
**QUARTERLY COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS REPORT
QUARTER 3 2017-18**

Reason for the Report

1. The Committee's terms of reference state that it will receive Children's Services Complaints reports.
2. This Quarter 3 report covers complaints and representations from 1st October 2017 through to 31st December 2017.

Introduction

3. The current Welsh Government guidance and regulations in relation to social services complaints and representations came into being on 1st August 2014.
4. The procedure places the emphasis on the initial local resolution stage – Stage 1 - with complainants being offered a discussion to resolve the matter. The second formal stage (Stage 2) provides for independent investigation. If the outcome of Stage 2 does not satisfy the complainant, s/he has recourse to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.
5. Citizens making complaints have a right to be listened to properly and have their concerns resolved quickly and effectively. Children's Services emphasis is on listening to concerns and using this learning to improve services for everyone who uses them.
6. Complaints should be handled in such a way that the complainant is the focus, not the process, and that the particular circumstances of the complainant are taken into account (including their age or disability). Where the complaint relates to a looked after child, a child in need or a care leaver the local authority has a duty to provide an advocate as required. All children or young people who make complaints are offered a meeting and all children and families will receive a written response to the concerns they have raised.
7. The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 devotes Part 10 to complaints and this reflects Welsh Government guidance and regulations and Council procedures. The Council is mindful that the Act will further promote people's rights and collaborative working will be actively encouraged.

Summary of complaints activity during the period

8.

Item	Q3 2017-18
Number open at start of period	17
Number received (overall)	20
Number received directly from children and young people	0
Number closed	22
Number outstanding at end of period	15
% acknowledged within 2 working days	20 / 20 = 100%
% concluded within 15 working days of acknowledgement	16 / 20 = 80%

9. During this quarter, the number of complaints received by Children's Services has seen a slight increase in complaints to 20 (18 in Quarter 2, 2017-18).

- a. 60% (12) of the complaints received were in relation to the Social Worker or the service received. There were no complaints in relation to finance. 10% (2) of the complaints received were in relation to contact. The remaining 30% (6) of complaints were in relation to other issues including decision-making.
- b. 11 complaints were received about the Intake & Assessment Service, which is an increase from 7 in Quarter 2 (17-18). 6 complaints were received regarding the Child in Need Service (1 from a young person) which compared with 5 in Quarter 2 (17-18); 2 complaints were received about the Looked After Children Service compared with 4 in Quarter 2 (17-18). The remaining 1 complaint was in relation to Family Intervention Support Services.

Example of complaints concluded during the quarter are:

A complaint where we were able to put things right

The Advocate of two young siblings, who are looked after and placed with foster carers, contacted the complaints officer and shared their concerns. Both siblings were unhappy that the plan for their rehabilitation home appeared lengthy, they had concerns about a relative who had initially cared for them, feeling they should have not been in the individuals care and remained unhappy about the unplanned way in which they were removed from their mother's care.

A Senior Manager responded to all Issues raised in a response to the siblings, explaining why they were removed from the care of the person who had initially cared for them, stating the relative would not be given the opportunity to care for them or any other relative again. A clear plan, involving the parents, themselves and social worker was initiated and timescales agreed. Time was spent with the young people explaining why they removed in an unplanned way. The Senior

Manager provided apologies and offered her empathy and time to meet again with the siblings in the future if they wished.

The issues they raised covered a number of service areas, Safeguarding, LA Services and the CIN Team, despite this the youngsters received a response within timescale. As with all complaints received from young people, feedback about the complaints process was obtained, both siblings and their Advocate were complimentary about the response and felt the investigation was thorough. They were satisfied with the outcome.

A complaint where we had no case to answer

A gentleman who is serving a prison sentence due to risks he poses to children wrote to complain that he was not being granted physical or letterbox contact with his children and stated that the social worker did not respond to his telephone calls. The appropriate Manager wrote to inform the individual that the social worker had spent time with his children and they did not want any contact with their father. It was agreed the complainant would contact the social worker on an agreed day and time every two weeks for updates.

Stage 2 Independent Investigations

10. If complainants remain unsatisfied at the conclusion of the informal Stage 1, they are entitled to seek a formal Independent Investigation under Stage 2 of the procedure.
11. 1 stage 2 complaint was resolved during Quarter 3. Investigations continue in relation to the other cases.
12. 6 new Stage 2 investigations were initiated during Quarter 3 (17-18) which remained open at 31st December 2017.

Ombudsman Investigations

13. There was Ombudsman activity in relation to 1 complaints during the quarter –
 - a. The Ombudsman recommended 'No further action' following the review of a complaint case that had been referred to them.

Learning from Complaints

14. Stage 2 reports undertaken by Independent Investigators and reports from the Ombudsman include recommendations if required. In response, an Action Plan is initiated to ensure that the recommendations are implemented and lessons are learned.

