

Appendix A

Family Services Complaints, Compliments and Comments

Annual Report 2015-16

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 123 formal Stage 1 complaints and 119 compliments
- 1.3 In the previous year we recorded 117 formal Stage 1 complaints and 95 compliments
- 1.4 We responded to 89% of complaints within the given timescale, which exceeds the corporate target of 80%. However, the corporate target has increased to 90% from April 2016, so need to increase our performance over the next year
- 1.5 Our focus for the year was to improve the complaints process for young people by utilising our advocacy contract with Barnardo's, which has resulted in a decrease in the number of formal complaints made by young people.
- 1.6 During this year we received an increase in complaints about library services. This is attributed to the proposed transformation of the library service, and although the complaints were about services rather than the transformation, the consultation meant that libraries received more attention from the general public.
- 1.7 In the first part of the year, the Intake and Assessment Service received a significant increase in the number of complaints received. This was highlighted to the Senior Management Team and the Head of Service via a report from the Complaints Team, so that any recurring themes could be addressed. These themes have also been highlighted to the Principal Social Worker to be incorporated into her work.

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 2015-16 (see appendix 1 for a detailed breakdown)**

There were 123 stage one complaints, three stage 2 complaints and no stage 3 complaints received during this period. Overall, 20% of Stage 1 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, which is a familiar trend, and to be expected. Families often find intervention from social services to be challenging, and counter this by raising complaints.
- 4.2 The most common reasons for complaints were action of a particular staff member, a disagreement with a decision that has been made, or general poor service. This is in line with complaints received in previous years.
- 4.3 The service area with the largest number of complaints received was the Intake and Assessment Service, which is not unexpected as they are the front line service, and usually the first team that interacts with a family. However this service received a significant increase in complaints received in the first part of the year. See Appendix.
- 4.4 Many of our complaints reflect that parents and carers feel unhappy with some of the decisions made 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 acknowledged that whilst the decision or action was correct, there was learning in how the same message should be delivered and / or more promptly. In this year we received 22 complaints about decisions that had been made, which is a decrease from last year (46). None of these were fully upheld but seven were partially upheld because it was acknowledged that the decision should have been better communicated to the parents.

- 4.5 44 complaints were received about the actions of a particular member of staff, and the majority of these were not upheld. We often find that in social care cases that are likely to progress further than the parent initially expected (i.e. to Child Protection Proceedings or legal proceedings), parents will make a complaint about the case worker.
- 4.6 The Complaints Team have highlighted a particular trend which is that we receive a large number of complaints from fathers. This is most often from father's who are not living in the family home or who are not the primary care givers for the children, and who feel that social services do not communicate with them well enough. This has been raised with the Senior Management Team and the Principal Social Worker, and some further work will be done to improve this over the next year.
- 4.7 This year we received a significant increase in complaints about the Libraries Service. This is attributed to the library service being more in the public eye due to the transformation, and significant issues with the IT system.
- 4.8 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 two of the months 100% of complaints were responded to on time.

5. Stage 2 Complaints

5.1 Service Complaints

We did not receive any stage 2 complaints that were dealt with under the corporate process. We received one request for a complaint to be escalated, but this was turned down by the Complaints Officer, as the complainant had not raised any new issues, but simply disagreed with the professional opinion of the social worker.

5.2 Statutory Complaints

During this year we completed three investigations under Stage 2 of the Children Act. The Children Act requires us to appoint an independent investigator to carry out Stage 2 complaints. Following the closure of a Stage 2 complaint investigation, an action plan of outcomes is put together by the Complaints Team and discussed with the relevant managers

5.2.1 *Complaint about Special Guardianship*

This was a complex complaint which dated back to 2012. The crux of the complaint was that the carer now feels that at the time of her nephew being placed with her, all of the care options were not explored with her, and that she felt that she has not received enough support with his care. There were also other issues linked to housing and finance. Whilst the Local Authority did not accept that options were not discussed with the carer, it is acknowledged that communication with her was not as good as it should have been.

5.2.2 *Complaint about child protection*

This complaint was made by parents who had since moved to abroad, and so the investigation was carried out via email. The complaint was that they disagreed that their children should have been placed on the child protection

register. Although we were clear with them that the complaint investigation would not change the outcome of this, they also wanted to raise complaints about the social worker's conduct. The investigators did not find any fault with the Local Authority, other than that a suitable interpreter should have been used during all contacts with the parents, although it was noted that the mother at first said that she didn't need an interpreter.

5.2.3 *Complaint about the Disabled Children Team*

This related to a Children and Families Assessment for a large family, which included two children with additional needs. The parent felt that the report was biased and did not take into account all professional's views. The investigators did not find any fault with the Local Authority's practice.

