

TÚSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

Complaints and Feedback in Tusla Casebook 2022

Introduction

We are pleased to present the 2022 edition of Tusla's Anonymised Casebook on Learning from Feedback and Complaints, which is now in its third edition. This document reflects Tusla's dedication to key lessons from service user feedback and using complaints as a critical tool for improving service delivery.

This casebook aims to share anonymised examples of complaints that reflect themes and issues arising in our daily service provision. Each case highlights not only how complaints are handled but also how key lessons from these cases inform improvements in the delivery of our services where possible. We believe that complaints provide a valuable opportunity for Tusla to evolve and better meet the needs of service users.

In 2022, a broad range of complaints were addressed across our services, ranging from communication breakdowns to concerns about foster care placements and perceived delays in service provision.

As part of our learning culture, Tusla endeavours to make real and effective improvements to our services using the complaints and feedback data. By analysing key lessons from complaints, Tusla can address immediate concerns while also informing decisions around longer term improvements.

At Tusla, we adhere to a three-stage complaints process, Local Resolution, Complaint Investigation (Stage 2), and Complaint Review (Stage 3). Each stage is designed to ensure that service users' concerns are addressed with fairness, transparency, and responsiveness.

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

We hope this document serves as a resource for both staff and service users, illustrating how feedback and complaints can lead to meaningful improvements. Our goal is to foster a learning culture where complaints are seen not as failures, but as opportunities for growth and better service delivery.

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Stage 1: Local Resolution

Each complaint in this section was resolved at Stage 1, Local Resolution, where Tusla staff worked directly with complainants to address their concerns without escalating to formal investigation.

Case 1: Dissatisfaction with access and care planning for children in care

Resolution Type: Locally Resolved

Overview: A parent expressed dissatisfaction with the pace and process of re-establishing access to their children in care. Their concerns included delays in therapeutic assessments that they believed had an impact on decision-making and clarity about the next steps in the care planning process. The parent felt unsupported in navigating the system and was unsure how their progress was being considered.

Tusla arranged a multidisciplinary meeting with all relevant stakeholders, including parents, therapeutic support teams and social workers, to discuss the re-establishment of access and other concerns. A detailed communication plan was developed to ensure regular updates for the complainant and clarity on timelines and required steps. The plan also addressed how the children's specific needs would be prioritised.

Outcome: The structured communication plan provided the parent with consistent updates and clear expectations, alleviating their concerns. This approach allowed the parent to feel more involved and informed about the care planning process. This complaint was concluded at local resolution Stage 1 with all parties satisfied with the outcome.

Tusla Learning: This complaint reinforces the importance of transparent communication, clear timelines, and a collaborative, child-centred approach when addressing access and care planning issues in complex cases.

Case 2: Concerns about response to safety and welfare reports

Resolution Type: Locally Resolved

Overview: A parent expressed concerns that Tusla had not adequately addressed safety concerns involving their child. The parent felt that their initial report was not considered fully, leading to increased anxiety about their child's well-being. The complainant also reported difficulty understanding Tusla's decision-making process in the matter.

Tusla scheduled a face-to-face meeting with the parent to discuss the findings. During this meeting, Tusla provided detailed explanations about the assessment process, decision-making criteria, and legal obligations, offering reassurance that the child's safety was the central priority. Additional resources were provided to support the parent in managing their concerns.

Outcome: The meeting resulted in a local resolution that satisfied the complainant's need for clarity and transparency. The parent reported feeling reassured about the steps taken to protect their child and appreciated the direct communication and resources offered.

Tusla Learning: This complaint highlighted the critical role of timely, clear, and empathetic communication when addressing safety concerns and managing expectations. The case

highlighted the importance of involving parents in discussions to promote understanding and collaboration.

Case 3: Concerns about foster care placement

Resolution Type: Locally Resolved

Overview: A parent expressed concerns about the suitability of a foster care placement, that their child's needs were not being met and felt that their well-being was being compromised. Specific issues raised included concerns about the provision of appropriate emotional and physical support for their child.

Tusla proceeded to engage with all parties including the foster carers, consulting with the child in question, and reviewing reports from social workers and other professionals involved in the child's care which provided no evidence to support the parents' concerns and found the child to be thriving in their current placement. Tusla communicated these findings to the parent and provided them with assurances about the ongoing oversight of the placement.

Outcome: The investigation reassured the parent that their concerns had been taken seriously and addressed comprehensively. The parent's trust in Tusla's processes was restored, and the complaint was resolved locally.

Tusla Learning: This complaint highlighted the importance of addressing concerns swiftly and transparently, making sure that parents feel heard and supported and reinforced the need for regular communication with all parties involved in foster care placements to build and maintain trust.

