

Getting it Right!

Education, Care & Health Services

Complaints

Comments

Compliments

Annual Report

April 2016 to March 2017

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Introduction



This report looks at the impact on people when things go wrong and when we get it right. At the heart of any complaint or compliment is a story of how someone or their family was affected. The range of services and legislation the Council manage is vast and often complex and confusing for people who need our help. Its important for us to get it right when dealing with our customers.

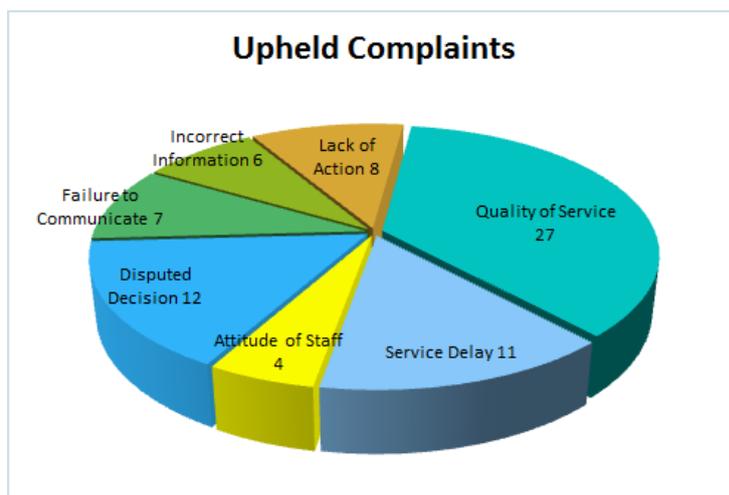
The overview of the compliments, complaints and enquiries handled over the year April 2016 to March 2017, covers services in adult and children's Social Care, housing, education, public health and the Chief Executive's Department.

It is important that those who use our services are supported in letting us know what they think. The Council has a dedicated team who record compliments, handle contacts received through our website and support those who wish to complain. We use the lessons learnt from complaints to change the way we do business.

Over the year we received 525 complaints across the services, just three less than last year. Most divisions showed a drop in complaints, with Housing Services receiving the most compliments. Most of the complaints (70%) we receive are submitted by email or through our website. We monitor MP or local councillor enquiries and always encourage customers to complain to us first to avoid delays.

Some complaints, particularly those involving social care, can be complex to investigate and require extra time to reply to. We aim to respond to at least 75% of standard complaints within 20 working days, but this year we have struggled to meet that target and as such we will be working to improve our response times.

Overall, 28% of the complaints we received were upheld. The most common issues related to quality of service, which can range from poor customer service to not receiving quality of care.



Learning from complaints is important in moving forward and finding solutions, so last year we aimed to put in place a number of measures as part of our learning. We improved our website **My life** with clear and up-to-date information to help people make informed choices about their care. We have introduced an online form to make homeless applications easier for families to complete.

Each year the Council receives an annual review letter from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). They have advised us that they are revising the way they monitor compliance with their recommendations and this will produce more detailed reports and closer scrutiny for all Councils in the future.

A report they published in July this year looks at mental capacity, and in 2016/17 the LGSCO investigated 1,212 adult social care complaints in detail. They estimate that up to 20% of these concerned mental capacity. Following investigation, they upheld 69% of these cases.

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 2016 and March 2017 we:



assessed the needs of

5,454

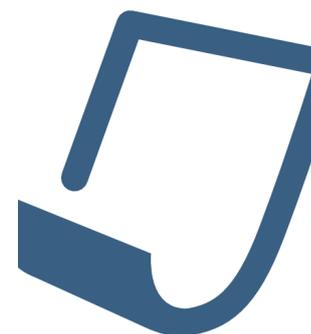
clients



assessed the needs of

1,007

people with caring responsibilities



provided

5,374

adults with social care services

“Thank you to all the wonderful reablement staff who visited my mother after her fall. Not only was the assistance they provided invaluable but the advice was essential towards recovery.”



Our performance



Compliments

2014-15

26

2015-16

45

2016-17

50



Complaints

2014-15

186

(64 partially or fully upheld)

2015-16

267

(89 partially or fully upheld)

2016-17

245

(75 partially or fully upheld)



Enquiries from Members of Parliament

2014-15

23

2015-16

46

2016-17

16



Enquiries from Ombudsman

2014-15

14

(5 partially or fully upheld)

2015-16

19

(5 partially or fully upheld)

2016-17

26

(12 partially or fully upheld)



56%

complaints responded to within
20 working days

"... the system worked very well for me when I made a safeguarding alert. Often feedback about social workers is negative around safeguarding but I have found the service to be excellent and wanted to share this feedback with as many people as possible."



