

Adult Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Complaints Working Group

Notes from a meeting with Daniele Manktelow, 28 September 2005

Present: Cllr Bruce Allen
Cllr Brenda Jennings
Cllr Alan Oxley
Daniele Manktelow
Clare Capjon

Daniele provided a report for members of the working group on complaints to services.

The social care complaints process is a statutory process and there are national guidelines in handling complaints. There is a three-stage complaints process. The first stage is dealt with within the team, the second stage is a review by an independent person. Daniele has a pool of people with a social care background (former care managers) who are available to conduct second stage enquiries.

The final stage is a Review Panel with an independent chair, an independent person and a councillor, which considers the complaint. There is a suggestion that Review Panels will, from April 2006, be conducted by CSCI.

Within Buckinghamshire the percentage of complaints has remained steady over the past few years. Older People's services tend to receive the majority of complaints. This is to be expected as Older People's Services represents the majority of social care services. Where services are contracted out, the agency in question is expected to handle the complaint. Commissioning services monitor these services and complaints raised.

Communication issues are the basis for many of the complaints, and most complaints are dealt with successfully at Stage One (10-14% move on from this stage). Adult social care has set up an appeals process to replace stage one, where a decision by a care manager is being contested. In this process, a manager not directly involved with the case looks at the decision. The appeals process has been considered a successful improvement.

One area of the community which is under-represented proportionally in complaints received is the Asian community. Language is an issue, but there is a general reluctance to complain. Daniele makes use of the internal interpreters service, which falls within the same Policy & Performance service area. Work to raise the level of awareness of the complaints process within the Asian community will be undertaken. Adult social care is appointing an Inclusions Officer shortly, with whom Daniele hopes to work.

For services contracted out on behalf of adult social care, complaints are dealt with at the first stage by the agency concerned. If they are not resolved at this level, complaints are then passed on to the County Council service commissioners. A member commented on their concerns about the lack of knowledge around these services in the same way. Daniele explained that the commissioning service is responsible for monitoring locally agreed services and as part of this work will require feedback from agencies regarding complaints.

Proportionally, the learning disability service has slightly more complaints, but this can be explained by the way in which relatives are vocal about needs of their family. People with physical and/or sensory disabilities tend not to complain.

Compliments recorded vary between teams, with some being better than others. A member asked why there are more complaints registered in Aylesbury Vale than in Wycombe. Daniele has investigated this and reports that this difference can be attributed to the interpretation of the definition of complaints. Teams in Aylesbury Vale report issues as complaints, which teams in Wycombe and Chiltern and South Bucks might resolve locally and not necessarily then report.

When services make changes, for example in introducing Fairer Charging, there tends to be a rash of complaints which then settle as the change is embedded. Although there is always consultation regarding any change, miscommunication can result in some complaints.

Transitions to adults services has been a focus of a number of complaints from families with children with disabilities in the past. However, since the transitions worker is now in place, complaints have decreased. (Complaints go to children's services).

Local teams are good at responding to complaints, a fact which is borne out by the small number of complaints taken beyond the first stage. All complainants are informed about their rights to take things further when they issue a complaint.

Information from complaints to services is reported monthly and quarterly to a variety of management groups for learning points.

Following the introduction of Customer First, it is expected that Social Care complaints will continue to be dealt with in the same way.

Clare Capjon
Policy Officer
3 Oct 2005