CHILDREN’S SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS

Annual Report 2014/2015

(1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015)

This report provides a summary and analysis of the complaints considered under the complaints representations procedure. It also includes compliments and comments. This report relates to representations and requests dealt with during the 2014/2015 financial year (1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015). It primarily concerns new complaints received during that period, but also includes complaints received prior to 1 April 2014 which were ongoing or completed during the period.

This report contains information under the following headings:

- Stage 1 Complaints: Outcomes and Themes (page 2)
- Stage 1 Complaints: Statistics (page 3)
- Learning Points from Stage 1 Complaints (page 5)
- Learning Points from Stage 2 Complaints (page 10)
- LGO Decisions (page 13)
- Changes to the Complaints Process (page 15)
- Compliments and Comments (page 16)

Headline Facts 2014/2015

- A total of 98 new statutory complaints were received relating to children’s social care services (which compares to 79 received during 2013/2014) along with 42 compliments (+ 127 received by Children’s Centres) and 49 comments.

- 16 complainants expressed dissatisfaction with their Stage 1 response and requested escalation to Stage 2. 4 complaints were ultimately taken to Stage 2. 85 out of the 98 complaints were resolved at Stage 1.

- The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) considered 3 complaints from complainants dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

- 4 existing complaints were being investigated at Stage 2.

- 5 complaints from 2013/2014 were completed and responded to at Stage 1.
Outcomes of Stage 1 Complaints 2014/2015

98 Stage 1 Complaints

- 1 Suspended
- 5 Ongoing
- 20 Not Pursued
- 1 Withdrawn
- 11 Upheld
- 36 Partially Upheld
- 24 Not Upheld

22 Expressions of Dissatisfaction with Stage 1 response

- 17 Meetings Held
- 1 Complaint Suspended
- 4 Resolved – No meeting
- 0 referred straight to LGO

- 3 Referred to LGO
- 6 Resolved at Stage 1
- 4 Escalated to Stage 2
- 4 Ongoing
The main issues recorded are:

- Inaccuracies in reports and assessments; perceived bias in the reports and by workers; unprofessional comments made by workers
- Delays in receiving minutes and assessment reports
- Delays in completing reports and assessments
- Lack of information provided by staff; lack of notice about meetings; lack of updates about their child’s case

These are similar to the themes identified in 2012/2013 and 2013/2014.

(1) Total complaints received 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 by Team
(Children with Disabilities Team and Children’s Assessment Team figures up to November 2013 only as from this date those teams were disbanded and merged into the Crewe and Macclesfield CIN/CP Teams)
(2) **Response Times to Complaints**
(refers to when a full Stage 1 response was sent)

- Answered outside 20 days
- Answered within 20 days
- Answered within 10 days

(3) **Complaints by Main Category Type**
Key Learning Points from Stage 1 Complaints

Make sure that clients receive a copy of reports at least 3 working days prior to conference.

Parents should be able to read the report and be able to think about what they would like to say in the conference and if they agree with what has been written. Although we can not always change what is in a report, we can take note of parents’ views and comments.

Ensure that parents are made aware of significant changes in the life and circumstances of a cared for child.

However, for cared for children aged 16+ we have to take into account their wishes for information sharing and contact with natural parents.
Workers to ensure they inform parents with parental responsibility when work is to be completed with their child, and to inform parents of the nature and location of that work.

Workers to inform managers of any personal or professional connections to a family, so that managers can ensure that the work to be completed is objective and that there is no conflict of interest.

Ensure that minutes of conferences are distributed to all parties in a timely manner. Minutes to be posted by Recorded Delivery.

Ensure that parents are informed of upcoming meetings/conferences in a timely manner.

Ensure that parents are informed in a timely manner about any changes of allocated social worker.

Independent Reviewing Officers should raise any concerns about staff conduct during Child Protection Conferences with Group Managers at the time.

Ensure that Combined Assessments are completed within statutory timescales and shared with parents in a timely manner.

Ensure that amendments to Direct Payments are processed swiftly and confirmed in writing to parents.

New referrals into Children’s Services should be checked carefully against the relevant databases – not just by child’s name, but by date of birth, address and parents’ details to ensure the correct child is identified.
If a Social Worker is to contact a school, the child’s parent should be informed and consent sought if appropriate.

Once identified that a social worker is going to be off long-term sick or is to leave the authority, their cases should be re-allocated to another worker as soon as possible to avoid delays and clients being left without a social worker.

Police and safeguarding checks to be completed in a timely manner.

