

Annual Complaints Report

Children's Social Care

2021/22

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Introduction

This report fulfils the council's statutory duty to monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure and produce an annual report for children's services social care complaints.

The Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 (as amended by the NHS & Community Care Act 1990) requires us to establish a procedure for considering complaints in relation to the discharge of, or failure to discharge, any social services functions in respect of a qualifying individual. The Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 provides the legal framework for the procedures in relation to social care functions.

The regulations require the local authority to attempt to resolve complaints as soon as reasonably practicable and within specific timescales. The procedure has three stages, which are set out below, however where appropriate and with the agreement of the complainant the local authority may arrange for alternative dispute resolution to help resolve matters.

- Stage 1 (local resolution by manager) – 10 working days or up to 20 working days for complex cases
- Stage 2 (investigation by someone outside of the service area complained about) – 25 working days with maximum extension to 65 working days
- Stage 3 (independent review) – 30 working days to convene and hold a review panel; then 5 working days for the panel to issue its findings; and a further 15 working days for the local authority to respond to those findings.

All complaints are triaged by the Complaints and Information Team to ensure they are suitable for the process. This ensures matters are managed through the correct procedures, should an alternative process be in place. Any matters which are not suitable for the complaints process are filtered out and passed to the appropriate channel.

If the complainant remains unhappy with the outcome of their complaint, they have the right to approach the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman who may choose to investigate their complaint.

The Children's Social Care Complaints Procedure is administered by the Complaints and Information Team, with oversight from the Complaints and Information Manager.

Children’s social care complaints received

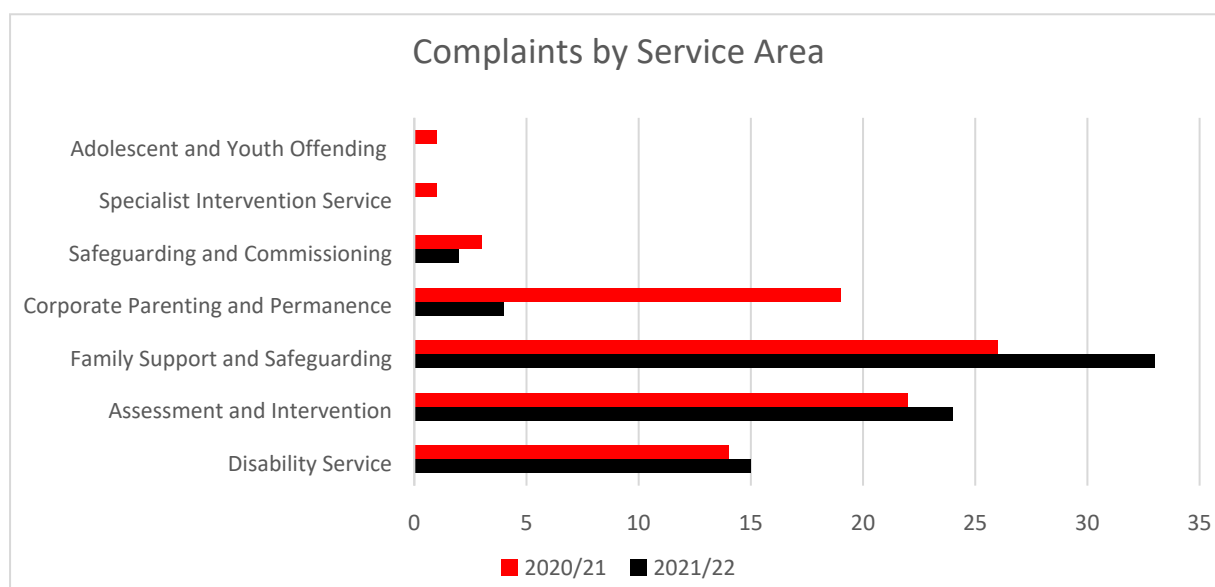
Stage 1 Complaints

The Local Authority welcomes all feedback, including complaints and representations about its services. Service users, families and carers can provide their views in an open and transparent way and can easily access the complaints procedure.

