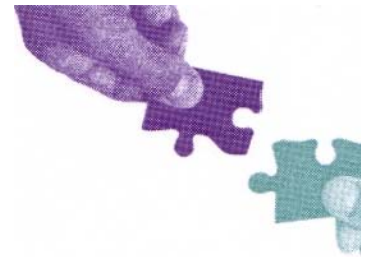


Wessex Disagreement Resolution Service

(Wessex Mediation)



Annual Report June 2007 - August 2008

Assisting Parents, Schools and Local Authorities
with the resolution of conflict in provision of
Special Educational Needs throughout the
South West.

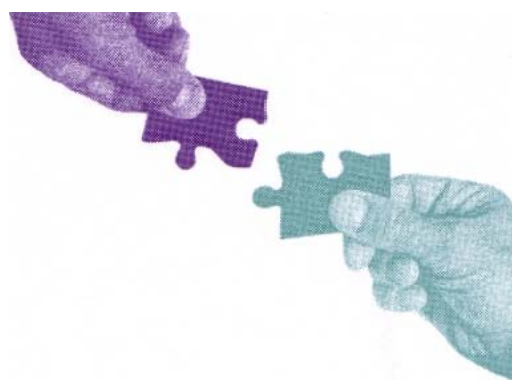


For further information please contact
Colin Gould or Lindsey Halford on
0845 0529487
Alternatively by email info@wessexmediation.co.uk
www.wessexmediation.co.uk

Wessex Mediation is a Partnership between Mediation Dorset and Mediation Somerset, established with the specific intention of providing SEN Disagreement resolution to Parents, Schools and Local Authorities.
Both organisations are registered charities, limited by guarantee.

Wessex Mediation Annual Report

June 2007 - August 2008



Introduction

The second year of the Wessex contact period was extended by Dorset CC on behalf of the South West LA's to include June, July and August in 2008. With the tendering process now complete for 2008 - 2010, Wessex was delighted to become the nominated supplier for SEN Mediation in the South West starting September 2008. The service we offer will continue as in the past but the tendering process did identify some improvements that can be made with regard to improving communication with those who commission the service. It is hoped that this will assist the LA's to obtain maximum value from SEN disagreement resolution in the future.

Casework

In 2006 - 08 we continued with the principle of experienced intake workers operating a help line with a single point of contact on a 0845 number. We believe this model has provided enormous value to Parents and LA's alike.

The 50 referrals listed June 07 - 30 August 08, reflects a take up of 85% of the pre-purchased cases.

Originator of Referral

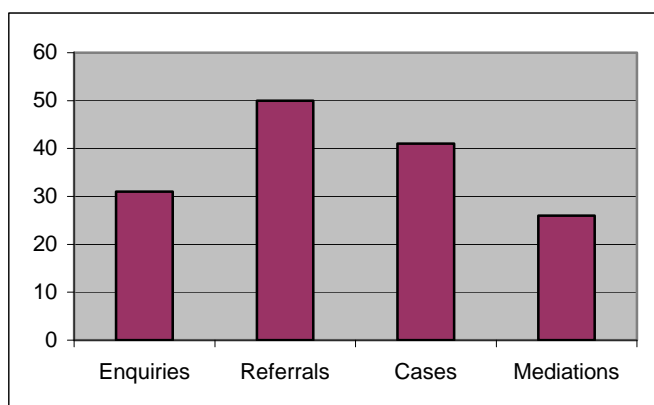
Parents	LEA	PPS
42	6	2

Parties to Mediation

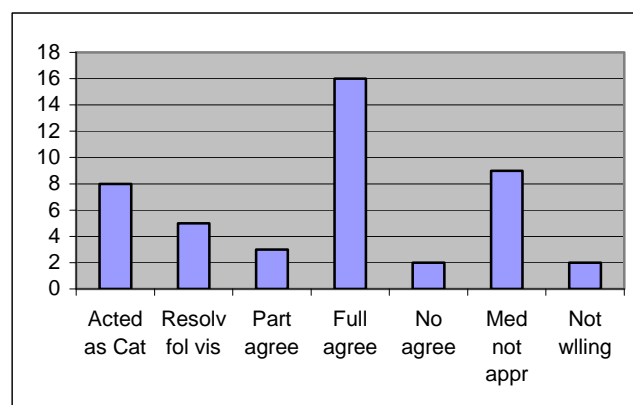
Parents	Schools	LAs
50	8	43

NB The above information is a snapshot at the time of referral; many self-referrals have been prompted as a result of a letter or discussion with the LA or Parent Partnership Service.

