

Summary: Children's Services Annual Complaints Report 2015-16

Purpose of the report: Scrutiny of Services/ Performance Management

To provide a summary of the Children's Services Annual Complaint Report 2015-2016 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 to the Assistant Director, Commissioning and Prevention. The Children's Rights Service 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 Children's 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.
- 1.5 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.

- 1.6 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 2015-16, 309 complaints were recorded, of which 26 were received direct from children, 6 of which were from unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Of the 26 complaints recorded, 8 young people received formal advocacy support in bringing their complaint.
- 1.8 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 agency partners or concerns raised by other members of the public and families themselves.
- 1.9 During the period 4% of the complaints escalated to the next stage of the process. There were no formal investigations undertaken by the Local Government Ombudsman.

2 Learning:

- 2.1 119 complaints resulted in corrective actions being identified, these include learning identified across all three stages of the complaint process. 218 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:
 - Managing difficult conversations with parents where their relationship with older children and young people has contributed to the decision that the threshold for intervention has been met.
 - Clear and detailed communication with prospective adopters about the reasons for not progressing an application to become adopters.
 - Ensuring that actions are taken to maintain the confidentiality of families, such as discreet return labels on printed letters and ensuring that confidential material is always held securely and is not at risk of loss or theft.

3 Summary

Complaints, resolved at an early stage, is a positive sign that children 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?

- 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?

- Clear messages for parents regarding the reasons for assessments to be completed
- Clear messages for families regarding the reasons for the threshold for intervention being met
- Improved management of policies and procedures for Care Leavers

Recommendations

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

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Sources/background papers:

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

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