

**WESTERN HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE TRUST**

# COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

## Introduction:

The Complaints Annual Report reviews the complaints received by the Western Health and Social Care Trust for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.

The Trust welcomes and actively encourages complaints and compliments about our services. From time to time individuals or families may feel dissatisfied with some aspect of their dealings with the Trust and when this happens it is important that the issue is dealt with as quickly as possible. We recognise that everyone has a right to make a complaint and we can learn valuable lessons from them – a complaint may well improve things for others.

Complaints provide us with lessons to learn to improve our services. Whilst we aim to give the best service to all our patients and service users, we wish to know when things do not go well so that we can take the appropriate remedial action to prevent it happening again.

We also like to know when users have been impressed or pleased with our service. We can use these examples to share best practice amongst our staff. In addition, compliments can help boost morale.

## Complaints

The Trust provides a wide range of different health and social care services from a number of hospitals and community facilities as well as providing services to people in their own homes. It serves a population of 300,000, 16% of Northern Ireland, in a catchment area of over 4,842km<sup>2</sup> and has approximately 12,500 staff.

The number of complaints continues to be low considering the number of contacts Trust staff have with patients and service users. Whilst there were 444 formal complaints received, there were:

- 52,892 admissions to hospital, 32,966 day cases and 125,177 new/unplanned attendances at Emergency Departments
- 178,305 contacts with District Nurses and within Adult Mental Health Daycare there were 72,988 attendances

## Facts & Figures 2018/19

444 formal complaints were received by the Trust, down 4% from the previous year

62% of the formal complaints received were acknowledged within 2 working days\*

21% of the formal complaints received were responded to within 20 working days\*

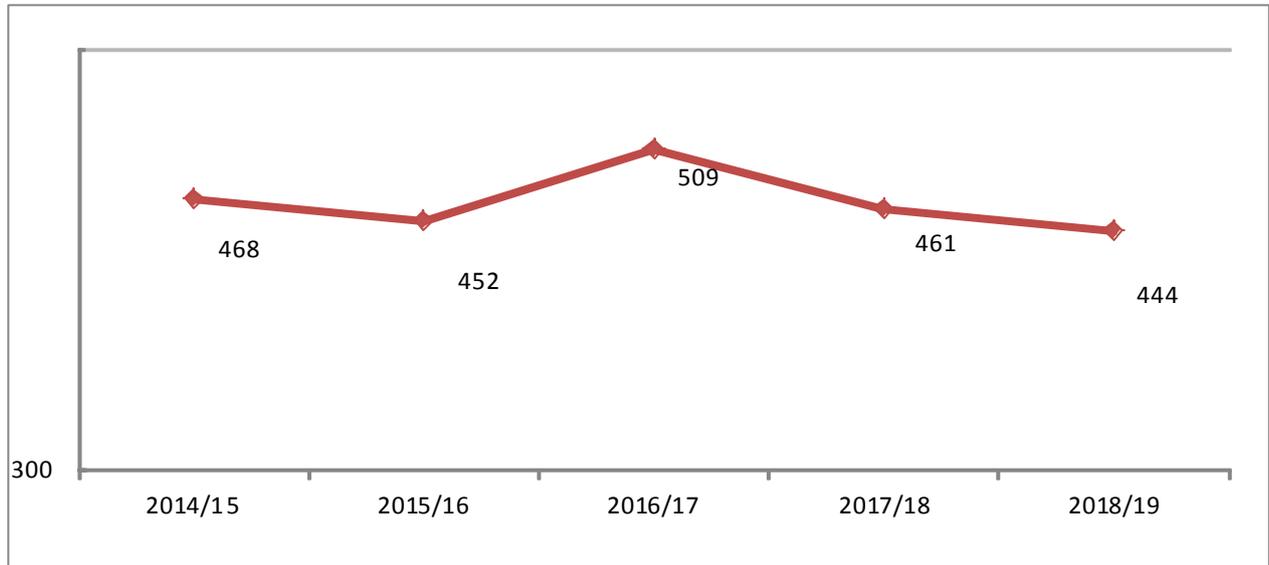
5,636 written compliments (e.g. by card, letter or email) were received during 2018/19 compared to 6,287 in 2017/18.

\* Reduced performance due to staff turnover and changes to work practices.

