

Appendix A

Family Services Complaints, Compliments and Comments

Annual Report 1 April 2018 – March 2019

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This is 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 feedback regularly to senior management via the Business Management Group. However, there is still more to do to integrate learning from complaints and compliments into wider workforce and service development.
- 1.3 During 2018/19 there were 104 formal Stage 1 complaints and 83 compliments received. This is a decrease of 17 formal Stage 1 complaints from 121 last year and a decrease of 41 compliments from 124 in the previous year. In this year Family Services worked with over 5000 children, so the number of complaints made represents just 2% of the cohort, and it is positive that we have received fewer Stage 1 complaints this year than the previous year.
- 1.4 Whilst there has been an overall decrease in the volume of stage 1 complaints received, the service areas which received them has remained in line with trends in previous years, with Intake & Assessment and Intervention & Planning receiving the majority.
- 1.5 46% of stage 1 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 as in previous years, however there were several other months during the year when performance was below expectation.
- 1.6 The number of compliments recorded has decreased slightly, but some areas, such as Corporate Parenting, and in particular the Adoption Team, seeing an increase.

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)

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 2018/19 (see appendix 1 for a detailed breakdown)

3.1 There were 104 Stage 1 complaints received during 2018/19 representing a 14% decrease from 2017/18.

3.2 The number of Stage 2 investigations concluded in this reporting period was three, the same number as the previous year.

3.3 Overall, 12% (13) of Stage 1 complaints received were upheld, a decrease from 21% (21) in the previous year. This indicates that in many of the cases we have not identified fault, although we do need to be conscious of the reasons why someone would make a complaint, and be aware that even if we do not uphold the complaint there may still be lessons to be learnt.

4. Summary of Stage 1 complaints

As Table 1 outlines, 94% (98) of all complaints received during 2018/19 were about Social Care Services. This is in line with expectations, as the work undertaken by these teams is often intensive and emotive.

As can be seen with comparison with Table 2 (2017/18), the distribution of the complaints across the service is largely similar to previous years.

Table 1 – 2018/19

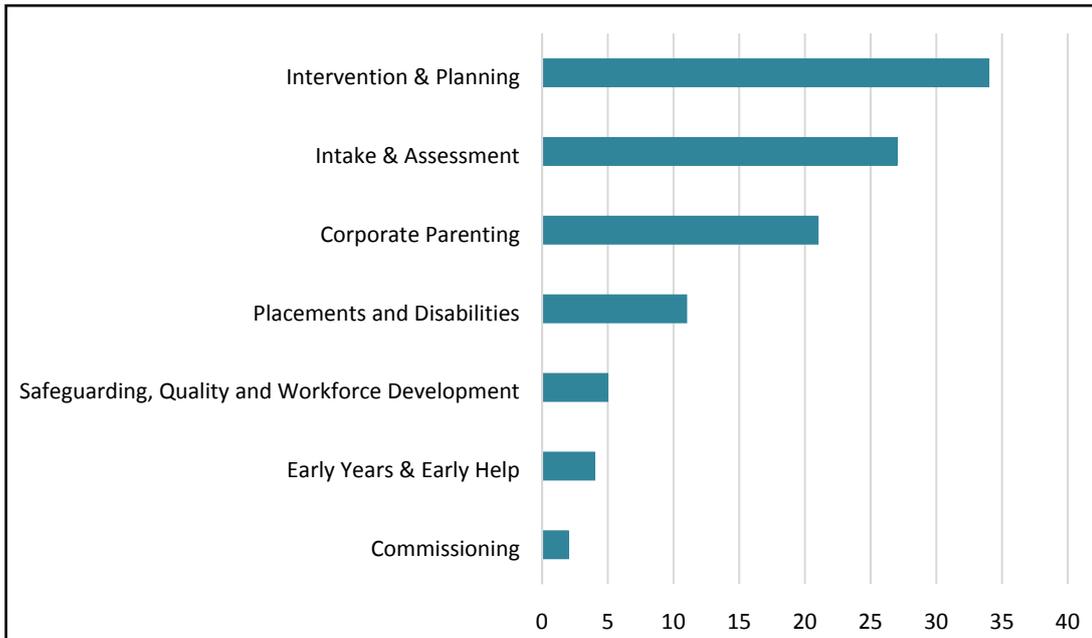
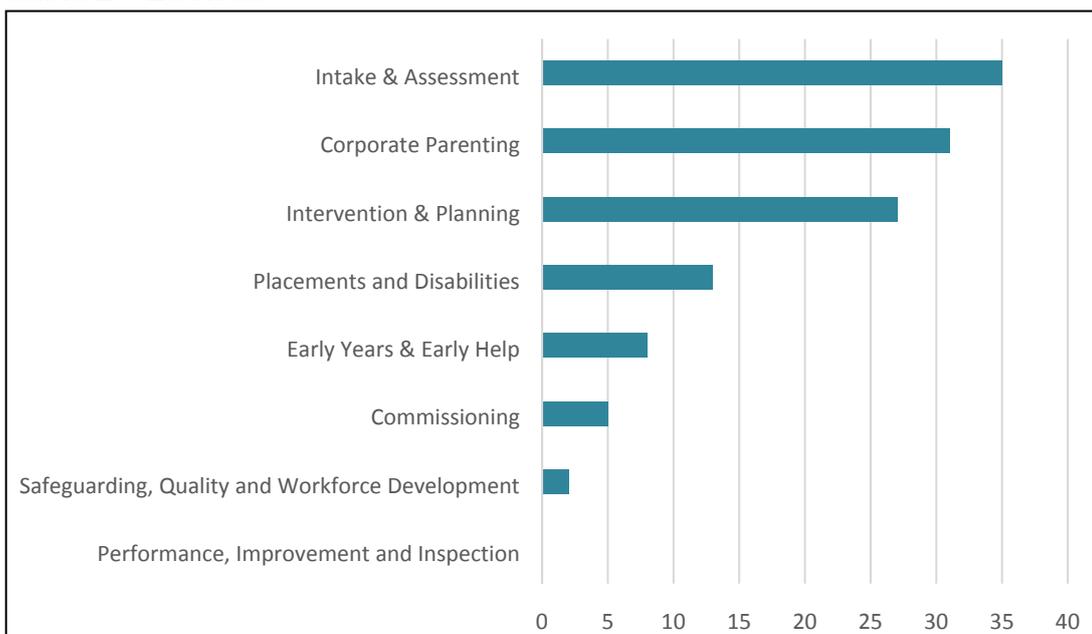


