

Appendix A

Family Services Complaints, Compliments and Comments

Annual Report 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This report provides an annual summary of feedback recorded by Family Services from received complaints, compliments and comments. As a learning organisation we value feedback, both positive and negative, as this helps us to understand what we do well and what we need to better in the provision of services for children, young people and their families.
- 1.2 Learning from complaints has been a key focus for this year. The Complaints Team are now reporting on themes, trends to identify areas for improvement in practice and are meeting regularly with Heads of Service. However, there is still more to do to integrate learning from complaints and compliments into wider workforce and service development. This year there will be further embedding of corporate complaints and compliments through the revised audit/workforce development strategy
- 1.3 There have been some good examples of service improvement as a result of complaints, such as an improved way of carrying out Joint Housing Assessments, and a closer working relationship between the Children in Care Teams and the Youth Offending Team which followed a complaint from a young person where his release date was affected by a lack of communication between the two teams.
- 1.4 During 2016/17 there were 111 formal Stage 1 complaints and 125 compliments received. This is an increase of 12 formal Stage 1 complaints from 99 last year and an increase of 34 compliments from 91 in the previous year
- 1.5 Whilst there has been an increase in complaints overall, the two main services areas in which complaints have increased are the Intervention & Planning and the Safeguarding and Quality Services.
- 1.6 77% of complaints received were responded to within the given timescale. This is below the corporate target of 90% and likely to be attributable to the volume of management changes seen in the service over the past year.
- 1.7 There has been an increase in the number of formal compliments being recorded, with a large number being received by the Intake & Assessment and Intervention & Planning Services. There has been an increase in the number of compliments made by parents and other professionals, and many of these are about how supportive and helpful they found their worker.

2. Complaints Procedures followed by Family Services

- 2.1 There are two types of complaints processes 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/Operational Director)
- Stage 3:** Review – by a senior manager from another Delivery Unit
- 2.4 Throughout the complaints process staff have due regard to the Council's responsibilities towards equality, and any issues relating to race, gender or disability would be investigated and addressed.

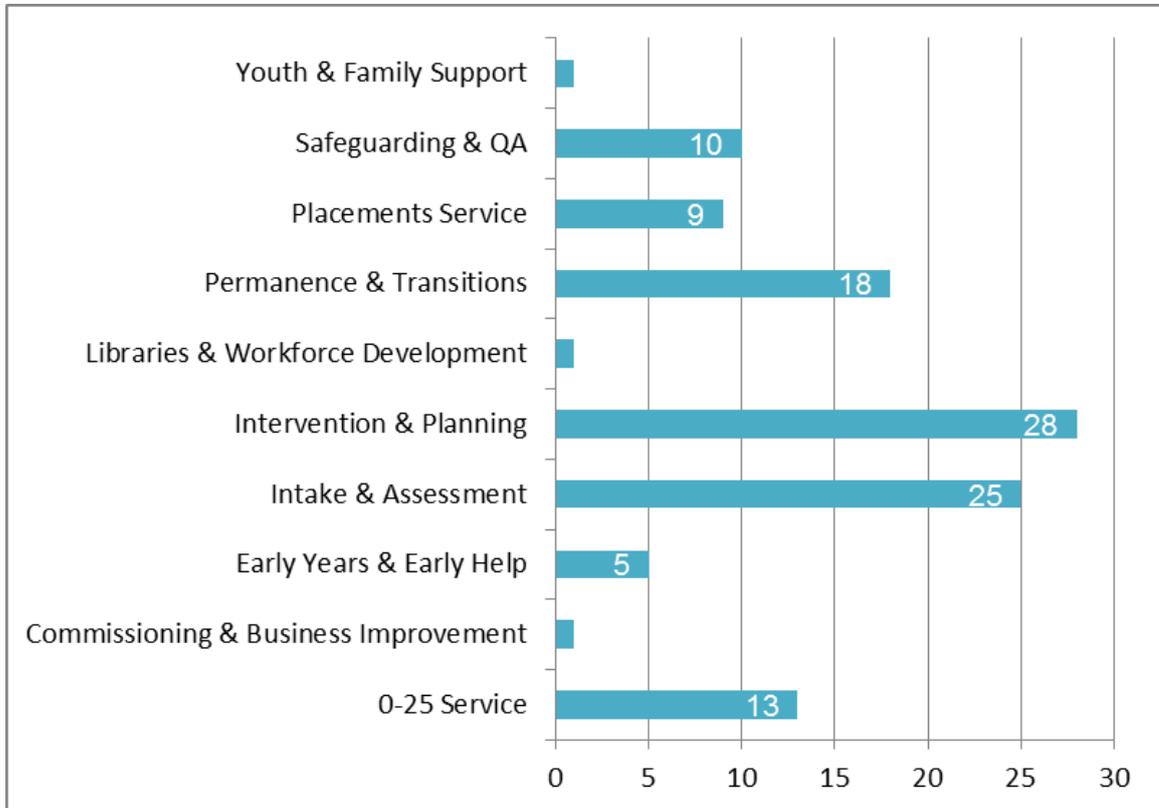
3. Overall number of complaints in 2016-17 (see appendix 1 for a detailed breakdown)

