promise you will:

- ▶ be treated with respect and dignity
- ▶ be treated fairly and equally
- ▶ be safe
- ▶ be given the information you need about our service to you
- ▶ be given clear information about confidentiality, and any limits to that confidentiality
- ▶ be able to read anything written about you by project staff
- ▶ be told when information about you is shared with other people and why
- ▶ have your say when decisions or changes are made that affect you, and have your views taken into account
- ▶ have your comments, suggestions or complaints taken seriously

This report captures information on the ways in which we have acted to fulfil our customer service promise during 2010/11, and how we responded to the customer service targets set for us by Council, our decision-making body.

2. Examples of activities we undertook to promote customer service during the year

- ▶ customer service including complaints was promoted within the inclusion team alongside equality and diversity, participation, and volunteering
- ▶ each of our geographical divisions (England North, England Central and West, London and England South, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) developed an inclusion group, comprising a range of managers and operational staff, to take forward inclusion issues more locally
- ▶ a training course, Managing Complaints, for project managers and senior project staff, ran 13 times in locations around the UK, provided by independent trainer Danny Bradley – evaluation feedback for this course was outstandingly positive
- ▶ a new e-learning package, Working with Customer Service and Complaints, was made available to all project staff
- ▶ customer service training was provided to specialist teams, including business support teams in our Watford office
- ▶ the customer care and complaints manager took part in seminars and meetings throughout the UK to promote our approach to customer feedback
- ▶ networking and benchmarking took place with similar organisations through Voluntary Organisations Children's Complaints
- ▶ we reviewed and revised the service users' complaints procedure in the light of learning from complex complaints and recommendations from a number of investigations
- ▶ we set up two new teams:
 - ▶ the customer support team to handle all kinds of communications within the organisation and with external groups and callers
 - ▶ the data care team to provide services to supporters and fundraisers

Further information on the activities of these teams can be found in sections 7 and 8.

3. How we listened to what people said about our services

What people said about our services became even more important this year due to the tighter economic environment our services are operating in. We need to continually demonstrate the value of existing and proposed services, and how we listen and respond to those who use our services is an important element in this.

Target for last year

We will continue a blended approach to collecting feedback from service users across a range of sources, to better analyse, understand and learn from the ways in which people experience our services



How we addressed this target

- ▶ projects were required to submit detailed information about complaints received, how they were resolved and what was learned. The information collected is discussed in section 5
- ▶ we continued to collect examples of compliments made by service users and other professionals about our services, and we reviewed the collection and use of this material
- ▶ regular reports on complaints activity, themes and learning were provided to appropriate senior managers in our children's services department
- ▶ divisional inclusion groups considered the learning gained from compliments and complaints on a more localised basis

4. What people said about our services

Compliments

During the year, 210 projects (44%) provided information about compliments and positive feedback about their service. They reported 1,230 compliments, including some detailed examples and evidence of learning. Compared to the numbers of complaints reported, this represents a 6:1 ratio of compliments to complaints. While this is very positive, we believe the ratio should be higher and the number of projects participating closer to 100 per cent. It is increasingly important to us to capture compliments, as the views of service users and co-professionals are given increased weight in the commissioning of services.



Action for 2011/12

We will increase the level of positive feedback and number of compliments reported about our services. We will increase the ratio of compliments to complaints (from 6:1 in 2010/11) to at least 10:1

Examples of compliments received

'I felt very supported by the worker, especially in meetings with school/social services. Before I had felt isolated and no one else could really see the real child behind the behaviour problems. My worker really engaged with my child and saw him as a full person, and her reflecting this in meetings helped me emotionally and practically to get him the right help.' **Herefordshire Family Support, England Central and West**



'Some children and young people have a great many issues to deal with including bereavement, family break up or poor home situations. Without skilled intervention from the counselling service this can often lead to children disengaging from their learning or being unable to socialise with their peers. The counselling service has been of huge benefit to our school over the years. It has provided a service which is efficient, easy to access and has a high success rate for changing the behaviour and self esteem of very vulnerable children.' **Head teacher regarding Manchester Counselling Service, England North**

'The support helped me a lot through moving from a very stressful situation. The help was appreciated especially with the house move, emotional support, diet and fitness advice and that the support worker got me to go for treatment at the dentist. Also I was given encouragement to attend counselling.' **Young person regarding the Youth Support Team, Wales**

'Thank you for all the kindness and love you give to [young person] every year.' **Christmas card sent to Yew Trees, England Central and West**

