



MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL

Annual Complaints Report

2014/15

Children and Families (Children's)

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1. Introduction

The Children Act 1989 and NHS and the Community Care Act 1990 require all Local Authorities with social services responsibilities in England and Wales to have a complaints procedure for people dealing with Social Care Services. *Getting the Best from Complaints* provides guidance for local authorities on implementing the Children Act 1989. The regulations require three internal stages to the complaints procedure: Stage 1 - Local Resolution, Stage 2 - Investigation and Stage 3 - Review Panel.

Part of the statutory requirement is the production of an annual report on complaints, which is available to members of the public, our staff, and our elected Councillors. This report contains information on social care complaints received about Children's Services in the financial year 2014/15.

Complaints which contain an element of social care fall under the statutory Children's Social Care guidelines, however, we also have responsibility for dealing other complaints and political enquiries which relate to customers who may be dissatisfied with services which are not related to social care. These non social care complaints will follow the Council's three staged complaints process. We have included in this report some information relating to the non social care complaints and political enquiries that we have dealt with.

2. What is a complaint?

A complaint is defined as a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction about the service provided by the Council.

We aim to acknowledge complaints within three working days and to send a full written response within 10 working days or 20 working days if the complaint is complex and relates to social care. In this case we will advise the complainant of the delay.

If the complainant requires clarity of any of the points in their complaint response, following investigation, they can return to the Council for further information.

We realise that young people may want to also complain, being important users of our services. All young people recording complaints against Children's Services are advised of the Children's Rights Advocacy Service, who works closely with Corporate Complaints Team to progress complaints.

There is no power for the complaints process to appeal or overturn a decision made by the courts.

3. The complaints we received and how we responded.

3.1 How well we responded

Summary

	Target response time	Complaints responded to	Responded within deadline
Stage 1 social care complaints	20 working days	190	51%
Stage 2 social care complaints	65 working days	4	100%
Stage 3 social care complaints	50 working days	0	N/A
Stage 1 corporate complaints	10 working days	42	67%
Stage 2 corporate complaints	10 working days	2	100%
Stage 3 corporate complaints	10 working days	0	N/A
Ombudsman social care	28 calendar days	4	25%
Ombudsman non social care	28 calendar days	7	100%

Stage 1

A total of 190 social care complaints were responded to in 2014/15. This is a 12% decrease on the previous year (216 in 2013/14), and our 20 day response times have decreased by 7% from 58% in 2013/14.

Of the 190 social care complaints we handled at stage 1, 66 (35%) of these were upheld, or partially upheld, a 4% increase on the 31% of 2013/14.

A total of 42 non social care complaints were responded to in 2014/15. This is a 60% decrease on the previous year (104 in 2013/14), and our 10 day response times have increased by 11% from 56% in 2013/14.

Of the 42 non social care complaints we handled at stage 1, 16 (38%) of these were upheld, or partially upheld, a 7% increase on the 31% of 2013/14.

Where we uphold a complaint we acknowledge that the complaint is justified and provide an apology, and also make recommendations for service improvement. Customer feedback is important to us and we are committed to learning from complaints that have been upheld.

Stage 2

There were four social care complaints responded to at Stage 2. Of these all four were upheld or partially upheld.

The number of social care Stage 2 investigations completed within the permitted 65 working days increased from 80% in 2013/14 to 100% in 2014/15, although none were completed within our initial target of 25 working days.

There were two non social care complaints responded to at Stage 2. Of these both were upheld or partially upheld and were completed within 10 working days.

None of the Stage 2 complaints responded to during 2014/15 progressed to Stage 3, which replicates the performance of the previous year and suggests that our customers are happier with the way we have resolved their complaints at earlier stages.

Ombudsman

The Council are given a timescale of 28 calendar days to provide a response to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). Responses are often complex, lengthy and require a large volume of appendices to be collated, catalogued and returned to the LGO.