- 3.1 There were 111 Stage 1 complaints, and 5 Stage 2 complaints received 2016/17 representing a 12% increase from 2015/16.
- 3.2 Three requests to progress complaints to Stage 3 under the Corporate Process were declined by the Corporate Complaints Manager.
- 3.3 Overall, 9% of Stage 1 complaints received were upheld.

4. Summary of Stage 1 complaints

As Table 1 outlines, 70% of all complaints received during 2016/17 were about Children's Social Care Services which is reflective of the challenging nature of statutory social work intervention and service provision.

Table 1



- 4.1 35% of complaints are about dissatisfaction with the actions of staff, and this is a 3% decrease from 2015/16. These complaints are usually about the attitude of the staff member (such as the complainant felt that they were rude, or unsympathetic) or that the staff member has not completed tasks that they should have done (such as responding to an email or returning a phone call)
- 4.2 The second highest category of complaint relates to decision making which account for 24% of all complaints. This category saw a 2% increase from 2015/16. These complaints are generally challenging decisions that are difficult for families to accept or understand, such as the decision to progress a case to a Child Protection Conference, or where a Looked After Child is placed.
- 4.3 17% of complaints were about the quality of service provided representing a 4% decrease from the previous year. These are where the complainant generally feels that they have received a poor service from us, for example that there have been delays or a lack of communication between the service and the family.

- 4.4 Complaints about assessments reduced from 10 to 7 and complaints categorised as 'other' reduced by half.
- 4.5 The Intervention & Planning (I&P) Service holds responsibility for Child in Need and Child Protection casework. It received the highest level of complaints (28) within Children's Social Care service area and the highest proportion of complaints under the category of 'action of a staff member' than any other service area. Conversely, the I&P Service also received the highest volume (29%) of Children's Social Care compliments.
- 4.6 During 2016/17 the I&P Service underwent a number of changes including a number of staffing and management changes alongside the development of seven smaller teams from three large teams which has increased the ratio of management to staff from 1:13 to 1:6.
- 4.7 69% of complaints received are not upheld. There will be a focus on achieving early and informal resolution in the year ahead to reduce the number of unfounded complaints that are received at Stage 1.
- 4.8 The percentage of complaints either fully or partially upheld is 30% which is a decrease from 50% in the previous year. Whilst this is a positive trend, there is still work to do to ensure that the service achieves improvements to reduce the volume of complaints received and reduce further still the volume of complaints that find the council to be at fault in some or all of the elements of the complaint.
- 4.9 Over the course of the year, 77% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to within 10 working days. This is below the Corporate Target of 90%. Apart from one complaint, all of the late responses were complaint responses from Children's Social Care, Q4 had the highest level with 9/25 complaints received responded to out of timescale. Efforts have been made to ensure that managers recognise the importance of responding to complaints on time.

5. Stage 2 Complaints

- 5.1 During 2016/17 4 complaints were progressed under Stage 2 of the Council's complaint procedure. No complaints were progressed under Stage 2 in 2015/16.
- 5.2 These complaints related to Fostering Recruitment, Adoption, Safeguarding and Children in Care. The reasons for the complaints vary, but in three of them the Stage 2 complaint could have potentially been avoided with more robust response at Stage 1.
- 5.3 Only one of the four Stage 2 complaints were responded to within the timescale.
- 5.4 One request for a Stage 2 investigation was declined by the Complaints Officer, as the complainant had not provided any new information and the outcome would not have changed.
- 5.5 During 2016/17 only one request for a Stage 2 complaint under the Children Act

was made which is a decrease from the previous year when three investigations were completed. The Children Act requires the appointment of an independent investigator to carry out Stage 2 complaints.

- 5.6 The complaint was made on behalf of a teenage girl who had initially given consent for her mother to make the complaint on her behalf. The Investigating Team met with the mother and the daughter, and it became apparent that the mother was not representing her daughter's views, as they shared differing opinions.
- 5.7 The Complaints Officer agreed with the Investigating Team that the investigation should be closed and the young person invited to make her own complaint. The Quality Assurance team were asked to audit the case to highlight issues or areas of learning, and these were taken forward by the Assistant Director.

