

**CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL  
CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES**

**CUSTOMER FEEDBACK:**

**COMPLAINTS  
COMPLIMENTS**

**ANNUAL REPORT  
2012/13**

## INTRODUCTION

This report fulfills the statutory duty to monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure and produce an annual report for Children's Services Social Care complaints. The report will be presented to staff, the relevant local authority committee and will be made available on the Council's website.

The report provides statistics for 2012/13 on the number of complaints received including those considered by the Local Government Ombudsman; which customer groups made complaints including analysis of statistical diversity data; complaint outcomes (upheld/not upheld); performance; and learning and improvements resulting from complaints.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Children's Services Complaints Procedure

The effectiveness of the complaints procedure is regularly monitored. Status reports on active cases are reviewed by senior managers to support timely resolution. Quarterly reports are also reviewed by the senior management team on the number of complaints received, outcomes, and learning and service improvements that result from complaints.

The procedure has three stages:

- Stage 1, Local resolution by manager – 10 working days, up to 20 for complex cases.
- Stage 2, Investigation by someone outside of the service area complained about – 25 working days, up to 65 working days.
- Stage 3, Independent Review – panel to be set up in 30 working days
- Alternative Dispute Resolution - offered as an alternative to the complaints procedure. Conciliation meetings, chaired by Customer Relations, are used to resolve complaints without the need for protracted investigations. A complainant can opt back into the complaints process at any time

### Effectiveness of the Complaints Procedure

There were 82 new complaints received for the period 1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013 compared to 48 reported in 2011/12. The services most complained about were the Family Support Services and Leaving Care & Looked After Children services.

75 stage 1 complaints concluded, 45 of them were resolved in 20 working days or less.

Eight conciliation meetings were held remedying complaints without the need for further escalation to stage 2.

Three stage 1 cases progressed to stage 2 investigation. Therefore, whilst some cases took longer than the set timescales, 96% of cases were resolved at local level.

52 of the 75 stage 1 complaints dealt with were either upheld fully or in part. Whilst individual cases had specific remedies put in place consideration was also given to wider service improvements. These are detailed in Section 4.

12 formal compliments were recorded compared to 13 the previous year.

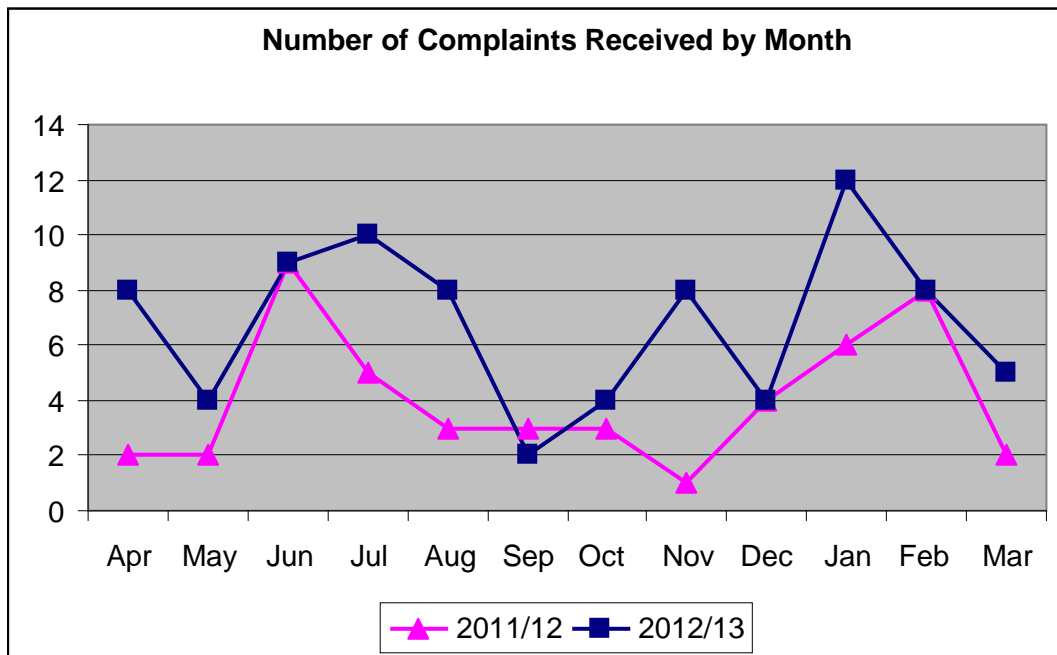
# 1 SUMMARY STATISTICS

## 1.1 Headline Data for Customer Feedback

New Cases Received 2012/13	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Totals
Complaints	21	20	16	25	82
Compliments	3	3	3	3	12