Case 4: Concerns about lack of response and treatment in care

Resolution Type: Locally Resolved

Overview: A young person raised concerns regarding their experience and response timelines during their time in foster care. They felt that their care needs were not considered fully, leading to feelings of frustration.

Tusla conducted multiple meetings with the young person to discuss their concerns and answer any questions they had. This meeting also allowed Tusla to clarify their care plans and related support structures. A plan was agreed which ensured the young person had access to the necessary information, resources, and supports.

Outcome: Tusla provided detailed explanations regarding the care plans and aftercare support available. The young person's concerns were addressed, and they expressed satisfaction with the clarity provided. This complaint was resolved at Local Resolution.

Tusla Learning: This complaint highlighted the importance of clear communication and responsiveness to address concerns raised by individuals in care and also emphasised the need for regular check-ins and follow-ups to ensure that young people feel heard and supported.

Case 5: Concerns about communication around placement

Resolution Type: Locally Resolved

Overview: A young person expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of involvement in decisions about their foster placement and the time it took to finalise arrangements.

Senior staff and social workers met with the young person to discuss their concerns and to provide information and clarity about the placement process. The team agreed to consult with the young person for any future changes and to ensure timely updates were provided.

Outcome: The young person felt more included in decision-making, and the complaint was locally resolved. Tusla emphasised the importance of timely communication and youth involvement as appropriate.

Tusla Learning: This complaint reinforced the importance of involving young people in discussions about their care and making sure timely, transparent decision-making processes.

Case 6: Concerns about insufficient service

Resolution Type: Locally Resolved

Overview: A foster carer raised concerns about the perceived lack of support from Tusla in managing their foster placement, citing inadequate communication and resources.

Tusla arranged meetings with the foster carer to address their concerns and established a plan for better support services, including improved communication channels and participation in planning meetings.

Outcome: The foster carer reported satisfaction with the actions taken to address their concerns and the improved level of support provided and was happy to close the complaint as locally resolved.

Tusla Learning: This complaint reinforced the importance of clear, open communication with foster carers and timely responses to their concerns to build trust and confidence in Tusla's processes.

Stage 2 – Complaint Investigation

Complaints that were not resolved through local resolution are escalated to Stage 2 , Referral to a Complaints Officer for either informal resolution, or formal investigation.

Case 1: Lack of clarity around supports and guidance

Resolution Type: Upheld

Overview: A family member, acting as the primary caregiver under a private family agreement, raised concerns about the perceived lack of clarity and support from Tusla regarding their role. They reported feeling unprepared to handle the children's needs and were dissatisfied with the absence of formal guidelines or financial assistance.

This complaint went to Stage 2, formal investigation because resolution could not be reached locally or informally at Stage 2. The Complaints Officer conducted a thorough investigation, reviewing the family's case files and interviewing the complainant and involved social workers.

The Complaints Officer found, based on evidence gathered during investigation that the family may not have received sufficient information regarding the implications of their caregiving arrangement, and based on this finding, the Complaints officer recommended that Tusla develop new guidelines for informal family care settings to better clarify roles, responsibilities, and available support.

Outcome: Better implementation of the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for relative foster care placements addressed the complainant's concerns and provided a framework for future cases. Training sessions were also introduced for social workers to ensure consistent communication with caregivers.

Tusla Learning: This complaint highlighted the necessity of clear communication and robust support structures for informal family caregivers. The case highlighted the importance of proactive engagement with families to avoid confusion and ensure consistent practices across regions.

Case 2: Concerns about communication/decision making/parental consent

Resolution Type: Partially Upheld

Overview: A parent raised multiple concerns regarding Tusla's communication practices, alleging that decisions affecting their child were made without adequate parental consent and that records were improperly managed.

The assigned Complaints Officer conducted a comprehensive investigation of the complaint, which included interviews with the complainants, the staff and also a review of all relevant documentation.

The Complaints Officer found that there was no evidence to support the complaint and therefore issued a finding of 'not upheld.' However, the Complaints Officer did identify areas for improvement in documenting consent and sharing information with parents which formed part of the recommendations.

Outcome: Tusla acknowledged and implemented the recommendations made by the Complaints Officer, i.e. new processes to ensure parental consent is clearly documented and that parents are informed about key decisions affecting their children. The complainant was provided with an assurance that the recommendations were accepted and being actioned.

Tusla Learning: This complaint highlighted the importance of accurate record-keeping and proactive communication with parent reinforcing the need for clear policies on obtaining and documenting consent in child protection cases.

Case 3: Lack of communication and timely responses

Resolution Type: Upheld

Overview: The complainant expressed frustration over Tusla's lack of timely responses to their inquiries and concerns, which they believed caused delays in addressing important issues related to their child's care.