What this means

We received fewer complaints about adult social care services this year and we are helping more people. The main concerns our service users have told us about are quality of service and out of the 75 we received, 13 were upheld and out of 66 received for disputed decisions, 9 were upheld.

Care and support provided to people in their homes is an important part of the services we provide, often supplied by external agencies, but overseen by us. Complaints about domiciliary care agencies were fewer compared to last year but exactly half were upheld. Each of those complaints potentially represents a vulnerable person not being cared for properly and we take that very seriously.

The daughter of an elderly lady with dementia complained that her domiciliary care agency had missed a number of visits. One such failure to attend had led to her mother being left alone for six hours, during which she had no medication or support, she became increasingly distressed and fell over. Following an investigation, the agency discovered their member of staff had cancelled the visits without permission. This matter was so serious that her agency dismissed her.

We know that financial issues are a major concern for families and more than a third of our

disputed decisions involved charges. We were prompted on a number of occasions this year about the importance of giving people proper and timely information about the charges that can apply for the support we provide.

One such complaint was that the Council's bill failed to explain what services were being charged for, which meant service users could not tally their bills because it did not show the number of hours of care provided per day. It also highlighted the importance of promptly resolving any incorrect charges applied to an account.

When an elderly couple complained that they were being charged more for their monitoring service than they had expected. We realised they had not been properly informed of all the charges because our original assessment was inaccurate and their personal budget had been miscalculated which accounted for the disparity.

We are working on avoiding human error that can have a significant effect on those we are trying to help.

"Thank you for the caring service my daughter received on her return from hospital. The ladies were cheerful and helpful, providing her with confidence to improve."



Lessons we have learnt

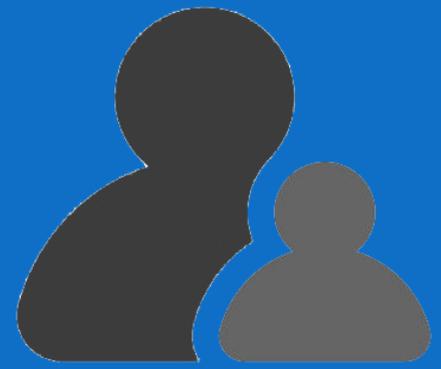
From April 2017 we will:

Seek to minimise disruption caused by any delay in agreeing plans with the local Clinical Commissioning Group

Provide ongoing support and training for those social workers on the frontline

Operate a refresher and reminder system to counter claims of a lack of action

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 2016 and March 2017 we:



handled more than

9,200

Multi-agency Safe-guarding Hub (MASH) enquiries



completed

2,700

social work assessments



helped

288

children in care to live in foster care and other accommodation



supported

342

children subject to a child protection plan

"Thank you for making my mum much calmer and sweet. You've made our mummy much better. We are a happy family again."



Our performance



Compliments

2014-15

59

2015-16

48

2016-17

25



Complaints

2014-15

76

(16 partially or fully upheld)

2015-16

87

(24 partially or fully upheld)

2016-17

96

(30 partially or fully upheld)



Enquiries from Members of Parliament

2014-15

15

2015-16

14

2016-17

11



Enquiries from Ombudsman

2014-15

4

(1 upheld)

2015-16

6

(2 upheld)

2016-17

9

(2 upheld)



40%

of complaints were responded
to within 20 working days

The maternal grandparents described the social worker as a “breath of fresh air... her work has gone some way to holding our family and preventing our grandchild from going into care”



What this means

When we receive complaints regarding children social care, the Council must adhere to statutory complaints procedures. We must ensure the voice of the child and issues are central to the complaint. This year there was a slight increase in complaints received, 9 more than last year. Some issues related to quality of service and 40% of these were upheld.

Child protection is an essential part of our work and something we take extremely seriously. Sometimes, the enquiries we need to make can be time consuming but it is important to reach a correct decision whilst minimising the impact on the families involved. To do so often requires effective liaison with our partners but sometimes they may wish to complain as well. We then have to be clear about our respective responsibilities.

A hospital doctor complained that when they called our duty team about an autistic child in their A&E department, they were advised to keep him whilst the police and the child's mother were contacted, but then heard nothing further from children's services. Both mother and child became distressed and ended up leaving the hospital without waiting for a formal discharge. This case demonstrates to us the importance of keeping everyone properly informed throughout.

