

Appendix 1

Family Services Complaints, Compliments and Comments

Annual Report 1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018

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 As part of our improvement journey, learning from complaints has been a key focus for this year. The Complaints Team are reporting on themes in the quarterly reports, and have good links with the Service User Engagement project and the Development Team. However, there is still more to do to integrate learning from complaints and compliments into wider workforce and service development. Over the coming year we need to focus on taking practical action to remedy individual complaints and prevent future complaints.
- 1.3 During 2017/18 there were 121 formal Stage 1 complaints and 124 compliments received. This is an increase of 10 formal Stage 1 complaints from 111 last year and a decrease of 1 compliment from 125 in the previous year. In this year Family Services worked with over 5000 children, so the number of complaints made represents 2% of the cohort.
- 1.4 Whilst there has been an increase in complaints overall, the main service with an increase in the volume of complaints was Intake & Assessment, whilst Intervention & Planning saw a decrease. There has been an increase in the number of complaints from young people, which indicates that young people have access to the complaints process.
- 1.5 61% of complaints received were responded to within the given timescale. This is below the corporate target of 90%. The months when staff are more likely to take leave (August, December and March) were particularly low in performance.
- 1.6 The number of compliments recorded has remained at a consistent level, with the Intake & Assessment and Placements & Disabilities services seeing an increase. In previous years the non-statutory teams received the highest number of compliments, so it is positive that we are now seeing more front-line teams receiving positive feedback. The majority of these are from parents and other professionals.
- 1.7 Plans are in place to deal with the key theme from complaints through the improvement activities being undertaken by Family Services.

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. This stage was removed from the process in July 2017.

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 2017-18 (see appendix A for a detailed breakdown)

3.1 There were 121 Stage 1 complaints, and 5 Stage 2 complaints received 2017/18 representing a 9% increase from 2016/17.

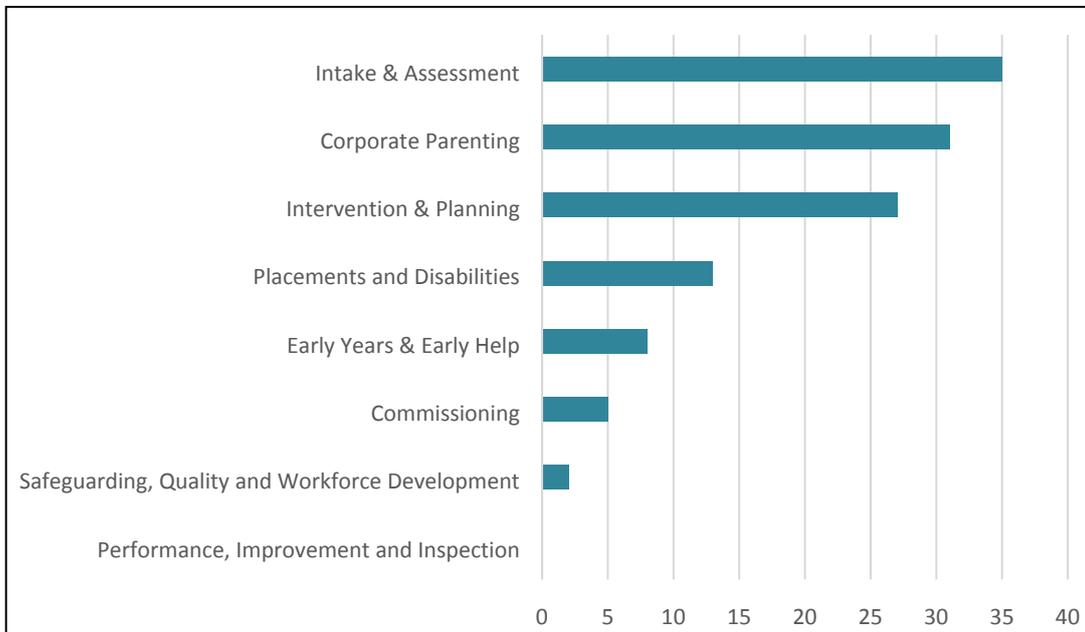
3.2 The number of Stage 2 investigations under the Children Act increased from one to three, with a further three being started but not completed in this reporting period. This is significant because Stage 2 investigations are lengthy, costly and are stressful for those involved.

3.3 Overall, 21% of Stage 1 complaints received were upheld, a significant increase from 9% in the previous year.

4. Summary of Stage 1 complaints

As Table 1 outlines, 87% of all complaints received during 2017/18 were about Children's Social Care Services. This is in line with expectations, as the work undertaken by these teams is often intensive and emotive.

