

# Getting it Right!



Education, Care and Health Services

Compliments,  
comments and complaints

## Annual Report for April 2013 to March 2014

<http://bromley.mylifeportal.co.uk/gettingitright>

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# Introduction



Complaints can provide us with a valuable insight into our weaknesses and teach us how to improve in areas where we haven't quite got things quite right.

This report gives an overview of the complaints we dealt with in the Education, Care and Health Services Directorate over the 2013 to 2014 financial year.

By way of context, we have many thousands of interactions with residents each year: the total number of complaints is a fraction of this number but every one provides an opportunity for us to improve how we provide our services.

We have seen a sharp increase in complaints in adult social care this year, but the fact that the majority were not upheld (71%) shows the importance of managing people's expectations, and communicating effectively. Sometimes a complainant can receive a financial remedy and this year we paid £2,045 in total.

This is particularly important around the thresholds of what we provide, and do not provide. But we must avoid delays wherever possible and build bridges between the service and the client so that any room for confusion and misunderstanding is minimised.

Complaints are also helpful in showing us where we've played to our strengths and the feedback we have received from the public has helped us greatly as we reconfigure services.

For example, we saw 55 Housing complaints this year but only 5 of those were upheld and none of the complaints considered by the Ombudsman, substantiated.

This continues to show the benefits of a clear and robust housing policy and ensures people looking

for social housing in our Borough are treated fairly.

In addition to this, we continued to receive a high number of compliments for our Reablement Service; while the compliments we received for Education made up nearly a quarter of the total contacts received for this area.

We must continue to learn from complaints but also to recognise from the positive feedback we continue to get that we are doing a good job for most of the time.

This doesn't mean we can ever be complacent and I will make sure the lessons we learn are followed up.

It is, of course, reassuring that we saw so few complaints: however, if you are the complainant, and your complaint is found, the sense of injustice can be profound.

We will never get to a point of no complaints as they can reflect a genuine healthiness in our systems but we must treat all residents fairly and in a timely manner.

This must be the aim of all our staff in the coming year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Terry Parkin'.

Terry Parkin  
Executive Director:  
Education, Care and Health Services

# Adult Social Care Services



## Areas covered:

- Assessments of care needs of older people and adults with a disability
- Assessment of needs of people with caring responsibilities
- Safeguarding vulnerable adults
- Supporting vulnerable people when they are discharged from hospital
- Services to support people to remain in their own home and to live within a care home and extra care housing

## What we did

Between April 2013 and March 2014 we:



assessed the needs of

**5,987**

adults



assessed the needs of

**1,134**

people with caring responsibilities



provided

**7,323**

adults with social care services



provided hours of

**22,415**

Reablement support

“I am extremely grateful for the help and support, both financial and practical, that you provided to help me cope with my husband’s illness”



## Our performance



Compliments

2011-12

43

2012-13

19

2013-14

27



Complaints

2011-12

156

2012-13

116

2013-14

168



Enquiries from  
Members of

2011-12

23

2012-13

14

2013-14

18



Enquiries from  
Ombudsman

2011-12

7

2012-13

14

2013-14

21



62%

of complaints were responded  
to in 20 working days

“Carelink are really the unsung heroes  
because my dad is able to press his  
alarm button and he gets a friendly calm  
voice on the other end of the intercom”



## What this means

With the number of adults who contact or receive social care services in the Borough with a range of complex needs, we do sometimes receive complaints. We are keen to ensure people are able to make their views known.

The main area of concern highlighted by those who complained was about delays in service. Of the 60 complaints upheld, a number were about unacceptable telephone waiting times and delays in approvals for funding.

We receive a number of enquiries from clients disputing their assessments and querying professionals decisions. Sometimes our customer care falls short of our accepted standards and where complaints about poor attitude are upheld, staff are provided with additional training in the values of customer service.

It is always unacceptable for anyone to receive a poor service. A number of complaints have arisen around financial disputes and delays in billing and we will make every effort to ensure these mistakes are not repeated.

The Learning Disabilities service supports over 600 residents, including young people moving into adulthood. On occasion there has been an absence in communication - in particular where there are changes

to services. We have failed to communicate effectively enough with family members and, in order to remedy this, we will be improving our communication when working with families.

The Reablement Service assists our residents to regain their independence, often following a stay in hospital. We continue to receive many compliments from families whose relatives have used this service.

Organisations we commission services from continue to attract very few complaints. Where a home care service misses a planned visit, the seriousness of this may generate a safeguarding investigation rather than being dealt with as a complaint.

Extra Care Housing gives tenants the benefit of access to 24 hour care if they need it, whilst remaining independent. Following a number of complaints about an Extra Care Housing provider, commissioners have worked with that provider to raise standards.

Mental Health services are provided by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust and complaints relating to mental health are dealt with by the Trust.

“My wife died peacefully at home, which is what she and I wanted. I think you can be proud of the service you provide”



## Lessons we have learnt and actions we are taking

From April 2014 we are:

Putting in place a better automated telephone system for our initial contact service to improve access to information

Improving staff standards of customer care through training and awareness of the importance of good communication

Continuing to work with our partners in delivering good services to our customers through monitoring

# Children's Social Care Services



## Areas covered:

- Keeping children safe from harm and abuse
- Supporting children in foster care families, care homes and other support settings
- Supporting children to move into stable adoptive families
- Services for young people who need support to the gain skills needed for adulthood
- Services for parents and carers of children who need extra support and advice

## What we did

Between April 2013 and March 2014 we:



provided support to

**371**

children with disabilities



completed

**2,012**

Assessments



helped

**277**

children to live in foster care and other accommodation



completed

**639**

Child Protection assessments

"I just want to say thank you for all your help. You are the first person in over 2 years that has listened to me and took this problem seriously"



## Our performance



Compliments

2011-12

14

2012-13

22

2013-14

24



Complaints

2011-12

69

2012-13

59

2013-14

63



Enquiries from  
Members of  
Parliament

2011-12

9

2012-13

7

2013-14

12



Access to  
Records  
requests

2011-12

36

2012-13

28

2013-14

37



69%

of complaints were responded  
to in 20 working days

“The best Looked After Children review I  
have ever attended thanks to you”





## What this means

The Children's Social Care division works with young people, children and families through a number of services. We were contacted by the public on 9,928 occasions, of which less than 1% generated complaints.

The main areas of concern raised by our customers were: Professionals did not carry out the required actions; disputing professional decisions; and a lack of compassion by social workers.

When Child Protection work is required, we have received a number of complaints by families against social workers carrying out risk assessments.

Naturally, we will work to improve our communications with families when dealing with sensitive issues.

Where family members disagree with a decision reached by a social worker, we have found in some cases, decisions did not take enough account of family's views. We will make it a priority to improve liaison with families we work with.

One third of complaints received related to

professionals not completing actions they said they would undertake and not communicating adequately the impact of decisions on families. We recognise it is important to acknowledge the impact poor timeliness has on those who may be dependent on our actions to resolve often difficult situations.

We received a high proportion of compliments from those happy with our services. Our youth services, which provide a variety of support, attracted no complaints this year.

Early intervention services in Bromley support children and families according to their needs; this includes family support outreach and children's centres. The excellent customer care provided in these areas will be shared across Children's Services.

Children's Services received 3 Ombudsman Enquiries; one is completed and was not upheld.

"Thank you so much for all the help and support and thank you for listening when I needed to express my opinions and feelings "



## Lessons we have learnt and actions we are taking

From April 2014 we will:

Work with our staff to improve our communications with families when dealing with sensitive issues

Improve the way we communicate with families when we make decisions that affect them

Commit to do what we say we will do and do it on time

# Education Services



## Areas covered:

- Requests for a Statutory Assessment of Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- Admissions to primary, secondary and special schools
- Transport to school for children with a Special Educational Needs
- Services for children who have challenging behaviour
- Adult learning through the Bromley Adult Education College

## What we did

Between April 2013 and March 2014 we:



undertook

**1,917**

Statutory Assessments of Special Educational Needs



Managed

**12,300**

applications for admission to Bromley schools



made

**778**

visits to school by the School Standards Team

“Can I just say; I have had such great customer service from all the team at Bromley Adult Education College.

