

2023 Tusla Casebook of Complaints and Feedback

Introduction

Welcome to the 2023 Tusla Casebook of Complaints, a resource designed to explore how Tusla responds to and learns from the concerns raised by those who use its services.

Tusla recognises that listening to feedback is essential for accountability, transparency, and service improvement. Complaints play a vital role in highlighting areas where services may not have met expectations, where mistakes have occurred, or where individuals feel they were not treated fairly. At the same time, complaints provide learning opportunities that can strengthen policies, improve practice, and build trust between Tusla and the people it serves.

Tusla's complaint management process is structured around its Tell Us policy, which sets out a clear pathway for service users to make complaints or provide feedback. The system includes Stage 1: Local Resolution, Stage 2: Formal Investigation and Stage 3 Review.

This casebook study explores how Tusla manages complaints in practice, examining real scenarios to illustrate how the process operates, where challenges arise, and how outcomes are reached under both statutory and policy frameworks. By analysing these cases, the study aims to shed light on both the strengths and limitations of Tusla's complaints system and consider how the Agency can continue to learn from service user feedback to deliver safe, effective, and compassionate services.

Complaints help identify where services have fallen short and where improvements are needed. They also highlight where service users feel unheard or unfairly treated. This casebook sets out examples of how Tusla responded to complaints and what learning emerged from them.

This casebook also includes examples of positive feedback from service users highlighting the dedication of Tusla staff to supporting children, families, and caregivers. This positive feedback highlights the value of Tusla's work and provides a balanced view of both the challenges and achievements within our services.

Ultimately, effective complaint management in Tusla is not about defending the Agency, but about learning from mistakes, recognising good practice, and using feedback as a driver of positive change. By valuing every voice, whether through complaints or positive feedback, Tusla can continue to improve the quality of its service.

Contents

Stage 1: Local Resolution	3
Case 1: Notice, Information and Participation in Placement Move	3
Case 2: Delay in Foster Care Assessment Process	4
Case 3: Missed Communication and Alternative Contact Arrangements.....	5
Case 4: Accessing Updates About Children	5
Case 5: Communication Following Garda Referral	6
Case 6: Access Arrangements and Transport Planning	7
Case 7: Young Person Feeling Unheard and Difficulties Contacting the Social Work Team	7
Case 8: Delay in Responding and Lack of Written Explanation	8
Stage 2: Complaint Resolution and Investigation	9
Case 1: Use of Section 5 and the Impact on a Child's Care History	9
Case 2: Consideration of Possible Neurodivergent Needs in Family Engagement	10
Case 3: Home Visit Following a Child Welfare Referral	12
Case 4: Inconsistent Appointment Communication and Participation in Safety Planning	13
Case 5: Communication of Relative Foster Care Assessment Decision	15
Case 6: Reunification Planning and Review of Supported Lodgings	16
Case 7: Support for a Neurodivergent Child Experiencing School Attendance Difficulties	18
Stage 3: Complaint Review	20
Case 1: Review of a Decision to Exclude a Complaint.....	20
Case 2: Review of Bursary Eligibility and Scheme Guidance	21
Positive Feedback.....	23

Stage 1: Local Resolution

Local Resolution is the first stage in the complaint management system in Tusla, in which the issues are addressed locally and directly with the service or staff involved in a timely manner. It aims to resolve issues early through listening, explanation, apology or practical action as it appropriate to the matters at hand. Matters that cannot be resolved locally, or require a formal determination, progress to Stage 2.

Case 1: Notice, Information and Participation in Placement Move

Resolution Type: Locally Resolved

Overview

A young person in residential care complained that they had not been given enough notice or information before moving from one residential placement to another. The young person said they were given three days' notice before the move and felt there had been limited opportunity to discuss the change, understand the reasons for it, or prepare for the move in advance.

Examination

The Social Work Team met with the young person to hear their concerns and better understand their experience of the placement move. During this discussion, Tusla acknowledged that the young person had received only three days' notice and that limited information had been available to them at the time. The discussion also considered how placement moves could be communicated more clearly and sensitively where advance planning is possible.

Resolution / Actions

The Principal Social Worker apologised to the young person during the meeting and followed this up with a written apology.

The young person identified a number of ways that placement moves could be improved in future, including:

- being given an opportunity to visit a new residential centre in advance of a move, where possible
- receiving written information explaining the reasons for the move
- having an opportunity to discuss the proposed move with their Social Worker in advance.

The Social Work Team agreed that this feedback would be shared with all relevant teams to support improved practice when planning and communicating future placement moves.