## Complaints this year:

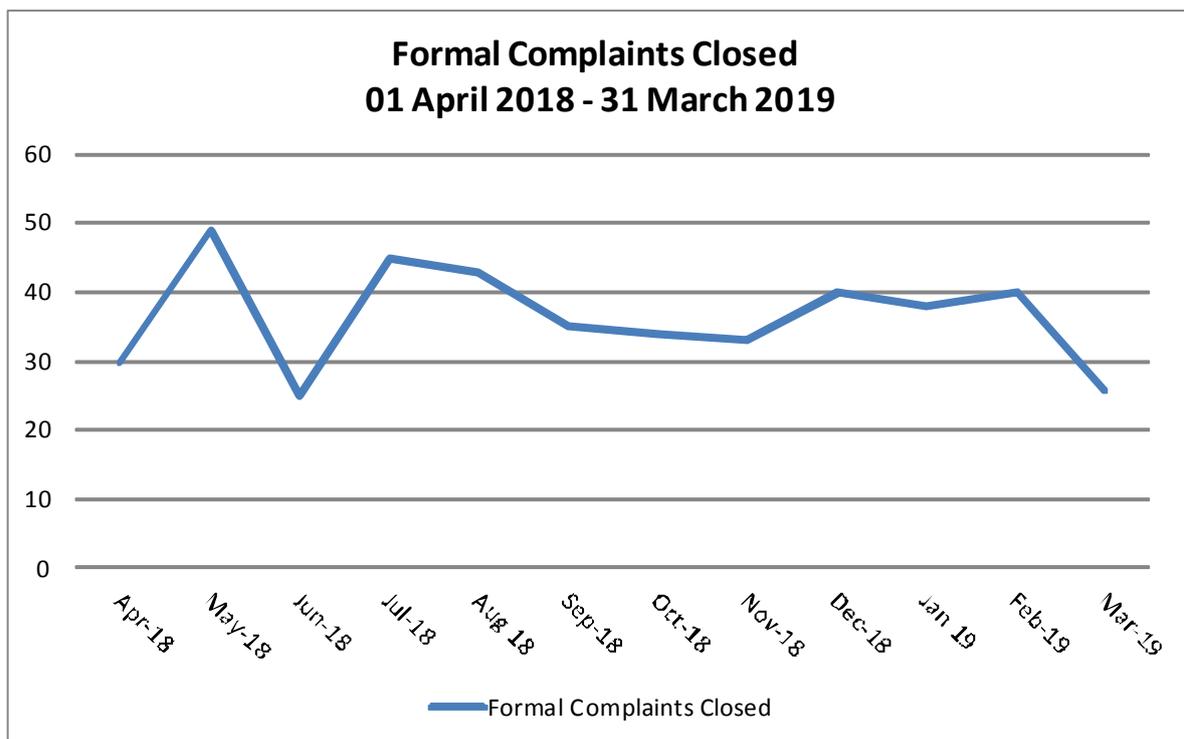
During 2018/2019 a total of 444 formal complaints including 1 Children Order Complaint were received by the Trust. This compares with 461 formal complaints received during the previous financial year of 2017/2018.

The continued awareness training provided to staff on the Health & Social Care Complaints Procedure highlights the emphasis around enhanced local resolution, encouraging staff to resolve complaints at a local level.



## Complaints Resolved during 2018/19:

During the 2018/19 year a total of 438 formal complaints were resolved. If the complainant was dissatisfied with the Trust's response a complaint can be re-opened. The following graph provides a breakdown by month.



## 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 was 1 Children’s Order complaint resolved by the service at the informal “problem solving” stage.

## Informal Complaints:

There are numerous concerns raised by patients, service users and/or their families or next of kin which are resolved at the point of contact with the services. Figures of these informal complaints are not captured centrally. It is acknowledged that informal complaints are under reported and consideration is being given to developing a mechanism/system for more accurate recording.

## Compliments:

Whilst the Trust recognises that sometimes things go wrong, each year it receives thousands of letters and emails of appreciation and expressions of thanks to acknowledge the excellent services provided. In 2018/19 the Trust received 5,636 compliments!