Children’s Social Care received 78 statutory complaints during 2021/22 this is a decrease of 9% on the previous year when we dealt with 86 statutory complaints.

Factors which could have impacted on the decrease however slight could be related to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic where services users were facing additional pressures which meant making a complaint was not deemed as high a priority. Furthermore, the initial point of contact with our services users with their allocated workers prioritising addressing challenges may have reduced the number of complaints.

Number of Childrens Social Care complaints		
Department	2021/22	2020/21
Disability Service	15	14
Assessment and Intervention	24	22
Family Support and Safeguarding	33	26
Corporate Parenting and Permanence	4	19
Safeguarding and Commissioning	2	3
Specialist Intervention Service	0	1
Adolescent and Youth Offending	0	1
Total	78	86



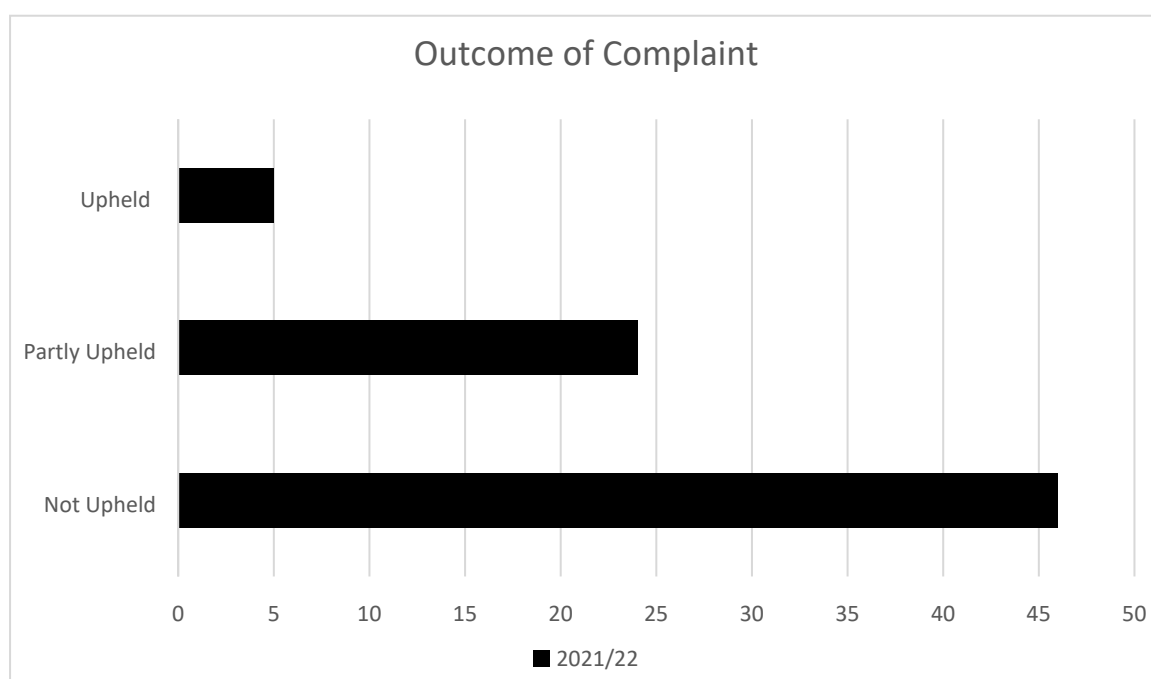
Timeliness of dealing with statutory stage 1 social care complaints

In 2021/22 82% (64 of 78) of complaints were answered within the 20 working days which is a slight decrease on the 2020/21 performance figure of 87%. This is not a significant decrease, and the Local Authority maintains performance above 80% which although falling short of the 90% corporate target is an improvement when in previous years, we were unable to meet 80%.

The Complaints and Information Team continue to support Children’s Social Care with relevant information produced on a weekly basis which provides insight into open complaints for each service area as a way to maintain visibility and accountability.