Activity



Outcomes



Explanation of labels

Activity

- Enquiries** - a discussion with one party, normally a parent or supporter
- Referrals** - possible casework, personal details taken and process commenced
- Cases** - work carried out with the parties by the coordinator or the mediator
- Mediations** - Mediator appointed and cost incurred by LA

Outcomes

- Acted as a catalyst** - change of position following intervention
- Resolved following visit** - mediator appointed and parties visited
- Part agreement** - mediation meeting held - agreement on some issues
- Full agreement** - mediation meeting held - agreement on all issues
- No agreement** - mediation meeting held - no agreement reached
- Mediation not appropriate** - discovered after accepting referral
- Not willing** - discovered following appointment of the mediator

continued...

Statistics from the above data

Referral to Case - reflects a conversion rate of 82%

Referral to Mediator appointment - reflects a conversion rate of 52%

Referral to Mediation meeting - reflects a conversion rate of 42%

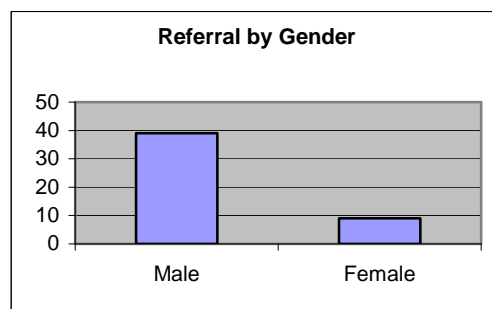
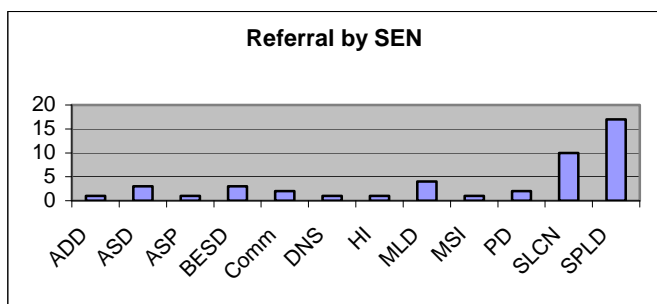
Referral to Acted as catalyst - 16% of referrals were resolved with assistance of the coordinator

Pre purchased cases - cases allocated to LA's represents a 46% take up of availability

Referral to an agreed a way forward - 71% (of completed referrals)

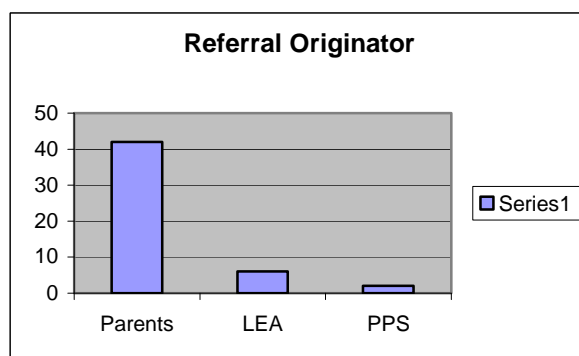
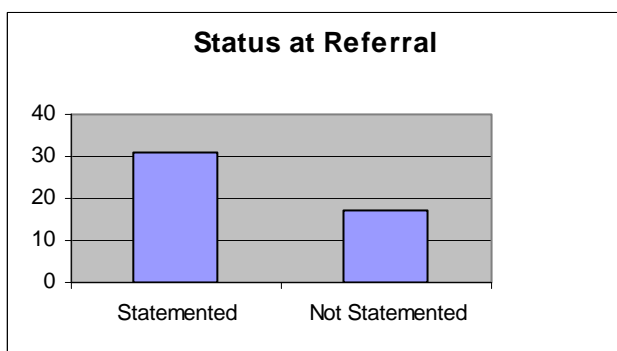
What does the above information tell us?

