

Children's Compliments and Complaints Unit

Annual Summary Report - Children Looked After and Care Leavers

March 2020-April 2021

Introduction

This Children's Services Compliments and Complaints report relates to complaints and compliments made by Foster Carers, Children Looked After (CLA) and Care Leavers under the statutory complaints procedure within the Children Act 1989.

The Complaints team play a key role in mediating between Complainants and the services they wish to raise a complaint about. In line with the Kirklees Children's Social Care complaints procedures, Responding Managers are encouraged to make early contact with the Complainant, to provide reassurance that they are being listened to, establish their wishes and feelings, and assist to put measures in place to achieve early resolution. The approach helps to improve relationships between Complainants and the Service, and enables issues raised to be resolved without the Complainant always feeling the need to resort to the formal complaints process.

The statutory complaints procedure has three stages:

- **Stage One.** Complaints at Stage One should be responded to by the Responding Manager (from the relevant service area) within 10 working days (with an automatic extension to a further ten days where necessary).
- **Stage Two.** This stage is usually implemented when a Complainant is dissatisfied with the findings of Stage One. Stage Two is an investigation usually conducted by an Investigating Officer with an Independent Person. An Independent Person must be appointed to the investigation. Stage two Complaints falling within the Children's Social Care Service statutory complaints procedure should be dealt with within 25 days, although in certain cases this can be extended to 65 days
- **Stage Three.** The third stage of the Complaints process is the Review Panel where Complainants who are not satisfied with the Stage Two response proceed their complaint. At this stage, the local authority is required to establish a Complaints Review Panel. The Panel makes recommendations to the Service Director who decides on the complaint and any action to be taken. Complaints Review Panels are made up of three independent panelists.

Summary

The table below outlines the number of contacts to the Compliments and Complaints team from, Children Looked After, Care Leavers and Foster Carers in the reporting period

Contact	Number (CLA and Care Leavers)	Number (Foster Carers)
Compliment	3	9
Enquiry	1	0
Early Resolution complaints	21	7
Stage 1 complaints	10	4

Stage 2 complaints	1	1
Stage 3 complaints	0	0
Total	36	23

Compliments

9 compliments were made by Foster Carers within this reporting period:

- 7 were regarding the good practice of Social Workers in the Assessment and Intervention and Children Looked After Teams.
- 2 were in relation to the good practice and support provided by Social Workers from the Fostering Service.

3 compliments were made by children and young people within this reporting period, these related to:

1. The support and kindness, a young person received from their Personal Advisor.
2. Thanking the Children's Rights Team for listening and support provided.
3. A social worker in the Children Looked After Team, for doing what they said they would do, being easy to talk to and for caring.

Complaints

Between April 2020- March 2021 there were:

Foster Carers

- 7 complaints from Foster Carers registered as Local/Early Resolution. All except one was resolved and did not require escalation. The one which was not resolved at Local /Early Resolution did not proceed at the Complainant's request.
- 4 complaints from Foster Carers were registered at Stage 1.

All the complaints except 2, were responded to within timescales:

1. One was delayed due to accommodating a request for restorative meetings between the complainant, Team Manager and Social Worker, prior to a written response.
2. The other was delayed due to further exploration being required and the complaint being made over a bank holiday period, with annual leave attributing to the delay.

Children Looked After and Care Leavers

- 21 complaints from children and young people Looked After /Care Leavers were registered as Local/Early Resolution.
- 10 complaints were registered at Stage 1. All except one were resolved and did not require

escalation. The one that was not resolved at Stage 1, was resolved at Stage 2.

All the above children and young people were advised by the Compliments and Complaints team of the support available to them from the Childrens Rights Service regarding making a complaint, however all except one young person had already sought support from the team to help them make their complaint. It is evident that the Children’s Rights team play a significant role in supporting children and young people to ensure that their voice is heard.

All the complaints except 2 were responded to within timescales:

1. One was delayed due to the complexity of the case as the complaint related to historical matters.
2. Another was delayed due to requiring a Service Manager response, following the Team Manager’s response.

