



Open Report on behalf of Heather Sandy, Executive Director - Children's Services

Report to:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
Date:	09 September 2022
Subject:	Children's Services Annual Statutory Complaints Report 2021-2022

Summary:

This report introduces the Annual Complaints Report for Children's Services. This is a statutory requirement and serves to update the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on the performance of Children's Services in relation to complaints. The report only addresses complaints relating to Children's Social Care in line with the statutory requirement and does not contain any data relating to complaints about the wider Children's Services.

Actions Required:

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is invited to review and comment on the Annual Complaints Report for 2021/22 and note the low numbers of complaints that were upheld or partially upheld.

1. Background

The report attached at Appendix A provides the Committee with information on the complaints received by Children's Social Care for the period of 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

A total of 144 contacts were received in 2021/2022 from individuals wishing to complain about the service, up by eight contacts from 136 last year. In recent years, Children's Services has introduced a more restorative approach to complaints, whereby when people indicate they are unhappy and are considering making a complaint, a manager in the relevant service reaches out and attempts to resolve the issue before a formal complaint is made. As a result of this approach, 35 complaints were resolved informally, outside of the complaints process, accounting for 24% of all contacts received.

With the resolution of 35 complaints outside of the complaints process, to the service users satisfaction, 2021/2022 saw an overall increase of 18 complaints (20%) entering the formal process to 109, in comparison to 2020/2021 where 91 formal complaints were

made. This figure of 109 formal complaints is the second lowest number in the last ten years. This is in the context of 48712 contacts made to Social Care and 6952 referrals progressed and unprecedented workforce challenges. Children's Services has continued to try and resolve concerns as early as possible despite the additional pressures seen over the course of the year.

29 complaints were fully upheld. Of these 29 complaints, four were in relation to data breaches. These were all dealt with appropriately and referred to the Data Protection Officer, with no on-going concerns from the Information Commissioners Office. Eight cases were as a result of a lack of communication from involved staff. This has been an on-going theme and is already an area of improvement that the service is aware of.

Five complaints related to the delay in services being delivered. Considering the changes seen throughout the year as services readjust following Covid, this relatively low number should be considered a positive reflection of the work done in meeting need. A total of six cases were in relation to staff conduct and attitude. This was in relation to staff in four different area teams and has been dealt with accordingly. It is encouraging that there are no specific teams that see this as trend in the complaints that have been received for their area.

The remaining six cases were as a result of errors in assessment. The relevant records were amended and none of these cases resulted in the issues being progressed to the next stage of the complaints process. Social care undertook 6484 assessments in the year, so to only have six that required amending highlights the quality of the work being produced.

In total 16 complaints were found to be Partially Upheld. Four cases were as result of a lack of communication. Delays in service accounted for three of the partially upheld cases with two cases arising as a result of assessment errors.

The above areas were also present in cases fully upheld. Cases recorded as partially upheld in these areas were due to some of the concerns raised not being accurate. An example of this being a case where an individual indicated three instances of a lack of communication. Upon investigation it was identified that only one of those instances saw communication not returned; the remaining instances raised were actioned appropriately.

Four of these complaints were as a result of procedures not followed. To clarify, these cases were not as a result of procedures and processes being ignored but instances where a step within a procedure was missed or delayed. These were rectified as a result of the complaint with support and guidance being provided to involved staff. No cases in relation to this were escalated to the next stage of the complaints process.

2021/2022 saw only one complaint escalated to the second stage of the statutory complaints process. The main aspects of this complaint were the following: -

- Disagree with assessment outcome
- Lack of Service

At stage one of the complaints process the complaint was not upheld. This case was referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman who asked the authority to progress this case within the complaints process. At the writing of this report this case remains open at stage 2 independent investigation.

Any learning from these complaints has been addressed by the managers for the team with the staff concerned. It is really pleasing to note the low numbers of complaints within the context of recovery from Covid, workforce challenges and the impact that early resolution is having on the numbers.

2. Conclusion

What can be surmised from the data presented in this report is the on-going investment and work in resolving issues informally wherever this is possible. Children's Services, despite the difficult circumstances and additional pressure of readjusting services, has remained focussed on achieving early resolution for individuals dissatisfied or concerned around what is being delivered. This is reflected in the maintaining of the number of complaints entering the formal process, with no significant increase, despite challenges.

In addition to the above, the Children's Services focus on providing robust responses, addressing all concerns, at the first stage of the formal complaints process, has seen only one case enter the statutory stage 2 process. The area should continue to focus on the informal resolution of cases in early resolution in order to maintain the positive figures achieved.

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

Not Applicable

4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Annual Social Care Statutory Complaints Report 2021 - 2022

5. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Carolyn Knight, who can be contacted on 07879 603618 or carolyn.knight@lincolnshire.gov.uk.

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