The young person was satisfied with the resolution, and the complaint was closed as locally resolved. The young person was also thanked for raising their concerns and was advised that they could meet again with their Social Worker if they had any further questions.

Organisational Learning

This complaint highlighted the importance of giving young people clear, accessible and timely information about decisions that affect them. It also reinforced the importance of involving young people in discussions about placement changes wherever possible. Learning from this complaint was shared locally to support better communication, preparation and participation when placement moves are considered.

Case 2: Delay in Foster Care Assessment Process

Resolution Type: Locally Resolved

Overview

A foster carer raised concerns about the length of time being taken to complete an assessment process. The foster carer was dissatisfied with the delay and the lack of clarity about when the process would conclude.

Examination

A meeting was held with the foster carer to hear their concerns, explain the process to date and discuss the reasons for the delay. The Principal Social Worker also reviewed the timeline of the assessment process, including the points at which external agencies were involved.

Tusla acknowledged that the delay had caused frustration and uncertainty for the foster carer. Factors affecting some of the delay experienced arose from outside Tusla's direct control, including reliance on external processes. However, the case also highlighted the importance of keeping foster carers informed where delays arise.

Resolution / Actions

The complaint was locally resolved through direct engagement with the foster carer and clarification of the process and current position. It was agreed that clearer communication should be provided where delays occur, including:

- keeping foster carers updated on progress where possible
- explaining any constraints affecting timescales
- managing expectations more clearly where Tusla is waiting on external input.

Organisational Learning

This complaint highlighted that delays, even where not fully within Tusla's control, can have a significant impact on service users and carers. It reinforced the importance of timely updates, realistic expectation-setting and clear communication where assessment processes are taking longer than expected.

Case 3: Missed Communication and Alternative Contact Arrangements

Resolution Type: Locally Resolved

Overview

A parent raised concerns about communication in relation to their child, including missed communication and difficulties obtaining information. The parent felt that communication had broken down and that they had not received the level of contact or clarity they expected.

Examination

The Social Work Team examined the circumstances surrounding the complaint and identified communication gaps. The Team Leader contacted the complainant, apologised for the communication difficulties and discussed the parent's concerns directly. This discussion clarified the circumstances and provided an opportunity to agree how communication could be improved going forward.

Resolution / Actions

To address the concerns raised, a communication plan was put in place, and alternative contact arrangements were provided to the complainant. This included identifying additional points of contact that could be used where an allocated worker was unavailable.

Organisational Learning

This complaint highlighted the importance of clear communication pathways and contingency arrangements where staff are unavailable. It also reinforced that prompt contact and practical communication planning can help restore confidence and prevent concerns from escalating.

Case 4: Accessing Updates About Children

Resolution Type: Locally Resolved

Overview

The complainant raised concerns that they were not receiving updates regarding their children who were receiving Tusla services and contacted their local Tusla office but was unable to speak to anyone. This caused frustration and added to the complainant's worry about whether their concerns were being heard and responded to.

Examination

A meeting was held with the complainant and the staff involved to discuss the concerns raised. The Social Work Team acknowledged that the complainant had had trouble accessing the service and that this had affected their confidence in communication with the team. The meeting provided an opportunity to clarify the concerns raised and to discuss how contact arrangements could be improved.

Resolution / Actions

The Social Work Team Leader apologised to the complainant for the communication difficulties and agreed direct contact arrangements to support more reliable access to the team in future. The complaint was locally resolved through engagement with the complainant, clearer contact arrangements and agreement on how future communication would be managed.

Organisational Learning

This complaint highlighted the importance of clear access routes and reliable communication. It reinforced the need to ensure that families know how to contact the service and who to contact if they are unable to reach the allocated worker.

Case 5: Communication Following Garda Referral

Resolution Type: Locally Resolved

Overview

The complainant raised concerns about a letter received from Tusla following a referral from An Garda Síochána. The complainant was upset that Tusla had become involved and raised concerns about the approach of the Tusla staff involved.

Examination

The staff involved met with the complainant to discuss the concerns raised and explain the basis for Tusla's involvement. During this discussion, the referral process was explained and Tusla's role in responding to child protection and welfare concerns. The complainant's upset and frustration were acknowledged, including the impact that Tusla's involvement had on them.

Resolution / Actions

The complainant was thanked for raising the concerns directly and the distress caused was acknowledged. It was explained that referrals received from An Garda Síochána are considered in line with child safeguarding procedures and that Tusla must assess and respond to such referrals.