Outcome of Complaints

Not Upheld	46	59%
Partly Upheld	24	31%
Upheld	5	5%



The majority of the complaints submitted through the investigation we have been unable to find fault with the manner in which we have dealt with the cause for concern raised with our service.

In cases where we have been able to find fault in the way we have dealt with a service user and their families we strive to find service learning for cases which we can improve the service offering.

Stage 2 and 3 Social Care Complaints

Barking and Dagenham continue processing low level numbers of Stage 2 and 3 complaints year on year. In 2021/22 we undertook only two Stage 2 complaints across all Children's Social Care. These cases related to Assessment and Intervention and Disability Service.

Both of these Stage 2 complaints went over the prescribed time limit due to circumstances outside of the control the Local Authority. Both service users were kept fully informed of the delays throughout the process.

The recommendations contained in the reports are particularly case specific and not in relation to general practice of our services as such it is not practical to provide recommendations as part of this published report.

Local Government Ombudsman

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman remains the final step in the process where complainants can approach the service directly and ask for a further independent investigation into their complaint.

In 2021/22 the LGO approached the Local Authority on 5 cases relating to Children's Social Care and of these 2 were taken via the formal investigation route and both were upheld by the LGO. The remainder of the cases were closed after initial enquires were made and information provided.

Reasons for closure of these cases related to falling outside of the jurisdiction of the LGO, satisfactory remedy provided by the Local Authority through the complaints process or falling outside of the time allowed to initiate a complaint.

Recommendations from the LGO

The Council has agreed to start its stage two investigation without delay. Once the process is complete it will write to Miss C to inform her of the outcome, ensuring it provides her with appropriate information about her rights under the process.

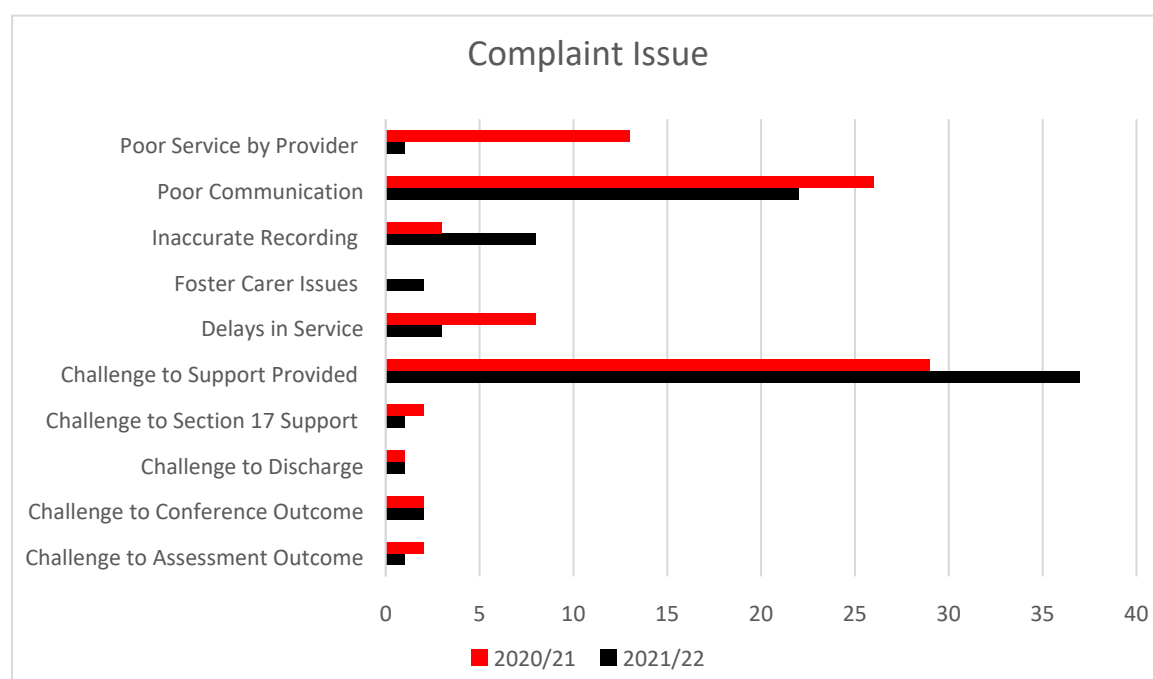
I have completed my investigation. The Council was entitled to reclaim the special guardianship allowance overpayment for Mrs G's eldest child. However, the Council should have made age-related increases to the special guardianship allowance it paid. The Council has re-calculated the payments and reduced the amount Mrs G owes. The Council has offered to write off the remaining balance, so Mrs G now owes nothing. The Council will also review the payments of other families to check they have received the correct allowance.

