

Report of the Assistant Director (Children's Specialist Services) to the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel to be held on 11th November 2015.

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Subject:

Complaints Raised by Looked After Children and Young People

Summary statement:

This report summarises the issues raised by Looked After Children who have used the statutory complaints procedures to seek redress for their concerns. The report relates to complaints in the period 1st April 2014 – 30th March 2015.

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1. SUMMARY

This report summarises the issues raised by looked after children who have used the statutory complaints procedures to seek redress for their concerns. This report relates to complaints in the period 1st April 2014– 30th March 2015. The Appendix A sets out some of the main issues raised by children and young people and the service improvements made to address their complaints.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Children Act (1989) places a duty on all Local Authorities to establish and implement a procedure for dealing with complaints and representations for children and young people looked after by them. There is a designated Complaints Manager who administers and monitors the procedure for receiving and responding to children's complaints.

2.2 The procedures require that:

- Complaints are resolved informally at the point of service delivery wherever possible (stage 1) by a local manager. Complaints at Stage 1 must be addressed within 10 working days.
- Where resolution of the complaint is not possible at that time, the complaint will be investigated more formally by a senior officer and Independent Person (stage 2). Complaints at Stage 2 must be resolved within 25 working days.
- Where following consideration of the findings of a stage 2 investigation the complainant remains dissatisfied, the complaint will be considered by a Complaints Review panel (stage 3). Review panels at Stage 3 are to be constituted solely of Independent People

Where any part of the complaint has been upheld, the Council is required to ensure that this is resolved for the young person and that it considers what wider service improvements can be made.

3. REPORT ISSUES

3.1 There are approximately 900 looked after children and young people. The majority are cared for in foster care placements, some in children's homes, some are looked after by 'Family or Friends' or Placed with their Parents. Others are leaving care to live independently.

3.2 The Unit liaises closely with the advocacy project (VoiceAbility). There were no complaints referred by the advocacy service during 2014/15 whilst there was one in the previous year.

3.3 There are also arrangements to address issues for children at an early stage and many issues are successfully resolved without the need for children to use the complaints procedures. An example of this is the use of the "Moans and Groans" books in children's homes.

Complaints raised by children represent 11% of the total number of complaints received by the Children's Specialist Services, which is a lower proportion than in the previous financial year (17%).

- 3.4 Responding to complaints within the statutory timescales (83%) has reduced in comparison with the previous financial year (88%).
- 3.5 Like in the previous year there were no complaints from Looked After children and young people about child protection or their wellbeing.
- 3.6 Ongoing liaison with the Children in Care Council regarding complaints information.

4. OPTIONS

The overview of a robust complaint procedure is a key role for corporate parents. The Panel needs assurance, through this report, that the process is working effectively and that issues are addressed.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- 5.1 A sound, robust and accessible complaints procedure contribute to children young people feeling safe to disclose any concerns in the knowledge that they will be treated seriously and sensitively.
- 5.2 Views from children and young people through complaints and compliments and lessons learnt from their complaints can contribute to the shaping of the services we provide.

6. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 Members are asked to note the report and consider whether they wish to seek further information about issues raised.

8. APPENDICES

Appendix A: Complaints received from Looked After Children and Young People (April 2014 - March 2015)

Appendix B: Children Social Care Background Information.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

APPENDIX A

Bradford Children Specialist Services

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED FROM LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (April 14- March 15)

1. Activity

- 1.1 The Complaints Unit recorded 84 new complaints between April 2014 and March 2015. Of those, 72 were related to Specialist Services.

Eight of the new complaints were made by young people compared to nine during the previous financial year. One of the complaints was a historical complaint made by an adult in relation to the time when he was looked after by the Authority, as such it has been included in this report. Two of the young people were classified as “in need” and were not looked after by the Authority. One young person complained about the youth offending team but was not a looked after young person.

- 1.2 A lower proportion of complaints (7%) within Specialist Services was made directly by Looked After young people than last year (17%). The number of complaints received from looked after young people represents 1% of the total of young people in care (as in 31st March 2015), which is the same proportion than in the previous financial year.

