

Customer Feedback – Complaints, Compliments Annual Report

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Purpose of this report

1. This report provides an overview of the key issues in complaint handling and the effectiveness of the complaints procedure for Children's Social Care for the period 2014/15.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to:

1. Note the content of the report.

Issues

Children's Social Care customer feedback report

2. The Regulations require that the annual report should include; the number of complaints at each stage including those considered by the Local Government Ombudsman; the type, timescales and outcomes of complaints, which customer groups made complaints; learning and service improvements and summary equality monitoring data.
3. The annual report addresses the requirements above and covers:
 - The Council's procedure for handling children's social care complaints.
 - Equality and Diversity Monitoring.
 - Summary Statistics including; number of complaints received; number referred to the Local Government Ombudsman; services most complained about; number well founded.
 - Performance.
 - Service improvements resulting from complaints.

4. To address the need to make the annual report available to anyone requesting it the report will be posted on the 'Feedback' pages of the Council's website. The feedback pages contain information on how to provide compliments, comments and complaints.

Complaints handling practice in 2014/15

5. There was a decrease in the number of complaints recorded compared to last year, from 104 to 92. The number of complaints suggests effective recognition and recording customer of complaints by service teams.
6. Complaints were seen as important customer feedback and a means of identifying how practices may be changed for the better. Services were receptive to customers' views and complaints, with 70% of complaints either upheld fully or in part.
7. As well as the statutory annual report, weekly and quarterly reports on customer feedback have been provided to assist the Director's senior management team (SMT) to monitor customer feedback, performance and outcomes.
8. The good practice of using conciliation meetings to resolve ongoing dissatisfaction continued this year. The approach focusses on resolution of complaints through face to face meetings and was successful in remedying seven cases without the need for lengthy formal investigations.

Key themes from complaints

9. The services for Looked After Children & Care Leavers were the areas most complained about, and saw the most significant rise in complaints compared to last year. The service received 27 new complaints compared to 19 recorded the previous year. The three top reasons for complaint were; concerns about care placements; case handling issues; and delay providing services. In the period SMT supported the Customer Relations Team to engage with the Corporate Parenting Service on a programme to review and improve complaints handling, with a focus on valuing feedback from looked after children and identifying the root cause in complaints. The work included a refresh on the value of complaints and resolution, to improve practice around recognising when concerns should be addressed as complaints. This led to an increase in complaints being recognised and registered.

10. Whilst individual complaints were resolved with case specific remedies, Section 4 of Appendix A, Annual Report, details actions to improve the wider service. The majority of complaints were resolved through an apology and/or by putting right mistakes, for example correcting a report or putting in a service. Financial remedies are sometimes paid where a mistake has directly led to some injustice and there is no other remedy available. The Local Government Ombudsman's (LGO) guidance says that injustice regarding distress generally cannot be remedied by way of a payment, so payment amounts are symbolic to acknowledge the impact. In the period the LGO recommended financial remedies in three cases to recognise avoidable distress. Whilst benchmarking data is not available for all similar sized authorities where there is data available the total paid out by other authorities in the same period on financial remedies has ranged from nil to £34,000.

Corporate Implications

11. Complaints are assessed at the point of receipt to ensure risks are managed for example; child protection issues, risks to reputation, exclusions. Effective complaints management ensures service failings are identified and remedied, thereby reducing the risk of public reports from the Local Government Ombudsman. There were no public reports about children's social care complaints.
12. To support children and families to feel safe it is important that they know how to complain about services they receive; feel heard when they raise complaints; and that action is taken. The report evidences that service users have been able to complain, where complaints have been upheld failings are identified and improvements put in place.
13. The Council is required to monitor statutory complaints procedures and prepare an annual report. The Children's Social Care complaints report must be made available to any person on request.

Council Priorities

14. The production of this report supports of the Council's objectives -
 - Promote health and well being and protect the vulnerable – by supporting children and families to feel safe and heard when they raise complaints, and by using feedback to identify failings and put improvements in place to remedy those failings.
 - Value for money – freezing council tax – by focusing resources on resolution without recourse to costly independent investigations wherever this is appropriate.

Legal Implications

15. The production of an annual report in relation to representations and complaints is a statutory requirement pursuant to the Children Act 1989 and subsequent Regulations. It is a requirement that this report should be made available to anyone on request and accordingly, the report will be posted on the council's website.

Financial Implications

16. Effective management of complaint issues focuses resource on resolution and reduces the risks of financial remedies being paid. The complaints procedure provides for conciliation meetings which are used as an effective alternative to costly independent investigations

Equalities Implications

17. The report contains statistical analysis of monitoring information where information has been recorded.

Conclusion and next Steps

18. The Committee is asked to note the Customer Feedback – Complaints, Compliments Annual Report for 2014/15

Appendices

19. The following Appendix is attached
Appendix 1- Annual Report 2014/15

Background Papers

20. The following background papers, not previously available to the public, were taken into account and are available on the Council's website:
None