



Children and Education Select Committee
27 November 2014

**Executive Summary: Children's Services Annual Complaints Report
2013-14**

Purpose of the report: Scrutiny of Services/ Performance Management

To provide an executive summary of the Children's Services Annual Complaint Report 2013-14, highlighting:

Learning arising from complaints.
What we are doing well.
What we need to improve.

1. Introduction:

- 1.1 The Rights and Participation Service sits to the side of operational Children's Social Care within the Children, Schools and Families Directorate. The head of service currently reports directly to the Strategic Director. The Children's Rights team sits within the service and manages complaints across the Children, Schools and Families Directorate.
- 1.2 This executive summary has been prepared to provide comment on the year-end position of complaints within Children's Services. The Children's Act 1989 Complaints Procedure¹ considers complaints from and on behalf of children and young people, and their carers who are receiving a service under the Children's Act. This report details complaints made under that procedure.
- 1.3 Examples of complaints received may include issues about the type or quality of service, the provision or lack of provision, or about staff interventions with users. Young people making or thinking of making a complaint are entitled to an advocate. The Service does, on occasion, receive complaints that are, in reality, concerns of a safeguarding nature or not about Children's Act provision. Such concerns are referred to operational teams for action as appropriate and in accordance with the Safeguarding Procedures. These concerns are not usually considered under the Statutory Complaints procedure.
- 1.4 As of 31 March 2014, 4,583 children had been identified through assessment as being formally in need of a specialist children's service.

¹ [Department for Education and Skills. "Children's Social Care: Getting the best from complaints" 1 September 2006.](#)

On average we look after 800 children per year. In addition, around 600 young people are entitled to a care leaving service.

- 1.5 In line with national trends, the number of children entering care is increasing. 75% of our children are placed in foster care and the remaining children are in residential homes, placed for adoption, in independent living or placed with parents.
- 1.6 Complaints are received in a variety of routes throughout the Local Authority including the contact centre, operational teams and via Members. All complaints received are recorded on a central customer feedback database, which is overseen by the Children's Rights Service.
- 1.7 During the 2013-14 346 complaints were recorded, of which 46 were received direct from children and young people. Of these, 25 young people received formal advocacy support in bringing their complaint.
- 1.8 During the period 4% of the complaints escalated to the next stage of the process which is equal to the previous 12 months. There were no formal investigations from the Local Government Ombudsman.

2 Learning:

- 2.1 128 complaints resulted in corrective actions being identified while 218 were explicitly recorded as not leading to any corrective action.
- 2.2 Specific examples of learning from complaints identified by operational and Children's Rights Service staff are listed below:
 - Review of Surrey County Council guidance regarding major adaptations within the family home
 - Review of the Occupational Therapy structure within the Countywide Service
 - Review of Terms of Reference for the Disability Resource Panel

3 Summary

An increase in complaints, resolved at an early stage, is a positive sign that young people and their representatives know how to access the process and express their wishes and feelings. The procedure provides for further review of decision making and also can, on occasion, highlight wellbeing, whistle blowing or safeguarding concerns. It enables an insight into the services users' experiences and the opportunity to learn and improve service delivery from this.

3.1 What we are doing well?

- Significant increase in the numbers of complaints being recorded.

- Significant increase in the numbers of complaints being made directly by young people
- All young people wishing for support to make formal complaints or to resolve problems are being supported through the Rights and Participation Service
- Average response times for initial stage of the process remain within timescale
- Maintained low levels of complaints escalating through the process
- Continued decrease in numbers of complaints investigated by the Local Government Ombudsman
- Higher level of identification of learning at stages 2 and beyond
- Improved awareness of the complaint process promoting open and fair discussion around intervention by Surrey Children’s Service.

3.2 What do we need to improve?

- Performance in terms of response timescales at 10 working days at Stage1
- Increase use of peer reviews to promote sharing of best practice and inform robust responses at all stages of the process
- Service wide dissemination of learning arising from complaints at all levels of the process, with a focus on improved communication
- Ensuring complaints process is accessible to all children and young people including those looked after residing out of county and unaccompanied asylum seekers.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the report content, and that increased numbers of young people are accessing the procedure to resolve problems while escalation rates remain low. The Committee is asked to

- endorse the areas for improvement identified, including the use of peer reviews to promote and share best practice.

And recommend:

- that officers from the Rights and Participation Service and Democratic Services work to develop a future proposal for ways in which the views of children, young people and their families can be used to support the Committee in its scrutiny role.

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Sources/background papers:

[Department for Education and Skills. "Children’s Social Care: Getting the best from complaints" 1 September 2006.](#)

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