Referrals to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub increased substantially this year, making effective channels of communication even more important. We allocated Heads of Service a cluster of schools each to oversee, after the Deputy Head of a school complained about inconsistency in a particular case, the time taken to make decisions

and the attitude of the social workers involved. The new arrangements are working very well.

High standards in producing reports and assessments are central to good social work. If standards are not upheld then the consequences for the families we support can be life-changing. In one case a mother complained about the quality of a report on her family, and the manager of the team concerned arranged a meeting to discuss those concerns face-to-face. From this we realised that the report had a number of inaccuracies because the mother had not been given sufficient time or support to enable her to raise her concerns to us. As a result, social care staff have been reminded to give families time to comment on their reports.

It is important that children themselves are enabled to make their own complaints, often supported by an independent advocate. It is important that we listen to the child themselves, focusing on what they want, and doing our best to support and enable them to achieve it wherever possible.

"I wanted to thank your team for the changes in my son's transport this year!... I thought I would let you know what a positive impact the changes from last year have had on my child! "



Lessons we have learnt:

From April 2017 we will:

Continue to improve our communication with their families who use our services

The importance of confidentiality and working together agreements are valid and fair

Involve families and give them time to comment on things that affect them

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 2016 and March 2017 we:



supported

1154

children with Education,
Care & Health Plans



Processed applications

9,424

for
admission to
Bromley schools



Additional

585

school places created

“My daughter’s driver and carer are amazing as is the transport company, who are efficient. All involved have provided her with such a positive experience.”



Our performance



Compliments

2014-15

12

2015-16

18

2016-17

6



Complaints

2014-15

23

(5 partially or fully upheld)

2015-16

39

(7 partially or fully upheld)

2016-17

26

(10 partially or fully upheld)



Enquiries from Members of Parliament

2014-15

9

2015-16

11

2016-17

9



Enquiries from Ombudsman

2014-15

4

(None upheld)

2015-16

2

(None upheld)

2016-17

2

(None upheld)



62%

of complaints were responded
to in 20 working days

“Thank you for all the support
this year for both KS1 & KS2 –
you have all been very
supportive and on the ball.”



What this means

We received fewer complaints for Education Services this year. The highest number related to quality of service (15) of which 5 were upheld, and we received a number about disputed decisions of which 2 were upheld.

Nearly half of our complaints related to children with Special Educational Needs and 2 out of 3 of those concerns were not upheld. Whilst there are few in number, they are amongst the most complex and time consuming matters to investigate and consider.

A recent complaint highlighted an issue with our IT system. A parent got in touch with us saying that she had accepted her daughter's offer of a school place online and received an automated response. She then received a phone call from the school who said the Council had informed them she had not in fact accepted the place. We looked at the concerns and found that the software had created an error, which meant that the Council and school's records had not matched up. We were able to resolve this administrative error quickly and confirmed the school place.

Poor communication can sometimes result in dissatisfaction. A parent felt her only option was to complain when her attempts to challenge a panel decision were hindered. Her daughter's

assessment was declined and in an attempt to agree a way forward, mediation was agreed but delayed and further impeded because of pressure of work. Delays such as this are unacceptable and we must work to minimise the impact on families and promote their right to appeal a decision. The family were offered a review of the decision.

We process a lot of confidential information that flows between professionals and families every day. Whilst it is uncommon for us to make a mistake, we received a complaint when a parent was sent someone else's information caught up in their correspondence. We reported what is called a data breach to the Information Commissioner's Office and issued revised guidance to staff.

We aim to work with families to reduce delays in reaching a resolution and not to prolong an outcome of a complaint. This year we have not met our own standards and are working hard to improve this.

"Thank you for all the support you have been giving to our schools this year... My staff have greatly appreciated your briefings and it has made them feel more confident about making judgements."



Lessons we have learnt:

From April 2017 we will:

Keep parents better informed of the progress of their applications

Provide staff with refresher training on data protection procedures

Work with families to limit complaints relating to SEN children

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 2016 and March 2017 we:



managed

3777

people on the
Housing Register



processed

1157

applications for
people who are
homeless



placed

1439

households in temporary
accommodation



helped

2177

households avoid
homelessness

“I would like to take this opportunity to thank the London Borough of Bromley for homing my daughter and I at this otherwise horrible and difficult time. The Options Officer really did save us and we are so grateful that you then took on board our evidence of domestic abuse and kept us safe and secure.”



