TUSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

Quality and Regulation Directorate

Anonymised Casebook on Learning from Complaints in 2021

INTRODUCTION

We are delighted to present to you the 2021 edition of Tusla's Anonymised Casebook on Learning from Feedback and Complaints, our second edition. We are a little late this year but still proud to continue taking steps towards improving our learning from complaints data and sharing a sample of this here.

This casebook is an important part of our commitment to expand and share the learning available from complaints and feedback. We have used anonymised examples that reflect the themes and issues encountered in daily service provision for Tusla, and which inform quality and service improvement.

At Tusla, we are committed to our values and behaviours of Trust, Respect, Kindness, and Empowerment, which are reflected in the way we manage feedback and complaints. We also aim to support our staff to learn from any mistakes and support a culture of resolution, not blame.

In this casebook, we present a sample of 13 complaints and 6 instances of feedback across a range of matters. We hope to increase awareness of the types of complaints and unsolicited feedback we receive about service delivery and provide insight into how complaints are managed and resolved by Tusla.

Tusla recognises and appreciates the contributions made by service users who take the time to raise complaints and provide feedback. We also recognise the work of staff who aim for local resolution of complaints.

Thank you to all the staff and service users for your time and contributions, which are vital to helping us improve our services.

Tell Us, Tusla's complaints and feedback policy has three stages:

(1) Stage 1: Local resolution

Local resolution is where those involved in the matter of concern try to come up with a solution that resolves the complaint to everyone's satisfaction.

(2) Stage 2: Examination by a complaint officer

A Complaint Officer will consider if an informal resolution to the complaint can be facilitated. If a Complaint Officer cannot facilitate a resolution the matter will be examined to establish what can be investigated under the complaint procedure. When a Complaint Officer decides to investigate a complaint, they have 30 working days to complete the investigation and produce a report.

(3)Stage 3: Complaint investigation review

Requests for review of a recommendation made in a complaint investigation report must be made within 30 working days of the complaint investigation report being issued to the complainant.

This stage may provide a resolution to the complaint, facilitated by the Complaint Review Officer, if that is possible, or will provide a review of the complaint recommendations made in the investigation report.

Tusla commits to completing a review of the recommendation(s) made in a complaint investigation report within 20 working days.

This casebook is laid out in three sections; section 1 describes complaints resolved at stage 1 by local resolution. Section 2 provides examples of complaints resolved at stage 2 following investigation, and Section 3 shares a snapshot of some positive feedback received by Tusla from service users.

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Local Resolution

Casebook 1
Category of Complaint: Poor Communication and Telephone Unavailability
Complaint Status: Locally Resolved

Background
A service user filed a complaint regarding insufficient communication and telephone unavailability. The service user was advised by Tusla via letter to contact their local Social Work Office to speak with a social worker. The service user called on several occasions, however, they were unable to leave a message, and the call was disconnected.

Response
Upon receipt of this complaint, the local Social Work Office tested the phone system and discovered a malfunction. The local manager contacted the service user, apologising for the communication difficulties, and expressed gratitude for bringing the issue to their attention. The manager provided the service user with their mobile number as an interim solution for contacting the appropriate team until the phone system was repaired.

Learning
The learning from this complaint highlights the importance of effective communication channels and the impact that telephone unavailability can have on service users. Staff must recognise the significance of timely and accessible communication in providing quality support to service users.

Casebook 2
Category of Complaint: Unfair treatment
Complaint Status: Locally resolved

Background
A parent submitted a complaint to the Social Work Department, expressing dissatisfaction with the handling of their children's case. The parent believed that Tusla closed the case despite their concerns.

Upon receipt of the complaint letter, Tusla contacted the parent to discuss their concerns. It was noted at that point that the case was not closed, however, this was not communicated effectively to the parent. The Social Work Department continued the information gathering exercise, and following review of this information, deemed it appropriate to advance the case for initial assessment.

Response
The parent received a letter, informing them that their referral concerns would be addressed during the initial assessment.

Learning
The learning from this complaint is that effective communication with parents or guardians

is crucial when dealing with sensitive cases involving their children. In this instance, the parent expressed dissatisfaction due to a misunderstanding about the case being closed.

Tusla recognised the issue and addressed it by contacting the parent to clarify the situation. Moving forward, ensuring clear and transparent communication with parents throughout the process can help avoid such misunderstandings.

Furthermore, the inclusion of information about Tell Us, Tusla's complaints process, proved beneficial in this specific case. By referring the parent to the Tusla website for information on how to make a complaint, it enabled them to appropriately advance their complaint and seek a local resolution.

Casebook 3
Category of Complaint: Poor communication
Complaint Status: Locally Resolved

Background
A parent complained that there had been communication errors and inadequate correspondence regarding decisions about their child being allocated a new social worker.