'We would both like to say a BIG thank you to Action for Children, the Black Families project and you for all the energy, effort and support we have received to date. It's been a long journey but we are happy to want to share our joy and thanks for the wonderful and exciting future we have to look forward to. We know that if not for [staff] support and dedication, we would not be in this position. Once again thank you for your wonderful work.' **Adoption Black Families, England South**

Examples of what projects learned from compliments

'We learned that providing our programmes in places other than the centre can be highly valuable and make a big difference to the lives of children and their families; and by working in partnership with other providers we can target a higher number of vulnerable families and provide additional support to any existing networks.' **Nomony Children's Centre, England Central and West**

'The positive comments about the foster carers noted in a young person's review showed that the foster carers have the skills, ability and empathy with this young person in placement to enable her to develop a sense of security and safety while she is in their care. They have enabled the move and transition to be made in a way that put the needs of the child to the forefront. We will ensure these comments are passed on to them.'

Foster Care Northern Ireland

'A parent thanked us because she had been able to explain her son's absence from school in English to his head teacher. It showed that our services can make a big difference to individual's lives. By offering ESOL classes we can reduce some of the language barriers that many of our parents face on a daily basis.' **Riversley Park Children's Centre, England Central and West**

'I learned by receiving this compliment that the work I do with families is valued. It has made me realise that the work we do on a grass roots level with families makes a difference and has made me work harder to fulfil outcomes in the future.' **Winchestown Family Centre, Wales**

Examples of what projects changed as a result of compliments

'We will continue to be mindful of having a mix in the group make up when offering parenting groups to make the best experience possible from a rich fusion of people and experiences. Asking for feedback on a regular basis, as we have to, can become tedious for people, but it also helps people to evaluate the impact of their participation and we have found that it also helps them value themselves more too when they consider their journey.' **Tullibody Families, Scotland**

'We continue to strive for excellence and respond to parents' and children's requests for changes and support. Parents sometimes comment rather than compliment or complain. Where we get a request to enhance our services, we try to incorporate these suggestions into our programme of services. We also respond and thank our parents for their compliments so that they know we are listening.' **Rossington Children's Centre, England North**

'I will keep making sure I let staff know the feedback we are getting for their outstanding service to children and their families.'

Wrexham Solutions, Wales



5. Complaints made about our projects

People who use our projects are informed about their right to complain. While they are encouraged to express concerns to project staff, they can alternatively contact the customer care and complaints manager direct if they prefer. Sixty-five people did so during the year.

We use a structured approach to addressing complaints, using up to three stages:

Stage 1 – local resolution: the complaint is addressed by the project, with management support if needed, aiming for a resolution within 10 working days



Stage 2 – investigation: if the complaint is not resolved, it may be independently investigated, aiming for a resolution within 25 working days



Stage 3 – review: if the complaint is not resolved, it may be reviewed by an independent panel

The vast majority of complaints are resolved locally at stage 1.

If someone remains dissatisfied and an investigation is deemed appropriate, this is usually carried out by someone independent of Action for Children. Where a child or young person is directly involved, an independent person is usually also involved to check that everything is done correctly and fairly. Most of our complaint investigations were carried out via the independent service provided by Voice, with whom we have a regularly reviewed contract. Further details about Voice can be found at www.voiceyp.org

How many complaints were made?

In 2010/11, notifications of 200 complaints were received centrally. Twenty-five per cent of our 481 projects reported one or more complaints.

Target for last year

Through our revised approach to user feedback and the richer set of data we are collecting, we will identify and address gaps in complaints reporting, to determine how accurate our complaints information is, and will engage with operational directors and service development managers to secure their leadership for this



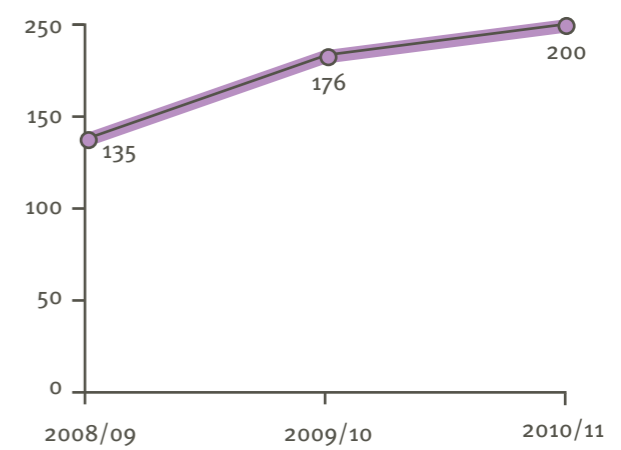
Target for last year

We will continue to ensure that training in customer service and complaints takes place at appropriate levels, and to ensure that staff and managers are reminded about expected good practice in responding to and recording complaints



How we addressed this target

We have in past years been concerned about under-reporting. However, our records now show a steady increase in the number of complaints reported at stage 1 over the past three years.



Complaints made during the year


This section gives an overview of complaints made and how we responded to them, including examples of good practice, learning and further actions to be taken. We are committed to learning from those occasions when people are dissatisfied about their contact with our services, both to put things right for the person concerned, and as an opportunity for us to learn and improve.

This increase corresponds to:

- ▶ the development of divisional inclusion groups, which have raised managers' awareness about the need to record and report on complaints
- ▶ ongoing training for project managers
- ▶ new training for all project staff, to ensure that complaints are recognised and responded to appropriately – managers are required to help ensure their teams undertake this training, which in turn ensures their awareness


At the same time, we continue to believe this is a small number for our 52,000+ service users across the UK, and we need to continue to raise awareness about the need to record and report on complaints.

Action for 2011/12

 We will continue to support divisional inclusion groups in ensuring that customer care and complaints issues are promoted, and collated information is analysed locally, to maximise project compliance in reporting and effective learning from complaints and other feedback

As Action for Children upgrades its computer and information systems, we need to ensure that we implement the best ways of gathering information about customer service from projects, including compliments and complaints. We will work with the Knowledge and Information Management work stream to ensure any new information technology systems take account of customer service data gathering needs.

Action for 2011/12

 We will use revised, improved methods of collecting customer service data, including compliments and complaints, from our projects, and aim to further increase the percentage of projects reporting



How quickly did we address complaints?

Timeliness is an important part of our response. In 74 per cent of cases, we concluded the complaint within the target of 10 working days. With the complainant's agreement, the timescale may be extended to a further 10 working days, and this time period accounted for a further 16.5 per cent of complaints. This left 9.5 per cent of complaints that were addressed outside our target timescales – a very slight improvement compared to 10 per cent last year, and a continued improvement from the 15.5 per cent of two years ago. This should be considered alongside the improvements in positive outcomes and complainant satisfaction for this year, described below.

Extended timescales were most often due to difficulties in contacting or engaging the complainant, the absence of key staff, difficulties in getting all the data necessary for an investigation and subsequent investigator availability. Nevertheless, we continue to strive to positively resolve even more complaints within the 10-day target.

How well did we resolve complaints?

We aim to find a positive solution to every complaint at the local resolution stage. During the year, 89 per cent of complaints were recorded by projects as being either wholly or partly resolved (compared to 78% in the previous year). In the remaining 11 per cent, resolution at stage 1 was not possible because:

- ▶ in eight cases, the complaint went on to another procedure (compared to 15 in the previous year). In seven of these this was to a stage 2 investigation under the complaints procedure, and – in one case – to a review for a looked-after young person
- ▶ in eight cases it was jointly concluded that no resolution was possible
- ▶ in six cases the complaint was withdrawn


Where possible, complainants were asked how satisfied they were with the outcome, and this was recorded in 77.5 per cent of cases (compared to 66% in the previous year). Where the complainant's response was known, 90 per cent were either partly or wholly satisfied with the response at this stage (compared to 84% in the previous year).

Complaints that required more attention

In seven cases, people who were unhappy with our response to their complaint at stage 1 asked to take it further, and it was agreed that further formal investigation was appropriate. This was the same number as went forward to investigation in the previous year.

Target for last year

We will continue to use learning from recent investigations to ensure the best balance is struck in the level of detail and investigation timescale



How we addressed the target

Three of the complaints were at the same project and involved similar issues, and the investigation of these three involved the same investigating team to ensure a consistent response. These three linked complaints, and one other of those investigated, were complex and involved other procedures or agencies and staff who had left; consequently the investigations were prolonged beyond the timescales we regard as appropriate. In these four cases, a strategy group was convened by a senior manager to ensure the dovetailing of different procedures, to ensure progress was maintained, and to ensure that external agencies were appropriately informed. The three other investigations were completed in a timely manner within, or very close to, the target of 25 working days. In two cases the investigating team commended the quality of service provided by the projects concerned.

'Apart from better understanding what happened in our case, our other main goal was to ensure lessons are learnt and actions taken from our experiences, which it sounds like you are seeking to do. We appreciate the effort and seriousness with which you handled our concerns, and want to express our thanks to each of you for your parts in bringing this to a satisfactory conclusion.' **Family following complaint investigation**

As a result of the prolonged investigations, significant work has been done to learn from them, so as to minimise recurrences of exceeding target timescales. This work is described in more detail in section 6.