Where a change of placement is needed – a new placement needs to be identified as soon as possible and the child/young person informed of their new placement to minimise stress and anxiety.

Cases that need to go to Complex Needs Panel for decisions on additional support should not be unnecessarily delayed.

Staff to be reminded of the standards expected when communicating with clients. Messages need to be passed on and phone calls returned in a timely manner.

Safeguarding to ensure that minutes of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC)s are sent to parents within the statutory timescales.

Safeguarding and social workers to consider any flexibility in the timing of meetings to allow for working parents to attend.

Ensure that, where appropriate, Family and Friends Carers are allocated a Supervising Social Worker.
Staff to ensure that (a) payments to foster carers for respite stays are processed promptly and (b) that adequate paperwork and information about the young person is provided in advance of their stay.

Parents should be kept informed where Children’s Services intend to contact specialist schools/providers and send their child’s information to such schools/providers.

That consideration be given by the Head of Service to discussions of the Complex Needs Panel being minuted and the agreed decisions and outcomes clearly recorded. These should then be communicated to parents in writing so that they are aware of (a) who attended the panel (b) a summary of what was discussed and of different views and (b) what the agreed outcomes and actions are.

Staff to be reminded to make it clear to parents that they wish to speak to their child(ren) alone and to consider if they need to get written agreement/permission from parents so that this is recorded at the time and cannot be disputed later.

Staff to provide parents with a summary procedure document explaining how a Child Protection Investigation will be carried out so that parents have a written procedure to refer to.

Staff to be reminded to ensure that all agreed actions are fully recorded and when plans change to inform all relevant people and agencies.

Staff to ensure that wherever possible when they cannot attend a conference that clients are informed beforehand who will attend in their place and reassurances given that the replacement staff are fully aware of the case.

All Staff (Social Workers, Admin staff, Managers and complaints staff) to be reminded to double-check that all letters and other correspondence is being sent securely to the correct address. Addresses to be checked by another member of staff if possible.
Staff to be reminded to ensure that referrals to other agencies, such as Barnardo’s or The Children’s Society, are made in a timely manner to avoid unnecessary delays.

Staff to be reminded of the need to ensure accuracy of all factual details (especially names, dates of birth, relationships and addresses) in assessment reports.

All Staff to be reminded to double-check that all letters and other correspondence are sent securely to the correct address. Addresses to be checked by another member of staff if possible.

Staff to be reminded that when contact sessions have to be cancelled, that as much notice as possible should be given to clients to avoid unnecessary journeys and distress.

Staff to be reminded of the need to ensure accuracy of all factual details (especially names, dates of birth, relationships and addresses) in assessment reports.

Suitable carers should be identified as soon as possible and unnecessary delays avoided.
Key Learning Points from Stage 2 Complaints

Stage 2 Complaint One

Recommendations by Independent Investigator:

Managers of children’s social care teams should consider how best to “flag” on the system such requests as the complainant has made (concerning an advocate). This request is no different to a request from a client with a disability who needs assistance or a client who needs an interpreter.

Children’s services need to ensure that their senior managers are familiar with correct procedure for complaints processes.

Children’s social care teams should examine their attitude and actions around inter-agency working, hearing the voice of the child, accurate record keeping through minute taking and amendments.

Children’s social care should ensure that their workers fully understand when it is appropriate to initiate new combined assessments and that these decisions should be based on the needs of the child not just a timeframe.

Children’s social care should ensure that their new system of managing Direct Payments is fair, timely and robust.

Stage 2 Complaint Two

Staff Training issues identified by the Independent Investigator:

(1) Staff will be reminded that any decision to support one parent over another in private law proceedings should be based and justified on assessment and evidence. It should also be approved by a Group Manager and legal advice sought where appropriate.

(2) Staff will be reminded that they should work openly and honestly with parents in Child Protection cases unless there is a clearly recorded management decision that to do so could place the child at significant risk of harm.

(3) Staff will be reminded that any work to be done with a family – particularly where it is proposed that a child does not live with or have contact with a parent - is clearly understood by all involved and that a timescale is agreed and recorded.

(4) Staff will be reminded that parents should be provided with a copy of any written agreement that they sign and agree to.
5 LGO Decision Notices were received during 2014/2015 in relation to children’s social care complaints. The outcome of these cases were as follows:

> **Not Investigated:** 2 (1 because the matter had been decided in court and 1 because financial recompense had previously been paid by the council to the complainant)

> **Classed as Premature Referrals:** 2

> **Investigated and Fault Found:** 1
### Changes/Developments to the Complaints Process

1. **New Young Person’s Complaints and Feedback Form** created with the assistance of young people themselves via The Children’s Society.