Table 1



- 4.1 39% of complaints were about dissatisfaction with the actions of staff, and this is a 3% increase from 2016/17. 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). However, it is recognised that in some cases the complainant is unhappy with the intervention from social services, and makes a complaint about the worker as a way of responding to the concerns that are being raised about their family. The majority of these complaints were about the Intake & Assessment Teams (20).
- 4.2 The second highest category of complaint relates to people feeling that they have generally received a poor service, representing 26% of complaints, a 9% increase from last year. These are where the complainant generally feels that they have not been supported in the right way, and usually contains elements such as a lack of good communication and delays in actions being completed.
- 4.3 Complaints relating to decision making account for 15% of all complaints, although this is a 9% decrease from last year. These complaints are generally challenging decisions that are difficult for families to accept or understand, such as the outcome of an assessment, or the placement of a Looked After child.

- 4.4 The Intake & Assessment Service is made up of the MASH team and the Duty and Assessment teams, who assess all new cases coming into the service. It received the highest level of complaints (35) within Children's Social Care service area and the highest proportion of complaints (20) under the category of 'action of a staff member'. Families being assessed by the Duty & Assessment Teams are often experiencing significant challenges or are in a time of crisis, and may react by raising complaints about the worker or the decision making. However, we also need to consider whether this could also indicate that DAT team workers need to consider their approach with families.
- 4.5 However, the I&A Service also received the highest volume (28) of Children's Social Care compliments. 16 of these were from parents, and many of the compliments included the sentiment of 'thank you for taking the time to listen to us', and saying that they felt supported by their social worker. This is a great improvement, because in the previous year this service only recorded 15 compliments in total, only six of which were from parents.
- 4.6 The 0 to 25 Service has seen a drop in the number of complaints received (6, compared to 13 in the previous year). The nature of the complaints received has changed, and the service received fewer complaints about care packages. This is attributed to a focus co-production with parents, and emphasis on evidence based assessments, and the Disability Resource Panel, both of which mean that families are getting the appropriate packages for their needs and in a timely manner.
- 4.7 21% of the Stage 1 complaints were upheld, compared to 9% last year. The majority of the upheld complaints were about a general lack of poor service, where we have acknowledged that the family has not received the quality of service that they should have done. Having a high number of upheld complaints demonstrates that we are recognising when we are at fault – the next step is to ensure that we are learning from those complaints.
- 4.8 61% of complaints received were responded to within the given timescale. This is below the corporate target of 90%. The months when staff are more likely to take leave (August, December and March) were particularly low in performance. The Intake & Assessment Service has the lowest percentage of complaints responded to on time. It is important that we improve on this, because if we respond to complaints on time, the chances of successful resolution are better. It also has an impact on the social worker's ability to successfully engage with a family if there is an outstanding complaint.

5. Stage 2 Complaints

- 5.1 During 2017/18, two complaints were progressed under Stage 2 of the Council's complaint procedure.
- 5.2 One of these related to the Early Years Service, where the parent was unhappy that there had been a delay in providing funding for his son's nursery place. The parent escalated this to stage 2 because he felt that the explanation for the delay, which had been in part due to the nursery and in part due to our finance

processes, was not satisfactory. The complaint was partially upheld at Stage 2, and we offered a compensation amount of £500.

