

# Complaints Annual Report 2011 - 2012

## Foreword

This is the fifth Complaints Annual Report for the South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust covering the year 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 which I am presenting as the Director with responsibility for complaints.

The Trust has established a Lessons Learnt Sub Committee, as part of the Governance and Risk Management infrastructure. The role of this committee is to ensure that lessons learnt have been put into practice on an organisational wide basis.

The overall number of complaints received has risen to 820 this year. Whilst we endeavour to ensure that our services fully meet the expectations of our patients and clients at all times, we wish to know when they do not and in these circumstances we welcome complaints to enable the Trust to take the appropriate remedial action to prevent a reoccurrence.

I would like to express my gratitude to Trust staff for their continued dedication to the resolution of complaints and for their sensitive handling of issues that are important to complainants.

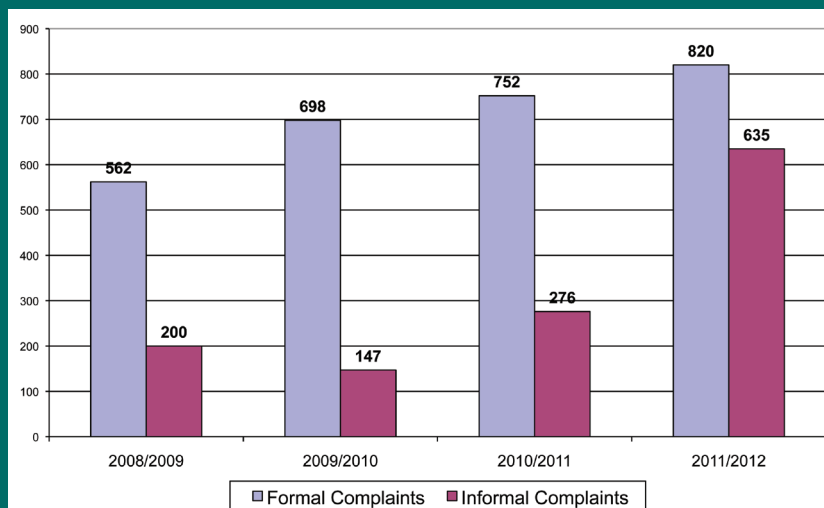
Eamonn Molloy

Director of Human Resources & Corporate Affairs



## Complaints this year

During the past year (2011-2012), the Trust received a total of **820** formal complaints. The chart below shows the number of formal and informal complaints received over the past year in comparison with the 3 preceding years.



There has been a **9%** increase in formal complaints in the past year. However, the number of complaints continues to be low, considering the large geographical area the Trust covers and the volume of contacts Trust staff have with patients and clients.

The Trust:-

- Provides services from the Ulster, Lagan Valley, Downe, Newtownards, and Bangor Hospitals
- Applies 60% of resources to community based services, supporting people in their homes
- Serves a population of 440,000
- Has approximately 11,500 staff
- Provides over 250 different health and social care services.