2. **Work started on procuring a new database** to record and track all complaints, comments, compliments, Freedom of Information requests, MP’s letters and Data Protection/Access to Records requests. To be implemented in 2015-2016.

3. **A leaflet produced** to briefly explain to complainants who are moving to Stage 2, what the process involves and timescales.

4. **The Complaints Policy and Procedure** has been revised and updated and is available on CEntranet.

5. **The Stage 1 Response Template Letter** has been re-issued to all Children’s Social Care managers with advice to make contact with the complainant sooner rather than later to discuss the complaint before responding in writing.

6. **Meetings are taking place** between the Complaints Officer and Independent Investigators at the beginning of a Stage 2 investigation to fully discuss the case and handover relevant paperwork.
A total of 42 compliments from either service users or professionals from other organisations/agencies were recorded plus 127 received direct by Children’s Centres. Compliments were received from amongst others:

Compliments were received from parents, an adoptive parent, a Youth Panel Chair, a young person after completing the Strengthening Families Programme, staff from schools, Peaks and Plains Housing Trust, Cheshire and Wirral Partnership and Loughborough University.

Some comments:

“Hello. Re: assistance received for helping find childcare for my child. I just wanted to pass on my sincerest thanks to A, who both myself and my husband spoke to I July. She was really helpful and empathetic with our situation and helped us out of a pickle. Please can you make sure that my thanks are passed on to A? Kindest regards”

“Hi, We want to thank you for your long term involvement with our son. It is evident to us that throughout your 5 year term as his Social Worker you have forged a great relationship with him. From our conversations you have evidently gained a good insight into his complex needs. Your support is much appreciated and we wish you well for the future. Cheers”
"GB did CAF training at ** Academy I would like to comment that she was a great help to me as she answered all my queries and explained fully what needed to be done when preparing for a CAF meeting. I personally think that it would be very helpful, and supportive, if a member of the team attended the first CAF meeting with their trainees”

“M has been wonderful. She has always been truthful and a great professional to be in contact with .. She always had the time to listen to my partner and myself .. I feel we have never been judged as parents .. I feel social services should be grateful to have such a professional, amazing member of staff”.

“The guardian has had numerous helpful discussions with the social work team in this case and has been appraised of the progress of the fostering assessment by Miss X (SW). Ms Y has been particularly impressed with the approach of the social work team in this case and by the fostering social worker Miss X, who has been proactive in assisting the maternal grandfather and aunt and partner to be assessed as joint carers for the children.”

From a Head Teacher:
“X has shown admirable dedication, commitment and professional courage in her support of the children, in what is a challenging and difficult set of circumstances. X communicates with me regularly by email, is available by phone when advice is needed and keeps all appointments made with the children and myself.

We can as a society be quick to criticise professionals and social workers and it is easy to overlook those who’s professionalism is outstanding so I wanted to ensure that X was given due credit for her role in supporting the family”.

From a Parent:
“Initially I felt as though, despite being the victims of the crime, we were the ones being investigated but upon the arrival of Z to our home we felt entirely put at ease. She was wonderful with both my children and so understanding to myself. Little credit is given to the good work social workers do and I admit to having a preconceived and inaccurate view prior to the meeting. This was proven totally unfounded. Z was kind, considerate and gentle and offered as much help and advice as possible”.
“Thank you for making our boys feel safe; I know you have made a difference”

Social worker ‘A’ “Has been wonderful to myself and the children. I really don’t know where I would be without the support and guidance from ‘A’.

“I spoke with X and Y and asked them if they had asked you to help them with anything and they both immediately said “yes we want ‘V’ to help us to find our mum”. When I said that actually you had managed to do that both of their faces lit up and they were so excited, X was shaking with joy” (from a Head Teacher)

Comments

49 contacts/communications were recorded as ‘comments’ during 2014/2015. These are usually cases where the issues raised do not warrant being logged as formal complaints, or where the complainant/person themselves are not eligible to make a formal complaint or simply do not wish to make a formal complaint, but provide feedback.

The issues raised were varied and were mostly from parents and grandparents. Concerns raised included issues about members of staff, delays, lack of progress and lack of information provided, problems with arranging contact between a parent and their child, alleged breaches of confidentiality and not being informed of cancelled/re-arranged meetings.

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