

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Committee 14th December 2006
Report Title Recommendations of the Complaints Working Group
Summary This report summarises the recommendations of the Complaints Working Group, established by the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise how Councillors can be involved in the Social Care and representations complaints process.

For further information please contact:

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Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework? No. .

Background papers Minutes of the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 14/09/06
 DfES – Getting the Best from Complaints

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:- Details to be specified

- Other Committees
- Local Member(s)
- Other Elected Members Cllr Wells, Cllr Ross, Cllr Dill-Russell, Cllr Grant
- Cabinet Member
- Chief Executive
- Legal Sarah Duxbury
- Finance

- Other Chief Officers David Carter, Marion Davis
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals

FINAL DECISION NONO

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

- Further consideration by this Committee
- To Council
- To Cabinet
- To an O & S Committee
- To an Area Committee
- Further Consultation

Agenda No

Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny - 14th December 2006.

Recommendations of the Complaints Working Group

Report of the Strategic Director for Performance and Development

Recommendation

The Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to endorse the recommendations of the Complaints Working Group outlined in section 3 of this report.

1. Background

- 1.1 At the meeting of this Committee on 14th September 2006 Karen Smith, Customer Relations Manager, outlined the social care complaints and representations policy and procedure for children, young people and families. She informed the Committee that guidance from the DfES now outlined the requirement for an independent Panel at stage three of the complaints procedure. Previously, these panels had been chaired by an independent person, with one or two Councillors representing the Council. The Committee noted their regret that Councillors would no longer serve on the Panels and resolved to establish a working group of Councillors to look at the best way of involving Councillors in the process.
- 1.2 Councillors Dill-Russell, Ross and Wells formed the Complaints Working Group as requested by the Committee. The remainder of this report outlines their findings and recommendations.

2. Report

- 2.1 It is the view of the Complaints Working Group that whilst the inclusion of Councillors on the independent panel at stage three of the social care complaints process will be missed, this will only affect a small number of Councillors who had experienced such panels. Therefore it was felt by the working group that focus should not be placed on Councillor involvement in the process, but upon Councillor awareness of the trends of complaints, the effectiveness of the mechanisms employed to deal with complaints and the ability of these mechanisms to lead to service improvements. It is the view of the Complaints Working group that a pilot Task and Finish Panel should be

established under the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee to address these issues.

- 2.2 It is the view of the Complaints Working Group that establishing a Task and Finish Panel would enable the Councillors involved to become “experts” in this area. These Councillors could act as a link between the complaints procedure, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Political Groups; thereby increasing the awareness of all Councillors.
- 2.3. The Task and Finish Panel should be a cross party panel and include one school governor representative of the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It is the view of the Complaints Working Group that the remit of the Task and Finish Panel should include all complaints relating to the Children, Young People and Families Directorate and not just social care complaints and representations which originally initiated the existence of the Complaints Working Group.
- 2.4 The Schools Complaints Officer receives calls from members of the public on a wide range of issues. However, certain factors make the monitoring of complaints within the department a complex task.
 - i) Many of the calls received are not actually complaints. They are frequently questions, or often relate to an issue the caller feels the Directorate should be made aware of.
 - ii) Due to the nature of the calls received, they often need to be resolved at school level. While the Complaints Officer will often liaise between the complainant and the school, the actual outcome is often unknown.
 - iii) Many complaints are taken directly to schools and are effectively dealt with. The Directorate are only usually made aware of these complaints if they escalate and reach Stage 3 of the complaints procedure.
- 2.5 Taking this into consideration the Complaints Working Group recommend that the Task and Finish Panel should meet on a regular basis to scrutinise stage two and stage three social care complaints and stage three education complaints. It is the view of the Complaints Working Group that Councillors do not need to be informed of complaints that are resolved at the first stage of the complaints procedure.
- 2.6 However; the Complaints Working Group recognises that there is a need to establish a mechanism to ensure that Councillors are informed if re-occurring social care complaints are received and resolved at the first stage of the complaints process. The trend of such complaints should be subject to deeper scrutiny to establish how this information can be fed into service improvements.
- 2.7 Additionally, whilst it is fundamentally important to avoid undermining or duplicating the schools complaint procedure, concern was raised regarding identifying trends which could be of strategic rather managerial significance. Therefore the Complaints Working Group recommend that further work should be undertaken to establish a mechanism to enable trends to be identified for complaints that reach stage two of the schools complaints procedure, on an annual basis.

- 2.8 Prior to meeting the members of the Task and Finish Panel should receive quarterly analysis of stage two and stage three social care complaints and stage three education complaints.
- 2.9 The Task and Finish Panel should report back to the Committee on trends or areas for further scrutiny if an issue is recurrent or significant to warrant in-depth scrutiny by the committee.

3. Recommendations of the Complaints Working Group

1. A Task and Finish Panel should be established by the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee to meet on a regular basis to scrutinise complaints related to the Children, Young People and Families Directorate.
2. The membership of the Task and Finish Panel should include Councillors from each political group and one parent governor representative from the Committee
3. The members of the Panel will receive quarterly analysis of stage 2 and stage 3 social care complaints, and stage 3 education complaints via email.
4. The Task and Finish Panel should report back to the Committee on trends or areas for further scrutiny if an issue is recurrent or significant to warrant in-depth scrutiny by the Committee.
5. The Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive annual and half year complaints and compliments reports via email and raise any issues with a member of the Task and Finish Panel
6. The panel should explore
 - i) how trends in schools complaints resolved at stage 2 can be identified and
 - ii) how Councillors can be informed of re-occurring social care complaints that are resolved at stage 1.
7. The Task and Finish Panel should be established for a period of 12 months, after which the Panel should report back to the committee providing details of the work undertaken and outlining the advantages and disadvantages of continuing with this approach.

Strategic Director for
Performance and
Development

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