

Education, Children and Families Committee

10am, Tuesday 24 May 2016

Recommendations of the Social Work Complaints Review Committee – 21 April 2016

Item number	8.9.1
Report number	
Wards	All

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Recommendations of the Social Work Complaints Review Committee – 21 April 2016

Summary

To refer to the Education, Children and Families Committee recommendations of the Social Work Complaints Review Committee on consideration of a complaint against the social work service within Communities and Families.

For decision/action

The Social Work Complaints Review Committee has referred its recommendations on an individual complaint against the social work service within Communities and Committee for consideration.

Main report

- 1 Complaints Review Committees (CRCs) are established under the Social Work (Representations) Procedures (Scotland) Directions 1996 as the final stage of a comprehensive Client Complaints system. They require to be objective and independent in their review of responses to complaints.
- 2 The CRC met in private on 21 April 2016 to consider a complaint against the social work service within Communities and Families. The complainant and the service representatives attended throughout.
- 3 The complaint related to the complainant's dissatisfaction with the Council's response to a complaint which comprised the following main points:
 - i) The Council's response to her complaint regarding changes to contact arrangements with her children in December 2015.
 - ii) The Council's response to her complaint regarding the cancellation and reinstatement of the contact visit on 30 December 2015.
 - iii) The Council's response to her complaint regarding arrangements/notification for the Looked After and Accommodated Children's review meeting held in January 2016.
- 4 The complainant's representative expressed concern at what they felt was a continuing form of malpractice and which may have constituted bullying. There had been 3 instances where the complainant had been given less than 5 days notice to re-arrange visits; continual 2-3 days notice of the change of dates of meetings; and the lack of papers being provide for LAAC meetings.

- 5 The complainant's representative indicated that the first part of the complaint related to a planned visit which had been moved from 16 to 14 December 2015. The request for this change had been received by the complainant on 9 December 2015 and a response was requested by 11 December 2016. The complainant had immediately contacted the Department to advise that the change of date would not be suitable.
- 6 The complainant 's representative had indicated that the Council had also advised the complainant that the following scheduled meeting on 30 December 2015 would also be unable to go ahead following a decision taken by the Practice Team involved when looking at staffing levels over the festive period. This would have given the complainant 6 weeks without contact with her children.
- 7 The complainant's representative indicated that the complainant had eventually managed to make arrangements to attend the visit on 14 December 2015 and the Department had re-instated the visit scheduled for 30 December 2016 but the complainant had not received a satisfactory explanation as to why the decision had been taken for no visits to take place.
- 8 The complainant's representative further outlined the continual short notice and date changes to LAAC meetings which they felt happened on a regular basis.
- 9 The members of the Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions of the complainant.
- 10 The Investigating Officer advised that the decision regarding visits during December 2015 had been taken by the Neighbourhood Practice Team to enable them to manage staff resources over the festive period. He acknowledged that the complainant had not been satisfied with the proposed arrangements for visits and had apologised for this.
- 11 The Investigating Officer stressed that the complainant's social worker had been reluctant to introduce a new supervising worker for the visits which it was felt would unsettle the children and not be in their best interests and for this reason the department had looked to bring the contact visit to 14 December 2015 when a familiar worker was available.
- 12 The Investigating Officer indicated that a new Social Worker for this case was now in place and that a schedule of future meetings had been arranged.
- 13 The members of the Committee were then given the opportunity to ask questions of the Investigating Officer.
- 14 The complainant's representative summed up by stressing the desire of the complainant to work with the Department and to put a stop to what was being perceived as continuous harassment and bullying. They also wanted to ensure that notification for meetings and papers were issued timeously in future.
- 15 The Investigating Officer stressed that the Department would always try to issue papers on time and that there were processes and procedures in place to support this.

- 16 Following this, the complainant, her representative and the Investigating Officer withdrew from the meeting to allow the Committee to deliberate in private.

Recommendations

After full consideration of the complaints the Committee reached the following decisions/recommendations:

- 1) The Committee recognised that for operational reasons social workers would occasionally have to make changes at short notice to service provision, however, these changes should be communicated effectively and as timeously as possible with recognition of the impact on the clients.

- 2) The complaint detailed at Point 2.1 of the report by the Acting Practice Team Manager and Acting Executive Director of Communities and Families was **upheld in part**.

The Committee noted that the Council recognised that they should have apologised for the lack of consultation on the change of date and the Committee supported the need for the Council to apologise for this failure.

- 2) The complaint detailed at Point 2.2 of the report by the Acting Practice Team Manager and Acting Executive Director of Communities and Families was **not upheld**.

The Committee noted that that this part of the complaint had been upheld by the investigation and that the Department had apologised.

- 3) The complaint detailed at Point 2.3 of the report by the Acting Practice Team Manager and Acting Executive Director of Communities and Families was **upheld in part**.

The Committee noted that the Council had apologised for the changes of dates for the LAAC meeting. The Committee was of the view that the Council should also apologise for not allowing the complainant adequate time to respond to a new date.

The Committee recommended that the Council ensure that meetings were arranged in consultation with clients.

- 4) It was further noted that the complainant had failed to receive the papers for the LAAC and welcomed the offer from the Advice and Complaints Officer to investigate this issue.

Background reading/external references

Agenda, confidential papers and minutes for the Complaints Review Committee of 21 April 2016.

Links

Coalition pledges

Council outcomes

Single Outcome Agreement	SO2	Edinburgh's citizens experience improved health and wellbeing, with reduced inequalities in health
Appendices	None.	