6. Stage 3 Complaints

- 6.1 There were no Stage 3 complaint investigations in 2016/17 although two requests for escalation to Stage 3 were submitted. These included a complaint against Safeguarding where the parent felt that a referral about her to Children's Social Care Services was unfair, and a complaint from a father who had asked his daughter to leave the family home because his request to be re-housed to a larger property was declined. These were declined by the Corporate Complaints Manager because the Stage 2 responses had thoroughly investigated the issues, and further investigation would not have changed the outcome.
- 6.2 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 four Stage 3 investigations for other departments.

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

- 7.1 During 2016/17 there were 12 complaints received from young people, a decrease from 15 last year.
- 7.2 Barnardo's were contracted to provide advocacy services for Children in Care, which includes supporting them with complaints. The Strategy, Insight and Commissioning Team have been working more closely with Barnardo's over the past two years to monitor the contract and ensure that the advocates aim to resolve issues locally with Team Managers, before submitting a formal complaint. The benefit to the young person is that the issues are likely to be resolved sooner and without the need for formal investigations which can cause delay.
- 7.3 All of the complaints received from young people were about their experience of

services from Children's Social Care Services; in particular, the Children in Care team, the Onwards & Upwards Care Leaver Service and the Intervention & Planning Service. Young people complained about social workers failing to keep promises, not feeling supported by their social workers or experiencing frequent changes of allocated worker

- 7.4 Four complaints related to the action of a member of staff (an increase from last year) and a further four generally feeling like they had received a poor service. In many of the complaints, there were points that were upheld as it was acknowledged that social workers could have done things better, or approached things in a different way.
- 7.5 Family Services now provide a smartphone app, Mind of My Own (MOMO) which young people can use to give feedback to the service. They can also use this to submit complaints. Although the app has not been in use for that long, it gives young people an opportunity to raise concerns without making a complaint. The Voice of the Child Team will be working to engage more young people with the app over the coming year.

8. Outcomes in the last year

- 8.1 77% of complaints were responded to on time. At the beginning of this year, the corporate target for response rates was increased from 80% to 90%. Therefore we are now falling short of the corporate target. Only two Delivery Units in the Council met the 90% target (Barnet Group and Street Scene), with most Delivery Units achieving between 80 and 89%
- 8.2 During this year, only one request for a statutory Stage 2 investigation was received which was not progressed following review. This is very low when compared to the volume of Stage 1 complaints which demonstrates that responses under Stage 1, whilst not always timely are of a sufficiently good quality to satisfy complainants and reduce the risk of further escalation.
- 8.3 There has been an improvement in achieving resolution to complaints through phone calls and face to face meetings which is proving to be a more effective way of resolving issues as it leans towards a person-centred approach. The Complaints Team, along with Heads of Service, will continue to encourage managers to deal with complaints in this way, and follow up meetings with a letter setting out what has been agreed and actions that will be taken.
- 8.4 The 'Closing the Loop' Group meets every 6 weeks to discuss and develop the complaints process for both service users and staff, and to identify learning from outcomes and areas for development. There is consistent and regular attendance from managers from outside of Children's Social Care but it has been more difficult to maintain consistency of attendance from Social Work Teams due to casework priorities and changes in management.
- 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, as well as benchmarking. The Barnet's Complaints Officer will chair the North London Complaints Managers Group for the year ahead.

- 8.6 There is a well-established complaints process, of which staff are aware. There are complaints leaflets and business cards, as well as information on the staff intranet and public website. Regular items are added to the staff newsletter as a reminder of the complaints process.

9. Areas for development for 2017-18

9.1 Outcomes following OFSTED inspection

Feedback following the OFSTED Inspection of Children's Services in July 2017 highlighted that although we have good processes in place for dealing with individual complaints, we need to ensure that outcomes and learning from complaints has a real impact on service delivery. It was noted that there is a good level of information available regarding themes and trends in complaints, this are not always utilised by senior managers. Actions will be included in the Improvement Action Plan with the aim of developing how we learn from complaints. OFSTED also advised that we consider reviewing our printed material and web content in relation to complaints, and this will be considered by the Complaints Team.

9.2 Identifying service improvement or process change

Family Services need to develop into a learning organisation by using complaints to aid learning about the way in which services are delivered. It is expected that services are improved as a result of complaint outcomes. Changes need to be driven by practice leaders and supported by the Complaints Team who will track and identify trends and common themes, and where appropriate suggest direct action that could lead to improvement. A strong link between the Complaints Team and the Practice Development Workers will be forged to embed learning into practice.

