

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND TACKLING INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 5
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Report of the Executive Director of Childrens Services

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CHILDREN’S SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

1. PURPOSE

1.1 This report was requested by committee on 8th September 2014 as a Supplementary report to the annual complaints report for Childrens Social Care Statutory Complaints.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Scrutiny Committee are requested to consider the report and make recommendations for further scrutiny if deemed appropriate.

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

3.1 The annual complaints report is a fundamental part of the corporate plan, the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Local Area Agreement.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 This report was requested by committee on 8th September 2014 as a Supplementary report to the annual complaints report for Childrens Social Care Statutory Complaints 2013-2014

5. KEY ISSUES

5.1 The Childrens Social Care Annual Complaints Report for 2013/14 was reviewed at the Scrutiny meeting on 8th September 2014. This lead to a request for an additional report to further explore two specific areas which were:-

- Analysis on the causes of complaints in Childrens Social Care (CSC) and what the service area plans to do to address the issues and improve
- Further information about the outcomes from the workshop held in May 2014 with CSC managers to discuss the reasons why complaint responses are often delayed.

Root Cause Analysis

Complaints are categorised into 10 nationally recognised categories by complaint services to help identify why complaints occur and to allow focus on the main areas of contention. Our complaints software allows analysis of these categories further by team and in terms of the outcome of the complaint. By focusing on the main complaint reasons and then the main teams where complaints occur we hope to reduce the need for clients to complain and improve the service they receive.

In the annual complaint report a breakdown was provided of the complaints received last year by complaint category (table 1)

Table 1

Nature of Complaint	2013/14
About Legislation	0
About Policy	6
Breach of Confidentiality	1
Broken Promise/Appointment	0
Delay/Failed Service	47
Denial/Withdrawal/Change Service	5
Lack of /Incorrect Information	3
Not to Standard	14
Staff Attitude/Conduct	39
Other	1
Total	116

From this it is clear that there are 3 main categories of complaint being received by CSC.

Delayed/Failed Service Complaints

The most common cause of complaint was Delay/Failed Service.

47 complaints were received where the customer believed that there had been a delay or a failure in the service they were expecting.

Children Social Care teams are challenged by high work volumes and conflicting priorities and have a series of controls and checks in place to constantly monitor performance against these deadlines many of which are statutory timescales that govern the work that they do with families. They aim for a high level of compliance with these statutory timescales and there are daily and monthly scorecards which are reviewed by the senior management team which allow them to identify where the stress points are and how these can be managed.

Illustrated in Table 2 are the 3 teams within Childrens Social Care that receive the majority of these complaints.

Table 2.

Delayed/Failed Service Complaints					
Team	Complaints Received	Complaint Upheld	Complaint Partially Upheld	Complaint Not Upheld	No Finding
Looked After Children	14	6	4	3	1
Family Support	11	3	4	4	0
Referral & Assessment	7	3	3	1	0

The Looked After Children Service have many ongoing statutory timescales which govern their work for example the timing of LAC reviews and the frequency of visits to Looked After Children.

However when analysing the data it is clear that the complaints upheld under this category for Looked After children were not for the failure to adhere to statutory timescales.

Examples of the complaints upheld are

- Delay in making transport arrangements for a contact session
- Delay in applying for a passport for a child in Foster Care
- Delay in informing a parent about travel plans for their child who was in Foster Care

These are the type of complaints that are being upheld where the team recognise the delay or failure to provide the service was their responsibility.

Family Support teams are also held to a range of statutory timescales and are often working with families where a number of challenges need to be made to families about the standard of care that is provided to children.

Examples of the complaints upheld for Family Support under this category are

- Complaint about the delay in agreed actions to support family
- Unhappy with the social worker allocated to the case -does not feel issues have been actioned when expected.

The Family Support teams support families over a longer period and therefore the volume of cases is higher. Some families do not want the intervention of Social Care and are keen to bring matters to a conclusion quickly making their expectations of the service unrealistic. However where delays have been unreasonable the team are accepting of this, they offer an apology to the family and sometimes a change of social worker if the workload needs to be re-balanced.

The Referral and Assessment team (now the First Response Team) also have to complete their work within statutory timescales.

