



MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL

Annual Complaints Report

2021/22

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.....	6
5. How we have improved our service as a result of complaints.	7
6. Compliments and customer feedback.....	8
7. Final comments.....	10

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 2021/22.

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	78	42%	19.8
Stage 1 Social Care complaints	20 working days	78	69%	19.8
Stage 2 Social Care complaints	25 working days	1	0%	47.0
Stage 2 Social Care complaints	65 working days	1	100%	47.0
Stage 3 Social Care complaints	50 working days	0	N/A	N/A
Stage 1 Corporate complaints	10 working days	361	63%	12.4
Stage 2 Corporate complaints	15 working days	30	17%	25.1
Ombudsman Social Care	28 calendar days	7	43%	39.9
Ombudsman non-Social Care	28 calendar days	8	63%	23.8

Stage 1

A total of 78 Social Care complaints were responded to in 2021/22. This is a 29.7% decrease on the previous year (111 in 2020/21). Our 20-day response times have increased slightly from 67% to 69%, whereas our 10-day response times have decreased slightly (45% to 42%). The average response time now stands at 19.8 days, down from 20.5 days last year.

Of the 78 social care complaints we handled at Stage 1, 26 (33%) of these were upheld or partially upheld, an increase from 18% in 2020/21.

Children's Services saw a significant increase in the number of non-social care complaints, and this can be traced directly to the new system introduced in Admissions during the summer 2021. Admissions in 2022 has been a smoother experience, and so we would expect improvements next year. A total of 361 non-social care complaints were responded to in 2021/22. This is a 178% increase on the previous year (130 in 2020/21); however, our 10-day response times have increased from 51% in 2020/21 to 63% this year. Similarly, the average response time now stands at 12.4 days, down from 17.9 days last year.

Of the 361 non-social care complaints we handled at Stage 1, 133 (37%) of these were upheld or partially upheld, which is higher than the percentage upheld in 2019/20 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 was 1 Social Care complaint responded to at Stage 2, which was upheld. The investigation was completed within the permitted 65 working days (as were all cases in this category last year). Additionally, the average response time has decreased to 47 days from 69.3 days last year.

No Social Care complaints progressed to Stage 3 for the second year in a row.

There were 30 non-Social Care complaints responded to at Stage 2 (14 in 2020/21), 16 of which were upheld or partially upheld (3 in 2020/21). Two of the responses were completed within our initial target of 10 working days (3 in 2020/21), and 4 of the remaining cases were completed within the extended target of 15 working days (2 in 2020/21). The average response time has decreased to 25.1 days from 38 days last year.

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).

Children's Services responded to a total of 15 LGSCO complaints during 2021/22, an increase from the previous year's total of 8. Following investigation by the LGSCO, 9 were upheld. Regarding the upheld complaints, the following table shows what the Council were required to do to remedy to the complaint:

Decision	Complaint and Remedy
Case A: Upheld: maladministration and injustice	Delay in taking her into its care when she was homeless and at risk. Agreed remedy to consider her as a 'new' care leaver and offer services as though she has just left care. Also, pay £1,500 for the avoidable distress and ensure her rent arrears have been written off, and that she is not deemed as intentionally homeless in future housing applications.
Case B: Upheld: maladministration and injustice	Failure to ensure he received timely information following child protection meetings and telling him his daughter was safe when he raised urgent welfare concerns. Agreed remedy to apologise and remind staff to provide parents timely information.
Case C: Upheld: maladministration and injustice	Lack of support for daughter under her Education, Health and Care Plan during the first COVID-19 lockdown. The Council failed to make 'reasonable endeavours' to put the provision in place. Parent paid for some support himself. Agreed remedy to pay for his expenses and £300 to recognise the uncertainty over what SEN support his daughter might have received.
Case D: Upheld: maladministration and injustice	Delay in arranging therapies as set out in Education, Health and Care Plans before, during and after the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Agreed remedy to make a payment

	to recognise the loss of therapy provision and pay £200 to recognise the anxiety and distress caused by the Council's failings and the time and trouble in pursuing this complaint.
Case E: Upheld: maladministration and injustice	Council refused an application for home to school transport without considering the correct grounds. Ombudsman found the Council at fault for failing to apply the correct test to the application. Agreed remedy to review our decision having invited parent to present any further information. Also, to pay £200 in recognition of the avoidable time, inconvenience and distress caused.
Case F: Upheld: maladministration and injustice	Failure to properly consider daughter's school admissions appeal. Agreed remedy to arrange a further appeal.
Case G: Upheld: maladministration and injustice	Did not properly update or record decisions about his child's teeth before removing the matter from the child protection plan, so parent was not kept updated. Agreed remedy to apologise to parent and remind officers to ensure they record any decision before removing it from a child protection plan.
Case H: Upheld: Maladministration and Injustice	Council stopped his education incentive payment without notice or explanation and refused to backdate the money to cover the gaps. We since offered to pay £500, support him until the end of his course and review our policies. LGSCO satisfied this was a reasonable and proportionate way to resolve the complaint.
Case I: Upheld: maladministration and injustice.	Fault with the way the Council considered the application for home to school transport for her son's application and appeal. Agreed remedy to pay £100 for avoidable time and trouble and arrange a fresh stage two appeal with a different panel.

