



**Report for:
INFORMATION**

Item Number:

Contains Confidential or Exempt Information	NO
Title	Social Services Complaints Report on Looked After Children (1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021)
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For Consideration By	Corporate Parent Committee
Date to be Considered	17th June 2021
Implementation Date if Not Called In	Not applicable
Affected Wards	All
Area Committees	None
Keywords/Index	Looked After Children – Complaints

Purpose of Report:

This report with appendix provides information on complaints for Looked After Children for the period 1st April 2020 – 30th March 2021.

1. Recommendations

It is recommended that the committee: Note the report.

2. Reason for Decision and Options Considered

No decision requirement.

3. Key Implications

The Corporate Parent Committee has asked that it receive quarterly reports on complaints and advocacy about Looked After Children.

4. Financial

The Head of Finance advises that the cost of the complaints function is contained within the Children and Families budget.

5. Legal

Complaints about the provision of support for families and children are governed by:

- a) The Children Act 1989 (as amended by the Adoption & Children Act 2002);
- b) The Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.

Guidance was issued in July 2006 by the DFES – ‘Getting the Best from Complaints – Social Care Complaints and Representations for Children, Young People and Others’.

The council has a duty to establish and operate a procedure for considering representations (including complaints) relating to the provision of services to children and young people that is compliant with the statute and regulations and is easy to access.

- c) Children and young people wishing to make a complaint have the right to access advocacy. Ealing Council arranges advocacy under contract with Coram Voice.
- d) For all stage 2 complaints, the local authority is required to appoint an Independent Person to ensure that the welfare of the child/young person remains paramount throughout a complaint consideration.
- e) In compliance with the 2006 Regulations the council’s complaints procedure provides for the department to report annually to committee on Social Services Complaints. The annual report for April 2020 to March 2021 will be presented to Overview Scrutiny Committee.

6. Value For Money

The cost and effectiveness of contracting external investigating officers and Independent Persons are monitored and reviewed regularly.

7. Risk Management

None.

8. Community Safety

None.

9. Links to Strategic Objectives

The Children's Service is key to delivering the strategic objectives of supporting young people to be safe, healthy and prosper.

The statutory complaints process and the access to advocacy arrangements in place ensure that children and young people are heard. In doing so, the service is in place to:

- give children, young people and/or their carers an accepted means of challenging decisions
- to ensure complaints are acted upon, resolved quickly and within timescales as close to the point of service delivery as is acceptable and appropriate.
- to provide an additional means of monitoring performance and improving service quality.

10. Equalities and Community Cohesion

The social care complaints procedure for children and young people has been subject of an Equality Impact Assessment and an improvement plan and action plan is to be devised in line with the Race Equality Scheme. The procedure has taken account of equalities legislation and one of the guiding principles is to ensure accessibility to all.

11. Staffing/Workforce and Accommodation implications

None.

12. Property and Assets

None.

13. Any other implications

None.

14. Consultation

The Children's Management Team will manage consultation on any future changes.

15. Timetable for Implementation

Not applicable.

16. Appendices

Appendix 1 Information on Stage 1 complaints.

17. Background Information

An electronic copy of the children's complaints procedure is available from the Customer Care Team and on the intranet. Complaints leaflets specifically for young people in care and/or who have recently left care are available at children's centres, libraries, colleges and youth clubs and health centres.

18. Detailed considerations

18.1 The Complaints procedure

The Social Care Complaints and Representations Procedure for Children and Young People has 3 stages:

1. Stage 1 where a response is prepared by the manager of the service within 10 working days (extendable to 20 working days in some circumstances)
2. Stage 2 where the complaint is subject to a formal investigation by an independent investigating officer and adjudication by the department within 25 working days (extendable to a maximum of 65 working days)
3. Stage 3 or Review stage where the adjudication at Stage 2 is reviewed by an Independent Panel consisting of 3 independent people and convened within 20 working days of receiving the request.

18.2 Monitoring

There is a statutory and corporate requirement to record all complaints received. This is currently recorded on a computerised system (iCasework).

18.3 Complaints and Representations

18.3.1 Clearly set out procedures mean that children and young people and / or their representatives are enabled to make a complaint or representation should they have a concern.

