

Children Social Care

Statutory Complaints Annual Report 2020-21

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Complaints are continuing to be resolved as part of early resolution; this year 9 concerns were resolved locally; a large decrease from 34 concerns resolved locally last year. There has been a decrease in formal complaints where 42 were completed during this period in comparison to 45 completed last year.

Overall, 92.8 % (39 of the 42) of formal complaints at Stage 1 were completed within timescale which is an increase from the 93.1% achieved last year.

There were no enquiries that required investigation from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, which is the same as in 2019/20

There have also been 17 compliments received during this period which has praised children social care services.

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 2020 to 31 March 2021. 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

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 has been impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic.

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)
- 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 9 customer concerns before they became formal statutory complaints; a large decrease from the 34 resolved last year.

During this reporting year, there were 42 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. Last year there was 45 formal complaints, so a decrease on the previous year

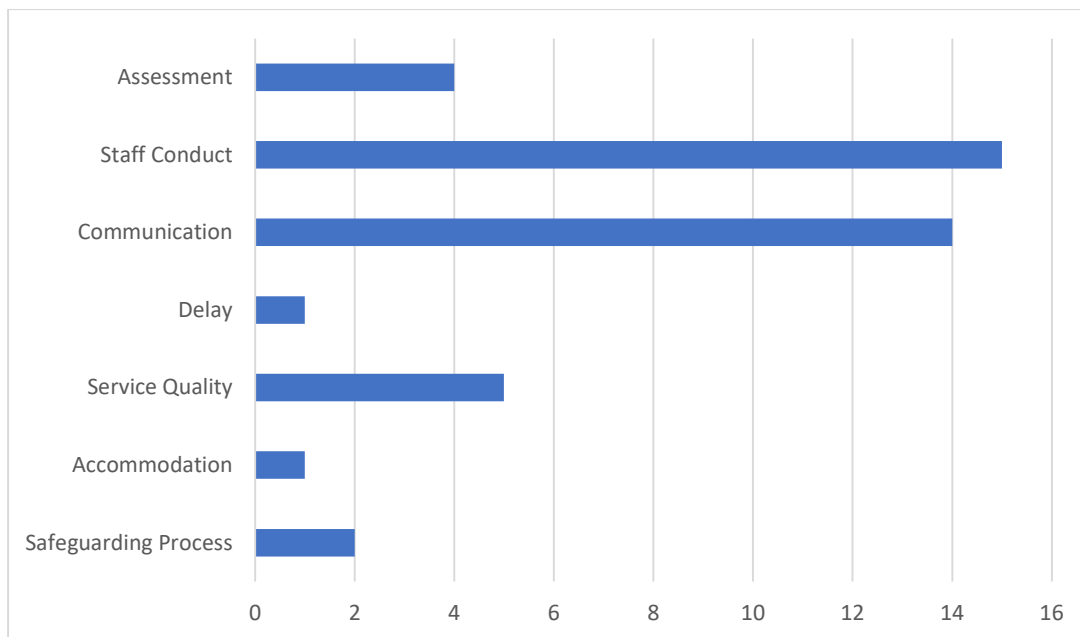
Enfield as a borough has 89,309 children aged under 18.

As at 31 March 2021, Enfield Council was responsible for 391 looked-after-children and in that period, there were 4,244 referrals* to Children's social care services.

**the number of referrals whilst it appears to have dropped from last year it hasn't actually it's due to a change in the recording. Mid way through 2019/20 there was a change as certain 'contacts' were coded as referrals, this gives the impression that there has been a drop in the number of referral however the recording has improved to count only true referrals now.*

The following chart shows a breakdown of issues for the formal complaints;

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
Child Protection & Vulnerable Children	31
Early Help, Youth & Community Safety	2
Looked after Children & Care Leavers	7
Safeguarding & Service Quality	2
Joint Service for Disabled Children	0
Practice Improvement & Partnership	0
Total	42

During 2020/21 there was Five Stage 2 complaints investigated and completed, four of these had begun in 2019/20.

During 2020/21 there were no stage 3 complaints, however one of the stage 2's from 2020/21 has progressed to a Stage 3 and this is being completed during 2021/22.

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. 42 complaints were completed under stage 1 of the statutory complaints procedure and 92.8% of these were resolved within time. This has been a slight decrease from last year where 93.1% of complaints were completed within time.

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. Five cases were completed, of which four of them were completed within the timescales

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 91.4%

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 2020/21, the LGSCO contacted the council regarding 11 cases concerning Education and Children's Services, however all of them were closed following preliminary enquiries. This means the Ombudsman did not investigate them

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:

- 2 from advocates representing child / young person
- 39 from parents/guardians
- 2 from relatives

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

Following complaint investigation where issues have arisen or errors are made in procedures, apologies are given to 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
- 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 17 compliments, for Children's Services – these are for the services that deal with Statutory Children's complaints received during 2020/21; The following graph show the breakdown of compliments per service area covering Statutory Children's Cases

Figure 4:

