



MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL

Annual Complaints Report

2016/17

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 2016/17.

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 two (previously 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 Coram Voice Advocacy Service, who work with the 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	176	77%
Stage 2 social care complaints	65 working days	3	67%
Stage 3 social care complaints	50 working days	0	N/A
Stage 1 corporate complaints	10 working days	82	56%
Stage 2 corporate complaints	10 working days	1	0%
Stage 3 corporate complaints	10 working days	0	N/A
Ombudsman social care	28 calendar days	2	0%
Ombudsman non social care	28 calendar days	3	100%

Stage 1

A total of 176 social care complaints were responded to in 2016/17. This is a 21% increase on the previous year (145 in 2015/16), and our 20 day response times have increased by 12% from 65% in 2015/16.

Of the 176 social care complaints we handled at stage 1, 62 (35%) of these were upheld, or partially upheld, a 7% decrease on the 42% of 2015/16.

A total of 82 non-social care complaints were responded to in 2016/17. This is a 26% increase on the previous year (65 in 2015/16), and our 10 day response times have increased by 2% from 54% in 2015/16.

Of the 82 non-social care complaints we handled at stage 1, 27 (33%) of these were upheld, or partially upheld, an 8% increase on the 25% of 2015/16.

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

The number of social care Stage 2 investigations completed within the permitted 65

working days reduced to 67% and none were completed within our initial target of 25 working days.

There was one non social care complaint responded to at Stage 2. The complaint was partially upheld but was not completed within 10 working days. The non-social care complaints process changed from January 2017 and now there are only two internal stages before a complaint can progress to the Ombudsman.

None of the complaints responded to at Stage 2 progressed to Stage 3.

Ombudsman

The Council are given a timescale of 28 calendar days to provide a response to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).

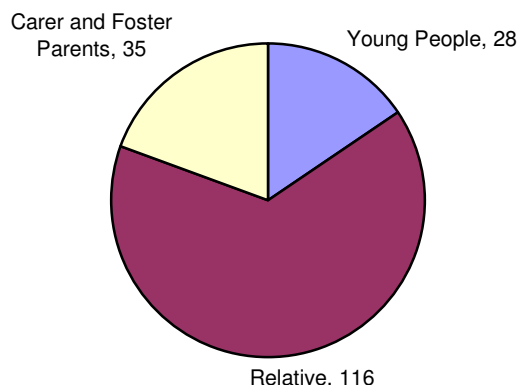
Total number of LGO complaints responded to by Children’s Services during 2016/17 was five, a decrease from eight the previous year.

During 2016/17 we received 10 decisions from the LGO following their investigations. Of these, 1 was upheld. Regarding the upheld complaint, the Council were required to do the following to remedy to the complainant:

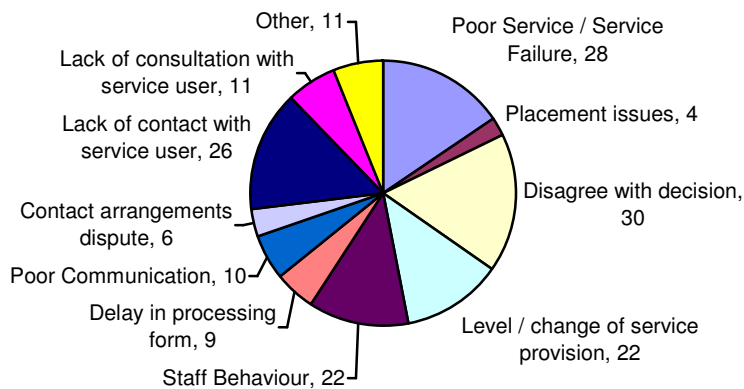
Decision	Complaint and Remedy
Case A: Maladministration and Injustice	A complaint concerning the consideration by the short breaks panel of a request for increased targeted support. It was not clear how the eligibility criteria had been applied and the decision was not given in writing. The Council agreed to complete a reassessment and pay the complainant £100.

3.2 Who complained and why?

Of the 179 social-care complaints responded to, the complaints originated from the following:



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.

3.3 Complaints received from children and young people

The number of complaints made by young people in their own right increased from 14% in 2015/16 to 16% in 2016/17.