Table 2 – 2017/18



- 4.1 41% (43) of complaints were about dissatisfaction with the actions of staff, and this is a 3% increase from 2017/18 (48), although volume wise this is a decrease of 5. 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. 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 deflecting the concerns that are being raised about their family.
- 4.2 The second highest category of complaint relates to people feeling that they have generally received a poor service, representing 19% (12) of complaints, a decrease from last year, which is positive. These are where the complainant generally feels that they have not been supported in the right way, such as delays in actions being carried out or poor communication from the worker.
- 4.3 Complaints relating to the quality and accuracy of assessments has increased significantly this year (9 complaints, 12%). Many of these related to alleged factual errors in reports, or the parent feeling that the report is biased against them. In many cases where the report was being presented to a meeting (i.e. Child Protection conference) the complainant felt that the report influenced the outcome of the meeting.
- 4.4 The Intervention & Planning Teams received the highest level of complaints (34), however this service also proportionately hold the most cases. The majority of the complaints were about action of staff, including that the complainant felt that the social worker was judgemental or unsympathetic, and generally feeling unsupported by the service.
- 4.5 12% (13) of the complaints were fully upheld and 26% (28) were partially upheld, a decrease from the previous year. The majority of the upheld complaints were about particular staff members or poor service, where we have acknowledged that the family has not received the quality of service that they should have done. It is positive that the number of complaints where we have found fault has decreased, although we still need to consider the reasons why someone would feel that there are grounds to complain (i.e. have we explained decisions to the family in an appropriate way)
- 4.6 46% (48) 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. There is no particular service who had a poorer performance than others, most of the teams responded to less than half of their complaints 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 as it demonstrates that we have taken the concerns seriously.

5. Stage 2 Complaints

- 5.1 During 2018/19, two complaints were progressed under Stage 2 of the Council's complaint procedure.

