

Getting it Right!



Education, Care and Health Services

Compliments,
comments and complaints

Annual Report for April 2015 to March 2016

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

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Introduction



At the heart of compliments and concerns are the people who use our services. When services do not meet their expectations for whatever reason, it is important that they feel able to complain or raise their concerns to us and know that we will listen, take action and learn from our mistakes when we are found wanting.

This report gives an overview of compliments, comments and complaints received over the past year.

We find it helpful to look back and compare with previous years where we have made improvements and where we have not met the high standards that have been set, or customers are unhappy with the service provided.

We have found overall the number of complaints received about our services in Education, Care and Health (ECHS) has risen by a third from 395 last year to 528 this year. The proportion upheld remains the same about a third.

A number of people choose to take their complaint to their MP before approaching us but they are always referred back to us. We want to encourage our customers to contact us first to

avoid potential delays in investigating their concern.

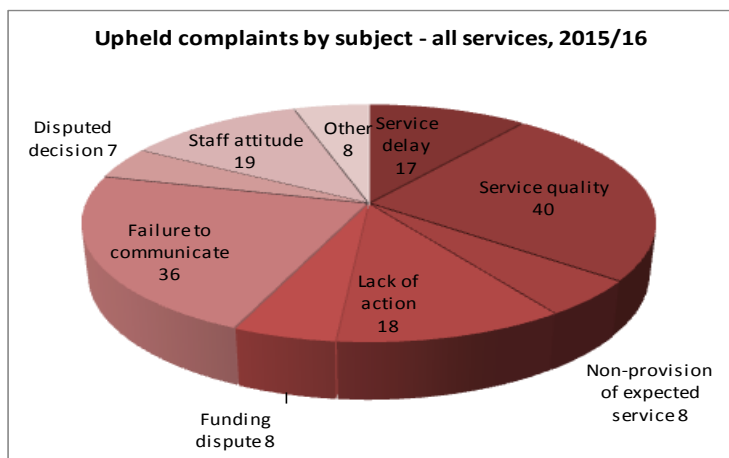
Responding quickly to a complaint is important and we aim to do so within twenty days and we set a target of 75% to achieve this. We are happy to report we reached our target in both our Education and Housing services.

Adults and Children's Social Care often receive very complex complaints which take longer to investigate thoroughly.

Learning from complaints is an important element of any solution so that we can act to reduce the risk of it happening again. Last year we aimed to put in place a number of measures as part of our learning. We did train our staff in customer service standards and data protection legislation. We did place housing officers in our reception to be on hand to help with expert advice. We did train our staff in care and safeguarding legislation and we did improve our fostering information for relatives.

Each year the Council receives an annual review letter from the Local Government Ombudsman. They have informed us of the significant levels of change they have experienced over the last few years and the outcome of a government review. The review proposal is to combine a single ombudsman scheme in England.

Their consultation document acknowledged local authority expertise and we wait to hear what the proposal will mean for us and for residents who wish to complain. We will publish any changes as soon as we know them.



Adult Social Care Services



Areas covered:

- Assessments of care needs for older people and adults with a disability
- Assessments of need for 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 2015 and March 2016 we:



assessed the needs of

3894

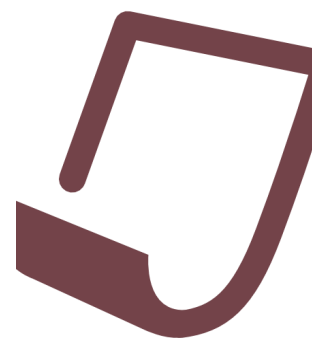
new clients



assessed the needs of

1883

people with caring responsibilities



provided

3846

adults with social care services

“We appreciated your honesty from the start and are thankful you were so easy to talk to when explaining our concerns and the fact you took everything we said on board.”



Our performance



Compliments

2013-14

27

2014-15

26

2015-16

45



Complaints

2013-14

168

(60 partially or fully upheld)

2014-15

186

(64 partially or fully upheld)

2015-16

267

(89 partially or fully upheld)



Enquiries from Members of Parliament

2013-14

18

2014-15

23

2015-16

46



Enquiries from Ombudsman

2013-14

21

(2 partially or fully upheld)

2014-15

14

(5 partially or fully upheld)

2015-16

19

(5 partially or fully upheld)



68%

complaints responded to within
20 working days

"I would like to let you know how brilliant your drivers and escorts were following the incident yesterday. In fact, you and all your staff, including those in the office, pulled out all the stops, went above and beyond and we managed to get all our clients back home with the minimum disruption."



What this means

Demand for support from the Council remains high and this year we assessed 3894 new clients, 7% more than last year. The number of complaints we were receiving began to rise above the expected seasonal range from January 2015 onwards and continued throughout the year. We have also seen a rise in the number of complaints disputing the outcome of assessments and decisions relating to care placements, but in the main most of these have not been upheld.

One in four complaints about funding disputes have been upheld and it is apparent that in most cases, we have not clearly expressed the reasoning and often not explained to people sufficiently before their assessment, about what the Council is legally able to provide, or how much they are expected to contribute towards their care. This led to dissatisfaction with the outcome.

Many adult services are provided under contract by external agencies and complaints made to the Council will always be investigated in the first instance by the care provider, before a response is issued. This year we received more complaints about domiciliary care agencies (45 compared to 30 last year). Well over half of all complaints received about the agencies were upheld. Concerns related to the quality of service, staff attitude and missed calls. Issues included medication not being managed properly, care plans not being followed and instances of poor manual handling by care staff as well as damage

to personal items. Missed calls are always referred to care management to assess the safeguarding risks and in particular the impact of a missed visit on the service user. Quarterly care agency forums hosted by the Contracts Team, provide an opportunity to explore general issues relating to customer services and quality standards and identify how improvements can be made.

A high proportion of complaints about care management related to failure to communicate and a proportion of these were upheld. In addition to this, complaints that related to service delays were mostly about postponements and deferral of assessments.

This year the number of MP enquiries relating to adult social care doubled to 46. None of the issues raised had been previously received as formal complaints and most were made to one particular MP (Bromley & Chislehurst) and we continue to work with his office to help encourage people to complain directly to us.

“If it wasn’t for the care manager and many other people I would have given up. You were my first hope and made my voice heard because I was shocked and traumatised. Carers and so many fantastically dedicated staff are all trying to help her.”



Lessons we have learnt

From April 2016 we will:

Provide customer services training to all front line staff in adult care services

Provide guidance for care managers to support those whose capital falls below the level where they can fund their own care

Publish a frequently asked question section on our website to help people make informed choices about their care

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 2015 and March 2016 we:



dealt with over

8,000

enquiries to the

Multi-agency Safe-guarding Hub (MASH)



completed

2,109

social work assessments



helped

286

children in care to live in foster care and other accommodation



Supported

230

children subject to a child protection plan

"I just want to say thank you to you as you acted quickly and professionally on Friday, you supported me fully all the time and the whole time you were professional. "



Our performance



Compliments

2013-14

24

2014-15

59

2015-16

48



Complaints

2013-14

63

(18 partially or fully upheld)

2014-15

76

(16 partially or fully upheld)

2015-16

87

(24 partially or fully upheld)



Enquiries from Members of Parliament

2013-14

12

2014-15

15

2015-16

14



Enquiries from Ombudsman

2013-14

3

(none upheld)

2014-15

4

(1 upheld)

2015-16

6

(2 upheld)



59%

of complaints were responded
to within 20 working days

“Thank you so much, you have helped and pushed me to become a better person and better mum and I will always be grateful for everything you have done for us.”



What this means

For complaints regarding children social care the Council must adhere to the statutory children's complaints procedures, which is there to make sure vulnerable young peoples voices are being heard and the issues impacting on the child are central to the complaint. Bromley received 87 complaints this year about children's care services, eleven more than the previous year a rise of 14%. However, only a small number of these came directly from young people and this is a similar picture reflected across many local authorities.

Demand for services has been increasing. The Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) dealt with over 8,000 enquiries last year, all of which had to be followed up. The service carried out 331 more social work assessment in 2015/16 than in the previous year-an increase of more than 18%.

As a result of the complaints received, Children's Services has learnt that checking decisions, work and seeking opinion in supervision is important to enable staff to contribute to complex work. An example of a disputed decision received is Special Guardian Orders, which offer greater security than long-term fostering but without the absolute legal severance from the birth family that stems from an adoption order. This gives the

carer clear responsibility for all aspects of caring for the child and for taking the decisions to do with their upbringing. Allocated social workers are expected to be well-informed and precise when making decisions which affect families proposing this route and in particular financial support. Its vital financial support is accurately represented in their report and that the family is fully informed of what it means for them personally so they can plan with certainty.

The highest number of complaints received this year related to disputed decisions and quality of service. Of the 24 recorded under disputed decisions, 2 (8%) were upheld, whereas of the 23 relating to quality of service 9 (39%) were upheld.

Complaints regarding attitude of staff have halved from the previous year, however of the 12 recorded 4 (33%) were upheld.

Only 45 (56%) of the 87 complaints met the target to respond within 20 working days. This year we received 14 MP enquiries relating to children.

"It is a huge shame that there are not many more people out there like you who are willing to help. Thank you though for taking the time out for us to help and make a change for."



Lessons we have learnt:

From April 2016 we will:

Encourage more young people to complain

Undertake to improve quality of communication between social workers children and their carers

When we say we are going to do something we will do it

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 Need
- Education Welfare
- Services for children who have challenging behaviour
- Adult learning through the Bromley Adult Education College
- School Standards
- Virtual Schools

What we did

Between April 2015 and March 2016 we:



undertook

619

Education, Care & Health
Plan Assessments



Managed

13,600

applications for
admission to
Bromley schools



undertook

260

visits to school by the
School Standards Team

“You have been so generous with your time, knowledge and understanding and it was more useful than any Continuing Professional Development I’ve ever been on!”



Our performance



Compliments

2013-14

21

2014-15

12

2015-16

18



Complaints

2013-14

26

(8 partially or fully upheld)

2014-15

23

(5 partially or fully upheld)

2015-16

39

(7 partially or fully upheld)



Enquiries from Members of Parliament

2013-14

23

2014-15

9

2015-16

11



Enquiries from Ombudsman

2013-14

8

(None upheld)

2014-15

4

(None upheld)

2015-16

2

(None upheld)

October 2012 to March 2013



81%

of complaints were responded
to in 20 working days

“Just a few lines to say thank you
for the brilliant safeguarding
course held.... It certainly helped
towards my Ofsted outstanding
award .”



What this means

The number of complaints received for Education this year was 39, 16 (69%) more than last year and the highest number related to quality of service (12) of which 4 (33%) were upheld. We received a number of complaints about disputed decisions and service delays but only two were upheld.

The Admissions Team received a number of complaints at a time when the team were short of staff and they were also managing a large number of applications for school places. At the same time a new telephone system was also being installed which proved to be problematic, the system didn't give an engaged tone or play a recorded message to the waiting caller. This meant customers became frustrated when trying to make contact with the team and this resulted in a number of complaints.

Poor communication between parents and Special Educational Needs services also gave rise to several complaints, so we are making sure that every time we have any new information about a child's case we are informing their parents, making every effort to keep parents informed and up to date.

A recent complaint brought to us by a parent highlighted two issues which were causing them some difficulty, the first being difficulty in contacting the Early Years Team by telephone and the second was inadequate information on the website for those making general enquiries. The team has remedied this by refreshing their information on the website.

We aim to work with families to reduce delays in reaching a resolution and not to prolong an outcome for their complaint. When compared to last year we received half the enquires from the Local Government Ombudsman and feel we have gone some way to achieving this.

"Thank you for being so understanding with regards to our moderation at the end of the last academic year."



"Thank you for the hard work with our application for a Child Performance licence."



Lessons we have learnt:

From April 2016 we will:

Improve our recording of compliments

Seek to reduce the number of complaints to less than 30

Aim to improve on 81% complaints responded to in 20 days with the ambition of achieving 90%

Housing Services



Areas covered:

- Providing the Bromley Housing Register
- Supporting people to find appropriate homes through the Home seekers 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 2015 and March 2016 we:



managed

2793

people on the
Housing Register



processed

1014

applications for
people who are
homeless



placed

1219

households in temporary
accommodation



helped

99

households prevented
from homelessness

“The housing officer went through every question on the form with me and made sure I had filled it in correctly and he checked to make sure I had all the supporting documents. He was brilliant, helpful and made sure I would move on with my application. I could not have asked for more help. “



Our performance



Compliments

2013-14

21

2014-15

35

2015-16

111



Complaints

2013-14

55

(5 partially or fully upheld)

2014-15

110

(22 partially or fully upheld)

2015-16

135

(41 partially or fully upheld)



Enquiries from
Members of
Parliament

2013-14

60

2014-15

78

2015-16

116



Enquiries from
Ombudsman

2013-14

6

(None upheld)

2014-15

13

(6 partially or fully upheld)

2015-16

7

(2 partially or fully upheld)



79%

of complaints were responded
to in 20 working days

"I would like to thank you for showing me such kindness and support, at a time when I felt like my world had crashed and I could not control anything."



What this means

The total number of complaints received for Housing Services this year was 135 which is an increase, but we saw less complaints being referred to the Local Government Ombudsman.

We received numerous complaints from families about the condition of their temporary accommodation (24) and as a result, the service has put in place a new team to monitor the quality of accommodation. This team has already carried out a number of inspections to make sure all the homes we place our residents in, have up-to-date safety certificates.

For our customers we are improving access to information, in particular to help those who approach the Council for housing assistance. We are doing this by creating a new on-line form for those threatened with homelessness to make the application process far more user friendly. The service has also purchased a new IT system to streamline working practices and improve services for our customers.

The Housing Service has introduced Top Tips, as a result of feedback received from our customers. This is intended as a guide for staff to act quickly to resolve problems for customers, minimising impact on them and our services.

We are very pleased to have received so many compliments from our customers and it is important for us to know, we are getting many things right.

Many people approach their MP to help them with their housing problems in the first instance rather than raising their complaint to us. This has meant we have seen a 49% increase on last year's total of 78 enquires from MP's. We are working with the MP's to encourage people to contact us first as often taking this route delays their complaint reaching us.

"Your tireless dedication is what made it all happen and I thank you for it."



"Thank you so much for giving me and my baby a hope of shelter. It all happened because of your hard work."



Lessons we have learnt:

From April 2016 we will:

Provide telephone training for front line staff to ensure more complaints are resolved at first point of contact

Introduce a new on-line form for homeless applicants to make the application process as user friendly as possible

Review housing policies and procedures to ensure they are consistent, effective and up-to-date

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April 2016

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