

# Family Services Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2014-15

## 1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This report summarises feedback recorded by Family Services in the form of complaints, compliments and comments received. It is important that we continually learn from feedback, positive and negative, to help shape our service for the benefit of service users
- 1.2 In this period we recorded 117 formal Stage 1 complaints, and 95 compliments
- 1.3 We responded to 82% of complaints within the given timescale, which exceeds the corporate target of 80%. The service has made significant progress in the timeliness of responses over the last two years.
- 1.4 Many of our complaints reflect that parents and carers feel unhappy with some of the decisions made of our by our social workers, even though they are in the best interest of the child.
- 1.5 Complaints from young people tended to focus on actions of staff, or decisions that they disagree with
- 1.6 A service wide managers group called Closing the Loop meets every 8 weeks to discuss complaints and compliments, including process, themes and outcomes
- 1.7 The majority of the compliments received in social care were for the Children in Need teams and the majority in Early Intervention & Prevention were for the SEN Information Advice and Support Service
- 1.8 Our focus for the next financial year is to continue to encourage young people to engage in the complaints process by utilising our contract with Barnardo's and our Role Model Army
- 1.9 We also need to continue to find ways of capturing feedback from service users, and ways to incorporate them into our service improvement plans
- 1.10 Overall, the culture of how we deal and learn from complaints has improved over the last two years, and this is reflected in improved response times and actively focussing on service improvements as a result of complaints.

## 2. Complaints procedures followed by Family Services

- 2.1 There are two types of complaints processed followed by Family Services: *The Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006* for all complaints relating to actions taken under The Children Act (statutory complaints); and the Council's Complaints process for all other complaints (Service complaints).

2.2 The Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 has 3 stages:

**Stage 1:** Local Resolution – responded to by Team Manager, with oversight from Head of Service

**Stage 2:** Independent Investigation – complaint is investigated by an external officer

**Stage 3:** Review Panel – the complaint investigation is reviewed by a panel of independent people.

2.3 Council's Corporate Complaints:

**Stage 1:** responded to by Team Manager, with oversight from Head of Service

**Stage 2:** Investigation by a senior manager (usually Assistant Director)

**Stage 3:** Review – by a senior manager from another Delivery Unit

### 3. Overall number of complaints in 2014-15 (see appendix 1 for a detailed breakdown)

3.1 There were 117 stage one complaints, three stage 2 complaints and 1 stage 3 complaint received during this period. Overall, 10% of complaints received were upheld.

### 4. Summary of Stage 1 complaints (see appendix 2 for a detailed breakdown)

4.1 The majority of complaints received by Family Services were about Social Care. This is not unusual as parents and carers find some of the interventions put in place to protect children challenging.

4.2 The majority of the complaints were about decisions and staff members were made about social care.

4.3 The service area with the largest number of complaints received was Children in Care & Provider Services (53), followed by Children in Need & Assessment Services (46).

4.4 The most frequent reasons for complaints were:

- the action of a particular staff member
- the complainant not being happy with a decision we have made
- about receiving general poor service.

4.5 Many of our complaints reflect that parents and carers feel unhappy with some of the decisions made of our by our social workers, even though they are in the best interest of the child, and manifest in them not liking the views of a social worker. Most of these complaints are not upheld, but those that were acknowledge that whist the decision or action was correct, there was learning in how the same message should be delivered and / or more promptly. There were 46 such complaints in this period of which 12 were

partially upheld, and 6 upheld.

- 4.6 A further 28 complaints were made about a decision made by Social Care staff. In the majority of these cases (22) the complaint was not upheld, as the decision was made in accordance with either corporate procedures or statutory processes. However, based on the upheld and partially upheld complaints, there is evidence that clearer communication about how and why the decision had been made could reduce the number of complaints in the future.
- 4.7 Over the course of the year, 82% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to within 10 working days. This is above the Council's target of 80%. In three of the months 100% of complaints were responded to on time.
- 4.8 In Social care Service, the most common type of complaint was about the action of staff members (46), although only six of these were upheld and 12 partially upheld. There were also several complaints about a decision made by the service (28), although only one of these was upheld.
- 4.9 In the Early Intervention & Prevention Service, there were three upheld or partially upheld which all related to poor communication with the service users.

