

# **BRIEFING NOTE**

**TO: Children's Scrutiny and Performance Panel**

**DATE: 8 April 2014**

**RE: Complaints Procedure**

## **Purpose**

To provide Scrutiny with an update on progress with implementation of the new Complaints Procedure further to discussions at Panel on 14 January 2014. This is an interim update for the panel, pending a full detailed annual report for 2013/14 that will be presented in July 2014.

## **Background**

The new procedure has now been implemented and the Operational Manager's Group, which meets monthly, is being used to identify and disseminate learning from complaints.

As well as learning the Ops Managers Group is being used to help monitor and improve the effectiveness of the procedure and weekly reports to the Assistant Director are helping to improve compliance with timescales.

The priority now is the roll out of a new training programme for complaint handling. The training sessions that had already been scheduled for the remainder of this financial year have been updated to reflect the new procedure and a new training programme will be in place from April. This will include a mixture of face to face and e-learning and will be targeted at two levels: One for all staff covering what they need to do when they receive a complaint, the principles they should be adhering to and how to incorporate complaints into their learning and development; and a more detailed one for managers who investigate and respond to complaints.

Discussions have also been held with officers from Active Involvement and plan to engage Council4Kids in the production of the annual report for 2013/14. An overview of complaints received during the year, and the learning identified will be shared with them in May as well as seeking their views on the overall effectiveness of the complaints procedure so that they can help shape the final report to be produced for the Scrutiny Committee in July.

## **Number of Complaints (Year to Date)**

There have been 246 complaints received since 1 April 2013, though not all of these will have been taken forward as formal complaints as some have been withdrawn and others exempt from the procedure (e.g. where they are subject to court proceedings.) The further detail that will be provided in the full annual report will provide a detailed breakdown as well showing how many individual cases these complaints relate to.

## **Timeliness of Responses**

Statutory guidelines require the council to respond to complaints within 10 working days, though this may be extended to up to 20 working days in certain circumstances.

The average time to respond to complaints within the shorter timescale is 10 days and for the longer timescale 20 days, the council is therefore, on average, meeting its statutory timescales though some do still exceed the timescale. Where this occurs every effort it made to keep the customer informed of progress.

## **Compliments**

There have been a total of 16 compliments recorded, though it is recognised that more needs to be done to encourage workers to share compliments they have received so that we can learn from these as well as complaints.

Examples of compliments received include:

*"I have to say we have benefitted from a fantastic experience so far during (name of child) visits to the school which have not been without their challenges but at the same time we have felt so secure working within an excellent multi-agency approach. It is clear that their willingness to work openly and intuitively with other agencies is hugely benefitting children in your care."*

*"We received (child's name) life story book and it's lovely. You've explained something so difficult in such a lovely way. We can really imagine looking through it with (child's name) when she's older."*

*"Can we just say thank you for all the support that you have given us, rest assured (child's name) will be totally spoilt and loved (he is already). He wants for nothing."*

## **Learning from complaints**

Whilst the learning identified so far has been predominately about reminding staff of good practice, as more complaints are processed under the new procedure and the quality of intelligence improves then patterns will emerge that, alongside other intelligence from performance and audits will help identify where system or procedure changes may be needed.

A more detailed commentary on all the learning captured will, again, be included in the annual report for 2013/14, but by way of example, at the March Operational Manager's meeting a pattern was identified in a number of the complaints that month that were caused by incorrect presumptions being made by staff at certain points (e.g. presuming another organisation was going to take care of something or presuming the service user had already been told something by someone else), a

simple, yet important lesson that was identified to be shared with staff that month was therefore “Don’t presume. Check”

**Author:**

Colin Teasdale  
Principal Corporate Performance Officer  
Walsall Council  
01922 65 3733  
[teasdalec@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:teasdalec@walsall.gov.uk)