

Corporate Parenting Board

23 November 2023

Corporate Complaints Team Annual Report 2022-23

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr B Quayle, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s): All

Executive Director: J Mair, Director of Legal & Democratic

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Report Status: Fully Exempt

Brief Summary:

This annual report provides an update on the numbers, types and outcomes of complaints made against Children’s Services at Dorset Council, and also focuses on Children in Care.

Recommendation:

- a. That the Corporate Parenting Board will continue to monitor the complaints reporting process and ensure scrutiny is evidenced.
- b. That Officers ensure the Annual Complaints report submitted by the Complaints Team - Assurance complies with statutory and regulatory guidance.
- c. All staff associated with the voice of the child continue to be transparent and promote the Complaints Team as an independent eye, so learnings can be promoted.

Reason for Recommendation:

To have an awareness of the numbers and types of complaints and the organisational learning.

1. Report

1.1 Key messages for 2022-23 are:

- For context there have been 1838 complaints across the Directorates in 2022-23 which is a 31% increase year on year, and 166% increase overall since Dorset Council was formed. Of these only 747 have been considered through formal processes
- Children's Services saw an increase in Social Care complaints of 17% from 120 to 140 in 2022-23
- Non Social Care complaint contacts increased by 78% from 174 to 309. This was largely due to the national issue of children out of education and lack of provision. An issue that is still a theme in Dorset
- We received just 10 Complaints from Children in Care in 2022-23, an increase from the 8 received the previous year. Numbers of complaints are usually low from our Children in Care and many concerns are well handled in the service before the need for any escalation
- Of the complaints received for Children's Social Care in 2022-23 only 7% were considered fully justified by operational managers, with 14% considered partially justified

1.2 The Complaints Team, as an Assurance function, continue to make a difference in promoting a culture of learning from complaints despite challenges across the directorates and overall increase in complaints year on year. We are also pleased to report that we are able to support managers across the directorates in resolving complaints without undue process, where possible. This is also having a financial benefit with a reduction in Stage 2 complaints and independent investigators fees, continuing the good work of 2021-22.

2. Financial Implications

2.1 Dorset Council have paid £40,630 in LGSCO maladministration charges in 2022-23. This is slightly down from 2021-22 (£42,300) but still a steep rise from £6,750 2020-21 and just £1,800 in 2019-20. This increase is largely centred around SEND and periods where education was not provided. We also note the 1 Childrens Services Stage 2 investigation cost Dorset Council £46,304.60

2.2 In 2022-23 £4782 was spent on independent investigators for the more complex complaints cases in Children's Services. This compares to £5703.40 in 2021-22. The Complaints Team are very proud of our positive work with Locality Managers towards informal resolutions and this has had a tremendous impact on keeping these costs down. The early indications in Q1 2023-24 suggest a steep rise is likely.

2.3 Whilst reporting on the outgoing finance it is important to note that the Complaints Team have generated £7376 from schools by providing a complaints advice service.

2.4 There has not been a financial implication to any of the Children in Care complaints as none progressed to external investigation.

3. Environmental Implications

3.1 None

4. Well-being and Health Implications

4.1 The increase in complaints, coupled with associated vexatious behaviours, have had an impact on staff wellbeing and the team are regularly encouraged, through line management and other Dorset Council support, to be mindful of themselves and their colleagues in-keeping with our behaviours.

5. Other Implications

5.1 None

6. Risk Assessment

6.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: LOW

Residual Risk: LOW

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

7.1 None

8. Appendices

8.1 Complaints Annual Report 2022-23

9. Background Papers

9.1 None