Our performance



Compliments

2014-15

35

2015-16

111

2016-17

146



Complaints

2014-15

110

(22 partially or fully upheld)

2015-16

135

(41 partially or fully upheld)

2016-17

126

(30 partially or fully upheld)



Enquiries from
Members of
Parliament

2014-15

78

2015-16

116

2016-17

83



Enquiries from
Ombudsman

2014-15

13

(6 partially or fully upheld)

2015-16

7

(2 partially or fully upheld)

2016-17

19

(6 partially or fully upheld)



52%

of complaints were responded
to in 20 working days

"In my time of need, I appreciate the
patience and effort you and your
entire housing team have given me
from the very first day."



What this means

The number of complaints about Housing Services was slightly less this year despite the significant increase in demand for their services. Encouragingly, we received significantly more compliments this year from people who used the service.

Providing temporary accommodation and moving families to permanent housing is challenging, however there are guidelines we must follow. We received a complaint from a family the Council had placed and they said they had been in their temporary accommodation for considerably longer than the statutory guidance permitted. Staff were reminded to monitor the time people spend in temporary accommodation and refer customers to the appeal process.

People often approach housing in crisis so it is important we meet both our own customer standards and the expectations of our customers. A couple complained about how they were treated and that their first appointment was cancelled and they were kept waiting for 2 hours at their second appointment. They were then told their application was not on the system and when they called their calls were not returned. When they came to the Council offices to collect the keys to their temporary accommodation, they were told to return later as the member of staff was unavailable. The poor services they received has been addressed with the member of staff being re-trained in customer service standards.

Offers of accommodation can be complex and it is important that these are properly explained to applicants. Another client complained that she was being held responsible for monies owing on a property that she never in fact moved into. The Council accepted that her original offer of housing was confusing, and that there had been errors in how the situation had been dealt with. The offer was marked as withdrawn and the rent account closed. The client was reassured that no monies were owed and received an apology for the distress and inconvenience.

Housing services are working hard to minimise complaints by preparing for the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. They are doing this in a number of ways but one in particular is the introduction of a new online housing advice form. This has contributed to significantly reduced waiting times for interviews and advice sessions.

"I cannot thank you enough for the support yourself and the temporary housing team have given my client in finding her this accommodation...I wish you a fantastic weekend, knowing you have made a big difference to this vulnerable woman's life."



Lessons we have learnt:

From April 2017 we will:

Continue to develop available options for temporary accommodation

Train visiting officers to address concerns about accommodation

Offer the public access to staff trained to provide benefits and debt advice

Chief Executive's Department



Areas covered:

- Overseeing the running of the Council
- Corporate communications
- Financial control and audit
- Human resources
- Administering Council Tax and Housing Benefit
- Customer Services
- Blue Badges and Freedom Passes

What we did

Between April 2016 and March 2017 we:



managed

20,287

claims for benefits



processed

19,223

emails



helped

63,485

visitors to Reception



handled

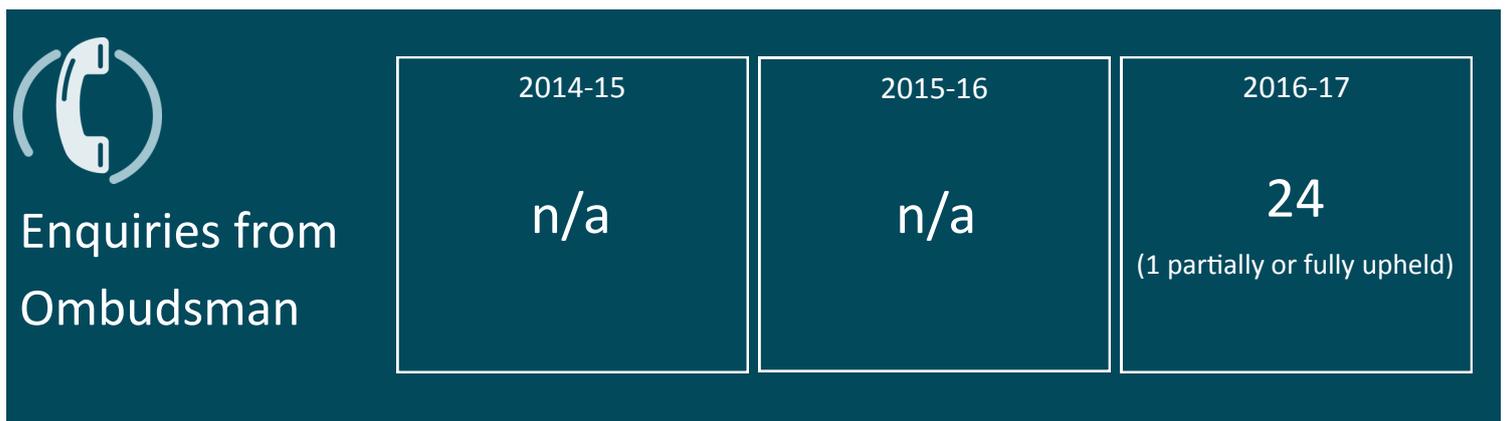
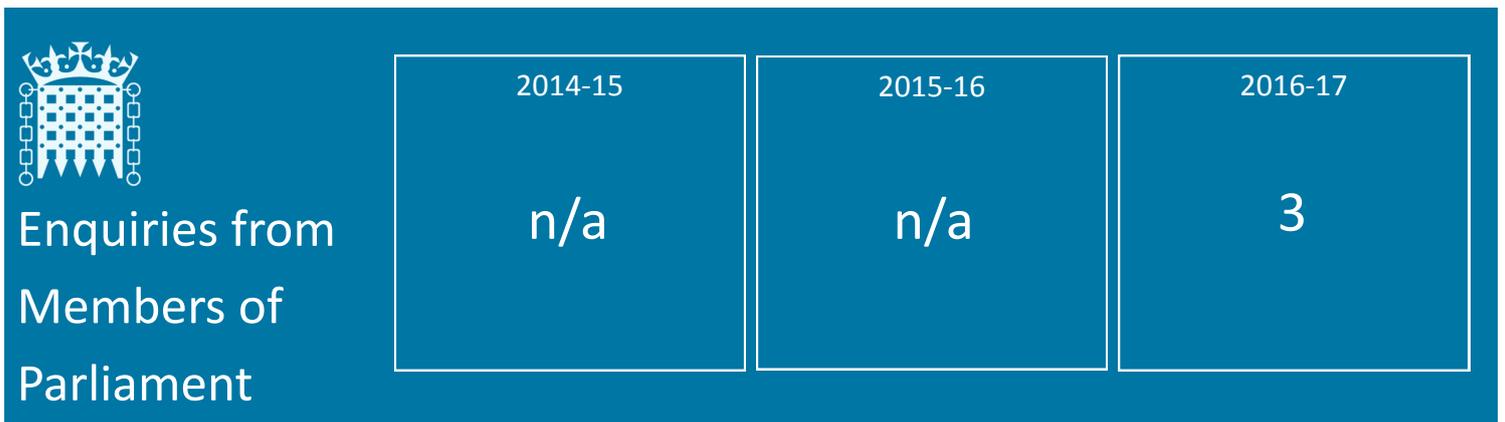
680,293

telephone calls

As mobile technology advances and 24 hour access to information is demanded, we are responding to our customers. We expect our website to help them resolve their queries quickly and efficiently and we have a dedicated team to keep information up to date and services online.

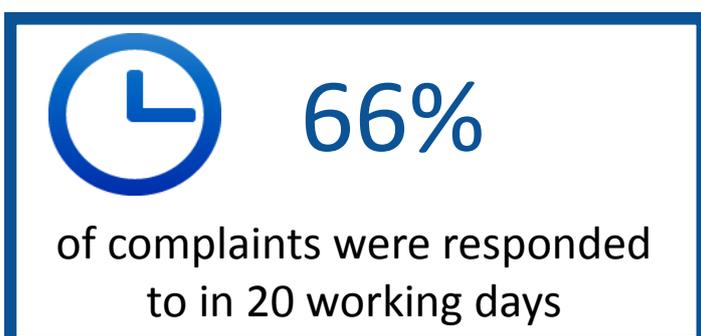
Considerable changes have occurred in both housing benefit and council tax support and we have been able to respond to our customers' concerns helping them cope, however sometimes we don't quite get it right. A parent complained to us that we were asking for too much supplementary information to support her application for a council tax disregard, whilst her daughter was attending university. The Council accepted that she had been asked for too much information, apologised and issued a corrected Council Tax account.

Our performance



Benefits and Planning each account for roughly one-third of Chief Executive Department complaints, which is not surprising given that they both represent areas which can have a significant impact on the public. Electoral Services whilst managing the Referendum did have an increase in residents contacting them, but no formal complaints were made.

We saw over 63,000 residents visit our receptions this year and we received very few complaints about our staff, however when standards are not met by our staff, retraining in customer service standards is mandatory.



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