Complaints policy and procedure is available online on the Ealing website and in leaflet form. Complaints can be made via telephone, email or using the e-form on the website.

The information is all provided in the LAC packs along with Coram Voice Advocacy information, literature and contact details. Additionally, the information is available via social workers and central teams such as the customer care unit.

The service aims to resolve issues at the earliest possible stage. This work is supported from within the CS by the team at Horizons multi-agency hub supporting health , wellbeing, education , NEETs and EETs) who mediate and work collaboratively with social work staff to consolidate issues, review and agree a resolution that is acceptable to the young person. The team at Horizons is seen as separate from the formal social work teams and this relationship is used to best advantage for the young people to bring closure to issues.

Additionally, complaints and wide-ranging issues can be raised via the children in care councils and taken as issues to the Corporate Parent Panel or consideration.

Looked After Children Complaints April 2020 to March 2021

Stage 1 (informal)	14
Stage 2 (formal)	0
Stage 3 (review)	0

Stage 1 Complaints

- 18.4.1 During the period of 1 April 2020 to 30 March 2021 there were 14 Stage 1 complaints made by or in respect of Children Looked After. Appendix 1 provides information on these Stage 1 complaints and advises as to whether the complaints were upheld, not upheld or partially upheld and of the outcome.
- 18.4.2 In this reporting period, all 14 of the Stage 1 complaints, 3 were made by the child/ young person looked after by the authority, 5 via an advocate and 6 by parents of the young person or child.
- 18.4.3 Of the 14 Stage 1 complaints made in this reporting period, 5 were not upheld, 8 partially upheld and 1 upheld.
- 18.4.4 The complaints received were responded to within the required timescales.

Stage 2 Complaints

- 18.5.1 There were no complaints that proceeded to a Stage Two Complaint during this reporting period.

Stage 3 Complaints

- 18.6.1 There were no complaints that proceeded to a Stage 3 Complaint Review during this reporting period.

18.7 Advocacy

- 18.7.1 The 2006 Regulations require all Local Authorities with social services responsibilities to provide advocacy services for children and young people who make a complaint under the Children Act 1989. The legislation applies to all children. There is also a duty to record the take-up of advocacy services and to monitor the effectiveness and independence perception of services.

- 18.7.2 Alongside internal support, young people have unfettered access to advocacy and support via Coram Voice. This contact offers a wide-ranging support service and works to seek movement on case issues and resolution for the young person involved across CLA and CL in addition to CIN and CP.

This range of support available ensures that the service emphasis on resolving dissatisfaction at an early stage is largely successful and means that formal complaints are relatively low.

- 18.7.3 The contract with Coram Voice was renewed in 2016 via the new Dynamic Purchasing System, this gave an opportunity to review contract quality standards and scope. The new arrangement also improved value for money by negotiating an improved rate per case, losing the standard per case administrative fee and travel costs. The service is commissioned utilising the range of guidance and legislation such as “Get it Sorted” statutory guidance concerning advocacy in complaints.

- 18.7.4 Access to Coram is direct with an initial agreement for 25 hours work in place. Further funding is requested as needed. From April 2020 to March 2021, Coram Voice sought approval to support 39 children and young people in a range of issues including: placement and accommodation requirements and decisions, access to suitable housing, education options, support in case conferences and reviews.

18.8 Monitoring and quality assurance

- 18.8.1 The CCT has a system which captures a range of complaints information, including the nature of the complaint, the action taken, the outcome of each complaint including whether there was compliance with the time periods specified in Regulations. The information captured from this monitoring is used in a number of ways including:

- The dissemination of this information to line managers
- Its use as a measure of performance and means of quality control; and
- Information derived from complaints about services subject to Statutory Regulation, or where services purchased under contract are concerned, to the person responsible for monitoring the contract.

- 18.8.2 The information collected during the monitoring of process and individual complaints provides invaluable feedback on performance management and operational matters such as how policies are interpreted by staff and service users. It helps to identify areas that need improvement and where training is required.

- 18.8.3 This is in addition to current practice of attending senior management meetings to highlight the importance of effective complaints handling in particular with regard to the statutory timeframe.