Children Social Care

Statutory Complaints Annual Report 2018-19

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ENFIELD Council

Contents

1. Introduction and Context 01
2. Overview of the Service.....01
3. Statistical information 02
   Complaints received 02
   Response times 03
   Statistical data of complainants 03
4. Ombudsman Contact 04
5. Customer Groups.....05
6. Learning from complaints.....05
   Actions taken from complaints.....05
7. Quality Assurance 06
8. Compliments 06

Executive Summary

Complaints are continuing to be resolved as part of early resolution; this year 16 concerns were resolved locally; a slight decrease from 18 concerns resolved locally last year. There has been an increase in formal complaints where 43 were completed during this period in comparison to 33 completed last year. Although complaint volumes are increasing, less complaints are being upheld. During this reporting year 28% of complaints were upheld whilst last year 39% were upheld. Overall, 81.4% of formal complaints were completed within timescale which is an increase from the 78.8% achieved last year. There were 3 enquiries from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman which has slightly decreased from 4 last year. There have also been 55 compliments received during this period which has praised children social care services; this has increased from 31 compliments received last year.

1. Introduction and Context

This annual statutory complaint report covers complaints and compliments received by Children's Social Care Services during the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. It highlights how the Directorate has performed against statutory timescales; organisational learning and service improvements that have been made from a result of listening and responding to complaints and plans for future development.

The Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints Procedures stipulate that an annual report must be produced for complaints made under the *Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 and in line with published guidance 'Getting the Best from Complaints'.*

The regulations dictate that the report should cover:

- The number of complaints received
- The issues highlighted
- Whether the complaints have been upheld or not
- Response times
- The number of cases referred to the Ombudsman's service
- Which customer groups have made complaints
- Advocacy services provided
- Statistical data relating to the age, gender, disability, ethnicity and sexual orientation of the complainant

There is also a corporate requirement that all complaints made against the Council are recorded, responded to and that, as an organisation, we learn from complaints.

Information relating to the statutory complaint procedure is published on the Council's website and those wishing to complain can do so online. The Council encourages complaints to be made online however where this is not possible, complaints can also be made by email, telephone, letter and by post, including using the complaints leaflet.

2. Overview of the Service

There is a dedicated team that manages complaints concerning Children's Social Care. The statutory complaints procedure involves a 3-stage escalation process. Stage 1 is addressed by the relevant service; Stage 2 is an in-depth independent investigation (usually by an external investigator) and Stage 3 involves the complaint being heard by a review panel of independent members.

3. Statistical information

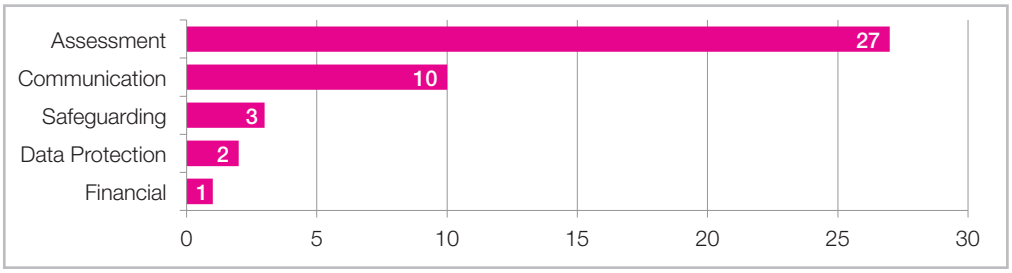
3.1 Complaints received

The complaints policy promotes early resolution of complaints so we initially aim to address issues informally. If matters cannot be resolved locally with services, complainants may then progress matters through the formal complaints procedure. The complaints team supported operational teams to resolve 16 customer concerns before they became formal statutory complaints; slight decrease from the 18 resolved last year.

During this reporting year, there were 43 formal complaints about children's social care services which is a relatively low number in comparison to the number of contacts that the Council has. As at 31 March 2018, Enfield Council was responsible for 374 looked-after-children and each year the Council carries out over 6,000 assessments so complaints for this reporting period equates to only 0.7% of assessment contacts. The 43 complaints related to 37 different families and involved a total of 72 children. The volume of formal complaints has increased from last year where there were 33 formal complaints recorded.