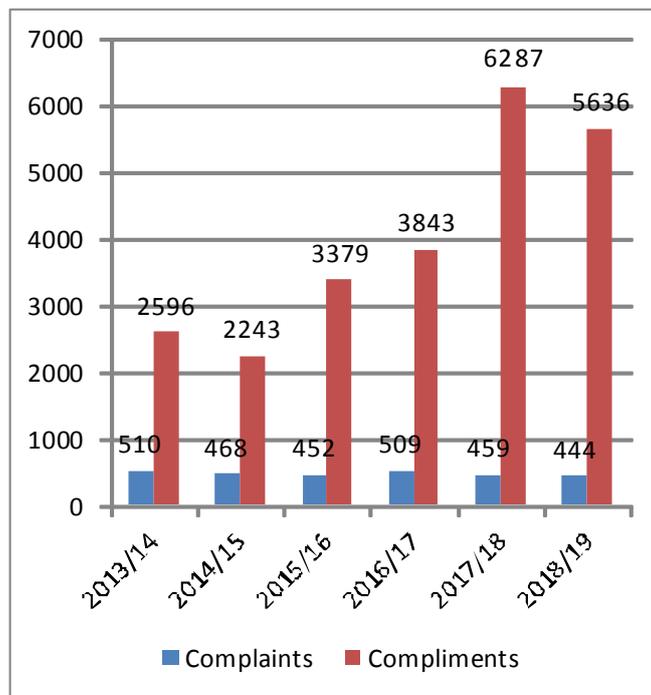
We are proud of our staff and ensure that positive feed back is shared and celebrated. Our staff certainly appreciate feedback from their patients and service users, and knowing when things go well.

In line with regional requirements, the Trust has been recording compliments on an electronic online system since February 2019. This new system will provide greater accuracy and consistency in relation to the compliments received in writing and provide statistics on our successes. The system has been designed to be easily located on the Trust’s intranet site. It is fast, user friendly and will be able to provide more information on the reasons why people have complimented a service or staff member. In the coming year we will be encouraging staff to use this system.

“I was treated with such kindness and care, from every single staff member I came in contact with, from the A&E team to the ward staff, all were incredible and I can not say enough good things about my treatment.”

“Thank you for implementing the Teach program, I do hope that the great work you are doing is allowed to continue within the Trust and that you are afforded all the resources that you need to reach as many adults and carers .”

“I have only praise for all the staff, thank you so much, a service to be very proud of. All thanks to the kind open approach and dedication of the staff members.”

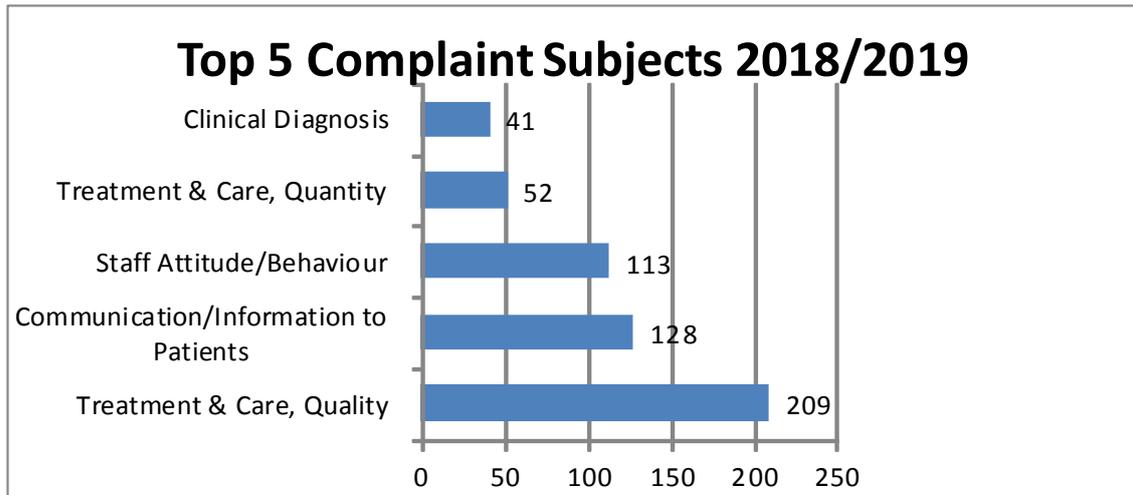


I want to convey my gratitude to all those who looked after me during my diagnosis and surgery. The nursing staff were absolutely amazing, treating me with courtesy and respect, putting me at ease and nothing was too much trouble. All staff made this difficult time somewhat easier. It is important for the Trust to know about the dedication of their staff.”

“Can we extend out thanks to the Trust for providing such an excellent service to our community. Our mother sadly passed away but we wanted to acknowledge the dedication and professionalism of all the staff who cared for her.”