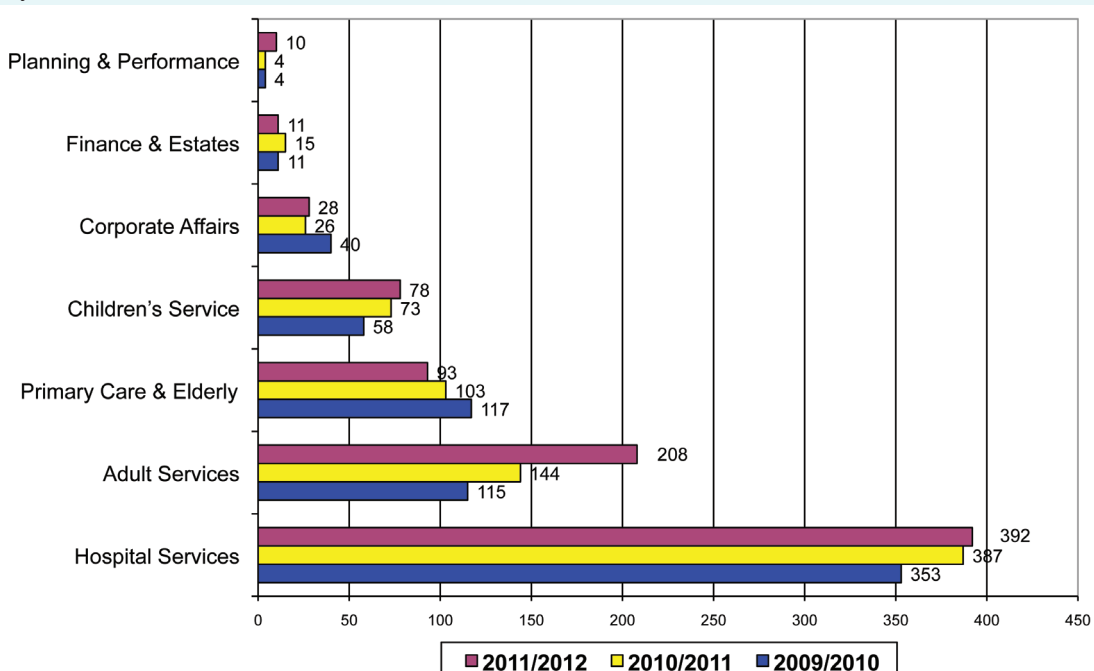
## What people complained about

The chart below shows the number of formal complaints by subject for the past year (2011/2012) in comparison to the previous year (2010/2011). The figures are per issue of complaint, as complaints can have more than one issue each. For 2011/2012 we had complaints made by 820 complainants and these raised 1189 issues, compared to 2010/2011 figures of 752 complainants and 1185 issues.

The top three subjects of complaint this year again were about quality of care, communication and staff attitudes. This is similar across all the Health & Social Care Trusts. It is encouraging to see a reduction in complaints about quality of care and staff attitude in comparison with the previous year.

Subjects	2010/2011		2011/2012	
Treatment & Care, Quality	299	25.2%	247	20.8%
Staff Attitude/Behaviour	182	15.4%	163	13.7%
Communication/Information to Patients	155	13.1%	159	13.4%
Prison Healthcare	90	7.6%	176	14.8%
Appointments, Delay/Cancel (Outpatients)	59	5.0%	44	3.7%
Clinical Diagnosis	50	4.2%	33	2.8%
Waiting Times, A&E Departments	16	1.4%	30	2.5%
Policy/Commercial Decisions	23	1.9%	28	2.4%
Environment	18	1.5%	26	2.2%
Admission into Hospital, Delay/Cancel	14	1.2%	22	1.9%
Patients' Property/Expenses/Finance	23	1.9%	20	1.7%
Access to Premises	21	1.8%	20	1.7%
Treatment & Care, Quantity	15	1.3%	20	1.7%
Aids/Adaptations/Appliances	18	1.5%	19	1.6%
Records/Records Keeping	21	1.8%	18	1.5%
Discharge/Transfer Arrangements	20	1.7%	17	1.4%
Infection Control	14	1.2%	16	1.3%
Confidentiality	18	1.5%	13	1.1%
Hotel/Support/Security Services	5	0.4%	11	0.9%
Waiting Lists, Community Services	5	0.4%	11	0.9%
Professional Assessment of Need	13	1.1%	10	0.8%
Waiting Times, Outpatient Departments	13	1.1%	10	0.8%
Patients' Privacy/Dignity	9	0.8%	9	0.8%
Theatre/Operation/Procedure, Delay/Cancel	18	1.5%	6	0.5%
Contracted Regulated Establishments/Agencies	2	0.1%	6	0.5%
Other	64	5.4%	55	4.6%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1185</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1189</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Compliments</b>	<b>3,966</b>		<b>6,838</b>	

This graph below shows the breakdown by directorates of formal complaints for 2011/2012 in comparison to the previous two years.



## Response Times

The majority of complaints which we received were acknowledged within 2 working days. We strive to investigate and respond to complaints within the target of 20 working days. However, due to the complexity of some complaints, this is not always possible.

In the past year, **2011/2012**, **46%** of complaints were responded to within the timescale. This is a drop from the previous year (**52%**). Response times will continue to be closely monitored during the forthcoming year to ensure complainants are provided with timely responses.

## If people are dissatisfied

Sometimes people are not always happy with the outcome of the investigation into their complaint.