Meeting the child or young person

Although it is not always possible, and occasionally the child would prefer not to, it is advisable to discuss the complaint with the child, either face to face or on the telephone, during the investigation. Of the 28 complaints from children/young people that were responded to during 2016/17 only 9 involved the investigator discussing the complaint with the child/young person. This is a similar percentage to 2015/16 and needs to improve.

Themes

The general themes of complaints from children and young people, responded to in 2016/17 were as follows:

- 3 Allowance/ payments issues
- 4 Delay in arranging passport or visa
- 10 Dissatisfied with suggested placement move
- 1 Pre/post 18 concerns
- 2 Unhappy with SW - lack of contact with SW
- 2 Unhappy with SW - not explained situation fully
- 6 Other

Advocacy Service

During the course of making a complaint the child or young person is entitled to advocacy support that is independent and confidential. The advocacy support is commissioned externally from *Coram Voice*.

4. Political enquiries received and how we responded.

Summary

	Target response time	Enquiries responded to	Responded within deadline
MP/Councillor social care enquires	10 working days	119	56%
MP/Councillor non social care enquires	10 working days	289	54%

During the reporting period the directorate responded to a total of 403 political enquiries. This was an increase of 25% on 322 the previous year.

55% of these enquiries were responded to within the 10 day deadline for responding to enquiries which is 1% less than the previous year. The target for dealing with enquiries within 10 days is 96%

The majority of enquiries were seeking advice or support. The main themes for these enquiries were:

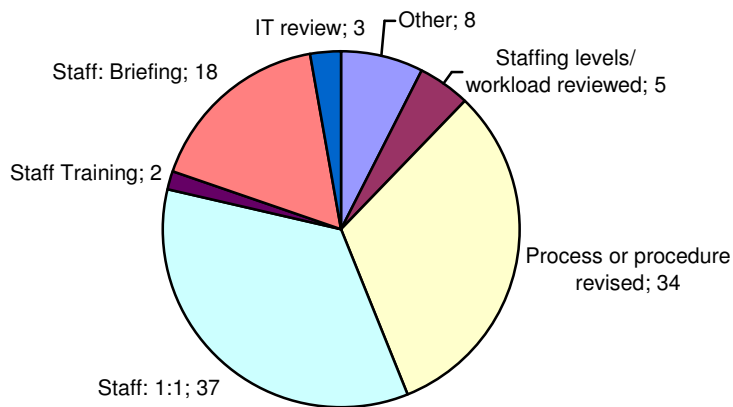
- Issues regarding school places
- Special Educational Needs
- Disagreement with social care decisions

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

5.1 Learning actions from complaint investigations

We recognise that when things do go wrong, we need to learn from the mistakes to reduce the likelihood of the same thing happening 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 2016/17 we recognised 107 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 2016/17 have been identified as:



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

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

We also 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, are closely monitored and evidence of their implementation is collated and fed back to senior Managers, with a clear line of responsibility for the actions required.

5.2 What you told us and what we did...

Other learning actions have been carried out throughout the year that are case-specific, and the following are examples of outcomes from complaint investigations.

You said	We did
I have concerns about my child's EHC Plan review and think it was not done properly by the Local Authority.	This is a delegated function from the LA to the school; however, because the LA often assists in the process, to help schools there is an assumption that it is the LA's responsibility. Schools have been advised of their responsibilities and parents/carers are made aware of who is responsible for all the arrangements regarding reviews.
Social care advice was sought as part of the process when my child was transferring from a SEN statement to an EHC Plan, however, the advice was not provided.	It has been recognised that social care colleagues in Children's Services have not fully understood expectations around the new SEND legislation and to assist them in developing their knowledge and involvement two social workers have recently been appointed to work with the Statutory