1.1.1 In 2012/13 there were 3287 records of children loaded for Children's Social Care Services. The total number of new complaints was 82 which was an increase on the 48 recorded in the previous year. Last year OFSTED reported that complaints were handled well but that complaint numbers were low. There has been an improved focus on recording complaints and this year. A new Head of Service for the Looked After Children and Leaving Care Service has taken an active lead on the need to record complaints. Due to the previous low numbers it is unclear if the increase year on year is due to continued improved recording, an increase in dissatisfaction, or a combination of both factors.

## 1.2 Spread of Complaints Received



1.2.1 There were a few similarities in the number of monthly complaints received over the last two years. June, December and February had the same number of complaints received.

1.2.2 There was an overall decline from June to September for both years with September being one of the quieter months.

November and January saw the largest difference in numbers received year on year. The declining number of complaints during the first three quarters of 2011/12 was reviewed in January 2012. This led to a focus on improving the recognition and recording of complaints. The result was more complaints were recorded across a wider range of services the following year.

### **1.3 Alternative Dispute Resolution**

- 1.3.1 Customer Relations offered alternative dispute resolution to those who requested independent investigation of their complaints. Conciliation meetings are more likely to rebuild confidence and improve communications between the complainant and service. There are also significant cost savings by remedying cases without the need for externally commissioned investigators.

Eight complainants took up the offer of conciliation and seven cases were remedied. The recipe for success appeared to be accessibility to complaining; good communication; spending time with the complainant; and taking time to listen. This resulted in better outcomes for complainants by resolving complaints without the need for protracted investigations.

### **1.4 Stage 2 & 3 Complaints**

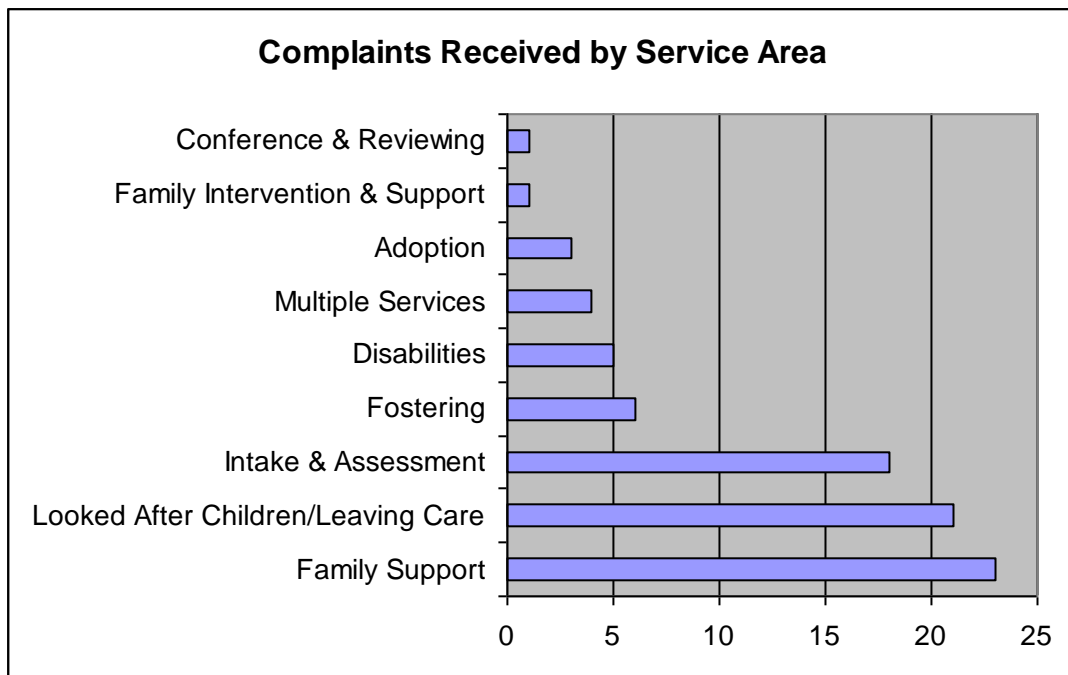
- 1.4.1 There were three cases that progressed to stage 2 in the period. Two complaints related to one case where both the parent and young person raised complaints. 96% of cases were resolved at local level. There were no stage 3 complaints.