The Social Worker apologised that the interaction had caused the complainant to feel undermined and clarified that it had not been their intention to cause stress or upset. Following the discussion, the complainant indicated that they had a better understanding of why Tusla had become involved and the complaint was resolved locally.

Organisational Learning

This complaint highlighted how early communication can shape a service user's experience of Tusla. It reinforced the importance of explaining service involvement clearly, responding sensitively where people are distressed by Tusla's contact, and ensuring that service users feel treated with respect throughout that process.

Case 6: Access Arrangements and Transport Planning

Resolution Type: Locally Resolved

Overview

The complainant raised concerns about access arrangements and transport planning in relation to time with their child. The complainant stated that no taxi was provided for an access visit and that they had to walk to the visit, which reduced the amount of time they were able to spend with their child.

Examination

The Team Leader reviewed the circumstances surrounding the access arrangements, including factors that had affected transport availability. A discussion was held with the complainant to understand the impact the issue had on them and to clarify the concerns raised.

Resolution / Actions

The complaint was resolved locally through discussion with the complainant and review of the transport arrangements in place. It was identified that local events and transport pressures should be considered more carefully when planning access visits in future.

Organisational Learning

This complaint highlighted that practical arrangements such as transport can have a direct impact on family time and service experience. It reinforced the importance of planning access visits with sufficient regard to local conditions and communicating any difficulties as early as possible.

Case 7: Young Person Feeling Unheard and Difficulties Contacting the Social Work Team

Resolution Type: Locally Resolved

Overview

A young person raised concerns that they did not feel listened to and were dissatisfied with communication from Tusla. The young person felt that both they and their parent were not being heard, and that it was difficult to contact their Social Work Team.

Examination

The Social Work Team Leader met with the young person to hear their concerns and discuss their experience of the service. During this engagement, the Team Leader acknowledged that the young person had not felt heard and that the relationship between the young person and the team was impacted.

Resolution / Actions

The Social Work Team Leader apologised to the young person. Contact details were shared and a communication plan was agreed to ensure the young person had a clear route for contact and follow-up.

Organisational Learning

This complaint highlighted the importance of relationship-based practice and the impact that communication difficulties can have on a young person's confidence in the service. It reinforced the need to respond promptly where a young person feels unheard and to take practical steps to restore trust and engagement.

Case 8: Delay in Responding and Lack of Written Explanation

Resolution Type: Locally Resolved

Overview

The complainant raised concerns about delays in receiving responses from Tusla and stated that they wanted a written explanation as to why their access visits were supervised. The complainant felt that the staff involved were not responding to them in a timely way.

Examination

The Principal Social Worker met with the complainant to discuss the complaint and review the communication history, and it was acknowledged that there had been times when the complainant had not received a response within the timeframe they expected.

Resolution / Actions

The complaint was locally resolved through direct discussion with the complainant and review of the concerns raised. It was agreed that response time expectations should be improved and that clearer communication would be provided going forward.

Organisational Learning

This complaint highlighted the importance of timely responses and clear communication where decisions affecting family access are causing concern. It reinforced the need to manage expectations around timescales and to ensure that service users receive explanations in a clear and timely way.

Stage 2: Complaint Resolution and Investigation

At Stage 2, a Complaints Officer clarifies the complaint issues and considers the available evidence. Where possible, concerns may be resolved informally with the complainant's agreement. Otherwise, the Complaints Officer completes a formal investigation, reaches findings on each issue and makes recommendations where appropriate.

Case 1: Use of Section 5 and the Impact on a Child's Care History

Resolution Type: Upheld

Overview

A foster carer raised concerns regarding the decision to accommodate a young person under Section 5 of the Child Care Act 1991 following the expiry of a voluntary care agreement.

The complainant believed that Section 5 had been used incorrectly and without sufficient consideration of the young person's circumstances and history. The complainant was also concerned about the potential effect of the decision on the young person's legal status, adoption application and future understanding of their care history.

Background

The young person had lived continuously with the same foster carer since infancy. Following difficulties securing a renewed voluntary care agreement, the Social Work Team had begun the process of seeking an Interim Care Order.

A decision was subsequently made not to proceed immediately with the court application and to use Section 5 of the Child Care Act 1991 instead (Section 5 relates to the provision of accommodation for homeless children). During the period in question, the young person remained living in their established foster placement.

Investigation / Examination

As part of the Stage 2 investigation, the Complaints Officer:

- met and communicated with the complainant
- reviewed the young person's case records and relevant correspondence
- consulted with the Social Worker, Team Leader and Principal Social Worker involved
- sought information regarding the related legal advice
- reviewed the Child Care Act 1991
- considered the national policy and guidance governing the use of Section 5
- reviewed guidance relating to voluntary care arrangements.