	Assessment and Reviewing Team.
I have had difficulties trying to process an application for a free bus pass when dealing with the Contact Centre. I thought I would receive a call back but this didn't happen.	The Contact Centre will ensure it is made clear to the back office that a call back is required. In the event that it is unclear then the back office staff should telephone the parent to make further enquiries to ensure the initial telephone call was resolved.
I have dyslexia and was not given extra time in exam.	The dyslexia team distributed a booklet to reinforce any instructions/ advice given by the dyslexia tutor and to ensure all learners who have been referred for dyslexia are aware of the support available, the process for getting support and adjustments on their courses and in exams.
I normally receive a copy of the LAC review minutes from the social work service but they have been delayed.	We have now reviewed our processes, and this function is now being carried out by the Safeguarding Improvement Unit to ensure a clear line of accountability exists for all areas of the process in future.
We were told our carers are long-term carers but now we are being told we will be returned to our mother's care, which we don't want to do.	It was explained to this sibling group that the LA have a duty to keep families together wherever possible. However, because all siblings clearly expressed their wish not to return, assessments were undertaken to assess the viability of these young people remaining with their older carers until adulthood.
We have not received any payment for child who has been in our care for the last three months.	The investigation revealed that a flaw within our IT systems was preventing the payments from automatically generated. We liaised with the IT service to have it corrected in this case and have the payments backdated. We also made further changes to the system to prevent the same error causing delay in future cases.
No support has been provided since my niece came to live with me, and I have not been given enough support to secure a Special Guardianship Order for her.	Due to the social worker (SW) leaving and a delay in new SW being allocated, it was agreed that visits and financial support had been missed. This was rectified as soon as it was brought to the manager's attention, with an apology given; also it was agreed to allocate a new SW as soon as notice is given by one who is leaving, to allow effective handovers to take place.
The scheduled Child Protection (CP) meeting was cancelled without notice the previous evening. I was told the SW would contact me the following day to reschedule feel more consideration should be given to the arrangements I have to put into place in order to attend. It is very frustrating to have to cancel and then rearrange so suddenly.	An apology was given for the meeting being cancelled at such short notice, however, the SW and CP chair both became unavailable. It was agreed that in future if the SW is unable to attend scheduled meetings, the Team Manager will try to attend in her place, and so preventing their being cancelled.

6. Compliments and customer feedback

During the year 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017, Children's Services received a total of 168 written compliments. This is an increase from 120 in the previous year.

Some examples of compliments received are detailed below.

Praise for a social worker and her team manager: "I would like to take this opportunity to send you our sincere thanks for all your help in recent months. It has been a very challenging time but, largely due to your expertise and support, we seem to have navigated through the 'immediate crisis'. I know that we now are in the best position we could hope for with the two boys."

Praise from a mother for social worker and her work with a family: "Thank you for all your help support, understanding and empathy with our family. Your report is fantastic and we couldn't ask for more."

Praise for Education Caseworker: "Thanks for helping me work through what could be in the EHCP as it's all new to me. Glad our contributions were useful. Thanks for all your support recently and over the whole of the last nearly five years."

Praise for social worker: "I have been fortunate enough to work with one of your social workers regarding a pupil who attends Abraham Moss School. The school is so pleased how it has been managed. Throughout this time the social worker has been very supportive and helpful. There is a core group around this child and it has felt like a multi-agency group all working together."

Praise for the Information, Advice and Support Team: "Your service played an important role regarding gaining this child admission into school. I think this service is amazing for parents and the advice and support is outstanding."

7. Final comments

Overall we note that timeliness of responses to social care complaints for 2016/17 has improved on last year's performance. Also, the number of social care complaints that progressed beyond the initial stage was one less than the previous year, evidencing that the quality of responses at Stage 1 remains high. Also, those complaints which were found to be at fault have decreased.

Children's Services and the Corporate Complaints Team will continue to work to improve our performance for responding to complaints. We expect the work carried out during the coming year will improve Children's Services' performance further and allow us to report even better results in the annual report next year.

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 are taking to improve this year:

Process improvements

- The Complaints Team are working with Senior Managers to closely monitor the high risk complaints, and the learning required, through action plans and we are ensuring the actions are shared to ensure wider learning across the Council via communication bulletins.

Guidance and Training

- Review of 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.

Performance

- The target for responding to social care complaints within 10 working days will remain at 70% although we will still focus on improving that performance. Our target for resolution within 20 working days remains at 96%.
- 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. Performance updates are reported quarterly to the directorate's Leadership Team and also to the Council's Strategic Management Team.
- We have a specific reporting framework for complaints made by children and young people, including care leavers, to ensure our performance in this area receives specific scrutiny not only internally, but by young people themselves.

Communication with customers

- The Young Person's complaint forms are made available to all children in contact with the service.
- The complaints-related information on Manchester City Council's internet pages is under constant review to improve clarity and access, particularly for Children.
- A poster is displayed in all reception areas to help sign post customers who wish to make a complaint.