### **1.5 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Complaints**

- 1.5.1 The LGO referred two cases to the Council. One related to matters not suitable for the complaints process and was closed. In the other case the LGO was satisfied with the actions taken by the Council to remedy the complaint and took no further action to investigate.

### **1.6 Trends - Services Most Complained About**

- 1.6.1 The area most complained about, receiving 23 of the 82 new complaints plus a further 3 that also crossed other service areas, were the Family Support Services. This is 4 more than last year. The main causes for complaint were alleged: poor handling of risks/concerns; poor communication or information; and dissatisfaction with assessments including accuracy of reports.



1.6.2 The Looked After Children and Leaving Care service saw the most significant rise in complaints compared to last year and the second highest number of complaints by service. The service received 21 new complaints compared to six recorded the previous year. The main causes for complaint were allegations of; lack of/poor support; poor communication including delay; and the professionalism of staff.

Young people raised their own complaints about the Looked After Children and Leaving Care Teams and complained about; lack of/delays in providing support and services; the quality of care/placement; not being consulted; poor communication; and a poor decision.

## 1.7 Outcomes from Concluded Complaints

1.7.1 77 stage 1 complaints and one complaint managed at stage 2 were concluded in the period. Two of the stage 1 complaints were withdrawn. The stage 2 complaint was not upheld.

10 stage 1 cases were upheld. A further 42 were partly upheld. This meant a total of 52 (69%) of stage 1 complaints investigated were deemed to be well founded in full or in part.

1.7.2 Of the 75 initial complaints investigated and concluded:

37 involved the Family Support and Intake and Assessment Services. 25 of the 37 (67%) complaints had an upheld or partly upheld outcome.

19 involved the Looked After and Leaving Care Services and 13 (68%) complaints had an upheld or partly upheld outcome.

1.7.3 Case specific remedies were put in place for individual cases Section 4 details the wider learning and improvements from complaints.

## 1.8 Compliments

1.8.1 12 compliments were recorded. Service users, including young people, thanked workers for help and support. External professionals expressed thanks for child protection training; support and professionalism regarding pupils in a school; high standard of work in a court case.

1.8.2 The spread of compliments was:

- 7 Intake & Assessment Service
- 3 Family Support Services
- 1 Looked After Children & Leaving Care Service
- 1 Family Intervention & Support Team

## 2 PERFORMANCE IN COMPLAINTS HANDLING

2.1 The procedure allows for 10 working days to resolve a stage 1 complaint, up to 20 working days if the complaint is complex.

2.2 Two complaints were withdrawn. 75 stage 1 cases were responded to. 45 out of the 75 (60%) were completed in 20 working days or less:

Timescale for Stage 1 Complaint Response				
Working Days to Respond	0 - 10	11 -20	21 - 30	30+
Number of Cases	21	24	9	21

2.3 Of the 21 cases that took the longest to resolve eight were subject to conciliation meetings. Conciliation meetings are often held following the initial response. Therefore, the overall timescale for resolution is longer than the stage 1 timescale.

Seven further cases were complex where issues were added to the original complaint which required further action after the initial response or more time to deal with the added issues.

Six cases went overdue due to delays by the service.

## 3 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY MONITORING

### 3.1 Monitoring

3.1.1 The purpose of capturing data is to monitor access to the complaints procedure; to ensure services are appropriate for all service user groups; and to check whether any issues relating to discrimination have been raised. Customer Relations record data about the **service user** for complaints. In complaints the service user can also be a parent who is engaged with social care services where the complaint issue relates to their direct involvement with a service. A person may make more than one complaint in the period.

3.1.2 3287 children were in contact with the Children's Social Care Services. 82 new complaints were registered.

3.1.3 There are 'unknowns' in the returns for complaints as data is collected at the first point of contact in a complaint. 73% of cases were received via letters and emails which did not generally contain information on monitoring data. When data is not

available the record in the complaint database is 'unknown'. Unknowns may mask representations from minority groups. Low or no representations from minority groups reduced the opportunity for reassurance that access to complaints about services was provided in an equitable manner.

