

23 November 2021

Subject: Child social services - child abuse cases

- 1. What is the burden of proof in child abuse cases? are there any specific guidelines that need to be followed or is this worked on probability of the reporters beliefs?**

Within the criminal courts the burden of proof for prosecution is beyond reasonable doubt. Within the Family Courts the burden of proof is the balance of probabilities.

- 2. Do child social services follow the same guidelines or process when investigating child abuse when the child is in the care of the local authority as it does when a child is still living with their parent/s?**

Yes

- 3. How many complaints have been raised each year since 2010 in regards to Cafcass or other child experts such as psychologists, psychiatrists? This can be either calendar or financial year, whichever you use for statistics.**

Please be advised that we do not centrally collate complaints made in regards other individual's / organisations.

- 4. Do child social services do background checks on the experts they use in cases such as criminal convictions, credentials etc.**

Yes an experts Curriculum Vitae will be considered prior to commissioning an assessment.

- 5. Does the family court use the same judge throughout cases in family court or can the judge change during cases? Are there any statistics on this for each year since 2010 in either calendar or financial period?**

The Trust is unable to respond to this question and as this relates to the Courts operational matters.

- 6. Are there any statistics for non return of children by non-residential parent to residential parent for each year since 2010 by either calendar or financial year? if so, are these statistics separated by male / female parent not returning child from contact?**

The Belfast Health and Social Trust Children's Community Services do not electronically collate this information. To provide this statistical return would require a manual review of case files which would exceed the time limit afforded to this FOI.

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- 7. Does the gender of the parent making a custody application have any bearing on the outcome of the custody dispute? Is there any statistics or evidence to back this up? Again since 2010 by either calendar or financial year.**

No, each case is assessed in its own right and a recommendation made to the court based on what is considered to be in the best interests of the child. The Belfast Health and Social Trust Children's Community Services do not electronically collate this information. To provide this statistical return would require a manual review of case files would exceed the time limit afforded to this FOI.

- 8. Does the distance or interim decision in custody disputes affect the outcome of the case? Again if there are any statistics on this please use statistics since 2010 per calendar or financial year.**

No, geographical distance or interim court directions / interim court orders will not influence Children's Community Services final recommendation to the Court in relation to Residence / Contact matters. The Belfast Health and Social Trust Children's Community Services do not electronically collate this information. To provide this statistical return would require a manual review of case files would exceed the time limit afforded to this FOI.

- 9. How many allegations made to child social services are upheld without a full investigation or professional proof? How many are immediately investigated. Any statistics from 2010 by calendar or financial year are appreciated.**

All child protection referrals to the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Children's Community Services are allocated to a social worker for investigation within 24hrs during which the child will be seen and spoken too. The Trust is required to report on this monthly to the Health and Social Care Board. For each month for the financial year 2010/21 the Trust has returned 100% compliance against this procedural requirement.

- 10. How often, if at all do child social services close a case without investigating? Statistics if available since 2010 by calendar or financial year.**

Please refer to response to question 9.

- 11. At what age should an adult explain death to a child and under what circumstances would this be deemed appropriate? Any reports of evidence of this would be lovely.**

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This will be child specific and dependent upon the child's age and level of development. The Belfast Health and Social Trust Children's Community Services do not electronically collate this information. To provide this statistical return would require a manual review of case files would exceed the time limit afforded to this FOI.

12. If a male has a pattern of behaviour of becoming involved with single mum's with children or moving in with a female with children within 3 months of first meeting her would child social services regard this as a risk factor? if so, how and are there any reports or documents to back this up?

Within the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, if a case is referred to Children's Community Services where the concern relates risk of harm to a child, this will be immediately investigated by social services as per response to question 9.

- ❖ Where responses have indicated this would require a manual interrogation of data, this would exceed the costs limit specified in the FOI act.

We estimate that compliance with these elements of the request for information would exceed the appropriate costs limit. Under Section 12 of the Freedom of Information 2000, the limit has been specified as £450 and represents the estimated cost of one or more persons spending 18 hours in determining whether we hold the information, locating, retrieving and extracting this information.