



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 10 SEPTEMBER 2018

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE STATUTORY COMPLAINTS AND
COMPLIMENTS ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY
SERVICES

Purpose of Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a summary of the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2017/18.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

- 2 The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 sets out the policy framework against which children's social care complaints should be considered.
- 3 Local authorities must, each financial year, publish an Annual Report (Regulation 13(3)).

Background

- 4 The Complaints Team, which sits within the Corporate Resources Department of the County Council, manage and co-ordinate complaints relating to 3 separate complaints system:
 - a) Adult Social Care - a statutory process
 - b) Children's Social Care – a statutory process
 - c) Corporate Complaints – a non-statutory process, which considers complaints relating to other services provided by the Council and where there is no other form of redress.
- 5 The Children and Family Services Department is contacted on a daily basis by service users, carers and other parties with concerns or requests for information. These queries are dealt with at a local level within care teams or through the Director's office without recourse to the formal complaints process. The complaints team do, on occasion, also receive queries and concerns that suggest a child or young person may require immediate support or which raise safeguarding concerns. Such reports are best handled outside of the formal

complaints procedure and are referred into the First Response team or allocated workers for urgent consideration as appropriate

- 6 The Annual Report for Children's Social Care is attached as Appendix A to the report, and provides a summary of the statistical information and headline issues emerging from the analysis of complaints activity for 2017/18, along with the Department's planned activity to respond to this.

Complaints received and outcomes

- 7 The number of complaints in 2017/18 were as follows:
- 92 complaints considered at Stage 1, compared to 66 in 2016/17
 - 10 complaints considered at Stage 2, compared to 6 in 2016/17
 - 2 complaints considered at Stage 3, compared to 3 in 2016/17
- 8 Using the figures on numbers of referrals made to Children's Social Care, in just 1.3% of cases a complaint is subsequently received. This is an increase on last year (+0.4%)
- 9 The number of requests escalating from Stage 1 increased this year (10), but this represents an almost identical escalation rate of 11%. Every effort is made to prevent the un-necessary escalation of complaints and these figures show that despite a significant volume increase at Stage 1, escalation rates have been largely controlled.
- 10 Analysis of the complaints received show the main areas complained about are "Professional Decision making" and "Quality of Work". A significant factor is the large increase in single assessments carried out.
- 11 During the year, seven complaints were received directly from children or young people. This is a slight increase on previous year (1%) but this figure remains low. The Complaints Manager does however meet regularly with Children's Rights Officers and has access to cases they are supporting informally. This is to ensure and validate that young people are not blocked in any way from accessing the formal complaints procedure.
- 12 72 of the complaints at Stage 1 (77%) were responded to within the statutory maximum of 20 working days. This is a significant drop in performance from 2016-17, and suggests work is required to improve performance in this area.
- 13 There are often good reasons why complaints can exceed 20 working days to resolve, for example meetings being arranged. Complaints analysis has also highlighted a number of changes that can be made to improve the performance. Examples of recent changes made include renewed emphasis on personal contact with complainants, and "stopping the clock" where it is agreed that meetings afford the best prospect of resolution.
- 14 The Local Government Ombudsman investigated thirteen complaints relating to Children's Social Care during 2017-18 and found fault in just one instance. This

provides good re-assurance that complaints are appropriately managed across the three stage process.

- 15 33 compliments were received and forwarded to the Complaints Manager during 2017-18. This is slightly down on last year (39), and reminders continue to be issued to all services of the importance of recognising and sharing positive feedback, which bring balance to the annual report.

Recurring themes with regard to complaints

- 16 The following key learning points are highlighted by the Complaints team as recurring themes:

- Lack of empathy when handling referrals
- Poor / inadequate detail within single assessments
- Delay in responding to calls left with social workers and managers

- 17 These themes have been discussed with senior managers and actions have been tabled to address the issues.

Resource Implications

- 18 The annual report outlines that the costs incurred through the complaints procedure were £38,640 an increase of £20,000 on 2016/17.
- 19 Cost increases are driven by the increased volume of independent investigations carried out during the year. This highlights the importance of local resolution.
- 20 Improvement activity will be carried out within existing resources and therefore there are no resource implications. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on this report.

Conclusions

- 21 There has been a significant increase in volume of complaints this year and there is some pressure on response timescales.
- 22 A number of clear themes have been identified and discussed with managers and senior practitioners to inform service improvement.
- 23 There are clear signs of emerging cultural improvement in managing complaints and the Complaints Manager is actively supporting the department in raising performance further.
- 24 The low level of complaints upheld by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman gives good re-assurance that complaints are addressed appropriately through the complaints procedure, and where applicable appropriate remedies are provided.

Background Papers

25 None

Circulation under the Local Alert Issues Procedure

26 None

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List of Appendices

Appendix A – Children’s Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments:
 Annual Report - April 2017-March 2018

Equality and Human Rights Implications

27 The Children and Family Services Department supports vulnerable children and young people from across all communities in Leicestershire. Complaints and compliments are a way of ensuring that service responses are fair and equitable to all. This report does not highlight any specific equal opportunities implications.