

Addition to the Children and Families Services 19/20 Complaints Annual Report

Introduction:

This report has been produced at the request of the members of the Safe and Strong Select Committee. Members have requested further specific detail is provided in terms of how the services implement change as a result of complaints investigations.

This document should be read in conjunction with the 2019/20 Complaints Annual Report, which provides detailed information surrounding the different complaints procedures and data which is pertinent to each service.

The Basis of Learning from Complaints and How the Council Learn from Complaints:

The Complaints Process is a means through which to interrogate and improve how the Council deliver services, complaints should be used as an opportunity to assist with the development of shaping future services and should be instrumental in recognising the views of the individuals who are receiving services from the County Council. Complaints should not always be considered in a negative manner, as there can be valuable opportunities to utilise these and create more of a learning culture from them.

The Complaints Team firmly believe that services should maintain their focus on the outcomes of complaints rather than the volume of such. It is naturally the complaints which are upheld which provide the Council with the deeper understanding of how things can be adapted, to minimise the chance of future complaints being made.

Whilst the majority of learning comes from those complaints which are found to be upheld, there can of course be learning to be gained from any complaint regardless of the finding. A complaint represents an individual's perception and view of a situation, by investigating that view in greater depth the service can undoubtedly gain a richer understanding of the individual and use that knowledge in the work moving forwards.

Learning is taken from complaints where fault has been found, to try and reduce the risk of the situation occurring again. To implement any recommendations or learning from complaints the Council may make changes to policies, processes or training programmes, amend templates used or convene learning events where feedback can be provided.

Specific Examples:

The following are examples of what the services have implemented as a result of complaints being investigated.

Looked after Children and Disability Services:

- As a result of a complaint which surrounded the Family and Friends Fostering Team, the service is in the process of reviewing the information and training available for Special Guardians to ensure that it meets their specific need. This is already being progressed via the creation of the Special Guardian Pod, which aims to provide beneficial support to this group of people. The work which the Pod carries out will help to inform future planning for the service.
- As part of a complaint surrounding the Children's Disability Service, the Council agreed to review the support available to parent-carers of children and young people in transition, in collaboration with the appropriate local representative body. This was completed as part of the work surrounding the Preparing for Adult process and the service continues to review this to ensure it meets the outlined recommendation.

- The service agreed to explore the closer integration of children's and adult Direct Payment systems, as part of the strategic move towards a more integrated process of transition. This work has been completed with children moving onto the P Card System.
- Contingency arrangements were put in place for situations where it becomes likely that statutory visiting requirements cannot be met, and that any subsequent difficulties are referred to senior management. This was relayed to staff via email in the form of a memo.
- As part of a complaint surrounding the Throughcare service, the service agreed to ensure that any accommodation which it arranges for vulnerable users of its services is suitable, when this has not been refused by the individual, within the meaning of the relevant regulations.
- The service agreed to take time to explain to a young person how and for what purpose the Setting Up Home Grant is paid, in the interest of eliminating unrealistic expectations.

Specialist Safeguarding and Early Help:

- Officers have been briefed with regards to the Council's policy concerning the use of recording devices in meetings – this was achieved via an amendment being made to a policy and being shared with staff. Whilst the specific complaint related to the Safeguarding Teams, the learning can be applied to the whole service.
- Staff were reminded via a memo sent through email, that in cases when a referral is made to Children's Services by the parent with whom the child resides and there is shared parental responsibility the other parent should be consulted and informed as soon as possible.
- As part of a complaint which related to the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service; the service agreed to clarify its position on the attendance of multiple representatives from a single agency at Child Protection Conferences. This was developed by the IRO service who have developed a process where the IRO will seek clarity regarding multiple professionals attending from the same service and will then make an informed decision as to whether this is needed.
- The local authority agreed to looking into into disability awareness training for all staff in the Safeguarding Team. Specifically building a knowledge of ASD and ADHD which may have enabled the social worker to engage with and support this child in a more effective way. This was implemented by disability training being written into the training programme for all newly appointed SWs and mandatory training for newly qualified social workers as part of the ASYE.
- The service was advised to review the inclusion of tick boxes in templates for social work reports, on the basis that they can require a misleadingly binary approach, rather than critical narratives which convey richer information. This recommendation was partially agreed on the basis that the tick boxes are required to collect data for the councils statutory return; however a memo was sent to remind staff that written assessments must evidence the reason for the inclusion of any ticked boxes ensuring that appropriate and factual information is included in the wider recording.
- The service accepted that thought should be given to additional training of workers in the Child Protection arena of the sensitivity and importance of initial visits in establishing a cooperative relationship with parents for the benefit of the children concerned and the family. Whilst it was noted that training in this regard should already be taking place, the service has agreed to ensure this was implemented into training for newly qualified Social Workers as part of their ASYE.

Developing Learning from Complaints in the Future:

We have recently been reflecting on and exploring how we can share the key messages, themes and learning from complaints through other avenues and forums to ensure these are reaching as many practitioners as possible. Through recently attending the Practitioners Briefings and the Practice Forum and sharing the detail of learning from complaints, it has become apparent that we need to be sharing this detail in a more routine and accessible way to ensure it has the widest possible reach. The feedback received from these sessions was positive and practitioners are keen to understand the outcomes of complaints and what has changed as a result of these. It has become apparent that when information regarding changes is communicated via email, there may be some practitioners who miss this due to their demanding workload.

Whilst practitioners may be aware of certain policy changes as a result of a complaint being made, it has been noted that it may be beneficial for them to be aware of the reasoning behind those changes being made and for some context to be given. In line with the above development we are considering how best to inform and update practitioners on a regular basis and how we can ensure messages and key learning is shared. This may be through collating information for all services and sharing it on a quarterly or bi-annually basis with key practitioners and managers who can disseminate this or use it as part of their routine team meetings.

One of the key positive themes which came from these meetings was that learning needs to be shared across the whole service, just because a complaint related to one service does not mean that the learning cannot apply to other services. This is something which we can move forward with and ensure any learning is shared in a wider sense and not restricted to the individual service.

As part of the ongoing work noted above, we have also stressed that it is important to share the positive feedback, which is received, and this can equally inform and shape service provision. We are considering how to share the key themes from positive feedback; to enable practitioners to share their ways of working with each other and discuss their experience of working with the individual who submitted a compliment.

Report Author:

Elaine Hemming - Customer Feedback and Complaints Officer Children's Services
elaine.hemming@staffordshire.gov.uk