

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report by Customer Relations & Information Governance Manager on behalf of Board Chair Di Smith and Director of Children's Services Deborah Glassbrook of Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC)

TO:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES & EDUCATION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	30 March 2021	AGENDA ITEM:	13
TITLE:	BFfC's CUSTOMER SERVICE REPORT 2019-20		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR TERRY	PORTFOLIO:	CHILDREN'S SERVICES
SERVICE:	BRIGHTER FUTURES FOR CHILDREN (CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE)	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Complaints, particularly in the emotive arena of children's services, are inevitable. However, the way that they are handled can help reduce the number of escalations and can improve parental and family understanding of the need for intervention by children's services and the positive outcomes for children and young people. This report's main focus is on complaints and compliments, although other aspects of customer relations, including subject access requests (SARs) are also covered. Complaints are an important source of information to help the company understand where and why changes need to be made to improve the service provided. Children's social care, early help, education and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services in Reading are delivered by Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC), the not-for-profit company wholly owned by, but independent of, Reading Borough Council. Through a Service Level Agreement, Reading Borough Council's Customer Relations team handles the administration for complaints, compliments and SARs.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of complaints activity and performance for Children's Services for the period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the timing of this report has been delayed and its contents are relatively historic.

The Customer Relations Team have continued to raise awareness of the complaints process and in accord with recommendations from Ofsted have worked with operational teams to encourage children and young people to

submit complaints where they are dissatisfied with the service they receive. Brighter Futures for Children went live on 3 December 2018.

The Council and BFfC have worked closely to drive improvement in the services for children.

- 1.3 The 'Children's Services Complaints 2019/20 - Summary Report' attached at Appendix A of the main report and provides an analysis of the data; it explains how complaints are managed and how the learning is used to improve services. This will also be made publicly available through both the Council and Brighter Futures for Children's websites from 01 April 2021.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 Note the contents of the report and intended actions to further improve the management of representations, particularly complaints in children's services in Reading.
- 2.2 That the Committee notes the continuing work to raise awareness of all conflict resolution processes including the statutory complaints process and encourage appropriate use by children, young people and their families.

3. LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

The DfE guidance asks for the Council or its representative, such as BFfC, to ensure that we report the learning and service improvements implemented as a result of complaints, for 2019/20 these are cited within the main report.

3.1 Intended actions for further improvement are:

- 1) RBC's Customer Relations Team (CRT) and BFfC to conduct a review of complaints, with specific emphasis on identifying learning points from these.
- 2) Learning points to be shared more widely with BFfC staff through a dedicated section of BFfC's intranet knowledge hub.
- 3) Complaints training for BFfC team and assistant team manager to become mandatory.
- 4) Improved BFfC process for capturing learning from complaints to be mapped and embedded, so learning is more visible in future annual reports.
- 5) Improved CRT recording of and BFfC oversight of complaints which are reported to the Ombudsman and visible learning from outcomes to be reported in quarterly internal reports and externally in the annual report.
- 6) Greater oversight of SARs completed by the CRT on BFfC's behalf, with more frequent reporting by CRT on open SARs' status, so any issues with completing these within timescale are addressed at an earlier stage.

3.2 With reference to point 2.2 above:

- 1) RBC's CRT and BFfC to continue to promote the use of all conflict resolution options, including the statutory complaints process, on both websites, through social media, in children in care guides, information for parents/carers and all other collateral available to the public.