## Complaints by Subject—Top 5

The top 5 categories of complaints received during 2018/19 are set out below:



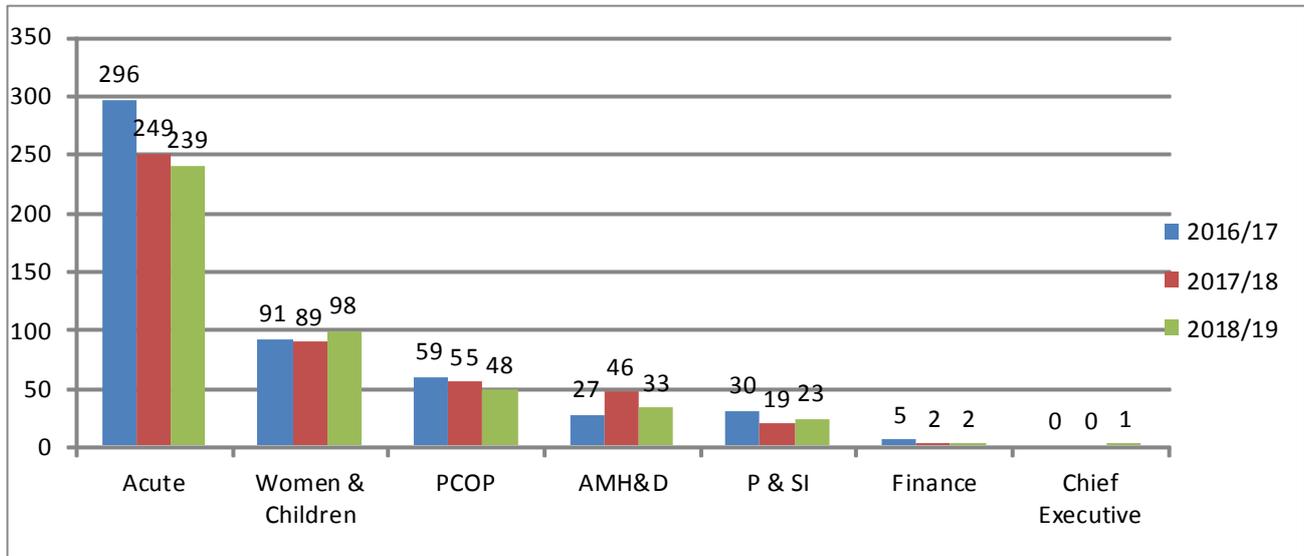
## What people complained about

The chart below shows ALL the complaints by subject for the past year (2018/19). The figures provide a breakdown of issues complained about, as a complaint can raise more than one issue. \*For 2018/19, 444 complaints were received which raised 689 issues, compared with 2017/18 where there were 461 complaints and 740 issues.

	2018/19	2017/18
<b>Treatment &amp; Care, Quality</b>	209	242
<b>Communication/Information to Patients</b>	128	144
<b>Staff Attitude/Behaviour</b>	113	107
<b>Treatment &amp; Care, Quantity</b>	52	34
<b>Clinical Diagnosis</b>	41	31
<b>Appointments, Delay/Cancellation (Outpatient)</b>	26	28
<b>Professional Assessment of Need</b>	17	23
<b>Other</b>	14	21
<b>Discharge/Transfer Arrangements</b>	12	11
<b>Patients' Privacy/Dignity</b>	10	8
<b>Admission into Hospital, Delay/Cancellation (Inpatients)</b>	9	49
<b>Waiting Times, Accident &amp; Emergency</b>	9	3
<b>Confidentiality</b>	8	5
<b>Waiting Times, Outpatient Departments</b>	8	14
<b>Records/Records Keeping</b>	7	3
<b>Environmental</b>	6	4
<b>Aids/Adaptations/Appliances</b>	5	3
<b>Patient's Property/Expenses/Finance</b>	5	2
<b>Access to Premises</b>	2	1
<b>Hotel/Support/Security Services</b>	2	0
<b>Other Contracted Services</b>	2	3
<b>Children Order Complaints</b>	1	2
<b>Infection Control</b>	1	2
<b>Patient's Status/Discrimination</b>	1	0
<b>Waiting Times, Community Services</b>	1	0
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>689</b>	<b>740</b>

