

Education & Skills Service Complaints Annual Report 2013-14

1. Background

This report summarises feedback recorded by Education & Skills Service in the form of complaints, compliments and comments received.

Complaints are processed under the Council's Complaint Policy, and are logged and recorded by the Children's Service Complaints Officer.

2. The complaints procedure

2.1 The corporate complaints procedure has 3 stages:

Stage 1: Local Resolution – usually this is the line manager of the area subject to a complaint and a response is prepared within 10 working days

Stage 2: Investigation by a senior manager (usually Assistant Director) within the department, and responded to within 20 working days

Stage 3: Review – by a senior manager from another Directorate and is dealt with within 30 working days.

3. Overall number of complaints in 2013-14

3.1 Number of complaints received at each stage

| Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 | Total |
|---------|---------|---------|-----------|
| 34 | 2 | 0 | 36 |

3.2 Complaints received, broken down by month

| Reporting Period | Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Total |
|------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| April | 4 | | 4 |
| May | 1 | | 1 |
| June | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| July | 2 | | 2 |
| August | 1 | | 1 |
| September | 3 | | 3 |
| October | 1 | | 1 |
| November | 2 | | 2 |
| December | 6 | | 6 |
| January | 4 | | 4 |
| February | 6 | | 6 |
| March | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| TOTAL | 34 | 2 | 36 |

4. Stage 1 complaints

4.1 Breakdown of complaints received by service area

| Service Area | Service |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Admissions | 11 |
| School attendance | 3 |
| SEN Referral & Assessment | 18 |
| Specialist Teams | 2 |
| Total | 34 |

4.2 Response Timescales (stage 1)

| Reporting Period | Within time | Out of time | % on time |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| April | 3 | 1 | 75% |
| May | 0 | 1 | 0% |
| June | 1 | | 100% |
| July | 2 | | 100% |
| August | 1 | | 100% |
| September | 2 | 1 | 66% |
| October | 1 | | 100% |
| November | 2 | | 100% |
| December | 6 | | 100% |
| January | 3 | 1 | 75% |
| February | 5 | 1 | 83% |
| March | 3 | | 100% |
| TOTAL | 29 | 5 | 85% |

4.3 Outcomes of stage 1 complaints

| Reporting Period | Complaint Upheld | Complaint partially Upheld | Complaint not upheld |
|------------------|------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| April | | | 4 |
| May | | | 1 |
| June | | | 1 |
| July | | | 2 |
| August | | | 1 |
| September | 1 | | 2 |
| October | | 1 | |
| November | | | 2 |
| December | 3 | | 3 |
| January | 1 | | 3 |
| February | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| March | 1 | | 2 |
| TOTAL | 10 | 2 | 22 |
| % | 29% | 6% | 65% |

5. Summary of Stage 1 complaints

5.1 The two service areas with the largest number of complaints were School Admissions (11) and SEN Referral & Assessment (18).

5.1.1 The complaints received by School Admissions either related to the decision which was made, or that the parent felt that they had received a poor service, either caused by delays or staff attitude. These were all not upheld complaints

5.1.2 The complaints received by SEN Referral & Assessment were mostly relating to delays in the service or poor communication from the team. This was particularly evident between November and February when the team was short staffed.

5.2 Over the course of the year, 85% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to within 10 working days. This is an improvement on the previous year's performance (65%) and shows a commitment by staff and managers to deal with complaints promptly. The performance dropped slightly after the Christmas period, but was still above the corporate target of 80%.

5.3 The majority (29) of the complaints received were made by parents, which is to be expected although we received two from schools.

6. Stage 2 Complaints

6.1 We received two requests to escalate complaints to the second stage of the complaints procedure.

6.2 One complaint relating to school terms dates, as the parent felt that the Local Authority did not take Jewish holidays into account when setting them. This was not upheld.

6.3 One complaint relating to a lack of support from the Specialist Teams. This was partially upheld, as the parent was receiving the standard level of support, but it was acknowledged that the team could have communicated better with the parent to explain the level of service that she would be getting. This complaint highlighted to Senior Management that this service is under pressure, and they will be looking at this in their strategy plans.

7. Stage 3 Complaints

We received no Stage 3 complaints this year.

8. Outcomes achieved in the last year

8.1 We have improved the timeliness of responses in this year from 65% in 2012-13 to 85% in 2013-14. This demonstrates an increasing commitment to dealing with complaints and responding promptly in order to resolve the issue and avoid escalation.

8.2 The improved response times is supported by better governance of complaints, which in turn has led to better response times. The Closing the Loop group meets every six weeks and is made up of representatives from across the service. The group has worked to update complaints literature

available to customers and encouraged managers to report complaints to the Complaints Manager so that they can be monitored.

8.3 We now have more detailed data available to provide better reports, and we have worked with Capita to implement a new customer services system to record complaints which will be available in the new financial year.

8.4 Through the more detailed information kept, we are now able to support managers to identify trends within service areas and make service improvements based on them. Service Managers are sent summaries of complaints and compliments received on a quarterly basis

8.5 We have new complaints, comments and compliments business cards available for all service users. We have also updated the information on Barnet's webpage. This should help increase awareness of the complaints procedure.

9. Areas for development

9.1 Monitoring Service improvement as a result of complaints

We need to continue to ensure that there are positive outcomes from complaints. Service Managers will receive summaries of their complaints on a quarterly basis, and will be expected to identify service improvements as a result of these complaints. These improvements should be monitored by the Head of Service and reported to the Complaints Officer.

9.2 Ensuring commissioned service have effective complaints processes

We need to ensure that our service users have a clear process in place to make complaints about any provision, whether provided directly by the council or by a commissioned service, and that feedback is part of any contract monitoring arrangements.

10. Members Enquiries

10.1 Education & Skills received 98 Member enquiries in this year. The majority (73) were made to School Admissions where the Member was providing assistance to the resident by asking for explanation of cases and to ensure that decisions were made fairly and in line with the correct procedures.

10.1.1 Six of these were also dealt with as complaints. Where a member enquiry is also a complaint, the complaints process takes precedence and the member is kept informed of progress and outcomes.

10.1.2 82 of these member enquiries were responded to within 10 working days. Those that were responded to late were either due to officers having a high workload, or the case being complex.

11 Compliments

We formally recorded nine compliments for Education & Skills Service in this year. Staff and managers are encouraged to send compliments to be formally recorded so that they can be shared with the Senior Management Team.

| Team | No. of compliments recorded |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Attendance at School | 1 |
| Catering | 2 |
| Educational Psychology | 1 |
| SEN Referral & Assessment | 2 |
| Specialist Team | 3 |
| Total | 9 |

12. Conclusions

The response rate for responding to complaints on time is much improved from the previous year, and we are now above the corporate target of 80%. This will help to improve customer satisfaction with the handling of complaints, and we need to continue to meet deadlines for responses.

12.1 We have improved awareness of the complaints process both amongst staff and amongst our service users. There is updated information on the staff intranet and the web site, as well as new printed literature, including a young person specific leaflet.

12.2 For the next year we need to focus on identifying service improvements that can be made as a result of complaint outcomes and ensuring that action is taken to implement these changes.