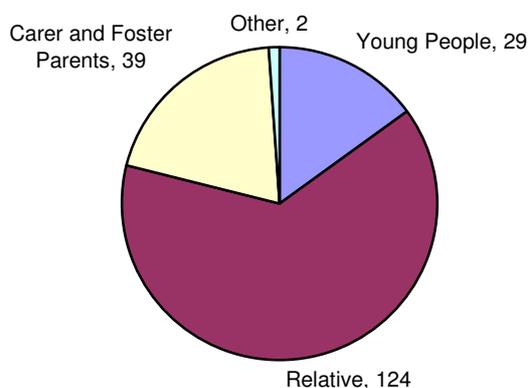
Total number of LGO complaints responded to by Children's Services during 2014/15 was 11, a 37% increase from eight the previous year.

During 2014/15 we received 12 decisions from the LGO following their investigations. Of these, three were upheld. Of those complaints upheld, the Council were required to make the following payments or remedy to complainants:

Decision	Remedy
Maladministration and injustice	Council to pay complainant appropriate fostering allowance for a specific period
Maladministration, No Injustice	None recommended
Maladministration, No Injustice	Council to revise its policy on free travel pass appeals to allow a panel of only two officers in exceptional circumstances

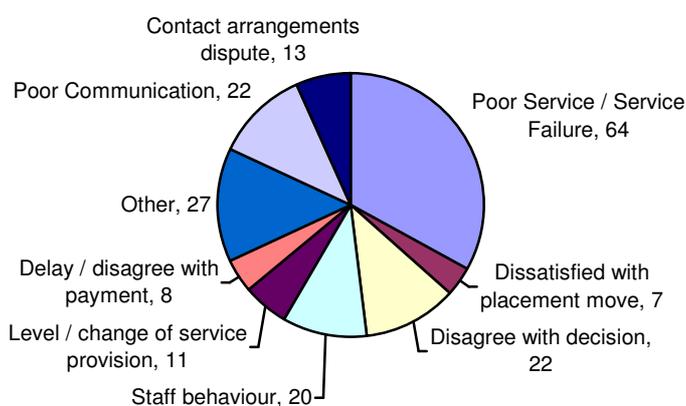
3.2 Who complained and why?

Of the 194 social-care complaints responded to, the complaints originated from the following:



The number of complaints made by young people in their own right increased from 14% in 2013/14 to 15% in 2014/15.

The main areas of dissatisfaction from the social care complaints are summarised in the number of complaints for each category as below:



The reasons and proportions for each complaint theme above are similar to those across all Council services. We accept that people are sometimes dissatisfied with delays in the delivery of our service, and we continually strive to improve quality and efficiency in this area.

4. Political enquiries received and how we responded.

Summary

	Target response time	Complaints responded to	Responded within deadline
MP/Councillor social care enquires	10 working days	88	56%
MP/Councillor non social care enquires	10 working days	242	56%

During the reporting period the directorate responded to a total of 330 political enquiries. This was an increase of 12% on 294 the previous year.

56% of these enquiries were responded to within the 10 day deadline for responding to enquiries which is a decrease from 65% the previous year. The target for dealing with enquiries within 10 days is 96%

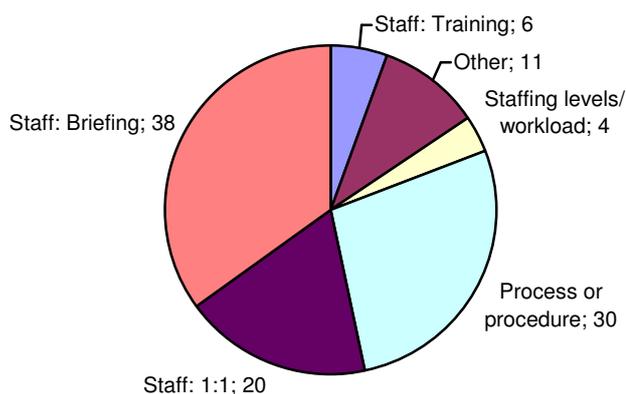
The main themes for these enquiries were:

- Issues regarding school places
- Special Educational Needs
- Disagreement with social care decisions
- Attendance and Exclusion issues
- Nursery Places
- Funding issues

5. How we have improved our service as a result of complaints

We recognise that when things do go wrong, we need to learn from the mistakes to ensure the same thing doesn't happen again. From the information given in complaints and their responses, we identified actions and potential service improvements and allocated them to service managers to be implemented within a set deadline. During 2014/15 we recognised 109 opportunities for service improvement for the directorate as a result of complaints made about our services.