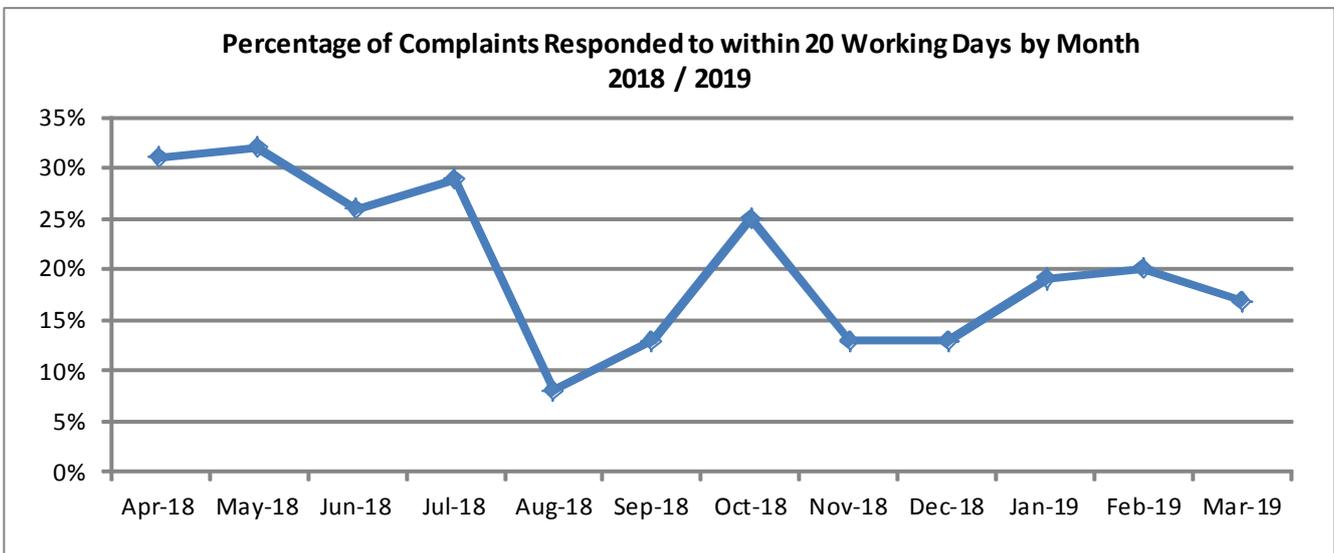
## Complaints received by Directorate

This graph shows the breakdown by directorates of formal complaints received during 2018/19 in comparison to the previous 2 years.



## Response time to complaints

Over the year 62% of complaints were acknowledged within the target of 2 working days and 21% of complaints were responded to within the target of 20 working days. The Trust continues to monitor timescales and promotes the need to provide timely responses. However our emphasis is on the quality of responses and ensuring resolution for the complainants, relevant to the issues raised.



The timeliness of response times to formal complaints has been an ongoing concern throughout the year. The delays can be attributed to receipt of a number of complex complaints – involving in many cases – more than one service area, significant staff changes in the Complaints Department and the changes to the process for development of responses which is now at service level by the Investigating Lead. The rationale for the change was to encourage ownership, improve accuracy of response and promote learning from the complaint.

A quality improvement project commenced in the Acute Directorate at Altnagelvin Hospital in September 2019 to identify and test ways to improve response times. Reports highlighting the number of working days that complaints are open are provided on a monthly basis to all Directors and Assistant Directors to help focus on completion of overdue responses.

## If people are dissatisfied

Sometimes people are not happy with the outcome of the investigation into their complaint. We 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, face-to-face.

In the last year 12% of complainants contacted us to tell us they were not completely satisfied with the response provided.

## Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

For those people who remain dissatisfied, they had the option to approach the NIPSO directly. In 2018/19, there were 5 complainants who approached NIPSO for further investigation of their complaint.

## Monitoring

The Trust is committed to using complaints/concerns as an opportunity to improve our services and care provided to patients and service users. The Trust's Complaints Department uses a database to record, update, manage and produce reports on complaints activity.

Where there are delays in investigating officers providing responses to complaints an escalation process is put into place. Complaints open over 3 months are escalated to the Trust's Chief Executive for attention.

A 'Rapid Review Group' was established in October 2018 which meets weekly to review formal complaints opened on the database the previous week. Brief information is also provided on complaints that have been re-opened and on new complaints received from the Ombudsman. This meeting provides an early opportunity to review the complexity and grading of complaints and recommends actions to promote a positive and timely outcome. A monthly report by Directorate and Division is also provided to this Group on the number of working days that formal complaints are outstanding. Following the meeting this report is shared with relevant senior staff for action.

Reports are produced regularly for each Directorate's Governance Committee as well as the Trust's Governance Committee. These provide information on complaints received, subjects, response times, lessons learned as well as details of outstanding complaints. Quarterly information is also provided on the number of compliments received.