Findings

The investigation found that the decision was inconsistent with the relevant policy and guidance governing the use of Section 5.

The investigation identified a number of potential consequences arising from the incorrect recording of the young person's legal status, including implications for official documentation, the young person's care history and adoption process, and how their care experience may be understood in the future.

Both complaint issues were upheld.

Recommendations / Actions

The Complaints Officer recommended that:

- the relevant policy and guidance on the use of Section 5 be circulated to Social Work Teams and discussed at team meetings
- a clear standalone record be placed on the young person's file explaining that Section 5 had been used incorrectly, although the decision had been made with the intention of acting in the young person's best interests
- the young person's life-story work clearly record that the foster carer remained committed to them throughout the placement
- the Area Manager issue a written apology to the foster carer for the stress caused.

Organisational Learning

This complaint highlighted the importance of ensuring that statutory provisions are used only in circumstances for which they are intended. It reinforced the need for staff to understand the legal basis and practical implications of decisions affecting a child's care status. It also demonstrated how an incorrect legal classification can have wider consequences for official documentation, care history, identity, international travel and adoption planning.

The complaint further highlighted the importance of correcting inaccurate records and ensuring that children receive clear, sensitive and truthful explanations of their care experiences.

Case 2: Consideration of Possible Neurodivergent Needs in Family Engagement

Resolution Type: Not Upheld

Overview

The complainant raised concerns that their own and their children's possible neurodivergent needs had not been adequately considered during Tusla's involvement with the family. They felt that their circumstances and needs had not been fully understood and that this had influenced their interactions with the service.

Background

The complainant reported feeling under pressure in relation to aspects of planning and engagement with services. They expressed concern that their communication and sensory needs, and what they believed to be possible neurodivergent needs within the family, had not been sufficiently recognised or accommodated during interactions with Tusla.

They also raised concerns regarding Tusla's engagement with members of their extended family, practical supports they believed had been discussed, and whether information had been shared without their consent.

Investigation / Examination

As part of the Stage 2 investigation, the Complaints Officer:

- met with the complainant to discuss their concerns in detail
- clarified the specific complaint issues for investigation
- reviewed relevant case records and documentation
- met with staff involved and
- reviewed relevant policy and procedural guidance.

Findings

The investigation found that Tusla's engagement with the family and the use of family and support networks were consistent with the relevant practice approach. The records did not support the concerns raised by the complainant that they had been treated unfairly.

The available evidence did not establish that confidential complaint information had been shared with members of the complainant's extended family. While practical assistance had been discussed, the records did not demonstrate that all of the supports described by the complainant had been formally agreed or promised.

The Complaints Officer acknowledged that the complainant had experienced Tusla's involvement as distressing and felt that their needs had not always been understood. However, the Complaints Officer found no evidence that decisions affecting the family had been made contrary to fair and sound administrative practice. The complaint issues were therefore not upheld.

Recommendations / Actions

The Complaints Officer recommended that this complaint close, but that the Social Work Team take the complainant's feedback seriously and discuss disability and neurodiversity awareness with the team. A commitment was made to continue strengthening staff awareness of these matters within the team's casework.

Organisational Learning

This complaint highlighted the importance of recognising the diverse experiences and needs of service users. The investigation reinforced the value of listening carefully to how service users describe their needs and of clearly explaining the purpose of assessments, safety planning, family network involvement and any practical supports being considered.

It also encouraged reflection on how communication and engagement approaches can be adapted to support individuals and families who may experience difficulties processing information, managing stress or participating in service processes.

Case 3: Home Visit Following a Child Welfare Referral

Resolution Type: Not Upheld

Overview

The complainants questioned whether appropriate checks, consultation and decision-making had taken place before an unannounced home visit was undertaken by Tusla staff. The complainants also raised concerns about how the Tusla staff members conducted themselves during the visit, including their contact with the child while the parents were not at home.

Background

A child protection and welfare referral concerning the family was received by Tusla. The referral contained a number of serious concerns, but it was unclear from the information provided whether the concerns were current or historical. The complainants believed that the concerns had previously been considered by Tusla and that a review of the family's records should have established this before a home visit was undertaken.

Investigation / Examination

As part of the Stage 2 investigation, the Complaints Officer:

- reviewed the complaint and related correspondence
- examined the referral and the available case history
- reviewed the account of the home visit completed by one of the Duty Social Workers
- met with the second Duty Social Worker
- met with the Acting Team Leader involved in the decision-making process and
- considered the steps taken before and during the home visit.

Findings

The investigation found that appropriate consultation and consideration had taken place before the home visit and that the decision was consistent with Tusla's duty to respond to child protection and welfare concerns.

The investigation also considered the conduct of the Tusla staff members during the visit. The Complaints Officer acknowledged the distress described by the complainants but found that the Tusla staff members had acted within their professional responsibilities and had not acted contrary to fair and sound administrative practice.

Both complaint issues were therefore not upheld.

Recommendations / Actions

No recommendations were made, and no further action was considered necessary arising from the investigation.

Organisational Learning

This complaint reinforced the importance of recording the steps taken when an urgent decision is required, including:

- reviewing available case information
- consulting with a Team Leader
- seeking clarification from the referring organisation and
- attempting to contact parents before undertaking an unannounced visit, where circumstances permit.

It also highlighted the importance of explaining the purpose of a home visit clearly and sensitively, particularly where a young person answers the door and a parent is not present.

The case was subsequently considered by the Ombudsman for Children's Office. Following its review of the available records, the Office did not identify a basis to pursue the complaint further.

Case 4: Inconsistent Appointment Communication and Participation in Safety Planning

Resolution Type: Partially Upheld

Overview

The complainant raised concerns regarding the quality and consistency of communication from the Social Work Department, including difficulties contacting the allocated Social Worker, missed or unclear appointments and incorrect or incomplete appointment details.

The complainant also raised concerns that they had not been adequately involved in safety planning or informed about the work being undertaken with their child. They believed that supports discussed with the family, including family therapy, had not been provided.

Background

The complainant described a number of incidents where appointments had been incorrectly communicated or where arrangements had changed without adequate notification. They felt these experiences had negatively affected their relationship with the service and reduced their confidence in communication from the Social Work Department.

They also stated that they had not received a clear plan of work for the family and had not been invited to participate in safety planning or network meetings following their child's move to live with his father. They felt that this had left them isolated from decisions and discussions concerning their child.

Investigation / Examination

As part of the Stage 2 investigation, the Complaints Officer:

- met with the complainant to discuss their concerns
- clarified the specific complaint issues
- reviewed the child's case records and relevant correspondence
- examined appointment letters and communication records
- met with the allocated Social Worker and Team Leader
- reviewed the supports offered to the child and family and
- considered the trajectory plans, safety plans and relevant practice requirements.

Findings

The investigation found that the Social Worker's general communication was consistent with a reasonable standard of administrative practice. However, it identified that a clear written communication strategy would have assisted both the complainant and the staff involved.

The investigation also identified evidence of inconsistent appointment communication. Some appointment letters did not clearly state the venue, and arrangements made by other staff were not always communicated to the complainant. This aspect of the complaint was upheld.

The records demonstrated that a significant package of support had been offered to the child and family. This aspect of the complaint was not upheld.

The investigation found that trajectory plans and safety plans had been developed and provided to the complainant. However, the complainant had not been invited to contribute directly to their development. The Complaints Officer found that both parents should have been given an opportunity to contribute. The failure to involve the complainant in developing and reviewing the plans was inconsistent with the relevant practice requirements. This aspect of the complaint was upheld.

As some elements of the complaint were upheld and others were not upheld, the overall complaint was partially upheld.

Recommendations / Actions

The Complaints Officer recommended that:

- the Principal Social Worker and Team Leader review how communication between the service and the complainant had been managed
- a clear communication plan be developed for managing similar situations
- appointment letters clearly state the date, time and venue of all meetings
- appointment and communication practices be reviewed during staff supervision
- the Social Work Team Leader monitor the application of Signs of Safety practice through case-file audits
- a written apology be provided to the complainant in relation to the appointment communication and their exclusion from safety planning
- the complainant be offered an opportunity to meet with the Social Worker and Team Leader and
- an updated safety planning meeting be held, allowing both parents to contribute and setting out an agreed trajectory and arrangements for future network meetings.

Organisational Learning

This complaint highlighted the significant impact that communication and participation can have on a service user's experience and reinforced the importance of accurate and complete appointment correspondence and demonstrated how relatively small administrative errors can affect confidence in services.

It also highlighted that providing a person with a completed safety plan is not the same as involving them in its development.

Case 5: Communication of Relative Foster Care Assessment Decision

Resolution Type: Partially Upheld

Overview

The complainant raised concerns regarding a decision that they were not suitable to be assessed as a relative foster carer for their grandchild. They felt that the reasons underpinning the decision had not been adequately explained.

