

Social Care Services Board
25 November 2015

Summary: Children's Services Annual Complaints Report 2014-15

Purpose of the report: Scrutiny of Services/ Performance Management

To provide a summary of the Children's Services Annual Complaint Report 2014-2015 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 summary has been prepared to provide comment on the year-end position of complaints within Children's Services. The Children's Act 1989 Complaints Procedure 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 The Children's Act 1989 Complaints Procedure consists of three stages. At the first stage the complaint is responded to by the local operational manager. At the second stage the complaint can be considered in a variety of ways which includes, case review by a peer manager, mediation and independent investigation. The response at the second stage is adjudicated by a senior manager within the service. At the third stage the complaint is reviewed by a panel of three independent consultants. Each stage has predefined timescales for response as set out within the regulations associated with the Act.
- 1.4 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 customers. 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.

- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 During the 2014-15, 321 complaints were recorded, of which 42 were received direct from children and young people, 12 of which were from unaccompanied asylum seeking young people. Of the 42 complaints recorded, 23 young people received formal advocacy support in bringing their complaint.
- 1.7 The majority of complaints recorded relate to the Referral and Intervention Services or the Child Protection and Court Teams. In the main concerns relate to disagreement with assessment or court report content and outcomes. This is not unexpected given that it is in the main these teams that are involved following referrals for intervention received from either partner agencies such as Health or the Police or concerns raised by families themselves.
- 1.8 During the period 2% of the complaints escalated to the next stage of the process which is less than the previous 12 months. There were no formal investigations undertaken by the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 1.9 The 2014 Ofsted inspectionⁱⁱ of Surrey County Council's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers made the following comments about complaints management:
 - "104. The children in care council provides all looked after young people with information about their rights and entitlements. Complaints are dealt with effectively, and the learning from these is reflected in training, service briefings and practice reviews."
 - "131. Care leavers know how to complain, and complaints are dealt with promptly and fairly."

2 Learning:

- 2.1 132 complaints resulted in corrective actions being identified, these include learning identified across all three stages of the complaint process. 183 complaints 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:
 - Improvements to managing expectations for families where more than one team is involved. For example cases with children who have educational as well as behavioural needs. Learning includes closer communication between operational social care and special education needs teams as well as making sure that families understand the different roles for each area or service.
 - Clear communication with families to ensure clarity in understanding the key messages relative to assessment, interventions and support available, for example: ensuring that families understand the reasons that the outcome of a

Child and Family assessment is that threshold for intervention has not been met and what other options may be available to them.

- Social care professionals reminded of the importance to maintain confidentiality and to explain this to third parties involved with a family (such as grandparents) as appropriate especially when taking account of the wishes and feelings expressed by young people.

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 customers experiences and the opportunity to learn and improve service delivery from this.

3.1 What we are doing well?

- Improved identification and recording of learning and actions arising from complaints at all stages of the process
- Average response times for initial stage of the process remain within timescale
- Maintained low levels of complaints escalating through the process
- Maintained low levels of complaints investigated by the Local Government Ombudsman

3.2 What do we need to improve?

- Effective communication with families to ensure clarity around reasons for interventions
- Assessments to clearly distinguish between comments or information received from third parties and statements that reflect the professional opinion of social care professionals
- Accessibility of the complaint process for children and young people especially unaccompanied asylum seeking young people given that numbers of these continue to increase

Recommendations

1. Committee to note report content
2. Committee to note key learning arising from complaints during the previous fiscal year and changes made as a result

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

ⁱⁱ "Ofsted Inspection of Surrey County Council services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. "

Inspection date: 21 October 2014 – 12 November 2014

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