The Trust continues to provide monthly monitoring returns to Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) regarding lessons learned from all complaints closed each month.

There has been a significant drop over the year in the percentage of complaints responded to within the 20 working day timeframe. Various factors which have influenced the timeliness of investigation and ultimately the response to complainants include the complexity of the complaint, absence of key staff and/or other priorities taking precedence. As the Trust acknowledges the need for improvement it has recently commissioned an external expert to review the systems and processes within the organization for the management and investigation of complaints, as well as consider how response times can be improved and identify areas of good practice. The final report is expected in May 2019.

## Lessons Learned & Service Improvements from Complaints

We welcome complaints so that we can learn lessons and improve our services. An action plan is completed, where appropriate, following investigation of complaints. We use this information to feed back to patients and staff on changes and improvements made.

Complaints are discussed with staff concerned and often the issues are brought to staff meetings for discussion on how services can be improved.

Following the investigation of complaints during 2018/19 the following comments were captured as part of the learning in relation to the Top 5 Complaint *subjects*:

### **1) Treatment & Care - Quality**

Following a complex complaint, part of which was poor pain management, it was recorded that “when staff go off duty or hand over to another member, the staff coming on duty should make themselves known to the patient. Staff will be reminded that if a patient is in pain to administer pain relief and re-assess that pain, or if pain relief is not given, the reason why documented.”

### **2) Communication**

Reflection on the value of keeping a patient, and their family's expectations managed, and how this can improve their overall experience: “We must emphasise the importance of communication with patients and their families as to what the next step will be in the patient's journey.”

### **3) Staff Attitude & Behaviour**

Issues continue to occur due to a patient's bad experience as a result of a staff member's behaviour, one complaint requiring the staff member to be “reminded of the importance of supporting and respecting patients privacy and personal space.”

Another complaint resulted in a member of staff completing “...a written reflection in respect of the concerns raised regarding the incident and to discuss what the learning was in the appraisal process. The importance of learning from this experience resulted that it will be discussed with the whole General Surgical Team so they can learn from this event.”

### **4) Treatment & Care - Quantity**

The learning that staff must have the correct information regarding waiting times, to convey accurately to patients: “Apology that the complainant was given the wrong information on waiting times but acknowledged that due to demands on the service they don't always meet their targets. They are however in the process of trying to put together a dedicated Team which will reduce waiting times once it is up and running.”

### **5) Clinical Diagnosis**

Following a complaint regarding a failure to diagnose a wrist fracture “the Service manager has confirmed that staff will review the process and also discuss if patients are advised to ‘review on request’ whether written advice should be given which in turn may encourage patients to re attend. The quality of the monitors within the radiology department will be reviewed.”

## Learning from an Ombudsman Case

A complaint in relation to how the Trust dealt with a request for a carer's assessment and their subsequent complaint, was reviewed further by the Ombudsman. The following learning was taken forward by the Trust as a result of the Ombudsman's recommendations:

- A review of the Trust's Carer's Policy and Procedure to ensure consistent information and capture of requests
- A review of Trust's Complaints Policy and Procedure to ensure full investigation of issues, meeting a person with a complaint where appropriate and avoidance of unnecessary delays.

## Plans for the incoming year – 2019/20

The Trust plans to take forward the following:

- Continue to encourage meetings at an early stage with complainants and the relevant clinical/nursing/professional teams, particularly with those who have made complex complaints, to gain understanding, identify learning opportunities and assist with resolution
- Provision of training to Trust staff on complaints handling, investigation and responding to complaints
- Develop and agree more meaningful performance indicators and reports to senior management groups
- Improve timeliness of acknowledgement letters and response letters to complainants
- Implement a 'learning template' following closure of complaints
- Continue to encourage staff to record the written compliments received on the online system
- Implement the recommendations from the Report on the Review of Complaints Management Process in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

COMPLAINTS DEPARTMENT  
TRUST HEADQUARTERS  
MDEC BUILDING  
ALTNAGELVIN HOSPITAL  
GLENSHANE ROAD  
LONDONDERRY  
BT47 6SB

Contact Email address: [complaints.department@westerntrust.hscni.net](mailto:complaints.department@westerntrust.hscni.net)  
[compliments@westerntrust.hscni.net](mailto:compliments@westerntrust.hscni.net)

Complaints Department Direct Line: 02871 611226  
Main Hospital Number: 02871 345171