

Central Bedfordshire Council

Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Children's Services: Customer Feedback – Complaints, Compliments Annual Report 2017/18

Report of: Cllr Steven Dixon,
(Steven.Dixon@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Responsible Director(s): Sue Harrison,
(Sue.Harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

This report is for information

Purpose of this report

This report fulfils the council's statutory duty to monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure and produce an annual report for Children's Social Care. The report provides statistics on the number of compliments complaints received; complaint causes; complaint outcomes (upheld/not upheld); performance; and learning and improvements resulting from complaints for 2017/18.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to:

1. **Note the content of the report at Appendix A**

Issues

1. The Customer Relations Team managed the council's customer feedback procedures. These procedures detail how customer compliments, comments and complaints are handled. There are three procedures. Two of the procedures are statutory and are governed by regulations relating to adult social care services and children's social care services. The third procedure covers all other council services. If customers remain dissatisfied with the council's handling of the complaint they can refer to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSO). The LGSO is an independent body that can consider complaints about the council.
2. There was a slight decrease in the number of compliments and a slight increase in the number of complaints recorded in 2017/18 compared to the previous year for children's social care. Compliments moved from 19 to 18 and complaints from 57 to 60.
3. Complaints were important customer feedback and a means of identifying how practices may be changed for the better. Services were receptive to customer views and complaints with 52% of complaints either upheld fully or in part.
4. The top reason for complaints across children's social care in 2017/18 relating to incorrect action being taken (i.e. procedure not being followed).
5. The good practice of using alternative dispute resolution to resolve ongoing dissatisfaction continued in 2017/18. The approach focuses on resolution of complaints through Head of Services Reviews; assessments by Customer Relations; and face to face meetings which were successful in remedying six cases without the need for lengthy formal investigations.
6. There may be occasions where financial redress is offered through the complaints procedure. Financial remedies can be provided to acknowledge avoidable distress; harm; risk; or other unfair impact. As injustice of this nature cannot generally be remedied by a payment, the amount is usually symbolic to acknowledge the impact of fault on the complainant. Financial remedies can be recommended during the council's procedure and following investigation by the LGSO.
7. In 2017/18, the LGSO recommended a financial payment of £500 in one complaint case to recognise distress and the time and trouble to pursue the matter. The council also recommended a financial payment of £70 through its own process as a goodwill gesture to a relative who experienced financial difficulties collecting a child from another area of the country. Whilst benchmarking data is not available for all similar sized authorities the decision notices available on the LGSO website indicate that in the same period financial remedies for other councils ranged up to £15,200.

Council Priorities

8. The report supports Central Bedfordshire's Five-Year Plan 2015/2020 and the specific priorities of great resident services; protecting the vulnerable and improving

wellbeing; and a more efficient and responsible council.

Legal Implications

9. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Financial and Risk Implications

10. Complaints are assessed at the point of receipt to ensure risks are managed e.g. child protection issues; risk to reputation; exclusions.
11. Effective management of complaint issues focuses resource on resolution and reduces the risks of financial remedies being paid. The complaints procedure also provides for alternative dispute resolution which is used as an effective alternative to costly independent investigations.
12. Effective complaints management ensures service failings are identified and remedied, thereby reducing the risk of public reports from the LGSO. There were no public reports about children's social care complaints in 2017/18.

Equalities Implications

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

Conclusion and next Steps

14. 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 website.
15. Members are asked to note the content of the report at Appendix A

Appendices

Appendix A: Children's Social Care Services:
Customer Feedback – Complaints, Compliments Annual Report
2017/18

Background Papers

None

Report author(s): Paula Terry

Customer Relations Manager

Paula.Terry@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk