

CHILDREN & LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 20 JANUARY 2021

Subject Heading:	Children’s Services Annual Complaints and Compliments Report 2020-21
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Policy context:	As part of the remit of the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006’
Financial summary:	There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However adverse performance against some performance indicators may have financial implications for the Council.

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

Communities making Havering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Places making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connections making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>

SUMMARY

Local authorities have a statutory requirement to set up a complaints process which is set out in section 26 Children Act 1989 and The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 and to publish an Annual Report.

The Children's Services Annual Complaints and Compliments Report for 2020–21, attached as Appendix 1, sets out Children's Services statutory complaints and compliments received during this period, as well as Members' correspondence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Members note the content of the Children's Services Annual Complaints and Compliments Report 2020-21 attached as Appendix 1.
2. That Members note the continued learning from complaints and the recognition of good practice through compliments.

REPORT DETAIL

1. Complaints in 2020-21 increased by 9% (87) compared to 2019-20 (80). The number of enquiries increased significantly in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20, by 46%. There continues to be a steady number of complaints escalating to Stage 2 investigations in 2020-21 (6) and is at the same level as in 2019-20. There was one complaint escalated to stage 3 which then escalated to the Ombudsman.
2. There has been a significant increase (36%) in the number of complaints received by Triage/MASH & Assessment in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20. A small increase in the number of complaints to Care Resources, and a decrease for Intervention & Support Services, with 'standard of service' being the highest reason.
3. The increase in complaints received by Triage/MASH & Assessment were primarily linked to allegations around child contact arrangements and concerns around domestic abuse. The number of contacts received by the service in this category in 2020-21 more than doubled in comparison in 2019-20, in line with national trends.
4. In 2020-21 complaints regarding 'attitude/behaviour of staff' decreased significantly by 50% 18 compared to 2019-20 (36) as a result of improved

recording and ongoing practice developed. However 'standard of service' has doubled in 2020-21, with significant increase also in 'inaccurate information'.

5. Throughout 2020-21 demand for children's services increased and this has continued into the current financial year. The number of contacts received in 2020-21 is the highest it's been since 2017/18, and the number of children entering care is the highest it's been since 2016/17.
6. The number of complaints upheld and partially upheld accounted for 39% (6) and (28) respectively of the total complaints. Those upheld or partially upheld resulted in an apology, linked to the need to provide explanation or further information about the reasons for intervention or particular parts of the process that initially may not have been clear. How information is given, and the consistency should be explored. Ombudsman recommendations have been actioned with refresher training being commissioned for safeguarding to ensure practitioners adhere to procedures.
7. Response times improved in 2020-21 with 31% (27) responded to within the 10 working day timeframe. Efforts will continue to improve response times, while recognising the increased complexities of cases and balancing the priorities of the service. Complaints continue to be received by email (57) as the preferred method with the next preferred method being online (18).
8. The cost of independent investigations decreased significantly in 2020-21, due to the withdrawal of three Stage 2 escalations, reducing to 6,087.95 from £19,531.65 in 2019-20.
9. Monitoring information is based on the child(ren) within the family unit in which a complaint was made. There were increases across age groups, 0-5-, 10-24 and 15-17, the highest increase being in the age group of 0-5. Male children were higher across all age groups except 6-9. Children recorded with a disability was low across all ages, and diagnosed with mainly Autism or Aspergers Syndrome. 'White British' children highest representation and reflects the borough's population make up with 'Caribbean' and 'Any other Mixed Background' increasing in 2020-21. Complainants declaring no faith significantly increased in 2020/21(49), compared to 2019-21(6). 'Catholic and 'Christian' faiths showed a slight increase in 2020-21.
10. The number of compliments received in 2020-21 is lower than we would like (22) however shows an improvement from 2019-20 (3). Continued efforts to encourage staff within Children's Services to share compliments so these can be logged to reflect more accurately the good work being done.
11. The Complaints and Compliments action plan has been refreshed and will be monitored at quarterly meetings between the Social Care Complaints and Information Team, and the Children's Services Senior Management Team

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks:

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However adverse performance against some performance indicators may have financial implications for the Council.

All service directorates are required to achieve their performance targets within approved budgets. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) is actively monitoring and managing resources to remain within budgets, although several service areas continue to experience significant financial pressures in relation to a number of demand led services, such as Children's Services. SLT officers are focused upon controlling expenditure within approved directorate budgets and within the total General Fund budget through delivery of savings plans and mitigation plans to address new pressures that are arising within the year.

Legal implications and risks:

As stated in the Report the Authority has a duty to set up a representations process under s 26 (3) Children Act 1989.

There are no legal implications in noting the content of the Annual Report.

Human Resources implications and risks:

The recommendations made in this report do not give rise to any identifiable HR risks or implications that would affect either the Council or its workforce.

Equalities implications and risks:

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have 'due regard' to:

- (i) The need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (ii) The need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share protected characteristics and those who do not, and;
- (iii) Foster good relations between those who have protected characteristics and those who do not.

Note: 'Protected characteristics' are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex/gender, and sexual orientation.

The Council is committed to all of the above in the provision, procurement and commissioning of its services, and the employment of its workforce. In addition, the Council is also committed to improving the quality of life and wellbeing for all Havering residents in respect of socio-economics and health determinants. The policy contains a breakdown of complaints received.