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	85	41%	14.9
MP/Councillor non-Social Care Enquiries	10 working days	361	71%	9.9

During the reporting period, the directorate responded to a total of 446 political enquiries. This was an increase of 68% on 265 in the previous year.

291 (65%) of these enquiries were responded to within the 10-day deadline for responding to enquiries, which is 4% 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
- Free Travel to School
- 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 2021/22 we recognised 159 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
You stopped my education incentive payment without notice or explanation on two occasions.	Manchester Leaving Care Service reviewed its policies to avoid this happening in the future.
Information relating to my daughter was not properly recorded on her child protection plan, so I was not kept updated.	We reminded officers to ensure they record any decision made about a task and its progress on a child protection plan.
School Admissions Team were waiting for the 'Section D' of the application	Our online portal where parents apply has now been adjusted to ensure that

form but I did not know, as no one contact me.	applications cannot proceed without a Section D being uploaded by the parent making the application.
An investigation took place regarding my child, and I requested the outcome paperwork, but did not receive it.	The team manager has now put in place better measures to ensure social workers are sharing copies of their assessments with families to prevent this happening in future.
My application for home to school transport was refused but the Council did not apply the correct test to the application.	In the light of this, we agreed to review the school transport policy.
It was agreed there would be an annual review of my adoption allowance to check my financial situation. But I always need to wait to find out if a decision has been made for the payment to continue.	We agreed that we would consult with the regional adoption service to consider how the organisation of the reviews can be streamlined to ensure that they are done quicker in the future.
The 'Category 2' meeting for my child's school place was postponed but I was not informed.	From now on, if a scheduled meeting does not take place, School Admissions will inform the parents of the cancellation and the rescheduled date.

6. Compliments and customer feedback

During the year 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, Children's Services received a total of 116 written compliments, compared to 209 the previous year.

Some examples of compliments received are detailed below.

A student social worker was praised by a Health Advisor: "the family are very lucky to have such a caring and supportive Service worker as yourself."

A school praised an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) officer: "they were all so happy with how it went at the meeting and thought you were fab - thank you so much for being part of it."

Praise for a social worker from a Children's Guardian: "the key social worker in this case has gone above and beyond to engage this young person and put in place a good package of support. He has worked hard with the parents and as a result the transition plan has been successful."

Praise for a supervising social worker from a carer: "Thank you for everything you've done. I want to thank you for picking up the phone and listening to me several times a day when I had concerns or worries and just constantly reassuring me when I felt not listened to by others."

Praise for a social worker from a parent: "we're all going to miss you. Thank you for everything, you have been amazing with us."

A Residential Care Manager praised the Safeguarding & QA Officer for being an excellent advocate for a young person and continually acting in his best interest.

Praise for social worker from a parent, "thank you for the support you have given to my family and children. You always make yourself available, the children respond positively to you and they trust you."

An Independent Reviewing Officer was impressed with the comments made by carers about their experiences with their supervising social workers, and how well written the reports were.

A court praised a social worker for the effort she is making and for going above and beyond what is normally expected of social workers.

A parent praised an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) Case Coordinator for the time, attention and detail given in the plan, and her assistance and professionalism during the process.

Praise for a social worker from parent, "I am very grateful to your team for changing my life. I never thought the day would come when I would be free of abuse as I didn't think I was strong enough. I can now bring up my kids in a healthy environment."

Parents praised the EHCP Team Lead for her help and support, "Thank you so much for your help and support. My son got the school place and we are happy that he will get the support he needs."

Foster carers' comments about a social worker, "She has been very helpful and supportive over the last year and has extended her support to us beyond her - she is courteous and approachable, and the foster child living with us really likes interacting with her."

Praise for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) Case Coordinator, for her kindness, help, patience and understanding, and being conscientious, highly professional and diligent in her work.

A family praised a social worker for "being the best social worker they have worked with."

A parent praised an EHCP Case Coordinator for "her hard work and dedication to get the EHCP done so well, it was also easy to read."

7. Final comments

Overall, we note positively that, for 2021/22, timeliness of responses and/or average time to respond across all but 1 complaint categories (Ombudsman Social Care), as well as political enquiries, has improved in comparison to last year's performance. In the main, the improvement in performance can be attributed to the new reporting regime which was introduced in May 2021 by Manchester Feedback & Complaints, enabling better information flow to the Senior Management, while flexible working arrangements following the pandemic became the norm. This is despite the sharp increase in caseload, with nearly twice as many cases dealt with during 2021/22 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. 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

- Manchester Feedback & Complaints 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.

Performance

- Our target for resolution within 20 working days is 80%. Although it was expected that for the early part of 2021/22 performance would still be impacted by the new working arrangements in place, we will continue to focus on improving that performance.

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.