The service had more capacity than was taken up. 48% of Referrals did not become a chargeable event to the Local Authority, Local Authorities made 12% of the referrals.



To assist Local Authorities use a higher proportion of pre purchased cases, the new contract, sets out how Wessex can take a more proactive role. These actions will be incorporated as key performance indicators and include; producing a Newsletter three times a year and making contact with the Authorising Officer twice a year to discuss issues and see if there is more that could be done by Wessex to help the LA obtain better value from the service.

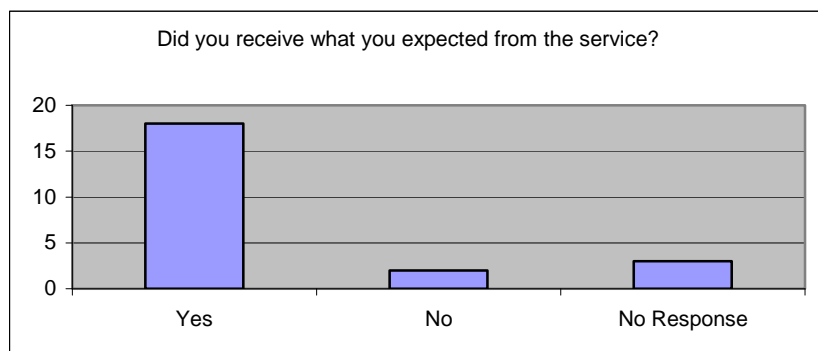
We believe that schools often have unresolved conflict and yet know little about the SEN Mediation Service as a method of resolving SEN disagreements. We also believe that maintaining a relationship with parents is better achieved in school / parent conflicts, they are often in their infancy and there is more ownership and control of the issues at this time. This avenue provides an ideal opportunity for Local Authorities to maximise the case allocation.



Evaluation

Evaluation of the mediation process is always difficult because of the fundamental principal in mediation - it is the parties who control the outcome from mediation not the mediator. However in an attempt to evaluate service provision we do send a Questionnaire to all parties (when a mediator has been appointed) and include a summary of those replies.

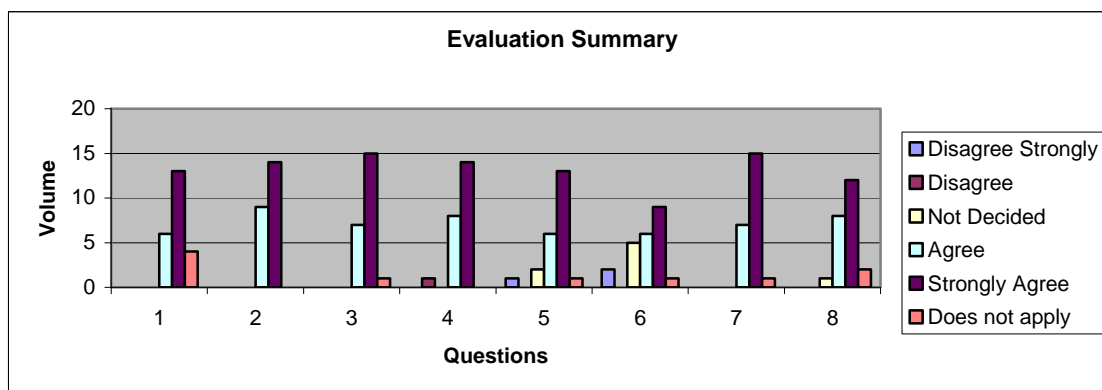
From cases where we appointed mediators during 2007 -2008 we received replies from 23 parties.



A high standard of service provision was confirmed by client survey responses. All respondents stated that that they received prompt attention and that "the staff are helpful and approachable". Mediators are experienced in SEN work; this is supported by 100% of the feedback from clients who told us "the mediator dealt fairly with all those involved and gave a clear explanation of what mediation was about".

