



MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL

Annual Complaints Report

2020/21

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 2020/21.

Complaints which contain an element of social care fall under the statutory Children's Social Care guidelines, however, we also have responsibility for dealing with 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.

A table showing the timeliness of our responses to complaints.

	Target response time	Complaints responded to	Responded within deadline	Average days to respond
Stage 1 Social Care complaints	10 working days	111	45%	20.5
Stage 1 Social Care complaints	20 working days	111	67%	20.5
Stage 2 Social Care complaints	25 working days	3	33%	69.3
Stage 2 Social Care complaints	65 working days	3	67%	69.3
Stage 3 Social Care complaints	50 working days	0	N/A	N/A
Stage 1 Corporate complaints	10 working days	130	51%	17.9
Stage 2 Corporate complaints	15 working days	14	21%	38.0
Ombudsman Social Care	28 calendar days	3	100%	6.0
Ombudsman non-Social Care	28 calendar days	5	80%	84.4

Stage 1

A total of 111 Social Care complaints were responded to in 2019/20. This is a 4.3% decrease on the previous year (116 in 2019/20). Our 20-day response times have decreased from 78% to 67%, as have our 10-day response times (61% to 45%).

Of the 111 social care complaints we handled at Stage 1, 20 (18%) of these were upheld, or partially upheld, a decrease from 26% in 2019/20.

A total of 130 non-social care complaints were responded to in 2019/20. This is a 35% decrease on the previous year (201 in 2019/20); however, our 10-day response times have decreased from 59% in 2019/20 to 51% this year.

Of the 130 non-social care complaints we handled at Stage 1, 30 (23%) of these were upheld, or partially upheld, which is lower than the percentage upheld in 2019/20 of 30%.

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 3 Social Care complaints responded to at Stage 2, none of which was upheld or partially upheld.

Two out of the 3 Social Care Stage 2 investigations were completed within the permitted 65 working days (compared to 2 out of 2 last year), one of which was completed within our initial target of 25 working days (compared to 0 out of 2 last year).

No Social Care complaints progressed to Stage 3, as opposed to 2 in 2019/20.

There were 14 non-Social Care complaints responded to at Stage 2 (19 in 2019/20), 3 of which were upheld or partially upheld (4 in 2019/20). Three of the responses were completed within our initial target of 10 working days (5 in 2019/20), and 2 of the remaining cases were completed within the extended target of 15 working days (none in 2019/20).

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 2020/21 was 8, an increase from the previous year's total of 3. Following investigation by the LGSCO, two were upheld. Regarding the upheld complaints, the following table shows what the Council were required to do to remedy the complaint:

Decision	Complaint and Remedy
Case A: Upheld: Maladministration and Injustice	Annual review of child's Education, Health and Care Plan not managed properly and did not provide alternative education when child was out of school. Agreed remedy to apologise and pay £500 for the avoidable distress, frustration, and the loss of opportunity to appeal to the SEND Tribunal.
Case B: Upheld: Maladministration and Injustice	A delay in completing the complainant's son's Education, Health and Care Plan. Agreed remedy to apologise and pay £1000 to recognise the avoidable distress and possible missed opportunity for child to attend the special needs nursery. Also, the Council's SEN procedures will provide that officers consult possible schools concurrently and not consecutively.

4. Political enquiries received and how we responded.

A table showing our timeliness of responding to political enquiries.

	Target response time	Enquiries responded to	Responded within deadline	Average days to respond
MP/Councillor Social Care Enquiries	10 working days	97	51%	16.9
MP/Councillor non-Social Care Enquiries	10 working days	168	67%	10.5

During the reporting period, the directorate responded to a total of 265 political enquiries. This was a decrease of 26% on 360 in the previous year.

161 (61%) of these enquiries were responded to within the 10-day deadline for responding to enquiries, which is 4% 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 2020/21 we recognised 48 opportunities for service improvement for the directorate as a result of complaints made about our services.

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 table gives examples of outcomes from complaint investigations.

You said	We did
<p>My daughter's new social worker had no understanding of my daughter's needs.</p>	<p>Targeted work with social workers working on assessments where there has been previous involvement to avoid a 'start again' approach where families feel they are having to repeat sensitive information.</p>
<p>I called School Admissions to apply for school places for my son. I received confusing advice regarding when my son would be offered a school place.</p>	<p>There was training for staff to become familiar with the children's records and to give out accurate information.</p>
<p>I'm unhappy with the lack of communication from Admissions in relation to my son's school place. I have emailed and phoned but nothing was done.</p>	<p>Manchester School Admissions is working hard to keep up with the volume of . A dedicated manager has now started in post to ensure emails and phone calls are responded to within the stated 10 working days.</p>
<p>My Higher Education Allowance ceased just before my 26th birthday and I said they were not complying with the law.</p>	<p>Training was provided to all Personal Advisors on the payment of HEA allowances, and to ensure that each PA is aware of a young person's plan once they turn 26 years of age.</p>
<p>I feel the service failed to offer any support to me as a foster carer, while my supervising social worker (SSW) was not in work.</p>	<p>We have implemented management trackers that provide the service with oversight of any carers whose SSW aren't available due to sickness and have a duty system in place to maintain contact and support.</p>
<p>I felt as though I was being treated unfairly as though there is some sort of bias towards me.</p>	<p>Working in an objective manner regardless of a person's nationality, race and culture is a high priority for us. Work has been completed with all social workers and team managers within the Permanence Service in respect to responding to professionals and families, enabling a good understanding of how our actions impact on others.</p>

6. Compliments and customer feedback

During the year 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, Children's Services received a total of 209 written compliments, compared to 186 the previous year.

Some examples of compliments received are detailed below.

A young person said he was listened to by his social worker and treated with respect and that they made a positive difference to his life.

From a parent about a social worker: 'I am so grateful for you. It is really reassuring to know he is away from the influences around here. I really appreciate everything you have done and continue to do for my son.'

A headteacher praised the Director of Education and her department regarding the Covid updates: 'Thanks to your team, great support at this time.'

'I would like to thank you for having given me the best social worker ever. He has shown sincere interest in my situation and he recognizes the needs of others and reaches out to lend a helping hand.'

A carer said that a social worker 'has been fantastic and supportive, he has visited during Covid 19 and has made himself available. She could not fault the work he has been doing.'

A school praised the Education department regarding the work being done with the Free School Meals and Welfare Scheme Vouchers/Support.

A parent said about the work of the social workers: 'Thank you everyone for all your help and support during these uncertain times. We really can't express how much it is appreciated, you have made a life changing difference.'

Thank you for being our social worker. You restored my faith in social services, you supported me and my family through some hard times and for that I thank you.'

From a parent: 'I'm writing about the service that the social worker has provided to our family at this extremely worrying and difficult time. She has been amazing, and I cannot express enough how much her support has been valued these past few months.'

From a parent: 'I'm so glad I got you as my social worker. Someone who finally understood that I'm just a working single mum trying my best! Thank you for all your help and support.'

'We found you to be helpful and professional throughout the process for our son's Education, Health and Care Plan, answering emails and queries promptly and you took all of our amendments into consideration.'

'I am very happy to say that my daughter is now a lot more settled. I want to thank you, and to praise the work of social workers. They have kept me focused, believed in me as a parent and have gone above and beyond their role.'

From a parent: 'My social worker has been very understanding and when I had a problem, I felt comfortable to reach out to her about it. She took time to understand me and get to know me and my son.'

From a parent: 'Grateful to our social worker for the support that has been given to us as a family, you never lost hope and have worked hard to support us. Helped my son through the path that he was on. He is now the son he always was.'

'I just wanted to thank you for your patience and perseverance with myself, regarding my child's Education, Health and Care Plan.'

7. Final comments

Overall, we note that timeliness of responses to social care complaints for 2020/21 has decreased compared to last year's performance. In the main, the reduction in timeliness would have been caused by the changes in working arrangements due to the pandemic/lockdown. On a positive note, the proportion of complaints where fault was found has decreased.

Children's Services and the Feedback and Complaints Service will continue to work to improve our performance for responding to complaints.

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 normally provide briefings for new managers or those who would benefit from a refresher, and highlight the importance of effective complaints handling and good practice.
- Unfortunately, however, during 2020/21, there has been little opportunity to meet with staff to deliver training sessions due to the temporary working arrangements.

Performance

- Our target for resolution within 20 working days is 80%. Although it is expected that for 2021/22 performance will still be impacted by the temporary working arrangements in place due the pandemic.

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.