

Children Social Care

Statutory Complaints Annual Report 2019/20

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Complaints are continuing to be resolved as part of early resolution; this year 34 concerns were resolved locally; a large increase from 16 concerns resolved locally last year. There has been a slight increase in formal complaints where 45 were completed during this period in comparison to 43 completed last year. This year 15.5% of complaints were upheld.

Overall, 93.3% (42 of the 45) of formal complaints were completed within timescale which is an increase from the 81.4% achieved last year.

There were no enquiries from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman whereas the previous year there were 3.

There have also been 35 compliments received during this period which has praised children social care services; this has decreased from 55 compliments received last year.

1. Introduction and Context

This annual statutory complaint report covers complaints and compliments received by Children's Social Care Services during the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. It highlights how the directorate has performed against statutory timescales; organisational learning and service improvements that have been made from a result of listening and responding to complaints and plans for future development.

The Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints Procedures stipulate that an annual report must be produced for complaints made under the *Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006* and in line with published guidance 'Getting the Best from Complaints'.

The regulations dictate that the report should cover:

- The number of complaints received
- The issues highlighted
- Whether the complaints have been upheld or not
- Response times
- The number of cases referred to the Ombudsman's service
- Which customer groups have made complaints
- Advocacy services provided
- Statistical data relating to the age, gender, disability, ethnicity and sexual orientation of the complainant

There is also a corporate requirement that all complaints made against the Council are recorded, responded to and that, as an organisation, we learn from complaints.

Information relating to the statutory complaint procedure is published on the Council's website and those wishing to complain can do so online. The Council encourages complaints to be made online however, where this is not possible, complaints can also be made by email, telephone, letter and by post, including using the complaints leaflet.

In relation to the context, the period covered by this report was to a small extent, impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic, which also impacted on timely publication.

2. Overview of the Service

There is a dedicated team that manages complaints concerning Children's Social Care. The statutory complaints procedure involves a 3-stage escalation process. Stage 1 is addressed by the relevant service; Stage 2 is an in-depth independent investigation (usually by an external investigator) and Stage 3 involves the complaint being heard by a review panel of independent members. The procedure covers complaints about the council's services to children in need or in care; about how the council applies to take a child into care; complaints about fostering, special guardianship and adoption services and complaints about services to children leaving care

3. Complaints Summary

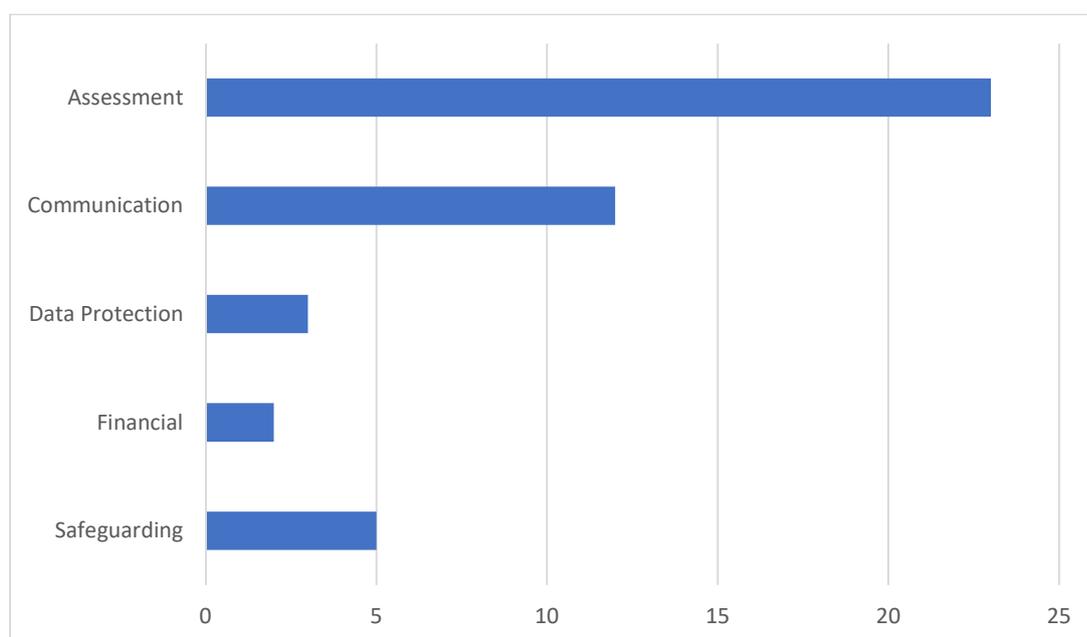
3.1 Complaints received

The complaints policy promotes early resolution of complaints, so we initially aim to address issues informally. If matters cannot be resolved locally with services, complainants may then progress matters through the formal complaints' procedure. The complaints team supported operational teams to resolve 34 customer concerns before they became formal statutory complaints; a large increase from the 16 resolved last year.

During this reporting year, there were 45 formal complaints about children's social care services which is a very low number in comparison to the number of contacts that the Council has. Enfield as a borough has approximately 89,000 children. As at 31 March 2020, Enfield Council was responsible for 395 looked-after-children and in that period, there were 6,293 referrals to Children's social care services. The 45 complaints related to 41 different families and involved a total of 66 children. The volume of formal complaints has increased slightly from last year where there were 43 formal complaints recorded.

The following chart shows a breakdown of issues for the formal complaints; the most common issue continues to be complaints about social care assessments which is expected due to the nature of social work.

Figure 1: Breakdown of formal complaint issues



The following table shows breakdown of formal Stage 1 complaints across team areas.

Figure 2: Breakdown of Children Social Care Stage 1 Complaints by Team

Teams	Number of complaints completed
Children Protection & Family Support	10
Safeguarding and Quality	12
Fostering	2
Joint Services for Disabled Children	4
Assessment Service	8
Looked after Children	8
Total	44

13.6 % of all the formal statutory complaints Stage 1 investigated (6 of 44) were upheld. This upheld rate has decreased in comparison to last year where 28% of complaints had been upheld. For transparency, however 35% were partially upheld; there are no comparison figures with last year for partially upheld.

During 2019/20 there was one Stage 2 complaint completed which was upheld whereas in 2018/19, 3 complaints were investigated at Stage 2. There were also 7 escalation requests, 3 of which did not progress to formal Stage 2 investigations as matters were resolved through other means. Four Stage 2 cases were still in progress and continued into 2020/2021.

During 2019/20 there were no stage 3 complaints, whereas in 2018/19, there was one.

3.2 Response times

Stage 1 complaints are resolved by the service concerned, and the target timescale for responding is 10 working days with a maximum of 20 working days. 44 complaints were completed under stage 1 of the statutory complaints procedure and 93.1% of these were resolved within time. This has increased from last year where 87.2% of complaints were completed within time. The three cases where responses were late, were not substantially late. Stage 2 complaints are undertaken by someone who is independent of the service complained about. The Council aims to respond to Stage 2 complaints within 25 working days of the agreed complaint statement which can be extended to 65 working days where more time is needed to investigate. One complaint was completed under stage 2 which was completed in time.

The Council's aim is to resolve 90% of all formal complaints within time. Overall, for all stages of complaints this year, compliance with response timescale was 93.3%

3.3 Statistical data of complainants

In line with regulations and guidance, the Council must report statistical data relating to the age, gender, disability, ethnicity and sexual orientation of the complainant. This information should be collected, where possible and appropriate. The Council has focused on providing statistical data for the 66 children/young people who are the subjects of the complaints made. The information has been drawn from several systems across the Council and in some of the categories, there is incomplete, or no data recorded.

3.3.1 Age

Of the 66 children /young people who were subjects of the complaints made, 59 (81.9%) were under 16. 7 children/ young people were aged 16-25

3.3.2 Gender

According to 2011 census, 52% of Enfield's residents are female and 48% are male. Of the 66 children /young people who were subjects of the complaints, 25 (37.8%) were females, 34 (51.5%) were males and 7 (10.6%) were unrecorded. For comparison last year 33% related to females and 67% related to males.

3.3.3 Disability

Of the 66 children /young people who were subjects of the complaints made, 12 (18%) related to children who were recorded to have disabilities including SEN, behavioural, autism, learning difficulties). The remaining 54 children /young people (82%) did not have a disability. In comparison to last year where 87.5% related to children / young people who did not have any disability, we have dealt with more complaints relating to children who have disabilities.