Background

The complainant wished to care for their grandchild, who had significant medical needs and was receiving care through Tusla services. Although a decision had been reached regarding their suitability to act as a relative foster carer, the complainant felt they had not received a clear explanation of the rationale for the decision.

Investigation / Examination

As part of the Stage 2 investigation, the Complaints Officer:

- met with the complainant to identify the complaint issues and clarify the information sought
- reviewed relevant case records and assessment documentation
- examined records relating to the decision-making process
- consulted with the Social Work Team Leader, and
- consulted with the Foster Care Team regarding the assessment process and rationale for the decision.

Findings

The Complaints Officer found that the decision not to proceed with assessing the complainant as a relative foster carer was supported by the available evidence and had been reached through an appropriate assessment process.

However, the investigation also found that the reasons for the decision had not been communicated as clearly as they should have been. While the decision-making process itself was sound, the explanation provided to the complainant fell below the expected standard. This issue was therefore partially upheld.

Recommendations / Actions

The Complaints Officer recommended:

- a clear written explanation be provided to the complainant outlining the reasons for the decision
- future decisions of a similar nature be accompanied by clear and accessible explanations and
- staff continue to consider how complex decisions are communicated to service users.

Organisational Learning

This complaint highlighted the distinction between making an appropriate decision and ensuring that decision is clearly understood by those affected. The investigation reinforced the importance of transparency, clarity and accessible communication when explaining decisions, particularly where those decisions may be distressing or disappointing for service users.

It also demonstrated that even where a decision is supported by evidence, service users are more likely to feel respected and engaged when the rationale is communicated openly and clearly.

Case 6: Reunification Planning and Review of Supported Lodgings

Resolution Type: Partially Upheld

Overview

The complainant expressed dissatisfaction regarding the level of support provided to them and their family during efforts to restore relationships and support family reunification. They also raised concerns regarding the management and review of supported-lodgings arrangements involving their children.

Background

The complaint arose during a period when the young people involved were staying in supported lodgings. The arrangements were also impacted by the restrictions and service-delivery challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The complainant believed that insufficient emphasis had been placed on repairing family relationships and supporting the young people to return home. They also felt excluded from aspects of planning and believed that the supported-lodgings provider had received greater support from the service than they had.

The complainant raised additional concerns regarding the suitability of the supported-lodgings provider and supports they believed had been requested but not provided.

Investigation / Examination

As part of the Stage 2 investigation, the Complaints Officer:

- met with the complainant to discuss and clarify the issues raised
- reviewed the relevant social work records and correspondence
- examined the support provided to the complainant and the young people
- reviewed the records relating to the supported-lodgings arrangements
- considered the available evidence of family meetings, placement reviews and reunification planning
- sought responses from the Social Work Team and Service Manager and
- reviewed the documentation signed by the complainant.

Findings

The Complaints Officer found that support had been offered to the complainant and their family.

The investigation found no evidence that the complainant's children had been placed in foster care by the service, other than one child being accommodated overnight following the use of Section 12 by An Garda Síochána. The later arrangements were supported-lodgings arrangements and did not involve the complainant signing away their parental rights.

The investigation also found no evidence that additional documents surrendering the complainant's rights had been signed.

The Complaints Officer could not establish that staff had supported the supported-lodgings provider over the complainant. Records showed that the complainant had regular telephone contact with the service. However, the delivery of support by telephone while staff had some in-person contact with the young people and provider contributed to the complainant feeling excluded and isolated.

The investigation found limited evidence of a structured system for reviewing the supported-lodgings arrangements. There was also limited evidence of clearly recorded goals, family-contact arrangements or planned work to support the young people to return home.

This element of the complaint was partially upheld.

The complainant's other concerns, including allegations concerning the supported-lodgings provider and alleged promises made by staff were not upheld on the available evidence.

As shortcomings were identified in the review, recording and reunification-planning arrangements, while the remaining complaint issues were not upheld, the overall complaint was partially upheld.

Recommendations / Actions

The Complaints Officer recommended that:

- a structured system be established for reviewing supported lodgings arrangements
- placements be clearly documented and tracked, including the care being provided, family-contact arrangements and planned work towards reunification
- the roles and responsibilities of all parties be clearly recorded
- clear and accurate records be maintained to demonstrate service-user engagement, agreed actions and progress
- parents presenting with significant emotional distress be appropriately signposted to their GP or other relevant supports
- consideration be given to clearly distinguishing the service's role in supporting the supported-lodgings provider from its role in supporting the parent and young people.

