



MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL

Annual Complaints Report

2017/18

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 2017/18.

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 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 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 Response times

Summary

	Target response time	Complaints responded to	Responded within deadline
Stage 1 social care complaints	20 working days	214	82%
Stage 2 social care complaints	65 working days	7	71%
Stage 3 social care complaints	50 working days	2	100%
Stage 1 corporate complaints	10 working days	108	56%
Stage 2 corporate complaints	10 working days	13	77%
Ombudsman social care	28 calendar days	2	0%
Ombudsman non social care	28 calendar days	2	100%

Stage 1

A total of 214 social care complaints were responded to in 2017/18. This is a 22% increase on the previous year (176 in 2016/17), and our 20 day response times have increased by 5% from 77% in 2016/17.

Of the 214 social care complaints we handled at stage 1, 52 (24%) of these were upheld, or partially upheld, a 12% decrease on the 36% of 2016/17.

A total of 108 non-social care complaints were responded to in 2017/18. This is a 32% increase on the previous year (82 in 2016/17), and our 10 day response times are the same in 2017/18 as they were in 2016/17 at 56%.

Of the 108 non-social care complaints we handled at stage 1, 36 (33%) of these were upheld, or partially upheld, which is the same percentage as in 2016/17.

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.

Stages 2 and 3

There were seven social care complaints responded to at Stage 2. Of these, five were upheld or partially upheld.

The number of social care Stage 2 investigations completed within the permitted 65 working days increased to 71% from 67% in 2016/17, but none were completed within our initial target of 25 working days.

There were two social care complaints that progressed to Stage 3. One of these was partially upheld, and they were both completed within the deadline.

There were 13 non-social care complaints responded to at Stage 2. Four of the complaints were upheld or partially upheld, and 10 of the responses were completed within the deadline of 10 working days.

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 2017/18 was four, a decrease from five the previous year.

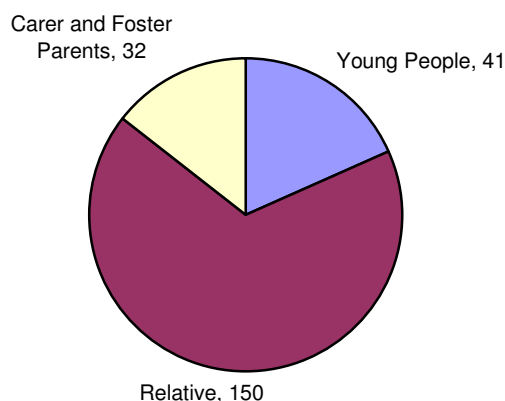
During 2017/18 we received 11 decisions from the LGO following their investigations. Of these, five were upheld. Regarding the upheld complaints, the Council were required to do the following to remedy to the complainant:

Decision	Complaint and Remedy
Case A: Closed after initial enquiries – no further action	This was a free school transport issue, but the Ombudsman decided not to investigate.
Case B: Upheld: Maladministration and Injustice	This was a social care issue where the Council failed to involve a parent in protection proceedings.
Case C: Upheld: Maladministration and Injustice	The Council's approach to dealing with a Special Guardianship Allowance for a child, and whether it should be backdated.
Case D: Closed after initial enquiries – no further action	Council's refusal to agree a deferred school entry of her child not into their normal age group. The Ombudsman decided not to investigate.
Case E: Not upheld: No Maladministration	This complaint was regarding a dispute about what was said in a Child In Need meeting.
Case F: Closed after initial enquiries – no further action	This was a complaint about the actions of the social worker.
Case G: Closed after initial enquiries – no further action	In this complaint the parent was unhappy that the social worker could not return her child home after he ran away to a family member.
Case H: Closed after initial enquiries – no further action	This involved a mother who felt she was misled into signing agreement that her children should be taken into care.

