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**Hints and Tips for Responding to a Complaint at Stage 1**

**BCP Council Children’s Services**

**Format of the response**

This letter is written after you have looked into the complaints raised and is your response letter to the complainant. This should be written as a letter and not as a formal report, although the use of numbering or bullet points can sometimes make this letter easier to read.

It is expected that complainants are contacted directly by the manager and an offer to meet the complainant is made. This meeting can either be held after they have received a response letter or before and using the letter as written confirmation of the discussions held. Restorative practice is key in ensuring that complaints are resolved at this stage.

Please make sure that any translation/diversity needs have been addressed.

**Introduction**

* Who you are and where you sit within the organisation, in relation to the issues.
* Where the complaint is in the complaints process i.e. stage 1 (explain in easy to understand terms).

**What you have done**

* What actions you have taken to look into the issues e.g. looked at records, spoken to staff, considered policies/procedures. This should be written in general terms, it is not necessary to detail the documents or name the staff in this letter.

**Your conclusions**

* Whether or not you feel the issues raised are valid and why. If there are several complaints, it will be easier to number these and respond separately to each following the acknowledgment letter format. If only 1 or 2 issues, make it plain which issue you are referring to.
* Any proposals for change having considered the issues e.g. changes to plans, training, procedures, reminders to staff etc.
* Any redress? I.e. putting the person back to the position they were in prior to the issues that have been complained about. Think flexibly about recompense, time and trouble, distress etc.
* Consider whether an apology is appropriate. This need not be because an issue is valid, it could be for any distress or confusion caused. An apology can go a long way to making the person feel that they have been taken seriously and listened to.
* Thank the person for taking the time and trouble to bring these matters to your attention.

**Ending**

This standard paragraph should be included in every stage 1 response letter. It can be adapted to meet the needs of individuals or to make it more personable depending on your relationship with the complainant. But it must include:

* Your contact telephone number
* How the complainant can progress their complaint
* Complaints Manager contact details
* Complaints leaflet (or refer to one given earlier)

The standard paragraph is:

***Thank you for raising your concerns with me, and I hope that you are satisfied that we have looked into them thoroughly. Please do contact me if you wish to discuss anything further. I can be contacted on (give your telephone number).***

***However, if you are not satisfied with my response and you wish to have your complaints investigated at the next stage of the complaints process, please contact either myself, or the complaints team. The complaints team can be contacted by telephone on 01202 118484, by e-mail on CSComments@bcpcouncil.gov.uk or by post at Children’s Quality and Commissioning Complaints, BCP Council NBLO, FREEPOST (RTKS-LEBR-YTAR) Bournemouth BH2 6DY.***

***We are also eager to learn from you about your experiences of making a complaint. This will help us improve this service for people who want to complain in the future. If you want to give us your views, please use the contact details above to let us know.***

It is important to think carefully about the language used in these letters. They need to be jargon-free and understandable. The tone needs to be approachable, without being over-friendly and above all with no aggressive / defensive undertones.

This is to be used for general guidance when you are responding to a complaint raised at Stage 1 of the complaint’s procedure. Obviously, each will be different depending on its nature and your relationship with the person complaining. All complaints are individual, so please adapt this guide to meet the needs of your complainants and their particular issues. Hopefully this will give a few hints and tips to consider that will make this difficult letter easier to complete.

**Please remember to send your response to the Complaints Team for quality assuring before it is sent to the complainant. You will therefore need to factor this into your timescales for response.**

**Use of Language (or what not to say!!)**

The Plain language website is a really good resource. Below are a few examples but there are many more on the website. You may find the Plain Language Guidelines section particularly helpful.

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| SOFTENING **And this is ‘softening’, not ‘changing’ the message!**  **‘The reality is that when we start pushing, people push back. The more we argue, the more they are forced into proving they are right’** *Shanbrome Mediation and Dispute Resolution* | | |
| Avoid | Replace with | |
| Your complaint is unfounded  I do not accept  I do not uphold your complaint | I was unable to find any evidence to support… | |
| I don’t agree with you  You are wrong / I disagree | Whilst I appreciate you might feel….*or*  I can understand that from your point of view it may seem as… However…. | |
| You refused | I am sorry that you were unable to accept the suggestion of…. | |
| You slammed the phone down | Unfortunately you ended the call before…. | |
| But you need to realise that | I hope you appreciate that…. | |
| All sentences that contain ‘you’ or ‘your’ need to be considered carefully as they can be seen as confrontational. **But** good practice would be to make the response personalised, so well thought-out use is recommended | | |
| SIMPLER WORDS / PHRASESMany alternatives to other words can be found on the plain language website, *‘****In making your word choices, pick the familiar or frequently used word over the unusual or obscure.’*** plainlanguage.gov  [www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/wordsuggestions/simplewords.cfm](http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/wordsuggestions/simplewords.cfm). | | |
| **Avoid** | | **Replace with** |
| Accordingly | | So, therefore |
| Acknowledge | | Thank you for |
| Amend | | Change |
| Ascertain | | Find out |
| Assist, assistance | | Aid, help |
| Commence, initiate | | Start, begin |
| Concerning | | About |
| Discontinue, terminate | | End, stop, cancel |
| Enable | | Allow / help |
| Ensure | | Make sure |
| Facilitate | | Help, make possible |
| Frequently | | Often |
| Implement | | Carry out, start |
| In excess of | | Over |
| In order that | | For, so |
| In order to maximise our limited budget | | To make best use of our money…. |
| In respect of, pertaining to | | About |
| In the event of | | If |
| Persons | | People |
| Refining the process | | Look at how we can improve….. |
| Requested | | Asked |
| Should you not be satisfied with my response | | If you are not satisfied with….. |
| Undertake | | Agree, promise, do |
| Utilise | | Use |