### 3.2 Accessibility to Complaints

#### 3.2.1 Receipt Method for Complaints

By having a range of contact options for complainants to make their complaints the Council aims to meet the needs of its service users in accessing the complaints procedure. People can make complaints in person; face to face or via telephone (including a direct line to Customer Relations), in writing; via email, letter, or complaint form. A complaint form specifically designed for young people is also available. Young people can have the support of an advocate to make complaints.

82 new complaints were received.

45% by email	18 % by telephone	5 % personal visit
28% by letter	4 % by complaint form	

#### 3.2.2 Young People

Children's Services Social Care delivers services to address the needs of children and young people. The majority of the 82 complaints made about the service were from adults complaining about their interactions and experience or on behalf of children. 10 young people raised complaints in their own right about issues affecting them. The complaints were received in emails (5) and letters (4) and a meeting with a manager and advocate.

### 3.3 Gender

3.3.1 In order to make some broad comparisons data gathered for new complaint cases received in 2012/13 has been considered alongside the provisional data on the gender of people who were referred to children's social care throughout the year.

3.3.2 For complaints we recorded the gender of the child in most cases.

Where a complaint is made by an adult about their own experience of intervention the adult's gender was recorded. This gives us the gender of complainants affected by complaints. Figures do not total 100% due to rounding.

	Male	Female	Not known
Service user affected by complaints	34%	53%	13%
People accessing the service	52%	46%	1%

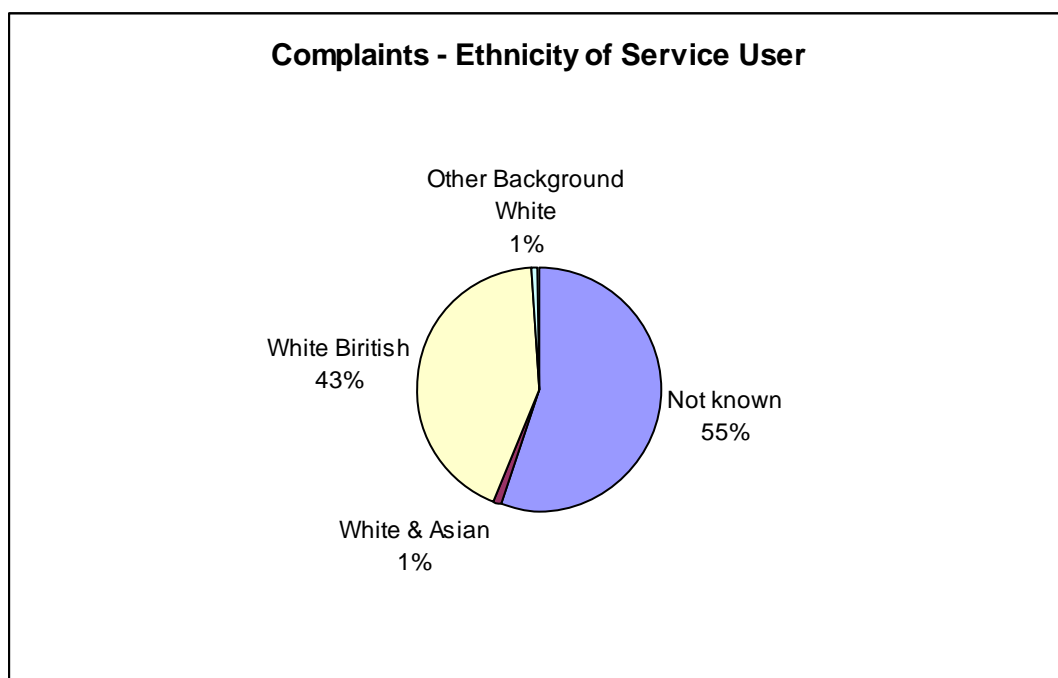
3.3.3 Service users of both genders are represented in the complaints procedure. More females were affected by complaints than males. There were fewer females accessing social care services than males. The adults making the complaints were predominantly female (19). Females generally complained about more aspects of the service in one complaint than males. This repeats the pattern reported last year.