The following chart shows a breakdown of issues for the formal complaints; most common issue continues to be complaints about social care assessments which is expected due to the nature of social work.

Figure 1: Breakdown of formal complaint issues



The following table shows breakdown of formal Stage 1 complaints across team areas.

Table 1 Breakdown of Children social care stage 1 complaints by team

Team	Number of complaints completed	Not upheld	Response times		
			< 10 days	< 20 days	> 20 days
Child Protection & Family Support	8	5	0	6	2
Safeguarding & Quality	4	4	1	3	0
Fostering	1	1	0	1	0
Joint Service for Disabled Children	7	5	1	5	1
Assessment Service	14	11	3	10	1
Looked After Children	5	5	1	3	1
Total	**39**	**31**	**6**	**28**	**5**

During 2018/19, 3 complaints were investigated at Stage 2; two of which were upheld. There were also 12 escalation requests which did not progress to formal Stage 2 investigation as matters were resolved through various ways including further resolution with service areas; complaint resolution meetings and further explanations given.

During 2018/19, there was one stage 3 complaint completed, which was partially upheld.

28% of all the formal statutory complaints investigated (12 of 43) were upheld. This upheld rate has decreased in comparison to last year where 39% of complaints had been upheld. The following table reflects the outcome of formal stage 1 complaints.

3.2 Response times

39 complaints were completed under stage 1 of the statutory complaints procedure and 87.2% of these were resolved within time. This has increased from last year where 79% of complaints were completed within time. Those cases where responses were late had taken services longer to resolve cases due to the in-depth investigations and liaising across various departments.

Three complaints were completed under stage 2 of the statutory complaints procedure. These were completed out of timescale due to external investigators requiring additional time. The Stage 3 complaint was completed within timescale.

Overall compliance with response timescale was 81.4% (35 of 43). Our aim is to resolve 90% of all formal complaints with time. Whilst this has not yet been achieved, services had made significant improvements in comparison to last year where, overall, 78.8% of complaints were responded to within time. Work is ongoing to meet future target. The central complaints team is currently restructuring which will allow for more internal scrutiny and support services for departments in dealing with complaints.

3.3 Statistical data of complainants

In line with regulations, the Council must report statistical data relating to the age, gender, disability, ethnicity and sexual orientation of the complainant. The Council has focused on providing statistical data for the 72 children/young people who are the subjects of the complaints made.

3.3.1 Age

Of the 72 children/young people who were subjects of the complaints made, 59 (81.9%) were under 16. The remaining 13 children/young people (18.1%) were aged 16-25. There have been more complaints relating to older children/young people as during last reporting year, 86.6% were aged under 16 and 13.4% were aged 16-25.

3.3.2 Gender

According to 2011 census, 52% of Enfield's residents are female and 48% are male. Of the 72 children/young people who were subjects of the complaints, 28 (38.9%) were females and 44 (61.1%) were males. Complaints relating to females has increased from last year where there was 33% and 67% had related to males.

3.3.3 Disability

Of the 72 children/young people who were subjects of the complaints made, 9 (12.5%) related to children who had disabilities (3 developmental; 1 mobility; 3 physical; 1 sensory and 1 unknown). The remaining 63 children/young people (87.5%) did not have a disability. In comparison to last year where most complaints (99%) related to children/young people who did not have any disability, we have dealt with more complaints relating to children who have disabilities.

3.3.4 Ethnicity

Enfield is among the most ethnically diverse areas in the country. According to 2011 census, the highest groups in Enfield's population are:

- 'White UK' (English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish and British) – 41%
- 'White Other' (Greek and Turkish Cypriots and Turkish) – 18%
- 'Black' (African/Caribbean and Other) – 17%

The ethnicity groups for the 72 children/young people who were subjects of the complaints made, were:

- 'White UK' – 10 individuals (13.9%)
- 'White Other' – 6 individuals (8.4%)
- 'Black' – 18 individuals (25%)
- Unknown – 5 individuals (6.9%)
- Mixed British – 9 individuals (12.5%)
- Mixed Black (Black & White or Black & Asian) – 8 individuals (11.1%)
- Other – 16 individuals (22.2%)

Generally, ethnicity groups are consistent with last year; there has been small increase in the number of complaints relating to 'White UK' and 'White Other' groups.