Is the complaints procedure equally accessible to all service users?

The age profile of the people who complained, enabling us to consider whether all age ranges are able to make their voice heard, is shown here:


Young people aged under 12	2
Young people aged 12–15	24
Young people aged 16–17	14
Young people aged 18–20	11
Adults (over 21) about an issue concerning a child	49
Adults about an issue concerning themselves	93
Not applicable (complaints not made by service users)	7

Fifty-two per cent of complaints made by service users were either by or on behalf of children or young people aged under 21. While people of all age groups did access the procedure, it is predominantly used by adults. This is explained at least in part by the fact that 60 per cent of our projects are family support services for families with young children.

Are children and young people able to involve an advocate?

Target for last year

We will further check practice in our projects, focusing on services for children and young people who are looked after away from home, to ensure they can access advocacy when they wish



How we addressed the target

Projects are asked to ensure that children and young people can access an advocate if they wish. During the year, the right of young people to access an advocate was raised with projects via

survey activity and management groups, focusing on young people who are looked after away from home. Advocates were involved in six of the young people's complaints, and in all other cases it was recorded that the young person did not wish to involve an advocate at this stage. During the year it became a statutory requirement for young people looked after in England, under Ofsted regulations, to have access to advocacy, underpinning our good practice in offering this support to children and young people.

Disability

Thirteen complaints were made by people with disabilities, including learning disabilities. Some of these were from young disabled people using our specialist projects, but the majority were from parents using our family support services. One complaint concerned wheelchair access to a building, and funding was sought to improve this. There were 21 complaints made on behalf of disabled children and young people, again concerning both specialist disability services and family support services. In one example, young learners complained that a young disabled person studying with them was being singled out by another with regard to his disability, and this was addressed by the service manager – evidence that young people can identify and expect us to take action on discriminatory bullying.

Ethnic background

Twenty complaints (10%) were from people from a black or minority ethnic background. This is reasonably proportionate compared to our overall service user profile, with about 13 per cent of our service users being from a minority ethnic background. In one case it was found that the complainant's ethnic background had been referred to in an insensitive way.

Sexual orientation

There were two complaints in this context. In one case it was found that a service user had been treated insensitively with regard to their sexual orientation. In another case, a young person complained of homophobic bullying by another young person. The project was swift and firm

in its response to this, ensuring that the young person concerned and their parents knew this was unacceptable, supporting the complainant who was confident enough to contact the police, and ensuring the issue was followed up with young people in one-to-one sessions and group meetings.

Target for last year

We will develop practice guidance on how to implement the equality scheme in customer service, including reaffirming how to address discriminatory bullying



How we addressed the target

The customer care and complaints manager and equality and diversity manager undertook initial planning, research and drafting of materials which were piloted with a project that had experience of tackling homophobic bullying. It is planned to use Anti-Bullying Week in November 2011 as a springboard to:

- ▶ raise awareness of bullying, regarding the issues, manifestations and impact, to enhance vigilance and responses so bullying does not go unnoticed or unaddressed in our projects
- ▶ provide ways that young people can have a voice on the issues and help drive our anti-bullying agenda
- ▶ improve staff confidence and competence in dealing with bullying and both perpetrators and victims
- ▶ actively involve young people, including students attending our schools



Action for 2011/12

We will ensure project staff are aware of identity-based bullying and the steps that should be taken to address it, via activities in Anti-Bullying Week in November 2011, and through supporting guidance resources

How do we compare to similar organisations in our handling of complaints?

For a number of years the customer care and complaints manager has attended meetings of Voluntary Organisations Children's Complaints, along with complaints managers from similar agencies that share a common approach to encouraging best practice. Member organisations aim to resolve complaints positively for the complainant at the earliest possible stage. Benchmarking among the group over three years (2007/8 to 2009/10) shows that they achieved this for an average of between 79 per cent and 88 per cent of complaints. Action for Children's average in this same period was 85 per cent. All of the organisations experienced variations from year to year, according to varying levels of difficulty and complexity in the complaints being addressed. For the year 2010/11, Action for Children has achieved 89 per cent. It is very helpful to us to be able to use this group to share good practice, and to know that our complaints handling compares well with that of other organisations.



6. Learning and improvement

Review of the complaints procedure

Target for last year

The complaints procedures will be revised to provide greater clarity regarding timescale and the circumstances in which it is appropriate to extend it



Target for last year

We will provide guidance within the complaints procedures on assessing risk and notifying managers and senior managers where appropriate



How we addressed these targets

Our complaints procedure was last substantially revised in 2006 to ensure it reflected the Department of Health guidance: Getting the Best from Complaints.

