

Date: 13 September 2018

**TITLE OF REPORT:** Children and Families Service - Annual Report on Services Complaints, Compliments and Representations - April 2017 to March 2018

**REPORT OF:** Caroline O'Neill, Strategic Director, Care, Wellbeing & Learning

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### Summary

Cabinet considered the attached report on 17 July 2018.

Cabinet approved the referral of the report to a meeting of the Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee in line with procedure.

It is a statutory requirement that the report is considered by a formal committee to ensure the Council has an effective complaints procedure that follows the legislation set out in The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.

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### Background

1. The Health & Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003 requires that Councils with Social Services responsibilities produce an Annual Report of their Statutory Children's Services Complaints Procedure. This annual report sets out details of the complaints and representations made during the period April 2017 – March 2018.
2. Information contained in the report provides a summary of the statistical information together with a review of the effectiveness of the procedure. Some examples of service improvement are also included together with details of future objectives.

### Annual Report Complaints and Representations

3. The report is consistent with the Sustainable Community Strategy – Vision 2030 and the Council's Corporate Plan. The report supports the Corporate Priority for serving our customers by continuously improving services and targeting areas of under achievement.
4. The Annual Report is specifically about Children Act 1989 Statutory Complaints for Children's Social Care Services, with information on complaint related queries and compliments that are received about staff or services. The report covers the period from 1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018.

## Operation of the Procedure

5. The procedure has three stages:
  - **Stage 1 Local Resolution** – response within 10 working days. The timescale can be extended to 20 working days if the complainant agrees to this extension.
  - **Stage 2 Investigation** – formal response within 25 calendar days. Extensions to this must be negotiated with the complainant. Maximum is 65 working days.
  - **Stage 3 Independent Review** – Panel consisting of Independent Chair and Independent Panel members who consider the complaint. Full response by Director of Social Services within 20 working days.

## Statistical Analysis

6. In 2017/18 the number of complaints and representations dealt with was as follows:
  - Forty nine statutory complaints were dealt with at Stage 1
  - Two complaints were investigated at Stage 2 of the Procedure.
  - There were no Stage 3 Independent Review Panels held during 2017/18.
  - There was a 53% increase in formal complaints received. (49), compared with the number received during 2016/17, (32).
  - Complaint related queries (CRQ) require either advice or problem solving by either a Complaints Officer or by a Team Manager. 32% (35) of all formal concerns were CRQs. This evidences that the Services are responsive in ensuring low level issues are dealt with swiftly and resolved to the complainant's satisfaction.
  - During 2017/18, 48% of all Children's Services contacts were compliments.
  - The number of representations received also increased by 20% (176 to 212).

## Points of Interest

7. The following key points may be of interest:
  - Almost 47% (23) of complaints were regarding the Safeguarding, Care Planning Teams.
  - 24% (12) of complaints were about the Referral and Assessment Team.
  - Four complaints were received directly from looked after children.
  - One complaint was from a previously looked after young person.
  - As in previous years, the main themes of concern raised within complaints were either regarding the quality of the support provided by either the individual worker or by the service or about the quality of communication from workers or services.
  - Compliments increased by 16% during 2017/18, (102 from 88).
  - 31%, (23) of all compliments received about Children's Social Work were about the Safeguarding and Care Planning Teams.

## Learning from complaints and representations:

8. Learning from complaints is critical to prevent recurrence of the cause(s) of the original complaint. It is important that we make sure that people's experiences help us to

improve services where we can. Changes can include policy, procedure or employee development.

### **Examples of Service Improvements identified during 2017/18:**

- A Review of the internal procedures for the Safeguarding Children Unit (SCU) has taken place. The procedure now instructs Senior Safeguarding Clerks to verify information shared within child protection conferences in respect of family members before it is recorded within child protection minutes.
- Procedures have been reviewed by the Adoption Team, which will ensure that as soon as information is known about a birth family member's death that it is shared with adoptive parents. This will be done initially by telephone and if no reply is gained then a home visit will be made.
- The processes and procedures within the Disabled Children's Team have been reviewed to ensure they provide an efficient, effective and children focused service. The service is to develop a clear Appeals Process and ensure that this is included within the Disabled Children's Team Panel Terms of Reference.
- That when potentially distressing information needs to be shared with family members, consideration should be taken by the worker to ascertain the best way to share this with them. Unplanned telephone calls should be avoided and consideration given to meeting with the family member to share the information in person where possible.

### **Future Objectives**

9. Objectives for 2018/19 are to:
  - a. Continue to meet regularly with Senior Managers from Children's Services to consider what further action needs to be taken to;
    - i. Resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity.
    - ii. Improve the number of complaints being investigated and resolved within statutory timescales.
    - iii. Ensure that the number of complaints progressing to Stage 2 and 3 remain low.
  - b. To assist the Children's Rights Officer in contacting all children who are currently being looked after by Gateshead Council, to gain their views and comments on the services they receive. All responses will be evaluated and appropriate action will be taken to resolve any concerns or queries. These views will also contribute to future service planning and delivery within Care, Wellbeing & Learning.
  - c. Ensure that staff members who receive compliments continue to pass the details on to Social Care Customer Services so that they or their team receive the recognition they deserve.

### **Recommendation**

10. Committee is requested to:
  - I. Consider and comment on the annual report;

- II. Indicate whether it is satisfied with the performance of Care, Wellbeing and Learning in responding to complaints and ensuring that this results in continuous service improvement.

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