The outcomes, as a result of learning from the complaints the directorate received during 2014/15 have been identified as:



The actions and service improvements detailed above are the result of individual complaint issues raised at Stages 1 and 2.

The main theme of learning involves staff briefings, which relate to low-level issues. Staff 1:1s are also a common theme and are due to one-off mistakes rectified by discussion. Changes in processes or procedures are also a common theme for service improvement.

Other actions have been carried out throughout the year that are case-specific, two of these are a review of the Letterbox process and improvements in the production of the life story work.

We have now started to categorise the learning actions depending on their severity and the implications for the service user. The actions that are identified as having major implications, such as those that require procedural changes or where something needs to be implemented across the whole of the city, will now be closely monitored and evidence of their implementation will be collated and fed back to senior Managers, with a clear line of responsibility for the actions required.

6. Compliments and customer feedback

During the year 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015, Children's Services received a total of 84 written compliments. This is a reduction from 118 in the previous year.

Some examples of compliments received are detailed below.

Praise for Social worker, who worked very hard to ensure the process went so well. The foster carer was also impressed with the time and commitment offered to the children.

Social worker received praise regarding a report. It was thorough and written in such a way that it enabled the judge to step back from issuing a custodial sentence. The young person received an alternative to custody as a result.

Social worker was praised: "You have worked tirelessly to try and keep this family together".

Service user's comments "I would like to bring to your attention that the recent contact worker was outstanding, she was easy to engage with and very professional at all times.

Praise for Youth Justice Worker "new coping strategies/anger management techniques which he has learnt through his YOS programme have contributed massively to him being a much more mature, responsible and independent young man".

7. Final comments

Overall we note that timeliness of responses for 2014/15 has reduced compared to last year's performance. Also, those complaints which were found to be at fault have increased. However, the percentage of social care complaints that progressed beyond the initial stage, decreased from 3% to 2%, evidencing that the quality of responses at Stage 1 remains high.

The main focus of our performance improvement activity will be to reduce the amount of time it is taking us to respond to complaints, and to get closer to our targets for this. We are confident that the work carried out by Children's Services and the Corporate Complaints Team during the coming year will improve Children's Services' performance and allow us to report better results in next year's annual report.

To help us improve further we recognise the need to continually review our processes and improve the quality and timeliness of our responses. The following examples highlight the steps we have taken to improve this year:

Process improvements

- We monitor complaint outcomes to ensure managers implement any service improvements required to prevent similar issues in the future.

Guidance and Training

- We constantly review the content of the training courses offered as part of our Learning and Development programme. We run half-day courses to highlight the importance of effective complaints handling and good practice, and are reviewed to highlight areas of weakness and any recurrent themes in complaints.
- A workshop training session was developed in 2015, for all managers involved in dealing with complaints. The focus of the session was on improving our complaints culture, focussing on making the complainant's experience a positive

one and emphasising the importance of learning from complaints to improve our service.

Performance

- The target of responding to 70% of social care complaints within 10 working days will remain and we will monitor our performance robustly. Our target for resolution within 20 working days remains at 96%. A process is being developed to reduce the number of managers who take longer than 10 working days to respond.
- Complaints performance features as part of our Council's Performance Management Framework, and this allows themes of complaints, timescales, quality of responses and outcomes to be closely monitored on a frequent basis. Performance updates are reported quarterly to the directorate's Leadership Team and also to the Council's Strategic Management Team.

Communication with customers

- The Young Person's complaint forms are now widely available in all Children's Services' establishments and are clearly on display.
- The complaints-related information on Manchester City Council's internet pages is under constant review to improve clarity and access.
- A poster is currently being developed to go in all reception areas to help sign post customers who wish to make a complaint.