Tusla conducted a Stage 2 investigation which found evidence of communication gaps in the case management process. The Complaints officer recommended that staff be reminded of the importance of timely responses, measures be implemented to improve the flow of communication between teams and service users, new procedures be considered to ensure prompt responses to inquiries, including regular check-ins and updates on case progress, and that Tusla issue a formal apology to the complainant for these identified gaps in communication.

Outcome: all recommendations were accepted by both parties and actioned.

Tusla Learning: This complaint reinforced the critical role of effective communication in maintaining trust and transparency and emphasised the need for accountability and the importance of promptly addressing service user concerns.

Case 4: Assessment of Need Concerns

Resolution Type: Partially Upheld

Overview: A foster carer raised concerns about the assessment process for a child in their care, alleging that critical needs were overlooked, and decisions were delayed.

The assigned Complaints Officer conducted a detailed investigation of the concerns raised including the assessment process and consultations with professionals involved in the child's case. While most of the assessment was found to be appropriate, some concerns raised showed evidence of requiring improvement, these concerns were upheld based on the evidence gathered by the Complaints Officer during investigation.

The Complaints Officer recommended that Tusla issue an apology to the complainant for the upheld concerns. Additionally, it was suggested that Tusla consider developing procedures to ensure timely responses to inquiries, including regular check-ins and updates on case progress. The officer also recommended that Tusla explore the possibility of providing additional training to staff to enhance their understanding of specific needs assessments.

Outcome: The foster carer received an apology for the identified shortcomings, and a revised plan was implemented to address the child's specific needs. This improved the overall experience for the foster carer and the child.

Tusla Learning: This complaint highlighted the importance of thorough and timely assessments in meeting the needs of children in care. Reinforced the value of ongoing training for staff to maintain high standards of practice.

Section 3: Complaint Review

When a complainant is not satisfied with the recommendations made by the Complaints Officer at Stage 2, they can request these recommendations be reviewed at Stage 3 by a Complaints Review Officer.

Case 1: Information handling and communication.

Resolution Type: Stage 2 Recommendations Upheld at Stage 3

Overview: The complainant raised multiple concerns, including unannounced visits, inadequate notice for meetings, improper sharing of contact information, and lack of structured communication during meetings.

Local resolution was unsuccessful, and the complaint was escalated to Stage 2 and assigned a Complaints Officer. The Complaints Officer investigated, resulting in an overall finding of partially upheld. Recommendations were made which focused on development of clear guidelines for handling consent for sharing information, structured meetings, staff awareness of protocols for handling client information.

However, the complainant was not satisfied with this outcome and requested that the recommendations be reviewed by a Complaints Review Officer.

Outcome: The review was assigned to a Complaint Review Officer who reviewed the recommendations made by the Stage 2 Complaints Officer and upheld the original recommendations.

Tusla Learning: The recommendation at Stage 2 and upheld at Stage 3 focused on the importance of making sure policies are updated to support consistent practices in information sharing and meeting management, emphasising informed consent and structured communication

Positive Feedback 2022

While complaints are a valuable source of learning, positive feedback from service users also provides important insights into what works well within Tusla's services. This section includes examples of positive feedback showing the impact that Tusla staff have had on children, families, and caregivers

1.

Positive Feedback from Foster Carer in relation to a Fostering Link Worker. *'This is something I've been meaning to do for a few weeks and only getting around to it now. ... It has been a very difficult time for us as a family as well as for child in care. The support I have received from Fostering Link Worker throughout the past few years has been life saving for me. I don't know if I'd have got through it without her. I feel very lucky to have her as my link worker. I just really felt that your managers should know the level of support Fostering Link Worker offered me. I don't even think this email explains how I feel but it's a start and something I feel I needed to do.'*

2.

A parent thanked her social worker stating that *"my life and life of the children has improved"* and she felt *"listened to, heard, respected and supported to leave a domestic violence situation."* She thanked her social worker for her help and support and that she will forever be grateful.

3.

Positive feedback received from a from Foster Carer who praised the Social Worker of the children in their care, *"She was understanding of us, she listened to us and heard us out, she met us at our level, she was empathetic, she was really supportive and really on top of things and didn't leave anything fall, anything we saw, she saw and she acknowledged it, she was on the ball, she responds to everything and was fully there behind us'.*

4.

A parent commented on her son's outreach worker, *"My sons outreach worker was amazing and worked well with my son. She was very kind and engaging with him, they had a great connection. This has really helped my son to deal with his sister's diagnosis of autism and has gained valuable skills to deal with her behaviours."*

5.

A previous child in care contacted his local service to let them know how thankful he is for Tusla, and he knows that the support provided by his team saved him from an unsafe environment. He stated that he knows that if his Tusla team didn't fight for him so hard he would have ended up in prison, but instead he is doing well.

6.

A child thanked their social worker for always being there for them, for being a mother figure and always believing in them. She stated her social worker *"always stuck up for her, understood her and helped her through the tough times."*