Themes Emerging During the Quarter

15. Quarterly complaints reports are shared with managers so any emerging themes can be considered and actions can be taken to improve practice.

16. The only patterns that emerged related to complaints, which were in court proceedings so we were unable to answer the complaint. No other patterns emerged that suggest there are any new thematic issues that need to be addressed.

Update on Progress from Themes Identified in Previous Periods

17. The previously noted issue of social workers not returning calls continues to be the cause of, or an element of, complaints received. The strong message regarding the importance of returning calls continues to be reiterated by senior managers who follow up individual issues that are brought to their attention. The new agile / mobile working arrangements have provided social workers with more flexibility and the right kit to enable them to respond to messages in a more timely way and this will continue to be monitored to seek an improvement in this area.

18. As a result of the following, there is an improved oversight and overall a reduction in the number of complaints being received

- a. Senior managers have more of an oversight into casework (e.g. by chairing Care Planning Meetings) and challenge practice where it is considered that both parents have not been consulted.
- b. In the Signs of Safety approach (which maps out a safety network for children considered to be at risk), social workers routinely consider every relationship linked to the child and this will include both parents and extended family.

Early Resolution

19. Children's Services place an emphasis on resolving issues at the earliest possible opportunity, and where these concerns are dealt with immediately they are not opened as a formal complaint. On these occasions, the issues are brought to the attention of relevant Team or Operational Managers who acted promptly to address the issues raised to the satisfaction of the individual. There were 2 examples of this during Quarter 3

Review of Complaints in Social Services

20. An external independent review of the arrangements for receiving, managing and resolving complaints in Social Services was completed in January 2017 and the recommendations were accepted by the Directorate Management Team. This will result in a combined social services complaints unit for both Adults and Children's complaints and work will be underway during quarter 3/4 to develop joint processes. Recruitment to a newly created post has been completed.

Summary of Compliments

21. Teams are more readily sharing the compliments they receive from a variety of sources, e.g. service users and professionals, although it is recognised that further work is required to ensure that all compliments are captured and reported.

22. 17 compliments were received in Quarter 3, which is an increase from 7 in Quarter 2 (17-18). A breakdown of compliments by team is provided below. This will help Children's Services build upon positive work and could identify improvements.

Team	No. of Compliments
Targeted Services	13
Specialist Services	3
Other	1

Example of a compliment received during the quarter:

The police passed on a compliment regarding the removal of a child by a social worker commenting that the manner and conduct in which the social worker handled themselves was exemplary. Another was from a young person regarding Greenfarm hostel saying "It was the best family hostel they had ever been in, with staff making it feel like home, always trying to help with any issues, making the 'kids' happy with loads of activities....and that they will miss living there".

Summary for Quarter 3

23. As at the 31st December 2017, the service were working with 2606 children and young people and of these:

24.

- a. In total, we received 20 complaints (0.7%), of which, 2 related to Looked after Children (0.07%). None were directly from the young person.
- b. 1 of the Looked after Children complaints related to decision making regarding a child being returned to the mother. This was not upheld, although apologies were given if there was not clear communication in relation to this. The remaining complaint related to contact visits being cancelled at short notice but when investigated the reasons were inevitable and the response provided accepted by the complainant.
- c. In total, we received 7 compliments (0.2%).

Responses to AM / MP / Councillor Enquiry Letters

25. 7 AM / MP / Councillor Enquiry letters were received by Children's Services during the quarter. An example of these enquiries is to become a special guardian to the grandchildren.

Subject Access Requests

26. A Subject Access Request is a request from an individual to see a copy of the information an organisation holds about them, or their children. These requests should be responded to within 40 calendar days of receipt. Some types of personal data are exempt from the right of subject access and so cannot be obtained by making such a request. On receipt of the request, work is undertaken to ensure that individuals are only provided with information that they are entitled to receive.

27. Children's Services undertook the following activity in relation to Subject Access Requests in Quarter 3 2017-18:

- a. 7 were responded to on time and within the statutory time frame.

- b. 5 were closed because identification was not received or the fee was not paid.
- c. We achieved 100% compliance (40 day deadline)

28. In addition to this, Children's Services received:

- a. 36 requests from the Police under the 2013 Protocol and Good Practice Model re: Disclosure of information in cases of alleged child abuse and linked criminal and care directions, a slight decrease from 37 in quarter 2 (17-18).
- b. 83 requests were processed in relation to access to requests from other Councils, Probation, Solicitors or Insurance, an increase from 67 in Quarter 2 and 35 in Quarter 1 (17-18).

Financial Implications

29. There are no direct financial implications arising from the report.

Legal Implications

30. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

RECOMMENDATION

31. The Committee is recommended to:
- i. To endorse the report.

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