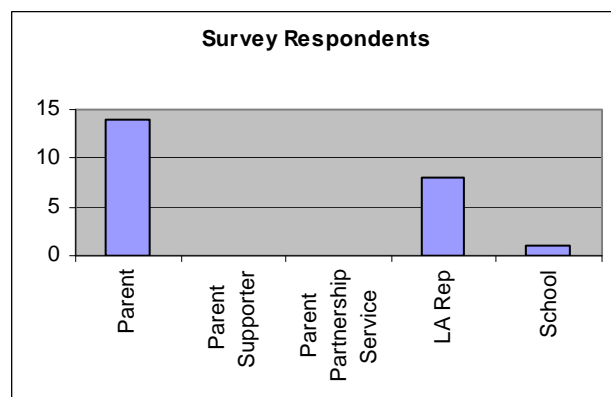
The value of mediation was demonstrated by statistics showing 92% (24 out of the 26 closed cases that went to a mediation meeting) concluded with an agreed outcome. The statistics also support the benefit of the partnership approach adopted by our LA's. The SW model enables coordinators to evaluate intake data, progress the referral or signpost parents appropriately. This approach has often helped to resolve conflict informally without the need for a formal mediation, representing 31% of Cases.

Quality Assurance



Questions asked (see above)

- 1 My initial enquiry received prompt attention
- 2 Staff were helpful and approachable
- 3 I was given a clear explanation of what mediation is about
- 4 I was kept informed of what was happening
- 5 I thought the mediation helped to improve communication
- 6 I felt the mediation helped to resolve areas of disagreement
- 7 The mediator dealt fairly with everyone involved
- 8 The venue was satisfactory



Quality Assurance continued.....

From the evaluation we found that - 65% of respondents thought that mediation helped to resolve the areas of disagreement. Five respondents were undecided as to whether or not mediation had helped (21%), whilst two strongly disagreed (8%)

86% of respondents believed that mediation helped to improve communication with the other party. Two were undecided and one strongly disagreed.

100% of respondents believed that the outcome statement from the meeting agreed with their understanding at the end of the meeting.

Comments received from clients included:-

"I wanted the chance to explain why I felt so strongly and needed to do that uninterrupted.

"I was listened to and felt like I was heard and understood".

"The proof will of course be in the pudding but I feel sure that we will communicate a lot easier with each other now".

"We salute the meticulous wording. It clearly reflects that there is a time of growth needed. We are VERY grateful that a further meeting is a possibility to act as a safety net"

The Wessex mediation model includes supervision of mediators throughout the process together with feedback to them on casework issues. Training events are held for mediators where issues and developments are discussed, often with training input from LA officers and other practitioners.

We believe that Wessex has provided an invaluable link for parents with SEN difficulties to other service providers. The service is often used as a sounding board by parents and education professionals. Recommendations and links to other support groups are often made, in particular Parent Partnership Services across our area.

We continue to evaluate our practice and feel reassured that the model we use, where parties are visited prior to a joint meeting, has been adopted by other SEN mediation providers nationally and remains the most effective model for disagreement resolution.

In conclusion

Wessex Mediation believes that there is a real opportunity and business benefit for South West LAs to use the mediation model as the primary method of resolving disagreements within the SEN context.

