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## **Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

### **Report of the Acting Director of Children's Services**

### **Children's Services Complaints: Response Times Action Plan**

#### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update with regards to the response times performance in respect of complaints received by Children's Services.

#### **Recommendations**

2. It is recommended that: -
  - Members note and comment on the contents of the report and improvements in response times.

#### **Background**

3. The annual report providing information relating to all statutory and corporate complaints for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 showed that only 41% of complaints were being responded to within 20 working days.
4. At the meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2020 Members requested the Acting Director of Children's Services submit updates in relation to complaint response times to future meetings of the Committee.
5. The revised process intended to improve performance was introduced on the 18<sup>th</sup> August 2020. During the past few months, the revised process has continued to operate.

The current response times performance shows that since the revised system was introduced on the 18<sup>th</sup> August 2020 the proportion of response times now provided within the twenty working day timescale is 65%.

This shows an improvement on the 41% for the 2019/20 period.

However, it is accepted that work must continue to further improve these figures and regular performance updates continue to be provided to senior managers.

6. With regards to those complaints that exceeded timescales since the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020. The main reasons for these delays were:

- Other work pressures – 53% (24 cases) of all overdue cases were as a result of this reason.
- Staff Absence - 16% (7 cases) of all overdue cases were as a result of this reason.
- Complex Cases - 13% (6 cases) of all overdue cases were as a result of this reason

The majority of the cases that were as a result of Other work pressures occurred in the Court and Care Management Teams which due to the nature of their work will always attract the most complaints.

Senior managers will be looking into what additional supports can be added to support this service area.

7. Additionally, to further supplement the work already on going to improve performance, workshops will be conducted on an ongoing basis for managers covering the complaints process and roles and responsibilities.

This work is being carried out in conjunction with the Centre for Professional Practice who are also developing an audit tool which will ensure that a sample of complaints will be analysed on a regular basis with regards to not only the timeliness of responses but also the quality of responses. Key findings will then be shared with the service.

8. Efforts have also been made to obtain benchmarking data from other Councils who are part of the West Midlands Complaints Officer Group. From the limited feedback received it appears that response times performance varies, ranging from 50% to 73% with regards to Children's Services complaints being responded to within 20 working days.

It should be noted that the most recent improved performance appeared to be by Sandwell. After further discussion with staff at Sandwell it was found that process changes along very similar lines as those introduced in August were implemented almost a year ago and performance improved from around 50% to 73%.

However, it was clear from their feedback that improvements were not immediate but achieved by constant application of the process, but more importantly senior managements detailed involvement in the process. This is also the core element to the process recently introduced in Dudley.

## **Finance**

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

## **Law**

10. The procedures for Children's complaints, are determined by legislation, predominantly involving the: -

- Children Act 1989, Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.
- The Children and Adoption Act 2002 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

11. However, some complaints fall outside of the statutory process. This is where the complainant does not meet the requirements to be considered under the statutory process. In these cases, the complaint is dealt with under the corporate complaint process. All complaints received are included in this report.

## **Equality Impact**

12. 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**

13. There are no organisation service transformation implications that require consideration.

## **Commercial Procurement**

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

## **Health and Wellbeing**

15. There are no health, wellbeing or safety implications that require consideration.



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