Organisational Learning

This complaint highlighted the importance of structured oversight of supported-lodgings arrangements. It reinforced the need for clearly recorded placement objectives, regular reviews, agreed family-contact arrangements and an identified plan for reunification or another appropriate conclusion to the placement.

The complaint also highlighted how service arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic affected the complainant's experience.

Case 7: Support for a Neurodivergent Child Experiencing School Attendance Difficulties

Resolution Type: Informally Resolved at Stage 2

Overview

The complainant raised concerns regarding the level of support provided by the Educational Welfare Service to their child, who had additional needs and was experiencing difficulties attending school.

Background

The complainant believed that the support available to their child had not adequately reflected the impact of their neurodivergent needs. They felt that greater assistance could have been provided to support their educational engagement and raised concerns about the response they received when seeking further support. Local resolution efforts were unable to resolve the concerns, and the matter progressed to Stage 2.

Investigation / Examination

As part of the Stage 2 process, the Complaints Officer:

- reviewed the complaint submitted by the complainant
- engaged directly with the complainant to understand their concerns and the impact on their child
- considered the issues raised regarding the support provided by the Educational Welfare Service and
- explored what action could appropriately address the complainant's concerns.

Resolution / Actions

Following engagement between the Complaints Officer and the complainant, it was agreed that training on working with neurodivergent children would be provided to Educational Welfare Officers.

The action was forwarded to the National Manager of the Educational Welfare Service.

The complainant agreed that this action would resolve their complaint. The complaint was therefore closed at Stage 2 with an outcome of informal resolution.

The training requirement was subsequently included in the Educational Welfare Service's Training Needs Analysis for 2024. Training was sourced for staff and scheduled to take place in April 2024, with neurodiversity identified as an area for continued staff development.

Organisational Learning

This complaint highlighted the importance of understanding how neurodivergence can affect school attendance, communication and educational engagement.

It reinforced the value of ensuring that Educational Welfare Officers have appropriate awareness and training to support neurodivergent children and young people and to understand the barriers they and their families may experience.

The complaint contributed to the identification of a service-wide training need and the delivery of further learning for Educational Welfare Service staff.

Stage 3: Complaint Review

Stage 3 does not reinvestigate the complaint in full; rather, it considers whether the Stage 2 process, reasoning and recommendations were appropriate and in line with the Tell Us policy.

Case 1: Review of a Decision to Exclude a Complaint under legislation

Outcome: Decision to exclude the complaint partially upheld

Overview

The complainant requested a Stage 3 review after a Complaints Officer determined that the complaint issues raised should not proceed to investigation. The complaint repeated a number of previously considered concerns but also raised issues about other staff and the handling of earlier complaints.

Stage 2 Determination

The Complaints Officer considered that the matters raised had already been examined through previous complaints or another statutory process and excluded the complaint from further investigation.

The complainant sought a review, maintaining that not all aspects of the new complaint had previously been considered.

Stage 3 Review

The Complaints Review Officer examined the Stage 2 determination, previous complaint history, relevant records and correspondence, and the applicable Tell Us provisions. They also considered whether the complaint contained any new issues that had not previously been examined. The review found that much of the complaint had appropriately been excluded because those matters had already been addressed.

However, the complaint also contained broader concerns about other members of the Tusla staff involved in previous complaints. These had not been sufficiently clarified before the exclusion decision was made. The reviewers considered these additional concerns during Stage 3 but did not identify evidence supporting referral for further complaint investigation.

Outcome

The decision to exclude the complaint was partially upheld. Exclusion was appropriate for matters already considered through previous complaints or other processes. However, the Stage 2 process should have more clearly identified and clarified any potentially new complaint issues before reaching that decision.

Organisational Learning

The case highlighted the need to:

- identify and clarify each complaint issue before applying an exclusion;
- distinguish clearly between complaint issues and child protection and welfare concerns;
- explain where concerns are being addressed through another statutory process; and
- exercise appropriate professional judgement where photographic or video material is offered as evidence.

Case 2: Review of Bursary Eligibility and Scheme Guidance

Outcome: No grounds identified for a full Stage 3 review; Stage 2 report reissued in the appropriate Tell Us format

Overview

The complainant sought a Stage 3 review following a Stage 2 investigation concerning their application to the Tusla Education and Training Bursary Scheme for Care Experienced Young People. They had lived in an informal

kinship-care arrangement and challenged both the decision that they were ineligible for the bursary and the clarity of the scheme guidance.