Many thanks ”



## Our performance



### Compliments

2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Not available*	34 <sup>#</sup>	21

\* not collected under our previous systems

# October 2012 to March 2013



### Complaints

2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Not available*	10 <sup>#</sup>	26

\* not collected under our previous systems

# October 2012 to March 2013



### Enquiries from Members of Parliament

2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Not available*	6 <sup>#</sup>	23

\* not collected under our previous systems

# October 2012 to March 2013



### Enquiries from Ombudsman

2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Not available*	1 <sup>#</sup>	8

\* not collected under our previous systems

# October 2012 to March 2013



# 64%

of complaints were responded to in 20 working days

“We are lucky in this Borough to have such great support”



## What this means

The Educations Division is responsible for serving the public through a range of services, including early years, behaviour service and the adult education college.

The majority of complaints we received this year fell broadly into two areas: Special Educational Needs (SEN) and School Admissions.

We pride ourselves on achieving high standards for those who use our services. Some of our most complex children who have a Statement of Educational Needs present our greatest challenge in terms of meeting those needs.

Putting this into context we have managed 1,917 SEN Statements this year, and those who felt the need to complain were less than 1%. We found we were failing to monitor third parties at regular intervals to ensure they were meeting the requirements of complex statements. We also found we need to improve how we communicate our decisions to families with children who have complex needs. The provisions contained in some of the SEN statements have also

been the subject of appeals and subsequent complaints. A priority for the service is to convey the importance of using the annual review to make sure statements are being successfully managed.

Enquiries made by Members of Parliament on behalf of their constituents related mainly to SEN statements.

In School Admission Services, complaints were generally about staff not meeting the expectations of their customers and we are working to improve our customer care.

The majority of the compliments we received were in relation to our Early Years service. We will take the excellent customer care practices as seen in our Early Years Service to improve our communication with our customers.

“We are lucky to live in the London Borough of Bromley, their early years support is fantastic ”



## Lessons we have learnt and actions we are taking

From April 2014 we will:

Improve our monitoring of third parties to make sure they meet the requirements of SEN Statements

Improve our communication with families and mediate to achieve early resolution

Undertake the Annual Reviews of a Statement, even if there are on-going disputes with the family and providers

# Housing Services



## Areas covered:

- Providing the Bromley Housing Register
- Supporting people to find appropriate homes through the Homeseekers service
- Preventing people from becoming homeless
- Supporting vulnerable adults and children with their housing needs
- Supporting people to find private rented accommodation

## What we did

Between April 2013 and March 2014 we:



managed

**3,052**

people on the  
Housing Register



processed

**1,748**

applications for  
people who are  
homeless



placed

**824**

households in temporary  
accommodation



helped

**552**

people to find private  
rented accommodation

“We would like to thank everyone involved for their kind attention and assistance in the resolving of our elderly Aunt’s housing needs ”



## Our performance



Compliments

2011-12

17

2012-13

3

2013-14

21



Complaints

2011-12

53

2012-13

44

2013-14

55



Enquiries from  
Members of  
Parliament

2011-12

160

2012-13

80

2013-14

60



Enquiries from  
Ombudsman

2011-12

9

2012-13

10

2013-14

6



54%

of complaints were responded  
to in 20 working days

“Thank you so much for all your help!  
I’ve heard so many negative reports  
about housing but so far you have  
been really helpful and supportive”



## What this means

As the demand for Housing in the Borough continues our housing service is under pressure to ensure it correctly allocates social housing to those with the greatest housing need.

The majority of our housing enquiries come from MPs on behalf of their constituents in response to disputes over the outcome of their appeals. Only 5 of the 55 complaints we received were upheld and, where customers took their complaint to the Ombudsman, all decisions were found in the Council's favour.

Rather than indicating we're not getting things right, we are being given a picture of general frustration about expectations that cannot always be met.

We have found we are not reaching our standards of customer care in all cases, in particular in how we communicate with our residents. Often this is in connection with residents disputing our decisions. We also recognise where people have complained, we are not responding quickly enough; and sometimes the

quality of our written replies falls short of our expectations.

Residents using our housing reception services have experienced excellent customer care and 21 compliments were received for our housing service, reassuring us the efforts of our officers to house people are not going unrecognised.

"I just wanted to take a moment to thank you for swiftly sorting out our housing application; it has meant the world to my family. Your communication with me throughout the entire process has also meant a lot "



## Lessons we have learnt and actions we are taking

From April 2014 we will:

Training staff to deal more effectively with complaints, both verbally and in writing

Ensure in our communication with customers, we take care to record their information accurately

Share the excellent customer care practices in reception services with other housing services to improve our communication with the public

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