The review carried out during 2010/11 considered:

- ▶ learning from our experience of complaints at all levels over the previous years, including some complex situations
- ▶ a review of a particularly complex scenario which was carried out by senior management
- ▶ our research on children's and young people's views, Challenging Perspectives, which concluded that most young people expect a known and trusted adult to sort out problems quickly and with minimal fuss
- ▶ recommendations from all stage 2 and 3 investigations and reviews from the last three years

A group of managers was convened to steer the review process, and there was wider consultation on specific topics.

Issues considered in the review included:

- ▶ ensuring our processes are proportionate to the issues, and fair to all involved
- ▶ investigation reports are timely, of high quality, meet the needs of both the complainant and the organisation, and represent good value

- ▶ situations where there is risk or complexity are identified as early as possible and are well managed so as to minimise negative impact on the process and the timescales of any investigation

- ▶ the process remains child-centred

The revised procedures include:

- ▶ detailed guidance on recognising and managing possible risks (eg reputational risk, insurance claims and litigation, data protection issues, safeguarding)
- ▶ ensuring the right people in the organisation are involved
- ▶ clarification of roles, including detailed guidance on the role and responsibilities of operational managers
- ▶ greater flexibility in matching the complaint investigation and review processes to the circumstances
- ▶ new core terms of reference for the management of complaint investigations, which can be expanded on a case-by-case basis, but will frame the investigation
- ▶ new guidance on the content and structure of investigation reports
- ▶ clarification of how the complaints procedure relates to other internal and external procedures, including the requirement to convene a management group as soon as other procedures and/or agencies are involved, or are anticipated to become involved

We will now ensure the revised procedure is embedded in our practice and have a programme of management training to support its implementation.



Action for 2011/12

Our monitoring will assure the quality and timeliness of complaint investigations and reviews under the revised procedures, with appropriate quarterly and annual reporting



Action for 2011/12

We will deliver a revised training programme for service managers on the management of customer service and complaints under the revised procedure

How we learned from complaints

Our complaints process focuses on resolution and learning rather than justification and blame. We are committed to learning from complaints and ensuring that, where practice can be improved, change takes place. Projects are asked, wherever possible, to identify learning from complaints that are dealt with at stage one; of the 200 complaints recorded in 2010/11, learning was identified in 175 cases.

Where complaints went on to investigation, a detailed action plan was agreed based on the outcomes of the investigation. Progress on the actions was monitored at senior operational level and reviewed after six months to ensure implementation.

Target for last year

We will agree with key operational senior managers and service development managers a system for overseeing learning from complaints and ensuring that it takes place at the right levels across the organisation



How we addressed the target

Via the revised complaints procedure, the operational director was identified as the key figure in ensuring that learning for the wider organisation is in place following a complaint investigation. For complex complaints, action plans identified tasks for a range of managers (eg those responsible for policy, safeguarding and health and safety), and strategic directors were involved in ensuring that actions were implemented across similar services. Reports on complaints activity were regularly fed through to divisional inclusion groups for discussion, and summary information was made available to country committees.

Key learning from complaints during the year

- ▶ Communication was a feature in about half of the complaints. Sometimes this related to complainants feeling under stress, or having misunderstood or forgotten information. When this happened, projects identified learning around the need to regularly remind people, offer clear information and check service users' understanding of what the service offers. Sometimes complaints offered insights into the way individuals perceived work with them as being carried out, which was useful for further work.
- ▶ Two complaints involved young people posting negative comments about others on Facebook, and there were a number of issues during the year regarding social networking postings that were not complaints as such, but which required action. We have learned that, where this occurs, we need to act quickly to minimise distress and risk, given the fast pace of social networking communication.



Action for 2011/12

We will ensure managers are aware of the possible implications for complaints of social networking, possible risks, and the need to take swift action. We will ensure our systems reflect this, and identify clear organisational responsibility for dealing with complaints made through social networking

- ▶ In some of our complaint investigations, delays were caused by problems in locating relevant information, the need to access the computer accounts of staff who had left, and the challenge of screening large quantities of computerised data requiring secure analysis systems. Learning from such issues is included in the new complaint investigation terms of reference.



Action for 2011/12

We will put protocols in place for the timely and secure retrieval of electronic information so that investigations are not unduly delayed

- ▶ Service users' rights regarding their information was a strong theme in 2010/11, as in the previous year, with people seeking to access their information and sometimes to challenge the recording.

Target for last year

We will introduce and implement a revised recording and record keeping policy and procedures which highlights service users' rights



How we addressed the target

The revised policy was implemented and has been useful in ensuring that clear and timely responses are provided by managers.