4. Ombudsman Contact

If a complainant remains dissatisfied, they can ask for the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) to review the Council's final response.

During 2018/19, the LGSCO contacted the Council regarding 3 cases concerning Children's Services; this has slightly decreased from last year when there was contact for 4 cases. In one case, the LGSCO was satisfied appropriate action was taken by the Council and the remaining two were referred to the Council for consideration. The following table shows breakdown of the cases.

Table 2: Breakdown of Ombudsman cases regarding Children Social Care Services

Number of cases	Decision
1	Closed after initial enquiries
2	Referred to the Council to investigate
Total: 3	

5. Customer Groups

Advocacy frequently enables speedy resolution of issues without escalation to the complaint procedure. In all cases the complaint team encourages children and young people to access independent advocacy to support them through the complaints process and will always put a child or young person in touch with an advocacy service where appropriate to do so. If an adult makes a complaint on behalf of a child or young person, the complaints team also ensures that all reasonable steps are taken to seek the views of the child/young person whenever a complaint is made on their behalf. The customer groups who submitted complaints were as follows:

- 2 from advocates representing child/young person
- 2 directly from child/young person (service users) without advocate involved
- 33 from parents
- 6 from relative

6. Learning from complaints

The Council welcomes feedback about its services as this provides valuable information about customers' experiences of the services that they use. We publicise details of how to complain on the Council's website and in areas where the public has access. We also provide information on how to comment or complain whenever a new service commences.

Complaints are taken seriously, investigated and responded to with appropriate redress. The Council can address complaints in several ways and, at times, it is appropriate for meetings to take place between the complainant and the relevant manager to facilitate resolution.

Feedback from complaints is used for organisational learning and reports on complaint themes and actions taken are regularly presented to senior managers. Complaint action points are identified and monitored to ensure that any practice or service improvements are implemented and that information is shared across the Council.

6.1 Actions taken from complaints

As shown earlier in this report, 28% of complaints were upheld. Apologies were given to all the complainants and learning from these 12 cases has resulted in the following summarised action:

- Records updated to reflect accurate information
- Officers reminded of need to share information appropriately; to clearly record action taken; to communicate promptly with service users and of the expected standard of quality of letters
- Contribution towards extension adaptations
- Officers given feedback and reflected on customer experiences/lessons learnt
- Local Authority considered including parents and carers in delivery of training as appropriate

7. Quality Assurance

The Complaints Team have systems in place to ensure that response timescales are met. This includes sending reminders of the deadline for responses to the assigned managers; escalating to a senior manager if there is no response within the specified timeframe; reporting to Directors regularly and highlighting to staff the importance of compliance in training programmes. The Complaints Team also monitor and assist with complaint responses to ensure that standards are met and all aspects of the complaint are addressed. The support offered by the Complaints Team includes:

- Quality checking responses
- Arranging and chairing complaint meetings
- Liaising with complainants regarding timescales and desired outcomes
- Identifying key themes from complaints, devising action plans and ensuring organisational learning is implemented
- Regularly providing management and performance information
- Service development to improve how we respond to and learn from complaints

8. Compliments

The Council welcomes compliments from its users. Compliments help to highlight good quality service and give staff encouragement to continue delivering service of the highest standard. The following chart shows a breakdown of the 55 compliments, specifically for Children's Social Care Services, received during 2018/19; a significant increase comparing to 31 received during 2017/18. The following table shows breakdown of the cases.

Figure 2: Breakdown of Compliments for Children's Social Care Services

Looked After Children	17	30%
Child Protection & Family Support	16	29%
Joint Service for Disabled Children	7	12%
Assessment Service	6	11%
Safeguarding & Quality	5	9%
Edmonton Contact Centre	3	5%
Adoption	2	4%

Notes

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Complaints and Access to Information Team
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