



MANCHESTER  
CITY COUNCIL

# Annual Complaints Report

**2019/20**

Children and Families (Children's)

# Contents

1. Introduction .....	3
2. What is a complaint?.....	3
3. The complaints we received and how we responded.....	4
4. Political enquiries received and how we responded.....	7
5. How we have improved our service as a result of complaints. ....	8
6. Compliments and customer feedback.....	10
7. Final comments.....	12

# 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 2019/20.

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 stage 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 Feedback and Complaints Service to progress complaints.

The complaints process has no power 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	10 working days	116	61%

	20 working days		78%
Stage 2 social care complaints	25 working days	2	0%
	65 working days		100%
Stage 3 social care complaints	50 working days	2	100%
Stage 1 corporate complaints	10 working days	201	59%
Stage 2 corporate complaints	15 working days	19	47%
Ombudsman social care	28 calendar days	2	50%
Ombudsman non social care	28 calendar days	1	100%

## Stage 1

A total of 116 social care complaints were responded to in 2019/20. This is a 24% decrease on the previous year (151 in 2018/19). Our 20 day response times have decreased from 83% to 78%, and our 10 day response times decreased 71% to 61%.

Of the 116 social care complaints we handled at Stage 1, 29 (26%) of these were upheld, or partially upheld, a 7% decrease on the 33% of 2018/19.

A total of 201 non-social care complaints were responded to in 2019/20. This is a 19% increase on the previous year (169 in 2018/19), however, our 10 day response times have decreased from 78% in 2018/19 to 59% this year.

Of the 201 non-social care complaints we handled at Stage 1, 61 (30%) of these were upheld, or partially upheld, which is higher than the percentage upheld in 2018/19 of 23%.

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 two social care complaints responded to at Stage 2. Only one of these was upheld or partially upheld.

Both of the social care Stage 2 investigations were completed within the permitted 65 working days, which is the same as last year, although neither were completed within our initial target of 25 working days.

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

There were 19 non-social care complaints responded to at Stage 2, and four of them were upheld or partially upheld. Nine of the responses were completed within our initial target of 10 working days, but none of the remaining cases were completed within the extended target of 15 working days.

## Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

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

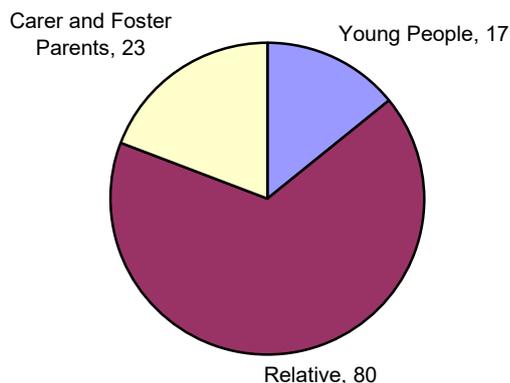
Total number of LGSCO complaints responded to by Children's Services during 2019/20 was three, a decrease from the previous year's total of seven.

During 2019/20 we received eight decisions from the LGSCO following their investigations. Of these, four were upheld. Regarding the upheld complaints, the Council were required to do the following to remedy to the complainant:

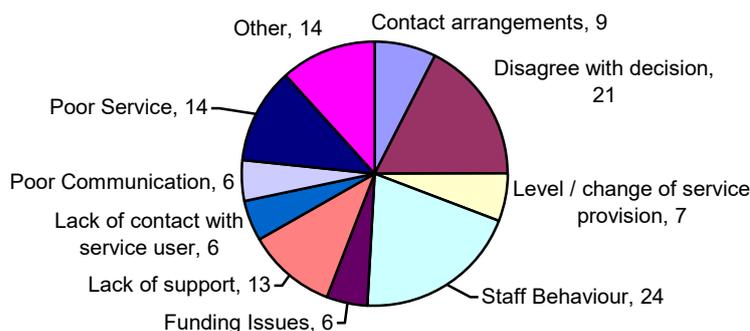
<b>Decision</b>	<b>Complaint and Remedy</b>
Case A: Upheld: Maladministration and Injustice	This was regarding the complainant not receiving an outreach or befriending service for their son, despite this being part of his care plan. The Ombudsman only found fault in the Council's complaint handling. The Council apologised for the handling of this complaint and paid the complainants £150 in recognition of the injustice caused.
Case B: Upheld: Maladministration and Injustice	This involved the Council's failure to properly consider a request for a summer born child's delayed entry into reception. The Council agreed to review its decision and properly consider whether it is in the child's best interests to join reception or year one.
Case C: Upheld: Maladministration and Injustice	The complainant alleged the Council wrongly refused to renew a personal travel budget to take her two children, who have special needs, to school. The Council was willing to reconsider its decision and seek further information from one of the children's schools. The Council has agreed to provide the complainant with a personal travel budget for one child.
Case D: Upheld: Maladministration, No Injustice	This is about the Council's handling of an application for free school transport for a child. The Council did not give the complainant the opportunity to make verbal representations at the final appeal stage. The Council agreed to review its free school transport policy to be in line with statutory guidance.

### 3.2 Who complained and why?

Of the 120 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 decreased from 31 in 2018/19 to 17 in 2019/20.

Also, the actual amount of complaints received from young people as a percentage of the total amount of complaints received decreased from 19% in 2018/19 to 15% in 2019/20.

#### 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 17 complaints from children/young people that were responded to during 2019/20 only one appeared to involve the investigator

discussing the complaint directly with the child/young person. This is a lower figure than 2018/19 and needs to improve.

## Themes

The general themes of complaints from children and young people, responded to in 2019/20 were as follows:

4	Allowance/ payments issues
1	Delay in arranging passport or visa
1	Contact issue
4	Dissatisfied with placement or suggested placement
1	Unhappy with *SW/PA - do not do what they say
3	Unhappy with *SW/PA - lack of contact with them
2	Unhappy with *SW/PA - not explained situation fully
1	Other

\* Social worker / personal advisor

## 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 and is currently delivered by NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service).

## 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	113	63%
MP/Councillor non social care enquires	10 working days	247	66%

During the reporting period the directorate responded to a total of 360 political enquiries. This was a decrease of 10% on 398 in the previous year.

65% of these enquiries were responded to within the 10 day deadline for responding to enquiries which is 5% lower 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:

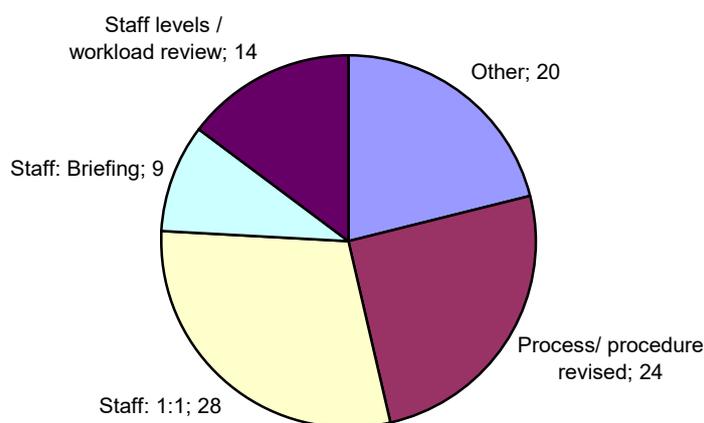
- Issues regarding school places
- Special Educational Needs
- Disagreement with social care decisions

## 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 2019/20 we recognised 95 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 2019/20 have been identified as:



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

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

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
With regards to my application for free school transport for my child, you did	We agreed to review our free school transport policy to bring it in line with the

<p>not give me the opportunity to make verbal representations at the final appeal stage.</p>	<p>statutory guidance.</p>
<p>My request for my summer born child's delayed entry into reception was not properly consider by the Council because it did not decide what school year was in my son's best interests to start in.</p>	<p>We agreed to review our decision and properly consider whether it is in this child's best interests to join reception or year one.</p>
<p>I was due to have a Child In Need meeting with a social worker, but she left a message to say she'd be late. Then, a social worker who I'd never met before arrived at my house. No one told me that another social worker would be standing in.</p>	<p>We told social workers to ensure continuity in relation to meeting with families and children and if they cannot attend a meeting then they inform the parent and other professionals beforehand.</p>
<p>The information provided by the local authority regarding eligibility for funding for childcare provision is not clear on the processes involved and does not specify the deadlines for applying.</p>	<p>The Council's webpage has been amended to provide clearer information on the dates children become eligible for funding. Also, the childcare section of the Council's website will be reviewed to ensure all information is clear and helpful to parents and carers.</p>
<p>I was not allocated a leaving care worker quickly enough. My case was transferred over to the 21+ Team, however, the manager of that team was not made aware of my case, and this has caused an issue in relation to allocating a worker.</p>	<p>The Leaving Care manager met with other managers to consider how we can improve internal communication when young people turn 21, to ensure that a leaving care worker is allocated within an appropriate timescale. Also, we are liaising with young people about the 21+ offer to ensure they have a full understanding of the service.</p>
<p>I was told that as a care-leaver I would be exempt from paying Council Tax up to the age of 25, but this is not true. Manchester care leavers who reside in the area are exempt, but Manchester care leavers who are placed outside Manchester are not exempt.</p>	<p>We will review our policy regarding the issue of Council Tax exemptions for Manchester care leavers who were placed outside Manchester as young children.</p>
<p>My daughter's EHCP was received by Manchester in August, but no-one from the Statutory Assessment Team spoke to me or offered advice on local schools until October. I felt the staff were disinterested.</p>	<p>We have updated our process for children with EHC plans who have moved into the city, which emphasises that contact must be made with a parent at the earliest opportunity, to confirm receipt of the EHC plan and advise on the procedural aspects of transferring the plan to Manchester.</p>
<p>I am unhappy with the delay in starting</p>	<p>The manager of the Early Years SEND</p>

the EHCP assessment process for my daughter, and the way the Early Years SEND process is communicated to parents has caused confusion and frustration.

process will ensure that her team is aware of the need for clarity when speaking to families. We have also implemented a tracking system that tracks when a referral is received and when it is passed to the panel.

## 6. Compliments and customer feedback

During the year 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, Children's Services received a total of 186 written compliments. This is the same as the previous year.

Some examples of compliments received are detailed below.

- Praise for a social worker from a young person who turns 18 in the next few weeks and really recognises the support the social worker has given her. She asked if she could change her age on the system so she could have another year with her!
- An Early Help Interventions worker was praised by a parent: 'Just wanted to say a huge thank you for the service I received. It wasn't always easy to open up and talk about things, but you made me feel very comfortable and never let me down. The relationship with my daughter is like never before, but it wouldn't be this way if there was no help from people like you.'
- From a parent about a social worker: 'He has been the 'knight on a white horse' during this whole episode. He actually took the time to listen to my concerns and treated me like a person, a father who was desperate to see his daughter.'
- A parent sent a thank you card to a social worker: 'I'd like to say thank you for all the support you have given me and helping me improve myself into becoming a better mum to my children and for giving me that push I needed.'
- Praise for the Youth Justice Team from a parent: 'I would just like to thank you for the help you provided me for my son. You were extremely helpful.'
- From a parent: 'I just wanted to say thank you for the help and support I have received from Early Help. When I was referred to you I was particularly concerned as I have young twins at home who are vulnerable, which you instantly recognised as a safeguarding issue. You mobilised several agencies on my behalf, giving me level-headed feedback and valuable support. I will always remember the sensitive, kind and professional way that you helped us.'
- Praise from the Children's Guardian: 'Never have I come across a more dedicated social worker who has been committed to an entire family. She has worked tirelessly with the parents to help them make changes in the hope that the children could remain in their care. The empathy and understanding she has shown the parents is outstanding yet at the same time she has remained child focused.'

- A Court Judge made a point of thanking a social worker and told the parents that other local authorities may have taken a different approach and it was a brave decision to recommend rehabilitation – an approach she fully endorsed.
- From a parent regarding her daughter: 'She has done far better than expected in her exam results and now has a place at college for September. Without the support of the social worker I do not think I would still have my family. I felt that social workers would be negative towards me, however, this could not have been further from the truth. We were supported as a whole family. I was very worried about social work intervention but it was the best thing that has ever happened for my family.'
- From a young person about their social worker: 'She has been the best social worker ever. She has helped me with loads like the relationship with my mum is loads better. She also understands my points and talks to me about loads like I can just vent to her about my problems and she helps me sort the problem out.'
- Parent's comments about social workers: 'Dealing with your department is the nightmare of most families, and although I did not get the outcome that I best hoped for, I am satisfied with the outcome that we have now. The case concerning my son would never be complete without appreciating your efforts and hard work. You displayed professionalism throughout the entire case.'
- A school headteacher praises the Education Casework Team: 'The complexity of the families we are working with are sometimes beyond our skills and the Casework Service is proving for us to be highly effective in keeping children in school and helping to de-escalate tensions.'
- Praise for a Contact Centre: 'I appreciate the contact centre workers for providing me and my son with a great bonding time. I cannot thank you enough for all your support.'
- A family praised a social worker: 'Thank you for the support you have given me and my family. That evening you could have just left us, but you worked after your time and wouldn't give up until you had us somewhere to stay.'
- From a mother about a social worker: 'I just want to say thank you for all the wonderful things you have been doing for me and the kids... We have received so much love that I think an angel is watching over us.'
- A parent praises a social worker: '...her concern regarding my daughter's welfare was obvious. I would go as far as to say she cared, which totally changed my perspective on social care, and that being a social worker is more than just a job.'
- Praise for the Education Casework Service from a parent: 'I want you to know I'm really pleased with the plan for my son - he has settled back into school really well - the plan is specific and he is very happy to go to school every day.'

## 7. Final comments

Overall we note that timeliness of responses to social care complaints for 2019/20 has decreased compared to last year's performance. On a positive note, the proportion of complaints where fault was found has decreased and so has the number of social care complaints that progressed beyond the initial stage, compared to the previous year.

Children's Services and the Feedback and Complaints Service 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 and allow us to report better results in the annual report next year.

To help us improve 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 Feedback and Complaints Service 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

- The content of our training briefings is updated regularly, to include changes made in internal practices directed by senior managers and to highlight areas of weakness and any recurrent themes in complaints. We provide briefings for new managers or those who would benefit from a refresher, and highlight the importance of effective complaints handling and good practice.
- 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 2020/21 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% and we will 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.

## **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.