



# Report to Cabinet

AGENDA ITEM [Number]

**Committee:** Adult Services

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**Title:** Complaints to Services

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## Introduction and summary

This report details the findings of the Adult Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee's evaluation of complaints to services within its remit. The assessment was conducted by a working group of the Committee consisting Cllrs Bruce Allen, Hugh Wilson, Brenda Jennings, Betty Lay and Frank Sweatman. During September/October 2005 the working group met with officers from the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, the Libraries Service, Adult Learning, Adult Social Care and the County Museum Service.

Social care services have a statutory requirement to report annually to Councillors on complaints to services. In the past, this report has been presented to the Personal Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC). However, in April 2005 the Committees were restructured, with Children's Social Care now under the remit of the Children's OSC, and Adult Social Care within the Adult Services OSC. The presentation of this report to the Adult Services OSC presented an opportunity for the members to look wider at all the services within its remit, and as a result, the Working Group on Complaints was appointed.

An understanding of complaints to services can provide a helpful insight in understanding issues of concern to service users. The purpose of this work was not just to understand the nature of complaints received, but to also determine any trends and to identify any issues warranting further investigation by the Committee.

## Recommendations

The Adult Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee seeks the Cabinet's recommendation that in future:

- 1 **The annual reports regarding complaints to social care services are presented to the Adult Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of their performance monitoring role.**
- 2 **Information to OSCs also includes an analysis of first level complaints to contracted out services through the commissioners of services in order to provide members with a complete overview of social care complaints.**

In addition, as a result of this work, the Committee has included items on its future work programme to consider the Customer First Contact Centre and how it will maintain customer service to services such as libraries and adult learning services, and to investigate the reasons for low complaints to services from the Asian community.

## **Findings**

Members learned that although complaints are dealt with in slightly different ways by the different services, each had a clear complaints procedure. All services have a number of stages to the complaints process, but reported that the vast majority of complaints were successfully resolved at the first level, either by frontline staff or managers.

Members found no significant trends in complaints relating to specific services requiring further investigation at this time. However, there were a number of issues which members believe warrant further consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and which could inform the Committee's work programme for 2005/6.

In recording complaints, both libraries and adult social care services use the County Council's Respond IT system but the system is not universal. Whilst the individual systems currently work well, it was recognised that these differences may need to be addressed when the handling of complaints is transferred by the Customer First Contact Centre in 2006.

Members heard that different services also have different customer service standards. Both the Libraries & Heritage Service and Adult Learning Service have particular standards around customer service and training which are more stringent than the current Buckinghamshire County Council standards. This is related to the quality marks held by these services. The Working Group recognises the concern of services in ensuring standards are maintained when customer services are transferred to the Contact Centre.

Complaints to Adult Social Care services from the Asian community in Buckinghamshire are proportionally low, members were told. The reasons for this are unclear but the Complaints Officer will be working with the Inclusions Officer when in post to try to raise the level of awareness in this community in future.

The Working Group was told that the report on complaints to Children's Social Care services this year was presented to the Standards Committee. Members consider that the content of both social care reports is important for both Overview and Scrutiny Committees with social care remits. The Working Group would in future like to see complaints reports included as part of the OSC's monitoring of service performance.

Members understand that the adult social care report contains first stage complaints received by services provided in-house, but that those made about services contracted out are not included. Such complaints are dealt with by the agency concerned and monitored as part of the commissioning of services. The Working Group considers that the inclusion of such data into the main report would provide members with a better overview of complaints to services.

## **Background Papers**

This report summarises information gathered through service meetings by members of the Working Group. All meeting notes are available for more detailed information, as follows:

Heritage Service, Roger Bettridge, 19 September 05  
County Museum Service, Sarah Gray, 20 September 05  
Adult Learning Service, Jane Burke, 23 September 05  
Adult Social Care Services, Daniele Manktelow, 28 September 05  
Libraries Service, Peter Mussett, 3 October 05

In addition, some services have provided additional supporting papers:

ASC Complaints Annual Report 2005  
Heritage Service Overview  
Museum Visitors 2004/5  
Museums Acquisitions and Disposals Policy

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