Complaints upheld about this service include:-

- Unhappy with lack of support offered by the department
- Lack of communication.
- Unhappy about the way in which case has been handled - constant change of SW, lack of communication etc.

Where referral volumes fluctuate there will inevitably be times when social workers must choose between conflicting priorities and this means that they may not be able to provide information or respond to communications by families as promptly as the service or family would expect.

Staff Conduct/Attitude Complaints

The second highest complaint category was Staff Conduct/Attitude with 39 complaints about this issue.

The 3 teams where these complaints predominate are shown in Table 3 below

Table 3

Staff Conduct/Attitude					
Team	Complaints Received	Complaint Upheld	Complaint Partially Upheld	Complaint Not Upheld	No Finding
Looked After Children	2	2	0	1	0
Family Support	25	5	9	11	0
Referral & Assessment	4	1	1	1	1

This clearly shows that the majority of complaints about staff conduct and attitude are about the Family Support team. As explained previously this team often work with families for extended periods where there are child protection concerns and deliver messages to parents in particular that may not wish to engage with the service. Against these pressures it is important that the workers communicate clearly and professionally. It is unrealistic to expect that families in this situation will not sometimes be angry and difficult to engage with and may seek to make complaints about the staff that they feel are being intrusive in their lives. So a certain level of complaints of this nature is anticipated. However there are a number of complaints for this team that have been upheld or partially upheld.

An example of the complaints upheld or partially upheld for Family Support under Staff Conduct/Attitude are as follows:-

- Unhappy as believes the SW is not capturing accurate information about the family.
- Complaint about the attitude of the SW allocated to case.
- Unhappy with lack of actions taken by Social Worker
- Unhappy with social workers conduct towards his children and his wife
- Lack of communication from her child's Social Worker

The department need to continually assess the competency and attitude of their staff both by supervision and the performance management process. Staff within social care are aware of the Code of Practice which includes expected standards of behaviour.

Complaints help senior management evaluate where there are particular problems for individual staff or the service as a whole. As confirmed in the annual report the names of all staff who have been named in this type of complaint were provided to the Director of Children Services who ensured the issues raised were managed through the supervision process. In general where a complaint involves a problem with an individual member of staff about attitude or conduct which is upheld this should be followed up by a meeting with their manager to discuss what they need to do to improve and in severe cases could lead to disciplinary action.

Where the problem is not isolated to certain individuals the service need to consider how they can engage more effectively with their client group to minimise distrust and uncertainty.

'Not to Standard' Complaints

The third most common category of complaint is received in relatively low numbers and tends to fluctuate. This year the category is Not to Standard – where the customer is generally dissatisfied with the service provided and does not think it is acceptable. There were 14 complaints in this category last year which were evenly spread across the teams. None of these complaints were upheld and only 4 were partially upheld so there are no particular lessons to be learnt from this category.

Outcomes from May 2014 Workshop

The workshop in May was attended by the majority of team managers in Children's Social Care to discuss best practice in responding to complaints and the need to respond promptly – complying with statutory timescales.

The first part of the workshop involved a presentation on

- the reasons why complaints are made,
- the opportunities this gives to engage with families
- respecting peoples' rights to raise their concerns.

The second part was a briefing on

- the three stages of the complaints process and the relevant timescales
- the individual team managers' responsibilities
- the importance of making contact with the complainant before responding
- How to maintain focus on resolution

There was also an exercise on how to write a comprehensive complaint response.

Since the workshop in May the number of days taken to respond to complaints has fallen from 20 days on average to 17 days. Whilst this is an improvement there is further work to do and a series of support sessions are currently being arranged within Childrens Social Care for team managers which will include a section on complaint handling.

In the meantime the briefing from the workshop in May has been sent round to managers so those who are new or did not attend the workshop in May 2014 are aware of their complaint handling responsibilities and can raise any questions direct with their managers or the complaints service.

6. IMPLICATIONS

Implications arise for the continuous improvement of children's social care services and the annual performance assessment whereby it will be demonstrated that complaints are received and responded to in accordance with the statutory process and lessons learnt from complaints are fed into service improvements

7. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

It is expected that the panel will consider this report and the potential for further areas of scrutiny

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