## 5. Stage 2 Complaints

### 5.1 Service Complaints

We received two stage 2 complaints that were dealt with under the corporate process.

One of these related to the SENDIASS team, and the parent felt that they had received a poor service. This was partially upheld by the Head of Service, as it was found that the team had supported the parent fully, but that the remit of the team was not fully explained to the parent, so she expected a different level of service.

Another complaint related to a financial decision and a dispute over expenses payments. This was not upheld and it was fully explained to the parent why it is not in the remit of the Local Authority to cover such expenses.

### 5.2 Statutory complaints

During this period, we completed one independent investigation under The Children Act. This related to the Disabled Children's Team, and that the parent was not happy with the outcome of the assessment of her child. The complainant was not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, and requested for her complaint to be heard at stage 3, which is ongoing.

We received two other requests for stage 2 investigations for which we found alternative ways of resolving.

In one case, a parent was not satisfied with the assessment of her child, and that the child did not meet the criteria for the Disabled Children's Team.

Before progressing to an independent investigation, the Head of Service offered for a different social worker to undertake an assessment, as this is a likely outcome for the stage 2 investigation.

In the other case, a young person had complained that he was being moved to a different placement. The stage 1 complaint was not upheld and it was explained to him that he was being moved because the placement could not support him due to his behaviour and he was not attending education. The young person's advocate originally requested a stage 2 investigation, but the complaints team suggested to the Team Manager that as the young person had already begun to improve his behaviour, the placement change could be reviewed after a set period of time to determine if it was still necessary. This would be much more effective for the young person than a lengthy complaint investigation.

## **6. Stage 3 Complaints**

### **6.1 Service Complaints**

There were no stage 3 service complaints received this year. Senior Managers in the Family Service have assisted with four Stage 3 complaints made against other delivery units in the Council.

### **6.2 Statutory complaints**

We received one request for a complaint to be escalated to the third stage under The Children Act complaints process. This involves convening a review panel of three independent persons, the two investigating officers, the adjudicator, and the complainant.

The complaint related to a Disabled Children's Team assessment, and the parent felt that the assessment did not fully consider her needs as a carer, and that she felt the level of Direct Payments her daughter receives should be higher.

The Panel upheld several of the parent's complaints, highlighting areas for service improvements. The Panel felt that although the level of Direct Payments may have been appropriate, the written assessment did not evidence that the parent's needs as a carer had been taken into account, and therefore any decisions could not be justified. The Panel recommended that another assessment should be undertaken for the family.

As a result of this complaint, the Team Manager and Head of Service have worked more closely with social workers in the team to ensure that assessments thoroughly evidence that the needs of the parents as carers have been taken into account, and to ensure that communication with families is stronger to ensure a positive relationship.

## **7. Complaints received from young people (see Appendix 3 for a detailed breakdown)**

7.1 Of the 23 complaints received from young people, 9 of them used an advocate from Barnardo's Children's Rights Service. One other young

person was supported by other advocates as they do not live locally to Barnet.

- 7.2 We received 19 complaints from young people during this period. These all related to social care, although one was related to the Finance Team which is managed by Early Intervention and Prevention.
- 7.3 Of these complaints, seven related to action of a member of staff, and six related to a decision that had been made. Of the 'Action of staff' complaints, four were partially upheld, and three were not upheld. There was an acknowledgement that in many of the complaint cases, the staff member had not done anything wrong, but could have approached the situation differently to avoid causing further distress to the young person.
- 7.4 A decision was made at the Closing the Loop group in November 2014 that an 'Action Plan' should be completed by the Team Manager following any complaints made by a young person. This plan details any decisions or actions to be put in place to remedy the complaint, or make service improvements.

