

ADULT CARE AND WELL BEING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 5 DECEMBER 2023

COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS FOR ADULT SERVICES

Summary

1. The Adult Care and Well Being Overview and Scrutiny Panel will receive a report on compliments and complaints relating to Adult Social Care Services for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, which is an annual update provided to this Panel.
2. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care and the Strategic Director and Senior Officers from the Directorate for People and the Customer Services and Relations Manager have been invited to the meeting to respond to any questions the Panel may have.

Background

3. Worcestershire County Council (the Council) is required to produce an annual report of compliments, complaints and comments received concerning adult social care services, which is published on the Council's website and a copy of this year's report is attached at Appendix 1.
4. The information in this report includes the formal complaint and compliments process, data on the types of complaints, time taken to resolve and how many are upheld, those dealt with by the Directorate and those dealt with by the Consumer Relations Unit. It also includes an overview of numbers and themes.
5. Learning from complaints is vital to the continued development and delivery of Adult Social Care. When a complaint is received, the Consumer Relations Unit contacts the relevant Team Manager to see if the issue can be resolved informally. This is to reduce any delays in carrying out unnecessary investigations if a positive outcome for the person / complainant could be achieved within 24 hours.
6. If this is not possible and the complaint remains formal, then it is allocated to an appropriate manager for investigation. As part of the investigation the manager will firstly contact the complainant to confirm the key points of their complaint and any outcomes they are aiming to achieve. The manager will then review records and speak with staff involved to gather evidence and reach a conclusion as to whether the complaint should be upheld, and any actions required. This information is then shared with the Head of Service who reviews the information and any recommendations. Once approved, a letter detailing the decision and actions, along with the supporting rationale is shared with the complainant.

7. Where there is learning identified (for informal or formal complaints) for the individual worker, a specific service area or Adult Social Care as a wider organisation, an action plan is agreed with the Directorate/Consumer Relations Unit. This could be feedback to the individual worker, the topic being added to reflective practice sessions within teams, or a review of a policy or a pathway. The Council's new Quality Assurance Framework is in the final stages of development. This includes a new Quality Assurance Performance and Practice sub-group, which has been developed to ensure all learning opportunities are embraced.
8. Action Plans and themes, patterns and risks for all complaints are discussed to ensure that learning can be triangulated across all areas. The themes and learning identified for complaints are compared with those identified from other learning sources, such as Serious Incidents and Safeguarding Adult Reviews. Where consistent themes are identified, further actions are agreed and owned by a Lead Officer. The Principal Social Worker will also create Practice Briefings with updates on themes, learning and actions which are shared with all Adult Social Care staff via email and then discussed in Team Meetings to support the embedding of learning. To evidence that these actions have been completed, they are reviewed at the Quality Assurance Performance and Practice sub-group and the dates of action completed are noted on the log.
9. Where actions relate to training needs, the information is used to inform the Learning Needs Analysis, where the Directorate reviews existing training course content and develops new training offers. The Council has also adopted a Lessons Learnt model to identify a theme that has previously occurred to ensure the previous actions are reviewed to consider whether there is any new information or why this may have reoccurred, and a new action plan is then produced. Lessons Learnt are a fantastic way of engaging with workers and providers to reflect on current procedures and develop more effective ones for future use.
10. Provider Services also has a Quality Assurance System that involves analysing complaints and compliments to identify any themes and agree an action plan to address any areas for improvement and learning from good practice.

2022/23 Complaints

11. 6% of total number of complaints received in 2022/23 were escalated to the Ombudsman.
12. The number of complaints has increased in Adult Social Care from 233 in 2021/22 to 250 in 2022/23.
13. The primary areas of complaint are in assessment, support planning and resource allocation: this is the core business of Social Work and includes assessment, support planning and resource allocation. Within this area, the largest areas of complaint are around communication, decision making, and the standard of service provided.
14. There has been an increase in complaints regarding externally commissioned home care and services that fall under Mental Health and Financial Services.

15. Financial Assessments and Direct Payments is an area that has also seen an increase in complaint numbers. The financial assessment process is prioritised for people who have a Direct Payments, to promote timeliness of financial assessments.
16. There has been an increase in the number of complaints that relate to the standard of service received in the complainant's view. 65% of complaints received in 2022/23 (as compared to 58% in 2021/22) were related to standard of service which reflects an increase of 7%. Standard of Services includes service delivery, assessment of eligibility for services and timeliness in receiving services. Not all adults will be eligible for services from Adult Social Care following assessment. This can inevitably result in challenge and disagreement on how individual needs can be met. These are often emotive and challenging situations which can stimulate complaints where people do not agree with the practitioner's views or level of service received. A common issue is people's expectations on choice of care homes or delays incurred due to sourcing the right support, again leading to a complaint. Concerns may also be raised regarding a lack of empathy and compassion shown to service users, the standard of care received on domiciliary visits i.e., not staying for the full time allotted and the amount of attention given to residents.

Examples of Learning from Complaints

17. Examples of learning taken forward as a result of complaints received include external care providers being referred to the Council's Quality Assurance Team to review and address the concerns. A new provider was engaged, and a Communication Strategy for the changes was agreed. The Quality Assurance Team regularly devise Action Plans with providers to improve quality of care and then they monitor the improvements as a result.
18. As a result of a complaint received, Adult Services has developed a new appeals process to ensure that concerns regarding decisions made within Adult Social Care, follow a formal appeal process rather than come straight into the statutory complaint process. This will be published to provide clear advice and information on the Council's website as part of the Customer Journey workstream.
19. A recent large scale safeguarding concern led to a Lessons Learnt event, chaired by the Assistant Director. As a result, the Directorate is updating its Provider Concerns Process, considering the use of Organisational Abuse procedures and impact of such terminology, and ensuring there are clear pathways to follow. Engaging with the provider, staff, and stakeholders, led to immediate changes in ways of working, to positively change the experience of those involved in the next large scale safeguarding concern that occurred.

Purpose of the Meeting

20. The Panel is asked to:
 - Consider and comment on the information provided on compliments and complaints for adult services

- Agree any comments to highlight to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care
- Determine whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Adult Social Care Statutory Representations and Complaints Procedure
Annual report 2022-23

Contact Point

Emma James / Jo Weston, Overview and Scrutiny Officers, Tel: 01905 844964 / 844965
Email: scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance), the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Agenda and Minutes of the Adult Care and Well Being Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 28 September 2022 and 15 November 2021

- [Weblink to Agendas and minutes of the Adult Care and Well Being Overview and Scrutiny Panel](#)

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)