



STANDARDS COMMITTEE
3 November 2008

SEN COMPLAINT FEEDBACK

PURPOSE OF REPORT: eg to note/to decide

To inform Standards Committee of current issues emerging around SEN Provision based on feedback from stakeholders.

SUMMARY:

Parents and carers of children with special education needs face a complex and overwhelming amount of information regarding service provision. This report identifies recent SEN complaint issues and highlights the value of logging customer feedback as a tool for continuous service improvement.

BODY OF REPORT

1. In his annual letter, dated 18 June 2008, to Surrey County Council the Local Government Ombudsman noted that he had encountered some delay receiving information and a reluctance in children's services to accept his findings in respect of certain SEN complaints. This response prompted the Committee to request more information about feedback relating to the SEN provision provided by the Council.
2. Although there appears to be very few formal stage 1 complaints logged on the County's Complaints Database the Council does receive complaints about SEN provision. The issues noted below are based on complaints received by the Ombudsman, stage 2 complaints and letters received in the Leadership office. It appears from the nature of these complaints that there is a:-
 - 2.1 Lack of understanding, by parents, regarding the roles and responsibilities of the schools and the local authority in the SEN assessment process. As a result parents don't always know whom to turn to if they believe elements of the SEN process are failing or if timescales are not being met.
 - 2.2 Lack of understanding and clarity for parents regarding the roles and responsibilities of support services, including Partnership with Parents and the Local Education Officers.

- 2.3 A perception by parents that the decision to undertake SEN statutory assessments is influenced by budgetary restrictions as appose to the individual needs of the child.
 - 2.4 Lack of confidence in the ability of some of the educational specialists to assess children with special educational needs effectively.
 - 2.5 Lack of communication between educational providers and medical professionals regarding the most effective and appropriate educational placement for children with special needs.
 - 2.6 The division of statutory responsibilities and the different complaint procedures between schools and the local authority can make it complicated for parents to challenge service delivery and complain in a simple way. There is a general sense from the feedback that there is no clear single point of contact to help them navigate their way through the SEN process, particularly when they consider it has failed.
3. Although the issues identified above are based on a relatively small number of complaints, they provide a useful insight into some of the issues faced by parents and carers of children with special educational needs, who face a complex and overwhelming amount of information describing service provision.
4. It is evident, from the very low number of stage 1 complaints logged on the Customer Feedback database, that there is under reporting of SEN complaints. . Logging all complaints and comments about SEN provision would provide an even greater insight and help to quantify and validate these and other areas of concern. Whilst it is not possible or appropriate to deliver everything that each customer or user expects, gathering and using information is an essential part of a process of continuous improvement leading to greater customer and staff satisfaction.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Standards Committee are recommended to ask the Children's Strategic Director to consider and comment on the issues raised.

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Sources/background papers: Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Letter
2007/08