We would encourage people to let us know if they are unhappy, and we consider other options to attempt to resolve their concerns. We routinely offer to meet complainants, as this allows the opportunity for more detailed discussions, on a face-to-face basis.

In the last year **12%** of complainants contacted us to tell us they were not entirely satisfied.

## Ombudsman

For those people who remained dissatisfied, they may approach the NI Commissioner for Complaints (Ombudsman) directly.

In **2011/2012**, there were **10** complainants who approached the Ombudsman for investigation of their complaint. Of these, 1 received an apology and consolatory payment, 1 was referred back to Trust, 5 were either not upheld or not taken on, and 3 are ongoing.

## Prison Healthcare

The South Eastern Trust is responsible for Prison Healthcare in Northern Ireland. All complaints relating to health care in prisons or young offenders' centre are dealt with through the Trust's complaints process.

In **2011/2012** there have been **507** informal complaints, ie. dealt with by healthcare staff. **364 (72%)** of these were resolved at that stage. However, **143 (28%)** progressed to formal complaints. The majority were able to be resolved at that point except **1** who asked the Ombudsman to investigate the complaint; this was not upheld.

## Complaints Procedure - Children Order

Complaints by, or on behalf of, children about services provided to them under Part IV of the Children (NI) Order 1995, are dealt with under a separate procedure – the Children Order Representations & Complaints Procedure.

Over the year, there were **37** complaints dealt with under this procedure and these were all resolved at the informal 'problem-solving' stage.

## Compliments

While we accept that sometimes things go wrong, thousands of letters of appreciation and expressions of thanks are received to acknowledge the excellent services provided. Our staff certainly appreciate knowing when things go well and in **2011/2012** the Trust received **6838** formal compliments.

## Monitoring

During this year the Trust's Lessons Learnt Sub Committee, which reports to the Corporate Control Committee, chaired by the Chief Executive, met on a quarterly basis.

The role of the sub committee is to ensure that the Trust has in place the necessary controls to manage its risk in relation to complaints, incidents and litigation claims. Its role is also to ensure that the lessons learnt have been put into practice on an organisational wide basis.

## Lessons Learnt / Improvements from Complaints

We welcome complaints and the opportunities they provide us with to learn lessons and improve our services. An action plan is completed, where appropriate, for complaints. We use this information to feed back to patients and staff on the changes and improvements made.

Complaints are discussed with the staff concerned and often the issues are brought to staff meetings for discussion as to how services can be improved. A number of improvements have been put in place over the year 2011/2012 following complaints. Here are some examples in some departments:

### Hospital Services:

- Issues were raised about communication with a family after the loss of their loved one. A follow up service with patients and relatives in Intensive Care is being set up
- A complaint highlighted the need for written information for women where there is a possibility of a miscarriage and how to deal with it. A leaflet is being developed to provide women in this situation with appropriate information
- Complaints that raise issues about medical practice, assessment or diagnosis, are fed back to the doctor for individual reflection and the learning is also shared with wider medical team for learning and training
- Following a complaint about communication with a family prior to the death of their loved one, the Last Office Policy was amended and has been issued. It has also been presented to individual wards to highlight staff responsibilities.
- When 2 complaints highlighted the difficulty for users with hearing difficulties, to make an appointment, a new email address was created for communication
- When the delay in medical staff pronouncing death was raised, senior nursing staff who work in Hospital at Night, were trained in certifying death.

### Adult Services:

- A prisoner complaint revealed there had been delayed transfer due to wait for mental health assessment. Systems have now been altered to allow speedier transfer where appropriate in such cases.

### Primary Care & Elderly Services:

- When a complaint showed difficulties a family experienced with care processes following discharge, systems were changed to ensure care management alignment so that clients and their families will know the key contact person. Information packs are now also handed to all families / clients with details of financial processes for clients going into Care Homes from hospital. This also contains information around the social work process.

### Children's Services:

- Following a complaint highlighting that confidential information had been sent to the wrong address, it was agreed that social work staff complete invitation lists for professional meetings on every occasion to ensure accuracy of details. Also sensitive information to be hand delivered or sent via recorded delivery
- Following representation about the condition of the facilities for a breast-feeding group, the Trust met a group of service users and agreed a number of improvements to the environment such as blinds replaced, carpets cleaned, alternative seating sourced, and changing mats purchased.