Other examples of learning included:

- ▶ care must be taken when information is formally shared with other agencies; in some contexts, it was agreed this should only be done in writing
- ▶ all volunteers are to be properly recruited and fully inducted, with a clear briefing on their role and responsibilities, even if they already work for Action for Children in a paid capacity
- ▶ when young people enter residential accommodation they are given clear information about whether or not they may be asked, or required, to change rooms during their stay
- ▶ in children's centres, parents/carers are invited to participate in planning for outings and the project records how this has been done
- ▶ increasingly, disabled children use our children's centres alongside their non-disabled peers. For outings and activities, individual risk assessments are agreed with the parents/carers of any child who may need additional support, with regard to each planned outing

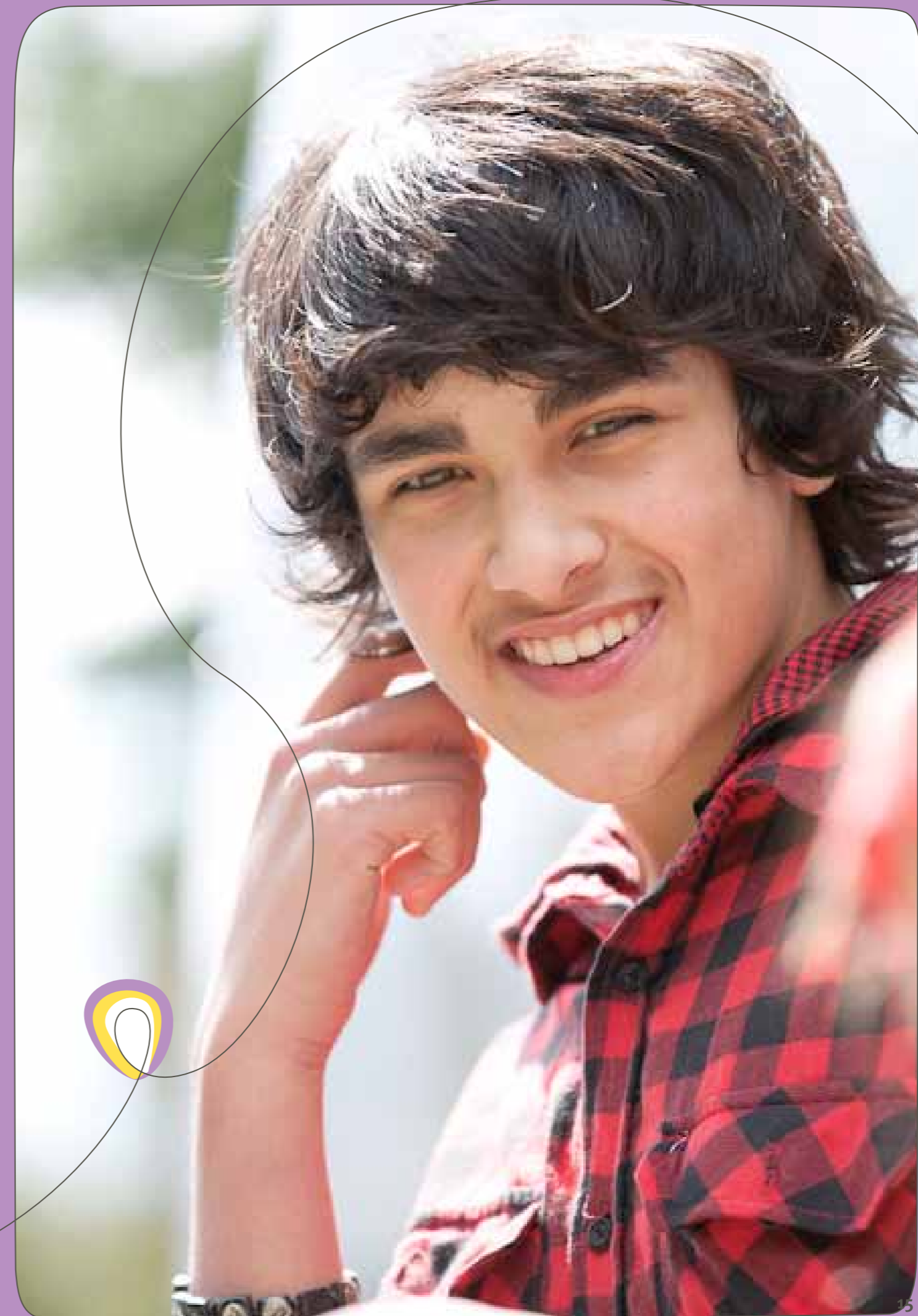
- ▶ it can be especially difficult for adoption applicants to feel able to raise concerns as they may be anxious about their application and perceive that a complaint might negatively affect their application. These projects need to be extra vigilant to make sure applicants can contact managers both internal and external to the project if they have concerns, and to ensure that applicants know that complaints are welcome and will not, in themselves, negatively impact on an application