- 5.3 The other complaint related to the Duty and Assessment Team, regarding a case where the parent felt that the social workers and team manager were not sympathetic towards her child's transgender issues, and did not feel that a Child and Family Assessment was necessary. This was reviewed at Stage 2 but was not upheld.
- 5.4 During 2017/18, we carried out three investigations under Stage 2 complaint of the Children Act, and a further three were started but not completed in this reporting period. This is an increase from one in the previous year. The Children Act requires the appointment of an independent investigator to carry out Stage 2 complaints. All of these were from young people.
- 5.5 One complaint related to events that happened in 2012, and the young person says that he should have been accommodated as a child in care, rather than offered Temporary Accommodation. The Investigating Officer agreed, and we offered a compensation amount to reflect support that the young person would have received had he been a child in care and care leaver. Since 2012, joint assessments between social care and housing have improved, so this should prevent similar issues occurring now.
- 5.6 One complaint was from two looked after siblings, who felt that their social worker was not supportive and did not complete tasks when promised. They also felt that their foster carer had been treated unfairly. The Investigating Officer did not uphold much of their complaint, although acknowledged that they had experienced several changes of social worker without smooth transitions. The siblings were not satisfied that their complaint was resolved, and are currently in discussions with the Operational Director, and it is hoped that this will move things forward for them.
- 5.7 The third complaint was from a care leaver who felt that we should not have closed her case when we did, as it affected her mental health. The Investigating Officer found that support had been offered to the young person to engage with services, but that the young person had not engaged with this support, therefore the Local Authority were right to consider closing the case, and acknowledged that this had been done gradually to allow the young person to move to independence. Since these events, the criteria for the Onwards and Upwards (Leaving Care team) has changed.
- 5.8 Of the 6 stage 2 complaint investigations started in this reporting period, 5 of them could have been avoided or at least reduced by more timely resolution at Stage 1. In all cases where the complainant is unhappy following the initial stage 1 response, the complaints team request that the Head of Service review the case and complaint, and where appropriate offer a meeting. In these 5 cases, delays in this happening led to the complaint escalating to stage 2, where it may have otherwise been resolved at Stage 1.

6. Stage 3 Complaints

- 6.1 There were no Stage 3 complaint investigations under the Children Act in 2017/18. One of the complainants who had had his complaint investigated under Stage 2 requested to escalate his complaint. However after discussions between him and the Complaints Team, it was agreed to request an early referral to the Local Government Ombudsman, which was accepted.
- 6.2 The Council's complaints procedure was rewritten in July 2017, and the Stage 3 was removed. Family Services did not receive any Stage 3 complaints between April 2017 and July 2017.

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

- 7.1 During 2017/18 there were 15 complaints received from young people, a slight increase from the previous year (12). This indicates that young people have access to the complaints process.
- 7.2 From September 2017, the advocacy arrangements for children in care changed, having previously been provided by Barnardo's the service moved internally, with the advocate being directly employed by Barnet. This should help to create a more direct relationship between the advocate and the social work teams, whilst still maintaining the independence of the advocate and help issues be resolved more quickly.
- 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 and the Onwards & Upwards Care Leaver Service. There was one complaint about the residential unit, and one about a Duty and Assessment social worker. Young people complained about social workers failing to keep promises, not feeling supported by their social workers or experiencing frequent changes of allocated worker. There were also several about placement moves (i.e. the young person needing or wanting to move placements, but felt that the worker was not doing enough to arrange a new placement quickly enough).
- 7.4 Six complaints related to the action of a member of staff (an increase from last year) and a further five complaining about a decision that had been made that they disagreed with. 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, but that the decision still needed to stand.
- 7.5 In the partially upheld or upheld complaints, it was acknowledged that there had been delays in decisions been made or action being taken.

8. Themes from complaints

- 8.1 There are a number of themes that the complaints team have highlighted throughout this year. There is a vast amount of improvement activity going on in

Family Services as part of the Improvement Plan, and the themes noted in complaints are often the same as noted in other review work, such as case audits.

8.2 Fathers who are not in the family home feeling excluded from the case management

This is something which was noted in the Ofsted inspection, and continues to be assessed as 'Requires Improvement' through our internal auditing processes which note parent engagement in assessments and planning. This is being used to inform training and development of staff.

8.3 Young people experiencing delays in placement moves

Ofsted found that placement stability and choices of placements for children are improving, with an increase in the number of Barnet registered foster carers, and reviews of semi-independent provision. However, we continue to need foster carers for adolescents with complex needs in particular, and will be updating the Placement Sufficiency Strategy in October 2018 to plan how this need can be met. The 2017/18 target of recruiting 10 foster carers was met.

Barnet is involved in sub-regional partnerships to aid placement sufficiency, including the West London Alliance, under which we are leading on the re-commissioning of Independent Fostering Agency, and the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium. and also on strengthening foster recruitment activity as part of the NLAFC.

8.4 Families not being given copies of reports or assessment in good time prior to Child Protection Conferences

A programme of activities, in collaboration with Essex County Council, has been developed to strengthen Child Protection Conferences and Looked After Children Reviews, with a new model of Conferencing being rolled out in April 2018

8.5 Parents complaining that social workers are hard to get hold of

Work has been done to reduce the average caseload of workers, to allow more time for direct work with families. Corporately, new technology including Office 365 and Skype has been implemented, which should allow workers better management of their workload and communication.