Stage 2 Investigation

The Complaints Officer considered two issues:

1. whether the decision that the complainant did not meet the bursary eligibility criteria was appropriate; and
2. whether the published guidance clearly explained those criteria.

The investigation found that applicants were required to have been formally in the care of Tusla for at least six months before their 18th birthday. As the complainant had not been in formal Tusla care, the eligibility decision was not upheld as a complaint issue.

However, the guidance did not clearly state that formal Tusla care was required. This issue was partially upheld, and it was recommended that the guidance be amended.

Stage 3 Review

The complainant remained dissatisfied and sought a review, arguing that their application should be reconsidered and continuing to challenge the distinction between formal and informal care.

Following a preliminary examination, the Complaints Review Officer found no grounds to proceed to a full Stage 3 review. The eligibility decision had been correctly made under the criteria applying to the scheme, while the lack of clarity in the published guidance had already been appropriately addressed through the Stage 2 recommendation.

The Review Officer did, however, identify that the Stage 2 outcome had been issued as a letter rather than in the appropriate Tell Us investigation report format. The report was therefore reissued, clearly setting out the complaint issues, findings, outcomes and recommendation.

Organisational Learning

The case highlighted the importance of:

- clearly defining eligibility criteria where access to a service or funding depends on a particular legal or administrative status
- distinguishing between whether a decision was correctly made and whether the criteria underlying that decision were clearly communicated and
- issuing Stage 2 outcomes in the appropriate Tell Us report format so that the basis for each finding and recommendation is clear.

Positive Feedback

Positive feedback helps Tusla identify and reinforce good practice. The following examples recognise staff whose care, communication and commitment made a positive difference to children, families, carers and other service users.

Positive feedback is seen as just as important as complaints because it helps Tusla learn what is working well. It highlights good practice, acknowledges the effort of staff, and can be shared within the Agency to encourage and reinforce effective service delivery.

A person who used the Adoption Tracing Service complimented the Social Worker who supported them in tracing their birth mother. They said the case was assigned and progressed quickly and that they felt well supported throughout the process.

They praised the Social Worker's experience, excellent communication and ability to gently guide those involved through difficult conversations. They described the empathy and care shown to everyone involved as outstanding and said the Social Worker had gone above and beyond to achieve the best possible outcome. The service user expressed their gratitude to the Social Worker, Tusla and Barnardos for the support and information provided throughout what had been a very positive and successful tracing experience.

A person who used the Adoption Tracing Service strongly commended the Social Worker who supported them through the tracing process.

They praised the Social Worker's expertise in balancing the rights and feelings of everyone involved, together with their professionalism, patience, guidance and thoughtfulness. They described the experience as a major success for all parties and said the positive outcome would not have been possible without the Social Worker's support.

A parent of a child in care expressed their thanks and gratitude to all those involved from Children in Care team and Aftercare. 'I can't thank you enough for everything you have done for my child and for treating him as a member of your family and not just work'.

A parent complimented the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support team for their guidance during a family programme event. "I want to thank you for what you do, you're amazing, you guided us really well, it's brilliant, I really felt respected and heard in this programme, you did not try to tell us that what we're doing is wrong or change what we are doing"

A parent of service user commended the Social Worker on their compassion, patience, and the kindness she showed their child. He stated that the Social Worker managed a difficult situation very well.

A child said that she really enjoyed working with her Social Care Leader and looked forward to seeing them every week and having somebody to talk to. She reported that she hoped we would not have to get involved again but knew who to talk to if she needed help.

A parent complimented an Educational Welfare Officer saying 'She went above and beyond to help my child. I cannot thank her enough for every aspect of the help she gave me and my child. She was kind, understanding and she never gave up fighting for my child. She did her job 100% but apart from that she gave emotional support to my family. I can't praise her enough and we will be forever grateful.'

A former child in care thanked Tusla and his social work team for saving him. He said he had “the best foster carers” and is now doing well but that if Tusla had not fought so hard for him he would have ended up in prison or worse. He said his Social Worker was “like a kind aunty to him”.

A parent complimented an Education Welfare Officer stating ‘I would like to thank our Educational Welfare Officer, my family was in crisis and when she intervened, she ensured he was treated fairly. She was a huge support to my family and is a credit to Tusla.’

A foster carer complimented their Social Worker, saying they were brilliant, and it was great to have their help and support.

Foster carers complimented the Social Worker, saying they “has achieved a huge amount in a few months and has really taken the time to get to know the children”.

A mother stated the Family Support Worker was amazing throughout and she felt very much listened to and that her family received huge support.