Response
A meeting was held between the principal social worker and the parents to discuss the child's care plan. The meeting addressed the complaint and developed a plan in conjunction with the parents to provide updates every week.

The young person's parents and social worker increased collaboration in the child's best interests. Parents now receive weekly updates, with their views, opinions, and feedback included for consideration in decision-making. This complaint highlights that face-to-face meetings can facilitate increased collaborative working, and local complaint resolution, fostering mutual understanding and positive outcomes. The parents expressed satisfaction and the complaint was closed.

Learning
Consideration should always be given to the views, opinions, and feedback of carers. Face-to-face meetings can promote mutual understanding and achieve favourable resolutions even in contentious situations.

Casebook 4
Category of Complaint: Poor communication
Complaint Status: Locally Resolved

Background
A young person submitted a complaint stating they had applied for a passport through their social worker but had not received it. They had gathered all the necessary signatures to apply for their passport and wanted to receive the passport before reaching the age of 18.

Response
The Tusla social worker engaged with the young person locally to resolve this issue. The Social Work Department committed to ensuring the young person received their passport at the soonest possible time, be that before, or after their 18th birthday, and offered to support them in any way that was required. While the relevant paperwork was submitted promptly to the passport office, there was a pause in processing passports due to level 5 Covid restrictions.

The Tusla staff member had submitted the passport application but didn't communicate to the young person that the passport office was closed. These were unforeseen circumstances due to the pandemic.

Learning
It is important to adapt and communicate with service users to keep them informed. Miscommunications and outside factors can lead to complaints, so it is important for staff to communicate any changes in the process to service users.

Casebook 5
Category of Complaint: Insufficient service
Complaint Status: Locally Resolved

Background. The service user raised concerns about the attitude and approach taken by their current social worker toward them and requested a new social worker.

Response
The principal social worker met with the service user and promptly followed up on the issues they raised and the request for a new social worker. The social worker involved was engaged to provide feedback on the matters raised by the service user via the principal social worker.

Following consideration of each concern and the response provided by the social worker, it was clear that to support the service user the most appropriate option to ensure a continued good relationship in this specific set of circumstances was to appoint a new social worker.

Learning
The learning from this complaint was that, even if Tusla feels a relationship that has broken down between a service user and a social worker can be repaired, the service user's perspective must be carefully considered. The option of appointing a new social worker was not the preferred solution by the manager, however, in this case, it was decided to appoint a new social worker to the service user to rebuild their confidence and trust in Tusla services.

Casebook 6
Category of Complaint: Unfair treatment
Complaint Status: Locally Resolved

Background
A child in care submitted a complaint that their social worker was preventing them from seeing family and friends due to the location of their interim placement, which was far from their home.

Response
The manager contacted the service user within 48 hours of receiving the complaint and noted that the social worker had concerns about the young person's safe travel to visit friends and family. The young person and manager agreed on a plan to ensure their safety while travelling. This plan was tested over a short period to ensure it was manageable and safe for the young person. A placement was subsequently identified closer to their family and friends, and they were satisfied that they had been heard.

Listening to and taking seriously the impact of the distant placement on the young person was crucial in repairing the relationship between the service user and their social worker. By agreeing on a safety plan for travelling before a placement closer to the young person's base was sourced allowed for an interim solution.

Learning
This complaint underscores the importance of always being open to listening to feedback from young people even where their wishes may raise concerns for practitioners. The learning here highlights the importance of the social work team's continual efforts to try and place young people near their home base where appropriate but when this is not possible, there is a need to ensure service users understand the rationale for decisions.

Casebook 7
Category of Complaint: Insufficient service
Complaint Status: Locally Resolved

Background
The Social Work Department received a letter from a young person in care who was in a foster placement that was about to end. With the help of an external support service, the young person wrote a letter to the area manager and new social worker expressing their concerns about the lack of support from Tusla, and how the uncertainty around their placement was impacting on them.

Response
The manager met with the young person to ensure the young person's views were heard and any concerns were addressed. The manager advised that they were attempting to source a new placement. They also obtained the young persons' views as to how they would

like to transition to a new placement and assured them that these would be taken into consideration when planning a placement move.

Learning
The learning from this case emphasises the importance of keeping young people involved and informed about their care, particularly at times of transition, even when available information is limited. It highlights the significance of ensuring that young people feel they have a voice and are actively included in the decision-making process.

Casebook 8
Category of Complaint: Unfair treatment
Complaint Status: Locally Resolved

Background
Foster carers submitted a complaint regarding the need to advocate for services for their foster children who had disabilities and needed associated services. They expressed that it should not be the responsibility of foster carers to navigate waiting lists and that Tusla should ensure availability of services like Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, and Psychology.

Response
A meeting took place between the foster carers and the relevant senior managers in Tusla.