- 5.1.1 One of these related to the Early Years Service, where a childminder was unhappy that there had been a delay in releasing funding to her for a child, and that she was unhappy with the advice she had been given by members of the team. This was upheld and following closure of the complaint the Manager contacted all providers to remind them of the correct process for applying for funding.
- 5.1.2 The other complaint was from a parent who had obtained a copy of his child's file via a Subject Access Request, and was unhappy with some of the wording in the case recording. The Team Manager did not agree to make any changes to the record, and the complainant asked for this to be escalated. This was reviewed by the Operational Director, and although the complaint was not upheld, she agreed to change factual errors, and place a clear note on the file outlining the parent's disagreement.
- 5.2 During 2018/19, we carried out three investigations under Stage 2 complaint of the Children Act. The Children Act requires the appointment an independent investigator to carry out Stage 2 complaints, and they can be lengthy.
 - 5.2.1 One complaint was from parents who felt that the decision to recommend a Child in Need plan for their children was flawed. They raised concerns about the quality of the Child and Family Assessment, and that the outcome was not backed up by evidence. They also felt that the original referral, from the school, should have been challenged more robustly, and that an assessment was unnecessary. The Independent Investigator's conclusion was that social services were right to carry out an assessment, and the outcome was reasonable, but identified that the C&F Assessment could have been of better quality. The Adjudicator agreed for a senior manager to review and update the assessment.
 - 5.2.2 One complaint was a grandparent on behalf of a young person regarding confusion and lack of decision making regarding her placement. The young person moved back to her grandparents because a suitable semi-independent placement could not be found. The Investigator found that the case had generally been poorly managed, and had led to uncertainty and confusion for the young person. The Operational Director met with the family to apologise and to agree a path forward to ensure that the young person had the right support moving forward.
 - 5.2.3 The third complaint was from a parent who disagreed with the decision to create a Child Protection Plan for her daughter. The Investigator concluded that the decision was reasonable considering the concerns that had been raised about the family.

6. Stage 3 Complaints

- 6.1 Two of the Stage 2 complaints referred to above (5.2.1 and 5.2.3) were escalated to Stage 3 review panels. Another one (5.2.2) was avoided because

the Operational Director met with the family and resolved the issues.

- 6.2 The purpose of Review Panels is not to reinvestigate the complaint, but consider whether the Stage 2 investigation was thorough and fair. At both of these review panels, the Panel Chair identified small issues that should be upheld, but concluded that the broad outcome of the investigation stood.

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

- 7.1 During 2018/19 there were 9 complaints received from young people, a decrease from 15 in the previous year. 5 of these were from care leavers, and 4 from children in care.
- 7.2 All of complaints received from young people were about their experience of services from Children's Social Care Services. Young people complain about social workers failing to keep promises, not feeling supported by their social workers or generally feeling that decisions and actions were not taken quick enough. In previous years we have received several complaints from young people who were not happy with their placements; only one of the complaints in 2018/19 was about this. We had no complaints about the young person having too many changes of allocated worker, which had been a theme in previous years
- 7.3 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. In the partially upheld or upheld complaints, it was acknowledged that there had been delays in decisions been made or action being taken.
- 7.4 4 of the complaints were responded to within the timescale; this needs to be improved as we need to demonstrate to our children and young people that their concerns are taken seriously.

8. Themes and outcomes from complaints

- 8.1 There are a number of themes that the complaints team have highlighted throughout this year which have been reported to senior management via the Business Management group and through quarterly reports. Many of the themes overlap with issues raised from other areas of improvement activity, and the information from complaints contributes to this work.
- 8.2 **Families complaining about Child Protection Conferences, including that they feel that the chair has based their decision on the social worker's view, and raising issues of accuracy in the social worker's report. In many cases the parents felt that they didn't receive the report with sufficient**

time to review before the Conference.

Manager ensure staff complete reports within timescale and ensuring that parents have time to read and review before any meetings.

8.3 Parents complaining about attitude of worker, being judgemental or unsympathetic, and parents being made to feel uncomfortable, often in their own home

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. The All About Me approach is also promoted to staff to ensure that the child remains at the centre of the work that is being done.

8.4 Delays in cases being transferred from Duty & Assessment Service to Intervention & Planning service, meaning that families can be left uncertain who to contact, and therefore feel unsupported.

The Improvement Board has reviewed this and has analysed the average number of days to transfer a case, which has reduced during the year, and is being kept under regular review by the Head of Service.

