

TO: EXECUTIVE MEMBER CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING
DATE: 28 May 2013

ANNUAL REPORT – CHILDREN’S SOCIAL CARE STATUTORY COMPLAINTS
(Chief Officer: Strategy, Resources and Early Intervention)

1 PURPOSE OF DECISION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the annual report of the Statutory Complaints function for Children’s Social Care – attached as Annex 1, for approval by the Executive Member for Children Young People and Learning. The report will then be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for Children and Young People.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the Executive Member approves the report.**

3 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 The Representations Procedure Regulations 2006 state that Complaints Services should produce an annual report for consideration.
- 3.2 The Complaints Service performs an important role in assuring the quality of response to children and young people or parents and carers who make complaints. The annual report supports the continuing development and review of the service and learning from complaints.
- 3.3 The Annual Report will be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel following the approval of the Executive Member.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 None considered

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 The report provides an overview of the work of the Complaints Manager and identifies some of the key issues arising in terms of complaints. It also considers further developments to continually improve the way in which the Department responds to complaints in a positive manner. In addition to complaints the report identifies compliments that have been received by Children’s Social Care.
- 5.2 The Complaints Manager works closely with Children’s Social Care to ensure any complaints are resolved in a timely and satisfactory manner. In order to ensure positive outcomes, the Complaints Manager has regular meetings with senior managers in Children’s Social Care, and provides training for new Social Workers on the complaints process. Findings from complaints are considered in the development of policies and procedures and in the ongoing learning culture within Children’s Social Care.

- 5.3 The Complaints Manager also attends and works within a regional complaints network so that good practice can be shared and there is a continuing focus on raising standards for complaints management practice across the region.
- 5.4 Whilst there are a higher number of complaints this year, this has increased in proportion with the number of open cases which is 781 in 2012/13 (compared to 683 in 2011/12). Overall, there were 37 complaints investigated (compared to 24 in 2011/12). Two of which progressed to stage 2, which gives us a figure of 35 individual complainants having approached Children's Social Care during the period of 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013 (18 for 2011/12).
- 5.5 Twenty one of these were addressed using the Statutory Complaints Procedure, of these nineteen were concluded at Stage 1 of the Statutory Procedure, and two progressed to Stage 2. Sixteen complaints were addressed using the Local Authority Complaints Procedure and were all concluded at Stage 1. This reflects good practice within Children's Social Care, where complaints are taken seriously and Managers are diligent in securing an early resolution wherever possible.
- 5.6. The nature of the complaints included the following:
- Assessments / investigations
 - Communication
 - Staff decisions / conduct
 - Standard of service
 - Eligibility criteria
- 5.7 In addition to complaints there are 138 compliments recorded in the period and section 6.1 provides a breakdown and some examples of those received. Some of these compliments relate to the way in which the Social Worker has managed the case, and some comment on the way in which parents have felt able to improve their parenting skills. It is pleasing to note the compliments that come from partners who work with Children's Social Care, for example, Solicitors, Court Judge, Independent Reviewing Officer and Child Protection Conference Chair.
- 5.8 This year has also seen a small number of Stage 2 Statutory Investigations which are carried out by an independent person; these are more complex complaints which require a significant amount of Complaint Manager and Officer time to resolve them. It should be noted that the use of an experienced manager, who is independent of Children's Social Care has reduced the costs of employing an external independent investigator, however there is still a cost to the Council in relation to the time and resources of an experienced manager who may be undertaking the investigation on top of their normal job role.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 The Guidance is issued under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 which requires local authorities in their social services functions to act under the general guidance of the Secretary of State. As such the Guidance does not have statutory force but the authority should comply with it unless local circumstances indicate exceptional reasons which justify a variation.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 The Borough Treasurer is satisfied that there are no significant financial implications arising from this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 The Complaints Procedure is available to all those who meet the specified criteria for making a complaint using either the Statutory or the Local Authority Procedure.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 None identified in connection with the annual report. It should be noted that complex complaints are carefully managed with support from the Borough Solicitor where relevant to address and minimise risks with individual cases.

Other Officers

- 6.5 None identified

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 7.1 None

Method of Consultation

- 7.2 Not applicable

Representations Received

- 7.3 Not applicable

Background Papers

The Statutory Complaint Procedure for Children's Social Care: 30 October 2007.

Contacts for further information

David Watkins, Chief Officer: Performance and Resources
david.watkins@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Susan Horton - Complaints Manager
susan.horton@bracknell-forest.gov.uk