Analysis of Complaints

The table below illustrates the service areas young people complained about within the reporting period.

Service Area	CLA and Care	Foster Carers
Assessment and Intervention	5	1
Emergency Duty Team	0	1
Duty and Advice	0	0
Children Residential	1	1
Children & Disability Residential	0	0
Fostering/ Placement	0	4
Looked After and Care Leavers	25	6
Child Protection & Review	0	1
Allegations Management	0	1
Connected Persons	0	3
Total	31*	18*

NB: *Some complaints were about more than one service area.

The service area with the highest number of complaints was Looked After and Care Leavers service. This is to be expected given that most children and young people who are Looked After will have experience of service provision from this service area for a significant period, which can often involve change, such as, a placement move, family time arrangements and/or transition to independence. The Fostering/Placement service was also a service area frequently complained about by Foster Carers. This service area is responsible for providing the support to carers and therefore would be the expected service area if Foster Carers have identified their own issues, they are unhappy with.

The table below indicates the issues complained about within the reporting period.

Issue	CLA/Care Leavers	Foster Carers
Delay in Service Provision/ Failure to provide a service/ standard /quality of service provided	4	3
Failure to consult / communicate / lack of communication	7	1
Welfare Issue	2	1

Inappropriate Management	0	0
Inaccurate Decision Making	1	2
Issues relating to Staff	12	4
Information/ issues/Access to records	1	3
Financial	12	3
Contact Arrangements	2	0
Loss / Damage to property	1	0
Other	0	0
Total	42*	17*

NB: *Some complaints were raised about more than one issue.

Foster Carers

The main theme identified from complaints from Foster Carers was in relation to the support and finances received under the Staying Put arrangements. Support available to a young person placed on a Special Guardianship was also highlighted. Other areas related to staff, e.g., behaviour, communication and not seeking views of children, were highlighted as a theme. Further complaints related to information sharing.

Children Looked After and Care Leavers

As indicated in the above table, the highest number of complaints raised related to financial issues (particularly relevant in respect of Care Leavers) and issues relating to staff. Issues regarding the conduct of and communication from professionals towards children and young people suggests that communication with and behaviour towards young people is an area for professional development. Other complaints highlight requests for support in understanding or challenging the Local Authority's decision making. Some examples of the financial issues raised included:

- Financial support during further education/university
- Council tax payments
- Money to buy clothes
- Reimbursement of lost/stolen money
- Financial support for driving lessons
- Financial support for leisure/hobby interest.

Some examples of staff issues:

- Changes of social worker / request to keep allocated social worker
- Behaviour /manner of staff /manager

Outcomes achieved

All the complaints that have been responded to in this period have been resolved. Both Foster Carer's and young people's views were listened to and acted upon, this included:

- ❖ A restorative meeting between Carers and professionals took place
- ❖ A young person's views were obtained to inform support
- ❖ Funding was accessed to provide further support
- ❖ Clearer information provided regarding financial entitlements
- ❖ Money reimbursed/provided

- ❖ Re-assessment of family time
- ❖ Change/retain Social Worker/ Personal Advisor
- ❖ Mediation offered, apologies provided to young people and conversations with individual staff members regarding practice

Learning from Complaints

The Compliments and Complaints team record and evidence on an individual level the impact and changes made from listening to children and young people and their carers.

Within this reporting period there are some examples of complaints raised influencing and informing service planning and front-line practice on a more strategic level, including:

- ❖ Informing an updated financial policy for Care Leavers.
- ❖ A service wide briefing regarding correctly recording on the Children's Social Care Liquid Logic database
- ❖ Complaint forms being easily accessible within Children's Homes.
- ❖ Improved safeguards when arranging and inviting attendees to virtual meetings
- ❖ Permanence Panel considering Staying Put arrangements

Recommendations

- Ensure Responding Managers reply to complaints from children and young people with child-friendly language that is clear and understandable to them.
- Better capturing and collating of positive feedback, to enable sharing of, and learning from best practice.
- To improve the feedback loop from complaints to facilitate learning from what children and families are telling us.

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