- 3.3.4 The area that received the highest number of stage 1 complaints, Family Support Services, received issues of complaint that affected 13 female service users compared to 11 males. Both genders were affected by similar issues.
- 3.3.5 A complaint relating to a parent's belief that they were not informed of social care involvement as a result of discrimination due to their gender was investigated. The parent had not been kept informed but there was limited evidence to draw any conclusion on whether this was due to discrimination. Complaints about not being kept informed were made by both genders.

There are several methods in place to ensure that Social Workers practice in a non discriminatory manner and this begins within their Social Work training, which is currently at Degree level. All Social Workers are registered with the Health & Care Professions Council. The values of the previous registration body, the General Social Care Council, are still acknowledged and adhered to. The Code of Practice included "Promoting equal opportunities for service users and carers" and "Respecting diversity and different cultures and values".

Within Central Bedfordshire there is a training programme which includes Equality and Diversity training. Social Workers have regular supervision where equality issues are an agenda item. Issues around diversity are discussed in supervision for each case. Any suggestion of discrimination can be picked up by the supervisor.

### 3.4 Ethnicity



- 3.4.1 In over half of new complaints (55%) of the ethnicity of the complainant was recorded as not known. Where information was recorded 43% of service users affected by new complaints were recorded as 'White British'. The issues covered a broad range of complaints. 77% of service users accessing social care services were 'White'.
- 3.4.2 People with a minority ethnic background were also represented in 1% of the complaints. A complaint alleging discrimination by racially motivated abuse was independently investigated and was not upheld. There were no complaints



registered in relation to service users described as 'black' compared to 3% of service users registered with this background.

- 3.4.3 With 55% of cases with 'unknown' ethnicity it is possible that complainants with other ethnic backgrounds were also represented in complaints.
- 3.4.2 The issues raised by service users with minority ethnic backgrounds were also raised by those with the majority ethnic background in complaints.

### **3.5 Age**

- 3.5.1 Of the 82 new Stage 1 complaints;

50 affected people under the age of 18  
14 affected people 19 – 64  
18 cases age unknown

This meant that people of all ages were able to access the complaints procedure either directly or through a representative.

- 3.5.2 The majority of complaints affected children and young people but were made by adults and crossed all services.
- 3.5.3 Ten young people made their own complaints which related to a range of services. The majority related to the quality of, or lack of, support from the service. Young people making their own complaints were offered the support of an advocate. Adults also raised lack of support as a cause for complaint.

### **3.6 Disability**

- 3.6.1 The majority of complaints were recorded as 'not known' in relation to disability.
- 3.6.2 There were five complaints related to children with disabilities services. The issues of complaint from parents of children who had a disability ranged from dissatisfaction with the level of support and care arrangements; conduct of staff; inappropriate sharing of information; handling of an incident. Similar issues were also raised by parents of children without a disability.

## 4 SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS RESULTING FROM CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

Where a service identified a fault from a complaint (upheld/partly upheld) case specific remedies were put in place. However, managers also considered what they could do to improve the service. The service improvements identified are detailed below:

<b>4.1 Family Support Services</b>	
<b>YOU SAID</b>	<b>THE SERVICE DID:</b>
<p>Parents and carers raised concerns about communication:</p> <p>Poor communication with carers on the work being undertaken with children and no feedback was provided to carers afterwards.</p> <p>Purpose of social work visit not made clear.</p> <p>Social workers leaving carers not feeling they had afforded them the time needed during and following visits.</p>	<p>Social workers were reminded of the importance of:</p> <p>Planning and discussing with parents/carers what discussions need to take place and why;</p> <p>Explaining the purpose of visits and social care involvement;</p> <p>Planning enough time to hear the views of parents/carers, and;</p> <p>Planning direct work with children and young people in partnership with their parents and carers.</p>
<p>A parent was not aware that they could raise issues about the social worker with the team manager and did not know about the complaints procedure.</p>	<p>Reviewed at management meeting and agreed that complaint leaflets be given to parents when Core Assessments are updated; following a significant event; and as a minimum yearly.</p>
<p>Concerns raised about missed social worker appointments due to unexpected leave and reports/papers for conference not being provided in a timely manner</p>	<p>Team meetings were used to remind staff to update calendars which details their appointments and allow access to all team members who can then check appointments if a worker is absent. Appointments can then be managed. The aim is to ensure the same issues do not arise in the future.</p> <p>In addition staff were reminded of the importance of ensuring the review child protection conference reports are with parents/carers five days prior to conferences</p>
<b>4.2 Intake and Assessment</b>	
<b>YOU SAID</b>	<b>THE SERVICE DID:</b>
<p>Poor quality of assessment, accuracy and spelling.</p>	<p>Staff were advised of the need to reflect sources of information in assessments, and the need to obtain details of health and wellbeing of parents.</p>
<p>Not providing details of managers when stating wished to complain.</p>	<p>Staff reminded to provide details of management structure when asked. See Section 4.1 re further actions.</p>
<p>Parents complained that requests for access to records were not actioned.</p> <p>In addition concerns raised about a potential breach of data protection</p>	<p>Team reminded to action requests for info and to discuss cases with team manager.</p> <p>The team manager negotiated with the manager of the relevant team to ensure that information be</p>