8.6 Parents complaining about attitude of worker, being judgemental or unsympathetic

The majority of these complaints related to Duty and Assessment and Intervention and Planning Teams, the nature of which is to make enquiries and challenge families to ensure that we are protecting children from harm. This can often be seen as a lack of sympathy by the family. Senior Managers and team managers manage this on a case by case basis, discussing in supervision with workers as appropriate.

8.7 Complaints about unpaid invoices and delays in paying invoices. Usually this is due to delays in commitment forms being completed or authorised on the case system.

Permissions have been reviewed in the social work systems and corporate teams are engaged in providing support to bureaucratic difficulties which are causing delays in provision of services.

8.8 Parents not being informed that their child will be interviewed at school under Section 47 enquiries. The Head of Service agreed that consent should have been sought

Although this was a one-off complaint, it is an important issue, as it shows a misunderstanding of the Section 47 process. The Head of Service discussed this in a team managers meeting as a reminder of our remit and duty under Section 47 and requested that this be reiterated to staff.

8.9 Families experiencing several changes of social worker and/or not being told when they have a new worker

In some cases, the change of social worker is necessary as the case progresses through the system (i.e. from duty to a longer term team), and in some cases the change was unavoidable due to the worker leaving. However what we need to improve on is reducing the time it takes to allocate a new worker, and the communication with the families.

9. Areas for development for 2018-19

9.1 Learning from complaints

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, and that senior managers can use this to drive improvement. Over the coming year the Complaints Team will ensure that reports and data is easily accessible to senior managers, and will encourage the flow of information back to the Complaints Team to provide updates on improvement work so that this can also be collated into reports.

9.2 Service User Engagement Group

A Service User Engagement Group is being developed, although it has taken longer than anticipated for the pilot to be completed. Once this is established, this should provide a valuable link between the Complaints Team and the improvement work that is being carried out throughout Family Services. Themes and outcomes from complaints will feed into the project and contribute to action being taken to make improvements.

9.3 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 deadlines. 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.

9.4 Learning from compliments

The Complaints team regularly encourage staff to pass on positive feedback that has been received, and this is presented in the quarterly reports. 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 team will look at ways to identify learning from these compliments and will direct this to the Service User Engagement group.

10. Members enquiries

10.1 In 2017/18, Family Service received 41 enquiries from elected members, a slight increase from 37 in the previous year.

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 80% 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 124 compliments formally recorded in Family Service in this year, which is a decrease of one 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

- *"Thanks so much for your help over the weeks. Any families that get you as their social worker are in great hands and I wish you were still mine!"*
- *"I want to thank you for all the time and effort you put into helping me. You are an amazing Youth Worker. I wish you all the best for the future. I will always remember how you supported me and motivated me and how I would leave your sessions with a smile on my face. You taught me a lot and you are inspiring. Don't change for the world."*
- *"She was patient, non-judgemental and incredibly kind. She listened and helped me to love myself and capabilities as a mum. She was outstanding. She has made us a team - a loving mum and daughter who are there for each other now. Thank you, you have changed our lives."*
- *"Thank you so much for all your help. We are all well and things are getting a little better everyday. Forever grateful for what you did for our family"*
- *"This seems like a good time to thank you for listening with patience, supporting us with care and for being considerate and kind! You have been and are a really marvellous help to our family during this past year. Thank you."*
- *"I have loved every second of my session with her. Her help and information has been life changing to our family and home life. This has been one of the best things that we have ever done for our family. My relationship with my daughter has improved 100 fold and this is so important for me. I have found this so important and cannot express my appreciation. Our home is calmer, happier and smoother. My girls are getting on better with each other. The advice we received was invaluable and we couldn't be any happier, thank you so much for your kind and helpful manner. It has been a pleasure seeing you every week and you (and your magical wand) will be missed"*

12. Overall conclusion

12.1 Over the past year there has been a concentration on improvement work within Family Services, which identifies many of the same issues as complaints do. However, there is more work to do to really demonstrate that complaints are being used to drive that improvement work, and that staff at all levels are keen to learn from complaints, on an individual and on a thematic basis.

12.2 We recognise that we need to improve our performance in meeting timescales. It is known that delays in the initial response means that the complaint is more likely to escalate, as this causes additional distress to families. Team Managers and Senior Managers need to help ensure that complaints, and the statutory timescales, are taken seriously within their teams.

12.3 Over the year ahead there will be a continued drive to ensure that all service users have access to the complaints process, that we meet our timescales, and that learning from complaints and compliments is embedded into the improvement work of Family Services.