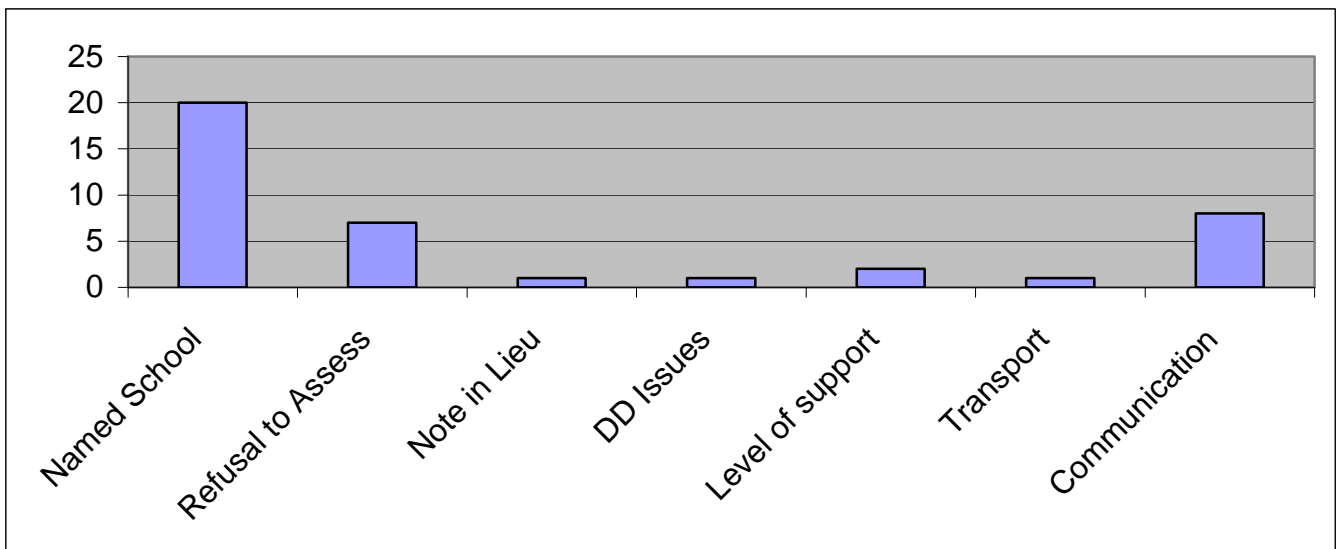
Parents say they find decisions made about SEN provision hard to understand and remote from them. Consequently some seek legal advice, believing that the solicitor route is the only way to obtain a fair decision for their child. There is also evidence that some solicitors and some independent parental supporters have advised clients not to take part in mediation but to go direct to appeal. However many welcome the direct access to communication with the LA and value the opportunity to work collaboratively on the issues causing them concern.

We believe mediation is an appropriate model to resolve conflict where there is a genuine will for resolution from both parties. However there are issues where Parents and LAs seem reluctant to

seek agreement at mediation and prefer the judgement of a tribunal. We do not see this as reflecting badly on the mediation process, it simply mirrors current practice and thinking. Our own experience, that of other SEN mediation services and service providers in other fields of mediation all indicate that early referral dramatically increases the benefit and success of mediation. We are hopeful that with the start a new contract and the measures we have put in place, the benefits of independent disagreement resolution will be become more apparent and as a result the service will be more widely used.

The data collected as to the "reason for referral" is set out below, clearly there will be overlapping issues but in order for the LA's to have an overview they are described as follows.

Reason for Referral



Since provision of a mediation facility for SEN disagreements became a statutory requirement, there will have been many changes within the SEN teams. We believe that to obtain maximum value from the DRS it is important that caseworkers have a good insight as to what can be achieved through mediation.

The last meeting of the Advisory Group agreed to the suggestion of LA's grouping together in order that mediation awareness sessions could be delivered economically.

As we start a new contract we believe it is important to build upon this idea and plan implementation as soon as possible. We look forward to discussing this with you in September.



Thank you for your support during the past six years. We look forward to building upon the trust that has developed and will continue to provide you with the highest standards of service when assisting in the resolution of SEN disagreements that may arise in the future.