Children’s Services – person making the complaint	14-15	13-14	12-13
Looked After Children	5	9	10

2. Who made the complaints?

Age	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
<15	0	2 (22%)	3 (30%)
15-18	4 (80%)	6 (67%)	7 (70%)
19-25	1 (20%)	1 (11%)	0
Total	5	9	10

Gender	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
Male	3 (60%)	5 (56%)	7 (70%)
Female	2 (40%)	4(44%)	3 (30%)
Total	5	9	10

Disabilities	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
Physical	0	0	0
Learning	0	1 (10%)	1 (10%)
No disabilities	5(100%)	9 (90%)	9 (90%)
Not stated	0	0	0
Total	5	10	10

Status	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
Care order	4 (80%)	5 (56%)	5 (50%)
Voluntary Placement	0	3 (33%)	1 (10%)
Interim Care order	0	0	1 (10%)
Other	1 (20%)	1 (11%)	3 (30%)
Total	5	9	10

Ethnicity	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
White British	3(60%)	5 (56%)	5 (50%)
BME	2 (40%)	3 (33%)	5(50%)
Not stated	0	1 (11%)	0
Total	5	9	10

- 2.1 As in the two previous financial years, the average complainant was a Looked After male between 15 and 18 years of age, who was under a care order and had no disabilities.
- 2.2 For the third consecutive year since 2008, the majority of complainants were male.
- 2.3 When all the complaints received by the department are considered (including those from parents, foster carers etc), there was a majority of female complainants (55%) contrary to the situation regarding complaints made by young people directly.
- 2.4 Higher number of complaints from a white ethnicity compared to the complaints received between April 2013 and March 2014.
- 2.5 The youngest person making a complaint during this period was 15 and the oldest was 30 (historical complaint). Not including the historical complaint, the average age was 17, which is higher than in the previous financial year (15).

3. What was the complaint about?

Type of issues	2014-15	20123-14	2012-13
Communication	1	0	2
Challenging decisions	0	1	0
Child Protection	0	0	4
Information on records	1	0	0
Service Provision (general quality, damage to property)	2	2	3
Staff (professional practice)	1	6	1
Total	5	9	10

- 3.1 There were 5 complaints made by Looked After young people during this period. Each complaint refer to one issue only.

- 3.2 Most of the issues were about service provision (40%), followed by communication, personal information held on records and staff (20%). This a different pattern to the previous year when most of the complaints were about staff (67%), followed by service provision (22%), and challengin decisions (11%).
- 3.3 There was one complaint about personal information held on the records by Children Social Care whilst there were none during the previous years.
- 3.4 There were one complaint about communication during 2014-15, whilst there was none in 2013-14.
- 3.5 Like in the previous year, the department did not receive any complaints made by looked After Children about child wellbeing. This type of complaints generally include issues such as harassment, assaults etc.
- 3.6 Compared to the previous financial year, there has been a significant decrease in complaints about staff (from 6 to 1).
- 3.7 Following a different pattern to last year, most complaints were related to the Looked After Children Team, followed by Leaving Care and Social Work teams. The department did not receive any complaints related to residential units (in house or commissioned) whilst 3 complaints were received in 2013/14.

Services	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
Children's Homes	0	2	2
Children's Homes (commissioned)	0	1	1
Leaving Care	1	0	1
Social Work Teams	1	2	0
LAC	3	2	4
Fostering Unit	0	2	0
YOT	0	0	2
Total	5	9	10

- 3.8 The Youth Offending Team and the Fostering Unit did not receive any complaints during 2014-15.

4. How were the complaints made?

- 4.1 Most young people wrote a letter (2). The other three methods used were face , telephone and complaints leaflet.
- 4.2 None of the young people used the Council's website or e-mails to make their complaint.
- 4.3 There were no complaints referred by the advocacy service between 2014 and 2015 whilst two was referred during the previous year.
- 4.4 Three complaints were made to front line teams directly, the rest were made to the complaints unit.

5. Outcomes of complaints

5.1 Six complaints were closed at Stage 1 during this period.

OUTCOMES	Social Work	Homes	Leaving Care	Fostering	Commissioned	LAC	TOTAL
Upheld	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Partially upheld	1	0	0	0	0	2	3
Not upheld	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Withdrawn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	2	0	1	1	0	2	6

5.2 Half of the complaints were partially upheld, compared to 75% in the previous financial year. For the first time in two years, one complaint was fully upheld.

5.3 Following the same pattern as in the previous year, there were no complaints withdrawn.

5.4 Reduction in the number of complaints (fully or partially) upheld from 75% in 2013-14 to 67% in 2014-15.

OUTCOMES	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
Upheld	1	0	0
Partially upheld	3	6	5
Not upheld	2	2	5
Withdrawn	0	0	0
TOTAL	6	8	10

6. Response times

6.1 The Department acknowledged all the complaints but one within the 2 required days. Whilst during 2013-14 all complaints received were acknowledged on time.

