



Learning from Complaints

Addendum report for ACE

December 2023

SUMMARY

This brief report summarises the learning and improvements made within the children's social care service as a result of complaints in 2022/23.

OWNER

Fiona Betts
Lead for Quality Assurance

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Brighter Futures for Children
Civic Offices, Bridge Street,
Reading RG1 2LU

Company number 11293709

Introduction

This paper sets out examples of the learning for children's social care as a result of complaints received between April 2022 and March 2023. It also identifies issues for continuous improvement.

General learning

Together for Families Team

The majority of complaints received between April 2022 and March 2023 were not upheld at stage 1. Where practice elements were upheld or partially upheld, the resulting action/learning was most often a revision to case records on matters of accuracy, and/or a discussion with the relevant practitioners and managers about practice expectations. The theme of these discussions is most commonly around communication (or lack thereof); ensuring children's records include feedback and views from parents; and case notes that detail how parents are being updated about the progress of assessments and support.

A small number of complaints included reference to child protection conference papers not being received in the expected timeframe before the conference meeting, and it is noted that the Service Manager for Reviewing, Conferencing and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) has implemented changes to the service that is addressing this.

Following one complaint, BfC has now implemented a system whereby social work practitioners must record the date which a copy of the single assessment was shared with a parent/carer/young person before it is completed – this supports families to receive a timely copy of the assessment, to provide their views, and also to support families being aware of the assessment outcome at the earliest opportunity.

Adoption and Permanence Team

Only one significant complaint was received that led to as part of an induction to the adoption and permanence service, relevant staff are made aware how to set up letterbox contact arrangements for adopted children. This alongside a dedicated post to support the timely arrangement of letterbox contact provides reassurances of improved practice.

Children and Young People with Disabilities Service

Complaints received in this service relate mostly to disagreements between the service and parents, as to how best to meet their children's needs, for example to provide services without a Section 17 assessment, or disagreement in respect to direct payments or a delay in the making of adaptations to equipment/buildings. This is different in its nature, as does not wholly reflect the practitioners or managers' practice. Many of these complaints are not upheld at Stage 1, and those that proceed to Stage 2 or 3 remain not upheld.

One aspect that has been upheld is the need for advocacy for parents (which has been addressed in the newly tendered advocacy contract) as well as the need to engage with parents who may be neurodiverse in a manner that allows them to process and reflect on emails or reports in a timelier manner.

BfC Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)

One complaint was received and not upheld at stage 1, but most complaints to the service that progressed to Stage 2 were upheld. Learning was child-specific, and where there was transferable

learning, this was shared with the team (e.g. foster carer logs, children's pocket money arrangements, supervision). Learning from one upheld complaint is currently being managed through our HR processes.

Specific learning across the whole service

It has been noted that a more consistent approach is needed to ensure that information is routinely triangulated by managers conducting a stage 1 complaint investigation, which includes always talking with the complainant as part of the response. Training is planned for February 2024 to address this, and guidance is being updated.

Whole Service Meeting: Learning from complaints and Ombudsman reports

In July 2023, the Head of Service, Tff, the Service Manager, Conference, Review, LADO and Participation, and the Lead for Quality Assurance presented a workshop to the Children's Social Care service regarding learning from complaints and Ombudsman reports. The session considered what we have heard from recent complaints and Ombudsman reports in the past year; looked at one case in more detail; confirmed what good practice in this area looks like; and explored recent Child safeguarding practice reviews (CSPRs) with domestic abuse as a factor.

Attendees broke into small groups to explore a case scenario based on a recent Ombudsman case before sharing insights and learning. These included:

- The importance of being person-centred rather than process-focused in our response.
- How we might avoid escalation of complaints by ensuring we listen to issues and concerns from people complaining about our services.
- The potential relationship between complaints and controlling behaviours/allegations of domestic abuse – understanding that complaints may be driven from a loss of control for a parent/carer and how that can be supported without losing focus on the child/ren.
- Making time to reflect and seek support as a practitioner.
- Working with challenging behaviours – symptoms and causes, and using a trauma informed approach.

The session also included a presentation about what good practice looks like in terms of assessment, participation and management support as influenced by learning from complaints. It concluded with small-group reflections about what attendees might do differently in the future to avoid potential complaints; how they would respond to complaints, and what they need from each other and the organisation to support practice.

Next steps

Management of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) for complaints is held by Fiona Tarrant, Head of Communications & Compliance for BFfC, and review of the compliance elements of the SLA is well managed – this includes robust checking of timescales for responses etc. There have been recent improvements in our approach to Learning from complaints. It is important for continuous improvement that we understand the details of complaints at the earliest stage, whether or not they are ultimately upheld or not, to shape our learning and development of case practice and management.

Going forwards and since the appointment of the most recent Compliance, Policy and Process Officer, there is a SharePoint site for letters and documents, and a tracker that includes the learning points for each complaint. The Compliance, Policy and Process Officer and the Lead for QA meets at

least monthly to review the learning points, and feed this into quality assurance, improvement and learning and development work across the company.

This ensures that learning from complaints is shared with the service at the earliest opportunity (e.g. service-wide meetings) and mechanisms developed to measure the impact of this learning on case practice and management. This will also help identify what support can be provided to the responders to stage 0 and stage 1 complaints to prevent them escalating on to stage 2 complaints and beyond.

We note that an RBC Internal Audit into the complaints SLA is currently underway, and our continued learning will be informed by the findings of this review.