6. Stage 3 Complaints

There were no stage 3 complaints received this year.

Under the Council's Complaints Process, Stage 3 complaints are investigated by a senior manager in another department. During this year, Family Services senior managers assisted with 7 stage 3 investigations for other departments

7. Complaints received from young people (see Appendix 3 for a statistics)

- 7.1 Our contract with Barnardo's provides an advocacy service for Children in Care, including supporting them to make complaints. The Head of Service and the Strategy and Commissioning Team have been working more closely with Barnardo's over the past year to monitor the contract and therefore improve the outcomes for young people. This has resulted in more issues being resolved locally between the Barnardo's advocate and the social worker or team manager, rather than being presented as formal stage 1 complaints. The benefit to the young person is that the issues are likely to be resolved sooner and less formally than in the complaints process.
- 7.2 Of the 15 complaints received from young people, 7 of them used an advocate from Barnardo's Children's Rights Service. 3 others were supported by other advocates.
- 7.3 All of the complaints received from young people related to social care, mostly about the Children in Care team and Onwards & Upwards (Leaving Care).
- 7.4 Of these complaints, two related to the action of a member of staff (a decrease from last year) but 8 related to them generally feeling that they had received a poor service (an increase from last year).
- 7.5 Only one of the complaints received from young people was upheld, and this related to a finance payment that wasn't made because the social worker didn't complete the correct paperwork.
- 7.6 Although we did not uphold many complaints, there is an acknowledgement that in some cases the worker could have approached the situation differently in order to help the young person make sense of the decisions being made.

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 We have seen an improvement in how staff deal with complaints from young people, and that more are being dealt with by phone or with a meeting (as well as more issues being dealt with prior to a formal complaint being made). For a young person, this is a more productive and personal way of resolving a complaint. The Complaints Team, along with Heads of Service, will continue to encourage managers to deal with complaints in this way, rather than with a letter.
- 8.3 The Closing the Loop Group has developed and is now well represented by all service areas. During the past year this group has improved its membership and is well represented by all services, including senior management. The group discusses improvements to the complaints process, for both service users and staff, and as well as learning outcomes and areas for development
- 8.4 The Complaints Team have good links with corporate colleagues involved in customer care, which ensures that we are incorporating corporate values into our services.
- 8.5 The complaints team play an active role in the Council's Complaint Link Officer group, as well as the North London Complaints Managers Group and the London Complaints Managers Group, both of which are for Children and Adults social care Complaints Managers. This enables the team to establish contacts with complaints colleagues which is useful for support and advice.
- 8.6 We have well established complaints processes, which staff are aware of. There are physical complaints leaflets and business cards, as well as information on the staff intranet and public website. Regular items are put into the staff newsletter as a reminder of the complaints process.

9. Areas for development for 2016-17

- 9.1 *MOMO (Mind of my Own)*

The Voice of the Child Team has commissioned a smartphone app which can be used by young people to give feedback to professionals. This can be used at any time by the young person, but will be particularly encouraged prior to Children in Care reviews. The Complaints Team will be working with the Voice of the Child team to identify any complaints that are received via the app, but also to identify trends from the feedback received.
- 9.2 *Identifying service improvement or process change*

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. 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, and how to communicate this learning to the

wider service. The Complaints Team will also work with the Principal Social worker to identify how service improvements can be implemented.

9.3 *Maturity Model*

Over the coming year, the Corporate Complaints team will be implementing a complaints maturity model, under which each Delivery Unit will be awarded a maturity level (on a 5 point scale). This level is based on how well the Delivery Unit responds to complaints received, including meeting timescales, recognising trends and proactively looking to improve the complaints process within the service.

The level will be reviewed by the Corporate Team every six months. The aim for Family Services over the next year will be to achieve the highest maturity level (Resilient) to demonstrate our commitment to learning from complaints and improving our services.

9.4 *Resilience*

Family Services has launched a resilience based approach to practice, which encourages families and workers to look for strengths within the family and build on foundations already in place. The Complaints Team can support this approach by ensuring that positive and negative feedback in the form of compliments and complaints is used to make service improvements and to encourage learning by individuals and services

10. Members enquiries

In 2015-16, Family Service received 55 enquiries from elected members, a similar number to the previous year. 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.

The corporate target for responding to Members is 5 working days, and we met this target in 80% of enquiries.

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 such cases the Member was advised that there would be a delay.

11. Compliments

11.1 We formally recorded 119 compliments for Family Service in this year, which is an increase since last 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.