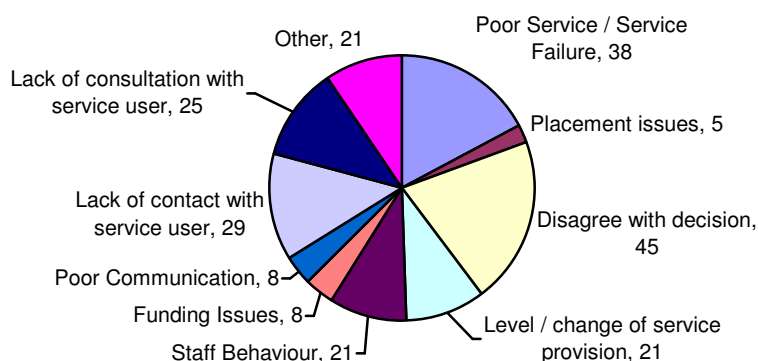
Case I: Upheld: Maladministration and Injustice	This case was about the failure to remove access restrictions on a parent, following a police investigation. This was upheld with an agreement remedy the injustice through a cash payment.
Case J: Not upheld: No Maladministration	This case was regarding an alleged breach of human rights because MCC shared the complainant's data with another council.
Case K: Upheld: Maladministration and Injustice	This was regarding whether a home to school transport appeal considered all the relevant information. It was upheld with an agreement to hold a fresh appeal.

3.2 Who complained and why?

Of the 223 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 16% in 2016/17 to 18% in 2017/18.

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. However, of the 41 complaints from children/young people that were responded to during 2017/18 only five appeared to involve the investigator discussing the complaint directly with the child/young person. This is a much lower figure than 2016/17 and needs to improve.

Themes

The general themes of complaints from children and young people, responded to in 2017/18 were as follows:

- 2 Allowance/ payments issues
- 4 Delay in arranging passport or visa
- 2 Contact issue
- 14 Dissatisfied with placement or suggested placement
- 2 Pre/post 18 concerns
- 4 Unhappy with social worker - do not do what they say they will do
- 2 Unhappy with social worker - lack of contact with social worker
- 5 Adoption process
- 5 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. If a young person makes a complaint without advocacy support they are still offered the option of receiving advocacy support at the start of the process. The advocacy support is commissioned externally.

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	106	50%
MP/Councillor non social care enquires	10 working days	246	68%

During the reporting period the directorate responded to a total of 352 political enquiries. This was a decrease of 13% on 403 in the previous year.

63% of these enquiries were responded to within the 10 day deadline for responding to enquiries which is 8% higher 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:

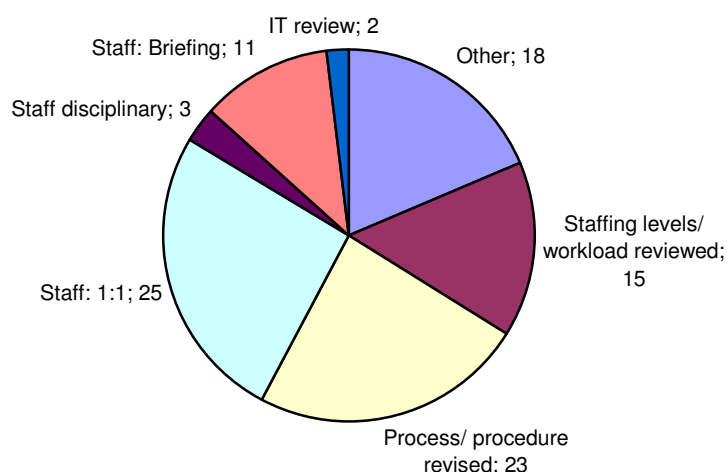
- Issues regarding school places
- Special Educational Needs
- Disagreement with social care decisions

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 2017/18 we recognised 97 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 2017/18 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. A need to review staffing levels is also an emerging theme.