Lindsey Halford & Colin Gould
Wessex Mediation June 2008

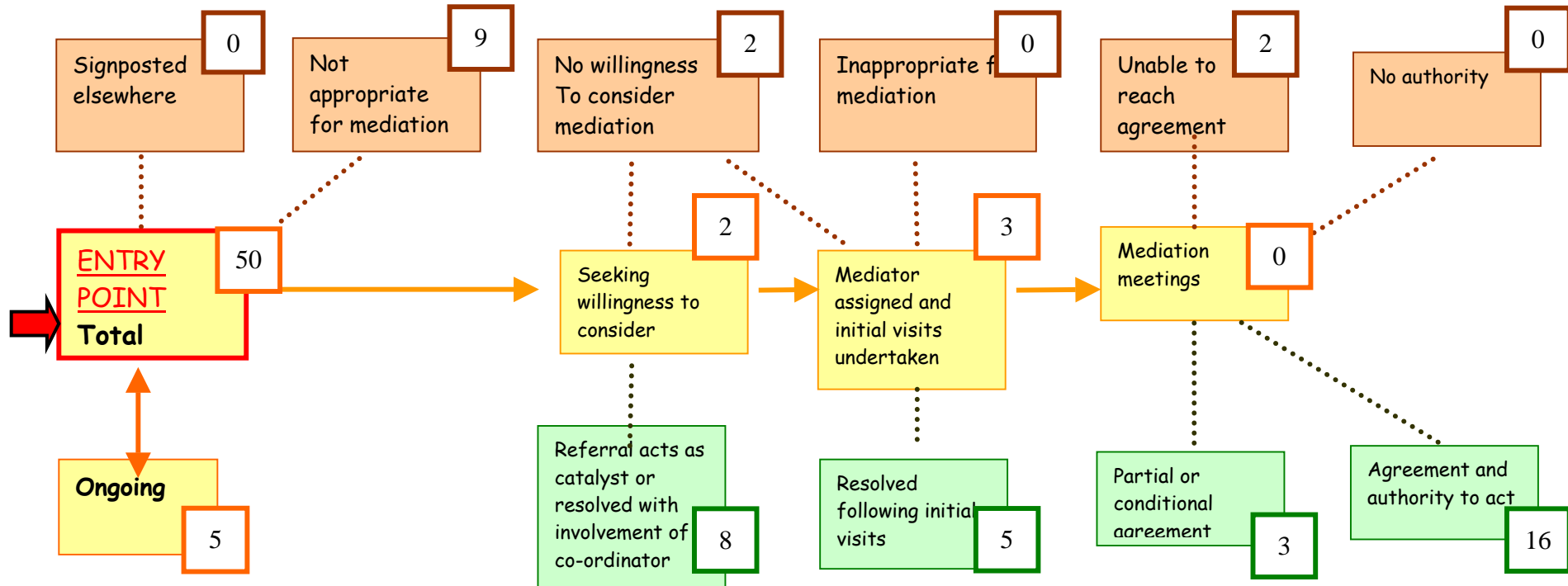
1-6-2007 - 31-08-2008

Local Authority	Prepurchased Cases	Summary			Cases Used	Current case status		
		Total number of referrals	Ongoing	Total closed		Seeking willingness for mediation	Initial visits	Joint meetings taken place
Bath & North East Somerset	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bournemouth	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bristol	6	2	0	2	2	0	0	0
Cornwall	6	2	0	2	2	0	0	0
Devon	6	13	0	13	2	0	0	0
Dorset	6	3	0	3	2	0	0	0
Gloucestershire	6	13	1	12	6	0	1	0
Isles of Scilly	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Somerset	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Plymouth	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
Poole	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Somerset	6	7	1	6	4	0	0	1
South Gloucestershire	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Swindon	2	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Torbay	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
Wiltshire	6	7	1	6	6	1	0	0
All LEAs	59	50	5	45	27	1	3	1

Outcomes	Mediation process started						Mediation did not proceed			
	Referral acts as catalyst or resolved with co-ordinator	Resolved following initial visits	Partial or conditional agreement	Full agreement	Unable to agree	No authority	Signposted elsewhere	Mediation not appropriate	No willingness for mediation	Inappropriate for mediation
Bath & North East Somerset	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bournemouth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bristol	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Cornwall	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Devon	6	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	1	0
Dorset	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0
Gloucestershire	1	0	1	7	1	0	0	2	0	0
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Somerset	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Plymouth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Poole	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Somerset	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	2	1	0
South Gloucestershire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Swindon	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Torbay	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wiltshire	0	2	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
All LEAs	8	5	3	16	2	0	0	10	2	0

WESSEX MEDIATION 01/06/07 - 31/08/08

The Mediation Process with Outcomes and Exit Points



This flowchart shows the various stages of mediation and the outcomes and exit points possible at each of the stages. The figures indicate the number of cases at various stages.

A referral becomes a case when all parties have agreed to the process and a mediator is allocated.

Acknowledgement:
Colin Horswell / Mouchel
(adapted for Wessex Mediation)