8.5 Children in care not having the correct level of savings accessible to them when they leave care

A project has been completed to review how savings for children in care are managed, and a new policy has been implemented. Savings will now be deducted at source and placed in a separate account, rather than expecting carers or providers to manage this. The Placements Team have also undertaken a reconciliation of savings for children currently in care.

8.6 Foster Carers complaining of a lack of communication with children's social worker

The Fostering Support team now ensure that all foster carer's have relevant duty contact details, and that reminders have been placed in the foster carer newsletter about who to contact.

9. Learning and Progress

9.1 The Complaints Team share trends and themes with senior managers through quarterly reports, and attending the Business Management meeting. This is an opportunity for managers to note regular issues and identify any actions that can be taken to prevent future complaints occurring.

9.2 The Complaints Officers are active members of the London Complaints

Managers Group, and the North West London Complaints Managers group, both of which are used to share ideas and experiences with peers across the London boroughs, and allow Barnet to keep up to date with changes to policies and guidance.

- 9.3 The Complaints Team keep up to date with information published by the Local Government Ombudsman, including changes to policies and case studies, which are shared with managers within the service as appropriate. The Ombudsman has also recently created an online form, which the Complaints Officers are an active part of, and is a good opportunity for two-way information sharing between Barnet and the Ombudsman.
- 9.4 The Council has introduced a Maturity Model which rates the department on the work put towards dealing with complaints and learning from the outcomes. Family Services achieved Level 4 (Proactive) and will continue to work with the Corporate Complaints Team to ensure that we maintain this over the coming year.

10. Areas for development for 2019-20

10.1 Learning from complaints

We have made some improvement this year regarding highlighting complaint trends to senior managers, through reporting and attending the Business Management meeting. Over the next year we need to keep up this momentum to ensure that we close the loop on complaints, and take action when themes or trends are identified. This can be done via the staff newsletter or via the DCS at the fortnightly briefing sessions.

10.2 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.

10.3 Support for managers in dealing with complaints

Guidance and templates for response handling is available to staff. This will be reviewed and updated over the coming months, to ensure that managers have the tools and skills to manage complaints. Training provided by the Local Government Ombudsman is going to be offered during 2019/20.

11. Members enquiries

- 11.1 In 2018/19, Family Service received 62 enquiries from elected members, a significant increase from 41 in the previous year.
- 11.2 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.

- 11.3 The corporate target for responding to Members is 5 working days, and this target was achieved in 50% of cases.
- 11.4 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.

12. Compliments

- 12.1 There were 83 compliments formally recorded in Family Service in this year, which is a decrease since last year. Staff and managers are encouraged via their managers and the department newsletter to send compliments to be recorded so that they can be shared with the Senior Management Team and colleagues in the quarterly report.
- 12.2 The Corporate Parenting Service saw an increase in the number of compliments, particularly the Adoption Team, whilst the Placements and Disabilities and Intervention & Planning Services received fewer than in previous years.

Some compliments received by staff in Family Services

- *"A huge thank you for everything that you have done. The tenacity, kindness and guidance you have us made a huge difference and we will never forget how amazing you are. We have been so lucky to have you in our lives and we are truly grateful. You are brilliant and you've changed our lives. When you're having a tough day and drowning in paperwork, remember you are appreciated and loved"*
- *"Can I just mention how incredibly grateful I am to be working with you. I feel I get on with you quite well, and so it's easier for me to discuss issues with you. You respond quickly, and get right on the work I give you. It's this kind of right support that can mean a lot. Social workers of my past have really just screwed me over, and your honest and kind approach is very appreciated. So thank you"*
- *"AB social worker has been a massive key to his success, I have witnessed a consistent and passionate social worker who works in the best interests of the young person and has invested in building a good working relationship and doing so he is able to do some salient direct work with him on every visit . She works closely with placement to ensure AB needs are being met and that AB again is being looked after to the expectations of the local authority and social care regulations."*
- *"I wanted to say thank you for yesterday. Your help and support with the CAF, from answering my numerous emails and coming into school to support me, has been fantastic and is very much appreciated. Once again, many thanks".*

13. Overall conclusion

- 13.1 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. We are also progressing on how we use learning to 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.
- 13.2 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 are ensuring that the importance of complaints and meeting the statutory timescales are understood within their teams. Complaints is a standing item on the Business Management meeting agenda.
- 13.3 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.