3.3.4 Ethnicity

Enfield is among the most ethnically diverse areas in the country. According to 2011 census, the highest groups in Enfield's population are:

- 'White UK' (English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish and British) – 41%
- 'White Other' (Greek and Turkish Cypriots and Turkish) – 18%
- 'Black' (African/ Caribbean and Other) – 17%

There was insufficient ethnicity data collected for this time period to publish any meaningful statistics, however the information that was recorded indicates that the children who were the subject of the complaints were from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds including from the highest groups in Enfield as detailed above.

3.3.5 Sexual Orientation

Enfield Council does not record the sexual orientation of service users and the Council does not deem it appropriate to contact complainants for this data as it has no bearing on their complaint made.

4. Ombudsman contact

If a complainant remains dissatisfied, they can ask for the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) to review the Council's final response.

During 2019/20, there was no LGSCO contact regarding cases concerning Children's Services whereas in 2018/19 there were 3 cases.

5. Customer Groups

Advocacy frequently enables speedy resolution of issues without escalation to the complaint procedure. In all cases the complaint team encourages children and young people to access independent advocacy to support them through the complaints process and will always put a child or young person in touch with an advocacy service where appropriate to do so. If an adult makes a complaint on behalf of a child or young person, the complaints team also ensures that all reasonable steps are taken to seek the views of the child/young person whenever a complaint is made on their behalf. The customer groups who submitted complaints were as follows:

- 4 from advocates representing child / young person
- 1 from solicitor on behalf of a parent
- 39 from parents
- 1 from relative

6. Learning from complaints

The Council welcomes feedback about its services as this provides valuable information about customers' experiences of the services that they use. We publicise details of how to complain on the Council's website and in areas where the public has access. We also provide information on how to comment or complain whenever a new service commences.

Complaints are taken seriously, investigated and responded to with appropriate redress. The Council can address complaints in several ways, including, at times, if appropriate, meetings between the complainant and the relevant manager to facilitate resolution.

Feedback from complaints is used for organisational learning. Complaint action points are identified and monitored to ensure that any practice or service improvements are implemented, and that information is shared across the Council.

6.1 Actions taken from complaints

As shown earlier in this report, 13.6 % of stage 1 complaints were upheld, and 35% partially upheld. Apologies were given to all the complainants and learning from these cases has resulted in the following summarised action:

- The reason for delays was examined and officers reminded of the need to communicate promptly, and to include full information in correspondence
- Records updated to reflect accurate information
- Staff reminded of need for better communication with other agencies
- Young person provided with pathway plan
- Officers given feedback and training on dealing with customers
- The quality and tone of some of the written correspondence was addressed
- Training to ensure families given clear information about the appeals processes

7. Quality Assurance

The Complaints Team have systems in place to ensure that response timescales are met. This includes sending reminders of the deadline for responses to the assigned managers; escalating to a senior manager if there is no response within the specified timeframe; reporting to Directors regularly and highlighting to staff the importance of compliance in training programmes. The Complaints Team also monitor and assist with complaint responses to ensure that standards are met, and all aspects of the complaint are addressed. The support offered by the Complaints Team includes:

- Quality checking responses
- Arranging and chairing complaint meetings
- Liaising with complainants regarding timescales and desired outcomes
- Identifying key themes from complaints, devising action plans and ensuring organisational learning is implemented
- Regularly providing management and performance information
- Service development to improve how we respond to and learn from complaints

8. Compliments

The Council welcomes compliments from its users. Compliments help to highlight good quality service and give staff encouragement to continue delivering service of the highest standard. The following chart shows a breakdown of the 35 compliments, specifically for Children's Social Care Services, received during 2019/20; a decrease compared to 55 received during 2018/19. The following tables show the breakdown of the cases per service

Figure 4:

Children Services - Team Name	Q1 Total	Q2 Total	Q3 Total	Q4 Total	Total
Adoption and Fostering		1			1
Child Protection and Family Support	2		4		6
Joint Service for Disabled Children	2	1	2	2	7
Looked After Children (LAC)	4	2	2	5	13
Safeguarding and Quality	2	2			4
Young People and Community Safety Team			2		2
Education	2				2
Total	12	6	10	7	35