6.2 During 2014-15 the Department responded to four out of the five complaints received from Looked After Children. One complaint was still ongoing by 31st March 2015. Two complaints that were received in the previous financial year were also responded during 2014-15.

6.3 Five complaints were responded within timescales (83%) which shows a decrease in performance compared to last year (88%).

6.4 The average time to respond to a complaint was 8 days, compared to 16 days during the previous financial year. However there was a complaint that took 164 days to respond due to the manager's sickness absence and was not considered in the above average.

7. Learning from Complaints

7.1 Managers dealing with complaints at Stage 1 highlighted the following actions as a result of the complaints made by Looked After young people.

- The Leaving Care plan to work on an action plan to support the young person in relation to education and accommodation.
- The current computerised records can keep better track of personal information regarding children and young people to minimise errors.

8. Escalation

8.1 Following the same pattern as in the last two financial years, none of the complaints made by Looked After Children escalated to Stage 2 or 3 of the Social Care Complaints Procedure.

9. Compliments

9.1 Specialist Services received 72 compliments of which 76% were from service users. Of those, 20 were made by young people which is a lower number than in the previous financial year (30) but the same percentage than in 2013-14 (28%).

TYPE	Social Work	Leaving Care	CWDH	TOTAL
Impact on service user	0	7	0	7
Quality of service	0	11	0	11
Staff	0	0	1	1
Beyond job's remit	0	1	0	1
Total	0	19	1	20

9.2 Following the same pattern as in the previous year, Leaving Care received the highest number of compliments (19), usually through the exit interviews. Placement support and social work teams did not receive any compliments during 2014-15. The children with disabilities and complex health needs team received one compliment whilst they didn't received any during 2013-14.

9.3 Following the same pattern as in the previous year, young people were happy with the quality of the service they received (21) and the impact this had on their lives (8). They also complimented staff for going beyond their remit (1).

9.4 Reduction in the number of compliments received about the quality of service provided in comparison with the previous financial year (21).

TYPE	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
Impact on service user	7	8	8
Quality of service	11	21	27
Staff	1	0	2
Beyond job's remit	1	1	0
Total	20	30	37

10. Work with the Children In Care Council

10.1 During the presentation of the complaints annual report to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 5th March 2014 It was agreed that the Complaints Manager would liaise with the CICC in order to review the complaints process and to present their recommendations to the Corporate Parenting Panel. The recommendations were presented to Corporate Parenting Panel on 19th November 2014.

10.2 Publicity and access to complaints information was revisited and the following actions have taken place:

- Update of all complaints leaflets (Corporate, Adult Services, Children Services, handout for young people and handout for children and young people with learning disabilities) and inclusion of a new and easier Freepost address.
- Although the leaflets are electronic, printed copies have been re-sent to the main Council buildings for display in the public area.
- Electronic and printed copies have been re-sent to all Children's Home with the recommendation that there is a designated area for displaying information about complaints.
- Electronic and printed copies have been re- sent to the Fostering Unit for inclusion in the information pack given to children and young people who are being fostered.
- The possibility of combining all the complaints information in one single leaflet is currently being considered.
- Review and update of the complaints information printed at the back of the Looked After Children's review minutes.
- Inclusion of information about complaints and how to make them in the new Council's mobiles application for Looked After children and young people.
- Update on information about complaints in the Council's website.

10.3 CICC has gone through a period of changes as two of their representatives have now left. The inclusion of complaints in their mentoring scheme is still in their agenda but as the two people identified for this purpose have left, they will need to continue the process in the new year (young people have requested a break to accommodate their exams). Information about complaints has been included in the CICC new leaflet that will be printed shortly.

APPENDIX B

CHILDREN SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS

Background Information

Open Children Cases: **3,828** *. This does not include any under 18's receiving services from Adults teams or some peripheral services like family centre parenting groups, exclusion projects, CAMHS, etc

Number of LAC: **878 mainstream (looked after full time) ***.

**As at 31/3/15*

Total number of representations related to Children Specialist Services received between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015:

Stage 1:	72
Stage 2:	0
Stage 3:	0
Pre-complaints resolved:	92
Compliments	72