

**Meeting:** Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 17 January 2017  
**Subject:** Customer Feedback – Complaints, Compliments Annual Report  
**Report of:** Councillor Carole Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care and Housing  
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**Summary:** This report fulfills the statutory duty to produce an annual report for Children's Social Care (Appendix A). The report provides statistics on the number of complaints received; complaint outcomes (upheld/not upheld); performance; issues complained about; and learning and improvements resulting from complaints for 2015/16.

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**Advising Officer:** Paula Terry – Customer Relations Manager  
**Contact Officer:** Paula Terry – Customer Relations Manager  
**Public/Exempt:** Public  
**Wards Affected:** All  
**Function of:** Council

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Council Priorities:**

The annual report for noting links to the priorities

- Great Resident Services
- Protecting the Vulnerable; Improving Wellbeing
- A More Efficient and Responsive Council

### **Financial:**

1. 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

### **Legal:**

2. The production of an annual report is a statutory requirement and should be made available to anyone on request. The report will be posted on the council's web site.

**Risk Management:**

3. 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.

**Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

4. There are no staffing issues arising from the report

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

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

**Community Safety:**

5. 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.

**Sustainability:**

There are no sustainability issues arising from the report

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- **That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee note and comment on the content of the report.**

**Introduction**

6. The Council's Customer Relations Team, based in the Social Care, Health and Housing directorate, manages the Council's customer feedback procedures. There are three procedures. Two of the procedures are statutory and are governed by Regulations relating to Adult Social Care Services and Children's Services respectively. The third procedure covers all other Council services.
7. The feedback procedures are the means by which customer compliments, comments and complaints are handled. Customer Relations provides a point of contact for customers wishing to complain via email, telephone or in writing. This provides confidence to those customers who may have lost faith in the services to respond to their issue.
8. The Council is required to monitor the effectiveness of statutory complaints procedures and prepare an annual report. The Children's Social Care complaints report must be made available to any person on request.

**Purpose of this report**

9. 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 2015/16.

### **Children's Social Care customer feedback report**

10. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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 2015/16**

13. There was a decrease in the number of complaints recorded compared to last year, from 92 to 84. The number of complaints suggests effective recognition and recording of complaints by service teams.
14. 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 55% of complaints either upheld fully or in part.
15. 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.
16. The good practice of using alternative dispute resolution to resolve ongoing dissatisfaction continued this year. The approach focusses on resolution of complaints through Head of Service Reviews, assessments by Customer Relations and face to face meetings which were successful in remedying 10 cases without the need for lengthy formal investigations.

### **Key themes from complaints**

17. The services for Looked After Children & Care Leavers were the areas most complained about however, it saw the most significant drop in complaints compared to last year. The service received 25 new complaints compared to 35 recorded the previous year. The three top reasons for complaint were; poor communication; staff conduct; and incorrect action taken.

18. Whilst the majority of complaints were resolved through an apology and providing individual case remedies, Section 5 and Section 6 of the Annual Report, details actions to improve the wider 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 a financial remedy in one case for £900 to recognise avoidable distress. Whilst benchmarking data is not available for all similar sized authorities the decision notices available on the LGO website indicate that in the same period financial remedies for Councils ranged up to £8798.

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A - Annual Report 2015/16.

**Location of papers:** Priory House, Chicksands