It has been agreed at the Closing the Loop group that complaint themes raised by young people will be taken to the Children in Care Council for further discussion and to identify any potential outcomes or improvements.

9.3 Engaging and supporting young people

The Complaints Team need to ensure that young people can access the complaints process. There are mechanisms in place, including paper forms and a smartphone app, but more needs to be done to ensure that young people are aware of these routes and engage with them.

9.4 Performance rates

The Complaints Team and all team managers responsible for responding to complaints need to focus on responding to complaints within the time scale in order to meet the corporate target. The Complaints Team will continue to send timely reminders to support managers to ensure that we comply with The Children Act complaints process and the Council's policy.

9.5 Maturity Model

The Corporate Complaints team has implemented 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.

9.6 Learning from compliments

Over the coming months a method for identifying learning outcomes from compliments and positive feedback received by the service will be developed. It is important for staff morale and continued service improvements that good practice is recognised and learning is shared across the service to raise standards. The Complaints Team will provide quarterly briefings on complaints through communication channels for staff including Practice Weekly and Family Service Grapevine. Managers need to ensure that positive feedback is recorded and shared to enable the Practice Development Workers to feed this back into practice across the system.

10. Members enquiries

10.1 In 2016-17, Family Service received 37 enquiries from elected members, a slight decrease from 40 in the previous year. There was an increase in the number of enquiries regarding the 0 to 25 service, mostly where parents had asked for assistance with obtaining services.

10.2 In the majority of enquiries, the Member was providing assistance to the constituent by asking for an overview of the family's involvement with services to ensure that decisions were made fairly and in line with appropriate policies and procedures. Members are aware that they cannot influence decisions made under statutory processes, however they can ensure that these processes are followed correctly and that their constituents are treated fairly and justly.

10.3 The corporate target for responding to Members is 5 working days, and this target was achieved in 76% of enquiries.

10.4 Where the responses were out of time, this was mainly due to the complexity of the family's involvement with services and the feasibility of the manager gathering the relevant information in 5 working days. In such cases the Member was advised that there would be a delay.

11. Compliments

11.1 There were 125 compliments formally recorded in 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 and colleagues in the quarterly report.

Some compliments received by staff in Family Services

- *"Hey just wanted to say thank you so much for literally being the best social worker I've had , you've helped me so much and been seeing me when I need someone to speak to unlike my previous social workers, god bless you, thanks again"*
- *" I would just like to say thank you for all of your support, we have walked away feeling very positive and proud of how far we have come. I can now start putting the past behind me and continue this journey with so much more positivity. I know by all means this is not the end but today I really saw and felt just how far we've come. I will continue progressing with my head held high. so thank you once again."*
- *'I want to thank you guys for setting me up for success and victory. This course was a long time coming, I'm so glad I made it in the end!! I will continue to use the tools that you have equipped me with for life. Not only the tools for myself, but also with my children!! I will continue to share my glory with other women. Thank you again, for your support, encouragement, kindness and the snacks!!'*
- *"Thank you for your email, I am so happy there are people like you, it is rare to come across people like you who care so much and go out of their way to ensure good outcome. It is a breath of fresh air and you removed a big weight from me when you took charge of my problem and did everything to assist. That's priceless. Thank you for your very kind attention."*
- *"I want to thank you for very kind telephone conversation, you gave me a peaceful mind as I am in breaking point. Thank you very much for empathising with us and taking time to talk to me that I do appreciate. I wish you had come to us in first place, you are a true social worker and you are working to true principle of social work and you have been keeping me sane throughout this tragedy. I do appreciate your attitude toward your work and our problem. Simply thank you for what you have done for us and how you did it always with smile and assurance."*

12. Overall conclusion

- 12.1 Over the past year there has been improvement in the analysis of trends and themes in complaints, supported by input from Heads of Service for the quarterly reports, which sets out service improvements that have happened as a result of complaints. However, there is more work to do to really demonstrate impact and to ensure that complaints are used to improve quality and the experiences of children, young people and families using our services.
- 12.2 We are pleased that we continue to have very low numbers of Stage 2 statutory complaints compared to other local authorities which is demonstrative of the quality of responses provided at Stage 1.
- 12.3 It is recognised that complaints play an important role in organisational learning, and the substantial change in the past year in a number of service areas appears to correlate with the rise in both complaints and compliments. It is expected that in the year ahead there will be a reduction in complaints and a rise in compliments as the service improvements take hold and the changes embed across Family Services
- 12.4 Over the year ahead there will be a continued drive to ensure that all service users have access to the complaints process, particularly children and young people and that feedback from complaints and compliments is used to improve our services