Complaints by issue

Complaints received provide valuable insight into how services are perceived by the clients and what can be learnt from complaints to improve the service provision offered.

When broken down by reason for complaint the most frequently mentioned concern relates to challenging the support provided closely followed by poor communication

Reason for complaint		
Reason	2021/22	2020/21
Challenge to Assessment Outcome	1	2
Challenge to Conference Outcome	2	2
Challenge to Discharge	1	1
Challenge to Section 17 support	1	2
Challenge to Support Provided	37	29
Delays in Service	3	8
Foster Carer Issues	2	0
Inaccurate Recording	8	3
Poor Communication	22	26
Poor Service by Provider	1	13
Total	78	86



When we receive complaints, they are a valuable resource in providing an opportunity to improve services for the individuals as well as improving services across the board for future and current service users. As such it is important that services continue trying to learn and implement improvements based on this feedback.

As a Local Authority we are committed to learning from our services users when they express dissatisfaction, and this is carried out by various methods such as;

- Using feedback from complaints to strengthen the voice of the children, young people and their families.
- Making sure our recording is clear including rationale behind decisions made so that they can be understood by children and families.
- Be transparent in our actions and communications

Below we explore some examples of key learning taken from our complaints and how we can improve.

- Ensure the role of the Children's Rights Advocate is explored with our children in care and explain how this role can support with issues which they identify through their journey.
- All allocated workers to ensure that case notes are kept updated when visits have occurred, and decisions made. Poor case recording impacts on the ability to not only produce comprehensive investigations but places the Local Authority at risk of more complaints should workers not be able to provide relevant information when asked how they have based decisions made.
- Wishes and feelings of children should be kept updated on records and where necessary communicated with the families such as concerns over contact.

Compliments

It is important to balance the complaints with evidence directly from services users that their experiences with the Local Authority have been positive.

An extract of compliments received 2021/22

From a grandmother I writing to let you know Grandson M has finally made contact with us thank God.

It has been a very sad and stressful time for us but we got there in the end, it will be a long road for M but he has made a start.

I have to give most of the credit to his YOS worker, he never gave up and was always very positive when we spoke to him, M also spoke very highly of him

I imagine he has a big workload, but he was always there for us.

A parent I just want to say thankyou from the bottom of my heart for all the help, support, advice and all the work you did for me and my family.

If it was not for you i dread to think what the outcome of our situation would have been.

Having you helped us has had a huge positive impact and will help us to keep moving forward.

So once again thank you and the service you provide.

From a Judge - Judge preceded to thank the social work team. She acknowledged they have the hardest job and that we don't realise what they do on a day-to-day basis.

Judge S would like thanks to be acknowledged as they are often the team that are often missed out. ”

Mother commented “thank you very much to P the social worker she has been amazing

It is a positive outcome for this little girl

A parent They were a joy to work with and a big help especially because we are new parents, we have learned so much.

It was really easy to contact the manager and relay how we feel.

Me and baby's dad have a trusted relationship with the Team and it benefited our baby the most.

In general, T and I feel like we could seek for help and ask for support with the team as they have always showed us how to be better and put us on a good path to lead to success.

As a family, we really appreciate the support and help , it had a big impact on who and how we are as R parents.