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 disagree with the Summer born school policy in relation to children who are not ready to attend. I feel the standard responses do not contain a lot of detail.	The Admissions Team has reviewed the standard of the decision letter and in future will include specific information from the minutes of the meeting to ensure that parents/carers are aware of the discussion that took place.
I wish to complain about the lack of contact with my social worker and my lack of involvement in my care plan. You didn't start my pathway plan early enough.	In order that this does not re-occur the locality manager is reviewing the planning for all young people who are currently leaving care to ensure they have a timely pathway plan and that they are better supported by social workers to ensure their wishes and feelings are at the centre of our planning, and they are offered regular visits and updates.
During a home visit the social workers did not introduce themselves properly to me.	Social workers have been advised of the need to properly introduce themselves to families, and especially to children.
I found there were numerous errors in the Education, Health and Care (EHC) Assessment.	All staff have been informed about the importance of quality assuring EHC plans before they are issued to ensure such mistakes are not made in the future.
I have been having problems receiving the fostering payments I am due.	The Service has undertaken a review of the short break scheme and how payments are completed, to make the system more efficient.
There has been a big delay in me receiving a response to my free travel application.	The Free Travel team received an exceptionally high volume of applications this year. A review of processing practices on the Free Travel team has taken place to avoid such issues arising again in the future.
I am unhappy at time taken to obtain my passport.	The service has had to learn a new process for children not born in the UK, and don't have their passports. Senior managers have been asked for more support to take on the

	complicated paper work for passport applications.
There has been an excessive delay in me receiving my LAC review minutes.	The Safeguarding and Improvement Unit will continue to scrutinize and improve the timeliness of distributing review minutes.
There has been a lack of consistency in services for my daughter as I live in Manchester but attend a nursery in Trafford.	We are working with other Greater Manchester authorities to share best practice and have spoken to colleagues in Trafford about how we can make sure families whose children who attend services across borders are provided with the right information.

6. Compliments and customer feedback

During the year 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018, Children's Services received a total of 186 written compliments. This is an increase of 19 on the previous year.

Some examples of compliments received are detailed below.

Praise from foster carers for a social worker: "we appreciate all the time and effort you put in to support us and the children. Your enthusiastic and caring nature shines through time after time and the communication you maintain with us makes our job so much easier."

Praise for education caseworker from a family: "just wanted to say how helpful and knowledgeable you have been over the time you have worked with us. You have been extremely helpful in all your dealings with us."

Praise from a headteacher to the Director of Education: "I just wanted to pass on my thanks to you and all the team for the support we received following the Manchester Arena attack. It was great to receive the information updates and the different avenues of support that were made available."

Praise for a social worker from a parent: "the social worker involved in my son's case has made such a difference to our lives. The social worker took the time to get to know my son's needs, and the effect of his understanding has helped things to improve so much because my son no longer feels misunderstood."

A parent praised an early help worker: "thank you for all you've done for our family. I do not know where we would be if you never came into my life. You believed in me as a parent and helped me see I was worth more than I gave myself credit for. Without you to show me how, where would my all babies be today?"

A card from a family said: "thank you for all your help and support over the past few weeks. You have helped us to put love and laughter back in our home."

A foster carer who moved from an Independent Fostering Agency to Manchester said: "we transferred from an IFA and have nothing but praise about working for Manchester. Our supervising social worker is a true professional and a credit to Manchester's Fostering Team."

Praise for an Early Years Quality Assurance worker from a childminder: "I want to say thank you to you for all your support and input in my achieving an 'outstanding' during my last OFSTED inspection as a childminder. You have trained me to be a thorough practitioner even to the minutest detail, to be OFSTED ready. I wish to express how even other childminders sing your praises and how efficient you are."

A social worker received flowers from a child, via his carers, to say thank you for being an attentive, caring social worker. The child said because it was mother's day he wanted to make sure he thanked her as well as his carers.

7. Final comments

Overall we note that timeliness of responses to social care complaints for 2017/18 has improved on last year's performance. Also, those complaints which were found to be at fault have decreased. However, the number of social care complaints that progressed beyond the initial stage have increased from the previous year.

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.

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.
- As mentioned earlier in this report it is advisable to discuss the complaint with the child, either face to face or on the telephone, during an investigation. Guidance and training for 2018/19 will focus on ensuring this occurs much more often for complaints from children.

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 complaint forms for children and young people 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.