The manager apologised for the complainant's experience and agreed to, in the first instance, provide support to the foster carers to access the services required. The manager also agreed to bring this to the attention of the area manager for consideration at a more senior level in Tusla. Additionally, the manager agreed to bring the case to the Tusla/HSE Joint Protocol forum, where the case could be highlighted to all relevant parties to provide appropriate support to foster carers.

Learning
A key learning point is the importance of sharing limitations and constraints related to service provision with foster carers. By establishing a shared understanding of the challenges involved in accessing services, foster carers can better navigate the system and manage their expectations. Transparent communication regarding limitations helps foster carers advocate effectively for the children under their care.

The foster carers' complaint highlighted the reliance of Tusla and its service users on services provided by other statutory agencies. As a result, it became evident that collaborative efforts and effective interagency communication are crucial for providing comprehensive support to foster carers.

Section 2
Stage 2 – Examination by a Complaints Officer

Casebook 9
Category of Complaint: Lack of Communication
Complaint Status: Partially upheld

Background
A parent of a child known to Tusla submitted a complaint citing concerns about (1) lack of communication by a particular service, (2) the lack of communication regarding a safety plan, (3) Tusla staff showed prejudice towards him and that he was treated differently due to being an unmarried father, and (4) lack of access to minutes of a meeting.

Response
Following the investigation, the Complaint Officer upheld two issues raised in the complaint, (1) lack of communication by a particular service, and (4) lack of access to minutes of a meeting. Issues (2) and (3) were not upheld following the investigation. The complaint officer also made the following recommendations:

- That Tusla reviews information that is sent to parents/guardians about safety planning, where a formal Signs of Safety Mapping Meeting has not taken place.
- That the service referred to in Issue (1) apologises directly to the complainant and ensures going forward that all relevant parties are notified about referrals to their team.

Learning
The learning from this complaint emphasises the importance of maintaining clear communication with parents, including sharing information in a timely manner to avoid causing distress. It was observed by the complaint officer that this complaint could possibly have been avoided if staff had communicated more transparently with the parent.

Casebook 10
Category of Complaint: Lack of Consultation
Complaint Status: Partially Upheld

Background
A parent of a child in care complained that they were not allowed to address the care planning meeting and that they were not treated with respect or given a significant role in planning for their child about access visits.

Response. A complaint investigation found that although the service user was given an opportunity to express their views, the chairperson of the care plan review had relied on erroneous or incomplete information about Tusla's guidance regarding access visits during

the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, the service user's concerns were not adequately addressed during the care plan review.

Outcome
The care plan review had a responsibility to ensure that the access plan met the children's needs in line with Tusla's guidance. The complaints investigation recommended that chairpersons for care plans and care plan reviews should ensure that they have read and understood all Tusla guidance relevant to their role and that it is implemented during the care plan/care plan review meetings.

Learning
The learning from this complaint emphasises the chairperson's responsibility in care plan reviews to have independent knowledge of relevant Tusla guidance and ensure that it is implemented within the scope of care planning.

Casebook 11
Category of Complaint: Behaviour and attitude
Complaint Status: Not Upheld

Background
A service user submitted a complaint to Tell Us expressing "very serious concerns about their child's welfare and wellbeing." The service user felt unheard by the social work team and believed that only the police were taking their child's welfare seriously.

Response
After an attempt at Stage 1 Local Resolution was unsuccessful, a complaints officer reviewed the social work files. The records evidenced phone calls between the service user and the social worker's manager, who clarified the role of social work in addressing the concerns. The social work manager also contacted relevant Tusla Offices regarding ongoing safety plans for the child's contact with family members. The complaints officer determined that there was evidence of clear communication and safety planning response from the social workers and that the management was appropriate.

Outcome
The complaints officer concluded that the response from the social workers and the social work manager was appropriate. A report into the investigation of the complaint was provided to the service user.

Learning
This case highlights the necessity of managing service user expectations and the role that up-to-date and verifiable records of engagement play in complaint resolution. It also highlights the need to continuously reflect on how we communicate with the service user to ensure clear, consistent, and comprehensive communications occur.

Casebook 12
Category of Complaint: Poor Communication
Complaint Status: Upheld

Background
A complaint was made by a hearing-impaired parent of a child who was in the care of Tusla, about not having sign language interpreters at meetings with Tusla Staff.

Response
After an attempt at local resolution was unsuccessful, this complaint was referred to a complaints officer. Following investigation, it was found that there was a shortage of interpreters available through Tusla's contracted interpretation services and when not booked at the earliest date, they may not be available. There had been no plan B if the interpreter cancelled due to illness or unavailability other than postponing the meeting or appointment until a later date.

Outcome
The complaint was upheld, and recommendations were made as follows:

- A meeting should be arranged with the service user, an interpreter, and services to establish the necessary communication aids required by the service user during meetings.
- A default agreement should be established for situations when an interpreter is not available. This agreement should be documented in the service user's family file to prevent administrative errors and to inform new staff about the minimum requirements for engaging with the service user. This standard should be followed for all similar cases in the future.
- Appropriate staff members should undergo relevant awareness training.

