

Meeting: Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Date: 15 October 2013
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 (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 2012/13.

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:

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. 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:

5. The report was discussed with the Corporate Policy Advisor (Equalities and Diversity) and the feedback taken into account in the final report.

Community Safety:

6. 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:

7. There are no sustainability issues arising from the report

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the content of the report.

Introduction

8. The Council's Customer Relations Team, based in the Director of Improvement and Corporate Services 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.

Purpose of this report

11. This report provides an overview of the key issues in complaint handling for Children's Social Care for the period 2012/13.

Children's Social Care customer feedback report

12. 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.
13. 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.
14. 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 2012/13

15. There was an increase in the number of complaints recorded, compared to last year, from 48 to 82.
16. Last year OFSTED reported that complaints were handled well but that complaint numbers were low. There has been an improved focus on recording complaints and this year. A new Head of Service for the Looked After Children and Leaving Care Service has taken an active lead on the need to record complaints. Due to the previous low numbers it is unclear if the increase year on year is due to continued improved recording, an increase in dissatisfaction, or a combination of both factors.
17. 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.
18. 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 eight cases without the need for lengthy formal investigations.

Key themes from complaints

19. The main cause for complaint over the year was care management in the Family Support Service, including alleged poor communication or information; poor handling of risks/concerns and dissatisfaction with assessments, including accuracy of reports.
20. Whilst individual complaints were resolved with case specific remedies, Section 4 of Appendix A, Annual Report, details actions to improve the wider service.

Appendices:

Appendix A - Annual Report 2012/13

Location of papers: Priory House, Chicksands