

Meeting of the Children's Services Select Committee - 11th March 2024

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Learning from Complaints

Purpose of report

1. This report is to provide information in relation to learning from complaints. The aim is to provide a better understanding of how we learn the lessons from complaints, and how training and quality assurance activity supports with this.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended:
 - Members note and comment on the contents of the report, which is provided to supplement the annual and statutory Complaints Report.

Background

3. Tracey Curran presented the Annual Report for Complaints, Comments and Compliments between 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023, at the meeting of the Children's Services Select Committee in September 2023. The report identified that 126 complaints had been upheld or partially upheld, and these form the basis for ongoing practice learning.

As part of the Select Committee discussion, we proposed that in the 6 months between the annual complaints report that is provided by the Complaints Team, the Centre for Professional Practice will provide an annual learning report. This will set out examples of how the learning is shared, and the impact of the learning tested through our assurance activity.

With each complaint response, there is the opportunity for the manager to also complete a monitoring form to summarise any learning. These are shared back with the Complaints Team, and in completing this exercise, it

has provided a useful prompt for this learning to be more routinely shared with CPP.

In each complaint response, there is a discussion with the practitioner and their manager in considering the response. Where there is learning identified, this is shared back with the practitioner as part of their regular supervision.

This report does not repeat the information available in the statutory Complaints Report but uses some specific and themed examples to set out how the learning is used across the service.

4. Concerns around Communication

19 of the complaints that were raised had shared a concern where the family felt they had missed out on clear information that should be shared in a timely manner.

Individual examples included not knowing when a social worker was away from work (sickness absence); where an assessment included information that the family did not consider to be accurate; or where family members considered they were not kept up to date in relation to the plans for children and that this impacted on the family time arrangements.

At the time when families raise a complaint, they are often experiencing hurt or distress. We know that this can affect how each of us 'hears' information or remembers the detail. In this context we want to be as clear as possible, in as many ways as possible.

For assessments, we have taken the opportunity to work through our Principal Social Worker in direct sessions across the workforce to review and refresh our practice guidance, which was completed in December 2023. This has given the opportunity to raise the profile of including fathers in assessments; of ensuring that assessments are shared with children and families in a timely way; of using the period of assessment to maximise our reach to the wider family and increase curiosity in our practice.

The triangulation of the impact of this has been included in our Quality Assurance Framework. Post redesign, this was reviewed and updated to make sure that it addresses the whole directorate (and not just Children's Social Care). The detailed and monthly practice learning audits specifically include exploration of the quality of assessments and consider how the assessment is shared with the child, young person and family.

Recognising the importance of keeping families and other professionals up to date with worker availability, we have reminded our teams about the

use of out of office responses; to be clear if practitioners are away from work, when they will return and who to contact if the query is urgent. We seek to hold each other to account for this – examples have included making sure through IT that an appropriate out of office is added when a staff member is unexpectedly off work and advising of appropriate phrasing for out of office messages.

5. Concerns raised about staff behaviour:

13 of the complaints that were upheld or partially upheld related to families experience of the practitioner. This is often aligned to a concern about communication, but not exclusively.

There are examples of families explaining that they considered a practitioner lacked empathy with their situation. Other examples have included a view that the practitioner did not respond to the family in a timely way, or in a manner that they considered would have been helpful.

As part of the work to implement Family Safeguarding, we have shared a comprehensive training programme for practitioners and for managers around Motivational Interviewing. This is an approach that has at its core a collaborative way of working *with* people; that pays attention to the language of change and is designed to strengthen the commitment to change by exploring the person's own reasons for change. It is an approach of compassion.

Motivational interviewing fits completely within our Restorative Practice Framework. Having shared the one-day practice framework training with the staff, this is also directed from induction for new practitioners.

Our assurance is also triangulated through a quarterly Stocktake and Showcase activity. Here, each Service Manager reviews and shares their progress against the Practice Framework and Participation Strategy. A directorate wide analysis is undertaken on the basis of this, and in addition, there is a detailed deep dive across three or four services in each quarter so that the whole service is reviewed in a 12-month period.

6 Education, Health and Care assessments and plans:

The Authority is subject to an Accelerated Progress Plan in relation to SEND, and this report does not seek to replicate the extensive detail of the plan, nor the oversight through the Dept of Education. The SEND strategic partnership board is established in this context.

However, it is an area that also raises complaints including for example in relation to timely delivery of a decision, or the quality of the EHC plan.

As part of the wider response, the Directorate now has in place a Designated Social Care Officer (DiSCO) to support the work. The primary focus is on enabling good quality social care contribution to the assessment of need and where relevant, in the plan.

A multi-agency, bi-monthly quality assurance group has been developed (including the parent and carer forum), which includes a specific focus on the quality impact of plans.

We have further developed our practice to contribute to an EHC assessment in a more timely way across early help and with social care. This includes making appropriate use of prior social care involvement; throughout February 2024, we are testing out such a tool in our Front Door.

We have progressed training through Genuine Partnership (4cornerstones co production) to better support our effective co production arrangements with children and families who have additional needs. This has been well received across the professional and family community, and the merging impact is evident in the reporting to DfE.

Finance

7. There are no direct financial implications arising from the contents of this report.

Law

8. The procedures for Children's complaints, are determined by legislation, predominantly involving the:
 - Children Act 1989, Representations Procedures (England) Regulations 2006
 - The Children and Adoption Act 2002 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

Risk Management

9. This report has no direct implications for the council in relation to Risk Management

Equality Impact

10. This report has no direct implications for the Council's commitment to equality and diversity. The complaints policy is applied fairly and equitably to all users.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

11. There are no direct Human Resources/Organisational Development implications arising from this report.

Commercial/Procurement

12. There are no commercial or procurement implications that require consideration.

Environment/Climate Change

13. There are no environment/climate change implications that require consideration.

Council Priorities and Projects

14. The 2022/2025 Council Plan is clear in its ambitions for Dudley to be the Borough of Opportunity in ensuring that:
- Children and young people benefit from the best possible start in life in our Child Friendly borough.
 - Those with special educational needs and disabilities and care leavers achieve the best possible outcomes.
 - Everyone, including our most vulnerable, have the choice, support, and control of the services they need to live independently.



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