
Meeting: Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Date: 29 November 2011
Subject: Customer Feedback – Complaints, Compliments Annual Report
Report of: Cllr Mark Versallion, Executive Member for Children's Services
Summary: This report fulfills the statutory duty to produce an annual report for Children's Social Care. 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 2010/11.

Advising Officer: Edwina Grant – Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services
Contact Officer: Sonya Branagan – 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

- Creating safer communities
- Supporting and caring for an ageing population

Financial:

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:

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:

Complaints are assessed at the point of receipt to ensure risks are managed for example; child protection issues, risks to reputation. 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):

There are no staffing issues arising from the report

Equalities/Human Rights:

The report has been reviewed by the Corporate Policy Advisor (Equalities and Diversity) and the feedback taken into account in the final report.

Community Safety:

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 are put in place.

Sustainability:

There are no sustainability issues arising from the report

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the contents of the report.**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Council's Customer Relations Team, based in Corporate Services, 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.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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.

2. Purpose of this report

- 2.1 This report provides an overview of the key issues in complaint handling for Children's Social Care for the period 2010/11.

3. Children's Social Care customer feedback report

- 3.1 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.

- 3.2 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.

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

4. Complaints handling practice in 2010/11

4.1 Following concern expressed by the Director that complaint numbers seemed low, work to improve the recording of complaints took place. There was a rise in the number of complaints recorded compared to last year, from 44 to 79.

4.2 The Customer Relations Manager met with representatives from the Children in Care Council to discuss their needs around the work they were undertaking on the information pack for looked after children. As a result the young person's leaflet was amended for inclusion in the pack.

4.3 As well as the statutory annual report, weekly and quarterly reports on customer feedback have been provided based on the Director's requirements for performance reporting. This meant that senior managers had the opportunity to monitor customer feedback for their services.

4.4 The service worked with customer relations to identify cases suitable for conciliation. This good practice focuses on resolution of complaints through face to face meetings and was successful in remedying seven cases without the need for lengthy formal investigations.

5. Key themes from complaints

5.1 The main cause for complaint over the year was care management in the Family Support and Intake & Assessment services, including communication and the quality of assessments and investigations. The Family Support Service received 29 of the total 79 received and Intake & Assessment 25 of the 29 complaints.

5.2 Whilst individual complaints were resolved with case specific remedies Section 4 of the report details actions to improve the wider service.

Appendices:

Annual Report 2010/11

Location of papers: Priory House, Chicksands