occurred when information about a referral was given to them over the telephone – this was due to a team not being able to access full case information at the time.	accessible to duty team workers
Social worker making inappropriate judgement of child's 'sexualised' behaviour, over reacting.	Workers attended two training courses around sexualised behaviours. Staff are more equipped to make these judgements following this learning.
A grandparent complained about poor communication to arrange a meeting – information from a text had not been recorded.  Grandparents who played a significant role were not kept informed of plans or that they could communicate with social workers in respect of their grandchild.	Workers were advised to ensure that any text messages sent or received to and from family members are copied onto the children's database as a case note so there is a clear trail of all communication made.  Manager emailed the team to remind them that Grandparents can play an important role in children's lives and their involvement should be considered. Where grandparents are involved workers are to inform grandparents if their grandchild is being transferred to another team or if the case is closing.

#### 4.3 Adoption (Shared Service with Bedford Borough Council)

YOU SAID	THE SERVICE DID:
Handling of a request by foster carers to be considered as permanent carers was poor. Areas of practice and formal communication caused unnecessary distress.	Matches will not in future be taken to panel if there is a possibility that any other match should be considered. On that basis, and because decision making is not simply a rubber stamping exercise, arrangements for introductions and timescales for placement will not in future be made until the Agency Decision Maker has made a decision, having read the Panel recommendations. The service is to reinforce to adopters the difference between the stages of panel recommendation and Agency Decision so that they know the final decision may not be the same as the panel recommendation.

#### 4.4 Looked After Children & Leaving Care Services

YOU SAID	THE SERVICE DID:
Delay in receiving review minutes.	The service has reviewed the process to reduce delays and ensure greater efficiency. A new electronic data recording system is in place which includes monitoring timescales for completion. An agreed escalation process has been introduced for cases where problems arise.
Concerns about contact plans. Contact Services were mis-communicating contact arrangements so parents and foster carers were given different dates/times.  Contact supervisors given the wrong times for the contact.  Contact arrangements fell down in worker's absence.	Meetings took place between the commissioning service and provider for contact sessions to explore issues. Managers and providers are meeting monthly to review this matter.

<b>4.5 Fostering</b>	
Preparation and communication regarding a young person's return to carers was not managed. Carers left in a situation for which they were not completely prepared.	The Team Manager confirmed <i>'In order to improve our Service we have reminded staff to always agree and confirm the arrangements for the placement of a young person with a foster carer.'</i>
Concerns raised by potential foster parents regarding the assessment process including missed social worker appointments and poor customer care.	<p>Actions put in place: Electronic notes of assessment visits give more detail about the areas discussed and any issues that arise.</p> <p>Where a fostering assessment is being undertaken the social worker and foster carers will draw up a written agreement outlining what will happen during the assessment, including expectations and agreements, including timekeeping, cancellations, recording, and how to raise concerns.</p>
<b>4.6 Children with Disabilities Services</b>	
Poor arrangements for care on return from hospital	<p>Work has been undertaken to review the commissioning arrangements and to consider the options for resolving this type of situation.</p> <p>The commissioning arrangements for children with disabilities are being taken forward as part of the work required for the SEN /Disability reforms in the Children and Families Bill. There is a working group which includes multi agency reps and parents who are taking forward changes that are required within the most radical national reforms to SE/Disability in over 30 years.</p> <p>Parent representatives have been nominated to work with the service in 13/14 on the redesign of services. Major changes need to be implemented from Sept 2014 but we are taking a staged approach to that in CBC.</p>