- ▶ where there is a major review of services affecting projects and job roles, the impact on staff is considered and monitored to ensure the quality or service delivery remains high
- ▶ where there is known to be friction between members of a staff team, the quality of the service delivered is monitored to ensure it is not negatively affected

- ▶ staff and volunteers who live near the project where they work must be clear about maintaining professional boundaries with people in the community

Policy development following learning from complaints included:

- ▶ following an investigation into a serious complaint the previous year, our trips and activities policy was fully revised to ensure that young people stay safe and healthy while having fun and experiencing a sense of adventure and excitement from participating in activities and new experiences. This includes planning and review, record keeping during trips, how emergencies are dealt with and how parents/carers are informed of any changes to plans
- ▶ following an investigation regarding the savings of a young adult in foster care, a new policy for foster carers on pocket money and savings has been developed to ensure that young people's money is looked after safely and accounted for
- ▶ a policy on reputational risk management is being developed to ensure we respond quickly and at the right level to issues that might affect Action for Children's reputation, including cases where investigation will be required



7. Learning from complaints made about Action for Children's fundraising activities

Action for Children's fundraising function reports on complaints in the calendar year, in keeping with the agency which regulates charitable fundraising, the Fundraising Standards Board (FRSB). We agree to adhere to the FRSB's codes and a promise that commits us to treating the public with respect, fairness, honesty and clarity in all our fundraising activities. This includes having an independent, robust and transparent complaints process. The FRSB sets and monitors categories of complaint, and works with members and with the Institute of Fundraising to address the areas identified and improve the public's and supporters' experience of charities.

During 2010 a new data care team was set up. Its responsibilities include handling any issues from supporters and the public about our fundraising activities. The team handled 92 complaints, compared with 162 in the previous year (see the breakdown below). The most noticeable trend has been a fall in the number of complaints about door-to-door fundraising, compared to 73 complaints last year, due to a change in emphasis on fundraising activities.

Examples of these types of complaints include:

- ▶ a supporter reported fundraisers behaving inappropriately in the street; an apology was given and the issue was taken up with the agency which supplies the fundraisers
- ▶ a supporter arranged to donate by direct debit, however due to a misunderstanding, the money was taken from his account a month earlier than he expected, leading to an overdraft charge. An apology was given, but unfortunately the supporter decided to withdraw
- ▶ a co-ordinator for home collection boxes complained about receiving the wrong materials and information not being sent promptly enough. Time was taken to update his record to ensure this did not happen again

Activity	Number of complaints
Administration errors	23
Direct mail	25
Direct response – TV	0
Door-to-door fundraising	2
Face-to-face fundraising on the streets	27
Collections	4
House-to-house	9
Regular giving	2
Telephone campaigns	0
Volunteering	0
Total received	92



8. Departments serving internal customers – activities and priorities

This section details customer service activities among our key customer-facing departments during the year, and their current priorities. A key challenge during the year for some of our centrally-based services was the move from London to new offices in Watford, but this was also an opportunity to introduce some service improvements.

Customer support team

This new team was set up during the year to support all departments and handle external contact. A key purpose is to field internal and external calls and enquiries and put people in touch with the right person to speak to within the organisation, or find out the information they are seeking. The team receives a wide variety of queries, including:

- ▶ access to records – helping people to understand the process and access the relevant forms
- ▶ adoption and fostering – providing people with information about the process and putting them in contact with the relevant teams
- ▶ Children's Services – responding to queries about the type of services we offer, finding local projects, and putting potential service users in contact with relevant services or sources of support
- ▶ donor and supporter help – putting people in contact with their regional fundraiser, ordering supporter materials, taking donations or registration fees
- ▶ volunteering and recruitment – helping people find relevant roles and making sure their application forms reach the right people

During its first year the team networked with other teams in the organisation to ensure they have the correct information and access to the right staff to ably respond to all manner of queries. They also handled internal customer service work for departments gathering feedback on internal communications and some key development projects.

A current priority is to put in place a more structured response to all contact made with the team and identifying a software solution to help with this.

Human resources shared service (HRSS)

This service is based in Glasgow and comprises payroll, recruitment and selection of staff and learning and development administration.