## **8. Outcomes achieved in the last year**

- 8.1 We have maintained a good performance for responding to complaints on time and are above the corporate target of 80%. This is attributed to staff and managers recognising the importance of responding to complaints promptly.
- 8.2 More detailed information is now recorded regarding the outcomes of complaints, particularly where the complainant is a young person. We are using this information to highlight potential service improvements.
- 8.3 The Customer Relationship Management System we now use (Lagan) to record complaints is used across the Council for recording all customer interactions. Capita CSG monitor customer service performance based on information recorded on Lagan through reports and regular meetings. Family Services are represented at these meetings by Rachel Williams
- 8.4 The complaints team play an active role in the Council's Complaint Link Officer group, as well as the North London Complaints Managers Group. This enables the team to establish contacts with complaints colleagues which is useful for support and advice.
- 8.5 We have new complaints, comments and compliments business cards available for all service users, and a new leaflet for young people. We have also updated the information on Barnet's webpage to make it more accessible.
- 8.6 The Complaints Team have made links with the Voice of the Child Team to encourage participation and feedback from young people. More work will be carried out on this in the coming year.

### Examples of improvements made as a result of complaints made by children and young people in our Care

- *A young person received a fine for not having the correct train ticket, which was very distressing. This was because the social worker had incorrectly ordered a child ticket, but the young person was 16 years old. Social workers and the Finance Team have been reminded to ensure that they request the correct type of ticket for their young people to prevent this happening again*
- *A complaint was made by a young person who was moving to a new placement, but as her social worker was on leave, a duty social worker took her to the new placement. Although using a duty worker was unavoidable, it has highlighted that young people might not be aware of the duty system. Children in Care Team Managers have agreed to ensure that social workers discuss the duty system with young people. The Voice of the Child team will also include this information in the Welcome Guide for young people in care when it is next updated. Role Model Army have recently undertaken some mystery shopping exercises regarding this.*

## 9. Areas for development for 2015-16

### 9.1 Ensure that young people are able to engage in the complaints process

We will continue to promote use of the business cards and distribution of complaints leaflets to young people. The Complaints Team will work with the Voice of the Child team to highlight ways of engaging young people and improving the complaints process for them.

### 9.2 Identifying service improvement or process changes

The Complaints Team will continue to send quarterly summaries of complaints received to Heads of Service so that they can identify any trends or themes. This is particularly important with the Onwards & Upwards service, which has seen an increase in complaints. Currently, we resolve the immediate issue for the person who has made the complaint, but what we need to focus on is learning from the complaints to prevent the issue occurring again.

### 9.3 Engaging young people in service improvements

The Complaints Team will utilise the Role Model Army to help identify service improvements. If a young person makes a complaint, it is difficult to establish this is a wider problem than one case. Once a complaint has been completed, the Complaints Team will request that the Role Model Army discuss the issues highlighted (without identifying the complainant), so that we can establish if other young people have had similar experiences and the level of concern. This will then better inform how we will improve the service as a result of the complaint.

## 10. Members enquiries

In 2014-15, Family Service received 57 enquiries from elected members. In the majority of these enquiries, the Member was providing assistance to the resident by asking for an overview of the family's case and to ensure that decisions were made fairly and in line with the correct procedures. Most Members are aware that they cannot influence decisions made under statutory processes.

During September 2014, the response timescale for responding to Member Enquiries was reduced from 10 working days to 5 working days, which was not clearly communicated to Delivery Units until the end of October 2014. This affected our reported performance at 75%, which is below the corporate target of 90%. Otherwise our estimated performance was at 83%.

Where the responses were out of time, this was mainly due to the complexity of the case, and that the manager responding could not feasibly gather all of the relevant information in 5 working days. In all cases the Member was advised that there would be a delay.

## 11. Compliments (see appendix 4)

We formally recorded 95 compliments for Family Service in this year. Staff and managers are encouraged to send compliments to be recorded so that they can be shared with the Senior Management Team in the quarterly report.

