



Children's complaints and representations Annual report 2020

Version 1.0, March 2021

1. Introduction

2020 has been a challenging year for everybody having to cope with the global Covid-19 pandemic, and therefore the statistics for complaints and representations processed this year may not be a typical picture. The one thing, however, that does remain true each year, is the determination of children and young people to see that social care processes improve, and this report seeks to recognise this and outline not just what complaints were made, but what difference they have made in the work of Herefordshire Children's Social Care.

This year was the first year that the children's complaints process was administered by the council's information access team, taking over its management from social care. The team have reviewed the policies and procedures for administering children's complaints, reported quarterly on complaints to the children's services senior management team meetings, and arranged training for complaint investigation officers which was delivered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

Details of the children's complaints process are now available on the [council web site](#).

2. Representations

Children and young people have a variety of methods in which they can input ideas, make comments and send compliments. The most direct way is through their physical meetings with their Social Worker. However, due to lockdown issues caused by COVID-19, more of these meetings have taken place virtually or by telephone. Other ways in which representations can be made are via third parties by way of their school, a family member or foster carer, for example.

In the period that this report covers, there have been;

- 6 Compliments from young people
- 2 Compliments from schools
- 11 compliments from family members
- 3 Compliments from foster carers

All compliments are reported quarterly. Not only are they distributed to the Team Managers of the staff who received them but the Heads of Service and Senior Leadership Team, which is designed to take the representations into the wider directorates for sharing best practice. As restrictions on Covid-19 lessen, it would be the expectation that compliments will increase in the business year 2021. This would be because of the re-opening of schools and the ability for Council staff to meet with the vulnerable people assigned to their caseload.

3. Volumes of complaints

There were 14 complaints made under the children's complaints procedure in 2020. In previous years, the numbers of complaints made have been 30 in 2019, 38 in 2018, and 36 in 2017.

Two complaints are ongoing into 2021., However of the complaints that are closed one went to Stage 2 of the statutory process, which was undertaken by external investigators, and none were referred to the LGSCO. Again, in the three years previous to this, an average of 13% of the total complaints (3 or 4 complaints) per year went on to further stages.

The 2020 figures are lower than in previous years, and may be as a result of the pandemic, however the information access team will work this year with social care to ensure that awareness is raised amongst young people regarding making complaints if they feel the need to.

4. Who has made complaints?

The majority of complaints were made by children in the care of the local authority, with a small amount being made by on their behalf by parents of children on child protection plans.

Due to the small numbers of complaints it is not possible to provide a breakdown of complainants by age, disability, ethnicity and other personal characteristics due to the risks of identification and subsequent breach of confidentiality. The information access team will monitor such information however to ensure fair representation across groups of people.

5. Reasons for complaints

The types of complaint that were made can be categorised as follows:

1. Non-delivery of support or services – 6 complaints
2. Delay in a decision or the provision of a service – 4 complaints
3. Communication (not being kept informed or involved, information not being properly explained, relevant staff not being available at time of contact – 3 complaints
4. Poor quality of service (errors made in assessments, procedures not followed) – 2 complaints
5. Costs (not receiving payments) – 1 complaint
6. Discrimination – 1 complaint.

There can be multiple reasons for a complaint, which is why the total number of complaints and total number of reasons for complaint are different. The most frequently raised issues related to professional support not being in place, and to services including placements taking too long to provide.

6. Outcomes from complaints

Of the complaints received, 2 were upheld and 5 were partially upheld following investigation. One complaint was withdrawn and 6 complaints were not upheld.

7. How are children and young people supported to raise concerns?

All children and young people making complaints are offered support from a professional advocacy service. [Hear Me](#) is a service provided for children in foster care and care leavers and they have supported several young people in making their complaints this year.

8. How quickly have we responded to complaints?

The statutory timescale for response at the first stage of investigation of a children's complaint is 10 working days, though this can be extended to 20 working days. In 2020, 7 complaints were extended to take longer than 10 working days.

Stage 2 investigations should take 25 working days, and can be extended to 65 working days. The one stage 2 investigation was completed in 65 working days due to an issue initially with the processing of the complaint.

Two complaints were responded to late at the first stage, by one working day and by two working days respectively.

9. What difference have complaints made?

Learning from complaints helps social care in their practice development and service improvement, which also benefits other children and young people receiving services.

Some examples of where things have changed as a result of the complaints made in 2020 are as follows:

- Heads of Service become more involved with complaints now from an early stage; if a young person makes a complaint, the Head of Service will speak with them to see if they can resolve the complaint at the earliest opportunity.
- The process for when a young person presents as homeless was reviewed to make it a faster process.
- Social care staff have received "Signs of Safety" training including using more straightforward, plain language when setting out concerns to parents.
- All placements have been contacted to remind them of who to contact if a young person's social worker or personal advisor is unavailable.
- The social worker checklist for accommodating children and moving placement has been reviewed.

10. The effectiveness of the complaints procedure

Due to the atypical circumstances of the pandemic, it is difficult to draw conclusions from much of the data this year. The fact that there have been less complaints made than in previous years is not necessarily indicative that all services are working well, and attention has been paid to ensuring that it is as easy as possible for children and young people to make complaints. The complaints procedure has been reviewed, training has been provided for investigating officers, and senior management is regularly updated on complaints received and provided with recommendations for action on service improvement. Further work will be carried out in 2021 to provide more awareness of the complaints procedures, to ensure that the process works effectively and results in better social care services.