HRSS made a number of changes in response to customer feedback during the year:

- ▶ Some staff had found the guidance on salary overpayments was not clear or easily accessible. The guidance was reviewed and revised into one clear, concise, comprehensive document
- ▶ In response to feedback from recruiting managers about the time recruitment sometimes took and the checking requirements needed, this service is now a two-tier recruitment process (for front line and non-front line staff) which enables support staff to start employment subject to checks, helping us compete more effectively with non-social care organisations for staff.
- ▶ Some project managers found it difficult to release staff for learning events: some struggled when more than one or two staff were required to undertake the same training, or when planning rotas and unexpected circumstances arise which affected planned learning and development. We re-designed the learning needs analysis process and subsequent event booking so managers can view the whole calendar and book staff onto courses that suit them, and can change bookings up to a month before a course. The pilot of this approach has been very positively received.

In 2011/12 HRSS will:

- ▶ continue to drive down the time to recruit
- ▶ review methods of gathering quality of service information and extend this across all business transactions

Finance

A new telephone system with advanced features including call data capture has enabled Finance to:

- ▶ ensure calls are answered within a specific time period
- ▶ monitor in detail the level and time spent on incoming calls and direct resources accordingly
- ▶ provide messages to external internal callers waiting, to prevent customers being on hold for long periods

The department continued to streamline its processes and procedures relating to forms and new and existing employees requiring access to finance systems. This has resulted in a reduced set up time, so users are operational on these systems in a shorter and more defined period.

During 2011/12 Finance will upgrade its Remedy customer tracking and incident resolution system. Advanced features in the upgraded system will ensure customers receive a swifter and more efficient resolution.

Information systems (IS) services

The IS customer services team finalised their project activity processes in 2010/11. This makes it easier for customers to understand what happens when a project opens, moves or closes and equipment needs to be installed, changed or returned. A customer satisfaction survey was introduced and satisfaction climbed to show a consistent satisfaction rate of 90 per cent on all calls dealt with by the IS service desk.

In 2011/12 the training team will launch a new service to assist with service user computing by providing a guide on how to set up service user accounts and tools such as free anti-virus software and parental controls. The team will support all areas of the organisation in any initiatives that involve procuring or upgrading software and will continue to support staff in getting the best out of our computers and software. We will be launching the Managers Working IT Out guide, to complement the existing Working IT Out guide currently available via the intranet.

Occupier services

The department now uses facilities management services supplied by Mitie FM across the UK.

Customer feedback is sought from one job in every five, though sometimes feedback has been difficult to obtain. This will be looked into during 2011/12. The department continues to listen to customers' issues and needs, and variations have been incorporated in the questions asked from the feedback list.

The priority for 2011/12 is to look at retendering the whole of the FM procurement process within property services.

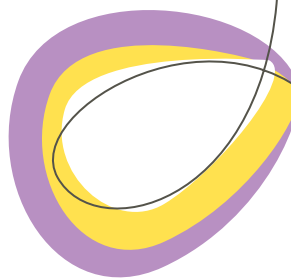
Appendix 1: Summary of actions

These actions have informed the setting of the annual work plan of the customer service and complaints manager and will be monitored and reviewed throughout the year.

1. We will increase the level of positive feedback and numbers of compliments reported about our services. We will increase the ratio of compliments to complaints (from 6:1 in 2010/11) to at least 10:1.
2. We will continue to support divisional inclusion groups in ensuring that customer care and complaints issues are promoted, and collated information is analysed locally, to maximise project compliance in reporting and effective learning from complaints and other feedback.
3. We will use revised, improved methods of collecting customer service data, including compliments and complaints, from our projects, and aim to further increase the percentage of projects reporting.
4. We will ensure project staff are aware of identity-based bullying and the steps that should be taken to address it, via activities in Anti-Bullying Week in November 2011, and through supporting guidance resources.
5. Our monitoring will assure the quality and timeliness of complaint investigations and reviews under the revised procedures, with appropriate quarterly and annual reporting.
6. We will deliver a revised training programme for service managers on the management of customer service and complaints under the revised procedure.
7. We will ensure managers are aware of the possible implications for complaints of social networking, possible risks, and the need to take swift action. We will ensure our systems reflect this, and identify clear organisational responsibility for dealing with complaints that are made through social networking.
8. We will put protocols in place for the timely and secure retrieval of electronic information so that investigations are not unduly delayed.



For further copies of this report, or to discuss the report or any aspect of customer care, compliments or complaints, please contact Dory Dickson, Customer Care and Complaints Manager at dory.dickson@actionforchildren.org.uk or on 01539 823678



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