### Compliments received by staff in Family Services

- *"I would just like to say a massive thank you, for all the help, advice and assistance that you have given to me to date. The result being that I now no longer feel that the situation with R is hopeless and that no one was prepared to take any responsibility to assist R."* – Family Support Team
- *"It has been an absolutely pleasure working with you over the past 3 years or so, partnership working at its best, during sometimes difficult circumstances. Long may there be Social Workers working in Child Protection, with your level of competence, knowledge, understanding and commitment to safeguarding children."* – Children in Need Team social worker
- *"With much appreciation for all you have done for J over these past two years. You have been a great support. You have helped us so much and we shall miss you terribly"* – Disabled Children's Team social worker

## 12. Overall Conclusions

- 12.1 The response rate for responding to complaints on time has been consistently maintained over the past two years, and we continue to be 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.
- 12.2 The improved culture around complaints means that managers and Heads of Service are now much more open to highlighting service improvements as a result of complaints, particularly with regards to complaints from young people.
- 12.3 During the next year we will continue to focus on incorporating complaints feedback into the wider work carried out on service improvement



## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Overall number of complaints in 2014-15

Number of complaints received at each stage

Type of complaint	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	% Upheld
Statutory complaints	77	1	1	8%
Service Complaints	40	2	0	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10%</b>

Number of complaints received by each Head of Service (Stage 1)

Youth & Communities	3
Family Support & Early Intervention	3
Early Years	3
Commissioning and Business Improvement	2
<b>Early Intervention and Prevention Total</b>	<b>11</b>
Assessment & Children in Need	46
Children in Care and Provider services	53
Safeguarding & Quality Assurance	7
<b>Social Care Total</b>	<b>106</b>

### Appendix 2: Stage 1 complaints

Stage 1 complaints responded to within timeframe

Reporting Period	Within time	Out of time	% on time
April	8	0	100
May	10	2	83
June	11	2	88
July	4	7	36
August	9	1	90
September	10	4	71
October	14	1	93
November	6	0	100
December	8	0	100
January	5	1	83
February	5	1	83
March	6	2	75
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>82</b>

### Stage 1 complaints received by service area

Service Area	No. of service complaints	No. of statutory complaints	Total
Children in Care Team	1	26	27
Duty and Assessment/MASH	4	13	17
Children in Need Teams	5	11	16
Disabled Children's Team	4	8	12
Kinship & Permanence	5	2	7
Safeguarding	2	5	7
Onwards & Upwards	1	6	7
Fostering Support Team		4	4
Intensive Family Focus	3		3
Fostering Recruitment Team	3		3
Children's Centres	2		2
Residential Units	2		2
Youth Offending Service	1		1
Youth Support Team	1		1
Business Support	1		1
Business Resources	1		1
Child Care Business Team	1		1
CAMHS	1		1
Workforce Development	1		1
Adoption Team	1		1
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>117</b>

### Outcomes of stage 1 complaints

Reporting Period	Complaint Upheld	Complaint partially Upheld	Complaint not upheld
April	2	1	5
May	2	3	7
June	1	5	7
July	1	3	7
August	1	3	6
September	0	4	10
October	2	2	11
November	0	1	5
December	2	2	4
January	0	2	4
February	1	1	4
March	0	1	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>66</b>

Breakdown of service users making complaints	No. of complaints received
Parent	60
Young Person	19
Other Family	11
Foster Carer	10
Other	8
Professional (External)	6
School	2
Professional (Internal)	1

### Appendix 3: Complaints received from young people

	No. received	No. responded to on time	No. upheld	No. Partially Upheld	No. not upheld
Social Care	18	15	2	8	8
EIP	1	1	0	0	1

Reason for complaint	No. received
Action of Staff	7
Decision	6
Poor Service	2
Financial	3
Report/assessment	1

Team	No. received
Children in Care Teams	11
Onwards & Upwards	5
Children in Need Teams	1
Safeguarding	1
Finance Team	1

#### Appendix 4: Compliments

Social Care Team	No. of compliments recorded
Children in Need	15
Hospital Team	11
Adoption	5
Disabled Children	8
Safeguarding	6
MAST	5
Duty & Assessment	4
Corporate Parenting Team	3
Family Resource Centre	2
Placements	2
Children in Care	2
Fostering	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>

EIP Teams	No of compliments recorded
Business Support & customer engagement	22
Intensive Family Focus	3
Children's Centres	2
Youth Offending Team	2
Analysis, Performance & Strategy	1
Workforce Development	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>