Some compliments received by staff in Family Services

- *'Thanks for all the help and support you've given me and helping me and giving me advice. You were so understanding, you are a really really nice person, and you have made me more strong, getting my confidence back and you have helped my daughter so much.'* – parent to Family Support Team
- *'Thank you for listening on the phone and sending me this positive list of action points. I was starting to feel exasperated by my son's behaviour and you have given me some new hope!'* – parent to SEND Information Advice and Support Service
- *'Thank you for being the best social work that any kid in care could have. You're funny, kind and helpful and (stating the obvious) have been there for me since the day you met me; crying my eyes out. Thank you for seeing the potential in me that no one really has, but with you I've helped people realise that. Thanks for knowing me inside out and knowing my flaws and accepting them. Thanks for making me laugh on my bad days and giving me something to look forward to. Thank you for doing your best and never giving up on me. Thanks for all the drinks, cakes, presents and time you've given me - it means a lot - and thank you for letting me say what I thought, when I couldn't do it anywhere else. Thank you for making me happy, thanks for your support. Thank you for helping me out of the hole many MANY times over. Thanks for saving my butt when I was close to losing it. Thanks for being there when I cry. Thanks for all you've organised. Thank you for everything you've done for me. Thanks for being my social worker'* – from a young person to their Children in Care social worker
- *"Thank you for all your help and convincing me to stay put and be patient. Ur truly epic!"* – from a young person to an Intervention & Planning social worker
- *"I wanted to inform you that B has done an amazing work with this family. Mother informed me that she was able to work with B and felt that the CP plan started to progress since B took over. All professional also commented that since Bev took over, they have seen a positive change in mother and child. Thanks to her dedicated and hard work, A is no longer subject of a protection plan."* from another professional to an Intervention & Planning social worker

12. Overall conclusion

- 12.1 Over the past few years we have significantly improved our response rates for Stage 1 complaints and continue to be above the corporate target of 80%. This helps to improve customer satisfaction with the handling of complaints, and reduces the chance of the complaint escalating.
- 12.2 We have very low numbers of Stage 2 statutory complaints compared to other local authorities. This is due to the quality of our work at Stage 1, and the positive attitude and approaches our Heads of Service towards complaints.
- 12.3 During the next year we need to focus on continuing to improve our service as a result of complaints, particularly for the benefit of the young people using our services.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Overall number of complaints in 2015-16

Number of complaints received at each stage

Type of complaint	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	No of Upheld
Statutory complaints	66	3	0	5 (7%)
Service Complaints	57	0	0	19 (33%)
Total	123	3	0	24 (20%)

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

Early Years & Early Help	1
Commissioning and Business Improvement	0
Youth & Family Support	2
Libraries, Workforce and Community Engagement	25
Early Intervention and Prevention Total	28
0-25	10
Intake & Assessment	32
Intervention & Planning	21
Permanence & Transitions	23
Placements Service	6
Safeguarding & Quality Assurance	3
Social Care Total	95

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%
TOTAL	96	21	82%

Stage 1 complaints received by service area

Service Area	No. of service complaints	No. of statutory complaints	Total
Adoption		5	5
Children in Care Teams	5	9	14
Conference & Review		2	2
Duty & Assessment Teams	6	19	25
Disabled Children's Team	5	6	11
Fostering Support	1		1
Intervention & Planning Teams	10	11	21
MASH	1	6	7
Onwards & Upwards	1	7	8
Safeguarding		1	1
Children's Centres	1		1
Communications & Complaints	1		1
Libraries	24		24
Youth Offending	1		1
Youth Team	1		1
Total	57	66	123

Outcomes of stage 1 complaints

Reporting Period	Complaint Upheld	Complaint partially Upheld	Complaint not upheld
April	0	4	5
May	1	2	1
June	0	3	8
July	1	7	4
August	2	3	5
September	3	4	6
October	1	4	8
November	2	2	2
December	1	4	1
January	2	2	6
February	8	5	4
March	3	3	6
TOTAL	24	43	56
%	20	35	45

Breakdown of service users making complaints	No. of complaints received
Parent	62
Service User	23
Young Person	15
Other Family	10
Foster Carer	3
Other	1
Professional (External)	3
School	5
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	15	11	1	5	9
EIP	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Reason for complaint	No. received
Action of Staff	2
Decision	3
Report/assessment	1

Team	No. received
Children in Care Teams	8
Onwards & Upwards	6
Duty & Assessment Teams	1

Appendix 4: Compliments

Social Care Team	No. of compliments recorded
Disabled Children Team	10
Intervention & Planning Teams	17
MASH	4
Adoption	6
Children in Care Teams	6
Conference & Review	1
Duty and Assessment Teams	4
Safeguarding	1
Family Resource Centre	4
Fostering Support	1
Placements	1
Total	55

EIP Teams	No of compliments recorded
Libraries	28
SENDIASS	13
Engagement & Participation	6
Communications & Complaints	1
Youth Team	7
CAF	5
Family Support Team	4
Total	64