Learning
Tusla is reliant on outsourced interpreters who, due to their own increased service demands or unforeseen circumstances, may cancel appointments with Tusla. Tusla staff should keep this in mind while booking and consider backup plans when it comes to relying on third-party interpreters.

Casebook 13 - Lack of Consultation/Communication
Complaint Status: Not Upheld

Background
A service user recorded their dissatisfaction with the lack of consultation by the social worker, outlining 3 specific issues in her complaint:

1. Lack of consultation regarding an arrangement for their child to meet another professional.
2. Lack of contact from their social worker between specific time periods.
3. Lack of support from their social worker.

Response
Following an unsuccessful attempt at local resolution, the complaint was assigned to a complaints officer who investigated each issue outlined by the service user by reviewing case files and having discussions with both the service user and staff involved.

In relation to issue no. 1, the complaint officer found that the social worker had discussed the arrangement for the child to meet with another professional with the service user at a meeting on a specific date evidenced in the case file. The complaint file noted that the service user did not raise any concerns or objections during this meeting, and therefore this element of the complaint was not upheld.

In relation to issue no. 2, the complaint officer noted that the social worker had documented all interactions with the service user and their child and that there was evidence the social work department had made efforts to work with the service user and other agencies in relation to the child's education and had supported the service user in finding alternative options. The complaint officer did not uphold this element of the complaint.

In relation to issue no. 3 the complaint officer found that the social worker had been in contact regularly with the service user about the Child in Care Review and had provided information and support to the service user and therefore was not in a position to uphold this element of the complaint.

Outcome
The complaint officer concluded that there was no evidence to support the service user's complaints and that the social worker had acted appropriately throughout their involvement with the family. The complaint was therefore closed at Stage 2 of the complaint process. The complaint officer recommended that no further action was required.

Learning
This case highlights the importance of clear and effective communication between the social work department and service users. The social work department must keep service users informed about any arrangements made for their children and provide regular updates on their progress. This case also highlights the value of providing regular updates in writing to the service user.

Section 3 – Positive Feedback

Section 3 of this document contains positive feedback received by Tusla. The feedback highlights the commendable efforts and positive impact of Tusla's services on individuals and families. These testimonials shed light on the dedicated and caring approach taken by Tusla's professionals emphasising the significant support provided to vulnerable families and children.

Positive Feedback 1
Positive feedback was received from a parent whose children had been listed as active on the Child Protection Notification System, 6 months before the review. The father found the Initial Case Conference difficult. He stated that the social worker had given them advice and strategies for how to avoid conflict and arguments, opened communications with the children's schools, and supported them with housing. He noted that many people see TUSLA negatively but that his family has received so much positive support from TUSLA. – *Service User - Father*

Positive Feedback 2
Positive Feedback was received from a service user expressing their appreciation to their Tusla team for their support. This service user described gaining reassurance from their family support practitioner. They noted the practitioner not only fulfilled promises but went above and beyond to provide aid. This included the creation of image books for the individual's son and the sourcing of support for the entire family noting how it significantly improved their lives and noting the positive impact of Tusla's involvement had transformed their family's well-being, making them feel lucky to have such a dedicated team by their side.

Positive Feedback 3
Positive feedback was received from Foster Carers who highly commend the social worker responsible for the children in their care. They praised the social worker describing their caring, friendly, and collaborative approach. The feedback underscored how the social worker consistently went above and beyond to meet the children's needs and ensure a successful placement.

Positive Feedback 4
Positive feedback was received from a parent of a child in the care of Tulsa in relation to the provision of Words & Pictures work. They noted the thoughtful approach by the team made a challenging aspect of their life easier. Additionally, the parent acknowledges the team's efforts towards reunification, acknowledging the significant work involved in bringing families together.

Positive Feedback 5
Positive feedback was received from a care-experienced young person receiving aftercare services who expressed their appreciation for the support they had received. They particularly highlighted the provision of a new laptop for college work and the aftercare worker's support throughout their education.

Positive Feedback 6

Positive Feedback was received from a family who extended their gratitude to the SW-Child Protection team and a family support worker. The family described experiencing immense support during challenging times, stating that they hadn't seen their child this happy in a long time. They also noted they wished other families weren't affected by negative stereotypes of Tusla as this might prevent them from accessing helpful services.

CONCLUSION

Tusla hopes that you have found the 2021, example complaints and feedback, and their associated resolution and learning, informative. This casebook was brought to you by the Service Experience and Feedback team who can be contacted at tellus@tusla.ie. All policy and procedure documents associated with the management of complaints and feedback in Tusla can be found on the Tusla website www.tusla.ie.

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